

“Faithfully Drawn from Real Life”: Autobiographical Elements in Frank J. Webb’s *The Garies and Their Friends*

A RESURGENCE OF INTEREST in Frank J. Webb’s *The Garies and Their Friends*—the second novel by an African American and the first to portray northern racism—underscores the need for consideration of recently discovered biographical information about this enigmatic author. Previously unknown details about the lives of Frank J. Webb (1828–94) and his family and friends parallel some of his literary portrayals, subtly inform other scenes and characters, and generally help to illuminate the unique combination of biography, social history, and creative imagination that constitute Webb’s complex literary achievement.

The Garies and Their Friends is constructed around two major narrative lines: the stories of the Garie family and the Ellis family. In Georgia, Clarence Garie, a white slave owner, is living openly with his mulatto slave mistress, Emily Winston; he treats her with as much affection and respect as if she were his wife and wishes to marry her, but interracial marriage is illegal in the state. They have two children, named after their parents, Clarence and Emily. The Garies entertain Emily’s cousin, George Winston, who, although born and raised in slavery, was educated and freed by a kind master. Now, with all the appearances of a refined gentleman, he is passing as white—much to the approbation and amusement of Mr. Garie.

In Philadelphia, the Ellises are a “highly respectable and industrious coloured family.”¹ Mr. Ellis, a carpenter, and his wife, Ellen, have three

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¹ Frank J. Webb, *The Garies and Their Friends* (1857; Baltimore, 1997), 16.

children. Esther (Ess) is the sensible eldest; sewing is her primary occupation. Caroline (Caddy), a fanatical housecleaner, is short-tempered and shrewish. Charlie, the youngest, is a high-spirited boy determined to find a life's work suitable to his intelligence and ambition and to avoid the domestic service that is expected of him in the rigidly racist culture of mid-nineteenth-century Philadelphia. Kinch de Young, a wild and unruly boy, is Charlie's best friend. When Charlie breaks his arm, the family doctor suggests that a stay in the country would restore his health. A white lady, Mrs. Bird, who was impressed with Charlie's performance at school, takes him to her country home.

In Georgia, Emily Winston discovers that she is pregnant with her third child. Mr. Garie decides to move north so that he can marry her and his children will be free. At George Winston's suggestion, Mr. Garie writes to a wealthy real estate dealer, Mr. Walters, requesting that he find a suitable house for the Garies in Philadelphia. Mr. Walters, a proud, powerful man of "jet black complexion," is wealthy and successful, but he is continually constrained by racism.² The Ellises clean and decorate the house Mr. Walters has chosen for the Garies and, when they arrive in Philadelphia, welcome them into colored society. Mrs. Ellis had known Emily Winston in Georgia, and Mr. Ellis had known George Winston when he was a boy. Mr. Garie finds a clergyman who will conduct an interracial marriage. He and Emily are married so she can become what he has always thought her—Mrs. Garie.

Living directly next door to the Garies is a disreputable lawyer, George Stevens—"Slippery George"—with his wife and two children.³ Before she knows that Mrs. Garie is a woman of color, Mrs. Stevens reveals her racism to the Garies and is shown the door. Stevens is deeply offended. Mrs. Stevens succeeds in having the Garie children expelled from school because of their color, while her husband conspires with other white businessmen to agitate against the colored community. They wish to provoke mob violence that will drive out home owners so they can buy up their property at low prices. Stevens is instrumental in saving an Irish ruffian, McCloskey, from suffering the death penalty and employs him to make nightly attacks on homes and property in the colored community. He also orders him to kill Mr. Garie when the time is right.

² Ibid., 121.

³ Ibid., 125.

Wishing to disguise himself so he can mingle with the lower classes, Mr. Stevens buys a suit of old clothes at a store owned by Kinch's father and accidentally drops a note listing all of the houses to be targeted in the upcoming mob violence. Alerted by the dropped note, Mr. Walters warns the mayor, who refuses to provide protection for houses that are outside his jurisdiction. Mr. Walters decides to take matters into his own hands. The Ellises join him, and they barricade his house and ready it for defense. When they realize that no one has warned the Garies, Mr. Ellis sneaks out to do so.

Mr. Walters and his companions repel the mob. Mr. Ellis, however, is overtaken and chased onto a rooftop. They try to throw him over, but he clings to the edge. One of them strikes his hands with a hatchet, and he falls to the street below. Because they have not been warned, the Garies are unprepared for the violence. Mr. Garie is shot through the head and killed. Mrs. Garie and the children hide in the woodshed. The baby she is carrying is stillborn, and she dies of shock. Little Clarence and Emily are now orphans.

The survivors of this terrible violence must try to rebuild their lives. Impressed with her bravery during the defense of his house, Mr. Walters has fallen in love with Esther Ellis and marries her. Mr. Ellis survives, but his mind is never right again. Charlie returns from the country and, after much difficulty because of his color, is apprenticed to a sympathetic white engraver. Mr. Garie's estate now will go to his next of kin, and it turns out that George Stevens is Mr. Garie's first cousin. In order to avoid suspicion in the death of Mr. Garie, Stevens agrees to provide for his children. Although Mr. Walters argues persuasively against it, Clarence is sent to a white boarding school and told to pass as white. Emily is adopted by the Ellises.

Some years pass, and the children have grown up. Clarence Garie is engaged to be married to a white girl, but his racial identity is revealed by George Stevens's son, and the girl's family breaks it off. Heartbroken, Clarence goes into a decline and dies of consumption. McCloskey, fearing divine judgment, makes a deathbed confession in which it is revealed that George Stevens was the one who killed Mr. Garie. Before a detective can arrest him for murder, Stevens leaps from his balcony, committing suicide. What is left of the Garie estate now goes to Emily Garie.

The remaining characters gather together for the celebration of the marriage of Charles Ellis to Emily Garie. Kinch is to wed Caddy Ellis shortly thereafter. George Winston returns from South America for the grand occasion. At the end of the novel, we are told that Charles and

Emily “were unremitting in their attention to father and mother Ellis, who lived to good old age, surrounded by their children and grandchildren.”⁴

The Garies and Their Friends was published in London in the fall of 1857 by George Routledge, the main promoter of American authors to the British public, but the book was not published in the United States until 1969. Although there are no known American reviews, the *New Era* in 1870 described Webb as “author of the somewhat famous book entitled ‘The Garies,’” which had been “extensively read in England and this country.” *Athenaeum* described the book as “interesting, and well written,” and an October review by the *London Daily News* was republished on the front page of *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* in December 1857. London’s *Sunday Times* devoted all but one paragraph of its review to an excerpt from the climactic riot scene in the novel.⁵

In her introduction to the novel, Harriet Beecher Stowe tells us that the book is a “truthfully-told story,” peopled with characters “faithfully drawn from real life”; that the events recounted are “mostly true ones, woven together by a slight web of fiction”; and that the central scenes of mob violence—which occurred in Philadelphia, “years ago, when the first agitation of the slavery question developed an intense form of opposition to the free colored people”—are based in “fact.” Frank J. Webb had stayed with Harriet Beecher Stowe at her home in Andover in August 1855 while she wrote and he edited *The Christian Slave* for his wife, Mary, to perform. Stowe’s insistence on the truthfulness of Webb’s story may have been based upon her personal conversations with him during this visit. There are two prefaces to *The Garies and Their Friends*. After learning that Stowe’s nineteen-year-old son, Henry, had drowned at Dartmouth on July 19, 1857, Lord Henry Brougham also wrote a foreword on Stowe’s behalf. In spite of her grief, Stowe promised to “do what I can with the preface. I would not do as much unless I thought the book of worth *in itself*.” She deemed Webb’s novel important enough that she penned her introduction just four weeks after her son’s death.⁶

⁴ Ibid., 392.

⁵ Rosemary Faye Crockett, “*The Garies and Their Friends: A Study of Frank J. Webb and His Novel*” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1998), 207.

⁶ Webb, *Garies*, xx, xxi, xvix; Susan Belasco, *Stowe in Her Own Time: A Biographical Chronicle of Her Life, Drawn from Recollections, Interviews, and Memoirs by Family, Friends, and Associates* (Iowa City, 2009), 249; Werner Sollors, ed., *Frank J. Webb: Fiction, Essays, Poetry* (New Milford, CT, 2004), 25–28. Webb’s choice of the fictional name “Ellis” may have been a tip of the hat to Harriet’s husband, Rev. Calvin Ellis Stowe; his minor character, Miss Ellstowe, might also be a conflation of Rev. Stowe’s name.

James Cathcart Johnston and Edith Wood

Frank J. Webb privileges the Garies in the title of his novel and opens his story with Clarence Garie and Emily Winston. To see what family might have served as a model for the Garies, we need look no further than Webb's sister-in-law. Annie Wood Webb (1831–79) has eluded scholars for years, yet her story sheds a brighter light on *The Garies and Their Friends*.⁷ Annie came from Hertford, North Carolina, to Philadelphia as a toddler in late 1833 with her mother, Edith Wood (1795–1846), and two older sisters, Caroline and Louisa. The Woods were settled in Philadelphia by Annie's wealthy, southern planter father, James Cathcart Johnston of Edenton, North Carolina.⁸ He had purchased his light-skinned mistress, “Edy,” in the late 1820s and emancipated her and their children in 1832, about the same time that a home was constructed for Edy in Hertford.⁹ The eldest sister, Mary Virginia Wood (1815–40), had already been sent to Philadelphia for her education and was comfortably established as a proper young lady within the elite colored society of the

⁷ “Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803–1915,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1/J6S2-TNR>; accessed May 23, 2013), Annie E. Webb, 1879; C. Peter Ripley, ed., *The Black Abolitionist Papers*, vol. 4 (Chapel Hill, NC, 1991), 183. [Note: the editors have correctly noted Annie Wood's relationship to Frank J. Webb but this biographical note contains many errors about Annie Wood: the spelling of her last name, middle initial, husband's death date, residence and dates in Philadelphia, number of children, remarriage, and that she was a teacher until the 1880s.]

⁸ James Cathcart Johnston (1782–1865) lived at Hayes Plantation in Chowan County, NC, and had extensive landholdings in Pasquotank, Halifax, and Northampton Counties. He donated anonymously to the American Colonization Society (ACS) in 1841. One of his closest friends, Henry Clay, was not only an ACS founder and secretary of state from 1825 to 1829; he also led the campaign to persuade Congress to appropriate funds for emigration to Liberia. Clay was president of the ACS from 1836 to 1852; his grandson, John Cathcart Johnston Clay, was named after James Cathcart Johnston. William S. Powell, ed., *Dictionary of North Carolina Biography*, vol. 3 (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988), 303–4; The Wood Webb family Bible, which had belonged to Annie Wood Webb, lists her husband, John G. Webb, her mother, sisters, children, sister Mary Wood Forten, niece Charlotte Forten, and nephew Gerritt Smith Forten, Annie Wood Webb Papers, Dr. C. Thomas, private collection; Annie E. Webb to Edward Wood, Dec. 31, 1866, in the Hayes Collection #324, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC; John G. Zehmer Jr., *Hayes: The Plantation, Its People, and Their Papers* (Raleigh, NC, 2007), 55; Eric Brooks, *Ashland: The Henry Clay Estate* (Charleston, SC, 2007), 42.

⁹ Will of James Wood, Aug. 8, 1819, proven Feb. 1822, Perquimans County, State of North Carolina, in *Wood Family Records*, comp. Benjamin Granade Koonce Jr. (n.p., n.d); emancipation paper for Eady Wood, Jan. 2, 1832, Annie Wood Webb Papers; John G. Webb to the executors of the James Cathcart Johnston estate, July 22, 1867, Hayes Collection; Dru Gatewood Haley and Raymond A. Winslow Jr., *The Historic Architecture of Perquimans County, North Carolina* (Hertford, NC, 1982), 174.



