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Media Contact: Nancy Hawley
Media garden photos available on request.
Phone: (252) 514-4937
Email: nhawley@tryonpalace.org
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The **SEA CAPTAIN'S WIFE**

A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century

By Martha Hodes

NEW BERN --- The first lecture in the 2008 African-American lecture series will take place on Thursday, January 17th at 7:00 p.m. in the auditorium in the Visitor Center at Tryon Palace Historic Sites & Gardens. Dr. Martha Hodes will discuss her award winning book, "The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century." This lecture is free and the public is invited. Books will be available for sale and a book signing will follow the lecture.

"Hodes is the rare scholar who can present historical research for mainstream readers." *Entertainment Weekly*

"Hodes's prose is lucid and her account engaging." *Publisher's Weekly*

"In this gem of historical writing and research, Hodes shows how a 19th-century white, working-class woman coped with the upheavals precipitated by industrialization, immigration, civil war, and racism." *Library Journal*

Eunice Stone was an ordinary woman from New Hampshire, white and working-class, but on November 3, 1869, she made an extraordinary decision. That day, Eunice married Smiley Connolly, a black sea captain from the West Indies. Even more remarkable, by marrying across the color line, Eunice transformed herself from a near-destitute Yankee widow of a Confederate soldier into a genteel lady in an elite family of color in the Caribbean.

From more than 500 family letters, and countless archives, census records, and local histories, Martha Hodes brings Eunice's story alive. Professor of history at New York University and winner of the Allan Nevins Prize for *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South*, Hodes knew she had uncovered something unusual when she came upon this trove of letters in the Duke University archives. Here she applies her expert knowledge to re-creating Eunice Connolly's uncommon life. Hodes also searched for and found descendants of both the New England and West Indian families and listened to their stories as well.

Through Hodes' meticulous research, we hear Eunice's voice in the letters she wrote to her family. We trace her earliest experiences in the cotton-mill towns of New Hampshire, where American-born workers resented Irish immigrants, and see that Eunice's first marriage, to carpenter William Stone, failed to ease the poverty she faced after her father's desertion. *I hardly know how we shall get along if William is out of work this winter*, Eunice wrote in 1857.

Eunice and William Stone's move to Mobile, Alabama, in the late 1850s was also an attempt to move up in the world, but the rewards of the Protestant work ethic eluded them there, too. In Mobile, came the Civil War -- not only for the nation but also for the family. While Eunice's husband joined the Confederate Army in the South, her two brothers up North fought for the Union. *What a dreadful thing war is*, Eunice wrote home. *Now I am with the North, all though I have to keep it to my self*. It was then that Eunice made her first unconventional decision: seven months pregnant, she took her young son and made her way North, back to her New England family. After the war, with one brother and her husband dead -- one on each side of the war -- Eunice found herself reduced to near-destitution, supporting herself and her two children as a servant and washerwoman, work usually relegated to Irish immigrants and black women. *I nearly gave up*, wrote Eunice in 1864, *but I will try and be strong*. But Eunice could not keep up her spirits as a single mother of two children, despite help from family members and church. Facing a deep depression, she returned to her mother's home to convalesce.

We will never know exactly how Eunice came to meet the black sea captain, but later letters point to a romantic courtship. As Eunice wrote to her mother from her new seaside home in the West Indies, *I often wish you could see us, and know just how happy he makes me & how much comfort we take together*. Still, by marrying a black man, Eunice gave up any claim to respectability in the United States. Indeed, her own brother never spoke or wrote to her again.

The sea captain Smiley Connolly promised Eunice he would never embark on a long voyage without her, knowing that she could not face the loss of another husband. Then, less than eight years after their wedding, Eunice, Smiley, and their children perished in a hurricane at sea.

As Hodes observes, “The world changed enormously over the course of Eunice’s life, offering her the occasion to ponder the grand themes of American history: class and opportunity, faith and religious practice, slavery and freedom, politics and war, racism and equality.” Through her eyes, we too can ponder these themes.

Impossible to put down, **THE SEA CAPTAIN’S WIFE** transports us to a world where race mattered a great deal, but where one woman made unusual choices. Against the vast sweep of the Civil War and racial politics, in Hodes’ page-turning style, we see first-hand how the great forces of history played out in the life of one ordinary -- and yet extraordinary -- woman.

About the Author:

Martha Hodes, professor of history at New York University, won the Allan Nevins Prize for *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South*. She has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the American Council of Learned Societies. She lives in New York City and Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

The Sea Captain's Wife: A True Story of Love, Race, and War in the Nineteenth Century is an alternate selection for Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Guild, and Quality Paperback Book Club; it was a finalist for the Lincoln Prize and was named a Best Book of 2006 by *Library Journal*.

Hodes received her PhD from Princeton University and also holds degrees from Harvard University and Bowdoin College. She is the recipient of fellowships from the National

Endowment for the Humanities, the American Council of Learned Societies, the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture of the New York Public Library, and the Whiting Foundation.

She serves as advisor for a variety of film projects, including a documentary feature-in-progress about lynching in America, and the PBS-TV series, "History Detectives." She lives in New York City and Swarthmore, Pennsylvania.

Martha Hodes, a professor of history at New York University, is also the author of *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South*, which won the Allan Nevins Prize for Literary Distinction in the Writing of History. She is also the editor of a collection of essays, *Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History*.

If you would like more information about this and other activities at Tryon Palace Historic Sites & Gardens, please telephone (800) 767-1560 or (252) 514-4900 or go to www.tryonpalace.org. # # #

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Tryon Palace Historic Sites & Gardens, located in New Bern, N.C., is part of the N.C. Department of Cultural Resources. Buildings currently open to the public include the reconstructed Tryon Palace, the John Wright Stanly House, the Robert Hay House and the New Bern Academy Museum. The visitor center and the first floor of Tryon Palace are accessible to visitors with disabilities. For directions and further information about special events, programs or group tours, phone 800-767-1560 or 252-514-4900 or check the web site: <http://www.tryonpalace.org/>