Harriet Chalmers Adams: Remembering an American Geographer

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Abstract

Harriet Chalmers, a California native, was one of the most celebrated American explorers from 1904 until her death in 1937. She became an expert on Latin America, and her knowledge was valued by government and business and in academic circles. Adams was one of the first American women elected to membership in the Royal Geographic Society of London (1913). She was a prolific writer, contributing twenty-one articles to the *National Geographic Magazine*. Although she enjoyed widespread fame during her lifetime, she is virtually unknown in the history of geography. Adams, and many female contemporaries, is missing from the history of geography and exploration. This article, part of a larger work in progress, begins the task of recovering the intellectual contributions of American women explorers from the early twentieth century.

Introduction

Harriet Adams. (Publicity photo, circa 1925. Author's private collection.)

HARRIET CHALMERS ADAMS, born in Stockton, California, in 1875, became one of the leading American explorers and geographers of the first half of the twentieth century. As a famous explorer, she was a much sought-after speaker, a member of the National Geographic's lecture series for over twenty years, a prolific contributor to *National Geographic Magazine*, a Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society (F.R.G.S.), and an expert on Latin America whose knowledge and advice was valued by both government and industry in the U.S. and South America. Along with paid lectures, she earned her living writing for *National Geographic*, her articles and photographs appearing regularly between 1904 and 1935. She was widely respected by her peers, male and female, as evidenced by

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the memorial written by Charles Wellington Furlong, F.R.G.S., one of her mentors.

> Harriet Chalmers Adams *is* a rare soul. In her explorations and travels, she accomplished a staggering amount of work in the fields of ethnology, geography, natural history, and sociology. She...became one of the great authorities on Latin America. Insignificant are these few side-lights of the full and useful life of a very great soul who answered God's whisper, "Something lost behind the ranges, go and find it" (SWG).

By the end of her life, Adams had traveled more than 100,000 miles in South America, mostly on horseback, and spent time in every country. She later visited most Indian reservations in the United States to study linguistic and cultural similarities and differences among tribes of North and South America. For more than twenty years, Adams captivated audiences as she recounted her adventures in lectures all over the U.S. She was called the "Mrs. Marco Polo of the Americas," and the "world's greatest woman explorer" (HCA 1907).

Unfortunately, Adams is by and large unknown in the history of exploration and geography. She did not have a university education; she was a woman engaged in "unwomanly" activities; and although she was a busy lecturer and prolific writer of articles, she never published a book. This article opens the door for examination of the contributions of American women explorers to the historiography of geography and exploration, natural history, and ethnography. It also reviews Harriet Chalmers Adams' experiences, work, and subsequent disappearance.

Gender and Exploration

A century ago, the exciting reports of explorers and other scientific travelers were fundamental to both academic and popular geography, many written by American women.[1] While little has been written about American women, modern scholars in several disciplines have analyzed the experiences and contributions of early British women travelers. Alison Blunt (1994) and Inderpal Grewal (1996) contributed to this growing body of literature through analyses of gender and imperialism in studies of women's travel writing. Their work focuses primarily on British women travelers who moved about under the protective umbrella of the British colonial system. More recently, Felix Driver (2001) explored the relationship between

exploration and colonialism, and Karen Morin (2008) looked at the work of British women travelers in the U.S. in the context of imperialism, gender, race, and class. While the analyses of British women travelers and writers is important as a starting point for considering the work of American women, we need a separate study of American women explorers in the context of their history, place, and culture.

Blunt and Gillian Rose (1994) offer narratives on the ways women's travel was both similar to and different from that of men in the context of imperialism. Sara Mills (1991) and Mary Louise Pratt (1992) also contributed critiques of early gendered histories of geography and travel writing. Both wondered why explorers did what they did as well as how the knowledge they gained was used to the advantage of colonialism. One of the unintended consequences of focusing on the question, why women traveled, is that it restricts their work and accomplishments to the margins, and places gender at the center of the discourse. This may be a key reason the work of women travelers is not taken as seriously as men's. Did women and men travel for different reasons, or did the social context in which they traveled create a smoke-and-mirrors situation in which similar motives appear to be very different? Mona Domosh (1991) argued that ideas about gender differences marginalized women's contributions based on the ties between masculinity and exploration as well as the belief that women's knowledge was subjective while men's was objective.

