

STATE AND LOCAL RECORDS AS WOMEN'S HISTORY SOURCES:

THE CASE OF EDNA PERKINS GODBEE

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Though the volume of research in women's history has grown dramatically in recent years, federal, state, and local government records remain sadly neglected as women's history sources. This oversight may be attributed in part to the failure of archivists to convey to researchers the potential of these sources, but the continued reluctance of most historians to explore public records must be seen as the more important factor in their under-utilization. Virginia Purdy of the National Archives has termed the prevalence of this phenomenon among historians "achivaphobia." But there is no need to indulge a fear of archives. For it is clear that if scholars apply the same patience and diligence to an exploration of public records as that traditionally given to manuscripts, they will discover sources as easy to exploit and possibly more rewarding and surprising.

In the case which follows, I present the experience of one Georgia woman as discovered through state and local records. While her life was, at least in its most spectacular aspects, not representative of the lives of most Georgia women, its review illustrates the richness of public records as women's history sources and is designed to provoke interest in their further exploration.

My interest in this particular woman began some four or five years ago when, engaged in the especially tedious task of preparing some early twentieth century Georgia newspapers for microfilming, I came across the rather sensational story of a woman on trial for murder in 1913. The paper graphically described how Edna Perkins Godbee, a forty-four year old white woman, stood in the Millen, Georgia post office, pulled a .32 caliber Smith and Wesson pistol from her purse, and emptied its five chambers into the bodies of her former husband and his then current wife. Walter Scott Godbee died that day; Florence, the day following.

The Godbee case seemed an excellent vehicle for demonstrating how archival research can be used in investigating women's history. Such research can help in answering three pertinent questions about the case: Who was Edna Godbee? What precipitated her desperate act that morning in the Millen post office? What records exist to offer an explanation?

The shooting would have resulted in a superior court trial. Hence the incident must be documented in the grand jury presentments and in the superior court minutes and case files. Such sources from this period are generally found only in the local county courthouse. If a defendant were found guilty by the superior court in a case such as this, however, an appeal would likely be made to the state Supreme Court. Indeed, Georgia Reports, the published synopses of cases heard by the Supreme Court, quickly revealed that Edna Godbee's case had been so appealed. The synopsis further indicated that she had been tried first for the murder of the other Mrs. Godbee and had been convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. The Supreme Court had upheld that decision.

Had I not already understood all this, I could have consulted the state's criminal code to learn what legal procedures pertain in such cases and how implementation of these procedures must be documented according to

law. The law directs what and how court records will be created; where and how they shall be maintained.⁴

Supreme Court case files, including *Godbee v. State*, are conveniently maintained at the state archives, along with other records of the state Supreme Court, in a body of records designated as Record Group 92. After reading the case file, I believed that given certain extenuating circumstances, Edna Perkins Godbee would have subsequently appealed for executive clemency--for either a pardon, parole, or commutation of her sentence. This proved true and a massive file was found among Executive Department records under Record Group 1 in the series titled "Applications for Clemency," which are arranged alphabetically by surname of applicant.

The preliminary effort to identify archival records for study of this woman thus resulted in two major findings--the Supreme Court case file, including a transcript of the lower court proceedings, and the application for clemency. This latter file contained affidavits and petitions from individuals and groups of citizens; a transcript of the Godbee's divorce suit and hearings concerning alimony; the transcript of a civil suit brought by Edna Godbee's defense attorneys against her kinsmen for failure to pay legal fees related to the two murder cases; other court records, including the decision of the Jenkins County Superior Court to *nolle pros* the second murder charge; and extensive medical reports documenting her physical health at the time the murders took place and during subsequent confinement in the state prison at Milledgeville.

Records of Jenkins County, which was created in 1905 from Bulloch, Burke, Emanuel, and Screven counties, have not been microfilmed. Hence they are not available for research at the archives in Atlanta. However, the Perkinses and Godbees resided primarily in that portion of Jenkins which was originally Burke County. Thus Burke County Superior Court deeds and mortgages, along with wills and other estate records of the Court of Ordinary which have been filmed, could be used to verify information contained in the Supreme Court and executive Department records. Newspapers and family and county histories completed the inventory of research sources. On the surface, this long list of dry titles may not seem very appealing, but the combined content of these sources reveals a compelling drama in which the tragedy of one woman's experience unfolds.