Left: James Cathcart Johnston (1782–1865), ca. 1850, of Edenton, NC, was Annie E. Wood's father. Courtesy of the State Archives of North Carolina.

Right: Annie E. Wood (1831–79), Frank J. Webb's sister-in-law, in mourning after her mother's, Edith Wood's, 1846 death. Courtesy of Dr. C. Thomas.

Fortens, Purvises, Hintons, Casseys, Willsons, Burrs, Douglasses, and others. In December 1833, Mary Virginia Wood signed the charter of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society.¹⁰ Her friend Frederick A. Hinton, a well-to-do barber and antislavery activist (and former slave from Raleigh, North Carolina), received the rent monies for her mother's home at 170 Pine Street on behalf of the property's owner, Sarah Allen, the widow of Bishop Richard Allen of Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church.¹¹

In early 1836, the middle Wood sisters died at the ages of eight and nine; later that year, Mary Virginia Wood married Robert B. Forten, the son of wealthy sail maker James Forten.¹² In 1840, Mary Wood Forten

¹⁰ Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (New York, 2002), 279–80; Janice Sumler-Lewis, "The Forten-Purvis Women of Philadelphia and the American Anti-Slavery Crusade," *Journal of Negro History* 66 (1981–82): 283; Julie Winch, "You Have Talents—Only Cultivate Them': Philadelphia's Black Female Literary Societies and the Abolitionist Crusade," in *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, ed. John C. Van Horne and Jean Fagan Yellin (Ithaca, NY, 1994), 116.

¹¹ Rent receipts for Mrs. E. Wood, 1833–35, Annie Wood Webb Papers.

¹² Wood Webb family Bible, Annie Wood Webb Papers; Winch, *Gentleman of Color*, 280.

died of tuberculosis, leaving behind her only child, three-year-old Charlotte Forten. Charlotte and her young aunt, Annie Wood, were only six years apart and raised together like sisters—first by Edy Wood, until her death in 1846, and then by the Forten/Purvis clan.¹³ Annie E. Wood, although well supported by her North Carolina father, did not live with him; she was adopted by Amy Matilda Cassey.¹⁴

The Johnston family bears more than a passing resemblance to the fictional Garie family. Like Clarence Garie, James Cathcart Johnston had grown uncomfortable as a slaveholder and had moved his mistress and children to Philadelphia in the early 1830s. James C. Johnston descended from North Carolina colonial governors; his closest relative in 1856 (at the time Frank J. Webb probably wrote his book) was a single first cousin. Introducing the Garies, Webb writes that they were “one of the oldest families in Georgia. . . . There now remain of the family but two persons.”¹⁵ Johnston, the son of Governor Samuel Johnston of North Carolina, was the last of his Johnston line. The fictional Clarence, son of old Colonel Garie, is told by his uncle, “When I am gone, you will be the last of our name.” Like Garie, Johnston possessed a vast estate; he was described at his death in 1865 as “one of the wealthiest men in the South.” His property, spanning four counties, was valued at several million dollars and “his immense possessions on the Roanoke river comprise[d] the richest lands in the country.”¹⁶

Like Clarence Garie, James C. Johnston was advised by a rich, older friend in New York City. Johnston’s New York correspondent, Robert Lenox, was one of the five wealthiest men in the state of New York and had first been a close friend and business associate of Johnston’s father.¹⁷

¹³ “Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803–1915,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/JDBS-FY4>; accessed May 23, 2013), Edith Wood, 1846; *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, ed. Brenda Stevenson (New York, 1988), 210; rent receipts, 1836–43 (Robert B. Forten collected board or rent money from Edith Wood beginning the day he married her daughter), Annie Wood Webb Papers; Wood Webb family Bible, Annie Wood Webb Papers; McElroy’s Philadelphia Directory for 1843 (Philadelphia, 1843), 308; *ibid.*, (1844), 52, 104; *ibid.*, (1846), 395.

¹⁴ David Paul Brown to the executors of the James Cathcart Johnston estate, May 30, 1865, and John G. Webb to the executors of the James Cathcart Johnston estate, July 22, 1867, Hayes Collection; Annie Wood’s room and board receipts from Amy Matilda Cassey 1847–50, Annie Wood Webb Papers.

¹⁵ Johnston’s remaining cousin was Margaret Blair Sawyer; Webb, *Garies*, 167.

¹⁶ Webb, *Garies*, 101; “Death of a Wealthy Loyal Citizen,” *Supplement to the [Connecticut] Courant*, June 3, 1864, 87.

¹⁷ Walter Charlton Hartridge, *The Letters of Robert McKay to His Wife: Written from Ports in America and England, 1795–1816* (Athens, GA, 1949), 313; Zehmer, *Hayes*, 2.

Clarence Garie complains that his friend Mr. Priestly—"much immersed in business"—"presumes on his former great intimacy with my father."¹⁸ The real-life Robert Lenox's only unmarried daughter, Henrietta A. Lenox, lived in the old Lenox homestead on Fifth Avenue; Mr. Priestly's fictional daughter, Miss Clara, is "a Fifth Avenue belle" who needs to be married off.¹⁹ The fictional Mr. Priestly is "connected with a society for the deportation of free colored people and thinks they ought to be all sent to Africa, unless they are willing to become the property of some good master." Lenox, although he cautioned against Liberia and was more sympathetic to Johnston's desire to emancipate his slaves in 1832, also advised him that "the greatest good you could do is secure them kind masters." The fictional Clarence Garie, we are told, "had a series of quarrels" with Priestly about slavery and is especially irritated by Priestly's "mis-statements respecting the free colored people." Garie argues that they are "much better situated than he [Priestly] describes them to be in New York." Similarly, James Cathcart Johnston wrote to Robert Lenox in 1828: "We have no apprehension in this country with regard to our slave & colored population. If left to themselves they are contented and, however little it may be believed in the North, I will say happy, and far better off than the poor creatures that are starved to death at looms, or poisoned in the dye kettle, or whose brains are spun out to a simple thread."²⁰

Like Clarence Garie, James C. Johnston considered selling all of his southern property and moving north but, in the end, sold neither his plantations nor slaves. Garie has his doubts about living in Philadelphia:

He had consented to it as an act of justice due to her and the children; there was no pleasure to himself growing out of the intended change, beyond that of gratifying Emily, and securing freedom to her and the children. He knew enough of the North to feel convinced that he could not live there openly with Emily, without being exposed to ill-natured comments, and closing upon himself the doors of many friends who had formerly received him with open arms. The virtuous dignity of the Northerner would be shocked, not so much at his having children by a woman of color, but by his living with her in the midst of them, and acknowledging her as his wife. In the community where he now resided,

¹⁸ Webb, *Garies*, 3.

¹⁹ "Miss Lenox's Heirs," *New York Times*, Sept. 14, 1886; Webb, *Garies*, 3.

²⁰ Webb, *Garies*, 4, 5; Zehmer, *Hayes*, 76, 77.

such things were more common; the only point in which he differed from many other southern gentlemen in this matter was in his constancy to Emily and the children, and the more than ordinary kindness and affection with which he treated them. Mr. Garie had for many years lived a retired life, receiving an occasional gentleman visitor; but this retirement had been entirely voluntary, therefore by no means disagreeable; but in the new home he had accepted he felt that he might be shunned, and the reflection was anything but agreeable. Moreover, he was about to leave a place endeared to him by a thousand associations.²¹

Like his fictional counterpart, James Cathcart Johnston also preferred a private life; he expressed the wish to "live as quiet and retired as I can without getting entangled in its cares & perplexities & strifes." According to his doctor, Johnston was "singularly retiring in his disposition." He enjoyed "the society of a few chosen friends" and lived "almost the life of a recluse."²² Yet, with three young daughters and a mistress, he did make serious inquiries about moving north. In July 1832, he received the following letter from Robert Lenox:

I wish from my soul you would seriously put in force and without loss of time, the idea you have suggested of parting with your Carolina property of every kind. I could not say there is a moral evil in such properties. As yours are treated their situation cannot be altered for the better, but there is a Spirit abroad in the world which at no distant day will make the property not only insecure but dangerous, and the greatest good you can do them is to secure them kind masters while you have the ability so to do. Were you to set them free tomorrow you could not do them a greater evil and could they be in Liberia tomorrow many of them would perish and starve. I would just add that it will not be long before a sale will probably be impracticable.

As to your removal, I would say, if you can get those of your family whose comfort I know is dear to you to agree to the measure, it will prolong your days and theirs, and if you dislike a City residence, you can be just as retired as you please in the villages in Jersey or Connecticut but no where can a man be more restored than in a large city.²³

²¹ Webb, *Garies*, 97.

²² Zehmer, *Hayes*, 61; Edward Warren, *A Doctor's Experiences in Three Continents* (Baltimore, 1885), 208.

²³ Zehmer, *Hayes*, 77.

Less than two months before slavery would be abolished in the British Empire, James Cathcart Johnston wrote to Robert Lenox: "I have strong thoughts of disposing of all my lands and Slaves in this country if I could vest the proceeds safely and profitably in northern funds which would give me less trouble & anxiety. Indeed from present appearances in England & the feeling in this country, I think the time will soon arrive when slave property will be of little or no value."²⁴ Johnston did not sell his Carolina property, but just five months later, Edy Wood and her children were living in Philadelphia.

When James C. Johnston was making the decision to relocate his family to Philadelphia, Edy Wood was pregnant. So is the fictional Emily Winston in *The Garies* when her husband opts to move his family north. These two women—the real and the fictional—were similar in other ways as well. It is possible that even their names were pronounced similarly. Charlotte Forten referred to Edy's granddaughter, Edith Webb, as "Eddie."²⁵ Edy Wood was described at age twenty as having a "very light complexion, modest pretty countenance, red cheeks." In her emancipation paper, she was said to have a "bright copper complexion" compared to her fair-skinned children.²⁶ The fictional Emily Winston is described as having a "light brown complexion [through which] the faintest tinge of carmine was visible."²⁷

Emily Winston's daughter, the fictional Emily Garie, also resembles Edy Wood's young daughter, Annie Wood. In 1834, shortly after the Woods arrived in Philadelphia, Annie was three years old, and her sisters were seven and eight. When the Garies arrive in Philadelphia, little Em is "small for school" and Clarence is "over nine." Like the fictional Emily, Annie suffered poor health.²⁸ Photos of Annie Wood at different stages of her life reveal her resemblance to James Cathcart Johnston, a slight crimp in her hair, and, in one later photograph, strikingly pale eyes. Young

²⁴ James Cathcart Johnston to Robert Lenox, June 22, 1833, Hayes Collection.

²⁵ Edith Wood's name was spelled "Edah," "Edeah," "Eady" on various documents. James Wood, Deed of Gift, 1816, and Will of James Wood, Aug. 18, 1819, proven Feb. 1822, Perquimans County, North Carolina, in Koonce, *Wood Family Records; Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, 325.

²⁶ *North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Register*, Sept. 9, 1814, in Koonce, *Wood Family Records*; emancipation of Edy Wood, Annie Wood, and Caroline Wood dated Jan. 2, 1832, email from Dr. C. Thomas.

²⁷ Webb, *Garies*, 275.

²⁸ Webb, *Garies*, 392; *Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, 381, 443, 503; Dorothy Porter Wesley and Constance Porter Uzelac, *William Cooper Nell: Nineteenth-Century African American Abolitionist, Historian, Integrationist; Selected Writings, 1832–1874* (Baltimore, 2002), 341, 333; Annie E. Webb to Edward Wood, Dec. 31, 1866, Hayes Collection.