Recent biographical treatments of male explorers suggest that a nongendered reconsideration of motives for their travel and exploration is necessary. For example, Roy Chapman Andrews' expeditions to Central Asia situated him as the exemplar of the rugged masculine explorer. However, his most recent biographer has argued that Andrews traveled as much for self-fulfillment as for objective, scientific reasons (Gallenkamp 2002). Perhaps the drive to explore was not so different for men and women as we imagine. And, what of the difference between explorer and traveler? British women are perceived as travelers, following a long history of travel and travel writing among the upper class. Most of them carefully and deliberately negotiated their avocation within specific boundaries of propriety in which their femininity was rarely in question (Mills 1991; Blunt 1994). American women, like Harriet Adams and her contemporaries, were more often from middle-class backgrounds and brought a different sensibility to their explorations, at least

in part, because of that fact. American women between 1900 and 1940 mostly traveled alone in conditions similar to that endured by male travelers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They camped, slept in huts, lived and ate with local peoples, and often traveled with only local guides as companions. Women explorers, such as Adams, could ride, shoot, carry a heavy load at high altitude, and fearlessly face danger without a whimper.

The Early Years

Harriet Adams was born in Stockton, California, on October 22, 1875, and inherited an adventurous streak from both parents. Her father's family emigrated from Scotland to Canada, and then, as a young man, Alexander Chalmers traveled to the Pacific Coast in 1864 "in search of fortune and adventure" (HCA 1914). He originally settled in Coloma with his older brother, Robert, and sought fortune as a placer miner on the American River. Alexander finally abandoned the river in 1868, and opened a dry goods store in Stockton with another brother, George. The Chalmers Brothers Wholesale and Retail Dry Goods business was fairly successful, but Alexander yearned for adventure, and shortly after the turn of the century he became superintendant and part owner of the Lightner Mine at Angel's Camp. Frances Wilkins, Harriet's mother, was descended from seventeenth-century colonists who helped settle what is now New Hampshire. Frances's father, Charles Wilkins, migrated overland to California during the Gold Rush. Unsuccessful as a miner, he began supplying the mining camps instead and settled his family in Piedmont, California. Alexander and Charles probably met when they were both dry goods merchants, but it is not clear how or where Alexander and Frances met and married. They had two children, Anna and Harriet, and settled in Stockton, moving to Piedmont in their later years (Davis 1995).

Harriet Adams was an adventurous child, attracting the attention of a reporter at age eleven during a family outing to the beach at Santa Cruz.

> Yesterday afternoon, says the Santa Cruz *Surf*, Hattie Chalmers of Stockton, a girl of about 11 years of age, swam from the wharf to the Neptune raft and then to the shore without resting. The young swimmer has had but little experience and as the distance is at least 500 yards it was considered a wonderful performance (HCA 1886).

Adams spent most of her childhood in her father's company, while Anna was tutored in the more ladylike social graces expected of women of her time. Perhaps the lack of a son created the then-unusual situation of Alexander treating his younger daughter as he would have treated a boy. According to Adams, her mother and Anna spent summers at a resort while she and her father spent the time exploring the west coast from Oregon to Mexico (HCA 1936). At age eight, Adams and her father traveled on horseback throughout California and the Sierra Nevada. When she was fourteen they journeyed to Oregon, and from there to Mexico before returning to Stockton.

> My beloved father was a Scottish Canadian, and when I was a girl he and I trailed *his* Rockies together. With ponies & one cargo animal, we set out every June for the high mountains, either in California or in Canada, and camped by many a highland lake. We covered our California Sierras in this way from Oregon to Mexico, when the high places, now well known, were virtually unexplored (SWG 1935).

She later declared these journeys made her "over from a domestic little girl fond of knitting and skipping rope to one who wished to go to the ends of the earth and to see and study the people of all lands (HCA 1914)." As an adult she managed to turn her passion for adventure and exploration into a successful vocation.

