

# THE FILSON CLUB HISTORY QUARTERLY

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VOL. 65

APRIL 1991

No. 2

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## PORTRAIT OF A MURDERESS: ANNA COOK(E) BEAUCHAMP

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Anna Cooke was born in Fairfax County, Virginia, in the mid 1780s, the fifth child and first daughter of Giles and Alicia Cooke. After the death of her father and the breakup of his estate, she accompanied her mother, a sister, five of her brothers, and their families to Warren County, Kentucky, where they settled between 1805 and 1810.<sup>1</sup>

Anna probably met Solomon P. Sharp during these years. Sharp was born in Washington County, Virginia, 22 August 1787, the son of Thomas and Jean Sharp. The family immigrated to Logan County, Kentucky, early in the 1790s. Sharp grew up in a log cabin on the banks of Muddy River, somehow procured education enough to pass the bar examination, and began practicing law in Russellville in 1806 or 1807. Subsequently he moved to Bowling Green. There he acquired a lucrative legal practice and entered into extensive land speculation. Sharp also represented Warren County in the legislature (1810 and 1811) and served in the thirteenth and fourteenth congresses. During the

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I want to express my particular thanks to Dr. Sam Shannon, associate professor of history at Tennessee State University, for his helpful reading of this article when still in manuscript form. The errors contained herein are, of course, my own.

1 Dr. and Mrs. William Carter Stubbs, *Descendants of Mordecai Cooke, of "Mordecai's Mount" Gloucester Co. Va. 1650, and Thomas Booth, of Ware Neck Gloucester Co. Va. 1685* (New Orleans, 1923), 82, 100, 102 (hereinafter cited as Stubbs, *Descendants of Mordecai Cooke*); *Warren County, Ky. Index of Taxpayers, 1797-1810* (no publisher, no date), n.p. (hereinafter cited as *Warren County... Index*).

War of 1812 he joined Colonel Young Ewing's regiment of Kentucky mounted militia and rose to the rank of major. He was later promoted and made adjutant general. After the end of the war he returned to the legislature for two more terms.

Colonel Sharp was a hard-driving, ambitious Kentuckian from the Green River country. He was of the "plain folk." His marriage to Eliza Scott, a Bluegrass belle, in 1818 may be understood as a further step up, both socially and politically, although Sharp returned to Bowling Green with his bride.<sup>2</sup>

Sometime in the fall of 1819 Anna Cooke conceived. The baby was born dead or died shortly after birth in May or June 1820. Its paternity remains unknown although Anna persistently asserted that Colonel Sharp was the father, a charge he persistently denied. Rumors also circulated that the child was a mulatto.<sup>3</sup> In 1821 Sharp was offered an appointment as attorney general in the administration of Governor John Adair. Despite a resurfacing of rumors concerning his relationship with Anna, con-

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2 L. J. Sharp, *Vindication of the Character of the Late Col. Solomon P. Sharp, from the Calumnies Published Against Him Since His Murder by Patrick Darby and Jereboam O. Beauchamp* (Frankfort, 1827), 18, 82 (hereinafter cited as Sharp, *Vindication*); Lewis Preston Summers, *Annals of Southwestern Virginia, 1769-1800* (Abingdon, Va., 1929), 999, 1000, 1003, 1007, 1011, 1289, 1354; Lela W. Prewitt, *Genealogy Notebook* (2 vols.; Fairfield, Iowa, n.d.), I, 179; Lalla McCulley, comp., *Logan County Kentucky Records* (Lewisburg, Ky., 1969), 42; Mrs. J. Wells Vick, comp., *Logan County Kentucky Deed Book X A-1* (Russellville, Ky., 1963-64), 5, 10, 18; *Warren County . . . Index*, n.p.; Anderson Chenault Quisenberry, *Kentucky in the War of 1812* (Frankfort, 1915), 185; Robert B. McAfee, *History of the Late War in the Western Country, Comprising a Full Account of All the Transactions in that Quarter, from the Commencement of Hostilities at Tippecanoe, to the Termination of the Contest at New Orleans* (Lexington, 1816), 158-60; Arndt M. Stickles, ed., "Joseph H. Underwood's Fragmentary Journal of the New and Old Court Controversy," *The Filson Club History Quarterly* 13 (1939): 205; SC190, *The Kentucky Papers, Draper Collection*; Willard Rouse Jillson, *The Kentucky Land Grants* (Louisville: The Filson Club, First Publication Series, number 33, 1925), 399-400, 708-709.

3 Sharp, *Vindication*, 13-14, 18, 82-83; Jereboam O. Beauchamp, *The Confession of Jereboam O. Beauchamp*, edited by Robert D. Bamberg (Philadelphia: The Mathew Carey Library of English and American Literature, 1966), 39-40, 103-104 (hereinafter cited as Beauchamp, *Confession*); *The Commentator* [Frankfort], 15 April 1826, p. 1.

firmation proceedings were routine. Sharp brought his family to Frankfort in October 1821.<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile Anna had left Bowling Green and moved to a farm in Simpson County that she named Retirement. In 1821 she became acquainted with Jereboam O. Beauchamp, the son of a neighbor and an aspiring lawyer. The two became friendly and eventually Beauchamp asked her to marry him although she was almost two decades his senior. After some hesitation Anna consented to the union upon the condition that Beauchamp kill Sharp, the author of her humiliation. The young man readily agreed. They were married three years later in June 1824.<sup>5</sup>

The colonel inevitably became involved in the Old Court - New Court controversy, a consequence of the state's chaotic financial condition. A New Court advocate, Sharp seems to have believed that the legislature might make what laws it chose concerning debt and replevin as the embodiment of majority will. It could also make or unmake the personnel of Kentucky's judicial system. Here Sharp set himself athwart many of the state's creditors; his opinions earned him intense animosity.

