

H-France Salon
Volume 9 (2017), Issue 18, #1

**Honoring the Life and Work of Rachel Ginnis Fuchs,
Scholar, Teacher, Colleague, Mentor, and Friend**

An Introduction

**Jean Elisabeth Pedersen
University of Rochester**

It is an honor, a privilege, and a bittersweet pleasure to introduce this issue of *H-France Salon* in honor and memory of Rachel Fuchs, the great French historian who left us too soon in October 2016. There have been many well-deserved tributes to Rachel and her work already, and there are sure to be many more.¹ This Salon takes a multidimensional multimedia approach by pairing the video footage of a special roundtable in Rachel's honor and memory that took place at the 63rd annual meeting of the Society for French Historical Studies in Washington, DC, in April 2017, with a series of additional essays that reflect on the creation, content, and reception of some of Rachel's major historical works.

Rachel was the distinguished author, co-author, or co-editor of seven important works of French and European history: *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France* (SUNY, 1984); *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (Rutgers, 1992); *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870-1914*, edited with Elinor Accampo and Mary Lynn Stewart (Johns Hopkins, 1995); *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge, 1995); *Women in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, written with Victoria E. Thompson (Palgrave MacMillan, 2005); the award-winning *Contested Paternity: Constructing Families in Modern France* (Johns Hopkins, 2008); and the recent posthumously-appearing *Gender and Citizenship in Historical and Transnational Perspective: Agency, Space, Borders*, edited with Anne R. Epstein (Palgrave MacMillan, 2017). Rachel's work in *Abandoned Children*, *Poor and Pregnant*, and *Contested Paternity*, the three great historical monographs that she singled out as the result of her scholarly commitment "to study the French family by

¹ See, for example, "Rachel Ginnis Fuchs, 1939-2016," *The Arizona Republic*, 20 October 2016; Johnson Kent Wright, "Rachel Fuchs (1939-2016)," *French Historical Studies* 40, no. 1 (2017): 1-3; Pamela Stewart, "In Memoriam: Rachel Ginnis Fuchs, 1939-2016" *Pacific Historical Review* 86, No. 1 (2017), 189-191; *Practiced Citizenship: Women, Gender and the State in Modern France*, ed. Nimisha Barton and Richard Hopkins (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, forthcoming 2018); special forum in the *Journal of Women's History*, ed. Elisa Camiscioli (forthcoming 2018); special issue of *French Historical Studies*, ed. Elinor Accampo and Venita Datta (forthcoming 2019). The Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association devoted a special session to Rachel's memory at its annual meeting in August 2017; and the Coordinating Committee on Women in the Historical Profession has established a new fellowship in Rachel's name. See Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association, Provisional Program of the 110th annual meeting, Session 56, <http://pcb.cgu.edu/program.htm>; Coordinating Committee on Women in the Historical Profession, "Rachel Fuchs Memorial Award," <https://theccwh.org/ccwh-awards/rachel-fuchs-memorial-award/>.

concentrating on those who fell outside the conjugal unit,” have transformed our understanding of modern French history forever by reconstructing the forgotten life experiences and survival strategies of abandoned children and poor mothers in Paris and the provinces, by explaining how and why French policy makers and cultural commentators came to accept the “working-class mother-child dyad” as an alternative family form in its own right, by identifying the roots of the modern French welfare state in the proliferation of programs to support mothers and children at the end of the nineteenth century, and by exploring the on-going tension between definitions of fatherhood that rely on biological kinship and definitions of fatherhood that rely on social, economic, and emotional support.²

