University of Virginia

The “Dutch Rose” of Columbia:

A Madam’s Life in a Confederate Refugee City, 1860-1863

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In June 1863, the "Dutch Rose" of Columbia, South Carolina, known also by the alias Rosalie LeGrand, died after being attacked and robbed in her home. She survived only a short time before succumbing to injuries she sustained during the attempted strangulation and chloroform overdose. Her death triggered a manhunt for her killers which spanned the Deep South and resulted in the execution of a Confederate soldier in the throes of desertion.

Rosalie LeGrand's murder remains a significant moment in Columbia's history. Her murder is *the* moment dramatically revealing LeGrand, a successful madam, and Sophia Aumann, a 43-year-old Jewish German immigrant, to be one and the same.[1] Though tragic, her death not only uncovers her identity assigned to her at birth but also the extent of her success during the war. In 1861, Aumann created a will which destined her estate to be probated upon her expiration. Her probate record demonstrates her enduring success and a consistent trend of growth in her estate from her first appearance on the federal census in Columbia in 1860 to her death in 1863.

Aumann's manner of death and occupation overshadows her experience as a Jewish German immigrant, a successful madam, and a member of Columbia's red-light district community within the historical record. Postbellum accounts recall the "Dutch Rose" as a notorious and domineering figure in the city, responsible for the immorality of the city's residents.[2] Her nickname stems from this notoriety, hinting at the morally detrimental nature of her occupation.[3] Aumann's death, according to some, rightfully rid the city of a temptress who

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[1] Going forward, this article utilizes Sophia Aumann to refer to Rosalie LeGrand as she identifies herself as such in her will.

[2] J. J. O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia: Leaves of Its History* (New York: D. & J. Sadlier & Co., 1879).; Julian Selby, *Memorabilia and Anecdotal Reminiscences of Columbia, S.C.* (Columbia: The R. L. Bryan Company, 1905).; J. F. Williams, *Old and New Columbia: 1786-1929* (Columbia: Epworth Orphanage Press, 1929).

[3] "Dutch rose" refers to the marks left by a hammer upon striking an object as well as a specific cut of diamond which has 24 triangular facets. The nickname likely acts as a metaphor for a wilted rose as the term "Dutch" is often used colloquially to portray stereotypes of Germans. Example: Dutch courage (false courage); To beat the Dutch (to

persuaded her murderer to join her promiscuous ranks, insinuating her responsibility for her own demise. The accounts ignore the momentous events she witnessed while living in Columbia, such as Columbia's growth from a small urban center, "a fifth of the size of Charleston," to an urbanizing refugee city, while also managing to grow a moderately successful brothel in the face of sectionalism and impending war.[4] Aumann's economic success both contradicts historians' descriptions of sex workers as destitute and marginal figures while challenging assumptions about the conditions of Civil War refugee cities. Instead, the final three years of her life reveal a woman who capitalized on wartime disruptions to earn a place of prominence—if not status—within wartime Columbia.

Considering Aumann's success, historians of sex work need to abandon their classification of sex workers as destitute and socially immobile while Civil War scholars must shift their analysis away from military intervention into the sex trade. According to Anne M. Butler, prostitution doomed women on the frontier to destitution because of the unstable nature of both the sex trade and the frontier. Butler notes that even when sex workers increased their profit, "they seldom demonstrated that they had the stability to handle their finances soundly; money filtered through their fingers."[5] Drawing a distinguishing line between madams and their underlings in her analysis, Butler emphasizes that the common prostitute had no means of upward mobility. Madams possessed a certain amount of power over the common prostitute in terms of finances–sex workers paid their madams rent and sacrificed a portion of their earnings

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excel); Big Dutchman (disliked person). Katherine N. Hondius, "The American Folk Idea of the Dutch," in *Western Folklore* 11, no. 1 (Jan. 1952), 29.

[4] Columbia's population in 1860 was 8,052, a figure which includes both white and black residents. By 1863, according to Hammond, this number jumped to around 16,000. Subsequently, according to an 1864 newspaper article in the *Daily South Carolinian*, the population spiked to between 25,000 to 30,000. John Hammond Moore, *Columbia and Richland County: A South Carolina Community, 1740-1990* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1993), 146.

[5] Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery: Prostitutes in the American West, 1865-1890* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 151.

for brothel upkeep. Butler's analysis, however, hints that women entered the sex trade with the economic resources, business savvy, and desire to own a brothel without having prior experience in the trade, which was often not the case as many madams rented their brothels. Karen R. Jones builds on Butler's analysis by explaining that for many madams, the nature of the sex trade meant "that success was ephemeral and subject to moral sanction."[6] A lack of upward social mobility and short-lived success plagues historical thinking about sex work, condemning them, as did nineteenth-century society, to destitution and relegating them to the periphery of historical research. Aumann's brothel conflicts with this narrative and demonstrates how conditions in the South, even as the Civil War loomed, allowed for growth and prolonged success.[7]

Civil War historians, on the other hand, often prioritize Union and Confederate military efforts to police and reform sex workers near their operations, emphasizing the sex worker as a nuisance to the Union and Confederacy's respective war efforts. Catherine Clinton, famously calling historians' attention to Southern "public women," discusses the dysfunctional nature of Union and Confederate attempts to ship, sweep, and confine sex workers to non-military occupied areas.[8] She specifically cites Nashville's significant growth in sex workers, resulting in

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[6] Karen R. Jones, *Calamity: The Many Lives of Calamity Jane* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020), 63.

[7] For more about antebellum and postbellum sex work in the United States, see Anne M. Butler, *Daughters of Joy, Sisters of Misery*.; Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sex Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).; Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds. *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).; Patricia Cline Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998).; Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790-1920* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1992).; Alecia P. Long, *The Great Southern Babylon: Sex, Race, and Respectability in New Orleans, 1865-1920* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005).; Amy Gilman Srebnick, *The Mysterious Death of Mary Rogers: Sex and Culture in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).; Judith Kelleher Schafer, *Brothels, Depravity, and Abandoned Women: Illegal Sex in Antebellum New Orleans* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2009).; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986).

[8] Catherine Clinton, "'Public Women' and Sexual Politics During the American Civil War," in *Battle Scars: Gender and Sexuality in the American Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 62-64.

Union General George Spaulding's various experiments with policing, expelling, and reforming them. Similarly, John Gaines deals with Union regulation in Nashville and illustrates the wartime over dilution of the sex trade with workers in both Washington, D.C., and Richmond, Virginia. He emphasizes the desperation tethered to women's motivations for seeking out the sex trade and protection in refugee cities, especially to survive the war.[9] While economic necessity certainly motivated some women to practice wartime sex work, historians neglect women in smaller cities, which constituted much of the South. Aumann's experience in a small Southern refugee city demands historians to further excavate the dynamics of the Southern sex trade to reveal how its participants experienced not only the trade but also the Civil War.[10]

Historians, such as Butler, Jones, Clinton, and Gaines, center their studies on the negative connotations of the sex trade. Prostitution, though portrayed as immoral and detrimental to city operations, provided women opportunities for upward mobility, despite social scrutiny.[11] Focusing on the individual experiences of Southern sex workers, such as Sophia Aumann, and the glimpses of their success in the archives demonstrates that the sex trade was not a means to an end but a willingly pursued profession in the South, offering unskilled women financial opportunities often denied them by nineteenth-century society.[12] Further, focusing on such

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[9] John Gaines, *An Evening with Venus: Prostitution during the American Civil War* (Buffalo Gap, TX: State House Press, 2014), 115-133.

[10] For more about the conditions and experiences in refugee cities, see Don H. Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South: Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile, 1860-1910* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990).; Mary Elizabeth Massey, *Refugee Life in the Confederacy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1964).; David Silkenat, *Driven From Home: North Carolina's Civil War Refugee Crisis* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016).; Yael A. Sternhell, *Routes of War: The World of Movement in the Confederate South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

[11] Butler argues that on the western frontier, the sex trade provided an occupation through which unskilled women were able to make money. Butler, *Daughters of Joy*.

[12] Stansell, *City of Women*, 171-216.

experiences provides a glimpse into how the coming of the Civil War and inflation impacted the sex trade in small Southern cities.

Contextualizing Aumann's life and understanding the Southern antebellum sex trade requires an analysis of sex work in 1830s New York City and the experiences of Dorcus Doyan, known famously by her alias Helen Jewett.[13] Born on October 18, 1813, in Temple, Maine, Doyan lived and worked in the City Hotel, a brothel owned and operated by Rosina Townsend at 41 Thomas Street. She witnessed the city's population skyrocket into the hundreds of thousands, leading to an increased demand for sex workers and the opportunity for Doyan to establish and nurture a loyal customer base. Her maintenance of a loyal customer base provides context for understanding how Aumann achieved her own success in Columbia. While New York City's red-light district grew with its population, Columbia's antebellum population remained small with an even smaller red-light district until the Civil War broke out and drove waves of refugees to the capital city. Columbia's miniscule antebellum population established the social conditions and relationship with the city Aumann needed for her brothel to thrive amidst the economic chaos of the Civil War.[14]

Sex trade terms, such as "red-light district" and "brothel," dictate the discourse on prostitution and the sex trade. According to Winnick and Kinsie, the term "red-light district" originated in "Western railroad construction camps, where prostitutes out-numbered other women by as many as fifty to one."[15] Railroad workers hung red-glass lanterns outside a sex worker's tent to signal their presence if a fellow crew member came looking for them. An

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[13] Going forward, I will refer to Dorcas Doyan by her given name rather than by her alias to avoid playing into the romanticization of her murder.