In 1825 Sharp resigned as attorney general to run for state representative from Franklin County as a Relief (New Court) candidate. His opponent was John J. Crittenden who, like Sharp, was associated with the Green River country as an upwardly mobile lawyer. The election was hotly contested. Feelings were strong and threats of violence and death were common. Both John U. Waring, the notorious killer, and Patrick Henry Darby, a land speculator and lawyer, were reported to have warned that Sharp would be killed if he won the election. About 1,600 ballots were cast in Franklin County; Sharp won by 69 votes.

At some time during the campaign, the Beauchamps were informed that Anna's baby had once again become an election issue and that Sharp had once again denied paternity. They were further told that Sharp had claimed the infant was a

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4 Sharp, *Vindication*, 5-7.

5 Beauchamp, *Confession*, 26-30; Sharp, *Vindication*, 27-28.

mulatto and that he possessed a certificate attesting to this from Anna's midwife.<sup>6</sup>

Beauchamp was infuriated at the news. He planned another attempt on Sharp's life (there had been three previous efforts), plans in which his wife actively collaborated. On 1 November 1825, he left Retirement for Frankfort. At about 2:00 A.M. on 7 November Beauchamp knocked at the door of Sharp's house. When Sharp confronted Beauchamp, the two men exchanged a few words. Initially Beauchamp had identified himself as a member of the Covington family. Then Beauchamp drew a knife, revealed his true identity, and stabbed Sharp in the stomach. He was dead within ten minutes.

Beauchamp escaped detection that night and left Frankfort for Retirement the next morning. When he arrived at his home flaunting a red handkerchief (a pre-arranged signal of success) Anna fell upon her knees and thanked God. The couple had planned to leave for Missouri before Beauchamp became a prime suspect, but he was arrested before the journey could begin and taken back to Frankfort for interrogation and incarceration. About two months later his wife joined him in a subterranean dungeon.<sup>7</sup>

It was widely believed that Patrick Henry Darby had also participated in the assassination. Darby was not arrested, but

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6 Sharp, *Vindication*, 40-49; L. F. Johnson, *Famous Kentucky Tragedies and Trials* (Cleveland, 1943 reprint: first published in 1916), (hereinafter cited as Johnson, *Kentucky Tragedies and Trials*), 44-46; Beauchamp, *Confession*, 39-40; Arndt M. Stickle, *The Critical Court Struggle in Kentucky, 1819-1829* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1929), 5, 38, 68-69; Frank F. Mathias, "The Relief and Court Struggles: Half-Way House to Populism," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 71 (1973): 154-76; Thomas B. Jones, "New Thoughts on an Old Theme," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 69 (1971): 307; Dale Maurice Royalty, "Banking, Politics, and the Commonwealth, Kentucky, 1800-1825" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1971), 228-30, 248, 250.

7 Beauchamp, *Confession*, 40-68; J. G. Dana and R. S. Thomas, eds., *Beauchamp's Trial. A Report of the Trial of Jereboam O. Beauchamp before the Franklin Circuit Court, in May, 1826 . . . For the Murder of Col. Solomon P. Sharp* (Frankfort, 1826), 8-20 (hereinafter cited as *Beauchamp's Trial*).

he suffered from intense suspicion; the newspapers were full of charges and countercharges involving the lawyer's alleged complicity.<sup>8</sup>

Anna sought to save Beauchamp by every means at her disposal. She attempted to suborn Captain John Lowe, a Simpson County neighbor, and to persuade John U. Waring to intervene on her husband's behalf. Beauchamp, meanwhile, sought to make a deal with the Desha administration by which he could save his life. All these endeavors failed. Beauchamp's trial began 8 May 1826. It continued for thirteen days and involved thirty witnesses. Beauchamp did not take the stand in his own defense. He was convicted of Sharp's murder on the basis of circumstantial evidence and sentenced to be hanged. Efforts by his counsel to obtain a new trial failed.

He and Anna (at the latter's instigation) determined to do away with themselves. They first tried laudanum and, when that failed, a knife was smuggled into their cell. On the morning of the execution, Beauchamp stabbed himself in the stomach. Anna then seized the knife and drove it deep into her own stomach. "I struck the fatal blow myself," she told her jailers, "and am dying for my dear husband." The wound proved fatal; she died about an hour before her husband was carried to the gallows. Observed by a crowd of thousands, Beauchamp rode through the streets of Frankfort in a covered dearborn. Along the way he exonerated Darby of all complicity in the murder. Beauchamp died bravely at about 1:30 P.M. on 7 July 1826.<sup>9</sup>

The Beauchamp-Sharp affair has occupied a minor but permanent place in Kentucky historiography. The year of Anna and Jereboam's death, for instance, saw the publication of Jere-

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<sup>8</sup> See, especially, *The Argus of Western America* [Frankfort], 9 November 1825, p. 3; *The Commentator* [Frankfort], 15 April, p. 1; 22 April, p. 1; 29 April, p. 1; 27 May, p. 3, and 3 June 1826, p. 3; *The Spirit of '76* [Frankfort], 2 June, pp. 206-208; 30 June 1826, pp. 265-68. Mrs. Eliza Sharp's indictment of Darby is found in the *Argus*, 22 March 1826.

