

## Elizabeth Robins Diary Podcast

Episode One. At <https://www.erdiary.com/>

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Transcript by Joanne Gates.

[Look also for Notes that accompany this Podcast.]

(Music plays)

NATALIE KAHLER: (Reading from ER Diary): "March 16, 1895. Home in London. I think I must leave a brief record behind me for the Enlightenment of the people who will care for me, to the effect that it is my firm and well-considered opinion that any account of the way I have spent my life must be more misleading than true. This is especially the case with my own accounts. I realize it even more after glancing through Diaries and old letters I have written, although I am conscious without these proofs how impossible it is for me to escape, or commonly wish to escape, from self-misrepresentation. In the first place, I have a constitutional unwillingness to let people know what seems to me to be the real me. I'm afraid I have moods when I delight to darken counsel on this subject. If I see anyone trying to ferret me out, my greatest delight is to baffle and elude my pursuer and leave him contentedly following a false scent. I don't try to defend this little eccentricity. At times, I deplore it. But I must content myself with trying to warn my relations and my friends that they will not find me or any explanation of me in anyone's description or in any letter or diary of my own. I have partly deliberately, and partly unconsciously, "cooked" my accounts. I have worked harder and idled more, suffered both more and less than I have said--or anyone suspected. The most extraordinary and illuminating experiences of my life I have

not attempted, nor wanted, to pass on. It is my belief that these things should die with the person chiefly concerned. I am conscious that in talking and writing to the nearest and most trusted friends, I sometimes suppress and I sometimes embroider. I may determine they shall think so and so; and if that is the case, I am careful not to damage my cause. The deception I have practiced has been more often than not in the direction of making my acquaintance think I am happy and prosperous, when in fact I am not either. This has almost always been my policy in writing home: to comfort my people. To please them, to justify myself to them, I have picked the plums out of my cake and presented them as specimens of my fare. It is a positive anguish to me to admit disappointment, failure, or loss. I would rather be damned than pitied. My "optimism" is wholesale and blandly unprincipled. I will insist all is well till all is over. It is my infirmity; my friends must bear with it. I have been amused of late, thinking these things over, to hear it said or to read in various biographies how such and such a view must be correct because the person of whom the thing is asserted said himself that it was true. Indeed, I think, and how do you know he understood himself? And how do you know, granting his self-knowledge, that he had also the gift of self-revelation? That is an art in itself. And granting his possession of the knowledge and the art to convey it, how am I to be assured that he was on this particular occasion exercising those gifts? People say the maddest things about themselves. I don't know that I ever heard a self-analysis that struck me as balanced, sane, true, however honestly intended. Most if not all of us are occasionally engaged, consciously or unconsciously, in making ourselves out better or worse than we really are. The last evidence to be trusted is that given by the subject of the inquiry. He is obviously too much interested in the case to be a trustworthy witness. Away with him! His friends? They are prejudiced, too. His enemies? Almost as much. How then shall we get at any true estimate of the dead? We cannot; that is just my point. So let's have done with trying-- especially in a case like mine-- when nothing depends upon even an approximate justice of appraisal. Just one person knows me as well as

anyone being may know another. That one will have few doubts on any matter touching my brief memory. And that one will not be able to speak. Let others, then, suspend their judgment of Elizabeth Robins."

(Music)

NATALIE KAHLER: Welcome to the Elizabeth Robins Diary Podcast. I'm your host Natalie Kahler. In this series we will examine entries from over 50 years of diaries kept by Elizabeth, covering the Gilded Age through post World War Two. Elizabeth's life will take us from Kentucky to New York to London to Alaska and innumerable other places. We'll meet authors Henry James and Mark Twain, US presidents and European royalty. Elizabeth will mine for gold on two continents, translate Henrik Ibsen's plays into English and bring them to the London stage, and drum up international support for women's suffrage.

I first came to know about Elizabeth in 2015 when I stumbled on her estate in my hometown of Brooksville, Florida, just six minutes north of the city. It is a sprawling 2000-acre estate that has been government land since the 1930s. I instantly fell in love with the land and the people who lived on it and became committed to sharing their inspiring stories with anyone who would listen. After eight years of research, I understand and love Elizabeth even more but still find myself amazed at new discoveries on a regular basis. So this podcast will call on the research of many others who will add to our knowledge of not just Elizabeth but the tumultuous times in which she lived. This first episode will be dedicated to getting to know Elizabeth. And what better way to do it than with Dr. Joanne Gates, a professor who has written a comprehensive biography on her, but is also responsible for the Elizabeth Robins Web. Welcome, Dr. Gates. Thank you so much for joining us on the Elizabeth Robins Diary Podcast.

