LOIS LONG, 1925-1939:
PLAYING “MISS JAZZ AGE”

by

MEREDITH LOUISE QUALLS

MATTHEW D. BUNKER, COMMITTEE CHAIR
MARGOT O. LAMME
DIANNE M. BRAGG

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Journalism
in the Graduate School of
The University of Alabama

TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

2013
ABSTRACT

This study demonstrates how Lois Long’s career at the New Yorker, which lasted 45 years, serves as evidence of Long’s place in the annals of New Yorker history, past her initial success as a society writer. Her work, including the popular “Tables for Two” and “On and Off the Avenue” features, as well as her longevity with the magazine show Long was unique in that she outlasted many of the original New Yorker writers, eventually falling into a workhorse role rather than glorified writer.

This paper uses Long’s published work in the New Yorker and additional unpublished sources to provide depth to the story of Long’s professional career and personal life, from 1925 to 1939. Going beyond her initial success as fashion critic and nightclub writer, it demonstrates how Long’s career evolved as her own life and the society around her changed throughout the early twentieth century.
DEDICATION

For my parents, whose protective guidance gave me a lens to understand the speakeasy era, namely the understanding that had I lived in 1920s Manhattan, I would have never been allowed such radical moral freedoms. Thank you.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project could not have been done without the encouragement and enthusiasm I received from my thesis committee, Dr. Matthew Bunker, Dr. Meg Lamme, and Professor Dianne Bragg. Thank you for your initial interest and support of the project, and for your patience, time, and energy throughout the process.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PURPOSE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LITERATURE REVIEW</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920s: FINDING A PLACE</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930s: SETTLING DOWN</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. “Tables for Two” column layout................................................................................................51
2. “On and Off the Avenue” column layout...................................................................................52
3. Family portrait of Lois Long, Peter Arno, and Patricia Arno....................................................53
PURPOSE

In looking at the original cast of New Yorker writers, the oft-mentioned names include editor Harold Ross and his wife, Jane Grant, E. B. White, Dorothy Parker, Alexander Wollcott, and Morris Markey. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how Lois Long’s career at the magazine, which lasted 45 years, serves as evidence of Long’s place in the annals of New Yorker history even beyond her initial success as a society writer. Her work and her longevity with the magazine show Long was unique in that she outlasted many of the original writers, falling into a workhorse role rather than glorified writer.
INTRODUCTION

“We go because we prefer rubbing elbows in a cabaret to dancing at an exclusive party with all sorts and kinds of people.”

Ellin Mackay, “Why We Go to Cabarets: A Post-Debutante Explains”

Ellin Mackay’s New Yorker essay, “Why We Go to Cabarets” was a poised construction of one event: Young people were changing. Explaining the movement from the parlor to the speakeasy, she wrote, “At last, tired of fruitless struggles to remember half familiar faces, tired of vainly trying to avoid unwelcome dances, tired of crowds, we go to a cabaret.” She continued, “We find privacy in a cabaret. We go with people whom we find attractive.”

The situation behind the essay was not as simple. In 1925, with the newly published New Yorker magazine, founding editor Harold Ross had yet to see the fruits of his labor. Although designed to mirror Manhattan “metropolitan” life and to cater to the social elite, the only thing Ross had realized so far were stacks of unsold magazines.

“Why We Go to Cabarets” changed everything. The article, which Mackay, the debutante daughter of Clarence Mackay, a mining heir and philanthropist, had written for free (which had been highly edited before publication) was syndicated on the front page of the New York Times, demonstrating the existence of an audience Ross—a Midwesterner who had started his career in newspapers—was hoping to find.

---

1 Ellin Mackay, “Why We Go to Cabarets: A Post-Debutante Explains,” New Yorker, November 28, 1925, 7-8.

2 For details on Harold Ross and his upbringing, see Susan Henry, Anonymous in their own names: Doris E. Fleischman, Ruth Hale, and Jane Grant (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2012), 152-153. For more details about Mackay’s place in society, see Ben Yagoda, About Town (New York: Scribner, 2000), 47.
The *New Yorker* provided commentary on Manhattan events, functioning like any news magazine and serving as a practical guide for city residents. Today it is remembered for its ingenuity in tone; what Ross intended as “wit and gaiety” was often critical and cynical, but remained unswayed by outside influences and untouched by any criticism. It was certainly not “edited for the old lady in Dubuque.” This authoritative voice—that emerged with the start of the publication, are present in Harold Ross’ original announcement of the magazine: “It will not be what is commonly called sophisticated, in that it will assume a reasonable degree of enlightenment on the part of its readers. It will hate bunk. . . . The New Yorker will present the truth and the whole truth without fear or without favor, but will not be iconoclastic.”

With time, the New York debutante who ran in the same circles as Ross would fade from memory, but the sentiment remained. “Why We Go to Cabarets” became a milestone for the *New Yorker* because it helped Ross articulate the voice and content he was looking for in his publication. It also demonstrated the success of social commentary, one that could transcribe the changing tableaux within Manhattan night life. It showed the need for a writer who could both penetrate and discern an age that was piloted by both abstinence and indulgence, driven partly by Prohibition.

Long was already writing for the *New Yorker* when Mackay found her success in print, but Long’s own relevance became connected to the thoughts presented in “Why We Go to Cabarets.” After graduating from Vassar College in 1922, where Long studied French and English, she had worked as a copy editor for *Vogue*, and as a staff writer and drama critic at

---

3 “Announcing a New Weekly Magazine: The New Yorker,” N.D. Jane C. Grant Collection, Division of Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries. Collection 41, Box 30, Folder 2.
*Vanity Fair* before moving to the *New Yorker* in the summer of 1925.4 A native of Stamford, Connecticut, and the daughter of Reverend William J. Long and Frances Bancroft Long, she learned to write at a young age, an emphasis underscored by her father, a Harvard graduate and author.5 When Harold Ross was seeking a writer who could capture New York City nightlife, Long’s experience at *Vanity Fair* made her perfect for the magazine. For Ross, Long was a strong candidate for the position because of her professional experience and writing talent, but also because of her personality. Most accounts agree that when Long started at the magazine, at age 23, she had a bright, infectious personality that was not coy or afraid of being outspoken.

Brendan Gill, who is remembered for writing the *New Yorker*’s “Skyline” column, wrote in his best-selling *New Yorker* memoir that having Long on staff gave Ross a perspective he was unable to grasp:

> [Ross] felt himself an outsider in New York and something of a hayseed, and in his eyes Miss Long was the embodiment of a glamorous insider. An exceptionally intelligent, good-looking, and high-spirited girl, she graduated from Vassar in 1922 and had plunged at once, joyously, into a New York that seemed always at play—a city of speakeasies, nightclubs, tea dances, football weekends, and steamers sailing at night.6

Long wrote two columns in her first years at the magazine: the restaurant review guide, “Tables for Two,” and the fashion column, “On and Off the Avenue.” “Tables” is remembered for its wry exposé of 1920s speakeasies, while “On and Off the Avenue” functioned as both a fashion guide and critic, marked by some as the originator of fashion criticism. Her relevance to

---


6 Ibid, 203. In Gill’s *New York Times*’ obituary, the author included that Gill’s “Skyline” column, which ran for a decade beginning in 1987, combined both his literary and activist roles. See also Herbert Muschamp, “Brendan Gill Dies at 83; Author and Preservationist,” *New York Times*, December 29, 1997.
the magazine would be advanced by her persona, too. “Ross never doubted that the ideal New Yorker writer, to say nothing of the ideal New Yorker reader, would be someone as like Lois Long as possible,” Gill wrote.\(^7\)

Long’s ability to perceive and participate in Manhattan society was enough to break Ross’ “old-time newspaperman’s prejudice” about females in the newsroom, and her natural talent as a writer gave her a place among the *New Yorker*’s talented staff.\(^8\) Her best work would demonstrate opinionated criticism, regardless of the subject. Joshua Zeitz wrote that Long “was armed with a keen eye for detail, a wicked sense of humor, and razor-sharp prose.”\(^9\)

Long’s career at the *New Yorker* spanned 45 years, seeing the growth of the magazine from inception to coverage of significant social changes, specifically the transformation from the excessive twenties to the Depression era during her first 15 years at the magazine. During her career, Long developed an authoritative voice as a steady contributor to the *New Yorker*, ventured into radio, and had a brief attempt at film writing. Her story is one of a working woman who was accepted by the social elite, and became the image of a modern twentieth century woman. Long’s early work demonstrates that she captivated New York’s prominent circles, and ultimately garnered a national reputation.

---

\(^7\) Gill, 203.