Adams' formal education lasted only until age eleven, and from that point consisted of exploration with her father, voracious reading, and lessons with private tutors. During this period, under her father's tutelage, she developed keen powers of observation and a systematic thoroughness that later garnered the respect of other geographers and explorers. Adams possessed an affinity for language and was fluent in Spanish and French, and conversant in Portuguese, Italian, and German. When the Spanish dictator Primo de Rivera asked whether she spoke Spanish, Adams responded, "Ungrammatically and enthusiastically" (Adams 1925, 70). As an adult, she read local literature and history and studied the customs and folklore of the regions she planned to visit (*Forecast* 1930).

In 1899 Harriet married Franklin Pierce Adams, and she found in him a lifelong friend, companion, and partner. Frank was employed as an electrician for the Stockton Gas and Electric Company, where his brother and father also worked. Like Harriet, Frank loved to travel, and rather than buy a home, the couple lived in a boarding

house so they could save money for travel. The Adamses traveled throughout California in the early years of their marriage and "knew about everyone in California in our day—as we were early motorists and did a lot of traveling" (SWG 1938).

There is little doubt that the Adamses had an unusual marriage for the time and place in which they lived. It was a partnership that was obviously productive and fulfilling for both of them. In nearly all the newspaper articles about his wife, Frank was mentioned briefly, if at all. In fact, in a 1922 article, a Boston reporter described the marriage as one in which Adams had "solved the age-old problem of what to do with a husband after one procures one. She continues to travel and takes him with her to look after camp things and be generally useful as a choreman" (HCA). If Frank resented the attention showered on his famous wife, there is no evidence of it.

Frank worked as a counselor and editor of the *Bulletin* at the Pan American Union from 1907 to 1933, was a Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society, and co-authored at least one article with Adams (Adams & Adams, 1913). Because of his commitments, he was unable to accompany his wife on many of her trips. However, they were together on the all-important first trip to South America from 1904 to 1906. This trip is where it all began for Adams, as it led to a long tenure as writer and lecturer for the National Geographic Society (an organization in which she was denied full membership because of her gender). This relationship with National Geographic did, because of her talents as a writer and speaker, catapult her to fame within a year after their return.

Famous Explorer

Leaving San Francisco in early January 1904, the Adamses traveled by steamer to South America, where they spent nearly three years traveling on horseback, train, and boat; they covered 40,000 miles on this first trip. Frank had obtained a position as inspector for the Inca Mining and Rubber Company, and funds from this, combined with their savings, allowed them to remain for an extended period. Adams' journal from this trip provides a detailed record of their daily experiences. For example, departing from La Paz on April 20, 1904, they started for the interior, traveling on horseback for ten days, and then, after a six-day rest, spent another eight days traveling on mule and horseback, foot, and canoe. "First followed river Crucero (or San Antone) trail by cliff over river then over pampa climbing up over mts. at 15,000 or more...the wonderful Cordilleras came in

view which we are to cross tomorrow." They traveled thirty-six miles in one day, and the journey had just begun. The journal entry on April 22, 1904, recounts the first of many episodes filled with the danger and excitement that Adams found so exhilarating.

> High up over river from 50 to 800 ft. Narrow with many curves, swinging bridges. In some places over 1000 ft. above river. ... FPA's horse gave out. He walked. I rode from 8.30 to 5.30. Then my mount stumbled too much in the dark and I led him. Night came with a heavy storm. Narrow escape on old trail which we took by mistake. Came to meeting of rivers but could not cross as rivers very high and no bridge. Out on ledge in storm all night. The adventure I have wanted I guess and it's kind of exciting... A long long night so wet and cold. No sleep or food.

On April 23 she continued, "daylight at last. Night seemed one year long. Went up higher on trail after horses and led them to meeting of rivers. Found logs over river and met two Indians who told us river was too deep to ford. Left horses and got across on slippery log. Escape no. 2. Went into hut for awhile... Then started on foot still in storm to Orroya. Escape no. 3. Crossing river up to our shoulders. Strong current." Traveling without a guide, they had become disoriented in the storm and took a wrong turn, which led them onto a narrow ledge that had been blocked by a landslide. During this storm, their pack mule fell off a cliff and most of their belongings were lost. The next morning, faced with a raging river, Frank braided a line from the horse's bridles and tied it to Adams' waist. Tied together in this manner, they crawled over the log across the river.