DR. JOANNE GATES: It's a pleasure to be here.

NATALIE KAHLER: I think people get excited about celebrities of different kinds. I am over the moon about getting to talk to you today. One of my New Year's

resolutions was to not use the word "excited" anymore. So I have to think of alternate ways to say that. But I barely could sleep last night because I am so excited about this opportunity to pick your brain. It's always fun to talk to people who know more about things than you and can inform you on that. So thank you so much for taking the time.

DR. JOANNE GATES: Well, I'm very impressed with the array of your interview schedules. And this is a great opportunity to spread the word about the Robins family.

NATALIE KAHLER: Absolutely.

DR. JOANNE GATES: And the issues that they were all involved in. Very impressive.

NATALIE KAHLER: Yes. It's kind of hard to get a grasp on sometimes; and I love the idea of just being able to kind of land on very specific things, one at a time, and that's what we're going to keep doing. So why don't you talk to the audience about what it is that you do for a living and how you ended up on this podcast with me in this space talking about Elizabeth?

DR. JOANNE GATES: So, I am recently retired as professor of English at Jacksonville State University and that's in Jacksonville, Alabama. My biography of Robins was published in 1994, but it draws heavily from my dissertation which was finished in 1987. Since 1996-- so nine years after that dissertation was produced--I've maintained the Elizabeth Robins Web at JSU. My plan was to keep online an updated bibliography. And it was originally supposed to be a place for-- a repository or at least links to-- the public domain texts of Elizabeth Robins. Those papers that I delivered at conferences are also finding a home online with public access at our library's Digital Commons. What I've tried to do is link some of those papers to the library site that holds them.

NATALIE KAHLER: So, we're on video. We're just recording audio. But you can see me. And I want you to see I've got your book here, and here's all my sticky notes

that I've added over the years of ways to find things. And it really is an incredible book. And we will definitely put a link in at the show notes to tell people how to get ahold of it. So just starting from scratch, if somebody did not know anything about Elizabeth Robins at all, how would you describe her?

DR. JOANNE GATES: Well, she was determined to almost defy her family hopes for her higher education and go on the stage and be an actress. She had several years where she was a prominent touring actress with first the James O'Neill Company then with the Boston Theatre Company. And she had a brief tour with the Lawrence Barrett-Edwin Booth touring company. But then she got a chance to go to England and fell in love with the English stage and decided this is where I have to make my stand as an actress. Simultaneous with her acting career-- including the premiere of many Ibsen roles in the '90s--she started writing fiction under a pseudonym. By the time her pseudonym was disclosed (against her will, in 1898), the works she had published under C.E. Raimond --spelled R-a-i-m-o-n-d--were almost making her reputation, especially *The Open Question*, published 1898. And then she went on and developed a voice in fiction that sort of transpired over the decades, partly because of issues she got involved in. She wrote two novels that are centered in Alaska. She was determined to take a trip to Alaska 1900. She wrote two novels that are centered in Florida. But her biggest claim to fame is probably her suffrage years. She wrote a very successful play called *Votes for Women* and adapted that into the novel called *The Convert*. Then later another women's issue she is connected to is probably her next most famous and most important novel, *My Little Sister*. It's about a young girl who gets abducted into White Slavery and is told from the point of view of the older sister who has no way to get some help tracing her. And then she continued to write fiction into even into the '20s.

NATALIE KAHLER: Yes, I initially thought that she had the pseudonym just because it was just still kind of odd for women to be writing at that point. But really if you look back at the kinds of things that she was writing, it was almost like she just

wanted the freedom to talk about some really controversial things without having the weight of that being over her own reputation-- because she explored a lot of women's issues that were not really being addressed at the time.

