

**The Case of Hester Vaughn (1868-69)**

Mid 1860s: Hester Vaughn arrives in the U.S. from Gloucestershire, England with a man she believes to be her husband. He deserts her because he has another wife. She then goes to Jenkintown, Pennsylvania where she works as a dairymaid/housekeeper. Late 1867- her employer fires her because she is pregnant (Vaughn never discloses the paternity of her child.)

Vaughn moves to Philadelphia, rents a scarcely furnished room and takes in sewing to support herself.

February 8, 1868-Vaughn, feverish and exhausted, is found after having delivered a child. The child is dead, with marks on its head. Vaughn asks another resident of the building for a tin box in which to put the dead child, and requests that the matter be kept secret. The neighbor instead notifies the police.

Vaughn is arrested, charged with infanticide and incarcerated at Moyamensing Prison.

June 1868- Vaughn stands trial. Her lawyer (Mr. Goforth) only meets with her on the day of the trial. She alleges that she fell upon her dead child, causing head injuries (The Coroner's office examined the body of the dead baby and found several fractures of the skull, possibly caused by a blunt instrument). Dr. Susan Smith interviews Vaughn and concludes that Hester had a long, protracted labor and gave birth to a dead child.

Vaughn's lawyer argues that she should not be found guilty because "in the agony and pain she must have suffered, she may have been bereft of all reason."

An all male jury convicts Vaughn of infanticide and the judge sentences her to execution.

Once the case hits the press, some men and women in the women's rights movement organize on Vaughn's behalf. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Ernestine Rose, Parker Pillsbury and Susan B. Anthony wrote, spoke and fund-raised on her behalf.

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**What connections do you see between *The Declaration of Sentiments*, the "Everyday Justice" theme and this case? What are the various issues that emerge in this case?**

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