With that long prologue aside, the question remains--who was Edna Perkins Godbee and why was she in the Millen, Georgia post office that fateful August morning in 1913?

Edna Perkins Godbee, born in 1869 in Burke County, was the eldest of ten children of Simeon Mills Perkins and Mary Calhoun Perkins. Her father, a planter, merchant, and manufacturer, was by all accounts one of the wealthiest men in Burke County. Following his death in 1886, his estate was valued in excess of \$55,000--over half a million dollars in today's economy. He and his brother Shepard founded Perkins and Brother and its subsidiaries, the Perkins Lumber Company and the Augusta-based Perkins Manufacturing Company, a producer of window sills, sashes, and other building materials. Apart from his corporate property interests, he owned substantial stock in the Tempille and Wrightsville Railroad and over 3,000 acres in Burke County alone.⁵

Among the assets of Perkins and Brother at Perkins Junction was a two story office building where Edna's father operated a commissary and which also housed the Perkins Post Office. When estate administrators decided to close the general merchandise store at Perkins, Walter Godbee, a thirty year-old widower from Waynesboro, was among those who came to

inspect the goods for sale. Godbee, purchasing the stock and leasing the structure with borrowed money, established himself in business and assumed the duties of postmaster as well. In the process he became well acquainted with the Perkins family and began courting seventeen year-old Edna. They married several months later in July of 1887.

Godbee, who had not managed his own affairs in Waynesboro with much success, immediately interested himself in the management of his wife's father's estate. Shortly after he gained control over Edna and her mother's share, dissension arose among family members concerning his role. Within five or six months he lost the widow's confidence, and they became so estranged that he forbade his then pregnant wife to visit her mother.

During this time Edna discovered in Walter's pockets several letters to her mother from one of the estate executors, a cousin with whom Walter had also been quarreling. She demanded to know why they had not been delivered. Walter became angry. In the ensuing struggle for possession of the letters, Walter struck Edna repeatedly.

He attempted to take these letters from me and in doing so he slapped my face. He bruised my eye and choked me so forcibly that the prints of his fingers were left on my throat, but he got the letters. . . . Finally he did say that he was sorry that he let his temper get away with him to the extent of hurting me, and promised me in the presence of my uncle that. . . if I would not leave him that. . . he would never hurt me again.

Less than two months later their first son was born. Domestic and familial relations eased, and for a time, as Edna recalled, "we lived more peaceably and anyway happier." But when her mother died in March 1889, a new source of controversy emerged. Walter insisted upon administering her mother's estate, despite Edna's protests. Family relations deteriorated severely that year, and Walter again isolated Edna from her family.

Her oldest brother, nineteen-year-old David, sharply resented Walter's interference in family affairs. Among other issues, young Perkins challenged Walter's control over the Perkins' store property in which he wanted to establish his own business. The two became bitter adversaries. Following a heated encounter in Walter's office on December 17th, the head-strong David threatened to kill his rival. The following morning, as David approached the store, Walter ordered him to halt. When David ignore the command, Walter reached for his gun, shot and killed him.

Tightening his grasp over Edna, Walter prohibited her from attending her brother's funeral, and "refused to let any of my people see me." Two and a half weeks later their second son was born.

Charged with murder, Walter claimed he shot David Perkins in self-defense. But with payment due on the money borrowed to establish his business in Perkins he could not afford the cost of legal defense. Choosing to believe him, Edna loaned Walter some \$1500 or \$1600 to pay debts and hire an attorney. Walter won acquittal, and despite his continuing financial distress, according to Edna they "lived happily after that." In 1893, their third child, a daughter Sarah, was born.