<sup>9</sup> See *Beauchamp's Trial*, 5-153; Beauchamp, *Confession*, 92-100, 104-12, 130-34; Sharp, *Vindication*, 89-106.

boam's *Confession*, the spurious *Letters of Ann Cook*, and a transcript of the Beauchamp trial. In 1827 Dr. Leander Sharp published an elaborate *Vindication* of his late brother's life and character. Neither the *Letters* nor the *Vindication* were reissued. The *Confession*, however suspect, continued to claim readers throughout the nineteenth century; at least four other editions are mentioned in J. Winston Coleman's *Bibliography of Kentucky History*.<sup>10</sup>

Sharp's prominence as a public man and lawyer coupled with the dramatic circumstances of his death gained him the attention of most nineteenth-century historians of the commonwealth. Lewis Collins, for instance, wrote a laudatory biographical sketch of him clearly gleaned from the *Vindication*, and both his tone and words were repeated by many others. Anna and Beauchamp received less attention although they could not be ignored. Their story was usually turned into a morality tale or a study in romantic values with little attention to biographical detail.<sup>11</sup>

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10 *Letters of Ann Cook, Late Mrs. Beauchamp, to Her Friend in Maryland. Containing a Short History of the Life of That Remarkable Woman* (Washington, D.C., 1926); J. Winston Coleman, *A Bibliography of Kentucky History* (Lexington, 1949), 218-20, 225, 359.

11 Lewis Collins, *Historical Sketches of Kentucky: Its History, Antiquities, and Natural Curiosities, Geographical, Statistical, and Geological Descriptions; with Anecdotes of Pioneers, Soldiers, Statesmen, Jurists, Lawyers, Divines, Etc.* (Maysville, Ky. and Cincinnati, Ohio, 1848), 311-12; *The Biographical Encyclopedia of Kentucky of the Dead and Living Men of the Nineteenth Century* (Cincinnati, 1878), 396-99; H. Levin, ed., *The Lawyers and Lawmakers of Kentucky* (Chicago, 1897), 109-14; William B. Allen, *A History of Kentucky* (Louisville, 1872), 256-57; Elsey Connelly and E. M. Coulter, *History of Kentucky*, edited by Charles Kerr (5 vols.; Chicago and New York, 1922), II, 622, 642, 676; [author unknown], *The Life of Jereboam O. Beauchamp, who was Hung at Frankfort, Kentucky for the Murder of Col. Solomon P. Sharp; Comprising a Full and Complete History of His Intercourse and Marriage with the Beautiful, Accomplished, but Unfortunate Miss Anna Cooke. . .* (Frankfort, 1850), hereinafter cited as *The Life of Jereboam O. Beauchamp*; Henry St. Clair, comp., *The United States Criminal Calendar or An Awful Warning to the Youth of America; Being an Account of the Most Horrid Murders, Piracies [sic], Highway Robbers, etc compiled from the Best Authorities* (Boston, 1835); By a New Yorker [Charles F. Hoffman], *A Winter in the West* (2 vols.; 2nd ed.; New York, 1835), II.

THE  
**CONFESSION**

OF

**JEREBAM O. BEAUCHAMP.**

WHO WAS EXECUTED AT FRANKFORT, KY

ON THE 7TH OF JULY, 1826.

FOR THE MURDER OF

**Col. Solomon P. Sharp,**

*A member of the Legislature, and late Attorney General of Ky.*

WRITTEN BY HIMSELF,

And containing the only authentic account of the murder, and  
 the causes which induced it.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

**SOME POETICAL PIECES,**

WRITTEN BY

**MRS. ANN BEAUCHAMP,**

*who voluntarily put an end to her existence, on the day of the ex-  
 ecution of her husband, and was buried in the same  
 grave with him.*

BLOOMFIELD, KY.

PRINTED FOR THE PUBLISHER.

1826.

*Title Page of Beauchamp's Account*

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More recently L. F. Johnson's *Famous Kentucky Tragedies and Trials* and J. Winston Coleman's *The Beauchamp-Sharp Tragedy* have focused on Sharp's career and, in particular, on his role as a champion of the Relief (New Court) party. Coleman went much further. Unlike many nineteenth-century accounts that had portrayed Beauchamp as an avenger of injured female virtue and praised him for upholding society's laws, Coleman denounced Anna and her husband in the most scathing terms. Beauchamp was "satanic," a "ham" actor, "conniving," "an arch-criminal," and "one of the greatest liars and cowards of his time." Anna was dismissed, almost in passing, as his "tawdry paramour." Coleman condemned the *Confession* as useless in reconstructing the tragedy (Johnson thought differently), wavered concerning the *Letters*, and praised the *Vindication* as "highly informative" and reliable. Both Johnson and Coleman seemed to believe that Sharp's assassination was primarily a political incident, a point of view first advanced by Amos Kendall, editor of the Frankfort *Argus*.<sup>12</sup>

My own conclusions are somewhat different. First, one must assume that *all* sources of information concerning the tragedy are tainted. The *Confession* and the *Vindication* are obviously self-serving and the *Letters of Ann Cook* are a fake. *Beauchamp's Trial*, as Coleman admitted, was "by far the most reliable source of contemporary material." Yet it is reasonable to assume that some of the testimony given at the trial was perjured. Beauchamp's manuscript may well have been tampered with. But how can we dismiss as worthless the last testament of a man

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<sup>12</sup> Johnson, *Kentucky Tragedies and Trials*, 44-57; J. Winston Coleman, Jr., *The Beauchamp-Sharp Tragedy: An Episode of Kentucky History During the Middle 1820's* (Frankfort, 1950), vii, viii, 37-38, 41, 44-45, 63 (hereinafter cited as Coleman, *Beauchamp-Sharp*); Fred M. Johnson, "Letters of Ann Cook: Fact or factoid?" *Border States*, 6 (1987): 13. Johnson's arguments are absolutely persuasive. *Argus of Western America* [Frankfort], 9 November 1825, p. 3; 16 November 1825, p. 3; Lynn Ladue Marshall, "The Early Career of Amos Kendall: The Making of a Jacksonian," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1962), 375-76; see also, Beauchamp, *Confession*, 66, 68; Sharp, *Vindication*, 47, and the newspaper citations in footnote 8.

