

Fiona Maxwell

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ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

2026- Assistant Professor of History, North Central College

EDUCATION

2025 Ph.D., United States History, University of Chicago, *with distinction*

Dissertation: “Democratic Ensembles: Spoken Art and Politics at Chicago Settlement Houses, 1890-1920”

Committee: Jane Dailey (Chair), Eric Slauter, Sarah Maza, Adam Green, Eleonory Gilburd

Qualifying Examinations:

U.S. History: The Long Nineteenth Century (Jane Dailey)

The American City and the Long Twentieth Century (Adam Green)

Literary and Oral Culture in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century America (Eric Slauter)

2019 M.A., United States History, University of Chicago

M.A. Thesis: “‘The Real Joy of Doing a Thing for Its Own Sake’: Children’s Clubs and the Process-Oriented Arts Experience at Hull-House and Chicago Commons, 1889-1912”

2018 B.A., History (Honors) and Theatre (Theatre for Young Audiences Module), Northwestern University, *summa cum laude*

B.A. Thesis: “‘House of Dreams’: Process, Reciprocity, and the Community Reception of Children’s Dramatics at Hull-House”

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century U.S. History; Chicago and the Midwest; Urban History; Spoken Performance; Social Reform and Social Movements; Childhood and Education; Women and Gender; Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity; Local and Public History; History of the Book.

PUBLICATIONS

Monographs

In-progress Democratic Ensembles: Spoken Art and Politics at Chicago Settlement Houses

Peer-Reviewed Articles

2026 “‘Expression is Power’: Gender, Residual Culture, and Political Aspiration at the Cumnock School of Oratory, 1870-1900.” *Gender & History* 38 (2026): 121-138. First published online April 22, 2024.

- 2025 “‘Talking lowd and laughing gay, Everyone has so much to say’: Working Girls’ Clubs, Spoken Art, and Political Organizing at Chicago Settlement Houses, 1890-1920.” *Lilith: A Feminist History Journal* (2025): 109–130.
- 2024 “‘Site of Social Justice Advocacy, or Home of Godly Women? Interpreting Women’s Work at the Frances Willard House Museum.” *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals* 20, no. 3 (2024): 439-449. Focus Issue: “Women and Museums,” edited by Juilee Decker, guest edited by Holly O’Farrell and Alice Twemlow.
- 2017 Collins, Rives B. and Maxwell, Fiona G. “Tell it with Zest: The Generative Influence of Storytelling on the Origins of Creative Drama.” *Youth Theatre Journal* 31, no. 1 (2017): 23-34.

Contributions to Edited Volumes

- In progress* Maxwell, Fiona and Strandmark, Matthew. “Teaching Women’s Suffrage in the North and South.” In *Teaching Women’s Suffrage: New Historical Perspectives*, edited by Kelly Marino et al. University of Oklahoma Press, forthcoming fall 2027. Manuscript accepted.
- In progress* “‘Actresses, Fairy Lovers, and Story Tellers’: Working-Class Girls’ Textual Play and Politics at Chicago Settlement Houses, 1890-1920.” In *Girls’ and Young Women’s Textual Cultures Across History: Imitation, Adaptation, Transformation*, edited by Lois Burke, Jennifer Duggan, and Edel Lamb. Routledge, forthcoming spring 2027. Manuscript accepted.
- In progress* “‘House of Dreams’: Theater at Hull-House During the Progressive Era, 1889–1935.” In *Act Well Your Part, There All the Honor Lies*. University of Illinois Press, forthcoming fall 2026. Manuscript accepted. Exhibition catalog essay for the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum.
- 2026 “‘In Their Youthful Simplicity’: Performing Political Childhoods in the WCTU.” In *Reassessing the White Ribbon Army: The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union after 150 Years*, edited by Adam Chamberlain, Janet Olson, and Alixandra B. Yanus. University of Kansas Press, 2026.
- 2024 “The Old and the New: Immigrant Women and Intergenerational Connection at the Hull-House Labor Museum.” In *Radical Craft: Arts Education at Hull-House, 1889-1935*. Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, 2024. Exhibition catalog essay.

Book Reviews

- 2026 Review of *Lecturing Women in British Fiction, Periodicals and Public Orality* by Anne-Julia Zwierlein. *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* (April 2026): 1-3.

PRESENTATIONS

Invited Talks

- 2026 “‘Upward with Aspiring Aim’: Autodidact Women and Progressive Reform in Turn-of-the-Century Chicago.” Gender and History in the Americas Seminar, Society for the History of Women in the Americas and Institute of Historical Research, February 10, 2026.
- 2025 “Performing Civic Futures: The Politics of Play in Working Girls’ Club Archives.” Centre for the History of Childhood Seminar, Magdalen College, University of Oxford, October 20, 2025.
- 2025 “Community in Chicago: A Discussion about Social Reformer Mary McDowell, Settlement Houses, and Machine Politics.” With Dominic A. Pacyga. University of Chicago Service League, October 15, 2025.
- 2024 “‘Expression is Power’: Chicago Settlement Houses, the Cumnock School of Oratory, and the Progressive Era Prehistory of Creative Drama.” Winifred Ward Symposium, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, June 1, 2024.

