

2013

"What to Do With Our Girls": Prescriptive literature and the girl problem in the rural Midwest, 1865-1900

Rachel Erin Kleinschmidt
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd>

 Part of the [United States History Commons](#), and the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kleinschmidt, Rachel Erin, ""What to Do With Our Girls": Prescriptive literature and the girl problem in the rural Midwest, 1865-1900" (2013). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. 13359.
<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/13359>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

**“What to Do With Our Girls”: Prescriptive literature and the girl problem in the rural
Midwest, 1865-1900**

by

Rachel Erin Kleinschmidt

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Agricultural History and Rural Studies

Program of Study Committee:

Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, Major Professor
Kathleen Hilliard
Jana Byars
Michael Bailey
David Hollander

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2013

Copyright © Rachel Erin Kleinschmidt, 2013. All rights reserved.

DEDICATION

*To Micah
and
Mom and Dad*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
ABSTRACT	vi
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER 2. ROLE OF PRESCRIPTIVE LITERATURE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY	24
CHAPTER 3. HOME LIFE	68
CHAPTER 4. EDUCATION AND WORK	115
CHAPTER 5. SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS	161
CHAPTER 6. EXTREMES	214
CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION	239
BIBLIOGRAPHY	251

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many individuals helped to bring this dissertation to completion. The staffs at the many regional and state archives I visited provided much assistance and expertise in searching for and suggesting collections and family papers. James Hibbard at the Platteville Area Research Center in Platteville, Wisconsin made many helpful suggestions and was able to transfer collections from the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison to Platteville so I had less travelling to do. Debbie Miller at the Minnesota Historical Society and Mary Bennett at the State Historical Society of Iowa in Iowa City both had materials prepared for my arrival so my research went smoothly. Bill Kemp at the McLean County Historical Society in Bloomington, Illinois pointed out relevant collections and showed a great interest in the finished project. Finally, the many archivists and librarians across Iowa and Illinois, too numerous to name, deserve thanks for their expertise. The collections at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois, the Champaign County Historical Society at the Urbana Free Library in Urbana, Illinois, the Carl and Mary Koehler History Center in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and the Linn County Historical Society Reading Room in Cedar Rapids all proved valuable the completion of this dissertation.

I also received much financial assistance to complete my research. The Roswell and Elizabeth Garst Family Foundation provided significant funds toward research and writing in 2012 and 2013. The State Historical Society of Iowa awarded me a research grant in 2011. In 2012, I received an award from an anonymous donor to the history department at Iowa State University. All of these financial contributions allowed me to complete my research at very little personal expense.

Dr. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg served as my dissertation advisor, and her invaluable advice and moral support allowed me to keep going through the most difficult periods of the project. She read chapters multiple times, suggested sources to flesh out my ideas, and continually

pushed me to make my writing clearer. Dr. Kathleen Hilliard and Dr. Jana Byars read papers at the very early stages of the project and gave helpful advice about the direction of the dissertation. I had the opportunity to present my work in various stages at the Annual Meeting of the Agricultural History Society in 2012 and 2013, as well as the Rural Women's Studies Association Triennial Conference in 2012. The attendees of these conferences were unfailingly positive and generous in their critiques. The graduate students at Iowa State University, especially Sara Egge and Maggie Weber, listened to me talk endlessly about the project and gave me an outlet for my triumphs and frustrations. Jennifer Rivera helped through every part of the process, keeping up with my paperwork and answering all manner of questions about the workings of the university. In 2012, she and her husband Joe opened their home to me, giving me a place to stay for my final semester of coursework, for which I cannot thank them enough. The friendships I cultivated at Iowa State will be life-long.

Finally, I never would have made it to this point without the support of my family. My parents, Kent and Brenda Elam, have always encouraged my career goals and have faithfully read my work, even attending several academic conferences to hear me present papers. My grandparents as well have shown an interest in my work, always providing kind words and moral support. My grandfather, John Heflin, especially wanted to see me achieve all of my aspirations, reminding me to "finish the course" when times got tough. Grandpa did not live to see me graduate, but he was there in spirit. My in-laws, Kim and Rita Kleinschmidt, have cheered me on throughout my academic career and did not protest too much when their son moved with me to Iowa so I could attend graduate school. Last, but certainly not least, I thank my husband Micah Kleinschmidt. He is my partner, my support system, my biggest fan, and the love of my life.

ABSTRACT

For women of the Midwest in the late nineteenth century, the teenage and young adult years provided opportunities for women to explore options for work, education, socializing, and marriage, but within the strictly controlled boundaries of the lifestyle of farm daughter and helper. The prevalence of teaching jobs in rural schools, as well as opportunities for socialization, such as church, temperance societies, and other community activities, provided a range of activities acceptable for young women to partake. Social prescriptions and parental guidance influenced the expectations of how a young woman should act, yet these women worked within and without of these boundaries to forge a lifestyle of their own.

Prescriptive literature, including etiquette advice manuals and articles in newspapers and farm journals, pushed young women in many different directions related to their lifestyle and attitude. Advice authors expected girls to conform to an urban, middle-class definition of womanhood, which defined women as caretakers of the home and family. This definition could not encompass the realities of life on the farm, where women and girls were productive members of the farming household. Rural advice attempted to take this position into account, but these writers worried more about the potential for farm girls to leave the farm. None of the prescriptive literature could accurately assess the position of rural daughters, as the unique aspects of farm life, and the differences between farm families' material circumstances, made generalizations about girls difficult.

Girls on the farm had serious responsibilities within their families, but still acted as young, single women. The tension between roles as productive members of the farming household and roles as job seekers, socialites, and potential marriage partners provided a space where single women in rural families both provided for the family and community and found ways to maintain social lives that may not have fit within the social prescriptions. The diaries of

four young women in rural Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin from the years 1865 to 1894 provide contrasting examples of how young, unmarried rural women negotiated the societal prescriptions for women's behavior in the context of the farm home.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

A day in the life of Addie Crouch, an eighteen-year old girl living in rural Iowa in 1881, was routine, but never boring. On a typical morning, Addie “got the work done up” around the house, which consisted of cooking breakfast for the family, cleaning up after said breakfast, routine maintenance of the home, and usually a bigger chore, such as laundry or baking. Some days, Addie taught at a local schoolhouse on top of her regular tasks; others, she worked outside around the farm home or helped her father keep the books for his business. David Crouch was a farmer, a veteran of the Civil War, although he only served in the last days of the war. Addie achieved a level of education higher than that of many young women in previous decades and was able to use it toward a successful career as a teacher. Her supplementary skills allowed her to sell garments that she sewed and help keep her father’s business solvent.

Addie’s grueling daily routine contrasted sharply with her leisure time activities. Myriad social activities made up Addie’s evenings and weekends, including many interactions with boys and girls her own age in a range of environments. At times, Addie socialized in community settings, with supervision from parents and other adults, but most of the time, she and other young people fraternized away from the prying eyes of authority figures. To the modern eye, Addie’s independence was staggering. She went where she wanted, when she wanted, without any thought or caution from her parents. Addie may have been slightly more strong-willed than the average rural girl, but all over the Midwest in the late nineteenth century, young women found opportunities to have a good time with friends and family, all while completing necessary chores and tasks on the family farm. In rural areas, this attitude was typical, but the unbridled

energy of the farm girl would have caused a middle-class family much consternation. In the pivotal period between the end of the Civil War and the twentieth century, girls were a problem.¹

In the wake of the Civil War, historian LeeAnn Whites noted a “crisis in gender,” particularly in the southern United States, as the burdens placed on women, including taking a larger role in supporting the family while their counterparts were away fighting caused a shift in thinking about “appropriate gender roles.”² Other historians of women found similar circumstances, both in the South and in the Northeastern United States.³ The Midwest presented a different situation. The states of Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin did not have battles fought upon their soil, nor did they experience the daily reminder of loss through the occupation period of Reconstruction as Southerners did. They were also farther removed from the sites of battle than those in the Northeast. Yet Midwestern women still did experience separation and loss as many of their men traveled great distances to fight for the Union. In Iowa, for example, almost half of all males had a role in the war, and of all of the states, Iowa sent the largest proportion of its men to fight in relation to the state’s total population than any other.⁴

During the conflict, the mostly rural context of the mid-nineteenth century Midwest provided a different setting for women to navigate society on their own.⁵ Historian J.L. Anderson documented the experiences of women in Iowa during the Civil War through diaries and correspondence left by women who worked and managed their family farms during the conflict.

¹ Addie A. Crouch, manuscript diaries, 1881-1885, D9, f.4, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, January 1881-May 1882.

² LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 3.

³ See Marilyn Mayer Culpepper, *All Things Altered: Women in the Wake of Civil War and Reconstruction* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2002); and Judith Giesberg, *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Home Front* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

⁴ Leland Sage, *A History of Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1974), 154.

⁵ For the purposes of this project, “rural” will be defined broadly as both a mainly agricultural area, as well as an area socially defined by belief in the moral value of an agrarian lifestyle. For example, Dorothy Schweider noted that Iowa’s nineteenth-century population “remained overwhelmingly rural” and “Iowans firmly espoused agrarianism, the belief in the superiority of rural life” in *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 172.

Anderson noted that farm women completed their normal duties, like household chores and childrearing, while also using strategies to keep the farm going during the soldier's absence.⁶ These farm women rarely had to step in and do field work themselves, as related men, either too young or too old for service, generally helped out, but most shouldered an extra burden of helping with the financial management of the farm, including selling the harvest and dealing with creditors. Many women also moved back to their family of origin and "were subsumed under the hierarchy of existing families," using kinship connections as a strategy for survival.⁷ Although most women relied on the advice of their husbands and families to keep the farm going, Anderson noted, "even when husbands provided copious advice, they reminded themselves and their wives that the women were in the position to know best."⁸ Farm wives assumed a substantial amount of power through their management of the farm.

Midwesterners experienced the war differently than others across the country, and most Midwestern states did not suffer the tremendous losses of life that areas surrounding battlefields experienced. For example, estimates suggest that the Confederacy lost one in five white, military age men.⁹ Although many former Confederate women developed alternative marriage strategies, such as marrying outside of the traditional age bracket, historians have noted a general feeling that "the war condemned a generation of southern women to spinsterhood."¹⁰ In contrast, the overall impact of the war on the Midwestern population was not as great. In Linn County, Iowa, for example, the population briefly suffered, mainly from lack of westward migration. In 1863,

⁶ J.L. Anderson, "The Vacant Chair on the Farm: Soldier Husbands, Farm Wives, and the Iowa Home Front, 1861-1865," *The Annals of Iowa* 66 (2007): 241-265.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 265.

⁹ J. David Hacker, Libra Hilde, and James Holland Jones, "The Effect of the Civil War on Southern Marriage Patterns," *Journal of Southern History* 76 (2010): 39.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

the population was 18,693, and by 1865, had already increased to 20,754.¹¹ Linn County's population would continue to grow to 31,080 in 1870. The ratio of males to females remained steady as well. In 1860, there were 9,954 males and 8,982 females. By 1870, there were 16,233 males and 14,847 females.¹²

Other Midwestern states showed a similar trend of growth in the period from 1860 to 1870. Whereas some states in other parts of the country suffered population depletion, especially among men, the Midwest expanded. The population of Champaign County, Illinois nearly doubled in the years during and after the Civil War, retaining a larger number of men than women by 1870.¹³ Olmsted County, Minnesota showed a similar jump in population during the same years.¹⁴ Grant County, Wisconsin did not have as large an increase in the ten-year period, but still saw growth and a similar ratio of males to females.¹⁵ The post-Civil War adjustments in these Midwestern states would have been different than those states that lost large percentages of their populations, but the experience of war still played an important role in the following years as the country struggled to return to a semblance of normality.

Not only the Civil War, but also rural-to-urban migration produced great changes in the gendered fabric of the United States. During the late nineteenth century, many young, single individuals traveled away from family farms to larger urban centers looking for new opportunities. Girls who left the farm could expect to find jobs as domestic laborers or factory workers, giving them freedom and disposable income to participate in leisure activities. The

¹¹ "Rallying to the Union," Military, Civil War Folder, Carl and Mary Koehler History Center, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Linn County, Iowa, was chosen for this study because a large amount of Civil War soldiers came from this area, as described in Luther A. Brewer and Barthinius L. Wick, *History of Linn County Iowa: From Its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The Pioneer Publishing Company, 1911), 470-478.

¹² 1860 and 1870 Population Statistics, Historical Census Browser, Retrieved 14 October 2011, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>. 2004.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Retrieved 1 December 2012.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

presence of these unsupervised girls in the city prompted what some historians have termed the “girl problem.” With money, time, and independence, girls had the opportunity to get into all kinds of trouble, which worried parents, community leaders, and social and cultural advisors. Social reformers identified this “girl problem” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in many larger cities of the United States.

In her study of New York in the first decades of the twentieth century, Ruth Alexander noted that the availability of work outside the home in the city provided a catalyst for young women to negotiate the boundaries of their gender and sexuality, and according to some conservatives, to create “problem” girls. According to Alexander, “during the early twentieth century young women and girls across the socioeconomic spectrum self-consciously rejected the behavioral conventions and moral values of the nineteenth century, substituting self-assertion and conspicuous heterosexuality for deference and sexual purity.”¹⁶ For young women in the nineteenth century, “feminine domesticity” acted as an idealized norm, with “devotion to the family, above personal freedom.”¹⁷ By the twentieth century, urbanization and an increase in industrial jobs allowed young women to flee to the city, breaking the bonds of domesticity so ingrained in Victorian culture.

The “girl problem” was not limited to the industrialized North. Scholar Susan Cahn studied girls in the South between 1920 and 1960, and identified the same apprehension over this type of situation, particularly the presence of more modern girls who held liberal attitudes about sexual experimentation. In the South, the “girl problem” coalesced around issues of race, class, and sex, as “adolescent girls behaving in similarly ‘modern’ ways across class and racial divides helped unhinge the established coupling of race and sex that fortified the power of white elites

¹⁶ Ruth Alexander, *The ‘Girl Problem’: Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

and a growing middle class.”¹⁸ More than simply distressing the population over sexuality, the “girl problem” in the South threatened the entire cultural fabric.

For Cahn, the South experienced much of the same anxiety as the industrial North over the role of girls in the critical era of the first half of the twentieth century, as “the bold presence and assertive sexuality of teenagers represented not only change, but also challenge.”¹⁹ In the wake of uncertainty of the viability of the New South, “the adolescent girl...became a trope for the South’s modernity—whether viewed as the region’s salvation or its damnation.”²⁰ Young women’s sexuality represented a changing social system not shared by many concerned adults.

Both Alexander and Cahn attributed the shift of women’s attitudes to “modernity,” as the societal changes wrought by modern ways of living allowed girls to explore new roles. In Alexander’s view, this shift was “aided by the increasing convergence of working- and middle-class ways of life,” and young women attained “a grudging acceptance of female adolescent autonomy and sexual expression” through this newly acquired lens.²¹ This all contrasted with the nineteenth-century way of life, which bound women by “moral and sexual values of domestic ideology.”²² The middle-class ideal of what girls were supposed to do profoundly changed in the wake of the modern, urbanized world.

Alexander’s work adequately identified the “girl problem” in a major city, but she failed to recognize that many of the characteristics she identified as “modern,” such as an interest in work outside the home and an active social life with the opposite sex before marriage, had previously existed, even in rural areas in the late nineteenth century. While urbanization and

¹⁸ Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Alexander, *The ‘Girl Problem,’* 2.

²² *Ibid.*, 19.

industrialization did open up new opportunities in new spaces for girls, most young women found ways to express themselves and “rebel” against the ideal in earlier times. Alexander assumed that women in the nineteenth century, “lived under the close supervision of adults—parents, teachers, employers, or slaveholders—and had little opportunity to mingle freely with their peers or to elaborate the values and rituals of an adolescent subculture.”²³ This may have been the case for some girls, but opportunities for socialization in rural communities, such as church, clubs, and fraternal societies, allowed young women and men access to each other in a relatively unsupervised setting, and in these situations, young people found their own space in which to mingle freely.

In addition, while historians have ably identified and expounded upon the “girl problem” in certain regions, many have virtually ignored the rural Midwest. A version of this problem was present in the Midwest as well, and in an even earlier period than has been noted before. Not as concerned with adolescent girls’ sexual and criminal delinquency as in more urban areas, prescriptive writers instead focused on girls of marriageable age rejecting the values of country life in favor of a more materialistic or middle-class lifestyle. Education and work provided opportunities for young women to experience independence, but within the standards of rural behavior.

Young women in rural areas in the post-Civil War period faced a variety of options in work, education, and social interactions. In contrast, advisors expected urban, middle-class women to focus only on the home and less practical pursuits, allowing them to become the moral centers of their families and ladies of leisure. Prescriptive advice literature directed to an urban audience failed to recognize the realities of life on the farm. Urban reformers fretted over the “girl problem,” or the issue of young, single women without supervision and the independence

²³ Ibid., 18.

and sexual freedom they held. The “girl problem” in rural areas, though, was more a problem of farm girls’ acceptance of the urban, middle-class ideal for women. Farm girls, then, adapted advice to correspond more closely to farm and rural community life by accepting and rejecting typical norms as they saw fit. The daily rhythms of rural life shaped courtship rituals, marriage prospects, educational opportunities, and employment, and girls adjusted to these realities, particularly as they related to options for marriage or single life.

Above all, the most important role a rural girl could play was to be “useful.” In a study of family and work patterns in early twentieth-century New Zealand, sociologist Claire Toynbee used the archetype of the “really useful woman” to describe the ideal farm wife or daughter. In a society with a large gender imbalance favoring males, farmers needed “really useful women” to help run farms and sustain rural households. Daughters followed in the footsteps of their mothers, learning how to keep house and do necessary farm chores to support their parents.²⁴ Although the material circumstances of turn-of-the-century New Zealand differed from the Midwest in the late nineteenth century, usefulness remained an important standard for rural girls. As long as daughters were useful, parents allowed much leeway for their social behavior.

Usefulness took a variety of forms as well. The farm girls surveyed by Toynbee performed many chores of all types, and girls were “expected to be independent, self-reliant and useful. Their contribution was essential to all aspects of domestic self-provisioning and to the productivity of the farm itself.”²⁵ This held true for Midwestern girls as well. Contributing to the family in any way, be it through labor in the home, work on the farm, or financial contributions from other employment, characterized young women as useful to their families. Like the girls Toynbee studied, the girls in this dissertation were all useful to their mothers and fathers, despite

²⁴ Claire Toynbee, *Her Work and His: Family, Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930* (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995), 50-51.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

some of them participating in behavior considered problematic to middle-class advisors. Their relative independence in social and community settings did not take away from their importance to their families at home.

According to Alexander, Cahn, and other historians of the “girl problem,” twentieth-century women wanted to throw off the moral prescriptions of the Victorian era and take part in education, work, and increased sexual activity. On the farm, this was already going on in the late nineteenth century, but within the context of the rural community. The opportunities for women to socialize and work together in rural religious groups and reform organizations made a broadening of their horizons possible in a multitude of ways. The relative independence granted to rural girls allowed for courtship and socialization opportunities at the same level as urban girls, but within a community context. The “girl problem,” as defined by urban standards, had little bearing on the lives of girls in the country. Middle-class prescriptive authors would have defined many farm daughters as “problems,” but parents worried less about their girls socializing with boys and more about girls’ usefulness and their potential to leave the farm and rural community.

What little rural prescriptive literature existed advised farm parents on how to make rural living more pleasant and enjoyable to their daughters. If girls abandoned farms and rural communities for more exciting living options in urban areas, the rural society, based on family and mutuality, would cease to function. Farmers passed down their land to family, usually to sons, and those boys would need good wives to help them perpetuate the farming enterprise. A “problem” girl in the country would be a girl who shirked her responsibilities at home and pursued a life away from the farm.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, prescriptive advice commonly appeared in local and national newspapers, farm journals and etiquette manuals. Girls emulated the women who had survived the war years by filling in for absent husbands and fathers on farms and in businesses, and who returned to their previously held gender roles when men returned from the war. Writers targeted this post-war generation and stressed the importance of marriage and proper roles for women. However “proper roles” for women on the farm differed greatly from roles of the urban, middle-class ideal woman. Women on farms and in rural communities faced a different reality, one of hard work and mutuality with other farm family members, men included. Daughters also made up an important economic component of the family farm by providing needed labor and assistance in many instances. Rural girls played an important role in community functions as well, participating in activities where socialization with young men could eventually lead to marriage, perpetuating the farming community.

The historical literature on rural women has hinged on the idea that the separate spheres ideology played a less significant role on farms than it did in more urban, middle-class areas. Nancy Grey Osterud’s foundational work, *The Bonds of Community*, effectively argued that women’s relations to men held more importance than the differences between men and women stressed in middle-class prescriptive literature.²⁶ According to Osterud,

The dominant paradigm of gender relations in nineteenth-century American women’s history is epitomized by the phrase ‘separate spheres,’ a phrase used during the early nineteenth century to define the proper realms of women and men. Prescriptive literature stressed the difference between women’s and men’s work, place, and character; relations between the sexes were seen in terms of complementarity rather than commonality.²⁷

This “complementarity” of the sexes did not work on the family farm; women and girls actively participated in the family economy, performing productive roles and running farm households.

²⁶ Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

These roles, in which women worked side-by-side with men, stood in contrast to the dominant ideology of the time. Previous historians of women, according to Osterud, largely ignored this inherent relationship, choosing instead to focus on the differences between men and women and single-sex activities rather than mutuality.²⁸

Joan Jensen has also noted the importance of girls and women on the farm. According to Jensen, “surviving on a family farm taught women to manage details. Chores gave daughters responsibility in the house, yard, and field at an early age.”²⁹ Jensen’s extensive study of Wisconsin in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries demonstrated the crucial role women played on the farm through sideline businesses, such as making butter and cultivating garden plots. These sidelines not only provided subsistence for the household, but also were sold at market for extra income.

Adolescent girls had their own part to play on the family farm. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg argued that despite age, parents of girls expected them to do a significant portion of work on the farm. According to Riney-Kehrberg, “farm households could not function without someone to clean and cook, and girls, often at a quite young age, might be asked to stand in for an incapacitated, absent, or dead mother. Given a mother’s poor health or the birth of a sibling, girls might expect to remain home from school and give their attention to household chores.”³⁰ Joan Jensen also recognized this importance to the home and wrote “girls, especially those between the ages ten and thirteen, were more likely to be enrolled [in school] than boys of that age. Yet, if they were more likely to be enrolled, they were also more likely to be absent than enrolled

²⁸ Ibid., 6.

²⁹ Joan Jensen, *Calling this Place Home: Women on the Wisconsin Frontier, 1850-1925* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006), 416.

³⁰ Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play, and Coming of Age in the Midwest* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 47.

boys.”³¹ Despite the fact that many families encouraged their daughters to go to school, their importance to the farm and home jeopardized their opportunity for school attendance. While girls lived at home with their family of origin, the family expected their labor.

Once a girl reached an acceptable courting age, she often turned her thoughts toward marriage. Marriage played an extremely important role in the life of a farm woman. Families expected young women to marry and establish their own farming family and household. Marriage served as the point at which women became adults. Osterud noted this recognition of marriage as the start of adulthood for women, comparing it to men, in which “marriage confirmed the independence men had achieved through the accumulation of property.”³² Men could not marry until they became independent adults, while women never truly became independent, but instead reached adulthood through marriage. According to Osterud, “Married women were no longer subordinated on the basis of generational position, but their subordination based on gender continued.”³³ The choice of marriage partner, though, remained, “the most important decision a woman could expect to make.”³⁴

This importance of choosing a partner featured prominently in the prescriptive literature of the era. Articles and books encouraged women to search out the best qualities in men who would provide for them and not abuse them in any way. Osterud noted, “for most women, remaining single was the result of both voluntary and involuntary factors. At first, an unmarried woman could discourage suitors she did not find appealing with the expectation that others would be forthcoming. After a while she began to face the choice between accepting a man who

³¹ Jensen, *Calling this Place Home*, 260.

³² Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 93.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

was less than ideal and remaining single for the rest of her life.”³⁵ By the time a woman was confronted with this choice, she began to seek out alternatives.

Remaining single was a viable option, but not one without some serious complications. In her study of single women on family farms in Australia, historian Kate Hunter noted that “single farm women were as Janus—looking from one world to another...from the world of girlhood, ‘maidenhood,’ and spinsterhood to the world of adulthood without wifehood.”³⁶ As marriage served as the signifier of becoming an adult, unmarried women faced the incongruous position as both a “girl” and an independent woman. Due to this independence, “single women were a mobile and flexible workforce, working in their own houses and in the households of extended kin and neighbours, and sometimes working for wages in households beyond the immediate community.”³⁷ Single farm women had the ability to move within and outside of the household, providing assistance where needed most.

This assistance, though, often came at the behest of “duty” to the family or community. Hunter described duty as “both the task a woman performed and the force that bound her to that work.”³⁸ For many young single women, duty to parents and siblings drove them to remain with their families for life, giving them all of the help and support they could manage. Women who subscribed to a philosophy of duty sometimes, according to Hunter, viewed the household as “a site of hierarchy and subordination.”³⁹ Like usefulness, though, duty took different forms for different people, and the girls in this study experienced duty similarly. For some young women,

³⁵ Ibid., 124.

³⁶ Kathryn Hunter, *Father's Right Hand Man: Women on Australia's Family Farms in the Age of Federation, 1880s-1920s* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004), xix.

³⁷ Ibid., 78.

³⁸ Ibid., 126.

³⁹ Ibid., 133.

duty was simply a part of life, and for others, an oppressive force, binding them to their family of origin.

The realities of life on the farm differed from the middle-class ideals espoused by prescriptive literature of the late nineteenth century. In the post-Civil War period, Victorian ideals about women's roles still dominated the conversation about the ways women were to conduct themselves in public and private. These ideals, however, mainly affected the middle class. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg made note of this and the fact that rural families rarely lived up to this ideal. According to Riney-Kehrberg,

in the last decades of the nineteenth century Midwestern middle-class families moved from a corporate understanding of family life, which emphasized the economic health of the group over the desires of the individual, to the companionate family, where because of relatively greater economic resources, emotional obligations took greater precedence over the simple physical support of the family.⁴⁰

This transition took place slowly, though, as rural families rarely had the resources to develop this type of family situation, but the ideology on some level “encouraged the transformation of at least portions of these ideals into policy.”⁴¹ As families gradually adopted middle-class roles, prescriptive literature writers attempted to solidify these ideals by encouraging young women to adapt their life situations to a more middle-class reality.

The project undertaken here will use Nancy Cott's seminal work, *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835*, as a model. Cott analyzed literature written about women as well as personal accounts of women from the early nineteenth century to ascertain how the social prescriptions related to the “‘cult of true womanhood’ and the ‘cult of domesticity’ ...related to women's actual circumstances, experiences, and

⁴⁰ Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm*, 11-12.

⁴¹ Ibid.

consciousness.”⁴² These “cults” placed a huge significance on women’s roles within the household and as wives and mothers, related to broader social changes in the antebellum Northeast. Cott examined women’s roles in work, the home, reform, and relationships with others based on the literature available. Where Cott’s study focused on early nineteenth-century middle-class women in urban areas of New England, the current study will instead use these tools to ascertain the societal roles of a different demographic of women.

This project will examine prescriptive literature relating to girls’ and women’s roles in nineteenth century society, as well as a selection of diaries of rural, Midwestern girls from a range of ages. Prescriptive literature, published in the form of newspaper articles, farm journal articles, and advice manuals, provided information relating to the ideal young woman in the post-Civil War era. This advice formed a basis for what advisors considered proper and admirable behavior in girls, as well as suggestions for reaching these idealistic goals.

A survey of Midwestern newspapers, nationally circulated farm journals, and etiquette advice manuals, makes up the analysis of prescriptive literature. The rural press in the late nineteenth century, represented by the newspapers from four Midwestern counties, provided a wealth of information about rural life and customs in addition to typical political, economic, and agricultural information. Newspapers of this variety came and went frequently throughout the period, many changing names and editors multiple times throughout their tenure, with others failing soon after beginning. The farm journals of the period contained valuable farming advice and techniques, but most also had women’s or children’s sections, geared toward the farming family members, which discussed social and cultural issues of the era. Etiquette manuals disseminated more formal advice for the ideal young woman and her relationships with men.

⁴² Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: ‘Woman’s Sphere’ in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1.

Manuals described typical social prescriptions detailing the ways in which young women and men should act, especially when negotiating the boundaries of romantic relationships and potential marriages.

Personal diaries provide a counterpoint to the prescriptive literature. Where manuals and articles gave details about the idealized girl, this ideal seldom, if ever, actually existed in practice. Diaries can illustrate the daily lives of farm girls in the late nineteenth century. Information that women wrote in diaries demonstrated certain realities of life that young women found difficult to express elsewhere. Grey Osterud noted the importance of personal papers, as “these not only provide information about the common activities and crucial events in people’s lives but also illuminate their thoughts and feelings.”⁴³ Girls wrote in diaries to record their daily activities, but also to confide about friends, family, and courtship rituals. Information from diaries can help the reader to get into the minds of farm girls and to ascertain how they felt about their lives and activities.

The use of diaries, and similarly correspondence, as source material presents some difficulties. Judy Lensink observed in her transcription and analysis of the diary of Emily Hawley Gillespie, a young woman in nineteenth-century Iowa, “the diary is not a literal transcription of a day in the life. The diarist too selects what to describe.”⁴⁴ Lensink termed this selectivity “diary time,” and noted that a diarist might spend time “giving a full page to thoughts surrounding a lover’s single sentence, while describing fourteen hours of the day with the single telling phrase, ‘did usual work.’”⁴⁵ The self-selection process of the diarist could obscure some of the realities of life, as the girl chose to write about what was important to her, not necessarily

⁴³ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 13.

⁴⁴ Judy Lensink, *‘A Secret to Be Buried’: The Diary and Life of Emily Hawley Gillespie, 1858-1888* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 382.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

the exact course of every day. Similarly, Ellen Rothman found that “diaries and journals represent a more immediate, if not always more illuminating, record of daily life.”⁴⁶ Diary writers’ individual focus allows for a better description of the human experience, but does not necessarily provide any ground-breaking insights.

In addition, while by today’s standards, diaries and letters hold an expectation of privacy, this did not necessarily hold true in previous generations. In some cases, diaries functioned as public books, with multiple family members writing entries together.⁴⁷ In the same way, family members often shared correspondence with each other, as a way to communicate information about friends and family who lived far away. Because of this, historians cannot view diaries and correspondence as simply the unbiased thoughts and feelings of the people writing them, but instead they must analyze the sources critically as a way to garner an idea of what daily life was like for the girls recording them. Despite the fact that the authors may have self-edited, diaries still provide the best insight into the place of girls on the family farm and the rural community.

An analysis of diaries in contrast to idealized prescriptive literature illuminates some complicating issues related to the more personal identity of girls as opposed to the societal definition of what made up “girlhood.” First, the chronological definition of girlhood was fluid. In the typical perception, as mentioned earlier, marriage served as the dividing line between “girlhood” and “adulthood,” regardless of age, particularly in a period when “teenagers” did not yet exist as a recognized demographic.⁴⁸ This rigid distinction between, essentially, young and old had less impact in rural areas, where some girls married right at the end of adolescence, while others might never marry and remain in the home of their immediate family for life. The

⁴⁶ Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 8.

⁴⁷ Lensink noted several instances in Gillespie’s diary where others, including her sister and her father, wrote passages in her diary, either with or without permission. See Lensink, *A Secret to Be Buried*, 386.

⁴⁸ Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm*, 3-4.

question of when these women became “adults” is complicated, as in many cases, a sixteen-year-old “girl” could also be a married woman, or a woman in her late twenties could be a “girl,” subordinated to her family of origin. As such, this project will use the definition Martha Foote Crow established in her work *The American Country Girl*. Crow examined rural girls from the ages of fifteen (or even younger) to twenty-nine, defining age span as thus:

Some farmers’ daughters become responsible for a considerable amount of labor value well before the age of fifteen; and on the other hand the energy of these young rural women is abundantly extended beyond the gateway of womanhood, far indeed into the period when the country girl is of greatest use as a labor unit and gives herself without stint (and often without pay) to the welfare of the whole farmstead.⁴⁹

As young, unmarried women, in a relatively wide range of ages, the girls who wrote the diaries focused less on their chronological stage of life and more on the duties and responsibilities that were required of them as farm daughters. Even older daughters held a special place in the farm home as a valuable source of labor. In some cases, women well past adolescence and young adulthood remained “girls” in the eyes of their families, as they never married and remained in their household of origin. Chronological standards for stages of life infrequently lined up with the statistical norm in rural families and communities.

Amy Froide’s work on unmarried women in early modern England also informs the discussion on what makes a “girl.” While the geographical and chronological scope of Froide’s study has little bearing on an analysis of girls in the late nineteenth-century United States, her theoretical framework provides a basis for defining what made a woman “single.” Froide used the term “singlewoman” to define “an adult woman who has never been married (although she might later marry).”⁵⁰ She also differentiated specific types of singlewomen, such as “life-cycle singlewomen” (women who eventually married) and “lifelong singlewomen” (women who never

⁴⁹ Martha Foote Crow, *The American Country Girl* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1915), 7-8.

⁵⁰ Amy M. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8.

married).⁵¹ The women described in the current study fit into both of these categories, and the distinctions between the two are important, despite the fact that literature of the era did not use such terminology. As such, the terms will not be used in the current study, but serve to differentiate the different categories of unmarried women and girls.

This study will analyze four diaries of girls from the period 1865-1894 in four different Midwestern states. Throughout this period, girls' lives in rural areas changed very little, despite the major changes happening elsewhere in the country, and the selection of diaries demonstrates this continuity. The girls represent counties from four states in the upper Midwest: Illinois, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota. The counties were mainly rural, with at least one larger metropolitan area, which provided urban centers for the girls to travel to for various functions.

Carrie Markle resided in Champaign County, Illinois and recorded diaries for the years 1865-1867. Carrie was born in Jackson, Michigan in 1844. Her father, Jacob Markle, was a farmer with 80 acres of improved land and a small amount of livestock.⁵² Jacob and his wife Doratha had at least six children, including Carrie, who was one of the youngest.⁵³ At some point before 1860, Carrie moved in with another family, the Franciscos, and lived with them in Washtenaw County, Michigan. Mr. Francisco worked as a merchant, and Carrie worked in household service. Carrie moved with the Franciscos to Champaign County, Illinois (formed by the State Legislature in 1833) where Mr. Francisco worked as a grain dealer in Philo, Illinois.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Ibid., 9.

⁵² Jacob Markle, Census Year: 1860; Census Place: *Waterloo, Jackson, Michigan*; Archive Collection Number: *T1164*; Roll: 9; Page: 47; Line: 05; Schedule Type: *Agriculture..* Ancestry.com, *Selected U.S. Federal Census Non-Population Schedules, 1850-1880* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Accessed 10 April 2013.

⁵³ Jacob Markle, Year: 1850; Census Place: *Waterloo, Jackson, Michigan*; Roll: *M432_352*; Page: 457B; Image: 663. Ancestry.com. *1850 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009. Accessed 10 April 2013.

⁵⁴ It is unclear how Carrie made her way to Illinois, but as of her diary in 1865, she was living with the Franciscos' in Philo, Illinois. By 1870, the Franciscos were still in Philo, and Carrie was married and living in her own household with her husband. Henry Francisco, Year: 1870; Census Place: *Philo, Champaign, Illinois*; Roll:

Carrie was about 25 years old at the time at the time she wrote her diaries, and she worked for Mrs. Francisco and as a teacher for several terms. Although she was at the older end of the spectrum, Carrie's status as a young single woman in the home of guardians defined her as a girl.

Mary Elizabeth Pascoe grew up in Hazel Green, Grant County, Wisconsin. Grant County was established in 1836, almost ten years before the Pascoe's arrived.⁵⁵ Born in 1855, she recorded an almost daily diary throughout the year 1871. Her parents, Henry and Grace Pascoe, emigrated from Cornwall and set up a farm among other Cornish immigrants. They had eight children.⁵⁶ Mary was sixteen years old and still attended school in 1871, as well as worked on the family farm. In her diary, Mary put down her thoughts about her schooling, her family and friends, and her jobs on the farm. Her recollections were different from the other girls surveyed, as she was younger and did not have a job outside of the home. Mary's life followed the more traditional path for girls, as defined by prescriptive literature, and her life serves as a comparison to the more "rebellious" girls.

Addie Crouch was born in 1863 in Prairieburg, Iowa, and kept a daily diary from 1881-1885. Addie spent much of that time as a teacher, periodically traveling to other communities and boarding with other families to work. Addie's father David farmed in Linn County, Iowa and the family participated in the community through religious and fraternal organizations. Linn County, situated in the eastern portion of Iowa, was established in 1837 as part of the Wisconsin Territory, nine years before Iowa would achieve statehood.⁵⁷ Addie Crouch lived in Prairieburg,

M593_193; Page: 225B; Image: 452; Family History Library Film: 545692. Ancestry.com. 1870 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009. Accessed 10 April 2013.

⁵⁵ C.W. Butterfield, *History of Wisconsin* (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1881), 496.

⁵⁶ Dr. Stephen DeWitt Stephens, Introduction. Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, manuscript diary, SC 222, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁵⁷ Luther A. Brewer and Barthinius L. Wick. *History of Linn County Iowa: From Its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time*, vol. 1. (Chicago: The Pioneer Publishing Company, 1911), 31-32.

the first community in Boulder Township, Linn County, incorporated in 1850. The railroad proved instrumental in the growth of Prairieburg, where Addie lived and worked as a teacher.⁵⁸

Finally, Rhoda Emery recorded a diary from 1889-1894 in Olmsted County, Minnesota. Rhoda worked as a teacher throughout that period, along with her brother and sister, and she helped to support her family farm when her father was no longer able to do so. Born in 1872, Rhoda was only 17 years old when she began writing, but she already had a teaching career. Of all of the girls who wrote diaries, Rhoda had the most developed working life, as she looked to teaching as a career rather than simply a way to keep busy until an eventual marriage. Rhoda also owned some property of her own, which made her in some ways much more independent than the other young women.

The women who wrote these diaries had several things in common. All of them had an education, or were in the process of going to school. As the youngest while recording a diary, Mary Pascoe had the least amount of schooling, yet regularly attended while still helping on the family farm. Carrie, Addie, and Rhoda also obtained jobs as teachers for at least several terms. In addition, all of the girls had some experience with a family member having served in the Civil War. Although Carrie and Mary would have been the only ones to remember some of the war, at least one member from each girl's family served in the Civil War.⁵⁹ Albeit indirectly, all of the

⁵⁸ Ibid., 278.

⁵⁹ Carrie Markle's brother David, Mary Pascoe's father Henry, Addie Crouch's father David, and Rhoda Emery's father Caleb all served in the Civil War. David Markle, Union, 11 August 1862. Historical Data Systems, comp. *American Civil War Soldiers* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 1999. Accessed 10 April 2013; Henry Pascoe, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington, D.C.; *Consolidated Lists of Civil War Draft Registration Records (Provost Marshal General's Bureau; Consolidated Enrollment Lists, 1863-1865)*; Record Group: 110, *Records of the Provost Marshal General's Bureau (Civil War)*; Collection Name: *Consolidated Enrollment Lists, 1863-1865 (Civil War Union Draft Records)*; ARC Identifier: 4213514; Archive Volume Number: 3 of 3. Ancestry.com. U.S., *Civil War Draft Registrations Records, 1863-1865* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Accessed 10 April 2013; David Crouch, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington, D.C.; *Consolidated Lists of Civil War Draft Registration Records (Provost Marshal General's Bureau; Consolidated Enrollment Lists, 1863-1865)*; Record Group: 110, *Records of the Provost Marshal General's Bureau (Civil War)*; Collection Name: *Consolidated Enrollment Lists, 1863-1865 (Civil War Union Draft Records)*; ARC Identifier: 4213514; Archive Volume Number:

girls would have dealt with the aftereffects of a significant male family member having been away from the farm and home for a period of time, however long or short.