Rachel was in the middle of two additional book projects when she died, two innovative microhistories in which she hoped to shed new light on nineteenth- and twentieth-century French neighborhood networks and family affairs by focusing on key legal cases, presenting them in vivid detail, and combining the compelling interest of the best historical novels with the contextual analysis, archival expertise, and historical insight of the best scholarly work. “Crossing Boundaries: Families in Vichy France,” which we can start to imagine from the text of the presidential address that Rachel delivered to the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association in 2009 and published in the *Pacific Historical Review* in 2010, focuses on the complicated series of interlocking divorce and child custody cases that united and divided three generations of husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and children from the Kahan and Ponelle families in the turbulent period from 1937 to 1942.³ “The Angel-Makers of Mission Street: Abortion and Community in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris,” which we can partially reconstruct from the podcast of a talk that Rachel gave at the Sorbonne in 2013 and the resulting article that she published in *Genre et histoire* in 2016, focuses on the criminal abortion trial and conviction of midwife Joséphine Cornu in 1873 to study the history of “ordinary people who live difficult lives,” provide “insights into an aspect of women’s private lives within the liminal terrain of the neighborhood,” and analyze the “relationships of power in the daily lives of men and women” as they interacted with “personal needs, community standards, state organizations[,] and the cultural discourse of the moral republic of 1870s Paris.”⁴

² Rachel G. Fuchs, *Contested Paternity: Constructing Families in Modern France* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 2, 112. Rachel’s forthcoming essay “Beyond Fiction: *Misère* in Historical Context” sums up some of these major discoveries about the interconnected histories of men, women, children, changing French attitudes towards the family, and the role of gender in the rise of the French welfare state in a new way by demonstrating the extent to which the life experiences and survival strategies of the major characters in Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* typify or differ from the life experiences and survival strategies of the real abandoned children, poor women, mothers, fathers, and other family members whose experiences she reconstructed through her work in the French archives. See Rachel G. Fuchs, “Beyond Fiction: *Misère* in Historical Context,” in *Approaches to Teaching Hugo’s Les Misérables*, ed. Michal Peled Ginsburg and Bradley Stephens (New York: Modern Language Association of America, forthcoming). I thank Katie Jarvis and Stephanie McBride-Schreiner for helping me locate this piece, and Michal Peled Ginsburg for permission to read, discuss, and reference her pre-publication copy of Rachel’s text.

³ See Rachel G. Fuchs, “Crossing Borders in Love, War, and History: French Families during World War II,” *Pacific Historical Review* 79:1 (February 2010), 1-22. For Rachel’s earlier work on the Kahan and Ponelle families, whose story she discovered in the archives of a private Parisian legal firm when she was working on *Contested Paternity*, see Fuchs, *Contested Paternity*, 247-257, esp. 249-252; and for her discussion of the relationship between *Contested Paternity* and “Crossing Boundaries,” Fuchs, “Crossing Borders in Love, War, and History,” 20-22.

⁴ Rachel G. Fuchs, abstract for “Angel Makers (Faiseuses d’Anges) of the Quartier Notre-Dame des Champs: Community and Personal Networks in 1870s Paris,” *Genre et Histoire* 17 (Printemps 2016),

Rachel was not only an important social historian and an extraordinary archival scholar, but also a warm and enthusiastic colleague, a supportive and insightful editor, and a generous friend and mentor who made immeasurable contributions to the historical profession and welcomed generations of new students into the field of French history. She served as president of the Society for French Historical Studies from 1999 to 2000, president of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association from 2008 to 2009, editor of *French Historical Studies* from 2011 to 2014, and co-president of the Coordinating Council for Women in History from 2012 to 2016. Searches through the databases of the ACLS Humanities E-Book Project, Google Books, the Thomson Reuters Web of Science (the new home of the former Humanities Citation Index and Social Sciences Citation Index), and elsewhere work together to reveal the countless books, dissertations, articles, and other projects whose acknowledgements list Rachel's name with love and gratitude for the contribution of her scholarly expertise, her intellectual inspiration, and her personal and professional support. It is a fitting tribute that the Coordinating Council for Women in History has conceived of its new Rachel Ginnis Fuchs Memorial Award as an honor that "recognizes and applauds service to the profession, including mentoring."⁵

