

“PLUCKING ROSES FROM A CABBAGE PATCH”:  
CLASS DYNAMICS IN PROGRESSIVE ERA LOUISVILLE  
AS UNDERSTOOD THROUGH THE CONTESTED RELATIONSHIP OF  
MARY BASS AND ALICE HEGAN RICE

by

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## ABSTRACT

JAMES BRIAN HARDMAN. "Plucking Roses from a Cabbage Patch:" Class dynamics in Progressive Era Louisville as understood through the contested relationship of Mary Bass and Alice Hegan Rice. (Under the direction of Dr. CHERYL D. HICKS)

In 1901, Alice Hegan Rice, a wealthy socialite reformer, published the novel *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* which dealt her experiences working with the poor. By the end of 1902 her novel had become a national phenomenon and finished the decade as one of its five bestselling books. Though the novel was fictional in nature, the book's heroine, Mrs. Wiggs, was based on the life of a real woman, who inhabited the one of the poorest neighborhoods in Louisville, Kentucky at the turn of the twentieth-century, a slum known as the Cabbage Patch. Shortly after the book's publication it became well-advertised that Mary Bass, a widowed mother of five children living in poverty in the Cabbage Patch, was the prototype for the beloved character of Mrs. Wiggs and subsequently and quite undesirably became fetishized by an overenthusiastic public. Mary Bass would end up suing Alice Hegan Rice for libel. The Bass/Rice story supplies an uncommon historical opportunity to analyze the portrayal of poverty in popular fiction in the Progressive Era United States and the classist values behind those representations.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                                                                            |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION                                                    | 1  |
| 1.1 Forward                                                                | 1  |
| 1.2 The Success of Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch                         | 4  |
| 1.3 The Story of Mrs. Wiggs                                                | 6  |
| CHAPTER 2: HISTORIGRAPHY                                                   | 8  |
| 2.1 Progressive Reform Historiography                                      | 8  |
| 2.2 Slumming Historiography                                                | 12 |
| 2.3 White Migrant Historiography                                           | 16 |
| 2.4 Alice Hegan Rice Historiography                                        | 18 |
| CHAPTER 3: THE PROGRESSIVE ERA CULTURAL SETTING OF<br>THE WIGGS PHENOMENON | 20 |
| 3.1 Fiction and History                                                    | 20 |
| 3.2 The Progressive Era in Context                                         | 21 |
| 3.3 Alice Hegan Rice and the Middle-Class Reform Narrative                 | 24 |
| 3.4 Mrs. Wiggs vs. Realism and Muckraking                                  | 25 |
| 3.5 Worthy Wealth and the Deserving Poor                                   | 28 |
| 3.6 The Rise of Popular Culture in the United States                       | 29 |
| 3.7 The Birth of the Bestseller                                            | 30 |
| 3.8 Of Children and Teddy Bears                                            | 32 |
| 3.9 The Reception of Mrs. Wiggs                                            | 35 |
| 3.10 Wiggs Criticism in Hindsight                                          | 38 |
| 3.11 The Wiggs Brand of Optimism and Local Color                           | 40 |

|                                                            |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| CHAPTER 4: PROGRESSIVE ERA LOUISVILLE                      | 44  |
| 4.1 The Gateway of the South                               | 44  |
| 4.2 City of Progress—City of Wealth                        | 46  |
| 4.3 Poverty and Politics                                   | 48  |
| 4.4 Progressive Louisville                                 | 52  |
| 4.5 The Fashionable Act of Charity                         | 54  |
| 4.6 Imagining the Cabbage Patch                            | 60  |
| CHAPTER 5: PROGRESSIVE ERA SLUMMING IN LOUISVILLE KENTUCKY | 68  |
| 5.1 The Strange Case of Mary Bass of the Cabbage Patch     | 68  |
| 5.2 Miss Alice Goes Slumming                               | 69  |
| 5.3 Slumming in the Cabbage Patch                          | 72  |
| 5.4 Wiggged Out                                            | 79  |
| 5.5 A Day at the Circus                                    | 82  |
| 5.6 Small Victories                                        | 88  |
| CHAPTER 6: THE DEFAMATION OF HER GOOD CHARACTER            | 91  |
| 6.1 Mary Bass vs. Alice Hegan Rice                         | 91  |
| 6.2 The Climate of Opinion                                 | 95  |
| 6.3 From Insult to Injury                                  | 102 |
| 6.4 Contempt and Compromise                                | 108 |
| 6.5 The Merits of the Defamation Claim                     | 110 |
| CHAPTER 7: SHAME AND IDENTITY                              | 113 |
| 7.1 Forging and Identity                                   | 113 |
| 7.2 The Politics of Shame                                  | 121 |

|                                                                  |     |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| CHAPTER 8: THE POWER OF REPRESENTION AND IDENTITY                | 131 |
| 8.1    The Puppet Master                                         | 131 |
| 8.2    White Trash                                               | 133 |
| 8.3    Representation Through Dialect                            | 135 |
| 8.4    Class Humor and Authenticity                              | 137 |
| 8.5    Mirror, Mirror                                            | 139 |
| 8.6    Romanticizing the Cabbage Patch                           | 141 |
| CHAPTER 9: CITIZEN RICE                                          | 145 |
| 9.1    In Her Blood                                              | 145 |
| 9.2    Marriage, The New Woman, and Race Suicide                 | 147 |
| 9.3    Progressive Era Themes in Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch | 149 |
| 9.4    The Continuous Good Fortune of Mrs. Wiggs                 | 151 |
| 9.5    The Plush Life of Alice Hegan Rice                        | 155 |
| 9.6    The Cabbage Patch Settlement House                        | 158 |
| 9.7    The Irony of Being Alice                                  | 161 |
| CHAPTER 10: EPILOGUE                                             | 163 |
| 10.1   Plucking Roses from the Cabbage Patch                     | 163 |
| REFERENCES                                                       | 170 |
| 11.1   Archival Sources                                          | 170 |
| 11.2   Secondary Sources                                         | 172 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

|                                                                                                    |     |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| FIGURE 1: Illustration by Florence Scovel Shinn from <i>Lovey Mary</i> 1903.                       | 63  |
| FIGURE 2: Home of Mary Bass – 1001 Hill Street.                                                    | 76  |
| FIGURE 3: Mary Bass on the Witness Stand.                                                          | 84  |
| FIGURE 4: Denominational Garden Postcard.                                                          | 94  |
| FIGURE 5: Macauley’s Theatre – Opening Night October 5, 1903.                                      | 96  |
| FIGURE 6: Mary Bass and Clyde Bass circa 1876.                                                     | 115 |
| FIGURE 7: The Cover of <i>Lovey Mary</i> with Mrs. Wiggs standing at the Cabbage Patch Water Pump. | 118 |
| FIGURE 8: Postcard of the Home of Mrs. Wiggs.                                                      | 129 |
| FIGURE 9: Alice Hegan Rice circa 1902.                                                             | 145 |
| FIGURE 10: Louisville Premier of Film 1934.                                                        | 154 |
| FIGURE 11: The Globetrotting Couple.                                                               | 157 |
| FIGURE 12: Mary Bas in Doorstep Photo at Hill Street House in Cabbage Patch 1903.                  | 168 |

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### *Forward*

In 1901, Alice Caldwell Hegan, a self-proclaimed social-worker from an aristocratic family published her first novel which incorporated her experiences working with the poor in Louisville, Kentucky. By 1902, quite unexpectedly, her novel *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* became a national sensation. It finished the year as the second bestselling novel of 1902 and even outsold Arthur Conan Doyle's classic *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The book remained in the top ten bestsellers' list of 1903, along with its follow-up *Lovey Mary* which also prominently featured the character of Mrs. Wiggs. In 1904 the two books were merged and made into a successful Broadway play that toured the United States, Europe and Australia for years. By 1908 the two books collective sales exceeded more than one-million copies. And the story's broad popularity engendered an immense and distinguished following. President Theodore Roosevelt listed *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* as one of his favorite books, even quoted from it in his speeches, and invited its author to dine with him at the White House. By 1910 *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* ranked among the top five bestselling books of the first decade of the twentieth-century. The character of Mrs. Wiggs sustained notoriety throughout the first half of the twentieth-century as the book continued to sell. By 1942, it had been made into a major motion picture four times, including a 1934 version starring the iconic comedian W.C. Fields.

Although *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* was a work of fiction, the character of Mrs. Wiggs was based on a real woman and resident of the Cabbage Patch, Mary Bass.<sup>1</sup> And the Cabbage Patch, in reality, was one of the poorest sections of Louisville, Kentucky at the turn of the twentieth-century. The book's young author, Alice Caldwell Hegan, soon to be married and referred to as Alice Hegan Rice, was active through her church group in supporting reform efforts in the Louisville's poor communities. As a reformer, she stumbled upon Mary Bass and was drawn to the rare nature of Bass' eccentric sense of humor and the hue of Bass' unconventional personality. Rice became fascinated with Bass' unique aphorisms, her dialect, her stories, and her optimism in spite of being the widowed mother of five children struggling to survive in the slums of Louisville.

Alice Hegan Rice came to the Cabbage Patch with reform in mind, but she left with a great deal more, including the ideas for a character and book that would greatly increase her status and wealth. Meanwhile, Mary Bass became typecast as an object of fiction, whose identity was altered in perpetuity. She remained in the Cabbage Patch for the rest of her life, viewed as a curiosity and tourist attraction. After the book's success, unwelcomed tourists from all over the United States practiced a form of slumming by invading her meager yard and home. Desperate for any famous memento, these invasive tourists stole any possession of Mary Bass' they could get their hands on as souvenirs. They tormented Mary Bass and thoughtlessly invaded her privacy as they hoped to experience the folksy humor and homespun wisdom of her contrived alter ego Mrs.

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<sup>1</sup> Full disclosure: The author of this thesis is a direct descendant of Mary Bass. Although this project is an effort to reveal Mary Bass' untold story, the rules of historical method were followed and the arguments are evidenced based and thoroughly documented.

Wiggs—an experience that Mary Bass refused to give them. Mrs. Bass eventually sued Alice Hegan Rice for “malicious and defamatory libel.”<sup>2</sup>

The plight of Mary Bass was immersed in the complexity of the Progressive Era. Her story remains highly representative of the era’s growing divide between the haves and have-nots. And her trials confirm the power, both real and symbolic, of middle-class institutions to dominate the lower classes. But her story also adds complexity to this knowledge by demonstrating the resourceful and creative agency of the working-class in the Progressive Era and how some objects of reform or exploitation in many circumstances responded to those who offered assistance.

The Bass/Rice drama provides a unique opportunity to examine the popular fictional representation of poverty and ideals that captured the nation’s imagination during the Progressive Era, and the harsher realities behind them. The novel speaks to the rise of popular culture in the United States and the developing national identity brought on by industrialization and urbanization. This thesis demonstrate that popular culture had enormous power in shaping how Americans thought about social, political, economic and gender issues in the Progressive Era. Though singular in circumstance, this story touches on the contradictions and inconsistencies of Progressive reform as well as the hidden agendas of some middle-class reformers, which has been the subject of recent scholarship. This project argues that the reform efforts in Louisville, Kentucky to address the growing issues of poverty were hampered by notions of class and racial superiority. Relief efforts for the poor in Louisville contradict the prevailing historical narrative of a

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<sup>2</sup> Court Petition, Mary A. Bass alias Wiggs vs. Alice Hegan Rice, September, 1904, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Mary Boewe Collection, Original document held at University of Virginia.

progressive society dedicated to justice for all Americans. Reform exercised in Louisville was amateur and inadequate, more of a social distraction than a dedicated cause for middle-class reformers, and fundamentally designed to protect the status quo of class and racial hierarchies in the Jim Crow South. Ultimately, views of class and racial superiority blinded Progressive Era Louisville from truly understanding the very real problems it faced.

*The Success of Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*

In 1901, Alice Caldwell Hegan was an unknown author whose first manuscript was surprisingly accepted for publication by the Century Company in New York. A year later, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* was the second bestselling book of 1902.<sup>3</sup> Rice made a point of mentioning in her autobiography that:

In those days best sellers were not so numerous as they are to-day, and very little advance advertising was done. *Mrs. Wiggs* was launched without comment in a modest first edition of two thousand. In a month, another two thousand were printed; at the end of six months the presses were turning out as many as forty thousand copies a month.<sup>4</sup>

Rice makes a valid point; the term bestseller today may be a bit overused. For instance, Frank Luther Mott, in his book *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States*, created an adjusted list of bestsellers which based the criteria for the term “bestseller” on minimum sales of at least one percent of the population of the United States.<sup>5</sup> According to Mott’s formula, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* was one of only twenty-one books in the first decade of the twentieth-century to hold this distinction. Based on its Progressive Era popularity, adjusted to today’s population *Mrs. Wiggs of the*

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<sup>3</sup> Alice Payne Hackett and James Henry Burke, *80 Years of Best Sellers: 1898-1975* (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1977), 66.

<sup>4</sup> Alice Hegan Rice, *The Inky Way* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1941), 68.

<sup>5</sup> Frank Luther Mott, *Golden Multitudes: The Story of Best Sellers in the United States* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1947), 7.

*Cabbage Patch* would have sold more than 3.2 million copies in the United States alone.<sup>6</sup> By 1903 *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* and its follow-up *Lovely Mary* had saturated the market—both finishing in the top-ten books of that year.<sup>7</sup> Scholar Mary Boewe claims that “When *Lovely Mary* made the best sellers list it began to merge with its predecessor in readers’ minds until the highly quotable Mrs. Wiggs became the star of both books.”<sup>8</sup> By 1904, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* became a successful Broadway play with touring companies across the United States and Europe.<sup>9</sup> *Chicago Tribune* columnist Vincent Starrett noted in his 1955 book, *Best Loved Books of the Twentieth Century* that “In a short time the Cabbage Patch—a straggle of huts and shanties along a railroad track in Kentucky—was known around the world, in seven languages.”<sup>10</sup> In short, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* came about as close to complete media penetration as one could get at the turn of the twentieth-century.

So, what was the allure of this novel? Why did it strike such a chord with Progressive Era Americans? Although, the book has fallen out of fashion for numerous reasons over the years, it was in many ways greatly appealing to conservative values in the Progressive Era, especially as so many of those traditional values were challenged by the unrepresented flux of aggressive modern change. Historian Lowell Harrison notes that *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* “combined a developing national interest in the urban poor with a solution that focused on individual achievement in the face of adversity.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Mott, 312-313: This adjusted figure was based on the increase in the population of the United States from 1902 to 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Hackett, 67.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch: The Literary World of Alice Hegan Rice* (Louisville, KY: Butler Books, 2010), 39.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>10</sup> Vincent Starrett. *Best Loved Books of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Bantam Books, 1955) 70.

<sup>11</sup> Lowell H. Harrison and James C. Klotter. *A New History of Kentucky* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1997), 324.

Literary scholar Gillian Avery states the book “gave readers a more cheerful picture of poverty.”<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, literary scholar William S. Ward adds that *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* followed several other belletristic trends of the time. It was part of the “local color movement,” which focused on “utilizing local dialect and speech patterns,” and “the brand of sentimentality it purveyed was very much in vogue” at the turn-of-the-century.<sup>13</sup> The book also lightened the perceived burden on the middle-class by suggesting the poor could be amply subsidized by benevolent dabblers and trinket philanthropy. However, the romanticized poor, worthy of assistance in Rice’s lighthearted romp of impoverishment, were exclusively white, even in an overwhelmingly African-American slum. Yet in spite of these uncritical assessments, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* simply made many Americans of the Progressive Era laugh.<sup>14</sup> That being said, the style that many Americans found unpretentious, sentimental, and humorous was also clearly disparaging, racist and rich with classism.

#### *The Story of Mrs. Wiggs*

Alice Hegan Rice’s 1901 novel *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* tells the story of a family of poor white rural migrants living in the slums of Louisville, Kentucky during the Progressive Era. The story, at its essence, involves the trials of a family living in poverty struggling against starvation and the elements of winter. Mrs. Wiggs, a widow works as a laundress in an effort to support her five children. She relies heavily on the labor of her oldest child, a fifteen-year-old boy, who works both night and day to help

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<sup>12</sup> Gillian Avery. *Behold the Child: American Children and Their Books 1621-1922* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 168.

<sup>13</sup> William S. Ward, *A Literary History of Kentucky* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 52.

<sup>14</sup> Earl F. Bargainnier, “Southern Humor and Sentimentality: Circa 1900.” *The Southern Literary Journal* 12, no. 2 (1980), 150-154.

support his mother and four young siblings. The burden becomes too great for the young boy and he catches pneumonia and dies. After the death of her son, Mrs. Wiggs relies on the assistance of a kind, young socialite reformer, Lucy Olcott to help save her family from absolute destitution. The narrative is held together by the thread of a love story between Lucy Olcott and a generous young suitor. However, the story's main appeal lies in the optimism and philosophy of the character Mrs. Wiggs. Nancy Wiggs represents a spirited woman who makes every effort to survive off her and her family's hard work, but faces insurmountable odds and ultimately relies on the gracious reformer to save the day. The novel provides a touch of very real pathos, but the humor and malapropisms of Mrs. Wiggs generally dominates the novel's storyline. Mrs. Wiggs' optimism is expressed throughout the novel in catchy sayings like "it ain't never no use puttin' up you umbrella till it rains," or in her philosophy: "In the mud and scum of things something always, always sings!"<sup>15</sup> Lines like these are common throughout the book, including the most famous Wiggsism with which the novel ends, "Looks like everything in the world comes right, if we just wait long enough."<sup>16</sup> Wiggisms became highly quotable catchphrases in the early part of the twentieth-century and contributed greatly to the novel's success.

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<sup>15</sup> Alice Caldwell Hegan, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* (New York: The Century Co., 1901), 123, 3: The dialect Alice Hegan Rice used for Mrs. Wiggs was removed by the author of this thesis from these particular sayings for clarity at this early point in the thesis, but dialect will be emphasized later.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 154: Like in the above quotes, dialect was removed from this Wiggsism.

## CHAPTER 2: HISTORIGRAPHY

### *Progressive Reform Historiography*

The historiography of Progressive reform begins in 1914 with Herbert Croly's *Progressive Democracy* in which he argued for more government involvement in the economy, but stressed the highly partisan battles fought amongst Progressives over this issue.<sup>17</sup> Croly was an actual progressive reformer and has been described "as one of the most important philosophical architects of...egalitarian and colorblind liberal nationalism" that the era produced.<sup>18</sup> In 1915, Benjamin Parke De Witt argued in *The Progressive Movement* that the first decade of the twentieth-century was dominated by fierce political agitation between the privileged middle-class and the liberal proponents of social justice.<sup>19</sup> This thesis reaffirms De Witt's assertion regarding the entitled middle-class and their haphazard campaign to devalue truly progressive notions of reform.

The historiography of liberal progressivism shifted after World War II. By the mid-1950s Counter-Progressive histories like Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* contended that the reforms were guided by white middle-class men, who despite their humane hyperbole held no real interest in democratically shifting

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<sup>17</sup> Herbert Croly, *Progressive Democracy* (New York: Macmillan, 1914).

<sup>18</sup> Robert D. Johnston, "Re-Democratizing the Progressive Era: The Politics of Progressive Era Political Historiography," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 1, no. 1 (2002), 69.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin Parke De Witt, *The Progressive Movement: A Non-Partisan, Comprehensive Discussion of Current Tendencies in American Politics* (New York: Macmillan, 1915).

the power structure of their current state of affairs.<sup>20</sup> However, by the 1960s embittered liberal historians formed the New Left movement to offer a counter narrative to the Counter-Progressive movement of the progressive reform historiography. In 1960, Charles Forcey argued in *Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann, and the Progressive Era, 1900-1925* that rising nationalism crippled the Progressive Era's liberal agenda.<sup>21</sup> In 1963, New Left historian Gabriel Kolko argued in *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Re-Interpretation of American History, 1900-1916* that the Progressive reform of the middle-class took the power away from the real force of change, the rise of socialism and labor movements.<sup>22</sup> By 1967, Counter-Progressive historian Robert H. Wiebe argued in *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* that middle-class professionals created a sociopolitical base for modern civilization to thrive through a culture of bureaucracy that made their world more organized and manageable.<sup>23</sup> Historian Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore claims that both "Hofstadter and Wiebe argue that these middle-class reforms enabled the United States to absorb millions of immigrants, become a world leader, and prosper as never before."<sup>24</sup> The Counter-Progressives or organizational historians as they are sometimes called continued to dominate historical writing until the 1970s. However, this highly chauvinistic approach revealed little diversity or agency among race, class, and gender, and runs contrary to arguments in this thesis noting the reform efforts of nonprofessional white middle-class females.

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform from Bryant to F.D.R.* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955).

<sup>21</sup> Charles Forcey, *The Crossroads of Liberalism: Croly, Weyl, Lippmann, and the Progressive Era, 1900-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961).

<sup>22</sup> Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism; A Re-Interpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963).

<sup>23</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

<sup>24</sup> Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Who Were the Progressives?* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 19.

This boxed historical uniformity began to change with the Progressive revisionist historians, in the 1970s, who found more diversity among reformers including women, African-Americans, political organizations and other associations. By the 1980s neo-Progressive historians were finding agency in the urban working-class. Gilmore argues that most historians today “concede that the Progressive Era brought together broad coalitions of people to effect reform. However, they still argue about which groups had agency.”<sup>25</sup> This thesis illustrates the limited, but resourceful agency of the working-class poor, however it also reveals the working-class faced overwhelming odds against the power of the middle-and-upper-classes of the Progressive Era, who used their advantage to maintain the status quo.

Modern American conception of a majority middle-class evolved after World War II with the rise of the suburbs, the GI Bill, and the expanding trend of homeownership that followed. However, the gap between the middle-class and working poor was more pronounced at the turn-of-the-twentieth-century. The middle-class of the Progressive Era was in general, substantially better off financially, and separated more extensively by material wealth and class distinction from the working-class than contemporary notions of class dynamics.

More recently, many scholars have addressed the question of who was involved in Progressive reform. In 1991, Robyn Muncy stated in *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1880-1935* that there was no consolidated Progressive movement, but rather a patchwork of coalitions whose efforts often ran contrary to one another.<sup>26</sup> She

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<sup>25</sup> Gilmore, 18-19.

<sup>26</sup> Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

also argued that women highly influenced social policy due to their involvement in child welfare and settlement houses.<sup>27</sup> This thesis largely confirms the patchwork coalition theory, focusing on private charities and church groups attempting to make a unified effort. It also examines and confirms middle-class female involvement in reform efforts, as well as the creation of the Cabbage Patch Settlement House.

In 1992, Ruth Crocker suggested in *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities* that “second-tier” settlement houses in hundreds of smaller cities were perhaps more typical of the settlement house experience than the standard big city examples in New York and Hull House in Chicago.<sup>28</sup> Crocker’s book exists as part of a very small minority of scholarly efforts that offer geographic diversity to the reform historiography with her case study on mid-size mid-western towns in Indiana. This thesis contributes to that geographic diversity by studying reform in Louisville’s Cabbage Patch, a slum that despite its Progressive Era fame has received only cursory scholarly treatment.

In 1995, Kathryn Kish Sklar found, in *Florence Kelley and the Nation’s Work: The Rise of Women’s Political Culture*, that cross-class accord among women experienced greater success in bettering the situation for the poor and working-class.<sup>29</sup> However, in 1991, Noralee Frankel and Nancy Schrom Dye argued in *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* that often middle-class white female reform efforts only reflected middle-class ideals and had trouble bridging class and racial

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<sup>27</sup> Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>28</sup> Ruth Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

differences.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, in 1994, Linda Gordon argued in *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* that the inequitable structures of power implemented over the poor and minorities by middle-class women served to hinder the lower classes, especially by endorsing the application of a family wage, which failed to benefit single mothers.<sup>31</sup> Much like this project, these books discuss the pros and cons of cross-class alliances of Progressive Era women. However, this thesis confirms and supports Nancy Schrom Dye's argument that the middle-class reform efforts primarily benefited the ideals of the middle-class.

Many scholars have also argued for more balance in their approach to progressivism. Daniel T. Rodgers in his 1982 article "In Search of Progressivism" stressed the complexity and pluralism of the era.<sup>32</sup> This pluralistic argument was echoed by Linda Gordon in 2002, in her article "If the Progressives Were Advising Us Today, Should We Listen?"<sup>33</sup> This thesis emphasizes the irony embedded in middle-class reform efforts and adds to the complexity of our understanding the Progressive Era.

### *Slumming Historiography*

Slumming is a term used to describe white middle-and-upper-class pleasure excursions into poor, often minority occupied neighborhoods. Though still understudied, scholarship on slumming has emerged over the last twenty years in a small but intriguing historiography that has focused primarily on representation of the slums, class

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<sup>30</sup> Noralee Frankel and Nancy Schrom Dye, *Gender, Class, Race, and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> Linda Gordon, *Pitied but Not Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890-1935* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

<sup>32</sup> Daniel T. Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (1982): 113-132.

<sup>33</sup> Linda Gordon, "SHGAPE Distinguished Historian Address: If the Progressives Were Advising Us Today, Should We Listen?" *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*. 1, no. 2(2002): 109-121.

entitlement, and the varying appeal of the slums for the white middle-class. Recent scholarship finds Progressive Era newspaper articles of the slum life exaggerated and lacking balance. News media portrayal of the slums reflected the cultural values of newspaper editors, serving more as sensationalized entertainment for middle-class readership than true embodiment of slum culture.<sup>34</sup> These articles, rich with biases and engrained ideologies often represented the presumptuous, thinly researched, and under-informed observations of the middle-class more than pure representation of fact. This work concedes that many of these Progressive Era articles regarding slum life lean toward hyperbole and clearly represent the perspective of the outsider, however this thesis still insists that they reveal a significant hierarchical American class dynamic that modern narratives gloss over. Progressive Era middle-class perspective exposes a hegemonic structure that betrays contemporary concepts of a classless American society. Regrettably, these lopsided newspaper accounts often represent the only descriptions that remain of these neighborhoods, but perhaps these depictions reveal a whisper about both the writers and their subjects.

Further scholarship has examined Progressive Era fictional representation of slumming. Fictional portrayals of poverty were popular in the Progressive Era. Historian Robert Dowling claims that with the rise of nationalism there was a call for an “indigenous literature,” written with local color, perspective, and vernacular. Dowling further argues that middle-class writers relied on a symbiotic relationship with a local slum guides to provide an insider’s perspective to their outsider’s voice. These relationships helped provide a more credible representation of slum life in the Progressive

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<sup>34</sup> Alan Mayne, *The Imagined Slum: Newspaper Representation in Three Cities 1870-1914* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1993).

Era through fiction.<sup>35</sup> Correspondingly, historian Chris J. Westgate argues that slum fiction encouraged the middle-class to identify and sympathize with the poor, and “defined the dilemma of ethical responsibility toward urban poverty.”<sup>36</sup> Although Dowling and Westgate have written well-informed and broad studies of New York slumming fiction, this thesis contends that their claims break down under the close inspection of the Bass and Rice relationship. This work argues that the middle-class representation of poverty relied on romanticisms and lacked credibility. It also asserts that middle-class representations of slumming like *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* were designed to make the middle-class feel content with their conduct and actions towards the poor by brushing over the real issues of poverty. Furthermore, Dowling’s argument as to the symbiotic nature of the relationship between guide and writer remains a subject of interrogation throughout this project.

The slumming historiography as a whole has frequently focused on class-entitlement to varying degrees. Historian Chad Heap’s extensive study of slumming in New York and Chicago most effectively examines the extent of these class divides, as well as confirms that white middle-class female reformers were among the first to start the trend of slumming.<sup>37</sup> This project builds upon Heap’s work.

Despite this small but growing body of slumming historiography the extant literature fails to examine slumming outside the major cities such as New York, Chicago and London. Scholars of both urban progressive reform and slumming have tended to

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Dowling, *Slumming in New York: From the Waterfront to Mythic Harlem*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Chris J. Westgate, *Staging the Slums, Slumming the Stage: Class, Poverty, Ethnicity, and Sexuality in American Theatre, 1890-1916* (New York: Palgrave MacMillian, 2014), 9.

<sup>37</sup> Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

share a parallel structure that focuses attention exclusively on first-tier cities at the expense of other places where the experience may be more complicated, unique, and intricate than the norms seen in larger cities, or may reinforce or partially reinforce existing narratives. Focusing on Louisville provides a model for other scholars to further examine slumming in second and third tier cities. Additionally, historical scholarship falls short in examining, in detail, the personal consequences of slumming on the families that lived in the slums. The subject as a whole remains understudied and in its infancy of historical inquiry. The field requires still more scholarship and diversity of theme, location, size and scope to produce a broader more complex historiography. This work adds necessary diversity and complexity to the narrative through a microhistory of the experiences of Mary Bass. This thesis demonstrates the contributing role that contemporary literature and media played in the popularity of slumming in the Progressive Era.

The story of Mary Bass offers the chance to examine first-hand the trials of a family constrained by the circumstances of poverty, living with the damaging effects of slumming and middle-class interference in their lives. However, it provides evidence that some families, living under such hardship, were not helpless in this process and possessed their own agency despite resounding middle-class views of their lack of resourcefulness. This thesis argues that in this complex hierarchical system, the poor understood how they were narrowly defined by the higher classes through literature and other prose, but fought in uncommon ways to maintain their dignity and everyday survival.

Furthermore, unlike the uproar and repercussions met in the federal government's reaction to Upton Sinclair's revered Progressive Era narrative *The Jungle*, Alice Hegan Rice's *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* provoked no governmental response at all and no meaningful or impactful response from the middle-class reform community of Louisville upon learning of the desperate living conditions of Mary Bass and her family. Rather, this thesis claims that the American middle-class' romantic fascination with poverty and popular culture unraveled into remorseless exploitation through the practice of slumming.

### *White Migrant Historiography*

White migration in the United States remains under studied and focused almost exclusively on twentieth-century migration. Most American studies on migration have focused on African-American migration post-Civil War, and the Great Migrations taking place as result of both World Wars. In 1991 James N. Gregory's *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* focused on the white migration of the 1930s and 1940s from the Southwest to California, which was also the subject of John Steinbeck's classic novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Gregory argued that Steinbeck's destitute rural farm family, the Joads were an atypical representation of Dust Bowl migration, because most of the migrants were from cities and nearly twenty percent were white collar workers.<sup>38</sup> In 2001 Chad Berry's *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles* dealt with white southern migration to the mid-west, also during the 1930s and 1940s and argued that white migration was dissimilar to black migration, because southern whites only

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<sup>38</sup> James N. Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

reluctantly left their homes and often longed to return.<sup>39</sup> Berry also argued that white migrants suffered from their flight much like the immigration experiences of ethnic groups and minorities that left white migrants fighting for the lowest paying jobs available.<sup>40</sup> James N. Gregory's *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* published in 2007 dealt with both white and black migration brought on by the World Wars and argued that migrants of both races faced negative stereotypes in the press, but the different races settle in separate areas in northern cities perpetuating segregationist practices.<sup>41</sup>

None of the white migrant historiography deals with intrastate rural migration or focuses on white migration brought on by the Civil War, Reconstruction or the farm crisis that effected Progressive Era movement. This thesis exposes the issue of poor white migration to the cities as the result of the developing industrial economy neglected in historical scholarship. Typical histories of the Progressive Era deal with minorities and immigrants, but fail to address the very real issue of poor white citizens. Strangely, poor whites have remained invisible in scholarship, as the narrative contradicts notions of white supremacy. The unique story in this thesis directly uncovers the difficult to find voices of marginalized poor whites through one individual case that addresses the micro-concerns of a larger set of issues and themes within the Progressive Era historiography. This one-of-a-kind story demonstrates that notions of white supremacy negatively affected poor whites in the South and that even romantic impressions of the deserving

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<sup>39</sup> Chad Berry, *Southern Migrants, Northern Exiles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> James N. Gregory, *The Southern Diaspora: How the Great Migrations of Black and White Southerners Transformed America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005).

poor were not enough overcome the stigma of being white and living in with trauma poverty.

### *Alice Hegan Rice Historiography*

The Alice Hegan Rice historiography remains quite small, beyond the many primary source articles written about her during the Progressive Era and Rice's own autobiography, *The Inky Way*, published in 1941.<sup>42</sup> However, Mary Boewe has authored two journal articles and a book on Rice. Her book *Beyond the Cabbage Patch: The Literary World of Alice Hegan Rice* reviews the life and forty-year career of Alice Hegan Rice as an author, providing summaries of Rice's major works and their reception, both publicly and critically.<sup>43</sup> And her article, *Back to the Cabbage Patch: The Character of Mrs. Wiggs* goes into some detail regarding Mary Bass and her case against Rice.<sup>44</sup> Mary Boewe dedicated much of her life to researching Alice Hegan Rice and provides some fascinating, well-researched information referencing the life of Rice, however Boewe's interests reflect a background focused more in English literature than historical perspective. Boewe provides a rather aggrandized vision of Rice's life, fame and wealth, but with little class analysis, and Mary Bass remains little more than a one-dimensional curiosity in Boewe's Rice-focused monograph. Boewe's exploration does not frame Rice's writings within the broader historical context of the Progressive Era historiography. And Mary Boewe's assertion that "the odd partnership of" Alice Hegan Rice and Mary Bass "was more symbiotic than parasitic" will be a strong point of

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<sup>42</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*.

<sup>43</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*.

<sup>44</sup> Mary Boewe, "Back to the Cabbage Patch: The Character of Mrs. Wiggs," *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (1985).

contention throughout this project.<sup>45</sup> Mary Bass' story has been told with scant details, mostly as a curiosity from the vantage point of the middle-class, but never from the working-class perspective of Bass herself.

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<sup>45</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, xvi.

## CHAPTER 3: THE PROGRESSIVE ERA SETTING OF THE WIGGS PHENOMENON

### *Fiction and History*

Literature provides fictional representation of life and as the saying goes—art imitates life. All art exists as a product of the time period in which it was produced. Art, or in this case literature, cannot help but reflect the spoken and often unspoken values of the time period in which it was written. Therefore, fiction, when viewed from an historical lens can reveal the mindset, attitudes, common beliefs, ideologies and prejudices of its author and the world in which the author lived. Fiction therefore often reveals the reality of past in ways the author may not have consciously intended, but speaks clearly nonetheless to those realities. Fiction opens a window that exposes both the aspirations and shortcomings of times past. A critical reading of fiction in historical context detects the essence of often perfumed words. Literary historian George Saintsbury instructed that when reading critically “we shall not busy ourselves with what men ought to have admired, what they ought to have written, what they ought to have thought, but with what they did think write and admire.”<sup>46</sup> The fiction of Alice Hegan Rice confesses an unflattering ideology cloaked in benevolence.

Alice Hegan Rice’s immensely popular novel, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* remains highly representative of the Progressive Era United States in both its promise and

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<sup>46</sup> George Saintsbury, *A History of English Criticism* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood and Sons, 1911), quoted in Hackett, np.

failings. The book to some degree broaches on many Progressive Era issues of scholarly research including the role of reform, migration, urbanization, the developing slums, poverty, child labor, imperialism, temperance, class, race, white supremacy, and the rise of popular culture and mass consumption. Many of these issues Alice Hegan Rice held no intention of representing in any thought provoking analytical way, but were merely so intertwined within the reality of her own world that they naturally worked their way into the story. Rice's novels *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, and its follow-up *Lovey Mary* were products and prime examples of Progressive Era ideology in the United States.