Three of the four girls, excluding Rhoda, would eventually marry and settle into typical lives as rural women. Rhoda never married, but instead worked as a teacher and a school administrator for the remainder of her adulthood. For the time that they were single young women, all of these girls had a certain amount of independence, yet held closely to their families of origin. Despite the geographical span throughout the Midwest and the age differences at the time of writing their diaries, all four of the young women lived surprisingly similar lifestyles.

Along with the four major diaries, this study also includes information from diaries and correspondence from a variety of girls throughout the Midwest during the late nineteenth century. These girls had varying levels of education and work experience, and these differences serve as a counterpoint to the stories of the prominent girls. The rural experience was not the same for all girls, and the material circumstances of the rural family shaped each girl's experience. For example, May Lindley Nelson, who will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6, was a farmer's daughter and rural girl, yet the relative wealth of her family allowed for her to take on a more middle-class lifestyle and attitude. The inclusion of girls from all different types of lifestyles helps to highlight the varied rural experiences lived by families.

Overall, the study to follow seeks to illuminate the lives of several individual young women within the context of roles expected of girls by prescriptive writers across the United

3 of 4. Ancestry.com. *U.S., Civil War Draft Registrations Records, 1863-1865* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Accessed 10 April 2013; Caleb Emery, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA); Washington, D.C.; *Consolidated Lists of Civil War Draft Registration Records (Provost Marshal General's Bureau; Consolidated Enrollment Lists, 1863-1865)*; Record Group: 110, *Records of the Provost Marshal General's Bureau (Civil War)*; Collection Name: *Consolidated Enrollment Lists, 1863-1865 (Civil War Union Draft Records)*; ARC Identifier: 4213514; Archive Volume Number: 1 of 3. Ancestry.com. *U.S., Civil War Draft Registrations Records, 1863-1865* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Accessed 10 April 2013.

States. These girls did not overtly reject these roles, nor did they follow them to the letter. Instead, rural girls in the post-Civil War period performed roles necessary to life on the farm, and they acted in ways that would have been problematic according to middle-class reformers. The reasons for and responses to such behaviors, though, differed from girls in industrial, urban areas, and girls in the countryside adapted advice and social prescriptions to fit their own circumstances.

CHAPTER 2. ROLE OF PRESCRIPTIVE LITERATURE IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

Throughout the nineteenth century, the United States as a whole experienced a myriad of transitions, including economic, social, and cultural changes. The so-called “market revolution” of the early 1800s brought about the shift of the American economy to a market economy, largely taking production out of individual homes and into a more fully developed factory system. With this shift came a restructuring of gender roles, as production and business became the purview of males, and women were more firmly entrenched in the domestic “sphere.” As such, the role of women focused less on production of goods to help the family economy and more on the caring and nurturing characteristics of wives and mothers.

The focus on women as the care-takers of the family, removed from the economic world, created a new standard of womanhood, one in which women were not supposed to have to work to support their families, and instead would devote their time to rearing children and catering to their husbands. In order to fulfill this role, though, men had to attain a certain level of economic stability which would allow women to remove themselves from economic activity. This new class of people became the “middle-class,” a term which would come to signify much more than economic status.

Along with economic level, the designation “middle-class” carried assumptions about the culture of the men and women of the group. Nancy Cott identified the culture as a “cult of domesticity,” as well as a “cult of true womanhood.” According to Cott, “within this ‘cult’ (it might also be called a social ethic), mother, father, and children grouped together in the private household ruled the transmission of culture, the maintenance of social stability, and the pursuit of

happiness.”⁶⁰ In this new social ethic, with its focus on the family, Cott noted, “the importance given to women’s roles as wives, mothers, and mistresses of households was unprecedented. The ministers, educators, and pious and educated women in the northern United States whose published writings principally documented the ethic made women’s presence the essence of successful homes and families.”⁶¹ The middle-class ideal for women of the nineteenth century involved increased attention to caring and benevolent roles. Wives and mothers nurtured their families, and that nurturing spirit could spread its influence to religious and community work as well. Women were supposed to be demure, chaste, and focused on caring for others. Advisors and prescriptive writers admonished women to behave in ways appropriate for the sphere of womanhood in all stages of life, throughout adolescence, courtship, marriage, and adulthood. The world of work and business was too stressful and masculine for women, so writers advised women to focus on household duties and responsibilities and make those activities their vocation.

Many historians have echoed the idea that the middle class was a set of ideals, rather than simply an economic status. Karen Halttunen focused on sentimentalism as the defining feature of the middle-class ideal, as it “defined middle-class gentility by dictating how the ‘right’ people would meet face-to-face in polite society.”⁶² Prescriptive writers advised that middle-class women should identify each other by their sentimental and sincere attitudes to the exclusion of all others. This exclusivity was what set the middle class apart mainly from the working classes, who could be identified by their lack of gentility. But because gentility was an act, it could be adopted by all classes, broadening the definition of what made up the middle class.

⁶⁰ Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: ‘Woman’s Sphere’ in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1-2.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶² Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 194.

Cott's work focused on the New England region of the United States during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and although many of the women she surveyed in her work had a rural background, their "ethic" was distinctly middle-class, related more closely to an urban lifestyle which required less of a contribution to the family income from women than on a farm. Haltunen's hypothesis rested on the idea that the middle class would identify each other in an increasingly urban and anonymous society. Rural women, even those attempting to emulate the middle-class ideal, had little knowledge of or experience with such an ideal society.

Prescriptive literature, such as etiquette manuals and articles in newspapers and journals, contained much advice for the middle-class ideal. Many historians have written about the role of prescriptive literature in forming the ideals held by and for young women. Haltunen's work on etiquette manuals in the nineteenth century showed that these works served to help shape the "cultural forms...within which Americans seeking to rise in the world of strangers might meet without fear of moral or psychological injury."⁶³ Etiquette and advice literature proved crucial to navigating an increasingly urban world. Within this etiquette literature, middle-class reformers sought to "shape all social forms into sincere expressions of inner feeling."⁶⁴ According to Haltunen, the emerging middle class feared any type of hypocrisy in society, which manifested itself in etiquette literature that stressed sincerity.⁶⁵ Women played an important role in this, as "the natural sincerity of woman granted her a special responsibility for counteracting the pervasive deceit of the larger society lying outside the realm of private experience."⁶⁶ Advisors considered women to be morally superior, which translated from within the home to interactions

⁶³ Ibid., 193.

⁶⁴ Ibid., xvii-xviii.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 57-58.

in the wider world. The middle-class ideal for women in the antebellum period provided the model of morality for how all people should act.

Halttunen's overall thesis posited that the expansion of the urban environment created an anxiety which spurred the transmission of middle-class ideals. These ideals also described how unmarried men and women were to act around each other in romantic situations. Courtship rituals featured prominently in prescriptive literature. Advice works for girls eschewed physical relationships with young men before marriage, but the ideal was not always as simple as that. In her history of courtship rituals in the nineteenth century, Ellen Rothman noted many of the inconsistencies and intricacies of interactions between young men and women. According to Rothman, "courtship was not a linear progression but an amalgam of expectation, experience, and convention...the translation to marriage was both a private journey and a public rite of passage."⁶⁷ Prescriptive literature served to mediate the space between public and private, as writers expected that much of the idealized courtship would take place in public, yet young men and women found private ways to express their feelings as well.

In Rothman's estimation, courtship in the nineteenth century presented a new historical situation. As men and women increasingly came into contact with each other in public situations, there should have been more opportunities for interactions, but instead, the increasingly homosocial environment of nineteenth-century society prevented many of these interactions from happening on a regular basis. Rothman noted, "compared with earlier generations, middle-class Americans of both sexes spent more time in school, had a wider range of occupation and mate choice, and moved in a more urban and more open society. Yet in spite of the fact that young men and women enjoyed greater proximity to one another, there seemed to be ever fewer points

⁶⁷ Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 5.

at which their lives intersected.”⁶⁸ This created new methods for seeking out and socializing with potential marriage partners.

Rothman also commented on the increasing emphasis on feelings and emotions in courtship and marriage-partner choice. Prescriptive literature provided ample advice on how young men and women were supposed to feel when socializing with a potential mate, but in reality, girls (and boys as well) had conflicting thoughts about reconciling their actual feelings with expectations. According to Rothman, “concern about what they were *supposed* to feel nagged at many women...ideals were a powerful force indeed; they acted on both women and men but in different ways. For women, ideals of love were an abstraction, often an obstacle to the thing itself; while men tended to personalize and internalize their ideals.”⁶⁹ This complicated courtship for boys and girls.

The middle-class ideal began to shift by the middle to late nineteenth century. Frances Cogan identified an ethic which she named “the ideal of real womanhood,” as opposed to the “cult of true womanhood” of the earlier nineteenth century. Cogan’s “real womanhood” focused on more practical advice to women in the midst of a changing social and economic milieu. Cogan noted that by mid-nineteenth century, “the ‘middle-class’ designation in *America* was enormous, blind, and shifting, embracing whole groups as long as they possessed certain values—thrift, industry, sensibility, education, and morality—and *thought* of themselves as middle class.”⁷⁰ Like Cott aptly observed, Cogan reiterated the fact that “middle class” was a state of mind and not necessarily an economic designation. Advice literature that only discussed

⁶⁸ Ibid., 190.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 196.

⁷⁰ Frances B. Cogan, *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 13-14.

leisure and etiquette, according to Cogan, ignored the reality of women's lives in a changing society in which education and skills were more valued.

Cogan acknowledged different types of prescriptive and fictional literature that emphasized maintaining good health, meeting the right man, and pursuing a future as an independent woman. "Real womanhood" stressed education for women, as some girls might eventually have to support themselves, although the possibility was unlikely. According to Cogan, "two forms of employment that play large parts in a 'good' woman's life are charitable employment and domestic employment. These distinguish Real Womanhood from early feminism because they suggest the value of 'at home' or benevolent work for no salary."⁷¹ So although Cogan's newly-discovered ideal placed more emphasis on women's opportunities outside of the home, it still connected women to the middle-class ideal. Real Womanhood, then, still did not fully characterize rural women and the particular work rhythms and gender roles that were unique to the countryside. As such, prescriptive literature of all types could not encompass the true experiences of rural women, however much they attempted to follow the advice.

For most country women, life on the farm meant duty and responsibility to their families. The idea of women's work as economically necessary did not exist in the middle-class ideal; urban, middle-class women who worked mainly did so for altruistic reasons, or as leisure pursuits. Even as employment became more normalized for middle-class women into the last decades of the nineteenth century, advisors encouraged girls to seek out gender-appropriate work and to eschew physical labor, such as the work many young women performed on farms. Prescriptive writers made suggestions for all women without properly understanding the duties of farm girls.

⁷¹ Ibid., 201.

Even though advice literature differed greatly from the actual lives of rural women, residents of the countryside had access to a variety of types of prescriptive literature in the late nineteenth century. Much of this literature advised people of the proper ways to manage their lives. Writers of this literature perpetuated the strictly defined gender roles of the era and stressed the urban, middle-class ideal of marriage and family for women, and the ways for girls to attain these goals. Prescriptive literature came in a variety of forms. Newspapers, magazines, and farm journals all published tidbits of advice in the form of short columns. Papers also often printed syndicated columns from national publications, such as *Harper's*, or in the case of advice directed to girls and boys, *Youth's Companion*. This advice ranged from suggestions about how women should act in their interactions with men and other women to poetry and silly anecdotes reinforcing the roles of women on the farm and within the home.

Another form of prescriptive literature was the advice manual. Advice manuals provided information on how to navigate the complicated world of social interactions. Authors of advice manuals drew from experience, as well as societal expectations, to guide readers through the proper ways to interact. Courtship and marriage advice manuals specifically laid out the proper steps for young people to meet, court, and marry a person who would be the perfect match, and then offered suggestions on how to keep the marriage happy and fulfilled.

Historians and scholars of literature have noted that prescriptive pieces appealed to a variety of people and everyone did not always receive the advice in the same way. Historian Ronald Walters has noted, “would-be moral guides were not always agreed among themselves, there was room to pick and choose what one might believe; in addition, humans find it possible to know ethical codes and to ignore them anyway.”⁷² Nevertheless, the advice offered in

⁷² Ronald G. Walters, *Primers for Prudery: Sexual Advice to Victorian America*, updated ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 7.

courtship and marriage manuals provided a basis for the socially prescribed behaviors associated with courting, and became a guideline for the steps a young couple should follow on their way to becoming husband and wife.

George W. Hudson, the author of *The Marriage Guide for Young Men*, written in 1883, noted that he had not had such information provided to him as a young man, and sought to remedy that for the next generation. Hudson wrote, “A desire to do good prompts the author to write this volume to the public. When a young man, he longed for information on the topics here discussed, but he had to gain the needed information by chance.”⁷³ Hudson also sought to make the material more accessible for the young man of the era. He argued that “false modesty” kept parental figures from bestowing this information upon young men, and that the book was direct and compact enough to appeal to the demands of “this busy rushing age.”⁷⁴ The manual conveyed information appropriately and offered the best information for young men on how, when, and where to find and obtain a woman who would be a good marriage partner.

In the same vein, C.H. Kent’s *A Manual for Young Ladies, with Hints on Love, Courtship, Marriage, and the True Objects of Life* sought to offer the same type of information, only directed to young women rather than young men. Kent placed the moral character of marriage and home life squarely on the shoulders of women, as “young ladies occupy a most exalted place in our country—greater than the young men. Their influence is to shape the destiny of the coming generation.”⁷⁵ As such, women should take pains to “fit themselves for these responsibilities.”⁷⁶ The author of another manual, *The Modern Art of Making Love*, argued that marriage was the most significant institution in the world, and that both men and women were

⁷³ George W. Hudson, *The Marriage Guide for Young Men* (Ellsworth, ME: self-published, 1883), 5.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 6, 7-8.

⁷⁵ C.H. Kent, *A Manual for Young Ladies, with Hints on Love, Courtship, Marriage, and the True Objects of Life* (Davenport, IA: Published by the Author, 1881), 5-6.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

responsible for making a good marriage. The author so strongly believed in his own advice that he boasted, “if the advice given in ‘Selecting a Husband,’ and ‘Selecting a Wife,’ to be found in this little book, is closely followed there never need be unhappy marriages through the fault of not understanding each other’s characters and tempers.”⁷⁷ Young men and women, concerned about and interested in getting married, made up the audience for advice about how to act around the opposite sex.

Like the courtship and etiquette manuals, newspapers and farm journals also printed advice of all kinds for readers. Throughout the nineteenth century, newspapers flourished throughout the country.⁷⁸ Rural newspapers contained local news, some national news, and often columns previously published in larger publications such as *Harper’s* or *The Atlantic*. Rural news targeted an audience interested in farming and local matters, and many also printed columns and sections dedicated to specific audiences, like a women’s column or a children’s column. Farm journals functioned similarly, with most of the press dedicated to farming, but some special interest information, directed to farm wives and children. Among these special articles published in rural newspapers and farm journals were advice columns for girls and young women.

The local newspaper was an important part of rural life. The paper published information about the community, announced activities of various organizations, and connected rural areas with the rest of the world through the news. Country newspapers also spread the word about farming techniques and information to help farmers get ahead.⁷⁹ An ode to the rural press,

⁷⁷ James S. Wilson, *The Modern Art of Making Love and Complete Manual of Etiquette, Love, Courtship and Matrimony* (Chicago: The Saalfield Publishing Co., 1881), 6.

⁷⁸ Jack Van Derhoof, *Eastern and Mid-Western Agricultural Journalism*, (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1951), 9.

⁷⁹ Constance D. Griffith, *The Sociological Significance of the Rural Newspaper in Iowa* (Master’s Thesis, Iowa State University, 1921), 2-3.

written by an editor for the State College of Agriculture at Cornell University titled “I Am the Country Weekly” exemplified the many reasons that people subscribed to and read newspapers. The “Country Weekly” was “the friend of the family,” and “for and of the home.” The paper would “speak the language of the common man” and was “the chronicler of birth, and love, and death,—the three great facts of a man’s life.” In concluding the poem, the author (as the “country weekly”) proclaimed, “I am the word of the week, the history of the year, the record of my community in the archives of state and nation. I am the exponent of the lives of my readers. I am the country weekly.”⁸⁰ Clearly, rural newspapers held a large influence over the members of their communities of distribution.

Similarly, national and regional farm journals sought to influence the farming population of the United States with the latest news about all types of farming, including crops, livestock, poultry, and even individual gardens. Several publications had a wide distribution throughout the Midwest, including the *Prairie Farmer*, the *Western Farm Journal*, the *Country Gentleman*, the *Western Rural*, and the *Farmers’ Review*. The *Prairie Farmer* began publication in 1840 in Illinois. The Union Agricultural Society in northern Illinois first published the paper, and its editor eventually purchased it.⁸¹ The society that founded the paper wanted to “disseminate information about western agriculture” and aided “any farmer of the west who would pay \$1.00 a year for subscription to a small eight page monthly.”⁸² The *Prairie Farmer* had a national readership, and appealed to farmers in the Midwest, due to its roots in Illinois. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the *Prairie Farmer* began to see competition from the *Western Rural* as the foremost publication in western farming. As such, the paper brought in Orange Judd, a

⁸⁰ Professor Bristow Adams, “I Am the Country Weekly,” reprinted in Constance D. Griffith, *The Sociological Significance of the Rural Newspaper in Iowa* (Master’s Thesis: Iowa State University, 1921), 124-125.

⁸¹ John J. Fry, *The Farm Press, Reform, and Rural Change, 1895-1920* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 6-7.

⁸² Van Derhoof, *Eastern and Mid-Western Agricultural Journalism*, 272-273.

prominent agricultural journalist, to reignite interest in the *Prairie Farmer*.⁸³ The farm journal survived and is still in publication today.

Another prominent farm journal, the *Iowa Homestead*, informally took shape in 1853. The paper officially began in Dubuque, Iowa as the *Northwestern Farmer and Horticultural Journal* in 1856.⁸⁴ After several ownership and editorial changes throughout the nineteenth century, another prominent Iowa journal, *Wallace's Farmer*, incorporated the *Iowa Homestead* into its paper.⁸⁵ From 1873 to 1880, though, the editorial staff named the paper the *Western Farm Journal*.⁸⁶ One historian of the farm press noted, “a feature of agricultural journalism in Iowa has been its intimate relationship with the newspaper press. County farm papers were sometimes by-products of weekly printing offices. The county farmers’ institutes of the last two decades of the 19th century promoted some of them.”⁸⁷ Local newspapers worked hand in hand with farm journals to disseminate information to the rural community in Iowa.

The *Country Gentleman* began in the same decade as the *Iowa Homestead*, in 1853.⁸⁸ After becoming an established journal in New York state, the *Country Gentleman* spread its influence, becoming a nationally distributed farm paper. This influence, though, waned toward the end of the nineteenth century, as “the conservative nature of its founder and the policy of excluding highly controversial subjects prevented any extended treatment of economic or political issues.”⁸⁹ Eventually, the *Country Gentleman* narrowed its focus to farming on the east coast, but its general message was one of optimism, “rooted in the belief in the soundness of the

⁸³ Ibid., 282, 284.

⁸⁴ C.R.F. Smith, “The Iowa Homestead,” *The Palimpsest* 11 (1930): 230.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 241.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 230.

⁸⁷ “Farm, Stock, and Dairy Journals,” *The Palimpsest* 44 (1963): 359.

⁸⁸ Van Derhoof, *Eastern and Mid-Western Agricultural Journalism*, 363.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 363.

economic system and the ‘bigness’ and ‘firstness’ of the United States,” which would have appealed to a variety of audiences.⁹⁰

Within the rural and farm press were many articles directed to women and girls, teaching them how to behave as proper ladies. The bulk of these pieces used the middle-class ideal as the standard for behavior, although a select few used a rural lens to emphasize the ideal. A survey of these farm journals and local newspapers from Champaign County, Illinois; Linn County, Iowa; Olmsted County, Minnesota; and Grant and Greene Counties, Wisconsin reveals a wealth of this type of advice literature. The articles can be broken down into roughly five categories. First, general advice on how young women should act and what types of attitudes they should have; second, advice on marriage and procuring a happy married life; third, advice for unmarried women, and how the single life could be as fulfilling as marriage; and the fourth and fifth categories advised on educational and work opportunities for women, respectively.

The first category of advice literature focused on young women’s proper actions and attitudes. Etiquette manuals and prescriptive literature set out the rules for this proper behavior. “A perfect gentleman or lady instinctively knows just what to do under all circumstances, and need be bound by no written code of manners,” wrote one author, “Yet there is an unwritten code which is as immutable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, and we who would acquire gentility...must by some means make ourselves familiar with this.”⁹¹ Politeness was a chief attribute of a well-mannered girl. Another writer described it as thus: “true politeness, as I understand it, is kindness and courtesy of feeling brought into every-day exercise. It comprehends hearty good will towards everybody, thorough and constant good-humor, an easy

⁹⁰ Ibid., 375.

⁹¹ Eliza Bisbee Duffey, *The Ladies’ and Gentlemen’s Etiquette: A Complete Manual of the Manners and Dress of American Society* (Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1877), 13.

deportment, and obliging manners.”⁹² This most important virtue permeated every description of the ideal girl.

Young women, according to the literature, were to be cheerful, demure, and beautiful on the inside as well as the outside. An article for the *Champaign County Herald* admonished girls to be modest, polite and kind. According to the article, “modesty and virtue are twin sisters; without both we cannot have either. Politeness is first cousin to the modest girl...kindness also comes from the same family.”⁹³ These inherent qualities that women supposedly possessed would lead girls to be good conversationalists with friends and family.

Happiness was another cardinal virtue of young women. The *Marion Register* noted, “A happy woman! Is she not the very sparkle and sunshine of life.”⁹⁴ The happy woman was also content with her circumstances, whatever they might be. For the happy woman, “rich or poor, high or low, it makes no difference...do they live in a cottage; the fire that leaps up on its humble hearth, because [sic]? brighter than the gilded chandeliers in an Aladdin palace. Do they eat brown bread, or drink cold water from the well; it affords them more solid satisfactions than the millionaires pate de foi gras and iced champagne.”⁹⁵ No matter what the station in life, advisors admonished girls to be content.

Advice writers also expected women to be pleasing to the eye. Duffey wrote, “it is the duty of every woman to make herself as beautiful as possible.”⁹⁶ Focus on appearance could contribute to vanity, but another etiquette expert believed, “vanity is not a bad quality, if it does not run to excess. It is the ounce of leaven in a girl’s character, and does a deal of good work for

⁹² Florence Hartley, *The Ladies’ Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness* (Boston: Lee and Shephard, 1872), 146.

⁹³ “Picture of a Modest Girl,” *Champaign County Herald*, June 4, 1879.

⁹⁴ “Happy Women,” *Marion Register*, November 3, 1870.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ Duffey, *The Ladies’ and Gentlemen’s Etiquette*, 225.

which it seldom gets any credit.”⁹⁷ Despite the emphasis on beauty, literature advised girls against using artificial means to enhance their appearance. The writer of “Advice to Young Ladies” scolded, “you are perfect idiots to go on in this way. Your bodies are the most beautiful of God’s creation...if you get husbands, and decent ones, dress in plain, neat, becoming garments and talk like sensible, earnest sisters.”⁹⁸ Writers urged women to be beautiful, but also to remain modest in dress as well as speech.

This modesty and inner beauty was all part of being a “lady.” Various attributes of “lady-like” behavior (and un lady-like as well) appeared throughout the prescriptive literature. According to one article, “a woman’s worth is to be estimated by the real goodness of her heart and the purity and sweetness of her character, and such a woman with a good disposition and a well balanced mind and temper is lovely and attractive.”⁹⁹ In this case, the author argued that the internal characteristics and attributes women possessed contributed more to their future happiness than any physical beauty. Women’s character and inner being made them ladies, as opposed to any work that they did or did not do.

A lady was also to maintain appropriate behaviors no matter what her place in life. “To be a lady,” one article noted, “does not depend on any of these fictitious circumstances with which we have nothing to do, but entirely on ourselves.”¹⁰⁰ In this instance, the author mentioned that a servant could be as much of a lady as the employer, if “she carries her conscience into her work, and is that gentle thing from which the word gentility was born.”¹⁰¹ All manner of women could be ladies, providing they conformed to the standards set out for proper behavior.

⁹⁷ Amelia Edith Barr, *Maids Wives and Bachelors* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1898), 19.

⁹⁸ “Advice to Young Ladies,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, February 14, 1873.

⁹⁹ “The True Lady,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, January 20, 1882.

¹⁰⁰ “To Be a Lady,” *Grant County Herald*, February 3, 1876.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

Along with describing proper behaviors for ladies, prescriptive pieces also set out the incorrect behaviors for women. The author of the article “The True Lady—Advice to Young Women” wrote, “brazen boldness is a thing which girls cannot afford to practice. Wildness of manner and an open defiance of all those wholesome laws which have made woman’s name illustrious...are no more becoming to girls and ‘young ladies,’ so-called, than in angels.”¹⁰² Much of what this author alluded to was in reference to girl’s relationships with men and how they must be modest and demure, as “familiarity without love, without confidence, without regard to the common rules of etiquette even, is destructive of all that makes woman exalting and ennobling.”¹⁰³ Another article from the *Prairie Farmer* again highlighted the bad qualities that young women should avoid, as “a disagreeable woman is like a vacuum; there is no place for her in nature.”¹⁰⁴ Even if a woman was beautiful physically, any hint of a sour disposition would render her unappealing to everyone, including potential suitors.

The bulk of the prescriptive literature about women’s attitudes steered women toward their potential for relationships with young men. Some gave advice on how to interact with males based upon gender prescriptions of the day, which put men at the head of society. Most of this type of advice had to do with treating men with respect, as this would command respect for the women themselves. On speaking in front of men, the author of “Advice to Girls” in the *Prairie Farmer* wrote “when you learn to still your continuous flow of small talk, to ‘keep up conversation,’ and learn to *listen intelligently*—not stupidly, not absently...*then* you will charm with one half the effort you now put forth, every day and hour.”¹⁰⁵ By thinking before speaking, girls could further impress their suitors. Also, by watching their speech in front of men, women

¹⁰² “The True Lady—Advice to Young Women,” *Central City News-Letter*, October 17, 1889.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ “Disagreeable Women,” *Prairie Farmer* 40 (March 27, 1869): 101.

¹⁰⁵ “Advice to Girls,” *Prairie Farmer* 39 (July 18, 1868): 21.

could prevent others from finding them too forward. In an *Olmsted County Democrat* article, the author noted, “there is very little left to call the people you love if you lavish words of affection on every stranger whom you meet...Don’t you think if you are a bit familiar in speech or with the pen to a man that he is going to more than meet this halfway?”¹⁰⁶ The *Grant County Herald* urged ladies to avoid disagreements with both men and women and to “treat him [a suitor] with formality, and everyone else with ease and freedom.”¹⁰⁷ If girls kept their words polite and restrained in front of men with whom they were not yet close, they would save themselves much embarrassment and criticism.

Overall, the advice on girl’s behavior and attitudes lined up with the traditional gender roles of the era. Women were supposed to be kind, generous, and submissive. They should be able to do anything, but not take credit. Modesty and humility were hallmarks of proper female behavior. The “true woman” was “the pride and paragon of her own sex, and the admiration of the other...young, beautiful, healthy, well-informed but not pedantic...who knows neither too much nor too little.”¹⁰⁸ Society’s demands for proper behavior heaped upon women the stresses of being perfect—to be just smart enough, but not too smart; to be beautiful, but not too beautiful. By meeting these expectations, women could expect to attract a man who would make a good husband. According to “The True Woman,” “nothing in the world—at least to the male eye—equals in pleasantness the face and form of a bashful, virtuous woman, looking up to a man for support and guidance, and giving him her true affection in return.”¹⁰⁹ All of the advice directed toward young women was for the eventual goal of marriage.

¹⁰⁶ “Advice for Girls,” *Olmsted County Democrat*, September 18, 1890.

¹⁰⁷ “To Unmarried Ladies,” *Grant County Herald*, June 19, 1879.

¹⁰⁸ “The True Woman,” *Rochester Post*, August 3, 1867.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

One of the main pieces of advice for finding a suitable mate was to assess how they treated their families. A good husband would be a man who “is a respectful, dutiful son, and kind and affectionate brother, a constant friend.”¹¹⁰ Along the same lines, a good wife would be “a dutiful daughter, an affectionate sister, a constant friend, gentle in disposition.”¹¹¹ The mirroring of the descriptions of good quality men and women was a way to emphasize the importance of family to a potential couple. Men and women who respected their families would also respect their eventual marriage partners. Good mates also should be helpful and kind. According to Wilson, “an honest heart, a good head, and a pair of willing hands are the chief requisites in a young man, to make a good husband.”¹¹² Similarly, a woman who was anxious to help her family and others “will be a kind, sympathizing wife.”¹¹³

The second category of prescriptive advice included words about courtship, engagements, and marriage. All of the advice pushed girls and boys toward maintaining an enjoyable and chaste courtship that would eventually lead to marriage. George Hudson firmly stated that “courting ought never to be done except with a view to marriage.”¹¹⁴ Although courting was a leisure activity, any casual relationships that did not lead to marriage were dangerous. According to Hudson, casual courting “leads to trifling and flirtation; in most cases it leads to disappointment, if not worse than disappointment.”¹¹⁵

Flirtation itself also presented a problem for young men and women seeking out marriage partners. According to *The Modern Art of Making Love*, flirting could lead couples down a dangerous path. Wilson wrote, “Flirtation! What can we say of it? Is it bad? We have almost said

¹¹⁰ Wilson, *The Modern Art of Making Love*, 33-34.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 29.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

¹¹⁴ Hudson, *The Marriage Guide for Young Men*, 58-59.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

it was a trait of woman's character."¹¹⁶ Although problematic, flirtation made up an inherent part of women's personalities. What they did with that flirtatiousness could make or break a relationship. Barr noted, "a flirt may not indeed be an altogether lovely character, even with all her alluring faults; but she is something a great deal nicer than a prude. All men prefer a woman who trusts them, or gayly challenges them to a combat, in which she proposes their capture."¹¹⁷ Flirtatious women pleased men, which led to relationships. But these trysts could lead to immoral actions, and Wilson pleaded, "The opportunities whereby the young people of both sexes become acquainted...are so abundant, that we should try to avoid as much as possible those chance friendships which are inclined to lead us into that state of familiarity which is apt to be dangerous for our future welfare."¹¹⁸ In other words, flirtation provided an avenue toward inappropriate behavior, most likely premarital sexual intimacy.

In order to combat the temptation toward inappropriate contact, advice authors urged young men to limit their visiting times to evening hours and not to overstay their welcomes in the homes of their female friends. Hudson warned men not to extend their visits into late hours of the night, or spend the night, as "what good can come from such a practice? Certainly but little ever does, and often very much harm."¹¹⁹ Wilson was even more specific, and stated that family should supervise the visits, and young men should not stay more than two hours, and should take their leave by ten o'clock in the evening.¹²⁰

When a courtship became so serious that the man proposed engagement, the same etiquette rules remained in place and became even more important. Men instigated marriage proposals, as "it is a maxim laid down among ladies, and a very prudent one it is, that love is not

¹¹⁶ Wilson, *The Modern Art of Making Love*, 36-37.

¹¹⁷ Barr, *Maids Wives and Bachelors*, 37.

¹¹⁸ Wilson, *The Modern Art of Making Love*, 36-37.

¹¹⁹ Hudson, *The Marriage Guide for Young Men*, 122.

¹²⁰ Wilson, *The Modern Art of Making Love*, 48.

to begin on their part, but is entirely to be the consequence of men's attachment to them."¹²¹ For example, Wilson noted, "A lady should not be demonstrative of her affection during the days of her engagement, for it would not be a very pleasant thing to remember, should a possibility arise whereby the engagement would have to be annulled."¹²² Another advice writer cautioned as well, "if you love him, never discover to him the full extent of your love—no, not although you marry him. That sufficiently shows your preference, which is all he is entitled to know. If he has delicacy, he will ask for no stronger proof of your affection for *your* sake; if he has sense, he will not ask it for his *own*."¹²³ In veiled terms, the authors wrote about premarital intercourse. Should a couple break an engagement after succumbing to the temptation of intercourse, both partners would have lost their virtue, and the young woman would have the risk of a pregnancy that could keep her from finding another man to marry.

This was not the only warning against sexual contact before marriage. Hudson mentioned that not only should men avoid "undue liberties," as he called them, but should also "keep your mind pure, free from all taint of lust."¹²⁴ It was not enough simply to avoid physical contact, but men must also avoid impure thoughts. The reasoning for this was not only the possibility of pregnancy, but also that the couple would be stealing from marriage. Hudson pleaded, "it cannot be that any one will enjoy married life so well, who has stolen its sweets and devoured them beforehand. It is against nature, therefore wait until you can enjoy the sweets of connubial life under the holy sanction of the laws of God and man."¹²⁵ Then Hudson invoked self-control by

¹²¹ *Etiquette for All, or Rules of Conduct for Every Circumstance in Life: With the Laws, Rules, Precepts, and Practices of Good Society* (Glasgow: George Watson, 1861), 57-58.

¹²² Wilson, *The Modern Art of Making Love*, 49.

¹²³ *Etiquette for All*, 58-59.

¹²⁴ Hudson, *The Marriage Guide for Young Men*, 119.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 128.

adding, “you can wait, you are a man; be master of yourself.”¹²⁶ By mentioning the particular importance of chastity for young men, Hudson reinforced the idea that men were in control of sexual relationships and that women did not have as much responsibility in this area.

The initiation of an engagement also brought about the possibility that the young woman would refuse. Wilson argued that men should never make a proposal when the affirmative response was uncertain, and that women should never encourage the affections of a man she had no intention of marrying.¹²⁷ Proposals were a delicate business, and “the utmost feeling and circumspection is required to soften the pain and mortification a man feels in the rejection of his suit.”¹²⁸ The kindest thing a woman could do was let a suitor down gently and preserve his dignity when turning down an engagement.

After discussing the courtship stage, prescriptive writers then turned to marriage advice. Many authors advised on the proper age for marriage. Wilson’s *The Modern Art of Making Love* recommended that women should generally marry around age twenty, but not before that. Men at that age, though, would be too young, and should put marriage off until about age thirty.¹²⁹ These recommendations were subject to the actual person, as the author noted that some men and women matured at different rates. Hudson argued similarly, “a young man ought to be married by twenty-eight or thirty, at the outside. If he be a true man, and one trying to make the most of life, he cannot afford to put it off any further.”¹³⁰ In any case, he should be married between the ages of twenty-three and twenty-six, as by that point, he should be mature enough to handle the marriage union.¹³¹ Although these recommended ages covered the whole range of the twenties,

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Wilson, *The Modern Art of Making Love*, 38.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 50.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 11-12.

¹³⁰ Hudson, *The Marriage Guide for Young Men*, 53.

¹³¹ Ibid., 51.

many girls began to get anxious much earlier. Hartley wrote, “at seventeen, most of our belles of fashion expect to receive proposals. If they do not marry within a few years after their introduction [to society], they have a mortified sense of having lost time...the next ten years are often a period of subdued vexation, and the sweetness and contentment of the original character is impaired.”¹³² Although girls often felt they should be married earlier, many times it did not happen until later.

Much of the prescriptive literature about marriage argued that marriage was a natural state, and agreed that girls should pursue it as a goal for life. The article “About Marrying—Advice to Mothers and Girls” suggested that mothers needed to teach their daughters that marriage was the appropriate state for women, but that they should not settle for a spouse who would not take care of them. The author noted, “marriage is so perfectly natural a state that it reveals its own laws...but in our present social state the probability for any girl is by no means small that she may be called on to live out her life without entering upon this blessed relation.”¹³³ If mothers taught their daughters that marriage was the only possibility, feared the author, then a young woman would “become a miserable, helpless, lonely, irritable woman—perhaps seeking marriage at any price to escape from the condition she dreads.”¹³⁴ This type of union would be destructive for the girl and would lead to a bad end.

Advisors also held mothers responsible for teaching the proper things girls would need to know to be good wives. An article for the *Prairie Farmer* lamented the fact that many young men were not marrying due to the lack of proper education on household duties. The author blamed this on the “mistaken kindness” of mothers, but argued, “it is natural and right that a mother should wish to see her daughters well educated and even highly accomplished, and it is a

¹³² Hartley, *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette*, 245.

¹³³ “About Marrying—Advice to Mothers and Girls,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, May 1, 1874.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

mistake that a good and careful education would unfit a girl for the homely duties of cooking, dusting, etc.”¹³⁵ The need for education should not outweigh the need to know basic household skills. The female author of the article qualified her statement by adding, “let none of my unmarried sisters suppose I wish them, when they marry, to become mere household slaves,” but argued that even when a time came that the household might have servants, the skills of housekeeping remained appreciated.¹³⁶

Other articles placed even more urgency on marriage for moral reasons. Focusing on the man’s perspective, the article “Get Married” listed the detrimental effects of a society without enough married men. According to the author, “Marriage renders a man more virtuous and wise. An unmarried man is but half a perfect being, and it requires the other half to make things right; and it cannot be expected that in their imperfect state he can keep the straight path of rectitude.”¹³⁷ He argued that men only committed crimes due to singleness or unhappiness in marriage with an “unsuitable match.” In order to keep these sordid events from happening, men must be married. In the author’s words, “the friend to marriage is a friend to society and to his country.”¹³⁸ The article made little mention of the wife’s position, other than that she would serve as a foil to the husband’s baser instincts.

The reasons given by prescriptive authors for marriage were many and varied. Kent’s *A Manual for Young Ladies* argued that marriage was “one of the wisest and best laws of their being” and that not marrying when able, young people “not only commit a sin against themselves, against community, but set at defiance the edict of the Almighty.”¹³⁹ Marriage was the end all of human relationships, and must be entered into if at all possible. Wilson noted, “a

¹³⁵ “Marriage or Celibacy,” *Prairie Farmer* 39 (August 8, 1868): 46.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ “Get Married,” *Marion Register*, November 10, 1869.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Kent, *A Manual for Young Ladies*, 34.

single being alone is always inharmonious, incomplete.”¹⁴⁰ By stressing marriage as such an important step in the life cycle, these advice authors denoted marriage as the signifier of adulthood, where young men and women reached an age where they put childhood behind them and became part of another stage of life.

But marriage was not to be entered into lightly. Earlier works of advice urged young couples to think carefully about the decision they would make to enter into a marriage vow. In a history of marriage from 1853, the author L.N. Fowler warned, “marriage is too often made a matter of *feeling*, and not enough of *reflection* and *judgment*. Many are influenced by no other motive when they marry than that of being *in love*, and are thus led by the blind impulses of their nature to form a union for life without any regard for consequences.”¹⁴¹ An article in *Godey’s Lady’s Book* from 1854 echoed this caution and observed that “love and marriage are very different states; and that those who are to suffer often for the sake of one another soon lose that tenderness of look and that benevolence of mind which arose from participation of unmingled pleasure and successive amusement.”¹⁴² In other words, the physical pleasure of love would not be enough to sustain a marriage entered into without proper consideration of all its consequences.

Although most of the literature agreed that young people should all attempt to attain a marriage eventually, some offered conflicting advice. The conflicts broke down along gendered lines, with male and female authors holding antagonistic opinions on the nature and terms of marriage. Clearly, the differing expectations and responsibilities within a marriage for men and

¹⁴⁰ Wilson, *The Modern Art of Making Love*, 64.

¹⁴¹ L.N. Fowler, *Marriage: Its History and Ceremonies; With a Phrenological and Physiological Exposition of the Functions and Qualifications for Happy Marriages* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, Publishers, 1853), 151-153, 159 in Walters, *Primers for Prudery*, 93.