With the Perkins business about to collapse, Edna financed their move to Millen, sometime before 1896, with an additional \$2000 loan. Walter opened another general store in Millen which he hoped would be more lucrative. But as Edna recalled, "almost everybody who lives in Millen

knows, it wasn't a year before Mr. Godbee failed or perhaps a little over a year."¹²

With only the \$300 annual rent on Edna's farm for income and no credit of his own, Walter persuaded Edna that they should purchase a Millen hotel in 1896 or 1897. Advancing a recent settlement of \$2500 from the Perkins Manufacturing Company as a down payment on the hotel property, she asked that it be put in her name. They lived in the hotel about a year when they once again began having marital difficulties.

Compounding these problems, Walter fabricated a scandal as a means by which to gain complete control over Edna's real estate. The "scandal," as detailed many years later, consisted of the following: one night Walter asked a soldier named Carlyle, who was a hotel guest and an acquaintance, to keep his wife and daughter company while he went out to visit friends. Carlyle agreed and remained with Edna and Sarah until Walter returned late that evening. Bursting into the rooms, Walter accused a stunned Edna of "improper relations" with the soldier and summoned a number of friends, including Waynesboro attorney Floyd Scales, to the scene. The soldier was arrested but released in the morning without bond.

For Edna the ordeal lasted much longer. Walter demanded that Edna convey the hotel property title to him and that she designate him sole trustee of the plantation inherited from her father. If she failed to do so, he would instigate proceedings to gain full custody of her three children. She signed the necessary papers prepared by attorney Scales. Walter evicted her from the hotel early the next morning. The children followed her to Perkins on the afternoon train.¹³

After several days, one of Walter's well-intentioned cousins effected a reconciliation of sorts. Edna returned to Millen on Walter's terms and his abuse took a new form. "He refused to give me any money to buy clothes or anything with and I worked for him in that hotel for \$10 a month. He paid me the same as he paid the housekeeper."¹⁴

Some months later, the recently insured hotel burned. The Godbees rented a house, subsequently purchased by Edna with proceeds from the sale of two Augusta lots she had acquired from the Perkins Manufacturing Company. Edna's resentment that her assets had provided the main financial support throughout their marriage deepened. "We had always lived in my house. I paid the insurance and taxes and I wanted Mr. Godbee to furnish a home for me and I didn't want to buy this house." But if the marriage¹⁵ had effectively ended, Edna's degradation was far from its lowest point.

Walter began using extra-marital affairs--what Edna described obliquely as "trouble on account of a colored woman"--to further humiliate and manipulate his wife. In part his conduct was designed to restrict her freedom of movement, to punish her disobedience. As Edna reported, "he was very bitter against my people," and on occasion when she persisted in visiting her family at Perkins, he made her servants leave and "would send for this negro woman, Gertrude." Gertrude would then "move to the house until I would come back." Moreover, he refused to allow the children to accompany Edna to Perkins or Augusta, then disrupted her plans by sending false reports that the children were sick. Life, in her words, "became almost unbearable." Despite Edna's objections, Walter "hired this woman to cook." Try as she might, Edna could not dislodge the other woman.

Mr. Godbee went off for a trip. I think he stayed two or three days. I made this negro [sic] woman

move out of his house in another part of town thinking that that would end the matter. Mr. Godbee came back home, went to see this woman, gave his horse and wagon and moved her back in the same house from which I had moved her.¹⁶

Increasingly violent and verbally abusive, Walter had become a heavy user of morphine. In one instance Edna awoke to find Walter standing over her with a pistol in his hand. The children and Edna become more and more alarmed. So began a cycle of separation followed by reconciliation followed by separation, with the basic conditions remaining unchanged. "He would strike me, slap me, pull me around and accuse me in every way he could. . . of things that were terrible in the presence of my children." In 1901 they were legally separated, but at the end of three years they were again reunited, "against the advice of my boys who were old enough to realize that it was the worst thing. . . for me to do, and against the advice of my people and against my own inclination."¹⁹

Not long after this the Godbees moved to Atlanta. It was Walter's idea, of course. However, the good life promised there was not forthcoming; Walter was as mean as ever. In a relatively short time Edna announced she intended to return to Millen and borrowed the money to do so. When threats of divorce failed to alter her decision, Walter accompanied her.