### *The Progressive Era in Context*

Most historians agree, the Progressive Era in the United States occupies the period between 1890 through 1920. The Era was defined by the rise of industrialization and increased immigration, spawning the growth of large cities and urbanization. The Era was plagued by the change from the traditional agricultural production economy to the more modern consuming economy of industry. Some benefited greatly from this change but many were left behind in the process. Large numbers of African-Americans as well as white rural farmers migrated to the major cities looking for opportunities as low profits, high long-term loan debts, and industrialized farming began to overwhelm the efforts of small family farms. In fact, more than a quarter of the entire population of the United States migrated from rural farms to cities and towns between 1870 and 1920.<sup>47</sup> The rural migration along with the rise of immigration from southern and central Europe often overwhelmed the capacity of newly industrialized centers. Overcrowding and sanitation issues contributed to these problems. Many cities lacked water treatment facilities and

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<sup>47</sup> Elizabeth Ammons, and Valerie Rohy, *American Local Color Writing, 1880-1920* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), ix.

sewer systems. Migrants and immigrants generally represented the economically poorest people in the city and were forced to live in often dilapidated, poorly constructed, poorly ventilated houses and tenements that became known as slums. Often more than one family occupied tiny spaces and disease outbreaks were common. These migrants and immigrants struggled with low paying jobs often very much relying on the labor of their own children just to make ends meet. There was no social safety net, no environmental protection agency, and the Food and Drug Administration wasn't established until 1906, and then only in limited form that left Progressive Era consumers mostly unprotected from poisons and disease that often lurked in the products available for consumption.

This steady influx of migrants and immigrants served as the impetus of Progressive Era reformist ideology. Jim Crow policies in the South held race in check; and both class and race superiority were commonly believed attitudes among middle-class whites throughout the nation. However, middle-class residents of newly industrialized cities found the overwhelming poverty impossible to ignore as in many cases slums arose right next to prosperous urban middle-class communities. Reformers, often white middle-class females, with the luxury of free time became concerned with the potential spread of disease in their own communities, as well as the scourge of disheveled beggars that encroached upon their own fashionable neighborhoods, not to mention the unpleasant sight of women and children openly living in poverty. Progressive Era reformers attempted to address the massive and uncomfortable change that arose all around them. Reform efforts were endeavors to address problems both real and perceived. Some addressed the very relevant need of the impoverished and diseased, while others were intended to maintain both the class and racial status quo. Many of the

reforms were handled locally by church groups and concerned citizens as governments' role in such affairs was still evolving. The provincial nature of many reforms created an often disorganized effort with no oversight that reflected the diverse range of goals desired by the middle-class reformers. Progressive reform could therefore be conservative, liberal, very much progressive in nature, or far from it. They were all however efforts to address the threat of change brought on by the Progressive Era.

General attitudes of the wealthy urban middle-class regarding the growing slum population were initially geared toward aversion and disgust rather than any sort of notions of sympathy.<sup>48</sup> Indeed Social Darwinism, prevalent in the early part of the Progressive Era, insisted that competition was the natural principle of human behavior and therefore there was no cure, nor need for a cure for poverty. Consequently, the poor were poor because they were physically, morally, and spiritually unfit to survive.<sup>49</sup> However, with the economic depression of the mid-1890s and mass poverty so evident, "it became harder to blame moral failings and individual weakness."<sup>50</sup> The children of farmers that migrated to the cities to earn a wage were particularly vulnerable to the new national economy and business crises.<sup>51</sup> Nearly twenty percent of the workforce during the depression of the 1890s were without jobs.<sup>52</sup> Literally millions of unemployed workers, crowding America's industrialized cities as a result of the depression, centered the debate on poverty as an "experience of an entire class of people rather than as a

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<sup>48</sup> Robert H. Bremner, *The Discovery of Poverty in the United States* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 5.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>50</sup> Susan D. Moeller, "The Cultural Construction of Urban Poverty: Images of Poverty in New York City, 1880-1917," *Journal of American Culture* 18, no. 4 (1995), 10.

<sup>51</sup> Bremner, 15.

<sup>52</sup> Moeller, 9.

phenomenon suffered by isolated individuals.”<sup>53</sup> The collapsed economy of the 1890s compelled charity organizations to establish less stringent attitudes towards dependence.<sup>54</sup> Yet even with a change in general attitudes of privately organized charity efforts, the need among the impoverished was greater than the capacity of private organizations to effectively handle the problem.<sup>55</sup>

*Alice Hegan Rice and the Middle-Class Reform Narrative*

Alice Hegan Rice as a member of elite Louisville society wrote about poverty and the struggle of the migrant slum residents from the perspective of the wealthy and emphasized the wealthy’s generous efforts to help the conditions of the poor. Her novel was timely, according to historian Lowell Harrison, “It combined a developing national interest in the urban poor with a solution that focused on individual achievement in the face of adversity.”<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, English Professor Wade Hall claims that “Rice’s story mined two proud veins of the American character—self reliance and private philanthropy.”<sup>57</sup> But Rice chose to gloss over the bleak realities of living in poverty with “generous strokes of humor.”<sup>58</sup> Historian Robert H. Bremner claims that genteel writers like Rice “voiced remarkably little protest against social injustice [and] employed economic distress mainly as an atmospheric backdrop for romance.”<sup>59</sup> Rice’s prose recognized the poor, but at the same time bypassed “confrontation with the social reality

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>54</sup> Moeller, 10.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Harrison, 324.

<sup>57</sup> Wade Hall, “Forward,” quoted in the forward of Alice Hegan Rice, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004), xi.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Bremner, 174.

of poverty.”<sup>60</sup> Scholar Gavin Jones stresses that “in this regard, poverty loses its urgency if it is not at least potentially absolute, if it is not defined by the lack—or by the threat of lack—or the resources necessary for subsistence.”<sup>61</sup> At a time when Americans were seriously questioning the evident disparity of wealth in industrialized cities, Alice Hegan Rice’s portrait of Mrs. Wiggs seemed to reduce the threat of poverty and justify the disproportionate wealth distribution that plagued Progressive Era America.

*Mrs. Wiggs vs. Realism and Muckraking*

Alice Hegan Rice relied on sentimental optimism that catered to her middle-class audience. However, at the same time, a school of literary realism was gaining ground in American fiction. Literary realists attacked the social inequalities that “imposed enormous disadvantages on the many while conferring extraordinary privileges on the few.”<sup>62</sup> Scholar Susan D. Moeller claims that literary realists “not only depicted how the other half lived, but blamed the first half for it.”<sup>63</sup> Novelist and literary realist, Theodore Dreiser wrote truthfully about slum residents in the Progressive Era. Dreiser’s work exposed that suffering in poverty was neither “interesting or colorful,” it destroyed families and life itself.<sup>64</sup> Dreiser never romanticized the plight of the poor to him “the struggle of men and women against unequal odds was beautiful in itself.”<sup>65</sup> Dreiser’s novel *Sister Carrie* written in 1900 has been called “the greatest of all American urban novels.”<sup>66</sup> But *Sister Carrie* was not well received during the Progressive Era and had

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<sup>60</sup> Gavin Jones, *American Hungers: The Problem of Poverty in U.S. Literature 1840-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 66.

<sup>61</sup> Jones, 3.

<sup>62</sup> Bremner, 175.

<sup>63</sup> Moeller, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Bremner, 171.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>66</sup> Donald L. Miller, *City of the Century* (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1996), 263.

barely sold five-thousand copies by the end of the first decade of the twentieth-century, while during the same period Alice Hegan Rice sold over a million copies of her sentimental and optimistic portrayal of poverty in Louisville.<sup>67</sup> Robert Bremner claims that literary realism was not well received by the “polite classes” during the Progressive Era as it “placed them on the defensive.”<sup>68</sup> While historian James C. Klotter stresses that *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* “reflected perfectly the viewpoints of the class that produced [it] and the society that read [it], both in Kentucky and in America.”<sup>69</sup> Klotter further states that it would take another twenty years before “Kentucky writers began to deal realistically with the darker side of the commonwealth.”<sup>70</sup> And although the public was very much aware of the struggles of the urban poor, the readers of popular fiction preferred “the sentimental school of social work” over the more bluntly disturbing portraits painted by literary realist and muckrakers.<sup>71</sup> Though Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* won rightful acclaim years after the fact, it was Alice Rice’s cheerful and optimistic slum resident that was more influential during the Progressive Era itself. It was Mrs. Wiggs, not Sister Carrie that captured the Progressive Era public’s imagination.

To some degree even, the more revered, muckraking journalism dealing with poverty of the Progressive Era relied on the same class and racial bias practiced by Alice Hegan Rice in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. In the Progressive Era, widely read muckraking journalist Jacob Riis was “the most important chronicler of American poverty,” and his work serves as evidence that Rice’s was not the only reform narrative to

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<sup>67</sup> Charles A. Madison, *Irving to Irving: Author-Publisher Relations 1800-1974* (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1974), 97-99.

<sup>68</sup> Bremner, 84.

<sup>69</sup> James C. Klotter, *Kentucky: Portrait in Paradox, 1900-1950* (Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Historical Society, 1996), 4.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ward, 52.

gain attention.<sup>72</sup> With the publication of Riis' *How the Other Half Lives* in 1890 class power relationships and assumptions of middle-class superiority greatly influenced the cultural representation of poverty in the Progressive Era.<sup>73</sup> Like Rice, Jacob Riis "appealed to the self-interest of the privileged, whose charity became an argument for the preservation of wealth."<sup>74</sup> Like Rice, Jacob Riis arranged his "representations of slum realities to align with his social vision and personal prejudices."<sup>75</sup> Much the same as the experience of the modern reader of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, Historian Edward T. O'Donnell points out that "those who bother to read *How the Other Half Lives* are more often than not shocked by what Riis wrote about the people he proposed to save. Riis managed to find certain virtues [in the poor] but not before dwelling in considerable detail on...stereotypes."<sup>76</sup> Also much like Rice, critics rarely "took Riis to task for his superficial approach to poverty or his emphasis on private sector prescriptions for relief."<sup>77</sup> Both Rice and Riis reduced the threat of the slum by providing the middle-class reader with a convenient and digestible "round-trip ticket to and from" their skewed interpretations of living in poverty during the Progressive Era.<sup>78</sup> Middle-class reformers like Rice and Riis visited the slums but failed to genuinely represent it, because it was a harsh reality they themselves never truly experienced. Their visits always ended with a welcome return to their comfortable middle-class existence.

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<sup>72</sup> Moeller, 6.

<sup>73</sup> Moeller, 1-2.

<sup>74</sup> Carol Quirke, "Picturing the Poor: Jacob Riis's Reform Photography," *Reviews in American History* 36, no. 4 (2008), 558.

<sup>75</sup> Benedict Giamo, *On the Bowery: Confronting Homelessness in American Society* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 71.

<sup>76</sup> Edward T. O'Donnell, "Pictures vs. Words? Public History, Tolerance, and the Challenge of Jacob Riis," *The Public Historian* 26, no. 3 (2004), 8.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>78</sup> Giamo, 69.

*Worthy Wealth and the Deserving Poor*

In an era of such monstrous imbalance of wealth, the middle-and-upper-classes were in search of a logical narrative in fiction that legitimized their position as well as justified continued social stratification. The accumulation of wealth in fiction was commonly treated unsympathetically with characterizations of squandering playboys and the folly of entitled heiresses.<sup>79</sup> However, if wealth appeared divorced from materialism “through a positive identification with idealism” and through “depictions of stewardship of wealth, where money was seen as a means to a non-economic end,” then wealth became a reward for good character.<sup>80</sup> The solution to the problem for the wealthy in fiction therefore was to discover a subject deserving of charity and become a benefactor. Alice Hegan Rice accomplished exactly this in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* with the character of the young socialite Lucy Olcott, whose behavior would generally have been considered naïve without her grace and generosity as a reform advocate through her church. Furthermore, in the character of Mrs. Wiggs, Rice provided a flawless example of the *deserving poor*. To understand the Progressive Era notions of the *deserving poor*, first recognize that the term produces binary opposition in the labeling of an unworthy poor. In a judgmental era that placed no value on diversity, those undeserving of help included African-Americans, unmarried mothers, beggars, able-bodied men, or any number of possibilities subject to discrimination. Mrs. Wiggs, however, was the perfect embodiment of the *deserving poor*, she was white, she was a widow, she was “honest and willing to work,” she possessed great pride, and she only reluctantly accepted charity

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<sup>79</sup> Erik Lofroth, “A World Made Safe: Values in American Best Sellers, 1895-1920” (PhD diss, Uppsala University, 1983), 51.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

when the need was urgent and absolute.<sup>81</sup> The concept of a *deserving poor* drew the line between Progressive Era middle-class perceptions of those who were merely “blameless victims of circumstance,” and those who were deemed “morally culpable for their financial status.”<sup>82</sup> However, this imaginary line was often based more on preconceived prejudices than the very real material needs of those living in poverty.

### *The Rise of Popular Culture in the United States*

Popular culture arose in the United States during the Progressive Era as a product of industrialization, increased production capacity, and greatly reduced travel times that created a national marketplace in which “American capitalism began to produce a distinct culture.”<sup>83</sup> Popular or mass culture emerged with the mass circulation of magazines in the 1890s.<sup>84</sup> Magazines were highly entrenched in the rise of mass culture. As scholar Tom Pendergast states, “modern magazines were born out the very transformative forces of corporate capitalism—they were children of mass production and distribution, large cities, and the existence of a national culture.”<sup>85</sup> Popular culture in print focused on a consuming public that was primarily white and middle-class. Mass produced culture in many ways narrowed concepts of individuality and instructed a national public in what was appropriate behavior in a changing world.

Magazines also serialized and publicized books creating a national demand for literature on a mass scale not seen before. Many magazine publishers were also book

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<sup>81</sup> Lina Mainiero, *American Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Ungar, 1979), 460; Lofroth, 53.

<sup>82</sup> Moeller, 2; Jones, 16.

<sup>83</sup> William Leach, *Land of Desire: Merchants, Power, and the Rise of a New American Culture* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 3.

<sup>84</sup> Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Verso, 1996), vii.

<sup>85</sup> Tom Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture 1900-1950* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 17.

publishers and this created opportunities for cross-marketing. Alice Hegan Rice's publisher, the Century Company, also produced a highly successful magazine. *Century* magazine was a family periodical aimed at the white middle-class market, specifically designed to influence and fuel the "national tastes and sentiments" of their conservative and genteel clientele and make them feel secure in their quickly changing world.<sup>86</sup> *Century* magazine not only catered to women readers but also published many women writers. Progressive Era literary critic James L. Ford noted that "in order to gain favor, and admission to the carefully guarded *Century* pages, it was necessary to depict life not as it was, but as [its] readers would like to have it."<sup>87</sup> Alice Hegan Rice's sentimental and optimistic views of poverty fit perfectly with the views of both the publisher of *Century* magazines and its broad readership.

#### *The Birth of the Bestseller*

The very concept of a bestseller was a product of the Progressive Era. The first bestseller's list was published in *The Bookman*, a literary magazine in 1895.<sup>88</sup> Scholar Elizabeth Ammons argues that "inexpensive popular novels...allowed hundreds of thousands of people to share the same narrative."<sup>89</sup> The mass popularity of bestsellers and their specific attachment with their time period speaks broadly to the values of the era in which they were published.<sup>90</sup> Though readers of bestsellers represent only a small portion of the overall population, "they belong to a highly influential segment of American

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<sup>86</sup> Samuel C. Chew, *Fruit Among the Leaves* (New York: Appleton-Century-Croft, Inc., 1950), 77, 79.

<sup>87</sup> James L. Ford, *Forty-Odd Years I the Literary Shop* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, 1921) 119-120.

<sup>88</sup> Hackett, 3.

<sup>89</sup> Ammons, xi.

<sup>90</sup> Lofroth, 15.

society, one central to American culture.”<sup>91</sup> Bestseller lists were compiled by information from bookstores. Bookstores in the Progressive Era were overwhelmingly frequented by those in the “upper and middle income groups.”<sup>92</sup> According to scholar Erik Lofroth, middle-class men in the Progressive Era tended to read more for “vocational purposes,” while women read more for amusement and pleasure, so the primary audience for bestselling fictional novels of the time was middle-and-upper-class females.<sup>93</sup> In bestselling fiction the reader and the writer tend to “share the same cultural community...and set of basic ideals,” therefore “the values in popular books are those of their readers as well as their writers.”<sup>94</sup> For this reason, Alice Hegan Rice’s belief in class and race superiority, and her simplistic romantic notions that the poor could be saved with little effort by the wealthy were views that found a sympathetic audience in the Progressive Era.

Bestselling novels tend to represent values of the broad community that read them in any specific time period. Scholar Alice Payne Hackett stresses that “best-selling books are not always the best in a critical sense, but they do offer a sense of what the public wants.”<sup>95</sup> Indeed critical acclaim appears to be no prerequisite for the wildly popular when it comes to fiction.<sup>96</sup> Scholar Erick Lofroth goes so far as to argue that the timely allure of bestsellers of the Progressive Era have had “the effect of making them utterly time-bound, unappealing to later generations, unread and all but unreadable.”<sup>97</sup> Lofroth notes in his study of the bestselling fiction of 1895 to 1920 that very few of the books that

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<sup>91</sup> Lofroth, 18.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>95</sup> Hackett, 3.

<sup>96</sup> Mott, 5.

<sup>97</sup> Lofroth, 15.

appeared on the yearly bestsellers lists from that time period have endured past the era where they first became popular.<sup>98</sup> This assessment certainly holds true of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, whose class-based humor now appears demeaning and pathetic, while its background ideology of race and class superiority seems appalling to the modern reader. Yet it was this same sentiment and humor that scholar Earl F. Bargainnier insists “brought laughter and tears” to many in the Progressive Era.<sup>99</sup> As a social worker and progressive reformer, Alice Hegan Rice was attempting to express an ideology that reflected her values and fit with the democratic ideals of the time, but like many writers of bestselling fiction of the Progressive Era her treatment only served to “put up a defense...for social stratification in its existing form.”<sup>100</sup> What makes Rice’s effort so startling is her childlike enthusiasm and warped humor in embracing such stratification. *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* was an appeal to the innocence and good-nature of middle-and-upper-class people in the Progressive Era, yet still managed to accurately reflect the entrenched racism and caste hierarchy so prevalent in the time period.

#### *Of Children and Teddy Bears*

The artless simplicity of Alice Hegan Rice’s *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* with its contrived juvenile plot, plain uncomplicated language, gentle humorous characters, and ample doses of children behaving like children throughout, makes many modern readers mistake the novel for a children’s book. Scholar D.L. Kirkpatrick clarifies that the novel “is an example of a book which has not so much been taken over by children as passed down to them. It was aimed originally at adult readers.”<sup>101</sup> Frank

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<sup>98</sup> Lofroth, 15.

<sup>99</sup> Bargainnier, 154.

<sup>100</sup> Lofroth, abstract.

<sup>101</sup> D.L. Kirkpatrick, ed., *Twentieth-Century Children’s Writers* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1983), 653.

Luther Mott points out that many Progressive Era readers of bestsellers “came to them with childish attitudes and appreciations...In 1910 less than half of the population twenty-five years of age had completed a grade-school education, and only about four percent possessed college diplomas.”<sup>102</sup> Mott also acknowledges in his study of American bestselling fiction that “probably half of the best sellers which we classify as having juvenile appeal were actually written mainly for adults.”<sup>103</sup> By 1913, however a study showed that *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* was required reading in many schools for girls in grades six through eight.<sup>104</sup> The fact that *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* was part of recommended curriculum for children demonstrates how deeply race and class superiority were embedded within Progressive Era popular culture. Simply put, what a society teaches its children represents its core values.

President Theodore Roosevelt, who held the nation’s top office at the time of the release of Alice Hegan Rice’s novel, once stated in an article written in *Bookman* magazine that “a thoroughly good book for young people is almost invariably one of the best books that grown people can read.”<sup>105</sup> Roosevelt was a huge fan of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* and listed the publication as one of his all-time favorite books.<sup>106</sup> In 1902, while in St. Louis delivering a speech, Roosevelt met a well-dressed woman from Louisville and inquired if she knew the author of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. After learning that the woman did indeed know Alice Hegan Rice, Roosevelt requested “won’t

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<sup>102</sup> Mott, 223.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 290.

<sup>104</sup> J.F. Bobbitt, A.C. Boyce, and M.L. Perkins, “Literature in the Elementary Curriculum.” *The Elementary School Teacher* 14, no. 4 (1913), 158-166.

<sup>105</sup> Theodore Roosevelt quoted in Mott, 290.

<sup>106</sup> Syracuse Public Library, *Roosevelt, Lover of Books* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Public Library, 1920), Hathitrust. [babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc2.ark:/13960/fk1td9n996;view=1up;seq=11.html](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc2.ark:/13960/fk1td9n996;view=1up;seq=11.html).

you please say to her when you see her that I have enjoyed ‘Mrs. Wiggs’ and that when she next comes to Washington, I hope she will make herself known.”<sup>107</sup> Rice upon receiving this news accepted Roosevelt’s invitation and sent him signed copies of her and her husband, Cale Young Rice’s books.<sup>108</sup> Roosevelt responded in a letter to Rice written on White House stationary:

I am old-fashioned, or sentimental, or something, about books! Whenever I read one I want, in the first place, to enjoy myself, and, in the next place, to feel that I am a little better and not a little worse for having read it...I do not want people to shirk facts or write what is not so, and it is often necessary to dwell on painful things; but I feel that they should be dealt upon in proper fashion and not for the sake of giving a kind of morbid pleasure.<sup>109</sup>

Roosevelt clearly preferred the sentimental narrative over the harshness of realism, and was willing to close one blind-eye to that reality. When Alice Hegan Rice finally arrived at the White House in 1904, she was greeted by President Roosevelt, who jovially declared, “Welcome to my Cabbage Patch.”<sup>110</sup> Roosevelt’s impressions of the Cabbage Patch were colored by Rice’s sentiment that portrayed the Louisville slum as a wonderful place in which even the President could imagine living. As late as 1907, Theodore Roosevelt at a speech on industrial training in Lansing, Michigan, proclaimed to the crowd that “You will learn the root of principles of self-help and helpfulness towards others from ‘Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch’ just as much as from any formal treatise on charity.”<sup>111</sup> Roosevelt’s view of reality, like that of many Progressive Era Americans

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<sup>107</sup> “Asks about Mrs. Wiggs,” newspaper clipping from unknown source from Alice Hegan Rice’s Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers: Rice subscribed to a press clipping service and kept articles that were published about her from all over the country.

<sup>108</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 52.

<sup>109</sup> Theodore Roosevelt to Alice Hegan Rice, February 4, 1904, Rice Collection MSS 47 B1 F1, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University.

<sup>110</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 68-69.

<sup>111</sup> Syracuse Public Library, *Roosevelt, Lover of Books*.

was skewed by his own perceptions of class and racial superiority, that fit nicely within the compounds of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*.

*The Reception of Mrs. Wiggs*

During the Progressive Era, Alice Hegan Rice's *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* rarely received unenthusiastic reviews from the nation's press. To the contrary, the reviews were generally glowing and were typically quite enamored by her sentimental brand of optimism. The *Baltimore Herald* declared that "Miss Hegan, with a wealth of pathos that is not sentimentality and of the sprightliest humor, describes the suffering of the poor in winter and teaches a lesson in unselfishness to everybody, and in truth, to every pessimist."<sup>112</sup> The *Louisville Times* insisted that "Mrs. Wiggs is something new, vital, original-drawn, indeed, from a class which has often been studied and often written about, but from which this type is very seldom taken."<sup>113</sup> One newspaper claimed that "When the book reading world discovers an author *whose book is full of human love and sympathy, written from the fullness of the heart, without any self-consciousness or false motives, but with the grace of simplicity and sincerity, it shows its appreciation in no half-hearted way.*"<sup>114</sup> Clearly not a fan of literary realism, the *Chicago Tribune* raved "So cheerful and optimistic its tone and so quietly amusing withal, it seems almost a rebuke to

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<sup>112</sup> Untitled, undated newspaper clipping, handwritten as *Baltimore Herald* from Alice Hegan Rice's Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

<sup>113</sup> Untitled, undated newspaper clipping, handwritten as *Louisville Times* from Alice Hegan Rice's Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

<sup>114</sup> Untitled, undated newspaper clipping from Alice Hegan Rice's Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers: Alice Hegan Rice was particularly happy with this review as she underlined the section that has been italicized for emphasis.

the morbid and sensational novels that litter the shelves.”<sup>115</sup> *Outlook Magazine* stated that “Its optimism is a constant, and it is a perfectly true and convincing picture of life.”<sup>116</sup> And the San Francisco publication *Waves* gushed “The fortunes of the ‘Wiggles’ are related with the keenest sympathy and sense of humor. One feels no embarrassment of the extreme poverty portrayed, and no desire that a more immediate and orthodox good fortune should overtake this interesting family.”<sup>117</sup> The novel *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* really seemed to make the middle-class feel good about themselves and their perceived lack of any real need to address the issues of poverty.

Only one critic truly challenged Alice Hegan Rice and that was the Progressive Era’s “most prominent feminist theorist” Charlotte Perkins Gilman in her article entitled “Dangerous Morality.”<sup>118</sup> Gilman asked “What is the secret of the fascination of this book—why is it so successful?”<sup>119</sup> And then she delivered the hard uncomfortable answer that “This book gives pleasure to the heart of the reader because it tends to assuage one of the widest griefs of our time.”<sup>120</sup> Gilman understood that *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* was an alternative to literary realism and in turn the antithesis of the harsh reality

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<sup>115</sup> Untitled, undated newspaper clipping, handwritten as *Chicago Tribune* from Alice Hegan Rice’s Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

<sup>116</sup> William Frederick Dix, “Alice Hegan Rice,” *Outlook Magazine*, December 1902, Rice Collection MSS 47 B4 F4, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University.

<sup>117</sup> Untitled, undated newspaper clipping, handwritten as *San Francisco Waves* from Alice Hegan Rice’s Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

<sup>118</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness & Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 122.

<sup>119</sup> Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “Mrs. Wiggs’ and a Dangerous Morality.” *The Critic: An Illustrated Monthly Review of Literature, Art and Life* XLIV, January-June (1904), 509.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

of poverty. She dreaded the notion of any truly progressive efforts contracting in scope.

Gilman expressed this concern by stating:

If the modern world, which is beginning to tingle throughout with the throbs of dawning social consciousness, a coming alive that hurts intensely because so much of society is cramped and suffering; if that shrinking and rebellious new conscious of ours can find any excuse for going to sleep again, it naturally grabs at it. This simple, amusing book, with its primitive motive, its easy benevolence, its faint thread of story, is pleasant to the taste and soothing in its effects. The very guilelessness of its makeup, the complete lack of effort necessary to follow and understand, the easy approval of its humble virtues, make it a relief to the sated appetite of the present-day reader, and a sedative to his recently aroused scruples.<sup>121</sup>

As an activist, Gilman worried that other progressive institutions would lose their ethical footing on the shaky modern ground. She went on articulating that:

Our rich men are wakening more and more to the stirring sense of social responsibility and doing what they can—according to their lights—to bring about better conditions. The social settlements, the Institute of Social Services, the churches in their active modern efforts, the thousand and one organizations that are working away at one or another feature of the evil—all these keep the public heart distressed and the public conscience uneasy about poverty. Then comes this manna, Mrs. Wiggs, this gentle emollient, to ease our pain. And it does so in two ways: first, we are shown this noble spirit, the strong, brave, cheery, unselfish soul, shedding sunshine all around her; and we heave a great sigh of relief and say to ourselves: “Poverty can’t be so bad after all, if it develops a woman like that! If these grumbling, dangerous poor people would only look at it like Mrs. Wiggs, it would be all right.” And then—owing to the crass ignorance and carelessness of the good woman, her slovenly, shiftless habits, her neglect of opportunity to find help, or pride that would not ask it—then we heave another sigh of relief and say: “After all, it was largely her own fault!”<sup>122</sup>

Gilman’s article, was a testament as to how different reformers understood ideas about poverty, and that there were discussions about the deserving poor that criticized the way that popular culture made it seem so accessible and devoid of urgency. Gilman’s

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<sup>121</sup> Gilman, 510.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 509.

commentary made little immediate impact as *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* continued to sell and gain popularity, but with time further scholarship would sway more towards Gilman's analysis than that of Alice Hegan Rice. Gilman's commentary continued to bother Rice, almost forty years later in her autobiography Rice vaguely mentioned a bad review though she stressed none of its reprimands. Rice only communicated that "Though flattered that anything I might write could have such cosmic consequences, I saw no reason for the lady to employ such heavy artillery to crush a butterfly."<sup>123</sup> Rice could be the butterfly or the net depending on the company. And after nearly four decades of ample time for reflection and introspection Alice Hegan Rice still wore blinders as to the culpability of her actions as both a reformer and writer.

#### *Wiggs Criticism in Hindsight*

Alice Hegan Rice's *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage* has not held up well critically as the years have passed. Literary scholar William S. Ward states that "Alice Hegan Rice's reading public is gone. Her brand of optimism and sentimentalism no longer seems as appealing and convincing as it once did...and many a reader despite the popularity of *Mrs. Wiggs*, found it full of platitudinous inconsequence."<sup>124</sup> As early as 1921, James L. Ford, the "Dean of New York' literary Bohemia,"<sup>125</sup> reflected back on his forty years in the literary community and accused Rice of "misrepresenting life in order to please [the] best-buying public."<sup>126</sup> Ford added that the book was "designed to make the reader feel

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<sup>123</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 75.

<sup>124</sup> Ward, 54.

<sup>125</sup> John Jay Chapman, "Memorial Pamphlet for James L. Ford.," *Brookhaven / South Haven Hamlets & Their People*. 1928. Accessed 22 July 2016.

brookhavensouthhaven.org/hamletpeople/tng/showmedia.php?&mediaID=558&all=1&page=1774.html.

<sup>126</sup> Ford, 119-123.

benevolent without spending a cent.”<sup>127</sup> Donald Irvine in his 1942 study of Progressive Era bestsellers concluded that the manner in which *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* “is written is implacably genteel and effeminate. The local background, hampered by paucity of detail, is vague; and the characterizations are given the same cursory treatment. Shallowness and saccharinity emerge as the chief attributes of the story.”<sup>128</sup> Irvine added that any dashes of “realism that creep into the picture of the Cabbage Patch are obscured by an aura of sweetness, and the real sordidness of the setting is disguised or omitted. Over privation and tragedy is spread the pleasant glow of the upper-income-bracket view of life.”<sup>129</sup> Scholar Earl F. Bargainnier claims that the book’s “innocence often seems sentimental and [its] patronizing often seems snobbish, if not worse; [if it] still provides laughter [it] is uneasy..[and] followed by embarrassment; for, however unconscious, its basis in most cases is class or racial superiority.”<sup>130</sup> Historian James C. Klotter notes that in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* “we have a picture of the poor as we would like them to be...it is comforting to think of the poor as such happy people,” but Klotter stresses that this view did not reflect the reality of life in the Cabbage Patch.<sup>131</sup> In fact, Klotter argues that as a result of the “attitudes fostered by the book [it] did little to help those in Louisville’s slums. Reform remained limited to traditional change [and] the upper class found it...difficult...to break the hidden cultural ropes binding them so firmly to a dying ethos.”<sup>132</sup> Clearly the overwhelming sentimentality of the Progressive Era was

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<sup>127</sup> Ford, 119-125.

<sup>128</sup> Donald V. Irvine, “The Best-Selling Novel in America 1900-1910.” Master’s Thesis (University of Kentucky, 1942), 42.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>130</sup> Bargainnier, 150.

<sup>131</sup> Klotter, 13.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

filled in reality with contradictions, that many people of the Era refused to recognize though the truth was right in front of them all along. Alice Hegan Rice herself never evolved beyond the high-walled mentality of her impenetrable social status. She securely clung to that decaying ideology for the rest of her comfortable life.

*The Wiggs Brand of Optimism and Local Color*

The style of writing that Alice Hegan Rice employed both followed and established literary trends in the Progressive Era. Though “glad-books” or books of good cheer were popular long before *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, Rice’s unfaltering brand of optimism set the template for the “happiness through hardship” model that found repeated success throughout the Progressive Era.<sup>133</sup> After Rice’s success in 1901, the Wiggs brand of optimism was carried forth by Kate Douglas Wiggin’s *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* in 1903, and later by Eleanor Hodgman Porter in *Pollyanna*, whose “almost masochistic cheerfulness gave the dictionaries a new name for a blindly optimistic person.”<sup>134</sup> But optimism can also be employed as a method of escape and a strategy to deal the rigors of a hard life.<sup>135</sup> It’s safe to say that the Wiggs brand of optimism was a combination of the of real determination of Mary Bass to continually move forward in her life, and the kind of blind optimism that never had to face difficult choices or suffered hard consequences, like that of the aristocratic Alice Hegan Rice, who as Mary Boewe, her biographer points out was “very much a Pollyanna in real life.”<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> LeRoy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture Since 1830* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 146; James D. Hart, *The Popular Book: A History of America’s Literary Taste* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1950), 209.

<sup>134</sup> Hart, 212-213.

<sup>135</sup> Mott, 221.

<sup>136</sup> Mary Boewe, “Aunt Tiny’s Denominational Garden,” *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History* 4, no. 3 (1992), 19.

Rice's literary style was connected to the *local color* movement and *urban picturesque* school of writing that was popular at the turn-of-the-century. During the Progressive Era, the yet maturing United States was searching for an artistic identity as Europe was still seen as the pinnacle of culture. In fact, when the first bestsellers list was published in 1895, only two books on the list were produced by American authors.<sup>137</sup> Historian Daniel Walker Howe claims that many Americans were concerned that their culture was "insufficiently distinctive to sustain a proper national identity."<sup>138</sup> Local color was a regionalist style of writing that "reflected tensions of sectional, racial, linguistic, gender, and sexual differences."<sup>139</sup> This style was seen by many at the time as a reflection of American distinctiveness in which its frontier and melting pot culture separated it from Europe. Hamlin Garland was a Progressive Era critic who championed "American vernacular literature [and] railed against the pernicious influence of Eastern literary standards."<sup>140</sup> Garland was excited that a new group of American writers were no longer imitating European models and were creating what he felt was uniquely American art. In his 1894 book *Crumbling Idols*, Garland defined local color as "the native element, the differentiating element."<sup>141</sup> Scholar Elizabeth Ammons states that "urbanization, rural depopulation, immigration, racial and ethnic tension, and internal migration were important themes in local color fiction."<sup>142</sup> Local color looked for differences and

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<sup>137</sup> Hackett, 59.

<sup>138</sup> Daniel Walker Howe, *Victorian America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1976), 4.

<sup>139</sup> Elizabeth Ammons, xxvi.

<sup>140</sup> Matt Johnston. "Hamlin Garland's Detour into Art Criticism: Forecasting the Triumph of Popular Culture Over Populism at the End of the Frontier." *The Journal of American Culture* 34, no. 4 (2011). 346, 348. Hamlin Garland, *Crumbling Idols: Twelve Essays on Art, Dealing Chiefly with Literature, Painting, and the Drama* (Chicago: Stone and Kimball, 1894), 62.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>142</sup> Ammons, ix.

stereotypes to create and emphasize a literary American *Other*. The *Other* is a term developed by Edward Said and used in literary criticism to mean “different from, unimportant, and that which is dominated.”<sup>143</sup> The *Other* provided the binary opposition to the concept of white superiority, in an age of imperialism and Jim Crow. Local color reflected a segregated American society. Alice Hegan Rice used Mary Bass to create an image of the American *Other*. She accomplished this by emphasizing Mary Bass’ differences—her dialect, her lack of refinement and education. And Rice produced the binary opposite of the poor, helpless Mrs. Wiggs with the young socialite Lucy Olcott, who as Wiggs’ clear superior reforms and saves both her and her family from certain demise.

Scholars of local color fiction of the Progressive Era note its tendency to misrepresent and exploit its subject. Elizabeth Ammons argues that “the relationship of local color writing to structures of dominant power reveals a number of complexities. Questions of representation and authority arise.”<sup>144</sup> Ammons goes on to reveal that “the richness of these nonrealist styles in local color writing not only makes problematic the notion of regionalism as realism, but also suggests the limitations of accuracy and authenticity in local color writing.”<sup>145</sup> Scholar Benedict Giomo notes that although the local color school led its followers to explore the American subculture, “the results were diluted by atmospheric rendering, stereotypical treatments, and shallow picturing of the other half.”<sup>146</sup> And William S. Ward states that “exaggerating for effect...and exploiting

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<sup>143</sup> Charles E. Bressler, *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2007), 353.