DR. JOANNE GATES: Yes, and not only women's issues but I think she wanted to separate her acting career, at the beginning especially, from her writing career. She didn't want to be defined [in her writing] as an Ibsenite. She even says that when her pseudonym is disclosed. But yes, I think you're right about the women's issues, and, in some ways, she can hide under the pseudonym and "mock" the New Woman who is a writer trying to adapt her own novel to the stage. That first novel, called *George Mandeville's Husband*, is very sympathetic to the poor husband Ralph, whose wife has taken a pseudonym and written as a man or at least semi-disguised as a man and really walked away from the duties of home.

NATALIE KAHLER: Oh, absolutely. So why, going back to the acting career, why do you think the acting was so controversial in her family--because it definitely made her dad really mad.

DR. JOANNE GATES: Yes, probably her father had ambitions that she would go to college and / or be a doctor. And I think her grandmother was quite harsh about her choice thinking that it was not a good profession. I even looked at one letter recently, and I saw where the grandmother Jane Hussey Robins was saying (this is after Elizabeth had already become an actress) -- she was trying to persuade her that there are certain roles that aren't desirable; you should refuse those, as if the reputation of the actress depended on the type of role she was accepting.

NATALIE KAHLER: So, she does the writing, she's doing the acting: what was the motivation to start the writing when she is obviously already doing so well at a pretty young age with her acting career.

DR. JOANNE GATES: Well, she was known as an important actress. But I don't think she was making that much money from it. Most of the Ibsen roles were sort of

afternoon matinees with limited runs. And they got a lot of press attention, but she really did have to support herself by accepting commercial management acting; and I think got tired of it, especially their restrictions in terms of "I sign a contract with this manager and he owns my acting rights for the year that the play is running." And a lot of these were melodramas. She could do well in them. But she had actually seen James O'Neill lose his status as an actor of note because he repeatedly played the *Count of Monte Cristo*. [Note that Oneill's son, playwright Eugene O'Neill, fictionalizes the single role career, in his portrait of James Tyrone in *Long Days Journey Into Night*.] Although she played the romantic lead opposite him, she could see that to define yourself by the one role is not necessarily how you want to be known in the theater. So, I think it was a money thing she even did some translation for hire. But I think her motivation there was that she'd been introduced to Ibsen in translation and wanted some control over how to get a better acting translation of some of the Ibsen parts.

NATALIE KAHLER: Well, that makes sense. One of her earliest short stories is called "Herstory of a Button" and I'd like for you to walk us through that story and tell us what you think it tells us about her.

DR. JOANNE GATES: Okay, it's one word, "herstory"; and at the time I discovered it, of course, the word "herstory"--it has sort of entered the feminist lexicon. But I thought how unusual that this pops out on a schoolgirl exercise. It's the most substantive of the short pieces in a folder of schoolgirl exercises. I was able to get it published in a journal and now it's online at the Robins Web. It has the markings of her teacher and a later annotation by the older Elizabeth. A colleague of mine classifies it as an "it narrative," in other words, one that is narrated by a non-human. A button is telling the story, and it remembers some highlights of its life: being on a card in the store, being sewn onto a young girl's school dress, being lost in a classroom, and hearing about George Washington described as the father of his country. When a girl stands up to ask why don't we hear anything of George Washington buttons, the teacher has to remind her she

is out of order. Robins has annotated in the margin, "That naughty child was me.!" At the end of the story—it is kind of sad--the button has gotten picked up by a baby and the mother preserves the button, for the baby had gone to where buttons do not fall off. So, it's clever for a school girl, and there's a little bit of grammar correction. But I think the teacher liked it, too.

NATALIE KAHLER: And she was a young girl; I mean she was obviously a very talented writer from the very beginning. So, do you see earlier uses of the word "herstory," prior to her?

DR. JOANNE GATES: I haven't really looked but I did look up who was given credit for the modern meaning of "herstory"; and I came up with this, Googling it, that it was coined by Robin Morgan in 1970 in the volume *Sisterhood is Powerful*. I don't think she (Robins) recalls using that word as a schoolgirl in her later feminist writings. There's one title that she has where it's called just "The Feministe Movement in England," but she uses the French spelling with an E at the end, as if she doesn't have a word in English for feminist, which I find interesting. Then she wrote an essay called "Paternalism," and a correspondent replied back and said you have coined a new meaning of paternalism; it doesn't just mean parenting, but it means all the maleness over the activity of taking care of people in the paternalistic way. In other words, making a sort of feminist attack on the idea of paternalism: that was what she thought was her correspondent knew for its age. So there are interesting aspects of coining words I think that go beyond, but I don't know that she really was even in later years conscious of the uniqueness of her schoolgirl impulse.