On May 18, 1904, they were off again, climbing higher into the Andes. Even though the adventures were often frightening, Adams never lost the sense of humor for which she was to become so well known. On this trek she suffered from altitude sickness, writing in her journal, "when got off horse everything black before me... If I have soroche at 12,000 ft. guess I'll expire at 17,000." Next day she felt better, but "faces terribly burned from winds. After dark I grew faint. 12 hours in saddle. At 7.30 nearly fell off horse. FPA saw me wobble and got me down. Lay down on frosty ground by Indians with llamas. Too ill to go on and no huts in sight or sounds. A terrible night... Expired at 15,000 ft." They were caught in a blizzard on Mount Misti, and curled up next to the Indians and their llamas for warmth and survived to reach the summit next day.

Adams wanted to be taken seriously as a geographer, and her articles were intended to educate more than entertain, omitting the more harrowing experiences found in her diaries. *National Geographic Magazine* was a popular as well as an educational magazine, and Adams' writing merged objective, scientific observation with vivid description so her readers could "see" what she saw:

> The old town, you see, lies just at our feet at one end of an oblong valley bordered by treeless mountains—a golden valley with cultivated patches on the hillsides shading into brown. ... This is the central vale in a group of fertile highland basins eleven thousand feet above the sea, sheltered by mountain walls from the bitter wind, which sweeps along the elevated table-land of Peru. Situated in the heart of the former Inca Empire, 'Cuzco' signifies 'navel' or 'center' in *Quichua*, the indigenous tongue (Adams 1908, 670).

Adams wanted to give her readers the feeling of being fellow travelers, so she often included detailed descriptions of the places in which she stayed: "we paid only two *soles* (one dollar) each day for room and board. The court-yard was strewn with rubbish and the room assigned to us had canvas partition walls extending only half way to the ceiling...the room was dirty and cold and the less said about the table the better" (Adams 672). Her vibrant descriptions of indigenous Peruvians also drew her readers into her travels: "both men and women are bare-legged and wear sandals of llama hide. The men are clothed in knee-breeches and woolen ponchos; the women in low-cut blouses and short skirts. Both sexes wear great cartwheel hats; a rich blue in shade, lined with red, and trimmed with gilt or silver braid" (Adams 673). Adams included historical background to contextualize her descriptions, giving readers a multidimensional experience of culture and place. "Here [in Cuzco] lived the people of wealth and culture. The Spaniards, however, neglected the roads built under the Inca regime, and as the highways fell into decay the difficulties of the long journey across the mountains to the coast increased. Gradually, Cuzco's power slipped away, and Lima became the capital and pulse of the country" (Adams 681).

Her articles for *National Geographic*, however, were not simple travelogues. While the first couple of articles were relatively short travelogues, her writing quickly became more sophisticated and her analysis sharper. For example, in an article on Rio de Janeiro (1920), only the two concluding paragraphs provided information specifically for travelers. This was a concise, analytical perspective

on Rio—more like a country report than a travelogue. She wrote in depth on the physical geography, modern and ancient architecture, introduction of Christianity, population, relationship with Portugal, sanitation, and economy. This article also included a detailed map of the Bay and city.

Her exposure to the impact of Spanish colonialism in South America was catalyst for a research project that would take her to the location of every former Spanish colony in the world in order to understand the social, economic, and cultural implications of colonization on the post-colonial world. This was a recurring theme throughout her work. Adams did not shy away from controversy and wrote with conviction, even when that meant criticizing the actions of Europeans in South America. For example, the article on Cuzco concludes with a sharp criticism of the impact on the Quichua Indians of colonization and religion: "What blessing has European civilization brought to them, which they did not already enjoy? What have they not suffered in the name of the cross which surmounts the hill?" (p. 689).

