

**PHOTOGRAPHIC DOMESTICITY: THE HOME/STUDIOS OF ALICE  
AUSTEN, CATHARINE WEED BARNES WARD, AND FRANCES  
BENJAMIN JOHNSTON, 1885–1915**

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**ABSTRACT**

This dissertation explores transitions in women’s photographic practice in the United States from roughly 1885 to 1915. I examine the work of three photographers who negotiated the path from the more traditional and private Victorian ideal of womanhood to turn-of-the-century advanced ideas of a more public New Woman: Alice Austen (1866–1952), Catharine Weed Barnes Ward (1851–1913), and Frances Benjamin Johnston (1864–1952). Concurrently, a shift occurred within photography as women encountered changing definitions regarding what it meant to be an amateur, and it became increasingly acceptable for them to work as professionals. Finally, in the last decades of the nineteenth century women’s photographic workspaces also transformed from makeshift home studios to professional spaces outside the home. I center my focus in the

place where these three transitions merged: Victorian to New Woman, amateur to professional, and home to studio. I analyze how women photographers actively and creatively negotiated gender and used domestic ideology as a catalyst for personal advancement.

Austen used her home, and the homes of her friends, as the stage for private performances and tableaux mocking Victorian conventions. Chapter One focuses on her use of the parlor and bedroom as photographic sites. The subject of Chapter Two, Barnes Ward established her first studio in the family attic yet wrote public articles advocating for women photographers and served as a national editor for *The American Amateur Photographer*. She considered interior photography the purview of women, yet wrote tirelessly for gender equality across the medium. Johnston, the subject of Chapter Three, opened a fully professional photographic studio in Washington D.C., an elaborate two-story addition behind her parents' home including studio, darkroom, and personal office space. References to the Arts and Crafts movement, the colonial revival, and Kodak informed the decoration of her studio and her identity as a professional photographer. All three photographers used current domestic ideologies and spaces as empowering tools to further their photographic work rather than as a cage trapping them within a gendered role. Each will be

considered within a wider social network rather than as exceptional figures who veered far from the norm.