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THE QUEER LIFE OF LORENA HICKOK

by

SAMANTHA LEYERLE

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Women's and Gender Studies in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts,

The City University of New York

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APPROVAL

The Queer Life of Lorena Hickok

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Samantha Leyerle

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in  
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for the degree of Master of Arts.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

## ABSTRACT

The Queer Life of Lorena Hickok

by

Samantha Leyerle

Advisor: Professor James Wilson

This thesis explores the life of Lorena Hickok, a remarkable woman whose story has been glossed over throughout history. Hickok was an accomplished journalist and writer, and her life offers a fascinating glimpse into being queer in the early twentieth century. While much has been written about Hickok's relationship with Eleanor Roosevelt, this thesis aims to go beyond their connection to examine Hickok's entire life and experiences in greater detail. Through analyzing her work as a writer, as well as her personal correspondence and unpublished autobiography, this thesis illuminates the quiet details of defining moments in history, including the Great Depression and World War II. At the same time, this thesis also explores the complexities of Hickok's queer identity. By exploring the evidence Hickok left in her writings, this thesis offers insight into the life of a queer individual during the twentieth century. This thesis argues that by examining the life of Lorena Hickok, we can gain a deeper understanding of life during the twentieth century. At the same time, we can also shed light on the struggles and triumphs of queer individuals during this era. By exploring Hickok's life in all of its complexity, this thesis offers a fresh perspective on a woman whose contributions to history have often been overlooked.

## **Acknowledgments:**

To my support team,

Dad

Mom

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Maddie

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## **Introduction:**

Often, Lorena Hickok is left in the background of history, standing in the shadow of giants like Franklin D. and Eleanor Roosevelt. Although she was a woman of stature during her time, she and others like her have been nearly forgotten because they did not conform to society's heteronormative ideals. Stories like hers must be re-examined with the continued rise in the study of queer history. Many academics have mentioned her in connection with Eleanor Roosevelt because of the intensely affectionate letters the two exchanged for decades. Before Eleanor Roosevelt became First Lady to decades afterward, the two women wrote diary-like letters to each other about their days; these entries include everything from commentary on the Great Depression to discussing domestic affairs like the Roosevelt children. While analysis of these letters is necessary, it is also essential to examine the life of Lorena Hickok outside of her relationship with Eleanor. She was a background character to many of the defining moments of the early twentieth century; to study Lorena is to study the quiet details of these events. Some of the questions I had while conducting this research included: How did she grow up? What was her life like as a queer individual in the 20<sup>th</sup> century during major events like the Great Depression, World War II, and more? Also, how did her role with Eleanor affect her life and career? My thesis will serve as an analysis of Lorena Hickok's life while also integrating her queer identity into the story.

Doing this kind of biographical work requires the significant use of archival materials. The journey began at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Presidential Library. There, I began combing through over fifteen boxes of the Papers of Lorena Hickok. The sheer number of documents in this collection was shocking, as was the presence of the notes and research of Doris Faber for her book, *The Life of Lorena Hickok: E.R.'s Friend* (1980). Faber was the first of a few researchers



to come into contact with these documents. She is credited with giving one of the only and most in-depth biographies regarding Lorena. In addition to the archival materials, she interviewed people who knew Lorena firsthand. These interviews allow for a more in-depth look into who Lorena was. For example, there are moments in Hickok's life that she chose not to relay in her writings; however, Faber's outside research allows for these moments to be included in the telling of Lorena's life. This is reflected in the inclusion of Faber's notes and own research in the Lorena Hickok Papers, as they add a wealth of knowledge and to my own understanding of a previously little-known woman.

While Faber's work is a necessary part of this research, it is also vital to understand that it is not without flaws. Within this writing, Faber interpreted her information regarding female relationships and homosexuality from outdated ideas and non-academic articles from *Time* and *Life* magazines rather than the publications of queer academics like Michel Foucault. Her writing of this book co-existed amid the queer liberation movement with events like the 1973 decision from the American Psychiatric Association to de-pathologize homosexuality. Yet even with this, she builds her argument directly from obsolete studies like Masters and Johnson's *Human Sexual Inadequacy* (1970). Another critique is that most of her research primarily focused on gay men's relationships rather than lesbian or bisexual women. What she looked at regarding lesbianism centered largely on discussing female friendships rather than female romantic and sexual relationships. This contributes to the bias within her writing to ignore Lorena's. It is also important to note that the letters between Eleanor and Lorena number in the thousands. There were many that Lorena destroyed before her death to protect Eleanor and her reputation. In a letter written to Anne Roosevelt, she stated, "Your Mother wasn't always so very discreet in her

letters to me.”<sup>1</sup> Even with the destruction of these letters, many still bear traces of their love for each other that will be explored in this thesis.

Lorena Hickok had promised the Roosevelt Presidential Library writings of her life and her correspondence with several influential people in the Roosevelt administration, including the First Lady. It was agreed that the materials would remain inaccessible until ten years after Lorena’s death. Once the ten years had passed, Faber quickly pounced in. Here, I separate myself from her reaction to what she found. Reading the letters between Lorena and Eleanor or her other lovers felt familiar like I was reading a queer life through her writing. For Faber, it was a story of a woman who ultimately “surrendered to her tendency.”<sup>2</sup> She immediately told the archive director that these “effusively affectionate letters should be removed at least until the year 2000”; she worried they would be used to sensationalize and impact Eleanor’s legacy.<sup>3</sup> If this happened, it would have shuttered future efforts of students and historians for an extra twenty years. Nonetheless, she still pursued the subject of Lorena’s life in intense detail by conducting interviews and research outside of the archive. For this reason, her writing has become the backbone of this research, and I am grateful since many of these interviews would be lost to time without her thoroughness. This research aims to liberate the queerness of Lorena’s life that was glossed over in Faber’s writing in hopes of highlighting how Lorena’s sexuality influenced her life.

I am not the only academic concerned about Faber’s handling of Lorena’s several queer relationships. My critique of Faber’s work aligns with Lelia Rupp’s piece, “Imagine my Surprise: Women’s Relationships in Historical Perspectives,” in which she highlights how much

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<sup>1</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Anna Roosevelt Halsted, June 9, 1966.

<sup>2</sup> Doris Faber, *The Life of Lorena Hickok* (New York: W. Morrow, 1980), 79.

<sup>3</sup> Faber, *The Life of Lorena Hickok*, 330.

of Faber's book is the perfect study for homophobia within biographical writing.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, the leading Eleanor Roosevelt biographer, Blanche Wiesen Cook, calls Faber's writing "the historical denial of lesbianism."<sup>5</sup> Both researchers' arguments of how best to analyze the fragments of intimacy and love left behind by women like Lorena Hickock and Eleanor Roosevelt are carried out throughout this thesis. Most of the previous work uses the words of Lorena Hickok primarily. From her letters, books, and articles, Lorena wrote about her experiences.

Lorena's experiences in her life reflect what many queer people faced but also under very specific circumstances. She was not only one of the most well-regarded woman journalists of her time but also one of the very few. This alone sets her apart from others. However, the key distinction is how close she truly got to power. At one point in her life, Lorena was living in the White House with the President and First Lady, arguably the most powerful residence in the world. Her life does not reflect the average individual of her time, especially the average queer individual. While she was still private with her sexuality, she was also awarded the privilege of being a white woman who rose from the lower class to a status associated with some of the most influential people in the world.

It is also vital to understand the terms used within this thesis. The most significant is using "queer" instead of "lesbian." I use queer rather than terms like bisexual, lesbian, or other contemporary terms; while "queer" was not used in the same way during her lifetime, it is more encompassing as we do not know how Lorena would describe herself now. My usage of the word "queer" conforms with Kathryn Kent's, who writes in her article "Making Girls into

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<sup>4</sup> Lelia J. Rupp, "'Imagine My Surprise': Women's Relationships in Historical Perspective." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* Vol. 5, No. 3 (Autumn, 1980), 61.

<sup>5</sup> Blanche Wiesen Cook, "Review of The Life of Lorena Hickok," *Feminist Studies*, 6 (1980), 51.

Women: American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity" (2003), "Queer is a transhistoric term that may include any act of protoidentity that exists outside the realm of bourgeois, heteronormative reproduction and its correlative ideology of gender roles. 'Queer' is not meant to carry the same politically radical connotations that it does when used in contemporary parlance."<sup>6</sup> By projecting our ideas of sexuality onto a historical individual, we often erase what sexuality meant specifically to that person and how society perceived it.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of Lorena's experiences as a queer individual during her lifetime, it is crucial to analyze them within the societal structures of her lifetime.

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<sup>6</sup> Kathryn R. Kent, *Making Girls into Women: American Women's Writing and the Rise of Lesbian Identity*, (Durham, Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

<sup>7</sup> For more, see Laura Doan, "Queer History/Queer Memory: The Case of Alan Turing," *Research Explorer*, The University of Manchester (Duke University Press, January 11, 2017).