On their return from South America in 1906, the Adamses settled in Washington, D.C. In 1907 Frank began working for the Pan American Union, and Adams published her first article in *National Geographic Magazine* and delivered her first public lecture. Adams' relationship with *National Geographic* lasted until the mid-1930s, when she and Frank retired and moved to Europe. Adams was a "Geographic loyalist...and proud of her connection to the Society" (Rothenberg 135), and the relationship that developed between Harriet and *National Geographic* "proved mutually beneficial to them both" (Rothenberg 134). John O. LaGorce, vice president of the Society, considered Adams an expert on Latin America, and she often reviewed articles submitted to the magazine.

But, as much as she was loyal to the Society, she was treated as an adventurous traveler rather than a serious explorer, and was denied funding for her expeditions. Adams requested funding in 1915 for an expedition to Africa and was rebuffed by Grosvenor, who referred her to the "Research Committee" with the caveat that the Society was conserving resources for new construction, so funding was limited (Rothenberg 2007). During the same period, though, the Society funded seven expeditions to Alaska as well as Frank Chapman's expedition to Peru's Urubamba Valley. Adams was disappointed, but her relationship with the Society remained strong, and while she wrote

for other magazines, most of her work continued to appear in the *National Geographic*. Friends encouraged her to write a book about her explorations, but although she signed contracts with Doubleday and Putnam, she never settled down long enough to complete a book-length manuscript (Davis 1995; Rothenberg 2007).

In 1910 Adams embarked on a journey that included Cuba, Haiti, and Santo Domingo. She traveled Cuba on horseback and by automobile and completely circled Haiti on horseback. While in Haiti, she captured five solenodon, a rat-like rodent considered a rare antecedent of the rodent family. She presented three of the animals to the Bronx Park in New York and two to the Zoological Gardens in Washington, D.C. This was the basis of her invitation to address the Royal Geographic Society in London and her subsequent invitation to membership in 1913 (Davis 1995).

In 1912 Adams began what would become a lifelong quest to explore and compile information on every former Spanish possession. She traveled around the world in 1913–14, visiting Hong Kong, Shanghai, Philippines, Mongolia, Central Asia, Siberia, Sumatra, Hawaii, and Japan. On this trip she also spent time in the South Seas, Borneo, and India.

Harriet Adams in the Gobi Desert, circa 1914. (Author's private collection.)

It was during this period that Adams determined to find evidence to support her theory that North America was populated by peoples who traveled by sea rather than the Bering land bridge. She photographed Philippine Ifugaos warriors and compared the physical and linguistic characteristics with Aymara Indians of the South American highlands (Davis 1995).

Table 1. Harriet Adams' itinerary, compiled from papers in the author's private collection.

1900–03	Mexico; Central America	1919–20	South America
1904–06	South America	1923–24	Spain and Morocco
1910	Haiti, Cuba, Santo Domingo	1926	Spain and Portugal
1912	Followed trail of Columbus through Old & New World	1929	Spain; Near East; North Africa; Cirenaica; Libya
1913–14	Philippines; Mongolia; Central Asia	1930	East Africa; Guest at coronation of Haile Selassie in Ethiopia
1916	War correspondent at French Front	1931	Spain
1917–18	Spoke throughout U.S., raising funds for war effort	1933–37	Europe
1918	Visited reservations in U.S. studying linguistic patterns	1937	Adams' remains were returned to the U.S., where she was interred in Oakland.

Adams' adventures often opened doors normally closed to women, and one of these opportunities was an invitation from the French government that resulted in a brief detour in her career path. In 1916 she became a war correspondent for *Harper's Magazine* and was issued a permit to visit the trenches on the French frontlines. She spent three months touring the front, American hospitals, and munitions plants where women workers had replaced men who were fighting. Adams was not only the first woman war correspondent allowed at the front, but also one of the few, male or female, permitted by the French government to photograph actual battle scenes (Davis 1995).

While her written work initially made her famous, her lectures sparked a love affair with her audiences and the media. The combination of personality, delivery, knowledge, and visual aids made her programs enthralling. She always spoke to packed houses, sometimes to 1,500 people at a single lecture. Handbills announcing upcoming programs claimed

> there is no greater lecturer today, man or woman, who possesses a more magnetic hold over the audience nor a greater personal charm than she (HCA).