[14] Capital cities, often the bigger cities in the state, attracted refugees during wartime because, as the center of state government, they had more access to government-sponsored economic assistance. Massey, *Refugee Life in the Confederacy*, 68-92.

[15] Charles Winnick and Paul M. Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce: Prostitution in the United States* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), 132.

accumulation of the tents became known as a "red-light district" because of the red glow emanating from their facades.[16] The term expanded to include both clusters of sex workers and other "immoral" establishments, such as saloons / gambling houses. Winnick and Kinsie define "brothel," originating from the public baths in Europe, as "a place that is exclusively used for the business of prostitution and where the inmates almost invariably shared their earnings with the operator."[17] Brothels provided a layer of protection for sex workers from the violence which plagued their trade and established a stable customer base, allowing them a sense of personal and financial security. On the eve of the Civil War, the 1860 federal census identified Aumann's brothel as the only one of its kind in Columbia's red-light district.[18]

Nineteenth-century women practiced prostitution in a variety of ways, for which Clinton identifies three overarching categories: public women, streetwalkers, and kept women. "Public women," one of the many names sex workers were called in the nineteenth century, solely depended on the sex trade for financial support, which includes madams, common streetwalkers, and women quietly practicing out of their homes by keeping their customer base minimal.[19] Streetwalkers, who often depended on more than just the sex trade for money, solicited their clientele by walking the streets and catching the attention of passersby. They performed services in alleys, or other semi-private areas. In contrast, kept women "made private contractual arrangements with individual men," named after the "upkeep" they received in return for sexual favors.[20] Madams and their charges tended to make more money than streetwalkers because they

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[16] Winnick and Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce*, 132.
[17] Winnick and Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce*, 137.
[18] On the record for Margaret Kelly's residence, the enumerator scratched an "X" over the "house of ill fame" designation in addition to the occupation boxes for all individuals residing in the house. Given this, I have determined that the enumerator incorrectly labeled Kelly's residence. 1860 Census, Columbia, Richland, South Carolina, accessed through *ancestry.com*.
[19] Clinton, "'Public Women'," 62.
[20] Clinton, "'Public Women'," 61.

generated a regular customer base by maintaining a consistent location and environment to carry out their services. While the census only identified Aumann's brothel as such, other women likely practiced other methods of sex work or chose not to identify their occupation as the keeper of a "house of ill-fame."

Columbia's red-light district, though small, operated with the sex trade as its nucleus. The red-light district included 14 saloons, 5 hotels, and Aumann's brothel. Hotels attracted visitors coming into town via the railroad and river depots, which lined the district on its western border. Streetwalkers lingered outside the establishment in hopes of soliciting customers. Hotels

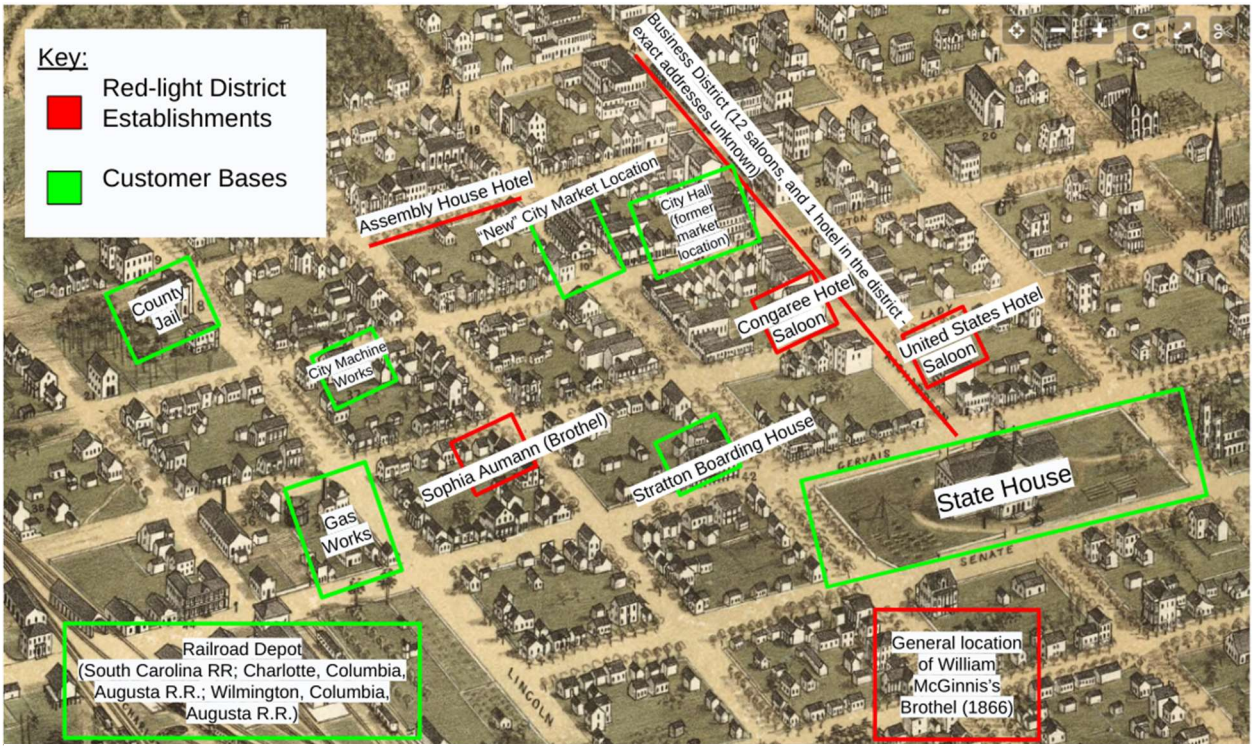

Figure 1. Notions added by author to assist in identifying relevant locations in the city. *Courtesy of C. N. Drie, Bird's eye view of the city of Columbia, South Carolina. Baltimore, 1872. Map.*

sometimes even allowed sex workers to practice within their walls, linking them with the sex trade. Dorcus Doyan, for example, worked in such an establishment primarily associated with the

sex trade.[21] On the other hand, saloons served alcohol and provided customers with opportunities to gamble through billiards, cards, slots, etc. Saloons also attracted sex workers to their businesses and, like hotels, sometimes promoted the sex trade as an amenity to their other "immoral" services.

Columbia's red-light district cropped up in relation to the city market—the hub of trade and commerce in the city—and remained closely linked with the city and state governments. The city constructed its city hall on Richardson Street, known today as Main Street, in 1818 with the city market incorporated into the building's ground floor. Vendors sold agricultural products, such as crops and livestock, from South Carolina in addition to products from neighboring states.[22] The market quickly became the main center for trade in the city and, according to historian Alexia Helsley, streetwalkers began operating more freely around the city market thereafter.[23]

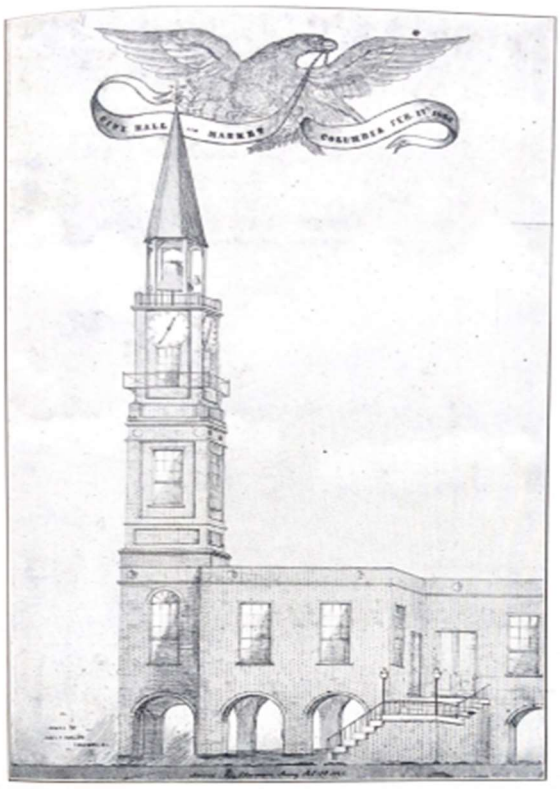

Figure 2. Image of the combined Columbia city hall / city market building. *Courtesy of J. F. Williams*, *Old and New Columbia.*

Antebellum Columbia's economy, stimulated by the city market, relied heavily on cotton and the meager contribution of agricultural manufacturing operations, contributing to the city's limited urban development.[24] Though the state capital and a hub for trade in the midlands,

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[21] Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*.; Rebecca Yamin, "Wealthy, Free, and Female: Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century New York," in *Historical Archaeology* 39, no. 1 (2005), 4.
[22] Helsley says that in addition to local agricultural products, the city market was also "an outlet for crops and livestock from Western North Carolina and eastern Tennessee." Alexia Jones Helsley, *Wicked Columbia: Vice and Villainy in the Capital* (Charleston: The History Press, 2013), chapter 2, Kindle.
[23] Helsley, *Wicked Columbia*, chap. 2.
[24] Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 146.