who is shortly to meet his God? And surely the intense love Dr. Sharp had for his brother and the grief he felt at his brother's murder would influence the way in which the *Vindication* was put together and presented. Nor can the doctor's obvious rancor toward Anna and Jereboam Beauchamp and Patrick Darby pass without notice. Could not these emotions have influenced his judgment? The historian, then, must be exceedingly wary in writing of the tragedy. Self-interest, ignorance, hatred, perhaps even madness — all play a notable role in these gothic events.<sup>13</sup>

Nor do I believe that Sharp's murder was primarily a political affair, although his death clearly deprived the New Court faction of an intelligent and ambitious leader at a crucial moment for its political fortunes. In one sense, Sharp was already a marked man. He had become, in James C. Klotter's phrase, "a high-risk politician," a man whose words and deeds violated current political rules. "High-risk" politicians court the "mob" and neglect or reject the usual forms of deference. They threaten the existing power structure, in this case the creditors and the Clay men.

But it was Sharp's alleged affair with Anna and its consequences, both real and imagined, that brought about his death. Anna demanded retribution for her disgrace; so did the cultural climate in which she lived. Standing for Relief, however reprehensible to many, did not justify annihilation. There was an additional complication; the assassin himself might have to sacrifice his own life to achieve Sharp's death. If, however, Beauchamp's passion for revenge could be manipulated to achieve Sharp's elimination, all would be well. And so it was done.<sup>14</sup>

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13 Beauchamp, *Confession*, 57; Coleman, *Beauchamp-Sharp*, viii; Johnson, *Kentucky Tragedies and Trials*, 49, 55; see also, Beauchamp, *Confession*, 47, for a revealing, chilling comment made by Anna Beauchamp concerning the close relationship between the brothers.

14 Beauchamp, *Confession*, 30; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 149-51 (hereinafter cited as Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*); James C. Klotter, *William Goebel: The Politics of Wrath* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1977), 126-27; *The Kentucky Gazette* [Lexington], 2 September 1824, p. 1, 28 October 1824, p. 1.

And last, the locus of attention has been shifted from Colonel Sharp and Mr. Beauchamp to Anna Cooke Beauchamp, a diminutive Fury whose hatred required the assassination of one man, the manipulation and death of another, and, finally, her own self-destruction.<sup>15</sup>

But what can we really know about her? Anna's name, to cite a trivial example of our ignorance, was spelled both with and without the "e" by her family and her husband. Anna's date of birth is also in dispute. One version is found on the historical marker identifying her grave and that of her husband at Bloomfield, Kentucky. Another, taken from Ludlow Cooke's Bible, is given in Stubbs's *Two Families of Virginia*.<sup>16</sup>

The family's social status (which would have significantly affected the sort of education she received) is difficult to determine. Only two land transactions involving her father Giles Cooke have been found. The first records the purchase of 267 acres in Fairfax County, Virginia, from James Crump in July 1777. Three years later he acquired 500 acres for himself and 615 more in partnership with Pierce Bayley on Dicks River and Station Camp Creek in Lincoln County, Kentucky. Apparently he never saw the Kentucky property. A 1782 Virginia census lists Giles Cooke as the owner of eight slaves. Despite later reports of financial reverses, he was able to leave an estate that included twenty-two slaves at the time of his death in 1805. It is reasonable to assume that he was a planter of the middling sort with values typical of that class.<sup>17</sup>

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15 See *Beauchamp's Trial*, 149-51; see also, *Beauchamp, Confession*, 30, 36, 41, 45, 47, 59, 102, 111, 119, for evidence of Anna's compelling domination of Beauchamp; *Sharp, Vindication*, 93.

16 Stubbs, *Descendants of Mordecai Cooke*, 102-110.

17 Beth Mitchell, *Beginning at a white Oak... Patents and Northern Neck Grants of Fairfax County Virginia* (Fairfax, Va.: Fairfax County Office of Comprehensive Planning, 1977), 152; Willard Rouse Jillson, *The Kentucky Land Grants*, 162; *Heads of Families at the First Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1790: Records of the State Enumerations of 1782 to 1785 in Virginia* (Washington, D.C., 1908), 17; Stubbs, *Descendants of Mordecai Cooke*, 82, 99-100; T. H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of the Revolution* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 39-58.

The Paynes, her mother's family, may have been of higher social status. Her grandfather, William Payne, Sr., was a gentleman (so described in a 1744 receipt) who served as sheriff of Fairfax County, a tobacco inspector, and as both a vestryman and churchwarden of Truro Parish for many years. He once quarreled with George Washington, a member of the same parish, over politics and knocked him down. A duel was momentarily expected, but Washington apologized. Would an affair of honor have been anticipated had Payne not also been a gentleman?<sup>18</sup>

