

AT: Welcome to the Infinite Women podcast. I'm your host, Allison Tyra. And today I'm joined by Elizabeth DeWolfe, professor of history and gender, women and sexuality studies at the University of New England and author of *Alias Agnes: The Notorious Tale of a Gilded Age Spy*. So first, could you give us a bit of background information on Jane Armstrong Tucker?

ED: Jane Armstrong Tucker was born in Maine and raised on the coast in a village called Wiscasset. Her father was a sea captain and he married a much younger woman. He was very successful at his trade in the 19th century and they lived in a lovely home, which he outfitted with the latest furniture and the latest accoutrements of middle-class living. And Jane was raised as a tomboy. She and her brothers and her sisters used to run through fields and have clam bakes on the beach. She rode horses. She learned to shoot a revolver. She was spunky. She was opinionated and she was also a bit lost. When you read her childhood diaries, she yearns for a great adventure, but she's not quite sure what it is. So spin ahead to the late 1880s, and Jane is a young single woman trying to make a living in Boston. She does a number of different jobs. She's a talented seamstress. So she worked for a dressmaker. Then she works for the dress department in a noted Boston department store, where she makes the fancy embroidered buttons and trim for bespoke dresses for the upper class. She paints porcelain and china that the upper class used in their parlors for their teas.

The turning point for Jane came in around 1890, when she marched across Boston's Copley Square to the Hickok School of Typewriting, where she learned how to type and how to take stenography. And so with those skills, Jane, like many other single young women in the United States at that time, went into office work with these new and in-demand skills. And she worked in several different places in Boston, and she worked in New York for a short time for a group of Kentucky businessmen. One of them was a lawyer named Charles Stoll, and she loved him, best employer she had ever, had loved New York City. But the economy in the 1890s was horrid. In roughly May of 1893, the Kentucky businessmen closed their New York City office and Jane lost her job. By the time the fall came in 1893, she was working again in Boston, but had been told she'd be laid off once again in December because of the economy. She fell ill. One of her sisters had recently passed. And she decided after a passive aggressive fight with the other surviving sister about which daughter would go home to care for their elderly grieving parents, Jane won, or lost depending on how you look at it, returned home to Wiscasset, Maine. And she took on a role that she absolutely abhorred: the invalid daughter with her mother caring for her as she sat in a daybed. And then letters and telegrams start to arrive from her former employer, Charles Stoll, begging her to take a secret job.

AT: And so this is where the crux of the book really comes into play, and a woman named Madeline Pollard. So tell us about this job.

ED: Jane Tucker was hired by Charles Stoll, who was now the attorney for a congressman from Kentucky, W.C.P. Breckinridge. Breckinridge had met Madeline Pollard in 1884, when she was a college student at Wesleyan Female College in Cincinnati, Ohio. Pollard grew up in a very small Kentucky town called Crab Orchard, not even a town, basically a village, very tiny place. But it had a spa and the upper class and the middle class would come there for the waters and come there for summer breezes. And so Madeline grew up seeing a finer side of life. Her father was a reader. Her mother was quite elegant and Madeline herself was quite precocious and very intellectually motivated. Her father died suddenly in 1876 and it threw the family into poverty. And in fact, her mother placed three of her children in a Masonic home for orphans because she simply couldn't afford to keep the family together. Madeline, immediately after her father's funeral in fact, was sent to live with an aunt in Pittsburgh and there she started to receive a really decent education. Pittsburgh had a really good school system at that time. So Madeline bounced from aunt to aunt to aunt as she grew up. What she wanted more than anything was a life of art, culture, languages, travel, literature. But there was no way she could go to an academy or college. There was no money. So she became acquainted or reacquainted with an older bachelor farmer and he made a deal. He would pay her tuition if, when she finishes school, she would

marry him. And Madeline added, "or I'll pay you back." Madeline goes to Cincinnati Wesleyan and she loves it. There's a library, there's magazine subscriptions. She is around other intellectually motivated young women. There was a debate club. She won a debate in front of 500 people in Cincinnati. It's fabulous. So as she is loving this world of intellect, she realizes that the education that's supposed to free her is only going to trap her if she marries this rural, barely literate and some say coarse farmer. She needs an out. By coincidence, she met on a train W.C.P. Breckinridge just as he was becoming a rising politician. They had a brief conversation. Madeline remembered that a few weeks later and wrote to him and said, "I need a lawyer's help." And he comes up, there was a carriage ride, there was a stolen kiss, yada, yada, yada, a few days later, they are lovers.