Emily Garie, Webb writes, “had the chestnut hair and blue eyes of her father”; as a young woman, her “hair has a slight kink, is a little more wavy than is customary in persons of entire white blood; but in no other way is her extraction perceptible.” By the time the fictional Emily Garie marries, she is a wealthy orphan. Similarly, Annie’s physical and social separation from her father relegated her to near-orphan status, and although she was not wealthy in her own right, she “received very considerable remittances from him.” James Cathcart Johnston had promised Annie Wood “an independence after carefully educating her,” and she had letters to prove that he intended to leave her something in his will.²⁹ How much Frank J. Webb might have known about Annie’s expected inheritance while he was writing the classic plot device—the missing will and packet of letters—will remain a mystery, but Mr. Balch, the sympathetic fictional white lawyer who handles the Garies’ estate matters, bears some resemblance to Quaker lawyer and abolitionist David Paul Brown, who represented Annie in her claim on the estate of James Cathcart Johnston after his death in 1865.³⁰

Other characters in *The Garies* seem to be suggested by real-life counterparts, and it is probably not coincidental that the author (consciously or unconsciously) chose fictional names that sounded like those of his real models. The fictional former slave, George Winston, resembles real former slave Frederick A. Hinton in name, wealth, and gentility as well as in his role as the agent who makes living arrangements in Philadelphia for the Garies. George Winston also mirrors author Joseph Willson, whose mother boarded Edy Wood and her children from the fall of 1835 until October 1836.³¹

The Webbs

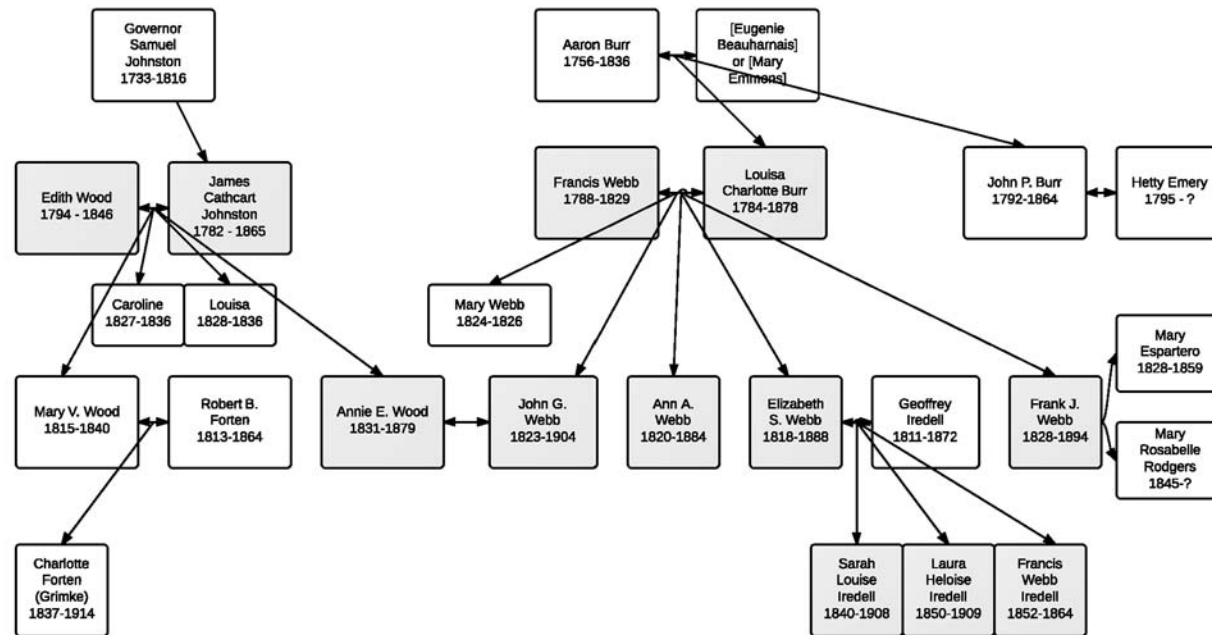
In November 1826, Frank J. Webb’s father, Francis, mother, Louisa, brother, John, and sisters, Elizabeth, Ann, and Mary, sailed on the schooner *Cyrus* from Port au Platt, Haiti, to Philadelphia. Baby Mary

²⁹ Webb, *Garies*, 2; David Paul Brown to the executors of the James Cathcart Johnston estate, May 30, 1865, John G. Webb to the executors of the James Cathcart Johnston estate, July 22, 1867, and Annie E. Webb to Edward Wood, Dec. 31, 1866, Hayes Collection.

³⁰ Wood Webb family Bible, Annie Wood Webb Papers; Webb, *Garies*, 228; Zehmer, *Hayes*, 103–15.

³¹ Rent receipts, 1835–36, Annie Wood Webb Papers. Joseph Willson published *Sketches of the Higher Classes of Colored Society in Philadelphia* as “A Southerner” in 1841.

Frank J. Webb Family Chart



Webb Family Chart, compiled by Mary Maillard. Courtesy of Mary Maillard.
Shaded boxes indicate people who have fictional counterparts in the novel.

died of “worms” the same day the ship docked.³² The Webb family numbered among thousands who had returned to the United States in “reverse migration” after the failed two-year colonization enterprise in Haiti. While in Port au Platt, Francis Webb had served as secretary on the Board of Instruction of a joint Episcopal-Presbyterian church school.³³ This role followed naturally from his previous service as an elder in the First African Presbyterian Church, a parishioner at the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, a founding member of the Pennsylvania Augustine Education Society, formed in 1818, and secretary of the Haytien Emigration Society, organized in 1824. Upon his return to Philadelphia, he worked as the Philadelphia distribution agent for *Freedom’s Journal* from 1827 to 1829.³⁴ His youngest child, Frank, was born sixteen months after the family returned from Haiti. A year later, in July 1829, Francis Webb died of unknown causes; his brother-in-law John Burr paid for his interment.³⁵

No marriage record has been found for Frank J. Webb’s parents. His mother was Louisa Burr (1785–1878), the illegitimate daughter of former US vice president Aaron Burr and sister of John Pierre Burr, a prominent activist in Philadelphia’s black community. The papers of Louisa Burr Webb’s granddaughter—held in the Christian Fleetwood Papers at the Library of Congress—include photographs identifying John Pierre Burr’s daughter and granddaughters as maternal cousins and giving Louisa’s maiden name as Burr. Correspondence from other members of the John Pierre Burr family and the inclusion of a biographical sketch of Aaron Burr among these family papers further confirm the bond between Louisa and John Pierre Burr.³⁶ Louisa Burr Webb worked most of her life for

³² “Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Passenger Lists, 1800–1882,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1/K8C9-J4D>; accessed May 23, 2013), Mary Webb, 1826; “Pennsylvania Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803–1915,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1/JFRR-XX4>; accessed May 23, 2013), Mary Webb, 1826.

³³ “To the Corresponding Secretary, Port au Platt, January 25, January 29, 1825,” *American Sunday School Magazine* 2 (1825): 94; Leslie M. Alexander and Walter C. Rucker, eds., *Encyclopedia of African American History*, vol. 1 (Santa Barbara, CA, 2010), 376; Sarah Connors Fanning, *Haiti and the U.S.: African American Emigration and the Recognition Debate* (Austin, TX, 2008), 172; Beverly C. Tomek, *Colonization and Its Discontents: Emancipation, Emigration, and Antislavery in Antebellum Pennsylvania* (New York, 2011), 150–53.

³⁴ Eric Ledell Smith and Joe William Trotter Jr., *African Americans in Pennsylvania: Shifting Historical Perspectives* (University Park, PA, 1997), 118.

³⁵ Vestry minutes, 1821–31, African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, Philadelphia, PA, 213.

³⁶ Photographs of Ellen Burr (Burrell), Helen Burrell, and Evelyn Durham (Shaw); David E. Gordon to Edith Fleetwood, Oct. 5, 1914, reel 1; both in Christian A. Fleetwood Papers, Manuscript

Mrs. Elizabeth Powel Francis Fisher, a prominent Philadelphia society matron closely connected to the oldest Philadelphia families: Francis, Willing, Shippen, Coxe, and Burd. As a girl, Louisa worked for Mrs. Fisher's sister, Sophia Francis Harrison, and when Rickett's Circus caught fire in 1799, the fifteen year old and her mistress saved the Harrison mansion with soaked blankets and carpets.³⁷ Louisa was nurse to Mrs. Fisher's only child, Joshua Francis Fisher (1807–73), who bonded with Louisa and did not, at a young age, show any "partiality" for his own mother.³⁸ After Fisher's marriage in 1839, Louisa helped to raise his young family. She relinquished her position as the children's nurse in 1848 to Mrs. Sarah Putnam but remained a valued part of the Fisher household for most of her life while maintaining her own family household.³⁹ Louisa Burr Webb had, by this time, married John Darius following Francis Webb's death; she used the name Darius interchangeably with "Derry." Her grandchildren were very much part of her life; Edith and Eugenie Webb visited often while attending school in Philadelphia in the early 1870s.⁴⁰ When Mrs. Fisher died in 1855, she bequeathed Louisa \$100 and half her wardrobe. Joshua Francis Fisher continued to maintain Louisa with allowances and monetary gifts (and, on one occasion, jewelry) for the rest of his life, and his will directed his heirs to pay her an annuity of \$150 and to give her a "respectable" funeral.⁴¹ Before leaving

Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Sarah Iredell Fleetwood's scrapbook includes clippings of Frank J. Webb's poems "Waiting" and "None Spoke a Single Word" (published in 1870 in the *New Era*), an 1875 article entitled "Aaron Burr's True Character," Robert Douglass Jr.'s 1844 "Monody on the Death of Francis Johnson" (reprinted in 1875), and a photograph of Frank Webb's brother, John G. Webb.

³⁷ *Recollections of Joshua Francis Fisher, Written in 1864*, arr. Sophia Cadwalader (Boston, 1929), 191–92.

³⁸ [Mrs. Francis] to Sophia Harrison, Oct. 18, 1808, box 1, folder 7, Dr. and Mrs. Henry Drinker Collection (Coll. 3125), Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

³⁹ Joshua Francis Fisher diary, Sept. 26, 1848, Historical Society of Pennsylvania; 1850 US Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, reel M432_812, 109B; 1860 US Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, reel M653_1158, 131; 1870 US Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Ward 8 Dist. 22 (2nd Enum.), reel M593_1421, 191A.

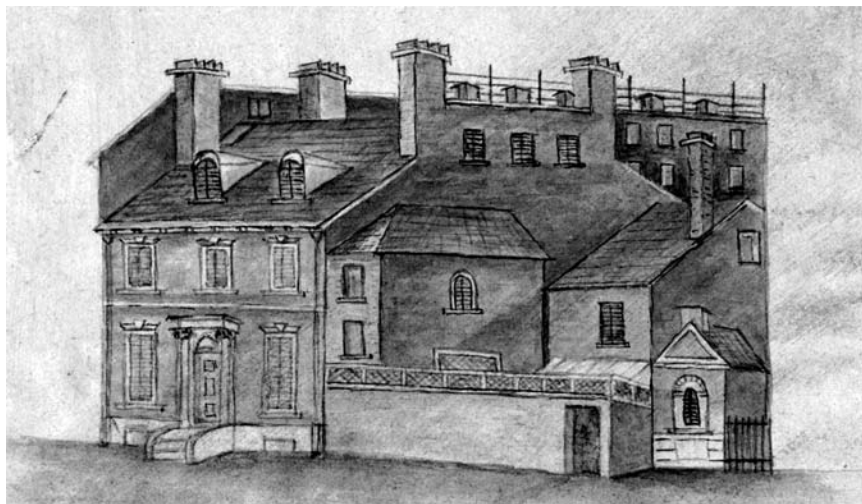
⁴⁰ Annie Wood Webb to Genie Webb, [Oct. 1873], and Edith Webb to Genie Webb, Oct. 1, 1873, Annie Wood Webb Papers.