¹⁴² “Marriage,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 49 (1854): 36 in Angela Howard and Sash Ranae Adams Tarrant, eds. *Opposition to the Women’s Movement in the United States, 1848-1929* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997), 48.

women led to a conflict of opinion on how to conduct courtship and marriage. One example of this was the age at which young people should marry. An article from the *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye* in 1877 reported on a lecture about marriage for young people. During this talk, “the lecturer believed most emphatically in early marriages, and thought it was a great mistake for young people to wait until the bloom of youth had worn away.”¹⁴³ The lecturer offered an anecdote of a young man who had left one of his lectures and immediately proposed, then, according to the article, several people left the hall at that moment, presumably to propose. The reason for the promotion of early marriages, according to this lecturer, seemed to have had little to do with much other than the physical enjoyments of marriage. According to the author, “if a man waited until he had made his fortune before he could enjoy himself, he often found he had sold his birthright to be happy for a mess of pottage.”¹⁴⁴

On the other end, another article from the *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye* in 1886, nine years later, published the musings of “a lady of intelligence and observation” that advocated for later marriage. According to the lady, “If girls could be brought up to believe that their chances for a happy marriage were better after twenty-five than before, there would be much less misery in the world than there is now.”¹⁴⁵ The reason for this was that “as a girl grows older, if she thinks at all, she certainly becomes more capable of judging what would make her happy than when younger.”¹⁴⁶ Rather than focus on short-term enjoyments of married life, as her male counterpart did, the lady quoted in the article concentrated on the aspects of a potential partner which would make the woman happy in the long term. In order to avoid the problems of a poor choice of husband, this author would have young women wait longer, as “at 30 a woman who is somewhat

¹⁴³ “Early Marriages,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, March 16, 1877.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ “For Young Girls,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, August 20, 1886.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

independent and not over-anxious to marry, is much harder to please and more careful in her choice than at 20.”¹⁴⁷ The chronological span between the two articles may have affected the opinions, but most of the difference comes down to different gender expectations.

In a similar exchange, two identically titled articles, published only a few months apart in newspapers in Iowa and Minnesota, presented the same message with a radically different tone. In this case, it is unclear whether the gender of the writer played a role, as the gender of the author was not explicit in one of the articles, but the difference in the character of the two articles showed a clear lack of cohesion in marriage advice for young people. The first of two articles titled “Is Marriage A Failure?” answered in a clear affirmative. According to the author, “Well, yes, upon the whole I think it is...it is unelastic, unprogressive, tough old institution, stupidly conservative and grossly material.”¹⁴⁸ The problems of marriage accumulated greatly for young men and women who entered the union without enough thought about the purpose of it and the responsibilities that came with it. The mood of the article was extremely serious, as the author worried for the future of such an institution that had undergone such a dramatic downfall.

An article from the *Youth's Companion* reprinted in the *Olmsted County Democrat* just a few months later upheld the basically the same argument, but framed it in a different way. In this case, the answer for “Is Marriage a Failure?” was a resounding no, at least for the Oregon farmer quoted in the article. In a drastically different tone, the author quoted the farmer, in which the colloquial spellings and pronunciations remain:

‘Marriage a failure? I should say not!’...‘Why there’s Lucindy gets up in the morning, milks six cows, gits breakfas’, starts four children to skewl, looks after the other three, feeds the hens likewise the hogs, likewise some motherless sheep, skims twenty pans o’ milk, washes the clothes, gits dinner, et cetery, et cetery. Think I could hire anybody to do it fur what she gits? Not much! Marriage, sir, is a success, sir: a great success!’¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ “Is Marriage a Failure?” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, November 23, 1888.

¹⁴⁹ “Is Marriage a Failure?,” from *Youth's Companion* in *Olmsted County Democrat*, February 14, 1889.

Obviously, the article affected a humorous tone, but the message behind it struck at the heart of the problems of marriage alluded to in the previous article as well as others that discussed the toil and drudgery of women's lives within marriage. Although the male farmer quoted might have been happy in his "successful" marriage, "Lucindy" might not have felt the same. Many of the articles advocated that women find husbands who would not treat them like servants, and this particular article highlighted the many tasks that farm wives completed on a daily basis, sometimes with no help or sympathy from husbands. In this case, the husband (fictional or not) glorified in his wife's toil, as it saved him the cost of hired help. While much work on the farm employed all members of the farming family, the equation of wives to hired men was still an affront to a woman's place as helpmate and overseer of the farm household. As one author aptly surmised, "the married state, if entered into from proper motives of esteem and regard, will be a happy one for both parties, and to the husband we would say, now that you have got the object of your choice secure in possession, do not depreciate or neglect her."¹⁵⁰

In searching for the appropriate spouse, writers of prescriptive literature pointed out characteristics that would make for the happiest marriage possible. Much of the advice demonstrated vices commonly associated with men. Drunkenness and subsequent abuse worried many women, so any dependence on alcohol frightened away potential wives. A man who would drink was "utterly unworthy the friendship or confidence of a young lady."¹⁵¹ For the authors of advice literature, alcohol consumption was one of the worst things in which a young man could participate. Authors urged women to stay away from any man who would drink, but did not mention women drinking. The author did not believe that young women would have access or

¹⁵⁰ *Etiquette for All*, 61-62.

¹⁵¹ Wilson, *The Modern Art of Making Love*, 29.

initiative to drink alcohol, and that this vice was limited to men. The advice about young people's behavior showed that family values were important to couples considering marriage.

The article "How to Avoid a Bad Husband" listed ten types of men never to marry, and the final, presumably most important, type was a drunkard. The author noted, "finally, never marry a man who is addicted to the use of ardent spirits. Depend upon it, you are better off alone than you would be were you tied to a man whose breath is polluted and whose vitals are being gnawed out by alcohol."¹⁵² The article invoked the health aspects of consuming alcohol more than the psychological affects it could have on the wife, but both were common fears for women. In Iowa, fears over alcohol consumption encompassed such a moral dilemma that legislators passed state laws prohibiting the use of alcohol. By 1855, Iowa had passed a short-lived prohibition amendment, and in the 1880s, an energized campaign for temperance, led by the many temperance societies in the state, led to increased work toward amending the state constitution "to prohibit the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquor."¹⁵³ The battle over alcohol in Iowa, particularly between religious and ethnic communities, demonstrated the extremely charged nature over the moral aspects of alcohol consumption.¹⁵⁴

Financial concerns also enveloped the minds of women choosing a mate. Men should be able to take care of their wives, but not so wealthy as to be vain or miserly. Rule number three of "How to Avoid a Bad Husband" admonished "never marry a...closefisted, mean, sordid man, who saves every penny, or spends it grudgingly. Take care, lest he stint you to death."¹⁵⁵

According to another article from the *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, "the terms well married and

¹⁵² "How to Avoid a Bad Husband," *Grant County Herald*, June 23, 1868.

¹⁵³ Dorothy Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 213; William C. Steel, *Woman's Temperance Movement* (New York: National Temperance Society and Publication House, 1874), 7-8.

¹⁵⁴ See Schwieder, *Iowa: The Middle Land*, 212-218 for a detailed summary of prohibition legislation and debate in late nineteenth-century Iowa.

¹⁵⁵ "How to Avoid a Bad Husband," *Grant County Herald*, June 23, 1868.

badly married become more complicated when poverty is to be considered.”¹⁵⁶ Wealthy men might have their choice of pretty, yet vapid women, while men in poverty had to find a woman who would appreciate them for their personality and affection, yet not be “a coarse-grained creature,” who could lead him into association with unsavory characters.¹⁵⁷ The *Walker News* also advised women to “choose a man who has plenty to occupy his mind. Not necessarily a great deal of money or real estate.”¹⁵⁸

Finally, writers advised that marriage partners should have a level of compatibility and friendship between them in order to have a happy marriage. “The Right Kind of Man” was one who “is the really domestic man in the wife’s sense; who enjoys home, who is tempted to make a friend of his wife.”¹⁵⁹ Cultural norms established the concept of creating a home through marriage, and couples strove for a home that nurtured a healthy companionate relationship between husband and wife.¹⁶⁰

One interesting attribute desired by most women from their potential husband was a more loosely defined “manliness.” Young women valued certain intractable qualities in their partners that exemplified a form of masculinity. Girls writing in nineteenth-century diaries used words like “soft” to describe undesirable mates, or pleaded for them to “be men.”¹⁶¹ The number two rule for how to “avoid a bad husband” was “never marry a fop, or one who struts around, dandy-

¹⁵⁶ “True Marriage,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, September 22, 1871.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ “The Right Kind of Man,” *Walker News*, May 11, 1883.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 151-154.

¹⁶¹ Addie A. Crouch, manuscript diaries, 1881-1885, D9, f.6. State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, May 23, 1883; Rhoda J. Emery, manuscript diaries, 1889-1894, Rhoda J. Emery and Family Papers, Manuscripts Collection, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota, January 20, 1890.

like, in kid gloves, cane, and rings on his fingers. Beware! There is a trap!”¹⁶² Another piece of advice, in the *Champaign County Herald* was from a woman, describing her ideal mate. She wrote, “I could not...love a man a little, just a little, my superior. I should detest my equal—I should despise my inferior...but the man for me to love is one vastly my superior, no so much in accomplishment, not even in intellect, but in irresistible force of character.”¹⁶³ The indescribable quality of manliness was the most important defining characteristic for this woman, who wanted a man who would “conquer the domain of my soul, add it to his own, and then generously divide the sovereignty between us.”¹⁶⁴ The manly man would treat his wife well through his own decision, although this advice very clearly demonstrated a tone of misogyny and “inferiority” of women in comparison to men.

Above all, the message of the prescriptive literature on marriage stressed companionship, mutual affection, and even a degree of equality. The “True Wife,” according to one article, was not simply a housekeeper, as “hired help can do it cheaper than a wife,” but a partner and friend.¹⁶⁵ Women and men needed each other, making marriage an important, almost necessary union. This union, though, was mainly designed for the woman to hold up the man. To be a “true wife,” a woman had to place her needs behind those of her husband. According to the literature, “all through life, through storm, and through sunshine, conflict and victory, through adverse and through favoring winds, man needs a woman’s love.”¹⁶⁶

What, then, would happen when a woman could not, or would not, find a man to spend her life with? Some advice literature conceded that a single life could be more fulfilling than

¹⁶² “How to Avoid a Bad Husband,” *Grant County Herald*, June 23, 1868; It is unclear whether this is a veiled reference to homosexuality, or possibly another financial warning, as attention to appearance and clothing could be costly.

¹⁶³ “Choice of a Husband,” *Champaign County Herald*, May 12, 1880.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ “A True Wife,” *Prairie Farmer* 57 (January 17, 1885): 44.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

married life in some cases, but only under extreme circumstances. The author of *A Manual for Young Ladies* made note that “an unfortunate union is more to be deplored than a life of single blessedness.”¹⁶⁷ This lifestyle was only acceptable, though, when the woman pursued a higher calling, such as helping others, and even then, an alternative path than marriage was “hardly conceivable” in Kent’s words.¹⁶⁸ Earlier works actually refuted this position, as an article from *Godey’s Lady’s Book* mused, “Oh, that I had the reasoning power of Socrates, that I might induce these young men whom I see around me to consult their own happiness by renouncing what is falsely called ‘single blessedness.’”¹⁶⁹ Even if there was room for some women to give up the idea of marriage in order to pursue forms of charity work, men did not have that same option, as for men, there was no suitable alternative to marriage.

For women of this era, the rate of singleness was about 11 percent, the highest rate recorded so far for Americans.¹⁷⁰ Whatever the reason, prescriptive literature provided advice for women who feared not getting married or were “Old Maids.” The advice extolled the virtues of married life, but urged women who did not marry not to be ashamed or dejected by their unmarried state. Marriage was “the ultimate end and aim of every life,” according to one article, but much of the literature advocated for girls to focus on other things, and not to be discouraged by a single life.¹⁷¹

Eunice Stewart, a single woman writing to the *Washington Post*, believed that “there is too much marrying and giving in marriage in the world.”¹⁷² For Miss Stewart, there was more to the world than simply getting married. She noted, “by far the greatest number of young girls of

¹⁶⁷ Kent, *A Manual for Young Ladies*, 44.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ “Married and Single Life,” *Godey’s Lady’s Book* 50 (1854): 232 in Howard and Tarrant, *Opposition to the Women’s Movement*, 50.

¹⁷⁰ Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 249.

¹⁷¹ “What Girls Ought to Know,” *Western Farm Journal* 23 (June 29, 1878): 5.

¹⁷² “Too Much Marrying,” *Washington Post* in *Sidney By-Way*, August 3, 1889.

the present day are raised with the sole ambition of ‘making a good match,’ as if the quintessence of happiness in life was to be found in matrimony.”¹⁷³ This was troublesome, as many young married couples quickly learned that marriage was difficult, and a marriage rushed into without serious thought could lead to grave unhappiness. Miss Stewart warned girls to “remain unmarried until they have reached an age when intelligence and common sense prevail over impulse.”¹⁷⁴ Only through a thorough examination of the options available would a young woman be able to make the right decision regarding marriage.

As an unmarried woman herself, Eunice Stewart provided a first-hand account of a single woman’s experience. Other prescriptive pieces brought up the positive aspects of remaining single. Writers never admitted that singleness was a better or more fulfilling life than marriage, but simply that singleness was better than settling. In the aforementioned “What Girls Ought to Know,” Mary J. Studley, M.D., the author, noted that “the true wife and mother is the queen among women,” but “second only to her is she who has had the courage to remain single because the right man never came.”¹⁷⁵ This type of single woman aspired to be married, but she refused to settle for a partner who was less than perfect.

Overall, the general theme of prescriptive literature about singlehood urged women to continue to strive for marriage, but recognized that marriage was not an option or advisable for everyone. According to an article in the *Sidney By-Way*, “it is undoubtedly true that a single life is not without its advantage for some. There are hundreds of young men, as there are young women, to whom a married life would be unsuitable and unwise.”¹⁷⁶ From a male perspective, another article noted, “as a realist I could understand that marriage was a lottery, and that, in

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ “What Girls Ought to Know,” *Western Farm Journal* 23 (June 29, 1878): 5.

¹⁷⁶ “The Married State,” *Sidney By-Way*, May 13, 1887.

view of the small chances for success, it was not worth to take any risks.”¹⁷⁷ Again, the writer reinforced the idea that marriage, while a worthy goal, was not for everyone. The idea of becoming involved in a relationship with someone who was not “perfect” posed a distinct risk for unhappiness and heartache for both parties involved.

The heartache accompanying an unhappy marriage also could accompany unmarried status. Women who did not marry faced a stigma unknown to their married counterparts—that of the “Old Maid.” The term “old maid” described a woman presumably past the point that she would ever marry and was derogatory in every sense. Maid, of course, indicated a woman untouched sexually. In other contexts, “maid” could be positive, a descriptor of a girl ripe for marrying. An “old maid,” though, was a woman who would never enjoy the physical pleasures allotted to married couples. A host of negative attributes accompanied the descriptor “old maid,” including bitterness, extreme frugality, and sour disposition, but in general, the prescriptive literature sought to uplift the position of “old maid” to one, if not quite desirable, not quite terrible either. “About Old Maids,” in the *Rochester Post*, slyly poked fun at the stereotype, saying, “What can be nicer than to sit down after a hard day’s work, beside an old maid and hear from her how, during the day, Mrs. Francis walked out with that old dress on...” and various other observations that would only be made by someone with nothing else to do.¹⁷⁸ The author bemoaned the fact that others looked down upon old maids and wondered how “they don’t give way to despair, and kill somebody or something.”¹⁷⁹ A satirical take on the stereotypical single woman, this article reinforced the idea that old maids were undesirable to society.

Despite the stigma attached, many advice authors stood up for “old maids,” defending their position as noble, or at least to be pitied. A writer for the *Prairie Farmer* noted, “there is a

¹⁷⁷ “Single Blessedness,” *Sidney By-Way*, March 1, 1890.

¹⁷⁸ “About Old Maids,” *Rochester Post*, November 14, 1874.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

stigma of reproach cast upon the term ‘old maid’—too often justly so, I admit. But where does the fault lie?...In fact, she lives a life which is useful to others and develops her own powers, and in the consciousness of that she finds happiness and peace.”¹⁸⁰ The author admitted that, in theory, “old maids” were responsible for their own unhappiness, but most lived their lives in service to others.

This service was also one of the defining characteristics of “old maids.” According to Kate Thorn in the *New York Weekly*, “old maids are upon the whole a blessing to the world. They take care of sick brothers and sisters, they make the clothes for little nieces and nephews, they cause Sabbath schools to flourish, they help to bind churches together...Long may they flourish!”¹⁸¹ Unmarried women practiced these positive attributes because of a lack of time constraints from a marriage and family. For this author, single women were necessary to provide these services auxiliary to those of wives and mothers. Although, she wrote, “we believe that it is far better to marry than to be single,” she also believed that “a woman had better a thousand times be an old maid than to marry a man whom she cannot love and for whom she feels no sentiment of respect.”¹⁸² Singlehood was an acceptable substitute for a loveless marriage, especially in light of the other contributions single women could make to society.

Some writers even believed single girls could aspire to more achievements. Amelia Barr noted, “they [unmarried women] are constantly invading fresh trades, and stepping up into more important positions...instead of being the humble poor relations of married sisters and brothers, they are not their equals, their patrons, and their honored guests.”¹⁸³ On the threshold of the women’s rights movement, the idea of an unmarried, independent girl was not fully accepted, but

¹⁸⁰ “Old Maids,” *Prairie Farmer*, February 6, 1869.

¹⁸¹ Kate Thorn, “Old Maids,” *New York Weekly* reprinted in *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, January 14, 1876.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Barr, *Maids Wives and Bachelors*, 8-9.

at the same time, not completely foreign. Gradually, prescriptive writers began to make note of the place of women's rights, for better or worse, in their literature about girls.

While an unmarried woman provoked some anxiety among advice authors, unmarried men proved an even greater problem. As Barr described, "on the whole, then, the unmarried woman is becoming every year more self-reliant, and more respectable and respected, and the unmarried man more effeminate and contemptible."¹⁸⁴ The sins of single men included quarrelsome behavior and a grumbling spirit.¹⁸⁵ Similarly, other literature designated old maids as "useful," and old bachelor "useless."¹⁸⁶ According to another author, old maids helped others, kept up with their appearance, and generally did not cause trouble for anyone. As compared to more pleasant old maids, old bachelors demanded much and returned little. In order to try to "comfort" women who had never married, the author upheld the charitable aspects of single women and elevated them well over those of single men.

In reality, though, the topic of single men did not appear frequently in prescriptive literature. Writers assumed that all men would find a wife at some point, as they would not be able to function in life on their own. Where women could take care of themselves, men presumably could not, as evidenced by the "old bachelor" in the previous article. Although men sought women who would be companions and friends rather than housekeepers, the physical realities of the gender system as played out in the home discouraged men from doing much if any household duties, which necessitated a female counterpart in the home. Men did not learn these activities in the course of their education as frequently as women.

Education for women could consist of many different aspects, anything from formal training in schools or colleges to information passed down from mothers to daughters about

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 11.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 10-11.

¹⁸⁶ "Comfort for Old Maids," *Brodhead Independent*, October 17, 1879.

housekeeping and lady-like behavior. For most prescriptive writers who focused on the middle class ideal, it was the latter education that interested them, although different types of education were not mutually exclusive. By the late nineteenth century, some type of formal education was fairly standard for girls. The young women in the diaries from the Midwest all had a significant amount of schooling despite living in rural areas, three of them going on to be teachers themselves. Education could allow women to pursue a more fulfilling lifestyle before getting married to a proper young man and starting a household. In 1888 an article noted, “women manifest an increasing determination to find happiness and to cultivate it for its own sake; to discover what is possible in life for them individually, which will bring interest, work, and, therefore enjoyment.”¹⁸⁷ This sometimes meant postponing marriage, but in general just illustrated a renewed interest in women’s education.

Advisors placed much of the impetus for girl’s education on parents, particularly mothers. Young women were supposed to know more than simply facts from traditional schooling, and that education was to come from within the home. In a *Prairie Farmer* article, the author worried for the sake of young girls who did not have a well-rounded education. He noted, “our girls are educated in common schools, but of what value is the knowledge there acquired, if nothing more be added by those who have charge of their home education.”¹⁸⁸ This article, though, was not so much in favor of women using education to have a career outside of the home. The author proclaimed, “we believe that girls should be trained for some position in life; and as it is a woman’s first, highest ambition to be a wife, she should be qualified for that in such a manner that she and her family may derive the greatest benefit from her labors.”¹⁸⁹ In fact, regular schooling, without proper attention to household arts, could be detrimental to a woman’s

¹⁸⁷ “Woman’s Position,” *Olmsted County Democrat*, January 12, 1888.

¹⁸⁸ “What Shall Our Girls Do?” *Prairie Farmer* 42 (May 6, 1871): 141.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

home life, as “the education they receive is such as to inspire them with a restlessness in the sphere in which they may be placed, without the ability to improve it.”¹⁹⁰ For the author of this article, women’s education outside of the home played a secondary role to learning the proper domestic arts to maintain a good home and marriage. Another writer noted, “economy is so important a part of woman’s education, so necessary to her performing properly the duties of a wife and a mother, that it ought to have the precedence of all other accomplishments, and take its rank next to the first duties of life.”¹⁹¹ For the middle-class ideal, women’s position as caretaker trumped all other ambitions.

While the above was a typical attitude, it was not the only one. The *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye* reprinted an article from the *New York Weekly* that argued similarly that many mothers neglected to teach their daughters how to cook, which “ought to be considered a most essential branch of every girl’s education.”¹⁹² However, another author argued that girls should learn to do something besides housework, as it might someday be necessary. “A Plea for the Girls,” in the *Olmsted County Democrat*, implored, “Parents, give your daughters a trade or profession. Yes, my dear, horrified-looking madam, and you, too, my dear sir, raising your eyebrows in polite condemnation.”¹⁹³ Here the author recognized the reluctance of parents to encourage an education other than in the household and instead urged that girls learn to work, so they could “earn a good, honest living for them in case they should ever need it.”¹⁹⁴

Much prescriptive advice literature urged girls to learn to do something in order to support themselves. Although, according to one author, “all—or nearly all—girls marry,” it was

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ *Etiquette for All*, 51.

¹⁹² “What the Girls Should Learn,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, May 9, 1879.

¹⁹³ “A Plea for the Girls,” from “Give the Girls a Chance,” *Demorest’s Magazine*, April in *Olmsted County Democrat*, March 22, 1894.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

just as important for those girls to be educated, as “she may add a few straws to the home nest that is to be hers, and feel free to exercise her own judgment and taste in so doing.”¹⁹⁵ Above all, it was important to achieve whatever level of education necessary to fit future goals. If marriage was the goal, then proper housekeeping and cooking techniques were necessary. If a woman aspired to something else, the literature recommended that she train for the task. One writer noted, “the education of girls should be planned and conducted with reference to the life which girls are destined to lead, precisely as the education of boys is intended to fit them for their probable situation in life.”¹⁹⁶ For young women who looked toward teaching or some other career, education provided the means to meet that goal.

For a very few authors of prescriptive literature, women’s education had a role as important, if not more so than young men’s. A Dr. J.C. Holland noted in the *Champaign County Herald*, “the average woman, educated in the better class of schools in this country, is a better scholar, and a more capable and accomplished person than the average college graduate of the other sex.”¹⁹⁷ The author pleaded for better and less expensive educational facilities for young women, as “the only places where she [a girl] can get an equal education are expensive beyond her means.”¹⁹⁸ For girls to get ahead through education, the opportunities had to be available for them.

Prescriptive literature also expounded upon the natural progression from education to work. Debates over women’s work, whether in the home or outside it, played out in the pages of advice manuals, local newspapers, and farm journals. The overwhelming majority of writers believed that women’s work was important, and at times necessary, but the type of work and

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ “The Education of Women,” *Grant County Herald*, September 9, 1880.

¹⁹⁷ “A Word for the Women,” *Champaign County Herald*, January 30, 1878.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

contribution to the family income varied. Performing work fostered a more well-rounded and humble woman, unconcerned with the trappings of wealth or class. Authors were concerned with a perceived desire for “an aristocracy of wealth,” which discouraged women from taking care of themselves through their own labor.¹⁹⁹ The ideal of true womanhood bolstered the work of women, rather than detracting from it.²⁰⁰ Despite this, though, women’s economic contributions to the middle-class home were minimal at best, and moral remuneration, rather than financial, more often provided the impetus for women’s work, according to prescriptive writers.

In the article “The Growth of Women’s Work,” the author claimed that women should work toward self-support, as it was a right of women in the United States. This particular article focused on women in more urban areas and the jobs available for women to support themselves. By refusing to settle for jobs as domestic servants, women in the past had a difficult time earning a living wage. However, more professions opened to women, in places like “telegraph offices, counting rooms, and...in the decorative arts” allowed for more choices for the right of self-support.²⁰¹ These jobs were distinctly feminine, and even if women supported themselves through these positions, they did not lose their womanly position as viewed by the middle-class.

Even when women did not pursue an occupation outside of the home, advisors encouraged them to perform whatever work they did well. Hartley wrote, “when a girl is nine or ten years old, she should be accustomed to take some regular share in household duties, and to feel responsible for the manner in which her part is performed.”²⁰² When girls started learning early, they gained a better respect for the work. Housework was so worthwhile, according to Barr, that “it is only the weakest, silliest woman who cannot lift their work to the level of their

¹⁹⁹ “Does Her Own Work,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, April 15, 1870.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁰¹ “The Growth of Women’s Work,” *Brodhead Independent*, June 24, 1881.

²⁰² Hartley, *The Ladies’ Book of Etiquette*, 300.

thoughts, and so ennobled both.”²⁰³ Again, the middle-class ideal stressed care and concern for others as the basis of work.

Overall, prescriptive literature considered engaging in most types of work a noble goal for women. Advice articles, particularly in farm journals, posited that it was a falsehood that physical work, either inside or outside of the home, was a negative position for women, and that true womanhood required working for oneself in some capacity.²⁰⁴ An occupation was a way for girls to earn a living, gain self-esteem, and prepare for a lifetime of marriage. An article in the *Country Gentleman* advised, “work hard in the summer, if necessary, to prepare the way for going to school in the winter. When there, remember that every moment is golden, and that it depends entirely upon how you improve yourself in these seasons, whether you will ever attain the position you aspire to—of someday becoming yourself a teacher.”²⁰⁵ If teaching was not possible, then “you should aim to become a very superior, intelligent housekeeper.”²⁰⁶ Either way, work and education were essential to young women, in the opinion of one writer.

The circumstances for girls on the farm, though, were different. Office or clerical jobs were not readily available in rural areas, and many girls labored instead on the family farm, whether in the field, barnyard, or household. As financial assets, children needed to understand their importance to farm labor. Although most prescriptive literature attempted to reach an audience of followers of the middle-class ideal, some, particularly in farm journals, reached out to the rural population. These writers used the working conditions within cities to convince girls to stay on the farm. Factory work, according to one article, “consists in working all day in a badly lighted and ill-smelling work-shop, where scores of other girls and women are employed at

²⁰³ Barr, *Maids Wives and Bachelors*, 129.

²⁰⁴ “False Sentiment as to Work for Young Ladies,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, July 11, 1879; “Does Her Own Work,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, April 15, 1870.

²⁰⁵ “Improving One’s Condition,” *Country Gentleman* 904 (May 19, 1870): 315.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

wages hardly enough to keep body and soul together.”²⁰⁷ This type of description appeared necessary to dissuade rural-to-urban migration. During a time when parents worried about boys and girls abandoning the family farm for the lures of the city, prescriptive literature played an even more important role in advising parents to emphasize the important role of children to the family economy.

As such, authors of a more rural bent published articles advising ways to make farm life and work more appealing to young people. An article from the *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye* noted, “to make boys and girls take an interest in farming, it is necessary that they be taught to respect the position as being the noblest, most independent and comfortable avocation any one can pursue.”²⁰⁸ With parental guidance, young people could learn the benefits of living on the farm, and therefore be less inclined to leave for the city. A little effort on a farmers’ part would “serve to make them [farm children] acquainted with their noble calling.”²⁰⁹

One way for farm parents to entice children, especially girls, to enjoy and appreciate farm work was to offer financial remuneration for work. A farmer’s daughter who wrote into the *Inter-Ocean* pleaded for recognition of girls’ farm work. She wrote, “I know some [farmers] who pay their boys as high as twenty dollars per month, whose daughters toll patiently from daylight in the morning until late at night, and would feel grateful for one dollar a week.”²¹⁰ Payment for farm work was not necessarily typical, as parents expected farm children to work. The girl writing the letter noted a pattern of payment among farm boys and reasonably asserted that girls, who worked just as hard, should receive the same. Payments for contributions to the farm home, according to “Mary Jane,” would keep farms from becoming “‘places’ which the boys and girls

²⁰⁷ “Advice to Country Girls,” *Grant County Herald*, November 4, 1886.

²⁰⁸ “Farmer’s Children,” *Our Home Journal* in *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, February 10, 1871.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ “Farmers’ Daughters,” *Champaign County Herald*, May 28, 1879.

will desire to leave for the crowded city.”²¹¹ For this girl, earning a wage for farm work was the key to interest in farming.

Some farm parents echoed the plea for farm girls’ wages. By requiring daughters to perform household chores, as well as farm production tasks, such as milking and gardening, parents contributed to a system of “robbing grown daughters of the fruits of their labor for the benefit of the family generally.”²¹² The author pleaded, “I insist that as soon as a daughter comes to the age of eighteen, if she is needed for her work, she should have her wages, and if not needed she should be trained for some business that would enable her to make a living.”²¹³ A financial consideration would allow girls to continue to be useful and to be happy about it.

If parents would not pay wages, farm girls had to find other ways to earn money without leaving the farm. Although problematic in some ways, the raising of poultry was a viable option for extra money. The *Prairie Farmer* published articles on how best to undertake this type of enterprise.²¹⁴ On an extreme level, some women took on the actual running of the farm. A correspondent to the *Boscobel Dial* wrote about women working in the fields in Pennsylvania. The correspondent made the following observation: “we noticed a young single lady handling with wonderful skill a large cultivator, to which three heavy horses were attached. At another farm we noticed several women planting corn and potatoes, and at another place a young and newly-married woman was spreading lime—one of the ugliest jobs on a farm.”²¹⁵ Whether or not families compensated women financially for their work, they still performed these jobs to benefit the working of the family farm. In addition, as a way to prove superiority to life in the city, the

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² “Contented Girls,” *Western Rural and American Stockman* 23 (July 18, 1885), 454.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ There were drawbacks to raising poultry for market, as a *Prairie Farmer* article noted, “most of them [women] are too far from market to secure fancy prices, and if near market could not raise early chicks without an incubator, and those are expensive.” See “What She Thinks about It,” *Prairie Farmer* 58 (May 29, 1886): 341.

²¹⁵ “Woman’s Work,” *Boscobel Dial*, May 26, 1876.

author noted, “such and many other jobs are done by country women—feats that would astonish some of your city ladies.”²¹⁶ From the perspective of the author, rural women played a much more important role than urban women did in providing for the home.

Advisors seemingly held farm girls to a higher standard as well. Farmers’ daughters were supposed to be “living not only to benefit themselves, but also to add happiness to the lot of others.”²¹⁷ Young women who chose to wait for a doting husband, rather than to figure out how to better themselves, did not exemplify model girls. Fortunately, according to the author, “very few such counterfeits are found among farmers’ daughters, but on the contrary, the majority of them are the genuine coin.”²¹⁸

Prescriptive literature in late nineteenth-century newspapers and farm journals provided ample, sometimes contradictory advice to young women contemplating future plans, such as education, work, and marriage. Young women on farms during this pivotal era in American development faced a range of choices, some which involved new opportunities for women, and some of which retained traditional roles, such as marriage and household work. But advice is not reality, simply a reflection of the ways in which those in power at the time conceived of proper roles and positions for women. This is not to say that rural girls did not aspire to these roles, or read and act on the advice published in such articles.

Rural historians must interrogate farm journals and newspapers beyond the surface-level to understand the articles' social and cultural context. The actual wording of the articles or the subjects was not as important as the ways the advice conformed or strayed from the common assumptions made about girls and their opportunities. As the countryside experienced major

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ “Letter to Farmers’ Daughters,” *The Country Gentleman* 35 (March 31, 1870): 203.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

changes throughout the Gilded Age, rural newspapers and farm journals did not cause changes as much as they reflected the attitudes of people toward broader social and cultural changes.²¹⁹

Assessing readership for rural newspapers or farm journals is problematic. Despite the presence of limited statistical data on subscription rates, it still cannot be known how people actually read and interpreted the prescriptive articles in the papers. In his extensive study of the farm press in the rural Midwest, John J. Fry found that despite these difficulties in assessment, rural people read and enjoyed the farm press. He noted, “A large proportion of rural Midwesterners received and read farm newspapers. These publications were aimed specifically at country people and hoped to instruct them in how to farm better and how to live better... Rural Midwesterners of all economic, ethnic, and education backgrounds received farm newspapers.”²²⁰ There were many reasons why rural people read and paid attention to local newspapers and farm journals. According to Fry, readers built communities through the use of newspapers.²²¹ As articles with similar content and advice appeared in newspapers throughout the Midwest, the values espoused by prescriptive literature created community norms for rural citizens to follow.

Even if girls took the messages to heart, there is no real way of knowing whether they followed them, and if there is evidence of activities in line with prescriptive literature in diaries or correspondence, it would be impossible to know whether these activities, such as schooling, courting, or marriage, were done because girls wanted to live up to the proposed ideal or because of other factors, like parental influence or personal ambition. Fry found that in the case of progressive farming techniques, farmers did not so much follow exactly the advice laid out in farm journals, but “selectively adopted and adapted any advice” that they felt necessary for the

²¹⁹ John J. Fry, *The Farm Press, Reform, and Rural Change, 1895-1920* (New York: Routledge, 2005), xix.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 88.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

success of their farms.²²² Farm journals did not always publish the words or advice of actual farmers, and therefore readers had to decide what actually worked for them.²²³ Similarly, girls would have responded to the types of advice that fit into their lifestyles on the farm.

Ronald Walters noted the difficulties of ascribing meaning to actions through the use of prescriptive advice literature, as “much of what transpired in courtship and in the household is lost. We cannot recapture whispered words, meaningful glances, or secret acts.”²²⁴ Instead, advice works “place sex in its network of cultural norms.”²²⁵ By understanding the norms in their historical context, diaries from young women take on new meaning, as girls' descriptions of their activities can be evaluated based upon the assumed “norms” for how girls were supposed to act when approaching courtship, marriage, or educational and work opportunities.

Prescriptive literature illuminated the social and cultural norms that young women faced due to their own stage in life and the changes in societal expectations for girls. The investigation of these norms, compared to first-hand accounts of women's daily lives, showed that girls both used and disavowed the advice found in prescriptive literature to their own advantage, based upon their own goals and motivations, as well as parental and community standards set individually among each rural family. Women's actual roles on the family farm and in the rural community allowed for a certain amount of latitude in performing expected roles, as the realities of farm living rarely matched up with idealized visions of women's lives. The following chapters will detail girls' lives and roles on the farm through their work at home, schooling and off-farm work, and social interactions and relationships in the community with their peers.

²²² John J. Fry, “‘Good Farming-Clear Thinking-Right Living’: Midwestern Farm Newspapers, Social Reform, and Rural Readers in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Agricultural History* 78 (2004): 36.

²²³ *Ibid.*

²²⁴ Walters, *Primers for Prudery*, 6.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

CHAPTER 3. HOME LIFE

Life on the farm revolved around work, and all members of the farm family participated in whatever manner necessary for. The farm functioned like a machine, in which all parts came together to perform the work. The rural family as a unit differed from urban ones, in that all of the members formed a collective, doing whatever necessary to get the job done, whatever it might be. Grey Osterud described this relationship in these terms, writing, “Men as well as women, adults as well as children understood themselves not as autonomous individuals but as participants in ongoing interdependent relationships.”²²⁶ In order for this system to work, all parts must give a relatively equal effort to their tasks. The livelihood of the family depended upon this effort, and if any member did not take part, the family suffered equally. Rural prescriptive literature writers homed in on these very concerns in offering advice to young women. Parents and advisors valued hard work and deference above all else for girls, and anything less was a problem.

The middle class ideal, highly valued by urban dwellers, challenged the rural system of mutuality and labor. Parents feared that girls would shirk responsibilities and eventually leave the farm for better opportunities. To the outsider, life in a middle-class home would have seemed preferable to the hard labor of the farm. The lure of the city could call to girls, offering work and social opportunities not available in rural areas. But not all girls wanted the city life. Many found the opportunities they craved in their rural and farm communities. In 1882, a young woman named Minnie Hull wrote about her feelings in a letter to a friend: “I live on a farm and like all other farm girls have to work but I believe that I would rather live on a farm than to live in a city for in a city there can be hardly any enjoyment nothing but cars and wagons all the time and in

²²⁶ Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 56.

the country there is always a nice breeze blowing in the summer and everything is so joyful and cheerful.”²²⁷ The work of the farm barely factored in to her assessment of rural versus urban living. Her desire to stay away from the noise and busyness of city life outweighed any discomfort she experienced in her work on the farm.

Women on farms led difficult lives, much different from women in an urban, middle-class setting. While Minnie Hull may have enjoyed her farm life, many other girls experienced unceasing labor that strained them physically and bored them mentally. Advisors believed that these attributes of housework benefited girls greatly. Dr. Allyne, writing for the *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, emphasized the physical training that accompanied household labor. “No kind of exercise for girls,” wrote Dr. Allyne, “is so well calculated as household work to develop all the muscles of the body.”²²⁸ Girls needed housework to “obtain that hardihood of constitution, that strength of muscle, that power of endurance...that balance of temperament so essential to good health and happiness in all the social and domestic relations of life.”²²⁹ The author neglected to explain how girls would gain these values through housework, but nevertheless stressed that the values must be obtained. Not only physical toil, but mental fatigue accompanied girls’ work. The “Two Prime Requisites” of housework, according to one author, were “patience and dispatch,” as “quiet, steady energy...accomplishes the work of the world.”²³⁰ None of these descriptions of girls’ labor seemed very attractive to a young woman considering her options for life.

Farming families worried about what would become of their daughters as they explored the world outside of the farm. A letter to the editor of the *Country Gentleman* questioned the role of girls on farms, particularly when they grew to an age where their labor was no longer needed.

²²⁷ Minnie Hull to D.E. Denman, manuscript correspondence, 1881-1882, Carlock/Denman/Irvin/Porter Collection, Box 1, Folder 18. McLean County Historical Museum, Bloomington, Illinois, April 24, 1882.

²²⁸ “Housework for Girls,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, October 21, 1870.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ “Two Prime Requisites,” *Country Gentleman* 35 (May 12, 1870): 299.

In many cases, extra labor was always welcomed, but the letter writer, “A Farmer’s Wife,” addressed what would become of girls who left home to earn a living. Many girls, according to the author, would regret leaving home due to the negative consequences of living a non-farm based life. She wrote:

Some become dressmakers, and from daylight to dark work diligently, and grow pale and sickly, and at last come back to the home to die. Some—a good many—go to the factories, and in the heated rooms and putrid air, breathe in the seeds of death, and they too look with longing eyes to the old roof-tree that sheltered their girlhood, and come back, to be a care to their broken-hearted mothers for a short time, and then are laid sorrowfully to rest.²³¹

For the farm wife, work outside of the home led to nothing but death and disaster. But at home, girls had so much more. She wrote, “there was a time when girls could milk cows, feed pigs, work in the garden, make butter and cheese, do housework, and turn a deft hand to all kinds of work...there were no anxious fears about their future, for they grew up safely under the eyes of parental love. There were not too many girls in those days.”²³² The way young women could combat this problem was to “bring our minds to be content with less ostentation and useless expense” and encourage girls to “be made happy and useful at home, without unceasing solicitude as to what would be their future destiny.”²³³ Only then would farm girls live contented and helpful lives.