## Chapter 1: Early Life

Lorena Alice Hickok, named Alice Lorena Hickok at birth, was born in East Troy, Wisconsin, on March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1893. Her parents, Anna and Addison J. Hickok had two other daughters, Myrtle and Ruby. Lorena's childhood took place in uncertain times and was fraught with abuse. She grew up amid major events like the Panic of 1893, President William McKinley's assassination, the Spanish-American war, and Queen Victoria's death. At one point in her unfinished autobiography, she discusses who her childhood hero was. In what could be a very ironic twist of fate, Lorena's hero was Theodore Roosevelt, her future lover's uncle. While the world was facing such events, Lorena dealt with her own challenges at home. Her family struggled financially and moved around often due to Addison's alcoholism and unstable employment status. As a result, her father often expressed frustration toward Lorena and his wife. In the autobiography, she vividly recounts a moment of her father's abuse: "I had started biting my fingernails. One day he thrust the tips of my fingers into my mouth and made me bite on them, holding my jaws together with his big, strong hands until the tears rolled down my cheeks."<sup>8</sup> While being beaten and abused by her father, she became vigilant to protect her younger sisters from the same. She often questioned why her mother did not try and protect her, as Lorena did with her sisters.

In 1906, Lorena's mother died suddenly of a stroke, leaving her and her sisters with their abusive father. It is unknown how she felt after her mother's death. There is a noticeable absence in Lorena's writing at this time. It seems she purposefully excluded any mention of her mother's death and the events proceeding that year. After her mother's death, her father hired a

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<sup>8</sup> Lorena Hickok, "Unpublished Autobiography." (Manuscript, Roosevelt Presidential Library), 6.

housekeeper named Emma Flashman to help maintain the home. This woman, whom Lorena only referred to as “the housekeeper,” would tell Lorena she needed to find housing elsewhere a year later as her father was moving and chose not to take her along. Addison married Emma two years after his wife’s death.

In hopes of finding accommodations and pay, Lorena and her childhood friend Lottie looked for jobs as hired girls. Hired girls were often maids, cooks, and nannies if the home had young children. Lottie had been one of Lorena’s best friends throughout school. The friendship fueled Lottie’s help in finding Lorena her first job. Simultaneously, Lorena noticed that her feelings towards boys differed from Lottie and the other girls. She wrote, “We were beginning to get interested in boys- the other girls more than I, for I was inclined to judge the opposite sex.”<sup>9</sup> This is Lorena’s first acknowledgment of her lack of romantic or sexual interest in men. Lorena also adored Lottie, who gave her a feeling of closeness she had not experienced previously within her family.

In a town like Bowdle, South Dakota, having a hired girl in the household was a sign of luxury and wealth. For the next two years, Lorena held nine different positions throughout South Dakota. She quit one, ran away from another, her father “removed” her from two, was fired from four, and finally, her last employer sent her off to family. While traveling to her last position, Lorena encountered her father for the final time. She was boarding a train to Bowdle for her last employer when she came across him.

In the coach, I was about to enter. I saw my father. Hastily I slipped into the next car. But he had seen me. He followed me and sat down in the seat beside me. He was wearing his town clothes and his brown derby, and he still looked queer and ill-at-ease in them, although they did not look new anymore. Furiously he berated me as an ungrateful daughter, told me he could have put me in jail for running away from the Searles, proclaimed that I would come to no good end, he washed his hands off me. But there was

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<sup>9</sup> Hickok, “Unpublished Autobiography,” 3.

something in his manner, a subtle change, that puzzled me at first. Presently, even as he continued his tirade, I felt myself lifted up in a new and wonderful exhilaration. That change in his attitude gave tacit recognition that I was no longer a child to be cuffed about and beaten. He would never strike me again. I was grown up! I left the train at Bowdle. He remained abroad. I never saw him again.<sup>10</sup>

Years later, she was told he had committed suicide and that Ruby wanted financial help with his funeral. Her response was, “Send him to the glue factory!”<sup>11</sup> After she arrived in Bowdle, she took her last job working for Mrs. O’Malley. During this employment, at the age of sixteen, she went on a date with a railroad worker at the request of Mrs. O’Malley. However, at the end of the date, her beau leaned in to kiss her while boarding his train. She immediately slapped the man, was very insulted, and swore never to go on another date with a railroader again.<sup>12</sup> This was one of the only encounters or dates with men that Lorena discussed in her writing, and like the others, she quickly wrote of her disdain for the gentleman involved. This absence of men in her writing speaks volumes about her queerness as she wrote graphically about all aspects of her life, including her lovers. After this encounter, Mrs. O’Malley thought it best to contact Lorena’s cousin, Ella Ellis, whom Lorena affectionally called Aunt Ella, to move the girl to Chicago for schooling.<sup>13</sup>

Lorena arrived in Chicago in 1909 at the age of sixteen. From the moment she arrived, she was in awe of Ella. In her writing, she highlights this by stating, “The hands she held out in greeting were encased in spotless chamois gloves. It was the first time I had seen a pair of real chamois gloves.”<sup>14</sup> Gloves were often a marker for the different social classes and protected the

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<sup>10</sup> Hickok, “Unpublished Autobiography,” 16.

<sup>11</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Ruby Hickok, date unknown.

<sup>12</sup> Hickok, “Unpublished Autobiography,” 23.

<sup>13</sup> Hickok, “Unpublished Autobiography,” 1.

<sup>14</sup> Hickok, “Unpublished Autobiography,” 25.

women from touching anything deemed unsanitary.<sup>15</sup> Due to Lorena's low-class upbringing and working life, she had not encountered textiles like chamois, a high-quality type of sheepskin leather. The move to Chicago marked a new time in Lorena's transition to a higher-class status. After Ella took Lorena under her care by moving the girl to Chicago, Lorena finished high school in Battle Creek, Michigan. During her time in school, she received outstanding marks. She also spoke of a crush on her teacher, Miss Alicent Holt, with whom Lorena read poetry. A "crush" during this period referred to a young woman's "deep adoration for another woman."<sup>16</sup> These were common for young women during the progressive era, and the crushes were typically one-sided. However, when they were reciprocated, they could lead to a more long-term, potentially romantic friendship. Lorena often described Holt as the "most gifted teacher I ever knew."<sup>17</sup> The two read poetry together between or after Lorena's courses. In Lorena's writing, her admiration and feelings toward Alicent mirror how she spoke of her future lovers. Later in their lives, the couple became even closer as Alicent was less than ten years older than Lorena. They often referred to each other as "Alix" or "Rena." Their later correspondences suggest they may have had a romantic relationship since Alicent would end her writings with "Toujours et Toujours," meaning "always and always" in French.<sup>18</sup> Alicent also helped Lorena decide to go to college. Lorena ultimately attended Lawrence University in Appleton, Wisconsin, in 1912 to follow in the footsteps of a writer she loved named Edna Ferber. However, she soon found that college did not suit her in the way that her high school studies did. In a letter written by the President of Lawrence University, Samuel Platz, to Aunt Ella, Platz wrote, "I would say that

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<sup>15</sup> "Vintage Gloves History," Vintage Dancer, accessed February 18, 2023, <https://vintagedancer.com/vintage/vintage-gloves-styles-1900-to-1960s>.

<sup>16</sup> Wendy L. Rouse, "'A Very Crushable, Kissable Girl': Queer Love and the Invention of the Abnormal Girl Among College Women in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era." 201.

<sup>17</sup> Hickok, "Unpublished Autobiography Summary." (Manuscript, Roosevelt Presidential Library), 1.

<sup>18</sup> Alicent Holt, letter to Lorena Hickok, Date Unknown.



Miss Hickok is a very bright girl and could stand among the very best in college. She, however, is not a reliable student....”<sup>19</sup> This led a discouraged Lorena to leave Appleton and Lawrence University in 1913 at the age of twenty.

After leaving college, Lorena moved back to Battle Creek, where she was hired as a cub reporter for the local newspaper. This job helped her fall in love with her work, and she dreamed of interviewing someone famous or covering major political and world events. These aspirations created a deep dissatisfaction with her station in life. After her twenty-first birthday, she felt she needed to go out and make a name for herself.<sup>20</sup> She soon reenrolled at Lawrence University to finish her degree. However, she left again after only one semester after no sororities offered her an invitation to pledge. She had, in her own words, “discovered I’m a complete misfit there and give up.”<sup>21</sup>

She then followed in the footsteps of her idol, Edna Ferber, to jumpstart her career in journalism. Lorena moved to Milwaukee in 1915 during the beginning months of the First World War. She landed a position at the *Milwaukee Sentinel* as a society editor. This was different from the position she dreamed of. In fact, from her first day, Lorena knew that this would not work because it did not follow the program she had set for herself. However, while working on the wedding and birth announcements, she also worked on the city editor to try and shift her writing to a more serious topic of merit.

The editor finally gave Lorena an impossible opportunity to interview a prima donna named Geraldine Farrar, who had recently established a “no-interviews” policy. This did not

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<sup>19</sup> Samuel Platz, letter to Ella Ellis, Date unknown.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Faber, *The Life of Lorena Hickok*, 48.

<sup>21</sup> Hickok. “Unpublished Autobiography Summary,” 2

deter Lorena's drive for the interview. She wore her most presentable outfit and set out to interview Farrar. However, it was a quite rainy day which ended with Lorena, as she writes in an article about the experience, "splashing through exactly 163 puddles of water and plowing through an acre or so of nice, rich mud, most of which clung to my best shoes."<sup>22</sup> She ultimately did not interview Farrar then; however, the experience landed her her first front-page piece under the name Lorena Lawrence. There is no clear indication of why she chose this pseudonym Farrar found the piece so amusing that she even offered an interview with Miss Lawrence and gifted her a ring. Lorena responded, "You can tell Miss Farrar for me to go to hell."<sup>23</sup> Or so she wrote in her later letters and writings.