Columbia's residents numbered only 8,052 in 1860.[25] Comparatively, Charleston's population sat at around 40,000, according to the 1860 federal census.[26] Besides Charleston, Columbia was the only other city in South Carolina with more than 2,500 residents. Southern cities with substantial populations were scarce because "Southern urban development was mostly limited to seaports and a few river ports, typically located on the periphery of the plantation districts, which they served as entrepots, or gathering and shipping depots for raw staples such as cotton, rice, tobacco, and sugar."[27] Columbia's manufacturing industry, on the eve of the Civil War, "was limited to a handful of items, most of them necessities or associated with field and forest."[28] Only three of the twenty-two manufacturing locations in Columbia had more than ten employees, a reflection of both the small-scale industry in Columbia and its population.[29] The waterways and railroads dissecting the city played an integral role in the region's agricultural production. Three railroads ran through Columbia beginning in the 1850s: the Charlotte, the Greenville, and the South Carolina.[30] A boat line ran cotton to the city market from surrounding areas. Some river boats even "ran to the up-country, bringing cotton and carrying back goods."[31] Local commerce attracted customers to the market and business district from around the region, and this flow of resources played a key role in Columbia's economic condition during the Civil War.

Located down the street from the South Carolina state house, the city market linked the state house with the red-light district. Because of cracks forming in the foundation of a newly constructed state house building, the South Carolina legislature operated out of the original

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[25] Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 119.
[26] 1860 census, Charleston, Charleston, South Carolina, accessed through *Ancestry.com*.
[27] Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 3.
[28] Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 146.
[29] Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 146.
[30] Williams, *Old and New Columbia*, 46.
[31] Williams, *Old and New Columbia*, 47.

capitol building north of Gervais Street from 1854 to 1865.[32] By 1860, city market vendors relocated to a bigger location along Assembly Street, closer to where the state legislature conducted its business though still accessible to the business district along Richardson Street. As the market settled into its new location, the commerce once again began attracting "pickpockets, confidence men and prostitutes."[33] The red-light district remained within the confines of the new business district until the 1880s before expanding further north in response to the construction of a prison. In 1860, however, the red-light district remained small and operated west of and along the business district.

Red-light operations in New York spanned across the city, forming several distinct districts rather than a single localized one. The city's most popular district dominated the area around the Five Points intersection in Manhattan, located one block from New York's infamous Broadway. Like Columbia, the district operated between "City Hall Park, the commercial heart of the city, and the Five Points."[34] The Five Points district consisted of a diverse population of sex workers, practicing in various ways. Much like in Columbia, New York City's sex workers served as streetwalkers and in brothels, but they also provided services in theaters, basement dramshops, and tenements.[35] Though larger, New York City's sex trade too had prominent women amongst its ranks.

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[32] Staci Richey and Lydia Brandt, *Columbia: Downtown Historic Resource Survey* (Columbia: City of Columbia, Planning and Development Services, 2020), 9.
[33] Helsley, *Wicked Columbia*, chap. 2.
[34] Stansell, *City of Women*, 174.
[35] Stansell, *The City of Women*, 174.

As the Five Points district grew, antebellum reform groups voiced their concerns about the sex trade. The reform movement against the sex trade originated with the bourgeois class of men and women and their strict understanding of "female sexuality," which "tended to see any woman who was sexually active outside of marriage as a prostitute."[36] Such a frame of mind plagued working-class women throughout the nineteenth century as they sought justice for violence committed against them.[37] Stansell highlights that "The alarm over prostitution was one response to the growing social and sexual distance that working-class women–especially working-class daughters–were traveling from patriarchal regulation."[38] Various reform societies implemented methods such as brothel visits, reports, publications, etc.[39] The upper- and middle-class individuals pushing sex trade reform unsuccessfully attempted to understand the women's reasons for practicing the trade. Working-class women's realities pushed them outside the Cult of True Womanhood and

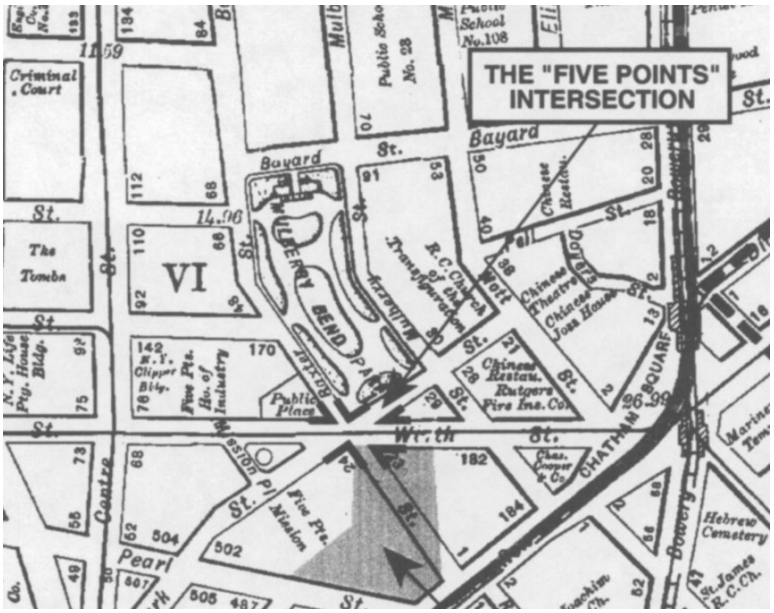

Figure 3. The "Five Point" intersection. *Courtesy of Riis 1971, 230, as cited in Yamin, "Wealthy, Free, and Female," 4.*

[36] Stansell, *The City of Women*, 175.
[37] For more about the implications of the classifying working-class women both black and women as prostitutes, see: Michael Ayers Trotti, *The Body in the Reservoir: Murder and Sensationalism in the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008.; Bynum, *Unruly Women*.; Laura F. Edwards, *Gendered Strife and Confusion: The Political Culture of Reconstruction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).; Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence, and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).
[38] Stansell, *City of Women*, 172.
[39] Nicole Severson, "'Devils Would Blush to Look": Brothel Visits of the New York Female Moral Reform Society, 1835 and 1836," in *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 23, no. 2 (May 2014), 226-246.

consisted of both "need and desire: the need for subsistence, the desire for change."[40] Despite motivations grounded in survival, arrests for "keeping disorderly houses" increased between 1849 and 1860, multiplying "by more than five times."[41] New York City's relationship with reform and policing red-light districts contrasted with Columbia.

The Southern sex trade navigated a fine line between denial of the trade and the condemnation of sex outside of marriage. Whereas moral reformers targeted Northern sex workers, Southern sex workers faced "varying degrees of acceptance" because of the relationship the region had with slavery.[42] Prostitution directly challenged patriarchal notions of the household, as women were entering the workforce via the sex trade, and worked against Southern expectations of sexual expression, but so did "the long tradition of the Negro woman as chattel" and the commodification of their bodies.[43] According to Victoria Bynum, John D'Emilio, and Estelle Freedman, the South's confinement of "sexual and reproductive activities" to marriage functioned as a form of social reform.[44] Such sexual regulation "correlated strongly with other forms of social regulation, especially those related to race, class, and gender."[45] A white woman's bodily commodification, especially in the South, represented the failure of a patriarch to sustain his family and produced a platform on which white women challenged the accessibility of the white female body. Stansell notes that "Prostitution as an economic choice dictated by extreme need cannot be understood apart from women's problems in supporting themselves." She goes on to say, "Prostitution as a social choice, an "inclination," cannot be separated from the entire fabric of that dependency."[46] In combination with the abuse of enslaved

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[40] Stansell, *City of Women*, 180.
[41] Stansell, *City of Women*, 173.
[42] Winnick and Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce*, 8.
[43] Winnick and Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce*, 8.
[44] Bynum, *Unruly Women*, 10.
[45] John D'Emelio and Estelle Freedom, *Intimate Matters* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press, 2012), xvii.
[46] Stansell, *City of Women*, 179.

women, prostitution called into question the morality of Southern society. Southern social reform, therefore, manifested as the outward disapproval of immoral acts while simultaneously allowing them to carry on for fear of disrupting the status quo and stimulating conversations about the morality of slavery. [47]

Early attempts at policing Columbia's red-light district proved futile. Only a block from the state house, South Carolina College attracted the ideal customers for the red-light district as young men explored their relationships with sexual expression, alcohol, and gambling. According to the *Cheraw Gazette*, the state legislature called for the moral preservation of the students at the college, saying "young men, at the tender age when their principles are unfixed, and resolutions weak, should be preserved if possible, from the contamination of dissipating and corrupting pleasure."[48] Further, the legislature called for trustees of the college and the circuit courts to "put into immediate and vigilant exercise, all means provided by existing laws" to rid Columbia of "bawdy houses, gambling houses, and other similar nuisances."[49] Later that year, the South Carolina State Assembly passed "An Act concerning Vagrants," which declared any individual owning, participating, or using a house of prostitution or gambling within ten miles of the college to be treated as a "vagrant."[50] While the act may have accomplished its goal, no evidence exists which demonstrates action taken against individuals in the red-light district or of the red-light district's reaction to the act.