Now spin Madeline forward into the 1880s. There have been two pregnancies and two infants who were given up who later passed at their orphanages. Madeline works in civil service for a while. She makes some money. She moves into increasingly better neighborhoods in Washington. All the while she is Breckinridge's mistress, he is married, he has daughters her age. At one landlord's house, the woman has a charming conversation with Madeline, says, "oh, you're from Kentucky, I have friends from Kentucky, I'll introduce you." And she meets Julia Churchill Blackburn, Churchill as in Churchill Downs in Louisville, Kentucky, the race track, her brothers provided the land for the race course. Julia Churchill Blackburn is the widow of the former governor. She is the sister-in-law to a sitting senator. And she is the grand dame of the Kentucky social scene in Washington. And Madeline flatters her. And Blackburn makes Madeline her protege. And so for the next two or three years, by one set of accounts, Madeline is somewhat of an it girl among the Southern society scene in Washington. She was not conventionally attractive, but she was a charming conversationalist and charismatic. And when she began to speak, people said her whole face just lit up. And so Madeline palled around with Charles Dudley Warner, Frederick Remington, all these people of note. Of course, the dark side of her story is that she was still a mistress to a married congressman. In 1892, Breckenridge's wife dies. And Madeline believes he will finally make good on his promise to marry. He marries someone else. And so she sues him for breach of promise, for failing to live up to his pledge and also to bring to light the double standard that would wave off Breckenridge's indiscretion, but ban Madeline from all decent society for the rest of her life.

So she fought for a principle and Breckenridge was a little taken aback. As the trial draws near in the winter of 1894, he is getting desperate. He's made a number of missteps. He has no evidence to defend himself. What he needs is dirt on Madeline to prove that he did not seduce her, meaning she was not a virgin when they first met. That she had been, let's say friendly with many men before their encounter. So if he could besmirch her, that would release him from the obligation to marry. And his lawyer, Charles Stoll, comes up with a plan. Male detectives couldn't even find Madeline, let alone get close to her. So Stoll realized, if we can get a young woman her age to befriend her, and then in their heart-to-heart talks, Madeline will spill her secrets and their plant, their spy, can turn them over to Breckenridge's law team and use those secrets against her during the trial. And Charles Stoll tells Breckenridge, "I know just the girl," and that's Jane Tucker. So in January of 1894, Madeline Pollard and Jane Tucker, who is now known as Agnes Parker, meet at the House of Mercy, an Episcopal home for fallen women. And Jane talks and cries her way in, and the mission begins.

AT: I gotta be honest, I like Jane a lot less knowing whose side she was on. Is there a reason that her former boss was like, "ah, yes, this is the perfect person to do this, frankly, scuzzy work?"

EW: Yeah, Jane knew shorthand, so she could, and she did, code her notes in shorthand, and she had a rather elaborate way to get them to Stoll, so she had that ability. He knew she was fearless, he knew she was clever and creative, could think on her feet, talented, and knew she needed a job. And at first, when Stoll first approached her, Jane started to back off, "no, no, my sister died, no, no, I need to stay home, no, no, no." And finally, she realized, "he's the best employer I ever had, I can set the salary." And she said to her mother, "this is my chance to grab some gold." Not in a way that says she was greedy, it was all about avarice, but that she realizes as a single woman, the way to her goal, financial independence, being self-sufficient, not beholden to

father, brother, or husband, the way to avoid that fate was to be able to make your own way in the world. And so she realized he was the best employer and a friend, he could help her achieve those goals. And so she decides to do it. So they had mutual respect and mutual trust for each other, although you have this seamy sort of background. Well, not even sort of, it's seamy, it's a horrible scandal. And so off she goes.

AT: I feel like you could frame this as, in both of these instances, these women were in somewhat desperate circumstances, not in control of their own lives, and then these two men sort of exploited that need. But I feel like you can also read this as two women in those positions taking control (ED: Yeah.) of their lives and taking the opportunities and making, in Madeline's case, making that opportunity - she wrote to him, not the other way around. And so it's just sort of interesting that you could tell both women's stories in a certain light that takes away that agency (ED: Yes.) and makes it about the men versus, well, no, these are two women who are doing what they need to do to live their lives the way they want to.