<sup>144</sup> Ammons, viii.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, xxv.

<sup>146</sup> Giomo, 34.

or sentimentalizing the eccentric in either character or dialect are devices” commonly found in local color fiction.<sup>147</sup> Alice Hegan Rice’s *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* was a product of Progressive Era prejudice and inequity reflected in art.

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<sup>147</sup> Ward, 50.

## CHAPTER 4: PROGRESSIVE ERA LOUISVILLE

### *The Gateway of the South*

Louisville, Kentucky like many industrialized cities of the Progressive Era was caught between two worlds. It lingered between a genteel Victorian past and the rapid speed of progress brought on by the new era. Geographically Kentucky occupies an area in the country's middle, somewhere between the southern portion of the North, and the northern portion of the South.<sup>148</sup> Writer, Elliott Paul, who in his 1949 novel, *My Old Kentucky Home*, reflected upon his experiences in Louisville during the Progressive Era, described Louisville as:

The City called the “Gateway of the South,” that nurtured Audubon, Daniel Boone, Marse Henry and the late Justice Brandeis, of 100-proof straight Kentucky whisky aged in the wood and bottle in bond, of mighty fine tobacco, Churchill Downs, Mrs. Wiggs and her Cabbage Patch, bluegrass seed by the sack, the home of chewing gum and a famous baseball bat.<sup>149</sup>

Louisville, occupying a place in a border state remained neutral during the Civil War and emerged from the conflict “virtually untouched” by its ravages.<sup>150</sup> As an industrial city with the benefit of the distribution networks of an expanding railroad system and riverboat access, Louisville rapidly developed after the “war’s end as a center

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<sup>148</sup> James Larry Hood, *Restless Heart: Kentucky’s Search for individual Liberty and Community* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2008), 18.

<sup>149</sup> Elliott Paul, *My Old Kentucky Home* (New York: Random House, 1949), 3-4.

<sup>150</sup> Harrison, 302.

of trade [and supply] for the still-devastated South.”<sup>151</sup> Scholar James Larry Hood points out that “the federal army, unlike in seceding states farther south, had given up enforcing martial law in Kentucky in 1865. Parochialism was strong. At the local level the local aristocracy resumed its dominance.”<sup>152</sup> Hood further states that much of Louisville had an “inability to imagine two races living in freedom together [instead] remembered or imagined the way life had been before the war...and after the war chose to ally themselves with the Lost Cause of the South.”<sup>153</sup> Louisville became a segregated city that was “divided into zones, depending on the occupation, respectability, color and affluence of the inhabitants.”<sup>154</sup> There were no monuments in Louisville devoted to the Union cause, but there was a rather “imposing monument” which honored Confederate soldiers on Third Street.”<sup>155</sup> Kentucky’s state legislature even “voted against the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution that abolished slavery, made ex-slaves citizens of the nation, and gave the vote to black men.”<sup>156</sup> By turn-of-the-century the percentage of Kentucky’s African-American population due to northern migration was actually shrinking and due to Kentucky’s national reputation for violence and backwardness foreign immigrants that provided the backbone of progressive northern towns, mostly avoided Louisville altogether.<sup>157</sup> Historian James C. Klotter argues that the city of Louisville in the Progressive Era “existed in a twilight world, one of paradox. To Kentucky it represented progress and the promise of the new century; it

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<sup>151</sup> Hood, 302; Klotter, 17.

<sup>152</sup> Hood, 23.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>154</sup> Paul, 133.

<sup>155</sup> Klotter, 8.

<sup>156</sup> Hood, 21.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

had a cultured educated, even progressive elite; it symbolized modernism and change. Yet, beneath all of that was a city limited by its past.”<sup>158</sup> Louisville was a modernizing Progressive Era city, caught between worlds, one foot headed towards the future and the other firmly stuck in romantic notions of its antebellum glory.

*City of Progress—City of Wealth*

Louisville as Kentucky’s only genuinely industrialized city experienced tremendous growth during the Progressive Era. In 1890 there were only six cities in Kentucky with populations greater than ten thousand and the commerce produced in those other Kentucky towns was quite small in comparison to Louisville.<sup>159</sup> The population of Louisville increased from roughly 124,000 in 1880 to almost 205,000 by the turn-of-the-century, making it the nation’s eighteenth largest city.<sup>160</sup> Louisville featured a world-class theatre in Macauley’s theatre, the nation’s most prestigious horse track in Churchill Downs, a series of public parks designed by the very man who designed New York’s Central Park, and over 175 miles of railway track which enabled easy commuting for residents were set in place before 1910.<sup>161</sup> By 1890 Louisville was the tobacco capital of the world, the nation’s largest producer of leather and cast iron pipe, the banking capital of the South, and it possessed nearly twenty distilleries producing more than “twenty million gallons of whisky every year.”<sup>162</sup> As Kentucky’s first industrialized city, Louisville was the location where Kentuckians first encountered

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<sup>158</sup> Klotter, 15.

<sup>159</sup> Harrison, 302.

<sup>160</sup> U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places, 1880* (Washington, DC: GOP, 1998. census.gov); U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places, 1900* (Washington, DC: GOP, 1998. census.gov).

<sup>161</sup> Harrison, 303.

<sup>162</sup> Bryan S. Bush, *Louisville’s Southern Exposition 1883-1887: The City of Progress* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011), 19, 113; Harrison, 303.

the issues of mass poverty and the nation's growing slum dilemma, but the city's largest newspaper, the *Courier-Journal* mostly ignored those problems and when it bothered mentioning the slums at all, they were generally considered a New York City problem that had nothing to do with Louisville.

Coming into the Progressive Era the city of Louisville recently concluded its highly successful Southern Exposition promoting business in the South. The Exposition's motto had been "City of Progress."<sup>163</sup> The flourishing city had a "need for upper class houses" and the land vacated by the Exposition immediately served as a "catalyst for development."<sup>164</sup> Over two-hundred-and-fifty homes were constructed "at an average value of \$6150," more than 1.6 million dollars in today's money.<sup>165</sup> The grounds became the area for the finest subdivisions in the city, St. James Court and Belgravia Court. However, by turn-of-the-century, "the area within a mile radius...had also become home to many of Louisville's poorest families, white and black."<sup>166</sup> Slums like the Cabbage Patch grew adjacent to the wealthiest neighborhoods in the city. Louise Marshal, founder of the Cabbage Patch Settlement House remembered that the wealthy, though close in proximity to the poverty of the slums, were "quite removed" from it.<sup>167</sup> She stressed that this situation was not at all unusual in the Progressive Era, "You see 4<sup>th</sup> Street was the main street of Louisville and then these side streets. Always near the side street, near a

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<sup>163</sup> Bush, 116.

<sup>164</sup> Marguerite Gifford, *St. James Court in Retrospect* (Louisville, KY: McDonald Business Service, 1966), 5-6; Bush, 113.

<sup>165</sup> Bush, 113.

<sup>166</sup> Martin E. Biemer, ed., *The Story of the Cabbage Patch Settlement House as Told by Those Who Lived it* (Louisville, KY: Cabbage Patch Settlement House, Incorporated, 2001), 4.

<sup>167</sup> Louise Marshall, interview by unlisted source, Cabbage Patch Settlement Oral History Transcripts, p. 21, June 25, 1974, BJ/C112, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY.

good neighborhood is almost at the back door of the poorest.”<sup>168</sup> And “insulated” in these Victorian style mansions within these wealthy neighborhoods “upper-class families depended on servants—and Louisville ranked high in the number of servants.”<sup>169</sup> James C. Klotter states that “by 1900...one of every five Louisvillians was black, but the main contact the leadership had with those 39,000 was in a master-servant relationship.”<sup>170</sup> Klotter further argues that “segregation prevailed with few exceptions, and practically no one in the white community sought to change that condition.”<sup>171</sup> For Louisville, progressivism meant upholding Jim Crow policies and keeping the perceived inferior races from threatening white superiority.

#### *Poverty and Politics*

Progressive Era Louisville was a city struggling with its conception of poverty and what, if anything should be done about it. Clearly as the Progressive Era started Louisville like many cities relied on stereotypical images of the poor that blamed the poor for their poverty. In 1888, the *Courier-Journal* reported that “Louisville is not without a large number of tenement houses...they are scattered throughout the city...many of them are large buildings, formerly used for better purposes, and some of them are small ramshackle houses unfit for occupancy.”<sup>172</sup> The article then went on to pass judgment on the people living in these areas saying “the few honest and decent people living in tenements are their only redeeming feature, and their number is not large.”<sup>173</sup> At the dawn

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Klotter, 11.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> “Life in a Tenement: One of the Evils Which Exists in All Large Cities,” *Courier-Journal*, March 4, 1888, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1036684791).

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

of the Progressive Era Louisville was already grappling with notions of the *deserving poor* as well as the unworthy. That same article noted that there was a great deal of “sickness amid poverty.”<sup>174</sup> Many factors contributed to the sickness found in the slum areas of Louisville: lack of affordable medical care, poor quality drinking water, “smoke pollutions” from Louisville’s factories and railroads, no sewer system, “open privies, plentiful germs,” and small crowded poorly vented rooms shared by multiple families.<sup>175</sup> The Cabbage Patch was in the heart of Louisville’s industrial smog “surrounded by four railroads.”<sup>176</sup> Cabbage Patch homes lacked running water and sanitation was poor. There was no easy means of bathing until 1911 with the opening of a local school. A Cabbage Patch resident recalled that they “went to John Marshall School and they had a bathhouse...that is where everyone went to take their bath and we did not have running hot water unless you heated it and run with it.”<sup>177</sup> James C. Klotter reports that in 1900, “one-fifth of the city’s population lived in dwellings of more than eleven people.”<sup>178</sup> By 1909 the *Courier-Journal* revealed the dire conditions in the city’s slums, stating:

Louisville does not compare favorably with other cities of its size already investigated for similar conditions. Louisville is far ahead of some of its neighbors in the percentage of deplorable living in one room tenements and other deplorable slum details. The last census shows that only two-thirds of the families of Louisville live outside of tenements, the definition of the word in the report being taken to mean a building occupied by more than one family.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> “Life in a Tenement: One of the Evils Which Exists in All Large Cities,” *Courier-Journal*, March 4, 1888.

<sup>175</sup> Klotter, 11-12.

<sup>176</sup> Louise Marshall, interview by unlisted source, Cabbage Patch Settlement Oral History Transcripts, p. 21, June 25, 1974, BJ/C112, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY.

<sup>177</sup> Mrs. James T Scott, Sr., interview by Keith Cardwell, Cabbage Patch Settlement Oral History Transcripts, p. 1, February 25, 1987, BJ/C112, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY.

<sup>178</sup> Klotter, 11.

<sup>179</sup> “Tenement as Eye-Openers,” *Courier-Journal*, September 8, 1909, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1017430095).

Almost ten years after Alice Hegan Rice composed her cheerful view of poverty with its blithe prescriptive remedies of the noble stewardship of a helpful, moral, and caring middle/upper-class, dutifully addressing the problems of those in need—Louisville ranked among the worst cities in the nation in the condition of those actually living poverty. Clearly the solutions Rice offered were nothing more than hollow fiction.

Political power in Louisville during the Progressive Era was not held by elected officials, but by a “powerful machine” of political bosses that controlled Louisville for more than fifty years.<sup>180</sup> The Whallen brothers, John and later his brother James held court in the working-class Irish ghetto of Limerick.<sup>181</sup> In an era where government relief efforts had yet to take hold, the Whallens and their machine administered assistance to some working-class families in Louisville, “in the form of a pair of shoes, a load of coal in the winter, or a turkey at Christmas.”<sup>182</sup> James C. Klotter states that “at a time when relief was local and sporadic, the Whallens...provided...legitimate aid, if for sometimes illegitimate purposes.”<sup>183</sup> The Whallens demanded the vote of poor Louisville families to place puppets, whom they could manipulate in the state legislature.<sup>184</sup> However, this system worked against Mary Bass and most of the families living in the Cabbage Patch. As a widow living in an era before women’s suffrage, Mary Bass held no benefit to the Whallens machine. And with the slum like that of the Cabbage Patch being primarily occupied by African-Americans, the voting power was highly suppressed.

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<sup>180</sup> Klotter, 192.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid.

<sup>182</sup> Harrison, 276.

<sup>183</sup> Klotter, 192.

<sup>184</sup> Harrison, 276.

At the turn-of-the-twentieth-century segregation was at the core of Louisville politics. Democrats consistently “raised the issue of race...and Democrats advertised themselves as the party of white people.”<sup>185</sup> Voter intimidation was used to suppress the vote in African-American neighborhoods like the Cabbage Patch. In 1906 a Cabbage Patch resident testified in the *Courier-Journal* that the city offered the neighborhood no police protection. He said that “I never saw a policeman out there but once, and that was on election day. He was sitting on a lumber pile whittling. I have lived there nine years. The time I saw the policeman there was on the day we should have had an election, but we did not have any.”<sup>186</sup> The Whallens controlled the police force and used it for political advantage and racial suppression.<sup>187</sup> In 1901, an article in the *Louisville Post* exclaimed the police “are not our servants; they are our masters. They are the marching force of the Democratic organization.”<sup>188</sup> The 1905 Louisville municipal election was so rife with fraud that the State Supreme Court ruled the election had not been “free and equal” and annulled the results.<sup>189</sup> The powerful in the city of Louisville made sure that the residents of the Cabbage Patch had no say in the political process. This voter suppression contributed to the neighborhood’s ongoing issues with poverty and the very amenities the city provided Cabbage Patch residents. Natural gas was not introduced to the Cabbage Patch until 1919, though much of the rest of the city had been served for almost thirty years.<sup>190</sup> And fire was a constant threat as the *Courier-Journal* reported “water mains do

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<sup>185</sup> Hood, 40.

<sup>186</sup> “Will Be Saloon: Fate of Famous Cabbage Patch House,” *Courier-Journal*, January 16, 1906, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (116015600).

<sup>187</sup> Klotter, 197.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Harrison, 277.

<sup>190</sup> “Cabbage Patch is Inoculated with Civic Improvement Virus: Gas Main will be Extended to Section Made Famous by Mrs. Wiggs,” June 19, 1919, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1037046396); Caron’s Directory of the City of Louisville (Louisville, KY: C.K. Caron, 1890), 17.

not extend into the Cabbage Patch, and property owners there depend upon the pond across the railroad at Tenth and Hill streets for water in case of fire.”<sup>191</sup> However, in spite of this fact, in 1903 the city of Louisville allowed an iron works company to purchase the vary land upon which that pond rested and fill it in so the company could erect a foundry.<sup>192</sup> Mary Bass was known to take some victims of Cabbage Patch house fires into her own home until they got back on their feet.<sup>193</sup> Often times the Cabbage Patch residents relied on one another for any true means of support.

### *Progressive Louisville*

Progressivism during the era of its namesake was never a unified movement, but a combination of private, local, state and federal government interests in dealing with the nation’s swiftly changing economic, industrial, racial, and ethnic landscape. Louisville was no exception and saw efforts by the state, city, and private interests in addressing some of these concerns. In February of 1900, Kentucky governor William Goebel was assassinated, an event that still holds distinction as he remains to this day the only state governor in United States history to die as the result of an assassination while in office.<sup>194</sup> The episode secured Kentucky’s violent reputation nationally.<sup>195</sup> And as historian Lowell Harrison points out, “some have argued...that the death of Goebel snuffed out the reform spirit in the state.”<sup>196</sup> This accusation wasn’t completely true as some limited legislative

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<sup>191</sup> “Fire Broke out in ‘The Cabbage Patch’,” *Courier-Journal*, March 3, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1015858821); “Seven Houses Burned in Cabbage Patch: Home of Mrs. Bass, the Original Mrs. Wiggs is Saved from Damage,” *Courier-Journal*, August 14, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1015855938).

<sup>192</sup> “Fire Broke out in ‘The Cabbage Patch’,” *Courier-Journal*, March 3, 1903; “New Plant: Snead Architectural Iron Works to Rebuild,” *Courier-Journal*, February 6, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1015918308).

<sup>193</sup> James Switzer, “The Memories of James Switzer” (Unpublished Memoir, Louisville, Kentucky, 1990).

<sup>194</sup> Harrison, 272-73.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

reform took place, but they were constrained, and often ineffective. In addition, the state's General Assembly made insufficient progressive legislation due to the domination of powerful lobby interests, in combination with "party factionalism" and localism in politics.<sup>197</sup> For instance, in 1894, a law was passed which forbid children from begging in the streets, yet they could still provide cheap labor day and night to Kentucky business interests.<sup>198</sup> In 1902, when Kentucky finally began to pass child labor laws, the legislation provided an exception with parental consent.<sup>199</sup> Being that many starving families very much relied on the labor of their children to survive, the law made no meaningful difference to protect children.<sup>200</sup> Poor children across the state as young as eight years of age worked twelve hours daily, six days a week for as little as 23 cents a day.<sup>201</sup> The Assembly amended the law in 1906 to reduce child labor to ten hours a day and maximum of sixty hours per week, but these laws were seldom actually enforced.<sup>202</sup> Kentucky's legislative efforts to protect poor children during the Progressive amounted to little more than hot air.

In Louisville, progressivism took many forms. Alice Hegan Rice claimed that Louisville was "intensely southern in custom and sympathies, yet sufficiently in touch with the North to be liberal and progressive."<sup>203</sup> In plain terms, Louisville was a city steeped in traditions of white supremacy, but also involved through different ways in the reform era. Many Louisville middle-and-upper-class women participated in church groups and private clubs that took part in reform efforts for the poor. Louisville had an

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<sup>197</sup> Harrison, 262.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 286.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 53.

Author's Club for young women many of whom participated in some form of reform. Annie Fellows Johnston, author of *The Little Colonel* and Alice Hegan Rice worked with the poor. And George Madden Martin, author of the *Emmy Lou* series was the "chair of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching."<sup>204</sup> Sixteen year old Louise Marshall started the Cabbage Patch Settlement House in 1910.<sup>205</sup> Patty Smith Hill in addition to writing the most sung American song of all-time, *Happy Birthday*, also originated the modern Kindergarten movement for early childhood education.<sup>206</sup> Additionally, the city of Louisville purchased land in its southern suburbs in 1890 for a park designed by famous landscape architect, Frederick Law Olmsted to promote Progressive Era concepts of public space.<sup>207</sup> And Progressive Era champion Louis Brandeis was born in Louisville, though he moved as a young man and made his progressive contributions outside of the city. Louisville, at least from the perspective of the white middle-and-upper-class, had the appearance of a progressive city, but beneath its shiny surface lurked an intermittent old riverboat town that functioned primarily for an elite minority.

### *The Fashionable Act of Charity*

With no government social safety net available to protect the poor, Progressive Era Louisville reform efforts relied on private charities, church groups, and citizen philanthropy to deal with problems facing those living in the poverty of Louisville's slums. The city's wealthy middle-and-upper-class residents lived in a rather concentrated

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<sup>204</sup> Harrison, 324.

<sup>205</sup> John E. Kleber, ed. *The Encyclopedia of Louisville* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 153.

<sup>206</sup> Frances Farley Gwinn, "Patty Smith Hill: Louisville's Contribution to Education," *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (1957), 203.

<sup>207</sup> Caron's Directory of the City of Louisville (Louisville, KY: C.K. Caron, 1890), 17.

area downtown. Their children had all grown up with one another and Alice Hegan Rice described this as close-knit community where all the gentle class knew each other and a leisurely friendship exist between them.<sup>208</sup> Louisville's wealthy young socialites followed a trend that allowed them to lavishly display their wealth guilt free in the otherwise perplexing Progressive Era wave of consciousness. The affluent held dances, parties, club meetings, and bazaars with charitable themes as the backdrop. The Louisville society pages were constantly filled with notices of such endeavors. Alice Hegan Rice described herself as a "clubwoman," and admitted that Louisville was a "city addicted to clubs, not only large ones, but small groups that meet through the years more for the joy of companionship than for any more serious motive."<sup>209</sup> Melville Otter remembered one such club gathering at Rice's home, while the rest of the group knitted items for a bazaar as they sat socializing around "the big open fireplace," Mrs. Rice read her stories and told tales of her adventures.<sup>210</sup> Historian James C. Klotter claims that in Progressive Era Louisville at, "social clubs and literary gathering, they might discuss new movements and old problems, but their world was carefully shielded from life's harsher aspects by mists of nostalgia."<sup>211</sup> Reform and private philanthropy in Louisville was often little more than social distraction for the well-to-do.

In a city so rich with benevolence, Louisville's elite became concerned that the poor might begin to take advantage of their kind-hearted generosity. In 1884 the Louisville Charity Organization was formed with the intention of preventing different charitable groups from duplicating their efforts. The Charity Organization served as a sort

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<sup>208</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 95-96.

<sup>209</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 134-35; Rice, *The Inky Way*, 95-96.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 155-56.

<sup>211</sup> Klotter, 7.

of clearing house for altruism and information about the city's poor. In 1884 the Organization published a manual to aid the humanitarian efforts of Louisville socialites entitled, *Hints and Suggestions of the Visitors of the Poor in Louisville*.<sup>212</sup> The Charity Organization advocated for the “wealthier citizens” to visit the poor in the tenements and slums. They were particularly interested in recruiting affluent women with idle time, “who, as mothers and daughters, coming from bright and happy homes—homes adorned by virtue and radiant with love, can impart to the cheerless tenement or the wretched hovel, a little of their own happiness.”<sup>213</sup> Historian Robert Bremner argues that many turn-of-the-century “philanthropists urged the rich to engage in friendly visiting and other voluntary activities in order that the poor might be improved by coming into contact with superior beings.”<sup>214</sup> The Organization supervised a form of surveillance over the slum residents by the wealthy in order to determine who were truly the “worthy poor.”<sup>215</sup> The Organization developed a system in order to obtain this information by sending female agents out to visit the poor, the manual specified that:

The poor are divided into groups, each consisting of a few families, and each family or cluster of families is committed to the care of an intelligent visitor, a volunteer, who spends [*sic*] a part of...her leisure time in going in and out among them as a *friend*, learning their individual trials, keeping alive their self respect, fostering hope, repressing any tendency to a spirit of dependence, and forming a powerful check on imposture. And mark the results of the System. If the poor really need assistance, who knows so well as this friend what should be given, and what withheld?<sup>216</sup>

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<sup>212</sup> S. Humphreys Gurteen, *Hints and Suggestions to the Visitors of the Poor* (Louisville, KY: The Charity Organization Society of the City of Louisville, 1884).

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 4-5.

<sup>214</sup> Bremner, 61-62.

<sup>215</sup> Gurteen, 8.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

The naivety of the belief that a pack of aristocratic part-time do-gooders with no concept of poverty could realistically assess the needs and make judgments as to the merit of those needs, speaks to one of the most fatal flaws of the amateur Progressive Era reform efforts—firmly held notions of class superiority clearly trumped any real need for professionalism or actual social service training. The wealthy believed that what the poor needed most was “assistance in developing good character,” which the mere presence of the well-bread and affluent served to remedy.<sup>217</sup> Rice and other reformers in Louisville saw the poor in paternalistic ways that diminished any hint of agency within the group they claimed to champion. Visiting was a method for the rich to assert their perceived superiority over the lower classes, but an ineffective means of actual support.

The Charity Organization held ulterior motives other than benefiting Louisville’s poor. The Organization’s goal was “the complete suppression of begging.”<sup>218</sup> And a pamphlet published in 1941 suggests that “the Society was primarily interested in protecting the community, rather than understanding the client.”<sup>219</sup> The insistence that the poor be visited at their homes was a thinly disguised method of keeping the poor out of sight and off the streets of Louisville’s polite society. The Organization possessed other flaws of the Progress Era as well—those of white superiority. The Organization made no effort to help the African-American slum dwellers until 1905, more than twenty years after its inception.<sup>220</sup> In the minds of Progressive Era white Louisvillians, African-American were the unworthy poor and therefore should not and could not be helped.

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<sup>217</sup> Bremner, 51.

<sup>218</sup> Gurteen, 3.

<sup>219</sup> *Speaking of Service: Family Service Organization 1883-1941*, Pamphlet from 1941 with no publication information, Alice Hegan Rice Papers – Mary Boewe Collection – Box 3 of 3 – University of Louisville Archive and Records Center.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

According to this warped logic, African-Americans were poor precisely because they were African-Americans. In Louisville, Progressive Era reform efforts often served to benefit the affluent community and reaffirm their beliefs in class and racial superiority.

Alice Hegan Rice, as member of the King's Daughters a group from her church, participated in the visiting activities promoted the Louisville Charity Organization.<sup>221</sup> It was through the organization and visiting programs with the King's Daughters that Rice learned the true distress of the Bass Family.<sup>222</sup> The Organization's pamphlet featured repeated wording describing the altruistic visitors of the poor as "friends" of the poor. This phrasing matches Rice's own assessment of her relationship with Mary Bass, whom she constantly referred to as a *friend* and her acts toward her as acts of *friendship*. But the pamphlet at one point notes the visiting was designed to provide poor families with "a kind of *friend*," and that was more realistically the relationship that Rice offered, a part-time friendship on her own terms.<sup>223</sup> And the organization's limited value to the poor was even emphasized by Rice in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. On the verge of starvation Mrs. Wiggs tells her hardworking son Jim that "I guess it looks like mebbe we'll have to apply to the organization." To which Jim doubtfully replies back "Not yet, ma! It ud be with us like it was with the Hornsby's; they didn't have nothin' to eat, and they went to the organization an' the man asted 'em if they had a bed or a table, an' when they said yes, he said, 'Well, why don't you sell 'em.'" <sup>224</sup> The Organization also held the belief that "the best method of assisting the deserving people when in need, is to help those who

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<sup>221</sup> Louise Marshall, interview by unlisted source, Cabbage Patch Settlement Oral History Transcripts, p. 21, June 25, 1974, BJ/C112, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY.

<sup>222</sup> "The Plucky Struggle of Little Arthur Bass Ended at Last: His Mother Broken Down by Misfortune, and Husband and Other Children Ill," *Courier-Journal*, November 13, 1892, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1023371059).

<sup>223</sup> Gurteen, 4: Italics are emphasized by the pamphlet, not the author of this thesis.

<sup>224</sup> Hegan, 18.

are able to work to find employment.”<sup>225</sup> And this was precisely the method employed in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, but the employment offered was for the labor to two of Mrs. Wiggs’ young children.<sup>226</sup>

The Louisville Charity Organization Society’s emphasis that the needs of the poor could be met by wealthy socialites devoting “a small part of her spare time,” left many of the charitable efforts limited to Christmas philanthropy.<sup>227</sup> Certainly Alice Hegan Rice was a practitioner of this method herself, because she lost track of the Bass Family between Christmas visits.<sup>228</sup> This type of philanthropy allowed the wealthy to find their inner Christian generosity and feel good about themselves and their benignity, but did little for the poor. Once a year offerings of food and cheap trinkets for the children of the Cabbage Patch sure came off well in the local newspapers, but what were those living in poverty to do on the days in which a savior was not born?<sup>229</sup> Even Rice seemed to recognize that the poor would often need to sell the turkey they were given to make other ends meet.<sup>230</sup> But wealthy Louisvillians, infatuated with their own benevolence, delighted in reading the *Courier-Journal’s* praise the day after Christmas:

The Cabbage Patch enjoyed the greatest Christmas in its history yesterday—thanks to “Mrs. Wiggs” and her clever creator... The whole plot of the story is based upon the “Christmas Lady,” a young society girl, who went into the Cabbage Patch with a basket of good things and discovered Mrs. Wiggs... Yesterday the fairy of books waved her magic wand and a hundred “Christmas Ladies” went to the Patch with heavily

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<sup>225</sup> Gurteen, 7.

<sup>226</sup> Hegan, 93, 116.

<sup>227</sup> Gurteen, 5.

<sup>228</sup> “The Plucky Struggle of Little Arthur Bass Ended at Last: His Mother Broken Down by Misfortune, and Husband and Other Children Ill,” *Courier-Journal*, November 13, 1892.

<sup>229</sup> “Influence of Mrs. Wiggs’ Book Causes Merry Christmas in the Cabbage Patch,” *Courier-Journal*, December 26, 1902, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1016237898).

<sup>230</sup> Hegan, 22-23.

laden baskets of turkey, candy, oranges, dolls and toys for the hundred little Wiggs families who live there.<sup>231</sup>

The *Courier-Journal* also noted that “impressions were created which will never leave their childish minds no matter how unfortunate they may be.”<sup>232</sup> Illusion of grandeur and Christian charity danced in the heads of Louisville’s elite. Praiseworthy indeed. But keep in mind that this was the highly excitable Louisville in the year of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*’s release and enthusiasm for giving was not normally so prevalent. In fact, prior to the release of the book the papers focused virtually no attention on the neighborhood. And though this thesis places a high amount of criticism on amateur reform efforts, it should be noted that at least these private endeavors were attempting, if in often superficial ways, to address real problems that public policy had yet to undertake in any meaningful manner.

### *Imagining the Cabbage Patch*

The Cabbage Patch was a slum in Progressive Era Louisville, Kentucky made famous by the novel by Alice Hegan Rice. It developed along the outskirts of the southern portion of the city. “The rural nature” of the area was altered as the Louisville & Nashville Railroad (L&N) laid tracks “through the farmland in 1855.”<sup>233</sup> After the Civil War, the open fields were divided and liquidated following the Southern Expositions of 1883 through 1885, which “directed attention to that portion of the city.”<sup>234</sup> There, industry began to flourish along the tracks of the L&N.<sup>235</sup> Properties in the area initially

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<sup>231</sup> “Influence of Mrs. Wiggs’ Book Causes Merry Christmas in the Cabbage Patch,” *Courier-Journal*, December 26, 1902.

<sup>232</sup> “Faces Beam: As Happy Children Receive Elks’ Gifts,” *Courier-Journal*, December 28, 1902, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1016236969).

<sup>233</sup> Kleber, 153.

<sup>234</sup> Elizabeth Cherry Waltz, “In the Black Hills and through the Cabbage Patch,” *Courier-Journal*, August 11, 1901, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1015709688).

<sup>235</sup> Kleber, 153.

rose in value; however white middle and upper class Louisvillians began to consider the locality tainted with “blight.”<sup>236</sup> This marred reputation arose as squatters emerged and “built shacks from the materials they salvaged from the nearby city dump.”<sup>237</sup> And property values declined after a number of former slave families that were given land “on what is now Levering Street, from Magnolia to Hill Street and in between Sixth Street and the L&N Railroad tracks.”<sup>238</sup> There, several small homes were built for African-American families and the area became known locally, at the time, in colloquial racist terms as “the Black Hills.”<sup>239</sup>

Unlike the compacted inner-city urban poverty that developed in the often studied Progressive Era slums of New York and Chicago, the Cabbage Patch resembled something like a shanty town. The *Courier-Journal* referred to it as “the shack suburbs.”<sup>240</sup> It emerged just west of the “Black Hills” and south of the Irish ghetto of Limerick. Unlike many noted slums, its demographic was not immigrant, but mainly migrants from rural farms victimized by the depressions and small farm crises of the era.<sup>241</sup> The Cabbage Patch was not officially segregated, like the rest of Louisville, as it developed without oversight, unlike most of Louisville’s neighborhoods. However, the minority white population of the neighborhood were typically lumped together on one side a particular block, here and there dispersed within the black community. The *Baltimore Herald* described the Cabbage Patch as “one of those collections of bare,

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<sup>236</sup> Elizabeth Cherry Waltz, “In the Black Hills and through the Cabbage Patch,” *Courier-Journal*, August 11, 1901.

<sup>237</sup> Ward, 51.

<sup>238</sup> Waltz.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid.

<sup>240</sup> “Brief Points about People,” *Courier-Journal*, May 24, 1901, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1015677039): Many of the newspaper articles of this era have no listed author.

<sup>241</sup> Ward, 51.

dreary-looking houses on the outskirts of a big city [in which the] poverty is more severe than in crowded slums, because help is farther away and less watchful.”<sup>242</sup> The *Herald* also noted that the cold weather left the outlying communities more vulnerable to the brisk winds that swept “unhindered” along the outskirts of town.<sup>243</sup> Alice Hegan Rice wrote of this bitter cold and the Cabbage Patch residents’ limited ability to fight it in *Lovey Mary* in which she stated:

As winter approached those who could afford it were laying in their winter coal, and those who could not were providently pasting brown paper over broken window-panes, and preparing to keep Jack Frost at bay as long as possible.”<sup>244</sup>

*Louisville Times* columnist Melville Otter described the houses as “unpainted, dilapidated, with...leaky roofs [and] lines of washing...stretched in the front yards to dry.”<sup>245</sup> And in the most famous description of the Cabbage Patch, Alice Hegan Rice, in the book, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* described it as follows: “It was not a real cabbage patch, but a queer neighborhood, where ramshackle cottages played hop-scotch over the railroad tracks. There were no streets, so when a new house was built the owner faced it any way his fancy prompted.”<sup>246</sup> The houses were not laid out on a grid like the

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<sup>242</sup> Untitled, undated and un-named newspaper clipping, handwritten as *Baltimore Herald* from Alice Hegan Rice’s Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers: I have chosen to use brackets in many of the quotes in this chapter to provide a smoother flow of information to the reader by reducing rambling quotations to brief summary, avoiding tense shifting issues, and egregious spelling errors that were all too common in newspapers of the time.

<sup>243</sup> Untitled, undated and un-named newspaper clipping, handwritten as *Baltimore Herald* from Alice Hegan Rice’s Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

<sup>244</sup> Alice Hegan Rice, *Lovey Mary* (New York: The Century Co., 1903), 128.

<sup>245</sup> Melville Otter, “Mrs. Rice of the Cabbage Patch,” *The Sampler*. No date or publication mark from Alice Hegan Rice’s Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

<sup>246</sup> Hegan, 4-5.

rest of the city's blocks in developed neighborhoods.<sup>247</sup> Indeed, Rice characterized that, “the houses all seemed to behave queerly. Some faced one way, some another, and crisscrossed between them, in front of them and behind them ran a network of railroad tracks.”<sup>248</sup> Louise Marshall, founder of the Cabbage Patch Settlement House, recalled that what passed for streets in the Cabbage Patch were really more like worn-down trails that “were crooked because they went the way the cow paths went.”<sup>249</sup>

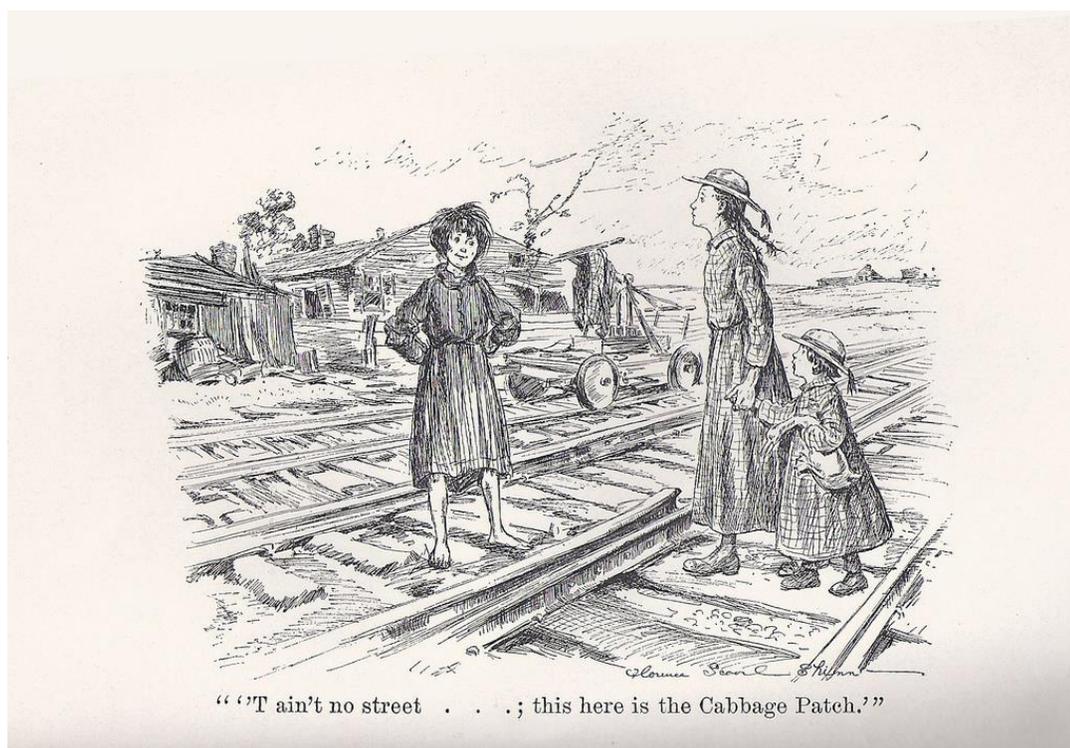


Illustration by Florence Scovel Shinn from Alice Hegan Rice’s *Lovey Mary* 1903<sup>250</sup>

<sup>247</sup> Louise Marshall, interview by unlisted source, Cabbage Patch Settlement Oral History Transcripts, p. 21, June 25, 1974, BJ/C112, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY.