⁴¹ Eliza Cope Harrison, ed., *Best Companions: Letters of Eliza Middleton Fisher and Her Mother, Mary Hering Middleton, from Charleston, Philadelphia, and Newport, 1839–1846* (Columbia, SC, 2001), 254; J. Warner Erwin to Joshua Francis Fisher, Nov. 3, 1856, Mar. 23, 1857, Jan. 19, 1858, Feb. 2, 1858, and "Sundry payments to be made during my absence," Joshua Francis Fisher to manager, undated, 1856–58, box 2, folder 8, Dr. and Mrs. Henry Drinker Collection; Joshua Francis Fisher will, n.d., series 9, box 552, folder 4, Cadwalader Family Papers (Coll. 1454), Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Joshua Francis Fisher (1807–73) supported Frank J. Webb’s mother, Louisa Burr, throughout her long life. Historical Society Portrait Collection.

Frank J. Webb’s mother, Louisa Burr, first worked as a girl in the George Harrison (below) home at 156 Chestnut Street. Joshua Francis Fisher wrote, “My Uncle’s house, my dear old home, the Paradise of my childhood, as old Louisa, my nurse, called it, was when he purchased it, the most western private residence on Chestnut Street, or any other.” Joshua Francis Fisher, *Recollections*, 191. Image courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia.



on an extended European tour in 1856, Fisher instructed his business manager:

please keep a watchful eye on her & see her constantly—If she is sick she must have the best physician and Nurses. . . . She must have good nurses Send for Delia Dickerson who was with her last summer. She is very intelligent & trustworthy—& a friend of Louisa. . . . If Louisa should die—she must have all her funeral expenses paid—and have it conducted from my house without foolish extravagance and in such a way as is suited to her state or a little above it.⁴²

Louisa died at the age of ninety-four—attended by the Fishers' doctor and kinsman, Dr. Wharton Sinkler—and was buried as a "Lady."⁴³ The Fisher family's benevolence continued into the third generation when in 1897 Joshua Francis Fisher's son and daughters advanced money to Eugenie Webb to help her establish a small business selling jams and preserves.⁴⁴

When Joshua Francis Fisher worried about Louisa becoming ill, he wrote, "I would not rely on Louisas children. Her son John is, I think, trustworthy but he is generally away." All of Louisa's children were "away" in one way or another. Ann Webb was sickly, and when she died, a family friend commented: "there can be no sorrow that her life has ended since she suffered much and neither gave or accepted comfort and happiness."⁴⁵ Frank was about to embark for Europe, and the eldest, Elizabeth, had recently returned to Philadelphia after living in Missouri for fifteen years. Elizabeth Susan Webb (1818–88) had trained as a dressmaker, operated her own shop in Currant Alley in 1838, and appears to have been well educated.⁴⁶ She contributed a page and a half of rhyming couplets—signed E. S. Webb—to the friendship album of Mary Anne Dickerson, a

⁴² Joshua Francis Fisher to [John] Cadwalader, [1856], box 1, folder 5, Dr. and Mrs. Henry Drinker Collection.

⁴³ Date of death of Louisa Burr Darius, Aug. 16, 1878, [written on verso of photograph of Elizabeth Iredell], Christian A. Fleetwood Papers; "Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803–1915," index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/J61W-TXN>; accessed May 23, 2013), Louisa Derry, 1878.

⁴⁴ George Harrison Fisher to Eugenie Webb, June 30, 1897, Annie Wood Webb Papers.

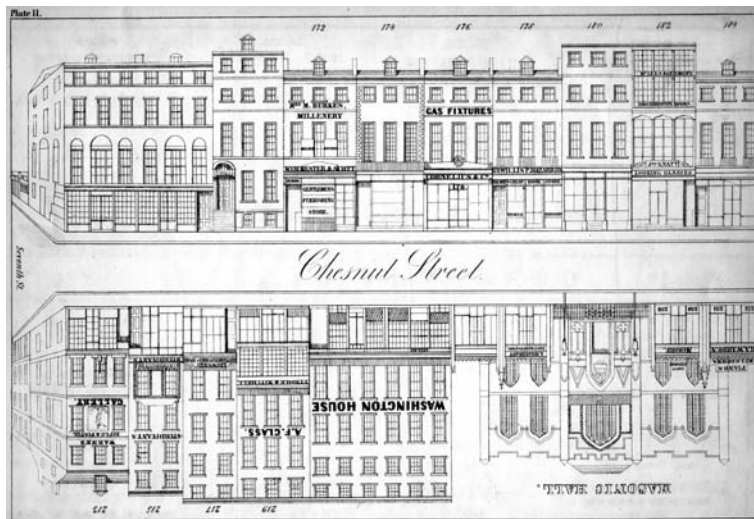
⁴⁵ Lulu to Eugenie Webb, Sept. 7, 1884, Annie Wood Webb Papers.

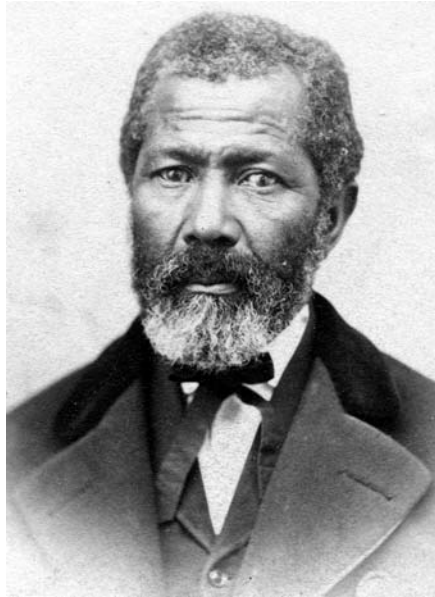
⁴⁶ "District of Columbia Deaths and Burials, 1840–1964," index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/F7RC-YLN>; accessed May 23, 2013), Elizabeth Susan Iredell, July 22, 1888. Elizabeth was known as "Bess" to her relatives; *Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, 352.



(Above, left) Mrs. Elizabeth “Betsy” Powel Francis Fisher (1777–1855) employed Frank J. Webb’s mother, Louisa Burr (1784–1878), as nurse to her only child, Joshua Francis Fisher, who, in turn, employed Louisa to care for his children. Painted by George Lethbridge Saunders, 1840. Courtesy of Nancy Aub Gleason.

Louisa Burr Webb worked for decades in Mrs. Fisher’s 170 Chestnut Street home (below) and, after her death, in the 919 Walnut Street city home (above, right) of her son, Joshua Francis Fisher. Both images courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia.





Left: Geoffrey G. Iredell (1811–72) married Elizabeth Webb in late 1838, and shortly afterward they moved to St. Louis, Missouri.

Right: Elizabeth Webb Iredell (1818–88), Frank J. Webb’s older sister.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Christian A. Fleetwood Papers.

student at Sarah M. Douglass’s school in Philadelphia. Her “Lines Addressed to a Wreath of Flowers, Designed as A Present for Mary Ann,” reflect her careful education and may have been part of a school farewell or debut. By 1839, she had married hairdresser Geoffrey George Iredell of Edenton, North Carolina, and moved to St. Louis, Missouri. There Geoffrey operated a barber shop, and, later, an elegant gentlemen’s shop and steam bath business.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ The poem was inscribed between 1834, when the album was begun, and November 8, 1838, when Elizabeth Webb married Geoffrey Iredell and moved to Missouri. Mary Anne Dickerson album, Library Company of Philadelphia; Edward C. Wilkinson, “Report of the Trial of William Darnes, *Trial of Judge Wilkinson, Dr. Wilkinson, and Mr. Murdaugh, on Indictment for the Murder of John Rothwell and Alexander H. Meeks* . . . (St. Louis, MO, 1839), 25, 67; copy of Blair Iredell family Bible record, which originally belonged to Geoffrey G. Iredell Sr. and lists his wife, children, and some grandchildren, Dr. Raymond L. Hayes, private collection; age and date of death recorded on photograph of Geoffrey G. Iredell, Christian A. Fleetwood Papers; Julie Winch, *The Clamorgans: One Family’s History of Race in America* (New York, 2011), 140–42, 154, 360; *The Present State and Condition of the Free People of Color, of the City of Philadelphia and Adjoining Districts* . . . (Philadelphia, 1838); Archives, African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, Philadelphia.

How Elizabeth Webb met Geoffrey Iredell in Philadelphia and why he left North Carolina are not known, but we have several clues. His father had died in Edenton on January 30, 1837, perhaps allowing Geoffrey the means to set up his own barbering business in Philadelphia across the street from the shop and home of retired wigmaker, hairdresser, and perfumer Joseph Cassey.⁴⁸ Geoffrey Iredell had almost certainly known Edy Wood during his childhood in Edenton, since she had worked just twelve miles away at Captain Wood's Eagle Inn and Tavern and was "well known by many gentlemen both in the Northern and Southern States."⁴⁹ Likewise, Geoffrey Iredell could not have lived in Edenton without also knowing James Cathcart Johnston well; both Geoffrey's father and grandfather had continued to work for Johnston's family after their emancipation.⁵⁰ It is entirely possible, then, that James Iredell Jr., James Cathcart Johnston, or Edy Wood had encouraged Geoffrey to move to Philadelphia. Geoffrey was on friendly enough terms with another wealthy Edenton planter—Josiah Collins III—that in 1859 he sent money via Collins from New Orleans to be given to his sister.⁵¹

Elizabeth Webb and Geoffrey Iredell had three children in St. Louis: a daughter, Sarah, in 1841; another daughter, Laura, about 1850; and a son, Francis Webb Iredell—named after his uncle and grandfather—in 1852. After little Frank's birth, the Iredell family relocated to Philadelphia and shared a house for over a decade with brother John G.

⁴⁸ Joseph Cassey appears to have retired in 1836 when his shop at 36 South Fourth was taken over by the Chew brothers. In 1837 Geoffrey Iredell's barber shop, Bonner & Iredell, was located at 33 South Fourth Street. *McElroy's Philadelphia Directory* (1837), 20.

⁴⁹ *North Carolina Minerva and Raleigh Register*, Sept. 9, 1814, in Koonce, *Wood Family Records*.

⁵⁰ Johnston's first cousin, Governor James Iredell Jr., emancipated Geoffrey G. Iredell Sr. (formerly Geoffrey G. Blair) in 1812. Johnston's uncle, Chief Justice James Iredell, emancipated Peter (father of Geoffrey G. Iredell Sr.), who was living in Philadelphia by 1794. William L. Byrd III, *In Full Force and Virtue: North Carolina Emancipation Records, 1713–1860* (Westminster, MD, 2007), 20–21; "Edenton's Iredell Family and the War of 1812," North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources, <http://www.nchistoricsites.org/iredell/war1812.pdf>, accessed Aug. 31, 2012; "North Carolina, Estate Files, 1663–1979," index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1/VX9F-KCT>; accessed June 18, 2013), Jeffrey G. Iredell, 1837; Griffith J. McRee, *Life and Correspondence of James Iredell: One of the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States*, vol. 2, (New York, 1858), 426; John C. Sykes, "Iredell Research Report" (research report, NC Dept. of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, Historic Sites Division, June 1992), 37–39.

⁵¹ John C. Sykes, "The Lake Chapel at Somerset Place" (research report, NC Dept. of Cultural Resources, Division of Archives and History, Historic Sites Division, Apr. 1999).

Webb's family and their unmarried sister, Ann.⁵² That busy household could well have been the scene of many family gatherings at which Frank heard the prototypes of the stories he used in his fiction. The fictional George Winston knew his cousin Emily Winston and Mr. Ellis in Georgia; the factual Geoffrey G. Iredell knew James Cathcart Johnston and Edy Wood in North Carolina. As Frank Webb's brother-in-law, no one was in a better position than Geoffrey Iredell to give the city-born author authentic details about southern plantation life.