ED: Exactly. Yeah, I agree. And that was one of the, when I started this project, which was at that time just about Madeline Pollard, that was my initial question, because the few historians who even wrote about this case, it was a huge deal in 1894 and then that was it. People went on to other scandals. There are oh so many. But the few historians who have written about it really focused on Breckenridge and the impact this had on his future political career. The assumption was, Madeline was a mistress. Win or lose the case, she's always a mistress. She was probably ignored and banished from society, which couldn't be further from the truth. And also no one even bothered to ask about her life before the trial, as if Madeline Pollard can be reduced to those six weeks in a courtroom. And so my initial goal was to explore, who is Madeline Pollard? And you find that she took a path that was offered to get what she wanted to get. And she, and I believe her, as a very young woman, when she was first seduced, she believed the gaslighting that Breckenridge was offering. In this carriage ride, you see quintessential ensnaring of a young woman. "Oh, Madeline, of all the girls I've ever met who've gone to college, you're the brightest. I can tell you're going to be a writer like you want. I can help you. Oh, let me introduce you to all these people." So he reeled her right in. So by the second or third time he is saying, "we're practically married. So we might," yeah. And so Madeline naively believes him.

AT: And you said that he has daughters her age, he is significantly older and more powerful, both socially and financially.

ED: Absolutely. Absolutely. And she wanted to marry him and she stayed with him for almost 10 years. That's a long game, right? She was accused of being an adventuress - 10 years? No. Now it's towards the end of that affair, she definitely knew what was up and she was getting exceedingly, increasingly anxious that this was not going to come to fruition. And I actually feel bad for her. She's at a point, the point of no return was nine years ago, but she realizes the precarious situation she's in. And so since marriage is off the table, because he married someone else, the only other option is to regain her respectability through breach of promise. Because breach of promise law was developed primarily to restore respectability to middle-class white girls who were left at the altar. It's a way to stamp and say, "it's the guy's fault. You're respectable. You did nothing wrong. Boo on him. Yay on you." And so she uses this law to her advantage. And to the accusation of adventuress, Breckenridge was never a wealthy man. She knew that. She knew she was not going to get a dime from this lawsuit.

AT: So it was just to restore her reputation?

ED: Restore her reputation and to call him out. Because of course, when she enters the lawsuit, everyone knows their sordid history. It's all out there. And so we could say she's a foremother of MeToo. She's saying, "I entered this relationship and I stuck with it for this long because I loved him, because he said he'd marry me."

That's what the plan was. And he reneged on that." She would get all the stigma and the shame. And she says, "oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, no, no. He entered this relationship willingly too. So if I'm shamed, he's shamed." And she never denied that she was in a relationship with a married man. She said, "I know I've made mistakes. I am ashamed, but he should be too." He gets on the stand and he says, "she made me do it. She held me hostage."

AT: This woman half his age?

ED: Yeah. By the time of the trial, he is a five-term US Congressman. And they're talking about higher positions for him, like on the Cabinet. Yeah, that didn't happen. So it's a great question about agency and the same is true with Jane Tucker. She's making her way in the world the best way that she can. And for her, it's using her very clever skills.

AT: All right. So Jane, AKA Agnes, befriends Madeline, and I assume is successful in getting the dirt. So what happens at the trial?

ED: Madeline is very, very lonely. Of course, all of her society friends have dropped her. She's been humiliated in the papers. She is very, very lonely. She sees Jane as a similarly educated woman, not the rough and tumble girls that were also living at the house of mercy. So they do talk. The thing is that Jane is successful in some realms, especially in learning about surprise witnesses. That was very beneficial, but in terms of dirt, she doesn't get much because there isn't any. So at the trial, Jane lives at the house of mercy for about a week. She's given a trial week. If she decides to stay, she has to stay for a year. Now Madeline can come and go every day from the house of mercy. She was the only one who could do that because of special arrangements with the attorneys. And where she's going every day is meeting with her attorneys to prepare for the trial. Jane realizes at the end of the week, "if I leave here and get a room in a boarding house, I'll have freedom of movement. I can follow Madeline around." That's what she does. But she tells the matron at the house of mercy, she offers to help her with their financial record books, which are all a mess. Here's Jane. She's trained to secretariat skills. And so the matron says, "Oh yes, how kind of you." That lets Jane back into the house of mercy every night. And so Jane can't of course go to the trial. Too many Kentucky people who might recognize her from her stint with Stoll in New York City. So she has to stay off scene. Every night, Madeline comes back. Jane comes over, makes her tomato salad with vinaigrette, brings her oranges, makes her hot toddies well-laced with Kentucky bourbon. And that gets Madeline talking. And so Jane learns about the trial through Madeline telling how it went for her.

