

learn more about this in Chapter 11.) Or they worked as servants in middle-class homes. Even women who had to work were influenced by middle-class ideals. Many of them read the new ladies' magazines, pointing the way to a middle-class life style.

The nuclear family of mother, father and their children was but one form of family in early nineteenth-century America. Farm hands, apprentices, and others often found a place at the dinner table and were even treated as family members.

Young children had a very high **mortality** (*death rate*). Women generally had many more children than is typical today. At the same time, the number of children that families had in the Northeast was slowly decreasing. One reason was that women were getting slightly older before they married. Women themselves often died giving birth. They were usually assisted by midwives and surrounded by women while the men anxiously waited outside. There were no antibiotics, X-rays or other ways of preventing complications or fighting infection.

Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Americans

Not all Americans became married couples. Gay and lesbian Americans faced special challenges in this period. Sexual activity was viewed as sinful and was generally forbidden except between married couples. People saw same-sex preferences as a sign of criminality or mental instability. States even passed laws turning same-sex practices into criminal acts. In colonial times, the punishment was death, although this seems never to have been enforced. Pennsylvania repealed its death sentence for same-sex behavior in 1786. Its example was quickly followed by all the other states except North and South Carolina.

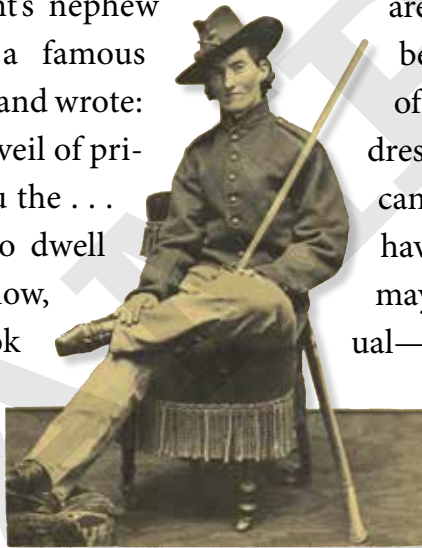
There was no literature or public support for those who had same sex preferences so gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans had to keep their true feelings hidden. There were still places where gay men could secretly express themselves, such as in all-male colleges, at sea, in the army, or in remote rural and frontier areas. Some historians, for example, think that Baron von Steuben, the Prussian who helped the Continental Army at Valley Forge, may have

been gay. With the growth of cities, a gay subculture appeared. The poet Walt Whitman was drawn to young men in the parks and dance halls of New York City. He even enjoyed just observing handsome young men in crowds, as reflected in his poem "Cross Brooklyn Ferry." But even Whitman sometimes denied his same-sex preferences in public.



Poet Walt Whitman

In the nineteenth century, many Americans did not think that women had sexual feelings at all. Sexual relations were a duty that a wife owed to her husband. Same-sex preferences were therefore not well understood. Women with strong romantic feelings towards other women might even be thought to be unwell. Unmarried women did, however, sometimes live together for many years in what were called “Boston marriages.” One historian has traced such a relationship between Charity Bryant (1777–1851) and Sylvia Drake (1784–1868). The two women met when they were in their twenties in 1806. Soon afterwards they built a house in Webridge, Vermont, where they lived for the next thirty years. Bryant’s nephew was William Cullen Bryant, a famous writer, who visited them in 1843 and wrote: “If I were permitted to draw the veil of private life, I would briefly give you the . . . story of two maiden ladies who dwell in this valley. I would tell you how, in their youthful days, they took each other as companions for life, and how this union, no less sacred to them than the tie of marriage, has subsisted



(lasted), in uninterrupted harmony, for more than forty years.” Most same-sex relationships were hidden, and it is often difficult to know the true feelings of those who lived at a time when people were not as open about them as today. The reformer Susan B. Anthony never married and had close female friendships, but it is unclear whether any of these were actually sexual relationships. Jane Addams, who lived later in the century, was the first modern social worker and lived with her friend Ellen Starr in a same-sex relationship.

Some women and men were also cross-dressers as the time, such as Charley Parkhurst (see Chapter 13). But once again their actions are largely hidden from historians because they lived in an atmosphere of fear and distrust. Women who dressed as men to fight in the American Revolution or the Civil War may have been simply patriotic or they may have also been lesbian or bisexual—but the truth cannot be known.

Transgender operations were, of course, impossible at the time because medical knowledge was too limited.

Indians

Indian tribes were not included in the U.S. Census, but there may have been as many as half a million Indians still living on U.S. territories in 1810. Only a few hundred of each tribe remained in New England or the Middle Atlantic states. Indian tribes began moving out of parts of the Northwest Territory after the defeat at Fallen Timbers and the Treaty of Greenville, but many

still remained. The largest number of Indians were found in the Southeast, where the “Five Civilized Tribes”—the Creek, Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw and Seminole—lived. Some of these tribes had created “civilized” communities with the characteristics of white settlements: a written language, constitution, organized government, houses, furniture and farming.