

2022 RSVP Peterson Fellowship Award Report

The Society of Women Journalists, 1894-1914

Laura Vorachek

University of Dayton

I would like to thank the Research Society of Victorian Periodicals and the Peterson Fellowship Award Committee for their generous support of my project, "Society of Women Journalists, 1894-1914."

The award funded a semester research leave in the fall of 2023 by enabling me to "buy out" my fall courses. This extended my spring 2023 sabbatical, allowing me to maintain the momentum I had established in the first part of the year. During the four-month period of the Peterson Fellowship, I made a research trip to the British Library to scan their collection of Society of Women Journalists' Annual Reports and examine other relevant materials. Drawing on the Society's Annual Reports and other materials, I drafted the second chapter of my book manuscript. In this chapter, I detail the development and early years of the Society of Women Journalists (SWJ). By tracing the evolution of the SWJ from its inception in 1894 to the First World War, this narrative demonstrates how social and economic pressures of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries shaped the organization. I examine why journalism appealed to middle-class women in need of a livelihood and the anxieties women entering the profession created amongst those who were already working in the field. I discuss the professional organizations that were created in the 1880s and 1890s in response to these concerns, including the SWJ, and examine how the SWJ responded to cultural anxieties around women in journalism. I argue that the SWJ served as a de facto credentialing body for women journalists at a time when the professional status of journalism was uncertain. The Society's history adds to our understanding of late-Victorian feminism and women's professional organizations by illustrating women journalists' struggle to define themselves, become economically self-sufficient, and promote their interests.

During the period of the Peterson Fellowship, I also worked with a group of undergraduate computer science majors to update and improve the database website component of this project. My database website has become a capstone project for seniors in the computer science department at my institution. Working with students on this aspect of my project has been a delightful, albeit slow process, as they are learning and developing skills while they improve the functionality and appearance of the site. The fall 2023 group of students redesigned the website's entire infrastructure. The site has a new design and is searchable by member name and leadership position. A list of honorary members is also viewable. <http://swj1894.org>

As I am in the midst of the book project, no publications have yet resulted from the work conducted during the fellowship period. However, I plan to present some of this research at RSVP's 2025 conference in Chicago. I have also begun to invite scholars to contribute brief biographies of women journalists to the website in order to increase the value of this resource.

I am deeply grateful for RSVP's support for this project. The Peterson Fellowship afforded me the time to make significant progress on my book project and energized me for the work ahead!