After her first front-page story, her career began to prosper. In 1916 she started to report on general news outside of society anonymously. At the age of twenty-three, she met President Wilson and the First Lady. She wrote of the deep feelings of nervousness, not because of meeting the president but rather meeting the First Lady. She wrote, "I was afraid to shake hands with his wife. Beautiful, smiling Edith Bolling Wilson inspired me with more awe and shyness than her distinguished husband. I do not think that I could have been more nervous in the presence of anybody else in the whole wide world."<sup>24</sup> While Lorena exhibited signs of deep adoration for the First Lady, separating this experience from her other relationships with women is crucial as the reasoning behind such emotions is unclear. While she admired First Lady Wilson, it came from a place of intimidation than from infatuation. This was the largest journalistic opportunity Lorena had had to date, leading her to crave more like it. At this time,

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<sup>22</sup> Lawrence, Lorena. "Geraldine Proves She's Prima Dona" *Milwaukee Sentinel* November 19, 1915.

<sup>23</sup> Abe Altowitz, "Lorena Hickok Obituary" *Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, MN), May 16, 1968. quoted in Doris Faber, *The Life of Lorena Hickok*, 53.

<sup>24</sup> Lorena Lawrence, "First Lady of the land wins way into hearts of thousands of Milwaukeeans by personal charm" *Milwaukee Sentinel* February 1, 1916.

she also began to understand her sexuality further. In a piece, she wrote about a new eligible bachelor for the girls in town. The bachelor showed interest in her, but by this time, Lorena had begun to realize she may be attracted to women. “Being a big-hearted unselfish woman, I am willing to give other Milwaukee girls a chance.”<sup>25</sup> This piece she wrote shows how she allowed her queerness to come through in her writing, even in unintentional ways.

She quickly grew tired of Milwaukee and attempted to find work in Chicago and New York but to no avail. When this failed and left her penniless, she moved to Minneapolis, where she found a job at the *Minneapolis Tribune*. Her time in Minneapolis was short-lived due to the United States joining the First World War, and this led Lorena to the excitement of potentially going overseas to report on the war. She immediately packed her belongings and again set out for New York City, and this time only lasted six weeks until she was fired from the old *Tribune*. Lorena then decided that what she needed to be successful in her career was, in the end, a college degree. She returned to Minneapolis, where she began taking classes at the University of Minnesota at almost twenty-five.

These couple years of her life were extremely stressful for her. During the day, she studied as a college student, and then from seven at night to three in the morning, she was hunched over a typewriter working on whatever story she had been assigned. This was also around when she picked up her nickname “Hick” from her friends. To her, it meant a sign of growing up and learning to enjoy her independence, as it allowed her to form an identity outside of the one her parents had raised. She went by this nickname for the rest of her life, and for this reason, she will be referred to as Hick for the remainder of this thesis. While she was working on

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<sup>25</sup> Lorena Lawrence, “Girls! Here’s Your Chance to Get a Husband! Cupid Points the Way, Provided You Qualify” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, November 4, 1915.

a deadline, though, she was always impacted by the story. Her colleague stated, “When she was pounding out a sob story, a tearjerker, we’d see tears streaming down her cheeks. When it was a humorous piece, her entire vast body rippled with merriment. And she could write both kinds- and the straight news variety, too- with excellence few could surpass, then or now.”<sup>26</sup> Her devotion to her work, by becoming so emotionally involved with her writing, did not go unnoticed by others at her newspaper. The editor-in-chief of the *Tribune*, Thomas J. Dillon, noticed this effort and promoted her.

During this time, Hick met Ella Morse, Ellie to Hick, and her friends. Ellie was a very petite woman who could make friends with almost everyone. The two met while Ellie was working as a society reporter, a job Hick despised herself, and they soon became involved. The two moved in together at the Leamington Hotel. While still in school, Hick was challenged by her university due to her refusal to live in dormitories. Because of this, she left higher education for the final time during her sophomore year. The couple dated for eight years and even took in a stray cat they named Francois Villon. Faber’s biography describes their moving in together as her moving into “the swank Leamington Hotel with a wonderful new friend.”<sup>27</sup> Recognizing Ellie as her lover rather than a close friend allows for a completely different interpretation of her life at this moment. It was Lorena’s first long-term relationship, a very impactful moment in any person’s life. Referring to Ellie as a friend similarly reflects the past portrayal of lesbian relationships as close female friendships during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Academics of the past often labeled these relationships platonic to keep open the possibility of, as Lillian Faderman puts it, “a hidden man who must have the object of their subject’s affection,

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<sup>26</sup> Abe Altowitz, “Lorena Hickok Obituary” *Minneapolis Star* (Minneapolis, MN), May 16, 1968. quoted in Doris Faber, *The Life of Lorena Hickok*, 59.

<sup>27</sup> Faber, *The Life of Lorena Hickok*, 61.

even though a beloved woman was in plain view.”<sup>28</sup> Also, writing of women in these relationships as friends is a way to protect the subject’s reputation. An example of this can be seen in Faber’s statements regarding her worry about overshadowing Eleanor’s reputation with such a “scandal.” Inserting these worries as historians intrudes on the subject’s life rather than telling the life of a queer individual. Discussing Ellie and Hick’s relationship as one of queer love showcases Hick’s journey regarding her sexuality and trying to find her footing in journalism.

Ellie and Hick were seen as an odd couple by most; they were opposites in their relationships but balanced each other out together. Ellie was much more extroverted, while Hick was often more brooding and introspective. While in this relationship, Hick showed more and more mental and physical ailments. She experienced an increase in mood swings and several health ailments that she often lumped together as “abscesses,” as well as sleeping for extreme periods but still waking up not rested. In 1926, Ellie convinced Lorena to seek medical attention and received life-altering news. She was diagnosed with diabetes. Her diagnosis came only three years after insulin had started being widely available. The disease had changed from being a death sentence to only hindering her life from here on out. After this diagnosis, Ellie proposed that the couple moves to San Francisco so that Hick could focus on her novel and relax. The couple only made it a year in San Francisco when Ellie reconnected with a widowed acquaintance named Roy Dickinson, whom she quickly fell for and left Hick to elope with. This completely devastated Hick. At thirty-three, she felt completely drained and decided it best to try New York City again, hoping to focus on her career after such a devastating loss.

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<sup>28</sup> Lillian Faderman, “Who Hid Lesbian History,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 4, no. 3 (Autumn 1979), 74.

## Chapter 2: Coming into her own

With Hick still reeling from her relationship with Ellie ending, her relocation to New York City was necessary and more successful the second time, as the *Mirror* hired her to cover sports. Hick did not enjoy her time at the *Mirror* and quickly found a new position as one of the first woman reporters at the *Associated Press* in 1928. This job meant a great deal to Hick as she had received her first award from the news outlet in 1923 for writing about President Harding's funeral train. With this new position, Hick understood what it truly meant to be a woman and a reporter. In a letter to Bess Furman, a fellow AP reporter, she describes it "The newspaper business is alright for a woman who is contented to write nothing but features without any news in 'em or- better still- syndicated stuff, which pay a helluva lot better than newspaper work, straight anyway... But if you've built as I am mentally, temperamentally, nervously, or however you want to put it, and you don't get any kick out of it except the thrill that comes out of working on the *news*- real, honest-to-gawd- stories- then it's just hell."<sup>29</sup> Working as a woman in journalism was no easy feat during this period and Hick had been able to, according to Ishbel Ross, achieve "standing with the AP that no other woman has matched."<sup>30</sup> Before 1926, the Associated Press did not have a woman reporter on their staff. After their 1926 board meeting, they decided it was time to bring women on staff.<sup>31</sup> They hired the first eight between 1926 and 1932, and Hick was one of them. Hick was the most experienced of the journalists with her long list of past jobs as a reporter. She had to work three times harder than her male counterparts for the opportunities they were given. To achieve this level of standing, she wrote in unconventional ways to gain the inside scoop. This can be seen in her coverage of the Lindbergh kidnapping,

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<sup>29</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Bess Furman. Date unknown.

<sup>30</sup> Ishbel Ross, *Ladies of the Press* (New York, 1936), 204.

<sup>31</sup> Liz Watts, "AP's First Female Reporters," *Journalism History* 39, no.1 (2013) 2.

where she risked hypothermia and police arrest to find the child and story before the other reporters.

However, this tactic was not well received by her superiors within AP. She later wrote of her experience during the kidnapping by highlighting the differences between her and the men's reactions to the story. She stated, "If you were a woman, your imagination played tricks on you. You'd wake up out of the sleep of exhaustion thinking you heard a baby crying. And then you would toss and twist, wondering if little Charles Lindbergh Jr. was neglected, sick, crying for his mother."<sup>32</sup> As a woman reporter, she had complex feelings about her role in journalism. She found it constantly irritating that she was reminded of her gender everywhere she turned and often masculinized herself as a way to bond with her all-male colleagues. She made it a point not to wear any brighter clothing and stuck to a uniform of dark clothing, a scarf, and always a bit of red lipstick.

While she had complex feelings about the job, it was her true passion in life, and she was one of the few women able to do it. By 1920, only 16.8 percent of all reporters and editors in the United States were women.<sup>33</sup> Of that number Hick was one of the very few women to report on topics beyond the traditional scope of "women's issues" such as fashion, society, and domestic affairs. One thing, though, that Hick and other woman journalists could not escape was their job title. All reporters who were women were always given the position of "woman journalist," which came with the assumption of these reporters being odd, deviant, or unconventional. In contrast, men who were journalists were more trusted to provide more "stable, trustworthy

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<sup>32</sup> Hickok, "Unpublished Autobiography," 5.