So at the trial itself, the first witness to get on the stand is Julia Churchill Blackburn. And she is an older woman. You can imagine older Gilded Age women with their finery on and their, let's say large presence. Let's put it that way. And she matches that particular stereotype and she gets on the stand and she says "on Good Friday in 1893, Breckinridge and Pollard insisted on seeing me in my parlor. And Breckinridge said, 'I'm going to marry her.'" Boom. The Kentucky lawyers are like, "Mrs. Blackburn, you're the widow of the former governor, are you not?" She says, "you know very well I am." And they start picking apart her testimony. "Was it Friday or was it Thursday? Was it four o'clock or was it six o'clock?" And she looks right at these Southern gentlemen and says, "you would not dare attack me thus if I had a man to protect me." And every Kentucky man in that room blushes because they know they have done a very naughty thing. And so she commands that courtroom. Now you have an elite woman saying Breckinridge said in my parlor, he would marry her. And based on that, she acted as Madeline's chaperone, as she was a fiancée. When Blackburn finds out that Breckinridge has married someone else and that Madeline Pollard was his mistress and she had been mentoring a mistress and that Breckinridge foisted her onto Blackburn, she is livid. So of course she's going to testify in court to protect her reputation because this was not the first time she'd been down this road where her reputation had been harmed by silly games that men play.

What makes this case so fascinating is the variety of women who get on the stand and tell their tales. And in fact, we start with Julia Blackburn up here in terms of elite status. We have working class women. We have Breckinridge's sister-in-law. We have all kinds of people. If we want to talk about the least apparent power, that would be Sarah Guest, who is a formerly enslaved woman, free, emancipated at some point in the 1850s, and in the 1880s ran a house of assignation in Lexington, Kentucky. And it was at her home that Breckinridge seduced for the first time Madeline Pollard. And she gets on the stand. Now keep in mind, here's an African-American woman in an all-male, except for Madeline, all-male, pretty much all-white courtroom. Every woman who got on the stand, the lawyers started, like with Blackburn, "you're the widow of the governor, right?" Everyone had to really establish their social credibility and no one more than Sarah Guest. She had to tell her entire story. She starts telling the testimony about the seduction and when it was, and one of the lawyers says, "wait, wait, wait. You just said it was in the middle of August, but in your earlier deposition, you said it was the beginning of August. So which is it?" She says, "well, if the written one says it was the beginning of August, then the man that wrote it got it wrong." Boom. So there are all these stories that collectively tell us about women's strategies to negotiate the world, really, in the last decades of the 19th century. And grabbing the gold, to use Jane's term, any way they can to get to their slice of the American dream. And so the courtroom is just this kaleidoscope of stories. And of course, Madeline testifies as well. And she holds that courtroom in her hand when she tells this tale of struggle as all but an orphan to simply get an education, and the choices, uncomfortable as they are, that she made to reach her goals.

AT: So did Jane actually find any dirt? Because it sounds like there wasn't any dirt to find. Like, did she actually succeed in her task?

ED: It's mixed. She did not get real dirt because there really wasn't anything to find. There really wasn't anything to find. As hard as Breckenridge's team tried, they were dragging in men left and right who swore that they had seen her at some brothel or some hootenanny or whatever. And all those stories just fell apart. And she had evidently a young man before she went off to Cincinnati Wesleyan who proposed marriage. But it is said when Madeline learned that he would never be able to afford to go to Europe or anything like that, that she turned him down. There were all sorts of stories. And Madeline talks about on the stand too, that were party games that kids would play and they'd blow it up into this whole seamy thing. So Jane never got anything that I would consider real dirt. I don't think there was anything to find. What she did get was a lot of sadness about a woman who is pregnant, as it turns out, three times. She miscarried the third time. Being stymied by Breckenridge, unable to move at will in the world. And she's this close to that life. And there are just so many barriers against her. What Jane did get was information on witnesses, who was coming up on the stand, a couple of really big evidently supposed to be surprised moves that got stymied. And Jane was very proud that she had a role in that. Trying to get some insight into whether Madeline was telling the truth or lying about not wanting money, Madeline received numerous offers: go on the stage, write a book, be in a play, open a hotel, all these different things basically, entrepreneurs tried to scoop up some gold. She said no to every single one of them, every single one. And one of them get this as an author, one of them, she was offered \$10,000 to write a book in 1894. I'll take that deal!