In response to the concerned Farm Wife, a self-proclaimed “Woman’s Rights Girl” wrote a letter to the editor expressing her opinion on proper behavior for girls. The writer criticized the lack of vocational options for girls and the societal restrictions placed on young women. “Let us follow our inclination,” she wrote, “in regard to how we would make our living; let us have a greater number of trades than three or four to choose from, and we will get through the world

²³¹ “What to Do with Our Girls,” *Country Gentleman* 38 (April 10, 1873): 235.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

first rate.”²³⁴ Girls, she argued, “have been brought up to have no ambition but marriage,” and for those that did attempt to learn a trade, “she is laughed at, and called a ‘Woman’s Rights Woman.’”²³⁵ While this young woman clearly advocated that girls should have more options, this opinion did not hold for many farm families. The “Woman’s Rights Girl” argued, “we do not all have to be farmers wives or housekeepers,” but the question of what a girl would be instead still held much mystery for farming families. As such, rural parents worried about girls who put little effort into their farm and home chores or preferred a lifestyle off the farm.

Anxieties of parents over the state of their girls’ behavior often manifested itself in dismay over their girls’ work at home. Much of the prescriptive literature criticized the ways that girls did housework, or more frequently, refused to do housework to the standards of parents. Writers showed much disdain for the presumed laziness and inattention to housework that some girls displayed. In a tongue-in-cheek article about the ways girls performed work, one writer recorded “How a Girl Helps to Clean House.” The author noted, “she is perfectly willing to help. She... informs her teacher, with a semi-triumphant air, that she has to stay home next week to help clean house.”²³⁶ Once home to help, the girl wasted time talking with a friend, then quit work all together as she “complains of being tired.”²³⁷ The manipulative girl portrayed in the article featured in many other articles as well. The idea that girls preferred to socialize and refused to help around the house persisted as part of the rural “girl problem.”

Another writer denigrated girls’ perceived attitude about housework, referring to them as “Idle Girls.” According to the author, “it is a painful spectacle in families where the mother is the drudge, to see the daughters elegantly dressed, reclining at their ease with their drawing, their

²³⁴ “What to Do With Our Girls,” response, *Country Gentleman* 38 (May 22, 1873): 334.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ “How a Girl Helps to Clean House,” *Rochester Post*, August 2, 1873.

²³⁷ Ibid.

music, their fancy work, and their reading, beguiling themselves of the lapse of hours, days, and weeks, and never dreaming of their responsibilities.”²³⁸ In such homes, girls paid more attention to leisure pursuits than to helping out around the house. If questioned about their behavior, “these individuals will often tell you with an air of affected compassion... that poor, dear mamma is working herself to death; yet no sooner do you propose that they should assist her, than they declare she is quite in her element; in short, that she would never be happy if she had only half so much to do.”²³⁹ Providing help for mothers, as previously mentioned, comprised the most important duty a girl could do in the home, and girls who refused to take part, claiming more important interests, contributed to the rural “girl problem.”

Parents themselves, according to many authors, provided the root of this problem. Girls needed correct instruction and discipline to work around the home, lest they lapse into idleness. One writer noted, “when a girl is ten years old she should be given household duties to perform according to her size and strength... This will supply a healthy stimulus.”²⁴⁰ By completing this training, and then increasing the load of labor, girls learned to work diligently on their own, unprompted by parents. Society ultimately held parents responsible for the actions of their daughters. When mothers and fathers did not instill the proper work ethic in their girls, the young women would not grow up to be responsible adults. In parsing out “What Girls Really Want,” one author recorded, “girls really want more self-reliance... out of kindness many a mother removes all responsibility from her daughters. She buys, and has made to order, every article of dress... To make a self-reliant, independent, business woman, begins in the nursery, and is the

²³⁸ “Idle Girls,” *Rochester Post*, February 19, 1870.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ “Train the Girls,” *Central City News-Letter*, October 17, 1889.

outgrowth of discipline.”²⁴¹ Parents had to start early and teach girls how to work in order to combat the “girl problem.”

Proper knowledge of housework and domestic duties became all the more important when a girl reached marriageable age. The fate of a potential marriage rested on the ability of a young woman to perform wifely and household chores to the satisfaction of their new husband. One prescriptive writer drew a direct correlation between being a good daughter and being a good wife in the article “Daughter and Wife” in the *Champaign County Herald*. According to the author, “a bad daughter seldom makes a good wife. If a girl is ill tempered at home, snarls at her parents, snaps at brothers and sisters, and ‘shirks’ her ordinary duties, the chances are ten to one that when she gets a home of her own she will make it wretched.”²⁴² Such a girl might try to hide her inability to work when getting engaged, but she quickly reverted to her old ways of laziness. To sum up the article, the writer questioned, “if she will not assist her mother in the domestic labors, and badgers the servants, is she not likely to be equally slothful and ill-tempered when she marries? If she now thinks herself to fine to work, is it safe to expect that her views as to that matter would radically change if she becomes a wife.”²⁴³ While a rural household might not have servants to badger, as mentioned in the article, the crux of the argument remained sound. Girls who did not carry their weight in their home of origin could not be counted on to run their own households in marriage.

In the worst cases, this attitude would keep girls from gaining the interest of young men for engagement or marriage. An article exhorted, “you don’t know how to work. You can’t keep house. You can’t make a pair of breeches. You can’t tell, for the life of you, the difference

²⁴¹ “What Girls Really Want,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, June 6, 1873.

²⁴² “Daughter and Wife,” *Champaign County Herald*, February 25, 1880.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

between bran and shorts, or which cow gives the buttermilk.”²⁴⁴ These simple pieces of information meant the difference between marriage and aimless courting. In the view of this author, young men recognized these failings, and would remark of girls, “Well, she is all right for an evening’s entertainment, but she will not make a good wife.”²⁴⁵ Wives had to be diligent in their labors, and the knowledge of running a home would go far to increase the odds of a young woman finding a good husband.

Authors of prescriptive literature widely recorded and acknowledged the failings of girls, but not as many authors provided concrete advice on how to change the situation. A writer named Bill Arp minced no words when he advocated more responsibility for girls. He wrote, “if they [girls] can’t make money, let them quit spending it. I know young ladies in this town whose fathers are on a strain and yet they won’t make their own dresses.”²⁴⁶ Arp advocated a strict schedule of work for girls, arguing “rich or poor they ought to do something useful. Get up early and fly around and sweep and dust and look after the dining room and lamps. After breakfast go to the sewing machine and make it hum and june as your grandmothers did the spinning wheel.”²⁴⁷ By following these simple steps, and refusing to be idle, girls would help their families and become better future wives.

As mentioned in the prescriptive literature, housework proved to be nearly a prerequisite for marriage. Articles warned that young men would not marry girls who did not show knowledge and finesse in taking care of a home. Girls were meant to learn these skills within the home of origin, as girls most often emulated their mothers and other women in the household. In fact, in a typical farm family, teenage girls could theoretically run the household in the absence

²⁴⁴ “For the Girls,” *Grant County Herald*, August 27, 1867.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ Bill Arp, “What About the Girls,” *Olmsted County Democrat*, April 18, 1889.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

of the mother. On a typical farm, women had the domain of the household, while men took care of the outside work and most of the heavy farming. These distinctions blurred at times, particularly during the peak of the farming season, but for the most part, this division of labor remained.

Housework typically consisted of cleaning, cooking, and taking care of the family in various ways. Cleaning covered a variety of tasks involving upkeep to the farm house and sometimes the yard as well. Daily tasks interspersed with bigger jobs that normally only occurred on a semi-regular basis. Diaries from farm daughters mentioned housework almost every day. Work formed an integral part of the daily tasks of farm daughters, sometimes even interfering with school or other activities that girls participated in. As these girls made up an important part of farm labor, their daily chores proved to be the most important tasks that girls could do.

Carrie Markle worked as hired labor in a farm family, but also taught school at various points before her marriage. Also, Carrie was an older girl, already in her twenties when she moved to rural Champaign County, Illinois with the Francisco family. As an employee, her daily cleaning chores were especially integral. Carrie mentioned her household chores regularly in her diaries that she kept from 1865 to 1867. Most of her work revolved around washing clothing items. In a typical diary entry, Carrie mentioned “helped wash,” or “done some washing.”²⁴⁸ Most of the entries indicated that she did not do the work alone, but helped Mrs. Francisco, the woman of the household in which she lived. On March 20, 1865, she wrote, “sewed for Mrs. Francisco helped her get water to wash with.”²⁴⁹ Just a few days later, she recorded “in the

²⁴⁸ Carrie Markle, manuscript diaries, 1864-1867, Special Collections, Box 90. Champaign County Historical Society, Urbana, Illinois, May 1, 1865, January 13, 1866.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., March 20, 1865.

morning helped wash up some calico clothes.”²⁵⁰ These short, no-nonsense diary entries did not say much about the scope of the tasks being performed, but showed the centrality of cleaning and housework to the life of a young housekeeper, due to the rote, nearly daily descriptions.

Household work sometimes extended outside the home into other types of work. At least once, Carrie mentioned that she worked in the yard, writing “washed, helped hoe and plant seeds in the garden.”²⁵¹ Gardens provided foodstuffs and extra income for the farming family, depending on what kind of garden, and women performed this work. Joan Jensen noted the importance of gardens as “central to subsistence farming.”²⁵² According to Jensen, “small garden plots or household gardens have been essential to the survival of both landed and landless households. Household gardens, usually women’s major responsibility, supply what cannot be obtained through hunting, gathering, or field production.”²⁵³ The Franciscos farmed and Mr. Francisco worked as a grain dealer, but a garden provided other means of support for the family, and Carrie played a role in the enterprise. On another occasion, Carrie recorded “I did the work in the house, baked, moped [mopped]” while “Mrs. F. [Francisco] dropped [dropped] corn.”²⁵⁴ In this instance, the women of the household provided necessary farm labor, with Carrie taking over the house and Mrs. Francisco helping by planting corn, presumably with her husband in the field.

Mary Elizabeth Pascoe’s diary provided a record which revolved even more about daily farm and household work. Mary was just sixteen years old in 1871 when she made a daily recording of her life. Chores formed the core of her diary entries, as hardly a day went by that she did not write about some form of work that she had completed. While not always

²⁵⁰ Ibid., April 1, 1865.

²⁵¹ Ibid., May 22, 1865.

²⁵² Joan Jensen, *Calling This Place Home: Women on the Wisconsin Frontier, 1850-1925* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006), 100.

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Carrie Markle, May 13, 1865.

enthusiastic about the work, Mary still performed the duties of farm daughter that proved so important to the running of the household.

Washing represented the one chore repeated most often in Mary Pascoe's diary. Like Carrie Markle, Mary washed frequently, sometimes with help and other times alone. Nineteenth-century laundry proved to be an extremely exhausting chore. The suggested schedule for washing clothes encompassed up to three days of the week. Historian Jeanne Boydston made note of Catharine Beecher's recommendations for laundry chores: "Tuesday to wash, Wednesday to iron, and Thursday to fold and put away the clothes."²⁵⁵ Women had to expend much physical energy in laundry as well. For a proper washing, a woman would have had to haul water and heat it, manually scrub the clothing, wring it and hang it to dry, then iron everything. Ruth Schwartz Cowan, an historian of household technology, detailed the steps, noting that laundry was "exceedingly hard work," and involved "rubbing, wringing, toting, and ironing."²⁵⁶ Interestingly, Cowan also noted that "children rarely became involved in it [laundry]," due to the difficulty of the task.²⁵⁷ Mary Pascoe, a sixteen year old girl, participated fully in laundry, despite her young age.

The washing chore could take all day to complete, a fact bemoaned in several of Mary's entries. On March 6, 1871, Mary recorded "we have been washing got through about 2 o'clock dried the clothes and ironed in the evening but did not quite finish."²⁵⁸ The grueling task of laundry stretched into the afternoon, with the final touch of ironing not even getting completed in the same day. On other occasions, Mary spoke with much hyperbole about the drudgery of

²⁵⁵ Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 85.

²⁵⁶ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 65.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, manuscript diary, 1871, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, March 6, 1871.

washing. On a fall day Mary grumbled “Oh dreary gloomy desolate day that evening pass so slow away I have been washing the day is very cold.”²⁵⁹ Washing became part of the overall miserable day Mary had, based on her diary entry.

The dreary October day Mary described was hardly an isolated incident. Mary frequently used words like “drearily,” “toil,” “tiresome,” and “hard” to describe her chore of laundry.²⁶⁰ Washing also could correspond to a bad mood for Mary. On one occasion she recorded “we have been washing and had the blues most of the day.”²⁶¹ While much of Mary’s complaining could be chalked up to typical teenage angst, the fact that it often corresponded with chores could be an indicator of the “girl problem.” Mary complained frequently about the work load that she endured as a farm daughter, which might have been an inducement to shirk responsibilities or possibly try to leave the farm for other opportunities. That Mary found little joy in her daily duties demonstrated the drudgery that accompanied many of the jobs assigned to farm women.

Continual references to her unhappiness appeared in the diary in different ways. On one occasion, she lamented, “weather is very fine and we have been working at scrubbing theres hardly any thing but work in this world.”²⁶² The fact that she felt trapped by her work showed plainly in many entries. She also seemed depressed at some points. On May 29, 1871 she noted, “the chores had to be done Mother and I cleaned the bedroom felt rather sad and why I think it is a discontented mind.”²⁶³ The necessity of completing the household work superseded Mary’s feelings of depression, but she still felt the emotional effects of sadness enough to mention it in her diary.

²⁵⁹ Ibid., October 23, 1871.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., February 27, May 22, 30, 1871.

²⁶¹ Ibid., May 1, 1871.

²⁶² Ibid., January 16, 1871.

²⁶³ Ibid., May 29, 1871.

Cleaning the house also featured prominently in Mary's diary entries. Many tasks went into keeping up the house, including scrubbing, cleaning, and whitewashing, and Mary participated in all of these. Most of the time, Mary described the work with plural pronouns, such as "we have been working at scrubbing theres hardly any thing but work in this world."²⁶⁴ This indicated that she worked with other female members of the family, including her mother and sisters. Other times, she described working alone on particular jobs. On January 26, 1871, she wrote "I have been home almost all day alone...I have been ironing."²⁶⁵ On this particular day, Mary's mother had ventured off the farm to visit her older sister. Another day, Mary wrote "Mother and Father went to Elkgrove I have been home all day scrubbing and cooking."²⁶⁶ During her parents' absence (for unspecified reasons), Mary ran the household. The amount of responsibility given to Mary, a teenage daughter, seemed to be quite large. Running the household proved to be a lot of work, but not more than parents believed a sixteen year old girl could handle.

Mary also handled many other larger tasks in the home and on the farm. She "whitewashed the kitchen," presumably by herself on one occasion, took on the task of deep cleaning several of the rooms in the house, and spent at least one afternoon cleaning at the church building.²⁶⁷ She also worked in the barnyard at times. She noted, "after milking we put the cows to pasture."²⁶⁸ Mary's integral work on the farm contributed to the overall well-being of the family enterprise. On other occasions, she provided needed labor, which will be mentioned later, but overall, as a farm daughter, her work in the home and on the farm supplemented her family's, sometimes even becoming the main labor force.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., January 16, 1871.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., January 26, 1871.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., February 1, 1871.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., November 24, May 18, 23, July 13, 1871.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., June 19, 1871.

While Mary Pascoe's diary revolved around her work, other girls spent less time discussing household chores. Addie Crouch's diary contrasted with Mary Pascoe's, simply in its lack of information about housework. Addie made only brief mentions of any kind of work, and much of it was half-hearted effort, which will be discussed in detail later. At times she would remark, "I got the work done up," not specifically detailing the actual work.²⁶⁹ Several times she wrote about more intensive labor, on one occasion noting "we cleaned up stairs today have worked hard all day."²⁷⁰ Isolated mentions of hard work stood out in Addie's diary, as most of the entries had little specific to say about work. This is not to say that Addie did not work, as being a farm daughter generally precluded any attempts to get out of working, but Addie did not focus on work in her diary.

In fact, work sometimes got in the way of other plans for Addie. She managed to socialize even when completing tasks at home. On October 23, 1884 she boasted, "Will and I had quite a talk this eve while I was doing the dishes."²⁷¹ Will was an acquaintance of Addie's who showed up in multiple diary entries, including one which involved a disagreement over work. Addie wrote, "I had all the work to do up. Will was going to help me but when Elmer came he would not."²⁷² The romantic rivalry between Will and Elmer got in the way of the completion of chores.

At twenty-one years old by the end of her diary, Addie was an adult with more independence than Mary Pascoe, but she still lived at home under the rule of her parents. And unlike Carrie Markle, who was hired labor, family ties drove Addie's responsibilities, rather than employment. Despite this, Addie seemed to get by with a minimum of work, something feared

²⁶⁹ Addie A. Crouch, manuscript diaries, 1881-1885, D9 f.4-6, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, September 13, 1884.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., November 26, 1884.

²⁷¹ Ibid., October 23, 1884.

²⁷² Ibid., November 9, 1884.

by parents and prescriptive authors. Like the advice literature quoted above, Addie provided an example of what could go wrong with a young woman more interested in socializing and interacting with boys than with helping out at home and learning how to be a good housekeeper in preparation for a future marriage. While Addie had plenty of male companionship, she focused little attention to the duties at home that should have made her more attractive to a potential marriage partner. Addie's work ethic may have been a source of anxiety for her parents or others in her community.

Unlike Addie, another young adult woman showed a much greater level of responsibility and dedication to family labor at a similar age. Rhoda Emery of Olmsted County, Minnesota, kept a similar diary from the ages of eighteen to twenty-two. In her diary, she provided more examples of work and more interest in the inner workings of her family farm. Rhoda taught school for much of her life, but in between terms, she lived and worked with her family on the farm.

Rhoda did much of the same work that the other girls did. She washed, cleaned, and did light farm work. Most of Rhoda's entries about work emphasized the difficulty of the work that she performed. A typical entry read "we all washed today and worked hard."²⁷³ The use of the collective pronoun showed that she did not work alone, but also the entry conveyed that the work was tiresome. Multiple times she mentioned that work exhausted her. On February 16, 1892 she wrote "we have been washing hard all day to-day, and are very tired."²⁷⁴ Sometimes work interfered with other more pleasurable activities. Rhoda remarked one day that "we washed this

²⁷³ Rhoda J. Emery, manuscript diaries, 1889-1894, Rhoda J. Emery and Family Papers, Manuscripts Collection, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota, July 3, 1894.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, February 16, 1892.

morning and thought of going to Wood's this P.M. but were too tired and so spent the afternoon sewing.²⁷⁵ The labor expended in washing made it too difficult to travel and visit friends.

But Rhoda's entries were not all dismal and depressing. Shortly after returning home from a term of teaching school, Rhoda wrote "well to-day has been pleasant. It is very good to be home again. I washed and ironed a little."²⁷⁶ Another time at a friend's home she recalled "I helped Helen some with the chores, milked one cow, and had a funny time."²⁷⁷ While she did not include the details of what happened, the overall tone of the entry suggested that she had a good time with her friend while completing chores. Rhoda also emphasized how the family worked together. On one busy summer day, she recorded "we washed to-day and worked hard cleaning up this afternoon. Pa mowed the weeds in the yard and Robert [her younger brother] and I have been picking them up."²⁷⁸ Again Rhoda and her brother demonstrated the importance of children on the farm, as they provided needed help to their father working in the field.

Along with household maintenance, cooking and baking took up a lot of girls' time in rural households. Food preparation took time, and comprised more than the meals each day. Baking especially occupied much time for a nineteenth-century woman. Bread was made in several ways, some more labor-intensive than others. Quick breads could be made from less processed grains, and they did not require any extra work other than mixing and baking. Yeast breads, on the other hand, used finely ground flours and involved kneading and rising, which took more time and energy.²⁷⁹ Like laundry, baking could be an all-day chore.

Of the diaries surveyed, only Mary Pascoe spent any time recording the activities surrounding food in her daily diary. Carrie Markle mentioned baking at least once, but made

²⁷⁵ Ibid., August 29, 1892.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., May 7, 1892.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., September 3, 1890.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., August 8, 1892.

²⁷⁹ Cowan, *More Work for Mother*, 49-51.

limited cooking references.²⁸⁰ Mary Pascoe spoke frequently of different food preparation activities, including baking, cooking, preserving, and churning butter. Churning was a particularly difficult and labor intensive task. On many farms, butter production added to the family income, with butter being sold at the market. Grey Osterud placed butter production at the heart of the family farming system, the place where men and women came together for the good of the family. According to Osterud, “because women participated in milking and churning, the division of labor by gender on local farms did not correspond with the difference between subsistence and market-oriented production. Women did not simply provide services and produce goods...women were also actively involved in the most highly valued form of farm labor.”²⁸¹ On July 7, 1871, Mary wrote “in the forenoon I was busy in the cellar churning and making the butter in the afternoon.”²⁸² Churning took all day to complete. Another time, Mary had spent the previous day, July 4, at town festivities and had to return the next day to chores. She recorded, “we all felt somewhat tired after our spree yesterday but I have been churning hard enough for anyone.”²⁸³ Despite fun activities and holidays, the work still had to be completed. The never-ceasing nature of chores also manifested in seasonal tasks, such as preserving fruits and vegetables. Mary mentioned, “we have been preserving...the plums were getting ripe,” on August 7, 1871.²⁸⁴ When summer fruits ripened, the family had to complete the preservation process in a timely manner in order to make the most of the harvest to store up for the winter.

Cleaning and cooking in the farm household showed the vital part that farm daughters played in the family. Caring for family members also demonstrated girls’ importance. Rhoda

²⁸⁰ Carrie Markle, May 13, 1865; Carrie mentioned that she baked, among other chores, in this reference, quoted earlier in the paper.

²⁸¹ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 156.

²⁸² Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, July 7, 1871.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., August 7, 1871.

Emery worried constantly over the state of her family. Her older brother Jim moved around from job to job, sometimes not informing his family of his whereabouts. Rhoda mentioned these worries sometimes cryptically, sometimes outright at various points in the diary. On April 25, 1892 Rhoda wrote “where is he and what is he doing?”²⁸⁵ As she did not specifically mention him by name, it is only speculation that she meant her brother, but less than a month later, she fretted, “I am worried about Jim.”²⁸⁶ Rhoda’s concern for Jim showed an interest in her family’s welfare and an almost parental role for Rhoda as a sister. Several years earlier, Rhoda had a similar exchange, this time about her mother. Rhoda’s mother had a baby later in life, and throughout the process, Rhoda worried about her mother’s health and well-being. After the child was born, Rhoda’s worries continued. She complained of the housekeeper, “our hired girl is not good for much. She does not cook anything hardly that Ma can eat.”²⁸⁷ Rhoda’s familial concerns placed her in a role as caretaker, elevating her above the level of a child, but still as a dependent in the family. The tension of this role, as not independent, yet still burdened by family troubles, placed farm daughters in an interesting position.

Prescriptive literature periodically commented on this unique position of farm girls within the family. Writers considered familial concern not only a good trait, but a necessary one. Like other articles which outlined the traits that made for the best future wife, similar traits made a good daughter. The “Model Girl,” according to one writer, did what needed to be done for the family: “If anything is to be done for grandmamma, it is she who does it. When mother is ill, it is she who waits on her, who looks after the little ones and does the housekeeping. Loving, unselfish, energetic, industrious, she has no ambition outside the circle of home and its

²⁸⁵ Rhoda Emery, April 25, 1892.

²⁸⁶ Ibid., May 15, 1892.

²⁸⁷ Ibid., April 21, 1890.

affections.”²⁸⁸ This type of girl fit perfectly in the home, and she also “does not pretend to intellectual merit.”²⁸⁹ The sly insult tucked into the article showed an overall degradation of women’s ambitions outside the home, including schooling. If a “model girl” did not tend toward outside pursuits, she would not leave the home to further her education or try out a career.

Prescriptive writers took pains to describe not only the traits of “model girls,” but also those traits considered abhorrent for a young woman. The *Brodhead Independent* described “Two Kinds of Girls,” the good girl and the “other girl.” The “other girl” says “I just hate housework...and I let ma do most of it.”²⁹⁰ When questioned about what type of work she did, she made excuses, including being too tired to make beds and having hands too delicate to wash dishes. What she did do, however, was “the shopping. That’s such a help for ma. I receive the company for she is too tired to stay up after supper, and she says I’m lots of help to her.”²⁹¹ This kind of girl stood in contrast to the good girl, the one who “appears best at home, who helps her mother, and takes unfinished tasks from the tired hands that falter at their work.”²⁹² The latter girl represented the ideal farm daughter.

The “Elder Sister” also described the same girl who took on the responsibilities of the farm home. The Elder Sister “stands side by side with the toiling mother, lightening all her cares and burdens.”²⁹³ The Elder Sister bested other daughters, “whose presence is not such a blessing in the house. Their own selfish ends and aims are the main pursuit of life, and anything that stands in the way of these is regarded with great importance.”²⁹⁴ The archetype of the elder sister provoked several questions. Was this role a life-long pursuit? The description provided allowed

²⁸⁸ “The Model Girl,” *Sidney By-Way*, October 22, 1887.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ “Two Kinds of Girls,” *Brodhead Independent*, November 23, 1888.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.*

²⁹³ “The Elder Sister,” *Prairie Farmer* 42 (December 9, 1871): 375.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

for no other interactions, other than helping in the home. Would such a woman meet someone and marry, or would she even be able to marry? A woman who stayed single, an “old maid,” often stayed in the home of origin, caring for aging parents, the ultimate end for the perfect “Elder Sister.”

Like the prescriptive literature would indicate, the expectation that girls would have such an important role in the family played out in the experiences of Carrie, Mary, Addie, and Rhoda. Beyond simply worrying about other family members, as Rhoda often did, the girls at times filled in for their mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters when necessary for the farm and home to continue to operate. Illness and absence of parents sometimes necessitated the daughters to step into different roles. In Carrie Markle’s case, as a hired girl, the dynamic differed slightly. Carrie worked from a standpoint of more than simple obligation to family, but as a paid member of a staff. As such, the references to work in Carrie’s diary rarely refer to “helping,” but to “working.” Employers’ relationships with hired labor, though, were significantly more complicated than they might appear. According to Grey Osterud, hired help often shared almost as much with their employers as blood relatives did. She noted, “there was no radical discontinuity between kinship, friendship, and employment.”²⁹⁵ In many families, “the relationship between them [employer and laborer] was in part modeled on kin relations.”²⁹⁶ This most likely held true for Carrie Markle and the Franciscos, as she was hired in Michigan, then traveled with the family to Illinois to continue working for them.²⁹⁷

Mary Pascoe’s diary provided an excellent example of a farm daughter pitching in and helping throughout the seasonal shifts of farm labor. In January and February of 1871, Mary

²⁹⁵ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 195.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁷ Francisco Family, Year: 1860; Census Place: Sylvan, Washtenaw, Michigan; Roll: M653_563; Page: 382; Image: 382; Family History Library Film: 803563. Ancestry.com. 1860 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009. Accessed 11 April 2013.

wrote about her daily tasks, as well as “killing hogs.”²⁹⁸ Hog killing was a community affair. In both instances of butchering, neighbors and family stopped by to help out. A Mr. Verne, Mr. Clemons, and Harriet and Billy (Mary’s sister and brother-in-law) all assisted with the task of hog killing.²⁹⁹

Later that spring came the task of planting the season’s crops. Mary played an important role in helping with the planting, doing some of the field work herself. She wrote, “I have been working in the field planting corn the wind have been rather hard and the same rather hot.”³⁰⁰ The next day, the difficult work continued, as “the wind have been very hard which made it very disagreeable for planting corn.”³⁰¹ On a final day of planting, Mary worked in more pleasant weather, then “went over for the cows and milked them.”³⁰² The multiple jobs involved in farming were redistributed during the busy times of the season.

Late in the summer came harvesting, and this brought added work. Mary did not mention harvesting herself, but the teams of men who came to help out needed to be fed, which increased the work load of the farm women. Historian Mary Neth described the “thresheree,” or harvest time in the early twentieth century and the preparations that women contributed as “an arena where women’s work skills were recognized.”³⁰³ Women who hosted farm workers faced an enormous and unenviable task. Neth described the preparations as starting in the wee hours of the morning and continuing until late into the night, as “the harvest ritual could include five meals—breakfast, morning lunch (at about nine), the noon dinner, afternoon lunch (at about

²⁹⁸ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, January 9, February 14, 1871.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid., May 8, 1871.

³⁰¹ Ibid., May 9, 1871.

³⁰² Ibid., May 10, 1871.

³⁰³ Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 155.

three), and supper at the end of the workday.”³⁰⁴ While Mary Pascoe did not describe their late nineteenth-century harvest as such a massive affair, she did note the increase in her work load. In July she wrote, “we have been washing and baking today been working hard all day feel pretty tired the men has been cutting and binding the wheat.”³⁰⁵ While the men worked in the field, the women provided sustenance. About a week later, the harvesting continued, as did Mary’s work. She recorded, “it is pretty warm today Now every day we hear the reaper and see the men busy in the...fields and the women folks are busy carrying lunch and every other thing they can do to help.”³⁰⁶ This particular entry encapsulated the role of farm woman succinctly. Women worked as helpers, doing anything needed for the good of the farm. Although subordinate to the male role of farmer, women performed necessary, and, according to Mary Neth, valued work and added to the overall profitability of the farm. Mary Pascoe mentioned the harvesting happening every day, and the faster and more efficiently the work could be done, the better the farm business progressed.

Mary Pascoe’s year ended the same way it began, with hog killing in late November.³⁰⁷ Mary’s diary mapped out the farming year through her work as supplemental labor to the farming operation. At only sixteen years old, Mary carried part of the burden of working the farm, and farm chores did not supersede regular household duties. Along with mentions of farm work, she also detailed the rote duties of cleaning, cooking, and washing. Mary never stopped performing her jobs around the home, despite the season of the year. The tight-knit Pascoe family came together to make sure they had enough to take care of each other.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, July 19, 1871.

³⁰⁶ Ibid., July 26, 1871.

³⁰⁷ Ibid., November 21, 1871.

Grey Osterud recognized this division of labor in her own research, and made the very keen observation that women could have control over their labor in these situations. According to Osterud, “although their work was heavy, these women were not ‘laboring drudges’ exploited by their husbands; they were, rather, integral members of farm families who controlled their own labor and chose to join men in the performance of what all regarded as vital and valuable work.”³⁰⁸ Neither housework nor farm work was more important than the other; to members of the farming family, work was work, and all people, male or female, had to do their part.

Helping out in Addie Crouch’s family took on a different dimension. Addie was older than Mary Pascoe, and her family’s farming operation differed significantly from the Pascoe’s. In 1881, Addie wrote that her father had rented the farm to a Philand, possibly a former hired man.³⁰⁹ It is unclear what this meant for the family, but what is known is that Addie’s father also sold trees, either as a sideline business or instead of farming after this point. On several occasions, Addie mentioned that her father was away selling trees.³¹⁰ In the course of running a tree-selling operation, Addie’s father recruited her to help out with the business. Addie wrote, “I copied orders for Pa he has sold most a hundred dollars worth.”³¹¹ She also “helped Pa about some freight bills.”³¹² The type of freight and for what business is unknown, but Addie’s father depended on her for assistance. Perhaps, as an educated young woman, Addie had more knowledge of reading and math than her father, necessary skills for running a business. Over two years later, Addie’s father’s business remained, as Addie grumbled, “well Pa has come and I

³⁰⁸ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 186.

³⁰⁹ Addie Crouch, March 20, 1881. A Hiland Ward is listed in the 1880 census with the Crouch family as a cousin and farm hand, so this may be the same person. Year: 1880; Census Place: Boulder, Linn, Iowa; Roll: 351; Family History Film: 1254351; Page: 12A; Enumeration District: 252; Image: 0026. Ancestry.com and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 1880 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010. Accessed 11 April 2013.

³¹⁰ Addie Crouch, March 23, 25, 1881.

³¹¹ Ibid., March 25, 1881.

³¹² Ibid., March 7, 1881.

expect I will have to copy orders till bed time. Yes I did.”³¹³ Addie’s negative reaction to helping out with her father’s business showed a contrast to Mary Pascoe’s devotion to her family’s farm. Although at times Mary mentioned displeasure with aspects of her life, she performed exhausting work on the farm. Addie complained about helping with the administrative aspects of her father’s business, much less taxing chores.

Rhoda Emery fell somewhere in the middle of the two other girls’ attitudes about helping family. Rhoda was the same age as Addie when she began her diary, and older than Mary. Rhoda had also been more independent than either of the other girls, striking out to begin a career as a teacher away from home. Rhoda always returned, though, and while living at home, she contributed to the work. Rhoda’s responsibilities ranged from traditional household work to more labor-intensive outdoor chores. Rhoda’s diary entries represented how the entire family pitched in to help get chores done. On one occasion she wrote, “I sawed some wood this afternoon and have a back-ache now. I am very glad school is out.”³¹⁴ Rhoda had certain trials while teaching school, which will be discussed elsewhere, and they made her long for manual labor and its aches and pains in place of teaching. The hard work must have continued, as a few weeks later, Rhoda recorded, “Ma and I have been too lame and stiff to-day to do much of anything though we have tried to sew a little.”³¹⁵ Whatever Rhoda and her mother had completed, it proved difficult physically.

Rhoda and other family members also worked together to help the family. Rhoda and a relative Nellie “sacked twelve sacks of oats this evening” on August 18, 1892, presumably for the market or for family use.³¹⁶ On another occasion, Rhoda wrote “this evening we have all

³¹³ Ibid., October 16, 1883.

³¹⁴ Rhoda Emery, January 24, 1892.

³¹⁵ Ibid., February 17, 1892.

³¹⁶ Ibid., August 18, 1892.

been cleaning chickens for Pa and Ma to take to town tomorrow.”³¹⁷ Even when Rhoda was not at home, the family still came together to work. In a letter to Rhoda, her mother Helen George Emery fretted, “the girls have worked like boys to help him [her father] this fall and he seems anxious to give them a chance. They helped him pile wood in the cellar he thinks we have enough down there for all winter.”³¹⁸ Although she despaired at her daughters doing “men’s” work, she still acknowledged the importance of that labor to the family.

Daughters were so important that at times they stepped in completely to take over for other family members. More than just supplementing the family, this labor stood in for someone, usually the mother, in cases of illness or absence. Diaries frequently mentioned sickness among family or neighbors which necessitated the daughter running the household for a time. Other times, the help daughters provided took on a different dimension, either material or financial. Two of the girls surveyed recorded helping their parents in very adult ways, despite being subordinate within the household. Yet this significant undertaking of labor by daughters did not alter the dynamic of who was in charge of the household. Kathryn Hunter found in her analysis of single women’s diaries in late nineteenth-century Australia that single women remained under the thumb of relatives and employers, despite their increased role in farm and family labor. According to Hunter, “the reliance of married women on single women did not equate to power in the household for single women. Authority was often exercised over these adult women by parents or by employers.”³¹⁹ Single women may have been subordinate at times, but this did not take away from the significant role they played in crucial times.

³¹⁷ Ibid., September 22, 1893.

³¹⁸ Helen George Emery to Rhoda Emery, manuscript correspondence, 1889-1918, Rhoda J. Emery and Family Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, October 28, 1894.

³¹⁹ Kathryn Hunter, *Father’s Right Hand Man: Women on Australia’s Family Farms in the Age of Federation, 1880s-1920s* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Press, 2004), 126.

Carrie Markle mentioned taking over the household while Mrs. Francisco left to do other tasks, but as mentioned earlier, Carrie had a different relationship within the household than the other girls. In fact, at times Carrie's relationship with Mrs. Francisco seemed to be reciprocal. On April 26, 1865, she wrote, "Mrs. Francisco went to Urbana. I staid home to do the work. She got me a new hat, hoop skirt, shoes, dress trimming...\$12.75. I went after the mail."³²⁰ The diary did not specify whose money paid for the new clothing items, Carrie's or Mrs. Francisco's. Either way, the situation highlighted the relationship between the two: Mrs. Francisco did a favor for Carrie by using her money to purchase needed items, or Mrs. Francisco provided clothing as part of the agreement for Carrie's employment. At the same time, Carrie remained at home to do the household chores. Similarly, on another occasion Carrie recorded, "R.A. went to town to get my hat. I staid at home done the work."³²¹ Carrie's work as a hired girl continued, even when her employer was absent.

Mary Pascoe's life functioned much differently than Carrie Markle's. As a daughter, the need to step in and take over the household reached farther than just a matter of employment. In the course of the year that Mary recorded her diary, her mother fell ill several times, once severely. On these occasions, Mary mentioned the state of her mother's health and what she did around the house that day. One day, she wrote, "I was ironing Mother had the headache."³²² No more was said of this headache, so presumably it was not a long-term illness. Another day, an injury prevented Mrs. Pascoe from working, as Mary wrote, "I have been working alone Mother

³²⁰ Carrie Markle, April 26, 1865.

³²¹ Ibid., April 28, 1866. According to the census record, Mrs. Francisco's name was Rhoda, indicating that R.A. would have been Mrs. Francisco. Year: 1850; Census Place: *Grass Lake, Jackson, Michigan*; Roll: *M432_352*; Page: 422A; Image: 594. Ancestry.com. *1850 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009. Accessed 11 April 2013.

³²² Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, April 25, 1871.

had a sore thumb she have been doing chores in the morning.”³²³ Again, this non-life threatening injury only prevented Mary’s mother from working for the day.

In the summer, however, Mrs. Pascoe fell ill for an extended period of time. Mary mentioned the illness repeatedly and worried over her mother’s state of health, all the while completing necessary work. On July 28, 1871 she noted, “Mother has been very sick all day in bed most of the time.”³²⁴ The next day, her mother was “no better,” and had to receive medicine. Mary lamented, “Oh sad and weary toiling when will these cares be ore.”³²⁵ In a few days, Mrs. Pascoe began to recover, although the weight of the illness continued to fall on Mary, as she wrote “I feel as tired as ever I wish to be.”³²⁶ Several days later, Mary’s mother finally felt well enough to help with the chores, lifting the burden off of her sixteen year old daughter.

While Mary specifically described her mother’s illness and the extra work load required of her, nothing less would have been expected of a daughter. Addie Crouch and Rhoda Emery also performed their daughterly duties at various times, taking over for jobs when necessary. Addie rarely mentioned this type of work, but on one occasion she did write about how her mother left one morning to check in on someone who just given birth. Addie recorded, “Ma went up there just as soon as she ate her breakfast and I had the work to do and all the children to take care of.”³²⁷ This isolated occurrence, though, was not the only assistance Addie provided to her family. At some point, Addie lent money to her father, presumably to help with his business. Addie did not describe the circumstances surrounding this loan, so Addie’s impulse for a contribution remained a mystery. On June 13, 1884, she wrote “Pa payed me \$15 of the \$60 he

³²³ Ibid., May 15, 1871.

³²⁴ Ibid., July 28, 1871.

³²⁵ Ibid., July 29, 1871.

³²⁶ Ibid., July 31, 1871.

³²⁷ Addie Crouch, October 5, 1884.

borrowed.”³²⁸ At the time, sixty dollars was a sizeable sum, especially for a girl in her early twenties.³²⁹ But as Addie had held teaching jobs for several years by this point, she may have had significant savings that she contributed to the family income. Interestingly, though, Addie’s father considered the money a loan, which he paid back in installments. Addie’s loan helped the family in some way, but her father also gave funds back to her.