"Colleague, Scholar, Mentor, and Friend: A Memorial Roundtable Honoring the Life and Work of Rachel Ginnis Fuchs," the special session that Cheryl Koos organized and Elinor Accampo chaired for the annual meeting of the Society for French Historical Studies in 2017, includes personal reflections by a range of contributors including Linda Clark, who first met Rachel at the Berkshire Conference of Women's Historians in 1978, contributed to *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform* and worked with Rachel when she was the executive director of the Society for French Historical Studies and Rachel served on the executive committee of the Society as one of the two co-editors of *French Historical Studies*; Venita Datta, who first met Rachel at a conference of the Western Society for French History where they abandoned the "rubber-chicken banquet" together in favor of better food and more fun; Victoria Thompson, who taught with Rachel at Arizona State University and co-authored *Women in Nineteenth-Century Europe* with her; Richard Hopkins, who studied with Rachel at Arizona State University and completed his dissertation with her there; Joelle Neulander, who invited Rachel to serve as Mark W. Clark Distinguished Visiting Chair of History at The Citadel; and Katie Jarvis, who first met Rachel when they were both working in the archives in Paris and later invited her to speak to the seminar of the research group "Genre et classes populaires" at the Sorbonne. Rachel's warmth and enthusiasm as friend and teacher come through especially clearly in the participants' occasional quotations of some of Rachel's exact

<http://genrehistoire.revues.org/2430>. For some of Rachel's first glancing references to the Cornu dossier, which she found in the archives of the Cour d'assises when she was working on *Poor and Pregnant*, see Rachel G. Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 283-284, n. 60. For Rachel's larger introduction to the new microhistory she had in mind and its relationship to her earlier work, see her presentation to the séminaire Genre et classes populaires at the Sorbonne and the discussion afterwards: Rachel G. Fuchs, "'Les faiseuses d'anges du quartier Notre-Dame des Champs: Communauté et réseaux personnels' ou 'Est-il possible pour une historienne qui s'était spécialisée dans l'histoire de la longue durée d'être heureuse avec micro-histoire?'" intervention pour le Séminaire Genre et classes populaires, 14 juin 2013, posted online in two sections on 17 June 2013 as Séminaire GCP Rachel Fuchs Présentation, <https://archive.org/details/SeminaireGCPRachelFuchsPresentation>, and Séminaire GCP Rachel Fuchs Discussion, <https://archive.org/details/SeminaireGCPRachelFuchsDiscussion>. I thank Katie Jarvis for alerting me to the existence of these evocative materials and the above-mentioned article in *Genre et histoire* that came out of them.

⁵ "Rachel Fuchs Memorial Award," <https://theccwh.org/ccwh-awards/rachel-fuchs-memorial-award/>.

words in important conversations on specific occasions: “You’ll find their voices.” “Don’t worry. I have great self-confidence in you!”

Christiane Demeulenaere-Douyère’s opening contribution to the essay portion of the Salon adds an important French archivist’s perspective by recalling how she and Rachel met when Rachel was working on her very first archival project, the investigation into the previously unexplored and completely uncatalogued archives of the Hôpital des enfants trouvés at the Archives de Paris that eventually resulted in the publication of *Abandoned Children: Foundlings and Child Welfare in Nineteenth-Century France*.

Sylvia Schafer continues the focus on *Abandoned Children* by reconstructing the intellectual world in which Rachel used her findings to critique some of the influential positions of Jacques Donzelot and Edward Shorter by arguing both that the welfare state could be helpful as well as harmful and that women who abandoned their children to private charities or state services were trying to provide for their children as well as they could under extremely difficult social and economic circumstances. Consulting the original reviews of Rachel’s work, she shows how *Abandoned Children* appeared in the influential SUNY Series in Modern European Social History at a particular moment when social historians were working out both their relationship to cultural history and their approaches toward the study of the state – and considers the ways in which historians might continue to refer to Rachel’s work as they confront these and many other methodological questions about how best to study topics such as gender, power, agency, and authority.

