

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-49544-8 - A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle

Janet Golden

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle examines the intersection of medical science, social theory, and cultural practices as they shaped relations among wet nurses, physicians, and families from the colonial period through the twentieth century. It explores how Americans used wet nursing to solve infant-feeding problems in the eighteenth century, shows why wet nursing became controversial in the nineteenth century as motherhood slowly became medicalized, and elaborates how the development of scientific infant feeding eliminated wet nursing by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Setting these changes in the context of women's history and the history of medicine, the book makes a significant contribution to our understanding of the cultural authority of medical science, the role of physicians in shaping child-rearing practices, the social construction of motherhood, and the profound dilemmas of class and culture that played out in the private space of the nursery.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-49544-8 - A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle

Janet Golden

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

A social history of wet nursing in America

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-49544-8 - A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle
Janet Golden

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge History of Medicine

Edited by

CHARLES ROSENBERG, Professor of History and Sociology
of Science, University of Pennsylvania

Other titles in the Series:

Health, medicine and morality in the sixteenth century EDITED BY
CHARLES WEBSTER*The Renaissance notion of woman: A study in the fortunes of scholasticism and
medical science in European intellectual life* IAN MACLEAN*Mystical Bedlam: Madness, anxiety and healing in sixteenth-century England*
MICHAEL MACDONALD*From medical chemistry to biochemistry: The making of a biomedical discipline*
ROBERT E. KOHLER*Joan Baptista Van Helmont: Reformer of science and medicine*
WALTER PAGEL*A generous confidence: Thomas Story Kirkbride and the art of asylum-keeping,
1840–1883* NANCY TOMES*The cultural meaning of popular science: Phrenology and the organization of
consent in nineteenth-century Britain* ROGER COOTER*Madness, morality and medicine: A study of the York Retreat, 1796–1914*
ANNE DIGBY*Patients and practitioners: Lay perceptions of medicine in pre-industrial society*
EDITED BY ROY PORTER*Hospital life in Enlightenment Scotland: Care and teaching at the Royal
Infirmary of Edinburgh* GUENTER B. RISSE*Plague and the poor in Renaissance Florence* ANNE G. CARMICHAEL*Victorian lunacy: Richard M. Bucke and the practice of late nineteenth-century
psychiatry* S. E. D. SHORTT*Medicine and society in Wakefield and Huddersfield, 1780–1870*
HILARY MARLAND*Ordered to care: The dilemma of American nursing, 1850–1945*
SUSAN M. REVERBY*Morbid appearances: The anatomy of pathology in the early nineteenth century*
RUSSELL C. MAULITZ*Professional and popular medicine in France, 1770–1830: The social world of
medical practice* MATTHEW RAMSEY*Abortion, doctors and the law: Some aspects of the legal regulation of abortion in
England, 1884–1984* DONALD DENOON*Health, race and German politics between national unification and Nazism,
1870–1945* PAUL WEINDLING*The physician-legislators of France: Medicine and politics in the Early Third
Republic, 1870–1914* JACK D. ELLIS

Continued on page following the Index

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-49544-8 - A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle

Janet Golden

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

A social history of wet
nursing in America
From breast to bottle

JANET GOLDEN

Rutgers University, Camden



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-49544-8 - A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle

Janet Golden

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1996

First published 1996

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Golden, Janet Lynne

A social history of wet nursing in America : from breast to bottle
/ Janet Golden.

p. cm. – (Cambridge history of medicine)

Includes index.

ISBN 0-521-49544-X (hc)

1. Wet-nurses – United States – History. 2. Motherhood – United States – History. 3. Infants – United States – Nutrition – History.
4. Breast feeding – United States – History. 5. Physician and patient – United States – History.

I. Title. II. Series.

RJ216.063 1996

649'.33'0973 – dc20

95-22149

CIP

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-521-49544-X Hardback

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-49544-8 - A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle

Janet Golden

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

CONTENTS

List of tables	<i>page</i> vi
Acknowledgments	ix
List of abbreviations	xii
Introduction	I
1 Public discourse and private relations: Wet nursing in colonial America	II
2 The new motherhood and the new view of wet nurses, 1780–1865	38
3 Finding “just the right kind of woman”: The urban wet nurse marketplace, 1830–1900	64
4 “Victims of distressing circumstances”: The wet nurse labor force and the offspring of wet nurses, 1860–1910	97
5 Medical oversight and medical dilemmas: The physician and the wet nurse, 1870–1910	128
6 “Obligated to have wet nurses”: Relations in the private household, 1870–1925	156
7 “Therapeutic merchandise”: Human milk in the twentieth century	179
Epilogue: From commodity to gift	201
Index	207