\(^8\) For Ross’s early attitude towards women journalists, see Kinney, 348.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This project relies primary source work as a lens into Long’s personal and professional work. This includes her published work in the New Yorker, including “Tables for Two,” the restaurant review column which she wrote regularly from 1925-1928, and then less frequently after. It also uses “On and Off the Avenue,” which began in 1925 and continued until she retired in 1970. In American Humor Magazines and Comic Periodicals, Stephen H. Gale argues that because the New Yorker often makes use of the editorial “we,” drawing commonality between writer and audience, these columns are an appropriate ground with which to study the writer. In the New Yorker and other humor magazines that grew out of the period, this language implies the reader and writer know each other, share the same beliefs, and are on familiar terms.\textsuperscript{10} In studying Long and her time at the magazine, these columns are a sound starting point.\textsuperscript{11}

Second, this paper uses the New Yorker records, unpublished materials held in the New York Public Library, drawing solely from the Lois Long files, which are filed in four series of records: the “Harold Ross General Files,” “General Correspondence,” “Letters to the Editors,” and “Manuscripts: Run and Killed.” These unpublished files provide useful information about Long’s relationship with the magazine, her public reputation, and her personal affairs, many of which were handled by her secretary, Marion Miller.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{10} Gale, 186.


\textsuperscript{12} For unpublished sources, see New Yorker Records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library. Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.
Third, published memoirs of other *New Yorker* editors and writers provide an immense amount of information about Long’s presence among the magazine’s staff. These include Jane Grant and Brendan Gill, as well as Long’s “On and Off the Avenue” successor, Kennedy Fraser.13

Secondary sources for this paper cover a variety of subjects, from biography to Prohibition to fashion. Two biographies were helpful in uncovering details about Lois Long and tracing the lives of early *New Yorker* editors. Dale Kramer's biography of Harold Ross includes details of Long’s start at the magazine, including Ross’ own prejudice towards women, stemming from his roots in traditional newspaper work. Harrison Kinney's biography of *New Yorker* writer James Thurber is also referenced when discussing Lois Long. Kinney discusses Long’s upbringing as a pastor’s daughter, and includes anecdotes from Long’s years at the magazine, including Long’s introduction to James Thurber:

“The men I invited along on my nightclub beat wouldn't let me pay my bills, even though it was *New Yorker* money. This meant that only the better-heeled could go out with me. My moneyed boyfriends scared Thurber away from me, I think. I began to see him more and more as he caught on to where the better liquor was served and developed the habit of pub crawling.”14

As with Kramer’s biography, it is easy to sense that Lois Long was both captivating and intimidating, one who was in complete control of her life and her career—in every sense a strong, modern women.

The Interwar period was dominated by Prohibition and the events that followed. Any study of Long must examine the context. As historian Norman H. Clark demonstrates,

---


14 Kinney, 378.
Prohibition can be outlined in three segments: temperance, Prohibition, and repeal. Including a foundation on industrialism and urbanism, and the growing divide between urban and rural life during the early twentieth century, Clark argues that Prohibition was the culmination of “a century of anxiety,” which aimed to protect the family above all else:

The origins lay in the slow articulation of deep anxieties: that the new world of industrialism, opportunity, and social turmoil was a moral frontier, that it demanded new patterns of interpersonal relationships, and that these new relationships were threatened by the unrestricted use of distilled spirits.

Clark’s main conjecture for the reasoning behind the enacting of Prohibition was that the central unit of stability in the early twentieth century was family. If Prohibition could hold the family together through the avoidance of alcohol, it could, in turn, hold society together.

Others have arrived at Prohibition from a different perspective. Historian Andrew Sinclair takes the viewpoint that Prohibition was the result of religious fundamentalists, with influence from French philosophy, in which people were aiming to improve their own weaknesses through legislation. He wrote:

It was in this wish to extend their own repressions to all society that the drys felt themselves most free from their constant inward struggle. Indeed, they defended their attacks on the personal liberty of other men by stating that they were bringing these men personal liberty for the first time. According to one dry leader, personal liberty reached its highest expression where the strongest inhibitions were invoked and enforced.

As Thomas Pegram argues, other forces came to the aid of Prohibition besides societal preservation, such as the rise of immigration to the United States. Between 1910 and 1919, more than six million immigrants settled in the United States, migrating mainly to cities.

---


16 Ibid, 13.

served as a way to help monitor the mixing of cultures that was disrupting American society.¹⁸ He also noted that New York, with 13 other states, did not ratify the Eighteenth Amendment, the act prohibiting the manufacture, sale, and transportation of spirits, stood in opposition to the Volstead Act.¹⁹

Apart from Prohibition’s origin during this period of heavy-handed legislation, urban residents were often dismissive of strict ordinaces. Burton Peretti wrote, “Prohibition served as a spark for cultural rebellion among many in a white middle class, who abandoned their families’ temperate self-discipline in a spirit of rebellion and liberation.”²⁰ Considering New York’s stance on Prohibition, it is no surprise that in Manhattan during this period, as historian Michael Lerner notes, an estimated 5,000 illegal speakeasies existed, next to another 10,000 in Brooklyn. While “Tables for Two” reviewed between ten and twenty restaurants a week, there were far too many places for individuals to navigate on their own. Aside from commentary, “Tables” served as a practical reference for unveiling the speakeasies of the era.²¹

It is helpful to consider the context of the New Yorker within twentieth century magazine history, particularly the “smart” genre. George H. Douglas, in his book The Smart Magazines, defines this type of publication as “magazines that at least superficially were designed for smart sets or social elites. . . .their appeal was to the upper crust of high society, or to some assumed


class of sophisticated readers.” Douglas evaluates the *New Yorker* as well as its contemporaries, *The Smart Set* and *Vanity Fair*. In *The American Magazine: A Compact History*, John Tebbel identifies Ross’ complex and quirky personality as a driving force in the magazine’s beginning, but notes the irony of Ross creating a publication that appealed to the social elite, as he himself was somewhat apart from that circle.

James Playsted Wood comments on the *New Yorker*’s style and tone in *Magazines in the United States*, noted the irony of a local publication gaining salience to a national audience.

Wood also argues that the *New Yorker* had influence through the use of satire. He wrote:

> Its mockery of stupidity is gentle. Its ridicule is consistently directed against vulgarity, against the fraudulent and false. Its sharpest thrusts are meant to pierce pretense and hypocrisy, to attack and demolish sham, bombast, and pretentiousness. It seems doubtful that The New Yorker has consciously any great social aims, but in a time which continues to offer greater quantity and variety, a wealth and powerful corrective. Through its satire and the example of its own cool restraint, through its clear prose, which has had its own influence on contemporary writing, and through its drawings, which have likewise influenced American cartooning and caricature, it looses keen thrusts for sanity, which are often far more effective. . . .

On a smaller scale, but related to “On and Off the Avenue,” the *New Yorker* has a place in the history of women’s fashion and publications for women. Changes in the manufacturing industry changed the accessibility of fashion for women, making clothing more accessible and affordable, and giving average women direction on what to wear. The earliest women’s magazines were birthed out of pattern companies, like *Demerest Monthly*, which was first

---


published in 1867.\textsuperscript{25} Fashion magazines in the interwar years catered to exclusive, high class society until 1935, when \textit{Mademoiselle, A Magazine for Smart Young Women} was launched, featuring affordable fashions.\textsuperscript{26}

In Catharine Oglesby’s \textit{Fashion Careers American Style}, a 1935 guide for females interested in working in fashion, Oglesby explains the job of writing about fashion for a career. In arguing for the United States as a center for fashion, on par with Paris, she explains the process of how fashion trends are communicated:

Today, within fifteen minutes after a model appears in the grand salon of the couturier on the Rue de la Paix, the description of that model by a press representative can be carried by wireless to America, or the actual voice of the representative may be heard describing it over the telephone. In a few hours the picture of that costume can be reproduced by the American press for thousands to see. And it is only a matter of a week until that same costume may actually be sold on the West Coast.\textsuperscript{27}

This concept of how fashion is communicated is consistent with how “On and Off the Avenue” was composed. Most columns included both a Paris and New York correspondent (for which Long served as the latter), and frequently Long would comment on what the fashions sounded like, if they had not arrived yet, and would later note what was in the stores and where items could be found. Women who shaped their career expectations based on Oglesby’s depiction would have anticipated a glamorous career, as she continued, “You will ride in Rolls-Royces and street cars with equanimity. You will go where smart, rich people go and the bourgeoisie congregate.”\textsuperscript{28}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 115-17.
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, 24.
\end{flushright}
Finally, to help contextualize “On and Off the Avenue,” it is important to consider the culture that shaped the lives of women during the time, as well as women’s fashion trends. Joshua Zeitz's text *Flapper* is a modern, comprehensive text arguing that women were the ultimate shapers of the 1920s, listing Long in conjunction with Zelda Fitzgerald and Gabriel Chanel as women who had significant influence in the first part of the century.29

Apart from the 1920s urban female, David E. Kyvig reminds readers that a number of technologies played a role in molding mass culture, including film, radio, and the automobile. In this period, citizens became more mobile, and were exposed to more sources of influence. Countless advertisements, produced in magazines and other places, helped inform readers of what to buy and what to become. It comes as no surprise that one of the best selling books of the 1920s was Emily Post’s *Etiquette in Society, in Business, in Politics, and at Home*.30

In *Playing Smart*, Katherine Keyser concludes that Long’s persona embodied both the typical female, with advice to women on what to do and wear, but also intended to keep her identity a secret.31 Keyser quotes Long’s “Tables” language: “I write this as an interested onlooker, of course. I know nothing about men at all, being a modest, retiring type.” Further, Keyser adds that Long presented herself with duality, on one hand asserting herself as a sexy

---


31 Judging from the anecdotes within “Tables for Two” of people claiming to have seen “Lipstick,” it is thought by some that Lipstick’s secret identity was only secretive for the first one or two years of writing “Tables”
sophisticate, but at the same time separating her “authorial personae” from the body, instead emphasizing the mentally superior “I.”