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[47] Gaines, *An Evening with Venus*.; Winnick and Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce*; Clinton, "'Public Women',".; Daniel Bluestone, "Charlottesville's Landscape of Prostitution," in *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2015), 49-50.
[48] *Cheraw Gazette*, "Resolutions passed at the late session of the Legislature respecting Gambling in the Town of Columbia," January 5, 1836, 30.
[49] *Cheraw Gazette*, "Resolutions passed at the late session of the Legislature respecting Gambling in the Town of Columbia," January 5, 1836, 30.
[50] *An Act concerning Vagrants*, The Statutes at Large of South Carolina 6 (1839): 553.

Columbia's citizens noticed the workings of the district as it went unpoliced and un-"reformed." J. F. Williams, a long-time resident of the city, recalls that among citizens, the district was "known as Hell's Half Acre, but it should have been called Hell itself. It was the toughest part of the city, and a decent person could hardly pass through there without being insulted."[51] Though the district thrived in 1860, "respectable business enterprises" were "overshadowed by the notoriety of a number of establishments."[52] The state legislature's call for action and the fact that on the eve of the Civil War, the red-light district operated freely amongst the business district demonstrates the prominence of Columbia's district and the need to further investigate the historical significance of the Southern sex trade, especially in small Confederate cities. In such a city, Sophia Aumann established and ran a successful brothel for at least three years as the Civil War decimated the Southern economy, yet she thrived while others struggled.

Before living in Columbia, Sophia Aumann immigrated to the United States from Frankfurt, Germany. She traveled approximately 230 miles to board the steamship *Phoenix* at Antwerp, Belgium.[53] Often, Germans traveled to immigration ports in Le Havre or Bremen, which traded directly with the United States and provided a cheaper means of immigration with steadier access to passenger ships. Popular ports, however, meant crowded passenger conditions, scarce rations, and rampant disease.[54] Conflict between Holland and Belgium resulted in

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[51] Williams, *Old and New Columbia*, 93.

[52] Gates Street, on the corner of which Aumann's brothel operated, became known as Park Street at the turn of the century because of the notoriety of the red-light district. Nancy C. Fox, *The Physical Development of Columbia, S.C.* (Columbia: Central Midlands Regional Planning Council, 1985), 27.

[53] Based on available information from the passenger list and the calculations of the distance between Frankfurt, Germany, and the closest ports (Bremen, Germany; Antwerp, Belgium) from which United States bound ships departed, I have deduced that the "Sophia Ammann" listed on the steamship *Phoenix*'s passenger list is the same person as the Sophia Aumann who operated her brothel in Columbia. *1854*, *New York, New York, USA*, *M237, 1820-1897* 18, no. *1160*.; Richard L. Cohn, *Mass Migration Under Sail: European Immigration to the Antebellum United States* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 136.; Aumann, Sophia of Richland District, Will Typescript (1863), Microcopy No. 9, S108093, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.

[54] Cohn, *Mass Migration Under Sail*, 133-134.

Antwerp's unpopularity among immigrants. For Aumann, the distance from Frankfurt to Antwerp played a significant role in her choice to set sail from there, compared to the approximately 434-mile trek to Le Havre and 273-mile trek to Bremen. Antwerp's unpopularity also meant less crowded conditions for passengers.[55] Along with only 107 Germans, Aumann departed Antwerp in July 1854, leaving behind her young son, Solomon, with her parents, Henry and Rosina Aumann. On August 29, 1854, the *Phoenix* arrived safely at port in New York, having successfully completed its journey.

Many antebellum immigrants, such as Aumann, arrived to the United States with nothing and faced immense pressure to find steady employment, knowing they had families across the Atlantic depending on them to send money. Therefore, the decision to head south was a difficult one, likely motivated by factors other than economic necessity, as immigrants competed with enslaved laborers for employment, swaying most away from the region in general. According to Doyle, "the prospect of competing with slaves or even cheap free-black labor kept most foreign immigrants away from the South."[56] Immigrants who decided to head south competed with each other and free blacks for jobs that white Southerners did not want to do, such as "grocers, bakers, dry goods merchants, commission brokers, tailors, and shoemakers."[57] South Carolina's entire immigrant population constituted only 2.9% of its total population, nothing in comparison to Louisiana's 23% and Missouri's 11.8%.[58] Therefore, small cities in cotton states attracted far fewer immigrants than larger, more industrialized cities, such as St. Louis and New Orleans.

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[55] Cohn, *Mass Migration Under Sail*, 133.
[56] Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 6.
[57] Jeff Strickland, "How the Germans Became White Southerners: German Immigrants and African Americans in Charleston, South Carolina, 1860-1880," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 28, no. 1 (Fall 2008): 54.
[58] Cohn, *Mass Migration Under Sail*, 169-170.; South Carolina's total 1850 population was 283,523, including only whites and free blacks. Louisiana's total 1850 population was 272,953 and Missouri's was 594,622.

Aumann settled in Columbia between August 1854 and July 1860, though she may have lived elsewhere during that time. The city's appeal to Aumann likely stemmed from its meager general population but significant German immigrant population. Finding a community among which to mourn for her son Solomon and come to terms with her immigration would have been of the utmost importance for her. Immigrant families, such as the Meyers, often counseled their relatives to "stay for a while in the area where your people are" to combat feelings of anxiety about finding work.[59] Aumann needed to find her "people" among whom she could find solidarity and assistance in establishing herself in the United States. In 1860, Columbia's immigrant population totaled 147 Germans (including Aumann), 294 Irish, and 133 British (89 from England, 40 from Scotland and 4 from Wales)–14% of the 8,052 residents.[60] The German population in the city, making up only 1.8% of the city's total population, would have provided Aumann the close-knit community she needed to cope with leaving her son. Columbia's modest total population provided the opportunity for Aumann to more easily integrate into the city's red-light as she established a monopoly on the sex trade, though whether she practiced sex work in Germany or intended to practice upon her arrival to the United States is unknown.

Aumann began operating her brothel at the southwest corner of Gates and Lady streets as early as July 1860–five months before South Carolina's secession from the United States. Less than a block from the city market and the business district, Aumann's entire estate extended "seventy-two feet front on Gates street, and running west on Lady street one hundred and fifty-

[59] "Meyer family letter, December 17, 1855." Meyer Brothers Records, Louisiana and Lower Mississippi Valley Collections, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University Libraries, accessed from *German Heritage in Letters*, April 23, 2023, https://germanletters.org/items/show/1882.

[60] Because of tensions far beyond my comprehension, I am keeping Ireland and the British empire separate from each other because the census does not specifically designate Northern Ireland as a separate entity from the rest of Ireland. 1860 census, Columbia, Richland, South Carolina, accessed through *Ancestry.com.*

seven feet."[61] Her neighbors owned their properties and "included schoolteachers and a Methodist clergyman."[62] In 1860, her personal estate valued at $800 on the federal census, $28,724 in modern value.[63] The enumerator, however, either failed to list her real estate value, or she had not yet purchased her home. Either way, Aumann resided at this location where, according to Reverend J. J. O'Connell, she was "for many years, pandering to the most degrading passions of lawless and immoral men" prior to her death.[64] During these "many years," the city deemed Aumann the "Dutch Rose" of Columbia.