Leslie Page Moch reviews *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth-Century*, which draws additional attention to working-class women’s life options, their experiences of pregnancy and childbirth, their changing image in the eyes of male and female social reformers, and their complex interactions with the wide array of religious figures, philanthropists, and government officials who created and administered social programs for the poor. In addition to summarizing the book itself and assessing its subsequent historical reception and scholarly influence, she explores the ways in which Rachel’s key research questions for *Poor and Pregnant* also went on to become some of the core questions that inspired Rachel’s subsequent work in projects such as *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform*, *Contested Paternity*, and “The Angel Makers of Mission Street.” In particular, she highlights Rachel’s commitment to the recovery of women’s voices, her interest in court records as a source and public policy as a topic, her “intensely social” approach to writing history, and the wealth of new historical information that she gave us about women’s and children’s lives as a result.

Mary Lynn Stewart and Elinor Accampo focus on the work they did with Rachel to co-edit *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870-1914*, an important book of essays on the history of the welfare state to which Rachel contributed not only a chapter on social reformer Paul Strauss but also the especially influential comparative conclusion that highlighted the significance of the French case relative to the history of other countries in Europe and North America. In addition to showing how the book took shape in shared conversations with Rachel and the other contributors, they stress Rachel’s contribution to the presentation of the book’s core argument that “examining the history of the welfare state in France through gender and the family shows conclusively that it

began much earlier than previous historians had stated.” They also discuss the ways in which their collaboration with Rachel has influenced their respective subsequent scholarship.

Robert Nye considers the importance of *Contested Paternity: Constructing Families in Modern France*, the magisterial history of over two hundred years of changing French ideals and practices of motherhood and fatherhood that won the 2008 Charles E. Smith Award from the Southern Historical Association, the 2009 Frances Richardson Keller-Sierra Prize from the Western Association of Women Historians, and the 2009 J. Russell Major Prize from the American Historical Association.⁶ He identifies “the genius and the moral grandeur of Rachel’s histories of French families” in “her refusal to identify, much less endorse, a particular form of family as a normative ideal.” He shows how Rachel worked with the archives of the French civil court system to explore the ingenious strategies that unmarried mothers used to acquire support for their children before paternity suits became legal in 1912, the ways in which these women used the courts to exercise their right to social citizenship before they gained access to formal political citizenship with the institution of women’s suffrage in 1944, and the resulting ways in which French attitudes towards motherhood, fatherhood, and families have changed from the Old Regime to the present day. He closes by showing how we can also use Rachel’s work to understand the ways in which certain older attitudes about the signal importance of the biological family continue in spite of a series of twentieth-century changes that includes the legalization of infant adoption and the institution of the PACS for both same-sex and opposite-sex couples.

Anne Epstein, the last contributor in our set of essays, turns our attention to Rachel’s last published book, the recent volume of essays that Anne and Rachel co-edited under the title *Gender and Citizenship in Historical and Transnational Perspective: Agency, Space, Borders*. She tells the story of the book’s creation as itself the result of their “transnational collaboration ... over the years within and between specific places and spaces” in at least six countries on two continents. She shows how she and Rachel each came to their respective research interests in questions of citizenship, and she highlights the ways in which the book reflects their shared commitment to the paired propositions that “citizenship has evolved historically both as concept and as legal category in an environment that extends beyond the nation-state” and that “a transnational (as opposed to cross-national or comparative) perspective ... offer[s] maximal insight into the evolution of gendered citizenship during a period when national and imperial borders were perpetually shifting, and people and ideas were constantly crossing borders.”