Apart from Long, Elizabeth Ewing’s *History of 20th Century Fashion* reviews the changes in fashion across every decade. In the twenties, Paul Poiret’s fashions, which were designed and sold in Paris, contested the mood of the post-war twenties by creating high class fashion, as opposed to the new trend of fashion that “looked to the average woman.” At the same time, Chanel gained success with jersey dresses and straight-line classic evening gowns, which created a new clean, simple style that was replicated internationally. Therefore, a number of subjects come together in the context that surrounded Long’s career at the *New Yorker*:


1920s: FINDING A PLACE

“Mixtures reported: ‘Lipstick’ cocktail, so named by its inventor Mr. Barney Gallant, because it tastes sweet and innocuous and has an awful wollop—Two parts champagne, one part gin, one part orange juice, dash of grapefruit juice, and a flavoring of cherry brandy. Shake rapidly with a single chunk of ice.”

In June 1925 the New Yorker launched “When Nights are Bold,” the magazine’s restaurant review and nightclub column, originally written by Charles Baskerville under the pen name “Top Hat.” After one month, when Baskerville left New York for Paris to pursue art, Long took over the column and renamed it “Tables for Two,” along with the pen name “Lipstick.” Under Long, it was immediately successful and named by some as the magazine’s first popular feature. At the same time, Long began writing the New Yorker’s fashion column, “On and Off the Avenue,” which she would continue writing through 1970.

Long’s success with “Tables for Two” was tied to her ability to play the part of socialite and ease into elite Manhattan circles. Kramer’s widely-cited description of Long illustrates the impression she left on those she interacted with:

She was twenty-two, exceptionally well constructed, tall, and dark-haired. She had striking features embellished by violet-gray eyes. Also she had energy in abundance. Her movements and her conversation were supercharged. She could have modeled for Miss Jazz Age.

---

35 Gill, 203.
38 Kramer, 82-83.
Whereas “On and Off the Avenue” described fashion trends and cataloged where to locate items, a function that aided the *New Yorker’s* advertising, “Tables for Two” had a more cultural function. It grew to document the trends and activity that spawned in New York City speakeasies, along with Long’s own flamboyant adventures in the city. Later, “Tables for Two” would remain as an image that reflected the most dramatic episodes of the speakeasy era.39

Apart from the historical significance of “Tables,” the column was notable for its blatant juxtaposition to Prohibition politics during the period. Although Prohibition had already polarized viewpoints on alcohol nationally, “Tables” reflected New York City’s dismissal of the law, and showed a deliberate rejection of Prohibition.

In his study on Prohibition, Clark raises the argument that writers, more so than other individuals, would have had unprecedented access to alcohol. Referring to *New Yorker* writer H.L. Mencken, Clark writes:

...the affluent and defiantly colorful individuals like Mencken and his friends were more likely to impress journalists than were the mass of wage earners for whom booze was usually too expensive. Thus when they reported that “everyone” was drinking, or was drinking more than ever before, journalists were recording what was to them the most visible and interesting, not the most representative, American experience.40

If this is true, it certainly applied to Long, who was consistently heralded for her engaging personality. While her adventures in “Tables” may not have reflected the experiences of the general population, these tales gave speakeasies a reputation as the center of the twenties’ youth, as well as the center of Manhattan.

---

39 Yagoda, 101, explains how “On and Off the Avenue” provided opportunity for advertising, though it was not in Ross’ original intention for the magazine.

40 Clark, 148.
In the first year of “Tables,” Long includes an anecdote of a speakeasy raid, stating that her delight in barrooms suffered a “serious setback”:

It wasn't one of those refined, modern things, where gentlemen in evening dress arise suavely from ringside tables and depart, arm in arm, with head waiters no less correctly clad, towards the waiting patrol wagons. It was one of those movie affairs, where burly cops kick down the doors, and women fall fainting on the tables, and strong men crawl under them, and waiters shriek and start throwing bottles out of the windows.\(^{41}\)

While the dramatic episode could have inspired fear, for Long it avoided punishment. She wrote that while others were being thrown out of the establishment, she was gently warned by a police officer, “Kid, you're too good for this dump,” and given a graceful exit through the fire escape.

Long’s unorthodox behavior crosses into her life within the *New Yorker* offices. She was remembered for her habit of stripping down to her slip during the warm summer seasons while working and for her habit of filing “Tables” between midnight and 3 a.m., coming straight from the speakeasies to the office to write.\(^{42}\)

If Long’s own involvement in reviewing speakeasies did not make her standpoint on Prohibition clear, in 1926, a year after taking over the column, Long played the part of satiric philosopher and aired her own solution:

I shall write about drinking because it is high time that somebody approached this subject in a scientific, constructive way. The answer, my friends, lies with the Youth of America. It lies in the nursery and the schoolroom. From the brawling brats of today come the good eggs of tomorrow. We will teach the young to drink.\(^{43}\)

Consistent with other Prohibition propaganda that targeted children, her tongue in cheek suggestion illuminated her viewpoint on the legislation, rejecting arguments and policies in favor

\(^{41}\) Lipstick, “Tables for Two,” *New Yorker*, September 12, 1925, 32-33.

\(^{42}\) Kramer, 82-83.

of legislating alcohol over both using the substance and integrating it into culture in a common way. The comment also served to illustrate the *New Yorker*’s complete dismissal of the law.\textsuperscript{44}

The *New Yorker* demonstrated its dismissal of Prohibition in other ways. It is said that out of concern for his staff and in an effort to ground them, Ross opened a speakeasy in the basement of the *New Yorker* offices in 1927 to encourage productivity.\textsuperscript{45} The affair was glossed over in “Tables,” as Long coyly named the *New Yorker* basement in the same manner as writing of any other establishment.\textsuperscript{46} She included Ross’s statement in response to the accusation that the magazine and the basement speakeasy were formally connected, giving his excuse that the *New Yorker* could not copyright the publication name to avoid such confusion.\textsuperscript{47} This omission may have been a necessary measure during Prohibition, and corresponds with Long’s reaction to a booklet titled “The New York I Know,” written by Karl K. Kitchen. Though Long praised Kitchen for his analysis, she appeared astonished at his mention of alcohol. She wrote, “But, oh, oh, to mention right out loud the names and addresses of places where you can get drinks!”\textsuperscript{48} If taken at face value, Long appears to show surprise at Kitchen’s audacity, but as with her own column, the reference is more likely another jab at the uselessness of Prohibition legislation, noting how easy it is to both purvey and locate alcohol.

“Tables” helped Long quickly develop an authoritative voice, which she would carry with her through her career. Letters between Long and Ross showed that Long was aggressive in her

\textsuperscript{44} See Okrent for an ad which depicts a mother feeding her baby with beer, with the phrase, “Lager’s amber fluid mild gives health and strength to mother and child.”

\textsuperscript{45} Zeitz, 100.

\textsuperscript{46} “Tables for Two” often featured one or two new restaurants, with an explanation of the menu, the entertainment, the decor, and the type of people who go there. A short list of other establishments often concluded the column.

\textsuperscript{47} Lipstick, “Tables for Two,” *New Yorker*, October 08, 1927, 77-79.

\textsuperscript{48} Lipstick, “Tables for Two,” *New Yorker*, January 22, 1927, 66-68.
writing, as a letter dated March 11, 1929 recorded Long’s complaint of how her work had been edited. She wrote, “Since I still go to more night clubs than anyone else and therefore have a better idea of the proportionate values, I think I should be consulted at least before things like that are done.”49

Speakeasies and liquor were only one aspect of “Tables for Two.” The column traced several other trends that evolved in Manhattan, including the popular dances of the decade. The Charleston, one stamp of the twenties, shows up early in “Tables,” first originating in Harlem and then trickling down to other circles of society. In October 1925, Long wrote:

“All the great minds ... now seem to have concentrated on but one vexing problem--‘Are they dancing the Charleston at the smart night clubs?’ At the present (not that I want to set myself up as an authority on etiquette) the answer is No. And the reason, undoubtedly, is not that nice people disapprove of this pastime, but that nice people do not yet know how to do it.”50

Early in her New Yorker work, statements such as these demonstrated Long’s keen eye for detail and her awareness of New York elite society’s reaction to change.