<sup>33</sup> Deborah Chambers, Linda Steiner, and Carole Fleming. *Women and Journalism*. (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2004). 1

reporting.”<sup>34</sup> This is something that, throughout Hick’s career, deeply upset her. She lamented to several friends in correspondence how she wished she could be seen as purely just a reporter rather than including her gender in the title.

She was assigned to cover the politics regarding the upcoming 1928 presidential election between Al Smith and Herbert Hoover. She became a regular visiting reporter at the Democratic National Committee as her focus was primarily placed on Al Smith and his campaign. While visiting the Madison Avenue headquarters, she became friends with another woman, Malvina Thompson. Thompson was the director of women’s activities for the New York State Democratic Committee. Through Hick’s friendship with Thompson, she set up an introduction with Eleanor Roosevelt. Thompson first introduced Eleanor and Hick in September 1928. At the time of their meeting, Hick had to remind herself that she was meeting the niece of her childhood idol, Theodore Roosevelt.<sup>35</sup> Their first official interview occurred on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1928, following Franklin Roosevelt’s gubernatorial victory. Hick became captivated by Eleanor and asked her relatively shallow questions about her children in her nervousness, something she recalled fondly in her later writings.<sup>36</sup> The pair would not meet again for several years as Hick made no efforts to reach out and instead focused on her career to cope with the abandonment she felt from Ellie’s leaving.

It was during her time at the Associated Press that she began mentoring new women being brought on as reporters. She took a newly hired writer known as Barbara Hanson, a pseudonym, under her wing, stating, “Hanson, I’m going to teach you how to play poker and

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<sup>34</sup> Chambers, Steiner, Fleming. *Women and Journalism*, 24.

<sup>35</sup> Lorena Hickok. *Reluctant First Lady*. (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead, 1962), 11.

<sup>36</sup> Hickok. *Reluctant First Lady*, 13.



swear- you might need it.”<sup>37</sup> It was during the 1920s that ideas of same-sex experimentation among women began to become discussed more with the publication of Sherwood Anderson’s books *Poor White* (1920) and *Dark Laughter* (1925). It also began to be assumed that love between women could be sexual, and it was described as homosexuality.<sup>38</sup> Because of this experimentation, women like Hick often searched for signals from other women. For example, she and Barbara became close as Hick felt safe with Barbara after seeing her carrying a copy of *The Well of Loneliness*, a novel written in 1928 by Radclyffe Hall that centered around themes of sexual inversion and lesbianism. It was the first unabashed lesbian novel published in Britain and the United States and became a form of signaling for lesbians nationwide. Hall used her main character, Stephen Gordon, to create a sympathetic portrayal of a lesbian. The character also became a model for lesbians in society.<sup>39</sup> Hick’s knowledge and understanding of the themes of the book highlight her engagement with queer literature and further support the integration of her queer identity into her life as it shows her interaction with what was the queer community at the time. Within *The Well of Loneliness*, the author writes of very masculine presenting lesbians, which Hick often saw herself as. At this point in her life, she often wore masculine clothing to blend in with her male counterparts at the Associated Press and potentially signal others to her more masculine expression and sexuality. Weeks later, Barbara and Hick shared a hotel room while covering a story out of town. It was there that Hick, as Barbara puts it, “made for her.”<sup>40</sup> After Barbara’s rejection, Hick quickly apologized and explained, “You were just so sweet to me that it undid me.”<sup>41</sup> Now that Barbara was aware of Hick’s sexuality, it seemingly broke the dam

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<sup>37</sup> Barbara Hanson, interview by Doris Faber, quoted in Doris Faber, *The Life of Lorena Hickok* (New York: W. Morrow, 1980), 78.

<sup>38</sup> Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls, and Twilight Lovers*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 65.

<sup>39</sup> James Wilson, *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies: Performance, Race, and Sexuality in the Harlem Renaissance*, (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2010) 158.

<sup>40</sup> Hanson, quoted in Doris Faber, *The Life of Lorena Hickok*, 79.

<sup>41</sup> Hanson, quoted in Faber, *The Life of Lorena Hickok*, 79.

on speaking about her upbringing and life. She told Barbara that her father had raped her as a child and discussed Ellie and their relationship.

After this interaction, Hick embraced her sexuality fully. When Faber interviewed Barbara, she stated that Hick had “gone off the deep end about various women.”<sup>42</sup> Framing this as Hick’s worst years, as Hanson does, is rooted in homophobia. By looking at this through a queer lens, it is clear that this was when Hick began to accept her sexuality by exploring it. Susan McCabe’s essay, “To Be and To Have: The Rise of Queer Historicism,” describes this approach well by highlighting that historical work can open up ideas of “rereading periods prior to modern sexual taxonomies as a means of undoing the straitjacketing of homo/heterosexual binary.”<sup>43</sup> This rereading allows us to understand how while she engaged primarily with women, her exploration also included men. Still, Hick framed it as more of an experiment than her time with women.

This view of Hick “going off the deep end” came from the pathologization that occurred in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which put homosexuality in the same category as other mental illnesses like schizophrenia. However, there was always a more lenient stance on lesbianism as it was portrayed as something separate from same-sex male relationships. This can be seen in Margaret Otis’s work “A Perversion Not Commonly Noted,” in which she writes of an anti-lesbian stance while also contradicting herself by stating, “Sometimes the love [of one woman for another] is very real and almost ennobling.”<sup>44</sup> Lesbianism was often written to put the women’s emotions first instead of their sexual desire or “perversion,” as sodomy was often described. This period in

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<sup>42</sup> Hanson, quoted in Doris Faber, *The Life of Lorena Hickok*, 79.

<sup>43</sup> Susan McCabe. “To Be and To Have, The Rise of Queer Historicism.” *GLQ* 11, no. 1 (2005), 120.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Otis, “A Perversion Not Commonly Noted,” *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* (Boston), 8, no. 2 (June-July 1913).

Hick's life was when she fully embraced her sexuality and decided to explore it further. An interesting distinction is in Barbara's interview when she says, "I don't think she ever lived with a man, but she certainly experimented." This implies that the experimentation was occurring with men rather than women, making it seem that Hick's usual preference was for women but would sometimes experiment with men. However, it was still a time in Hick's life when she had to subscribe to a very heteronormative life to survive in her career and life.

Survival was at the forefront of Hick's and other Americans' minds as they lived through the Great Depression. Many individuals, including Hick, tried to ignore the problem and pretend it was not of legitimate concern and believed that Wall Street or the government could solve it with legislation. Hick had already experienced a ten percent cut in salary by the Associated Press and was anticipating another cut in the coming months.<sup>45</sup> During the beginning years of the Depression, the democratic party was naming their nominee for the 1932 election. Hick was not chosen to attend the convention, which upset her greatly as she had covered politics for many years. It was "a blow to find out," as she felt betrayed by the news desk's choice to send another reporter over her. So instead of traveling to Chicago, she did the next best thing and went to Albany to wait out the results in the garage of the Executive Mansion. After the third ballot for the nominee, she and another woman, Elton Fay, were invited to breakfast by Eleanor Roosevelt. During this meal, Hick realized Eleanor's deep unhappiness in what should have been quite an exciting time for her. After the meal, Hick told Elton, "That woman is unhappy about something."<sup>46</sup> Fay chalked it up to Eleanor's worry that her husband would not receive the nomination. However, Hick suspected something much more profound was the cause.

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<sup>45</sup> Faber, *The Life of Lorena Hickok*, 84.

<sup>46</sup> Hickok, *Reluctant First Lady*, 33.

Ultimately, she was correct. In a letter to her dear friends, Marion Dickerman and Nancy Cook, Eleanor wrote that “she could not live” in the White House.<sup>47</sup> Shortly after this breakfast, the Democratic National Committee announced F.D.R. as the Democratic presidential candidate. Reporters quickly tracked down Eleanor for comments and questions, including Hick. At this moment, Hick knew she wanted to uncover what made Eleanor unhappy as she watched the future First Lady stare down a woman reporter asking, “Mrs. Roosevelt, aren’t you thrilled at the idea of living in the White House?”<sup>48</sup>

After F.D.R.’s nomination, Hick immediately returned to the city to propose that Eleanor be assigned her own reporter to cover her separate life from her husband’s campaign trail. Surprisingly, Hick turned down the offer to do so. She believed that Franklin was the true story, and the idea of traveling around the country covering him was exciting. AP allowed Hick to join the campaign trail to do crowd research and other minor things while having the men focus on Franklin’s speeches. They then hired a different woman reporter to cover Eleanor’s day-to-day life; however, the reporter was not professionally invested and left the post to marry. Then, unbeknownst to Hick, Eleanor decided to join her husband on the campaign trail in Arizona. Quickly, Hick resumed her friendship with Thompson, who now was Eleanor’s secretary and right hand. Thompson and Hick’s closeness was beneficial in getting closer to Eleanor. Lorena assumed that Thompson acted as Eleanor’s ears for screening people before getting close to them. In Hick’s case, Eleanor began warming up to her after Thompson and Hick’s conversations about her upbringing. This could have been due to Eleanor’s compassion for

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<sup>47</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt, letter to Marion Dickerman and Nancy Cook, date unknown.