NATALIE KAHLER: Yes, well, I'm going to give her credit for the word! Just going to keep on going until somebody corrects me on that --even if she doesn't remember!

DR. JOANNE GATES: The online version has a little bit more of my introduction. I'm not sure I bring in Robin Morgan there, but I can't really track prior uses. And of



course, it's a false etymology; it's not "his" story from the original it's the, again, the French, for "the story," or whatever.

NATALIE KAHLER: Right, right. So, we're going to find out as we go on that her career is mainly based in England. How does she end up in a rural estate in Florida, at Chinsegut Hill? And I know you know that I know the answer to that question, but I am going to let you say it anyway.

DR. JOANNE GATES: You're closer to this than I am, but what I have here is that Robins' longest time not in America was in 1888 to '98, and then she came here in 1898. And then in 1900, there's this long diary that is her travels to Alaska to find her two brothers, especially Raymond. She spends only half a day with Saxton. And after this 1900 trip to reunite with the youngest brother after which or at the end of which they both came down with typhoid, Robins had increasing health problems. She and Raymond wanted a type of Roadhouse or resting home where they could vacation, relax, recharge. I think she probably made some money from *The Magnetic North*, the 1904 novel based on her brothers' 1897 to '98 winter where he's trying to get to the Klondike. I think she writes him that I have five or six thousand dollars in the Zanesville bank that I want you to use for this purpose. They used Elizabeth's money for this purchase. Shortly after he made the purchase, he met and married Margaret Dreier. So, it became more that couple's home, with Elizabeth visiting and still having a partial ownership but knowing that it's just a visit. Robins was able by the end of this decade, right after she wrote the novel *The Convert*, I believe; she was able to purchase an historic house in Sussex England. and that's called Backsettown. I think she knew by then that much of her influence and audience would depend on that life as well; [she saw more clearly she would] stay in England where she became, from late 1906 onward, an important voice for women's suffrage.

NATALIE KAHLER: Yes, I often there is definitely a misconception that Raymond was the one that owned the property and that's something that I always correct on my tours because it was Elizabeth's money. Raymond did some involvement in

managing and helping with the renovation of the property. But she bought it, and she didn't even realize he'd spent as much as he did because the property itself was only like \$1800 which is still like under \$200,000 in today's money so they got that very inexpensively. But then the renovations were another three thousand or so. And she ends up giving half of the estate to Margaret as a wedding gift but it's not until the '20s that Raymond ends up having any kind of ownership of it at all. So it's pretty cool that it was two women owning that place.

DR. JOANNE GATES: Raymond was very sensitive to knowing that Margaret had a lot of money. And I do believe that some of her Margaret's trust or whatever helped pay for the upkeep, or the repairs and upgrades at Chinsegut. I don't believe they had running water or hot water, you know; things that were kind of important to making it more of a permanent living quarters. And Raymond was real sensitive that he wasn't a rich a person. He devoted so much of his life to progressive causes and outreach to the down and out. But a kind of myth arose that perhaps he had made some money from gold mining in Alaska. And he just sort of went with that and didn't bother to correct the record, so to speak.

NATALIE KAHLER: Yes, there's definitely speeches. I think that it became kind of a protection of him of him feeling like he was protecting Margaret by not letting people think that he married her for his money --because he would make speeches about becoming independent in Alaska when we know that's not true. So, it'll be interesting we'll talk about that I'm sure more when we get into *Raymond and I* and at a later point in some other season. So, Dr. Gates, what do you consider the most fascinating incident in Elizabeth's super fascinating life?