While the Charleston did originate in Harlem before it spread to other circles, speakeasies in Harlem were not equivalent to those in lower Manhattan. Most of Long’s usual listings were located between Forty-Second and East Sixtieth Street. In Harlem, the clubs and speakeasies were more luxurious than an average working-class member of Harlem could afford. While the period showed a casual integration of cultures, as practices like jazz and different dances spread throughout Manhattan cultures, white involvement in Harlem was different than that of the neighborhood’s working-class residents. Of Harlem’s four largest night clubs, Small’s Paradise

49 Letter from Long to Ross dated March 11, 1929, New Yorker Records.
was the only club accessible to the regular Harlem resident. The “real” Harlem that Long recommends in the *New Yorker* catered to white New York, and often excluded Harlem’s black residents in the audience, despite Manhattan’s “smart” infatuation with the Harlem world.

Long’s commentary on Harlem shows her openness to different cultures, though her audience may not have been keen on this idea. Throughout “Tables,” Long used the ratio of black to white patrons as a measure of the authenticity of a Harlem club. In a 1927 review of The Nest, Long wrote that it “has taken on a new lease of life, that it is as black and white as ever (verging on black as the evening wears on),” and to another club that, “the clientele is now at least one-third white.” In the same review, she describes the women of Club Ebony as “beige, biscuit, and brown women,” using skin color as evidence of credibility. A 1925 “Tables” review listed one Harlem establishment as so admirable that “under the amber lights” everyone looked the same color. Long published a response from a reader whose response seems surprised by the suggestion:

In addition to expressing a belief that you have a kink in your otherwise brilliant mind, when you attribute to the dusky Retta [sic] great ability to entertain, may I express a belief that you must be suffering from a severe attack of color-blindness when you state that ‘all people look the same color under the curious amber lights?’ My escort and I were decidedly crimson!

As places in Harlem became more widely known, Long continued to deconstruct white participation in Harlem society. Though the elite, white circles visited the establishments of

---


53 Lipstick, “Tables for Two,” *New Yorker,* December 12, 1925, 51-55; the “dusky Retta” is thought to be the name of an entertainer.

54 Lipstick, “Tables for Two,” *New Yorker,* December 26, 1925, 32-33.
Harlem, they were still separated from Harlem life in practice, both because of their lack of rhythm while doing the Charleston, and their inability to last the late night hours. In *Culture Makers*, Amy Koritz wrote, “White people found the rhythm of the Charleston music foreign (if exciting), the movements difficult, and the speed of the dance strenuous.” Long addressed a complaint from a musician in Harlem, saying, “no white girl could possibly do the Charleston, ‘the REAL Charleston’ as a colored one can,” because the dance was originated by the people of Harlem. Still, it seems Long appreciated the authenticity, writing two weeks later of a Harlem performer, “The lady has no inhibitions, and is proud of it. She is simply swell, and like the tattooed [sic] lady, worth going miles to see.”

The other key to navigating Harlem nightlife was whether or not patrons appeared at the right time. According to “Tables,” late-night Harlem meant from 5:00 a.m. forward, nicknamed “Monday morning breakfast dances.” This was brought on by the working-class members of Harlem who arrived home late after evening shifts were finished, extending late nights far into the morning.

After the Charleston, another dance emerged. Named the “Black Bottom,” it was another variant of the Charleston that originated in Harlem. It was said to be easier to learn, and in October 1926, Long wrote, “The steps in it are nowhere near as difficult as those of its predecessor, and there is no trick foot moving stunt to get the knack of. The entire effect lies in the suppleness of the muscles.”

55 Koritz, 66.
58 Ibid.
brings buildings down, this practice must be stopped. And at once,” evidencing its popularity.⁶⁰ Dismissing the idea of respectability, the Black Bottom’s popularity was related to the seduction of the “new cabaret.” Long initially had a harsh review of the practice, but after two months, Long wrote that “every wayfarer to Paris is learning it madly,” showing a clear acceptance of the modified Charleston.⁶¹

The details that Long supplied gave parallel evidence of the amount of bootlegging that occurred in Harlem, which would have provided economic opportunities for the poorer communities. At the time, apartments in Harlem were opened as “hooch joints,” and welcomed black residents; because the Prohibition Bureau, the policing unit, was an all-white group, whites were suspect among local Harlem crowds.⁶² “Rent parties” also cropped up—a trend in which Harlem apartment owners opened their doors as a speakeasy and set out a box to collect money from visitors to fund the resident’s rent in exchange for alcohol. Long referred to rent parties in 1927 and applauded the idea as one she herself would use, but instead of rent, to afford the high cost of spring wardrobes.⁶³

Throughout her writing, Long showed fatigue with accepted trends, and by 1927, Harlem had become popular enough that Long criticized how much it had been tainted by white influence. “I am mad at Harlem,” she wrote. “It is getting too refined. All the Harlemites are getting a little ashamed of the Black Bottom, that quaint old native dance handed down by levee-working grandfathers...”⁶⁴ In January 1928, Long complained of the “White-manized” jazz

---

⁶² Okrent, 208.
⁶³ Lipstick, “Tables for Two,” *New Yorker*, April 02, 1927, 84.
orchestras and recommended that the only cure for her discontent was for the whites to stop trying to sing the blues, trying to preserve the prestige of Harlem. Long’s dialogue in “Tables” brings clarity to how the 1920s both embraced and shied away from the complexity surrounding Manhattan’s response to change in cultures, including Harlem.

Long adopted an authoritative role in “Tables,” often publishing letters from readers asking for advice on which places had the best crowd, or where to find the best Chinese food in town. With the various questions and complaints, Long understood her patterns of entertainment were comparatively unorthodox. Not every woman in New York had the economic means or social freedom to frequent night clubs multiple nights of the week. As readers asked for advice, a dichotomy emerged between Long’s recommendations and what her readers could afford. Readers asked for advice on which place was the best, or where to go for a certain fare, but most did not adopt Long’s patterns, and looked for guarantee of a good time. In response, Long regularly decried the idea of “safe” nightclubs, and showed offense by those who sought advice on where to go to enjoy themselves, yet were only comfortable in the company of their own friends:

I am just a little weary of those conscious ones who, snugly wrapped in their ermines and serenely conscious that their pearls are insured, say to me joyously, “Let's go to a really rowdy and terrible place!” For the last time I have racked my brains to produce something that at least is noisy, and for the last time, I have heard them complain: “What terrible people!”

In November 1926, Long cast a critical eye on night club regulars, calling the majority of the night-life-goers a “pretty sad bunch,” and insisted they were only out night after night because they had nothing else to do. Of one couple, she said, “They do not eat, neither do they

---

drink. They rarely dance. They look ineffably bored with each other.” While the New York
dining backdrop was an excellent parade of events, Long was keenly critical of who she saw:
“Something, no matter what, must be done around them every minute.” Amidst the weekly
entertainment, Long declared what she found amusing, in contrast. She closed, “In other words, I
am proclaiming that New York night life is the dullest thing in the world per se, unless you are
accompanied by people who would interest you in the middle of the Sahara Desert without a
victrola in sight, anyway.”67

The overarching themes that “Tables” presented, including an intrigue with different
cultures and counter to elite society gave the column permanence. In 1926, one year after writing
the column, she wrote, “...you needn't ever get really tired of going out all the time if only you
have an unlimited capacity for enjoyment wherever you happen to be.”68 In comparison with
Long’s comment that “New York night life is the dullest thing in the world,” this reinforces the
idea that even among the most loved New York places, the key to the age was the character of its
participants.

