

Draft Dodger, Soldier's Wife: Trans Feminine Lives, Civic Duty, and World War II

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Abstract: This article examines trans feminine lived experiences in the United States during the Second World War amid persecution amplified by the Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, the May Act of 1941, and heightened visibility through local and national news publications. This article contends that there is a longer and more complicated linked history between trans feminine Americans and the U.S. military than has been acknowledged by both scholarship and public discourse. Federal statutes like the STSA and the May Act lent authority to the state and its auxiliaries beyond the singular municipal or county jurisdiction. These factors aided the legal persecution of innumerable Americans with perjury, draft evasion, 'moral', and fraud charges. Through case studies of the disparate circumstances surrounding the 'discovery of sex' of three individuals, Sadie Acosta, Lucy Hicks Anderson, and Georgia Black, this study illuminates the role of various actors involved in investigating and policing their 'moral' crimes and gender variance in the 1940s and 1950s. In the post-war years, the figure of the 'ex-G.I.' woman is seen through numerous well-publicized cases in the U.S. and the U.K., showing that trans feminine experiences of World War II could be found both at home and abroad.

Introduction

Except as otherwise provided in this Act, it shall be the duty of every male citizen of the United States, and of every other male person residing in the United States, who, on the day or days fixed for the first or any subsequent registration, is between the ages of eighteen and sixty-five, to present himself for and submit to registration at such time or times and place or places, and in such manner and in such age group or groups, as shall be determined by rules and regulations prescribed hereunder.¹

In September 1940, a year before America's formal entry into the Second World War, the United States Congress passed the Selective Training and Service Act (STSA).² This act enabled the first draft for conscription during designated peacetime in United States history. As the STSA was a sex-specific law, individuals who were assigned male at birth and whose gender did not align with that assignment were given an impossible choice: they could either identify themselves as men with the Selective Service System, or

¹ U.S. Congress. United States Code: Selective Training and Service Act, 50a U.S.C. §§ 302-315 Suppl. 1. 1940. Periodical.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/uscode1940-005050a003/>.

² Ibid.

they could ignore the act and risk substantial legal penalty.³ Through the assertion of their gender and innocence of military-related charges, trans feminine Americans found themselves vulnerable to state violence at a time of expanded wartime powers. Trans feminine lives in the United States were not exempt from the immense impact of global conflict, and indeed they were uniquely affected by World War II.⁴ While the potential for persecution was an integral part of WWII-era trans feminine experiences, their relationship to the conflict adds further complexity to their varied experiences. Some were wives and mothers of soldiers, others

³ The U.S. draft law remains sex-specific. The current Selective Service System policy is as follows: "Selective Service bases the registration requirement on gender assigned at birth and not on gender identity or on gender reassignment. Individuals who are born male and changed their gender to female are still required to register. Individuals who are born female and changed their gender to male are not required to register." "Frequently Asked Questions - Who Needs to Register," Selective Service System, <https://www.sss.gov/faq/#who-needs-to-register>.

⁴ A note on terminology: While the three main subjects of this study were trans women, I use "trans feminine lives" as an umbrella under which numerous identities, experiences, and presentations may be subsumed. As Emma Heaney employs in *The New Woman*, I acknowledge trans femininity as a capacious category that includes individuals who identify with, "one or more vernacular trans feminine terms (around the turn of the twentieth century in the United States, Britain, and France these terms include fairy, Mary, molly, queen, tante, and molle) and/or identifying as women." Just as an examination of military policy through the sole lens of homosexuality fails to account for its impact on trans lives, a narrower interpretation of the impact of these policies on trans womanhood leaves out many more caught in the net of the "male citizen" terminology. Emma Heaney, *The New Woman: Literary Modernism, Queer Theory, and the Trans Feminine Allegory* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017), xiii.

engaged citizens and organizers, and some served in the military at home or abroad.

The 1940 STSA armed the state and its auxiliaries with the purpose and authority to persecute individuals among its population who, “moved away from the gender they were assigned.”⁵ As a federal statute the STSA blanketed the United States—it extended beyond the jurisdictions of cross-dressing laws, which were largely, “local innovations, passed by municipal governments.”⁶ In doing so, the language of the STSA regarding the regulation of ‘male citizens’ emboldened the federal government to pursue ‘draft dodgers’ while it further expanded avenues to police gender into areas of the United States that heretofore did not have cross-dressing ordinances. Throughout the course of the war over six thousand draft boards encompassed the Selective Service System, and each imbued a local authority with national power to pursue draft dodging and other related charges.⁷ In addition to the risk of a perjury charge if one filled out a certificate of marriage that attested to their gender, individuals assigned male at birth and who lived as women were endangered by three military-related charges: draft evasion; fraud, the collection of military spousal support checks; and violation of so-called ‘moral zones’ around military bases, usually by charges related to sex work. These charges extended past the

⁵ Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Seal Press, 2017), 1.

⁶ Clare Sears, *Arresting Dress: Cross-Dressing, Law, and Fascination in Nineteenth-Century San Francisco* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 3.

⁷ Allan Bérubé, John D’Emilio, and Estelle B. Freedman, *Coming Out Under Fire: The History of Gay Men and Women in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 8.

municipal level, and they could come from the federal courts to the local sheriff's department.

Those who lived as women and were assigned male at birth were subjected to the expectations of patriotic womanhood as well as the civic duties expected of men when their pasts became part of public discourse. It was expected that young men would make themselves available for conscription. Women occupied a variety of roles to support the war effort. These included military enlistment, work in industries where conscripts had left vacancies, the maintenance of victory gardens, procurement of funds or materials, and the purchase of war bonds.⁸ Despite trans feminine individuals performance of the civic duties expected of American women during the World Wars, they faced the threat of criminal prosecution if they did not register with the Selective Service System.

When faced with the threat of prosecution for military-related charges or ruin to their reputations, all three main subjects of this study affirmed their womanhood at great risk. These cases are a critical rejoinder to prior historiographic understandings of trans feminine gender embodiment. Peter Boag's *Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past*, which covers an array of 'cross-dressing' practices and individuals, considers the figure of the,

⁸ While women were not allowed to take up combat roles in the United States military during the Second World War, they comprised a large force within the military—from 1,500 women in 1940 to an estimated 350,000 over the course of the war. World War I was the first war in which American women could officially serve in roles aside from "nurse," and by WWII each branch of the military formed a division for servicewomen by the midpoint of the war. Gail Marjorie Beaton, *Colorado Women in World War II* (Louisville: University Press of Colorado, 2020), 2; Bérubé, *Coming Out Under Fire*, 28.

“male-to-female cross-dresser,” whose lack of representation in American western history is glaring against the abundance of source material.⁹ Boag attributes this absence to the “progress narrative,” which has been used to explain or, perhaps more accurately, contain gender transgression: “It normalizes the cross-dresser by maintaining that ‘she’ changed her clothing for some purpose related to securing personal advancement in a world with a deck that was otherwise stacked against her.”¹⁰ Individuals who ‘cross-dressed’ sometimes offered the rationale that they did so in order to support their families, themselves, or their partners. As Emily Skidmore noted, the explanation that opportunities functioned as the most significant factor in the motivation to cross-dress was commonly provided well into the 1990s in LGBTQ scholarship.¹¹ While this explanation accurately captures the

⁹ Peter Boag, *Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), xi.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 19; Marjorie Garber's *Vested Interests* precedes Boag's *Re-Dressing America's Frontier Past*, and describes the narrative's purpose seen in the case of Billie Tipton: “Whatever discomfort is felt by the reader or audience...is smoothed over and narrativized by a story that recuperates social and sexual norms, not only by reinstating the binary (male/female) but also retaining, and encoding, a progress narrative: s/he did this in order to a) get a job, b) find a place in a man's world, and c) realize or fulfill some deep but acceptable need in terms of personal destiny, in this case, by becoming a jazz musician.” Marjorie B. Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 69.