Whereas Aumann left behind a legacy of her own in Columbia, so too did Helen Jewett in New York City. On April 10, 1836, a regular client murdered Jewett. Timothy Gilfoyle identifies Jewett as a part of the "wealthy, free, and female," who practiced sex work as their main source of income and excelled while doing so—a category into which Aumann herself would easily fit.[65] Jewett lived and worked in Rosina Townsend's City Hotel and maintained an extensive customer base by writing letters to her clients. After her death, "a trunk in her room yielded over ninety letters both from and to her."[66] She conducted her services and lived her life extravagantly, owning at least $1,500 worth of clothing and jewelry at the time of her death. Jewett lived and worked extravagantly. According to the *New York Herald*, "she was famous for parading Wall Street in an elegant green dress, and generally with a letter in her hand. She used to look at the brokers with great boldness of demeanor."[67] Aumann and Jewett shared many

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[61] *An Act to Vest Certain Real Estate in the City of Columbia, Liable to Escheat, in Soloman Aumann*," South Carolina State General Assembly 15 (1874-75): 881.
[62] Helsley, *Wicked Columbia*, 647.
[63] 1860 census, Columbia, Richland, South Carolina, accessed through Ancestry.com.; CPI Inflation Calculator. https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1860?amount=800.
[64] O'Connell, *Catholicity in the Carolinas and Georgia*, 284.
[65] Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 97.; Yamin, "Wealthy, Free, and Female," 4.
[66] Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett*, 17.
[67] *New York Harold*, April 12, 1836. Quoted in Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett*, 21.

similarities in the ways they lived their lives but, despite the fact more is known about Jewett, Aumann's wealth and success far exceeded Jewett's.

The 1860 census identified six women practicing in Aumann's brothel: Amelia Brown (21), Mary Jones (20), Blanche Mellville (19), Kateline Seabrook (18), Julia Lee (18), and Floreace Johnston (16).[68] Comparatively, only seven women, including Aumann, working in a brothel exemplified Columbia's small red-light district. Brothels provided sex workers with economic and physical stability, which others forms of sex work neglected to provide. According to Winnick and Kinsie, "working in a brothel represented the least demanding kind of prostitution."[69] Physically, streetwalking took a toll on women, especially during the summer months in South Carolina. Brothels provided shelter from the heat and humidity in the summer in addition to warmth and a consistent customer base in the winter. Further, operating out of a brothel meant sex workers "did not have to engage in any sales activity," avoid policemen, or seek out clients, though they certainly could if the mood struck them.[70] Many women, like New York City's Helen Jewett, "preferred to work in communities other than their own, in order to avoid recognition by people they knew."[71] Therefore, it is unsurprising that only two of the six women living in Aumann's brothel were from South Carolina.

Larger Southern cities, such as Nashville and New Orleans, had a significantly greater population of sex workers than Columbia. Nashville's 1860 red-light district consisted of 95 women who identified themselves as "prostitutes" on the federal census. According to the same census, New Orleans had four brothels with sixteen "prostitutes" divided among them.[72] On the

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[68] 1860 census, Columbia, Richland, South Carolina, accessed through Ancestry.com.
[69] Winnick and Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce*, 143.
[70] Winnick and Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce*, 143.
[71] Winnick and Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce*, 143.
[72] This is a low number compared to what historians know about the notorious red-light district in New Orleans – however, women likely lied to the enumerator about their occupations. Motivations for lying ranged from their

other hand, big Southern cities and their populations of sex workers faltered in comparison to New York City. Stansell cites an estimate of over 5,000 women operating "on the town" in 1856, a significant increase from the 1,200 in 1818.[73] Smaller populations meant fewer sex workers. Once the Civil War broke out, Columbia's small red-light district flourished as refugees increased the district's customer base and Aumann's maintenance of her success during the war demonstrates as much.

On November 23, 1861, Aumann created a will to ensure the security of her family and estate in case of her death, citing Garret Van Antwerp as the executor of her estate. The will called for Antwerp to sell whatever real and personal property Aumann possessed when she died and to send the resulting money to her father, Henry S. Aumann, to establish a trust for the "support, Education, and maintenance of [her] only child Solomon."[74] From there, once Solomon reached twenty-one years of age, Aumann wanted her father to pay over the entire estate to her son. Creating a will destined her estate for probate assessment, which forever engrained her success in the historical record and captured the dynamics of Columbia's wartime sex trade.

Figure 3. Aumann's signature as witnessed on her finished will on November 23, 1861. *Courtesy of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History.*

Aumann's estate executor poses an alternative, though speculative, explanation for her decision to settle in Columbia. Garret Van Antwerp was born in 1809, in Schenectady, New

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desire to keep their occupation private to their lack of consideration of themselves as sex workers. See Clinton, "'Public Women' and Sexual Politics During the American Civil War."

[73] Stansell, *City of Women*, 173.

[74] I have a suspicion that the creation of her will was in response to her coming into legal ownership of her property, but I have not been able to find the property records to prove that. However, based on census records and her son's appeal to the state for ownership of her property in 1874, she must have taken ownership of the property sometime between 1860 and her death in 1863. Aumann, Sophia of Richland District, Will Typescript (1863), Microcopy No. 9, S108093, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.

York.[75] Though he had moved to Columbia with his wife Elizabeth by 1850, he maintained his connections in New York and still had family living there.[76] After his death in 1866, a mere three years after Aumann's, his will revealed that he owned property in the Bronx neighborhood of Morrisania, about 27 miles from the New York harbor.[77] Perhaps he was in the business of pimping women and luring them to South Carolina to work in the sex trade. Aumann may have encountered him, or someone working for him, after she landed in New York and was persuaded to Columbia with the promise of money. Perhaps Antwerp enticed Aumann into the sex trade after she arrived in Columbia. Equally as likely, however, is that Aumann met Antwerp in Columbia and befriended him.

The city's wartime landscape witnessed a population growth beyond anything it had previously experienced and Aumann watched as the city she knew changed while the thousands of "refugees, war workers, and soldiers" flocked to the wartime industry around Columbia.[78] In 1863, Columbia's population jumped up to 16,000, a 100% growth from its 1860 population of 8,052.[79] As tensions between the Union and the Confederacy increased so too did the populations of Southern cities on the outskirts of the frontlines. In 1864, Columbia crammed 25,000-30,000 people into its city limits. A rise in population of this magnitude stretched the city's resources to razor thin margins. J. F. Williams recalls that "Columbia was crowded to its capacity. Every place that a person could get into was taken by refugees from all over the country."[80]

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[75] 1850 Census, Columbia, Richland County, South Carolina, access through ancestry.com; 1860 Census, Columbia, Richland County, South Carolina, access through ancestry.com.
[76] 1850 Census, Columbia, Richland County, South Carolina, access through ancestry.com; 1860 Census, Columbia, Richland County, South Carolina, access through ancestry.com.
[77] Garret V. Antwerp, New York, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1659-1999.
[78] Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 190-191.
[79] Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 146.
[80] Williams, *Old and New Columbia*, 117.

Southern cities along the frontlines witnessed the Civil War differently. Large cities, like Richmond, faced constant threats of invasion, destruction of land and property, significant overpopulation, and rampant inflation, all of which contributed to how their citizens experienced the war. In 1860, Richmond's population consisted of 37,910 residents, including whites, free blacks, and the enslaved. Yael Sternhell explains that "once chosen as the Southern seat of government, the genteel town was reinvented as a capital city at war, home to the nation's administrative center and army headquarters as well as to major factories, hospitals, and a central rail station."[82] Almost immediately the city was "swamped with refugees, government workers, and soldiers in every capacity" and "[t]rains of quartermasters' wagons, bodies of Federal prisoners, ambulances with sick and wounded, mounted aides-de-camp, or masses of determined, though rough-looking Confederate troops, trailed through the streets incessantly."[83] Resources quickly became scarce as Richmond witnessed a population growth of 215% from 37,910 residents in 1860 to over 120,000 by 1865.[84] Richmond's physical landscape quickly changed to reflect the Confederate government's and military's domination of the city.

Table 1. Columbia's Population Growth from 1850 to 1864[81]

Year	Population	Percentage of Growth
1850	6,060	--
1860	8,052	32.9%
1863	16,000	100%
1864	25,000-30,000	56.25-87.5%

Women flooded Richmond's wartime red-light district as the city grappled with its new designation as the capital of the Confederacy. According to Gaines, "throngs of prostitutes flowed into the city" both to simply survive the war as "destitute refugees" and to cater to the

[81] Moore, *Columbia and Richland County*, 119.; "The Police," *Daily South Carolinian*, March 17, 1864.
[82] Sternhell, *Routes of War*, 63.
[83] Sternhell, *Routes of War*, 63.
[84] Doyle, *New Men, New Cities, New South*, 15.; Sternhell, *Routes of War*, 63.

soldiers and government officials who worked in the capital.[85] Many sex workers came to Richmond "penniless, helpless, unadvised, unrestrained by the presence of those to whom they are known."[86] The hopes of securing assistance from the government proved futile as resources became scarce, and competition between sex workers increased with the over dilution of the district. According to the *Richmond Dispatch*, the city's markets became "extremely destitute of all kinds of supplies which the people have usually been in the habit of obtaining."[87] Compared to Richmond, Columbia experienced the war differently.