In addition to “Tables for Two,” Long wrote the New Yorker’s fashion column, “On and
Off the Avenue,” which is cited as being the first fashion criticism column of its time. In Jane
Grant’s New Yorker memoir, she explains that the column was designed, in part, to attract local
advertisers, and that the feature was “smart copy about smart clothes contrived to lure readers
and advertisers alike.” From the beginning, Long was in charge of the department, which
eventually added “About the House,” a weekly feature about interior decorating.69

69 Grant, 213.
From the start, the functions of “On and Off the Avenue” was to describe new fashions and products. While Long inserted her own sharp opinions on occasion, the acted as a correspondent between New York and Paris fashions and she regularly listed new products as a shopping guide. From the start, the column showed a recognition of an audience that was concerned with price and affordable fashion. In 1925, Long wrote:

Any woman who has faultless taste, a reasonable amount of time to spend on her shopping, and a good figure, can dress, and dress very well, for a ridiculously small amount of money. If you have taste, you can tell where to remove or to add an ornament, where to take in a dress or let it out and give it just the right line, and how to give just the right fillip to a hat brim and thereby avoid looking like the little girls that pour out into Forty-second Street at the lunch hour.70

This sentiment, that any woman could dress well, brings a particular relativity to fashion. Here, it assumes that fashion was not only for the rich or social elite, but that anyone could obtain it. She continues, “The main thing to remember is to pick out the very simple thing that these shops have in stock, to remove all pieces of lace, artificial flowers, buttons, braid and superfluous flounces from it, and to add, if you must add something, very nice accessories of your own.”71

Long was a regular contributor to both “Tables for Two” and “On and Off the Avenue” throughout the 1920s. In 1927, two years after beginning at the *New Yorker*, Long was regularly writing both “Tables” and “On and Off the Avenue” when she was appointed fashion editor.72 In correspondence between Ross and Long, Ross considered omitting “Tables for Two” as a weekly feature in event of a financial emergency, despite it being, as Ross wrote, “in a way a more valuable feature.”73 Long responded to Ross by suggesting pay of seventy-five dollars per week

71 Ibid.
72 Gill, 206.
for her regular fashion column, and one hundred dollars for weeks in which the magazine ran both the fashion column and “Tables for Two.” Ross did not agree to this suggestion immediately, but when James Thurber joined the staff in 1930, Long was earning seventy-five dollars per week.

In addition to her professional life coming together, Long’s personal life was also developing. In 1927, she married Peter Arno, who worked as cartoonist for the *New Yorker*. He is remembered as the *New Yorker*’s most distinguished, dashing figure. Long and Arno personified the age’s rejection of convention, described by Iain Topliss as “the union of laughter and shopping,” a nickname driven by their respective roles on the *New Yorker* staff. The two were married for four years and gave birth to one child.

---

74 This suggestion was signed “With love and without any mercenary motives.” See Lois Long, memo to Harold Ross, March 1, 1927, New Yorker Records.

75 Kinney, 378.

1930s: SETTLING DOWN

*About Tables—you shriek that I have only done one since the first of the year. This is beside the point. You may recall that in 1927, when I got married and “settled down” I resigned from that department.*

*Letter from Long to Ross, 1936*

Five years after her start at the *New Yorker*, Long entered the new decade married to Peter Arno, and with a new daughter. Long was still contributing to “Tables for Two,” though writing the column less frequently, and primarily writing “On and Off the Avenue.”

The biggest factor that shaped Long’s world would be the changing economy after the Stock Market Crash of 1929. But in 1930, “On and Off the Avenue” did not reflect dramatic change in the economic status of the *New Yorker’s* readers. This description from February 1930 on how Greenwich Village women dressed indicated no less luxury—or at least in recognizing that luxury was something that people still regarded highly and made the case for a grand self-image:

Everyone who follows this department with the proper diligence undoubtedly knows how it feels about “dressing your type” in the usual sense of the word. Greenwich Village is full of lanky women in trailing robes who were once told they looked like Mona Lisa and have never restrained their mania for green velvet embroidered with gold thread. However, I have always had a sneaking love for rich, lustrous fabrics in flaming colors, made very simply and worn for dinner at home, for quiet functions where the question of formal or informal dress is undecided, and other occasions where your dress is a matter of your own discretion.

---


While there was an appreciation for luxury, the New Yorker’s audience also sought affordable fashion, or at least an obtainable way to become fashionable. “On and Off the Avenue” continued to provide details of what was seen on Paris and New York runways, and listed what was being sold in department stores, regardless of changes in the economy. In August 1930, when critical of a four-figure price tag, Long wrote, “Though this department is rather wary of discussing things like mink coats at $6,500, thinking (and rightly, too) that the purchasers need no help from me...”79

As both critic or consumer, she continued to list bargains and budgets. Describing one store, she described the quality of fur coats, highlighting one with a lower price than most:

“When people go out bargain-hunting for furs, they usually understand perfectly that they are gambling. There seems to be no way of telling beforehand whether your nice little hundred-and-twenty-five dollar fur coat will collapse at once or be going to football games three years hence. ... The preceding paragraph is by way of a temperate introduction to the fact that McCreery has inaugurated a hundred-dollar-fur-coat-department, with novelty in design stressed to a festive point.”80

This case and others demonstrated an awareness of the value of items, and assumed not all readers would have been able to afford expensive furs. Another example of price consciousness includes Long’s description of one store’s department as suitable for a “Girl-on-Allowance,” in constrast with the “debutante department.” This may have indicated changes in retail with lowered prices, as fashion became more affordable, though there is no indication from “On and Off the Avenue” this was consistent or widespread:

“The new debutante department on the third floor of Saks should really be labelled the Girl-on-Allowance Department. All kinds of dresses, suits, and coats have been assembled here, tremendously chic and very inexpensive. The day clothes run from $27.50 to $50; evening clothes from $27 (for very attractive simple dresses of flat crepe,

intricately cut) to $67; there are charming tweed suits at $27 and on upward; and tweed coats—but need I go on?”

With humor, Long both praised and criticized new fashion trends. In 1930, “On and Off the Avenue” discussed Chanel’s tweeds and long skirts, but still remained conscious that runway fashions were not suitable for everyday life. In one criticism of Chanel’s line, she wrote, “Unless you are superlatively chic and move in circles where they know Clothes, you are more likely to look like Aunt Susie in it.”

While Long’s ability to criticize fashion had merit, particularly in the way that it functioned to make the runway and style relatable to the average individual, her work does not demonstrate any visionary fashion sense. She was quick to review something negatively and quick to rescind that opinion, showing little stability or consistency in her reviews. For example, in March 1930, she wrote of Chanel:

So far (my experience has been a touch limited), I have an exasperated wish to spank Mme. Chanel. Her materials are marvellous [sic]—tweedy jerseys and odd-mixture of wools of all sorts—and she has the most beeyootiful ideas; but she is so likely to do one annoying thing when she carries out her idea.

The following week, after having seen the items for herself, she changes her opinion to the opposite: “It is high time this department fell on its face and took back all those harsh hints that Mme. Chanel was losing her grip. Her evening clothes are breath-taking this season.”

---

83 With parallel timelines between Long’s work and her newborn child and soon to be failing marriage, it is easy to speculate that Long’s personal life could have affected her work. Similarly, the inconsistency in opinion may have been the result of subject fatigue, in the fifth year of covering fashion.
84 Ibid.
In addition to her fashion judgments, communication between Ross and Long evidenced Long’s struggle to turn in copy on time. In one memo dated April 17, 1930, Ross wrote to Long, “I have told her (Mrs. White) to nag the hell out of you until you have several pieces done.”

Long wrote three “Tables for Two” columns in 1930, which struggled to reach the caliber of the columns during the former decade. Instead of using the column to enlighten readers on current nightlife, she used the space to look back at the 1920s:

> Five years ago, the alternative to the flask on the hip was to be dragged to ‘the cutest little place, my dear—so cheap, and anything you want to drink.’ The Cutest Little Place invariably turned out to be a sordid basement room jammed with tables and serving that abomination of abominations—the Italian or French table-d’hote dinner...

Long’s best work was when she included herself as a part of the culture—and the regularity with which Long mentions herself showed that she had difficulty seeing outside of her own experiences:

> After doing much too much romping around in the bright lights, viewing with an expert eye the improvements in midnight entertainment during the past weeks, I am forced to the reluctant conclusion that either old age and ennui are creeping over me or else good times haven’t their former verve.

A tone persisted throughout the final “Tables” columns that things were better in the former era. It is unclear whether Long intended this as a reflection of the national state struggling through economic changes, or her own struggles with a new life that included taking care of a baby.

Contrasting new and old youth, she wrote:

> They have become so charming, these speakeasies de luxe, that there has been a trend among the bright young drinkers toward a glass of sherry before meals instead of cocktails, a bottle of wine during dinner, port with the cheese, a liqueur with the coffee—

---

instead of one highball after another. If things continue to progress in this alarming way, we are going to have a nation of gourmets on our hands who never heard of drinking for the effect and not liking the taste. Apparently, satiation with a hard-liquor diet can accomplish the same temperance that light-wine-and-beer laws promise to.\textsuperscript{89}

Whether because of her work, which showed little revelation in contrast to the discoveries of the 1920s “Tables” features, or because of the decade, “Tables for Two” expired on June 7, 1930, retiring for the next 70 years.