¹¹ Emily Skidmore cites the works of Lillian Faderman and John D'Emilio in her article, “Recovering a Gender Transgressive Past,” as examples, both of whom tie this explanation generally to working-class “passing women,” a term popularized by Jonathan Katz. In *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, Faderman writes “A transvestite woman who could actually pass as a man had male privileges and could do all manner of things other women could not: open a bank account, write checks, own property, go anywhere unaccompanied, vote in elections.” Skidmore

circumstances of *some* cases of gender transgression, it fails to account for such cases in which individuals *affirmed* their gender identity to their material detriment rather than economic or social advancement.

Historical analysis of the wartime popular press highlights both the ubiquity of trans feminine lives across the 'pre-Jorgenson' United States, and it demonstrates trans feminine individuals' commitment to their genders despite the transmisogynistic consequences that often accompanied being outed. Legally, the severity of the charge was relative to the length of time since the beginning of their transition. Socially, since military-related legal charges were extended beyond municipalities, their cases were amplified alongside current events of the war in the popular press. The latest news on the Second World War filled the front pages of the press, and such cases of draft dodging were also given extensive coverage. Yet the investigatory nature of the American press meant that whether merely reporting the facts or sensationalizing the story, these institutions were instrumental in not only stripping the rights and privileges entailed in 'passing' as one's lived gender, but

observes that "In this way, many scholars assumed well into the 1990s that masculine identification was a way for women to cope with the historical conditions they found themselves in, and not necessarily an expression of gender identity." Nancy A. Hewitt, Anne M. Valk, and Emily Skidmore, "Recovering a Gender-Transgressive Past: A Transgender Historiography," in *A Companion to American Women's History*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2021), pp. 209-222, esp. 211; John D'Emilio, *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Jonathan Katz, *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the USA* (New York: Thomas Crowell Company, 1976); Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 44.

also one's right to privacy and to control their own narrative, and they further served as a social institution of gender enforcement through the infliction of humiliation and ridicule. Yet, it is the articles written by the press that both endangered the lives and tarnished the reputations of these individuals that makes research of this kind possible. Jen Manion, in *Female Husbands*, notes the significant role of the newspaper in such cases: "When husbands were outed as being assigned female at birth, newspapers were often the first to spread the word throughout the community," and, "In choosing the tone, length, and section for any given story, editors crafted narratives that gave meaning to events."¹² This article examines the relationships of Sadie Acosta, Lucy Hicks Anderson, and Georgia Black to civic duty and World War II. Through this analysis the roles played by communities, local law enforcement, and the press emerge as consequential factors within each of their respective circumstances. I then examine the experiences of 'ex-G.I.' women, and I argue for the potential and significance of historical research on trans Americans and the military.

"She's in Jail Now For Evading the Draft"

In 1941, the Larimer County Sheriff's Office of Fort Collins, Colorado, received a tip that one of their community members, Sadie Acosta, was, "not a woman."¹³ Only a few months prior in late 1940, Acosta received medical treatment, and in the process her

¹² Jen Manion, *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 2, 7.

¹³ "Mrs.' Sadie Acosta Didn't Register for Draft, but Sheriff Says He Should," *Fort Collins Express-Courier*, January 7, 1941, 1.

“true sex was revealed.”¹⁴ Despite having transpired in a supposedly confidential setting, the particulars did not remain so. Her private information soon became public knowledge—the subject of town gossip—and ultimately local authorities wielded it against her. Three state entities involved themselves in the matter: the Larimer County Welfare Office, the Larimer County Selective Service Board, and the Larimer County Sheriff's Office. Each carried out a role in policing the gendered existence of Sadie. The story circulated in newspapers across the United States after it was picked up by the *International News Service (INS)* and the *Associated Press (AP)*.

Sadie Acosta was born in Reeves County, Texas on April 10, 1910, to Juan Acosta and Celsa Casildo.¹⁵ Her parents died when she was an infant, and she was raised by her grandmother, Josephine Casildo. The local newspaper, the *Fort Collins Express-Courier*,

¹⁴ C. A. King, “Just Around the Corner,” *Mendocino Coast Beacon*, January 18, 1941, 7; This term is featured in Emily Skidmore's *True Sex*, in which the scholar acknowledges the commonplace usage of the term by the press and employs the term in order to “trouble the assumed connection between the sex assigned at birth and gender identity, and to make clear that I am *not* suggesting that biology is (or should be) destiny.” (emphasis in original) Emily Skidmore, *True Sex: The Lives of Trans Men at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 10. For the purposes of this article, language related to ‘sex’ is chosen to highlight this “assumed connection” while noting governmental agencies’ attempts to define individuals in order to stabilize that connection. Paisley Currah’s succinct and effective definition of sex applies well in this application. In *Sex Is as Sex Does*, Currah’s use of sex is defined as “whatever an entity whose decisions are backed by the force of law says it is.” Paisley Currah, *Sex Is as Sex Does: Governing Transgender Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 9.

¹⁵ The Larimer County relief rolls and Sadie Acosta’s draft cards differ in the year, with 1909 on the former and 1910 on the latter.

reported that she had lived in the area since 1922.¹⁶ Before her 'sex' was known to the town, Sadie appeared in only three instances in the local newspaper. In 1935, her name appeared in the local paper for "Auto Certificates," which showed that she was the owner of a 1926 Chevrolet.¹⁷ In 1937 when she was around twenty-seven, Sadie helped put on an event for an audience of sixty at the Fort Collins branch of the American Association of University Women in Ammons Hall.¹⁸ The festivities included the "Sanchez sisters" who sang Mexican songs, local high school teacher Miss Henrietta Brown who gave a lesson about, "Spanish American Women on the Rio Grande," and finally Sadie who taught attendees how to make tortillas or, "Mexican bread."¹⁹ The third known instance was in 1939 when Sadie applied for a permit to renovate the basement of her home at 622 Maple Street.²⁰

As Sadie Acosta was single and without a family, she had to rely on public assistance to survive. She registered with the Larimer County Welfare Office in 1938, and her name was added to the relief roll.²¹ The 1940 Federal Census reported that Sadie lived in a rented apartment on 208 First Street.²² The census indicated that Sadie reported her household was herself, she was widowed, and she lived alone. The original article published shortly after the discovery of her sex mentioned that she was also registered as widowed with the

¹⁶ "Mrs.' Sadie Acosta Didn't Register for Draft," *Fort Collins Express-Courier*.

¹⁷ "Auto Certificates," *Fort Collins Express-Courier*, October 13, 1935.

¹⁸ "Making Mexican Bread Is Shown," *Fort Collins Express-Courier*, March 11, 1937.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ "Building Permits Include Residence," *Fort Collins Express-Courier*, October 1, 1939.