<sup>248</sup> Rice, *Lovey Mary*, 35-36.

<sup>249</sup> Louise Marshall, interview.

<sup>250</sup> Florence Scovel Shin in Rice, *Lovey Mary*, 37: Shinn allegedly worked with Louisville photographers to establish “background authenticity” for her illustrations of the Cabbage Patch, according to Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 40.

Additionally Rice remembered “There were...no sewers, no street lights, but there were many saloons, sometimes three to a block.”<sup>251</sup> These descriptions reveal a community left behind as the rest of industrialized Louisville began to modernize. And modern Louisville offered only fault-finding judgment in regard to the residents of Cabbage Patch, but no credible support or solutions for their problems.

Elizabeth Cherry Waltz, Literary Editor of the *Courier-Journal*, investigated the neighborhood upon news of the publication of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* and issued the first article written about the Louisville slum on August 11, 1901. In that article she described the Cabbage Patch as an “island in a waste of commons, dropped down in a weedy nowhere, almost treeless and dust deep in its dirt lanes.”<sup>252</sup> Waltz then informed Louisville of the Cabbage Patch’s location and demographic:

The actual location of “The Cabbage Patch” is Tenth, Eleventh, Twelfth, Thirteenth and Fourteenth streets from Magnolia to A Streets. It contains about 500 or 600 people, all in cottages or small houses, and almost without exception colored people. On the borders are a fringe of Irish and Germans, but it is, of a reality, an Afro-American settlement.<sup>253</sup>

Waltz then stressed the rural characteristics of the Cabbage Patch as follows:

There are no...sidewalks, save here and there boards or a few flat stones. The houses have usually a small yard in front, and a larger one in the rear which is devoted to garden and field purposes. Some of the houses are so small as be almost entirely obscured by sunflowers, grapevines and hollyhocks... It is almost impossible to believe, unless one looks afar off to the city smokestacks...that he is not in some tiny hamlet in an out-of-the-way county.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>251</sup> Rice, 40.

<sup>252</sup> Elizabeth Cherry Waltz, “In the Black Hills and through the Cabbage Patch,” *Courier-Journal*, August 11, 1901.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

Indeed, the Cabbage Patch was once an area on the outskirts of Louisville known for its “cornfields and gardens,” and of course cabbages, but by the dawn of the Progressive Era, Waltz described it as a “queer little rural hamlet within Louisville’s city limits.”<sup>255</sup> It was however, a not so rural hamlet that had emerged with industrialization and migration along the city’s railroad tracks. And for that matter a hamlet the municipal government of Louisville had managed to ignore though it was in “plain sight.”<sup>256</sup>

To some eyes, the Cabbage Patch may have seemed like a common backwoods village, yet its location so close to the opulent quarters of upscale Louisville harshly emphasized the material inequality that existed between the social classes. Scholar Mary Boewe, has stressed that “the Cabbage Patch was literally on the other side of the tracks, yet within walking distance of the imposing [wealth and] residences on Fourth Street.”<sup>257</sup> This sharp economic disparity huddled so closely together and its sudden development within a few short years was shocking to many Louisvillians. The term slum was so foreign to much of the city that Elizabeth Cherry Waltz referred to it as a “slump” more than once in her article. She bewilderingly exclaimed, “There is one word to express the amazing change...It is, in fact, a regular slump, a presto-change-oh!”<sup>258</sup> Waltz’s words implied that this change occurred suddenly, as if by magic, but it was no mystery that the Progressive Era white middle-class had selfishly contributed to this glaring economic gap. Waltz further noted the stern financial incongruity of the wealthy residences bordering the Cabbage Patch, claiming “perhaps the strongest contrast in Louisville exists

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<sup>255</sup> Elizabeth Cherry Waltz, “In the Black Hills and through the Cabbage Patch,” *Courier-Journal*, August 11, 1901.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, xvi.

<sup>258</sup> Waltz.

near...the elegant homes of...St. James Court [that] have been kept clean and green and cool-looking by constant care and profuse sprinkling.”<sup>259</sup> But Waltz was more concerned with reputation and proximity of Louisville’s elite to poverty than poverty itself. She underscored the surprising irony of this disparity by stating, “Passing along the stranger would never guess that little more than a stone’s throw to the west was a section well known to the police and where all the horrors of dust and [drought were] at their worst.”<sup>260</sup>

For middle-class Louisvillians the main burden of the Cabbage Patch hinged on its identification with crime. Alice Hegan Rice made this sentiment clear on multiple occasions. In *The Inky Way*, Rice indicated that “Boys and girls ran wild through the muddy streets and dark alleys, and arrests were frequent.”<sup>261</sup> And in *Lovey Mary*, Rice claimed that, “It had come to be an unwritten law in the Cabbage Patch that as few questions as possible should be asked of strangers. People had come there before who could not give clear accounts of themselves.”<sup>262</sup> In an age of escalating temperance movements, the concentration of liquor-serving establishments among the impoverished Cabbage Patch heightened public awareness and reinforced austere ideologies and racist stereotypes. Elizabeth Cherry Waltz expressed many of these hidebound concerns in her article, in which she suggested:

There are few inhabitants visible while the sun is hot, but if there is any shade, the typical negro is asleep. “The Cabbage Patch” is not alive until the shades of night begin to fall, and then and only then the negro wakes and begins to reach out for any of the pleasures of existence he can get—by begging, borrowing or appropriating. If anything is wrong in the

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<sup>259</sup> Elizabeth Cherry Waltz, “In the Black Hills and through the Cabbage Patch,” *Courier-Journal*, August 11, 1901.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 40.

<sup>262</sup> Rice, *Lovey Mary*, 43.

“Cabbage Patch” no officer can approach without being sighted afar and prepared for. His passage along a thoroughfare can be accompanied by maneuvers over the back fence and through other yards and garden plots. So that it is what is known as a “slippery place” and rather dreaded by the police.<sup>263</sup>

Waltz’s words reveal not only the racist sentiment readily embraced by white, middle-class, Progressive Era Louisville, but also the paradox of Progressive Era thought—a neighborhood, perhaps most in need of police support, the authorities all too willingly ignored. By identifying the Cabbage Patch as primarily African-American public squalor, Waltz both implied its association with crime and erased justification of civic aid.

To the outside observer, the Cabbage Patch appeared a *slippery place*, but it is important to consider that all these observations were made by interlopers of a different economic class, and their findings reflected their biases, ignorance and fears. In 1901, middle-class Americans were beginning to contemplate mass urban poverty for the first time in the only way they knew how: as outsiders.

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<sup>263</sup> Elizabeth Cherry Waltz, “In the Black Hills and through the Cabbage Patch,” *Courier-Journal*, August 11, 1901.

## CHAPTER 5: PROGRESSIVE ERA SLUMMING IN LOUISVILLE KENTUCKY

### *The Strange Case of Mary Bass of the Cabbage Patch*

What if you discovered one morning, quite suddenly and without provocation, that your identity had been forever altered, that your existence had become trapped in a surreal menagerie, and that you had become an exhibit, a spectacle of ridicule, and an object to be displayed for the viewing pleasure of strangers? This may sound like a familiar plot to a novel of sensationalized fiction or B-movie fantasy, but this really happened to an unfortunate woman named Mary Bass when she was unwittingly characterized as the heroine, Mrs. Wiggs in the popular work of fiction *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* at the turn of the twentieth-century.

Through Alice Hegan Rice's characterization, Mary Bass found herself the subject of the vogue practice of middle-class slumming into poor urban neighborhoods. This form of slumming followed national trends, first through white, middle-class female reform movements, then by literary tourists, adventurous thrill-seekers and other troublemakers. The story of Mary Bass provides a rare opportunity to examine the Progressive Era practice of slumming on a personal scale. It offers the chance to detail the direct consequences of slumming on a slum resident as well as examine the agency of a slum dweller in her efforts to control the process.

Slumming was a term created by the middle-class, which described their intentional crossings into lower-class neighborhoods in search of adventure and taboo. It

was something typically done on the down low. Historian Chad Heap describes these middle-class journeys as efforts to seek “supposed more authentic black entertainment, cross-racial sexual encounters, and the anonymity necessary to allow themselves to indulge in the ‘primitive’ behavior and desires they associated with blacks.”<sup>264</sup> The Cabbage Patch certainly offered all these types of opportunities for middle-class clientele.<sup>265</sup> However, the slumming, dealt with in this thesis evolves as a form of literary tourism that was more family oriented in nature, but perhaps even more invasive.

### *Miss Alice Goes Slumming*

Alice Hegan Rice was born Alice Caldwell Hegan. As the daughter of a wealthy Louisville merchant, Alice spent her childhood in the comfort and safety of her parents’ home. The Hegans resided in one of the stately and elegant homes on Fourth Street just a short walk from the Cabbage Patch. As a creative child, Alice enjoyed telling stories to her friends and family.<sup>266</sup> However, she was a sickly child, and did not begin formal schooling until the age of ten.<sup>267</sup> She received seven years of education at a private school for girls, housed in a nearby mansion on Walnut Street, called Hampton College.<sup>268</sup> At Hampton College she began to channel her creative storytelling skills into written form. In her autobiography, Alice Hegan Rice claimed somewhat tongue in cheek, but perhaps with a hint of lack of self-awareness that “Some are born with silver spoons in their mouths. I, more fortunate, was born with a pen in my hand.”<sup>269</sup> Rice, though she was reluctant at times to emphasize her social status, only ate from silver spoons.

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<sup>264</sup> Heap, 1.

<sup>265</sup> Paul, 98, 134, 138-40, 235, 238, 393-94.

<sup>266</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 23.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, xv.

<sup>269</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 1.

Although Rice clearly belonged to the privileged class, her mother advised her at a young age not to “encourage class distinction.”<sup>270</sup> In fact, Rice’s dedication in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* states that, “This little story is lovingly dedicated to my mother, who for years has been the good angel of the Cabbage Patch.”<sup>271</sup> Rice, like her mother became interested in the Louisville slum through her church. She claimed that at around sixteen years of age her life was forever changed when she “discovered the proletariat.”<sup>272</sup> In a Marxist sense, Rice’s choice of words in remembering the Cabbage Patch residents in 1941 reveal perhaps more than she meant to share, especially when we consider their association with lower-class oppression and rebellion. And Rice’s language openly emboldened the very class distinctions her mother wished to conceal.

Rice first visited the Cabbage Patch accompanied by a friend during a “mission Sunday School.”<sup>273</sup> Rice claimed that “it was in prowling about the alleys visiting their families that I acquired the first-hand knowledge of the poor that was to be the foundation of my life work.”<sup>274</sup> Rice never mentioned if the working poor of the Cabbage Patch found the guidance of a coddled sixteen year old girl helpful. But she was quick to note the challenges someone of her station faced when visiting the slums. She stated that “district visiting is a delicate and difficult job. One must be democratic without being familiar, sympathetic without being condescending.”<sup>275</sup> These were challenges that Rice would not successfully overcome in her writings about the people of the Cabbage Patch.

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<sup>270</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 15.

<sup>271</sup> Hegan, np.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 37-38.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*

Rice tended to view the poor in romantic ways that only come with being several steps removed from the real challenges of poverty. In her autobiography Rice states:

To me the slum dwellers were never ‘finite clods untroubled by a spark.’ There was always a romance about them, and about the way they met their problems and triumphed over their difficulties. Each of us carries a story, but people in my own walk of life wore masks and were apt to say and do conventional things. In the lower social scale I found people who not only shared their emotions, but expressed themselves with spice and originality. Looking for the nobility that lay hidden in the most unpromising personality became for me a spiritual treasure hunt.<sup>276</sup>

But Rice may have been searching for more than just spiritual treasure as she began thinking about putting her observations of the Cabbage Patch on paper. Rice recalled that “the business of familiarizing [herself] with a queer neighborhood, of discovering new ways of thinking and living, and of meeting amusing characters and mastering their unfamiliar vocabularies, never waned in interest.”<sup>277</sup> And for Rice, she didn’t need to look very hard to find her treasure. Rice confessed that, “Fortunately I had a subject ready to my hand. For years a funny old woman had been coming to our back door.”<sup>278</sup> Apparently, as the *Saturday Evening Herald* later suggested, “the whole thing began in the most accidental way: looking from a rear window on a cold winter day, Miss Alice Hegan...saw a bent old woman searching the snow for scraps of fuel, clothing, food.”<sup>279</sup> Rice pitied the poor woman’s situation and invited her in for coffee.<sup>280</sup> The woman’s name was Mary Bass and she began to share with Rice some of her experiences in their passing contact over the following years. This began an unlikely association between two

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<sup>276</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 39: In “finite clods untroubled by a spark,” Rice quoting Robert Browning’s poem “Rabbi Ben Ezra.”

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>279</sup> Edward Freiberger, “The True Story of ‘Mrs. Wiggs and the Cabbage Patch,’” *Saturday Evening Herald*, undated newspaper article from Alice Hegan Rice’s Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

<sup>280</sup> *Ibid.*

Progressive Era women on opposite sides of the social stratosphere. Author, Mary Boewe in her book about Rice's writings claims that Rice "was a generous dependable friend and willing listener," and that Bass "was a ready talker who unwittingly provided a steady stream of quaint metaphors and malapropisms."<sup>281</sup> Rice, in her autobiography, described Mary Bass as follows:

She had a good-for-nothing husband who, she said, was 'just as bad as a poor man could be,' and a brood of children of whom she loved to discourse. She was dirty and improvident, but gay and courageous, and her sayings and doings became part of our family history. It was easy to build a story around her and the other characters I knew in the Cabbage Patch.<sup>282</sup>

Clearly Alice Hegan Rice held more than mere philanthropic intensions in her relationships and dealings with the dwellers of the Cabbage Patch. However, Mary Bass never understood at least in her early dealings with Rice that she served as an object of surveillance and covert amusement for the underhanded reform agent.

#### *Slumming in the Cabbage Patch*

Though slumming was occasionally referenced in the *Courier-Journal* prior to the 1901 publication of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, the accounts generally spoke of it as a problem in New York, not Louisville. There was an occasional mention of an arrest associated with slumming, but by and large the slums went unnoticed by the Louisville press. In fact, the name of the slum, the Cabbage Patch was never once acknowledged in the *Courier-Journal* until a brief article appeared announcing the upcoming publication of a new Louisville author dealing with what the paper described as "life out in one of the shack suburbs of the town."<sup>283</sup> Two and a half months later Elizabeth Cherry Waltz wrote

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<sup>281</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, xvi.

<sup>282</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 45: Mary Bass was not yet widowed when she first met Rice.

<sup>283</sup> "Brief Points about People," *Courier-Journal*, May 24, 1901.

the first exposé on the Cabbage Patch for the *Courier-Journal*.<sup>284</sup> However, soon after the publication of Rice's book and its abrupt success, slumming became quite fashionable in Louisville.

Although Louisville was slow to notice the slums, the practice of slumming prospered with astounding momentum following the release of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. As early as October 1902 the *Courier-Journal* published an article in a satirical tone of disbelief in regard to a piece printed in the *New York Sun*. The feature stated that "Lion hunters storm the Cabbage Patch in quest of the original of Miss Hegan's heroine, and the heroine has appealed to the author for protection."<sup>285</sup> By February 1903, the *Courier-Journal* changed its tone, reporting that:

Before Miss Alice Caldwell Hegan...introduced Mrs. Wiggs to her thousands of friends, the Cabbage Patch was held as undesirable a living spot as Kentucky would show. Now all Louisville takes its guests to see the Cabbage Patch and to discover if possible, Mrs. Wiggs...Lovey Mary and all the rest; while every traveler through Kentucky stops off at Louisville on the same errand, and Kodak enthusiast haunt the region at all hours.<sup>286</sup>

In May of 1903 *The Bookman*, the Progressive Era equivalent of *Publishers Weekly*, put out a two page spread of photographs of the Cabbage Patch, including the only known surviving photograph of Mary Bass in the Cabbage Patch, posing at her front door.<sup>287</sup>

Edward Freiberger in an article published in the *Saturday Evening Herald*, entitled "The True Story of Mrs. Wiggs and the Cabbage Patch" claimed that:

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<sup>284</sup> Elizabeth Cherry Waltz, "In the Black Hills and through the Cabbage Patch," *Courier-Journal*, August 11, 1901.

<sup>285</sup> "About Louisville as a Literary City," *Courier-Journal*, October 11, 1902, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1015709688).

<sup>286</sup> "The Boom in the 'Cabbage Patch,'" *Courier-Journal*, February 20, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1015925957).

<sup>287</sup> "Down at the Cabbage Patch," *The Bookman: A Magazine of Literature and Life*, May 1903, 211-214, UNZ.org – Periodicals, Books, and Authors.

There has been so much romancing about “Mrs. Wiggs and the Cabbage Patch” that I recently ran down to Louisville in order to learn the truth about the now famous old philosopher and her unique environment... There is indeed, a real Cabbage Patch—just the queer collection of tumbledown shanties that the book depicts; and a real Mrs. Wiggs—Mrs. Mary Bass, by name.<sup>288</sup>

Freiberger went on to discuss how the Cabbage Patch had become a “Mecca to the masses” and that “school children in classes undertook regular pilgrimages.” He further announced that “the railroads began selling stop-over tickets” in Louisville as interest spread throughout the nation.<sup>289</sup> Newspapers and regional businesses began to exploit the situation.<sup>290</sup> Postcards featuring an illustration of the home of Mary Bass were sold at local pharmacies. And by January 1904, the attraction of Cabbage Patch slumming had crossed the Atlantic. In an article published in *British Weekly*, by J.E. Hodder Williams entitled “A Visit to the Cabbage Patch,” Williams stated:

So many readers of Mrs. Rice’s two books have doubted the possibility of the existence of such a family as the Wiggses, that it is a pleasure to be able to assure them that while, of course, it would be obviously unfair to search for the originals of all Mrs. Rice’s characters, the members of the Wiggs family are drawn largely from life.<sup>291</sup>

Through the publicity of the book, it was becoming apparent that those trapped in the poverty of the Cabbage Patch also found themselves the subject of a bizarre tourist trap.

The audacious determination of needy middle-class slummers and arrogant literary fanatics quickly overwhelmed the Cabbage Patch. By November of 1903 papers

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<sup>288</sup> Edward Freiberger, “The True Story of Mrs. Wiggs and the Cabbage Patch,” *Saturday Evening Herald*, no date, no page from Alice Hegan Rice’s Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> J.E. Hodder Williams, “A Visit to the Cabbage Patch,” *British Weekly*, January 9, 1904 page from Alice Hegan Rice’s Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

acknowledged Mary Bass' impatience with the uninvited guests, but paradoxically seemed to both encourage and dissuade the practice. *The Sunday State*, in Columbia South Carolina, declared that Mary Bass had been "so harried by droves of visitors that life [had] been a nightmare to her ever since it was discovered that she was the woman whose ideas and stories were reproduced in the book."<sup>292</sup> Ironically, they immediately followed that discerning statement by disclosing her address to all their readers.<sup>293</sup> *The Sunday State* particularly recounted the personal experience of three slummers who came to the Cabbage Patch hunting for the real Mrs. Wiggs. Two of the slummers were Louisville natives, but the third was their out-of-town guest who insisted upon seeing the real Mrs. Wiggs before returning home to Columbus, Ohio. In the novel, Rice described Bass' home in the Cabbage Patch and visitors easily spotted it: "The Wiggess' [*sic*] house was the most imposing in the neighborhood. This was probably due to the fact that it had two front doors and a tin roof."<sup>294</sup> After discovering Bass' home, the slumming party of three proceeded on their journey and the *Sunday State* reported that:

With some trepidation they mounted the stairs outside of the house. As they did so, they heard someone stirring within. When they knocked, however, there was no answer. They rapped, but all to no purpose, so there was nothing to do but to descend the stairs again.<sup>295</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> "A Pilgrimage to Home of the Real 'Mrs. Wiggs,'" *The Sunday State*, (Columbia, South Carolina), November 1, 1903, NewsBank/Readex, Database: America's Historical Newspapers (1135F785231DAB78).

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>294</sup> Hegan, 5-6.

<sup>295</sup> "A Pilgrimage to Home of the Real 'Mrs. Wiggs.'"



*Home of Mary Bass – 1001 Hill Street*<sup>296</sup>

This seemed to satisfy the two Louisville girls, but their more persistent guest began asking around the Cabbage Patch for someone to introduce her to Mrs. Wiggs. The reception she received from the residents of the neighborhood was largely unfriendly. *The Sunday State* reported that “evidently public opinion in the Cabbage Patch sympathize[d] with that good woman in her troubles.”<sup>297</sup> But still the visitor from Columbus continued pestering residents until she found a Cabbage Patch woman who, like herself, was also born in Columbus. The woman took pity on her and made the introduction to Mary Bass. Soon the visitors were admitted into the Bass home. “There

<sup>296</sup> Photograph, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives.

<sup>297</sup> “A Pilgrimage to Home of the Real ‘Mrs. Wiggs,’” *The Sunday State*, (Columbia, South Carolina), November 1, 1903.

was an awkward pause, and at last one of the young women asked, hesitantly: ‘So you are Mrs. Wiggs?’” To which Mary Bass responded heatedly with an insistent repetitive shriek “Mrs. Wiggs! Mrs. Wiggs! Mrs. Wiggs!” until the slummers hastily retreated.<sup>298</sup> Mary Bass had no patience with those who saw her only as Mrs. Wiggs. Her name was Mary Bass and she was a real woman not a contrived formulaic doormat presented for middle-class approval.

The actions of slummers and articles written about slumming demonstrate that the Progressive Era middle-class placed little value upon the actual well-being of the poor, while simultaneously romanticizing their condition. Sociologist John Urry suggests that the force of “tourist gaze” is a form of “coerced consumption” in the search for an enhanced authentic experience connecting fantasy to reality in the expectation of engaging in something distinctively unique.<sup>299</sup> Scholar Dean MacCannell notes that tourism occurs during breaks from normative reality.<sup>300</sup> MacCannell argues that “it is difficult for tourists to be moral in anything but banal or clichéd ways...Moral acts only go so far as to uphold or fail to uphold social norms or local practices,” but tourists possess a sense of entitlement and to some degree remain “exempt from most local norms.”<sup>301</sup> Therefore the slumming brought about by Rice’s novel forced a collision between Mary Bass’ reality and the subjective fantasies of the sightseers.

Some articles about Mary Bass and the Cabbage Patch seemed to advocate stalking and were written in a tone that was ambiguous and creepy. As late as 1907 a

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<sup>298</sup> “A Pilgrimage to Home of the Real ‘Mrs. Wiggs,’” *The Sunday State*, (Columbia, South Carolina), November 1, 1903.

<sup>299</sup> John Urry, “The Consumption of Tourism,” *Sociology* 24, no. 1 (1990), 26-29.

<sup>300</sup> Dean MacCannell, *The Ethics of Sightseeing* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011), 46.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

trade paper invited its readers into the world of Mary Bass. The *United States Tobacco Journal* featured an article written by Felix J. Koch in which he stated, “If you have come to exploit the queer corners of the city. You make your way through a pretty residence district...By and by you come onto another spot that has grown famous. This is the home of Mary Bass.” Koch further advised the journal’s readers that visitors of the Cabbage Patch “have been legion and Mrs. Bass has been pestered to death, so that people have had to use all manner of subterfuges, from impersonating an insurance examiner up, to get inside the fence.” The duplicitous nature of middle-class privilege in the practice of slumming was starkly highlighted by the journal’s avocation of deception of the poor. And Koch’s promotion of voyeurism continued as he described Bass’ home with contemptuous detail, stating that:

The house is just a two-story gray-painted frame, with a window to right and left of door on the front, and these covered with paper to prevent the curious from peering in. A door on the left side of the house opens upon a side porch, running the length of the house, and containing outer stairs onto another veranda above. There too paper covers the dirty windows, to keep out pestiferous peepers. The yard at the other side is filled with young peach trees scattered here and there amid all manner of litter. A wagon wheel, set upright serves as a trellis for vines. Then there is a box perhaps four feet square with a glass roof to make up a flowerbed. An old tub and other litter of the shiftless is scattered broadcast.<sup>302</sup>

Creepier still, Koch mentioned that though Mary Bass was good at avoiding pests that her “neighbors will talk, so you learn much of the famous little woman.”<sup>303</sup> But even more disturbing, Koch went into some detail about her children. “One daughter is married in Louisville, and another is forelady in the factory where likewise a son works, and the third child remains at home.”<sup>304</sup> The brazen impudence with which a business venture

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<sup>302</sup> Felix J. Koch, “In Kentucky’s Famous Lands: Queer Corners of the Tobacco Metropolis,” *United States Tobacco Journal*, Volumes 66-67 (New York: E Rosenwald & Bro., March 30, 1907), 5.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

could willfully jeopardize an impoverished widow and her innocent children exposes a decidedly dark facet of class privilege in the Progressive Era. The *United States Tobacco Journal* was a trade magazine for wealthy merchants and vividly revealed the extent to which the aristocratic class endorsed objectification of the poor. Wealthy merchants felt comfortable in their entitlement to interpret the poor without consequence as material for their amusement and viewing pleasure. Koch's article serves as a disturbing example that illicit practices such as stalking and invasion of privacy when perpetrated by the upper-classes were considered socially acceptable when the poor were its victims.

### *Wigged Out*

It was clear from the start that Mary Bass was deeply upset and uncomfortable with the loss of normalcy from her ill-got fame. In March of 1903, Mary Bass informed the *Chicago Record-Herald* in an article later reprinted in the *Courier-Journal* entitled "The Disgusted Mrs. Wiggs" that she "never wanted to be put in no book."<sup>305</sup> The writer of that book, Alice Hegan Rice remembered with regret that the "one thing that marred my pleasure in the unexpected success of my first professional venture was the unpleasant notoriety it brought on my humble heroine."<sup>306</sup> The *Urbana Daily Courier* reported in 1904 that it was a:

Cruel trick of fate...that this genial being of fiction who has made thousands laugh and has chased away despondency from so many should have brought a lot of trouble upon one person, and that, the one from whom she was drawn. Yet such is the case, and today Mrs. Bass finds herself as disagreeably involved with the intangible Mrs. Wiggs as Dr. Jekyll ever was with the more disreputable Mr. Hyde.<sup>307</sup>

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<sup>305</sup> "The Disgusted 'Mrs. Wiggs,'" *Courier-Journal*, March 10, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1014987141).

<sup>306</sup>Rice, *The Inky Way*, 70.

<sup>307</sup> "Sick and Tired of Being Mrs. Wiggsed," *Urbana Daily Courier*, April 30, 1904, Illinois Digital Newspaper Collections, Urbana Daily Courier. [idnc.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=d&d=TUC19040430.2.52#.html](http://idnc.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=d&d=TUC19040430.2.52#.html).

The *Urbana Daily Courier* further reported that Mary Bass may have at first received “visits with some complacency,” but as time went on her patience began to wear down and that in a short time, “those who sought the shrine of cheerfulness were surprised to find that the supposedly melodious Mrs. Wiggs was in reality a vinegar-tongued, elderly woman.”<sup>308</sup> Alice Hegan Rice remembered an episode of a newspaper reporter who discovered that sharp tongue when she asked Mary Bass what she had to be thankful for, to which Bass replied, “I’m thankful I got the sense enough not to go ‘round poking my nose into other folks’ business.”<sup>309</sup> Bass’ irritation grew proportionately with the mass popularity of Mrs. Wiggs.

Mary Bass felt indignation and righteous anger under the constant eyes and judgment of wealthy, carefree, tactless, gawking rubbernecks. In November 1903, the *Martinsville Republican*, out of Indiana, published an article stating, “Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch resents calls from the public [and] accuses fashionably clad ladies of prying into her poverty and business.”<sup>310</sup> The *Martinsville Republican* also noted that not only were many slum visitors denied the opportunity to speak or even see Mary Bass, but those who got within speaking distance of her were often forced into a hasty retreat “under the fire of words that [were] hurled at them with vindictive anger.”<sup>311</sup> It was reported that Mary Bass believed “that people visit the Cabbage Patch solely for the purpose of passing remarks on her poverty [and that] all offers of financial relief have

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<sup>308</sup> “Sick and Tired of Being Mrs. Wiggsted,” *Urbana Daily Courier*, April 30, 1904.

<sup>309</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 70-71.

<sup>310</sup> “A Scrap Shower,” *Martinsville Republican*, November 26, 1903, 2, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Mary Boewe Papers.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*

been spurned.”<sup>312</sup> Those who dared enter her yard were often chased away with Bass throwing “trash, potato peelings and scraps” at them.”<sup>313</sup> The *Martinsville Republican* quoted Mary Bass as yelling at some intrusive slummers:

You folks are an everlasting pest and too busy to be sound. If you would look behind your own doors and spend some of the time cleaning up your own dirt you would not have so much time to gad around and put your noses into other people’s business.<sup>314</sup>

Alice Hegan Rice thought that Mary Bass seemed to “enjoy the drama of fighting the intruders.”<sup>315</sup> There may have been some truth to Rice’s observation considering a report made in *The Urbana Daily Courier*, which stated:

Mrs. Bass adopted a course of peremptorily driving away and shutting the door in [visitor’s] faces. This has come to be a recognized sport in the Cabbage Patch, and now when a literary pilgrim is seen wending his or her way to “the home of Mrs. Wiggs,” the word is passed around and Cabbage Patchers come from far and near to see what Mrs. Bass will do to the unwary one.<sup>316</sup>

Whether Mary Bass enjoyed fighting the slummers may merit debate, but misses the point. Mary Bass clearly disliked the encroachment of slumming in her life. Certainly the time wasted combatting incessant trespass depreciated her ability to focus on more pressing issues like work and sustaining family. However, Bass chose not to stand idly and submit to the whims of these meddling voyeurs. She fought for her privacy and dignity in the limited ways available to her as a member of the lower-class in the neglected slums of Louisville.

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<sup>312</sup> “A Scrap Shower,” *Martinsville Republican*, November 26, 1903, 2.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid.

<sup>314</sup> Ibid.

<sup>315</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 70.

<sup>316</sup> “Sick and Tired of Being Mrs. Wiggsed,” *Urbana Daily Courier*, April 30, 1904.

*A Day at the Circus*

Mary Bass' behavior was bound, sooner or later, to get her in trouble and that's exactly what happened. On April 26, 1904 Mary Bass found herself in Police Court on a charge of disorderly conduct.<sup>317</sup> The complaint was submitted by "Mrs. Emily Smith, a resident of Hazelwood, an aristocratic suburb of Louisville."<sup>318</sup> The *Louisville Courier-Journal* reported that the charge was "based on the allegation of Mrs. Smith that Mrs. Bass deluged her with a pail of slop when she called at the Bass home a few days ago to offer assistance."<sup>319</sup> The plaintiff took the stand and gave her statement. Mrs. Smith declared that after she read *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*:

I became interested in her, and a few days ago I told my husband I wanted to help Mrs. Bass and he agreed. Saturday I went to her home to proffer assistance. At the front door I attempted to attract attention, but failed. Thinking Mrs. Bass was about her household duties in the kitchen, I went to the rear door. While I was standing there sluice of foul-smelling slop come from above and covered me. I hurried away and told my husband of the ungrateful reception I had received. I did not intend to cause Mrs. Bass any trouble, but my husband was furious, and said she should be punished and urged me to swear out the warrant, which I reluctantly did.<sup>320</sup>

Mrs. Smith then altered her story just a little by adding that she was led around the back of the Bass home by a "little urchin."<sup>321</sup> Smith claimed when recalling the little boy that:

I saw a mischievous twinkle in his eye and I know now that he knew he was leading me into trouble. I had not heard of Mrs. Bass' ill-will toward visitors, or I should have known what the urchin was smiling about as he timidly showed me around the house and stood at a safe distance until the climax came.<sup>322</sup>

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<sup>317</sup> "Mrs. Wiggs is Weary of Being Pestered," *Courier-Journal*, April 27, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1016334967).

<sup>318</sup> "Mrs. Wiggs Vindicated in a Louisville Court," *New York Times*, April 30, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (96420406).

<sup>319</sup> "Mrs. Wiggs is Weary of Being Pestered," *Courier-Journal*, April 27, 1904.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>322</sup> *Ibid.*

Smith made no effort to elaborate on how she was so easily outfoxed by the budding criminal mastermind before ending her testimonial. Mrs. Smith's husband then testified that he had accompanied his wife on their altruistic journey to help Mrs. Bass. The *Courier-Journal* reported that Mr. Smith said that "he ran when the water was thrown, as did his wife, and they never stopped until they called at the office of the Clerk of Police Court and swore out a warrant for the arrest of Mrs. Bass."<sup>323</sup> Perhaps the Smiths' somewhat comical, higgledy-piggledy retreat and abrupt change of heart reflected the superficiality of their charitable concerns. There certainly were inconsistencies within the Smiths' testimony; including in the verbiage of the police warrant in which Emily Smith let slip that she had called on Mary Bass "merely to get a good view of Mrs. Wiggs."<sup>324</sup>

The tone and the atmosphere of the courtroom changed however when the defendant, Mary Bass took the stand.<sup>325</sup> The *Courier-Journal* observed that "Mrs. Wiggs' gray hair stood out in bold relief from under her dingy black headgear and her eyes sparkled with the delight of a victor as she raised her left hand above her head to be sworn by the Bailiff of the Court."<sup>326</sup> All eyes were on Mary Bass. The *Courier-Journal* reported that:

The courtroom was crowded with spectators, all eager to catch a glimpse of the famous heroine of the Cabbage Patch, but she paid little attention to those around her and kept her eyes on Judge McCann. Never once did she cast a glance at Mrs. Emily Smith, who had caused her arrest and trial on a

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<sup>323</sup> "JUSTIFIES 'Mrs. Wiggs' in Treatment of Visitor," *Courier-Journal*, April 30, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1014983558).

<sup>324</sup> Ibid.

<sup>325</sup> Mary Bass' testimony was pieced together from various newspaper accounts. The actual transcript of the trial was purged long before the records made it to microfilm. The clerk of Louisville's court confirmed that it was not unusual for judges to expunge records at the request of influential residents. This request could have been made by Emily Smith, her husband, or even Alice Hegan Rice.

<sup>326</sup> "JUSTIFIES 'Mrs. Wiggs' in Treatment of Visitor," *Courier-Journal*, April 30.

disorderly conduct charge, ignoring her presence in the courtroom completely.<sup>327</sup>

Bass proceeded to tell the Judge McCann her side of the story. She claimed that when Mrs. Emily Smith knocked, she distinctly told her not to come in, but Smith ignored Bass' request and opened the door and walked right into her front room. The intrusive behavior of Mrs. Smith enraged Mary Bass and she threw the contents of a pail of slop on the intruder and angrily told her to leave immediately.<sup>328</sup>



*Mary Bass on the Witness Stand.*<sup>329</sup>

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<sup>327</sup> "JUSTIFIES 'Mrs. Wiggs' in Treatment of Visitor," *Courier-Journal*, April 30, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1014983558).