Anna's appearance is also in some dispute. At the time of her seduction, Dr. Leander Sharp described her as small, "not exceeding 90 pounds," with dark hair and eyes. She was also dusky, "inclined to sallow," with a prominent forehead, long nose, large mouth, and receding chin. He also asserted that she had lost her front teeth and was stoop-shouldered. Her jailer John M'Intosh largely confirmed Dr. Sharp's description about six years later, although he reported that Anna had fair, not dark, skin and was flat-chested. The anonymous author of a later account of the tragedy was more chivalric even though perhaps more romantic. "She belonged," he wrote, "to one of the best and most wealthy families in Kentucky, and was herself celebrated for beauty, talents and accomplishments." Physical beauty in Anna's case may have been less important than certain qualities of mind and personality that gave her extraordinary vividness. A drawing that accompanies some of the earlier editions of the *Confession* suggests that the descriptions of Dr. Sharp and M'Intosh may be fairly accurate. It is reasonable to assume that the artist relied to some extent upon contemporary

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18 Nan and Ross D. Netherton, comps., *Notes on the History and Architecture of Pohick Church Truro Parish Fairfax County, Virginia* (Fairfax, Va.: Fairfax Historical Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1968), 36; *Minutes of the Vestry Truro Parish Virginia 1732-1785* (Lorton, Va.: Pohick Church, 1974), 41-43, 57-68, 70, 72, 74-77, 82, 84-86; Charles W. Stetson, *Washington and His Neighbors* (Richmond, Va.: Garrett, 1956), 234; Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography* (6 vols.; New York, 1948), II, 146; Brooke Payne, *The Paynes of Virginia* (Richmond, Va.: William Byrd Press, 1937), 232.

descriptions as the basis for his sketch. In any event this drawing is, so far as is known, the only extant representation of Anna Cook(e) Beauchamp.<sup>19</sup>

We do not know exactly when Anna immigrated to Kentucky. Her mother Alicia appears in the Warren County U.S. census of 1810 as the owner of twelve slaves. Three, possibly four, of her sons had preceded their mother to Warren County; it is possible that Anna made the journey with one of them.<sup>20</sup>

How or where she first met Solomon Sharp is also unknown although the meeting probably occurred in Bowling Green. He was first listed as a Warren County taxpayer in 1807; three years later he was elected to represent the county in the legislature. But his residence was cited as Russellville when he was a member of the Thirteenth Congress in 1813. A letter from Sharp to Henry Clay, dated 27 January 1813, postmarked Bowling Green further confuses the issue.<sup>21</sup>

The extent and nature of Anna's intimacy with Colonel Sharp can only be inferred. According to her sworn enemy Dr. Leander Sharp, Anna claimed to have conceived on Sunday, 18 September 1819 in Sharp's office. This was obviously untrue Leander Sharp asserted because Solomon Sharp was at church that morning. 18 September, however, does not fall on a Sunday but on a Saturday. How common were Saturday services? The child is supposed to have been born or stillborn in June 1820. But there is a stone in the Peyton Cooke graveyard at Oakland, Kentucky, with the legend "Peytie" and the date 3 May 18--. There is no other identification.

Who was the father? Anna named Sharp. He denied paternity.

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19 Sharp, *Vindication*; [author unknown], *The Life of Jereboam O. Beauchamp*; the presumed likeness mentioned is on the front cover of this account of the tragedy.

20 *Warren County Kentucky 1810 United States Census*, 49; *Warren County . . . Index*, n.p.

21 *Ibid.*; Sharp, *Vindication*, 4; *Biographical Dictionary of the American Congress, 1774-1971* (Washington, D.C., 1971), 84; James F. Hopkins, ed., *The Papers of Henry Clay* (9 vols.; Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1959-), I: *The Rising Statesman, 1797-1814*, 777.

Dr. Sharp implied that John U. Waring was responsible if, indeed, the father could be identified from the host of Anna's alleged lovers. Its darkness was attested to by Mrs. Rebecca Dunn, the midwife attending the birth, and by French Fort, who was employed by Peyton Cooke to build a coffin, dig the grave, and bury the child. Rumors later circulated that the child was a mulatto. Yet from the meager description left us, the child was probably cyanotic, or what we would call a "blue baby."<sup>22</sup>

It was Anna's response to her seduction, childbirth, and humiliation that made her so very different from her contemporaries. A specific female variant of the code of honor was acknowledged by most antebellum Southerners. Women were thought to possess the same passions as men, including the sexual passions, and they were also commonly supposed to be more easily misled, more trusting, and more childlike. Should seduction occur, the woman was usually assumed to be the innocent party. If injured, they were to abjure revenge and remain sweetly forgiving. They were, explains Jan Lewis, expected to be "pious, modest, resigned to God's will and their lot." "Female honor," comments Bertram Wyatt-Brown, "had always been the exercise of restraint and abstinence."<sup>23</sup> Their world was the home. The family

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<sup>22</sup> Sharp, *Vindication*, 3-18, 22, 82-83; Richard E. Behrman, Victor C. Vaughan, III, Waldo E. Nelson, *Nelson Textbook of Pediatrics* (13th ed.; Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1987), 964; Henry K. Silver, C. Henry Kempe, Henry B. Brwyn, Vincent A. Fulginiti, *Handbook of Pediatrics* (15th ed.; New London, Ct.: Appleton and Lange, 1987), 296; see also, Patrick Henry Darby's article in *The Commentator*, 15 April 1826, p. 1, for another interview with Mrs. Rebecca Dunn, Anna's midwife. Whatever the reason, Anna rejected abortion as a solution to her dilemma although historian James C. Mohr tells us the procedure was common in the 1820s and was considered fairly safe. See *Abortion in America: The Origins and Evolution of National Policy, 1800-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 18-19.