²¹ "Mrs.' Sadie Acosta Didn't Register for Draft," *Fort Collins Express-Courier*.

²² US Department of Commerce, US Census Bureau, *1940 United States Federal Census*, Fort Collins, Larimer, Colorado.

County Welfare Office (CWO), but the article did not report the name of her deceased husband.²³ In the portion of the census titled, "Other Work," she was reported as being unable to work.²⁴ She was said to derive income from other sources—a reference to the public assistance that she received.

Just four months after the passage of the STSA, the front page of the *Fort Collins Express-Courier* carried an article titled, "Mrs.' Sadie Acosta Didn't Register for Draft, but Sheriff Says He Should."²⁵ Next to the story was a photograph of Sadie Acosta captioned, "Masquerade Exposed."²⁶ Per the article, Larimer County Sheriff Ted Schaffer received a tip that Sadie was, "not a woman," and Schaffer had her arrested. After she was brought before the local draft board, its officials ordered her to be examined by a medical professional. Sadie was non-consensually examined in order to determine her 'true sex.' According to the newspaper, the doctor told the sheriff that "sure, 'she' is a man."²⁷ After this violation, County Welfare Director Walter E. Dalby removed her name from the relief roll, and he added her back on with her alleged name assigned at birth.²⁸ As Sadie languished in jail as she awaited charges, the draft board convened to decide their course of action, for this confirmed case of draft evasion. The story circulated across the United States after it was picked up by the *AP* and the *INS*.

²³ "Mrs.' Sadie Acosta Didn't Register for Draft," *Fort Collins Express-Courier*.

²⁴ US Department of Commerce, US Census Bureau, *1940 United States Federal Census*, Fort Collins, Larimer, Colorado.

²⁵ "Mrs.' Sadie Acosta Didn't Register for Draft," *Fort Collins Express-Courier*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ It is not definitively clear that the name listed in the article is indeed her prior legal name.

The *INS* article contained three vital pieces of information on Sadie's case: a more detailed timeline of events, a direct quote from Sadie, and a reference to the STSA. According to the *INS*, Sadie's 'sex' was first exposed when she underwent an unspecified operation at the local hospital a few months previous. Shortly thereafter, the CWO changed her name in their system. Lest that change and the occasional local gossip, nothing else came of the 'exposure of sex'—until it was relayed to the draft board months later. In the words of the *INS*, "The incident was more or less forgotten, and Acosta continued to wear dresses, comb his hair down to his shoulders, and bedeck himself with jewelry."²⁹ In hindsight, Acosta's continuance of dressing as she felt was not likely to have been forgotten, but instead it festered in the minds of the local community, and most of all in its authorities. It seems unlikely that the change of her name in the CWO system was merely for 'accurate' recordkeeping purposes. Instead, it reads as a failed attempt to compel her to alter her presentation.

The Larimer County Selective Service Board was the one who notified the local law enforcement that Sadie Acosta had not registered for the draft. After Sheriff Ted Schafer had her arrested, she was placed in the "bullpen" with ten men.³⁰ In the face of the charges, Sadie maintained that she was a woman. After the doctor pronounced Sadie a man, she responded, "So? But I would rather be a woman. So I am a woman."³¹ Sadie's *definitive* response to the medical professional, if indeed captured accurately by the press, is powerful in the face of adversity and serious legal consequences. By

²⁹ "Declares He's a She; Draft Dodger Held," *Minneapolis Star Journal*, January 26, 1941.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ "Evasion of Draft Laid to 'Woman,'" *Arizona Republic*, January 8, 1941.

contrast the *Express-Courier's* article failed to quote Sadie Acosta though it had ample opportunity to do so. The article appears to take the contention right out of the issue at hand as it provided a depiction of the story, but absent its most central figure, and its allegation that Sadie was a man went unchallenged. The *INS* article concluded with a reference to the newly enacted draft law: "Since there is no provision in the selective service act which permits eligible persons to choose their sex, the draft board plans to proceed with charges against Acosta for evading registration."³² The STSA established guidelines that are, by and large, *still* present in the current law that pertains to selective service for 'eligible males' in the United States. This lack of provision for eligible persons to 'choose their sex' requires all who were assigned male at birth to register for the draft: whether they are men or not.

Just twenty-four hours after the first article about Sadie Acosta's 'exposure of sex', a local newspaper published a second article with the headline, "Acosta Registers With Draft Board."³³ As put by the *Fort Collins Express-Courier*, the Larimer County draft board "washed its hands" of the Sadie Acosta case. Due to Sadie's immediate acquiescence to the demands of local authorities, the draft board did not pursue the case further:

We are satisfied that Acosta never would have been accepted for military training anyway," said Thomas Gray, Chairman of the board, "and, as far as we are concerned, it is up to county authorities to take any further action against the man..." "The board feels that, since Acosta did not refuse to register as being

³² "Declares He's a She," *Minneapolis Star Journal*.

³³ "Acosta Registers With Draft Board," *Fort Collins Express-Courier*, January 8, 1941.

opposed to military service, the government's interests in the matter were complied with when the man was registered and his questionnaire completed.³⁴

The deputy district attorney Winton Ault reported to the press that he did not yet know what action the local authorities would take against Sadie Acosta.³⁵ At the time of the article, she was held in the local jail without a formal charge levied against her. As there was little recourse for Sadie in the matter of complying with the draft and the United States was still a neutral country, it is apparent why her compliance with the draft was expeditious. As Sadie subsisted on welfare, she relied upon the government for survival, and this meant she may have been ineligible for aid if she did not comply with the draft.

Board Chairman Thomas Gray's belief that Sadie, "never would have been accepted for military training," is a fascinating admission. The statement could either be a reference to her inability to work and thus participate in military exercise, or it was an allusion to her gender modality, either as a woman (unlikely) or as a potential male draftee.³⁶ The board chairman may have recalled the

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.; Gender modality," a term proposed by jurist and bioethicist Florence Ashley, "refers to how a person's gender identity stands in relation to their gender assigned at birth." The term meant to correct the misconception that individuals who traverse gender and sex boundaries are discriminated against solely for their gender identity but for that relationship; Laura Erickson-Schroth and Florence Ashley, "'Trans' Is My Gender Modality: A Modest Terminological Proposal," in *Trans Bodies, Trans Selves: A Resource by and for Transgender Communities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 22.

provision in the STSA that concerned “moral deficiency.” Reasons for deferral included if the potential draftee was, “physically, mentally, or morally deficient or defective.”³⁷ As noted by historian Margot Canaday, from the First World War onwards these ‘defective/deficient’ draftees included homosexuals and trans feminine individuals who would be potentially incorrectly categorized as such.³⁸

The Larimer County draft board collectively signed as the registrar on Sadie Acosta’s draft card.³⁹ Sadie’s draft card is only partially filled in on the front as she did not record anyone who, “will always know your address,” she did not own a telephone, and she only wrote “unemployed” under the employment section.⁴⁰ The census and the draft card differ both in birth year and race. The 1940 Federal Census enumerator marked her as white.⁴¹ On the draft card, a faint x is marked by white, but with a more defined x marked

³⁷ U.S. Congress, United States Code: Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, 50a U.S.C. §§ 302-315 Suppl. 2. 1940. Periodical.
<https://www.loc.gov/item/uscode1940-006050a003/>.