Within a month his behavior dispelled any illusion that the two could even live together. More dependent on morphine than ever, the irascible Walter threatened "day after day to kill me," Edna claimed. Moreover, he knew no discretion, as he berated, cursed, and threatened her in public. At last she resolved to make a final separation.¹⁸

Notwithstanding the divorce granted in 1908, Edna found it impossible to escape Walter's harassment. Without alimony and unable to recover her property, she opened a boarding house in Augusta, only to be thwarted by Walter telling her boarders that she was "an immoral woman" and that she ran "a disreputable house."¹⁹ When she returned to Millen, and even after his marriage to Florence Boyer, Walter continued tormenting her. In fact, almost as soon as he brought his twenty-four year old bride to Millen, Walter gleefully resumed hounding and humiliating Edna. As she recounted, "He would ride by my house four and five times of an afternoon. On moonlight nights they would stroll by two or three times."²⁰ Through his daughter Sarah he renewed his threats on her life. That, according to Edna, is when she started carrying a gun--afraid of the man who "had hounded me, mistreated me, neglected me, . . . abused me in every way. . . cursed me for everything in the world that he could, and had threatened to kill me or make me leave Millen."²¹

When she left the house that August morning, she later testified, "it never entered my head . . . that I would hurt him." For months she had done her utmost to avoid Walter and his new wife, fearing first unpleasantness, then malice. She seldom left home by herself, but that morning, unlike others, she hurried to the post office alone. Last minute instructions had to be sent to Sarah's dressmaker before Edna and her daughter departed for an Indian Springs vacation. As she stood writing these instructions, Walter and Florence entered the post office. Something in his actions seemed menacing. She heard or thought she heard him mutter, "you old whore." Walter turned to leave, and suddenly she "expected him to shoot me or to choke me or hurt me." Then, as Edna recounted the moment, "I remember getting the pistol and I remember

shooting him. . . I shot to hit him if I could, I shot just as fast as I could at Mr. Godbee, never once seeing Mrs. Godbee." She couldn't "remember how many shots I fired," but minutes, maybe seconds, later, "when I came to myself that pistol refused to shoot." She "reached and got the handbag and put the pistol in it and walked out of the post office door and started home."²²

Given the events outlined above, perhaps it is not so difficult to imagine the forces that drove her to slay Walter and his young bride. Indeed, one might wonder not why she did what she did, but rather why not sooner. Be that as it may, what became of Edna in the aftermath of that tragic morning? Had her persecution finally ended?

The reaction of her fellow citizens may be used as one gauge. For although the people of Millen and environs could not be expected to condone or applaud Edna's actions, surely they might have looked upon her with some empathy. Was Edna Godbee not a woman wronged? Did she not warrant the best protection chivalrous men could afford? Yet the sources indicate that sentiment in and around Millen was strongly against her at the time of her trial. Should her public condemnation be viewed as tacit approval of Walter's conduct, of his continual abuse? In any event, the publicity surrounding the trial portrayed Edna, not as the victim of outrageous male brutality, but as the cool perpetrator of a heinous, incomprehensible crime.²³

Prosecutors cleverly tried Edna first for the murder of Florence Godbee. Though Walter Godbee was popular among many Jenkins County citizens, in a small town like Millen, the facts of his troubled marriage were well known. Public opinion notwithstanding, had Edna been tried for Walter's murder first, might she have been acquitted? Certainly then she would have stood a better chance of winning her defense in the murder of Florence. What can be learned from Edna's case about the nature of criminal justice and criminal defense for women in the Georgia courts of 1913?²⁴

As time passed, tempers cooled, and hostility towards Edna Perkins Godbee subsided. Beginning in 1915, and continuing until her release in 1920, hundreds, maybe thousands of Georgians from Jenkins county and throughout the state, expressed support for Edna's parole in annual appeals to the governor. The ultimate success of this campaign can be largely attributed to her relentless daughter Sarah Godbee Griner. Afterwards, Sarah, who remained dutifully by her mother's side during the Jenkins County trial and who shared her mother's cell beneath the executioner's trap door in the Millen jail, provided a refuge for the bent and broken mother in her Kansas home. Edna died there in 1931.²⁵