<sup>48</sup> Hickok, *Reluctant First Lady*, forward.

people with difficult upbringings as she had or that she saw something within Hick that she could empathize with.<sup>49</sup>

While on the trail, Hick wrote several pieces about Eleanor and the events she attended. They typically did quite well, with the most prominent piece discussing how Eleanor slept through Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig hitting home runs at the World Series game in Chicago. While following Eleanor, it was clear that Hick was becoming attached to the future First Lady. She reminisced about these days with Eleanor in her book, *Reluctant First Lady*; Hick wrote:

To my embarrassment, Mrs. Roosevelt insisted on giving me the lower berth and taking for herself the long, narrow couch on the other side of the drawing room. "I'm longer than you are," she said when I protested. "And," she added with a smile, "not quite so broad!"... It was then she told me that I could thank Tommy for the fact that she had accepted me and permitted me to follow her about... "It was very hard for me at first. I was brought up by a very strict grandmother who thought no lady should ever have stories written about her except in the society columns. "To be frank with you, I don't like being interviewed. And that applied especially to you, for Franklin used to tease me about you. He'd say, 'You'd better watch out for that Hick woman. She's smart.' He wasn't criticizing you in any way- he likes you. He was only teasing me." She then proceeded to tell me about her own unhappy childhood and girlhood, the tragic death of her father, whom she loved so much, her strict Grandmother Hall, and her aunts who called her "the ugly duckling." "May I write some of that? I asked her fearfully before we finally said good night. "If you like... I trust you," She responded.<sup>50</sup>

With this conversation, Hick finally had Eleanor's trust and the ability to write about the future First Lady on a new and deeper level. Hick had reached a level of trust and respect that many reporters only dream of. However, with this new intimacy came the potential for a conflict of interest. Hick became a friend to Eleanor first, then a reporter for the Associated Press second. Her feelings were beginning to interfere with her unbiased reporting of events. This can be seen by Hick's admission regarding writing about the women she cared so profoundly for by stating, "Since she had grown to trust me, she left it to my discretion as to whether or not I should quote

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<sup>49</sup> Susan Quinn, *Eleanor and Hickok* (New York: Penguin Press, 2016), 16.

<sup>50</sup> Hickok, *Reluctant First Lady*, 48-9.

her. I rarely did.”<sup>51</sup> She left out of her pieces her musings about Eleanor. She wrote down the things that fascinated her as a woman rather than as a reporter.

However, as Election Day grew closer, Hick developed more intense feelings for the future First Lady. The extent of these emotions always remained hidden from the public. It was only ever expressed between Eleanor and Hick in the privacy of each other’s company or the letters written daily to and from one another. Her writing about Eleanor at this point took a more romantic turn. This can be seen in her writing in *The Reluctant First Lady* regarding Election Night at the Roosevelt household. “She greeted us at the door, and when I came in, she kissed me and said softly: ‘It’s good to have you around tonight, Hick.’.... The gown she wore was long with a short train... Tall and slender and erect, she looked like a queen in it. I decided that she was as some English women are said to be; they may look rather dowdy in daytime clothes, but in evening clothes, they are beautiful.”<sup>52</sup> The longer she spent with Eleanor and the Roosevelt family, the more Hick, the dear friend, came out, rather than Hick, the reporter for the Associated Press.

There were many opportunities for Hick to use the personal things Eleanor told her, for instance, that she did not feel any different after FDR’s win or that “if I wanted to be selfish, I could wish Franklin had not been elected.”<sup>53</sup> To maintain her integrity as a reporter, Hick needed to use some of these profoundly personal truths within a story. This is just what she did, with a few adjustments. She portrayed a new side of Eleanor, painting an idea of the lonely child who rose to be the fearless woman America knew as their new First Lady, thus making Eleanor the perfect First Lady for F.D.R. After his election day win, it was assumed that Bess Furman would

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<sup>51</sup> Hickok, *Reluctant First Lady*, 57.

<sup>52</sup> Hickok, *Reluctant First Lady*, 58.

<sup>53</sup> Hickok, *Reluctant First Lady*, 1.

take over coverage of Eleanor. Furman had already been covering President Hoover's wife, Lou, and was assumed to transition to Eleanor after the election. However, Hick quickly brokered an agreement that allowed her to be kept on the story of Mrs. Roosevelt up until Inauguration Day. The Associated Press preferred this because Hick knew the First Lady's plans before the press could have access, giving her the first chance at any news. It was also a symbiotic relationship as Eleanor often used Hick as a distraction for the other reporters so that she could conduct her errands privately.

After brokering this deal to have more time with Eleanor, Hick realized she could not keep living a double life of being an Associated Press reporter and Eleanor's closest confidant. Two weeks before the Inauguration, Eleanor suggested the two take a trip to Groton, the school where two Roosevelt children were staying. However, Eleanor made it clear to Hick that there were no press or reporters on the trip, just Eleanor and Hick. This trip was the first time Hick told the Associated Press she would not be recording anything unless something was happening with Governor Roosevelt.<sup>54</sup> Around this time, Hick was also tired of reporting her every moment to the office. On this trip, Hick finally understood that her time as a journalist was approaching a very fast end. She had finally gotten too close to her news source. The turning point was when F.D.R. sent Eleanor a copy of his Inaugural Address, which the future First Lady had read aloud to Hick.<sup>55</sup> During this conversation, it had not even crossed Hick's mind to alert the office of what the future President might say the next day. Reflecting on these events, it was not until much later that she felt a sense of professional guilt regarding her lack of action to hear such a historical speech. It was after this moment and the several letters between Eleanor and her that

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<sup>54</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to W.W.C. Chaplin.

<sup>55</sup> Hickok, *Reluctant First Lady*, 89-107.

showcased the ending of her career as a reporter and the need to move on to a new project. On June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1933, Hick officially resigned from the Associated Press.

Hick, at this point, was indeed in love with Eleanor. The gifts the couple exchanged were examples of this love. The primary example is in the sapphire ring Hick gave Eleanor. This was the same ring Geraldine Farrar, the opera singer Hick had tried to chase down all those years before, gave to Hick. Eleanor wore it on the day she became First Lady, on March 4, 1933. In a letter to Hick, Eleanor wrote, “Hick darling, all day I’ve thought of you & another birthday I will be with you... Oh! I want to put my arms around you. I ache to hold you close. Your ring is a great comfort. I look at it & think she does love me, or I wouldn’t be wearing it!”<sup>56</sup> The full meaning of the ring to these women has been left up to interpretation by academics since the opening of Hick’s papers due to the absence of an explanation in her writing. Arguably, the ring symbolizes Hick’s romantic love for the First Lady. This ring was one of the first tokens Hick received as a journalist; thus, it was highly important. It was also important to Eleanor as she chose to wear it during her First Lady ceremony and understood the loving meaning behind the gift, as indicated by the excerpt from her letter. The fact that Eleanor wore the ring during such a momentous event as the inauguration suggests that her relationship with Hick was perhaps at the forefront of her mind.<sup>57</sup>

After the inauguration and Hick’s resignation from the Associated Press, she needed new employment. She began working under Harry Hopkins at the Federal Emergency Relief Administration through her connections with Eleanor. Hick traveled across the United States while working under Hopkins, writing to Hopkins about how the Great Depression and Dust

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<sup>56</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt, letter to Lorena Hickok, March 7, 1933.

<sup>57</sup> Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, 98.



Bowl had impacted Americans nationwide. She visited almost every region except for the Northwest. She often wrote to Eleanor about the depressing things she saw and how deeply these experiences affected her. Her job, according to Hopkins, was that he wanted her “to go out around the country and look this thing over. I don’t want statistics from you. I don’t want the social-worker angle. I just want your own reaction... and don’t pull your punches.”<sup>58</sup> Hopkins and Hick worked well together. She was everything he needed as a relief investigator; her ability to conduct in-depth interviews with those impacted allowed Hopkins to see how the everyday man or woman was impacted and what they thought of the current economic crisis. The information provided by Hick during her first job with Hopkins has been considered one of the most graphic views of the United States at the height of the Great Depression, rivaling only the periodical pieces written by Edmund Wilson in *The American Jitters* and later in *The American Earthquake*.<sup>59</sup>

An important distinction to make about Hick’s life is that while she criticized many for their need for assistance from the state, she, in her way, was receiving relief and aid. For example, she lived at the White House with the President and First Lady as a guest between her FERA trips. She also received most of her jobs after she resigned from the Associated Press because of Eleanor’s connections. She even acknowledges this by speaking to Eleanor, stating, “I’m really on relief, myself,” to which Eleanor replies, “You might say it’s rather luxurious relief.”<sup>60</sup> During Franklin’s presidency, Hick took Eleanor’s invitation to move into the White House. Living in the White House allowed Hick to live and sleep mere feet from her love, Eleanor, and meet many influential people. However, this closeness to power and breaking news

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<sup>58</sup> Lorena Hickok, “Unpublished introduction regarding Harry Hopkins” (New York: Papers of Lorena Hickok)

<sup>59</sup> See *One-Third of a Nation: Lorena Hickok Reports on The Great Depression* edited by Richard Lowitt and Maurine Beasley, XXV

<sup>60</sup> Hickok, *Reluctant First Lady*, 155.

inspired her to write and caused her to miss being a journalist desperately. She also missed Eleanor deeply while she or Eleanor was on trips. Often writing to her, “Goodnight, dear one. I want to put my arms around you and kiss you at the corner of your mouth. And in a little more than a week- I shall!”<sup>61</sup> These trips alone highlight how dependent the two women were on each other. After being apart from one another from March to June of 1933, the two women decided it would be healing to take a trip across the country together. Their constant closeness to each other during this trip and the lack of letters exchanged between the two make it quite difficult to know exactly what occurred. When the two women were together in the public eye, Hick was often described as Eleanor’s companion. In one particular article, though, published in *Time*, the description of herself angered Hick greatly. She was described as a “rotund lady with a husky voice” wearing “baggy clothes,” implying that she owed her position to Mrs. Roosevelt. As a reaction, she wrote to Hopkin’s secretary, “I love Mrs. Roosevelt dearly. She is the best friend I have in the world, but sometimes I do wish, for my own sake, that she were Mrs. Joe Doaks of Oelwein, Iowa.”<sup>62</sup> While she enjoyed working under Hopkins, the constant travel and stress exasperated her already urgent health problems. She ultimately had to resign from the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in 1936 from the increasing health problems she experienced from her diabetes.