³⁸ The revised standards regarding screening that came into use in 1918 were applied inconsistently and the resulting examinations were “cursory at best.” See: Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2009), 62.

³⁹ Santos Acosta, National Archives at St. Louis; St. Louis, Missouri; WWII Draft Registration Cards for Colorado, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947; Record Group: Records of the Selective Service System, 147; Box: 1, Ancestry.com Operations Inc., Lehi, UT, 2011.

⁴⁰ Santos Acosta, National Archives at St. Louis; St. Louis, Missouri; WWII Draft Registration Cards for Colorado, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947.

⁴¹ US Department of Commerce, US Census Bureau, *1940 United States Federal Census*, Fort Collins, Larimer, Colorado.

next to 'Indian.'⁴² The draft card recorded that she had brown eyes, black hair, and a dark brown complexion. Sadie's height was listed as five-foot-three that doubtless aided her ability to 'pass.'

After the conclusion of her three-day ordeal, Sadie Acosta dropped from the circulation of the local news. A month later, an update of the story appeared in the *Express-Courier*.⁴³ While the update was about Sadie Acosta, she did not contribute to the article, nor did it give an update on her life after she registered with the Selective Service. Instead, the short article is about interest in the case from outside the community. The inquirer, a man from Vancouver, Canada, wrote to the newspaper that he had first read the article about Acosta in a New York paper. After the article briefly described the draft case, it included a request from the man: "Would you please send me a copy of your paper that has the story of Acosta in it and maybe a picture of him too?"⁴⁴ The first sentence of the short update conveyed the local newspaper's surprise at non-local interest and the broad reach of news organizations: "How news travels!"⁴⁵

A month later, in March 1941, the *Express Courier* published the final update. It concerned the response of the Canadian inquirer. The newspaper included a comment from the reader, who replied:

Thanks for your paper dated Jan. 7 with the picture of Acosta who has lived as a woman for several years. It is hard for one to imagine a guy getting

⁴² Santos Acosta, National Archives at St. Louis; St. Louis, Missouri; WWII Draft Registration Cards for Colorado, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947.

⁴³ "How News Travels!," *Fort Collins Express-Courier*, February 11, 1941.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*.

⁴⁵ "How News Travels!," *Fort Collins Express-Courier*.

away with a stunt like that for so long a time. I guess Mr. Acosta thinks he has just as much right to wear women's clothes as women have to wear men's clothes.⁴⁶

The *Express-Courier* contributor, Lisle Widman, wrote that the newspaper staff was amused at the "subtle crack" at the end of the reader's comments.⁴⁷ The reference to women who wore men's clothing shows the reader connected Sadie Acosta to women's rights activists and the rise in women who wore pants and other articles of clothing associated with masculinity. With the use of press syndication and news organizations to extend the circulation of re-print media, it is entirely plausible that the reader from Vancouver had previously encountered articles that documented other trans lives—which would have included the generally more publicized articles about individuals who were assigned female at birth and lived as men.

Sadie Acosta's name does not appear in the *Fort Collins Express-Courier* after March 1941, and this signals that local law enforcement dropped the case that they built against her after the draft board did not pursue charges. Acosta immediately acquiesced to the demands of the local law and draft board to affirm on paper that she was 'male' while she continued to maintain both through her public appearance and testimony that she was a woman. Acosta maintained her womanhood. But factors like her reliance on welfare to subsist and survive forced her to comply with the Selective Service System. Due to her inability to assert her economic independence, Sadie Acosta found it difficult to *legally* assert her

⁴⁶ Lisle Widman, "Town Tidings," *Fort Collins Express-Courier*, March 4, 1941.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

gender identity. Acosta was forced to register with the Selective Service, but she did so merely as a formality. The press coverage of Sadie Acosta lasted a total of three months. For another woman targeted by authorities for draft evasion, Lucy Hicks Anderson, the press coverage continued for several years. While the two cases shared the same charge, their outcomes could not be more different.

“Draft Charge Seen in Lucy Hicks Case”

Lucy Hicks was a well-known and admired member of her community of Oxnard, California. She arrived in Ventura County in 1920, after she had previously lived in New Mexico and Texas. Hicks established a reputation as an excellent cook through her temporary work in various homes in Ventura County before she gained a permanent position with the Donlon family of Hueneme.⁴⁸ Charles Donlon, the family patriarch, was an influential banker in the local community, and the Donlon family had lived in Ventura County since 1870. Their former cook was a Chinese immigrant named Gee who had cooked impressive dinners for the large gatherings that the Donlon family held at their home.⁴⁹ Hick’s demanding new position granted her the stability to put down roots in the local community. Lucy commuted to and from work in her Model T Coupe, and she lived in nearby Oxnard on the corner of Seventh and B street.⁵⁰

Hicks had steady employment with the Donlons that gave her some stability, but the position demanded much from Hicks, and it paid comparatively little. While she was officially employed as the

⁴⁸ Cynthia Donlon, *The Donlon Family 1815-1969* (Oxnard, 1969), 16.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ “Seven Carloads Fords Received in One Day,” *Oxnard Daily Courier*, December 6, 1922.

family's cook, she also had other responsibilities that included childcare for the Donlon children along with the collection of chicken eggs.⁵¹ Cynthia Donlon, who wrote a family history about the Donlons, characterized the work of those employed by the family—who were primarily immigrants—as, “domestic, menial, poorly paid positions.”⁵² While she worked for the family, Lucy also engaged in the sale of liquor during Prohibition. Lucy was caught in possession of a gallon of whiskey and several drinking glasses hidden in a trap board in the wall of her home in 1931.⁵³ She had previously been brought to court on three separate occasions, once for alcohol possession where she was found guilty, one time for the possession of wine glasses that was thrown out for lack of evidence, and one charge for three counts of the sale of alcohol during Prohibition.⁵⁴ After she was found guilty, she was fined a thousand dollars per count on the latter charge.

Lucy Hicks invested the income that she received from both legal and illegal sources into property in Oxnard. Soon, she had an establishment that functioned as a speakeasy and brothel. It seemed an open secret in the community that Lucy owned properties in Oxnard that were rented out to individuals who used them for sex work. At its height, she owned and operated multiple units. Despite her run-ins with the law on charges of violating Prohibition along

⁵¹ Jeffrey Wayne Maulhardt, *Oxnard: 1941-2004* (Charleston: Arcadia, 2005), 89; “Lucy Hicks Gathering Eggs,” Identifier: 40387, Research Library at The Museum of Ventura County, <https://photographs.venturamuseum.org/items/show/3021>.

⁵² Donlon, *The Donlon Family 1815-1969*, 15-16.

⁵³ “Lucy Hicks Nabbed On Liquor Charges,” *Oxnard Daily Courier*, March 16, 1931.

⁵⁴ “Probation to Be Asked for Oxnard Negress,” *Oxnard Daily Courier*, May 10, 1928; “Arrests Start Yesterday and Continue Today,” *Oxnard Daily Courier*, April 25, 1928.

with her residence and operation of bawdy houses, Lucy continued to engage with the Oxnard community. The local papers featured her donations to several non-profit causes that were in the form of money and baked goods. Lucy balanced between her two reputations, and this behavior was eventually immortalized in the lyrics of a song about her that was written by local folk band the Restless Hillfillies: “Do you waltz back and forth between sin and soufflé?”⁵⁵ After she was arrested and released for different charges, she continued to engage with the community.

