

A Woman's Place ... : An Historical Archaeological Investigation of Identity and Power on the Nineteenth Century Pastoral Landscape of Southeast Queensland

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An individual's perception of their place is integral to the complex processes of identity development and maintenance. These processes are highly contextual and occur in a dynamic landscape where power is a defining factor. In this thesis, using two case studies, I employ a microscalar approach to demonstrate that the identity of middle class women living on pastoral properties in southeast Queensland, Australia, in the nineteenth century was inseparable from the relational power of both their cultural landscape and the natural environment. The conceptual framework takes a multidisciplinary theoretical approach to the fusing of identity, landscape and agency within an interpretive historical archaeological methodology. This provides a fresh perspective on the individual's perception of place by emphasising the reciprocity of human-landscape interaction and demonstrating that either can be the agent instigating social change.

Within their specific historical context, which approximately spanned the Long Victorian period, the 'place' of the subjects of the case studies—Isabella Joyner Griffin and Katharine Somerset—is examined. This is a period when, in line with the western paradigm of separate spheres, place is a concept considered to be highly gendered, with 'a woman's place' assumed to be in the home where she was subservient to her father or husband within the confines of a patriarchal society.

In the Australian context, the few historical archaeological studies of middle class women that have been conducted have tended to focus on the performance of gentility, with an assumption of gender as the central characteristic of their identity. The methodology used in this thesis makes it possible to look beyond the social mores of Victorian gentility and to situate these women within the specifics of their particular historical contexts and to examine the relevance of this to their identities.

The archaeological evidence and historical data in these case studies engenders what has previously been considered a 'male' industry conducted in a harsh male environment, where tough men were determined to overpower and subdue 'mother nature'. Through the use of a feminist inclusive model, as developed by Spencer-Wood (2010), I establish that 'a woman's place' is a term that is infused with power and that Isabella Joyner Griffin and Katharine Somerset inhabited a landscape where, both within the family and the wider community, there was a complex, relational power structure. By demonstrating the heterarchical nature of the relationship that the individuals involved in the pastoral industry had with each other and with their landscape, it is apparent that even within the assumed rigid requirements of Victorian middle class society, on a pastoral property the place of an individual was determined by a suite of factors, of which gender was only one.

The place of individuals of any gender is determined by skills and relationships that result from the cross cutting of all the facets of their identity within their particular context/s, it is never based solely on gender. As these middle class women demonstrate, a woman's place can be evocative of the power women have to exercise their agency through both the routine and the unusual situations that arise in their day-to-day life and, importantly, to choose their own life-course.

References

- Spencer-Wood, S. 2010 A feminist framework for analyzing powered cultural landscapes in historical archaeology. *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 14(4):498–526.