Rachel Hope Cleves. *Charity & Sylvia: A Same Sex Marriage in Early America*. Oxford University Press, 2014. Pp. 267. Hardcover $29.95.

Cleves, Associate Professor of History at the University of Victoria, explores same sex relationships at the turn of the nineteenth century in, *Charity & Sylvia: A Same Sex Marriage in Early America.* She argues that same sex partnerships and romantic relationships were not hidden. Instead early American communities were tolerant of these partnerships for a variety of reasons. Cleves asserts that in the unique case of Charity and Sylvia, both women established a vital business in their small Vermont outpost and, most importantly, invested time, money, and wisdom into their community. In constructing this narrative, Cleves is vigilant in her use of archival sources to piece together the lives of Charity and Sylvia, using official records (property deeds, census, etc.), letters, and diaries to bring these two women to life.

The book begins with the births of Charity and Sylvia in the late eighteenth century, and follows both women throughout their lives, chronicling their early childhood and their development into young women, and eventually their partnership. Charity is the focus in most of the chapters concerning early womanhood, most likely due to the many relationships Charity developed. From the limited intimate correspondence that remains, it is clear that Charity had at least two female lovers before she met Sylvia, and as a result became the victim of vicious rumors. While Cleves is unable to determine exactly what the gossip involving Charity entailed, it is the lack of information that Cleves finds most telling, arguing that it was very likely gossip involving the "unspeakable sin" (since no documentation of the gossip itself remains). After this difficult time Charity met Sylvia, and the two women fell in love. In order to remain together, Charity took Sylvia in as an apprentice for her tailoring business, which provided the perfect excuse for the two women to begin cohabitating.

As Charity and Sylvia established their lives together, they participated in a colonial marriage tour, visiting family and friends and cementing their bond and image as a unit. As time went on, both their reputation as tailors and their active role in community and religious obligations further established their "marriage" in the eyes of their community. Cleves convincingly illustrates that not only was their union recognized, but that

community members and family even prescribed gender roles to the same sex couple, often deferring to Charity as the husband and Sylvia as the doting wife and "help-mate" to Charity. The story of Charity and Sylvia reminds us that same sex relations and even marriage/partnerships were not entirely uncommon in the strict religious atmosphere that is commonly expected of early nineteenth century America; instead grey areas existed and some communities could at times turn a blind eye to some behaviors in favor of positive contributions to the community.

Extremely aware of silences present in the dialogue as well as the words on the page, Cleves has a difficult task: constructing these narratives based on fragmentary sources. Sylvia kept a diary, but it is not complete, nor do many letters Charity wrote to friends survive(in many cases these friends were also former lovers) as she insisted that they be burned upon the death of the recipient, and she burned many from her own collection. Despite incomplete sources, the tremendous attention to privacy, and hidden innuendos in the surviving letters further supports Cleves' claims of a deeply intimate relationship between the two women, as their reputation required that their secret remained officially unmentioned. *Charity and Sylvia* is an important addition to the field of Gender and Sexuality, providing a reminder that these stories exist and should be incorporated into the fabric of early American history. Excellently researched and well written, it is a book for both the novice and accomplished historian alike.

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