Lucy’s cooking and baking skills won her accolades at events that she catered, and she consistently won awards at the annual county fair. She won first place for her fruit cake in 1923 and 1925, first place for her fig jam and crabapple jelly in 1926, first place for her light rolls in 1927, and first place for her pumpkin pie and second place for her fig jam in 1928.⁵⁶ She was among the prize winners in a cake contest at Lehman Bros in 1931.⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Lucy hosted social gatherings that attracted many a well-known and influential Oxnardian, and most often those named in the newspapers were women.⁵⁸ Against the backdrop of World War II, Lucy created strong social ties with women in Oxnard’s community

⁵⁵ The Restless Hillfillies. *Sin and Souffle*. MP3, 2011. The title of the song was a reference to the national story written by *TIME Magazine*.

⁵⁶ County Fair Prize Winners,” *Oxnard Press Courier*, October 9, 1923; “County Fair Prize Winners.” *Oxnard Press Courier*, September 17, 1925; “County Fair Prize Winners.” *Oxnard Press Courier*, September 24, 1926; “County Fair Prize Winners.” *Oxnard Press Courier*, September 19, 1927; “County Fair Prize Winners.” *Oxnard Press Courier*, September 13, 1928; “County Fair Prize Winners.” *Oxnard Press Courier*, September 15, 1928.

⁵⁷ “Cake Contest Winners,” *Oxnard Press Courier*, January 27, 1931.

⁵⁸ “Church Social Club,” *Oxnard Daily Courier*, November 20, 1925; “Lucy Hicks Entertains at Community Center,” *Oxnard Daily Courier*, August 3, 1927.

at a time in which a great many of the men were drafted. Lucy's role in the community had an even greater effect as she contributed to the public good while she socialized with the other women of Oxnard. This integrated Lucy in with the other women of a 'socialite' status, a label attributed to her in the press. Lest Hick's illegal activities, she embodied the performance of feminine civic and communal virtues that were expected of mid-20th century American women.

In 1944, Lucy Hicks married Reuben Anderson, a soldier who served in the Army in World War II.⁵⁹ Like her previous marriage to Clarence Hicks that had occurred she arrived in Ventura County, the two had a difference in age. This was more pronounced in the Anderson marriage as Lucy married 32-year-old Reuben Anderson when she was 59. Both the couple and Ventura County locals noted that they were happily married, and the two frequently exchanged letters when he was stationed in New York. Though Reuben was in the city for much of their relationship if he had leave from the base, he invariably spent the time with his wife. Some retrospective local accounts, that include Cynthia Donlon's *The Donlon Family*, maintained that the community knew about Lucy's 'sex' well before the events of 1945. If the community had known, although exceedingly unlikely, the Anderson marriage ceremony incurred no scandal nor extensive coverage in the local press.

After a soldier stationed in nearby Port Hueneme claimed that he received a venereal disease from a, "house of ill fame," that was owned and operated by Lucy Hicks Anderson, all the women in the establishment were taken into custody to be medically examined for signs of possible venereal diseases. Anderson protested that she

⁵⁹ "Lucy Hicks Wed to L.A. Man," *Oxnard Press Courier*, June 15, 1944.

was merely the proprietor and did not engage in sex work, but she was examined last by authorities who claimed that she, “proved to be a man.”⁶⁰ Dr. Mangan, who examined Lucy after her arrest on October 4th, 1945, provided, “Evidence in the case,” to the office of District Attorney Arthur Waite. On October 19th, Waite ordered Anderson arrested, and he declared that she was, “actually a man but has been masquerading over a long period of years as a woman.”⁶¹



Figure 1: “Lucy Hicks with Deputy Sheriffs,” Sheriff’s Office Ventura County, Calif, Research Library at The Museum of Ventura County, Identifier: 1998 [31155] <https://photographs.venturamuseum.org/items/show/3087>.

⁶⁰ “Waite Says ‘Lucy Hicks’ Is a Man,” *Ventura County Star-Free Press*, October 19, 1945.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

The years that immediately preceded the raid on Lucy Hicks Anderson's establishment saw several Oxnardians arrested and/or charged with prostitution or vagrancy. Lucy Hicks Anderson's operation of a speakeasy and the brothel made her a prime target for legal action as both violated the 'moral zone' of Port Hueneme.⁶² The passage of the May Act of 1941, the increased conflict within Oxnard about moral charges, and the proximity to the military port in Hueneme, all were necessary precursors to the legal cases that ensued.⁶³ She had been charged twice before for charges that related to her ownership and operation of a 'disorderly house,' but those charges were comparatively less severe, and they were seemingly forgotten in the face of charges related to her gender modality after she was examined by the local authorities following the raid.

The first article published by the *Ventura County Star-Free Press* about the arrest of Lucy Hicks Anderson included a quote from the district attorney's original charge: "The said John Doe Hicks, also known as Lucy Hicks, also known as Lucy Anderson, was and is a male person, and he was not capable of being the bride in said license to marry, as he, then and there well knew."⁶⁴ *TIME* broke the story on a national level under the title 'Sin and Souffle,' and

⁶² Frank Barajas extensively covers local factors surrounding the moral anxiety around Port Hueneme, including the arrest of Lucy Hicks Anderson, in his dissertation, "Work and Leisure in La Colonia." Frank P. Barajas, "Work and Leisure in La Colonia: Class, Generation, and Interethnic Alliances among Mexicanos in Oxnard, California, 1890-1945" (PhD diss., Claremont Graduate University, 2001), 248-256.

⁶³ The May Act prohibited prostitution within a 'reasonable distance' to military or naval establishments. U.S. Congress. U.S. Statutes at Large, Volume 55 -1942, Chapter 287, H.R. 2475, 77th Congress, Session 1. United States, - 1942, 1941. Periodical. <https://www.loc.gov/item/lsl-v55/>.

⁶⁴ "Waite Says 'Lucy Hicks' Is a Man," *Ventura County Star-Free Press*.

newswire services broadened the circulation through local papers across the United States.⁶⁵ In a follow-up to the original *TIME* article, which had caused a flurry of interested readers to send in letters to the editor and a reprint in the local Ventura County press, the editor gave an update: “the U.S. Army is after ‘her’ for evading the draft.”⁶⁶ The follow-up article included a mocking illustration meant to be a caricature of Anderson going to the draft board.⁶⁷ The drawing depicted a bearded individual in a dress, a sailor hat, and a purse walking towards the ‘draft board.’

⁶⁵ ‘Sin & Souffle,’ *TIME*, November 5, 1945.

⁶⁶ James A Linen, ‘A Letter From The Publisher,’ *TIME*, January 14, 1946, 13; Research on trans jurisprudence of the nineteenth and early twentieth century United States warrants closer study to contextualize later legal histories of trans individuals of the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. It has been suggested in contemporary histories that Lucy Hicks Anderson may have been the first trans woman to fight for her rights through the legal system. While the Anderson trial was one of the highest-profile cases of its time in trans history, earlier cases have been well-covered in recent scholarship. One excellent account has been written by Kit Heyam on the trial of Thomas(ine) Hall; Kit Heyam, *Before We Were Trans: A New History of Gender* (New York: Seal Press and Hachette Books Group, 2022); Susan Stryker’s *Transgender History* begins with the account of Hall as an introduction to American transgender history. Susan Stryker, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Boulder: Seal Press, 2017).