As a center of military manufacturing, Columbia's economic conditions, though bad, remained at a more stable level than Richmond's.[88] Because of the city's agricultural-based economy, many people were able to sustain their families. Williams recollects that: "The south, not being a manufacturing country, and all of the seaports being blockaded, it was very hard to get any goods through and we had to fall back on our own resources."[89] Likewise, LeConte noted "Though our salaries at the College continued, as we were State officers, they were dreadfully insufficient on account of the depreciation of the currency, and I found it necessary to supplement mine."[90] Some items, such as bacon and toilet soap, remained hot commodities during the war, but for the most part, Columbia and its citizens, along with several aid organizations, worked to provide for its struggling citizens. Aumann, however, comfortably survived the war years and thrived despite escalated wartime inflation.

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[85] Gaines, *An Evening with Venus*, 118.
[86] *Daily Mississippian* (Jackson), April 8, 1863.
[87] "The Markets." *Richmond Dispatch*, March 3, 1863, 1.
[88] Directory in *Daily Southern Guardian*, September 8, 1863.; Helen John Henning, ed. *Columbia: Capital City of South Carolina, 1786-1936* (Columbia: The R. L. Bryan Company, 1936), 27.; Williams, *Old and New Columbia*, 104, 107-111.;
[89] Williams, *Old and New Columbia*, 104.
[90] Joseph LeConte, *The Autobiography of Joseph LeConte* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1903), 183.

Aumann's probate record supplies tangible evidence of her success and her experiences in the Southern sex trade, while also delineating her from the historiographical trends condemning her to destitution. The probate assessor for her estate noted six rooms in the main house. Five of these rooms contained bedsteads and bedding, signaling their use as bedrooms, in addition to a mattress on the floor. The parlor, too, had a mattress on the floor. Perhaps Aumann provided the extra mattresses as accommodations for customers who consumed too much alcohol or who paid for an overnight experience, which would mean the women in Aumann's brothel maintained strict boundaries with their clients. On the other hand, though less likely, extra mattresses may have meant extra space for more sex workers to work and sleep. In the yard of the estate, two buildings acted as additional bedrooms with the capacity to house three additional occupants. One of those buildings either had two rooms with bedsteads, or a third building existed. The assessor labeled the building "Shed Room and Yard No. 1," insinuating the existence of a third building, and the other one as "Yard No. 2." Yard No. 2 contained "kitchen furniture," which aligns with the nineteenth-century tradition of having the kitchen separate from the main house in case of fire.[91]

Figure 4. This is a closeup of where Aumann's property would have been in 1860-1863. Annotation added by author. *Courtesy of C. N. Drie, Bird's eye view of the city of Columbia, South Carolina. Baltimore, 1872.*

Mahogany and marble-topped furniture and photographs, though whose is unknown, in gilt frames decorated Aumann's suite, "Room No 1," in the brothel. The probate record distinguishes her suite from other bedrooms by listing personal items while, for other rooms, they listed only furnishings, such as bedsteads, bureaus, chairs, etc. Aumann's suite contained

[91] Aumann, Sophia of Richland District, Will Typescript (1863), Microcopy No. 9, S108093, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.

$2,725 worth of personal items, translating to $22,147.67 in modern value.[92] One item in particular stands out amongst the furniture, clothing, and wine–a silver watch, valued at $25 ($203.19 in modern value).[93] Nineteenth-century watches needed maintenance "at least every other year" and were especially valuable because of the gold and silver from which they were made.[94] A silver watch, like Aumann's, symbolized status. Alexis McCrossen's analysis of the records of a nineteenth-century watch repairman determines most female watch owners "came from the comfortable classes."[95] Women's watches were made with "precious metals, jewels, other ornamental touches, as well as mnemonic devices such as a mother's, or other loved one's, initials."[96] In addition to her watch, Aumann also had two clocks–one in her room and another in the parlor. The presence of these timepieces illustrates Aumann's time consciousness, a necessity when running a business like a brothel. In his analysis of southern merchants, Mark M. Smith notes that Southerners recognized that "time was money, that punctuality in business transactions was a virtue and necessity."[97] Perhaps Aumann purchased the watch herself, perhaps a family member, friend, or client gifted it to her–however she acquired it, her watch signifies not only her success but also the business mindset from which that success stemmed.

A looking glass, perhaps attached to a stand or hanging on the wall, resided in Aumann's parlor room. More commonly known as a mirror, the looking glass served both a functional and

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[92] The estimates of Aumann's estate which the assessor provided on the record are representative of the items' value in Confederate greybacks. To properly assess the value of the items, the Confederate value must be converted to its value in Union greenbacks, so going forward, the modern value of the calculations is done so with the greenbacks value, not the greybacks value. When an estimated price of an item is listed as $25, this means $25 in Confederate dollars. CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=899.25.
[93] CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=8.25
[94] Alexis McCrossen, "The 'Very Delicate Construction' of Pocket Watches and Time Consciousness in the Nineteenth-Century United States," in *Winterthur Portfolio* 44, no. 1 (Spring 2010), 2.
[95] McCrossen, "The 'Very Delicate Construction,'" 15.
[96] McCrossen, "The 'Very Delicate Construction,'" 15.
[97] Mark M. Smith, "Old South Time in Comparative Perspective," in *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 5 (Dec. 1996), 1447.

decorative purpose in the brothel. In the nineteenth century, looking glass owners placed them across from light fixtures to project light into the room. Doing so increased visibility and expanded the illuminated space.[98] Looking glasses also contributed a playful aspect to the spaces they inhabited. The glass reflected "segments of an interior that changed as the viewer moved," offering alternative perspectives and contributing "certain visual effects that people enjoyed."[99] Situated most often in parlors, looking glasses acted as showpieces for guests while also giving them the opportunity to fix themselves up before venturing to the main parts of the house. Prior to 1865, the method of creating a looking glass meant applying amalgam of mercury to glass to make it reflective but in doing so, toxic to their owners.[100] Displaying an object made out of a costly material like glass in one's home signaled "wealth and high social standing" because of the intricate and time-consuming process of their production, requiring the glass to be "colourless, free of bubbles and thick enough to be ground and polished on both sides before coating."[101] The probate assessor appraised Aumann's looking glass at $25 ($203.19 in modern value).[102] The presence of the looking glass demonstrates the success of Aumann's brothel–a success she displayed prominently for her customers to see.

Aumann furnished her brothel with pieces of marble-topped furniture. In Aumann's suite, she owned a mahogany pressing bureau with a marble top and a mahogany washstand with a marble top. The probate assessor valued the bureau at $100 ($812.76 in modern value) and the washstand at $50 ($406.38 in modern value).[103] In the parlor, Aumann had a $25 marble-topped

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[98] Ames, *Death in the Dining Room*, 24.
[99] Ames, *Death in the Dining Room*, 24.
[100] Ames, *Death in the Dining Room*, 24; PGG Industries, *Glass: History, Manufacture and Its Universal Application* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh Plate Glass Co., 1923), 56.; Per Hadsund, "The Tin-Mercury Mirror: Its Manufacturing Technique and Deterioration Processes," in *Studies in Conversation* 38, no. 1 (Feb. 1993): 4.
[101] Ames, *Death in the Dining Room*, 24.; Hadsund, "The Tin-Mercury Mirror," 4.
[102] CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=8.25.
[103] CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=33; CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=16.50.

center table ($203.19 in modern value).[104] Furniture topped with marble tended to be more expensive than pieces topped with wood. Compared to wood, marble was "heavier, more expensive, and more dangerous to fragile objects."[105] According to Kenneth Ames, the nonfunctional slabs of marbles on "sideboards, chests of drawers, dressing cases, washstands, cabinets, tables, and stands, were largely chosen for their courtly associations."[106] Along with the looking glass, Aumann exhibited her associations with wealth and success through the furnishings she purchased.

A piano sat in Aumann's parlor, waiting for someone with the privilege of knowing how to play to caress its keys. Its glossy wooden appearance likely drew the attention of guests as they entered the brothel. Showcased in the parlor, the assessor valued the instrument at $100 ($813 in modern value). Though the probate assessor neglected to list the type of piano, two types were available in the nineteenth century: the conventional square and the grand piano. Aumann likely had a conventional square piano, which was most common in residential South Carolina parlors because of its compact size and its ability to "withstand the climate's fluctuating temperatures and high humidity."[107] In the late 1850s and early 1860s, pianos were increasingly accessible to both upper and middle classes in the United States.[108] Yet mid-century pianos still served "as a symbol of wealth and status" despite its emerging attainability.[109] The instrument marked its owner as having "good taste and refinement," rapidly becoming an "object of envy" once the Civil War ignited.[110]

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[104] CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=8.25.
[105] Ames, *Death in the Dining Room,* 25.
[106] Ames, *Death in the Dining Room*, 25.
[107] Dana E. Byrd, "Ebony and Ivory: Pianos, People, Property, and Freedom on the Plantation, 1861-1870," in *The Oxford Handbook of History and Material Culture*, eds. Ivan Gaskell and Sarah Anne Carter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 440.
[108] Byrd, "Ebony and Ivory," 435.
[109] Byrd, "Ebony and Ivory," 435.
[110] Byrd, "Ebony and Ivory," 435.