However, this brief review must inevitably raise far more questions than it can answer. Whether we choose to believe the eye-witness accounts which supported the contention that Edna "went to the post office for the deliberate and express purpose of shooting and killing Florence Godbee," or Edna's version of the story, her saga introduces larger issues of timeless importance.²⁶ While in at least one respect Edna Godbee is not representative of her sex--it is still a very small minority of women who commit such violent acts--yet perhaps aspects of her life will inform those of us living some seventy years later, at a time when abused women are speaking more freely about their bitter experience, when the shelters of battered women and other advocates of women's rights are directly confronting the incidence of violence against women, when we are beginning to recognize that battered women--and the men who assault them--come from all classes and all races. And we must wonder how many Edna Godbees

remain buried in the records of the courts and how many more such cases never came to the attention of the judicial system.²⁷

Certainly Edna Godbee felt vulnerable and unprotected by the law. And while she came from a closely-knit family, a family that was used to taking care of its own, one wonders to what extent they felt unable to intercede-felt it improper to interfere -in her married life. What factors constrained Edna Godbee to remain so many years in a marriage so clearly in conflict with her best interests? In sum, what are the questions we would ask of the records? And what are the questions we would ask, for which there are no recorded sources, whose answers would help us to understand her experience in that time? And finally, how might an understanding of this one woman's life assist us in understanding women living today under similar circumstances?

At the outset of this investigation, I did not know what I would learn, much less what record sources would support this inquiry. What I discovered was a body of material, the richness of which provoked far more questions than could possibly be explored here. And on this basis, I urge you to abandon the standard approach to teaching historical research and writing. Abandon the requirement that students submit glib theses and outlines, for this method encourages the presumption that the answers can be known before the research is done, and before the real questions are discovered. Rather, offer your students the opportunity to explore sources for the purpose of discovering whatever the records can tell. For this is the method which I believe will train students to understand the research process, to understand what kinds of questions records can answer, and moreover, will train them to encounter human experience, past and present, and to question its nature.

NOTES

¹Virginia C. Purdy. "Archivaphobia: Its Causes and Cure," Prologue 15 (Summer 1983): 115-119. Purdy comments on the failure of historians to employ archives as women's history sources and outlines clearly the logical approach for women's history scholars in using public records. An extended review of archives as women's history sources is provided in the discussions of Purdy and others contained in Clio Was A Woman: Studies in the History of American Women, Papers and Proceedings of the National Archives' Conference on Women's History, April 22-23, 1976, vol. 16 (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1980), edited by Mabel E. Deutrich and Virginia C. Purdy.

The single most important response to the heightened demand for the identification of resources to support the upsurge in women's history research of the last decade, the two volume guide edited by Andrea Hinding, Ames Sheldon Bower, and Clarke A. Chambers, Women's History Sources: A Guide to Archives and Manuscript Collections in the United States (New York: R.R. Bowker Company, 1979), inadvertently reinforces the bias against the use of public records and makes it clear that historians are not entirely to blame for the sorry state of archival research. Despite the editors' ambitious efforts, most public records repositories, including the Georgia Department of Archives and History, found the format of the survey's query incompatible with a reporting of their archival holdings. As a consequence, while a few state archives reported public records, most, like Georgia, elected instead to report

only their private manuscripts. Thus this impressive, even indispensable guide, contributes little to an understanding of the full scope and content of public records as potential sources. For a review of Women's History Sources and other bibliographic guides for women's studies see Darlene Roth's "Growing Like Topsy: Research Guides to Women's History," Journal of American History 70 (June 1983): 95-100. As Roth notes, the survey which resulted in Women's History Sources "stimulated more attention to women's records than it itself could record, spawning fresh collecting efforts, new programmatic attention to women's history, and the creation of many other inventories, finding aids, and publications at institutions around the country" (p. 96). Historians of Georgia women will be interested in Women's Records: A Preliminary Guide (1978) compiled by Darlene Roth and Virginia Shadron for the Georgia Department of Archives and History. It provides an expanded description of the Department's private manuscript holdings pertaining to women.