⁶⁷ C. Riley Snorton’s *Black on Both Sides* analyses this weaponization of the language of the article and the content of the depiction: ‘The editorial decision to tell her story in the form of a joke brings into sharper focus *Time*’s cover image. Just as interventionist strategies in Argentina were illustrated as a necessary extermination of a scourge of phantasmatic fascism, Hicks Anderson’s racially caricatured speech and the article’s deployment of gender-as-punch line similarly rationalized the violent temporalities that would privilege to sovereignty over liberty within a prosecutorial logic.’ C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017).

Along with the initial state charge of perjury on a marriage license, there was a federal charge of draft evasion. Lucy listed her age as 42 years old on her marriage certificate although she was 59 when she had filled out the application. Her age was quickly ascertained toward the trial's start as she was likely eager to deflect it in self-defense. The disclosure of her age occurred within two days of the trial. The Superior Court of California found Lucy Hicks Anderson guilty of perjury. Rather than a prison sentence, she received ten years of probation. After this trial she was arrested by the FBI. Her federal trial focused on the collection of a soldier's wife's pension. She was charged with eighteen counts of defrauding the government for each of the fifty dollar checks she received which totaled \$900.⁶⁸

Lucy's husband Reuben was taken into federal custody, and he was put on trial in a New York district court. Since Lucy was in custody at the time of Reuben's trial and their marriage was declared void through her previous case, she was legally compelled to testify against him in New York. In turn, Reuben indicated through his testimony that Lucy suggested that they get married in order to collect the spousal support checks—which contradicted Lucy's testimony in her own trial that they had been together for some time before their marriage.⁶⁹ Reuben received eighteen months in a federal penitentiary with no financial penalty for his involvement in

⁶⁸ United States of America v. Lucy Lawson Hicks Anderson (charged as Tobe Lawson) Alias Lucy Hicks, Lucy Anderson, Lucy Hicks Anderson, 1946 (18504) [Electronic Record]; U.S. District Court for the Central District of California; Criminal Case Files, 1907-2004; NAID: 294957; Folder Title: 18499-18504; Box Number: 1066; Records of the District Courts of the United States, Record Group 21; National Archives at Riverside, Perris, CA.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

the 'fraud.' Lucy was found guilty and sentenced to a year in county jail as the court wished to avoid the difficulties of determining if she should be placed in a men's or women's federal prison. Like many of her previous encounters with the law, the financial penalty was more severe. In addition to the jail sentence, she was ordered to pay back the \$900 along with a \$2,500 fine. After her conviction of perjury, she was released on a bail of \$5,000. Over the course of her time in Oxnard, she paid at least \$10,650 from her various convictions.

After her year-long jail sentence, Lucy Hicks Anderson was still on probation. With the increased scrutiny on her activities, irreparable harm to her reputation, and the dissolution of her marriage, her livelihood was likely far too damaged to be economically independent in Ventura County again.⁷⁰ Reuben Anderson remarried in the years after his release, and he appears to have never come back to Ventura County.⁷¹ In 1948, Lucy was brought again to the Superior Court on the charge of violation of

⁷⁰ While trans marriages were often not acknowledged or were in circumstances to dissolve the union, some managed to marry without the knowledge of the officiant and/or county clerk. One of, if not perhaps the earliest, trans marriage that was legally recognized in the United States was of Frances and Frank Carrick in 1923. The Illinois court determined that Frank could not testify for Frances as the testimony on behalf of a spouse was not admissible. For detailed accounts of Frances Carrick and the Tessmer murder case, see: Jim Elledge, *The Boys of Fairy Town: Sodomites, Female Impersonators, Third-Sexers, Pansies, Queers, and Sex Morons in Chicago's First Century* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2018), 164-186; Adam Selzer, "Frances Carrick, a Chicago Trans Woman Accused of Murder in 1923," *Mysterious Chicago*, September 28, 2022, <https://mysteriouschicago.com/frances-carrick-a-chicago-trans-woman-accused-of-murder-in-1923/>.

⁷¹ "Obituary: Anderson, Reuben 'Andy,'" *Sacramento Bee*, October 29, 2002.

her probation as she purportedly had 'loose women' about her Oxnard property. Her lawyer managed to get the hearing suspended for a month. By November, the two parties came to an agreement. Her ten-year probation was suspended on the condition that she sell the rest of her property in Oxnard and leave the county.

Lucy sold the Oxnard property to her local church, and she complied with the terms of the agreement. She moved to Los Angeles where she resided until her death in 1954.⁷² Though the local press claimed that the exile was for at least a year, she never came back to the area aside from the occasional, brief visit. The coverage of Hicks Anderson's case was far more extensive than Acosta's, and it captured national interest and local fascination. While she was given a year sentence in the local jail rather than a federal institution, Lucy and her husband's cases had significant federal involvement, and they exemplified the degree to which the state had sought after individuals who had 'draft-dodged' or 'defrauded' the federal government.

"Sex Revelation Follows Illness"

In early March 1951, Georgia Black received a medical examination when she sought a diagnosis for an undetermined illness at the Fernald-Laughton Memorial Hospital in Sanford, Florida.⁷³ While the cause of a physical examination differed in Lucy Hicks Anderson and Georgia Black's cases, they both were visibly distressed and adamant in their refusal when they were confronted with the situation. According to her son, the doctor diagnosed

⁷² Murray Norris, "The Legend of Lucy Hicks," *Oxnard Press Courier*, April 30, 1967.

⁷³ Willie Sabb, "My Mother Was a Man," *Ebony*, June 1953, 80.

Georgia Black with cancer. Black had previously been treated at home, but her condition worsened, and she began to receive in-patient care at the hospital. During the examination Dr. Orville Barks discovered that Georgia had bodily characteristics associated with the male sex. At the time, Mrs. Black's son Willie did not know about his mother's trans feminine status. Willie's wife Henrietta, who drove her mother-in-law to the hospital, was told by the doctor.⁷⁴ It was unknown to either Willie or Henrietta how word spread from there. While they were unsure whether Dr. Banks further violated medical ethics and spoke to other members of the community about the examination, the discovery became known to the local community of Sanford. Several newspaper articles and an *Ebony Magazine* article brought Georgia's private medical matter into national discourse. While *TIME*'s article on Lucy Hicks Anderson reinvigorated local interest and aided an explosion of local press coverage, *Ebony*'s article on Georgia Black did not prompt such a reaction. Fortunately, out of respect for her character and by the direction of local leaders', local coverage of Black ended soon after. The similarities between Hicks Anderson's article in *TIME* and Black's article in *Ebony* are indicative of the impact of the popular press on burgeoning national trans discourses. Both publications ignited and fueled national interest which in turn affected coverage by other mediums.

After the death of Georgia's first husband Alonzo Sabb, whom she married in 1916 in Tavares, she brought her son to live with her in Sanford, Florida. Still quite young, and widowed at the age of twenty-three, she remarried in 1918.⁷⁵ She married Muster

⁷⁴ Ibid. 78-80.