<sup>23</sup> Dickman D. Bruce, Jr., *Violence and Culture in the Antebellum South* (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1979), 8-12 (hereinafter cited as Bruce, *Violence and Culture*); Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 293; Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 199 (hereinafter cited as Lewis, *Pursuit of Happiness*); Barbara Welter, "Anti-Intellectualism and the American Woman," *Mid-America: An Historical Journal* 48 (1956): 261 (hereinafter cited as Welter, "Anti-Intellectualism"); Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 227, see also, 54, 228, 230;

was to be the center and extent of their concern. Accordingly, daughters were educated to be "amusing and gentle" hostesses, good mothers to their numerous brood, and thrifty household managers. "For most Southern women," writes Ann Scott, "the domestic circle *was* the world." Individual intellectual development in such a scheme was clearly subordinate if not downright suspicious. Women were expected to be less cerebral and more sensitive. Their dependence upon some male, usually the husband, was taken for granted. If she were single, there were fathers and brothers to defend her honor and shield her from a hostile world.<sup>24</sup>

But what if there was neither husband nor family? Unmarried women or women without close kin constituted an anomaly in the antebellum South. They suffered, writes Catherine Clinton, "from envy and self-pity on account of their position on the fringe of Southern society." Spinsterhood was "a form of social death." Single daughters had no essential role to play. They were usually barren in a society that valued fecundity; such sterility was a matter of some shame, as was dependence upon relatives or friends, no matter how loving.<sup>25</sup>

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David Brion Davis, *Homicide in American Fiction, 1798-1860: A Study in Social Values* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1957), 227, see also, 228-34; Lewis, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 47; Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1980), 67-68.

<sup>24</sup> Welter, "Anti-Intellectualism," 259, 262-65; Ann Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 7-8, 16-21, 42 (hereinafter cited as Scott, *Southern Lady*); Nan Netherton, Donald Sweig, Janice Artemel, Patrick Hicklin, and Patrick Reed, *Fairfax County, Virginia: A History* (Fairfax, Va.: Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, 1978), 244 (hereinafter cited as Netherton, et al., *Fairfax*); Welter, "Anti-Intellectualism," 261; Catherine Clinton, *The Plantation Mistress: Woman's World in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 57 (hereinafter cited as Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*); Jack K. Williams, *Dueling in the Old South: Vignettes of Social History* (College Station and London: Texas A & M University Press, 1980), 77; Edward L. Ayers, *Vengeance and Justice: Crime and Punishment in the 19th Century South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 13, 29, denies that women, children, and slaves could have a sense of honor; I infer, however, that he would accept my description of "ideal" feminine behavior.

<sup>25</sup> Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 85; Lewis, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 196;

Antebellum Southern women were also expected to uphold society's sacred values. "Religion," writes Jan Lewis, was "necessary for women, dispensable for men." Ridicule of conventional beliefs or open skepticism brought a measure of ostracism and isolation. Such speculations often earned women the reputation of "blue-stockings," intellectual females who did not keep their place. They were, somehow, "unnatural."<sup>26</sup> If a single woman proved unchaste there was grief, both for the woman and her family. Her reputation was tarnished if not ruined forever, and her family was shamed. Giving birth to a child out of wedlock was second only to elopement among the social sins. Mary Wollstonecraft, Anna's alleged mentor, summed it up all too succinctly: "A woman who has lost her honour, imagines that she cannot fall lower, and as for recovering her former station, it is impossible; no exertion can wash this stain away." If there was any suspicion that the offspring was a mulatto, the humiliation would be magnified exponentially.<sup>27</sup>

Anna flouted these social conventions in at least four significant ways. First, she had a child out of wedlock. Second, she did not marry until she was thirty-nine — and then to a man seventeen years her junior, a man whom she had not known at the time of her disgrace. Third, Anna's intellectual pretensions were most unusual. Even Dr. Sharp, her implacable foe, conceded that she was "a girl of good mind," having, he added maliciously, "on her side 35 or 40 years of experience, surrounded by wealthy

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Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 238; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 83-86, 236-37; see also, Welter, "Anti-Intellectualism," 258, 265.

<sup>26</sup> Lewis, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 47, 52; Scott, *Southern Lady*, 13, 42; Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 201-203, 228-29, 250; Scott, *Southern Lady*, 8; Welter, "Anti-Intellectualism," 264.

<sup>27</sup> Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 233, 254, 294; Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 88, 94, 110-22, 204; Steven M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 100; Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, edited by Charles W. Hegelman, Jr. (New York, 1967), 199; see also, 206-11 (hereinafter cited as Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*).



connections. . . ." Her conversation, he continued, was "remarkably frivolous"; a reader of novels, she "delighted to converse upon scenes of romance and fiction." John M'Intosh confirmed Dr. Sharp's description. Anna was also accused of religious skepticism or worse. She reportedly denounced "the whole Christian system as a fraud on mankind," ridiculed the ideas of Heaven and Hell, and sneered at matrimony.

Mary Wollstonecraft was almost certainly a deist. Anna may have shared her opinions. There are no references to Christ, the Holy Spirit, or miracles in her extant work. Her verse and comments by her husband in his *Confession*, however, indicate an emotional intensity well beyond the range of deistic "reasonableness" and urbanity. Perhaps Anna found deism cold comfort in times of emotional stress. Certainly her marriage seems to refute the idea that she found matrimony ridiculous. To add to her reputation as an eccentric, Anna often walked alone in the fields and woods outside Bowling Green "under the pretence of searching for herbs and flowers." She dismissed those who questioned the propriety of such behavior by remarking "that people would always find something to talk about."<sup>28</sup>

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28 Sharp, *Vindication*, 12-13, 18, 29, 132-34; Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, 34, 43, 51, 58-59, 63, 72, 84-85, 176, 187, 205, 267-68, 270-72; Beauchamp, *Confession*, 29, 108-110, 115, 117-18; Kentuckian William Barry supported Dr. Sharp's contention that Anna was a disciple of Mary Wollstonecraft; see Clinton, *Plantation Mistress*, 126; see also, Kenneth Neil Cameron, ed., *Romantic Rebels: Essays on Shelley and His Circle* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 46-53; Leslie Stephen, *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (2 vols.; London, 1876, 1972), II, 235; and Eleanor Flexner, *Mary Wollstonecraft: A Biography* (New York, 1972), 143, 159-66. Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 225-26, 247-49, confirms both Wollstonecraft's popularity among the Virginia gentry which had a widespread reputation for religious skepticism. See also, Niels Henry Sonne, *Liberal Kentucky, 1780-1828* (Lexington, 1939, 1968), 25-28, 33-35, 38-42.