Aumann owning such an instrument communicated a knowledge of how to play. Possession of a piano "was evidence of gentility, ability to play it."[111] Thus, Aumann's family likely educated her and, as a part of that education, her instructors taught her how to play. The historical record documented Aumann's ability to read and write as her signature appears on her will and the 1860 census notes her literacy.[112] Similar to Aumann, the items in Helen Jewett's room after her death left hints of her education. According to the police officer, Jewett kept a book "where she copied down poems and other literary passages. A worktable was strewn with pens, ink, and expensive writing paper."[113] She wrote letters to her clients to build lasting relationships with them and keep her services in demand. Comparably, Aumann's piano playing increased the value of her brothel by providing an extra level of entertainment for guests. Winnick and Kinsie note that "Only expensive places had a pianist, who would usually sit in the parlor and play sentimental songs."[114] Showcasing a piano as part of her parlor, Aumann demanded people's attention as they entered her brothel and, in doing so, she provided a peek into her past before the sex trade.

Hidden throughout the brothel, a stockpile of wine waited to be served to clients. In Aumann's suite, fifteen bottles of dry wine were assessed at a total of $750 ($6,065.69 in modern value).[115] The passageway closet also contained $750 of wine, consisting of box wine, dry Madeira wine, and barrel wine. In total, Aumann had $1,500 in wine before she died ($12,191 in

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[111] Byrd, "Ebony and Ivory," 436.
[112] Aumann, Sophia of Richland District, Will Typescript (1863), Microcopy No. 9, S108093, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.; 1860 Census, Columbia, Richland, South Carolina, accessed through *ancestry.com*.
[113] Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett*, 17.
[114] Winnick and Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce*, 141.
[115] CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=247.50.

modern value).[116] Brothels commonly provided alcohol to their clients at "exorbitant prices," though some clients chose to arrive comfortably inebriated.[117]

Not only did Aumann possess a significant amount of wine, but she also had five cases of rare wine from Madeira. Each case was worth $50, totaling $250 ($2,031.90 in modern value).[118] In 1851, the vineyards on Madeira became overrun by a fungus which almost completely decimated their grapes.[119] Production of madeira "fell from almost 12,000 pipes per year in 1850 to 36 pipes in 1855."[120] Around the start of the Civil War, production of madeira started rising once again, but Abraham Lincoln's naval blockade prevented Southern imports from entering the region. Wines and other alcohols quickly became luxury items as the blockade created supply shortages. According to James H. Tuten, low country planters valued madeira culturally and economically as it illustrated "class identity and even position within the class." Toward the end of the war, planters sold their madeira after Union soldiers seized their property and financial assets.[121] Aumann's possession of such an immense amount of rare wine demonstrates she had monetary and physical access to luxury items when others struggled to survive.

Aumann's growth in personal property captures both the upward trajectory of her success from 1860 to 1863 and the depreciation of the Confederate dollar. Because of the change in currency from Union greenbacks to Confederate greybacks and the wartime inflation, the value of wartime personal property declined with the value of the Confederate dollar. Therefore, Aumann's wartime personal estate estimate must be considered in the same terms as her estate before the war. In 1860, Aumann's personal estate totaled only $800 ($29,655.04 in modern

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[116] CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=495.
[117] Winnick and Kinsie, *The Lively Commerce*, 192.
[118] CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=82.50.
[119] James H. Tuten, "Liquid Assets: Madeira Wine and Cultural Capital among Lowcountry Planters, 1735-1900," in *American Nineteenth Century History* 6, no. 2 (June 2005), 180.
[120] Tuten, "Liquid Assets," 180.
[121] Tuten, "Liquid Assets," 175.

value).[122] In 1863, the probate assessor estimated her personal estate at $4,184.[123] Considering inflation, the equivalent value of her personal property in Union greenbacks totally only $1,380.72 ($33,714.88 in modern value).[124] As shown by Table 2, her personal property increased by 72.59% in three years. Though not an extravagant amount of money, her estate more than doubled in *only* three years, combating the historiographical notion of sex workers as financially irresponsible and destitute. In accordance with her will, the money received from Aumann's personal items went to Antwerp, her executor, to pay the expenses accrued after the attack, her death, and the subsequent manhunt for and trial of her killer.

Aumann's growth in personal property, though significant, pales in comparison to the sheer amount of money paid out by her estate to Antwerp for debt settlement. He received $18,195.35 ($147,873 in modern value) after Aumann's death and once her personal property was sold.[125] A breakdown of this payout reveals that divided between two separate banks, Aumann had $7,300

Table 2. Sophia Aumann's Personal Property Growth

Year	Value in 1863 Greybacks (.33/$1)	Value in Greenbacks	Modern Value	Percentage of Growth
1860	--	$800	$29,655.04	--
1863	$4,184	$1,380.72	$33,714.88	72.59%

[122] 1860 census, Columbia, Richland, South Carolina, accessed through *Ancestry.com*.; CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1860?amount=800.
[123] Sophia Aumann, *Richland County, South Carolina Miscellaneous Estate Records, 1799-1955*, *South Carolina. County Court (Richland County)*.
[124] Aumann, Sophia of Richland District, Will Typescript (1863), Microcopy No. 9, S108093, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.; CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=126.79.
[125] CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=6004.

($59,331 in modern value).[126] Antwerp also received $5,890 after a stash of gold Aumann saved had been converted to Confederate bills ($47,878.87 in modern value).[127] She had

Table 3. Sophia Aumann's Estate Payout and Post-Attack Expense Break Downs

Category	Value in 1863 Greybacks (.33/$1)	Value in Greenbacks	Modern Value
Overall Estate Payout	$18,195.35	$6,004.47	$146,619.15
Money in Commercial Bank	$4,300.00	$1,419	$34,649.61
Money in Branch Bank	$3,000.00	$990	$24,174.15
Gold Cash-in ($294.50 in Gold)	$5,890	$1,943.70	$47,461.91
Total House Rent Paid to Estate from Women Brothel	$440 / year $36.67 / month (June 1863 – June 1864)	$145.2 / year $12.10 / month	$3,545.54 / year $295.46 / month
Total House Rent Estimate from Brothel per Person (based on 6 women)	$73.33 / year $6.11 / month	$24.20 / year $2.02 / month	$590.92 / year $49.33 / month
Overall Post-Attack Expenses (includes her care, funeral, and the means to bring killer to justice)	$9,762.94	$3,221.77	$78,670.25

a total of $13,190 saved ($107,202.86 in modern value).[128] Her estate records neglected to include the $5,000 in cash stolen by her attackers, though perhaps they had already spent what they took.[129] Incorporating the stolen money with Aumann's savings brings her savings total to $18,190 ($147,848 in modern value).[130] Not including the amount in her savings, Antwerp received $5,005 from other sales and payments from her estate ($40,679 in modern value).[131] Aumann's accumulation of money, especially the maintenance of her savings during wartime

[126] CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=2409.
[127] CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=1944.
[128] CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=4352.70.
[129] "A Woman Named Rosalie LeGrand," *Yorkville Enquirer*, June 24, 1863.
[130] CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=6003.
[131] CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=1651.65.

inflation, proves astounding and absolutely shatters the historiographical trend of painting sex workers as destitute and their success as ephemeral.

Aumann's tax records reflect the monthly house rent her estate received from the women who worked for her. After her death, the sex workers paid a total of $440 between June 24, 1863, and June 1, 1864, for rent. The record does not list the names of the women, nor does it specify the number of women living in the house. However, based on the number of women included on the 1860 census and the number of rooms identified on her probate record, Aumann's house had the capacity to comfortably house six practicing women.[132] With the amount paid to Aumann's estate and based on six women, the estimated house rent a month comes to $6.11 per month per woman. Unknown is whether the house was indeed full but even the ability to estimate the rent provides an intriguing glimpse into life in Columbia's wartime red-light district.

Aumann's posthumous records illustrate the sense of community which formed within the red-light district. Winnick and Kinsie maintain that sex workers "had feelings of considerable loyalty toward a specific brothel and its madam."[133] Women working in the brothel provided integral descriptions of Aumann's attacker, leading to his capture.[134] Further, Amelia Brown, three years after her initial appearance alongside Aumann on the 1860 census, also appeared on Aumann's tax records after her death. Brown, who was born in New York in 1839, likely helped manage the brothel after the attack and she received a payment of $100 ($813 in modern value) from Aumann's estate for doing so.[135] Though Aumann had no choice but to relinquish control

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[132] 1860 Census, Columbia, Richland, South Carolina, accessed through *ancestry.com*.; Aumann, Sophia of Richland District, Will Typescript (1863), Microcopy No. 9, S108093, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.
[133] Winnick and Kensie, *The Lively Commerce*, 142-143.
[134] Julian Selby, *Memorabilia and Anecdotal Reminiscences of Columbia, S.C.* (Columbia: The R. L. Bryan Company, 1905), 63.
[135] Aumann, Sophia of Richland District, Will Typescript (1863), Microcopy No. 9, S108093, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.; CPI Inflation Calculator, https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1863?amount=33.

over the brothel, the fact that Antwerp trusted Brown enough to help maintain the business signifies a loyal relationship between sex worker and madam.