After her time with Harry Hopkins and FERA, she decided she needed a change in direction. With the help of Thompson, Hick landed a position helping plan the 1939 World Fair under the politician Grover Whalen. She was hired to do publicity for the fair specifically. However, her job quickly morphed into promoting the fair to young people and children. She

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<sup>61</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt, letter to Lorena Hickok, 5 Dec. 1933.

<sup>62</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Godwin, Feb. 18, 1934.

liked having a hand in planning such an extravagant event. However, it left her feeling quite unfulfilling, making her miss and crave the excitement of her days as a reporter. It also required her to be a more extroverted version of herself, something she had always struggled with. She felt intensely unfit and unsatisfied by her position, writing Eleanor, “All day I ‘sit on myself,’ so to speak, disciplining myself, trying to control my impatience, my natural irascibility, my loathing of friction and disorder. By night I’m exhausted.”<sup>63</sup> The two had seemingly swapped positions, Eleanor traveling the country while Hick was behind a desk.

During this time, Hick tried to rely less on her relationship with Eleanor by reaching out to her former lovers. She invited Alicent Holt to New York to rekindle their relationship but found she could not give Alicent what she wanted, “which is a lot of affection and consideration.”<sup>64</sup> This letter could be construed in a couple of different ways. It may show that Hick was still in love with Eleanor and could not provide Alicent with the same love. She also invited Ellie to visit her after hearing that Ellie’s marriage was having difficulties. However, Hick’s lack of energy led to her primarily wanting to be left alone while Ellie stayed with her. It also did not help Hick’s mental well-being that Eleanor and herself were slowly drifting out of each other’s orbits. She felt as though Eleanor did not want to see her as much as she wanted to see Eleanor. It became evident that Hick depended on Eleanor to maintain balance in her life. This proved quite difficult as the First Lady was stretched incredibly thin, working on her responsibilities to the country. Hick went as far as to say, “I’m being perfectly honest when I say I’ll be relieved when it’s over... You are always horrified when I say that I wish it had happened when I had that automobile accident out in Arizona... I’d have died happy, as happy as I’ve ever

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<sup>63</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt July 16, 1937.

<sup>64</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt. August 27, 1937.

been in my life.”<sup>65</sup> This was one of Hick’s lowest points in her life. Her dependency on Eleanor was fragile and unstable as evident in that letter, and she went from voicing suicidal intentions to attempting to reaffirm that these was not Eleanor’s fault.

She often feared with her jobs that she was potentially viewed as Eleanor’s charity case. Because of this fear, she worked harder than expected and often gained the admiration of her supervisors like Hopkins at WPA and now the president of the World’s Fair, Grover Whalen. By the time the fair opened in 1939, Hick was known for getting crowds to come to the fair. She was considered as the “human dynamo” by her boss and brought in thousands of teachers and children from the city by creating “Nickle Day,” in which admission was only five cents. Hick oversaw this, and it was so successful that she became the head of her department and was given a raise while many others were being laid off.

Her work with the 1939 World’s Fair happened amid the beginning of the Second World War. On September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1939, she and Howard hung on to every word King George VI spoke regarding Hitler’s invasion of Poland. She and Howard “wept openly and without embarrassment.”<sup>66</sup> Later that day, she wrote to Eleanor, “What can one say? Nothing. I can’t even think very clearly. Just now, one can only feel... I find being an isolationist rather hard going today! And so does Howard!”<sup>67</sup> This was one of the few moments where Hick revealed her opinions of the war. She shared the popular idea of isolationism after watching the atrocities of the First World War. However, with this second war fast approaching and the need for the United States’ involvement, she, like many others, started to question those ideals. This is also a

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<sup>65</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, January 19, 1939.

<sup>66</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, Sept. 3, 1939.

<sup>67</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, Sept. 3, 1939.

drastic change from her original views as a young woman. She had been quite a vocal opponent of the First World War, to the point of being investigated by the Department of Justice in 1917.

The fair remained open for another season, and Hick was offered to stay. However, she decided to look for other employment. However, this proved difficult as Hick seemingly depended on Eleanor to find her next job. When given many opportunities by friends to network and build connections for a new opportunity, Hick often missed the event and avoided them. Hick knew she depended on Eleanor's connections and even admitted to friends she was.<sup>68</sup> In the end, though, the First Lady's connections brought a promising new job to Hick. She began working for the Democratic National Committee as a publicist. It was the perfect job for Hick; it allowed her to travel the country, something she loved from her job under Hopkins, while also getting to know how the public felt about their president, F.D.R. She described her job to Eleanor as "such fun, dear."<sup>69</sup> She also wrote that it was the closest she had gotten to the work she had done at AP in a very long time.<sup>70</sup> There were two clear opinions on going to war during her time on the road. The first was that most women did not want the country to go back into war only 21 years after the end of the Great War. The second was the public's desire for Roosevelt to stay in the White House for a third term. This was something that Hick dreaded reporting back to Eleanor, as she easily could predict the First Lady's reaction. Eleanor's reaction was as expected. Responding to Hick's finding, she summarized her thoughts by writing only two words, "I groan."<sup>71</sup> This did not stop Eleanor from campaigning for her husband and helping Franklin win a third term.

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<sup>68</sup> Quinn, *Eleanor and Hick*, 214.

<sup>69</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, February 20, 1940.

<sup>70</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, February 21, 1940.

<sup>71</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt, letter to Lorena Hickok, February 11, 1940.

After the election of 1940, Hick was hired as the executive secretary of the Democratic Party's Women Division. There was some concern from the division's director, Molly Dewson, and Eleanor if Hick could keep up with responding to all of the letters from women across the country. However, once again, Hick rose to the occasion. After hearing the First Lady's concerns, Hick wrote, "I honestly don't think you and Molly have any real cause for worry about my getting bored or impatient with the ladies. What neither of you seems to realize is just how desperate my plight is- and how little I can afford to be choosy."<sup>72</sup> Hick was nearly forty-seven, an age when it became uncommon for women to find meaningful jobs. She quickly secured her job with the suggestion of hiring a "frontwoman" for the division. The frontwoman would be hired as the Director of the Women's Division and act as the face of it for the press, while Hick worked as the executive secretary behind the scenes. The chosen frontwoman was Gladys Avery Tillett, the daughter of a North Carolina Supreme Court justice and an early leader of the League of Women Voters. Hick liked the idea of working behind the scenes. This new position required Hick to move back to Washington, D.C. Eleanor recommended she stop renting the Little House and find a place near D.C. Hick quickly rejected this idea as she could not give up the cottage she loved so dearly. Instead, she planned on renting a room when she needed to be in town. Eleanor disliked this idea and told her, "Well, if that is the way you are going to live, you might just as well stay on here."<sup>73</sup>

Hick stayed at the White House again, and the war truly began for the United States. Japanese forces attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1941, killing twenty-four hundred people. While Eleanor was immediately thrown into the depths of comforting the American

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<sup>72</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, November 16, 1940.

<sup>73</sup> Hickok, "Unpublished Autobiography," 17.

public by being the first voice they heard regarding the attack, Hick listened in over her radio from the Little House. She soon returned to the White House that was so silent that it was “as though it had died.”<sup>74</sup> The only sounds she heard were from the men digging trenches to begin building a presidential bomb shelter underneath the Treasury Department. Even though Hick was still primarily a civilian, her life was impacted unexpectedly. An example of this can be seen when Eleanor canceled her Christmas celebration with Hick because of an unexpected visit from Winston Churchill. One can imagine that it was surreal for Hick to hear this because she shocked Eleanor by laughing intensely. Eleanor did not find it amusing. However, from Hick’s perspective, it was a shock to her system. Hick grew up dreaming of interviewing and meeting such powerful people, and now they disrupted her daily plans. Her Christmas plans with the woman she loved were ruined by the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and the President of the United States meeting to discuss the impending second global war of her lifetime.

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<sup>74</sup> Hickok, “Unpublished Autobiography,” 18.