Frank Webb would also have been exposed to southerners and their way of life through his mother's employer, Mrs. Fisher. It is likely that the author used his intimate knowledge of the Fishers to write his comic and affectionate portrait of Ellen Ellis's employer, Mrs. Thomas. Like Mrs. Thomas, Mrs. Fisher not only lived on fashionable Chestnut Street but had an only child who had inherited wealth from a grandfather and married into a wealthy (or once-wealthy) South Carolina family with ties to English nobility.⁵³ Typical of Frank J. Webb's naming practices, the real and the fictional South Carolina family names have a similar ring: Middleton and Morton. Like the fictional Mrs. Thomas, Mrs. Fisher retained firm control of the household after her child's marriage; her daughter-in-law, Eliza Middleton Fisher, tactfully agreed that it was "more comfortable with Mother at the head of the establishment." Mrs. Thomas, obsessive and domineering, is described prowling around her house, duster in hand, "to see that everything was being properly conducted, and that no mal-practices were perpetrated."⁵⁴

Mrs. Fisher, like her fictional counterpart, was high-strung and nervous and required constant mollifying. She did not have broad interests or more than a standard education. In fact, Webb pokes fun at Mrs. Thomas when he describes her smiling, uncomprehending, at the "villanous French" spoken at her table. Like Mrs. Thomas, the real-life Mrs. Fisher gave excessive dinner parties from which it took days to recover. Eliza Middleton Fisher wrote of "dreading the effects of so much dissipation"

⁵² Christian A. Fleetwood Papers; US Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Ward 2, reel M653-1152, 296; *McElroy's Philadelphia Directory*, 1856, 1858, 1859, 1860; "Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803-1915," index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/JDKC-698>; accessed May 24, 2013), Francis Webb Tredell, 1864; 1870 US Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Ward 2, Dist. 7, reel M593_1388, 345A.

⁵³ Harrison, *Best Companions*, xl-xlii; Webb, *Garies*, 24.

⁵⁴ Harrison, *Best Companions*, 20; Webb, *Garies*, 74.

night after night. The fictional Mrs. Thomas continues with party after party, "although the late hours and fatigue consequent thereon would place her on the sick-list for several days afterwards."⁵⁵

In the Fisher house, as in the fictional Thomas's, after the children arrived in quick succession, more than one nurse was required. Mrs. Thomas wails about the cost of "so many nurses—and then we have to keep four horses—and its company, company from Monday morning until Saturday night." Eliza Middleton Fisher disliked having four horses too, but for different reasons. One day, while Frank Webb's mother held a sleeping Lily Fisher in her arms, the lead horses bolted. From that point on, Eliza decided against "taking the children again when the four horses are in the carriage." Just as Caddy and Mrs. Ellis take their sewing "home" to Mrs. Thomas in *The Garies*, so Ann Webb worked with her mother in the Fisher household. Like the ill-tempered Caddy, who angrily wishes "there were no white folks," Ann had a difficult "manner and temper," according to Eliza Middleton Fisher, until she had "companions of her own colour." How much time Frank Webb might have spent in the Fisher home is not known, but he may be the same Frank who had an occasional "romp" in the nursery with the Fisher children.⁵⁶

The fictional Mrs. Thomas, like the real-life Mrs. Fisher, receives financial help from her sister. Mrs. Fisher's sister, Sophie, and her husband, the wealthy wine merchant George Harrison, had no children of their own and provided generously for the Fishers, including buying them their Chestnut Street home and bequeathing their fortune to Joshua Francis Fisher. The fictional Mrs. Thomas, we are told, "whined and groaned as if she had not at that moment an income of clear fifteen thousand dollars a year, and a sister who might die any day and leave her half as much more."⁵⁷

One of the more comic scenes in the *Garies* revolves around Mrs. Thomas's decree that she will only receive visitors one day a week:

Amongst the other fashions she had adopted, was that of setting apart one morning of the week for the reception of visitors; and she had mortally offended several of her oldest friends by obstinately refusing to admit

⁵⁵ Harrison, *Best Companions*, 82; Webb, *Garies*, 73.

⁵⁶ Webb, *Garies*, 24; Harrison, *Best Companions*, 262, 146, 316.

⁵⁷ Harrison, *Best Companions*, viii, 14, 19–20, 44, 82, 287–88, 466, 234, 26, 261–62; Anne, 146, 165, 189, 240, 244, 247, 248, 401; Frank, 316; Louisa, 253–55, 261, 466, 502; Webb, *Garies*, 23–24, 74, 73, 300.

them at any other time. Two or three difficulties had occurred with Robberts, in consequence of this new arrangement, as he could not be brought to see the propriety of saying to visitors that Mrs. Thomas was “not at home” when he knew she was at that very moment upstairs peeping over the bannisters.⁵⁸

Mrs. Thomas then tries to train Charlie “so as to fit him for the important office of uttering the fashionable and truthless ‘not at home’ with unhesitating gravity and decorum.” The real-life Mrs. Fisher also reserved a day to receive friends: “Mrs Fisher’s Sunday,” it was called. She was strict about enforcing “at home” hours, and her daughter-in-law, Eliza, complained bitterly about the rules when one good friend was refused on a Wednesday morning because Eliza was supposedly not “at home” until the evening. Eliza Middleton Fisher gratefully accepted those visits from the “privileged few who are not turned away, when I am really at home.”⁵⁹

While Eliza Middleton and Joshua Francis Fisher were starting their family and employing Louisa Webb as their senior nurse of several, Frank Webb was twelve to fourteen years old—the same age as Charlie Ellis in the novel. He was not only old enough to observe the goings-on in the Fisher household, but he was also school-aged. Nothing is known about Frank J. Webb’s education other than what can be deduced by his later creative output. In the novel, Mrs. Bird, who is interested in the education of children and visits schools as an examiner, offers to take Charlie to her country house in Weymouth while he recuperates from his broken arm. While there, she attempts to have Charlie enrolled in the boys’ academy, and she introduces him to her artist friend who discovers Charlie’s sketching talent. In a touching scene, Charlie asks Mrs. Bird “Did you ever have any little boys of your own?” Webb writes, “A change immediately came over the countenance of Mrs. Bird, as she replied: ‘Oh, yes, Charlie; a sweet, good boy about your own age.’” She then tells Charlie that he died years before on a voyage to England.⁶⁰ A real-life counterpart to Mrs. Bird can be found in Mrs. Fisher’s neighbor, the wife of her first cousin, Edward Shippen Burd. This Mrs. Burd was not only interested in education and a benefactor of children (she founded the Burd Orphans’ Asylum for Girls) but was a well-known folk artist of

⁵⁸ Webb, *Garies*, 74.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 74; Harrison, *Best Companions*, 43, 45, 48, 166.

⁶⁰ Webb, *Garies*, 262, 147.

watercolor scenes during the 1840s and a patron of artist Rembrandt Peale. Her only son died in Paris in 1837 when he was fifteen years old.⁶¹

The Fishers were known in aristocratic circles from Philadelphia to Boston to Newport to Charleston. If contemporary readers recognized old Mrs. Fisher in the character of Mrs. Thomas (she had just died in 1855), they would also have noticed that Joshua Francis Fisher, like Mr. Morton, speculated in real estate, had the power to influence politics, and held typically northern racist views. Harriet Beecher Stowe had asked in the preface to *The Garies*: “Are the race at present held as slaves capable of freedom, self-government, and progress?” Joshua Francis Fisher inadvertently responded in a pamphlet just three years later: “We are here with an inferior race, not fit to share in the management of our institutions—whom we will protect in their place—but that place is not one of equality with us either socially or politically.” Fisher believed that nine out of ten of his fellow countrymen would agree with him, and he added that he was “glad to find these are the sentiments of our President elect [Lincoln], pronounced with the bold and honest frankness which characterizes all his declarations.”⁶² His cousin, Sidney George Fisher, wrote:

These are the opinions of the great majority of the people, to whatever party they may belong. It is impossible for them to have any other opinions.

There are in the North some abolitionists, carried away by the enthusiasm of a dominating idea, who dream of emancipation; and there are also some slavery propagandists, who have not yet escaped the influence of party passion and discipline, but every indication of popular feeling, shows that the great masses of the North will obey the instincts of their race, maintain its supremacy and dominion over the negro, and keep liberty and

⁶¹ Finding aid, Edward Shippen Burd Papers, Dickinson College, Carlisle, PA, http://archives.dickinson.edu/sites/all/files/files_collection/mc1999.10.pdf; Portrait of Edward Shippen Burd of Philadelphia, ca. 1806–8, by Rembrandt Peale, Smithsonian American Art Museum, <http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=19318>; Henry Graham Ashmead, *History of Delaware County, Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1884), 537; Birth record Woodrop Sims Burd, Church of the Transfiguration, Philadelphia, “Baptisms, Communion, Families, Marriages and Burials, 1803–1919,” microfilm, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, also in Ancestry.com, *Pennsylvania, Church and Town Records* [database online] (Provo, UT, 2011); Death record Woodrop Sims Burd, “England and Wales, Non-Conformist Record Indexes (RG4-8), index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1/F3TT-R93>: accessed May 24, 2013), Woodrop Sims Burd, May 13, 1837; Reburial of Woodrop Sims Burd, “Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803–1915,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1/J6F8-D4H>: accessed May 24, 2013, Woodruff Sims Burd, 1851.

⁶² Webb, *Garies*, xix; Joshua Francis Fisher, *Concessions and Compromises* (Philadelphia, 1860), 5.

land, and wealth and power for themselves, exclusively, whether in the North or the South.⁶³

Fisher's succinct statement of white supremacy explains what drives all of the events in Frank J. Webb's novel. The question of why *The Garies and Their Friends* was not published or reviewed in the United States might be attributed to the fact that, for most American publishers and readers, a literary work written by an African American was, by definition, impossible. It simply could not exist.

Just as the Ellises in *The Garies* knew Mr. Walters well, so the Webbs were longtime friends of the entrepreneurial Cassey family. Joseph Cassey—financier, landlord, educator, and activist as well as barber, wig-maker, and perfumer—served with Francis Webb in the Augustine Society and the Haytien Emigration Society. Like Walters, he was a Philadelphia agent for an antislavery newspaper.⁶⁴ After Francis Webb's death, his children continued their close family ties with the Casseys. Frank Webb's second sister, Ann (1820–84), did not marry and, at the age of thirty, lived with Joseph's widow, Amy Matilda Cassey.⁶⁵ In 1852, Frank's brother, John Gloucester Webb (1823–1904), worked as a barber in San Francisco alongside Joseph C. Smith, the son-in-law of Amy Matilda Cassey and husband of her only daughter, Sarah Cassey.⁶⁶

⁶³ Sidney George Fisher, *The Laws of Race, as Connected with Slavery* (Philadelphia, 1860), 24.

⁶⁴ Dorothy Porter, *Early Negro Writing 1760–1837* (Baltimore, 1995), 95; *The Elite of Our People: Joseph Willson's Sketches of Black Upper-Class Life in Antebellum Philadelphia*, ed. Julie Winch (University Park, PA, 2000), 162–63; Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven, CT, 2008), 145–46.

⁶⁵ “New Jersey Deaths and Burials, 1720–1988,” index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/FZ6J-9V8>; accessed May 24, 2013), Ann A. Webb, 1820, citing reference vol. 16, p. 117, FHL microfilm 589837; 1880 US Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, reel 1170, 123B. Ann Webb lists her age as twenty-six in the 1850 census, but other records confirm that she was born in 1820. 1850 US Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, New Market Ward, reel M432_817, 400B.