AT: I was going to say, I would like that deal now.

ED: Yeah, we'd like it now, let alone in 1894. She said no to every single one. No to every single one. She was not a gold digger. She was not a gold digger. Jane would write these nightly reports and she would report how much Madeline ate and if she had a hearty appetite. Jane was incredibly snarky. She would write about, "well, that hardly seems like a mother who's mourning her child." It's like, "really?" Jane could be caustic. The other target of her judgmental snark was Breckinridge and Charles Stoll. She took issue with the way the lawyers were handling the trial, including handling Julia Blackburn and other women with what she said were kid

gloves, saying “the women are running right over you and you need to be, this is a court of law, question them.” And this sounds so modern. She would make suggestions and they would be ignored. And then one of the other attorneys, male, would make it. And she would write to her mother or sister “if they had listened to me.” And in fact, well, I won't reveal what happened at the trial, but suffice it to say that Jane says, “if they had let me run things, there'd be a very different outcome.” So you had asked earlier, why does she take this job with this less-than-ideal politician? I think she believed in Charles Stoll. I think she believed in the opportunity. And then when she gets to know these men, I think she believes, and she is capable of more than people think she might be capable of as a woman. And this becomes her lesson here. So I don't think she took the job because she was saying, “yeah, defend Breckinridge. Oh, he's been harmed by this woman who is just an adventuress and just trying to make money.” No, no. She's like, “here's an adventure. Here's the great adventure that I wrote about when I was 12. And here it is.”

AT: So what happens to both women after the trial?

ED: So after the trial, Jane and Charles Stoll, but primarily Jane, write a book called *The Real Madeline Pollard*, something like “a diary of 10 weeks with the plaintiff in the Breckinridge case,” something like that. And it is based in fact, there's a lot of overlap with factual evidence, things we know absolutely happened. But Jane colors it to try, and this is just to me so fascinating, she's trying very hard to make Madeline out to be a bad woman, make her out to be what the lawyers hoped they could make her out to be. And there's no factual evidence for that. But it's very clear that Jane is having difficulty with that. And I think at the end, she realizes “Madeline's just trying to make her way in the world just as I am.” And so she publishes this book. It's one of four books that are published. When the verdict comes down, these books are coming out. Jane's book flops. It's a bomb. She publishes it under the name Agnes Parker. Keep in mind, no one except Charles Stoll knows her real name, not even Breckinridge, no one. So she publishes this book under Agnes Parker. And in it, she talks about taking on being a detective. “Oh, how could I do this as a woman?” And then a little bit later says, “and so I had to tell yet another clever lie. I'm clever at this, and I rather like it.” Newspaper reviews rip her to shreds for this unwomanly task. And “how can she admit to lying? There is nothing to recommend in this book.” These reviews, they make chills up your spine for any author who has a book coming out in a month. And so the book flops. The book flops. This is where Charles Stoll said, you'll make as much as a thousand dollars. As much as I can tell, she doesn't make a dime. She goes home to Maine and her parents and siblings have been left in the dark. They believed for the most part that she was simply a stenographer working in Washington. Although her mother kind of figured out what was going on, but she starts to tell them her tales and they are horrified. And this is part of the reason Jane Tucker's alter ego Agnes Parker and her great adventure get buried. Her parents are horrified. There is no copy of *The Real Madeline Pollard* at the Tucker Homestead, which is now a historic house. No copy, no copy in the archives that hold the Tucker family papers. No copy.

AT: I don't feel bad for her that her book flopped. And I do wonder though, how much internalized misogyny is playing a role in Jane's side of this story? Like you were talking about how judgmental she was towards Pollard and how she's deliberately trying to frame her as a bad woman when, arguably having seen the outcome of the trial, knowing that there's not a whole lot of dirt, she could have talked her up as a heroine. And the poor woman who's been done wrong by a man, I think would have actually played really well in that time period. So it's sort of fascinating, what's going on in her head?