⁷⁵ Sanford, Florida, Marriage Certificate no. 233 (1918), Muster Black and Georgia Sabb; Clerk of the Circuit Court and Comptroller Seminole County Florida.

Black, who was a soldier that had served in the First World War, in the home of the local principal, and they were married by a prominent minister.⁷⁶ According to the 1920 census, the newlyweds lived together with her son Willie on Myrtle Avenue.⁷⁷ Although Muster was born in Florida, both of his parents were from South Carolina like his wife Georgia, and he was employed as a laborer in the "RR Shop."⁷⁸ Muster worked late in the railroad yard, and Georgia had their son walk to deliver dinner to his stepfather. After he delivered the meal, Muster brought Willie up into the locomotive seats, and Muster let Willie watch him fire up the engine.

Georgia Black adopted her son from one of her cousins who lived in her home state. Willie's adoptive father died when he was young, and Muster Black helped to raise Willie through his formative years. Unfortunately, in 1925 Georgia's second husband died from dropsy.⁷⁹ Willie remembered how in love his parents were, and how much he bonded with his father. Muster's death was an emotionally heavy loss for their family, and they further lost their primary source of subsistence. To earn an income after the death of Muster, Georgia carefully selected boarders to live with her and her son. She also collected a military wife's pension after her husband's death from the county and the state. Though even with these sources, it was not enough to subsist upon. In his teenage years

⁷⁶ "The Man Who Lived 30 Years as a Woman," 25.

⁷⁷ US Department of Commerce, US Census Bureau, *1920 United States Federal Census*, Sanford, Seminole County, Florida.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ Sabb, "My Mother Was a Man," 76.

Willie supported the family through work in a crate mill where he earned \$1.50 a day.⁸⁰

According to the 1940 census, Georgia and Willie lived together at their home along with four lodgers.⁸¹ Despite Georgia's various sources of income her annual income was only eighty dollars which was far less than any of her lodgers. Two of her boarders made three- and four-times Georgia's income. Willie's ability to provide for the household was still necessary years after he came of age. However, with the United States' entry into World War II, Georgia's son would not be able to provide an income for his family. On Willie's draft card he listed his mother as the person who would always know his address. After Willie registered for the draft in 1940, he was conscripted in 1942.⁸² But his military career was a short one. Willie served for three months before he was diagnosed with an ulcerated stomach.

Upon his return home, Willie found that his mother was worried about losing their family home due to unpaid back taxes.⁸³ He assured her that he would help take care of the outstanding debt, so she could keep the home. He returned to the crate mill where he now earned twenty-five dollars a week. He stayed there for a short time while he sought out positions which paid even more, and he did all this so that he could help clear his mother's debt. Willie

⁸⁰ Ibid., 77.

⁸¹ US Department of Commerce, US Census Bureau, *1940 United States Federal Census*, Sanford, Seminole County, Florida.

⁸² Willie Sabb, National Archives at St. Louis; St. Louis, Missouri; WWII Draft Registration Cards for Florida, 10/16/1940-03/31/1947; Record Group: Records of the Selective Service System, 147; Box: 391, Ancestry.com Operations Inc., Lehi, UT, 2011.

⁸³ Sabb, "My Mother Was a Man," 77-78.

eventually moved to Philadelphia where he worked in a steel mill during the height of the war industrialization boom. Through his move north, Willie earned forty-five dollars a week, and he sent money back to his mother until she cleared her debt.⁸⁴ Willie's actions are a straightforward demonstration of a son's love. But, they also ensured that Georgia avoided becoming a public ward which would have substantially increased the exposure of her gender modality.

Months after her cancer diagnosis, Georgia Black was hospitalized. Sanford Police Chief Roy Williams visited Georgia in the hospital on March 8, shortly after the rumors became known to the local community.⁸⁵ At this visit Williams questioned Georgia about the gossip, and she insisted that she was a woman. But he was chiefly concerned with her previous relationships. Williams questioned her about the income that she derived from a pension after the death of her second husband—likely the military spousal pension.⁸⁶ She gave him information about the years of their deaths and where they died. When he spoke to the press, Williams stated that there would be an investigation into the deaths of her husbands. While the Sanford community was aware of her previous two marriages, it was only after the 'exposure of sex' that the local law enforcement suspected criminality and pursued an investigation. *Ebony* later reported that Williams changed course away from prosecution when met with his investigation's findings:

I see no basis for prosecuting Black. At first we believed he might have been a criminal in disguise.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁸⁵ "Negro 'Woman' Revealed as Man," *Tampa Times*, March 8, 1951.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

We carried the investigation clear back to his native South Carolina. We could find nothing to show that Black had done anything legally wrong. She—er—I mean he has lived decently, is highly respected by everyone in town.⁸⁷

Six months after her cancer diagnosis, Georgia Black died on April 26th, 1951 at the age of 57. Though her death certificate indicated her sex as male, there were no other attempts to impose on her the sex she was purportedly assigned at birth. Her name was unaltered, and recorded as Georgia Black. She was also marked as “widowed” instead of “never married,” which was another option listed on the form. Willie Sabb’s signature was written on the informant line. The lines for Georgia’s parents were filled in by a quick “D.K.” which presumably meant that the registrar or Willie did not know her parents’ names. The registrar relied on the information provided by her son, as evidenced by his signature in the personal information portion of the record, and so the registrar filled in information about Georgia’s gender that was seemingly contradictory with contemporary perceptions of gender acceptability in 1950s America.⁸⁸ The death certificate preserves Georgia Black’s gender modality. Furthermore, it signifies that communities like Sanford could hold more nuanced understandings of sex and gender when one of their own defied those conventions. With her trans femininity disclosed shortly before her death, and her name defended by the community to local investigations, her

⁸⁷ “The Man Who Lived 30 Years as a Woman,” 26.

⁸⁸ This is confirmed as Willie Sabb’s signature on the death certificate matches the signature written on his draft card.

marriages and collection of a soldier's wife's pension were deemed nonthreatening and there was, essentially, no one left to prosecute.

As the wife and mother of a soldier, Georgia Black's family connected her directly with the Second World War. Fortunately, through the careful connections she made and the support of her family, Georgia Black herself was not subjected to scrutiny about the draft like Sadie Acosta and Lucy Hicks Anderson were. Citizens of Sanford came to her defense around the time of her death, and many cited her importance as an involved and integral part of their community. Strong local support for Georgia Black stifled transmisogynistic media spectacles seen elsewhere, and the national coverage essentially was just one magazine: *Ebony*. In turn, this magazine relied extensively on Sanford locals that were willing to speak to the press.

'Ex-GI' Women and the Post-War Years

There are several notable cases of trans feminine Americans who served in the military during the Second World War who then transitioned. These include Christine Jorgensen, Charlotte McLeod, and Tamara Rees.⁸⁹ Their experiences highlight that some trans feminine Americans fulfilled their 'civic duty' as citizens during World War II through military service. Despite serving their country, they were not given the full rights as citizens of the United

⁸⁹ Joanne Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); These three women were also examined in Emily Skidmore's article "Constructing the 'Good Transsexual'." Emily Skidmore, "Constructing the 'Good Transsexual': Christine Jorgensen, Whiteness, and Heteronormativity in the Mid-Twentieth-Century Press," *Feminist Studies* 37, no. 2 (2011): 270–300, <https://doi.org/10.1353/fem.2011.0043>.