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-49544-8 - A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle

Janet Golden

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

TABLES

3.1	Advertisements in the <i>Philadelphia Public Ledger</i> , 1837–1897	page 68
3.2	Sample of advertisements in the <i>Boston Evening Transcript</i> , 1861–1896	69
3.3	Advertisements in the <i>Baltimore Sun</i> , 1875	71
3.4	Placement of wet nurses discharged from the Boston City Temporary Home, 1862–1864	79
3.5	Wages earned by wet nurses discharged from the Boston City Temporary Home, 1862–1864	81
3.6	Requests regarding wet nurses at the Protestant Home, 1882–1887	85
3.7	Wet nurses placed by the Nursery and Child's Hospital, 1857–1871	93
4.1	Marital status of Boston City Temporary Home registrants by occupational choice	100
4.2	Infant status of Boston City Temporary Home registrants by occupational choice	101
4.3	Age of wet nurses in the Massachusetts Infant Asylum	103
4.4	Age of private-duty wet nurses discharged from the Massachusetts Infant Asylum, the Boston Lying-In Hospital, and the New England Hospital for Women and Children	104
4.5	Occupation of fathers of wet nurses' babies, Massachusetts Infant Asylum, 1868–1907	105
4.6	Marital status of wet nurses at the Massachusetts Infant Asylum, 1868–1907	106
4.7	Marital status of women discharged as wet nurses from the Boston City Temporary Home, 1862–1864	106
4.8	Marital status of wet nurses from Boston's private institutions, 1868–1907	107
4.9	Birthplace of wet nurses entering the Nursery and Child's Hospital, 1859–1860	108

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-49544-8 - A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle

Janet Golden

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

<i>Tables</i>		vii
4.10	Birthplace of wet nurses discharged from the Boston City Temporary Home, 1862–1864	109
4.11	Birthplace of private-duty wet nurses in Boston, 1868–1907	109
4.12	Birthplace of wet nurses in the Massachusetts Infant Asylum, 1868–1907	110
4.13	Previous occupations of wet nurses from Boston's private institutions, 1868–1907	111
4.14	Previous occupations of wet nurses employed at the Massachusetts Infant Asylum	111
4.15	Infant mortality rates for institutionalized infants suckled by their mothers	122
4.16	Outcome of wet nurses' infants placed in the Massachusetts Infant Asylum, 1868–1911	123
4.17	Outcome of wet nurses' infants placed at the Philadelphia Home for Infants, 1873–1899	124
4.18	Age of wet nurses' infants at the Philadelphia Home for Infants by outcome	125
4.19	Age of wet nurses' infants at the Nursery and Child's Hospital, 1859–1860	125
4.20	Age of wet nurses' infants at the Charles Street Temporary Home, 1862–1864	126

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-49544-8 - A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle

Janet Golden

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book took a long time to write. In the process, I built up a lot of intellectual debts that I am pleased to acknowledge. I must begin with my graduate school professors: Sol Levine, Diana Long, Roslyn Feldberg, and Sam Bass Warner, Jr. Each of them encouraged my interests and pushed me to work harder. Diana Long, my thesis advisor, supplied me with friendship, support, and a critical eye. While in graduate school I benefited from the advice and support of members of the Boston Women's Social History Group: Charlotte Borst, Barbara Hobson, Ellen Holzman, Diana Long, Margaret Thompson, Susan Reverby, and Kathleen Scharf. Two special friends, Joan Zoref and Ron Sanfield, helped me by sharing meals and good conversations that had nothing to do with history.

Over the years many librarians and archivists provided me with the materials I needed for my work. I want to acknowledge Christine Ruggere, Jean Carr, and Tom Horrocks of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, Carol Pine and Richard Wolfe of the Countway Medical Library, Fred Miller and David Weinberg of the Temple Urban Archives, Adele Lerner of the New York Hospital Cornell Medical Center Archives, Sister Elaine Wheeler of the Daughters of Charity Northeast Province Archives, and Karl Kabelac of the University of Rochester Library. I also want to thank the staffs of the American Antiquarian Society, the Hagley Museum and Library, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the New-York Historical Society, the Philadelphia City Archives, and the Schlesinger Library. Charles Rosenberg graciously allowed me access to his private library.