<sup>328</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>329</sup> "Mary Bass on the Doc," *Louisville Times*, April 26, 1904.

Mary Bass then went on to inform the court of her suffering since the release of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. She explained, “It was all right before that fool book was written, but since then there has been no peace for me and the children.”<sup>330</sup> Bass proceeded to speak of the relentlessness of the slumming incursions, she said, “They come by droves. People have flocked there time after time from east, northeast, southwest, and all parts of Louisville, and now they’re coming from the suburbs... Some of them [have come] from across the ocean.”<sup>331</sup> Mary Bass then looked at the judge and said, “I must be a grizzly bear that they want to see me and the kids.”<sup>332</sup> Bass went on to say:

For a long time I would go to the door, and I wouldn’t know a face. ‘Well, what do you want,’ I would say. And they would stand and look and then one would say: ‘We read the book,’ and grin. Everybody would grin until I was so mad that I could ‘a skinned ‘em. ‘Well,’ I would say, ‘if that is all you know about me, you kin go.’<sup>333</sup>

Mrs. Bass continued to show her frustration by saying, “I’ve been Mrs. Wiggs-ed until I’m sick and tired of it. Day in and day out people come moseyin’ around askin’ fool questions and pokin’ their noses into what don’t concern them at all.”<sup>334</sup> Then referring to her accuser, Mrs. Smith, Mary Bass proclaimed, “Them kind o’ people git in trouble an’ that is ‘zactly her fix. The like of her have been a-buttin’ in and pesterin.”<sup>335</sup> Bass then

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<sup>330</sup> “Sick and Tired of Being Mrs. Wiggged,” *Urbana Daily Courier*, April 30, 1904.

<sup>331</sup> “Mrs. Wiggs Vindicated in a Louisville Court,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1904.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>334</sup> “Sick and Tired of Being Mrs. Wiggged.”

<sup>335</sup> “Mrs. Wiggs is Weary of Being Pestered,” *Courier-Journal*, April 27: Sadly, some newspapers served as pillars of hierarchal divisions of class. This included the *Courier-Journal* which chose to print Mary Bass’ testimony in dialect, much the same as she was disparagingly portrayed by Alice Hegan Rice in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*.

frustratingly said, “It’s too much for flesh and blood and I won’t put up with it any longer.”<sup>336</sup>

The actions of aggressive slummers and the inactions of the passive Louisville community left Mary Bass with few options. And Bass felt she had to take matters into her own hands. She professed that “patience has ceased to be a virtue.”<sup>337</sup> After years of people intruding on her premises, tearing down her trees, breaking off parts of her house, and taking “her belongings as souvenirs,” she had decided to stop hiding and combatively resist.<sup>338</sup> The *Courier-Journal* reported that:

Recently, [Bass] decided to put an end to the intrusion upon her premises and, accordingly, began a water campaign. When callers came to the house and knocked at the door she would not let them in and if they persisted in entering the building she carried out her plans and deluged them with water. Only recently she emptied the contents of a dish pan over the heads of a Fourth-avenue society woman and an out-of-town visitor.<sup>339</sup>

Bass then said to the court with a hint of sardonic wit, “I lets them have the bucketful. It’s funny, ain’t it? When you go to see a circus, you get a slop pail.”<sup>340</sup> Then referring to Emily Smith, Bass added “Well, I reckon, anyhow, this one ain’t comin’ to see the circus no more.”<sup>341</sup> Bass concluded by stating, “I ain’t running’ a menagerie, I’ll have ‘em understand—that I will.”<sup>342</sup> Mary Bass, under the judging eyes of wealth and power, boldly made a joke at their expense. If Bass’ life was going to be a circus, then she was distinctly stating that she was going to be the ringmaster.

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<sup>336</sup> “Sick and Tired of Being Mrs. Wiggssed,” *Urbana Daily Courier*, April 30, 1904.

<sup>337</sup> “Mrs. Wiggs is Weary of Being Pestered,” *Courier-Journal*, April 27, 1904.

<sup>338</sup> “JUSTIFIES ‘Mrs. Wiggs’ in Treatment of Visitor,” *Courier-Journal*, April 30, 1904.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>340</sup> “Mrs. Wiggs Vindicated in a Louisville Court,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1904.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>342</sup> “Mrs. Wiggs is Weary of Being Pestered.”

When Mary Bass finished her defense all that remained was the decision of Judge McCann. The nation's press stood at the ready for the verdict. The case was reported in newspapers and magazines across the country from the *New York Times* to the front page of the *Charlotte Daily Observer*.<sup>343</sup> Judge McCann, after weighing the testimony delivered the verdict as follows as reported in the *New York Times*:

The lady who is the prosecuting witness in this case visited the house of the defendant without invitation and went into the front yard, knocked at the door, and, receiving no answer, proceeded into the home of the defendant...The defendant has received a great deal of notoriety in this country and all over the world through a book written by a noted literary lady of our city. The defendant is one of the leading characters in that book, and through this book great curiosity has been created to see this noted character, and her home has been invaded by people from all over the country, and the sanctity of her home and her peace and quiet have been disturbed, and through these annoyances she lost her temper on this occasion. I am going to dismiss her on general principles.”<sup>344</sup>

Mary Bass, a poor, uneducated, widow from the slums of Louisville had made her case in front of the law, Louisville and the nation. If Bass, in her appeal, lacked certain eloquence, this was more than overshadowed by her potent effectiveness. Though her victory never effectively challenged the root of the slumming problem, it denounced middle-class agency in their behavior towards the impoverished through the practice of slumming. Her determined will in the courtroom demonstrated that she was not merely subversively fighting for her right to privacy but suggested that she felt the boorish middle-class should rightfully live under the same amount of scrutiny that seemed commonplace for the poor.

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<sup>343</sup> “Emptied Slop Jar on Her – Famous ‘Mrs. Wiggs’ in Court,” *Charlotte Daily Observer*, (Charlotte, North Carolina), April 30, 1904, NewsBank/Readex, Database: America’s Historical Newspapers (1134821F66CA1978).

<sup>344</sup> “Mrs. Wiggs Vindicated in a Louisville Court,” *New York Times*, April 30, 1904.

Mary Bass, through her words and actions had clearly established that she was very much her own person. Though the character of Mrs. Wiggs was based on her—she was never based on it. The beloved Mrs. Wiggs may have belonged to the mass of self-seeking enthusiasts that infested the Cabbage Patch, but not Mary Bass. She was the writer of her own story.

*Small Victories*

Slumming in the Cabbage Patch was unusual, but not without precedent. Certainly the slums of New York and London had been romanticized in prose and subjected to a hybrid of slumming and literary tourism as well. In fact, scholar Alex L. Milsom has noted that fiction of the era actually promoted and encouraged the development of early tourism.<sup>345</sup> However, treatments by other authors were not specifically directed to one existing resident of the slums, but the intrigue of the slums themselves, so no other slum resident bore the gaze of middle-class slummers quite like Mary Bass. The story of Mary Bass personalizes the issue of slumming and puts a face on the subject. Her ordeal realizes the intimate sacrifice placed upon the poor by the middle-class practice of slumming. And though Mary Bass' methods may seem crude and ill-mannered, they demonstrate that the poor were not completely helpless against the incursion of white middle-class entitlement during the Progressive Era. However, Bass' small legal victory fails to overshadow the lack of police protection available to lower-class residents of the slums from the constant harassment of slummers in the first place. Her trial emphasizes a legal double standard that unfairly places a disproportionate

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<sup>345</sup> Alex L. Milsom, "19<sup>th</sup>-Century Travel and the 21<sup>st</sup>-Century Scholar," *Literature Compass* 10, no. 9 (2013): 725.

burden of proof on the poor and powerless. Bass was put on trial defending that she was not a nuisance or a threat to middle-class intruders in defending the sanctity her own home, while those of higher social standing stood accused of nothing for flagrantly invading her privacy. Alice Hegan Rice and those of her class would have never had to defend themselves legally against intrusive slum-dwellers.

It would be wrong to suggest that Mary Bass' small victory was representative of typical working-class triumphs over the upper and middle-classes of the era. Bass was certainly afforded favor as the only celebrity slum resident and had the sympathies of many of Mrs. Wiggs middle-class fans. Point in fact, in regard to her trial the *New York Times* reported that "Judge McCann of the Police Court had received requests from women all over the city asking that Mrs. Wiggs be dismissed."<sup>346</sup> Indeed, "the Judge's own daughter went further, and commanded him, on pain of never again being allowed to come home, to dismiss her."<sup>347</sup> Of course it should also be noted that even the *New York Times* referred to Mary Bass as Mrs. Wiggs, an identity that she would never completely shake<sup>348</sup> And though journalism should ideally remain neutral in the presentation of facts, language matters, and many newspapers across the country chose to print the transcript of Mary Bass' testimony in dialect, characterizing their coverage and highlighting Mary Bass' Otherness. Furthermore, the press, though they highlighted Bass' frustration with the slumming process also perpetuated it. Nevertheless, the case of Mary Bass provides

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<sup>346</sup> "Mrs. Wiggs Vindicated in a Louisville Court," *New York Times*, April 30, 1904.

<sup>347</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*

one modest, yet triumphant example of lower-class ingenuity in the hushed social class battle that raged in the United States at the beginning of twentieth-century.

## CHAPTER 6: THE DEFAMATION OF HER GOOD CHARACTER

### *Mary Bass vs. Alice Hegan Rice*

Alice Hegan Rice transferred her prejudicial and unflattering stereotypical views of the poor into her character of Mrs. Wiggs. However, her negligent fictional portrayal of a vulnerable ingenuous acquaintance was not without precedent. Oscar Wilde had duped a former dalliance, John Gray, in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890); and Charles Dickens mockingly caricatured Leigh Hunt in *Bleak House* (1852).<sup>349</sup> Dickens, especially, was a major influence on Rice's writing, and like Rice's characterization of Mary Bass, Dickens' portrayal of Leigh Hunt in the character of Skimpole made it difficult to discern the surrogate from the authentic model.<sup>350</sup> Both Dickens and Rice chose to mock their character's positions of poverty.<sup>351</sup> And for both Dickens and Rice, it was not the only time they chose to draw one of their characters close enough to reality to make identification inescapable for their original inspirations.

Rice based a minor character from *Lovey Mary* on an eccentric gardener. While vacationing at an exclusive spa in Martinsville, Indiana in 1901, Rice inadvertently stumbled upon the garden of Miss Celestina R. Phelps, who went affectionately by the name Aunt Tiny.<sup>352</sup> Phelps gave Rice a tour of her "Denominational Garden" in which

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<sup>349</sup> Stanley Weintraub, "Exorcising 'Dorian,'" review of *The Man Who was Dorian Gray*, by Jerusha Hall McCormack, *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920* 44, no. 3 (2001): 354; Robert A. McCown, *The Life & Times of Leigh Hunt* (Iowa City, Iowa: Friends of the University of Iowa Libraries, 1985), 1.

<sup>350</sup> McCown, 7.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>352</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 33.

she had peculiarly associated her impressions of various religious denominations with the characteristics of certain kinds of her flowers. Rice was strangely charmed by the endearing ways the gardener managed to demean religious groups. Phelps in her judgement of others' religion was often thinly polite, but not without prejudice. In *Lovely Mary*, when her character of Miss Viny was asked if there were any Presbyterians in her garden, she replies:

Yes, indeed; they are a good, old, reliable bed. Look at all these roses an' tiger-lilies an' dahlias; they all knew what they was goin' to be afore they started to grow. They was elected to it, an' they'll keep on bein' what they started out to be clean to the very end.<sup>353</sup>

On another occasion, Phelps was asked by a reporter if she had any Christian Scientist or Adventist in her garden and she retorted "Oh, no! They are all mushrooms and rank poison. It doesn't pay to fool with them."<sup>354</sup> Rice selectively excluded any subjective flowery descriptions of her own church from the *Lovely Mary* narrative.<sup>355</sup>

Rice claimed that she drew the character of Miss Viny as a "composite character."<sup>356</sup> This claim has some merit because Rice characterized Miss Viny as sweet and kindly, while people that actually knew Phelps commented that they had never so much as even seen her smile.<sup>357</sup> Rice also shifted the actual location of the "Denominational Garden" from a small town over a hundred miles away from Louisville into the Cabbage Patch for the book, *Lovely Mary*. It was more the "Denominational Garden" itself than the character of Aunt Viny that was lifted from Phelps. But like

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<sup>353</sup> Rice, *Lovely Mary*, 111.

<sup>354</sup> E.A. Hewitt, "Aunt Tiny Phelps and her Denominational Garden," *Courier-Journal*, November 29, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1012326171).

<sup>355</sup> Boewe, "Aunt Tiny's Denominational Garden," 18.

<sup>356</sup> "Indianola Salary," *Courier-Journal*, April 17, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1016017021).

<sup>357</sup> Boewe, "Aunt Tiny's Denominational Garden," 19.

Rice's portrayal of Mary Bass as Mrs. Wiggs, the "Denominational Garden scene in *Lovely Mary* offers descriptive and lively prose missing in much of Rice's other work. Scholar Mary Boewe claims that "what distinguishes 'The Denominational Garden from other chapters...is an exactness of detail only slightly different from that given to reporters by Aunt Tiny Phelps."<sup>358</sup>

Phelps embraced her fame as Aunt Viny in *Lovely Mary*. She welcomed reporters and literary enthusiasts alike. In the *Courier-Journal* she described her chance meeting with Alice Hegan Rice as follows:

I was sitting on the porch one day when a strange lady came to the gate and asked me if she could come in. I showed her 'round the garden and told her about my denominational flower beds, and she said 'would you mind if I put that in a book?' and I said, 'No, indeed go along. You can't hurt me!' And that's the last I have seen of Miss Hegan. I never read the book till all my friends were talking about it.<sup>359</sup>

Rice later sent Phelps an autographed copy of *Lovely Mary* with the inscription: "To Miss Celestina Phelps, Who kindly gave me permission to tell the world about her delightful garden."<sup>360</sup> Permission was one thing that Rice never sought from Mary Bass. However, Rice emphasized in her autobiography that Phelps "unlike the prototype of *Mrs. Wiggs*...capitalized her notoriety."<sup>361</sup> Indeed, contrary to Bass' reaction to the unexpected exposure, Phelps was more opportunistic and immoderately accommodating, with a pliable notion of self-identity that suited the fancies of literary tourists. When asked about her new found fame Phelps replied:

Well, I thought it was a godsend. I'm not like I hear tell of Mrs. Wiggs: I don't shut the door in anybody's face and tell them to go about their

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<sup>358</sup> Boewe, "Aunt Tiny's Denominational Garden," 17.

<sup>359</sup> E.A. Hewitt, "Aunt Tiny Phelps and her Denominational Garden," *Courier-Journal*, November 29, 1903.

<sup>360</sup> Boewe, "Aunt Tiny's Denominational Garden," 18.

<sup>361</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 179-180.

business and let me tend to mine. If the real Mrs. Wiggs had as much sense as the Mrs. Wiggs in the book, why, she would have made the best of her opportunity too. Why don't you suppose if I'd been Mrs. Wiggs and my house didn't have no roof made out of tin cans, I would have put a roof of tin cans on it and had a picture made of the house and me standing in the door, and sold them for twenty-five cents apiece just as I am doing with my house and garden?<sup>362</sup>



*Denominational Garden Postcard.* <sup>363</sup>

Indeed, according to Alice Hegan Rice, Phelps “utilized her fame to make of her humble dwelling a modest literary shrine.”<sup>364</sup> Aunt Tiny Phelps willingly slid into the character of Aunt Viny, whereas Mary Bass was never content being a side show; and it was unfair to compare Phelps’ reaction to that of Bass’ because Aunt Viny was only a marginal character in the lesser of the two Cabbage Patch novels and was geographically located in an out of the way rural town. Phelps’ exposure and publicity, be it welcome or not, could

<sup>362</sup> E.A. Hewitt, “Aunt Tiny Phelps and her Denominational Garden,” *Courier-Journal*, November 29, 1903.

<sup>363</sup> “The Denominational Garden,” Postcard, author’s personal collection: Aunt Tiny Phelps produced and sold these postcards to literary pilgrims.

<sup>364</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 179.

never have been more than a minor inconvenience and was minimal compared to that of Mary Bass as the popular Mrs. Wiggs. However, Phelps' strategy suggests there were a range of reactions to the middle-class gaze.

*The Climate of Opinion*

Alice Hegan Rice was not completely unsympathetic towards the plight of Mary Bass. As early as March 1903, Rice began writing the editors of local Louisville newspapers requesting they keep Bass' name out of print.<sup>365</sup> On March 10, 1903 Rice wrote Young Ewing Allison, editor of one of Louisville's papers, stating:

I am writing you in behalf of the so-called 'original of Mrs. Wiggs.' The Bass family in the Cabbage Patch whom I have unwittingly brought into publicity are very much annoyed by sight-seers and reporters and worst of all by seeing their name in print... They are good, honest people with a strong aversion to being 'writ up,' and I was greatly chagrined when I found them published as the original Wiggess. Now as a personal favor may I ask that their names be kept out of your paper?<sup>366</sup>

It's interesting, however, that even in moments of sympathy, Rice felt the need to belittle the Besses among company of her own social stature by emphasizing for no useful reason Bass' dialect and her annoyance with being "writ up." By August 1903, Rice realized she may have already put Mary Bass through enough trouble. While she was vacationing at the Grand Hotel Venice, she wrote her literary editor, Robert Underwood Johnson, stating, "Thank you for your suggestion which was very amusing, but Mrs. Wiggs and I have parted company for good. My next book may deal with the same class of people but outside of the Cabbage Patch."<sup>367</sup> Rice was clearly still very much amused with the

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<sup>365</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 63.

<sup>366</sup> Alice Hegan Rice to Mr. Allison, March 10, 1903, Alice Hegan Rice Papers – Mary Boewe Collection – Box 1 of 3 - University of Louisville Archives and Records Center.

<sup>367</sup> Alice Hegan Rice to Robert Underwood Johnson, August 19, 1903, Alice Hegan Rice Papers – Mary Boewe Collection – Box 1 of 3 - University of Louisville Archives and Records Center.

humor in class dynamics, but began to sense she may be opening herself up to criticism, by further exploiting Mary Bass.

Despite Rice's misgivings about Mary Bass, the Wiggs phenomenon was still in full throttle. In October of 1903 the play, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* opened in Louisville's lavish McCauley's Theatre.



*Macaulay's Theatre - Opening Night October 5, 1903.*<sup>368</sup>

The production was a huge event among Louisville's elite. Nearly fifty years later, Melville Otter Briney still recalled the special night, stating that:

Nothing gave Louisvillians any more excitement than did the premiere of a play that took place here 47 years ago this month. Those ladies in their long, white kid gloves and those gentlemen with the sleek, collapsible opera hats who gathered at Macauley's Theater on the night of October 5, 1903, came to do homage to fellow citizen, friend and neighbor, 33-year-old Alice Hegan Rice...For the play (you've guessed it): "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch."...It was according to The Courier-Journal, 'an

<sup>368</sup> Photograph, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives.

historic and gala occasion for Louisville.”...And there was ‘tumultuous applause and bravos when Mrs. Rice [was] brought before the curtain at the close of the first act.’...In thousands of homes, Mrs. Wiggs’ pithy sayings were already family by-words.<sup>369</sup>

But not all of Louisville was equally amused. The *Courier-Journal* reported that the day before the play’s grand opening, posters all around the city advertising the upcoming performance were defaced by coving over the image of Mrs. Wiggs on the lithographs.<sup>370</sup> And Rice, thinking it would be best, denied a request from the play’s cast for a tour of the Cabbage Patch “explaining that her book had brought enough trouble to the Cabbage Patch inhabitants.”<sup>371</sup>

Shortly after the slumming debacle that drug Mary Bass to court in defense of her privacy, and exposed her predicament to the national media, public opinion began to turn against Alice Hegan Rice. An Albany newspaper suggested the day after the Bass trial that Rice and her novels had greatly benefited from all the publicity of the Bass case.<sup>372</sup> By early May 1904 newspapers across the country were siding with Bass. The *Baltimore Herald* expressed that “Mrs. Bass, or Mrs. Wiggs, as she is known now, in spite of herself, is entitled to sympathy, especially as she has not only had to furnish the material for a money-making novel, but is now unwillingly forced to do press agent work for its publishers.”<sup>373</sup> One paper suggested that Mary Bass “should have been left in the obscurity which she, in common with a majority of the really good people cherishes. The

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<sup>369</sup> Melville O. Briney, *Fond Recollections: Sketches of Old Louisville* (Louisville, KY: The Louisville Times, 1955), 70-71.

<sup>370</sup> “Defacers of Posters will be Arrested,” *Courier-Journal*, October 5, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1015861511).

<sup>371</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 49.

<sup>372</sup> “Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Suffer from Runaway,” *Courier-Journal*, April 30, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1014983468).

<sup>373</sup> “Side Lights on ‘Mrs. Wiggs,’” *Courier-Journal*, May 6, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1015873178).

identification of a living individual with a character in fiction is not only a sign of clumsy art, but it often leads to great unhappiness.”<sup>374</sup> The *Denver Republican* claimed that “the author is entirely to blame in the case, and she should be made an example of.”<sup>375</sup> The *Atlanta Constitution* was particularly sensitive in its portrait of the situation, in which it professed:

The case of Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch brings up for discussion certain moral responsibilities that attach to authorship. For instance, it is a question whether an author has the right to draw his character so closely and photographically to real life as to enable the public to identify the individual who unconsciously sat for the portrait. It is not only a mistake in what is called art, but it is a violation of the ethics which should be the guide of those who furnish the world with fiction, and in this matter the humblest person alive has as many rights as the highest.<sup>376</sup>

Still other newspapers began to hit at Rice’s pocketbook. The *Epworth Herald* pointed out that “The author made both fame and fortune out of the use she made of Mrs. Bass as ‘material,’ and it seemed hardly fair that she should have this reward and leave Mrs. Bass in poverty, with the added unpleasantness of being a personage.”<sup>377</sup> The *Chicago Record-Herald* proposed that Mary Bass should be given a share of the profits. Its stated, “Without her there would have been no ‘Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch.’ Is it right, therefore, that she should continue to toll for a living while others get rich making books

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<sup>374</sup> “The Ethics of Authorship. Some Reflection Called Forth by Mrs. Wiggs Conduct,” *The Sunday State* (Columbia, South Carolina), May 15, 1904, NewsBank/Readex, Database: America’s Historical Newspapers (1135FA778F20A670).

<sup>375</sup> “Side Lights on ‘Mrs. Wiggs,’” *Courier-Journal*, May 6, 1904.

<sup>376</sup> “The Ethics of Authorship. Some Reflection Called Forth by Mrs. Wiggs Conduct.”

<sup>377</sup> Google Books, *Epworth Herald* 7/2/1904 page 135

books.googleusercontent.com/books/content?req=AKW5Qadu8zznCgcjllZIXDBRulc0CQh\_cYPwLAlwm8hX6CAtRDATiRv0gbh9f8qDUqGl88SB4IB7\_TzGsHM-30SxXiRN5eIghcs6beCHeHAg7MMIYpwQcsm211mAotPOeDWizL6IGroq0lo\_ufYoc2CXJA6Gn1LwTyIExW5H45uDd56Z8DuJJEJb7v4MbuVdjgZ2EBUm1aCrSwGotM-14FTgwfClZ2K28TzrUkqeI3soDCsyj0ntDTBghEqiM3G-tgLnyGgU5Sx.html.

and plays about her?”<sup>378</sup> *The Sunday State* out of Columbia, South Carolina echoed that sentiment, stating:

It is the irony of fate that the book which has given so much pleasure to others should have robbed the original Mrs. Wiggs of the peace of mind and good nature which endeared her to the public. - While her bright sayings have brought money and fame to the author, Mrs. Alice Hegan Rice, as well as to the publishers, the dramatist, the actors and everybody connected with “Mrs. Wiggs” as a book or play, Mrs. Mary A. Bass, the original sage of the cabbage patch is living in her former poverty.<sup>379</sup>

While the national press sat in judgment, the Louisville press mostly sat on their hands. Historian James C. Klotter stresses that Louisville’s newspapers of the era very much shielded the city’s elite.<sup>380</sup> Alice Hegan Rice admitted that “Louisville is what might be called ‘an intimate city.’ The majority of men and women in social life have known each other from childhood and an easy camaraderie exists between them.”<sup>381</sup> And Rice was intimate with the most powerful in Louisville. In her autobiography, Rice mentions that:

Two families with whom we were especially intimate lent special color and charm to our periods of relaxation. The two famous editors at that time in Kentucky were Richard Knott (editor of the *Louisville Post*) and Henry Watterson (editor of the *Courier-Journal*). The former (Knott), a man of remarkably fine judgment and keen perceptions, had much to do in forming the political ideals and standards of the state [and] At Colonel Watterson’s home I had been a visitor since the days when as a little girl I had played with his children. Later when I elected writing as a profession and married a poet, he adopted the pair of us as protégés.<sup>382</sup>

The *Courier-Journal* at the time had the largest circulation of any newspaper in the South.<sup>383</sup> Henry Watterson was a man of powerful influence, who as historian Lowell H.

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<sup>378</sup> “The Disgusted ‘Mrs. Wiggs’,” *Courier-Journal*, March 10, 1903.

<sup>379</sup> “A Pilgrimage to Home of the Real ‘Mrs. Wiggs’,” *The Sunday State* (Columbia, South Carolina), November 1, 1903.

<sup>380</sup> Klotter, 11.

<sup>381</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 95-96.

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid*, 102.

<sup>383</sup> Harrison, 303.

Harrison points out was the voice of Kentucky and the South.<sup>384</sup> Rice, through her connections was able to control her image in the Louisville press. For instance, in September of 1905, Rice wrote to Watterson requesting he suppress rumors of her increasing wealth. In the letter, she stated, “I hate to deny the foolish rumor in my own name as it only gives me more publicity, but if you could devote a short paragraph to the penalties of fame and puncture the bubble before it reaches greater dimensions I should be most grateful.”<sup>385</sup> Watterson quickly quelled the hearsay in the edition of *Courier-Journal* the next day to accommodate his dear friend’s request.<sup>386</sup>

Watterson also came to Rice’s aid as the controversy in the national press brewed over Rice’s culpability in the calamitous ordeals of Mary Bass. On May 7, 1904, Watterson penned an article for the *Courier-Journal* entitled, “Another Side of the Picture,” in which he began to spin the story in the favor of Alice Hegan Rice. In the article, Watterson began to tear away at Bass sympathizers by stating:

While many papers are censuring Mrs. Alice Hegan Rice and sympathizing with the troubles of “Mrs. Wiggs,” a word on the other side is timely. The public that hints at “a division of the spoils” and expresses its horror at the invasion of the old woman’s “castle” should be made acquainted with some truths hitherto printed. It needs to be informed that for years—for ten years at least before Mrs. Rice ever thought of writing her book—the author and her family have helped Mrs. Bass in whatever trouble of mind, body or estate she has found herself. That Mrs. Bass was merely a suggestion to genius and not the whole character is proved by her own actions, which show none of the merry optimism attributed to the celebrated personage of the cabbage patch. The old lady would never have known she had been “writ up in a book”—so composite is the creation—had not some outsiders, recognizing the scene of the tale and some of her sayings, told her.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>384</sup> Harrison, 319.

<sup>385</sup> Alice Hegan Rice to Henry Watterson, September 13, 1905, Library of Congress, quoted in Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 77.

<sup>386</sup> “Patrick A. Collins,” *Courier-Journal*, September 15, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1015947505).

<sup>387</sup> “Another Side of the Picture,” *Courier-Journal*, May 7, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (10158731781016011102).

Note Rice's influence and exact words in manipulating Watterson's article. Rice had demeaned Bass with her use of the same dialectic expression, "writ up," more than a year prior, in her letter to another Louisville newspaper editor in an effort to influence the direction of Louisville press coverage.<sup>388</sup> In this "intimate city" the elite continued to take care of their own interests.<sup>389</sup> Watterson's article went on tearing down Bass' reputation, while buffering Rice's virtuous beau monde image:

The pictures in the papers came from Mrs. Bass herself. One editor suggests that Mrs. Rice should be made to pay the fines in court, another that she be "made an example of"—just how he doesn't say; hundreds of papers have taken the matter up and not one has done Mrs. Rice justice. To all of these a few words must be said: Some of her friends know a few points that Mrs. Rice herself never mentions. They know that shortly after her big royalties began to flow in, Mrs. Bass came in possession of nice bank account; they know that from the moment Mrs. Bass began to suffer from too curious public Mrs. Rice and her family offered to bear all the trouble and expense of a move to an entirely new neighborhood, but preferring her cabbage patch, Mrs. Bass declined. They know that from the first Mrs. Rice has sympathized with Mrs. Bass in her attitude toward her persecutors and has gone to great lengths to shield and protect her.<sup>390</sup>

Clearly, Rice as a member of the privileged class was able to exploit not only her own representation in the Louisville press, but also that of Mary Bass. With the stroke of his powerful pen, Henry Watterson turned what limited sympathies Bass favored against her. He had effectively made her the villain of the story, nothing more than a heedless ingrate to Rice's angelic humanitarianism. But holes existed in Watterson's defense of his friend. Rice may have indeed helped Bass on occasion, but Rice's estimation of her value to Bass was greatly inflated. Furthermore, Mrs. Wiggs was clearly not a composite

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<sup>388</sup> Alice Hegan Rice to Mr. Allison, March 10, 1903, Alice Hegan Rice Papers – Mary Boewe Collection – Box 1 of 3 - University of Louisville Archives and Records Center.

<sup>389</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 95-96.

<sup>390</sup> "Another Side of the Picture."

character and everyone involved recognized it. Additionally, Bass had no interest in talking with newspaper reporters and couldn't have cared less regarding public opinion about her, pro or con in the press; she simply wanted herself and her family to be left alone in the Cabbage Patch. Watterson's portrayal of Bass possessing either the will or the power to manipulate the national media was preposterous in concept. Bass was known to throw buckets of water and garbage at inquisitive reporters as well as meddling slummers.<sup>391</sup> And Rice's so-called efforts to protect Mary Bass were at best inadequate. However, it should be noted, if paradoxically, that the only information regarding Bass' position exists solely through the press. Yet this suggests not so much that Bass held any type of influence with the media, but that as a whole the national press was more complex, less unified, and capable of expressing a disparate range of opinions that would push issues to some degree throughout the Progressive Era. Much like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's highly critical review of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* indicates that contrasting views existed within the middle-class and were being voiced, at least regionally, yet in a hyper conservative southern city like Louisville these views were often drowned out or fell on deaf ears.

#### *From Insult to Injury*

By early September 1904, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* opened to glowing reviews on Broadway at the Savoy Theatre.<sup>392</sup> Shortly thereafter Alice Hegan Rice and her husband, Cale Young Rice returned prosperously to their home in Louisville only to discover that Alice had been served with papers informing her that Mary Bass was suing

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<sup>391</sup> Isaac F. Marcossan, *Adventures in Interviewing* (London: John Lane Company, 1920), 272.

<sup>392</sup> "Mrs. Wiggs, in Drama at the Savoy," *New York Times*, September 4, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (96431378).

her for libel. Rice wrote of the incident in confidence to her editor at the Century Company in New York that, “At first I was too much amused to be angry, for I knew that Mrs. Bass had never read the book, that she wouldn’t recognize herself in it if she did, and that it was a plain case of black-mail.”<sup>393</sup> But Rice was not completely forthcoming with her editor, because she knew that as part of her contract with the Century Company that she had previously and with deception declared before the publication of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* that she was “the sole owner of said work and [had] full power to make this grant, and that said work [contained] no matter which [was] an infringement of any other copyright or which [was] scandalous or libelous.”<sup>394</sup> Perhaps in Rice’s mind, her assessment of the poverty stricken residents of the Cabbage Patch did not merit the same legal considerations reserved for the wealthy at the time. Rice played down the whole affair in her autobiography, claiming that the law suit, “after causing considerable amusement, was thrown out of court, and the lawyer disbarred, leaving me and my protégé to continue our intimacy undisrupted.”<sup>395</sup> But in yet another effort to control her public image, Mrs. Rice lied. First, it is revealing that Rice imagined herself in a position of such power that even the mere accusation of an attorney to question her actions would qualify for his disbarment. Bass’ attorney H.T. Wilson was not disbarred and the case was ultimately settled outside of court.<sup>396</sup> As for Rice’s continued claims that Mrs. Wiggs

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<sup>393</sup> Alice Hegan Rice to Richard Watson Gilder, December 4, 1904, University of Virginia Library Collections, quoted in Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 64.

<sup>394</sup> Memorandum of Agreement, May 25, 1901, Rice Collection MSS 47 B1 F4, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University.

<sup>395</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 71.

<sup>396</sup> “Settlement between Mary A Bass...and Alice Hegan Rice,” Manuscripts & Folklife Archives Library Special Collections Western Kentucky University, Rice Collection, MSS 47, B1, F6; For evidence of H.T. Wilson’s further practice of law see “Youths: Attacked and Injured,” *Courier-Journal*, December 16, 1904, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1016160298); and “File Suit,” *Courier-Journal*, September 15, 1910, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1023446548).

was a composite character, Rice may not have written Bass' biography, but she had copied her sayings, mannerisms, and optimism. She had accurately described Bass' house and where it was located. She had accurately described Bass as a laundress, a widow, a mother of five children. She had accurately described the age differences and sexes of Bass' children. And she had precisely described in detail the death by exposure of Bass' oldest son at age fifteen.<sup>397</sup> In fact, Mary Bass so inspired the character of Mrs. Wiggs that on multiple occasions in Rice's own handwritten original manuscript of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, Alice Hegan Rice had accidentally written the name of "Mrs. Bass," only to cross it out and write above it "Mrs. W."<sup>398</sup> Rice was guilty of willfully plagiarizing Bass' sayings, fictionalizing her life, and she knew it and tried to cover it up.

Even the young, socialite/reformer, Lucy Olcott in the book is only a thinly disguised Alice Hegan Rice. When Rice wrote of Olcott's noble deed of writing a letter to the newspaper to encourage the community to help the Wiggs after the death of oldest child, who was the family's primary means of support, she was merely telling of her own experience with the Basses. Rice actually did write a letter to the Louisville newspapers requesting help for the Bass family after the death of young Clyde Bass, who as a child laborer had caught pneumonia moonlighting from his day job by sleeping in a grocery cart outside in the Louisville winter to protect it from poachers.<sup>399</sup> In the letter written almost ten years before the publication of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, Rice

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<sup>397</sup> Hegan, 5-41.

<sup>398</sup> Manuscript of Alice Hegan Rice's *Mrs. Wiggs and the Cabbage Patch*, University of Virginia Library, Special Collections, MSS 6340.

<sup>399</sup> "The Plucky Struggle of Little Arthur Bass Ended at Last: His Mother Broken Down by Misfortune, and Husband and Other Children Ill," *Courier-Journal*, November 13, 1892.

described the optimistic nature of Mary Bass in spite of the hard times she and her family had endured.<sup>400</sup>

In the court petition against Alice Hegan Rice, Mary Bass stated that she was:

now about sixty years old, was born and raised in the State of Kentucky and [had] resided for the fifteen years in... the City of Louisville... [That she] all her life tried to be a good, true and honorable citizen in the community and as such [had] always conducted herself and until the committing of the grievances [of the water campaign and the dousing of Emily Smith] was always reported to be a person of good fame and credit and [had] never been guilty [or] suspected to have been guilty of any crime and [had] deservedly obtained the good opinion of all her neighbors and of all other persons to whom she was known.<sup>401</sup>

Though this description was sparse, it was Mary Bass' only written attempt at self-representation. Something that may not have been historically important if Alice Hegan Rice had not distorted the image of Mary Bass to the rest of the world. Mary Bass wanted to be known as a decent, upstanding, respectable American citizen. Something that she rightfully deserved.