Podcast Episodes

- 2024 [“Club Newspapers and Civic Collaboration at Chicago Settlement Houses.”](#) C19: *The Society of Nineteenth-Century Americanists Podcast*. Season 8, Episode 3. October 21, 2024.

Conference Presentations

- 2027 “In the Position of Teachers: Immigrant Leadership, Social Mobility, and Community Solidarity at Chicago Settlement Houses, 1890-1960.” Organization of American Historians Conference on American History, scheduled for April 1-4, 2027. Panel organizer: “Reevaluating Americanization: Case Studies of Immigrant Agency in Education and Reform.”
- 2026 “‘The Faithful Band of Young Folks’: Children as Charitable Actors in Chicago Settlement Work, 1890-1960.” Charity, Humanitarianism, and Childhood Colloquium, Centre for the History of Childhood, Oxford University, June 22, 2026.
- 2026 Presenter, “Sovereignty, Healing, and Reform among Indigenous & Immigrant Communities” Book Workshop; Roundtable Participant, “The WCTU at 150 Years: Uncorking New Approaches to the Women’s Christian Temperance Union.” Society for Historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era Conference, June 6, 2026.
- 2026 “‘Work with a Will’: Spoken Arts as Democratic Labor at Chicago Settlement Houses, 1890-1920.” American Historical Association Annual Meeting, January 10, 2026.

- 2025 “‘Training Schools for Political Life’: Print, Platforms, and Publics in Cumnock School of Oratory Periodicals, 1870–1900.” Research Society for Victorian Periodicals Conference, Loyola University Chicago, July 10, 2025.
- 2025 “‘When These Interesting Little Artists Come Before the Footlights’: Children’s Theatre and Political Imagination at Chicago Settlement Houses, 1890–1920.” Society for the History of Children and Youth Conference, June 27, 2025.
- 2025 “‘We Women Would Rule the World of Politics’: Women’s Oratory and Activism at Chicago Settlement Houses, 1890–1920.” Chicago Women’s History Conference, March 22, 2025.
- 2024 “‘A Continuous Story’: Intergenerational Education and Community Organizing at Chicago Settlement Houses, 1890–1920.” Organization of Educational Historians Conference, September 27, 2024.
- 2024 “‘Just a Bunch of Merry Maids’: Girls’ Play and Politics at Chicago Settlement Houses, 1890–1920.” Girlhood Studies Collective Symposium, “The Mundanity of Girlhood: Pleasure, Play, and the Everyday,” Rutgers University-Camden, Camden, New Jersey, April 4, 2024.
- 2023 “‘Upward with Aspiring Aim’: Working Girls’ Clubs, Spoken Art, and Political Aspiration at Chicago Settlement Houses, 1890–1920.” Gender and Joy in Feminist History Symposium, Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, Australia, September 8, 2023.
- 2023 “‘Each Member a Reporter’: Youth Participants, Club Newspapers, and Collaborative Democracy at Chicago Settlement Houses, 1890–1920.” Society for the History of Childhood and Youth Conference, University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, Canada, June 10, 2023.
- 2023 “‘Expression is Power’: Gender, Speaking, and Parlor Democracy at the Cumnock School of Oratory, 1871–1901.” British Association for American Studies Conference, Keele University, Keele, England, April 14, 2023.
- 2022 “Site of Feminist Activism, or Home of ‘Godly Women’? Opposing Interpretive Visions for the Frances Willard House Museum.” Women and Museum Collections Conference, Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands, March 18, 2022.
- 2021 “From Chicago Settlement Houses to the Zoom Room: Process-Oriented Youth Drama, Social Democracy, and Building Ensemble in Times of Crisis.” Performing Childhoods Conference, University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand, November 25, 2021.
- 2021 “Bringing Literature to Life: Literary Performance in Post-Civil War Evanston.” Conference on Illinois History, Springfield, Illinois, October 8, 2021.
- 2021 “Training for Social Democracy: Elocutionary Education, Parlor Culture, and the Beginning of the Chicago Settlement House Movement, 1870–1900.” Organization of Educational Historians Conference, October 2, 2021.

- 2018 “‘House of Dreams’: Process, Reciprocity, and the Community Reception of Children’s Dramatics at Hull-House.” Franke Future Directions Forum, Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, April 20, 2018.

Media Appearances

- 2021 “Chicago’s last Phyllis Wheatley House in Washington Park in danger of demolition.” ABC7 Chicago, February 3, 2021.