DR. JOANNE GATES: I thought about this a minute. I document this in my book: I think when she met Henry James. She describes that event in a continuation of her autobiography that didn't get published, and I think it's been cited by more than myself. But it's 1891, and she got a chance to be interviewed for the opportunity to be in his adaptation of his novel *The American*. And she is realizing that he

wants her for a bit part of the older woman because he's seen her in a role a little bit like that. And she is assuming that she's going to play Claire, the romantic lead, so to speak. And the description of it-- I—I've got to read one sentence at least--

NATALIE KAHLER: Yeah, go ahead--

DR. JOANNE GATES: So, he "hemmed and hawed" trying to explain what he really wants, and he's "balancing himself carefully, holding on to the arms of protective parenthesis." And it's so typical of James when he separates his clauses with dashes and parentheses and commas that I got a kick out of it. What he's attempting to say is no I don't want you for the lead I want you for my old housekeeper, "Mrs. Bread!" And she's kind of --she really does talk him into playing the lead part. And I think it's because the actor manager's wife gets pregnant so she replaces her. But those chairs that they first met in became chairs that he passed on to Elizabeth Robins.

NATALIE KAHLER: Oh, wow!

DR. JOANNE GATES: And so, there's a kind of a link to their continuing relationship. And of course, she publishes the volume of letters called *Theatre and Friendship*. And the other thing that I think strongly connects her to Henry James is that she is with James's nephew Harry; they have come to America on the same boat in 1916. And I think reporters come on board to pull Harry aside to announce that his uncle has died, Henry James. And she immediately wrote a letter [published soon after in the New York Times] that she appends to *Theatre and Friendship*, saying that his wish was for the US to join the war on Britain's side against Germany. And she feels strongly that the agony of seeing England at war was part of what killed him. Of course, he had a bad heart condition and everything else. And they knew the end was near. But it's quite poignant that she is there when it happens and you can see that in the diary.

NATALIE KAHLER: Yes, and her relationship with Harry will continue for quite a while there's a lot of letters back and forth between the two of them.

DR. JOANNE GATES: And she, I believe, stays with him when she comes back to America during the next war, 1940, which-- That period of time I've taken a new interest in-- trying to find some more research-- but I'm actually contemplating a novel based on Robins. And in many ways, it reminds me what's going on now with our war in Europe and the effort to turn back Putin and his army. And what agonies Elizabeth really had because Britain was being bombed. There's one letter where she writes, I think to Margaret, that, "Oh I have that christening dress of our ancestors *if* it hasn't been bombed." And her country home in Sussex is where it is. So, it's quite interesting that that she was touched by James not just the relationship but the news of his death.

NATALIE KAHLER: Absolutely. And he is definitely one of the more important ones, but she had a *lot* of famous friends over the years. So, besides the James relationship, which one interests you the most?

DR. JOANNE GATES: Well, it has to be Florence Bell. And although she appears in *Theatre and Friendship* with some correspondence, you don't realize the depth of the way that she continually wrote to Florence Bell. I believe it was she -- probably Florence Bell-- who knew Henry James before she [Robins] did and helped with the introduction. But Florence Bell died in 1930 and made a promise that she would turn all her letters that Elizabeth had written to her back to her. I think this helped with not just the *Theatre and Friendship* volume but *Both Sides of the Curtain*. And you just get a *wonderful* closeness to their relationship. She would always go to Florence to have her read a manuscript that she had written. They attempted a couple of times to collaborate on things and sometimes Florence would turn the project over to Elizabeth and then vice versa. They did collaborate on that anonymous play called *Alan's Wife*. It was published anonymously. It is now credited to the both of them, and it was their adaptation of a short story, translated, I believe, from the Swedish. But a lot of scholars

write about it as if it's Robins own philosophy I guess you could say. And it features a woman who smothers her infant knowing that he's going to grow up-- or may not grow up --he's born deformed. Her husband has just died in a mining accident and she has no-- nobody to support her. The whole last or third act or scene is Robins mute on the stage accepting the guilty verdict, basically, and knowing that she's going to go to her death. And I guess it made a sensation in its time. But I don't credit the philosophy behind killing's one child directly to her. They just grabbed a neat story that could be adapted. And it was a sensation for the audience, but I don't think anything she was credited for in her lifetime.

NATALIE KAHLER: Well, and what I like about the Bell relationship is it shows that you can really be mentored and be involved with people that you don't necessarily agree with on everything because they definitely were not on the same page as far as the suffrage movement went. And they were both brilliant women who had well thought out their opinions and they didn't agree on stuff and that was okay. And I would love it if we could get back to that point in this society today.