In the court petition Bass accused Rice of tarnishing her image. She stated that Rice “for the purposes of gain wrote, composed and published, and caused to be published to the world that [she, Mary Bass] was an ignorant, illiterate pauper and that she and her children...all lived upon the charity of the community.”<sup>402</sup> Mary Bass took issue with this portrayal as it had been reported in the paper many times that she refused all charitable offers. Even Alice Hegan Rice had described Mary Bass ten years earlier in her letter to the newspaper, later made famous by the book, as “never accepting money

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<sup>400</sup> “The Plucky Struggle of Little Arthur Bass Ended at Last: His Mother Broken Down by Misfortune, and Husband and Other Children Ill,” *Courier-Journal*, November 13, 1892.

<sup>401</sup> Court Petition, Mary A. Bass alias Wiggs vs. Alice Hegan Rice, September, 1904, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Mary Boewe Collection, Original document held at University of Virginia.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*

unless she worked in return, and never taking anything until it was absolutely necessary.”<sup>403</sup> Bass further accuses that Rice well knew this aspect of Bass’ personality and chose to misrepresent it. And perhaps the court petition’s most damning statement gives evidence of the actual help the poor received from the philanthropic middle-class ladies of Louisville. In the document, Bass speaks of Alice Hegan Rice’s mother, who Rice had described in the dedication of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* as “The Good Angel of the Cabbage Patch.” Bass reveals that after the death of her son Clyde, all Rice’s mother offered was advice, and that advice was to send her children to an orphanage and “go upon the street and beg.” Angelic charity indeed. Bass passionately countered to the *Good Angel* that “No! I will starve first, and as long as I have got breath in my body and my hands with the assistance of God we can pull up the hill of life.”<sup>404</sup> Mary Bass’ own words tell more about her optimism and drive than anything Rice ever wrote about her.

In the indictment Bass accused Alice Hegan Rice of:

wrongfully, unlawfully and for the purpose of gain knowing it would injure the plaintiff in her good fame, name, and credit and to bring her into public gaze, ridicule and disgrace. Did falsely, wickedly, maliciously and unlawfully compose, write and publish...malicious and defamatory libel.<sup>405</sup>

Strangely, Bass was particularly upset about an offhanded comment that Mrs. Wiggs made in the book that clearly comes off as a joke. Wiggs, talking with a neighbor in the book jokingly says of her late husband that “I guess you knew I killed him,” implying

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<sup>403</sup> “The Plucky Struggle of Little Arthur Bass Ended at Last: His Mother Broken Down by Misfortune, and Husband and Other Children Ill,” *Courier-Journal*, November 13, 1892.

<sup>404</sup> Court Petition, Mary A. Bass alias Wiggs vs. Alice Hegan Rice, September, 1904, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Mary Boewe Collection, Original document held at University of Virginia.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*

that she poisoned her husband with her cooking.<sup>406</sup> Strange, but...Mary Bass' actual husband, William T. Bass' cause of death was poisoning.<sup>407</sup> Alice Hegan Rice knew the circumstances surrounding the death of William Bass and chose to make light of it in her book. Mrs. Wiggs' folksy statement in the book presented Mary Bass with rumors and accusations in the Cabbage Patch. Bass accused Rice of defamation with the implication in her writing of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* that she, Mary Bass "had committed the crime of murder by killing her husband."<sup>408</sup>

Tragically, Bass' petition against Rice also reveals the true consequences of Rice's book on the Bass family. The reality of being fictionalized was overwhelming to Bass and her children. As the indictment makes plain:

In said book...[Bass] and her family have been greatly injured that they have been the object of ridicule, that they cannot *attend church*, or any public gathering without being pointed out as the Wiggies and that at home they are annoyed both night and day by calls from the four quarters of the Globe by all stations of life...and that they cannot walk upon the streets of their home city without being pointed out to ridicule and contempt, and that her and her children's credit have been injured and they have been brought to public scandal, infamy and disgrace in so much that...good and worthy people of this community have by reason of the publication suspected and believed and still believe the plaintiff was guilty of the crime of murder, a dead beat, an ignorant illiterate pauper. That by reason of the composing, writing and publication of said libelous book she [Mary Bass] has been arrested and put in irons as it were and put to great expense in her defense and subjected to great mortification, humiliation and trouble thereby.<sup>409</sup>

Rice had effectively taken away Bass' notion of community, identity, and recreation.

Historian Kathy Peiss has noted that "the most common forms of recreation, especially

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<sup>406</sup> Hegan, 59.

<sup>407</sup> "Took Strychnine," *The Louisville Times* (Louisville, KY), August 28, 1896, Primary Source Microfilm.

<sup>408</sup> Court Petition, Mary A. Bass alias Wiggs vs. Alice Hegan Rice, September, 1904, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Mary Boewe Collection, Original document held at University of Virginia.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid.*: Italics added for emphasis in "attend church."

among families living on the margins...were free. Streets served as the center of social life” where poor families gathered and socialized.<sup>410</sup> The spotlight on Mary Bass made seeking forms of fellowship and recreation problematic and far from relaxing. Even more troubling, Rice’s actions had essentially taken away Bass and her family’s freedom to practice religion in church. Bass and her children never went to church again, though they remained religious in their private lives, they were never comfortable in the mocking gaze of judging parishioners.<sup>411</sup>

### *Contempt and Compromise*

Mary Bass’ contempt for Alice Hegan Rice had been building since the duplicitous publication of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* forever compromised her well-being. However, the tipping point for Bass ironically came in what Rice considered act of goodwill and accord. Sometime shortly preceding Bass’ charge of libel against Rice, the author presented Mary Bass with a check for \$1000.00, which Rice described “as a present,” and “mark of friendship.”<sup>412</sup> Bass, however, recognized it as a sign of Rice’s bad conscience and ultimate responsibility in her burden. Bass claimed the Rice “well knew that she had greatly damaged [her] and her children and as evidence of her guilt, she tendered the plaintiff one thousand dollars in the form of a check.”<sup>413</sup> Bass

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<sup>410</sup> Kathy Lee Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 13.

<sup>411</sup> Switzer, 8.

<sup>412</sup> Settlement by and between Mary A. Bass...and Alice Hegan Rice, September 23, 1904, Rice Collection MSS 47 B1 F6, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University.

<sup>413</sup> Court Petition, Mary A. Bass alias Wiggs vs. Alice Hegan Rice, September, 1904, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Mary Boewe Collection, Original document held at University of Virginia.

never cashed the check, but instead brought suit against Rice for fifty-thousand dollars.<sup>414</sup> Once again Mary Bass demonstrated her pervasive aversion to accepting charity, as well as her capacity to take care of herself. Additionally, she firmly established the boldness of her own agency by hiring an attorney to bring suit against a powerful upper-class woman, and used the law to speak for her, behavior highly uncommon for the working-class poor of the Progressive Era.

Alice Hegan Rice responded by sending her Harvard educated, poet husband to eloquently plead with the no-nonsense Bass. Over the next two weeks Cale Young Rice desperately tried to bridge the divide between the two aggrieved parties.<sup>415</sup> Ultimately, Bass decided to settle out of court. She certainly didn't want to endure the spectacle of a what was sure to be a highly publicized trial. Her terms were perhaps too generous to Rice, but Mary Bass was not an uncompromising opportunist. She was a woman of simple means, a displaced farm girl, out of step with the rapidly emerging consumer economy of the Progressive Era. Bass simply requested that Rice write her a new check for \$1000 a product of a legal settlement, not high-minded middle-class altruism.<sup>416</sup> Mary Bass returned to Alice Hegan Rice's her original gifted check, and so-called "mark of friendship" ripped in three pieces.<sup>417</sup> In the end Mary Bass did not want the charity of Alice Hegan Rice, she wanted her respect. Bass insisted the action be completed by their

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<sup>414</sup> Court Petition, Mary A. Bass alias Wiggs vs. Alice Hegan Rice, September, 1904, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Mary Boewe Collection, Original document held at University of Virginia.

<sup>415</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 64.

<sup>416</sup> Settlement by and between Mary A. Bass...and Alice Hegan Rice, September 23, 1904, Rice Collection MSS 47 B1 F6, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University.

<sup>417</sup> William Warwick Thum to Alice Hegan Rice, Rice Collection MSS 47, B1 F6, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University.

respective attorneys and that Rice pay the attorney fees.<sup>418</sup> Rice was not present for the transaction, but her attorney described the event as follows:

I saw a woman in black sitting at a window looking fixedly out... I pulled out the check to Mrs. Bass for \$1,000 as the paper was now fully signed, handed it to her lawyer, who handed it over to her. She gave it an indifferent and contemptuous glance and looked out the window, never having said a word to me during the entire interview although I made modest advances to obtain her favor... but the old woman maintained the silence of a Chinese idol.<sup>419</sup>

Bass was clearly neither proud nor happy with outcome. The whole event was another inconvenience to Mary Bass, who would have preferred not to have been put in the position in the first place. The money surely helped Mary Bass and her family. It was most certainly more money than Mary Bass had ever seen before or would again. But Bass' compensation was particularly small, both compared to her troubles and the enormous wealth that Alice Hegan Rice acquired by defaming her.

#### *The Merits of the Defamation Claim*

Mary Bass had a legitimate claim against Rice. With all facts presented, Rice could have very reasonably been found guilty of libel in the defamation of Mary Bass' character, of course depending upon the jury pool and a fair unbiased court. Libel laws existed in Common Law prior to the formation of the United States and the basic tenets have remained intact through much of our history. Professor David L. Hudson of Vanderbilt University's School of Law claims that liability for the crime of libel arises when a defendant "uses actual people as fictional characters, or bases fictional characters

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<sup>418</sup> Settlement by and between Mary A. Bass...and Alice Hegan Rice, September 23, 1904, Rice Collection MSS 47 B1 F6, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University.

<sup>419</sup> William Warwick Thum to Alice Hegan Rice, Rice Collection MSS 47, B1 F6, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University.

on living persons but fails sufficiently to disguise the characters, so that the fictional characters are understood to be of and concerning their living models.”<sup>420</sup> Professor Hudson insists that “What matters is whether people who know the plaintiff can understand that the character was meant to depict the plaintiff.”<sup>421</sup> This was certainly the case with Mary Bass and the character of Mrs. Wiggs. Professor Vivian Deborah Wilson of the University of California’s Hastings College of Law asserts that if an author creates “a fully-developed character with certain flaws, some aspects of the portrayal will lower the now-identified plaintiff in the esteem of some members of the community.”<sup>422</sup> This was also certainly the experience of Bass and her family. But Professor Hudson further points out an irony in the claim of libel in the work of fiction, that the “plaintiff is claiming that they are very similar and very different from the fictional character.”<sup>423</sup> Though Alice Hegan Rice had literally taken her story directly from many of the circumstances of Bass’ actual life, and mimicked the mannerisms and sayings of Mary Bass, she did so in a way that clearly demeaned Bass and her social class while elevating her own. Mary Bass described Rice’s portrayal of her in the character of Mrs. Wiggs as “a woman of low nature, without education or self-respect.”<sup>424</sup> Finally, Professor Wilson also points out that when attempting to gauge whether the “requirement of malice” is met in the charge of defamation in libel in fiction, the question to ask is, “Did the author fashion the fictional character with the knowledge that the plaintiff would be identified to

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<sup>420</sup> David L. Hudson, “Libel in Fiction,” First Amendment Center Web, page 1, Last modified January 19, 2005. [firstamendmentcenter.org/libel-in-fiction.html](http://firstamendmentcenter.org/libel-in-fiction.html).

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>422</sup> Vivian Deborah Wilson, “The Law of Libel and the Art of Fiction,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 44, no. 4 (1982), 33.

<sup>423</sup> Hudson, 2.

<sup>424</sup> Court Petition, Mary A. Bass alias Wiggs vs. Alice Hegan Rice, September, 1904, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Mary Boewe Collection, Original document held at University of Virginia.

his [or her] detriment or, in the alternative, in reckless disregard of the likelihood of that result.”<sup>425</sup> Alice Hegan Rice’s *reckless disregard* for Mary Bass was bold and apparent. Rice should have brought up the possibility of libel when she signed her contract with The Century Company, which specifically required her to disclose such issues. She should have been honest with her editor when describing Bass’ petition against her. She should not have used her connections in the Louisville press to further demean Mary Bass when the accusation of libel was presented by the national media. Most importantly, she should never have deceptively posed as Bass’ friend while secretly writing about her. And she most certainly should have asked for Bass’ permission before publishing a book that would forever alter both their worlds. Rice’s actions were not only disingenuous and immoral, they were illegal. And Rice greatly profited from her deception for the rest of her life. Two months after Rice reached settlement with Mary Bass for the paltry sum \$1000, she and her husband purchased an enormous home in St. James Court, the most exclusive and lavish community in Louisville.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Wilson, 42.

<sup>426</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 63.

## CHAPTER 7: SHAME AND IDENTITY

### *Forging an Identity*

Mary Bass was born Mary Adair Thomas in 1844 in La Rue County, Kentucky not far from the legendary little long cabin of Abraham Lincoln's birth. Her parents were landless tenant farmers who owned neither real estate or any personal property of note.<sup>427</sup> By 1860, through hard work and toil her family had acquired Kentucky farm real estate valued \$2,275.00, though the terms of the loan on this land remain unknown. However, the Thomas family's situation would change shortly thereafter with the turmoil of the oncoming Civil War.<sup>428</sup> By 1867, Mary Adair Thomas had married and buried her first husband, a Union Soldier with the 30<sup>th</sup> Regiment Kentucky Volunteer Mounted Infantry, who was discharged with typhoid fever and died later of consumption.<sup>429</sup> By 1870, the widow, now Mary Compton was back living with her father, who had lost the farm and now worked as a blacksmith in Hardin County with real estate assets now valued at only four-hundred dollars.<sup>430</sup> Mary Compton later married William Tyre Bass, a son of

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<sup>427</sup> "United States Census, 1850," database with images, *FamilySearch*(familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M65Z-PYL: 9 November 2014), Mary A Thomas in household of George W Thomas, Hamilton, La Rue, Kentucky, United States; citing family 64, NARA microfilm publication M432 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.).

<sup>428</sup> "United States Census, 1860", database with images, *FamilySearch*(familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MZBC-YWK: 30 December 2015), M A Thomas in entry for Geo W Thomas, 1860.

<sup>429</sup> U.S., Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934, Application 395041, Certificate 316466, May 1889.

<sup>430</sup> "United States Census, 1870," database with images, *FamilySearch* (familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MXWW-HP3.html: 17 October 2014), Mary Compton in household of

landless tenant farmers in December of 1873.<sup>431</sup> William and Mary Bass with their two small children, roamed the Kentucky countryside with short unfruitful stays over Hart, La Rue, Hardin, Nelson, and Bullitt counties looking for work and sustenance before landing in Louisville in 1879.<sup>432</sup> Between 1879 and 1885 William found work as a tailor and Mary as a laundress. They lived and worked in a small shop on Montgomery Street, a location, which they shared with the Kentucky Lead & Oil Company.<sup>433</sup> During this time Mary Bass bore two more children as the family of six lived and work in crowded, cramped conditions, exposed to lead and other poisons from the Kentucky Lead & Oil Company. In the early days of industrialization in the United States, environmental safety concerns had yet to materialize into any formal health regulations and the Bass' like many industrialized families lived in severely unhealthy environments.

Good fortune seemed to shine upon the Bass' in 1886 as William T. Bass was appointed postmaster of a small rural outpost in Marion Country.<sup>434</sup>

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Geo W Thomas, Kentucky, United States; citing p. 5, family 41, NARA microfilm publication M593 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); FHL microfilm 545,966.

<sup>431</sup> "United States Census, 1870," database with images, *FamilySearch* (familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MXW4-276.html: 17 October 2014), William Bass in household of N R Bass, Kentucky, United States; citing p. 31, family 204, NARA microfilm publication M593 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.); FHL microfilm 545,967.

<sup>432</sup> Court Petition, Mary A. Bass alias Wiggs vs. Alice Hegan Rice, September, 1904, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Mary Boewe Collection, Original document held at University of Virginia; Caron's Directory of the City of Louisville (Louisville, KY: C.K. Caron, 1879).

<sup>433</sup> "United States Census, 1880," database with images, *FamilySearch* (familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MCZ3-Z2S: 11 August 2016), Mary Bass in household of William G Bass, Louisville, Jefferson, Kentucky, United States; citing enumeration district ED 151, sheet 506A, NARA microfilm publication T9 (Washington D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.), roll 0424; FHL microfilm 1,254,424; Caron's Directory of the City of Louisville (Louisville, KY: C.K. Caron, 1879-1885).

<sup>434</sup> *Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1832-1971. NARA Microfilm Publication, M841, 145 rolls. Records of the Post Office Department, Record Group Number 28.* Washington, D.C.: National Archives, Ancestry.com. *U.S., Appointments of U. S. Postmasters, 1832-1971* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010.



*Mary Bass and Clyde Bass circa 1876*<sup>435</sup>

The Bass Family of seven with the addition of another baby moved to the small town of Phillipsburg, but shortly thereafter things began to go wrong. In May of 1889 William's position as postmaster had been consolidated and discontinued, their farmhouse apparently burned down, and William contracted some form of consumption before the

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<sup>435</sup> Photograph, author's personal collection.

family sought new work and refuge by returning to Louisville.<sup>436</sup> That same month, out of desperation Mary Bass applied for Civil War widows benefits for the death of her first husband immediately after arriving back in Louisville.<sup>437</sup> However, her effort was likely futile as widow's pension benefits were terminated by the United States government upon remarriage.<sup>438</sup>

In Louisville, the Bass family found refuge at the Christ Church Parish House at 1525 2<sup>nd</sup> Street until 1892.<sup>439</sup> However, by late 1892 the Bass family were living in a “hovel” on Green Street, “crowded in a tiny room, four of the children down with the measles, one dead from pneumonia and the father dying of consumption.”<sup>440</sup> William Bass somehow managed, this time, to survive his bout with consumption and the family found quarter in a tenement on East Jefferson Street for couple of years, before finding permanent residence on Hill Street in the Cabbage Patch in 1895.<sup>441</sup> The deplorable conditions of Bass family's dwellings on Green and Jefferson streets reflected the City of Louisville's attitudes toward the primarily African-American community living in these areas. Though the Bass family benefited at times from organizational charities, a service unavailable to African-Americans in Louisville at the time, their economic status as poor

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<sup>436</sup> *Record of Appointment of Postmasters, 1832-1971. NARA Microfilm Publication, M841, 145 rolls. Records of the Post Office Department, Record Group Number 28.* Washington, D.C.: National Archives, Ancestry.com. *U.S., Appointments of U. S. Postmasters, 1832-1971* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010; Alice Caldwell Hegan, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* (New York: The Century Co., 1901), 4-6; “The Plucky Struggle of Little Arthur Bass Ended at Last: His Mother Broken Down by Misfortune, and Husband and Other Children Ill,” *Courier-Journal*, November 13, 1892.

<sup>437</sup> U.S., Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934, Application 395041, Certificate 316466, May 1889.

<sup>438</sup> Laura Salisbury, *Women's Income and Marriage Markets in the United States: Evidence from the Civil War Pension* (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2014), 1.

<sup>439</sup> U.S., Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934, Application 395041, Certificate 316466, May 1889; Caron's Directory of the City of Louisville (Louisville, KY: C.K. Caron, 1891-1892).

<sup>440</sup> “The Plucky Struggle of Little Arthur Bass Ended at Last: His Mother Broken Down by Misfortune, and Husband and Other Children Ill,” *Courier-Journal*, November 13, 1892.

<sup>441</sup> Caron's Directory of the City of Louisville (Louisville, KY: C.K. Caron, 1895-1895).

whites forced them into segregated African-American communities that were neglected by both organizational charities and the city of Louisville itself. Therefore, in Louisville Jim Crow not only negatively affected African-Americans but poor white migrants as well.

As a river city, Louisville was an attraction for rivermen seeking the company of prostitutes during the pinnacle years of steamboat travel.<sup>442</sup> Historian James Klotter notes that “some seven hundred saloons open all days of the week, dotted the urban landscape, and competed for male attention with over a hundred houses of prostitution.”<sup>443</sup> Like many Progressive Era cities of the time, the Louisville middle-class forced vice into poor African-American neighborhoods away from polite middle-class wealth in 1890.<sup>444</sup> This was by no means an effort to completely stamp out prostitution as the city benefitted as a tourist attraction for its vice offerings and even offered Blue Books, much like the city of New Orleans, advertising its various houses of prostitution along with information regarding the races and ethnicities of the prostitutes available.<sup>445</sup> The Louisville middle-class, like the middle-class of other Progressive Era cities, attempted to solve the problem of vice by concentrating it in poor and African-American communities due to commonly held notions by the powers that be of class and racial superiority.

Mary Bass’ husband, William Bass had been sick since they arrived in Louisville after his tenure as a postmaster ended. William Bass eventually died at age 48 in 1896. Alice Hegan Rice mentioned in her letter to the Louisville press that William Bass had been sick with consumption in 1889 and was still sick in 1893; and in *Mrs. Wiggs of the*

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<sup>442</sup> Kleber, 731.

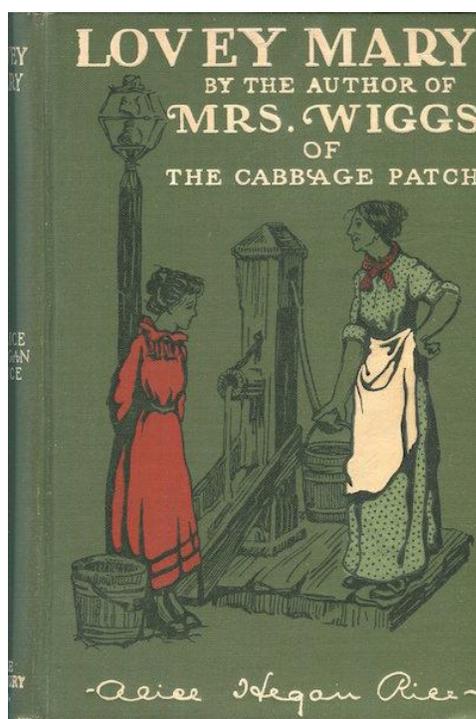
<sup>443</sup> Klotter, 11.

<sup>444</sup> *Ibid.*, 732.

<sup>445</sup> Paul, 238, 393-94.

*Cabbage Patch* his character was sick with typhoid at the time of his death.<sup>446</sup>

Consumption was a frequently used term in the days before modern medicine, associated with a “wasting away of the body, particularly from pulmonary tuberculosis.”<sup>447</sup> Be it typhoid, tuberculosis or some combination, slum residents like William Bass were particularly susceptible to disease due to issues of overcrowding and poor sanitation. No water filtration plant existed in Louisville until 1909 and as James Klotter further reveals that in Louisville “pumps on street corners, where many slum families got their water, were often further polluted by open sewage [and] typhoid epidemics broke out periodically.”<sup>448</sup>



*The Cover of Lovey Mary with Mrs. Wiggs standing at the Cabbage Patch water pump.*<sup>449</sup>

<sup>446</sup> “The Plucky Struggle of Little Arthur Bass Ended at Last: His Mother Broken Down by Misfortune, and Husband and Other Children Ill,” *Courier-Journal*, November 13, 1892; Hegan, 59.

<sup>447</sup> “Definition of Consumption,” MedicineNet Web, last modified May 13, 2016, [medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=19050.html](http://medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=19050.html).

<sup>448</sup> Klotter, 11.

<sup>449</sup> Rice, *Lovey Mary*, front cover.

If we are to believe Alice Hegan Rice's portrait in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, William Bass may have had an alcohol problem as well. However, there is no clear evidence of this accusation and it is put somewhat in doubt by the fact that Rice's story is clearly a morality tale of the dangers of alcohol in the age of temperance leagues, and the problem of alcoholism involved more than just one character in her book. Scholar Robert Bremner notes that by the turn-of-the-century "there was a growing tendency to think intemperance was as much a result as a cause of poverty," but this was certainly not the view held by Rice.<sup>450</sup> William Bass may very well have been self-medicating, and likely was dealing with overwhelming issues of depression. Regardless of the implications of his alcoholism and his clear health issues, William Bass had troubles holding down employment when he arrived back in Louisville due to one, the other, or both.<sup>451</sup> Mary Bass through her work as a laundress and her son, Clyde Bass, through the then common practice of child labor, became the Bass family's primary means of support.<sup>452</sup> This in an era of no social safety net for the families of the sick and poor held devastating results for the Bass family.

By 1896 the burden had become too much for William Bass. His illness had not improved and he had apparently been living away from his family and their home on Hill Street in the Cabbage Patch.<sup>453</sup> William Tyre Bass was found late on the evening of

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<sup>450</sup> Bremner, 80.

<sup>451</sup> Caron's Directory of the City of Louisville (Louisville, KY: C.K. Caron, 1893-1896). William Bass held jobs in produce, as a driver, a teamster and a huckster.

<sup>452</sup> "The Plucky Struggle of Little Arthur Bass Ended at Last: His Mother Broken Down by Misfortune, and Husband and Other Children Ill," *Courier-Journal*, November 13, 1892.

<sup>453</sup> "W. T. Bass Commits Suicide On Jefferson Street: Was Unable to Tell Why He Did It When Found," *Courier-Journal*, August 29, 1896, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1035478512).

August 28, 1896 in a warehouse on East Jefferson Street, where he worked as a night-watchman.<sup>454</sup> William Bass committed suicide that evening by swallowing a bottle of strychnine.<sup>455</sup> The *Courier-Journal* reported that “no one in the neighborhood...seemed to know anything about the man.”<sup>456</sup> The paper noted that he was “poorly dressed” and nothing was found in his possession except for the empty bottle of strychnine and note written by a young socialite, female aid worker requesting that he provide financial assistance to his family; “a request for aid, which, from all appearances Bass was unable to give.”<sup>457</sup> The paper further noted that “what cause he had for the act [was] not known, but it [was] thought that he was despondent over his lack of money.”<sup>458</sup>

By the time *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* was published in 1901, Mary Bass had buried two husbands and a child. She had survived the Civil War, and a protracted futile migration from the farm to the industrialized city at the onset of urbanization. She had endured the threat of disease and hunger that plagued so many families of her time and station. As a widow and mother she had managed to care for four children, alone in slums of Louisville. Mary Bass had an identity long before that of Mrs. Wiggs. She was a daughter, a wife, a mother, and a woman trying to withstand one of the most difficult times in American history through perseverance of will. Mary Bass above all was a survivor.

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<sup>454</sup> “W. T. Bass Commits Suicide On Jefferson Street: Was Unable to Tell Why He Did It When Found,” *Courier-Journal*, August 29, 1896.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*: The note was written by Bettie Miller, a young woman listed many times in the social pages of the *Courier-Journal*.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid.*

*The Politics of Shame*

The onset of the Progressive Era brought new concepts of poverty and identity. In the 1890s, William Dean Howells, the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, conveyed the broadly believed notion of social Darwinism, which was illuminated by the “chronic condition” of poverty in the United States.<sup>459</sup> For Howells, the circumstances were emphasized by the absurd disparity between of excessive wealth and extreme need that was becoming apparent in industrialized American cities.<sup>460</sup> This disparity, according to Howell, was underlined by an “ideological belief in the possession of money as a self-justifying fact—a combination that created shame in the poor and an anxiety that all Americans [could fall] into this state of unquestioned inferiority.”<sup>461</sup> Sociologist Richard Sennett has argued that “shame and social class became linked in modernity as it was in industrial societies where people were seen as personally responsible for their place in their world...In modernity, to be weak and powerless was considered as shameful.”<sup>462</sup> Sociologist Helen Merrell Lynd has noted that in every era, humans have naturally asked “in some form, the questions: Who am I? Where do I belong?”<sup>463</sup> However, Lynd adds that in that in times of immense change, like the change brought about by the migration, industrialization, and urbanization of the Progressive Era, “social dislocation” brought these questions of identity particularly to the forefront, “against the background of whatever personal hopes and social harmonies an earlier period [may have]

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<sup>459</sup> Jones, *American Hungers*, 66.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>462</sup> Richard Sennett, *Authority* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980), 91, quoted in Mirca Madianou, “News as a Looking-Glass: Shame and the Symbolic Power of Mediation,” *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 15, no. 1 (2011), 11.

<sup>463</sup> Helen Merrell Lynd, *On Shame and the Search for Identity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1958), 13.

cultivated.”<sup>464</sup> Mary Bass might have experienced some form of shame in her circumstances prior to the publication of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. She may have felt some form anxiety and self-doubt regarding her identity as a working-class wife, mother, widow living in poverty. She may also have felt shame and judgment from being white and living in poverty among African-Americans in the segregated South. But as sociologist Mirca Madianou alludes, “the exposure” of Mary Bass in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* and her subsequent exposures in the national and local press, as well as the relentless attention of invasive literary slummers “brought her vulnerability and anxieties to the surface in a violent and unexpected way. By publicizing and evaluating her life in a detached and indifferent way,” Rice and those that followed may have magnified Mary Bass’ latent sense of shame.<sup>465</sup>

Alice Hegan Rice altered Mary Bass’ sense of identity by changing how others looked at her. Professor of English Literature Alex L. Milsom contends that “literature plays a profound role in affecting a reader’s relationship to notions of place,” literature in essence plays the role of “authenticating” a place in the minds of readers.<sup>466</sup> By writing the immensely successful *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, Alice Hegan Rice had successfully turned an unusual, but not all that untypical city slum into an *authentic* slum in the minds of Progressive Era readers. And more damagingly, Rice elevated notions of Mary Bass from that of just another woman living in poverty to that of *the woman* living in poverty as the iconic Mrs. Wiggs. In other words, in the eyes of many Mary Bass was not just a poor woman, she represented poverty itself on a grand scale.

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<sup>464</sup> Lynd, 13.

<sup>465</sup> Madianou, 11.

<sup>466</sup> Milsom, 726, 730.

In the minds of Louisvillians Mary Bass was Mrs. Wiggs. In an interview conducted in the 1980s, a former resident of the Cabbage Patch recalled that in her childhood, “We used to...go down...there across the railroad tracks, Mrs. Wiggs lived there in that house. It was a two story...and I guess she lived upstairs because she always came from the upstairs with a broom in her hand and we would just scamper.”<sup>467</sup> Helen Merrell Lynd has argued that in shame “there is a basic separation between oneself and others; that others are related to oneself as audience.”<sup>468</sup> Certainly Mary Bass found audience in the Louisville Press and its readership who constantly referred to her as Mrs. Wiggs. As late as 1919, an editorial in the *Courier-Journal* rhetorically asked of Mary Bass, “Why aren’t you proud of your distinction, too, Mrs. Wiggs? Why don’t you accept the great honor expected of so great a lady? Why don’t you discard the hostile brooms and let us come in and talk to you, and learn from you, and fulfill our ideals of you?”<sup>469</sup> Clearly, in the minds of some Louisvillians, Mary Bass seemed to exist for their benefit. Philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre characterized shame as subjectively being seen as “a being-for-Others.”<sup>470</sup> And Philosopher Emmanuel Levinas argued in essence that shame embodies a predicament that takes the form of an inability to escape one’s own relation to being,” and this state exists in the form harassment by an “Other” who places ones “freedom in question” and demands immediate self-justification.<sup>471</sup> Even Alice Hegan Rice in her autobiography reflecting on the death of Mary Bass took the opportunity to

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<sup>467</sup> Mrs. James T Scott, Sr., interview by Keith Cardwell, Cabbage Patch Settlement Oral History Transcripts, p. 6, February 25, 1987, BJ/C112, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY.

<sup>468</sup> Lynd, 21.

<sup>469</sup> Homer Dye, Jr., “Cultivating the Cabbage Patch,” January 12, 1919, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1021484636).

<sup>470</sup> Lisa Guenther, “Shame and the Temporality of Social Life,” *Continental Philosophy Review* 44, no. 1 (2011): 23.

<sup>471</sup> Guenther, 23.

plug her book by stating “St. Peter bowed as he lifted the latch for Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch.”<sup>472</sup> Apparently in Rice’s mind, Mary Bass should feel content to spend eternity as Mrs. Wiggs. Lisa Guenther states that “shame makes [one] feel frozen in time, stuck to a moment that goes nowhere, opens to no future, and gives...no possibility of becoming otherwise.”<sup>473</sup> Mary Bass could not escape from being gazed upon and thought of as Mrs. Wiggs even in death.

Mary Bass’ reaction to her exposure in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* and the events that followed may at first glance seem inappropriate, juvenile, or even somewhat backward, but upon closer inspection, Bass’ behavior meets with models of reaction to shame by established sociologists, psychoanalysts, and philosophers. Remember, Mary Bass’ whole world was altered by the event. She was alienated from her own environment. Any previous notions of self-worth were challenged. Shame is a feeling of intense scrutiny, but as philosopher Martha Carven Nussbaum suggests, “awareness of other’s regard does not imply a diminished self-regard. On the contrary...self-regard is the essential backdrop of shame.”<sup>474</sup> Therefore Mary Bass’ reaction can be seen as an effort to maintain or establish a new self-identity worthy of her own perceptions of self.

Mary Bass restricted accessibility to her person and personality by means of self-suppression. For instance, she hid from unwelcomed visitors and slummers in the shelter of her home. Lisa Guenther describes “the intersubjective structure of shame as a feeling of being exposed to the gaze of others in a way that makes one feel the desire to escape or disappear.”<sup>475</sup> And disappear is pretty much what Bass did. Psychoanalyst Leon Wurmser

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<sup>472</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 72.

<sup>473</sup> Guenther, 25.

<sup>474</sup> Madianou, 4.

<sup>475</sup> Guenther, 24.

notes that this effort not to expose the self by hiding can be viewed as a form of shame that serves “as a protection mechanism against broad based wishes for expression and perception, thus guarding the privacy and intimacy of the self.”<sup>476</sup> Mary Bass also masked aspects of her personality that were once prevalent, like her optimism. For instance, her cold manner in reacting with Rice’s attorney in which he described her sternness and contemptuous silence.<sup>477</sup> Helen Merrell Lynd argues that a natural response to shame “is the seeking of some sort of external protection. And the use of this external protection may become a depersonalization,” which can take the form of “adopting a pose.”<sup>478</sup> However, Lynd notes that while this “form of externalization offers protection from exposure,” it does so at the “cost of diminished personal identity.”<sup>479</sup> Leon Wurmser described this disregard for one’s identity as “soul murder.”<sup>480</sup> Therefore, Alice Hegan Rice by exposing even the quirky animated aspects of Mary Bass’ personality in essence also extinguished them by making Bass uncomfortable in her own skin.

The shame experienced by Mary Bass when placed in context with the desired notoriety, reverence, and subsequent fortune seized by Alice Hegan Rice is emblematic of the power structure that existed between social classes in the Progressive Era. Rice was very much a part of the protected white middle-class of Louisville and Bass, simply, was not. Rice was able to exploit Mary Bass, not because she was diabolical, but because the social attitudes of her time placed her middle-class values firmly above those of the

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<sup>476</sup> Leon Wurmser, “Primary Shame, Mortal Wound and Tragic Circularity: Some New Reflections on Shame and Shame Conflicts,” *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 96, no. 6 (2015), 1618.

<sup>477</sup> William Warwick Thum to Alice Hegan Rice, Rice Collection MSS 47, B1 F6, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University.

<sup>478</sup> Lynd, 185.

<sup>479</sup> Ibid.

<sup>480</sup> Wurmser, 1618.

lower classes. Those that study shame have noted its asymmetric power relationship and have associated shame with the lack of balance among groups and that it often occurs in relation to one's gender, race and social class.<sup>481</sup> In the case of Mary Bass, shame occurred because of Alice Hegan Rice's selfish pursuit of her own interests with innate disregard for the consequences that her actions imposed on Mary Bass. According to Mirca Madianou "shame results from indifference. This process of indifference and subsequent shame results in the maintenance of the hierarchy of power and authority."<sup>482</sup> Helen Merrell Lynd argued that shame resulted from the feeling of being "unprotected" and "overpowered."<sup>483</sup> Alice Hegan Rice clearly took advantage of her position and status in society in her treatment of Mary Bass both in her words and actions.