### Chapter 3: Final Years

With the United States bringing forces into the war, the war drastically shifted the country's priorities. For Eleanor, her hopes of social reform were put on the back burner, and so were Hick's ideas for the Women's Division. However, she was able to stay at the Women's Division, where she found a strong network of women who were just as passionate about politics as she was, like Mary Norton, a Democratic congresswoman from New Jersey. Norton had made a name for herself within Congress as someone who expected the same respect as her male counterparts and demanded it when it was not given. The two quickly became very close friends over their many shared experiences. The two women spoke, wrote, and met each other frequently. The friendship was something both women desperately needed. Mary, seventeen years older, treated Hick like a daughter, and Hick quickly grew to love Mary more than she may have ever loved her mother. The two coincidentally also shared the same birthdate, and because of this, it was Eleanor's idea to throw a joint birthday party. Coming off of a win for Norton in Congress, the party was a booming success. For Hick, it was a success, as Marion Harron, a friend of Mary's, was in attendance. Marion was ten years younger than Hick and a judge for the U.S. Board of Tax Appeals, the only woman on the court. The age gap between the two mirrors the age difference between Hick and her former lover and teacher, Alicent Holt. Marion became infatuated with Hick, writing her less than a month after meeting, "You don't even have the faintest notion of how magnificent you are."<sup>75</sup> Hick replicated Eleanor's generosity when they first started seeing each other. Hick gave Marion several gifts, including a new suit from the tailor Eleanor had recommended. Marion soon became Hick's most frequent visitor at the White House and to the point that guards waved her through as they quickly recognized her. The couple

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<sup>75</sup> Marion Harron, letter to Lorena Hickok, March 22, 1942.



also visited the Little House frequently, where they worked on tending Hick's garden. Eleanor took the news of Hick's new relationship quite well by refocusing the effort she showed toward Hick and channeling it onto other people in her life.

Hick's dear friend and Eleanor's closest confidant, Thompson, began to express her complaints to people regarding Hick. It was beginning to look as though Hick was becoming somewhat of a freeloader living in the White House. Thompson wrote to a friend in 1941, "Hick is still here; she can't pay rent and her income tax and her dentist bill- so she has cut out paying rent!"<sup>76</sup> She also wrote, "Our friend, Hick, is still... here, and I imagine it will take dynamite to blast her out."<sup>77</sup> Living in the White House changed dramatically since Hick moved back. Eleanor often went on trips to the war fronts in England and the Pacific, which worried Hick endlessly. She wrote to Eleanor, "Darling, I am thrilled about you- and worried," after learning that Canterbury Cathedral had been bombed by the Nazis just after Eleanor's visit there.<sup>78</sup> However, Hick also understood as a journalist how important the press Eleanor was getting was for morale back home. 1942 was one of the rare years that the two did not get together for Christmas. The two exchanged gifts but spent the holiday separately, Hick having neighbors over and Eleanor spending it at the White House. Eleanor's trip to the Pacific theatre was just as crucial as well. She constantly wrote to Hick about the men's stories and the conditions. With all of this information, Hick began to write articles for the *Democratic Digest*; she never signed her name on the pieces, but she expressed joy in writing once again. In 1943, Hick and Eleanor resumed their Christmas tradition as the two met and exchanged gifts. However, Hick also had a pre-Christmas celebration with Marion at the Hay-Adams Hotel. Later, Marion sent Hick a

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<sup>76</sup> Joseph P. Lash, *A World of Love: Eleanor Roosevelt and Her friends, 1943-62* (New York: Doubleday & Co, 1982), xix.

<sup>77</sup> Lash, *A World of Love*, xxi.

<sup>78</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, October 26, 1942.

postcard from the hotel with an arrow pointing to the window of their room, writing, “X marks the spot... I will always remember the pleasant and happy hours of last evening.”<sup>79</sup> The two were still going strong, and Hick started to stay at Marion’s home in Maryland much more than she stayed at the White House.

With Hick’s focus on Marion, Eleanor and Hick’s relationship became strained. The couple’s letters and communication with one another began to become less frequent. While on a trip to visit the troops in the Caribbean, Eleanor visited Puerto Rico, where she reminisced on the couple’s trip there ten years ago. So much had changed for both women. The love affair was quickly transitioning into a friendship. Hick was in love and focused on Marion, while Eleanor had also moved on. Eleanor had always had some restraint regarding their relationship; however, Hick did not. She often dreamed of being with Eleanor outside the public eye, lamenting to friends how she wished she had fallen in love with Eleanor as a regular woman. The difference in restraint between the two could be attributed to the fact that Eleanor was still married to F.D.R. while Hick was seen as a spinster by society. Also, Hick was able to be more open as she did not have the burden of being the First Lady that Eleanor had. If this had happened four years earlier, one would worry about how Hick handled the separation after her severe dependency on Eleanor at the height of their relationship. Though since her time of codependency, she had built strong friendships with other like-minded women and found a woman she could love in private as she wished. Her life with Marion was nothing like her life with Eleanor. Marion held nothing back and loved her to the fullest extent. While we cannot access Hick’s side of their correspondence, Marion wrote, “Your letters are short, but they mean so much,” the letters were

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<sup>79</sup> Marion Harron, letter to Lorena Hickok, December 1943.

less intense than Harron's.<sup>80</sup> This lack of reciprocated intensity signaled Hick's initial withdrawal from the relationship. In the summer of 1944, it is evident Hick lost the same intense interest Marion had in her. She was also withdrawing herself from her work at the Women's Division. In a letter to Eleanor, she stated she was tired and that a long rest would help her be able to keep working longer. Eleanor saw through this and suggested that she resign on January 1<sup>st</sup> and attempt to line up a job before leaving the Women's Division.<sup>81</sup> Hick did not take this advice; this was her last job in politics. With the election of 1944 and FDR elected for his fourth and final term, Hick reached out to Eleanor, concerned about what these next four years may hold for Franklin and her but understood they were needed compared to his opponent.<sup>82</sup>

At the beginning of Franklin's final term, fatigue ran fervently through both women. Eleanor became exhausted from ignoring the realities of her husband's health deteriorating, while Hick became increasingly exhausted because of her own health. While Eleanor ignored Franklin's illness, she shifted focus to Hick's. She begged her to see a doctor and finally demanded she go to Eleanor's. She eventually went around Christmas of 1944 and discovered her diabetes was hazardously out of control. In a letter to Eleanor, she wrote, "Darling, thanks for making me go to the doctor. He says you probably saved my life."<sup>83</sup> This helped to explain her intense fatigue and ultimately gave her reasoning to leave her post at the Women's Division at the start of FDR's fourth term. She finally resigned in March of 1945 and celebrated her fifty-second birthday at her farewell party organized by Gladys Tillet, her dear friend, and boss for many years. The *Democratic Digest* gave her the highest honor. They described her as "a gifted writer, a politically wise and realistic advisor, and one of the warmest and most penetrating

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<sup>80</sup> Marion Harron, letter to Lorena Hickok February 2, 1944.

<sup>81</sup> Quinn, *Hick and Eleanor*, 291.

<sup>82</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, November 10, 1944.

<sup>83</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, December 23, 1944.

personalities who has ever been with the National Committee.”<sup>84</sup> She never held another job. However, she gained many close confidants, friends, and a lover with that position. She then retired to the Little House in Long Island for rest.

Franklin passed away on April 12<sup>th</sup>, 1945, in Warm Springs, Georgia. While Eleanor had sensed he was nearing the end, her husband’s death still came as a shock. She had not been with him when he passed and instead was in Washington, D.C. When Hick found out, she wrote about visiting Eleanor in Washington and Hyde Park. However, Eleanor talked her out of this, stating, “You know what it will be like. And you, of all people, must realize what a load I am carrying right now.”<sup>85</sup> This could be seen as a direct rejection of Hick; however, she took it as an honor because of the First Lady’s bluntness. While Eleanor asked for her not to attend, the two spoke and wrote to each other multiple times a day for the next several days. When packing up the White House, Eleanor reflected on all the time spent with Hick in what had become her home. She sent the mug that Hick always used as a memento of the time they lived there. The two had lived on and off together in the White House for nearly ten years. Even with the strain of her husband’s death, Eleanor understood the shift this caused in her and Hick’s relationship dynamic.

FDR’s death allowed Eleanor to forge her own path out from her husband’s shadow. Hick first noticed this when she wrote a piece for the *Democratic Digest* titled “Eleanor Roosevelt... First Lady.” In the essay, Hick predicts that Eleanor could accomplish great things by stating, “Wherever there are people- individuals or masses of people- who need a friend, Eleanor Roosevelt will be there somewhere, very likely in the background... doing her job. And

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<sup>84</sup> *Democratic Digest*, April 1945, Library of Congress

<sup>85</sup> Lorena Hickok, Letter to Molly Dewson. May 3, 1945.

so, it's goodbye to Eleanor Roosevelt, First Lady, but *not* goodbye to Eleanor Roosevelt.”<sup>86</sup>

Eleanor transitioned seamlessly into her new life, which consisted of peacekeeping endeavors and social reform. For Hick, though, it was not as easy a transition. She learned how to adapt to her new diet after the diabetes scare in 1944. She struggled with her finances to the point that her friends helped her with every small job they could. Eleanor asked her to do research for a Q and A column she wrote, Mary Norton found her a part-time salary in her congressional budget, and her former boss Gladys Tillett poked around for writing leads for Hick. While she was incredibly thankful for everyone's help, it also made Hick feel dependent on them and despised not being able to care for herself. She hoped to be able to write enough articles to keep herself afloat, yet no magazines or papers picked up the articles. Her relationship with Marion also was deeply troubled. Marion depended on her mother, who did not approve of their relationship. Hick also believed that the relationship was doomed because of Marion's change of circumstance to becoming a “spinster” as she hit her forties. In a letter to Eleanor in the summer of 1945, she wrote, “Marion has gone.”<sup>87</sup>

This dichotomy of the two women's lives could be seen as a source of tension in their friendship. There is no clear indication of any reason until November of 1949 with the publication of *This I Remember*, Eleanor's autobiography. It became an instant hit with readers. This could be when Hick became jealous of Eleanor, as it was Hick's lifelong dream to be a renowned writer. However, what seems to have truly angered Hick was the portrayal of herself in the book. Eleanor's primary mention of her in the draft was on her first day at the White House when Hick interviewed her. Hick was furious with how Eleanor described the encounter,

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<sup>86</sup> Lorena Hickok, “Eleanor Roosevelt... First Lady,” *Democratic Digest*, June 1945.