Support for my research came from a Beveridge Grant from the American Historical Association and from Research Grant 1 RO1 LMO5150-01, awarded by the National Library of Medicine of the National Institutes of Health. Parts of the book appeared in "From Wet Nurse Directory to Milk Bank: The Delivery of Human Milk in Boston, 1909-1927," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 62 (1988), and in "Trouble in the Nursery: Physicians, Families and Wet Nurses at the End of the Nineteenth Century," in Carol

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-49544-8 - A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle

Janet Golden

Frontmatter

[More information](#)x *Acknowledgments*

Groneman and Mary Beth Norton, eds., *“To Toil the Livelong Day”: America’s Women at Work, 1780–1980* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), and I thank the journal and the press for granting permission for their use.

References to wet nurses are hard to find and so I am grateful to the many individuals who sent me citations by what is now known as snail mail: Janet Carlisle Bogdan, Faye Dudden, Sally Dwyer-McNulty, Sonya Michel, Randall Miller, Susan Porter, and Lynn Weiner. I benefited from the research assistance provided at key points by two scholars, Sarah Tracey and Virginia Montijo. I appreciate the help given to me by the late Clement A. Smith who shared his personal papers and the late Samuel X. Radbill who supplied me with several references.

Over more years than I care to recount the members of the Chester Avenue Seminar – David Allmendinger, Len Braitman, George Dowdall, Svend Holsoe, Emma Lapsansky, Adele Lindenmyer, Cindy Little, Randall Miller, and Marion Roydhouse – read and commented on chapters, giving generous, detailed criticism that improved this work enormously. Other colleagues who read chapters or the papers from which they evolved include Rima Apple, Gretchen Condran, Lori Ginzburg, Brian Gratton, Joel Howell, Ed Morman, Rosemary Stevens, Janet Tighe, and Lynn Weiner. Each of them offered insights that have worked their way into many parts of the book. Barbara Bates, Susan Porter, Morris Vogel, and Charles Rosenberg read the entire manuscript, generously taking time from their own work. I benefited greatly from their wisdom and their vast knowledge of the history of medicine and women’s history. I hope that they will see how the manuscript developed under their kind encouragement. As I prepared the final manuscript my colleague Laurie Bernstein pushed me to sharpen my writing and clarify my ideas so that the book would be accessible to a wide range of readers. She also helped me keep up my sense of humor and my momentum.

In the final stage of finishing the book, I received help from several others. The anonymous readers for Cambridge University Press took great care in commenting on the manuscript, doing exactly what we expect of our peers when we place a manuscript in their hands. Loretta Carlisle suggested the title for the book and helped me prepare the manuscript in its final form. Susan Greenberg provided skillful copyediting. Helen Wheeler, production editor, was enormously helpful. My editor, Alex Holzman, helped me make some important decisions, including placing the book in the Cambridge History of Medicine Series. Most deserving of thanks is my family. My parents, Arthur and Doris Golden, my brother, Richard Golden, and my late mother-in-law, Gunde Joucken Schneider, always supported my academic interests and promoted my inquisitiveness. Samantha Bristow, Ruth Hotger, Beate Ittenbach, and Anita Nitsch contributed

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-49544-8 - A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle

Janet Golden

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Acknowledgments*

xi

significantly to my work by helping to care for my children and by being my friends. My children, Alex Schneider and Ben Schneider, made me think in new ways about the experiences of the mothers I write about. I thank them for this and for always tempting me to leave the confines of my study to play. My greatest debt is to Eric Schneider. He did all he could do to see that this book was written: reading every draft, taking over chores, being a single parent of two young children during my research trips, and inspiring me always with his dedication to his own scholarship. More important than all this, however, is the life we live together, and it is for this reason that I have dedicated the book to him with love.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-49544-8 - A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle

Janet Golden

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

ABBREVIATIONS

Manuscript Collections

AAS	American Antiquarian Society Worcester, Massachusetts
CCP	College of Physicians of Philadelphia Historical Collections Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
DCA	Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul Northeast Province Archives Albany, New York
FACLM	Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine Harvard Medical School Boston, Massachusetts
HLUMB	Healy Library, University of Massachusetts, Boston Boston, Massachusetts
HML	Hagley Museum and Library Wilmington, Delaware
HSP	Historical Society of Pennsylvania Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society Boston, Massachusetts
NYHCMC	New York Hospital Cornell Medical Center Archives New York, New York
NYHS	New-York Historical Society New York, New York
PCA	Philadelphia City Archives Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-49544-8 - A Social History of Wet Nursing in America: From Breast to Bottle

Janet Golden

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Abbreviations

xiii

SLRC	Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College Cambridge, Massachusetts
TUA	Urban Archives, Temple University Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
URL	University of Rochester Library Rochester, New York