Born in England, Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) was a ladies companion, teacher, governess, translator, and an author whose *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) made her one of the scandals of the age. A friend to the French Revolution and religiously unorthodox, she compounded her sin in the eyes of polite society by first living with Gilbert Imlay and then giving birth to his illegitimate daughter. Later, after an attempt at suicide, Mary became intimate with the anarchist William God-

And she wrote poetry. Anna used iambic pentameter and iambic tetrameter as her basic verse patterns, although there were a number of seeming haphazard variations. The "Epitaph" is iambic tetrameter. All her verse was done in quatrains (*abab*) with the occasional use of "off-rhymes" or "near-rhymes" in her "Epitaph." Two themes dominate her work: a sense of grievance at the cruelties inflicted upon her by Sharp and by "fate" (an unchristian concept) and lavish praise for her husband because he perfectly embodied honor and courage and because he was the instrument of her revenge. Her poems present Anna to the world as an orphan, alone, and unprotected until the appearance of Beauchamp. In "Verses Addressed . . . to Her Husband" she refers to "that unknown abode,/ To which my father's spirit early fled"; there Beauchamp will also meet her sister and "my brothers brave,/Who left me early to the storms of fate. . . ." They will praise him for his righteous assassination.

Sharp's death was inevitable. He was "Accused of Heaven." Sharp, she wrote, lived in guilt and died paralyzed with fear. He was unable to resist the "poisoned steel" because his conscience convicted and disarmed him. Sharp's death was also deserved: he possessed "the vilest heart/That ever human blood did animate. . . ." Her own victimization, her husband's bravery, and Sharp's cowardice continue to be the themes of "Verses Addressed by Mrs. Anna Beauchamp, A Few Hours Before Their Death." In this poem, Beauchamp followed a predetermined course in killing Sharp, directed by "Him whose will [also] decrees thy bright career/Should end in cruel death ere half thy

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win and married him after discovering she was pregnant. She died in bearing a second daughter.

We have only Dr. Sharp's word that Anna was an "avowed disciple" of Mary Wollstonecraft. The relationship cannot be proved although Anna's wide reading makes it at least a possibility. Both Dr. Sharp and Judge Barry seem to have regarded Mary as a model of female depravity, a woman whose actions and publicly expressed thoughts had placed her forever outside the bounds of respectability. By defining Anna as her pupil they were also putting her beyond the pale. Juxtaposing Mary and Anna in this manner was an early 19th-century version of guilt by (presumed) association. See Sharp, *Vindication*, 12.

days. . . ." Yet Beauchamp is also described, inconsistently as a man who commanded fate: "Stern was thy purpose: fate obeyed/  
Thy righteous will, and to thy hand resigned, Thy wretch. . . ." She does not wish to survive her avenger: "for naught but fate,  
/Could move my stubborn purpose free to die,/With all my soul calls dear, or good, or great."

Her obsessions are renewed in "Lines Addressed to Mrs. Francis R. Hawkins. . . ." Obvious gratitude to Mrs. Hawkins for kindnesses bestowed conveys a heightened sense that her days are short. Yet there is joy at the thought of perishing with Beauchamp: "And oh! the solace to the heart/  
Of woman dying for her Lord." She has not been in control of her life; rather, she was "one/  
Whose lot has been the sport of fate,/Whose ills on earth this day are done,  
/To Heaven's high behest await." Again juxtaposing freedom and necessity, Anna writes that since fate has decreed Beauchamp's death she chooses to join him: "I glory that our blessed estate,  
/One coffin and one grave shall be." The "Epitaph" recapitulates the emphases of Anna's other verse. She refers to herself once more as a "child of evil fate," the victim of "A villian's [sic] wiles." It was Beauchamp who avenged the wrong done her. He deserves the encomia of all those who cherish virtue. Their common burial place will be celebrated as a "tomb of love and honor."<sup>29</sup>

Anna's prose remnant is equally literate, intense, and deceptive. Her letter to John U. Waring, dated 1 January 1826 from Retirement, was written after her husband's arrest, but before she joined him in the Frankfort jail. She assured Waring of her husband's innocence, strongly implied that Patrick Darby was the culprit, and begged for Waring's intercession in helping prove Beauchamp guiltless. Anna briefly described her first meeting with her husband, their subsequent courtship, and marriage. She assured Waring that both he and her spouse possessed

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<sup>29</sup> Alex Preminger, ed., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), 556, 684, 848; Beauchamp, *Confession*, 115-18, 120-21. Mrs. Hankins remains unidentified.

an essential nobility of soul that would make them confidants were they to meet. They were, she wrote, "both capable of friendship in the supreme degree. . . ." Anna then pointedly quoted four lines from Pope's translation of the *Iliad*:

A generous friendship no cold medium knows,  
Burns with one love, with one resentment glows;  
One should our interests and our passions be;  
My friend must hate the man who injures me.

She ended by again imploring Waring's help for Beauchamp, an "innocent culprit whose acts have been founded in rectitude."