The rise of mass culture in the Progressive Era also greatly amplified Mary Bass' shame. Urbanization of large cities in conjunction with industrialization created faster, cheaper and more efficient printing practices making it possible for large numbers of books, magazines, and newspapers to be affordably published.<sup>484</sup> Improved travel speed by steamship and train created a national market. By the turn-of-the-twentieth-century in the United States some newspapers, magazines and books began to sell in the hundreds of thousands.<sup>485</sup> Mary Bass' exposure through a new national media was indicative of a new kind of shame. Mirca Madianou argues that "the more significant the audience, the greater the shame."<sup>486</sup> The massive "fragmented...nature of the audience to whom she

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<sup>481</sup> Madianou, 4.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>483</sup> Lynd, 32.

<sup>484</sup> Ammons, xi.

<sup>485</sup> Hackett, 65.

<sup>486</sup> Madianou, 4.

was exposed made it impossible for” Mary Bass to react in any conventional manner.<sup>487</sup> Her only method to address such an enormous audience would have been to embrace the very exposure she found so desperately appalling. Furthermore, access to media would have always been on the media’s terms and she, frankly, was more important to them as Mrs. Wiggs than as Mary Bass. This hard truth was made clear when the *Courier-Journal* chose to print the transcripts of Mary Bass’ courtroom testimony in dialect and refer to her as Mrs. Wiggs in the article.<sup>488</sup> The *Courier-Journal* article might as well have been entitled *Mrs. Wiggs goes to Court* by Alice Hegan Rice as her influence was clearly felt in the newspaper’s representation of Bass. The media, both national and local, and Alice Hegan Rice enjoyed the status and capital of white middle-class power, something that Mary Bass as widowed mother living in poverty would never truly possess. Mirca Madianou stresses that “exposure, especially if it is unwanted and unexpected, is also revealing of the power asymmetries of shame. Shame arises when the self perceives itself as unable to control its own image, or the exposure of its image.”<sup>489</sup> Mary Bass clearly did not wish to be defined by Rice. She resisted this interpretation in confrontational ways and altered her personality in response. But ultimately Mary Bass never held the real power in her own self representation.

Mary Bass and her children were forced to live with the shame and embarrassment of the exposure brought on by Rice’s book and the hype that followed. Mary Bass had once expressed that “the happiest moment of her life would be when she

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<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>488</sup> “JUSTIFIES ‘Mrs. Wiggs’ in Treatment of Visitor,” *Courier-Journal*, April 30, 1904.

<sup>489</sup> Madianou, 5.

could forget that she had ever been associated” with the book.<sup>490</sup> Unfortunately for Bass that moment would never come. It was a shame that she took with her to the grave. Mary Bass and her family had a strategy for dealing with that shame and that was to never speak of it. By the time of the birth of most of her grandchildren, nearly all of Bass’ descendants were kept in the dark about the whole affair. One of her grandchildren mentioned that “Grandma Bass died in 1921 before I was born” and that the family “never mentioned anything at all about” the book or difficulties that followed.<sup>491</sup> In fact most of the family never learned about Mary Bass’ association with *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* until more than fifty years after her death. One of Mary Bass’ oldest grandchildren remembered stumbling upon the secret as a young child:

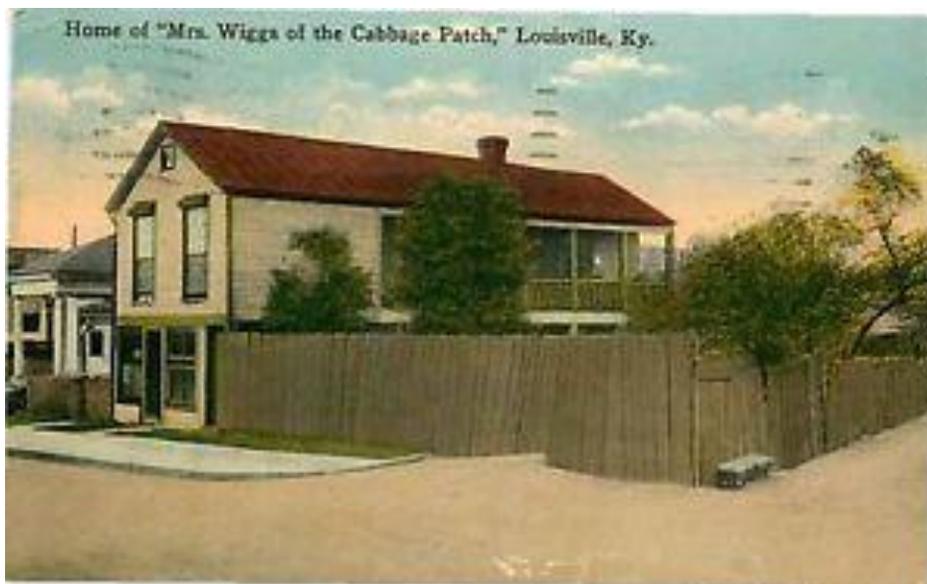
Our Grandmother Bass’s home was historical in one sense. She was the Lady in the book “Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch.” Secretively as far as we children were concerned. [My aunt] had a large china vase...in their front room to hold all postcards received in mail and I loved to look at the places and things pictured on those cards. But one day a card appeared in front of me that sent me running through three rooms of the shot gun house to show my discovery of one picturing Grandma Bass’s house. [My aunt] said “You put that back where you found it and don’t ever talk of it again.”<sup>492</sup>

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<sup>490</sup> “Sick and Tired of Being Mrs. Wiggssed,” *Urbana Daily Courier*, April 30, 1904, Illinois Digital Newspaper Collections, Urbana Daily Courier. [idnc.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=d&d=TUC19040430.2.52#.html](http://idnc.library.illinois.edu/cgi-bin/illinois?a=d&d=TUC19040430.2.52#.html).

<sup>491</sup> Evelyn Switzer Draper, “These Memories Were Written by Evelyn Louise (Switzer) Draper” (Louisville, KY: Unpublished memoir, 2008), 40; Evelyn Switzer Draper, interview conducted by James Brian Hardman in Louisville, Kentucky, 2015-06-18.

<sup>492</sup> Switzer, 2-3.



*Postcard of the Home of Mrs. Wiggs<sup>493</sup>*

He wondered for years after the fact “why all the hush hush whenever as a child he would ask questions.”<sup>494</sup> The Bass family’s silence was a form of resistance and coping. Social anthropologist Paul Connerton, known for his work in memory studies, suggests that “such silencing, while they are a type of repression, can at the same time be a form of survival, and the desire to forget may be an essential ingredient in that process of survival.”<sup>495</sup> Connerton further adds that forgetting can be fundamental in the “formation of a new identity. The emphasis here [is placed on] how to discard memories that serve no practicable purpose in the management of one’s current identity.”<sup>496</sup> This approach may have been somewhat successful. Certainly Bass’ grandchildren largely never had to directly carry the baggage of Mrs. Wiggs. However, the weight of the silence for those

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<sup>493</sup> “Home of Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch, Louisville, KY,” Postcard, author’s personal collection: Unlike the self-promotion of Aunt Tiny and her Denominational Garden, Louisville area pharmacies and stores sold unauthorized postcards of Mary Bass’ home to tourists and enthusiasts. At least three variations of these cards exist. This artist’s rendering appears to have been spruced up to make the Cabbage Patch less threatening and more appealing to white middle-class consumers.

<sup>494</sup> Draper, “These Memories Were Written by Evelyn Louise (Switzer) Draper,” 40.

<sup>495</sup> Paul Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting,” *Memory Studies* 1, no. 1 (2008), 68.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

who understood its implications may have been a burden they carried the rest of their lives. As cognitive scientist Charles B. Stone notes, “intentional silences can actually make [participants] more likely to remember the suppressed material . . . than to forget it.”<sup>497</sup> And certainly members of the Bass family were routinely reminded as the success and popularity of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* endured through the mid-twentieth-century.<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>497</sup> Charles B. Stone, “Toward a Science of Silence: The Consequences of Leaving a Memory Unsaid,” *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7, no. 1 (2012), 44.

<sup>498</sup> This project provides the opportunity not only to address through history the untold story of Mary Bass, but also address my personal family history that went for years untold and was never fully understood by Mary Bass’ descendants.

## CHAPTER 8: THE POWER OF REPRESENTATION AND IDENTITY

### *The Puppet Master*

Alice Hegan Rice as a widely read, nationally praised author held enormous power to transfer her ideology, biases, and beliefs in her cultural and racial superiority onto the characters that she represented in her fiction. As a genteel Progressive Era writer, she used her voice to speak for other races and classes. Rice was able to promote class and racist ideals by placing these values into the words and actions of the poor whites and African-American characters that she created. Therefore, Rice was able to express her own narrow-minded judgments through the words of the very people that she was judging, without ever making the characters of her own station appear as petty and intolerant. For instance, in a scene from *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, which clearly never happened as the noble aristocratic love interest of Miss Lucy Olcott, Mr. Bob, takes the Wiggs family, children and all to a swank and cultured Louisville restaurant for dinner, Rice puts her small-minded Jim Crow floridity into the mouth of babes. Rice writes, “‘Mr. Bob,’ said Mrs. Wiggs; ‘he’s the gentleman that took us to supper. He’s got money. [Young Asia Wiggs] said he give the nigger waiter a quarter.’”<sup>499</sup> In another instance in the book, the vibrant Lucy Olcott writes a letter to the Louisville newspapers asking the citizens to send money to help out the poor Wiggses who had just lost a child and were starving in the cold winter. After receiving hundreds of dollars in generous

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<sup>499</sup> Hegan, 108.

donations of support from the white community, she receives more from an almost implausible Progressive Era source, at least from the white supremacy point of view. Rice writes, “a lame old negro who brought a quarter, [said] ‘Maria done tole me what was writ in de papah ‘bout dat por child,’ he was saying. ‘I sutenly do feel sorry fer he’s maw. I ain’t got much, but I tole Maria I guess we could do without somethin’ to gib a quahter.’”<sup>500</sup> In writing this, Rice managed to hit a Progressive Era white supremacist home run. First, through her use of dialect she established her distance and superiority over African-Americans and their otherness. As scholar Dana L Fox points out “the savage savage [was] a stereotype, but the noble savage [was], too. Both [were] designed to set up borders,” and maintain distance from the white community.<sup>501</sup> Second, by having an African-American contribute charitable support, Rice provided reassurances to white middle-class society that poor African-Americans were themselves in no need of philanthropic assistance, which reinforced the status quo of excluding the black community from altruistic relief. And third, Rice insults the otherness of the poor white Wiggs family for actually needing the assistance of lowly African-Americans living under Jim Crow. And she accomplished all of this without the slightest suggestion that these were her own small-minded beliefs.

The African-Americans in Rice’s novel were all stereotypes, they were servants living in a caste system, not all that far removed from antebellum slavery, working for noble wealthy whites. Like in many Progressive Era novels, Rice’s African-Americans were portrayed as naïve, childlike and petty—Mammies, all fat and meddlesome, and

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<sup>500</sup> Hegan, 43-44.

<sup>501</sup> Dana L. Fox, and Kathy G. Short, eds. *Stories Matter: The Complexity of Cultural Authenticity in Children’s Literature* (Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 2003), 109.

Uncle Toms, all obedient and broken. Rice also offers an explanation as to the poverty and White Otherness of the Wiggs by erroneously concocting that the flawed and alcoholic Mr. Wiggs had “real Injun blood,” and that he was often confused as a “Dago.”<sup>502</sup> Both of these Progressive Era racist terms were used to describe someone less than authentically white. Rice had these words come from Mrs. Wiggs herself, not the high-minded socialite Lucy Olcott. Rice even used her weak-minded Mammy servant to question the Wiggs’ whiteness. In the book, Rice wrote, “The old darky grinned...’What you want be follin’ ‘round wif dat po’ white trash fer?’”<sup>503</sup> All of these images were from the mind of Alice Hegan Rice, defender of her race and class, and crusader for the Progressive Era status quo. They were words of the symbolic power of representation, which affirmed the notions of those with the power to portray and demeaned those that held no such power.

### *White Trash*

Alice Hegan Rice’s use of dialect in her portrayal of Mary Bass, not only marked clear class distinctions, but questioned her racial as status as well. By identifying Mrs. Wiggs as white trash, Alice Hegan Rice also identified Mary Bass and her family as the same. Mary Bass as a young woman, along with her husband William, were part of the post Reconstruction disfranchisement in the South of not only recently emancipated blacks, but also many poor white farmers who were forced to deal with “the emergence of coercive forms of agricultural labor [that] signaled the beginning of a new era of social relations.”<sup>504</sup> The Bass family were part of an “an economically driven white migration,”

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<sup>502</sup> Hegan, 106.

<sup>503</sup> Ibid, 99-100.

<sup>504</sup> Matt Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 19.

or as scholar Mike Hill terms “poor white diaspora” from rural centers to the industrializing big city.<sup>505</sup> Hill argues that this diaspora was critical in the forming of white identities and that “white trash was just one of the many hateful names given to those who seemed out of place, who seemed to pose a threat to the existing economic and social order.”<sup>506</sup> In other words if upright white people were struggling then poverty could not be justified. But if its victims were somehow less than white, then their poverty may be merited. Scholar Elizabeth Ammons stresses the Progressive Era notions of race were not firmly fixed and could not be simply divided into issues of black and white. She argues that “race needs to be seen as an unstable and decentered complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle.”<sup>507</sup> As a commentary of capitalistic Progressive Era social relations, Mike Hill argues that white trash can be seen as both a “way of naming actually existing white people who occupy the economic and social margins of American life, and [as] a set of myths and stereotypes that justify their continued marginalization.”<sup>508</sup> A term like white trash directly associates racism with class, emphasizing “economic difference,” that suggests that poverty itself was one the worst things a person could be accused of possessing.<sup>509</sup> A Philadelphia newspaper that reviewed *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* upon its release, described it as a view of the “half-pathetic, half-absurd, and wholly improvident ‘po whites’ of Kentucky.”<sup>510</sup> In *Lovey Mary*, Alice Hegan Rice implies that with a little morality and protestant work

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<sup>505</sup> Mike Hill, *Whiteness: A Critical Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 182.

<sup>506</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>507</sup> Ammons, xv-xvi.

<sup>508</sup> Hill, 172.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, 169-70.

<sup>510</sup> Untitled, undated newspaper clipping, handwritten as *Philadelphia* from Alice Hegan Rice’s Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

ethic, the poor could be “livin’ like white folks” in a matter of weeks.<sup>511</sup> Scholar Matt Wray notes that “for much of its long history, *white trash* has been used by Americans of all colors to humiliate and shame, to insult and dishonor, to demean and stigmatize.”<sup>512</sup> Alice Hegan Rice from her perch was comfortable in her position and moral standing to freely *demean, stigmatize, and racialize* Mary Bass and her children.

#### *Representation Through Dialect*

Of all the sins apparent in Alice Hegan Rice’s writing of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* the belittling representation of the poor, both white and black through the use of dialect, remains the most glaringly obvious. Susan Moeller notes that Progressive Era reformist “cultural representations of the poor shared a common trait: they were all attempts by the dominant power groups to impose order and control on the other half.”<sup>513</sup> Scholar Dana Fox notes that problems often arise when an author writes about another culture and the author “unconsciously imposes their own perspective onto the depicted culture with an attitude of cultural arrogance.”<sup>514</sup> Scholar Gavin Jones claims that “literature reveals how poverty is established, defined, and understood in discourse, as psychological problems that depends fundamentally on the language used to describe it.”<sup>515</sup> Rice, by extensively using dialect to represent the poor residents of the Cabbage Patch, was not identifying with their struggle, but separating herself from it. Rice was readily aware of the problem as she saved an article in her scrapbook which stated that

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<sup>511</sup> Rice, *Lovely Mary* 64.

<sup>512</sup> Wray, 1.

<sup>513</sup> Moeller, 12.

<sup>514</sup> Fox, 18.

<sup>515</sup> Jones, 4.

“nobody likes to be ‘wrote up’ in dialect.”<sup>516</sup> But Rice was proud of her perceived literary skills in the use of dialect and as late as 1921 wrote to another author praising his use of dialect. Rice wrote, “I especially like the reality of your dialogue. Until one attempts to do dialect he never knows how difficult it is to do successfully.”<sup>517</sup> It would be hard to argue that Alice Hegan Rice did not use dialect successively in purely a financial sense due the mass popularity of her books, but to confuse that with reflecting reality is something altogether different. For example, in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, Mrs. Wiggs son, on his deathbed, says “Well, I *bin* thinking’ it over. If I ain’t better in the mornin’, I guess” we should get help.<sup>518</sup> Phonetically there is no difference between the spelling Rice used in word of “bin” and the implied word of “been,” they are both pronounced exactly the same according to Webster’s dictionary. So Rice’s use of dialect was not so much an accurate portrayal of the way the Bass’ spoke, but instead an instrument used by design to imply a lack of education as if the words themselves coming out of their mouths were misspelled. And Rice seemed to have no conscious apprehension about inferring the Bass/Wiggs’ lack of refinement as even in the books most heartbreaking scene as Mrs. Wiggs’ son was actively dying, Rice laid the dialect on thick by having Mrs. Wiggs say “I’m so skeered.”<sup>519</sup> Rice possessed no modern sense of literary ethics in a number of ways, but her use of dialect was all the rage in the Progressive Era. Critic James L Ford, in 1921 reflected back on this trend he called “the

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<sup>516</sup> Untitled, undated newspaper clipping from Alice Hegan Rice’s Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

<sup>517</sup> Alice Hegan Rice to Laban Lacy Rice, 1921, quoted in Mary Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch: The Literary World of Alice Hegan Rice* (Louisville, KY: Butler Books, 2010), 216.

<sup>518</sup> Hegan, 28.

<sup>519</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26.

dialect rash” of the turn-of the-century.<sup>520</sup> Ford stressed that “during its prevalence stories of the pitiful nature found a ready market so long as they were spelt wrong and, as the vulgates of the various races of the earth became exhausted, fraudulent ones, the products of fertile minds, replaced them.”<sup>521</sup> Rice’s use of dialect confirms her true feelings regarding the poor—they were there for her amusement and to elevate her sense of self.

### *Class Humor and Authenticity*

Clearly Progressive Era popular culture found the lives of the poor entertaining and ideal situational humor certainly worth mocking. *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* is held together by “an upper-class love story as a structural thread.”<sup>522</sup> If “personal fulfillment in love is what heroes are looking for” according to Erik Lofroth, then the hero of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* is the young socialite, not Mrs. Wiggs. This is a story about Alice Hegan Rice, just as much as Mary Bass. Rice in fact demonstrated rather pronouncedly how humorous she thought love among the poor was in her short story *Cupid Goes Slumming*. Certainly the theater scene in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* is another attempt at class-based humor. As Scholar Gillian Avery points out “theater was considered “inappropriate for people of Wiggs’ station,” thus humor ensues when the low-class poor enter high society.<sup>523</sup> But class based humor was prevalent throughout the Progressive Era, and certainly not limited to Alice Hegan Rice’s frivolous flapdoodle. Even the *Courier-Journal* in the first article written about Alice Hegan Rice as author of the new book *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* in jest described the book’s characters as follows, “Wiggs is the name of the family who are leaders in social life of

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<sup>520</sup> Ford, 119, 122-23.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid.

<sup>522</sup> Bargainnier, 152.

<sup>523</sup> Avery, 170.

that aristocratic quarter.”<sup>524</sup> Even journalists at the *Courier-Journal* felt comfortable mocking poverty in the Progressive Era; it was that prevalent.

The paradox of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* lies in its mix of the occasional genuinely authentic moments and its forced humor and awkward class and race dynamics. Rice was at her best when she was drawing from her actual experience with Mary Bass and her family. For instance, the death scene of young Billy, even with its horrible dialectic treatment, remains very moving and real, and this was because it really happened and Rice experienced it. Several of Mrs. Wiggs' humorous, interesting and unusual sayings still ring true, because they were authentic representations of Mary Bass. Remember that Rice mentioned in her autobiography that Mary Bass was “gay and courageous, and her sayings and doings became part of our family history.”<sup>525</sup> Even the scene with Mrs. Wiggs attempting to teach Sunday School to some easily distracted children rings true, not because this actually happened to Mary Bass, but likely because it happened to Rice. Alice Hegan Rice taught Sunday School and probably had the fruitless experience of trying to keep children interested. It's certainly more likely than imagining Mary Bass trying to conduct a Sunday School service in her home in the Cabbage Patch. Regardless it comes off as real and it works. Alice Hegan Rice once remarked in an interview that “the Cabbage Patch is full of stories,” as this was Rice's sweet spot.<sup>526</sup> But at other times when Rice has the poor of the Cabbage Patch hold a benefit dance to raise money for a Cabbage Patch boy who lost his peg leg, it just comes off as absurd. The

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<sup>524</sup> Brief Points About People,” *Courier-Journal*, May 24, 1901, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1015677039).

<sup>525</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 45.

<sup>526</sup> “Alice Hegan Rice,” *Outlook Magazine*, December, 1902, Rice Collection MSS 47 B4 F4, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University.

benefit dance was a large part of Rice's life as a young socialite growing up in elite Louisville and she mixed it into her Cabbage Patch story. When Rice said that "the characters were not real, but made up of the characteristics of many different people," she was not completely lying, but she was stretching a pointless truth and placing emphasis on the wrong aspect.<sup>527</sup> Rice chose a fair amount of her material from reality—hers and Mary Bass', but she mixed it with her own prejudices and flawed attempts at humor. Rice simply was not that good of a writer. This point becomes apparent to any modern reader, who bothers to suffer through her crude prose. The parts where she succeeded were real, and the parts where she failed were emblematic of her own deficiencies, both as a writer and human being. Rice took a story of heroism and heartbreak and made it childish tale, even the illustrations in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* and *Lovey Mary* function merely as caricatures and cartoons, which speak, to the stories overall lack of authenticity. These were fables for the Progressive Era middle-class, a product of the biases of the time period.

### *Mirror, Mirror*

Nothing adds contrast to Alice Hegan Rice's demeaning portrait of Louisville's poor quite like the way she chose to represent herself in these novels. Scholar Mary Boewe notes that "in Louisville, everyone knew that Mrs. Bass was the model for Mrs. Wiggs, but few recognized Alice Hegan Rice as the model for Lucy Olcott, the tenderhearted socialite."<sup>528</sup> In *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, the character of Lucy Olcott, due to her association with Christmas philanthropy, the Wiggsses called her the

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<sup>527</sup> Alfred Steineker, "Interview Mrs. Rice." *The Clarion* 3, no. 2 (Louisville: Training Department of the Louisville Normal School, 1934), 1, Alice Hegan Rice Papers – Mary Boewe Collection – Box 3 of 3 - University of Louisville Archives and Records Center.

<sup>528</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 49-50.

“Christmas lady.”<sup>529</sup> This label associates Olcott/Rice with Christ—a savior. At other times in the novels Olcott/Rice was called a “fallen angel,” or described as looking “like a saint.”<sup>530</sup> Rice appears at times to be writing her own hagiography, reinforcing “the perspective of social distance,” from the poor and dispelling any rumors that the meek will inherit the earth.<sup>531</sup> In Rice’s hands, God’s chosen people were presumed by the virtue and honor of their aristocratic lineage. But Rice’s self-praise doesn’t stop at divinity comparisons, rooms literally light up when she walks in and dim when she leaves. A prime example comes from the scene in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* in which the *Christmas Lady* first introduces herself to the Wiggs family:

A knock on the parlor door interrupted her. [Mrs. Wiggs] hastily dried her eyes and smoothed her hair. Jim went to the door. “I’ve a Christmas basket for you!” cried a *cheery voice*. “Is it Christmas?” Jim asked dully. The girl in the doorway *laughed*. She was *tall and slender*, but Jim could only see a pair of *sparkling eyes* between the brim of the hat and her high fur collar. *It was nice to hear her laugh, though; it made things seem warmer somehow*. The colored man behind her deposited a large basket on the doorstep... “Well,” she said doubtfully, “if you ever want—to come to see me, ask for Miss Lucy Olcott at Terrace Park. Good night, and a happy Christmas!” She was gone, and *the doorway looked very black and lonesome in consequence*. But there was the big basket to prove she was not merely an *apparition*, and it took both Jim and his mother to carry it in.<sup>532</sup>

This scene emphasized the nature of privilege and inequality that was common to Rice, her poor defined as dull, dingy, hunched, improvident, and often shiftless, her African-Americans perpetually in servitude, while she remained effervescent. Olcott/Rice becomes the answer to the prayers of the Cabbage, in turn she achieves fulfillment, and serves as an example for thousands of catchpenny middle-class white women dabbling in

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<sup>529</sup>Hegan, 28.

<sup>530</sup> Rice, *Lovey Mary*, 47; Hegan, 32.

<sup>531</sup> Giamo, 55.

<sup>532</sup> Hegan, 19-23: Italics added for emphasis.

humanitarianism. Rice served as the shining example of middle-class enlightenment in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, claiming that:

Lucy Olcott became an important personage in the neighborhood. She was sought for advice, called upon for comfort, and asked to share many joys...And the friendship of these simple people opened her eyes to the great problems of humanity, and as she worked among them and knew life as it was, the hard little bud of her girlhood blossomed into the great soft rose of womanhood.<sup>533</sup>

But Olcott/Rice's awaking reflected more her own self-importance than any empathetic revelation of the harsh realities that lay just outside the comforts of her own exclusive community. Her words expressed her status much more than her compassion. Rice was serving her own narcissism more than the needs of the community she professed to champion. Much like the addition of the iron works plant to the Cabbage Patch, which placed the neighborhood in jeopardy of increasing fire hazard, relief efforts by dilettante white middle-class reformers were often self-serving and a burden to the poor communities they purported to serve. In many ways the subjects of reform efforts had no voice in dictating actions that would serve to help change their own condition.

#### *Romanticizing the Cabbage Patch*

Alice Hegan Rice's romantic representation of the Cabbage Patch set well with many Progressive Era readers, whose image of poverty was distant and abridged. For many these fragmentary images of the Cabbage Patch remained for years after the publication of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. There was an ongoing, unhealthy and misinformed fascination with slum dwellers throughout the Progressive Era.<sup>534</sup> Scholar Benedict Giomo notes that the "special segregation" between the slums and cities'

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<sup>533</sup> Hegan, 119.

<sup>534</sup> Bremner, 67.

aristocratic quarters “translated into the condition of social distance which shrouded poverty with a sense” of the mystical and unknown.<sup>535</sup> A 1919 article in the *Courier-Journal* spoke of the “frazzled beauty of the Cabbage Patch,” and suggested for the benefit of middle-class slummers that:

Without going to the extent of putting up ropes and charging two-bits a throw to see the spots of special literary merit, the Cabbage Patch might show herself more and put out just a little more affability—for the Cabbage Patch has a wonderful reputation to live up to. Isn't there someone to tell the Cabbage Patch that it is one of the wonders of the World?<sup>536</sup>

The belief aroused by Progressive Era literature that the poor were somehow “more real and natural than those in prosperous circumstance” often served to perpetuate poverty.<sup>537</sup>

For example, an article in the *Louisville Times* in 1919 somewhat lamented the city's extension of services such as paved streets, sewers, utilities and other amenities to the Cabbage Patch. The article stated:

The particular pity of this particular case is that we have no right to bemoan the march of progress into the sainted precincts of the Cabbage Patch. We have no right to wish picturesque hardship onto fellow-humans in order that our craving for poetry may be gratified...In this situation, then, let us render thanks that Mrs. Rice has recorded the Cabbage Patch in an undying fashion. Let us treasure Mrs. Wiggs as tenderly as may be. Let her be enshrined upon the most secure of library shelves, to the end and when the millennium comes, making all things perfect, we shall be able to turn the pages and recall a day when people were still people.<sup>538</sup>

Even Alice Hegan Rice confessed apprehensions that the improvements destroyed all The Cabbage Patch's “picturesque if unsavory characteristics.”<sup>539</sup> But the middle-class of

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<sup>535</sup> Giamo, 31.

<sup>536</sup> Homer Dye, Jr., “Cultivating the Cabbage Patch,” January 12, 1919.

<sup>537</sup> Bremner, 167.

<sup>538</sup> “Fancy Under Progress Tread,” *Louisville Times*, June 17, 1919, Alice Hegan Rice Papers – Scrapbook - University of Louisville Archives and Records Center.

<sup>539</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 101-02.

Louisville had no interest in slum reality, only in its idealization. Recall the aristocrat Emily Smith, who's "philanthropic impulses received a shock" from Mary Bass and soon brought suit against her.<sup>540</sup> The reality was Emily Smith could have looked anywhere in the Cabbage Patch and found a family in need, but she possessed no interest in fulfilling any real need, only her need for melodrama. Emily Smith loved the story of the poor, not the reality, and her views were shared by many.

Upper-class Louisville's enchantment with the romantic theatre of the Wiggs story sometimes revealed an egregious insensitivity to the struggles of poverty by the city's wealthy elite. For instance, a group of self-obsessed, well-heeled Louisville housewives fashioned the Wiggs drama into a vulgar display of wealth for their own amusement. A Louisville newspaper described the high society event as follows:

The Cabbage Patch was entertaining at a six o'clock dinner at the home of Mrs. Lee Miller, who is the organization... The Cabbage Patch is a new social organization comprising seven young women, who have taken unto themselves names from the characters of that popular story... These names (of the characters) were very religiously used at the club meeting... The table was set for six and presented a truly beautiful appearance... The centerpiece was an enormous cabbage, hollowed out, and from the capacious interior of which white and green ribbons ran to each plate... [The menu consisted of] Orange Glance, Huitres a l'ecaille, Pom de terre, Biscuits, Saumours, Olives, Poutels, Croquets au Pommes de Terre, Pain Beurre, Salad et Biscuits au Framoge, Salade au Fruit Bisciuts de champagne, Café a la Crème, Bon Bons... One of the unique features of the dinner was the fact that the salad was served in very tiny cabbages, the centres of which were cut out, forming the daintiest little cups imaginable... The Miller orchestra rendered delightful music throughout the repast.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>540</sup> "Emptied Slop Jar on Her. Famous 'Mrs. Wiggs' in Court," *Charlotte Daily Observer* (Charlotte, North Carolina), April 30, 1904.

<sup>541</sup> "The Cabbage Patch Dined," undated newspaper clipping from Alice Hegan Rice's Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

The Louisville socialites' French menu, representing a family that hovered on brink of starvation, was worthy of the Court of Versailles, perhaps they saved cake for the actual residents of the Cabbage Patch. Scholar Gavin Jones argues that the "distance that makes poverty seem beautiful can easily contract into a belief that social difference is really cultural degeneration."<sup>542</sup> Alice Hegan Rice's representation of the Cabbage Patch confirmed notions of class and racial superiority and for that it was celebrated and revered in a backward Progressive Era city that placed no value on diversity, and held no credible desire to learn anymore about it.

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<sup>542</sup> Jones, 68.

## CHAPTER 9: CITIZEN RICE

### *In Her Blood*

Alice Hegan Rice as the wildly successful author of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* carved a niche in the history of Louisville and Kentucky.<sup>543</sup> Almost all broadly written histories of Kentucky, at least, mention her and praise her as a woman who dedicated her life to poor people of Louisville.



*Alice Hegan Rice circa 1902.*<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> Kleber, 761.

<sup>544</sup> Rice Collection, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University. Unlike Mary Bass, Alice Hegan Rice was able to elegantly control her own self-image as demonstrated by this portrait.

She was born Alice Caldwell Hegan in 1870 in Shelbyville, Kentucky on her grandfather's estate. She was the only daughter of a wealthy Louisville merchant. Her father's business often sent him on trips abroad and due to this she spent three years of her childhood living in the largest and most lavish hotel in Louisville, the Galt House, with her mother and brother. A hotel that Alice fondly recalled "bespoke the luxury and elegance of the old South."<sup>545</sup> As a wealthy socialite in a big little town, Alice, while a teenager and young adult, often made the Louisville society pages, which announced her attending parties, entertaining guests, or going on vacations. Alice was proud of her pedigree, in her autobiography she claimed that:

On my father's side I come of a high-living, hard-riding Celtic family whose chief ornament was Sir Edward Colson, the British philanthropist. He was called The Merchant Prince of Bristol, and his charities were known far and wide. Most of his wealth had been obtained by his sailing ships which brought treasures from the Orient.<sup>546</sup>

However, Alice failed to mention the nature of the treasures aboard Sir Edward Colson's merchant ships as his wealth came directly from the slave trade.<sup>547</sup> But Alice was also proud of the lineage on her mother's side as well. She longingly recalled her childhood on her grandfather's plantation:

My Grandfather, Judge James Caldwell [lived in] a big friendly house among the trees, glowing with light and ringing with laughter... There was a long cellar lined with barrels full of pickles, and apples, and molasses, shelves upon shelves of preserves, jams, and jellies. In the kitchen, black Aunt Charity, enormously fat, seemed always in the act of mixing a cake, the batter being left in the bowl for the children... In back of the cow pasture was a creek, clear in name only, where we waded and paddled, and on whose banks we sat spellbound while a young mulatto nurse recounted

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<sup>545</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 10.

<sup>546</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>547</sup> Nigel Pocock and Victoria Cook, "The Business of Enslavement," BBC Web, last modified February 17, 2011, [bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/slavery\\_business\\_gallery\\_10.shtml.html](http://bbc.co.uk/history/british/abolition/slavery_business_gallery_10.shtml.html).

the doings of Brer Fox and Brer Rabbit a couple of years before Joel Chandler Harris put them on paper.<sup>548</sup>

Alice didn't question how a young mulatto nurse came to be living on her grandfather's estate, but a proud heritage indeed she claimed. Alice Hegan Rice's ancestral line, much like that old plantation creek of her youth, was unclouded in name only. However, Rice's prose engaged a segregated Progressive Era market that embraced racist stereotypes to attract readers. Her memories of plantation life fit into the romantic view of slavery that many white Americans embraced long after the Civil War. And the gross popularity of her novels serve as evidence that white supremacy was the embraceable norm for much of white middle-class popular culture in the Progressive Era.

*Marriage, The New Woman, and Race Suicide*

Alice Hegan Rice was an example of the Progressive Era New Woman, a change in gender roles, which intimidated and infuriated many men of her time period. She postponed marriage until her thirties, rejected motherhood, and as an author made her own living.<sup>549</sup> Alice married her longtime paramour Cale Young Rice, a Harvard educated, unemployed poet, only after she had acquired the wealth to support him through her publications.<sup>550</sup> In fact, her fame allowed either by her name or by her personal finance the publication of Cale Young Rice's prolific doggerel. Cale was oblivious, delusional, self-obsessed and referred to himself as "the foremost poet of his country."<sup>551</sup> Though he was well-published, his efforts never sold well, or received

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<sup>548</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 8.

<sup>549</sup> Ammons, xx-xxi.

<sup>550</sup> Boewe, "Aunt Tiny's Denominational Garden," 17.

<sup>551</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 203.

critical American acclaim. In fact, in 1912, a New York Times review questioned his notoriety, stating:

When a poet has already accomplished the composition of at least seven volumes of verse, all of which have been published by one the largest firms in the country, one naturally assumes the possession on his part of a larger share of esthetic and intellectual merit than is present in most of our American producers. Such an assumption would be misleading in the case of Mr. Rice, although Mr. Rice is certainly a remarkable young man. He appears to be the one poet in America who experiences no difficulty whatsoever in getting his work published.<sup>552</sup>

With Alice serving as the breadwinner, Cale found himself the butt of some Progressive Era jokes. Newspapers sometimes referred to him as “Mr. Alice Caldwell Hegan Rice.”<sup>553</sup> And although Theodore Roosevelt admired Alice Hegan Rice, it’s hard to imagine that Cale, a childless bard, who relied on his wife’s support measured up to Teddy’s definition of strenuous manhood. Roosevelt like many white males of his generation was distressed by the concept of race suicide, a fear brought on by declining birthrates, and anxiety regarding effeminacy as a result of over-civilization.<sup>554</sup> The term was coined by sociologist Edward A. Ross in 1901, who was concerned that “the same manly virtues which had once allowed the ‘Superior Race’ to evolve the highest civilization now threatened that race’s very survival.”<sup>555</sup> Cale represented the very embodiment of these Progressive Era worries over the future of white manhood.