ED: Yeah. Yeah. And I think that would have been really interesting for her to take that tack. Pragmatically, it's Charles Stoll funding the book.

AT: Oh, okay. I think I missed that part. There's an agenda.

ED: Yeah. He has a very specific agenda with this book, right? Basically they want a second chance to play their case. And you can tell where Charles Stoll is taking a heavy hand. So Jane is writing in the house of mercy parts, but Charles Stoll is clearly inserting material that could not be aired in a court of law because of evidentiary rules and all sorts of things. So he's playing that. That said, it is really interesting. Jane is just so fascinating. I admire her, and at the same time, I don't think I would have liked her. And I don't think I would have wanted to cross her path. You want to think, I want her to be this feminist hero who would stand up for other women, because all the time, she's talking about the men who have, the male employers who treat her so badly and her brothers get to do things that she can't, all of these kinds of things, but while she's in Washington, she tours the White House and she writes home to her mother about how there was a gaggle of feminists with their ugly short hair and they're awful. And so she is talking smack about suffragists, women's rights activists on one page. And on the next page, she's saying basically "these darn lawyers, why don't they listen to me? I'm smarter than all of them." And she was usually right. She was usually right in her advice and they wouldn't listen to her.

AT: I do wonder how much of that is, there is a particular type of woman who basically says, "I have done everything right and it's not fair. Like, I have colored within the lines, my whole life, I've done everything I was supposed to do, and it's not fair that I haven't gotten what I feel I deserve." And part of that resentment then shifts to the women who color outside the lines, whether that's Madeline Pollard pursuing her dreams the only way she sees that she's able to, whether that's the suffragists fighting for change. And that's what this sounds like to me. (ED: That's interesting.) Like they redirect that anger away from the people who are enforcing the system, towards the people who are trying to change the system.

ED: That's interesting. That could very well be. That said, Jane, there are boundaries on her life, but she has a lot of freedom too. She never marries. She runs a number of, again, entrepreneurial businesses from her home. She was said to have been, I talked to a couple of people who live in Wiscasset, much older people who did know her, and they said that she was a presence, which makes me laugh. She was strong-minded. She was definitely strong minded. She is fascinating. Another kind of ironic thing is, she does write another book. It's not about the trial. She compiles a cookbook for the Maine Democratic Women in 1920-something. So this woman who basically eschews domesticity, being at home, she ends up in that home, but I think makes it her own. Madeline, after the trial, she goes from the courtroom to a hospital, which is basically a rest home, and she rests up. And six-week trial, being dragged over the coals, who wouldn't need rest? As I mentioned, she had plenty of offers for a while. Jane reports that Madeline went back and forth between a couple, and eventually she does none of it. Despite the public thrashing of her history, real or imagined, she is not, well, she's shunned by some of society. At the conclusion of the trial, Washington Women's Group send commendations and flowers to Madeline's attorney, because he went after Breckinridge, and sends flowers to Julia Churchill Blackburn and a couple other women who testified. No one sends anything to Madeline. But Madeline does find a supporter, and I'll say that Madeline gets the life of which she always dreamed. If anyone wins in this event, I think it's Madeline Pollard. She gets to Europe, and she lives there for the rest of her life. One of the happiest things I found was when she was in her 60s, she came to the U.S., stayed in the U.S. for a little bit, and she attended Columbia University and studied literature. She won.

AT: Now, Madeline is obviously the better known of the two women we've primarily been talking about, and one of the things I find really fascinating about your book is that no one knew Jane's story. So how did you find her?