²Columbus Ledger, 12 September 1913.

³Godbee v. State, 141 Ga. 515 (1914).

⁴The Code of the State of Georgia, 2 vols. (Atlanta: Foote & Davies, 1911).

⁵Last Will and Testament of Simeon Mills Perkins, 8 October 1885 (recorded 22 July 1886), Burke County Court of Ordinary, Will Book A, pp. 499-501; Inventory and Appraisement of the Real and Personal Property belonging to the Estate of S. Mills Perkins, deceased, 1 February-3 June 1886, Burke County Court of Ordinary Inventory and Appraisements, 1867-1897, pp. 509-526; and Donald E. Perkins, History of the Perkins Family of Perkins, Georgia (Atlanta: By the author, 1979), pp. 120-15, 185-90.

⁶Statement of the Defendant, Mrs. Edna Godbee (hereafter cited as Statement of Edna Godbee), State v. Godbee, Jenkins County Superior Court, September Term, 1913, p. 37. Transcript of the Jenkins County trial is contained in Godbee v. State, No. A-34338, Supreme Court of Georgia, Record Group 92, Georgia Department of Archives and History, Atlanta; Marriage Book 6, p. 418, Burke County Court of Ordinary; and Perkins, History of Perkins Family, p. 185.

⁷Statement of Edna Godbee, p. 38; and Shepard Ezekiel Perkins Diary, 1887-1888, Georgia Department of Archives and History. Shepard Perkins' diary entry for 27 July 1888 notes the rental of property from the estate of S. Mills Perkins to W.S. Godbee and for 3 August 1888, of problems with the management of his brother's estate ("Bro Mills estate has gone to distruction because he is dead. . ."), but unfortunately the diary ends before the assault Edna recounts.

⁸Statement of Edna Godbee, pp. 38-39; and Appraisement of the Estate of Mrs. M. Tallulah [Calhoun] Perkins, deceased, 16 March-23 May 1889, Burke County Court of Ordinary, Inventory and Appraisements, 1867-1897, pp. 594-95, indicates Walter Godbee as administrator.

⁹Statement of Edna Godbee, pp. 40-41; and Affidavit of W.W. Baird, 29 October 1915, Executive Department Records, Record Group 1, Applications for Clemency, Edna M. Godbee, Georgia Department of Archives and History.

Baird witnessed the shooting of David Perkins and further stated, "I knew W.S. Godbee all his life and I regarded him as a very tyrannical and domineering character, a man of quick temper and the most bitter animosity I ever saw." The Augusta Chronicle, 31 August 1913, recounted the circumstances surrounding young Perkins' death.

¹⁰Statement of Edna Godbee, p. 41; and Augusta Chronicle, 31 August 1913.

¹¹Statement of Edna Godbee, p. 42.

¹²Ibid. Augusta Chronicle, 31 August 1913, reviewed Godbee's business enterprises in Millen.

¹³Statement of Edna Godbee, p. 44; and Affidavit of W.V. Lanier, 30 October 1913, Application for Clemency; and Deed, Edna M. Godbee to Walter S. Godbee, trustee for children of Edna M. Godbee, 29 August 1898 (recorded 31 August 1898), Deed Book 3, pp. 333-334, Burke County Superior Court. Deed conveys two hundred and fifty acres, "part of her father's estate," to Walter S. Godbee as trustee, reserving a life interest for herself.

¹⁴Statement of Edna Godbee, p. 44.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 45; and Deed, Mack M. Lively to Edna M. Godbee, 29 September 1899 (recorded 5 March 1900), Deed Book 4, p. 604, Burke County Superior Court. Deed conveys town lots number 78 and 80 for consideration of \$1050 to Edna M. Godbee.

¹⁶Statement of Edna Godbee, pp. 45-46; and Walter H. Dodd to Bennett, 20 November 1917, Application for Clemency. Dodd reported in this letter, "My first impression of the 'Judge' some twelve years ago was the hearing of him make his boast on the streets of having slept with a great number of 'yellow negro' girls. According to the general reports the course of the separation of Mr. and Mrs. Godbee was his much practiced open infidelity generally, tho not confined to the negro race. One instance, as an example (I was informed by several good citizens) on one occasion when Mrs. G. was ill he brought a negro woman into his home, compelled his wife to get out of bed, and there had sexual intercourse with said negro. This is one of many similar crimes that led to divorce. . ."