DR. JOANNE GATES: There's a moving letter where she has turned her [*Votes for Women* play] into the novel, *The Convert*, and sends it to Florence mostly finished and says if you disapprove, I won't publish. And Florence goes ahead. But it does show you that we can still be friends and agree to disagree, so to speak.

NATALIE KAHLER: Yes. I'm still trying to find --and I have not really examined that section of her life enough to have found it-- but just figuring out what the relationship then was with Gertrude Bell because you know she was you know the female Lawrence of Arabia and doing all of these really fascinating things. And I can definitely see the two of them being friends and hanging out. But I haven't found that yet.

DR. JOANNE GATES: They did share some intimacies, and I didn't know it at the time I was writing the book but Gertrude had a love affair with a man who died at

Gallipoli. And I think Robins was pulled into that awareness. And she reviewed one of her travel books, I think around [1911]. It's on my website. And also [ER] did a radio address for the BBC upon the death of Gertrude. So, I think it was a pretty close relationship, and Gertrude, I think, not just was against women's suffrage but actually wrote or spoke enough about saying why she was against it to know that there was friction, but they still endured with the friendship.

NATALIE KAHLER: Elizabeth was really important --we talked about it a little bit earlier in the suffrage movement in England-- but there were lots of different ways to be involved in the suffrage movement and there were things that she didn't do like we're not going to find her in prison; she did not want to think that was a good idea as an American in England. But what sorts of things was she participating in to help the movement move forward?

DR. JOANNE GATES: I want to go back to what she wrote to another suffrage leader, Millicent Fawcett, I believe when she was working on *Votes for Women*; she wrote that it was the first thing I've sort of put my heart in with a "moral purpose." And she saw especially these open-air suffrage meetings as galvanizing to a public that was eager to join the movement, so to speak. I don't think any of the suffragists thought that the effort to get women's suffrage would take so long. And I'm very impressed that she was the first President of the Women Writers Suffrage League and addressed them at least once or twice in versions that are preserved in publication. In early 1913, she collected all her suffrage letters, pamphlets (I guess not all because some are not are not present), but speeches--and she spoke twice at these mass meetings at the Albert Hall-- and they are collected in a volume called *Way Stations* that, again, you can find online. She was also briefly-- and I think it was a diplomatic move-- on the board of the WSPU (that really Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst pretty much ran). The Pethick-Lawrences, man and wife, were also part of it until they got kicked off. And my read of it is that they kept Robins on for a little while more just as a token, to say they weren't as autocratic as they were trying to be.

She later broke from the Pankhursts and thought their movement had become too sort of "obey the general" kind of thing, autocratic and not diplomatic and democratic. Her speeches on behalf of suffrage were not spontaneous like some of the other suffrage speakers. And I think she gets at the spontaneity in the fiction and the play where people come up and are able to talk down the hecklers, basically. That's what some of this writing that she was doing was good at conveying. But her own speech was probably carefully prepared, and even practiced. I think they drew her in because of her stature as much as anything. In episodes where she knew there was violence about to happen, she was at the fringes. But it was a deliberate effort to ride in a taxi cab and pick up the wounded when it was known that the police had permission to rough up the women. I think Churchill had just taken an important position as the Home Secretary and said we're not going to have any more arrests. Yet the police took that as a license to kind of, you know, scare them away with their clubs.

NATALIE KAHLER: Right.

DR. JOANNE GATES: And her description of how battered some of them became and then raced back out into the fight: it was quite moving.

NATALIE KAHLER: well and I think that's probably why she ended up learning self-defense and I don't know if you've seen it but there's a graphic novel that shows her in the suffrage movement as kind of the bodyguard of the Pankhursts. And it's super funny but she's doing jiu jitsu the whole time. And I just thought it was a great nod to Elizabeth. You don't see her show up very often in fiction, but yeah it was a graphic novel from just a few years ago that was written about it.

DR. JOANNE GATES: I think she interviewed somebody either it's in *The Convert* or preparation to write *The Convert*. And she got the idea that women sort of secretly carried dog whips and pulled them out and were able to fight back that way. I'm not sure the truth of that but it was attractive. And then I think the description of the way that the militants smashed all the windows is quite

moving. This doesn't come directly from her, but she supports the effort after it happens-- I think to the horror of some of her closer friends-- but their tactic was to hide their hammers they're going to smash the windows with inside of very fashionable that season big fancy muffs that were their hand warmers. And this was clever.