ED: It was accidental. It was not the book I thought I was writing. I thought I was writing a book about the trial and Madeline Pollard, and I was working primarily initially at the Library of Congress where Breckinridge's papers are housed, and the Breckinridge papers comprise multiple Breckenridges. It's interesting, the Breckinridge men in the 19th century were very involved in politics at the state and national level. In the 20th

century, it's the Breckinridge women that we know, but this immense, wonderful corpus of material is there. So I started with WC..P. Breckinridge's papers and reading through, following the revelation of the scandal and then following as they were preparing for the trial. So the trial is set for March of 1894. And in January, I start seeing these vague references from Charles Stoll to Breckinridge and also to Breckinridge's son, Desha, saying, "well, I'm going to go to Boston. I doubt the wisdom of telephoning the young woman. I won't say more now. I'll report in person this evening." And I keep seeing these little things that makes me think, what is going on? Shortly thereafter, I see letters from Stoll to Breckinridge again saying, "Ms. P has succeeded in step one," things like that. Getting these little hints about Ms. P and Ms. Parker. And when I finally saw Ms. Parker, I realized, wait, one of those books that was published about the trial in 1894 was written by a woman named Agnes Parker. Could this be? Went back to the Agnes Parker book that I initially thought was fiction. And indeed, it had been cataloged as fiction in a number of libraries. But having the book and Breckinridge's letters side by side, there was so much overlap. It's like, what? This happened. To some degree, this happened. So it's able to match. So that told me Agnes Parker was real. But who the heck was she?

So I go digging in Washington, DC city directories and census records. And of course, you're probably aware that the 1890 US federal census burned in 1921. So we have a 20-year gap between census records. It's a huge loss for people who study the Gilded Age. So long story short, I could not find any person named Agnes Parker who was in the right place at the right time. So I was absolutely stymied. Keep reading, keep reading, keep reading. Trial ends. In the correspondence, Ms. Parker disappears. I'm finishing up my research in Breckinridge's papers. Like I got to get back to Pollard and see what happens to her next. I figure, well, I know he's broke, but I want some color for the book. So let's see who we owed money to. So I go poking through financial records. First, I find a note from Sophonisba to her father after the trial saying basically, "Dear Father, Ms. Parker has not yet been paid for her work. She would very much like to be paid. Here is a note that she has sent. I forward it to you." And so the note says, basically, "Dear Colonel Breckinridge, pay me. I am in New York" because she's there finishing publication of her book. "I'm in New York. You can write the check in any of my three names." She has three aliases." And then she says, "but it would be best to use my real name, Jane Tucker." Now I know Agnes Parker's Jane Tucker. Go to Ancestry, plug in Jane Tucker. There are 7,000-some Jane Tuckers in the United States in 1894. And I have no idea. So then I think, well, okay, there was this whole scheme with a friend in Boston. She sent her coded notes to Boston, stenographer there transcribed them, sent them back to Washington. Maybe she's from Boston. Nope, dead end. I think, "well, I don't know. Where could she be?" Keep looking through this folder. And then I find an invoice for about 10 weeks' work. It starts in January and ends about three weeks after the trial did. And it's unsigned, there's no name on it. But there is the rental of a typewriter that Jane used to type her reports. There's the bourbon for the hot toddies. There's the Harper's magazine that Jane used to entice Madeline to talk about all of her literary friends. It's Jane Tucker's invoice for spying.

This was before texting. But I remember emailing my husband and saying, "I found gold." I was so excited. Took pictures of it, photocopied it, everything. Get back to the hotel that night and I pull out all the things that I had copied for the day and read them over. I pull out that invoice. And in the moment I had found it, I was so excited that I missed the first line. The first line says "transportation, Maine to Washington." Jane Tucker is from Maine. So I put that in: Jane Tucker, I know about when she was born because I knew she was Madeline's age, Maine. Boom, a dozen Jane Tuckers pop up. Toss out the old, toss out the young, toss out the married. And there's Jane Armstrong Tucker. Put her name into Google. Son of a gun. Historic house with an archive. So the research goddess was smiling on me that day. But that's how I found it is piecing together all internal clues from the letters, from the real Madeline Pollard, from a lot of searching on Ancestry, and then a good healthy dose of Google to put all these pieces together.

When I went to the archives, so call up Historic New England, which, I live in Maine, so Boston's two hours away. Go down, meet with them. Curator, director, archivist, all sitting on one side of the table. And I'm telling them this whole story and they're sitting there going, "no, no, you have the wrong Jane Tucker. She was a stenographer." And then she actually ran a cosmetics business. "She ran a cosmetics business. No, you have

the wrong one.” And I’m sitting there thinking, “where did I go wrong?” I was so sure. And then one of the staff members said, “where did you say she did this spying?” I said, “Washington.” And I literally saw her eyes go *whoop*. She said, “wait, I cataloged those letters. I know there were letters from Washington.” So they bring boxes down. If you don’t know this backstory, those letters read like a young woman who went to Washington to be a secretary for a former employer. But when you know the backstory, it’s as clear as can be. These are letters from an undercover detective.