GRANTS AND FELLOWSHIPS

External

- 2023 Debra Mesch Doctoral Fellowship for Research on Women’s Philanthropy

University of Chicago

- 2024 Benjamin Bloom Dissertation Fellowship
 2018-25 Social Sciences Division Fellowship
 2019-20 UChicagoGRAD Graduate Global Impact (GGI) Internship

Northwestern University

- 2017-18 Franke Undergraduate Fellowship, Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities
 2017-18 Leopold Fellowship, Chabraja Center for Historical Studies
 2017 Summer Undergraduate Research Grant, Office of Undergraduate Research
 2016 Undergraduate Research Assistant Program, Office of Undergraduate Research

AWARDS AND DISTINCTIONS

- 2024 The Anna Award, Recognizing Extraordinary Service and Dedication to the Center for Women’s History and Leadership
 2018 Grace Douglas Johnston Prize for Best Senior Honors Thesis, Northwestern University Department of History
 2017 Phi Theta Chapter of Lambda Pi Eta, National Communication Association Honors Society

2016 Theatre Departmental Award for Excellence in Leadership and Service, Northwestern University

2014-18 Dean's List, Northwestern University

UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND ADVISING EXPERIENCE

Assistant Professor, North Central College

2026-27 Chicago History, U.S. & Illinois to 1865, Lincoln and the Civil War Era

Invited Guest Teaching

2026 "Italian Neighbors: Culture and Community at Chicago Settlement Houses." Guest lecture and discussion for Italian American Chicago, University of Chicago, May 14, 2026. Instructor: Fara Taddei.

2025 "Settlement Houses and Jewish Cultural Production in Progressive Era Chicago." Guest lecture and discussion for Jewish Civilization III: Chicago Jewish History, University of Chicago, April 25, 2025. Instructor: Jessica Kinzane.

2025 "'Expression is Power': Chicago Settlement Houses, the Cumnock School of Oratory, and the Progressive Era Prehistory of Creative Drama." Guest lecture and discussion for Theater for Young Audiences, University of North Carolina Greensboro, January 15, 2025. Instructor: Rachel Briley.

Instructor of Record, University of Chicago

2022 Performing Democracy, co-designed and co-taught with Jane Dailey

Teaching Assistant, University of Chicago

2021 America in the Twentieth Century, Jane Dailey
 ■ Guest lecture: "Progressive Era to New Deal: Chicago Women, Social Democracy, and Social Welfare."

2021 American Revolutions, Matthew Kruer

Pedagogical Training, University of Chicago

2023-24 Pedagogy Workshop, History Department

2022 Rhetoric of Writing Focused Feedback, Writing Program

2020 Fundamentals of Teaching Workshop, Chicago Center for Teaching and Learning

UChicagoGRAD

- 2025-26 Assistant Director of Graduate Career Development
- Advised graduate students and postdocs in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences on postgraduation preparation, public speaking, and writing; supported professional development programming; built and implemented curricula for PhD-level Research Communication Credential and GRAD Communication Lab.
- 2021-25 Career Advising and Oral Communications Specialist
- Advised MA students on career-related topics and PhD applications; coached graduate students and postdocs to improve their public speaking and interviewing skills; helped develop and deliver oral-communications related workshops across campus; created and updates digital and written resources.
- 2023-25 Graduate Writing Tutor
- Led one-on-one sessions for MA and PhD students; guided brainstorming process; provided feedback on written drafts, with a focus on argumentation, use of evidence, organization, clarity, persuasiveness, and logical flow; helped students correct patterns of error in prose; tracked and administered writing appointments.

MUSEUMS AND PUBLIC HISTORY EXPERIENCE

Jane Addams Hull-House Museum

- 2023- Research Consultant
- Contributed original essay to the [Act Well Your Part, There All the Honor Lies](#) exhibition catalog; conducted research on 1) Lewis Hine photographs of immigrant neighbors and 2) sources of wealth accumulated by Charles Hull and John Addams, which ultimately helped to fund Hull-House.
 - Conducted research on the early development of arts education at Hull-House, with particular attention to immigrant artisans; contributed original essay to the [Radical Craft: Arts Education at Hull-House, 1889-1935](#) exhibition catalog; performed six original short stories based on archival research as part of [Open House Chicago](#); story collection featured as a textual resource in on-site exhibit and accompanying K-12 materials.

Chicago Center on Democracy

- 2024-25 Graduate Student Affiliate and Program Facilitator
- Developed and led public programs relating to the history of democratic social movements in Chicago, including an “Improv and Democracy” workshop and a women’s suffrage bus tour.