Adams possessed a remarkable talent for photography, and her lectures were accompanied by color slides and motion pictures. She was the first person in the U.S. to use color photography professionally as part of a slide presentation in a lecture (HCA 1910).

Adams' lectures were not simple travelogues of an upper-class tourist traveling through other countries in comfort and for pleasure. She was not upper class, never traveled first class, and she took her geographical explorations very seriously. She compiled copious amounts of data, including commercial, industrial, and historical information that she presented in lectures and articles. She used her explorations to gain knowledge and her lectures and writing to share that knowledge and experience, with the intention of encouraging understanding between different cultures. Her attention to detail and to the customs, folklore, language, and history of the areas she visited added to the interest and value of her work. As much as possible during her trips, she lived among the indigenous peoples of the places she visited.

> We slept on the dirt floor of huts, or in the open. We ate just what the natives ate, and traveled just as they do, and in all things accommodated ourselves to the country customs (HCA 1908).

This cultural immersion provided her with an intimate knowledge of the people and places she visited. After one of her talks at Columbia University, Professor William Shepard wrote to Frank,

> The lecture by Mrs. Adams the other evening in the hall of the Engineering Society here in New York was a genuine treat, both aesthetically and intellectually considered. About the purely intellectual aspects of the lecturer, there can be no cavil (HCA).

In February 1911 she was a keynote speaker at the first Pan American Commercial Conference, and the program introduced her as one of the "most experienced travelers and best lecturers" on the subject of South America (HCA). In her writing on Latin America, Adams demonstrated an astute understanding of economic conditions. For example, in her article on the Transandine Railroad, she wrote about the potential economic impacts of the new transportation system. She also included an analysis of Argentina's successful domination of global agricultural exports, important because Argentina had just surpassed the U.S. While her speech at the Pan American Conference was probably due, at least in part, to Frank's influence at the

Pan American Union, she was invited later that same year to speak on the same topic to a different group.

She delivered a well-received speech titled "Advertising and Export Trade in Relation to Latin America" at the annual convention of the Associated Advertising Clubs of America. The *Philadelphia Times* reported on August 3, 1911, that "It was the first time in the history of the organization that a woman had taken part in the formal ceremonies of a convention and when Harriet Chalmers Adams arose to speak she was given the greatest ovation of the three days of meetings by the 3,000 delegates." She informed the advertising men that the balance of trade in 1910 was many millions of dollars in favor of Buenos Aires, Argentina, and that Argentina ranked ahead of the U.S. in food exports. She told the delegates that U.S. companies needed to learn about the countries with which they wanted to trade and that a change in strategy was essential to success.

She discussed at length the difference in attitude between U.S. companies and the more successful German companies. The difference, she pointed out, was that the Germans determined what people wanted while the North Americans were too busy trying to convince South Americans to buy things they did not want. It was here that Adams first began encouraging that Spanish be added to the curriculum in public schools in the U.S. Later that year, Julius Moritzen (1912) wrote "Mrs. Adams has...been able to not only gain the friendship of Latin Americans, but she has been exceptionally successful in bringing the commercial chances before American businessmen."

Becoming a Geographer

Adams was not an academically trained geographer; she was self-taught, but this was not unusual for any professional geographer in the early twentieth century. "Most of the 'fathers' of American academic geography...did not have doctorates" (Dunbar 74). The discipline was not firmly established in the U.S. until around 1915, even though the first doctorate in a geography department was granted at the University of Chicago in 1907 (Dunbar 1981). While the first stand-alone geography department was established at the University of California, Berkeley, in 1898 within the College of Commerce, the first M.A. was granted in 1908 and Ph.D. in 1923 (Dunbar 1981). In 1895, William Morris Davis, considered the "father" of American geography and one of the founders of the Association of American Geographers in 1904, counted as "professional geographers" those

who were "topographers, cartographers, explorers, teachers, and writers on geographical subjects. None could get adequate university training in geography, as compared with specialists in other fields" (Dunbar 77). While most of the early geographers were "self-made," they were also predominantly men.