Of course her letter to Waring perpetrated a monstrous deception: her husband was not innocent but guilty. Darby, on the other hand, was innocent of the murder, although he may have aided and abetted Beauchamp. Anna, then, was a liar.<sup>30</sup>

Her language suggests a familiarity with such intense experiences as love, passion, virtue, honor, humiliation, and death. Certainly these were the words that could best be used to describe the series of catastrophes that had overtaken her since 1817. In that year her younger sister Elizabeth had died. This tragedy was closely followed by the deaths of two brothers, Thomas in 1818 and Giles in 1819. The next year her child was born dead or died shortly after birth. Her brother John W. expired in 1821, followed by her brothers Littleton in 1822 and William in 1823.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile she had made the acquaintance of

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30 I have used a xerox of Anna's letter to John U[pshaw]. Waring, the noted killer, made for me by Dr. Robert D. Bamberg, editor of Beauchamp's *Confession*. My special thanks for his kindness. The location of the original has not been determined. For more on Waring's connection with the Beauchamp-Sharp affair, see Sharp, *Vindication*, 18-22. The author called Waring "one of the most malignant and dangerous men that ever lived." A similar assessment of Waring is found in Johnson's *Kentucky Tragedies and Trials*, 45, 58-67.

31 Beauchamp also represents Anna as an "orphan female"; see the *Confession*, 26, 57, 226. This, of course, was not true. Four, possibly five, brothers were alive at the time she conceived and gave birth, although not all lived in Kentucky. What is of utmost significance is that the brothers did not spring to Anna's defense when her condition became known and challenge Colonel Sharp. Waring described their reactions as "torpid"; see Sharp, *Vindication*, 21. One can only speculate at the depths of humiliation Anna must have felt at this rebuke. From that moment she may well

Jereboam C. Beauchamp and agreed to become his wife upon the condition that Sharp must die. At last, here was someone to defend her honor.

Beauchamp enthusiastically accepted this stipulation and rode off to Frankfort, determined to fight Sharp. There followed a tumultuous interview with Sharp and a warning that the latter could expect a daily hiding if he did not consent to a duel. Sharp, however, was not so easily cornered. To Beauchamp's chagrin, he left Frankfort the next day for parts unknown. Thus ended the first attempt on the colonel's life.

The second trial occurred some time later. Anna concocted a letter in which she assured Sharp (then in Bowling Green) that she had not instigated Beauchamp's assault on him. She had, in fact, "entirely broken off his [Beauchamp's] visits" because of his behavior. Since she was leaving the state, she implored, could they not have a final meeting? She had several of his letters which she wished to return; perhaps some of hers still remained in his possession. Anna named a convenient evening and requested that Sharp convey his decision through the servant who brought him the letter.

Sharp read the letter attentively and then questioned the servant concerning the whereabouts of Beauchamp. Probably he sensed Anna's deception. Nevertheless, Sharp responded that he would be delighted to see her once more "and concluded, that death alone would prevent his certain attendance at her house, on the hour appointed." He did not appear. Once again, Sharp evaded the trap and rode off two days before Beauchamp searched for him in Bowling Green. In preparation for Sharp's visit Anna had practiced assiduously with a pistol until she was

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have begun to think of herself as an orphan. Anna's will, dated 5 July 1826, left all her property, which may have included land and slaves, to Thomas Beauchamp, her father-in-law. There was no word of farewell to her mother, her brother Peyton, her sisters-in-law, or her nieces and nephews. See *Warren County Will Book C*, 70; for the brothers' necrology, see *Warren County Will Book B*, 209, 312-15, 431-33, and *Warren County Will Book C*, 12.

an accurate markswoman. "She ever seemed to esteem the possibility of killing him with her own hand, as what she most desired of all things in the world," wrote her admiring paramour.

The third attempt was made in 1824 after Anna and Beauchamp were married. Beauchamp wrote several letters to Sharp using assumed names and mailed from different post offices. He sought a meeting with Sharp when he was next in Bowling Green for the purpose of asking his advice concerning some land claims. Before Sharp had returned a definite answer to Beauchamp's bait, Beauchamp was told by "a gentleman, who at that time lived in the whole world" that the Sharps "had set afloat insinuations, that the child of Miss Cooke was a mulatto." This rumor was the immediate cause of the successful attempt to kill Sharp.

Beauchamp and Anna once again cooperated. Disguised, Beauchamp would kill Sharp in Frankfort under cover of darkness and slip away undetected. Anna assisted by sewing the mask her husband would use to hide his face, and she personally poisoned the tip of the dagger he would plunge into Sharp's belly. Anna was, noted her lawyer-husband, "liable as an accessory [sic] before the fact." For this murder [Sharp's]," he wrote in the introduction to his *Confession*, "is neither imputable to the one or the other of us, but to both."

By invoking the Furies, Anna had decisively departed from the conventions of her time, place, and sex. Her response to the triple humiliations of having given birth to an illegitimate child, repudiation by the man she named as the father, and subsequent accusations of miscegenation was neither meek nor forgiving. Her sense of honor was emphatically masculine, and she plotted revenge with Beauchamp as her instrument. Anna's passion for revenge was appeased with the death of Sharp. She found, however, that she could not rescue her chosen instrument, her "honor'd Lord," from the gallows. The one man who had been both willing and able to avenge her honor was doomed to

die. It was now for Anna to reciprocate. She, too, understood the imperatives of honor. In a final encounter with that old familiar spirit, Death, she would pay her just debt.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Beauchamp, *Confession*, 22, 30-52, 102-105. Beauchamp's assertions concerning these first three attempts are uncorroborated.