<sup>87</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Eleanor Roosevelt, August 30, 1945.

“Later, I came to realize that in the White House, one must not play favorites,” completely reinforcing the rumors and thoughts that she only got ahead because of Eleanor and not on her own. Inspired by Eleanor’s autobiography, Hick began her own. However, a publisher turned her chapters down because they lacked life. I would argue that they did contain life: the life of a woman who, as a teen, was kicked out of her home after her mother’s death by her alcoholic father to becoming one of the most well-known woman reporters and eventually dining with a President.

Hick received her next writing opportunity when Mary Norton finally retired in 1950; she proposed to Hick a collaboration to write Norton’s biography. At the point of her retirement, Mary had served twenty-six years as a congresswoman. The two referred to the book as their “baby,” and Norton thanked Hick endlessly for helping her to complete it. However, it had no interested parties when it finally went out for a publisher. Hick grew incredibly frustrated. She worked part-time at the New York State Democratic Committee until 1950. After leaving, she could barely make ends meet and relied almost entirely on the checks Eleanor sent her for holidays like Christmas, her birthday, and other occasions. It was then, in 1952, that Eleanor saw how badly Hick was struggling and offered her another collaborative project writing a book for Harper Publishing. They went on to write *Ladies of Courage* about many of the powerful women in politics, many of whom they knew closely. While Hick received an advance from Harper Publishing, she struggled to finish the book because of her rapidly declining health. At this point, she had episodes of dizziness, severely impaired vision, and arthritis so bad she could no longer write.

As Hick’s health and financial situation declined, Eleanor began to understand the extent of Hick’s crisis. It was only when contacted by Hick’s landlord that Eleanor recognized the

extent of it. Eleanor immediately sprang into action, calling her driver to retrieve Hick and her belongings to bring them to Hyde Park in 1955. This was quite a difficult transition for Hick because she had to relinquish her self-sufficient lifestyle. After the move, Hick took Eleanor's advice and wrote smaller stories that could be written and sold easily. She wrote several books for younger audiences about FDR's childhood, Helen Keller, and began one about Walter Reuther, the labor movement leader. She also wrote a biography of Eleanor named *Reluctant First Lady*, which detailed many of her conversations with the First Lady outside of their letters. In one of Eleanor's last books, *You Learn by Living*, Eleanor dedicated a portion of it to her former love and dear friend, Hick, and the adversity she repeatedly faced. She wrote, "A case that comes most pressingly to my mind is that of my friend, Miss Hick... Always she lived a dynamic life, surrounded by theatrical and political people, her friends among the celebrities in half a dozen fields, the news of the day a part of the very fabric of her life."<sup>88</sup> It is apparent that while no longer in a romantic relationship, the pair's love and mutual respect for one another survived the test of time.

Eleanor and Hick spent their last day together in the summer of 1962. The two sat outside in Hick's yard, discussing everything and anything. Reminiscing, Hick wrote, "That time she stayed more than an hour, and we had a long, quiet, relaxed, intimate talk that I shall always treasure."<sup>89</sup> Months later, Eleanor was in the hospital for an unknown illness. It was confirmed later, on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1962, that Eleanor Roosevelt died from complications of tuberculosis that were dormant until other medical treatments activated it. The morning after Eleanor's death, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1962, Hick received a telegram from Western Union that read, "THE FAMILY

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<sup>88</sup> Eleanor Roosevelt, *You Learn by Living* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 82-83.

<sup>89</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Esther Lape, November 21, 1962.

OF MRS. FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT INVITE YOU TO THE CHURCH SERVICE TO BE HELD AT ST. JAMES EPISCOPAL CHURCH.” Two days later, the streets of Hyde Park were lined with police as many political giants arrived to say farewell to one of the most powerful women of their time. While Hick was invited to the ceremony and to stand among these famous men and women, she said her goodbyes privately after the powerful had left. She asked the rector of Eleanor’s church and close friend, Reverend Kidd, to escort her to the grave. However, due to Hick’s arthritis, bad eyesight, and declining health, she could not walk to the grave. She left the homemade bouquet to Reverend Kidd, who laid Hick’s simple bouquet at the feet of Eleanor’s large marble slab. Each year, on Eleanor’s birthday, Hick placed a yellow rose on her grave.

Hick outlived Eleanor by five years. Eleanor’s death profoundly affected Hick and led to a period of deep depression. She wrote to a friend, “Grief can be a very debilitating thing, and I haven’t had much energy or interest in anything.”<sup>90</sup> However, once she could grieve and process her love’s death, she began writing a biography for teenagers. She never finished this as it hurt her too much due to her eyesight problem. She was almost fully blind in her left eye, with the right not much better. Her arthritis also became a problem, and she went from needing a cane to a wheelchair. Although, with this adversity, she never saw herself as pitiable. She reflected on her own life and how the many programs implemented by her friend F.D.R. were now something she was grateful for. An example of this can be seen in her disinterest in Social Security when it was passed originally, which she then depended on to pay her rent for her remaining years. Subsequently, she often shared her thoughts on political events. To her friends, she often discussed how she ultimately liked President Lyndon B. Johnson because he was politically

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<sup>90</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Jeannette Brice, April 3, 1963.



smart, much like FDR but hated the “stench of our foreign policy” in Vietnam.<sup>91</sup> She also believed that President John F. Kennedy would have been so impactful and helpful for the country and that losing him was a terrible loss.

In 1968, her health declined. Her doctor told her that due to her diabetes, the numbness in her toes had progressed, and she would require surgery. The medical recommendation was to do two surgeries, one to amputate the first leg and then see if a second amputation was necessary. At this time, Hick requested the presence of her distant sister Ruby, who immediately came and visited multiple times each week during her recovery from the first surgery. Sadly, Hick did not survive the wait for the second surgery and passed only two months before her seventy-fifth birthday on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1968, from complications resulting from diabetes. Her will states that she be cremated in the presence of her dear confidant and friend, Reverend Kidd. Unfortunately, part of her will was overlooked regarding what to do with her ashes. It read, “The disposal of my ashes is immaterial, although, if it can be done, I should like to have them dug into the soil around growing trees, which may benefit from whatever chemicals the ashes contained.”<sup>92</sup> Because of this oversight, her ashes remained at the Dapson Funeral Home amongst the unclaimed remains, forever belonging to the shadow of the giants she encountered while alive.

Hick’s life is an extraordinary story. She was born of modest means in a very abusive household, became one of the few female journalists of her time, and finally had an intensely intimate relationship with the Roosevelt family. Furthermore, her story is even more impressive when recognizing her singular position as a queer woman in such highly public spaces. She gained access to some of the world’s most exclusive spaces and people, including Eleanor

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<sup>91</sup> Lorena Hickok, letter to Helen Douglas, November 24, 1964.

<sup>92</sup> Lorena Hickok, “Will and Testament Addendum.” (Will, Roosevelt Presidential Library).

Roosevelt, by bonding with her, over their similarly tortured childhoods. However, it was her queerness that kept Hick in those spaces, as it allowed her to develop an intimate relationship with Eleanor. Hick's forward thinking of donating her letters, unpublished manuscripts, and other key objects from her life has given the world one of the most thorough looks into the life of a queer individual.

Her story exemplifies the need to explore queerness within biographical works. Ignoring her evident queerness and several same-sex relationships completely reduces her to a two-dimensional persona used to fill a plot point in the life of Eleanor Roosevelt rather than highlighting one of the pioneering women in journalism. This allows stories like Hick's to claim the space they rightfully deserve in the cloth of history while proving once again that queer individuals have and will remain. The enduring legacies of Hick's life are her works as a journalist, reporter, and writer. Her reports from traveling around the country during the Great Depression aided Hopkins and President Roosevelt immensely, allowing them to give proper aid to those suffering. Her writings about Eleanor paved the path for a much more in-depth look into American First Ladies. Even later in her life, she continued to write for children and young adults, educating them on a plethora of historical figures.

Examining the letters and writings of Hick emphasizes a need within the field of history to reassess how we, as historians, have perceived past events and add new lenses, particularly the queer lens, to our ways of seeing the world. There is quite a lot to gain by doing so, as it allows further investigation into how the experiences of queer-identifying individuals may have influenced history. However, it is important not to be consumed with naming individuals as queer who may not have been. It is vital that as historians we examine the person in their own era's terms and definitions of sexuality and gender. Considering Hick queer (rather than lesbian)

allows us to leave her sexual identity as flexible and amorphous. With this in mind, I once again provide the word queer to define these individuals while simultaneously reclaiming the word from its derogatory meaning to a productive historical term.

Work like this thesis has never been more needed than in today's political climate. With the adoption of bills like the Don't Say Gay bill in Florida and the epidemic of anti-LGBTQ+ bills across the country, there are efforts at the highest levels to halt the telling of queer history, lives, and stories. The retelling of these histories shows how over the course of the study of history, time and time again, queer people's lives have been erased and told without the complete truth. This thesis is for students in places like Florida who have lost the ability to learn about Lorena Hickok's extraordinary life. As a queer academic, I find it essential to preserve these stories and uphold the legacies of those who came before me, especially during these challenging times for the queer community.

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