Rachel’s most recent talks and articles about her two final books in progress, “Crossing Boundaries” and “The Angel-Makers of Mission Street,” focused on her desire to return to some of the most interesting court cases that she had found in the course of her earlier archival work for *Poor and Pregnant* and *Contested Paternity* and her plans to use these cases as the basis of compelling new historical works that would make full use of the faculty that she identified variously as her “historical imagination,” as her “informed historical imagination,” and once, even,

⁶ The Smith Award is for the best book of the year in European history by a member of the European History Section of the Southern Historical Association, by a faculty member at a Southern college or university, or by a Southern press; the Keller-Sierra Prize, for the best historical monograph of the year by a member of the Western Association of Women Historians; the Major Prize, for the best work of the year in English on any aspect of French history.

as her “unleashed historical imagination.”⁷ When she introduced “Crossing Boundaries” in her presidential address to the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association in 2009, she considered three different ways in which the stories of the Kahans and the Ponelles might have ended as the members of these interlocking Jewish and Catholic families attempted to survive the dangers and difficulties of German occupation during World War II.⁸ When she concluded the question and answer session after presenting her work on “The Angel Makers of Mission Street” at the Sorbonne, she shared her interest in Akira Kurosawa’s great film *Rashomon*, which she described to her audience in the seminar of the research group *Genre et classes populaires* as “a Japanese film with several stories ... many, many stories on the same crime.”⁹ We will never know how Rachel would have completed the two books that would have included the many fascinating true stories she was hoping to tell in these important new microhistories. We can always be grateful, however, that she used her historical imagination to design so many creative archival projects and that she built on the results of her innovative scholarly research to teach us so much about the history of women, children, mothers, fathers, families, the rise of the French welfare state, and the changing nature of citizenship in the three great monographs and four important additional books that she completed while she was still with us.

Rachel was always generous with her thanks, and so I especially want to take a moment here to thank some of the colleagues to whom I am especially grateful for their help with this special issue of the Salon: David Kammerling Smith and Elinor Accampo, for conceiving of the special issue, inviting me to edit it, and contributing their advice and counsel at every step of the way; Cheryl Koos, for organizing the original roundtable for the Society for French Historical Studies; all of the Society leaders, conference organizers, H-France editors, and videographers who have contributed to programming and recording the Roundtable, editing the print contributions, and otherwise putting this issue of the Salon together; and most of all, to all of the contributors who spoke or wrote for this Salon, for sharing their vivid personal stories of Rachel and their thoughtful intellectual appreciations of her work.

I hope that readers who had the pleasure of knowing Rachel will enjoy seeing her again through the eyes of our Salon contributors’ essays and observations here – and that readers who missed the opportunity of meeting Rachel or reading her books while she was alive will have the pleasure of coming to know her and the power and importance of her work for the first time by watching the conference video footage and reading the additional essays in the Salon now. May Rachel’s life, her work, and her example inspire all of us to become better scholars, better teachers, better colleagues, better mentors, and better friends.

⁷ For Rachel’s references to her “informed historical imagination,” see Fuchs, “Crossing Borders,” 3, 5, 7, 21. For her repeated references to her “historical imagination” and her single reference to her “unleashed historical imagination,” see Fuchs, “Les faiseuses d’anges du quartier Notre-Dame des Champs,” presentation and discussion. For further discussions of the relationships that Rachel saw between her new books in progress and her earlier work in *Contested Paternity* and *Poor and Pregnant in Paris*, see notes 3 and 4 above.

⁸ See Fuchs, “Crossing Borders,” 13-21. “Any of these three endings is plausible, given the information and evidence available about Vichy France,” she concluded, “but only the third ending is the reputable historian’s ending, because it is based on the shreds of available evidence.” Fuchs, “Crossing Borders,” 20.

⁹ See Fuchs, “Les faiseuses d’anges du quartier Notre-Dame des Champs,” discussion.

Copyright © 2017 by H-France, all rights reserved. H-France permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. H-France reserves the right to withdraw the license for redistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Salon nor re-publication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France.

H-France Salon

Volume 9 (2017), Issue #18, #1