Throughout her work, Long did maintain a consistent voice that was opinionated and humorous. Reviewing different fashion, she suggested the oddities of new jewelry:

The big-time jewelers are getting as quick as their imitators. Clip pins of diamonds and other precious stones, with tiny watches set in them, appear all over the place. A cop may be a bit bewildered if you prance up to him and ask for time on your hat, but the idea is novel anyway.\textsuperscript{90}

The humor is again found in a comment about ostrich feather material. She wrote that it is “the loveliest stuff possible,” but gives fair warning: “...it sheds and sheds. Tiny bits of marabou fly gently through the air. You can’t wear a dark coat with it, not can you sit in a taxi with a man, however properly, without compromising him.”\textsuperscript{91}

Another consistency was Long’s unforgiving sense of authority. Much as Long became tired of young people who wrote to “Lipstick” in the twenties, she grew irritable on the subject of her authority on fashion. She wrote, “I am getting kind of tired (to get back to the subject at hand) of people rushing up to me to tell me that Macy is a pretty good little store. I knew that long ago. I found that out.”\textsuperscript{92}

Her unforgiving opinions were apparent both in her published

\textsuperscript{89} Lipstick, “Tables for Two,” \textit{New Yorker,} March 15, 1930, 70-72.

\textsuperscript{90} Long, “On and Off the Avenue,” \textit{New Yorker,} April 5, 1930, 74-82.

\textsuperscript{91} Long, “On and Off the Avenue,” \textit{New Yorker,} April 19, 1930, 74-80.

work, and in her correspondence with Ross. In the summer of 1930, a telegram from Paris addressed to Ross responds to the editor’s inquiry that she is “accomplishing nothing,” though it is unclear the reason why she is traveling.\textsuperscript{93}

Besides her humor, Long adopted a reassuring tone with her readers, at times calling herself “Aunt Lois,” as a figure of authority. While listing Christmas items, she made one observation on the behavior of men, criticizing men for buying bad gifts:

In compiling the cataclysmic lists of dreat [sic] big ‘normous stores that follow, our purpose, as usual, is to be of Service. Men wandering unaided into the howling Christmas mob at Macy, for instance, are likely to become panic-stricken to the extend of buying six sets of rhinestone bowknot buckles ($ .74 ea.), thereby losing their Love of the Hour.\textsuperscript{94}

Overall, Long presents herself as someone whose opinion is unaffected by the influence of others. “I am a girl who gazes with a canny and disillusioned eye upon beauty products that claim miracles,” Long wrote. “I was brought up with the theory that God gives you a face, and you might just as well be contented with it for the rest of your life.”\textsuperscript{95} Though Long’s work demonstrates that her opinions were candid and without outside influence, Ross’s own organization of the \textit{New Yorker} elicits the same idea, as he set up a hard rule that the business department need only communicate with Long by memo through him, so as to keep pressures from advertisers separate from the column.\textsuperscript{96}

Long’s most interesting work for the \textit{New Yorker} unfolded in 1931 with the feature “Doldrums,” which was published six times during 1931. It is unknown whether the idea came

\textsuperscript{93} Telegrams Aug. 3 and 13th, 1930 (Box 6, File 15 in folder titled “Long, Lois, 1929-30.” New Yorker Records. Ross’s response indicates that Long needs to submit written copy, and is running close to deadline if not late.


\textsuperscript{95} Long, “On and Off the Avenue,” \textit{New Yorker}, October 25, 1930, 64-70.

\textsuperscript{96} Kramer, 84.
from Long herself, or from the editorial staff, but the pieces carried a dampened mood, with
topics ranging from etiquette to the next generation’s future. Remaining a strong critic, which
had been her entire success in “Tables for Two,” Long uses “Doldrums” to cast a judgmental
gaze on the different changes in society. A later letter to Ross in 1936 demonstrates that the
change in Long’s personal life may have been the primary reason for her writing something new.
She started, “About Tables—you shriek that I have only done one since the first of the year. This
is beside the point. You may recall that in 1927, when I got married and “settled down” I
resigned from that department.”

The first column, “Bed of Neuroses,” showed the development of psychology on social
interactions, as was evidenced through different conversations she recorded. Long also
maintained a sense of interplay with her position on trends, continually marking her age, whether
true or exaggerated, and always setting herself as better than whatever trend, lending an
authoritative and perceptive sense. She wrote:

> Being a simple, direct type, I loved parties because I had fun. I thought the point of them
> was to be gay and superficial, anyway. If dull bores, rude people, or badly managed
drunk occurred once in a while, they left early and never appeared again. And then,
> translated into world of one syllable that a child could understand, psych-o-an-al-y-sis
came along and ruined everything.

In contrast with how Long presented herself, as a simple, uncomplicated woman, she highlighted
psychoanalysis as the culprit of fun. She continued, enumerating the ways in which people
behaved badly in public, ruining the fun of social gatherings:

> Parties are just swarming with women who have read about sex appeal and “It” and are
> so afraid they haven't got it that they roam the room like ravenous tigresses. There are
> men who seem to feel that they will certainly go into a nervous breakdown if a Great

---


Romance doesn't drift their way at every gathering. It makes the atmosphere rather tense and fervid, to say the least.  

Using psychoanalysis as a condition of unveiling male and female insecurities—the height being the comment that, “A fine pass have we got to when, together with the radio and electric light, they had to invent the idea that every human being is interesting”—Long concluded that the only way to enjoy a dull party is to “get into a taxi by yourself and go home,” opting out of this social engagement.

Long continued to unveil the social problems of 1931. She opened the late January column by writing, “Life is much too calm and peaceful, with nothing to brood about except the activities of gangsters and Supreme Court judges, the Red Menace, the possible repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment, and dull subjects like that.”

After proposing ways in which the children of “the dated old fogies of the Scott Fitzgerald era” will rebel, Long concluded that rather than outdoing their parents in rebellion or bad behavior, they would veer to the opposite direction. “Fresh-air fiends is what we are raising,” she concluded, though possibly referring to her own venture in motherhood. “If one of us is sufficiently old-fashioned enough to light a cigarette, they will cough ostentatiously and fling open window after window…”

As in other places, Long often looked back to her social height in the twenties. “We were the boys and girls who heard so much about our petting in automobiles, taking swigs from flasks, and being morally corrupted by companionate marriage, the automobile, synthetic gun, that we came to believe it all ourselves,” she wrote, placing more value on her own experiences.

---

99 Ibid, 18.
100 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
Within the “Doldrums” series, two columns evidenced a closer lens through which to understand the social elite. While the women’s movement and temperance movement had given women a voice in the political sphere and the 1920s had eased some of the strict Victorian boundaries between men and women, Long’s sentiment presented a casual view on working women. Her tone was condescending as she started: “My bitterness and disbelief are at their height, however, when I read those pathetic stories about little society girls wanting to work for a living, just to justify their existence and benefit mankind.”

Long, who was no stranger to the workforce since starting her career *Vogue* in 1922, nearly a decade before, dismissed the idea of jobs as aesthetically fulfilling. “I had never thought of jobs as being chic and glamorous,” she wrote. “In fact, working for a living wasn't at all smart until very recently, and going to an office in the morning was far from being the deb's ideal.” As was often her practice, Long drew from personal experience and recalled comments about working women prior to this fashion, remembering a stigma associated with working: “The young people of the Cholly Knickerbocker set began muttering the old, old formula: ‘It must be fun to work—you must know so many interesting people.’” From her assessment, it appears that the debutantes did not need to work, but were more interested in the changes that arrived as result of being a working woman, including moving and setting up an apartment in the city.

Long elaborated on the true experience of working, and why a debutante would never be fit for the job. “They get the jobs alright, but they don't stick very long, as a rule. You'd get pretty tired yourself and begin to worry about a nervous breakdown if your former pals were getting

---

104 Ibid.
tanned at Palm Beach and New York was cold and slushy.” In the context of Long’s experience with “Tables,” it was ironic to watch accepted trends shift from the elite class to the working woman, despite what appeared to be on a superficial level. Long was not vague about the realities of life within the workforce:

Wisdom perches permanently upon the battered brow of Aunt Lois. She knows that it is absolutely impossible to get to the office in the morning after a hard night unless you need the pay envelope involved. She doesn't write out any more letters of introduction for girls who don't need the money. No, no. They get so excited fixing up their bachelor-girl apartments that they haven't time to see the editor. They dash off to formerly forbidden speakeasies until five A.M. and the nasty casting director has the part all filled by the afternoon.

Jobs suited those who needed employment, rather than an existential, fulfilling experience for improving a woman’s happiness. Working, Long reminded, is less glamorous than it seems.

Here, in making this case, she drew on both women’s aspirations as well as the realities working:

And the will-o'-the-wisp that our gilded girls are all pursuing (as who isn't?) is an office into which Jimmie Walker, Jack Dempsey, Rudy Vallee, and Ring Lardner drift daily to take you to cocktails; an office in which you are invited on cosy foursomes with Maurice Chevalier or George Gershwin every night in the week, and where you receive twenty thousand dollars a year for the minimum of time and effort. After all, only vulgarians can dance all night and work all day for a very long stretch.