As a young woman, Rhoda also took on some larger burdens for her family. Rhoda’s mother had another child while Rhoda was away teaching, and she worried about her mother’s health and well-being. Rhoda recorded, “Thursday has gone again. Tomorrow I can see Ma and the baby. Somehow I am very anxious about them.”³³⁰ Rhoda did not explain why, perhaps because she herself did not even know the root of the anxiety, but somehow she felt that she had to help her mother. This particular example, although small, showed a responsibility that Rhoda felt to her family.

Rhoda’s duty to her family spread into more serious matters as well. At one point, she took on responsibility for her father’s health and welfare. In 1892, she recorded an instance of a major event in the life of her father. She wrote, “Pa and I went to R. [Rochester, Minnesota] today. He was examined for his pension. I went to see the Dr. They said Pa had heart disease. We are all worried about him. Clara and I went to Geary’s and told them he would not work there anymore.”³³¹ Not only did Rhoda accompany her father to the doctor and consult over his health, she and her sister Clara also took responsibility for their father’s job, informing his employer of his status. Her mother did not play a part in these conversations for reasons which are not

³²⁸ Ibid., June 13, 1884.

³²⁹ \$60 would be valued at around \$1420.00 for an income in 1884. Samuel H. Williamson, "Seven Ways to Compute the Relative Value of a U.S. Dollar Amount, 1774 to present," MeasuringWorth, April 2013. Accessed 11 April 2013.

³³⁰ Rhoda Emery, April 17, 1890.

³³¹ Ibid., August 17, 1892.

evident. Possibly the responsibility of raising the rest of the children kept Mrs. Emery from taking a larger role in her husband's health and employment. Whatever the reason, the job fell to Rhoda, who handled the situation as an adult. Although Rhoda was a single girl living in her parent's home, she still stepped into a more mature role to take care of business that had to be attended to at home.

The case of Minnie Moon further illustrated a daughter's role in the rural home, particularly in absence of one or both parents. Minnie grew up in rural McLean County, Illinois, nearby the city of Bloomington. Minnie was born around 1874 to parents James and Margaret Moon. James was a farmer and Margaret kept house. Minnie had several younger siblings, and would eventually take care of the family before and after she married.³³²

Minnie's diary provided the typical details of a farm girl's life. She wrote about her daily chores, including washing, ironing, baking, and gathering food for family consumption. She also mentioned some of what others in the household did, including her mother, father, and brother. She wrote several times about her father and his farming operation, one time noting that he had sold one of his farms (for unexplained reasons), and another occasion when he left the family in Illinois to travel to his farm in Indiana.³³³ At least once, she wrote about an illness in the family, noting "Ma feels better to-day."³³⁴

Interestingly, Minnie had help with the chores from other unexpected family members. On the same occasion that Minnie discussed her mother's illness she also mentioned "Simon did the baking."³³⁵ Simon was Minnie's brother, and the fact that he did some of the housework

³³² Moon Family, Year: 1900; Census Place: Normal, McLean, Illinois; Roll: 323; Page: 1A; Enumeration District: 0116; FHL microfilm: 1240323. Ancestry.com. 1900 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2004. Accessed 11 April 2013.

³³³ Minnie Mae Moon, manuscript diaries, 1892-1895, Moon Family Collection, Box 3, Archives Collection, McLean County Historical Museum, February 29, March 20, 1893.

³³⁴ Ibid., March 4, 1893.

³³⁵ Ibid.

called into question typical assumptions about gender roles in family labor. Minnie herself was ill frequently, which she mentioned in her diary entries. Later that month, Simon “took the clothes down to the wash-woman,” although he did not wash himself.³³⁶ Simon’s dedication to the family could be seen in such actions, or perhaps just the need to get chores done, no matter who did them. On another occasion she recorded “Pa washed. I am not much better.”³³⁷ Not only did her brother pitch in, her father did as well. Prescriptive literature rarely suggested gender fluidity such as this, and in fact, wrote about the topic with a negative tone. An article about “Women Farmers” in the *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye* described the plight of two sisters who took up the family farm. According to the article, “he left his children land, but little else, and the two girls, Laura and Electa, resolved to become farmers. Both are now past sixty, and since early womanhood, they have cultivated their grounds with their own hands.”³³⁸ Although the writer could have praised the women for their endurance and pluck, he focused on their un-ladylike appearance, as Laura had “a beard as heavy as is often seen upon a man, and a voice that would not be taken for that of a woman” and her sister was “more dignified, patriarchal, with a head considerably bald, and locks whitened by the frosts of many winters.”³³⁹ Instead of creating resourceful women, farming basically turned the women into men.

Prescriptive literature and parents who denigrated women’s work in outdoor farm chores failed to put the work into the proper context. For farm women and girls, this work made up part of their overall contribution to the farm. Grey Osterud noted about women’s outdoor work, “interpreting the meaning of women’s work on family farms involves placing particular tasks such as raking hay both within the context of the rest of women’s labor and in relation to the

³³⁶ Ibid., March 21, 1893.

³³⁷ Ibid., August 1, 1893.

³³⁸ “Women Farmers,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, December 15, 1871.

³³⁹ Ibid.

labor performed by men.”³⁴⁰ Women did not see themselves as doing “men’s” work, but as doing the necessary labor to run the farm.

Minnie Moon did not seem concerned about her father or brother turning into women by performing so-called “women’s” tasks, but overall, she served as the primary helpmate in the household. Minnie’s father passed away in 1895 (signified by a single line in Minnie’s diary, “Pa died”), and afterwards, Minnie became the caretaker for the family.³⁴¹ According to an inscription on a photograph of Minnie written by her brother Byron Moon, Minnie “became the Housekeeper for all of us after Father died in 1895, Nurse to Mother when she became a semi-invalid in 1905.”³⁴² Although Minnie eventually did get married and leave the family, she was remembered by her siblings for the position she held as primary care-giver. The inscription did not mention whether or not Minnie also took care of any younger siblings, but her work in helping her parents in their time of need clearly made an impression on her brother.

With the discussion about girls and their duties, the role of parents in raising the girls cannot be ignored. So far, mothers and fathers have been identified as shadowy figures, providing an unseen level of subsistence and care for young women who worked for them. But parenting in the late nineteenth century was much more complex than adults who disaffectedly trained a workforce of their children. Children’s work was complicated by their relationships with their parents.

Prescriptive literature painted a mixed picture of the parental role. Some writers admonished parents for coddling girls, while others criticized the lack of direction provided to girls. A writer for the *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye* encapsulated this tension, explaining why

³⁴⁰ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 140.

³⁴¹ Minnie Moon, January 23, 1895.

³⁴² Photograph of Minnie Moon, Byron G. Moon—Manuscript Drafts 1, Moon Family Collection, Box 1, Folder 14, Archives Collection, McLean County Museum of History, undated.

mothers acted the way they did. According to the author, “though the mother is loth to lose her darling, she cannot deny her the privilege of following her mate, as the mother did before her. Indeed, it is considered an undesirable thing by most mothers to have a house full of ‘old maids.’ But it is a fact, in spite of this feeling, that many mothers do not prepare their daughters for happy marriages.”³⁴³ In the view of this author, daughters provided more than just needed labor—they were valued emotional support for their mothers as well. And because of their longing to retain that support, mothers neglected education for their daughters. The advisor went on to chastise mothers, writing “they neglect to teach them the commonest duties of a housekeeper, under a mistaken idea, which they hold of love and tenderness, that they do not want their daughters to have so hard a life as they have.”³⁴⁴ This opinion of mothers and daughters did not accurately depict the lives of women on farms, as all people on farms worked hard. Rarely would a mother have the luxury of shielding her daughter from housekeeping duties, as life on the farm revolved around labor. Nevertheless, the fear that girls did not know how to keep house or be a good wife prevailed in the literature, but writers generally did not blame the mothers for that deficiency.

In contrast, some writers praised mothers for the work that they did in raising well-adjusted girls. One daughter herself wrote for the *Brodhead Independent* about the good example her mother set. Reminiscing about sewing lessons as a girl, the daughter wrote, “I shall never forget my own childish tears and sulks over sewing. My mother was a perfect fairy at her needle, and her rule was relentless...I hated it then, but I have lived to bless that mother’s patient persistence, and I am prouder to-day of the six patches in my small girl’s dress...than of my

³⁴³ “A House-Mistress,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, January 14, 1881.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

other handiwork,--except, perhaps, my bread.”³⁴⁵ As compared to the previous example, the author of this article praised her mother’s role in teaching her needed skills and a level of proficiency at them which gave the girl a sense of pride.

In reality, most parents probably rested between the two extremes. What, then, was a parent’s responsibility to a child? Was anything more than basic subsistence required? Advice authors again differed on this question, offering different suggestions for how parents should raise their daughters. One particularly inventive advisor advocated sending farm girls away for a time to let them see a life outside of the farm. “The farmer’s girl,” according to the author, “is pure-minded, loveable and obedient;--all these are things to be desired, but then, quite likely she is awkward and ungraceful; and these are not to be desired.”³⁴⁶ This unique view of farm girls differed from others, as outward appearance rarely factored in to descriptions of good farmers’ daughters. In fact, most frowned upon too much emphasis on that type of characteristic. The author advocated sending the girl away from home to combat the “awkward and ungraceful” stage, allowing the girl to experience “another phase of life and society from that of their own firesides” which would build a larger world-view for the girl.³⁴⁷ This type of advice, while maybe a good idea, might not have been taken up by many rural families. Of the girls surveyed, none of them ventured far or long from home, excepting Carrie Markle, but she went from one farm home to another. Rhoda and Addie occasionally boarded at others’ homes while teaching, but lived close enough to travel home for the weekends to visit and help their families.

An even more liberal idea involved paying girls for their contributions to the family, as, according to one source, “it is a common thing for farmers to pay their sons fair wages for their

³⁴⁵ Rose Terry, “An Example for Girls,” *Sunday Afternoon*, reprinted in *Brodhead Independent*, September 12, 1879.

³⁴⁶ “Let the Girls Go From Home,” *Prairie Farmer* 40 (January 23, 1869): 30.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

work.”³⁴⁸ This idea, while unconventional, represented just one of many ways to gauge girls’ participation in the farm family. But families had expectations for their daughters, with varying levels of recognition and affection given in return. Mothers and fathers worried about their girls, expressing this in different ways. Diarists rarely recorded instances of what their parents actually said to them, preferring instead to make vague references to their families in a generally neutral tone. On the rare occasion that a girl specifically mentioned a mother’s or father’s words, it usually reflected a negative opinion. Addie Crouch’s mother expressed some worries over Addie’s health. On one occasion, Addie was forbidden from attending a party because of her well-being. She wrote, “there is a party tonight but I cannot go on account of my throat. Billie says they have the scarlet fever in Monti. [Monticello, Iowa] and Ma is afraid if I go I will take it.”³⁴⁹ Scarlet fever proved a legitimate threat, but Addie seemed more concerned about missing the party.

Rhoda Emery received much negative attention from both of her parents, despite being a model daughter in most respects. Rhoda took to heart what her parents thought of her actions and behavior, and on several occasions wrote about how their barbs affected her. In 1890, when Rhoda’s mother had another child, Rhoda recorded her reaction to the birth. She wrote, “perhaps having him might make up to me for not being a boy myself.”³⁵⁰ Clearly at some point, one of Rhoda’s parents told her, or at least made her to feel, that her being a girl displeased one or both of them. If that injustice was not enough, her father “scolded me awfully...he accused me of using Ma mean and I was afraid she would think I meant to.”³⁵¹ Rhoda did not disclose what she

³⁴⁸ “A Word for the Girls,” *Champaign County Herald*, September 8, 1880.

³⁴⁹ Addie Crouch, January 14, 1881. On February 4, 1884, Addie wrote, “Mother said I could not go to church.” In this instance, the reason for the prohibition was not mentioned. This could also have to do with sickness, or possibly some type of punishment.

³⁵⁰ Rhoda Emery, April 15, 1890.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

had done to warrant a scolding from her father. Judging by her other entries, in which she wrote about the work she did for the family, it would seem out of character for her to have displeased her father. Yet she also earned the ire of her mother at times. Shortly after returning from a term of teaching she recorded, “I have sewed some to-day. Ma says I don’t do anything since I came home and I know I do not, but the atmosphere of things is so different, it takes a short time I think to become used to the old routine again.”³⁵² It is doubtful that Rhoda did not contribute to the home, but whatever she had done, it did not satisfy her mother at that moment.

Despite what parents said or demanded of their daughters, young women often did what they wanted instead. They did not always defy their parents outright, as many girls could follow their own desires while still fulfilling their duties to family. Many times this simply meant doing chores around social events or personal activities. Diaries provided many examples of girls playing around or not working. This complicated the characterization of the “girl problem,” though, as work got done despite the girls’ recreational activities. Advice about the “girl problem” failed to take this aspect into account.

Surprisingly, a pastime favored by many of the girls was sleeping. The life of a farm girl involved very hard, even exhausting labor at times. According to examples in diaries, girls slept when they could, relishing in the act whenever possible. Carrie Markle mentioned several occasions when she slept during the day. On one particular Sunday she wrote, “went to Philo to Sabath School read and slept the rest of the day. Very warm.”³⁵³ Because this activity took place on a Sunday, possibly sleeping was part of making the Sabbath a day of rest. She also mentioned the temperature as “very warm,” which would facilitate afternoon sleepiness. But afternoon napping did not just take place on Sundays. Another day she recorded, “washed, pleasant day.

³⁵² Ibid., February 18, 1892.

³⁵³ Carrie Markle, August 27, 1865.

Slept most of the afternoon.”³⁵⁴ She did not record the circumstances surrounding this day, but in the previous entry, Carrie described spending the evening with a friend, Dan. Perhaps Carrie stayed out late with Dan and remained tired the next day.

Other girls mentioned sleeping the day away, or sleeping into the afternoon. Mary Pascoe mournfully wrote, “black clouds passing all day We arose at a late hour.”³⁵⁵ Sleeping in late could have indicated a neglect of chores, but Mary followed up by saying, “did our Saturdays work.”³⁵⁶ The extra sleep did not keep Mary from performing her duties at home. The other girls frequently mentioned sleeping late, even in conjunction with other household activities. Rhoda Emery wrote, “today has been very lonesome. We rose very late and no one has been here all day.”³⁵⁷ No other explanation or activity was given. Minnie Moon wrote about sleeping all day in the absence of her parents. On a particularly eventful day, Minnie recorded, “Maggie and I went to Bloomington this morning and got our pictures taken came back home. Slept most of the afternoon. Pa and Ma gone away.”³⁵⁸ These isolated examples exposed an unusual pastime of rural girls, which did not always affect their regular schedule.

Other times, though, girls simply did not do their work. All of the girls spent time doing nothing, or conversing with others at the expense of their chores. Carrie Markle admitted on one occasion, “Mr. Davis came for me did not get all my work done.”³⁵⁹ Similarly, Rhoda Emery and Minnie Moon gave testimony of unfinished work. On March 7, 1892, Rhoda recorded, “we have not done much all day.”³⁶⁰ Minnie wrote one day, “a nice warm day. I swept the house this

³⁵⁴ Ibid., May 7, 1866.

³⁵⁵ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, June 24, 1871.

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

³⁵⁷ Rhoda Emery, January 3, 1892.

³⁵⁸ Minnie Moon, June 17, 1893.

³⁵⁹ Carrie Markle, November 23, 1867.

³⁶⁰ Rhoda Emery, March 7, 1892.

afternoon didn't do much of anything."³⁶¹ Addie Crouch as well noted instances of not working, recording, "I have not done anything but play with my dog and practice."³⁶² None of the girls recalled any consequences of not finishing chores. If a punishment followed, they did not write about it, possibly out of embarrassment. Most likely, though, the girls would have just completed the unfinished work the next day.

At times young women did give an excuse for not getting their work done. On a particularly optimistic day, Mary Pascoe wrote an uncharacteristically long entry recording her day's activity. She wrote, "today the sun shines out and is for plentiful than yesterday my toothache has ceased and I feel like a morning star in the evening Mother and Father went to Hazel Green to store I did not finish my work very early I had a good deed to do."³⁶³ While her parents traveled off the farm, Mary went off and neglected her chores until late. She never described her "good deed," but made it known that it superseded work. Illness also precluded finishing chores at many times. Minnie Moon recorded many instances of being "sick" in some way. For example, on April 15, 1895, she wrote, "I was sick most of the day and didn't do much."³⁶⁴ An "x" marked this particular entry, which probably meant she had her monthly menstrual period. Historians of personal papers and diaries have noted the presence of particular markings, usually coming in a cyclical pattern, and have drawn the conclusion that these markings denote the monthly period.³⁶⁵ The accompanying "sickness" could have been menstrual cramps or headache, frequently occurring with a period. Again, no evidence of

³⁶¹ Minnie Moon, March 23, 1895.

³⁶² Addie Crouch, November 5, 1883.

³⁶³ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, April 22, 1871.

³⁶⁴ Minnie Moon, April 15, 1895.

³⁶⁵ Judy Lensink noted a pattern of markings in the diary of Emily Hawley Gillespie and referred to Paul Rosenblatt's work to conclude the pattern related to the menstrual cycle. Rosenblatt believed the markings denoted sexual activity for girls, and the notation of the monthly period signaled that the girl was not pregnant. Lensink did note, however, that "the marks in Emily Hawley's diary do not necessarily mean she was sexually active (they could simply be a young woman's method of predicting her next period)." See Lensink, *A Secret to Be Buried: The Diary and Life of Emily Hawley Gillespie, 1858-1888* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 90.

consequences for neglected work appeared in the diaries, perhaps proving that parents did not monitor the behavior and activity of their daughters, particularly older girls, as closely as thought.

Although girls often did not finish their work in a timely manner, or sometimes at all, they still had close ties and responsibilities to their families. Addie Crouch and Rhoda Emery provided a good comparison for how girls interacted with their parents and how deeply they felt the bond of family. Addie Crouch often dismissed her parents, and frequently shirked her responsibilities in favor of socializing with her friends or doing what she wanted to do. Rhoda, on the other hand, showed an extreme devotion to her family, taking on added responsibilities in order to make sure her parents and siblings were well taken care of. Both girls were the same age, and both worked as teachers for most of the year, but their radically different stance on family loyalty showed an interesting contrast to what was typically expected of young women.

Like the other girls, Addie spent a surprising amount of time sleeping, but Addie usually noted the circumstances surrounding her excess napping. Typically if Addie slept during the day, it was because she had been out late the night before. On November 20, 1884, Addie wrote, “Elmer went home between two and three this morning and I went to bed and would you believe it I never got up till most three this afternoon.”³⁶⁶ This incident took place in the middle of the week, a Thursday, which made it all the more aberrant.³⁶⁷

Staying out late figured frequently in Addie’s diary. Throughout the five year period Addie kept a daily diary, she mentioned various social occasions that she returned home from in the early morning hours. On October 22, 1881, she wrote, “I did not get up very early...had a

³⁶⁶ Addie Crouch, November 20, 1884.

³⁶⁷ On another occasion, July 5, 1885, Addie mentioned “I did up the work and went to bed a slept all day.” This particular day was a Sunday, which lined up more with other diary entries of napping or sleeping during the day, possibly due to Sunday being the Sabbath, or day of rest.

splendid time at the dance last night.”³⁶⁸ Most likely, the dance did not finish until late into the night, which left Addie tired the next day. Several years later, another dance kept Addie out late. She recorded, “we got home at four this morning from the dance. Martha came and stayed till after breakfast. I slept all the afternoon till six.”³⁶⁹ Not only did Addie stay out until the morning, she had a friend over afterward, which probably meant she did not get any sleep in the few hours before breakfast.

As a single girl still living at home, Addie had responsibilities. Chores, family, and other obligations all had to be completed. But as a young woman in her late teens and early twenties, she seemed to have a certain amount of independence which she expressed by going out with friends and staying out late. This did not necessarily mean that she neglected her work. On September 20, 1885, Addie wrote, “came home a little after six...after I got the work done up I went to bed slept till after church was out.”³⁷⁰ She stayed out until breakfast time, but she still completed her chores before sleeping, although she missed church for the day. Household responsibilities did not disappear simply because Addie chose to socialize late into the night.

At other times, though, Addie’s sleeping seemed to be the result of a general teenage malaise. Unlike Mary Pascoe, who frequently mentioned being unhappy with her situation, yet still worked, Addie sometimes did not do anything during a day. “Have been abed most all day,” Addie wrote on one occasion, “Elmer never intended to come but never mind if that is the way he keeps his mood it is all I want to know of him.”³⁷¹ Addie most likely declined to rise due to hurt feelings over a snubbing by Elmer, one of the many boys Addie mentioned being close with

³⁶⁸ Addie Crouch, October 22, 1881.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., June 4, 1885.

³⁷⁰ Ibid., September 20, 1885.

³⁷¹ Ibid., January 11, 1885.

in her diary. Other times, something as simple as the weather could keep Addie in bed.³⁷²

Whatever the reason, spending the day in bed could not have pleased Addie's parents, yet she did not mention any reproach or punishment in diary entries. Possibly, Addie completed chores despite the extra sleep, but did not record it in her diary.

Whether or not Addie's parents were displeased with these actions cannot be ascertained from the diary. Examples in prescriptive literature would call Addie a "problem," as she did not always appear to be the most hard-working or caring daughter, judging by her disinterest in work. Where Addie most exemplified the "girl problem," though, was through outright defiance of her parents. On several isolated occasions, Addie wrote diary entries detailing activities she participated in which directly violated her parent's wishes.

Two of the incidents involved Addie attending an event that her parents did not want her to go to. On October 29, 1882, Addie wrote, "Annie Klein and her friends from Gelena were here this afternoon. Burton was up. Pa did not want us to go to the sing but did not care much so we went."³⁷³ A "sing" was most likely a get-together at church or school for young people to sing songs and socialize. Addie did not list a reason her father did not want her to attend the sing, only that he did not protest too strongly, in which case she went anyway. Her outward defiance of her father strongly indicated that Addie had a proclivity towards disobedience, which would make her a "problem." Another time, she noted in her diary, "Pa was awful mad when he noticed my hair was cut."³⁷⁴ Hair style remains today a typical means of teenage rebellion, as girls cut and color their hair in increasingly bizarre fashions to the dismay of their mothers and fathers. At age 22 in 1885, Addie was hardly a child, but apparently still was required to fit her father's expectations for appearance.

³⁷² Ibid., August 2, 1885: "Rained all day have slept most of the time."

³⁷³ Ibid., October 29, 1882.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., December 20, 1885.

Addie also used subterfuge to evade her parent's rules. One winter evening, Addie recorded, "Pa and Ma went over to See's and then I went to the lodge. If Ma had not gone I could not have went for when he came for me she would have known that I was to go with him and she makes me use everyone well. Had a good time at the lodge."³⁷⁵ The exchange lacked some vital information about the circumstances surrounding the date. Addie's mother clearly did not favor the mysterious "he" that Addie mentioned, so Addie had to have "him" pick her up when her parents were away. Her phrasing proved interesting as well, noting that her mother "makes me use everyone well."³⁷⁶ The phrase's meaning could indicate that Addie's mother believed Addie would not be kind to the suitor in question, and wanted Addie to leave this boy alone. As will be discussed later, Addie tended toward catty and manipulative behavior, particularly when dealing with the opposite sex. She recognized this tendency in herself, evident in a birthday resolution she made in 1881: "I may do better in this year than I did last. I hope I may govern my temper and actions so everyone will be happier as well as myself."³⁷⁷ Whatever the reason for her mother's displeasure, Addie again defied her parents, this time by not telling the whole truth about her whereabouts and companions.

Addie Crouch showed a penchant for disobedience to her parents' rules. Despite the fact that her age made her an adult, she still lived with her parents and was subject to their rules. Chronological age had little to do with how girls acted and how their parents treated them. Addie's flippant attitude about such discretions indicated a less-than enthusiastic attitude about living with her family and helping them in the way a single daughter should have. In contrast to Addie, Rhoda Emery, a girl of the same age and similar living situation, went far the other way in regards to deference to her family. As mentioned earlier, Rhoda was an extremely dutiful

³⁷⁵ Ibid., January 27, 1883.

³⁷⁶ Ibid.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., December 8, 1881.

daughter who worked hard to make her parents and siblings happy. In the same way that Addie disregarded rules and regulations, Rhoda agonized over making her mother and father happy and helping them out when they needed assistance.

Many of Rhoda's diary entries involved her work toward pleasing her family. Rhoda showed much concern for how her parents were getting along, both financially and emotionally. Other than the diaries, Rhoda also maintained a lengthy correspondence with her mother and sister while she was away teaching. These letters and diary entries revealed the unequal relationship Rhoda had with her family, as Rhoda placed an undue burden on herself to be a caretaker and protector of her mother and father.

The Emerys placed a high level of significance on family and familial relationships, as evidenced by many pleas for visits and information in family correspondence. Keeping in close contact remained a high priority for Rhoda's mother. In a diary entry dated November 11, 1892, Rhoda recorded, "I am at the school-house. John Roth brought me a letter from Clara that she will not be home till Monday. I am sorry. She has no excuse for disappointing us all so."³⁷⁸ Apparently Clara, Rhoda's sister, had made plans to come home, then changed them at the last minute, delaying the visit. Rhoda took on the responsibility of chastising her sister for causing a hardship for the family. The Emerys required close contact, as losing that level of communication caused the family worry and shame. Rhoda frequently questioned her brother's whereabouts, worried for his well-being, and the family expressed shame and dismay over their cousin, Babe, who apparently had a falling out with her own mother. Rhoda, Clara, and Helen all at different times mentioned that cousin Babe did not show proper respect to her mother. Clara wrote to Rhoda, "I would rather Mary did not go with Babe. She does not write to her

³⁷⁸ Rhoda Emery, November 11, 1892.

mother.”³⁷⁹ The lack of communication clearly made Babe a bad daughter in the eyes of her cousins.

In the correspondence between Rhoda and her mother, they passed back and forth much worry. Concern over illness and well-being at times dominated the conversation. Rhoda had a health-related issue, a problem with her neck, which was attended to surgically in 1892. Clara worked as a helper for Rhoda, staying with her during the surgery and recovery.³⁸⁰ Her mother inquired about the well-being of Rhoda’s neck, writing, “I am very anxious to see for myself how your neck looks.”³⁸¹ The concern was reciprocal, though, as in another letter, Rhoda mentioned her mother’s sickness, to which Helen replied, “do not worry about me for I feel sure I am getting well right along now but write long letters or tell me all about you.”³⁸² Helen and Rhoda relied on letters for information about each other and craved the updates provided.

Health concerns played a big part in the Emery correspondence and writing, but money was the most worrisome topic. Money matters occupied a lot of space in Rhoda’s diary, most of it worry over the state of the family’s finances. Rhoda had a job as a teacher, and she contributed to the family, as her parents seemed unable to make ends meet. Rhoda denied herself material possessions that she had wanted in order to help out the family, and she took on a much more mature role as an adult member of the family by making the money problems her personal problem.

As early as 1892, when Rhoda was only twenty years old, she expressed interest in owning property. She mused in her diary, “I think some of buying a piece of land and went over

³⁷⁹ Clara Emery to Rhoda Emery, Clara Emery Wood correspondence and miscellaneous papers, 1875-1951. Rhoda J. Emery and Family Papers, Manuscripts Collection, Minnesota Historical Society, September 16, 1894.

³⁸⁰ On December 20, 1893, Rhoda wrote, “I think it was a year ago today that I had my throat operated upon. I tell you I am thankful that that will not have to be gone through with again. What a good friend Clal was to me then!”

³⁸¹ Helen George Emery to Rhoda Emery, undated.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, undated

to-night to see if Bryant thought of getting it.”³⁸³ She followed through with these plans about two weeks later, as she recorded, “this morning Pa and Ma stopped on their way to Rochester. To-night they stopped to tell me that business is settled satisfactorily. I am the owner of forty acres of land.”³⁸⁴ Rhoda did not give a reason for the sudden interest in land ownership, but most likely she planned to contribute to the family income. The next fall, she recorded the first harvest on her new plot of land. She herself did not actually farm the land, though. On October 1, 1893, she wrote, “Peter threshed Wednesday and Pa hauled my grain off on Thursday. It came to \$46.91.”³⁸⁵ Presumably, the money made from the grain sale went to Rhoda’s family, especially seeing as her father helped in the harvesting process. Her purchase of land helped to ease the financial burden on her family and gave her an important source of income and legitimacy as an adult. Rhoda’s land ownership was not common. In *Bonds of Community*, Grey Osterud noted, “to men, the ownership of productive property was an attribute of heads of households and a prerequisite for independence, a quintessentially masculine status. Women were properly the wives of male household heads and subordinate members of farm family economies.”³⁸⁶ Although Osterud wrote this in regard to women receiving land as inheritance, the general idea that women were not the owners of land carried over to other situations. For Rhoda, though, as a single woman, her land ownership added to her contribution to the family, despite her not being a man or the head of household.

Throughout the rest of the years of Rhoda’s diaries and correspondence, her family’s financial situation persisted. Rhoda’s father continued to have trouble paying off all of his obligations. Caleb Emery received a pension for his service in the Civil War, but it was not

³⁸³ Rhoda Emery, September 12, 1892.

³⁸⁴ Ibid., September 21, 1892.

³⁸⁵ Rhoda Emery, October 1, 1893.

³⁸⁶ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 65.

enough to make much of a difference for the family.³⁸⁷ Rhoda glumly recorded, “Pa’s pension came last week too but is a disappointment to him. \$6 per month and no back pay.”³⁸⁸ Rhoda’s father also needed loans from Rhoda to make ends meet. She wrote, “I would like to draw some money. Pa wants me to lend him some for taxes but there is only \$10 in the treasury.”³⁸⁹ Rhoda’s need to help her father could be seen throughout the diary, even when she could not do all she wanted to help.

Rhoda’s mother also asked for help, but used different means to achieve the same end. The tone of Helen’s correspondence regarding financial matters shifted to emotional appeals, bringing up requests for money in a way that focused on the good of the family. Helen dropped a reference to the mortgage into a letter to Rhoda, saying, “you know part of that mortgage debt must be paid for we have sold two of the sows...for 25\$.”³⁹⁰ By mentioning the sows, part of the family’s livelihood, Helen sought to drive home the point that the family needed money desperately. More poignantly, in another letter, Helen pleaded with Rhoda to send money to the family so her younger sisters could go to school:

So if you can get any money this week I do wish you would send Clara 5\$ to use for the girls. They say they will pay you all back when they get to earning money. Our corn is almost all gone and we will be obliged to keep the oats to feed so have nothing to raise money from unless we sell a cow and I do not know how we can do that yet and keep both families going. I am in hopes Jim can help to keep the girls in school when he gets his Dr’s paid and perhaps I can get some money for butter after awhile, but just now their need is extreme.³⁹¹

The desperation in Helen showed in the letter, as every possible source of money had been exhausted. It seemed, even, that Rhoda was the only hope for the family, the only one who had

³⁸⁷ Caleb Emery served briefly in 1865 as a corporal and applied for a pension in 1891. National Archives and Records Administration. *U.S., Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2000. Accessed 11 April 2013.

³⁸⁸ Rhoda Emery, January 15, 1894.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, May 9, 1894.

³⁹⁰ Helen George Emery to Rhoda Emery, February 16, undated.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, October 28, 1894.

any money to offer. Rhoda would have had no choice but to aid her sisters, as such a heartfelt plea could not have gone unanswered.

In the most extreme cases, Rhoda sacrificed what she wanted for the good of the family. In early diary entries, Rhoda talked about books and clothing that she intended to buy with her teaching earnings, goods that were necessary for her chosen profession. Yet when her parents required money, the family came first. “Well tonight I am \$65 more in debt than I was last night,” Rhoda recorded on June 18, 1894. “I went to R. [Rochester] with Pa today and bought a two-seated buggy at that price due Dec. 1. I don’t care, leastways mostly I don’t, for Pa and Ma will I guess take a good deal of comfort out of it.” Rhoda’s purchase of the buggy, on credit, for her parents increased Rhoda’s overall financial burden, coupled with her land purchase several years before. Rhoda went on to say, “I will probably manage to live someway though it means no more clothes even next fall, and I have had none for two years, and never any bicycle.”³⁹² Rhoda sacrificed her own desires to spend her money in the way she wanted to make sure her parents were cared for and in “comfort.”

Addie Crouch and Rhoda Emery provided two different archetypes of young adult women and their duties and responsibilities toward their families. Addie worked in the home, but felt no strong impulse to do any more than she had to by tradition. She spent most of her time doing what she wanted to do with little thought to how her family would react. In fact, she even openly defied the wishes of her parents on more than one occasion. Rhoda, on the other hand, acted more like a martyr, sacrificing and working for the good of the family and concerning herself with family matters in all instances.

³⁹² Rhoda Emery, June 18, 1894; Rhoda wrote frequently about her desire for a bicycle, or “wheel,” of her own, and considered buying one on credit on at least one occasion. Rhoda’s friend, Wellington Clay, whom she corresponded with regularly, also spoke often of Rhoda acquiring a bicycle, even offering to buy her one himself. Rhoda inevitably declined the offer, instead choosing not to go further into debt.

Addie and Rhoda were not complete opposites, however, but did some similar things, just had different reactions to them. For example, Addie did do work for the family, yet did not dwell on the work itself in diary entries. One fall day, Addie wrote in her diary, “Rod [her brother] and I went and picked a load of corn and we had lots of fun.”³⁹³ Performing farm work for Addie could be an enjoyable experience, and she did not mention the back-breaking nature of the work. Similarly, Addie was concerned about her family in many ways, but did not express it in the same way that Rhoda did. On one occasion she wrote about concern for her brother, recording, “Roddie was drunk oh how I hope and pray I may never have to say that again...he would promise never to drink again and I hope he never brake that vow.”³⁹⁴ The Crouch family participated in the temperance movement devotedly, and for Roddie to drink alcohol would have been a blow to the family. Addie did not actively do anything to prevent Roddie from drinking, but still worried about his well-being.

In the same way that Addie contributed to her family in her own way, Rhoda rebelled from hers, just in a different manner. Occasionally, Rhoda did not complete work, or put her own needs in front of those of the family. But Rhoda felt extreme guilt for doing so. On September 8, 1892 she wrote, “ironed all day long to-day and am very tired. I was sick of myself because I did nothing yesterday...These are dismal days.”³⁹⁵ When Rhoda spent a day not contributing, she berated herself and worked twice as hard the next day, unlike Addie who went about her regular business after sleeping the day away.

Did either girl, then, fit the profile of the “girl problem?” What about Mary Pascoe, Carrie Markle, and Minnie Moon? All of the girls devoted the majority of their time to working in the home for their families, yet all at times displayed certain behaviors of rebellion and a low

³⁹³ Addie Crouch, October 1, 1883.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., September 22, 1883.

³⁹⁵ Rhoda Emery, September 8, 1892.

work ethic. The “model girl” or “elder sister” of prescriptive literature gave up time and talent cheerfully to help her mother in whatever way necessary, and the prescriptive advice left little room for girls to spend any time socializing or relaxing in any meaningful way. These young women dutifully performed work on the farm and in the home, yet still found opportunities for socialization, work off the farm, and even “teenage” rebellion. The following chapters will explore the other aspects of rural girls’ lives, off-farm work (mainly teaching) and social interaction with peers and the opposite sex.

CHAPTER 4. EDUCATION AND WORK

In the nineteenth century, education for women meant different things to different people.

The many facets of the educational experience related to the intended outcome for the young woman. According to historian Frances Cogan in her work on nineteenth century ideals,

Education could—and did, to some—mean simply experience with life and living; it could also mean academic training, which many understood to be no higher than the eighth grade. Another concept presupposed secondary work through high school, and still others believed women should pursue a course of ‘home study’ completely outside of school. Others meant vocational training when they referred to education, and for some spiritual or moral education through Christian instruction or training in citizenship and social responsibilities was the preferred course.³⁹⁶

Educational opportunities for young women in rural areas were limited in the late nineteenth century. Even in prescriptive literature, most writers did not focus on the idea of women receiving a formal education, although many articles pressed girls to learn household and domestic tasks, whether in the home or in some form of trade school. According to one author, “if it is necessary that there be schools where boys may learn a trade, it is equally necessary for girls.”³⁹⁷ Like those that stressed good housekeeping skills as necessary for marriage, most prescriptive writers emphasized the role of education in self-sufficiency, a trait likely to please men.

Very little of the literature discussed why young women should obtain an education. Other than suggesting that a woman might have to support a family at some point (presumably after the death of her spouse), no advisor wrote strongly in favor girls going to school for the sake of a well-rounded education. Some, however, spoke of the dire consequences to a girl who did not know how to take care of herself. “It seems to me at least,” wrote one such advisor, “that every girl is grievously wronged who is suffered to grow up to womanhood and to enter the

³⁹⁶ Frances Cogan, *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 67.

³⁹⁷ “Teach Trades to Girls,” *Lisbon Sun*, August 10, 1888.

world without some marketable skill.”³⁹⁸ Those skills, though, were limited to jobs considered appropriate for women. Another author, “A Farmer’s Wife,” wrote specifically to young and unmarried women, stressing the need to learn to do something well. She argued, “if you have industry, patience, and perseverance to learn it [a trade] well you will not lack employment at remunerative wages.”³⁹⁹ But this advice would simply prevent girls from becoming destitute in the face of remaining unmarried. The Farmer’s Wife continued, “better a thousand times, girls, be an independent old maid than the wife of a man who worships rum and the artificial lady, who is dying in her filth.”⁴⁰⁰ The types of trades available to girls included “artist, musician, teacher, milliner, dress maker or any vocation you choose.”⁴⁰¹ Based on that list of possibilities, though, the idea that a girl could choose whatever she wanted seemed unlikely. Very few jobs were available to women outside of the home.

Not all advisors denigrated the state of women’s education. In Iowa, several periodicals praised the educational institutions in the state on the basis of their inclusion of girls. According to the *Marion Register*, “Iowa girls are not a whit behind Iowa boys in their educational record. We have already referred to the Burlington girl who took the prize at the Academy of Design of New York, and now it is announced that Miss Helen Freeman, or Iowa City, stood at the head of her class at the University of Notre Dame.”⁴⁰² In another example, Iowa stood on the forefront of a new era in women’s education, as “the first female professorship in the world is about to be successfully established at Cornell College, in this state. Miss Cook, who is now a professor in that College...is one of the noblest women in Iowa, and the state should know and appreciate, even more extensively than now, the great work she has done and is doing for Iowa’s sons and

³⁹⁸ “A Girl’s Equipment for Self-Support,” *Prairie Farmer* 55 (June 30, 1883), 412.

³⁹⁹ “To Girls and Unmarried Women,” *Champaign County Herald*, November 19, 1884.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰² “Iowa Girls,” *Marion Register*, August 24, 1871.

daughters.”⁴⁰³ The author clearly wanted to draw attention to this impressive feat, but couched it in terms of a piece of information expressly for women, as evidenced by the article title, “For Ladies.” Also, the professor in question was “Miss Cook,” an unmarried woman. Presumably, no married woman would hold such a position, as there would be no need for a woman with a husband to work outside the home.

Despite minor anecdotal evidence of women in education, most writers continued to stress the role of women in the household, rather than any other vocation. Even in praising educational institutions, authors focused on the role of household education. “The Iowa agricultural college,” according to one article, “has a domestic department for teaching girls the noble art of housekeeping and the managers declare that it is running successfully...the course seems to include pretty much everything from bed-making to cooking and entertaining visitors.”⁴⁰⁴ The author declared that “it would be a grand thing if all the agricultural colleges in the country would follow the example of the Iowa college.”⁴⁰⁵ Although the journal praised the college for including women, the terms of women’s education only revolved around housework. Girls who would have attended the agricultural college would have had much experience in farming and outdoor work, but that knowledge was not acknowledged or valued in higher education.

Mary Elizabeth Pascoe attended school during 1871, the year in which she recorded her diary, but placed very little emphasis on the role of education in her life. Like all of her diary entries, her mentions of school were short and stilted, and in many occasions, other responsibilities and conditions superseded school attendance. The weather played a very large role in Mary’s school attendance. One cold winter day Mary wrote, “had a little rain this morning

⁴⁰³ “For Ladies,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, June 24, 1874.