Adams never attended a university, but her reading list was extensive and included works of history, exploration, geology, and geography. Two of her mentors were the prominent British geographer Sir Clements Markham, FRGS, and Sir Percy Martin, FRGS, expert on Peru, who also nominated her for membership in the Royal Geographic Society. Adams was the second American woman invited to membership in the RGS and one of the few who had lectured before the Society. During her career she also belonged to the geographical societies of Brazil, Bolivia, Peru, Argentina, the Dominican Republic, and many in the United States. She also was a member of the National Institute of Arts and Sciences of Cadiz and the National Institute of Social Sciences. Her membership in these professional associations (all of which were by invitation at that time) is a reflection of the acceptance of her peers in the field of geography (Davis 1995).

Adams defined geography as being "built on travel and research. The true geographer comes early to know the joy of mental exploration, comparable in its breathless interest with the attainment of the highest summit, or virgin territory beyond the farther ranges" (SWG 1950). Adams clearly met Davis' early definition of a professional geographer in more ways than one. She was an explorer who wrote prolifically on geographical subjects. Since Davis' criteria were generally accepted in the years in which Adams traveled and wrote, and she met the criteria, she indeed was a geographer.

Through her lectures, Adams met several other women doing similar work and who were similarly frustrated by the way exploration was viewed as a masculine pursuit. She was honored with teas and was invited several times to speak to the Explorers Club, but neither she nor any other woman was invited to membership. American men had the Boone and Crockett Club, Campfire Club of America, Adventurers' Club, Wilderness Club, Ends-of-the-Earth Club, and Explorer's Club. A woman explorer "had never had back of her the group-strength of the sort of organization which combines good fellowship with a sublimated kind of trade-unionism" (HCA 1928).

In late 1925, that situation changed when Blair Niles, Marguerite Harrison, Gertrude Shelby, and Gertrude Emerson Sen founded the Society of Woman Geographers (SWG). Having determined that the greatest difficulty for women explorers was the "isolation of women of the exploring species," they asked Adams to be the organizer and first president (HCA 1928). Shortly after agreeing, Adams fell trying to rescue another climber in Spain and crushed several vertebrae. She was told she would never walk again and was mostly bedridden for nearly three years. Adams returned to the U.S. strapped to a backboard and went to the Battle Creek Sanitarium to recover. She was fifty-one at the time of her near-fatal fall, and although she worked hard at her rehabilitation, there was some question as to whether she would be able to fulfill her promise to organize the SWG. But she "refused to give up the work of organizing the Society of Woman Geographers...and from her bed she continued to direct it and promote its growth" (*Bulletin* 1938). Adams did recover and returned to her travels in 1929.

Adams became the first president of the organization, a position she held until her retirement to Europe in 1933. In 1928, she described the rationale for founding the SWG: "the men, ...have had their hide-bound, exclusive little explorers' and adventurers' clubs for years and years. But they have always been so afraid that some mere women might penetrate their sanctums of discussion that they don't even permit women in their clubhouses, much less allow them to attend any meetings, for discussions that might be mutually helpful. We decided that the best thing to do would be to organize our own club" (HCA 1928). In 1931 she proposed that women's impressions were quite different from men's and that both were essential to "offer a more complete idea of what has been seen and present a more satisfying viewpoint as a whole than a purely masculine one can do alone" (HCA 1931). Even though she was committed to the necessity for a separate organization to offer support and intellectual camaraderie to women in the geographical and scientific professions, she never gave up hope that men would one day accept women as equals (Davis 1995).

Eager that the SWG be acknowledged as a professional organization, Adams compared it to the Explorer's Club, which she claimed was a social club. Her vision of the SWG was "not a club and distinctly not a geographical society like the National Geographic, as we plan to publish no magazine, and the membership must necessarily be limited" (HCA 1928). Indeed, active membership was restricted to

"those women...who have done distinctive work whereby they have added to the world's store of knowledge concerning the countries in which they have traveled" (HCA 1928). Adams felt that promoting the SWG as a professional organization would lead to women's acceptance in the male-dominated arena of exploration. What did she believe women could, and should do? Anything they wanted.