Alice Hegan Rice was a modern woman, in many ways ahead of her time, who worked to support her family. Though the Rices never had children, Alice demonstrated

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<sup>552</sup> “Doubtful Poetry,” *New York Times*, April 14, 1912, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (97351362).

<sup>553</sup> “Meeting of Famous Men. Result of Mutual Introduction in a smoking Car,” *Rising Sun* (Kansas City, Missouri), September 4, 1903, NewsBank/Readex, Database: America’s Historical Newspapers (12CE390EC0C53C78).

<sup>554</sup> Bederman, 200.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid.*

her agency in an Era that would normally have limited her to the domestic sphere, she worked until her death to support her husband and their lifestyle. As demonstrated by a letter written by a dear friend of the Rices, Ida Tarbell to a grieving Cale upon Alice's death, Tarbell wrote, "I loved Alice devotedly, part of that devotion was born of her love and care of you—her unselfish pride in your work and life—her desire to protect and sustain you."<sup>556</sup> Alice knew the difficulties women faced in the professional world, but her views were often hampered by her class and wealth. In her autobiography she admitted that "there is no doubt about it that it is more difficult for a woman to follow a career than for a man...If she be a writer, she may have to interrupt the most impassioned love scene to tell the cook whether the chicken should be broiled or fried."<sup>557</sup> Rice clearly held opulent distorted notions of what true difficulty entailed.

*Progressive Era Themes in Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*

Beyond the clear reform themes addressed in *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*, Alice Hegan Rice focused on other Progressive matters as well. At the turn-of-the-century "concern with poverty was usually accompanied by hostility to liquor."<sup>558</sup> Though Louisville was world famous and quite prosperous for its Kentucky bourbon whisky, prohibition found a great deal of support in Louisville in groups such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League.<sup>559</sup> Prohibition forces promoted the idea that "drinking destroyed families" and those same themes were woven into the fabric of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*.<sup>560</sup> Temperance was an objective for

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<sup>556</sup> Ida Tarbell to Cale Young Rice, February 24, 1942, Alice Hegan Rice Papers – Mary Boewe Collection – Box 3 of 3 – University of Louisville Archive and Records Center.

<sup>557</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 100.

<sup>558</sup> Bremner, 80.

<sup>559</sup> Harrison, 278.

<sup>560</sup> *Ibid.*, 279.

Rice in her writing of the novel and her words may have had some effect on the movement if not in the novel's morality tale, then perhaps in terminology. The expression "On the Wagon," comes from *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. Prior to paved street water carts were used to dampen dry dirt roads to prevent them from becoming too dusty. Therefore, the expression, "on the water cart," or "on the water wagon" was taken to mean that "someone had vowed or at least promised to stop drinking intoxicating beverages in favor of the comparably harmless habit of drinking water only."<sup>561</sup> *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* contains the "first known published appearance of the 'water cart' phrase," when the character of Mr. Dick says "I'm on the water-cart."<sup>562</sup> In the novel, Rice shows Mrs. Wiggs moving on without her husband and does this by creating temperance tract, stating "When Mr. Wiggs traveled to eternity by the alcohol route, she buried his faults with him."<sup>563</sup> Temperance was part of the Progressive Era doctrine that Rice was clearly endorsing.

The United States budding imperialism in the Progressive Era also finds quarter in Rice's novel. At the turn-of-the-century, following the designs of the great nations of Europe, and justifications of the White Man's Burden ideology that claimed the duty of Anglo-Saxons to "civilize racialized others" in efforts of promote colonization, the United States began imperialist expansion.<sup>564</sup> The Spanish-American War of 1898 had "united the nation's North and South and Kentucky in a great wave of patriotism and nationalism."<sup>565</sup> The war allowed for and justified U.S. imperialist expansion into Cuba,

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<sup>561</sup> John Peterson, *In Praise of Phrases* (Lexington, KY: Wisp Press, 2012), 172.

<sup>562</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>563</sup> Hegan, 4.

<sup>564</sup> Ammons, xvi.

<sup>565</sup> Hood, 29.

the Philippines, Mexico, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Samoa.<sup>566</sup> The ideology was so prevalent in the Progressive Era that even Rice found a way to embrace it in an unconventional way. In a scene in the book which clearly never happened and involves Mrs. Wiggs somewhat mystically bringing a dying horse left for dead in the street back to life and then naming or in this case misnaming the horse after a geographic location. In the book Mrs. Wiggs says “We’ll call him Cuby! It’s a town I heard ‘em talkin’ ‘bout at the grocery.”<sup>567</sup> In a chapter entitled, “The Annexation of Cuby,” Rice illustrates:

And thus Cuba, like his geographical namesake, emerged from the violent ordeal of reconstruction with a mangled constitution, internal dissension, a decided preponderance of foreign element, but a firm and abiding trust in the new power with which his fortunes had been irrevocably cast.<sup>568</sup>

Alice Hegan Rice’s *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* was in many ways the embodiment of popular Progressive Era ideology, and a testament to the foundational racism present in U.S. imperialist policy.

#### *The Continuous Good Fortune of Mrs. Wiggs*

Alice Hegan Rice wrote more than twenty novels in her lifetime, though she never again achieved the success brought about by *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. However, she successfully rode Mrs. Wiggs coattails into the year’s top ten best sellers with *Lovey Mary* in 1903 and her third novel *Sandy* in 1905.<sup>569</sup> Her future successes all relied on her reputation as the author of her first book, and every book thereafter featured right below the title on the front cover “by the author of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*.” Scholar Mary Boewe states firmly that “never again did [Rice] invent a character who would

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<sup>566</sup> Ammons, xvi.

<sup>567</sup> Hegan, 52-3.

<sup>568</sup> Ibid., 52-3.

<sup>569</sup> Hackett, 66.

equal Mrs. Wiggs of Louisville's Cabbage Patch."<sup>570</sup> By the early 1920s her brand of "personal tragedy wrapped in bittersweet optimism" had fallen out of fashion with the rise of modernism as bestsellers became more complex and recognizable by today's standards.<sup>571</sup> Rice, however, never escaped the shadow of Mrs. Wiggs as reviews of all of her subsequent works were always compared unfavorably to her first. For instance in 1929 a newspaper reviewing her latest novel *The Buffer* concluded that "when an author creates one immortal character, all [her] others are more or less bound to stand or fall by it, Alice Hegan Rice's *The Buffer* is not a second Mrs. Wiggs."<sup>572</sup> Even in death Mrs. Wiggs followed Alice Hegan Rice, the cover of a 1942 issue of the *Louisville Times* held the caption, "Author of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* and many other novels and short stories, Mrs. Alice Hegan Rice, 72 Died of a Heart Attack Last Night at Her Home."<sup>573</sup>

Alice Hegan Rice made a fortune off of the sales of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* and to her it was a gift that kept on giving. In May of 1902, the book produced royalties of over \$2200.00, by November the monthly royalties were close to \$7000, and by May of 1903, Alice Hegan Rice received a royalty check for almost \$33,000—all of this in the days before income tax and when the salary for a local schoolteacher was roughly "\$35-\$65 per month."<sup>574</sup> The book was translated into German, French, Danish,

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<sup>570</sup> Boewe, "Back to the Cabbage Patch: The Character of Mrs. Wiggs," 186.

<sup>571</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 93; Lofroth, 182.

<sup>572</sup> Eleanor E. Nolen, "Human Story in New Rice Book: Characterization in 'The Buffer' Fine; Not Equal to Mrs. Wiggs," *Wilmington Every Evening*, April 20, 1929, Rice Collection MSS 47 B4 F3, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University.

<sup>573</sup> "Mrs. Rice was at Work until Day Before Death," *Louisville Times*, February 11, 1942, Rice Collection MSS 47 B4 F3, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University.

<sup>574</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 32, 43-44.

Dutch, Swedish, Japanese, Chinese and even into Braille.<sup>575</sup> In fact, Helen Keller even sent Alice Hegan Rice a letter expressing that she would like to meet her.<sup>576</sup> The play *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* “ran for seven consecutive seasons in American, sometimes with three road companies playing simultaneously; for two seasons in London, and one in Australia. It continued in stock for over thirty years,” and ran on Broadway for over 150 performances.<sup>577</sup> In February of 1919, Alice Hegan Rice gained publicity by taking more than five-hundred Louisville orphans to see the first motion picture version of the book.<sup>578</sup> In 1925 Alice Hegan Rice “learned of the sixty-second printing of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. For more than twenty-four years its monthly sales had equaled that of many new novels, including her own.”<sup>579</sup> In the early 1930s, when times were financially tight due to the stock market crash, Alice Hegan Rice sold the original hand written manuscript of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* for \$1500.<sup>580</sup> In 1931, during the heart the Great Depression, Rice sold the talking rights for *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* to Paramount Pictures for \$7500.<sup>581</sup> And in 1934, the film starring W.C. Fields made its gala premier to a thrilled Louisville audience.

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<sup>575</sup> Ward, 52.

<sup>576</sup> University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

<sup>577</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 175; Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 60-61.

<sup>578</sup> “Author of ‘Mrs. Wiggs’ Goes to Movie with Orphans,” *Courier-Journal*, February 27, 1919, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1036959586).

<sup>579</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 284.

<sup>580</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, 277.



*Louisville Premier of Film 1934.*<sup>582</sup>

Also during the heart of the Great Depression, Rice sold the radio rights to of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* to Superior Radio Artists for \$1200 for a national radio program that ran from 1936-1938.<sup>583</sup> Nearly four decades after its initial release sales of *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* were outperforming the release of her most recent novel *Our Ernie*. In 1940 the sales of the book alone were still generating nearly \$1800, that represents over \$33,000 in 2016 money.<sup>584</sup> In 1942 at the time of her death and at a time

<sup>582</sup> University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Digital Collection.

<sup>583</sup> Alice Hegan Rice Personal Banking Ledger, Rice Collection MSS 47 B1 F10, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University; “Today on the Radio,” *New York Times*, October 14, 1936, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (101689046).

<sup>584</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 337-338.

of great financial insecurity, Alice Hegan Rice left a stock portfolio to her husband worth the equivalent of 1.7 million in today's money, even though they had spent frivolously throughout their married lives, and lost a great deal of their fortune during the stock market crash of 1929.<sup>585</sup> In 1950, nearly five decades after its release the *New York Times* ran an article claiming that most novels had a short shelf-life, but “scratch any publisher’s backlist and you will also find a few old-time best sellers that have never lost their popularity. For example, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch* now in its eighty-second printing.”<sup>586</sup> As Alice Hegan Rice scholar Mary Boewe affirms that “the problem with Alice Hegan Rice’s fiction—there is no character even remotely the equivalent of Mrs. Wiggs.”<sup>587</sup>

#### *The Plush Life of Alice Hegan Rice*

Alice Hegan Rice lived a pampered existence from the moment of her birth. The child of a wealthy businessman, a flowering socialite and debutante, she like many of her class in Louisville floated through a life of extravagance, secure in her place and did what was expected of a person of her station, by “supporting the charitable efforts for the poor” without questioning poverty’s deeper causes.<sup>588</sup> But once she became a novelist, writing about the Cabbage Patch, it opened to her a “world of romance” that seemed like a “Cinderella tale,” even to her.<sup>589</sup>

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<sup>585</sup> Estate of Alice Hegan Rice, Deceased. Appraisal and Inventory, March 26, 1942 - Alice Hegan Rice Papers – Mary Boewe Collection - University of Louisville Archives and Records Center.

<sup>586</sup> David Dempsey, “Those Hidden Best Sellers,” *New York Times*, December 3, 1950, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (111714827).

<sup>587</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 336-37.

<sup>588</sup> Klotter, 7.

<sup>589</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 1.

She and her husband lived in luxury in a spacious home in the exclusive St. James Court neighborhood. Stately and intimidating lion statues guarded the entrance of St. James Court, an isolated residential community “shaded by linden and chestnut trees. An atmosphere of elegance was everywhere, from the large stone and brick homes with their heavy hand-carved doors, lace curtains, and wine cellars, to the carriages with uniformed coachmen waiting on call.”<sup>590</sup> St. James Court housed the members of “Louisville’s elite including members of the DuPont family,” and former congressmen and mayors.<sup>591</sup> Rice had on her staff several “colored maids,” a cook, a laundress, and a chauffeur.<sup>592</sup> In a 1916 article about the Rice’s St. James Court home, the reporter noted that “St. James Court [was] not far from the Cabbage Patch as the pigeon flies, but...far removed in caste and circumstances.”<sup>593</sup> Indeed, for the resident philanthropists of St. James Court, the Cabbage Patch was a short *round trip ticket*, but for the residents of the Cabbage Patch—St. James Court may as well have been the moon.

Alice Hegan Rice and her husband loved to travel, and did so extensively throughout their marriage save for when inconveniences like the First World War interrupted their busy globetrotting schedules.<sup>594</sup> The Rices made several trips around the world, some of them lasting as long as a full year.<sup>595</sup> The *New York Times* reported in 1903 in an article entitled the “Profitable Mrs. Wiggs,” that “when she returned from her

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<sup>590</sup> Klotter, 9.

<sup>591</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 112; Klotter, 6.

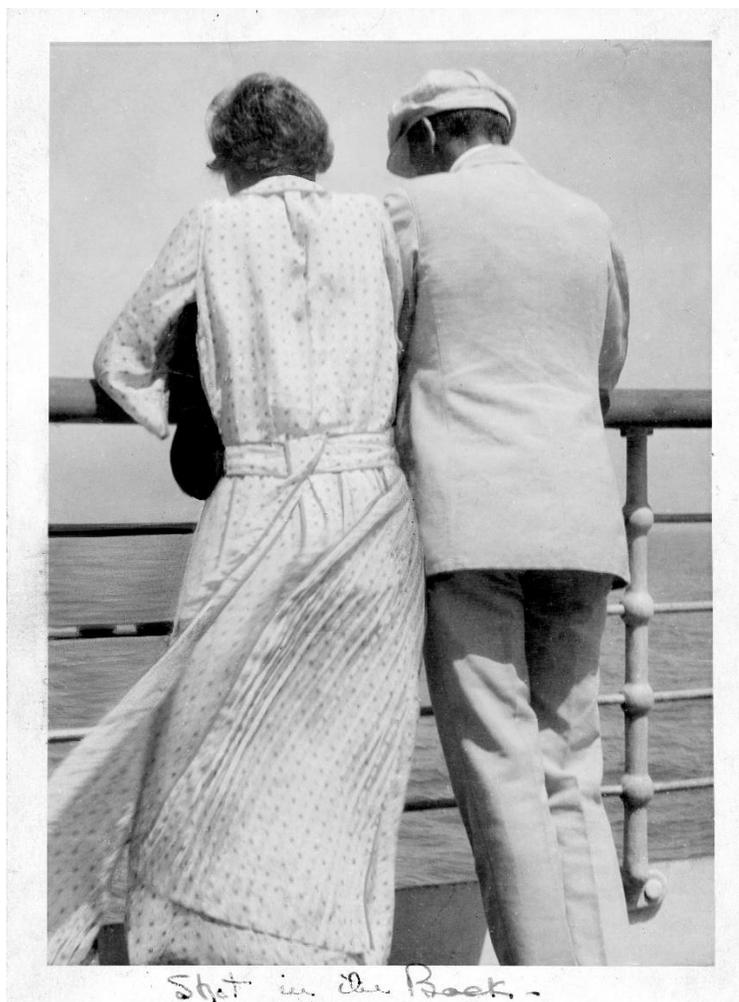
<sup>592</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 257, 260-61.

<sup>593</sup> Tom Wallace, “The Home of the Rices” *Courier-Journal*, June 23, 1916, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1035473885).

<sup>594</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 204-05.

<sup>595</sup> *Ibid.*, 106, 131, 161.

visit abroad last week Mrs. Alice Hegan Rice found enough money waiting for her to more than pay the expenses of several trips to Europe.”<sup>596</sup>



*The Globetrotting Couple.*<sup>597</sup>

The Rices sailed to England to find an English publisher for *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*.<sup>598</sup> Rice noted that she felt like “Alice in Wonderland. She elaborated that “I had never, as the darkies say, ‘socialized’ much with writer folk, and when I found myself

<sup>596</sup> Profitable ‘Mrs. Wiggs,’” *New York Times*, October 10, 1903, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (96352584).

<sup>597</sup> Rice Collection, Manuscripts - Folklife Archives Library Special Collections – Western Kentucky University.

<sup>598</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 118.

catapulted into the heart of literary London, things got curiouser and curiouser.”<sup>599</sup> The Rices traveled to Germany, Holland and Belgium.<sup>600</sup> They took a “walking tour of Switzerland with their friends S.S. McClure and Ida Tarbell.<sup>601</sup> They traveled to Siberia, China, India, Egypt, and Italy.<sup>602</sup> Comfortable in their class and status they” traveled through Japan by rickshaw, and kago, and open palanquin slung on poles and carried by coolies.”<sup>603</sup> When Alice and Cale were not busy seeing the world, they spent much of their time traveling across the United States and Canada and always spent their summers in Maine and their winters in Florida.<sup>604</sup> For a woman, whose historical reputation was that of a woman who devoted her life to the poor of Louisville, she was hardly ever around them, yet her stereotypical renderings of the poor afforded her financial independence and extensive travel opportunities. Her connection with Louisville’s poor often generated more onerous hardship for them than comfort, while it opened for her a world of adventure and luxury.

#### *The Cabbage Patch Settlement House*

The Cabbage Patch Settlement House was formed in late September of 1910 by Louise Marshall with Alice Hegan Rice serving as one of eight board members.<sup>605</sup> Though Rice has received a great deal of credit for being one of the Settlement House’s founders, the actual extent of her involvement remains suspect. Minutes of the Cabbage Patch Settlement House and the Cabbage Patch Settlement Board Meetings provides

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<sup>599</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 62.

<sup>600</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 84.

<sup>601</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 65-66.

<sup>602</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 97, 134.

<sup>603</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>604</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 204-05.

<sup>605</sup> Cabbage Patch Settlement House, Articles of Incorporation, September 27, 1910, p.1-2, MSS BJ C112/112, The Filson Historical Society.

evidence that remains spotty, incomplete, and wanting of detail. But minutes through 1913 show Rice missing from several of the very few meetings, and when Miss Toy resigned as chairman of the committee in December of 1913, Alice Hegan Rice was elected in her place, but immediately moved to reduce the number of board meetings to only three times a year.<sup>606</sup> During the War Years, as Rice's travel was restricted, She still managed to occasionally miss one the three meetings a year, though scant evidence suggests she was somewhat involved in the board meetings, she was not entangled in the day to day operations of the Settlement.<sup>607</sup> One of Rice's main functions, it seems, was using her celebrity status to write letters requesting assistance for the Settlement House.<sup>608</sup> The attention that Rice had brought upon the Cabbage Patch through her novels, and celerity greatly helped in obtaining funds to start and maintain the Settlement. Rice remembered that the Settlement's modest request for sustaining members at four cents a week met with widespread success."<sup>609</sup> The fact that the Settlement only served the white community, of the primarily African-American Cabbage Patch neighborhood also made it more appealing to the sentiments and ideology of the conservative white sustaining members of the Settlement House in Jim Crow Louisville.<sup>610</sup> Historian Louise Knight argues that in the Progressive Era the settlement concept "like most reforms that proved popular, both egalitarian and hierarchal. It challenged and reinforced the status

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<sup>606</sup> *Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee of Workers of the Cabbage Patch Settlement House*, Louisville, Kentucky, February 20, 1912, January 17, 1913, March 29, 1913, December 12, 1913, MSS BJ C112/1, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY.

<sup>607</sup> *Minutes of the Cabbage Patch Settlement Board Meetings*, Louisville, Kentucky, October 13, 1918, January 14, 1919, March 19, 1919, MSS BJ C112/2, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY.

<sup>608</sup> *Ibid.*; Mary Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch: The Literary World of Alice Hegan Rice* (Louisville, KY: Butler Books, 2010), 286.

<sup>609</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 40-41.

<sup>610</sup> Biemer, 18.

quo; it moved society forward but did so comfortably.”<sup>611</sup> The Settlement in Louisville had to meet Progressive Era notions of the deserving poor in able to gain public support and that meant excluding African-Americans.

Louise Marshall, the founder of the Cabbage Patch Settlement House, who guided the Settlement for over seventy years, when interviewed in the 1970s didn’t place much emphasis on Alice Hegan Rice’s role at all.<sup>612</sup> At the time of the Settlement’s founding, the then sixteen year old Marshall was in the process of finding qualified people to fill the Board. She explained, “I was so young and inexperienced and had no idea of doing anything like that but my father said I had to get somebody,” and Alice Hegan Rice’s notoriety and connection to the Cabbage Patch made her a logical choice.<sup>613</sup> But Marshall didn’t seem to hold a very high opinion of Rice, she elaborated that Rice “wrote numbers of books and they were all poor. *Mrs. Wiggs* was the only one that had any life in it. She wrote one called *Lovey Mary*. I think most of them were just kind of slush. She gave me one every time I went on a trip.” But to Marshall the real value in those books was when she sold them at Cabbage Patch Bazaars.<sup>614</sup> Alice Hegan Rice remains notable and remembered for her involvement with the Settlement House, but the Settlement’s true founder couldn’t think of one positive thing to say about her. And Alice Hegan Rice herself knew her commitment was lacking and that she had not really given the Settlement her best effort. An aging and somewhat regretful Rice wrote to Ida Tarbell in 1934, “I have always looked forward to the time when I had the leisure to throw myself

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<sup>611</sup> Louise W. Knight, *Citizen: Jane Addams and the Struggle for Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 171.

<sup>612</sup> Biemer, 24.

<sup>613</sup> Louise Marshall, interview by unlisted source, Cabbage Patch Settlement Oral History Transcripts, p. 21, June 25, 1974, BJ/C112, The Filson Historical Society, Louisville, KY.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*

heart and soul into this work. And now the leisure has come and I am spending it combatting pain, when there is so much to be done, and so many to help.”<sup>615</sup> Rice had lived an entire life of leisure constantly traveling the globe, and she certainly had the gumption to throw her heart and soul into those endeavors. Today, Alice Hegan Rice remains noted as Progressive Era humanitarian novelist, but perhaps she should be remembered better for what she was more prominently—an adventure seeking tourist.

*The Irony of Being Alice*

Alice Hegan Rice criticized Mary Bass for her reaction to all the unwanted attention, yet Rice herself hated the spotlight.<sup>616</sup> Rice stated in 1902 that she was “just a plain, average, everyday sort of person, who objects to seeing herself advertised instead of the book.”<sup>617</sup> The *Courier-Journal* reported in 1902, that Alice’s “success as a writer has been phenomenal, and she literally woke up one morning to find herself famous.”<sup>618</sup> Certainly the idea of waking up surprised by fame applied more readily to Mary Bass’ situation than that of Rice who played a major role bringing about her own fame. Irony seemed to be completely lost on Rice, who wrote “from the orgy of publicity I tried in vain to escape. Every avenue seemed closed.”<sup>619</sup> Rice appeared to lack any sense of self-awareness that her traumatic experience with fame might be similar to that of Mary Bass. Rice claimed that, “There are some people who do not enjoy being in the public eye. I am one of those...In occupying a spotlight one has to face preconceived ideas and sometimes

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<sup>615</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 295-96.

<sup>616</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 179-80.

<sup>617</sup> Boewe, *Beyond the Cabbage Patch*, 33.

<sup>618</sup> “Louisville Society: Engagement Miss Alice Caldwell Hegan and Mr. Cle Rice, To Be Married this Winter,” *Courier-Journal*, October 12, 1902, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1012312426).

<sup>619</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 183-84.

ideals, and human nature being what it is, the result is often disconcerting.”<sup>620</sup> Imagine the plight of poor Alice trying to deal with the public’s preconceived ideas about her. Rice further lamented that “so sensitive did I become to this unsolicited publicity that I sometimes dodge a spotlight...Once when sailing, I was so annoyed by reporters with note-books and cameras...that I fled to my state-room.”<sup>621</sup> But the difference between her and Mary Bass was that Alice would always have some sort of elaborate state-room in which to find solace. Rice even found outlandish ways to combine her distain for the public with her innate racism. Alice wrote in her autobiography:

The craze for autographs seems never to wane...When the autograph fever was at its worst I had a dream that would have delighted Freud. [Cale] and I were at the old Bertolini Palace in Naples, and one night when I had dropped asleep after a bout with mosquitoes, I awakened us both by my laughter. “It’s what the mosquitoes are saying,” I explained. “They have been collecting autograph bites all over the world. One of them said he had one from Theodore Roosevelt, and the other bragged about having one from Booker Washington. “I draw the line there,” said the first mosquito. “I was born in Virginia.”<sup>622</sup>

Imagine if poor Alice had to deal with the attention that follows preconceived ideas of a public that read representations of her as a shiftless, improvident “woman of low nature and without education or self-respect.”<sup>623</sup> Alice Hegan Rice as a member of the elite upper-class, could not imagine herself occupying the same space as Mary Bass in any fashion, so the comparison likely never entered her mind. The burdens of fame haunted poor Alice even in her racist dreams.

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<sup>620</sup> Ibid., 190-91.

<sup>621</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 192.

<sup>622</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>623</sup> Court Petition, Mary A. Bass alias Wiggs vs. Alice Hegan Rice, September, 1904, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Mary Boewe Collection, Original document held at University of Virginia.

## CHAPTER 10: EPILOGUE

### *Plucking Roses from the Cabbage Patch*

Alice Hegan Rice composed a warmhearted romantic reform tale which praised the bravery and optimism of a Progressive Era woman living under the extreme conditions poverty, while simultaneously demeaning her culture and insulting her drive and intelligence. However, what Rice wrote about Bass/Wiggs divulged more about the apprehensions and humanitarian limits of the Progressive Era white middle-and-upper-class than it revealed about the durability and fight in the working-class poor. Rice's writings reflect clear tensions between efforts to help the impoverished while supporting of notions of class superiority and disdain towards the poor. Alice Hegan Rice's interest in the poor was always to some degree racialized and came out of a twisted sense of moral obligation similar to the delusion of the White Man's Burden. In other words, Rice was part of a white middle-class reform movement that practiced a form of philanthropic colonialism with the intent of protectionism as its core. Like that of colonizers, Rice's brand of reform saw the slum's native element as a threat and managed to force itself upon them, reassuringly for the moral benefit of the slum residents but ultimately for exploitative purposes. White middle-class reformers distinctively racialized the slum residents as Others and mined them for resources including cheap labor and amusement. And being white held no protection for poor rural migrants from racialization within this system. However, white poverty complicated notions of white supremacy during the

Progressive Era, which was the allure of Rice's romantic tale of the happy poor whites of the Cabbage Patch. Her narrative established wealthy white female reformers as sort of fantasy fairy godmothers to the white deserving poor, all while maintaining managerial dominion over them.

Rice was distinctively ill-suited to tell Bass' story and her arrogance and insensitivity restricted Bass' ability to represent herself. In the dedication of *Lovey Mary*, Alice Hegan Rice wrote, "To Cale Young Rice who taught me the secret of plucking roses from a cabbage patch."<sup>624</sup> This passage revealed that Rice saw the Cabbage Patch as her own personal garden, a possession, a space that she had the power to harvest, and its people mere objects that she could pluck at will. But roses are never plucked for the benefit of the rose. It is a selfish act that leads to their demise in an effort to display their beauty as your own.

Alice Hegan Rice never missed an opportunity to disparage Mary Bass, while simultaneously claiming her friendship all the while. Even in writing about Mary Bass, twenty years after her death, Rice felt perfectly natural belittling her. In her autobiography Rice narrated a supposed letter from Bass:

One of the last letters I had from her was characteristic of the many she left on my back steps often with a dozen stemless hollyhocks wrapped in a newspaper. "Dear Miss Alice and her Maw—Thanks one an all for check. i all a lone igin, a rober broke out the winder lite, croled in, i was eaten over with a weding couple next door and never come hom til 1 oclock. He never got nothing but got scared an left behine what he come with. He was one of yore good Setlement boys, and had perfesed religion. The rale rode firemen throwed me a few Big Lumps in that cole weather, from the engine and i went and got them every time. Yores truly, maney thanks, goodbye all."<sup>625</sup>

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<sup>624</sup> Rice, *Lovey Mary*, dedication.

<sup>625</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 71-72.

This supposititious correspondence once again reveals more about Rice than Bass. Rice saved none of the apparent letters from Bass, even though she filled many scrapbooks and left boxes of artifacts at local university libraries, so it's a little odd that Rice could remember even the awful spelling of a letter that if she received at all would have been more than twenty years prior to her recount of the story. But more damagingly this fabrication reveals Rice's true feelings for Bass. These *are not* the words of a confidante. They are the words of an interclass mole, one who feels they sit in a place of superior judgment over their subject. Rice sat firmly in that place, seemingly unaware that she profited greatly until the day she died for her dishonest depiction of an honest woman; twenty years after her death, Alice Hegan Rice was still content degrading the memory of Mary Bass. But once again Rice concocted a narrative that by design produced an image that made herself look good by putting words in someone else's mouth. From this letter, it would appear that Mary Bass had been consistently accepting checks from Rice. Something that there remains no proof of other taking the words of a clearly suspect letter as gospel. Nearly everything written about Bass demonstrates she consistently refused charity, it was only Rice that mentioned otherwise and always in an effort to make herself look generous. For instance, Rice granted an interview to the *Saturday Evening Herald* after achieving fame, in which she described her first meeting with Bass, and how she took pity on her after seeing her search for scraps of fuel and clothing, and then graciously invited her in for coffee.<sup>626</sup> This version of the story was the famous one, the Rice approved one, the one that emphasized Rice's kind virtues. But long before Rice

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<sup>626</sup> Edward Freiberger, "The True Story of 'Mrs. Wiggs and the Cabbage Patch,'" *Saturday Evening Herald*, undated newspaper article from Alice Hegan Rice's Personal Scrapbook, University of Louisville – Special Collections and Archives – Alice Hegan Rice Papers.

became famous, and had to rely on her reputation as a champion of the poor, she described this very meeting quite differently in her plea for help after the death of Clyde Bass in the Louisville papers. In this letter Rice was writing about Mary Bass, not herself, and described the meeting this way:

Three years ago a woman came to the home of the writer and asked for work; nothing was to be done about the place but shoveling snow from the sidewalk, and upon being told this the plucky little woman insisted upon taking the shovel and falling to work. Being attracted by her cheerfulness and willingness to do anything to turn an honest penny, we inquired into her history.<sup>627</sup>

Keep in mind Mary Bass was a woman in her mid-forties at the time and still had the fortitude to shovel snow for a few pennies to make ends meet. Rice's letter further went on to detail Bass' aversion to charity:

In the Christmas of 1890 The Kings' Daughters supplied the family with a big basket of clothing and vegetables, which helped them through the rest of the winter. Last Christmas eve on the Kings' Daughters sent for Mrs. Bass and asked her what she wanted the order to send her the next day. Without a moment's hesitation, she said: "Oh my children got the good things last Christmas, and this year we are getting along a little better, so you take it to them that ain't got nothing!—And this has been the spirit she as kept up for the last three years, never accepting money unless she worked in return, and never taking anything until it was absolutely necessary."<sup>628</sup>

Note that Rice failed to use dialect in this instance, which meant she was not thinking about it. She was not creating a story or perpetuating the mythology of a character, because she hadn't invented that character yet. She instead was describing a proud, resourceful, stubborn woman and mother willing to do whatever it took to support her family. But this story was written when Rice's reputation was not on the line, before

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<sup>627</sup> "The Plucky Struggle of Little Arthur Bass Ended at Last: His Mother Broken Down by Misfortune, and Husband and Other Children Ill," *Courier-Journal*, November 13, 1892.

<sup>628</sup> *Ibid.*

either her or Mary Bass gained any notoriety, and thus it represented the true agency of Mary Bass. Later, Rice changed the story to emphasize the merits of her own character, and withdrew any hint of the Bass' nature other than her poverty and need.

Mary Bass was resourceful and when she needed help, she relied on people she trusted, true friends, people of her own class. In her old age she made an arrangement with a local saloon owner which served to meet her basic material needs. In 1910, Bass sold part of her property in the Cabbage Patch to David and Katie Klotter for the meager price of only \$1, and in return the Klotters provided necessary food and services.<sup>629</sup> The Klotters opened a saloon on that land, and the profits helped support Mary Bass, while still maintaining her independence. If Mary Bass, wished to go for a ride, she would walk over to the saloon, inform David Klotter and "he would call for the handyman to go to the new stable to get the rig ready, saying 'Groom and hitch up the mare, Mrs. Bass will be driving this morning.'"<sup>630</sup> Mary Bass was not reliant upon Alice Hegan Rice for her needs; she found ways to take care of herself. Bass' story suggests a counter-narrative to existing scholarship that has often been overly focused on the reform minded middle-class without stressing the productive agency actually required of the working-classes for self-preservation in a challenging era.

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<sup>629</sup> Latest Real Estate Transfers Reported: Mary A. Bass to David Klotter, 30 feet, south side of Hill, east of Eleventh (\$1?) ("Latest Real Estate Transfers Reported," *Courier-Journal*, September 14, 1910, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Louisville Courier Journal (1023398648); Switzer, 3.

<sup>630</sup> Switzer, 3.



*Mary Bass in Doorstep Photo at Hill Street House in Cabbage Patch 1903.*<sup>631</sup>

Mary Bass should not be remembered as a curious footnote to someone else's story. She serves as a reminder of working-class resistance to white middle-class reform efforts designed in ways to oppress those it claimed to help. While she was clearly victimized, she was not a victim. She managed and she endured. Her story demonstrates the resilience of the working-class poor in their effort to survive in abhorrent times. Her

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<sup>631</sup> "Down at the Cabbage Patch," (*The Bookman: A Magazine of Literature and Life*, May, 1903), 211-214; The little boy pictured with her is likely her grandson Bunk Humphry.

story reveals the generosity that existed in working-class communities and that when they needed assistance many times their best resources were within their own working-class neighborhoods. At Mary Bass' funeral, a man approached her grandson and said:

I knew that family well. We lived down the railroad track a short distance from the Bass Family...Mrs. Bass was a fine woman, took us all in her home for a while, after our house burned to the ground. She was a kind helpful woman and some of the book about her was not true.<sup>632</sup>

But these were whispers that would never be heard over Rice's mighty roar. The truth of the Cabbage Patch was never as popularly appealing as its middle-class romance narrative, but it was enduring and evident in the character of the people who survived it. What little we know of Mary Bass now remains in the wittiness of her character represented by Rice in the novel and by her appearances in court and in the press. Most of the memories faded a long time ago. Alice Hegan Rice once unintentionally paid her a compliment, not by praising her, but the performance of actress Madge Carr Cook in the original play, *Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch*. Rice said that her portrayal of Mrs. Wiggs "made the spiritual beauty of the woman shine through her poverty...She was ideally suited to the character, being motherly and tender and at the same time shrewd."<sup>633</sup> Mary Bass was a strong Progressive Era woman—simple, but effective. Her grandson remembered her lovingly and recalled that when she visited he always begged to go home with her, "for I loved to be beside her as she drove," the buggy.<sup>634</sup> She would "rattle the whip in the stock to make the horse run, [all while never actually] taking the whip from its socket."<sup>635</sup>

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<sup>632</sup> Switzer, 2.

<sup>633</sup> Rice, *The Inky Way*, 172-74.

<sup>634</sup> Switzer, 3.

<sup>635</sup> Switzer, 3: The actual quote reads "Rattle the whip in the stock to make the horse run, but never taking the whip from its socket."

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