¹⁷Statement of Edna Godbee, p. 48; and Petition for Divorce, Edna M. Godbee v. Walter S. Godbee, Jenkins County Superior Court, March Term, 1908. Transcript of the divorce petition, contained in the Application for Clemency, details the Godbees' marriage and many separations. Affidavit of Dr. R.Y. Lane, 1 November 1915, Application for Clemency, details Walter Godbee's morphine addiction and consequent behavior. As the Jenkins County physician and pharmacist Lane reported, "At such times as he was under the influence of morphine, he was a bright, witty, companionable fellow and when it died out of him and he was not under the influence of this drug, he was a very disagreeable character. . . His mind seemed to be bent on thinking of devilish schemes to annoy his people with and he was an expert almost in devising plans, schemes, rumors and various artifices by which he could annoy people."

¹⁸Statement of Edna Godbee, p. 53; and Petition for Divorce, Edna M. Godbee v. Walter S. Godbee.

¹⁹Statement of Edna Godbee, p. 54.

²⁰Ibid., p. 59; and Affidavit of E.K. Overstreet, 26 October 1915, Application for Clemency. Overstreet represented Edna Godbee in petition to obtain alimony and to recover her property subsequent to divorce in 1908.

²¹Statement of Edna Godbee, pp. 61-62; and Affidavit of Sarah G. Griner, 1 December 1915, Application for Clemency. Edna's daughter stated "that for several weeks during the summer of 1913 after her father had divorced his mother [and] had re-married . . . she met and talked with her father and repeatedly and on many occasions he made violent threats against the mother of affiant. It appeared to be his intention to act towards the mother of affiant in such a way as to render life unbearable for her in Millen, thus causing her to leave Millen and take up her residence elsewhere." Affidavit of Pete T. Foote, 1 December 1915; and of Mrs. Ora Ethel Rogers, 2 December 1915, also contained in the Application of Clemency, confirmed Edna's statements that she started carrying a gun as a consequence of her justifiable fear of assault by Walter.

²²Statement of Edna Godbee, p. 64.

²³H.A. Boykin to Governor N.E. Harris, 4 December 1915, Application for Clemency. State Senator Boykin described the climate of public opinion in Jenkins County at the time of the shooting as, "very strongly against Mrs. Godbee, so strong, that in my opinion, her trial was too soon after the homicide, was a mistake, as the condition of the public mind at that time having only one side of the story, was so inflamed as to be prejudicial to Mrs. Godbee. Since the killing, however, and the conduct of her former husband, Walter S. Godbee, has become known, sentiment has completely changed, and . . . I [would] say that three out of every four men in Jenkins County, who very strongly condemned Mrs. Godbee, are now decidedly in her favor." The Augusta Chronicle, 19 August-19 December 1913, followed the charges against Edna Godbee and the court proceedings closely. The Chronicle, in pre-trial publicity, speculated wildly on every aspect of the case, including, for example, the following excerpt from a 31 August 1913 story: "Unable to find in any of the Millen stores a handbag big enough to carry it [the gun] with her, Mrs. Godbee went to Augusta sometime ago and secured after a long search, just what she wanted. The handbag was big and roomy enough to conceal the weapon, and she carried it with her wherever she went."

²⁴Judge Hammond's Charge to the Jury, State v. Godbee, pp. 77-91.

²⁵Augusta Chronicle, 14 September 1913; and Perkins, History of the Perkins Family, p. 125.

²⁶Judge Hammond's Charge to the Jury, State, v. Godbee, pp. 86-87.

27 Ann Jones, Women Who Kill (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1980), offers a provocative discussion of women who kill and why based on a series of historical and recent case studies. Women will find it fascinating, men may find it disturbing, but in any case, Women Who Kill is recommended reading for everyone.