NATALIE KAHLER: Whatever works, I guess. But I think one of the things that's not really been addressed too much is the fact that she was so persuasive in what she was doing and writing and speaking. And there is such a great line from Evelyn Sharp who ends up being really important in the suffrage movement and hadn't cared a thing about it until she went and heard Elizabeth speak and then she said basically her life would never be the same after that.

DR. JOANNE GATES: Oh, great!

NATALIE KAHLER: Yes, and it's just; it's amazing in how many ways she's just been under-represented in the way that we remember the events of those days.

DR. JOANNE GATES: And is it correct that Robins wrote an introduction to Sharp's *Rebel Women*?

NATALIE KAHLER: Yes, *Rebel Women*.

DR. JOANNE GATES: I haven't seen that in print but it's one of the many editions of that book by Evelyn Sharp, yes.

NATALIE KAHLER: All right, so I didn't give you this question, but you and I share a favorite object at Chinsegut. And you wrote about it in the last chapter of your book. Talk to me about the door knocker.

DR. JOANNE GATES: I reference it at the end, saying that it sustained me. I visited Chinsegut just once, in 1987, in January, and I did talk to Lisa von Borowsky. And she let me look over the place and take photos. But it's a huge big knocker. It is just scripted "E Robins 1771," right?



NATALIE KAHLER: Correct, right.

DR. JOANNE GATES: And there's a great grandfather; the first Ephraim Robins was probably the "E Robins" that it refers to. But of course, this is also Elizabeth Robins. And so, I think it becomes a link for me about the way she cherished not just written records of her ancestors but artifacts.

NATALIE KAHLER: One of the other things on the door knocker is another way that she brought --just like the buttons in her story --she does bring that door knocker into *The Open Question* and it's kind of a character in that novel and you can gauge where the family is emotionally and financially based on the condition of the door knocker which I just thought was really brilliant.

DR. JOANNE GATES: Oh, that's neat! I hadn't I hadn't picked that up. I want to go back; it's one of the first and longest books we transcribed. And one early recognition of Robins was a woman who was close to Zanesville collaborated with me to go up and participate in Elizabeth Robins Day at the 100th year of the printing of *The Open Question* [1998]. And one thing I did-- that was one of the early transcribed efforts I did for the Robins Web. And of course, there are whole new ways to put books online now that surpassed what we were doing back in the mid-nineties. But I was able to present that *The Open Question* can now be read online. And they showed me around and they were proud of the house. And they still, like you I think; it's owned now by the Muskingum County (Ohio) Historical Society. And I've recently corresponded with them. And of course, one of the claims to fame of that house was it was presumed to be a station on the Underground Railroad. And I was taken up to visit Jane's grave and she's in the so-called abolition circle of the prominent members of Zanesville that were for the abolition of slavery as most of the town of Zanesville was set up that way. I'm sorry it's Putnam that is a northern suburb of Zanesville that is the abolitionist offshoot of the town, and of course Putnam Female Seminary was near to her home. She probably walked to school when she was --

NATALIE KAHLER: Right! Yes. So I have this quote that I found just this morning and I really like it because I feel like Elizabeth was a very serious person but she was also very playful; and I think this shows both, that she says "In 1872 Susan B Anthony went to the polls, voted, was arrested, tried, and fined for her audacity. In the same year, Victoria Woodhull\*\*\*, a woman notorious for relations with men, ran for the presidency, and her equally disrespectful sister ran for Congress. In the same year, Elizabeth Robins, aged ten, left Staten Island to live with her grandmother and go to school. Ergo, the year 1872 was one of the considerable feminist activity in the USA." And I just thought that is such a fantastic thing. How do you think her playfulness and also just deep, deep seriousness helped or hurt her work?