⁴⁰⁴ “The Iowa agricultural college,” *Prairie Farmer* 55 (January 27, 1883), 63.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

the wind blows rather hard it is very muddy I did not go to school on that account.”⁴⁰⁶ Such conditions would have made it difficult to get to the school house. Several weeks later she again mentioned the roads, saying “the roads are pretty bad for walking I have been to school.”⁴⁰⁷ On this occasion, the roads were not impassable and Mary still made it to school. The day before, the roads had been frozen, which allowed for easier foot travel. Throughout the volatile month of March, Mary vacillated between school and home due to changes in the weather.⁴⁰⁸

The trek to the school house proved a significant impediment to Mary’s education, but little was made of that fact. At times, Mary was absent for a week or more, which delayed her studies. In January, she mournfully wrote, “went to school after staying away a week did not get along with my lessons very well the weather is gloomy.”⁴⁰⁹ Similarly in November she recorded, “I have been to school did not go all last week.”⁴¹⁰ The absences affected her education, but most likely, she and her family had little aspiration for her to get any more education than what was required. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg noted that absences such as this were common among farming families, as parents often needed the help of their children for certain farm tasks, and officials recognized the special case of farm families by shaping the school year around agricultural seasons to allow boys and girls to still work.⁴¹¹ Also, some girls simply did not like school or care to advance their education, as Riney-Kehrberg wrote, “some did not see the connection between reading, writing, arithmetic, and the lives that they hoped to lead as adults.”⁴¹² Just five years after she wrote her diary, Mary got married and moved out of state with her husband,

⁴⁰⁶ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, manuscript diary, 1871, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, February 24, 1871.

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid., March 2, 1871.

⁴⁰⁸ On March 8, Mary stayed home because it was too muddy, but by the next day the temperature had dropped and the roads froze, allowing her to travel to school.

⁴⁰⁹ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, January 30, 1871.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., November 20, 1871.

⁴¹¹ Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play, and Coming of Age in the Midwest* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 61.

⁴¹² Ibid., 84.

starting a family with him. She made no further mention of her minimal attendance at the country school, or any type of career outside of the home.

Despite the many reasons for absence from school, Mary did spend a significant part of the year in school or preparing for lessons. For the most part, Mary enjoyed school, or at least remained indifferent. When writing about her school day, Mary generally used “pleasant” to describe the events. She wrote on January 12, “I have been to school although it is very muddy things passed pleasantly at school as normaly [sic].”⁴¹³ Similar entries peppered the diary, along with “lessons passed as usual.”⁴¹⁴ Rarely did anything happen at school which would prompt a more detailed entry, the one notable exception being the end of the term. On March 31, 1871, Mary recorded, “the weather is fine it is the last day of school I went to school in the afternoon and we practiced peaces...had our exhibition at home it went off splendid.”⁴¹⁵ Throughout the term, she mentioned practicing her speaking “peaces” (or pieces) which were part of the evaluation of students at the end of the term. Mary would have had to recite the memorized piece in front of the teacher and an audience. The exhibition was open to the community, and parents and friends came to witness how well the students had learned and how effective the teacher had been. Because the exhibition “went off splendid,” the term must have concluded favorably, with the students performing their lessons well.

As many times as Mary mentioned pleasant days at school, she also wrote about dismal, disagreeable days. As discussed earlier, Mary tended toward exaggerated, emotional accounts when writing about events that bothered her, and school was no different. The winter tended to exacerbate her “teenage” malaise. Throughout February she frequently recorded negative reactions to school. On February 7, 1871, she wrote, “the weather is rather cold I have been to

⁴¹³ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, January 12, 1871.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., November 10, 1871.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., March 31, 1871.

school that is the same thing over and over again day after day.”⁴¹⁶ While rather mild criticism, Mary seemed to dislike the lessons learned for the day. The following two days offered more of the same, as Mary recorded, “sorrows were many pleasures were few studies were dry the whole day through,” and “cold the weather but bright the sun going to school and coming home it was not much fun.”⁴¹⁷ Later in February, she alluded to a disagreement with the teacher, which would have added to her dislike of attending school.⁴¹⁸

Why, then, did Mary go to school? She was a farm girl and became a farm wife, marrying at 21 and moving out of state with her husband to a new farm and family. Her duties at home interfered regularly with school attendance, keeping her home for weeks at a time and putting her behind in her learning. But school offered more than simply lessons. Historian Joan Jensen noted, “For those young girls who could attend school regularly, schools offered a variety of opportunities for social interaction. Community schools were geared to yearly rituals that united parents and kin with students.”⁴¹⁹ The lessons, speakings, and spells were all communal activities, and Mary would have had interaction with friends and neighbors on a daily basis. At times, as well, Mary excelled in her lessons. She did very well with her speaking and was good at spelling.⁴²⁰ On one occasion she wrote that she “was at the head of my class,” and during a “spell” at the school house she “spelt them down,” indicating that she out-performed the rest of the class.⁴²¹ Most likely, Mary could have been an excellent rural teacher like the other girls surveyed, but either the opportunity did not present itself or she showed no interest in such a job. The Pascoes also lived in a tight-knit community of Cornish immigrants, with their own church

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., February 7, 1871.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., February 8, 9, 1871.

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., February 21, 1871.

⁴¹⁹ Joan Jensen, *Calling This Place Home: Women on the Wisconsin Frontier, 1850-1925* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006), 263.

⁴²⁰ Mary wrote about spelling school and speakings more than once, specifically on January 13, January 20, and March 4, 1871.

⁴²¹ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, January 19, February 2, 1871.

and customs. Mary's sister Harriet married Billy Stephens, from another immigrant family, and Mary herself married Billy's younger brother.⁴²² The community may not have recommended a young woman have such a career.

Another possibility may have been local custom, which dictated the gender of the teachers hired in Grant County, Wisconsin. In the records for the Rock School in nearby Lancaster, Wisconsin, the school board showed a particular interest in the gender of the teachers who would be hired for any term. In 1870, an entry in the minute book for the Rock School read, "It was also voted that we have a female teacher winter and summer"⁴²³ They did not list any possible teachers in this particular entry, not until later in the minute book. Similarly, another entry read, "it was then voted we have 4 months school by a first class male teacher for winter school and 4 months by a female teacher for summer," and then several years later, "voted that we employ a female teacher for both winter and summer terms of school."⁴²⁴ It is very likely that the gender of the teacher may have been chosen based on the farming seasons. A male teacher, who also farmed, would be available in the winter and not in the summer. Similarly, a male teacher in the winter could have been hired in order to deal with the influx of boys into the school house. These boys would have missed the summer session due to responsibilities on their parents' farms. Mary Pascoe had male teachers in 1871, and much of her schooling took place in the winter months. But the school board for the Rock School very specifically wanted a "first class" male teacher for a certain term, yet did not specify the quality of the female teachers elsewhere. Whatever the reason, the Rock School had very particular standards for their teachers,

⁴²² Dr. Stephen DeWitt Stephens, Introduction. Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, manuscript diary, SC 222, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁴²³ Minute Book entry, Jt. Dist. #8 Town of S. Lancaster, Rock School, Minutes, 1867-1887, Box 3, vol. 27, Grant County (Wis.) Superintendent of Schools, Rural School Records, 1867-1965, Grant Series 100, Wisconsin Historical Society, Platteville Area Research Center, Platteville, Wisconsin, September 26, 1870.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, August 31, (date obscured), August 31, 1875.

and gender played a role in the selection. If Mary had wanted to be a teacher, she would have been subject to the demands of the school board in hiring teachers.

Other accounts of school attendance by girls ran the gamut from enthusiastic to bored, as would be typical for any generation of young people. Minnie Moon attended school for many years, into her late teens and early twenties. In 1893, she recorded going to school at nineteen years old.⁴²⁵ In 1895, she still attended school, and even noted “got the children off to school this afternoon went up to school down town.”⁴²⁶ Even with her responsibilities to her younger siblings, Minnie made time to further her education. Her yearly financial register for 1893 included tuition expenses, evidence that Minnie attended some sort of post-secondary or private school. Although Minnie was a farm girl, her family lived nearby the city of Bloomington, Illinois, which held more opportunities for a young woman.⁴²⁷

Another young woman, Minnie Hull, had less than positive things to say about her school experience. In 1882, she wrote to her boyfriend Eugene Denman, “I mean the worst teacher we ever had. His [sic] is very near crazy and I just despise him but I am not going to quit coming to school for I expect that we will have lots of visitors and I intend to cut up and have lots of fun.”⁴²⁸ Even a terrible teacher did not impede Minnie Hull’s attendance, but she did admit to trouble-making behavior toward the teacher. She continued, “I would a great deal rather have a young man for a teacher than an old man.”⁴²⁹ A single anecdote cannot fully encapsulate the school-going experience of a girl, but Minnie Hull did not seem to have much desire or ambition to further her education.

⁴²⁵ Minnie Mae Moon, manuscript diaries, 1892-1895, Moon Family Collection, Box 3, Archives Collection, McLean County Historical Museum, Bloomington, Illinois, February 14, 1893.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., January 28, 1895.

⁴²⁷ Miss Minnie Moon, 1895. Ancestry.com. *U.S. City Directories, 1821-1989 (Beta)* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011. Accessed 14 April 2013.

⁴²⁸ Minnie Hull to D.E. Denman, manuscript correspondence, 1881-1882, Carlock/Denman/Irvin/Porter Collection, Box 1, Folder 18, Archives Collection, McLean County Historical Museum, November 8, 1882.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

Girls who obtained an education would not necessarily be part of the “girl problem,” as schooling provided many skills that could be useful even as a farm wife, but education was often the purview of the middle class, a status to which farm girls could rarely attain. In a survey of middle and upper class girls and courting, historian Ellen Rothman also evaluated the place of education in these girls’ lives. Rothman noted that by the end of the nineteenth century, educational opportunities had grown for many young women, and that by 1870, “more than half of the country’s sixteen thousand high school graduates were female.”⁴³⁰ In rural areas, girls were usually needed at home and on the farm, hampering many efforts at higher education, although school was important to some families.

As mentioned earlier, the nature of the education proved crucial for many prescriptive authors. For many, learning household skills was a necessary part of education, but the end goal was marriage. In cases such as this, girls might pour all of their focus into learning domestic skills and trying to find a husband, and in turn neglect important chores on the farm. For a rural family, farm chores and other outdoor tasks made up a very large portion of girls’ responsibilities, and any neglect could hurt the overall success of the farm. Instead, one advisor offered a radically different stance on rural education. According to the writer, “the strength of women at the crisis of their life depends on their physical culture while children. Let parents be no more ashamed of their girls’ brown faces and fists than of their boys. Let them train and clothe them so that they can run and climb and care for and protect themselves. Let them take them with their brothers into the harvest field.”⁴³¹ This author was specifically referring to the *Atlantic* disaster, an ocean liner sinking in which all women passengers were killed. He believed that if the women had the proper physical training, they could have saved themselves. Although

⁴³⁰ Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 7.

⁴³¹ “Education of Women,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, May 23, 1873.

farm work was not a sinking boat, outdoor exposure and work still formed a necessary part of girls' upbringing, and an education that would serve them better in the future than simply domestic tasks. He continued, "the refinement that shuts a girl out of God's sunshine, and allows her no rougher work in-doors than to embroider worsteds, or tap ivory keys, or dust a marble mantel, is refining her off of the face of the earth to give place to the daughters of the servants of the kitchen."⁴³² Domestic education, to the exclusion of other studies, would make any young woman worthless. Similarly, an article in the *Cedar Valley Times* denigrated the overly educated woman as having no marketable skills in the real world. The author wrote, "the girl who comes out of college with no sense of proportion, no eye for color, no sense of the fitness of things, no knowledge of the present conditions of the world of which, from her standpoint, she forms so large a part, will need another training, that of painful experience, to fit her to use the tools given by her alma mater."⁴³³ That girls would come away from a college education with so little practical knowledge worried those who attributed more value to girls as labor and practical helpers.

One way to put education to practical use was to become a school teacher. In rural areas, teachers were in high demand, yet salaries were low. Joan Jensen noted that many rural schools hired young woman who had little training, or even little education themselves, to teach school whenever possible. She wrote, "local school boards hired the best qualified or the best connected by kinship or community ties and issued them certificates to teach."⁴³⁴ Carrie Markle, Addie Crouch, and Rhoda Emery all taught in rural schools, and many of these circumstances applied to one or all of them at various times. The necessary training for school teachers was not always

⁴³² Ibid.

⁴³³ "She Had College Training," *Cedar Valley Times*, January 9, 1892.

⁴³⁴ Jensen, *Calling This Place Home*, 298.

available in rural areas, and for many families, the potential teachers were needed at home and could not leave to attend a training school.⁴³⁵

Although not emphasized in all rural areas, teacher training was beginning to occupy a bigger place in the professionalism of education. Philosophers of education wrote at great length on the subject of training educated young people to be effective teachers. The Normal School became the institution designed to make way for the new generation of teachers. The Normal School, according to one author, was much more complicated and influential than any other type of training school, as students were taught how to teach subjects, rather than the subjects themselves.⁴³⁶ In order to attend a Normal School, “the subjects themselves, as mere matters of knowledge, should be first learned elsewhere, before entering the Teachers’ School.”⁴³⁷ Once enrolled in Normal School, the pupil learned the philosophy and methods of conveying information to younger students. Part of this included the recitation, similar to the “speakings” Mary Elizabeth Pascoe mentioned. The recitation, according to educational philosopher John S. Hart, was a way to “first get thorough possession of the thoughts or facts of the lesson, and then, imagining the class and the teacher to be ignorant of the subject, explain it to them, just as you will expect to do when the time comes that you will have a class of your own to instruct.”⁴³⁸ This practical method of learning to teach was practiced at Normal Schools around the country.

In the absence of a Normal School within a reasonable travelling distance, advisors encouraged locales to hold Teachers’ Institutes. Institutes predated Normal Schools, and continued even after the establishment of Normal Schools in places without access. J.R. Sypher, another philosopher of education, described the Institutes as “gatherings of the teachers of a

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 300.

⁴³⁶ John S. Hart, *In the school-room.: Chapters in the philosophy of education* (Philadelphia: Eldredge and brother, 1868), 131.

⁴³⁷ Ibid..

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 234-235.

county or neighborhood at some convenient place for general instruction. In these Institutes methods of instruction are examined and criticized; there is an interchange of views on the subject of school government, and in this way teachers learn from each other what may be of practical use to them in their labors.”⁴³⁹ Similar to a Normal School but on a smaller scale, Teachers’ Institutes allowed young men and women access to professional training and development even in more sparsely populated areas.

Carrie, Addie, and Rhoda all had access to certain types of teacher training, despite their rural localities. Carrie Markle, in characteristically brief fashion, wrote about her experiences with teacher training. Late in 1865, she wrote, “Went to town to be examined...Called at Miss Mitchels school.”⁴⁴⁰ The examination process tested the potential teacher on required knowledge, and the examiner could issue a certificate to teach upon successful completion of the examination. The system was not foolproof, though, as rural schools many times had teachers without the necessary qualifications due to a lack of funds or time for training.⁴⁴¹ Carrie apparently passed her examination, and then visited a local school, perhaps to apply or simply observe. In September of 1866, she recorded, “went to town with Mr. Thompson to attend the Institute,” which lasted for three days.⁴⁴² According to Joan Jensen, most rural teachers, “received their training at county-sponsored teachers’ summer institutes. Counties usually held these gatherings during July or August.”⁴⁴³ Carrie, Addie, and Rhoda all attended teacher training activities at various lengths and skill levels.

⁴³⁹ J.R. Sypher, *The art of teaching school: a manual of suggestions for the use of teachers and school authorities, superintendents, controllers, directors, trustees and patrons of public schools and higher institutions of learning...* (Philadelphia: J. M. Stoddart & co., 1872), 30.

⁴⁴⁰ Carrie Markle, manuscript diaries, 1864-1867, Champaign County Historical Society, Urbana Free Library, Urbana, Illinois, December 30, 1865.

⁴⁴¹ Jensen, *Calling This Place Home*, 302.

⁴⁴² Carrie Markle, September 25, 1866.

⁴⁴³ Jensen, *Calling This Place Home*, 302.

Addie Crouch wrote more extensively about her teacher training. Her education took place at a Normal School. Addie's schooling took place over a longer period of time, for which she traveled away from home. Her Normal School was in Marion, Iowa, where a women's seminary had existed for many years. The *Marion Register* chronicled the opening of the Marion Seminary as a place to "furnish requisite facilities for the education of Young Ladies of this vicinity."⁴⁴⁴ As part of the curriculum of the Seminary, the "Normal Course, will require two years to complete it, in addition to the preparatory studies, and will embrace those branches particularly required in teaching our public skills."⁴⁴⁵ Addie did not attend the Normal School until almost 15 years after its establishment, and her experience was a bit different than described, but teacher training had held an important place in Linn County, Iowa, for many years.

As her diary noted, Addie actually had the opportunity to go to Normal School several times in her teaching career. In 1881, her training experience began in early August. She did not elaborate very much on the classes or lessons, but seemed rather indifferent to the process. On August 3 she wrote, "Normal is real nice but they have not Arith. [arithmetic]... We studied some after school."⁴⁴⁶ The next day passed similarly, with Addie noting, "Normal as usual" and mentioned studying later in the evening.⁴⁴⁷ The Normal School experience provided Addie with necessary training for teaching school, but also a chance to get away from home for a period of time and spend more time with her peers away from the farm.

Addie's next Normal experience took place a year later. She left early on a Monday morning for Marion, Iowa and quickly met her classmates and teacher. She mentioned, "Mrs.

⁴⁴⁴ "Marion Seminary," *Marion Register*, July 8, 1868.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Addie A. Crouch, manuscript diaries, 1881-1885, D9 f.4-6, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, August 3, 1881.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., August 4, 1881.

Davis is the same as ever,” most likely meaning she had had the same teacher before.⁴⁴⁸ The training lasted about two weeks, during which Addie had a chance to study and socialize with her fellow students and the people she boarded with, although she complained about wanting to go home. Overall, though, the Normal School experience proved to be useful to Addie, and evidently her family was able to spare her for the nearly two weeks she was gone.

All of the Normal training led to obtaining a teaching certificate. The certification process differed for Addie from year to year. In 1881, she did not get certified until October, despite attending Normal School in August. The method was unconventional as well. She detailed her experience with the examination: “we got up very early and started for Marion...we got there about nine and the superintendent was not there. We stayed till after dinner. Had our pictures taken...we went about 9 mi to where the supt. lived he examined Nellie she got a certificate he took my old one and took the grades and gave me a new one.”⁴⁴⁹ The informal nature of the certification process was evident, as the girls visited the school superintendent in his home for the test, and he was not home when they arrived.

Addie’s next examination, in 1882, followed a more formal procedure, at the end of the two weeks of Normal training. On Monday, August 21, she wrote, “I saw the Supt. about going home tomorrow he said I might be examined Wednesday and go Thurs.”⁴⁵⁰ Addie had a measure of control over the terms of her schooling, helping to decide when she was ready for the final examination. She prepared to leave, yet had a difficult time with the test. “I have had a hard day of it,” she wrote on Wednesday, August 23. “It took me till dark to get through with the

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., August 14, 1882.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., October 10, 1881.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid., August 21, 1882.

examination.”⁴⁵¹ When she finally finished, she settled up with her board (“35 cents very cheap”), and made preparations to head home the next day.⁴⁵²

Addie Crouch had significant opportunities to be formally trained for teaching, yet remained characteristically ambivalent about the whole process, pining away for home and writing letters while attending the training sessions. Rhoda Emery, on the other hand, longed for more chances to better herself, yet was hampered by location and circumstance. Rhoda felt an extreme devotion to her family, putting in her time at home as a dutiful daughter and helping out whenever necessary. Her motivations for furthering her education spoke to her deeply-held ambitions, but her family intervened as usual.

In the summer of 1890, Rhoda made her desires known, writing, “I am tired of drudging along teaching country school. If I only had the means to go to St. Paul and go through the training school, how I should welcome the change; and I would earn so much more too.”⁴⁵³ Not only personal fulfillment, but financial stability would be more readily available with further training for Rhoda. But again, family obligations got in her way. “I have almost made up my mind to save my money this year and go to the training school next fall,” she wrote later that summer. “If it were not for the mortgage I would but I don’t know.”⁴⁵⁴ Rhoda made herself personally responsible for helping pay her family’s mortgage, as her parents had trouble making ends meet. This financial need made Rhoda question her ambition to go to school.

With Normal School off of the table at the moment, Rhoda had to settle for local institutes to earn her teaching certificates. Again, the certification process proved very informal, as a network of teachers and school board members passed information back and forth to keep

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., August 23, 1882.

⁴⁵² Ibid.

⁴⁵³ Rhoda J. Emery, manuscript diaries, 1889-1894, Rhoda J. Emery and Family Papers, Manuscripts Collection, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota, May 27, 1890.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., Summer 1890.

everyone up to date. In 1892, Rhoda relied on her brother Jim, also a teacher, to pass correspondence with the necessary people in order to get certified. She recorded, “He [Jim] brought me a letter from Mr. Keating which says he will give me a certificate if Mr. Chapman will send him my papers. I have written to Mr. Chapman asking him to do so.”⁴⁵⁵ Mr. Keating was willing to offer Rhoda a teaching certificate based on the word of Jim and another administrator.

Rhoda attended a teaching institute, which lasted about a week. She and her sister went together, and the institute drew many potential teachers. Unlike Addie Crouch, Rhoda enjoyed the seminars and lectures, writing very specifically about the topics and what she found interesting.⁴⁵⁶ When the institute ended, Rhoda wrote, “institute is out to-day and I have a certificate of attendance after a good deal of trouble,” although she had seemed to enjoy the institute very much. Highlighting the informal nature of the certification process, though, Rhoda hit a snag in taking an examination and receiving her certificate. She was supposed to start her next school on April 11, but was unable to take an examination until April 9. Because she had taught before, though, the examiner gave her a pass. Rhoda recorded, “Mr. K. complimented me on my former record in this co. and gave me permission to teach without a cert. till I heard from him.”⁴⁵⁷ It was not until the end of the month that Rhoda received her certificate, with a 90 average, almost a month since she began teaching.⁴⁵⁸ As Joan Jensen noted, teacher training and certification often were disorganized in country schools, and Rhoda was able to teach without a certificate based on her prior reputation.⁴⁵⁹

⁴⁵⁵ Rhoda Emery, March 17, 1892.

⁴⁵⁶ Rhoda heard several lectures on varied topics including “The Hand of God in American History,” Africa, “*Something’s Done Broke*,” and “what we should read.” Ibid., March 28, 30, 31, 1892.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., April 9, 1892.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid., April 28, 1892.

⁴⁵⁹ Jensen, *Calling This Place Home*, 298, 302.

Once duly certified and installed in country schools across the Midwest, Carrie, Addie, and Rhoda again had very different experiences. Carrie wrote very little description of her days at school. She normally denoted the number of students she had that day, and then a brief description of the day. For example, on January 4, 1866, she wrote, “at school 13 schol. Got along very pleasantly.”⁴⁶⁰ Other days did not go so well, as was the case on April 22, 1867. On Carrie’s first day of the term she recorded, “commenced my school...with 10 scholars not very pleasant.”⁴⁶¹ The next day was more of the same. These small insights into Carrie’s teaching career cannot reveal very much about the experience of teaching, but only serve to denote that she was a teacher. Like the rest of Carrie’s diary, her teaching entries left much uncovered about the state of her actual life and work.

Addie Crouch’s accounts of teaching provided more insight into the life of a girl who generally did not take much seriously. Previous accounts of Addie’s activities showed that she had a tendency not to take much responsibility for her daily tasks. Addie approached teaching as she did other tasks, which was evident in her diary entries. She seemed to like teaching well enough, but most of her entries focused on the lighter side of teaching, mainly socializing with her students and others during the school day. She started with her boarding room. As many of the schools Addie taught in were away from her home, she had to stay with others. In 1881, she commented on the school house and her room, writing, “the school house is very dirty and O my the rats I mean the mice are as thick as—well I don’t know what.”⁴⁶² She went on to mention, “I sleep alone. Have a good bed to sleep in,” meaning the family she was boarding with was able to provide her a single bed and it was rather nice.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶⁰ Carrie Markle, January 4, 1866.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., April 22, 1867.

⁴⁶² Addie Crouch, November 7, 1881.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

In the course of teaching, Addie recorded many instances of levity she experienced throughout the school day. She wrote about an instance of good natured “pranking” between herself and the students, recording, “at noon we had a great deal of fun. Ira hid my ink stand today, and O how he blushed when he gave it to me.”⁴⁶⁴ She also poked fun at some students in another term, noting, “at noon and recess they all talk bohema it sounds so funny.”⁴⁶⁵ To Addie’s untrained ear, another language became a joke. In general, though, Addie found teaching agreeable, with many entries such as “everything pleasant at school. I enjoy myself very well down here much better than I expected to.”⁴⁶⁶

At times, though, Addie showed immaturity despite her position as a teacher. This took on several forms, such as gossiping about one of her students in her diary. “I had a new scholar today Sarah Drexler,” Addie recorded. “She is real pretty but not a very good scholar I guess.”⁴⁶⁷ Addie had very little information to make her evaluation of the student, but chose to write it in her diary anyway. Addie also neglected her classroom in favor of visiting with her friends on several occasions. Her friend Hiland came to the school house and Addie carried on a conversation with him, not mentioning whether she had students at the time.⁴⁶⁸ She also cut her preparation time short to attend a dance.⁴⁶⁹ Addie’s attention to the classroom was lackluster at times.

Despite these examples, Addie continued to get teaching jobs. On December 8, 1882, her birthday, she mused, “a year ago today I was teaching at Bolder today at Prairieburg. I wonder

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., December 22, 1881.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., May 2, 1881.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., June 14, 1882.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid., December 27, 1881.

⁴⁶⁸ Addie wrote, “Hiland came over after some wood and stoped to the school house. I was very glad to see him he asked about some girls over here. I would like to have a long talk with him but could not,” December 1, 1881.

⁴⁶⁹ On another occasion Addie wrote, “after school I was writing out the History questions on the board when John Hill came he came over in the buggy...got home quite early,” January 25, 1882. She most likely would have stayed to finish her lesson if not for the dance.

where I will be a yr. from today.”⁴⁷⁰ Her tenure as a teacher had lasted more than a year so far, and she planned on continuing. Also, Addie was mentioned in the local paper for her prowess as a teacher. In the “Prairieburg” section of the *Central City News-Letter*, a journalist noted in December of 1889, “if there is a township in Linn county that has more good teachers according to the population than Boulder Township, just let some observing itemizer make a note of it i.e. whether teaching in their home township or away.” Following this was a list of teachers, including Addie Crouch and several other names of women that Addie had mentioned in her diary.⁴⁷¹ The community respected Addie as a teacher and believed she was doing a good job.

Like in other aspects of life, Rhoda Emery differed greatly from Addie Crouch in teaching style and dedication. Rhoda vacillated between nervousness and confidence throughout her teaching career, worrying constantly over the state of her classroom and her financial and living situations during the teaching term. Overall, though, Rhoda showed a dedication to her students, and she genuinely cared whether or not they were learning what they needed from her classes. Rhoda tolerated less silliness in her classroom than Addie, and she concentrated on discipline and making the lessons as effective as possible.

Early in Rhoda’s diary, she wrote from the fall to the winter about her school. Right away, Rhoda’s ambivalence about the term showed in her entries. She recorded, “I like my boarding place first rate, have a nice room all by myself. I am awful tired. It is not so much fun as it might be.”⁴⁷² Already, Rhoda expressed negative feelings about the start of the term. A few days later she lamented, “I don’t know as I shall ever like school-teaching.”⁴⁷³ This depressed

⁴⁷⁰ Addie Crouch, December 8, 1882.

⁴⁷¹ *Central City News-Letter*, December 19, 1889.

⁴⁷² Rhoda Emery, October 21, 1889.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, October 24, 1889.

attitude came through during the school day as well, as she felt nervous throughout the school day and “could hardly keep from giggling aloud several times.”⁴⁷⁴

Rhoda’s nervousness was directly linked to her performance in the classroom in front of the students. She routinely agonized over whether the students were learning and frequently questioned her own abilities as a teacher. The same day that she giggled with nervousness throughout class she also wrote, “I have prospered in school though. I believe I have really made some improvement in the scholars in these two weeks. They have better lessons than they did at first anyway.”⁴⁷⁵ This bit of good news was overshadowed later in the term, as Rhoda continued to have problems with her class. After several discipline issues on a particularly long day she wrote, “I am afraid the other too think they do not have to study very hard. I have resolved that , Lord helping me, I whack them through after this, also that I will settle Eugene Sibley’s hash.”⁴⁷⁶ To “settle someone’s hash,” according to the Oxford English Dictionary, meant to “deal with someone in a forceful and decisive manner.”⁴⁷⁷ Whatever Eugene Sibley had done, Rhoda meant to administer some form of discipline and restore order to her class. She may or may not have achieved this goal, as she later recorded, “I do hope so much I am doing the scholars some real good and I do not know whether I am or not.”⁴⁷⁸

Throughout the term of teaching, Rhoda longed to return home, to the dwelling of her parents. Even though she was seventeen years old, she still made her “home” with her family. Even when making arrangements for future teaching jobs, she took into account where she would be living during the term, preferring to be with her mother and father. In writing about her boarding situation she recorded, “how I wish I could go home and stay there! I wonder if I ever

⁴⁷⁴ Ibid., October 31, 1889.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., October 31, 1889.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., November 20, 1889.

⁴⁷⁷ “hash,” *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 652.

⁴⁷⁸ Rhoda Emery, December 9, 1889.

will have a settled home.”⁴⁷⁹ But her desire to be home went even further. She also felt a deep commitment to helping her family whenever possible. As mentioned previously, Rhoda gave her all to her parents, helping physically and financially on many occasions. In December of 1889, she contemplated her school choice for the next term, hoping to apply for one closer to home. “If I staid at home this summer,” she wrote, “I could help Ma a great deal before and after school and really do not see how she will get along without some help. Besides I could be at home and oh! how good just the words seem.”⁴⁸⁰ Rhoda felt very strongly that her family could not function without her, so much so that she abandoned certain teaching goals in order to be with her mother. Later that month, she mentioned that she would not be able to teach at a certain school, but did not despair, as “my great ambition now is to get home. It seems as though if I could be home. . . I should be almost too happy to stand it. It has been almost three years since I have been there to make it my home.”⁴⁸¹ As with all aspects of Rhoda’s life, her family came before all else.

Family intervention was not the only factor that played into Rhoda’s decisions of where she would teach. As a long time teacher, Rhoda had some bargaining power in where she wanted to teach and for how much money. Schools sought out Rhoda for teaching positions, offering her salaries that she could accept, decline, or counteroffer as she saw fit. In March of 1892 she wrote, “Pa got a letter for me from Six Oaks to-day. I can have the school for \$25 but do not want it for that.”⁴⁸² The amount offered was not enough for Rhoda to agree to take the school, even though they asked her. She dealt with the situation two days later, recording in her diary, “I

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., November 20, 1889.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., December 17, 1889.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., December 30, 1889. She also wrote later, on February 12, 1890, “I am so anxious to get through, and get home and at housework that my fingers fairly itch.” Even housework was preferable to teaching and living away from home at this point.

⁴⁸² Ibid., March 3, 1892.

answered the letter from Six Oaks to-day saying I did not like teaching for the price they offered.”⁴⁸³ She had another offer on the table, which she did accept, for \$30.⁴⁸⁴ Rhoda’s negotiating power was interesting, as there was no shortage of teachers in her area, if her diary is to be believed. Rhoda mentioned herself, her brother Jim, her sister Clara, and several other relatives and friends as teachers in the immediate area. Her teaching skills, as much as she derided them herself, were in high demand. For the next term, the same school she accepted \$30 from previously offered her \$28. She wrote, “I have been in a study all day how to answer Segar’s [the school administrators]. I certainly should not go for \$28 but I feel quite sure they would give me \$30.”⁴⁸⁵ Due to previous history, Rhoda had the ability to ask for what she wanted.

Throughout her successes, Rhoda still doubted her ambition and ability to teach. She resigned herself to teaching, and she continued for the rest of her life. Toward the end of a term she wrote somewhat dejectedly, “I suppose I shall always teach. I am glad though that I do not have to trudge over here with my big dinner basket and little clock but once more.”⁴⁸⁶ Even a life-long teacher like Rhoda tired of the daily routine at times. And school was often emotionally draining for her. In June of 1894 she wrote, “I got home from school and cried all pretty nearly supper time. I do not know for a number of reasons.”⁴⁸⁷ Overall, though, Rhoda at least identified as a teacher and recognized that teaching was an opportunity for her, even if it was not the path she would have originally planned for herself. Just a few months later she wrote, “Guess I had better make up my mind to always be a school m’am,” resigning herself to a lifetime of

⁴⁸³ Ibid., March 5, 1892. Addie Crouch was also able to negotiate the terms of her employment to a point, by asking for a teaching position outright. On March 19, 1883, she wrote, “I ask Long for the school I can have it at \$20.”

⁴⁸⁴ Ibid., March 8, 1892.

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., July 27, 1892.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., February 1, 1894.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid., June 25, 1894.

teaching.⁴⁸⁸ Implicit in the statement, too, was the expectation that she would not get married. The “school m’am” designation, sometimes written as “school marm,” denoted an unmarried woman who continued to teach throughout her life. Rhoda did not ever marry, and so was able to continue teaching. She never lost the occasional depression over her work, however, as noted by her entry in October of 1894, “Oh I wish I didn’t have to teach and could be free to go out door when I please...I am so tired, so awfully tired of school. I have not missed a single term since I was four years old.”⁴⁸⁹ With that many years devoted to education, it was understandable that Rhoda occasionally felt fatigued with her profession.

While a girl leaving home to take a teaching job might have worried parents, as the girl was outside of the watchful eye of family, the examples of the girls surveyed here, particularly Addie and Rhoda, have a lot to say about the concept of duty, and how duty to the family (or lack thereof) could translate to a profession. School teaching offered a chance for independence in some cases, yet in a very limited setting. Addie and Rhoda both lived away from home at times while teaching and had to learn how to function in another household. The boarding family may have been similar to their own, but the girls still had a modicum of responsibility to behave properly on their own. Carrie Markle, who already lived with another family, experienced another layer of independence as a teacher. At the same time, the salary earned from teaching directly helped her family. As mentioned earlier, both Addie and Rhoda contributed to the family income in different ways, and that income was earned through teaching. Both girls also traveled home whenever possible, and when home on weekends, helped with the chores as if they always lived there. In a way, teaching was a small-scale world for rural girls to explore, yet still stay within the bounds of family and community. By learning skills needed to function outside of the

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid., October 3, 1894.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., October 19, 1894.

confines of family discipline, girls who taught avoided the “girl problem,” yet still were able to express themselves in ways that might not have pleased their parents, which will be explored in the next chapter.

Teaching school also exposed an interesting power structure for young women. In a typical farm household, a girl had little real power in terms of authority over other household members. Her usefulness made up her place in the home, and she was still subject to parents, or even older siblings. Girls with younger brothers or sisters might have been able to express a modicum of authority through child-care responsibilities, but within a family situation. In a classroom, a young woman had the full authority over the students, both male and female. Sometimes, the students might have been the same age, or even older than the teacher, making the power relationship much different than they would have experienced in any other situation. Carrie, Addie, and Rhoda all had to deal with classroom discipline and figure out the best way for their students to behave and continue learning. Their methods of discipline showed the extremes that girls had to take to get the respect and attention of their students.

Carrie Markle relied on corporal punishment to maintain order in her classroom. Throughout her diary, she frequently had days that went poorly, and some of it may have had to do with discipline problems in the class. Carrie rarely mentioned any specifics about her school day or her students, but she did write when she administered a punishment. One snowy day in January she wrote, “snowed most all day long day. Expected to go home but no one came for me disappointed. Whipped GF and D. Thomson.”⁴⁹⁰ To compound the dismal day, she also had to deal with discipline problems. A few days later, she had problems again and wrote, “whipped Edward and George.”⁴⁹¹ Carrie did not write about what the students had actually done, simply

⁴⁹⁰ Carrie Markle, January 26, 1866.

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., January 30, 1866.

the punishment doled out, as on February 7, 1867, when she recorded, “had trouble with Leslie Stewart tried to whip him.”⁴⁹² She did not elaborate as to whether the discipline successfully rehabilitated the student or not.

Unlike Carrie, Addie Crouch was much more positive overall about her school experiences. Most of her diary entries about school took on a cheerful tone. On May 5, 1881, she recorded that “every morning I start at eight for school. I like the school real well.”⁴⁹³ In subsequent entries, she would first say “every thing has gone nicely at school,” or some similar phrase. By June of 1881, she seemed pleased with the school, writing “I like it better and better.”⁴⁹⁴ As mentioned earlier, Addie participated in some harmless teasing with her students, including pranks and comments about their language. One of the only negative entries about her classroom, though, also had to do with the “bohema,” as she called it, that some of her students spoke. She recorded, “but at recess the boys got to talking Bohema and I happened to understand and it was not very nice.”⁴⁹⁵ Linn County, Iowa, and neighboring Johnson County boasted the state’s highest number of immigrants from Bohemia throughout the late nineteenth century, so Addie would have had some exposure to the language and culture of that area.⁴⁹⁶ Most likely, the boys spoke poorly about her or someone else, which Addie found offensive. Other than this incident, Addie did not write much about discipline.

Like in most aspects of her life, Rhoda Emery took classroom discipline much more seriously and gave it much more attention in her diary than the other girls. Rhoda also questioned

⁴⁹² Ibid., February 7, 1867.

⁴⁹³ Addie Crouch, May 5, 1881.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., June 13, 1881.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., January 17, 1882.

⁴⁹⁶ For example, in 1880, Linn County had 2166 persons born in Bohemia, and Johnson County had 2152. This trend was similar in 1870 and 1890 as well. 1870, 1880, and 1890 Population Statistics, Historical Census Browser, Retrieved 18 February 2013, from the University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center: <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html>. 2004.

her own authority to punish students more than Carrie, who simply mentioned administering corporal punishment when she felt it necessary. Rhoda wrote in great detail about troubles that she had with her students, particularly the boys in her classes.⁴⁹⁷ In 1889, Rhoda had several students who insisted on starting fights during the school day to her great consternation. On December 3 she wrote, “I have had a pretty disagreeable time at school to-day but I think the new way will be a good one after awhile... There came near being a fight at school this noon but I stopped it, much to George J’s disgust.”⁴⁹⁸ George J continued to vex Rhoda, as the next day she recorded,

I have had a hard day to-day. It has kept me on the lookout all the while to keep George J and Henry Y. from a fight. I don’t know what the trouble was but they have begun twice and I have had to stop them. I gave them all a talking to this morning and tried to convince them of the ‘error of their ways’ but I am afraid that it did more hurt than good. I was so tired and discouraged and blue generally this noon that I couldn’t eat a bit of dinner and I don’t feel much better now.

Much of Rhoda’s anxiety regarding the boys’ behavior had to do with her perception of her own authority. Rhoda did not believe that she had the power to rectify the problem in the best way she could see, which was to send the boys home. She wrote, “I had determined that if those boys made any more trouble I should threaten to turn them out, but I was not sure that I had the authority to do it or that the board would uphold me.”⁴⁹⁹ Rhoda’s reluctance to discipline came from a gender-oriented frame of reference, because as a woman, she would rarely have had any need or opportunity to exercise power over men. Also, as a woman, she worried that the school board would not support her authority in asking students to leave her class.