States. They could not legally wed, transition, or be protected from discrimination based on their gender modality. For Christine Jorgensen, hers meant the rejection of her marriage application. Despite these common experiences, trans feminine people joined the military for a variety of reasons. Joanne Meyerowitz's *How Sex Changed* provides one such explanation for some: "A number of MTFs had joined the armed services in a futile attempt, as one described it, to 'make a man of myself,' but their peers in the military had not necessarily welcomed them."⁹⁰ Articles about their transitions often referred to their previous careers in the military, most famously the famed *New York Daily News* article, "Ex-G.I. Becomes Blonde Beauty," about Christine Jorgensen.⁹¹ Newspaper articles across the United States also referred to both McLeod and Tamara Rees as "Ex-G.I." in their titles and, in the case of Rees, "Ex-Paratrooper" and "Ex-Chuter."⁹² The press capitalized off of the intrigue around these 'Ex-G.I.' women, and coverage did not normalize their womanhood, but often provided exoticizing coverage that worsened their ability to attain marital rights and/or economic security.

In addition to the consistent references by the press to their time with the military, a fact that evidently bore repeating, articles featured the 'before' and 'after' photographs side by side for each to highlight the drastic transformation of a 'sex change.' If a trans feminine individual served during the war, these side-by-side comparisons sometimes featured a 'before' photograph where the

⁹⁰ Meyerowitz, *How Sex Changed*, 136.

⁹¹ "Ex-GI Becomes Blonde Beauty: Operations Transform Bronx Youth," *New York Daily News*, December 1, 1952.

⁹² "Father to Welcome Ex-GI Home As His 'Daughter'," *Tampa Tribune*, April 18, 1954; "Ex-Paratrooper Weds Her Business Manager," *Press Democrat*, July 28, 1955.

subject is dressed in her military uniform, and so embodied the ideals of patriotic masculinity.⁹³ Trans veterans and this kind of side-by-side comparison were of course not limited to the United States as emphasized by the cases of Roberta Cowell, Linda Broderick, Jan Davies, and Susan McIntyre.⁹⁴

In the fifties, while articles about Jorgensen, McLeod, and Rees could be found in newspapers across the nation, there was another woman who enlisted in the military before her transition: Joanna Clark.⁹⁵ Clark enlisted with the Naval Reserve in 1955 before

⁹³ Susan Stryker notes how the media's focus on the "ex-G.I." label suggests, "profound anxieties about masculinity and sexuality," and that, "if a macho archetype such as 'the soldier' could be transformed into a stereotypically feminine 'blonde bombshell,' what might that mean for a man of average— and now apparently more precarious—virility?" Stryker, *Transgender History*, 66; *Sacramento Bee*. "Held Over!! - One More Week." Clipping. 1955. *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/wm117p15b>; *Associated Press*. "Sex-Change Pioneer Has Party, Not Funeral." Clipping. 1989. *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/w66343760>.

⁹⁴ International News Photos. "Sex Changeo." Clipping. 1954. *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/w6634370b>; Mount, Ron. "Attenshun, you 'orrible little men Don't call me Sarn't -call me Linda!." Clipping. 1973. *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/kw52j8199>; Du Pre, John. "Why Ex-Airman John Wants to Join the W.I.." Clipping. 1981. *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/05741r787>; "Ex-Guards Sergeant Has Sex Change." Clipping. 1978. *Digital Transgender Archive*, <https://www.digitaltransgenderarchive.net/files/nv9352973>.

⁹⁵ Joanna Clark had also been subject to the 'before' and 'after' side-by-side comparison in the pages of the press, with her 'before' photograph showing her in uniform. Shearlean Duke, "Transsexual Served as Man in Navy, Fights Discharge," *Baton Rouge State Times Advocate*, October 5, 1977.

she formally entered the Navy two years later.⁹⁶ She served for seventeen years before she was discharged after a medical evaluation. Clark transitioned in the mid-1970s shortly after her time in the Navy. Not long after, she was approached to enlist once more, and she served in the U.S. military as a woman for a year and a half before she was discharged again.⁹⁷ In this instance, she took the case to court for wrongful dismissal where it was eventually settled in 1985.⁹⁸ She received an honorable discharge, and she made history as one of—if not *the*—earliest documented instances of a transsexual woman who openly served both before and after transition.

The differing relationships of Sadie Acosta, Lucy Hicks Anderson, and Georgia Black to their respective communities, the state, and World War II, all drastically altered their outcomes. In addition, these three cases provide a much more intimate view of gender policing beyond cross-dressing laws. Sadie Acosta registered with the Selective Service System with little alternative, and the local draft board believed that she was not fit for service, so she managed to scrape by without legal penalty—as there was seemingly no law, or at least no knowledge of one by the local authorities, that prohibited her dressing and living as she did. The state's options exhausted, Acosta faded from the pages of the local press. Lucy Hicks Anderson's downfall came not from ownership and operation of a brothel, but by the location of her establishment as it was near the military port of Hueneme. Authorities first sought charges

⁹⁶ Joanna Clark and Margot Wilson, *Before My Warrant Runs Out: Human, Transgender, and Environmental Rights Advocate* (Victoria: Transgender Publishing, an imprint of Castle Carrington Publishing, 2021), 17.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 85.

against her for evading registration before they realized her age. The government proceeded with charges of perjury for her marriage license, and they charged her husband with perjury on his spousal support form. The two were both convicted on the charge of defrauding the government by collecting checks meant for the wives of soldiers. Georgia Black's case was quite different from the other two. Until near the end of her life she successfully evaded situations in which her 'sex' could be 'revealed', and her community did not know about her gender modality until she was on her deathbed, and both of her husbands had passed away. In this sense, there was no one able to be punished for the potential charge of perjury that related to her marriages nor fraud for the collection of military spousal support checks.

Trans military history has immense research potential, and its possibilities have only grown with the digitization of newspapers and other primary source materials made available through the effort of museums, research libraries, and other archival repositories. While individuals who moved away from the gender they were assigned were actively denied the full rights of citizenship, there is a rich historical record of soldiers and others who transgressed gender boundaries both in a military context and around conflict that stretches back to the earliest years of the United States. The lived experiences of trans feminine Americans in the Second World War and the post-war years in particular provide vital context and historical background to contemporary public discourse about trans Americans and the military. As the first U.S. draft law to be enacted in peacetime, the STSA of 1940 continues to guide current policy and—for its impact as a tool of gender policing—is both relevant to a broader trans military history in addition to current discourse about those who serve and transition

openly while they are in the military. On October 11, 2022, after a viral tweet by the Selective Service System's Twitter account that reminded Americans of the requirement to register, the organization posted a clarification: "The Military Selective Service Act, as it is written, only authorizes the registration of 'male persons'. For SSS to be authorized to register women, Congress would have to pass legislation amending the current law."⁹⁹ The language of the STSA that has been used by the government to imperil trans lives and livelihoods is *still* an active part of today's draft law. It holds the potential to be weaponized against American trans feminine lives should there be another draft.

⁹⁹ Selective Service. Twitter Post. October 3, 2022, 6:01 PM.
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