Center for Women’s History and Leadership

- 2021-24 Director of Museum Operations and Communications
- Oversaw administrative and operational functions; planned, promoted, and hosted public programs; wrote and edited biweekly newsletters; coordinated tours and trained

docents; maintained communications and online presence; contributed to fundraising and strategic planning initiatives; compiled reports; reviewed historiography and museum best practices; developed and maintained relationships with universities, archives, nonprofits, artists, and scholars.

- Select blogposts: “Opening the Door to Knowledge: Frances Willard’s College Days,” “Knowledge is Power: Frances Willard’s Early Education,” “‘Look Up and Off, and On and Out’: Frances Willard and Women’s Oratory,” and “The Activism and Artistry of Frances Ellen Watkins Harper.”
- Select digital exhibits and audiovisual content: “Do Everything 2023: Frances Willard at Northwestern,” “Collection Close-Up: Frances Willard’s Childhood Writing,” “Frances Willard’s Childhood Toys,” and “Performing Temperance.”

2020-21 Museum Fellow

- Created blog and video content; launched *Arts at the Willard House* and *Handicraft Hours* series; consulted with Preservation Chicago about the Phyllis Wheatley Home.

2019-20 UChicagoGRAD Global Impact Intern

- Led tours; launched K-12 educational programming; wrote blog posts; curated digital exhibit and archival resource guide; attended board meetings as a notetaker.

Newberry Library

2021 Internship through University of Chicago Public History Practicum

- Collaboratively wrote original script and provided voiceover narration for an audio narrative for the *Chicago Avant-Garde: Five Women Ahead of Their Time* exhibition.

David Rubenstein Forum Art Program

2021 Historic Document Research Intern

- Researched historic documents exhibited at the David Rubenstein Forum and created public-facing text for a companion website: “U.S. Constitution – First Day Public Printing (1787),” “Bill of Rights Newspaper Printings (1789),” and “Official State Department Printing of the Emancipation Proclamation (1863).”

NONPROFIT ARTS EDUCATION EXPERIENCE

Piven Theatre Workshop

2024- Director

- Directed a Story Theatre adaptation of *Urashima and the Turtle* for the Young People’s Company (grades 9-12), premiered February 19-22, 2026.
- Directed a Story Theatre adaptation of *Puss in Boots* for the Performance Project Theatre Company (grades 6-8), premiered February 6-8, 2025.

2012- Teacher

- Youth classes and performance ensembles (grades 3-12) in Storytelling, Story Theatre, Improv and Theatre Games, and Scene Study; PEEP and Options for College Success

(adults with developmental disabilities). Special topics workshop: “Extra, Extra, Read All About It! Writing and Performing the News.” Blogpost: [“Stories, Play, and Process: The Early Days of Children’s Dramatics at Hull-House.”](#)

- 2015 School Administration Intern
- Created social media strategy and Google Ads marketing campaign plans; tracked audience data; worked with EasyWare, Microsoft Excel, and Google Drive; proof-read class catalogues and grant applications; prepared mailings.

HISTORICALLY INFORMED STORYTELLING PERFORMANCES

- 2026 [“Performing in the Parlor: The Golden Age of Guitars and Elocution.”](#) Northwestern University, Evanston, IL, April 12, 2026.
- 2024 [“Stories from the Labor Museum.”](#) Open House Chicago, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, October 19-20, 2024.
- 2023 “Childhood, Friendship, and Memory.” DePaul University, Chicago, IL, January 22, 2023; Northeastern Illinois University, Chicago, IL, May 1, 2023.
- 2022 [“Chicago Storytelling in Bughouse Square.”](#) Newberry Library, Chicago, IL, July 30, 2022.
- 2021 “A Pleasant Sunday Afternoon: Recreating a Nineteenth-Century Literary and Musical Entertainment.” Center for Women’s History and Leadership, Evanston, IL, July 25, 2021.

SERVICE AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 2026- Member, Board of Directors, Chicago Women’s History Center
- 2026 Article Reviewer, *Women’s Studies in Communication*
- 2026 Book Reviewer, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*
- 2025-26 Alumni Judge, Northwestern University Undergraduate Research Expo
- 2025 Reviewer, Chicago Studies BA Thesis Prize, University of Chicago
- 2024-26 Externship Host, Northwestern University Alumni Association
- 2023 Book Proposal Reviewer, Oxford University Press
- 2021-24 Graduate Student Representative, Dean’s Advisory Council, University of Chicago
- 2018-25 Presenter and Participant, University of Chicago Council on Advanced Studies Workshops: U.S. History and Culture; Theatre and Performance Studies; Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Cultures.

LANGUAGES

French Research proficiency

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

American Historical Association
Coordinating Council for Women in History
Immigration and Ethnic History Society
Organization of American Historians
Society for Historians of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era
Society for the History of Childhood and Youth
Urban History Association

REFERENCES

Jane Dailey
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