DR. JOANNE GATES: I think she does have that seriousness and yet the ability to humanize or at least ironize it. I love that quote; it's in the end of my first chapter. And it was written on a scrap of paper which is one example of-- even though the archive is exquisitely organized and you can methodically work through things—you are always discovering oddities that you didn't know were there. I think there are there are a couple others; most of them I've quoted. I say that is included in a scrap of paper filed with the manuscript "Theodora." Theodora was her fictional name for her young actress self. And there are unpublished several volumes. I think "Theodora A Pilgrimage" is one of them, where she's starting to work on the stage. She is brand new in New York, trying to get just the first job, and she has an epiphany moment when she is "reciting the Ophelia." She hears the brass curtain rod echo back to her; it vibrates and it tells her that you have got a good voice, a voice that's worth perfecting. She is taking voice lessons. but I believe that's in the fictional version of the Theodora. And I would like to see--I stress this more than some other writers with a couple of exceptions-- the manuscripts of titles that never got published are very rich in the Fales. And I did learn within the last several months that her play called *My Little Sister* is now published. I had originally had a plan to put several of her

plays and her short fiction of actresses on the stage in England together and make a volume. But I guess teaching and the web commitment and revising the biography for publication got in the way of that. But it came out in I believe 2015. I hadn't known about it till I was searching and searching. And it's worth a look because it's different from the way the novel ends, which I always found interesting.

NATALIE KAHLER: Besides reading your book which everyone should do and going to the website which we'll link in the show notes, if somebody wants to learn more about Elizabeth what do you think is the best resource to do that?

DR. JOANNE GATES: Well, there's of course the other full-length biography; it's by Angela John and it's called *Staging a Life*. And we kind of published about the same year, although I had obviously gotten my version that was in the dissertation out before that. There is another very important work that I link to: Sue Thomas, also in 1994, I believe, published the monogram that was a bibliography. And that's now been made into an online document, and I find that just so rich with the things that I keep finding. And there have been a few besides mine, "The Herstory of a Button" and the *Alaska Klondike Diary* there have been some very good scholars publishing posthumous works of Robins. One is that Kerry Powell got Robins' essay on Oscar Wilde published in a journal. It's not published as a work but Brenda Weber -- and this is in my bibliography-- has worked on an unpublished volume called "White Violets" and I think there she's also quite satiric and humorous.

NATALIE KAHLER: Well Dr. Gates, it has been an honor. So grateful to you for all of this time and all of the wisdom and knowledge that you have imparted on us for this episode and we're all looking forward to just diving deep into these different aspects of Elizabeth's life and getting to know her-- maybe someday as well as you know her already.

DR. JOANNE GATES: I have to thank you for your enterprise. Hopefully it'll introduce a lot of new people to the importance of their lives-- all the Robinses-- and the scholarship that has happened but also what needs to continue because I think there's lots to discover still.

NATALIE KAHLER: Dr. Gates and I have touched on a lot. But from here on out we're going to do deeper dives into one subject at a time, like why she pushed George Bernard Shaw out of her carriage and into the mud. But that is a story for another podcast.

(Music)

Thank you for listening to the Elizabeth Robins Diary Podcast, a creation and production of Brooksville Main Street a nonprofit focused on economic redevelopment through historic preservation and placemaking. The podcast is made possible with the help of a generous grant from Florida Humanities and the brilliant minds of our guest experts like Dr. Gates. Would you please consider following and rating the podcast? By following us, you'll be sure not to miss an episode. And rating is a super-helpful way to help us spread the word and support all the hard work of the following people Leif Thomason of Odd Life Studios produced this content, as well as editing mixing and mastering it. Tom and Patria Dye opened Profound Revelation Studios in Downtown, allowing us to create this content right in the heart of Brooksville. The docents of Chinsegut Hill Historic Site and Andrea Reed generously provided research support and advice. Elizabeth Robins' diary and letters are housed in the Special Collections in New York University's Fales Library. Those resources are quoted with the kind permission of Independent Age, a registered charity number 210729. Find out more about them at [independentage.org](http://independentage.org). Barry Meindl of DeBarr Design created our lovely graphics. Allisa Babor of Roots Creative Company designed an amazing website and social media. Randi Olsen of Live Oak Theatre wrote and performed our theme song, "Time is Whispering." Special thanks to Florida Humanities for assisting with funding the Podcast, especially Lindsey Morrison who believed in

the project when it was just a spreadsheet and a dream from the little city of Brooksville. And, of course, Elizabeth Robins who lived life so fully and shared so freely while at the same time reserving portions of herself for herself. It only adds to our sense of her real self and the mystery she still holds. It's an honor for me to executive-produce, write, and host this telling of her story.