Recalling Oglesby’s guide for working in fashion, where, “You will ride in Rolls-Royces and street cars with equanimity. You will go where smart, rich people go and the bourgeoisie congregates,” mixed with Long’s own ardent tales of Manhattan living, it was not shocking that women would have looked to find a career of the same type.
Long contributed other opinions on women. In an April column, Long discussed feminism and social expectations for women and posed the question, “Where is the Modern Man?”:

With gleeful accord, they proclaim, for instance, that it is women's right—nay, duty—to take on five times as much work as any man would tackle, just to prove equality. She must bear and raise children, count the jars of jelly and check up on the marketing, frequent beauty parlors and keep up on her tennis, go out nights regularly (preferably with an ex-marital partner, just to be sure that she isn't talked about), and carry on a full-time job earning at least twenty thousand a year.\(^\text{109}\)

In another column, she continued the commentary on women, arguing against the claim made by men that, “Women have ruined everything.”\(^\text{110}\)

Long’s voice was consistent in “Doldrums,” as she continued to practice duality through her criticisms, recounting her own experiences, yet sharply drawing herself out of the story when necessary, merely calling herself “an interested onlooker” and denying any knowledge. On the other hand, she contrasted this innocence with the inclusion of provocative, coded language and elevated herself as someone with every detail. For example, she wrote:

I know nothing about men at all, being a modest, retiring type. I know only that they all love black lace over pink; they adore long, sheer black silk stockings, plain pumps without buckles or straps, and long eyelashes. They abhor, almost to a man, wrinkled stockings, ox-blood fingernails, a bob that isn't neat at the back of the neck, exotic perfumes, and prolonged making-up in public. With only this to go on, it was pretty fresh of me to write this article at all.\(^\text{111}\)

Her double tone of detachment and intimacy expoused the voice that the \textit{New Yorker} is remembered for, along with the voice Ross intended in his original conception of the magazine.


\(^{111}\) Ibid.
Though the development of Long’s work showed shortcomings with the demise of “Tables,” as well as a struggling work ethic, Long did show maturation in her work, and continued to maintain an unswayed, opinionated view on society.

In June 1931, Arno filed for divorce in Reno, Nevada, charging “intolerable cruelty,” and said in her deposition that she lived in “abject terror” of Arno. The alimony agreement provided $8,000 for the first year, $7,000 annually for the next two years, and $6,000 a year thereafter, of which $200 a month was for the support of Patricia. The parents shared joint custody of their daughter.\(^\text{112}\)

Apart from her work at the *New Yorker*, Long did some work in radio, beginning in 1935, and later had a short stint writing in Hollywood. “The Women’s Page” aired on the Columbia Broadcasting System, with tones of both “Tables for Two” and “On and Off the Avenue.” Reviewing the show, the *Oakland Tribune* called Long “a mistress of ceremonies,” and added that she did “a remarkably smooth job.” The review continues to distinguish Long from other women, writing, “Her program is directed to women, but she does not fill their ears with jam recipes, pretty poetry, or advice to the lovelorn. She simply tells them what's what in New York, and proves she knows everybody by bringing them up to the studio as her guests.”\(^\text{113}\) Another radio column, in 1936, argued that one appeal of appearing as a guest on Long’s radio hour was the pre-broadcast cocktails, held at Long’s home. Robert wrote:

They are only too willing to appear with Lois on her broadcasts, for the pre-broadcast get-togethers at Lois' home, where they work out the interview, turn into a merry party and

---

\(^{112}\) See “Peter Arno Files Suit: Wife in cross-complaint at Reno also charges cruelty,” *New York Times*, June 25, 1931; “Mrs. Arno Gets Divorce: Charges in Reno suit cartoonist was violently jealous,” *New York Times*, June 30, 1931.

provide much food for thought in their own fields of endeavor. After the show they
migrate to a favorite cocktail haunt and talk it over.\footnote{Robert, “The Radio Reporter,” \textit{Oakland Tribune}, January 12, 1936.}

In a letter to Howard Dietz of Metro Goldwyn-Meyer, Long calls the radio program, “Kind of a
program to end all women’s program’s [sic],” and uses her experience in radio to seek other
Swanson, a writer’s agent in Hollywood, showed that Long was in some negotiation for writing
summer in Hollywood on this endeavor, but it is uncertain if she found any success in this
venture.

Though seeking alternate work could seem like dissatisfaction with the \textit{New Yorker},
because of the warm correspondence she maintained with Ross it seems more likely that Long
was motivated by finding more sources of revenue. As early as 1932, a letter dated December 30,
1932 showed that Long requested a $500 advance, marking financial trouble that extended
through the decade.\footnote{Letter from Bergman, date December 30, 1932, Box 185, File 13 “Long, Lois,” New Yorker Records.}

By 1935, correspondence between Long and her \textit{New Yorker} secretary, Marion Miller,
show that Long was struggling financially, that she had not paid taxes for several years, and was
generally neglectful in accounting. In a letter dated October 23, 1935, Miller wrote, “She hasn’t
any record of having paid it. In fact she thinks its likely she never did.” It also listed her
estimated salary, saying that Long made $6,400 from the *New Yorker* in 1931 and $8,540 in 1932.\footnote{118}

By 1936, correspondence shows that Long continued to struggle with money, and that she was beginning to receive more negative feedback from Ross. In May 1936, Ross addressed Long, writing, “This is outrageous. Week after week, following the appearance of this sole heroic effort, another department was scheduled, you were followed up hopefully, and you didn’t deliver.”\footnote{119} The same year, letters from Miller show that Long’s financial situation was growing worse. In regard to a loan, Miller wrote, “I take care of her checkbook and she is really pretty broke.”\footnote{120} Miller continued:

> If you could get along without her help it would be just dandy (the creditors would think so too), as scraping up this amount would but her in a pretty bad hole. The Income Tax people are after her for back assessments, and the new one is due on the 15th and she owes a lot of bills. If this puts you in an awful jam let us know and she will see what she can do about raking up some part of it.

In 1937, Long’s letter to Swanson, her literary agent, cites an agreement to begin work at Paramount Pictures in June 1937 for a fee of $500 per week, including transportation.

In 1938, Long married Donaldson Thorburn, a newspaper and advertising man, but continued to recover from her poor finances.\footnote{121} A letter from Miller to Long’s lawyers asking for more time to settle an account included sentiment from Long: “Meantime, she is terribly sorry,

\footnotesize

---


\footnote{119}{Letter from Ross to Long dated May 1, 1936, Box 20, File 14 “Lois Long 1936,” New Yorker Records; Possible reasons for Ross’ scolding could be her side work in radio, or the demanding role of being both a working female and mother.}

\footnote{120}{Letter from Miller to Mr. George Garrett, n.d. Box 257, File 18 “Long, Lois - Personal,” New Yorker Records.}

\footnote{121}{Vassar Encyclopedia.}
but she is just without funds.” Long also reaches out to Arno, who apparently was also not good with money, requesting that he provide financial assistance:

Dear Peter:

Look, poots, please be a little more charming. I don’t like to nag and hound people and wire and telephone in the first place, and I get hurt, besides, when those messages saying he has just stepped out are handed to me.

As I told you before, I literally cannot afford to let you off the payments, but I did tell you that you could have a little time. This was well over a month ago -- in the meantime, moving expenses have been something terrific, and I am still burdened with the heavy installment payments on that damned house in Queens, which is surely not Don’s responsibility. I can’t manage to take over your share of Pat in addition.

You know that none of the money you pay has ever been alimony -- it has always been used entirely for the support of Pat, and, even if I were flush, I think it is something you should do. Don makes less money than you do, despite that “exec” title, and the two hundred he sends to the Coast for the support of his son every month are a definite sacrifice. Even if he could, I don’t see why he should be asked to take over the responsibility of Pat with me in your place.

So be a darling and do some bustling about that four hundred. Neither of us want lawyers getting everything messy and mixed up. But baby needs new shoes (and how) and the last installment of camp, and piano lessons, and yalla curtains for the winter.