And at that point, going through all of Tucker’s papers, we’re able to find the bits and pieces to confirm it. And especially after the trial in the fall, she comes back home and people aren’t fond of her book, which by this time is already gone off the shelves. There is a letter, I think it’s notarized, from Charles Stoll attesting that Jane Tucker did detective work for him under the name Agnes Parker. And so all sorts of little pieces also were just there. But the interesting thing is, I don’t think anyone ever read Jane’s letters, really all of them, before me. Because this was a collection that in the latter part of the 20th century, when the house became a historic home, the story was, here’s this lovely sea captain’s home. Look at all the fine furniture. And in fact, I saw brochures from the 1970s and it names the sea captain and then says “his young wife.” That’s what she’s referred to. And so I doubt anyone other than the person who first cataloged the collection read through all of them. And even if you had, you would have said, “oh, office work, Washington, that sounds fun. Boy, she’s snarky.” So I think the message here for those of us who are trying to recover women’s lives is oftentimes you have to go through the men. You have to go through the men. That family collection of papers was saved because of this sea captain legacy of the Tucker family writ large, not just Jane’s father, but Jane’s grandfather. And coastal Maine, seafaring town. But when you go in through the men, that’s when you can start to see the women and bring them to the fore. And then also with finding hidden women is you just have to exploit every possible source, every possible source that you can think of to find these little bits. And then you knit them together.

AT: So the first quarter or so of my book, *Uncredited*, is all about how documentation, or rather the lack of documentation, is one of the big reasons that women’s stories don’t get told. And so as you’ve been recounting this, things like that note where she lists her aliases, that is a little gold mine in itself. And the fact that Historic New England had her papers, not because they were deliberately saving her papers, but they just happened to survive and be preserved in an archive. And someone happened to at least have looked closely enough at them that they said, “oh, yeah, DC.” And it just is so maddening because we have no idea how many women’s stories will be lost forever because that documentation either didn’t exist in the first place or it wasn’t saved at the time. Because her family could have just thrown her stuff out after she died. (ED: Absolutely.) Or it wasn’t considered important enough to save by an archive, or the archive didn’t consider it important enough to, digitization is a huge one, but they didn’t consider it important enough to properly index it. And so it’s just sitting somewhere and it will be rediscovered in another like 20 years. So it’s just all these steps that had to happen for you to be able to find those when you were specifically looking for them.

ED: Yeah. And having the right narrative in my head. If the research tasks were reversed, it wouldn’t have worked. Wouldn’t have worked. I wouldn’t have recognized what I was seeing. And so part of it, historians talk a lot about lucky breaks. I believe in luck in the sense that these things survived. They’re still there to be able for us to see. That things haven’t been eaten by bugs or burned up in a fire is a good lucky break for us. But finding this material is dogged persistence. That’s what it is. That you look through every single file, even though you’re certain you’re not going to find, and there were many files that had nothing, but you do it anyway because it builds your mental map of the historical event. So that when I see a bill that starts in January and ends three weeks after a trial, I know this is significant. It’s like those dates, bing, bing, bing, flash and a bell. One of the most buried things I’ve found, Madeline Pollard left exceedingly few documents. There are no letters. There are no diaries, despite her multiple statements of writing. But I’ve found mentions of her in other letters. One was a dear friend of hers in England. And this woman mentions Madeline several times post-trial

in a letter, which goes into a man's collection. And this gentleman worked for a 20th century pacifist reform organization. So the collection is cataloged in the Library of Congress as the Reform Association. Never in a million years would I think to look at that, a 1930s, 1940s pacifist. Why would I look at that? Unless on this mental map, because there's so little information on Pollard in her own hand, I drew out charts of all of her friends and her friends' friends. That's how I found it. It's basically friend of a friend. This is why projects take so long. But to me, it's the hunt. And I can't let it go because once I learn one of these women's stories, I almost feel honor-bound to tell it. I now know something. I have to share it. And I want to tell it to the best of my ability. And so I keep digging, keep digging.

AT: Join us next time on the Infinite Women podcast. And remember, well-behaved women rarely make history.