> There is no reason why a woman cannot go wherever a man goes and further. If a woman be fond of travel, if she has love of the strange, the mysterious and the lost, there is nothing that will keep her at home. All that is needed for it as in all other things is the driving passion and the love. And as for being injured because she is a woman, that sounds rather a stupid notion to me. She has proved that she can go where men go and that lack of caution (which is a little of every woman) will take her out of the tent to discover something else while her husband is sleeping covered up to the ears in blankets and fur (HCA 1920).

Adams retired from the presidency of the SWG when Frank retired from the Pan-American Union. They moved to Europe, and although Adams was homesick, she felt that she owed it to her husband to follow him for once. In a letter to the SWG in April 1936, Adams wrote that she would like to come home, but Frank thought it would be too expensive for them to live on their retirement funds in California or Washington, D.C. "There is nothing for me to do but make the best of it and his happiness comes first with me as it always has" (SWG). Adams died a little over a year later, on July 17, 1937, after an illness lasting about a month—after a lifetime in which "in her explorations and travels she accomplished a staggering amount of work in the fields of ethnology, geography, natural history and sociology" (SWG 1936).

Gender constraints functioned as barriers in women's lives, making achievements of women explorers more extraordinary, in many ways, than their male counterparts. While their feats equaled those of men in magnitude, difficulty, and advancement of knowledge, women explorers and adventurers were celebrated during their lifetimes, but later mostly forgotten. Their accomplishments, however, not only enriched our knowledge of other places and peoples, but also effected social change at a variety of scales.

Perhaps the most important lesson from Adams' life is the suddenness with which her fame vanished after her death. When C.D.B. Bryan published *The National Geographic Society: 100 Years of Ad-*

venture and Discovery in which he wrote, "explorers Roy Chapman Andrews, Carl E. Akeley, Martin and Osa Johnson, Kermit Roosevelt; naturalist William Beebe; vulcanologist Thomas A. Jagger; archaeologist Sir William Ramsay; geographer J. Paul Goode; Sir Wilfred Grenfell of Labrador fame—these are but a few of the eminent National Geographic lecturers" (Bryan 85). Bryan omitted any mention of Adams in his "comprehensive" history of the Society, even though she stood with all and above many on Bryan's list in terms of eminence as an NGS lecturer and American explorer. The transition from being a well-known and respected geographer, explorer, and expert on Latin America to a lost memory was swift and nearly complete. The question that remains is why a woman of such extraordinary talent and influence does not appear in the history of geography and exploration. A simple answer would be that her lack of formal education and professional training diminished her credibility, and the absence of book-length publications decreased her sense of permanence.

Adams challenged gender-role stereotypes from within a field that was considered masculine domain. She was feminine, brilliant, soft-spoken, fearless, pretty, stubborn, generous, determined, opinionated, and very charming. There was nothing in her personality to condemn her, no excuse that justified ignoring her, and during her lifetime her work acclaimed important by her peers, male and female. She only claimed that women could do what men could do—and sometimes more—after she had already proven it through her own experiences.

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Notes:

1. I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers who offered valuable suggestions that improved the quality of the paper, as well as my colleague, Kathrine Richardson, who offered helpful comments and suggestions.
2. (HCA) in citations refers to the scrapbooks of newspaper clippings, letters, notes, etc. located at the Stockton Public Library. Dates are not available for all clippings, but are included when available.
3. (SWG) in citations refers to the archives of the Society of Woman Geographers housed at the Library of Congress, except where otherwise noted.
4. Harriet Adams journals are in the author's possession. In 1992, while searching online for sources on Adams, I came across a note posted by her grand-niece on an NGS bulletin board. I contacted her and was given access to papers in the family's possession and was entrusted with Adams' journals from the 1904–06 South American trip.

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Endnotes

1 Delia Akeley, Gertrude Emerson Sen, Blair Niles, and Margaret Bourke-White are only a few of the women traveling and exploring during the first half of the twentieth century. All of them published about their work. They were also some of the original members of the Society of Woman Geographers.