⁶⁶ “Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803–1915,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/J63T-B7S>; accessed May 24, 2013), John Webb, 1904; Wood Webb family Bible, Annie Wood Webb Papers; 1870 US Census, Erie, Pennsylvania, Corry Ward I, reel M5931339, 169B; 1870 US Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Ward 26, Precinct 9 (2nd Enum.), reel M5931442, 325A; 1900 US Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Ward 30, reel 1472, 3B. John G. Webb alternated residence between Philadelphia and his properties in New Jersey and Corry, Pennsylvania. He was probably named after John Gloucester, the founder of the First African Presbyterian Church, where his father served on the vestry. Gloucester died several months before John G. Webb was born. 1852 California State Census, San Francisco, California, 352A; Wesley and Uzelac, *William Cooper Nell*, 341. Joseph Cassey's son, Peter Williams Cassey (1831–1917), also worked as a barber in San Francisco in 1852–53. Eric Gardner, *Jennie Carter: A Black Journalist of the Early West* (Jackson, MS, 2007), 40n3.



Left: John G. Webb (1823–1904), Frank J. Webb's older brother, married Annie E. Wood in 1854.

Right: John G. Webb worked during the 1860s as a barber in Philadelphia and operated a farm in New Jersey.

Courtesy of Dr. C. Thomas.

The Webbs' connection to the Casseys adds another dimension to our understanding of the relationship between the Ellises and Mr. Walters in *The Garies*. Frank's brother, John G. Webb, returned from California in February 1854 and went directly to the Charles Lenox Remond home in Salem, Massachusetts, to court his childhood sweetheart, Annie E. Wood—the adopted daughter of Amy Matilda Cassey. Amy Matilda had married Remond in September 1850 and moved to Salem with the younger three of the six Cassey children. One of the older Cassey children, Alfred, was hopelessly in love with Annie Wood and had proposed to her in 1851.⁶⁷ Abolitionist William Cooper Nell also had a crush on Annie Wood, but after realizing that “Mr Webb just from California and herself have fanned the embers of an early affection into a blaze,” he told himself, “If you have tears prepare to shed them now.”⁶⁸ Nell, also a friend

⁶⁷ Alfred S. Cassey to Annie E. Wood, Aug. 2, 1851, Annie Wood Webb Papers.

⁶⁸ Wesley and Uzelac, *William Cooper Nell*, 378. On August 22, 1852, William Cooper Nell visited Charles Lenox Remond “and his excellent Lady Amy Matilda = her Daughters Mrs. Smith and Miss Annie E. Wood.” Ibid., 307, 341, 374, 378, 380; Pennsylvania Supreme Court, *Pennsylvania State Reports*, vol. 38 (Philadelphia, 1861), 227; “Massachusetts, Marriages, 1841–1915,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1/N4MP-G8L>; accessed May 24, 2013), John G. Webb and Annie E. Webb, 1854.

of Frank J. Webb's, witnessed the marriage on April 19, 1854, officiated by Rev. Octavius B. Frothingham in the Remond home. He remembered a "happy time at the Wedding."⁶⁹

Much has been written about the Ellis wedding supper, described in lush detail in *The Garies*, but it is worthwhile savoring it again here, keeping in mind that the Remond family—who most certainly catered the Webb affair—were renowned throughout New England for their restaurant, bakery, and confectionary enterprises.⁷⁰ Charles Lenox Remond's parents and his brother ran successful restaurant businesses in Massachusetts and Rhode Island. Charles is listed as a restaurateur in the 1855 Massachusetts census; his father was a retailer of fine wines; his mother, Nancy, and sister Susan were fancy pastry cooks and candymakers; and his sister Nancy was married to an oyster dealer.⁷¹ Compare the scene in *The Garies*:

Then there were the oysters in every variety—silver dishes containing them stewed, their fragrant macey odour wafting itself upward, and causing watery sensations about the mouth. Waiters were constantly rushing into the room, bringing dishes of them fried so richly brown, so smoking hot, that no man with a heart in his bosom could possibly refuse them. Then there were glasses of them pickled, with little black spots of allspice floating on the pearly liquid that contained them. And lastly, oysters broiled, whose delicious flavour exceeds my powers of description—these, with ham and tongue, were the solid comforts. There were other things, however, to which one could turn when the appetite grew more dainty; there were jellies, blancmange, chocolate cream, biscuit glace, peach ice, vanilla ice, orange-water ice, brandy peaches, preserved strawberries and

⁶⁹ Amber D. Moulton, ed., "'Times Change': Frank J. Webb Addresses Robert Morris on the Promise of Reconstruction," *New England Quarterly* 85 (2012): 140–41; Wesley and Uzelac, *William Cooper Nell*, 403.

⁷⁰ Samuel Otter, *Philadelphia Stories: America's Literature of Race and Freedom* (New York, 2010), 252–65; Robert S. Levine, "Disturbing Boundaries: Temperance, Black Elevation, and Violence in Frank J. Webb's *The Garies and Their Friends*," *Prospects* 19 (1994): 366–67.

⁷¹ "Massachusetts, State Census, 1855," index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/MQHM-697>: accessed May 24, 2013), Charles Remond, 1855; Juliet E. K. Walker, *The History of Black Business in America: Capitalism, Race, Entrepreneurship*, vol. 1, *To 1865* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009), 175; *Black Entrepreneurs of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century*, exhibition, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston and Museum of African American History Boston and Nantucket, Massachusetts, 2009–10, <http://www.economicadventure.org/exhibits/black-entrepreneurs/brochure.pdf> (accessed Apr. 2, 2012).

pinces; not to say a word of towers of candy, bonbons, kisses, champagne, Rhine wine, sparkling Catawba, liquors, and a man on the corner making sherry cobblers of wondrous flavour.

The guests enjoy the Ellis wedding party—"What a happy time they had!"—as William Cooper Nell had enjoyed the Webbs'.⁷²

In the weeks before the wedding, however, neither John Webb nor Annie Wood was happy. Webb's "family discord," particularly between John and his mother, left him "dull and melancholy." John did not want to give up his "restless" and "wandering" ways, despite Annie's request that he "try to be settled and not float about the world as you have done." He wanted to return to the California goldfields or go to Australia. Annie responded, "I would rather go to Australia with you than remain with your sister [in-law] Mary or any body else. Tell your Brother Frank I am truly grateful for his offer but decline accepting it unless you earnestly wish me to do so." In the end, Annie persuaded John to stay and thanked him for the sacrifice: "I love you more than ever for this as it proves to me that your dear mind is not entirely set upon gain and gold."⁷³ The newlyweds returned to Philadelphia, and Annie's niece, Charlotte Forten, replaced her in the Remond's Salem home as a surrogate daughter of Amy Matilda and "sister" of Sarah Cassey Smith and Henry Cassey.⁷⁴

While Annie and John Webb adjusted to married life and looked forward to the arrival of their first baby, Frank J. Webb's business as a commercial artist and designer failed.⁷⁵ Frank occupied much of his time in 1854 with writing, pursuing intellectual interests, and promoting black causes, including emigration schemes. He presented "The Martial Capacity of Blacks" to members of the Banneker Institute, and in March 1854, he attempted to defend his "course . . . as published in a Colonization paper" at an anticolonization meeting. We do not know if, or to what extent, Frank Webb might have been active in the colonization movement, but if he was the merchant Francis Webb who arrived in Baltimore on the last day of 1849 from a fact-finding mission in Liberia

⁷² Webb, *Garies*, 376–77.

⁷³ Annie E. Wood to John G. Webb, Mar. 9, Apr. 11, 1854, and undated [Apr. 1854], Annie Wood Webb Papers.

⁷⁴ *Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké*, 382, 212, 236, 302.

⁷⁵ Phillip S. Lapsansky, "Afro-Americana: Frank J. Webb and His Friends," *Annual Report of the Library Company of Philadelphia for the Year 1990* (Philadelphia, 1990), 35; Sollors, *Frank J. Webb*, 426.



Mary E. Webb (1828–59), Frank J. Webb’s first wife, reading *The Christian Slave* at Stafford House, London. *London Illustrated News*, Aug, 2, 1856.

with longtime secretary and founder of the American Colonization Society Rev. R. R. Gurley, then he had long entertained thoughts of leaving the United States.⁷⁶ By 1854 he may have concluded—as does the character George Winston early on in *The Garies*—that he would go to “some country where, if he must struggle for success in life, he might do it without the additional embarrassments that would be thrown in his way in his native land, solely because he belonged to an oppressed race.” Like George Winston, who embarks for South America, Frank attempted first to go to Rio de Janeiro in 1855 but was turned away by the ship’s captain because of his color. He persisted with plans to go abroad and succeeded the following year (after again being denied passage), when he sailed with his wife, Mary, to England on a packet ship.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ “Francis Webb,” Ancestry.com, *Baltimore, Passenger and Immigration Lists, 1820–1872* [database online] (Provo, UT, 2004), original data: Baltimore, Maryland. *Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at Baltimore, 1820–1891*, National Archives and Records Administration, micropublication M255, reel 7.

⁷⁷ Wesley and Uzelac, *William Cooper Nell*, 453.

46 Beaumont St
Portland Place.
Wend. 4th May.

Dear Sir

Mrs Webb has gone to Liverpool
on a visit to Mrs Edmund Cropper.
Whilst there it has been proposed
that she should give one or two
readings. It has also been sug-
gested to her, that if you would
be kind enough to favor her with
an introductory note to the Rathbone
it would assist greatly in promoting
her success, as their great influence
enables them to do much towards
securing it. Trusting I have not
taken too great a liberty in thus
asking of you, for her, a line to
them.

I remain truly Yours.

Yr.
Frank J Webb

Mr Chas Sumner

The bearer will wait for an answer

Frank J. Webb letter to Charles Sumner, July 1857. Ms Am1 (6680), Houghton Library, Harvard University.

Mary E. Webb, reputed by Longfellow to be the daughter of Spanish general Baldomero Espartero (1793–1879) and confirmed by her husband to be the daughter of a wealthy Spanish gentleman and a slave “of full African blood,” had performed the poet’s *The Song of Hiawatha* during her 1855–56 American reading tour.⁷⁸ Longfellow’s knowledge of Mary’s paternity is credible; he had received the information from Harriet Beecher Stowe, and he knew Mary well enough to write her a letter of introduction for her British travels. The Webbs lived in London for about eighteen months from 1856 through 1857 while Mary toured the country giving dramatic readings, the headliner being Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *The Christian Slave*. By the summer of 1857, Frank Webb had completed his novel. He not only managed Mary’s career and organized her tours but also participated in at least one of her British performances, “The Linford Studio,” on June 18, 1857.⁷⁹ A few weeks later he wrote Charles Sumner, who was also staying in London, to request a letter of introduction for Mary to abolitionist Richard Rathbone of Liverpool.⁸⁰ The Webbs moved easily in the royal circles of Lady Byron, Lord Hetherton, Lord Shaftesbury, Lord Clarendon, and the Marquis of Lansdown. They spent several months in the winter of 1857–58 in Cannes for the benefit of Mary’s declining health.⁸¹ Returning from Europe in March 1858—on their way to Kingston, Jamaica, where Frank had been appointed to the post office—the Webbs visited with Frank’s Philadelphia family for several weeks. John and Annie Webb had considered going with the Webbs to Jamaica, but those plans changed. The Webbs sailed for Jamaica at the end of March, but Mary’s health did not improve in the warmer climate. She died the following year.

Frank lived in Jamaica for eleven years. He worked for the post office, became a planter, married Mary Rosabelle Rodgers—the daughter of a Jamaican merchant—and raised a young family.⁸² With the exception of

⁷⁸ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow journal, Dec. 6, 1855, in *Life of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: With Extracts from His Journals and Correspondence*, ed. Samuel Longfellow, vol. 2 (Boston, 1886), 269; Sollors, *Frank J. Webb*, 425.

⁷⁹ Ellen Joy Letostak, “Surrogation and the [Re]creation of Racial Vocalization: Mary E. Webb Performs *The Christian Slave*” (MA thesis, University of Georgia, 2004), 39.

⁸⁰ Frank J. Webb to Charles Sumner, July 1857, Charles Sumner Correspondence (MS Am 1), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Thanks to Beverly Wilson Palmer.