In an undated letter, Long explained how Arno had been delinquent in paying alimony since their divorce, noting that she had been a good sport for years, in part because Arno had no bank account, but also because in Reno, she was just “another creditor,” and “there are hundreds of me”:

For a few months, the money came in on schedule, then stopped altogether. Years elapsed in which I pleaded piteously for a hundred here and a hundred there. Tonsil and mastoid operations came along, and I struggled with the damn bills. Finally Arno and I had a conference. I said that $500 a month is a lot of money to a wife who makes a salary, that I

---


123 Letter from Long to Arno, dated October 17th, 1938 in Box 300, File 4 “Long, Lois - Personal,” New Yorker Records. “Pat” refers to Patricia Arno, the couple’s daughter.
knew that he was not riding as high as formerly, and offered to readjust the matter. He cried out that I was the most wonderful sport in the world, and he could afford $300. So three hundred a month and failed to come in.\textsuperscript{124}

Still, Arno’s financial negligence was nothing new. In 1929, he had defaulted on payments on his Packard automobile, losing the lawsuit in which he complained that the car failed to attain the 95 miles per hour speed the company claimed it would.\textsuperscript{125} In 1931 after his divorce from Long, Arno moved into a penthouse at 419 East Fifty-Seventh Street.\textsuperscript{126} The same year, when Arno failed to pay the bill for a supper party he threw at the Waldorf-Astoria, he later requested that the hotel “play ball” with him and extend the note if necessary. Instead this resulted in a court summons to pay the remainder of the $1,215 bill.\textsuperscript{127} From these events, it appears that Arno took little financial responsibility for either Lois Long, or his daughter, Patricia. When his father, Supreme Court Justice Curtis A. Peters, died in 1939, Long received $1,000 at his death, while Patricia received $5,000 from the estate.\textsuperscript{128}

By 1939, Long was receiving an annual salary of $8,500 from the \textit{New Yorker}, with an agreement for 39 weeks of work. She continued writing another year of “On and Off the Avenue,” with an additional clause about agreeing to submit work to the \textit{New Yorker} first before submitting it elsewhere, and to obtain consent from the magazine before writing for radio or TV.\textsuperscript{129}

\textsuperscript{124} Box 300, File 4, Long, Lois - Personal “Memo to Morris Ernst (n.d.),” New Yorker Records.


\textsuperscript{128} “Justice Peters’s Will: Most of Estate Left to Family—Peter Arno, Son, Gets $20,000,” \textit{New York Times}, February 2, 1934; Arno was born “Curtis Arnoux Peters, Jr.” but changed it when he began working for the magazine.

\textsuperscript{129} Letter from Shuman, dated December 27, 1939 in Box 320, File 7 “Long, Lois,” New Yorker Records.
At the end of the decade, Long’s work at the *New Yorker* still retained the same voice, though it was limited to her fashion work. At best, Long found her stride when she was irritated and opinionated. She continued to poke at current fashion. Writing in response to a feature in the *Herald Tribune*, which mocked the fashion of twenty years prior, Long began:

Women tittered two or three weeks ago when the Herald Tribune’s rotogravure section showed the ‘silly’ fashions of twenty years ago as a contrast to the ‘sane’ modes of today. They chortled at the coy poses of former stellar mannequins and were cheered by the assumption that present fashions will look all right in the future because they recognize that women have waistlines, busts, and hips. This old war horse has heard all this many times before—even when flappers wore hats that showed nothing but their mouths. Since our evening dresses at the moment are full-skirted costume affairs, they may not look too ridiculous ten years from now, but the makeup of our modern glamour girls is going to be very funny in no time.”

Another detail demonstrated a shift in fashion over the Depression era, commenting on the “healthy” faces that Long cites as fashionable during the thirties. Describing a beauty product she wrote, “The kitten-faced cuties, with great, pleading eyes and tiny mouths, who were the stars of yesteryear have vanished in an era of sullen, bony faces that show Character.”

Certainly, the “sullen, bony” faces are connected with the struggle through the economy of the 1930s.

With published letters from readers asking for shopping and fashion advice, it was clear that Long’s fashion work held salience with her audience throughout the decade. She wrote:

The other day the phone rang in the office and a very nice woman at the other end of the wire said that she just adored this department. Said she read it from start to finish. Said she couldn’t live without it. Everyone was just beginning to purr softly and realize that it is a fine old world after all when she trustingly asked where she could buy a bright-colored wool dress to wear under a fur coat.

---

131 Ibid.
Long mentions the change in women’s fashion, as women began to wear pants, and the difference between tailored and ready-to-wear clothing, which was a reflection of mass production and the changed economy. Of pants, she warned that despite fashion and general moral acceptance, “You’re trespassing on masculine territory by wearing slacks, and you’ll find that men become extremely candid when they insist that women who wear pants should see that they fit.”\(^{133}\)

Long is not dismissive of ready-to-wear clothing, but elaborates on the difference between buying tailor-made clothes and mass-made apparel. “The ready-to-wear people are not interested, however, in women who have definite likes and dislikes. They apparently want customers with no minds of their own.”\(^{134}\)

Though Long’s career lost some of the momentum it gained during the early days of the *New Yorker*, she maintained the same sense of humor and cynicism in “On and Off the Avenue” throughout the decade. Long, who was frequently unamused by popular trends, never failed to illuminate the spectacle of it all. Such was the case with spring fashion. Long wrote, “Once the fashion scene changes from formal, man-made surroundings to the Great Outdoors (supplemented by a few essentials that Nature forgot, like beach cabanas and white iron furniture), the manifest duty of the American woman is to pretend more than ever that she is a carefully pruned flowering shrub.”\(^{135}\)

\(^{133}\) Ibid.

\(^{134}\) Ibid.

\(^{135}\) Long, “On and Off the Avenue,” *New Yorker*, June 3, 1939, 60-63.
CONCLUSION

When looking back at early *New Yorker* writers, it is difficult to decide where to place Lois Long. Her early work does demonstrate a coming of age: Her successful encounter with Manhattan socialites, witnessed in “Tables for Two,” followed by the challenging realities of life as a working mother (and at times single), matched by the struggles of making ends meet. Still, her career was expansive, as her talent developed in other capacities, seen through her work in radio and a brief attempt at writing in Hollywood. All of these events point to a the view that throughout her career, Long maintained energy and stamina.

The original luster of her work at the *New Yorker* faded some after the glittering episodes included in “Tables,” but her career, spanning 45 years, demonstrated that Long was an integral member of the *New Yorker* staff, with a career longer than many of her contemporaries from the first days of the magazine.

Her presence at the magazine and with the subjects of her column demonstrates a difference between the Manhattan social classes as well as the difference between her own life and elite Manhattan. “Wisdom perches permanently upon the battered brow of Aunt Lois,” she started in a 1931 *New Yorker* column, explaining the unpleasant realities of the work life she knew. “She knows that it is absolutely impossible to get to the office in the morning after a hard night unless you need the pay envelope involved.”136 Still, through these differences, Long’s work demonstrates that she found a place in these circles, and stayed on for decades.

Of guests on her radio show, Bernes Roberts wrote in a 1936 *Oakland Tribune* review that, “They are only too willing to appear with Lois on her broadcasts, for the pre-broadcast gettogethers at Lois’ home, where they work out the interview, turn into a merry party and provide much food for thought in their own fields of endeavor. After the show they migrate to a favorite cocktail haunt and talk it over.” Long had been a captivating character since day one, and she continued to attract attention throughout her career. It was part of the mantra she had stated in her early work in “Tables for Two”: “I now feel like doing a little reminiscing (I bet it is going to sound like a modern realistic novel) to prove that you needn’t ever get really tired of going out all the time if only you have an unlimited capacity for enjoyment wherever you happen to be.”

Through the clouded episodes written in her column, Long demonstrated that personal identity more important than where and what one has—capturing some essence of the twenties.

Long was the image of a modern woman, one who spent most of her life working, rather than settling into a demure style of life as she aged. Her story demonstrates the complexities of life in the early twentieth century and how social circles continued to evolve in the thirties when much of the nation struggled to recover from the economic plunge.

“Lois Long's sharp, smart wit is the kind that makes even the musicians laugh,” Roberts continued in his radio synopsis. “And when they laugh with a performer, the gag must be good.”

---


139 Robert.
WORKS CITED

Primary Sources

“Announcing a New Weekly Magazine: The New Yorker,” N.D. Jane C. Grant Collection, Division of Special Collections & University Archives, University of Oregon Libraries. Collection 41, Box 30, Folder 2.


———. “That was New York—And Those Were Tables for Two.” New Yorker, February 17, 1940, 35-41.

———. “When Nights are Bold.” New Yorker, July 18, 1925 - August 22, 1925.

“Lois Long is Dead; Fashion Editor: Writer, 73, on New Yorker Staff Since Founding New Field of Writing.” New York Times, July 31, 1974.


Mackay, Ellin. “Why We Go to Cabarets: A Post-Debutante Explains.” New Yorker, November 28, 1925, 7-8.

“Mrs. Arno Gets Divorce: Charges in Reno suit cartoonist was violently jealous.” *New York Times*, June 30, 1931.


*Secondary Sources*


———. “‘We Must Not Forget That We Are Dealing with a Woman’: Jane Grant's Return to a Magazine and a Cause.” *Journalism History* 33:3 (2007): 151-162.


APPENDIX

Figure 1. A typical “Tables for Two” spread. (“Tables for Two,” New Yorker, October 24, 1925.)
Figure 2. “On and Off the Avenue” was a primary target for advertisements, sometimes spanning over several pages. (“Fifth Avenue,” New Yorker, November 7, 1925.)
Figure 3. A photo of Peter Arno, Lois Long, Patricia Arno (N.d., Courtesy of Patricia Arno)