



<https://library.ndsu.edu/search-find/research/research-assistance/historical-sex-work-new-contributions-history-archaeology>

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**Kristen R. Fellows, Ph.D.**, is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology at North Dakota State University. Her research interests include historical archaeology, ethnohistory, the African Diaspora in the Caribbean and the US, race and gender, the plantation complex, and feminist archaeology and anthropology. She is the co-editor of *Historical Sex Work: New Contributions from History and Anthropology*.

**Abstract:** Vice districts, saloons, and prostitution are things of HBO series set in the West. And yet, the actual people who inhabited these roles and places had real effects on their communities. Melvina Massey, an African American brothel owner who lived in Fargo and ran one of the city's most notable establishments between the 1880s and 1911, serves as a case study through which to examine the history and larger impacts of those living on the fringes of society. After students in Dr. Angela Smith's public history class first discovered Madam Massey in the local archives, Smith continued to look for more in-depth biographical data that would help shed light on broader historical patterns. Dr. Kristen Fellows, a historical archaeologist with research interests in race, gender, and the African Diaspora, joined the research team in 2014 and added an anthropological approach to the mix. Their collaboration has resulted in an exhibit on the red-light district in Fargo (2017) and an edited volume on the topic of historical sex work (2020) which includes chapters on Massey and her brothel. This talk will focus on Massey, but also on recent advances in the history and archaeology of historical sex work.

## Laws

## [Bawdy Houses](#)

1911 North Dakota Law outlawing “All bawdy houses, houses of ill fame, of assignation or of prostitution, or any other house, room or place for persons to visit for unlawful sexual intercourse, or for any other lewd, obscene, or indecent purpose....”

## [Chapter 12.1-29](#)

Current North Dakota Century Code on prostitution.

## [Sex trafficking: an overview of federal criminal law](#)

"Sex trafficking is a state crime. Federal law, however, makes it a federal crime to conduct the activities of a sex trafficking enterprise in a way that affects interstate or foreign commerce or that involves travel in interstate or foreign commerce."

## **Articles**

### [White Slavery, Whorehouse Riots, Venereal Disease, and Saving Women: Historical Context of Prostitution Interventions and Harm Reduction in New York City during the Progressive Era](#)

This paper will examine the historical context of interventions with sex workers in New York City during the Progressive Era (1890–1920). Present at the time, though under a different name, the harm reduction approach was largely dismissed. These same moral underpinnings may be active today in driving interventions and policy toward those that are morally focused and away from those that focus on harm reduction and structural change.

## **Media**

### [Selling Sex: 19th Century New York City Prostitution and Brothels](#)

Podcast by Elizabeth Garner Masarik. In 19th century New York City, sex was for sale and it wasn't hard to find it. Commodified sex was everywhere and available for any price. The years between roughly 1850 to about 1910 were the years that commercialized sex and vice in New York City were the most visible, the most prolific, and the most wild. Join us for a journey into the brothels and dance halls of early New York City.

### [A Brothel Reveals Its Secrets: CAS Archaeology Team Examines 19th-century Artifact](#)

s Boston's infamous Big Dig construction project, which rerouted the city's Central Artery, unearthed a trove of archaeological treasures in a 19th-century brothel's outhouse. Buried there were items of importance to the women who made their living outside the margins of polite society: hairbrushes, medicines, and vaginal syringes used for self-medicating and cleaning.

### [Privy Shaft a Window to Brothel's Past](#)

August 20, 2016, Grand Forks Herald article detailing lead-up to archaeological dig at Fargo's Chrystal Palace brothel.

### [Archaeologists Find Toys, Bottles and Debris of Daily Life at Former Fargo Brothel](#)

October 20, 2016, Fargo Forum article detailing archaeological findings from Chrystal Palace excavation.

### [Unearthing Fargo's Promiscuous Past](#)

October, 22, 2016, KVRR TV news report on Chrystal Palace excavation, with video.

## **Bibliographies**

[Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society's Bibliography of Sex Work](#)

[Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society's Bibliography of Sex Trafficking](#)

## **Statistics**

[Human Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation: The Statistics Behind the Stories](#)

From World Without Exploitation.