⁸¹ Crockett, “*Garies and Their Friends*,” 25.

⁸² Frank J. Webb’s children by Mary Rodgers (b. 1845) were: Frank (1865–1901), Evangeline (1866–1945), Ruth (1867–1930), Clarice (1869–1962), Ethelynd (1874–1969), and Thomas R. (1877–1964). Frank Jr. worked for the Treasury Department in Washington, DC, in 1893, graduated



Left: Photograph of Frank Webb’s unidentified daughter taken in Columbus, Texas.

Right: Ethelind Webb (1874–1969), Frank J. Webb’s youngest daughter. Verso reads “Ethelind Constance Annie Webb Born Decr 24th 1874, With love for ‘Uncle John’” 15/6/81.

Courtesy of Dr. C. Thomas.



Mary Rosabelle Rodgers of Kingston, Jamaica, was Frank J. Webb’s second wife. Verso reads “To Mrs. John Webb with Mary R. Rodgers’ love.”
Courtesy of Dr. C. Thomas.

a year spent in Washington, DC—living with his recently married niece, teacher Sarah Iredell Fleetwood, clerking in the Freedmen's Bureau, and contributing to Frederick Douglass's *New Era*—he spent the last twenty-three years of his life in Texas, working first as a newspaper editor, then as a postal clerk, and finally for thirteen years as principal of the Barnes Institute, a school for colored children.⁸³ It is no wonder, then, that scholars have had difficulty linking Frank J. Webb with his Philadelphia family.

from Howard Medical College (class of '95), and died unmarried at thirty-six. Evangeline taught at Central Public School in the 1880s in Galveston, Texas, trained as a nurse at Freedmen's Hospital School of Nursing in Washington (class of '97), and nursed through the early 1900s in Georgia, Florida, and Washington. Ruth Glover settled in Hot Springs, Arkansas, and her sisters, Ethelynd Trower and Evangeline Webb, inherited her house when she died in 1930. Clarice McCracken Riddle, a teacher at the Anderson School in Denison, Texas, had one daughter and a stepdaughter, who married jazz musician Lionel Hampton. The youngest, Thomas R. Webb, and his wife, Alice Dickerson, adopted a daughter, Queenabelle (1901–44), who worked as an actress in Hollywood. "Jamaica Church of England Parish Register Transcripts, 1664–1880," index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/VH68-Z3N>), Frank Rodgers Webb, 1865; (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/VH68-ZC8>), Evangeline Maria Louisa Webb, 1867; (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/VH68-P2L>), Ruth Mary Rosabelle Webbe, 1869; (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/VH68-P25>), Clarice Madeline Webbe, 1869, all accessed May 24, 2013; "Frank J. Webb," 1880 US Census, Columbus, Colorado County, Texas, reel 1297; Frank J. Webb Jr. to cousins, Sept. 1, 1893, Jan. 18, 1894, Annie Wood Webb Papers; Daniel S. Lamb, *Howard University Medical Department, Washington, D.C.: A Historical, Biographical, and Statistical Souvenir* (Washington, DC, 1900), 227; *Directory of Deceased American Physicians, 1804–1929* [database online] (Provo, UT, 2004), 36:1723, original data: Arthur Wayne Hafner, ed., *Directory of Deceased American Physicians, 1804–1929* (Chicago, 1993); Crockett, "Garies and Their Friends," 35; "Texas, Marriages, 1837–1973," index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/FX9K-F48>; accessed May 24, 2013), Nelson G. Glover and Ruth M. R. Webb, June 15, 1892; "Ruth W. Glover," 1900 US Census, Hot Springs Ward 5, Garland, Arkansas, reel 59, 8A; 1910 US Census, Hot Springs Ward 5, Garland, Arkansas, reel T62450, 7a; 1920 US Census, Hot Springs Ward 5, Garland, Arkansas, reel T62563, 5A; *Polk's Hot Springs (Arkansas) City Directory* (Kansas City, MO, and Detroit, MI, 1930), 167; "Texas, Deaths (New Index, New Images), 1890–1976," index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/KSB8-9RC>; accessed May 24, 2013), Clarice Riddle, 1962; Clora Bryant, interview by Steven L. Isoardi, UCLA Oral History Program, Mar. 29, 1990, <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb6489p54g&query=&brand=oac4>; "United States Social Security Death Index," index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/J1J8-LNL>; accessed May 24, 2013), Ethelynd Trower, July 1969; "California, Death Index, 1940–1997," index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/VPF6-X8C>), Evangeline MI Webb, 1945; (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/VPJD-K2N>), Quennabelle Pearl Webb, 1944; (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/VGRK-VPK>), Thomas R. Webb, 1964, all accessed May 24, 2013; "District of Columbia Deaths and Burials, 1840–1964," index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:/MM9.1.1/F7YM-X9J>; accessed May 24, 2013), Frank J. Webb, May 14, 1901.

⁸³ Wedding record of Sarah Iredell and Christian Fleetwood, Christian A. Fleetwood Papers; William Loren Katz, ed., *History of Schools for the Colored Population* (New York, 1969), 257; "Frank J. Webb," Ancestry.com, Nov. 10, 1869, *New York Passenger Lists, 1820–1957* [database online] (Provo, UT, 2010), reel M237_321; 1870 US Census, Washington, DC, Ward 1, reel M593_123, 15B.

The Riot

Scholars have suggested that the mob scene in *The Garies* is a composite of the Philadelphia race riots of 1838, 1842, and 1849.⁸⁴ While it is true that Webb, in his imaginative reconstruction of real events, may have incorporated broad elements of these riots—such as the targeting of African American achievement and the defense of African American property—many significant details of these riots are missing from Webb’s story: the burning of Pennsylvania Hall and disfranchisement in 1838; a temperance parade like the one that precipitated the 1842 riot; and an election-eve attack on a black-owned tavern like that of 1849. Rosemary Crockett notes in her dissertation that Webb’s omission of specific African American political events from 1838 to 1855 was conscious.⁸⁵ My research indicates that Webb may have incorporated more details of an earlier race riot—that of 1834—than scholars have previously recognized.

The parallels between the Webbs and the Ellises in *The Garies and Their Friends* are startling. The fictional Ellises live in the same neighborhood of Philadelphia as the Webbs did.⁸⁶ In 1834, Esther “Ess” Ellis, the fictional counterpart of Elizabeth “Bess” Webb, would be about sixteen years old, the same age as Bess. Like her, Ess is the eldest of her siblings and an accomplished seamstress who marries in the late 1830s and has three children: two daughters and the youngest child a son named after his uncle. The fictional Caroline “Caddy” Ellis is, like second daughter Ann “Annie” Webb, about fourteen years old in 1834 and a prolific seamstress. Like Ann, who was ill-tempered and never married, Caddy is plain and shrewish. The fictional Charlie Ellis, like the real-life John Webb, is about eleven years old in 1834. Like John, Charlie is well educated and, as an adult, marries a girl he has known since childhood—a mixed-race, white-looking daughter of a southern planter.

Webb presents scenarios in *The Garies* that are consistent with Philadelphia in the early 1830s. His anecdote about the black hotel waiters who dupe rich southerners by pretending to be homesick for their former slave life on the “ole plantation” probably came straight from the source.

⁸⁴ Otter, *Philadelphia Stories*, 237, 244, 248–49, 252; Levine, “Disturbing Boundaries,” 355, 357–63; Noel Ignatieff, *How the Irish Became White* (New York, 1995), 155–56, 125–30; Lapsansky, “Frank J. Webb and His Friends,” 34.

⁸⁵ Crockett, “*Garies and Their Friends*,” 193.

⁸⁶ Lapsansky, “Frank J. Webb and His Friends,” 35.

His uncle, John Pierre Burr, one of the twelve founding members of the Vigilance Committee, had provided information to John Greenleaf Whittier about the workings of the Underground Railroad. Early in the novel, the library company is wrapping up its winter lecture series, and the Ellis girls are off to attend the final course.⁸⁷ Mr. Ellis proudly explains African American achievements to George Winston: "Why, my dear sir, we not only support our own poor, but assist the whites to support theirs. . . . Only the other day the Colonization Society had the assurance to present a petition to the legislature of this State, asking for an appropriation to assist them in sending us all to Africa, that we might no longer remain a burthen upon the State—and they came very near getting it, too." Mr. Ellis goes on to say that even though the vote was postponed, it was proven that black property owners "paid, in the shape of taxes upon our real estate, more than our proportion for the support of paupers, insane, convicts, &c." Mr. Ellis's statements accurately reflect political activity from December 1831 through 1833, when white Philadelphians had gathered to petition the state legislature to prohibit black immigration into Pennsylvania and to endorse colonization, while black leaders drew up memorials to prove that their citizens paid taxes, owned property, had made great strides in education, and did not make up a large proportion of the city's poor.⁸⁸

Echoing Stowe's words in the preface, *The Garies* cites newspaper articles which "denounced negroes in the strongest terms. It was averred that their insolence, since the commencement of the abolition agitation, had become unbearable."⁸⁹ The term "abolition agitation" had specific meaning for Stowe and Webb. It referred to a movement that began in 1831–32 with William Lloyd Garrison's activism, the near passing of an abolition bill in Virginia, Nat Turner's rebellion, and the springing up of antislavery newspapers, magazines, and tracts.⁹⁰ Abolitionism—and opposition to it—gained tremendous momentum in 1834 after the for-

⁸⁷ Webb, *Garies*, 5, 48, 40. The Vigilance Committee had just been organized in 1834 and the Library Company of Colored Persons in 1833. Samuel Thomas Pickard, *Life and Letters of John Greenleaf Whittier*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, MA, 1894), 224; Thomas Augst and Kenneth E. Carpenter, *Institutions of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States* (Boston, 2007), 104.

⁸⁸ Webb, *Garies*, 49–50; Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787–1848* (Philadelphia, 1988), 46, 132–34.

⁸⁹ Webb, *Garies*, 175–76.

⁹⁰ John Dunmore Lang, *Religion and Education in America: With Notices of the State and Prospects of American Unitarianism, Popery, and African Colonization* (London, 1840), 423–24.

mation of the American Anti-Slavery Society and the abolition of slavery in the British Empire. During the long, hot late summer of 1834, racial tensions in Philadelphia simmered, then exploded into violence.

The riot scenes in *The Garies* are graphic, and even by today's standards Frank J. Webb's narrative has the power to disturb. The mob cry in *The Garies*, "Down with the Abolitionist—down with the Amalgamationist!"⁹¹ echoes the inflammatory rhetoric of newspaper editorials that incited an eerily similar race riot in New York just one month before, in July 1834. These editorials repeatedly equated abolition with interracial marriage and, coupled with rumors that Rev. Peter Williams Jr. of St. Philips' African Episcopal Church had performed an interracial marriage ceremony, fueled a ferocious ten-day riot that ended with the targeted destruction of black churches, houses, and businesses.⁹² Williams's church and home were singled out and burned. It is no surprise then that Frank J. Webb chose the mansion of Mr. Walters—his character drawn partly upon Joseph Cassey—to be the target of attack in his riot scene. Cassey's wife, Amy Matilda, was Williams's only daughter.⁹³

The trouble began on August 8, 1834, when a black gang stole fire-fighting equipment from the white Fairmont Engine Company. The following night, in retaliation, a white gang of fifty or sixty youths attacked James Forten's young son as he returned home on an errand. A white neighbor overheard the gang planning to meet again in a few days, and these plans were reported to the mayor. A few days later, "a deputation of the most respectable of their number [of black leaders] . . . waited on the mayor, requesting protection of their unoffending brethren." The mayor promised that James Forten's house would be protected by a horse patrol, but he did not have jurisdiction in the poorer areas lying outside the city

⁹¹ Webb, *Garies*, 168.

