

FEMALE HUSBANDS

Long before people identified as transgender or lesbian, there were female husbands and the women who loved them. Female husbands – people assigned female who transed gender, lived as men, and married women – were true queer pioneers. Moving deftly from the colonial era to just before World War I, Jen Manion uncovers the riveting and very personal stories of ordinary people who lived as men despite tremendous risk, danger, and threat of violence. *Female Husbands* weaves the story of their lives in relation to broader social, economic, and political developments in the United States and the United Kingdom while also exploring how attitudes toward female husbands shifted in relation to transformations in gender politics and women’s rights, ultimately leading to the demise of the category of “female husband” in the early twentieth century. Groundbreaking and influential, *Female Husbands* offers a dynamic, varied, and complex history of the LGBTQ past.

Jen Manion is Associate Professor of History at Amherst College, the author of *Liberty's Prisoners: Carceral Culture in Early America* (2015), and a lifelong LGBTQ rights advocate.

FEMALE HUSBANDS

A Trans History

Jen Manion

Amherst College, Massachusetts



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48380-3 — Female Husbands
Jen Manion
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108483803

DOI: 10.1017/9781108652834

© Jen Manion 2020

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2020

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Manion, Jen, 1974– author.

Title: Female husbands : a trans history / Jen Manion.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2020. | Includes index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2019038186 (print) | LCCN 2019038187 (ebook) | ISBN 9781108483803 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108718271 (paperback) | ISBN 9781108652834 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Female-to-male transsexuals–History. | Transgender men–History. | Husbands–History. | Gender nonconformity–History.

Classification: LCC HQ77.9 .M26 2020 (print) | LCC HQ77.9 (ebook) | DDC 306.76/809–dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019038186>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2019038187>

ISBN 978-1-108-48380-3 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-48380-3 — Female Husbands
Jen Manion
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

For Leslie Feinberg
(1949 – 2014)

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	page ix
Introduction: Extraordinary Lives	1

PART ONE: UK HUSBANDS, 1740–1840

1 The First Female Husband	17
2 The Pillar of the Community	44
3 The Sailors and Soldiers	68
4 The Wives	104

PART TWO: US HUSBANDS, 1830–1910

5 The Workers	139
6 The Activists	165
7 The Criminalized Poor	198
8 The End of a Category	231
Conclusion: Sex Trumps Gender	258
Epilogue: The First Female-to-Male Transsexual	267
<i>Notes</i>	279
<i>Index</i>	337

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I AM SO GRATEFUL TO THOSE FRIENDS AND COLLEAGUES who have been excited about this project from the beginning.

A generous grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities allowed me to spend a semester at the American Antiquarian Society (AAS). AAS staff and curators went above and beyond in helping me identify a usable archive of newspapers, books, magazines, and children's literature including Ashley Cataldo, Vincent Golden, Lauren Hewes, Elizabeth Watts Pope, Kimberly Tony, and Laura Wasowicz. Then Director of Academic Programs Paul Erickson ensured every scholarly gathering was both generative and fun with his humor, smarts, and savvy. An Andrew Mellon Foundation Fellowship from the Massachusetts Historical Society enabled early research on women's rights, education, and abolition with great support from then Director of Research Conrad Wright.

Several Research Matters Grants from Connecticut College funded exploratory research trips to New York Public Library, San Francisco State University Archives, and the Library Company of Philadelphia (LCP). I am continually grateful to Connie King from LCP for her thoughtful engagement with the project and ongoing support for bringing LGBTQ history to life. A New England Regional Fellowship Consortium Research Grant gave me the opportunity to travel to numerous state archives including Maine Historical Society, Rhode Island Historical Society, and Vermont Historical Society, allowing me to survey a variety

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

of nineteenth-century organizational and carceral records from these wonderful places. Andrew Lott at London Metropolitan Archives helped me find sources I never would have found on my own.

An Amherst College Trustee Faculty Fellowship supported a sabbatical year in which I completed most of the research and some of the writing. Jane Kamensky generously invited me to be a Research Associate in the Department of History at Harvard University during my sabbatical year to facilitate my research. The Research Grant at the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America allowed me to examine writings by key feminist writers on a variety of subjects including medicine, education, labor, and women's rights activism. The Slavery, Abolition, and Resistance Fellowship from the Gilder Lehrman Center at Yale University helped me think through connections between slavery, abolition, carceral practices, and transing gender.

I am still amazed and grateful that these organizations have funded this unconventional project in transgender, queer, and feminist history. Many people who have done important dissertations in LGBTQ history have not gotten the institutional support (in the form of fellowships or jobs) needed to finish their books.

This project benefited from generous engagement by colleagues across the country from the earliest stages until the bitter end. I am grateful for the opportunity to present the findings at the Nineteenth Century US History Workshop at Brown, the McNeil Center for Early American Studies at Penn, the Yale Research Initiative on the History of Sexualities, the Humanities Action Lab and Department of History at the New School, the Alice Paul Center for Research on Gender, Sexuality, and Women at Penn, the Department of African American Studies at Wesleyan University, the Francis A. Countway Library of Medicine at Harvard, the Stanford Humanities Center, the Rothermere American Institute at Oxford, and the Five Colleges History Seminar. Each of these talks gave me a chance to test arguments and receive so much amazing, thoughtful feedback.

It has been an honor to join the history department at Amherst College, especially during Biddy Martin's presidency. Amherst has generously supported my work in countless ways, including funding research trips to nearly a dozen archives. Thank you to Dean Catherine Epstein

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

and Austin Sarat for often saying “yes.” Amherst students Daniel Lee, Sydney Tate, Isabel Tessier, and Elliot Van provided research assistance and important insights. Thank you to Amrita Basu, Nellie Boucher, Nicola Courtright, Frank Couvares, Judy Frank, Tariq Jaffer, Sheila Jaswal, Rick Lopez, Ted Melilo, Monica Ringer, Sean Redding, Karen Sanchez-Eppler, Adam Sitze, and Martha Umphery for being friends and colleagues in all the best ways.

Several colleagues read parts of the book at various stages. This is the invisible labor of academic life and friendship which makes all of our scholarship better. Thanks to Kathy Brown, Brian Connolly, Bruce Dorsey, Richard Godbeer, Nancy Hewitt, Sarah Knott, Joanne Meyerowitz, Claire Potter, Lizzie Reis, Dan Richter, and Nick Syrett. I have learned so much in talking this project through with Jessica Halem, Kathy Brown, and Ann Fabian. I still can’t believe that Jan Lewis is no longer with us but I thought of her often as I debated whether I needed to keep doing research for this book. Jan once told me if the new findings affirm what you already know and don’t change your argument, then are you done. She said it much more eloquently than that.

I can’t thank Cecelia Cancellaro of Word Literary enough for helping me get the book into shape, clarifying its argument, and finding it a great home at Cambridge University Press. It has already been a pleasure getting to know the team at Cambridge who will bring this book into the world. Debbie Gershenowitz gave this manuscript the best read an author could ask for in balancing critique, curiosity, and encouragement. It has meant the world to me throughout this process that Cecelia and Debbie get that this is a work of love for and about the LGBTQ community as much as it is a conventional history book.

One day, Jessica Halem declared that I was her female husband. Why hadn’t we thought of that sooner? It was the perfect category for me as someone assigned female who happily took on many of the responsibilities typically expected of husbands. Being her female husband is my greatest joy, as I aspire to be worthy of all the love and laughter she has brought into my life.