William McGinnis, a grocer and notable figure in Columbia's red-light district, also appears on Aumann's posthumous records. McGinnis ran his grocery along Richardson Street, a short distance from where Aumann's brothel stood. The same William McGinnis was charged with "unlawfully maintaining a disorderly house" at the corner of Pendleton and Assembly streets in 1866. Columbia's residents nicknamed his property "Fort Ramsey," which according to the indictment record was "inhabited by loose and disorderly persons…who are a terror to the neighborhood."[136] In the days after Aumann's attack, however, he loaned one of his servants, likely enslaved, to assist the injured madam however she needed.[137] Her estate paid McGinnis $11.46 for his servant's services, or $93.10 in modern value.[138] Antwerp likely paid McGinnis because, in loaning his servant, McGinnis lost an individual who contributed to his livelihood. Whether McGinnis insisted on payment is unknown. McGinnis's enlistment to assist Aumann in her time of need demonstrates the communal attachment members of the red-light district had to each other.

Aumann's estate also owed $3,150 to the owner of an enslaved woman working on her property at her time of death. Antwerp paid said owner $3,150 for the services of their enslaved woman.[139] Unknown is whether the money given to the owner finished paying for the purchase

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[136] The State vs William McGinnis (Unlawfully Maintaining a Disorderly House), Indictments, Richland County, 1866. South Carolina Department of Archives & History.; Such an arrest in the year after the end of the Civil War highlights the changing dynamics of the city as Union soldiers lingered after William Tecumseh Sherman and his men burned portions of the city in February 1865.
[137] Aumann, Sophia of Richland District, Will Typescript (1863), Microcopy No. 9, S108093, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.
[138] Aumann, Sophia of Richland District, Will Typescript (1863), Microcopy No. 9, S108093, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.
[139] Aumann, Sophia of Richland District, Will Typescript (1863), Microcopy No. 9, S108093, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.

of the woman, or whether the owner hired the woman out to Aumann. Hiring out enslaved individuals remained a common practice throughout the war due both to the enslaver's fear of the Union army emancipating their property and the desire to rid themselves of the responsibility of providing for the enslaved.[140] The enslaved woman likely served as a house slave, but also may have been forced into providing sexual services to Aumann's clients.

Enslaved women's bodies were commodified at a more pervasive level than the women, like sex workers, who chose to commodify their bodies. Southern white women felt threatened by the presence of enslaved women in their households because their husbands raped them, which often resulted in pregnancy. Mary Chesnut wrote that slaveholding women were "surrounded by prostitutes," because of "a *monstrous* system" in which the "Mulattos one sees in every family exactly resemble the white children."[141] Chesnut's classification of enslaved women as prostitutes highlights that white women believed their husbands were being lured into temptation by the enslaved. White women's resentment of enslaved women likely resulted in their being hired out. Given that enslaved pregnancies increased the enslaver's property value, hiring enslaved women out to a brothel meant that, if being forced into sexual relations, any resulting pregnancy would go to the enslaver.

Hiring an enslaved woman would allow Aumann's brothel to provide racial options for their clientele in addition to providing a level of privacy to the client who would have been looked down on if his fellow Columbians found out he paid to have sex with a black woman. This would, of course, be against the will of the enslaved woman because enslaved women could not consent to sexual advances by men. According to Hannah Rosen, antebellum Southern law

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[140] Joseph P. Reidy, *Illusions of Emancipation: The Pursuit of Freedom and Equality in the Twilight of Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).; Silkenat, *Driven from Home.*; Taylor, *Embattled Freedom*.
[141] Quoted in Thavolia Glymph, *The Women's Fight: The Civil War's Battles for Home, Freedom, and Nation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020), 73.

insinuated that enslaved women were "incapable of consent—because, as slaves, they had no will or honor of their own—and simultaneously as always consenting to sex; in other words, the law represented enslaved women as lacking the will and honor to refuse consent."[142] Whether or not this unnamed enslaved woman was forced into prostitution, Aumann's possession of her at the time of her death reflects Aumann's financial ability to dip her toes into the slaveholding class.

Antwerp and the local sheriff's office enlisted Detective Morris Greenwall from Richmond to find Aumann's attackers, highlighting her prominence within Columbia. Greenwall served in the Confederate military as a second lieutenant in the 10th Louisiana Infantry until he resigned in January of 1862.[143] He then received an appointment as a detective for the Provost Marshal's office in Richmond, though when exactly is unknown. In early July 1863, Detective Greenwall located her attackers in Montgomery, Alabama, returning them to Columbia to stand trial.[144] He received a total of $1,700 from Aumann's estate–$1,600 as a reward for capturing her attackers and $100 for serving as a witness during the trial, amounting to $13,817 in modern value.[145] Hiring such a high profile authority to locate her attackers underlines the love, or at the very least care, that the individuals she surrounded herself with had for her. Antwerp ensured Aumann received the justice she deserved from the city and the city ensured at least one of her attackers received a sentence of death.

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[142] Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom*, 10.; see also, Stephanie M. H. Camp, "The Pleasures of Resistance: Enslaved Women and Body Politics in the Plantation South, 1830-1861," in *The Journal of Southern History* 68, no. 3 (Aug. 2002), 533-572.; and Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2022).
[143] National Park Service. *U.S., Civil War Soldiers, 1861-1865* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2007.
[144] "We Learn that Special Government Agent Morris Greenwald…" *Richmond Enquirer*, September 14, 1863.
[145] Aumann, Sophia of Richland District, Will Typescript (1863), Microcopy No. 9, S108093, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina

Sophia Aumann, though her death overshadowed her life, left behind a legacy distributed by her will, and revealed by her probate record. Marble-topped furniture, a looking glass, a piano, wine, cash, gold—these items and their nineteenth-century social and contextual significance mark both her personal and professional stake in the sex trade. Aumann's experience as a sex worker in Columbia demands historians to further excavate the dynamics of the Southern sex trade through individual experience, specifically in the years leading up to and during the Civil War. Her life demonstrates opportunities for sex worker success and denotes historiographical trends condemning them to destitution. Aumann died before the truly trying years of the war, as Columbia saw the height of its refugee crisis and a third of the city burned by William Tecumseh Sherman's troops in 1865. Still, her maintenance and amount of her wealth three years into the war remains impressive and distinguishes her from the generalization of financial irresponsibility waged against sex workers.

While historians of Northern sex work distinguish Helen Jewett from the masses, the studies on Southern sex work neglect the significance of understanding how red-light districts function and influence the workers within their bounds, instead focusing on the policing of districts by Union generals in Union-occupied Southern cities. Aumann's lived experiences act as historical evidence of the financial and personal opportunities sex work presented to nineteenth-century women.

The conditions of Aumann's will went unfulfilled in the years after her death. None of the relatives identified as receiving parts of her hard-earned wealth came forward to claim their legacies. Eventually, the estate fell into the hands of the state and was sold for $5,000 to the Trustees of the Columbia Academy, which allocated the property for the use of the Female

College. [146] In 1874, Solomon Aumann—the son Sophia left behind and who was still residing in Germany—appealed to the South Carolina General Assembly for ownership of the property and its existing structures. [147] Aumann's son finally reunited with the remnants of his mother's estate, fulfilling her desire for him to possess it "as his own property absolutely and forever."

Sophia Aumann had laid at rest inside Columbia's city limits in the Tickleberry Cemetery, now known as Elmwood Cemetery, for eleven years before her son reunited with his mother's legacy. At forty-three years old, Aumann became more successful than many experienced in their lifetime. But after years of hard work, her life came to an end because of that success. Like Jewett, Sophia Aumann lived life as a madam extravagantly and died before she finished doing so.[148]

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[146] I was unable to calculated the modern value of this amount because the exact date of the property's sale is unknown.; Aumann, Sophia of Richland District, Will Typescript (1863), Microcopy No. 9, S108093, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.; *An Act to Vest Certain Real Estate in the City of Columbia, Liable to Escheat, in Soloman Aumann*," South Carolina State General Assembly 15 (1874-75): 881.

[147] Aumann, Sophia of Richland District, Will Typescript (1863), Microcopy No. 9, S108093, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, South Carolina.; *An Act to Vest Certain Real Estate in the City of Columbia, Liable to Escheat, in Soloman Aumann*," South Carolina State General Assembly 15 (1874-75): 881.

[148] Cohen, *The Murder of Helen Jewett*, 17.

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