The boys continued to make trouble in Rhoda’s class, and she continued to doubt her ability to discipline them. After standing firm and telling them multiple times that they would

⁴⁹⁷ In her analysis of Rhoda Emery’s diary, Pamela Riney-Kehrberg noted the presence of a “boy problem” throughout rural schools in the Midwest. See Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm*, 76-79.

⁴⁹⁸ Rhoda Emery, December 3, 1889.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, December 4, 1889.

have to leave if they did not stop fighting, she still felt uncomfortable in her role as authority figure. Later, when she recorded her feelings about discipline she wrote, “I felt pretty shaky concerning my power to do such a thing.”⁵⁰⁰ But that day, she received a visitor to her school, a neighbor who had heard talk of fighting at school and spoke to a member of the school board, telling Rhoda that he would help her maintain order and the school board would support her in disciplining the boys.⁵⁰¹ The man told her “to be on my guard, not to let them fight, and if I had any trouble he gave me to understand that they would back me.”⁵⁰² With community support, Rhoda was able to take care of problem students, which made her feel “jubilant,” according to her diary.⁵⁰³

Rhoda never learned to feel very comfortable with discipline, as in future mentions of problem students, she continued to worry about how to handle situations.⁵⁰⁴ She debated different types of discipline, as on November 28, 1893 when she recorded, “this has been a horrible day. I have started out to be more strict and it does not have a good effect just at first. Three boys went up to Youmans’ this morning without permission and I obliged them to come in and take their seats.”⁵⁰⁵ Her half-hearted discipline continued, as she wrote a few weeks later, “school is discouraging. My boys trouble me greatly,” then “the boys have been bothering me by bringing guns to school. I told them this noon not to do it any more.”⁵⁰⁶ Rhoda’s meek and anxious nature kept her from having real control over the classroom and also contributed some to a general depression that she suffered at times throughout her diary.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., December 5, 1889.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ One notable exception being on June 18, 1890 when she wrote, “nothing of importance has transpired only I broke a slate over Len Bussi’s back,” which was an interesting way of physically disciplining a student.

⁵⁰⁵ Rhoda Emery, November 28, 1893.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., December 14, 28, 1893.

Despite these shortcomings early in her career, Rhoda continued teaching throughout her life. As a single woman, teaching provided her a source of income to take care of herself in her adult life. Teaching was one of the few employment options available for a single woman, or any woman, to support herself. Most women simply stayed on the farm and continued working for their families, then with their husband in their own families. This type of work, while valued on the farm, did not offer any type of financial remuneration. Grey Osterud recognized this in her study and noted, “since people assumed that everyone who grew up in a rural area learned agricultural skills in the course of daily life they did not regard farm or household labor as deserving special compensation.”⁵⁰⁷ A girl would only ever be able to live at home and be supported doing that type of work. As far as other work available to women, Osterud again noted, “while men practiced a wide variety of trades, women were confined to dressmaking, millinery, and weaving. Women’s trades were more casualized than men’s.”⁵⁰⁸ These jobs were built around the work women already did in the home. Teaching, while more independent, also contained certain elements that were inherent in traditional women’s roles, such as nurturing and educating young children. Ellen Rothman came to similar conclusions, finding that “between 1840 and 1870, the teaching profession was feminized, and nursing and library work were clearly identified as female.”⁵⁰⁹ With the limited options available, most girls instead sought a husband and stayed on the farm.

Prescriptive literature, as usual, provided conflicting advice to young women on the topic of work. Girls were supposed to be hard workers, but when that work strayed out of the bounds

⁵⁰⁷ Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 215.

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁹ Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 191. This statistic may be skewed, as Rothman’s study focused on middle and upper class women, and evidence from the rural locales presented in this work showed a presence of men in the teaching profession, but overall teaching was a typically female profession.

of what was considered “typical” for women, meaning professions that harnessed women’s inherent abilities as nurturers, this work was derided in the prescriptive literature. Women working in professions were presented in anecdotal evidence, and many times were mocked or condemned. The article “A Female Operator,” reprinted in the *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye* from the *New York Express*, merely told the story of a woman in Massachusetts who traded stocks on the market as an anomaly, a piece of interesting news but nothing more. The fact that this woman’s “sole delight and ambition in this world is to make money,” as noted in the article, was not treated as a real piece of news.⁵¹⁰

Other articles derided women in professions, or assumed that women who attempted to work would not amount to much. An article on “Women Mechanics” in Germany was distrustful of such a vocation for women, as the author wrote, “it is almost impossible for an American to conceive of such a state of things. Women, fortunately, have never been reduced to such a condition anywhere in America, and we trust they never will be.”⁵¹¹ The type of physical work would not have been acceptable for women for many middle-class Americans.

Similarly, occupations in business were not acceptable for women either. In an article titled “The Woman in Business,” the advisor warned, “a young woman faces a succession of hard trials when she turns to a business career...it is easier for her to think that she can do what she sees other doing than it is for her to do it.”⁵¹² The idea that women were more likely to think they could do something than to actually do it featured heavily in various advisory articles.

Another author wrote about women working as census takers, and only managed a

⁵¹⁰ “A Female Operator,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, August 20, 1869.

⁵¹¹ “Women Mechanics,” *N.Y. Ledger*, reprinted in *Sidney By-Way*, February 11, 1887.

⁵¹² “The Woman in Business,” *Olmsted County Democrat*, April 6, 1893.

condescending story about how women would spend too much time chatting with their neighbors and friends and not get the work done.⁵¹³

Even prescriptive writers who advocated for women to attain an occupation still held the same condescending attitude about women's work ethic. "I would say, to all young ladies who are called to any peculiar vocation," wrote one author, "qualify yourselves for it as a man does for his work."⁵¹⁴ If a woman preferred a typically male job, she should "not exact a woman's privileges—the privilege of inaccuracy and weakness."⁵¹⁵ Despite all of the negative attention to women's work ethic and potential for job success, prescriptive authors still urged young men to seek out girls who had experience. "You who are looking for wives and companions," entreated the writer, "turn from the fashionable, lazy and haughty girls, and select one from those who work for a living, and never—our word for it—will you repent your choice."⁵¹⁶

Clearly, prescriptive writers believed any professions in the world of business, long considered the male domain, were unsuitable for women. The only work proper for women emulated their work in the home as nurturers and care-takers. As such, health care was one area that many advisors deemed acceptable for women. The *Prairie Farmer* advocated for women in various health care professions several times throughout its run in the late nineteenth century. Nursing was particularly prescient, as many women had served in the Civil War to help wounded and dying soldiers. A woman with a "natural gift" would have no trouble finding work as a nurse, according to one article.⁵¹⁷ Women doctors proved a realistic goal, as "that women possess by nature many of the most important requisites for the successful practice of

⁵¹³ "How the Lady-Census Takers Will Do," *Brodhead Independent*, May 14, 1880.

⁵¹⁴ "A Woman's Advice," *Prairie Farmer* 39 (December 12, 1868), 190.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁶ "She Works for a Living," *Grant County Herald*, September 22, 1868.

⁵¹⁷ "Skilled Nurses," *Prairie Farmer* 41 (December 17, 1870), 397.

medicine.”⁵¹⁸ The author of this article advocated that women gain the recognition of male doctors in order to “gain the reputation or secure the practice that they may fairly be entitled to.”⁵¹⁹ And they were entitled, according to another writer, who observed “if men students only worked as hard and conscientiously, and were absolutely obliged to be as well prepared for the practice of medicine” as women physicians were.⁵²⁰ These articles seemed more anecdotal than practical, though, as they portrayed women in the professional medical field as an interesting aberration, although most women would have had experience taking care of others in their own homes and communities.

With all of the conflicting advice, rural girls might have been confused as to what their path in life should be. Carrie, Addie, and Rhoda all did some type of work other than teaching to help earn money for themselves and their families. Mary Pascoe did not record any jobs outside of her usual farm, school, and church obligations, probably because she was only sixteen years old when she wrote her diary and did not have the ability or need to take on any other type of work. Carrie Markle was hired labor, according to the census, but she never mentioned her payment for her services. Because Carrie came to Illinois from Michigan with the Franciscos, they most likely were family friends or neighbors. The relationship between them may have been based on those ties, rather than a financial arrangement, in which case Carrie probably did not get paid but lived as a family member and was supported by the Franciscos. Her value to the Franciscos was her labor.

Hired girls posed a particularly divisive problem in the late nineteenth century. The “hired girl problem,” or “servant girl question,” as it was sometimes called, took up many words and pages in newspapers, advice books, and other prescriptive literature. Hired help, as

⁵¹⁸ “Women as Doctors,” *Prairie Farmer* 40 (December 4, 1869), 397.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁰ “Women Physicians,” *Prairie Farmer* 42 (April 29, 1871), 125.

mentioned previously, occupied a unique place between family and employee, private and public. Most lived in the home of the employer and, in the case of household help, took care of many duties relating to the workings of the family, such as cooking and laundry. Despite the working nature of the tasks, these jobs were very intimate, and the hired help took on a very familial role in undertaking the employment.

The problem came in the form of the close relationship between employer and employee. Women who employed servants and hired help constantly struggled with the best way to deal with their help, mostly young, unmarried women with no parental supervision. Employers became surrogate parents, in a way, yet still expected the help to perform the work for which they were paid, and perform it well. The trouble started when girls did not work up to the standards of their employers. Women faced the task of disciplining hired girls who were not their daughters and figuring out the best way to make sure the girls did their work properly.

Harriet Prescott Spofford articulated and outlined “The Servant Girl Question” in a work of the same name in 1881. Spofford placed the blame for the servant girl problem on both servants and mistresses, as neither fulfilled the duties of their station as necessary to a good relationship. She laid out the argument in these terms:

When a woman buys another woman’s labor, she does not buy her body and soul also; and when a woman sells to another woman her honest services she sells the understood worth of the money; on the one hand wages, a home, consideration, and kindness are due; on the other hand work, faithfulness, and civility. It is because the duty on both sides is overlooked, because the employer seeks to acquire more work and more servility for the wages paid, and because the servant seeks only to get the wages while shirking the duties.⁵²¹

There were several reasons for this type of disrespect between employer and servant, mainly class and cultural differences, which Spofford expounded upon at great length. She wrote, “too

⁵²¹ Harriet Prescott Spofford, *The Servant Girl Question* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1881), 8-9.

frequently we feel about them [servants] as if they were a different race from ourselves as though they were chimpanzees. We are liable to credit them with none of our emotions and finer feelings, are astonished, if not indignant, at their presumption, when they happen to display them.”⁵²² The disconnect, which Spofford likened to different species trying to communicate, came from a fundamental misunderstanding of servant culture.

Spofford’s work concentrated on household servants in more wealthy, upper-class, urban homes. These servant girls typically were immigrants new to the United States, living in larger cities, with limited opportunities for employment. The immigrant issue played a large role in Spofford’s argument, as she, and presumably others at the time, felt that immigrant labor, particularly Irish immigrants, was inferior to native-born American girls. She argued, “we owe a great debt to our foreign help; yet, for all that, it is only natural that we should prefer our own people in our homes when we can have them.”⁵²³ Her extreme nativist sentiment stemmed from a belief that the difference between immigrants and native-born Americans was too great and could not be overcome. “Union is hardly possible, there is always something foreign in the household, and there is disintegration at the very foundation of home;” she argued, “but with servants of our own race, religion, and habits, the family is complete.”⁵²⁴ A proper servant, with the same beliefs and background, would be more like a family member than the help.

Spofford was not the only writer on the “servant girl question.” Amelia E. Barr wrote a chapter in her book *Maids Wives and Bachelors*, a manual for young women on dating, marriage, and life skills, titled “The Servant-Girl’s Point of View.” Barr focused less on the cultural differences between servant and mistress and more on an overall shift in the attitude about labor which transformed the relationship into one of employer and employee, rather than a familial

⁵²² Ibid., 12-13.

⁵²³ Ibid., 159-160.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

relationship. For women who complained about the quality of their servants, Barr wrote, “it is said, on all hands, that servants every year grow more idle, showy, impudent, and independent. The last charge is emphatically true, and it accounts for and includes the others. But then this independence is the necessary result of the world’s progress, in which all classes share.”⁵²⁵ Barr argued that a young woman inclined to find work outside of her own home would not want to be judged or looked down upon for her own personal life, but would simply want to work for wages.⁵²⁶ The only way for this situation to change would be to make domestic work a regular trade, as “when it is looked upon as a mere business bargain, then the servant will not feel it necessary to be insolent and to do her work badly, simply to let her employer know how much she is above it.”⁵²⁷ Unlike Spofford, who advocated mistresses treating their maids like their own children, Barr believed the opposite.

Barr’s opinion mirrored an earlier, statistically-based study of hired labor by Lucy Maynard Salmon. Salmon’s work *Domestic Service* surveyed many people on the question of servants, and her conclusions took into account the same social transformations that altered the perception of the place of labor. Salmon concluded, “household service and household employments do not occupy an isolated position; that while they may be indifferent to the political, industrial, and social changes constantly occurring, they cannot by virtue of this indifference remain unaffected by them.”⁵²⁸ Not only that, but greater opportunities for women and “industrial, political, and social revolutions” changed the way employees related to domestic

⁵²⁵ Amelia E. Barr, *Maids Wives and Bachelors* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1898), 231.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁵²⁸ Lucy Maynard Salmon, *Domestic Service* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897), 263.

servants.⁵²⁹ Again, like Barr, Salmon advocated that the social stigma of service be removed and the servant herself live outside of the home, making it more like a regular business or trade.⁵³⁰

The major social changes and disconnect of culture, though, were mostly limited to urban areas, where more young immigrant women congregated and found jobs. In rural areas and on the farm, hired help was much more likely to be a friend or neighbor, and rural women definitely observed the difference between the urban “servant girl question” and the rural “hired girl problem.” Advice directed to a rural audience, in local newspapers and farm journals, focused more on the rural dimensions of the issue of hired help.⁵³¹ Hired girls on the farm did not have the same responsibilities as servants for an upper class, urban family. Barr and Salmon talked about changes which further separated employer from employee, but close quarters in farm homes made this difficult. Spofford wrote about the distinctions between scullery maids, cooks, and other specific servant roles, but on the farm, hired girls did a bit of everything, from household work to farm labor. This fact was so well known that even agricultural machinery companies capitalized on the idea that girls participated in all forms of farm work. A pamphlet for the Victor Disc plow from the South Bend Chilled Plow Works advertised, “so simple the hired girl can run it, and let the hired man rest between meals.”⁵³² The benefit of such an easy to use device was its accessibility for women.

Despite the problems, most agreed hired help was necessary for the grueling tasks of farm labor. One writer spelled out the issue, writing, “when the hired domestic undertakes the task, it is generally understood that she is to be relieved of all other duties and left free to devote

⁵²⁹ Ibid.

⁵³⁰ Ibid., 266-269.

⁵³¹ Rural publications even talked about the “hired man problem,” as some of the same issues applied to farmers who hired men for labor, but this issue will not be discussed here.

⁵³² South Bend Chilled Plow Co., advertisement, Lawrence H. Skromme Agricultural Machinery Literature Collection, RS 21/7/227, Special Collections Department, Iowa State University Library, Ames, Iowa, n.d.

her entire energies to the cleansing process. Not so the woman who is her own hired girl.”⁵³³ Without some form of help, a woman would be left to do the difficult work, “a heavy washing and half a day’s scrubbing, besides preparing the meals for the family, and clearing away the disorder left from Sunday.”⁵³⁴ The poor woman without help was forced to continue the work by herself, unable to “rest her tired body by a half hour’s nap.”⁵³⁵ While this might have been a bit of an exaggeration, the work load was still very large for only one person.

The problem, then, came when the hired help did not perform enough to suit the needs of the home and farm. “We do not expect perfection in any one,” wrote “One of the Wives” from Columbus, Wisconsin, “but we would like our hired girls, especially when we pay big wages, to stir around lively enough to wash the breakfast dishes and cook a little meat and a few potatoes for dinner, when everything else is prepared for them to put upon the table.”⁵³⁶ Hired girls, in the writer’s experience, rarely lived up to the expectations placed upon them, and instead shirked their responsibilities. She went on to argue, “it is very nice indeed to have your dishes all broken or cracked so they are worthless, the handles all melted off your tinware, victuals left standing around to dry, a half bushel or so of bread left in the box to mold, wanted wastefulness and destruction everywhere.”⁵³⁷ The extremely sarcastic tone of the article showed the writer’s deeply held disappointment in hired girls.

In order to fix the problem, the author recommended a type of training school for girls to help them be better housekeepers. Without some kind of instruction, many women would be stuck with poor workers, “barely tolerated by those that hire them, because they can do no

⁵³³ “Monday,” *Farmers’ Review* 20 (February 13, 1889), 116.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁶ “The Hired Girl Again,” *Western Rural* 20 (December 2, 1882), 386.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*

better.”⁵³⁸ Education factored into many women’s assessment of the servant girl problem. Mrs. C.H. Stone, writing for the *Journal of Industrial Education*, noted the importance of proper training for housework. She wrote, “in reality, if one understands the fundamental rules of housework, the necessary changes from one home to another require no more mental effort than the domestic reality really needs to lift her in her calling.”⁵³⁹ Servant work was some of the only work available to many young women, especially lower-class women without any skills. Mrs. Stone argued, “it cannot be expected that a large per cent of girls yearly cared for by charity are to be adopted in comfortable homes or trained for well-paying artistic professions. Also, the trades which women can enter with little previous preparation, are crammed already.”⁵⁴⁰ Only through proper training could girls become adequate housekeepers, and that training would help the “dependent class” of girls find work to support themselves.⁵⁴¹

The designation of “dependent class” formed the crux of the issue of training for domestic economy. Land grant institutions, such as the Iowa Agricultural College mentioned above, began programs of domestic science which, according to historian Andrea Radke-Moss, “encouraged the training of ‘scientific farm wives,’ or women who had the scientific and technological knowledge to bring efficiency and economy to the farm home.”⁵⁴² Training in domestic tasks would seem to give more agency to farm women, which was the purpose of such programs, but due to the middle-class stigma against domestic servants, many women had reservations about training for such physical labor. For example, although the family desperately

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ “The Problem of Domestic Service,” *Journal of Industrial Education*, reprinted in *Western Rural and American Stockman* 30 (November 26, 1892), 763.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid.

⁵⁴² Andrea G. Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch: Women and Coeducation in the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 145.

needed money, Helen Emery, Rhoda's mother, refused to allow her daughters to become domestic workers.⁵⁴³

Formal training in domestic science, though, was not intended to create a professionalized branch of housekeepers. At coeducational universities which taught domestic science, the courses helped to separate the educations of the young men and women who attended. Also, many of the courses focused on tasks that would increase a sense of gentility on the farm, such as cooking fancy meals and setting an elaborate table for guests.⁵⁴⁴ The girls who attended coeducation facilities in domestic science held the expectation of living a more middle-class life, and they most likely expected to have servants of their own one day, presumably who had not had such formal training.⁵⁴⁵

Despite changing expectations for farm women, many writers agreed that the "servant girl question," and all of the advice given, did not apply as well to the unique conditions of hired girls on the farm. One writer, a Mrs. H.M. Blackfan of Bartley, Nebraska, touched on this very issue. "The servant girl question is very interesting to me," she wrote, "but I sometimes think it is based too much on the relations of city mistress and maid to prove of practical benefit to farmers' wives and daughters."⁵⁴⁶ The author offered her own suggestions, based on her experience working as a hired girl. She believed that keeping a close relationship between the mistress and the hired girl made all of the difference in the relationship, as "I think that I have experienced a thrill of pleasure which is unknown to the mistress who places a wide gulf

⁵⁴³ In her analysis of Rhoda Emery's diaries and papers, Pamela Riney-Kehrberg noted that "as much as she needed her children's wages, Rhoda's mother believed that domestic labor was socially inappropriate for her daughters," and that the only profession her daughters could hold was teaching. See Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm*, 98.

⁵⁴⁴ Radke-Moss, 156

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., 156-157.

⁵⁴⁶ "My Experience," *Prairie Farmer* 66 (April 7, 1894), 1894.

between herself and her handmaiden.”⁵⁴⁷ Another advice writer concurred, claiming, “it is always good policy, if nothing more, to be courteous to servants, to recognize little voluntary acts of politeness on their part. Done in the right way it never makes a rule less stringent, but only less galling. And it is always the worst possible policy to scold.”⁵⁴⁸ Friendliness and a good relationship with clearly defined boundaries could help alleviate the servant girl problem.

Other women wrote into farm journals asking for advice on how to handle their hired help. In a letter to the “Fireside” section of the *Western Rural*, Lena Lewis of Glenwood, Iowa asked, “I wish some friends of the Fireside would tell me how they manage their hired girls. I have had to keep one for the past year, and I am tired of it. Should I complain when I see my best dishes broken; when they help themselves to my hair pins and tooth brush as if they were their own; when they stay away until late Monday mornings, and go out at least one afternoon in each week?”⁵⁴⁹ According to Mrs. Lewis, her hired help performed poorly and shirked responsibilities at her place of work. In response a few weeks later, “M.P.M.” from Lebanon, Oregon wrote, “I fully sympathize with Lena Lewis in her trials with hired girls. My worst trouble is to get them to be kind to the children. I have six, and of course it takes tact and patience to get along with them, but I try to treat a hired girl as one of the family, allowing her as much liberty about going, etc. as I take myself, and I only ask fidelity and kindness in return.”⁵⁵⁰ By treating a servant girl like her own child, the letter-writer found that she could better control the terms of her service.

When kindness and empathy would not work, some advisors came up with more creative means to end the hired girl problem. In an article called “Co-operative Home Building,” the writer described a plan for multiple families to join together into one large home and pool

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁸ “Servant Girls,” *Western Rural* 21 (May 19, 1883), 164.

⁵⁴⁹ “Societies—Hired Girls,” *Western Rural* 14 (April 15, 1876), 126.

⁵⁵⁰ “For the Fireside,” *Western Rural* 14 (May 27, 1876), 174.

resources. “In such homes will be found a solution of the servant girl question,” he wrote of such cooperatives, “and a boon for women whose burdens will be so completely lifted by their introduction and by scientific appliances and modern skill afforded with them that better living will certainly be the result.”⁵⁵¹ Another suggestion was to stock the kitchen with classic books, “taking the place of trashy novels usually to be found in the hands of domestics,” to better educate the hired help in more proper means.⁵⁵² But above all, according to one writer, the servant girl problem existed “because women derive so much pleasure from discussing the subject.”⁵⁵³ Max Adeler, the author, noted, “place two women together, and, it makes no difference where the conversation starts from, it will be perfectly certain to work around to the hired girl question before many minutes have elapsed.”⁵⁵⁴ If women put less time into discussing the subject, perhaps it would not be so prevalent.

The servant girl question, or hired girl problem, related to Carrie, Mary, Addie, and Rhoda in different ways. Carrie was herself a hired girl, but seemed to be more like a family member. She moved from Michigan to Champaign County, Illinois with the Franciscos, and after she was married, she remained neighbors with Mrs. Francisco, who was widowed in the meantime.⁵⁵⁵ Rhoda’s family employed hired help at various points, and she had problems with the servant. She disapproved of the way the hired girl worked in their home, feeling the girl did not do the work well enough. Rhoda specifically criticized her parent’s hired help on her cooking skills, as Rhoda was disappointed in the way the girl was unable to satisfy Helen, who was

⁵⁵¹ “Co-operative Home Building,” *Western Rural and American Stockman* 32 (April 26, 1894), 264.

⁵⁵² “Books in the Kitchen,” *Western Rural and Livestock Weekly* (November 12, 1896), 1495.

⁵⁵³ “The Hired Girl,” *Rochester Post*, October 11, 1873.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁵ Edward Davis Family, Year: 1880; Census Place: *Philo, Champaign, Illinois*; Roll: 180; Family History Film: 1254180; Page: 226D; Enumeration District: 018; Image: 0013. Ancestry.com and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 1880 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010. Accessed 11 April 2013.

recovering from child birth.⁵⁵⁶ Mary Pascoe never mentioned hired help, but neighbors and extended family helped out frequently.

As hired labor, Carrie Markle's diary was most relevant to the servant girl question, but no such problems existed in Carrie's estimation. She seemed to have had a good relationship with the family for which she worked. Besides that, she also worked as a teacher, which took up a considerable amount of time, and she participated in other activities outside of the home. Carrie wrote in her diary about the daily work that she did, but also made mention that she "commenced taking drawing lessons" in August of 1866.⁵⁵⁷ Prescriptive literature writers generally looked down upon artistic skills as useless, although many institutions of higher education taught them.⁵⁵⁸ While Carrie would not have believed she would make a living at art or drawing, the lessons might have taken her time and attention away from other tasks, but at the same time would have enriched her as a woman.

Addie Crouch also spent some time on artistic pursuits. On October 13, 1882, she wrote, "this evening after school I took a music lesson. I like music real well."⁵⁵⁹ Addie taught at the time, so music was not a potential profession. She did, however, begin another occupation toward the end of her diary, that of sewing clothing to sell. Joan Jensen noted that "dressmakers were highly skilled professionals, well paid, and in demand," and Addie tapped into that potential by hiring out as a seamstress.⁵⁶⁰ She mentioned sewing and selling garments multiple times in the last year of her diary entries. In June of 1885 she wrote, "have cut three dresses," then a few days later recorded, "Deal paid me \$40 for making the shirts first money I have

⁵⁵⁶ Rhoda Emery, April 21, 1890.

⁵⁵⁷ Carrie Markle, August 10, 1866.

⁵⁵⁸ Andrea Radke-Moss noted, "music also played a major role in the level of student gentrification...musical skills were an important representation of refinement." See Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch*, 159.

⁵⁵⁹ Addie Crouch, October 13, 1882.

⁵⁶⁰ Jensen, *Calling This Place Home*, 62-63.

earned for my sewing.”⁵⁶¹ The fact that Addie wrote this showed the pride she had in earning her own money for something that she like to do and could do well.

Rhoda Emery helped support herself and her family throughout her life, and as mentioned earlier, had purchased farm land to help achieve that goal. In September of 1894 she recorded, “the crops on my farm were quite good this year.”⁵⁶² Like Addie, Rhoda attached a sense of weight to the accomplishment, but in a different way. For Rhoda, the act of selling crops and supporting herself “makes me shiver and feel so old.”⁵⁶³ At the age of 22, Rhoda had resigned to being a teacher and single woman for the rest of her life, and farming and selling her crops just added to the level of maturity and responsibility she felt. Rhoda’s diary often took on a world-weary tone, as if the weight of her duties to herself, her job, and the family depressed her at times. Even a triumph, such as having a successful harvest and sale from her land, still brought home the reality of her position in life and in her family, as caretaker and provider.

Women earning money, whether through teaching or some other trade, brought up some interesting implications for the family and for girls’ independence. Once earned, what did girls do with their money? Carrie, Addie, and Rhoda all had some power over their spending, making choices to use their earnings. Among the many other negative aspects of girls, according to much prescriptive literature, was their tendency toward frivolousness with money. “The young man’s reason for not marrying, says an exchange, is that girls are so extravagant and costly. This has been the regulation story for years,” wrote one author, attempting to change this perception.⁵⁶⁴ But by going to work for themselves, as Carrie, Addie, and Rhoda did, girls showed “a much

⁵⁶¹ Addie Crouch, June 20, 1885. The diary states forty dollars, but that would have been a very sizeable sum of money. It is possible that Addie meant four dollars or perhaps forty cents.

⁵⁶² Rhoda Emery, September 10, 1894.

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ “A Defense of the Girls,” *Champaign County Herald*, May 16, 1883.

more useful tendency than the young men.”⁵⁶⁵ According to this optimistic author, “they [girls] are seeking work and supporting themselves, in most instances with better judgment and more courage than is displayed by the average young man.”⁵⁶⁶ Although this seemed like a plea for more independence for girls, due to their responsibility, the real motive of the author was made clear with the ending line, “getting married can be resumed again some time, if the young men will cultivate economical habits and make it possible for the young women to support husbands.”⁵⁶⁷ Men needed to improve themselves in order for women to go back to giving them support, rather than doing the supporting themselves.

Even if girls were not making money to be the breadwinners in marriage, before getting married, girls had to learn to manage their finances, presumably to be better wives in the future. Keeping track of spending would help in this goal. One advisor noted, “the daughter who desires to cultivate economy, the housewife who wants to be frugal and draw as little as possible from her husband’s earnings, should keep a diary of daily expenditures. Those who have never made the experiment would be surprised to find how the keeping of an expense account promotes economy.”⁵⁶⁸ The duty of the wife was to be responsible with money, and girls had to learn this trait.

Carrie Markle did not write much about what money she spent. She did record getting some new clothing items, as mentioned in the previous chapter, but did not dwell much on the cost or the thought that went into spending hard-earned money. Minnie Moon provided a financial ledger in her diary, which included such things as tuition expenses, but did not record many feelings about her own money either. In her typical care-free fashion, Addie Crouch did

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ “Keeping Diaries,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, January 5, 1872.

write about some of the things that she purchased, and these were mainly personal items for herself. She ordered a silk dress, a very extravagant purchase at the time.⁵⁶⁹ She also wrote on one occasion, “I went up town and...I bought me a gold watch \$30.”⁵⁷⁰ Both of these items were expensive and for her only. Addie had been earning money for several years by this point, and she never mentioned spending her money on her family or contributing to the family economy, other than a loan she mentioned giving her father which was paid back. Addie fit into the more frivolous category of girls, interested in fancy clothing and accessories on which to spend earnings.

Rhoda Emery, as usual, was very much the opposite of Addie Crouch. Rhoda clearly demonstrated her dedication to helping her family both through physical and financial contributions. She even gave up her dream of owning a bicycle in order to buy a buggy for her parents, justifying it by deciding that her parents needed it more. Whenever Rhoda mentioned her money, it was usually in context of not having enough, although she did occasionally purchase items for herself, such as a new hat.⁵⁷¹ On June 8, 1892 she wrote, “I need some sewing to do but my finances are in such a state as not to admit of my buying anything.”⁵⁷² A certain amount of material goods were necessary for a girl to function, though, and Rhoda worried about how she would manage to get what she needed. She made a laundry list of her debts in one diary entry, recording, “Pa and I paid Mr. Button \$100. I paid Mr. Wagoner \$5 for the M.E. church, and have sent Mr. Stevens \$4 for rye I bought this fall. I must send Grandma \$6 for what I bought at Leet and Knowlton’s and then I will be strapped again.”⁵⁷³ When she earned money, most of it went out to settling her outstanding debts. She went on to add, “I called on Mr.

⁵⁶⁹ Addie Crouch, September 27, 1884.

⁵⁷⁰ Ibid., August 30, 1884.

⁵⁷¹ Rhoda Emery, June 29, 1894.

⁵⁷² Ibid., June 8, 1892.

⁵⁷³ Ibid., November 6, 1893.

Chapman Saturday and got my certificate renewed, a school register and some school books,” as work had to continue to pay the next round of obligations.⁵⁷⁴ Even the good crops she had during harvest of 1894, which were mentioned earlier, went toward settling debts, as she recorded, “I hope to pay with these [the crops] the note that is due this fall.”⁵⁷⁵ Perpetually in debt, the Emerys constantly worried about the state of their finances and managing their obligations. With a job and a farm, Rhoda took on much of that weight for her family.

Girls with the capacity to earn their own money sometimes were able to exercise their discretion over where their earnings went, but sometimes not. Addie purchased what she wanted and helped her parents through loans, whereas Rhoda took on much of the financial responsibility of her home, presumably on her own volition, but most likely through the extreme emotional appeals of her mother and father. Had Rhoda not had a family on the farm to worry about, she might have lived a much different lifestyle. Addie Crouch more exemplified the “girl problem,” as she fit the profile of the frivolous girl that did not manage money responsibly. Rhoda Emery, on the other hand, had the capacity to intelligently handle her own finances, but through familial obligations, remained in debt.

Rhoda in some ways could have been the forerunner of what was known as “The Coming Girl,” mentioned several times throughout the prescriptive literature. “The Coming Girl,” according to one article, “will vote, will be of some use in the world, will cook her own food, will earn her own living, and will not die an old maid.”⁵⁷⁶ She also, “will preside with equal grace at the piano or washboard, will spin more yarn for the house than for the street, will not despise her plainly clad mother, her poor relations, or the hand of an honest worker.”⁵⁷⁷ Rhoda

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ Ibid., September 10, 1894.

⁵⁷⁶ “The Coming Girl,” *Church Union*, reprinted in *Grant County Herald*, December 22, 1868.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

had the capacity to meet all of these requirements, although she never married and presumably voted when she was able by the passage of the nineteenth amendment. “The Coming Girl” was the ideal type, and according to the qualifications, clearly a rural woman. The obligations that rural girls took on, though, like Rhoda’s dedication to her family, hampered some of their ability to fully aspire to the position. Overall, “The Coming Girl” would “seek to glorify her Maker and to enjoy mentally his works. Duty will be her aim and life a living reality.”⁵⁷⁸ “The Coming Girl” was a bit too good to be true. Even as young women strove toward the ideal, complications from life, such as work, family, and relationships got in the way, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁵⁷⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5. SOCIAL INTERACTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS

Rural girls in the late nineteenth century participated in many social activities and had many same and opposite sex friendships and relationships. The tight-knit rural community allowed all members to know the comings and goings of the other families and individuals in town and country. Girls, especially, were at the heart of many social and community activities. As work and responsibilities to the farm and home circumscribed girls' lives, community functions were some of the only means for girls to interact with others. In her description of rural Australia, Kathryn Hunter mentioned the extensive descriptions of social activities in diaries, such as "sewing groups, dances and fundraising concerts, as well as markets and sales."⁵⁷⁹ These events, and more, took place in the rural Midwest, and Carrie, Mary, Addie, and Rhoda all took part. Like school, social activities helped farm girls to meet and connect with others their own age and form bonds that could carry on through adolescence and adulthood.

Historian Grey Osterud found that social activities naturally transitioned into courting and marital relationships, and due to the public nature of these activities, family and friends played a big role in helping young people make decisions about marriage.⁵⁸⁰ As girls entered the outside world and came into contact with others, they began to explore friendships which might naturally progress into more serious relationships and marriage. Other than Rhoda, all of the girls in this study married men they met in the course of community life, and most stayed in the immediate area as adults, raising their children in the same place they had grown up. The connections the girls made at this pivotal point in their lives proved to be extremely important in growing up and moving on as adults. Due to the expansive entries in their diaries, Addie Crouch

⁵⁷⁹ Kathryn M. Hunter, *Father's Right Hand Man: Women on Australia's Family Farms in the Age of Federation, 1880s-1920s* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004), 38-39.

⁵⁸⁰ Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 95.

and Rhoda Emery's accounts provided much more detailed descriptions of social activities and courting. At only sixteen years old, Mary wrote about little other than school and work. Carrie Markle recorded such truncated entries that it is difficult to learn much about her reactions to the social activities and relationships that she recorded. Despite this, all of the girls at least mentioned church and social outings in which they participated.

Church activities encompassed a large portion of many girls' weeks, as religious culture was extremely important in many parts of the Midwest. All of the girls attended weekly church services and Sunday school, and most used the opportunity to meet with friends and socialize. Carrie Markle wrote little about her church experiences, simply that she attended services and Sabbath School, once they had been established in her community.⁵⁸¹ Church seemed to have made little impression on Carrie, as she portrayed it as just something that she did weekly, like many girls her age. In contrast, church factored heavily in Mary Pascoe's life. Mary frequently mentioned church attendance, sometimes several times a week. Religion factored heavily in the Pascoe's community. As a group of Cornish immigrants, the Pascoe's and others formed a Primitive Methodist Church in Grant County, Wisconsin.⁵⁸²

Mary wrote about church and Sunday School regularly, as well as other meetings in the church. On Friday, March 3, 1871, she wrote, "I went to weekly chape in the evening...they are having a revival there."⁵⁸³ Two days later on Sunday, snow and rain kept Mary at home, although "the boys went to Wesley chape this evening to meeting."⁵⁸⁴ The idea of revival played an important role in Mary's church, as she rejoiced when new people came to church. On

⁵⁸¹ Carrie Markle, manuscript diaries, 1864-1867, Special Collections, Box 90, Champaign County Historical Society, Urbana, Illinois, May 28, 1865.

⁵⁸² Dr. Stephen DeWitt Stephens, Introduction . Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, manuscript diary, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, 4-5.

⁵⁸³ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, manuscript diary, 1871, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin, March 3, 1871.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., March 5, 1871.

November 19 she recorded, “the church was full some joined the church today or came to class willing.”⁵⁸⁵ Overall, Mary took a positive tone when writing about church. On April 16, 1871 she recorded, “The weather is favorable. It is my birthday but I have not enjoyed myself very much though I went to Sunday School and church.”⁵⁸⁶ Something caused her birthday to be amiss, but church was not part of it. A week later she wrote, “The calm Sabbath day commenced with its usual sweetness,” indicating that she generally enjoyed Sundays and the church-going experience.⁵⁸⁷

Mary’s religiosity played an important part in her life, and she took her faith very seriously. Addie Crouch, on the other hand, used church meetings mainly as a way to see her friends and socialize, including meeting potential boyfriends. In most of her Sunday church-going entries, she wrote about who she went with or who she saw there, rather than the content of the service. Addie received visitors frequently on Sundays, then went to church with them in the evening. For example, on September 4, 1881 she wrote, “Mr. Johnston was here a while so was Hiland they both wanted me to go to church at Nugents Grove with them. I went with Mr. J had a very pleasant time.”⁵⁸⁸ Addie mentioned Hiland often as a friend or date, depending on the day, and Addie went to church with him regularly, or in one case, did not go to church, as on one February day when Addie recorded, “Hiland came home with me we did not go to church this P.M. He stayed all day what a boy he is.”⁵⁸⁹ Other boys wanted to attend church with Addie as well. An Emet asked her specifically to go to church with him, as well as Elmer, about whom Addie wrote at length in her diary.⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁵ Ibid., November 19, 1871.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid., April 16, 1871.

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid., April 23, 1871.

⁵⁸⁸ Addie A. Crouch, manuscript diaries, 1881-1885, D9 f. 4-6, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, September 4, 1881.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., February 17, 1884.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid., December 13, 1884, November 15, 1885.

Church activities also allowed Addie to provoke trouble with boys. Addie was extremely flirtatious, and enjoyed the attention of multiple young men at once. On September 2, 1882, she recorded, “Burton and Donahue were here this eve we went to church with them. Len Trefy called Burton to account for coming home with me from the sociable.”⁵⁹¹ While at church, Addie’s multiple suitors came to a confrontation over some unmentioned slight. Addie also had an ongoing relationship and conflict with a particular young man named Trusdell. Trusdell consistently worked to win Addie’s affection, but Addie herself never made a firm commitment. In fact, she seemed to enjoy teasing him, making him work for any positive feelings that she might show for him. Addie and Trusdell’s story will be further elaborated upon, but several of the more detailed interactions that Addie wrote about in her diary happened at or around church. For example, on March 11, 1883, she recorded, “Trusdell came up this afternoon he stayed till evening meeting he ask me to go to church with him but I told him ‘not for five dollars.’”⁵⁹² Despite her protestations, Trusdell continued to pursue Addie to church, as she wrote, “he was determined that I should not go but stay at home with him and I would not do that so I went to church with Pa and he went down town with us.”⁵⁹³ She eventually must have felt badly about the argument, as she lamented, “I hope he will not be mad because I told him to go home but it would not have been right for him to stay.”⁵⁹⁴ Addie continued her back and forth with Trusdell at church, even causing a scene at one point.

Part of Addie’s flirtations with Trusdell involved another girl, Mina. Mina liked Trusdell, but he wanted to be with Addie. Addie enjoyed the attention and made sure to attract it whenever

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., September 2, 1882.

