



## *Preserving and Adapting their World: The Women of Cliveden*

The women who occupied or worked at Cliveden over the centuries were enslaved and free, Black and White, upper class and working class, young and old. Although each woman's relationship to Cliveden and the people around her differed, each shared a common interest in trying to manage and adapt to the world around them. Most importantly, each of these women from the past, like women today, played the lead role in their narratives.

The women of Cliveden provide a case study of the ways women exercise power and agency even though society constrains them legally, culturally, and politically. The lives of enslaved women, although limited by a lack of freedom and respect, show agency and initiative as they shaped their world in any way possible to protect and preserve themselves and their families, as Charity Castle did. The lives of the women who worked at Cliveden illustrate their ability to change their situations as needed, including moving from their place of birth, as in the example of Almira Saunders. The lives of the women of the Chew family illustrate their desire to reshape societal constraints by taking actions such as driving an ambulance in war-torn France during the early 20th century and fighting for women's right to vote in America, as did Ada Knowlton Chew. Common themes emerge through more than 200 years of women at Cliveden: the desire and ability to preserve their families, themselves, and their histories by adapting their world as necessary.

The stories of these women are illuminated through legal, economic and personal documents and images. Some of these women's lives are known only through records preserved because of their association with male members of their families, others through documents recording their legal status, and a few by their own letters and records. The lives of many more remain unknown, and work will continue to unveil their stories.

*Preserving & Adapting their World: The Women of Cliveden* is generously supported by The Haley Foundation, the Pennsylvania Humanities Council and Dr. Randall & Linda P. Miller in memory of Elisabeth Shellenberger (1921-2019), community member, preservation advocate, Cliveden board member and guide.