⁹² Craig D. Townsend, "Episcopalians and Race in New York City's Anti-Abolitionist Riots of 1834: The Case of Peter Williams and Benjamin Onderdonk," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 72, no. 4 (2003): 201–3; David Brion Davis, *Antebellum American Culture: An Interpretive Anthology* (University Park, PA, 1997), 295; Joanne Reitano, *The Restless City: A Short History of New York from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York, 2006), 45–49.

⁹³ Other prosperous black citizens—such as James Forten and William Whipper—are probably part of the composite of Walters. Forten's home was targeted during the 1834 riot and his portrait bears some likeness to the physical description of Walters. At age sixty-eight, however, he does not quite fit the novel's description of a vigorous man in the prime of life. Winch, *Elite of Our People*, 167.

limits. Many frightened residents, at the first hint of disturbance, packed up what they could carry, fled the city, and crossed the river into New Jersey.⁹⁴

Frank J. Webb's narrative follows a similar course. In revenge for a gang attack the week before, a youth gang brutally beats George Stevens because he unwittingly wears the distinctive coat of a rival firefighter gang. Stevens himself had been fomenting organized violence against African Americans in the city and had lost his handwritten list of the names and addresses of targeted black residents. Mr. Walters, discovering the hit list and learning of attack plans on his own home (overheard by Kinch), promptly warns the mayor: "There is an organized gang of villains, who are combined for the sole purpose of mobbing us coloured citizens; and, as we are unoffensive, we certainly deserve protection." The mayor offers Mr. Walters two or three police for protection of his own home but claims that all the other addresses are out of his jurisdiction. Walters sends messengers throughout the city to warn residents of the impending attack, and the "majority fled from their homes, leaving what effects they could not carry away at the mercy of the mob, and sought an asylum in the houses of whites who would give them shelter."⁹⁵

After sending out warnings, Walters offers asylum to the Ellis family, whose home is endangered and will soon be razed: "Mr. Walters had converted his house into a temporary fortress: the shutters of the upper windows had been loopholed, double bars had been placed across the doors and windows on the ground floor, carpets had been taken up, superfluous furniture removed." There is no shortage of ammunition in Walters's house: "Guns were stacked in the corner, a number of pistols lay upon the mantelpiece, pistols, and a pile of cartridges was heaped up beside a small keg of powder." Blinding light is used on the mob before "a shower of heavy stones came crashing down upon their upturned faces."⁹⁶ The final ingeniously improvised weapon—volumes of scalding water laced with cayenne—drives the rioters away for good.

W. E. B. Du Bois, more than three decades later, described the last night of the 1834 rioting, when "the Negroes began to gather for self-defense, and about one hundred of them barricaded themselves in a building on Seventh street, below Lombard, where a howling mob of

⁹⁴ Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite*, 144–46.

⁹⁵ Webb, *Garies*, 186, 198–99, 201–3.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 203–4, 212.

whites soon collected." A confrontation with armed blacks was narrowly averted.⁹⁷ The fortification of Walters's house also rings familiar with an 1835 description of a garrisoned three-story brick house in St. Mary Street. "[A] body of coloured men . . . armed with knives, bludgeons and pistols, had sought refuge in the house . . . They had taken the sashes of the upper windows out—had provided themselves with a large pile of stones, and were prepared to resist to the death any attempt to dislodge them."⁹⁸

The 1834 riot lasted four days. Thirty-seven houses were destroyed, many more plundered and gutted, two black churches were attacked, and Stephen James, "an honest, industrious colored man," was killed. Hundreds of rioters marched through the streets of Moyamensing, swinging their clubs, smashing windows, doors, and furniture, and attacking any blacks in their way. *The Garies'* depiction of the mob matches that of the newspaper accounts: "There was something awful in the appearance of the motley crowd that, like a torrent, foamed and surged through the streets. Some were bearing large pine torches . . . Most of them were armed with clubs, and a few with guns and pistols."⁹⁹ The attack on Walters's house occurs late in the evening, just as the attack on the second night of the historical riot was delayed until about eleven o'clock. By the time the mob reaches the Garies' house and ransacks it from two to four o'clock in the morning, Mr. Garie has been murdered and his dead wife and stillborn child lie in an outbuilding.¹⁰⁰ In the historical account, a corpse was turned out of its coffin in one house while a dead baby was thrown to the floor in another.¹⁰¹

Newspapers reported, "the inhabitants who were not fortunate enough to fly at the first approach of the rioters, were treated with brutal cruelty; and we learned that an old inoffensive negro was lying dead from the effects of the treatment he received, in the wreck of his house. Others who were carried to the hospital, it is said cannot survive." An old man thrown from a window onto the street below cried out for help. "The rioters

⁹⁷ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Negro in Philadelphia, 1820–1896," in *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899; repr. Philadelphia, 1996), 25–45; Edward R. Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania: Slavery, Servitude, Freedom, 1639–1861* (Baltimore, 1912), 161.

⁹⁸ Winch, *Gentleman of Color*, 291.

⁹⁹ Du Bois, "The Negro in Philadelphia," 27–28; Webb, *Garies*, 211.

¹⁰⁰ Webb, *Garies*, 220; John Runcie, "Hunting the Nigs' in Philadelphia: The Race Riot of August 1834," *Pennsylvania History* 39 (1972): 209.

¹⁰¹ Turner, *Negro in Pennsylvania*, 160.

in despite of his piteous entreaties for mercy, seized the poor fellow and hurled him out of the window." Several people "were inhumanely beaten and dreadfully lacerated." Rioters described their rampage as "hunting the nigs," and one eyewitness reported that "the mob exhibited more than fiendish brutality, beating and mutilating some of the old, confiding and unoffending blacks, with a savageness surpassing anything we could have believed men capable of."¹⁰² Those were the published accounts. Here is Frank Webb's description of Mr. Ellis's fate:

"Here's a nigger! Here's a nigger!" shouted two or three of them, almost simultaneously, making at the same time a rush at Mr. Ellis, who turned and ran, followed by the whole gang. . . . [He] found himself on the roof of a house that was entirely isolated. The whole extent of the danger flashed upon him at once. Here he was completely hemmed in, without the smallest chance for escape. He approached the edge and looked over, but could discover nothing near enough to reach by a leap. . . .

"Throw him over! Throw him over!" exclaimed some of the fiercest of the crowd. One or two of the more merciful endeavoured to interfere against killing him outright; but the frenzy of the majority triumphed, and they determined to cast him into the street below.

Mr. Ellis clung to the chimney, shrieking,—“Save me! save me!—Help! help! Will no one save me!” . . . Despite his cries and resistance, they forced him to the edge of the roof; he clinging to them the while, and shrieking in agonized terror. Forcing off his hold, they thrust him forward and got him partially over the edge, where he clung calling frantically for aid. One of the villains, to make him loose his hold, struck on his fingers with the handle of a hatchet found on the roof; not succeeding in breaking his hold by these means, with an oath he struck with the blade, severing two of the fingers from one hand and deeply mangling the other.

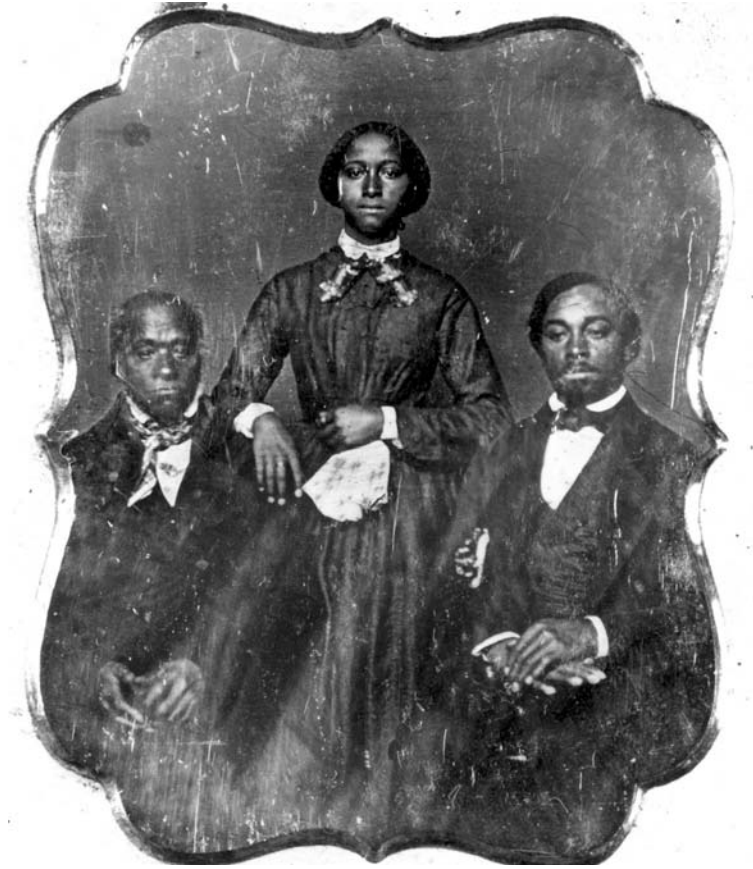
With a yell of agony, Mr. Ellis let go of his hold, and fell upon a pile of rubbish below, whilst a cry of malignity went up from the crowd on the roof.¹⁰³

Mr. Ellis's legs and ribs are broken, his head smashed in, his fingers turned into "stumps." Once in the hospital, he is given "small chance of life." He suffers permanent brain damage and lives the remainder of his life in fear: "they're coming, thousands of them; they've guns, and swords, and clubs. Hush! There they come—there they come!"¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² *Niles's Weekly Register*, Aug. 23, 1834, 435–36; Runcie, "Hunting the Nigs," 187–218.

¹⁰³ Webb, *Garies*, 218–19.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 269, 235.



This ca. 1850 daguerreotype of the Webb family invites closer scrutiny. The unidentified older man's hands are wasted and—with two fingers missing on one hand and finger tips gone on the other—consistent with Webb's description of Mr. Ellis's injuries. A closer look at the man's face reveals a broad scar across his forehead, exactly as described in the novel (*Garies*, 235, 240, 267–68). The man on the right is thought to be Frank J. Webb. Courtesy of the Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, Hartford, CT.

With the Ellis home destroyed, Mr. Walters not only offers up his home to the Ellises and Emily Garie—"for ever, if you like"—he gives them positions in his household: Mrs. Ellis as chief housekeeper, Esther as nurse to her father and teacher to orphaned Emily and Clarence, Caddy as boss of the servants. Years later, Emily Garie says of Charles Ellis, "We have grown up together . . . and now that he claims the reward of long years of tender regard. . . . I shall marry Charles Ellis."¹⁰⁵

Real-life Annie Wood and John G. Webb had "fanned the embers of an early affection into a blaze." Annie Wood had been adopted by the Casseys and lived with them at the same time as Frank Webb's sister, Ann.¹⁰⁶ John G. Webb roomed with a Cassey in-law and remained close to the eldest son, Joseph W. Cassey, throughout his life.¹⁰⁷ These scraps of information point to the probability that the Webbs lived for a while under the same roof as the Casseys.

The many parallels between the novel's characters and the author's family and friends suggest that the Webbs, like the Ellises, were traumatized by the riot. Their lives were defined by it. We can only imagine that "many years after,"¹⁰⁸ when John G. Webb married Annie E. Wood in 1854, family members regrouped, reminisced about their shared experience, laughed over the good times, grieved their losses, celebrated their achievements, and moved into their future with hope and optimism. And Frank J. Webb—fresh from the gathering—wrote their story.

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¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 335.

¹⁰⁶ Rent receipts 1847–1850, Annie Wood Webb Papers; 1850 US Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, New Market Ward, reel M432_817, 400B.

¹⁰⁷ John G. Webb to Genie Webb, undated [1870s], Annie Wood Webb Papers.

¹⁰⁸ Webb, *Garies*, 309.