⁵⁹² Ibid., March 11, 1883.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

she could. On one particular occasion, Trusdell disrupted church service in order to flirt with Addie. She recorded the incident in great detail:

Trusdell was here he sits two seats back of Mina Amanda and me. He wanted me to come and sit with him but of course I would not. Then when some one was praying he stepped over the seat so he was just behind me and of all the soft actions you ever saw and I stood it because Mina was there and it was fun to see her how she acted he put a flower (lilac) in my hat that he had wore in his. And I am always going to keep it in my book at this place.⁵⁹⁵

Addie frequently described different boys as “soft” in her diary entries, and it is not clear exactly what that meant, only that it was a negative for Addie. Despite his “soft” actions, Addie evidently enjoyed the attention very much. She vowed to keep the flower in her diary, and she did, as the diary still contains a dried flower and the page is stained in its outline.

Addie’s church flirtations continued with Trusdell and others. She wrote about a friend John who was visiting, and he “came up and we went to church in the evening he stayed here till three.”⁵⁹⁶ Whether or not they had a good time was unclear, as she continued, “I know one thing I never will sit up that late again.”⁵⁹⁷ Even when not dealing with boys, Addie still caused trouble at church. She did not like a particular pastor at one point, and she recorded, “the preacher was there he seems to inspire me to act as mean as I can and I can’t help it.”⁵⁹⁸ Again, she did not write down exactly what she had done, but she obviously committed an unkind act. Addie’s church actions were characteristic of her behavior in most social situations. She craved attention, and used church as a place to socialize and meet with her peers.

Rhoda Emery did not write as much about church as some of the other girls, and what she did record was much different. On one weekend, Rhoda returned home from her boarding place and went to church with her sisters. She wrote, “we four girls went to church in Oronoco to-day.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., May 23, 1883.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., December 16, 1883.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid., January 6, 1883.

Pa took us down but would not come into church.”⁵⁹⁹ She declined to explain why her father did not come into the church, which would have been an interesting window into the religious habits of her family, but whatever her father’s religious leanings, Rhoda seemed to devote serious attention to church activities. Earlier that year, she wrote in more detail about a church service. She recorded, “I went to church to-day. The text was: ‘Give us this day our daily bread.’”⁶⁰⁰ By noting the subject of the sermon, she showed that she paid attention and cared about what had been said. Her next comment added to the overall picture gained of Rhoda from her diary, that of a timid and nervous person. She wrote, “I hid my face behind a lady’s bonnet so as not to see the minister’s face and enjoyed the sermon very much. It is foolish, I suppose, to take such an aversion to faces but his looks to me so unkind.”⁶⁰¹ Rhoda so disliked the visage of the preacher that she had to hide from him, noting that the act was not exactly normal.

As often as church attendance was mentioned in girls’ diaries, so too were other community activities. Closely related to church was the temperance movement. The temperance movement began in the 1840s and gathered much support throughout the country, turning to a more religious focus in the 1870s.⁶⁰² Women took a particularly active role in temperance, as community leaders considered women extremely important to policing the morals of their families and communities.⁶⁰³ Temperance factored heavily in the lives of Addie Crouch and her family, as well as the people of Linn County and the people of Iowa. The state passed its first prohibition law in 1855, and the issue would remain in the public eye for many years after.⁶⁰⁴ In the list of institutions that Central City had, as listed in the *Central City News-Letter*, the only

⁵⁹⁹ Rhoda J. Emery, manuscript diaries, 1889-1894, Rhoda J. Emery and Family Papers, Manuscripts Collection Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota, July 10, 1892.

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., February 14, 1892.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² William C. Steel, *Woman’s Temperance Movement* (New York: National Temperance Society and Publication House, 1874), 7-8.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 3-4.

⁶⁰⁴ Dorothy Schweider, *Iowa: The Middle Land* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996), 79.

negative quantity was “no saloons (praise God).”⁶⁰⁵ That happened to be written in 1889, eight years after Addie Crouch recorded her participation in the temperance group. The temperance organization of Prairieburg (or Central City, as it is not clear from the diary where the group met), was a mixed-gender group. At various times, Addie mentioned that her father and brother accompanied her to the meetings.

Addie herself was very strongly against the use of alcohol. Throughout her diary, she mentioned on several occasions close acquaintances or family members imbibing and her disapproval of such actions. Her brother Roddie got drunk one evening, as previously mentioned, and Addie prayed that it would never happen again.⁶⁰⁶ Another time, a male friend, Link, was intoxicated on New Year’s Day, and Addie wrote, “I felt sorry for Carrie,” Link’s girlfriend.⁶⁰⁷ Addie and her community looked down upon alcohol consumption, and those that did over-indulge were ostracized.

Her strong temperate feelings aside, Addie seemed to enjoy the social aspects of temperance meetings. She attended temperance meeting every Saturday night throughout the year 1881 and took on a leadership role in the group, even if it was involuntary. She wrote, “we went to Temperance meeting it was elections of officers and I am secretary and I don’t like it a bit.”⁶⁰⁸ She also participated in some of the programs, although she did not like that either.⁶⁰⁹ Sometimes not much exciting happened at the meetings, as on the date when Addie recorded, “it did not amount to anything” about the meeting.⁶¹⁰ Other times, though, the gatherings could be quite raucous, as Addie worriedly wrote, “I went to the temperance meeting and such a time they

⁶⁰⁵ Untitled advertisement, *Central City News-Letter*, July 11, 1889.

⁶⁰⁶ Addie Crouch, September 22, 1883.

⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, January 1, 1883.

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, June 4, 1881.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, March 5, 1881.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, May 21, 1881.

almost had a fight. I did not think it looked well.”⁶¹¹ Although she did not record the cause behind the fight, it must have made quite an impression on her. Addie’s weekly attendance faded after 1881, but she still held her staunch anti-alcohol views.

Rhoda Emery also spoke out against alcohol, but did not have a regular, organized venue to express such sentiments. She did once write, “I went to a temperance lecture last night. It was by an old man and I liked it.”⁶¹² Other than that mention, she never wrote at length about any formal temperance society. She made her feelings about imbibing clear, though, in one disturbing incident she witnessed at a carnival. She wrote, “I was dreadfully frightened to-night by a drunken man who came up quite close around the house. I am afraid a good many poor women will be miserable tonight.”⁶¹³ Many people throughout the nineteenth century held the expectation that a drunken man would scare women. Prescriptive literature frequently spoke about the evils of drunkenness, and the primary characteristic of a bad husband was excess drinking. A woman who married a drinker, according to most writers, was doomed to a life of abuse and sorrow.

The temperance movement played a large role in many Midwestern communities and offered a way for women to become more involved in social and political activities.⁶¹⁴ Mary Pascoe was not involved in temperance throughout the duration of her diary, the year 1871, but an added notation at the end of the notebook, dated 1916, described a social engagement with the group the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). She recorded, “WCTU met with Mrs. Wise, a very pleasant evening was spent scripture reading and program by Mrs. Cape a fine address on the Crusade given by Mrs. Smith and a sweet and beautiful Christmas story or poem

⁶¹¹ Ibid., December 3, 1881.

⁶¹² Rhoda Emery, January 27, 1890.

⁶¹³ Ibid., February 12, 1892.

⁶¹⁴ See Steel, *Woman’s Temperance Movement*, 48-53 for information on women’s early participation in temperance in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa.

by Mrs. Cueppa which described her own self going to church in a lovely silk and fur cloak of which she was very proud.”⁶¹⁵ The story said nothing about temperance and made no political statements about the use of alcohol, but showed the very social nature of the organization as a chance for women to get together and enjoy an evening of sharing.

Church activities and temperance societies provided social interaction within a very structured environment. Girls attended these events with their families, and although they may have had the chance to meet friends and members of the opposite sex, these meetings took place in the presence of authority figures. These authority figures limited many opportunities for mingling romantically. Other activities, though, allowed for a much freer atmosphere for experimentation with the opposite sex.

Dances and parties were such activities. The girls attended dances throughout the spans of their diaries, and each took a different perspective on the social events. Sometimes dances and parties seemed to have been attended by adults, and at other times, they were gatherings of young adults only. Addie Crouch viewed socials as a way to get to know boys and play different suitors off of each other. Rhoda Emery, on the other hand, saw parties as nerve-wracking events, full of anxiety over social expectations and parental authority. Addie’s social experiences helped her gain confidence with young men, while Rhoda’s brought only angst.

In Addie’s life, parties and social gatherings were a very high priority. Who she went with and how long she stayed were especially important, as she took great pleasure in making others jealous. On the day of one particular dance she wrote, “True came to ask me to go to the dance. I told him I thought it was rather late in the day.”⁶¹⁶ Following closely to social prescriptions of the day, Addie had to think carefully about whether or not she would accept a

⁶¹⁵ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, December 21, 1916(?). The date of the entry was a bit ambiguous, but the most likely date was 1916.

⁶¹⁶ Addie Crouch, February 14, 1881.

date made at such late notice. In the end, though, Addie chose to attend the dance with True. On other occasions, suitors pursued her quite aggressively. Charlie DeWoody, one of her many male friends, worked hard at first to get Addie's affection. On one night, after a dance, she recorded, "DeWoody ask to come home with me but he didn't."⁶¹⁷ That particular occasion did not lead to much, but later that year, Addie and Charlie were supposed to have another date. She wrote, "Charlie DeWoody came home with me and ask me to go to the dance tomorrow night and I said I'd go."⁶¹⁸ The next day, though, did not go as planned. Addie menacingly recorded, "I expected Charlie DeWoody to come for me to go to the dance but he did not come. I bet (excuse the slang) he will get paid for it to if he has not a good excuse...Charlie I vow vengeance on you."⁶¹⁹ Being stood up for a date caused Addie a great deal of emotional distress.

Rhoda Emery too felt emotional distress over dances, but for a much different reason. She was asked to a dance and accepted, then had second thoughts. "Oh dear! Oh dear, what shall I do!" she wrote, "Bud Sheldon stopped this morning and asked me if I would go to the dance at Hartz's tonight and I said I would. I don't know him well at all and Pa will be mad and I hadn't ought to go."⁶²⁰ Rhoda was so upset over the invitation she wrote, "Oh darn it, dash it, confound it, oh, oh, oh! I wish it would rain pitchforks, bombshells and rotten eggs so I would have to stay home."⁶²¹

Why was Rhoda so upset? She mentioned that her father would be angry with her for going with this boy, whom she did not know well enough. Parental influence held a great deal of sway over Rhoda, who worked hard to gain the favor of her parents and often failed, especially in her father's eyes. Also, she continued, "it will ruin my reputation to go such places, and if I go

⁶¹⁷ Ibid., January 28, 1881.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., December 25, 1881.

⁶¹⁹ Ibid., December 26, 1881.

⁶²⁰ Rhoda Emery, June 2, 1890.

⁶²¹ Ibid.

once, how can I help going again.”⁶²² Rhoda’s conception of what would ruin her reputation differed greatly from Addie’s. Addie had no problem going out with different boys, even taking the initiative when she was slighted, but Rhoda’s strict sense of duty to her family kept her from being able to enjoy an evening at a dance with a boy, even calling herself “disgraceful” for accepting his invitation.⁶²³

Rhoda ended up not going to the dance, as she recorded the next day, “I didn’t go. It did rain all night not pitchforks and pothooks but just a quiet steady rain all night and all day today.”⁶²⁴ The pressure of appeasing her father was too great to resist. Addie Crouch, although much freer than Rhoda, still had some parental influence in her life, whether she paid attention or not. As mentioned previously, Addie violated her parents’ wishes several times and went to events they had asked her not to go. She also agreed to go to a dance with Charlie DeWoody, although her father “talked terrible [sic] about him before he knew who he was.”⁶²⁵ Addie’s parents were also present at some of the social engagements she attended. At one party, she wrote, “Pa and Ma are going to help... We had a nice time at the party,” although afterwards, “we went home (that is started for it) before twelve then I went to the dance and had a very good time got home at five.”⁶²⁶ After leaving the party with her parents, she went and spent the whole night out with her friends.

But Addie did keep her responsibilities in mind sometimes when making plans. She considered what else she had planned, and her own work and home life, when deciding to accept a date or not. On October 20, 1881, she wrote, “Ollie asked me to go to a festival up to Mr.

⁶²² Ibid.

⁶²³ Ibid.

⁶²⁴ Ibid., June 10, 1890.

⁶²⁵ Addie Crouch, December 25, 1881.

⁶²⁶ Ibid., January 28, 1881.

Fouriers. I told him I was going to a dance tomorrow night and thought I had not better go.”⁶²⁷

Although she eventually agreed to go, she still weighed the fact that she already had made plans for the week. On another occasion she recorded, “John came for me to go to a dance at Parsons hall but I could not go for three nights is too many and teach.”⁶²⁸ She felt that she could not keep up with her teaching duties if she went out too much. These isolated instances of judgment showed that Addie did take responsibility for herself, but in a limited fashion, as having fun remained a huge priority in her life.

Like Addie, girls found many ways to have fun, both in organized group activities and through informal settings with friends. Carrie Markle was quite social, although she did not record many details about her engagements. She belonged to a Lodge, possibly the Good Templars’ Lodge, although she was never specific when discussing it. Many groups of a political nature were not open to women, but according to Grey Osterud, “only the Good Templars’ Lodge, a moral reform group, admitted women to equal membership.”⁶²⁹ Carrie was supportive of the Lodge and on one occasion wrote, “went to the party at Parkers for the benefit of the Lodge with Dan.”⁶³⁰ Even her social activities helped to further the goals of the organization to which she belonged. Carrie also participated in socials and parties, including a New Year’s party in which she “got home at 4 o clock in the morning,” one of the only times she mentioned staying out into the early morning.⁶³¹ On one particularly festive occasion, Carrie wrote, “attended the co. fair at Urbana with Mr. and Mrs. Francisco had our dinner on the fair ground. Saw the Mamoth Queen (weighed 350).”⁶³² Carrie went out with friends and socialized on a

⁶²⁷ Ibid., October 21, 1881.

⁶²⁸ Ibid., January 9, 1883.

⁶²⁹ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 249.

⁶³⁰ Carrie Markle, November 22, 1866.

⁶³¹ Ibid., January 1, 1867.

⁶³² Ibid., September 13, 1866.

regular basis, adding to her normal schedule of household and teaching responsibilities. She even played chess, which may have helped engage her intellectually.⁶³³

Although Mary Pascoe did not attend dances or parties, she did engage in some social activities. The events she attended were community gatherings and usually had a service component to them. Mary mentioned a “cherry party,” an “apple bee,” and a “sewing bee” that she or her family attended, which may have been get-togethers in which women completed tasks together.⁶³⁴ In a more social gathering, Mary and her friends also worked to prepare for the fourth of July celebration. On June 30, 1871, she wrote, “in the evening a party of girls called here to make rosettes for the cavalry men there were ten or eleven here.”⁶³⁵ On the day of the event, she recorded, “we had a picnic...cavalry men and the Sunday schools marched from the church we had a regular feast there were quite a number there we also had a fun firework in the evening.”⁶³⁶ Again, the social function took on a community element, with everyone from the church joining in.

Other times, Mary spent time with her family and friends going out and visiting. In January, she went sleigh riding with friends who had “a big sleigh load,” indicating many girls and boys participated.⁶³⁷ In warmer weather, Mary and her friends traveled into town and “had our likenesses taken.”⁶³⁸ Young women often gave their pictures to boys they were interested in courting. She also encountered baseball players, but did not enjoy that experience as well, due to the fact that the players were drunk.⁶³⁹ Mary’s youthful sensibilities about such things caused her social anxiety when confronted with drunkenness.

⁶³³ Ibid., July 5, 1865.

⁶³⁴ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, June 22, August 3, November 16, 1871.

⁶³⁵ Ibid., June 30, 1871.

⁶³⁶ Ibid., July 4, 1871.

⁶³⁷ Ibid., January 8, 1871.

⁶³⁸ Ibid., August 12, 1871.

⁶³⁹ Ibid., July 9, 1871.

Although Mary was younger than the other girls surveyed, she still enjoyed a vital social life, but one not focused on relationships with the opposite sex. For Mary, having fun had less to do with impressing boys and was more about useful, community-centered activities. Addie Crouch, in contrast, wrote extensively about the many young men she visited and attended social functions with. Addie's social circle included many young men and women, and as independent young adults, they participated in a variety of different activities, some community-based and some with a broader focus. For example, Addie mentioned several clubs, including a Lodge (again, most likely the Good Templars' Lodge), political rallies, and even pseudo-scientific lectures she attended with friends.

In 1881, along with the temperance society, Addie also belonged to something called the Reform Club. Like the temperance society, the Reform Club was most likely another abstinence group, as in one entry Addie wrote, "went to the Reform Club tonight there signed the pledge," presumably a temperance pledge.⁶⁴⁰ Addie and her family supported the Reform Club in various ways. She and her brother Roddie attended a benefit sociable for the "R. Club," as she called it, and while there, Addie managed to make connections among the young men in attendance. She recorded, "I went to supper four times (with Herb F., Tom O. Mr. J. and I have forgot the other one) had a good time they got \$10.10."⁶⁴¹ In the process of raising money for her club, Addie also had several "dates."

Addie also wrote about her lodge meetings on several occasions. She held a leadership role in the club, which led to some issues with her fellow club members. On October 20, 1883, she grumbled, "I went to the lodge and we had a regular fuss they said Brown had \$7.50 of the

⁶⁴⁰ Addie Crouch, July 23, 1881. Without more specific descriptions, this can be assumed to be an abstinence pledge, or an agreement to not drink alcohol.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid., June 10, 1881.

lodge money and that Nellie and I had not kept the books right.”⁶⁴² The accusation was a serious one. Had Addie been responsible for the missing money, it would have caused quite a problem for her social life. She was vindicated, however, as she wrote several days later, “Brown came up to see about the lodge affairs and we all went over to Abbey’s there found out we were right they wrong.”⁶⁴³ This single anecdote can hardly encapsulate the whole of Addie’s experience in reform movements, but she did play an active role in the groups, whether for strongly held beliefs or for the social opportunities the groups afforded.

Addie may have been more politically inclined than her diary would indicate, as several small entries said more about her political engagement than any of her entries about her club memberships. In one isolated sentence in June of 1882 she recorded, “oh how I hope the voters will do right and that the Amendment will carry.”⁶⁴⁴ The amendment in question was the Iowa Prohibition amendment, which would have banned the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages in the state. The amendment did pass, with an enthusiastic campaign by temperance organizations, but shortly afterward, it was overturned by the state Supreme Court.⁶⁴⁵ Although she could not vote for herself on the issue, Addie still had strong opinions about the politics of the day. In fact, she proved to be quite invested in political discussions. One evening she wrote, “went to a republican speach [sic] this eve and Nell and I had a spat with Mary Klein about politicks [sic].”⁶⁴⁶ Addie and her friends acted politically, despite being denied the right to vote themselves.

⁶⁴² Ibid., October 20, 1883.

⁶⁴³ Ibid., October 23, 1883.

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid., June 27, 1882.

⁶⁴⁵ Johnson Brigham, *Iowa: Its History and Its Foremost Citizens* (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1915), 494-495.

⁶⁴⁶ Addie Crouch, October 25, 1884.

Finally, of all of the events Addie took part in, possibly the most interesting was the lecture series she attended on phrenology. The pseudo-science of phrenology, which involved the reading of the contours of a subject's head in order to ascertain certain character traits, reached a peak in the 1830s and 1840s in the United States. Practical phrenologists travelled the country, giving lectures and demonstrating head-readings. Later in the nineteenth century, phrenology lecturers moved into the rural Midwest and became part of the popular culture.⁶⁴⁷ Addie and her friends took the readings very seriously. At the first lecture she wrote, "we all went to a lecture on phrenology. Mr. Brunion examined Mary Kleins head and he told some pretty rough truths."⁶⁴⁸ Whatever the lecturer told about Mary, Addie seemed to believe it to be true. A few days later, they visited the phrenologist again. Addie noted, "Nell and I had our heads examined."⁶⁴⁹ Addie did not attend the lecture later, which was unfortunate, as "he called for me to come up in the lecture that night to let him examine my head but I was at home ironing. Wish I knew what he would have said."⁶⁵⁰ Although she fulfilled her responsibilities by ironing, she missed out on the reading of her head. The phrenology lecture series highlighted the type of educational entertainment available in the late nineteenth century and the ways in which girls were able to participate.

Addie's less formal socializing took place with her friends, both male and female. She played cards, dominoes, and croquet, went to oyster suppers, concerts, and fairs, and even took in the occasional ball game.⁶⁵¹ She and her friend Elmer "went to Marion to see the Chicago

⁶⁴⁷ John D. Davies, *Phrenology Fad and Science: A 19th-Century American Crusade* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), 30-38.

⁶⁴⁸ Addie Crouch., March 30, 1885.

⁶⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, April 3, 1885.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, March 3, 1881; August 25, September 13, 1882, October 3, 1883, March 18, June 26, 1884; September 5, 1885.

Blue and the Milwaukee St. Paul and Midland boys play ball...had a big time.”⁶⁵² Sometimes the get-togethers got a bit rowdy, like the night of May 2, 1883. Addie wrote, “I went to a party at John De Lanceys and coming [sic] home we run off a bridge near Uncle Wigs and turned the wagon over and threw us all out there was five of us girls and Henry Barnhart. Not one of us said a word. Henry could not get the wagon up so we had to walk home...not one of us was hurt when we got tipped [sic] over,” although they did get hurt after tripping and falling on the walk back.⁶⁵³ The next day, “every one is having a big time about the tip over.”⁶⁵⁴ The recklessness of Addie’s group gave them a good story to talk about later.

As in most aspects of her life, Rhoda Emery was much more measured and cautious in her social interactions. She had many friends and participated in many activities, but Rhoda thought more carefully about how and with whom she spent her time. Rhoda’s community had many social functions, and she frequently attended them. She wrote about a clothes-pin sociable, an Odd-Fellows party, and several occasions of playing games like authors and cinque with her friends.⁶⁵⁵ She mentioned having a good time at these events, despite her more reserved nature. One of the very few times she wrote about really letting go and enjoying herself was a picnic in 1892. She recorded, “the picnic did not start out till about 3:45. We had supper...then boat rides on the lake. I went out twice. It was lots of fun. We started home about ten and got there at nearly one. We had a splendid time and made a number of new acquaintances.”⁶⁵⁶ This entry was out of character for Rhoda, as she generally did not express such a carefree attitude.

⁶⁵² Ibid., July 15, 1884.

⁶⁵³ Ibid., May 2, 1883.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., May 3, 1883.

⁶⁵⁵ Rhoda Emery, May 10, August 2, November 30, 1892, December 27, 1893.

⁶⁵⁶ Ibid., August 2, 1892.

Instead, Rhoda usually showed ambivalence about participating in diversions. Early in her diary she wrote, “there is a sociable in Mazeppa Friday night. Perhaps I shall go.”⁶⁵⁷ Where Addie Crouch would have gone with no hesitation, Rhoda had doubts, although she did end up going. Similarly, she declined to go to a party at another girl’s house because “the invitation came so indirectly that I do not know if I am wanted.”⁶⁵⁸ Rhoda feared that she would go to the party without the proper credentials. She also worried much about what would happen while she was out, like the time that she feared riding home from a circus with someone who she was “afraid he had been drinking.”⁶⁵⁹ She could not even enjoy herself, as she had to be concerned about how she would get home.

Rhoda’s parents and other authority figures in her life also hampered much of her socializing. On December 29, 1889 she wrote, “there was an oyster supper at Ed Nelson’s Tuesday night and the boys came for us to go and we could not. Pa objected and Clara thought the crowd not respectable.”⁶⁶⁰ Rhoda skipped the supper, as her father did not want her to go. She also worried what people would think of her when she did enjoy herself, as when she fretted over accepting a date from a young man she did not know very well. On another occasion she recorded, “no one came to-night so we all went to the sociable. Allen’s expected me to stop there until Sunday but I did not...I saw a number at the sociable that I knew. I am afraid Allen’s will think ill of me.”⁶⁶¹ By doing what she wanted, she risked disappointing someone in her life. She asked permission for everything that she did, which may have gotten tiresome after a while.⁶⁶²

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid., October 23, 1889.

⁶⁵⁸ Ibid., January 8, 1892.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., June 20, 1894.

⁶⁶⁰ Ibid., December 29, 1889.

⁶⁶¹ Ibid., June 24, 1892.

⁶⁶² On June 7, 1894, Rhoda wrote, “we will go if Mr. Martin will consent. Would like to awfully but expect Pa after me.” Not only did she have to get permission from the adults where she boarded, she still had the expectations of her parents as well.

Overall, girls could find fun things to do in just about any circumstance. Parties, picnics, and sociables happened on a regular basis, and young women had the opportunity to attend these events with little to no adult supervision. Other than organized activities, girls also found many ways to entertain themselves. Outdoor activities, like sleigh-riding, games, and even sports helped girls to pass the time with their friends and family. Minnie Moon recorded a particularly active day in the outdoors, writing, “helped the boys hunt pearls, found some. Ate dinner. Shot with the rifle. Went rowing up the river.”⁶⁶³ Minnie also had the opportunity to travel to Chicago for the Columbian Exposition in 1893, where she saw Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show.⁶⁶⁴ Even educational opportunities, like political events and Chautauqs drew girls in with the opportunity for socialization.⁶⁶⁵

Nearly all of these events offered girls the chance to mingle with the opposite sex and even participate in some flirting. This casual opportunity for girls to speak to and tease boys altered the power dynamic between the sexes. With flirtation, girls had the upper hand in the relationship, which allowed them to express themselves in a relatively safe manner. This very expression, though, was at the crux of the “girl problem.” For girls to have such bold attitudes and influence over young men could lead to a generation of cuckolded men, unable to take control and lead their families. Writers of prescriptive literature warned against girls who were too forward with their feelings and gave boys the wrong idea about the kind of relationship they would have.

In most cases, prescriptive literature gave neither men nor women much agency in the flirtation situation. For many authors, men were unable to resist any romantic or sexual overtures

⁶⁶³ Minnie Mae Moon, manuscript diaries, 1892-1895, Moon Family Collection, Box 3, Archives Collection, McLean County Historical Museum, Bloomington, Illinois, August 30, 1893.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid., September, 1893.

⁶⁶⁵ Maude Crooker Diary, 1887-1888. Lucien Bonaparte Crooker Papers, Folder 1, SC 358. Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois.

from women, while at the same time, women's nature forced them to make those overtures. Women had to reign in their natural impulses if they ever hoped to find a good husband. Beatrice Fairfax wrote for the *Boston American*, "the girl who lets every man she likes make light and facile love to her loses her power to kindle high and lofty feelings... The path [to marriage and motherhood] should not be strewn with cheap emotions, light flirtations, and meaningless caresses which express casual desires of a fleeting moment."⁶⁶⁶ Real romance, according to this author, should only happen within the committed relationship of marriage.

Prescriptive authors of the late nineteenth century felt that girls moved too quickly in relationships. A writer for the *Prairie Farmer* penned a piece called "Wanted—A Little Girl" describing this very phenomenon. "Where have they gone to—the little girls, with natural manners and natural curls?" began the poem.⁶⁶⁷ The girls of the present day were "little old flirts who talk of their 'beaux,' and vie for each other in stylish clothes," while girls before "never imagined boys were 'beaux;' other girl's brothers' and 'mates' were they, splendid fellows to help them play."⁶⁶⁸ The author pleaded for "one of those dear little girls of old, with an innocent heart and an open smile, who knows not the meaning of 'flirt' or 'style.'"⁶⁶⁹ The dangerous modern girl would not be an acceptable partner for a respectable young man.

Like the modern girl, the flirtatious girl (or boy), was also the type of person that one prescriptive writer called "company you should keep—out of."⁶⁷⁰ "A man or woman who flirts," the author admonished, "and tries to convince you that flirting is right... who makes a sin seem like something that perhaps is foolish, but pleasant foolish, *not* wrong," was absolutely the worst

⁶⁶⁶ Beatrice Fairfax qtd. in Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 233.

⁶⁶⁷ "Wanted—A Little Girl," *Prairie Farmer* 58 (March 13, 1886), 173.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁰ "Girls' Company," *Sidney By-Way*, May 25, 1889.

type of person with whom to consort. By watching out for people like this, young men and women could avoid many problems later in life, such as being married to one who would encourage bad behaviors.

Flirtation was such a problem, according to some writers, that they felt the need to stress how flirtation would not gain a girl anything but heartache. In an aptly titled article, “Don’t, Girls,” Mrs. E.M. Conklin wrote, “Don’t flirt. There is danger in playing with edged tools—to your *own* pretty fingers and careless hearts as well as to ruder masculine ones.”⁶⁷¹ She used the example of “the quiet, gentle girls of a community led to the altar by worthy men—girls who were never considered ‘anything very *special*, simply *nice* girls (recommendation enough)—while the saucy, reckless young belle...gradually fades into a dissatisfied, neglected old maid.”⁶⁷² Flirtatious girls would never marry the type of man that they wanted, even though men “laugh, vote you ‘jolly, smart,’ etc.” but place their “real respect” for the “modest girl, who needs no excuses for her conduct.”⁶⁷³ These dire warnings left no doubt that aggressive girls would come to bad ends.

Although most advisors considered flirtation one of the worst things a girl could do, it clearly happened on a regular basis. One woman, writing for the *Grant County Herald*, even encouraged it in the proper situation. This “worthy old lady” wrote, ““whenever a fellow pops the question don’t blush and stare at your feet. Just throw your arms around his neck, look him full in the face and commence talking about the furniture.””⁶⁷⁴ While not necessarily flirting, this older woman advised a modicum of boldness on the part of women, as “young fellows are

⁶⁷¹ Mrs. E.M. Conklin, “Don’t, Girls,” *Arthur’s Home Magazine*, reprinted in *Brodhead Independent*, December 17, 1880.

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁴ “Advice to Marriageable Girls,” *Grant County Herald*, June 17, 1875.

mighty nervous, sometimes.”⁶⁷⁵ The old lady herself had to learn the hard way, as she “lost several good chances before I caught your dear grandfather.”⁶⁷⁶ This type of interaction, though, was within the confines of choosing a life partner, not simply a casual date or acquaintance.

Carrie, Mary, and Rhoda did not participate in much flirtation in their adolescence and young adulthood, according to their diaries. Carrie Markle had several long-term suitors over the course of her diary, before marrying the last one. Dan, a particularly close friend, visited often with Carrie until they ended their relationship, then she saw Edward Davis, whom she married at the end of her diary in 1867. Other than Dan and Edward, Carrie mentioned only few interactions of a romantic nature with young men. On one occasion, she wrote, “Dan spent the eve here Mr. Cole sent me a bouquet [sic].”⁶⁷⁷ Dan was her “boyfriend” at the time, but someone else apparently tried to win her heart. She did not mention the reason for the flowers, or even what her relationship with Mr. Cole was. She also received some unwanted attention from someone named Eddie, as she recorded, “Eddie called at the school house hope he call no more.”⁶⁷⁸ Again, Carrie left no evidence as to why she did not want Eddie to see her, but she clearly did not enjoy his advances.

Similarly, Mary Pascoe did not write much about flirtation, and in fact, did not write about romantic feelings or relationships at all. Mary was only sixteen years old, and her age and most likely her close-knit family prohibited her from seeking out any entanglements. The only real, telling mention of any type of romantic relationship was on June 1, 1871, when she wrote, “Mr. Jeffrey true love first love.”⁶⁷⁹ This small fragment could have meant anything, whether an adolescent crush, a relationship, or simply a reference to a friend or story she had heard. All that

⁶⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ Carrie Markle, July 20, 1866.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., January 25, 1867.

⁶⁷⁹ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, June 1, 1871.

this quotation could accurately describe was Mary's acknowledgement of romance and romantic relationships. She was not so naïve that she did not understand the feelings of romantic love, but expressed those feelings in a juvenile manner.

Rhoda Emery was not so juvenile, but her romantic options were limited by her circumstances as dutiful daughter and wage earner for her family. Rhoda had few opportunities to engage in flirtation or dating, as her other responsibilities took precedence over her social life. Rhoda never married, although she did have one long-term suitor with whom she mainly corresponded with via letters. She mentioned a caller on June 12, 1890, but wrote, "I hope he will never come again."⁶⁸⁰ Rhoda worried about her reputation, and her father especially took an interest in those with whom she associated. Other social engagements had been hampered by her father's disapproval, and this instance may have been no different.

Rhoda very rarely relaxed and enjoyed herself as other young adult women of the time did. Her parents forbade her from participating in many activities in which she might have gotten into trouble or spent too much time with boys. One exception to this was an interesting series of entries in which she visited an insane asylum with some friends. On the first occasion she wrote, "we went to the insane asylum and should have stayed there," perhaps meaning she felt some regret over the trip.⁶⁸¹ But a few days later, she wrote, "Miss Martin, Mr. Hubbard and I took a ride last evening. We went to the asylum. It makes me shudder all over to hear those lunatics howl."⁶⁸² While this would seem like a strange place to escort two young women, Rhoda went on to record, "Mr. H. seems to have been brought up to the firm belief that when he takes young ladies out riding, he must take them to the asylum, and so acts according to his belief."⁶⁸³ This

⁶⁸⁰ Rhoda Emery, June 12, 1890.

⁶⁸¹ Ibid., May 21, 1894.

⁶⁸² Ibid., May 24, 1894.

⁶⁸³ Ibid.

could have been more disturbing than flirtatious, but Rhoda thought, “perhaps he’s not so far wrong after all come to think it over.”⁶⁸⁴ For a girl who did not have many opportunities for courting, perhaps the sensation of just being out with a boy was enough to win her over.

Although Carrie, Mary, and Rhoda all wrote about casual interactions with boys, some with romantic overtones, the girls rarely actually participated in “flirting” as defined by the prescriptive literature or according to their own description. Other girls, like Minnie Moon, had similar experiences, mainly involving visiting with young men throughout the evening, usually at church or some other meeting.⁶⁸⁵ Maude Crooker, who was attending an all-girl boarding school, took any opportunity to interact with the opposite sex. She wrote in her diary that Sundays were spent “in writing letters, and ‘flirting’ with nice looking boys who drive past.”⁶⁸⁶ Maude spent her whole week waiting for any interaction with boys, yet was able to do very little when the opportunity came. Other limited interactions included receiving gifts from boys. Rhoda Emery mentioned a gift of flowers from a young man, and Minnie Moon received candy from a potential suitor.⁶⁸⁷

Another unique form of flirtation was “philopena,” a game between young men and women designed to enhance the flirtatious relationship. The terms of philopena involved a boy and girl sharing a nut, such as an almond, with a double kernel. Then, whichever party said “philopena” first at the next meeting would receive a present from the loser.⁶⁸⁸ Mary Murphy recorded a game of philopena in her diary, with Mr. Murphy, her future husband. On January 18, 1857, she wrote, “Mr. Murphy caught me philopena,” and he was then obligated to give her a

⁶⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁸⁵ Minnie Moon, May 19, June 22, June 25, 1893, February 21, 1895.

⁶⁸⁶ Maude Crooker, September 18, 1887.

⁶⁸⁷ Rhoda Emery, June 5, 1894; Minnie Moon, February 21, 1895.

⁶⁸⁸ Definition of “philopena,” *Merriam-Webster*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com>. Accessed 21 March

present, which he did later by coming to her house and spending the evening there.⁶⁸⁹ The philopena was a safe way to flirt within socially prescribed boundaries.

Where the other girls approached flirting with caution and reservation, Addie Crouch did quite the opposite. Addie exemplified the problem girls in prescriptive literature when discussing flirting. Of all of the girls, Addie had the most male friends by far. Not all of these young men were suitors, but many were flirtation partners. Addie usually played coy, pretending to dissuade men from engaging her. For example, she wrote, “Will Butter sent me a subject to write my essay about and the subject was ‘What is Love.’ Sat. eve he wanted me to write about flirting but I told him I did not know a thing about that.”⁶⁹⁰ The tone and inflection of the exchange was missing from the diary entry, but based upon other evidence, Addie definitely did know something about flirting.

Addie also flirted with another young man named Marvin. The two passed notes back and forth throughout the lodge meeting, then even talked about the future. Addie wrote of Marvin, “he said if I went to Dakota this fall he would see me.”⁶⁹¹ Addie considered moving away, and apparently Marvin would have been part of those plans. The next day, though, she continued, “Marvin was here this PM. We had a good talk. He says if I do go to Da. he will come and we will have a jolly time. Well he starts tomorrow so this is the end of a very delightful flirtation. I bid him goodbye.”⁶⁹² As serious as Marvin may have felt about Addie, she clearly did not feel the same, as she considered him only a “flirtation.”

Above all else, flirtation provided opportunities for Addie to manipulate others. She often played suitors off of one another, and she also liked to make others jealous. A clear example of

⁶⁸⁹ Mary H. Murphy, manuscript diary, 1856-1857, SC 2174, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, January 14, 18, 1857.

⁶⁹⁰ Addie Crouch Diary, February 13, 1882.

⁶⁹¹ Ibid., June 10, 1882.

⁶⁹² Ibid., June 11, 1882.

this would be on September 17, 1882, when she wrote, “Mr. Camfield came this eve and we took a ride... We stoped [stopped] to Bens. Burton was there he did not know what to say when he saw me come with Camfield. Turn about is fair play.”⁶⁹³ Burton had been a previous “boyfriend,” as evidenced by a note slipped into the pages of Addie’s diary which read, “It is quite certain that Addie and Burton are everyday flirtin in which there is no hurt in.”⁶⁹⁴ Whatever slight Burton had done to Addie, she intended to get back at him.

Addie also had an increasingly contentious relationship with Trusdell, as mentioned previously, and another girl named Mina. Addie’s status with Trusdell was never quite clear. He felt very strongly about her, which will be detailed later, but she never disclosed her own feelings. For example, she recorded, “I wonder what Trusdell thinks by this time. I know what I think and it is this. I wonder how I could tell so many lies.”⁶⁹⁵ Her guarded message left out many details, but she seemed to feel remorse for how she treated Trusdell. At other times, though, she felt no such remorse. A few months later she wrote, “Trusdell caught up with us down by Grays and he went home with me. He was very foolish I think but I don’t care. He ask me about every mean thing I had ever said to him so we had quite a time we did not get there till half past twelve. I don’t know where T. got back nor do I care.”⁶⁹⁶ Their standoff ended a few days later, but Addie continued to antagonize her friends. Trusdell walked Addie home in the presence of Mina, and Addie remarked, “I don’t know what Mina will think.”⁶⁹⁷ This incident caused strife, as Mina “called me to an account of how T. used her. She thought it was my

⁶⁹³ Ibid., September 17, 1882.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., note with entry for May 21, 1881.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., February 20, 1883.

⁶⁹⁶ Ibid., May 13, 1883.

⁶⁹⁷ Ibid., May 17, 1883.

fault.”⁶⁹⁸ Addie very well knew that she caused her friend to be jealous, but it did not seem to matter to her, as it was in her agenda to continue to flirt with Trusdell.

Overall, Addie took a very casual approach to relationships with young men, and usually did not consider the feelings of her friends, male or female, when engaging in flirtations. In fact, she seemed to take great pleasure in manipulating the feelings of others and using her wiles to provoke reactions from others. She acted rashly at times, and spoke harshly to her peers, such as an incident she discussed with her friend Donahue. She wrote, “Donahue wanted me to go down to Mr. Lockwoods and I said no sir I shant and he didn’t like it I was ashamed because I answered so but was to [sic] proud to take it back.”⁶⁹⁹ Her rude response bothered her, but not enough to apologize. She also behaved rudely to other friends, but always had an excuse for her behavior. In one entry she recorded, “Blanchard and Burton was here this eve we played cards and I acted terriably [sic] but I was sick.”⁷⁰⁰ She used her illness to excuse her bad behavior. On another occasion, after angering her friend, she wrote, “I don’t care for he is going off tomorrow.”⁷⁰¹ Her rudeness could be waved off by her simple excuses.

Prescriptive literature warned young men against pursuing flirtatious girls like Addie. Authors believed that such girls made poor wives, as they spent too much time thinking about themselves and did not have the capacity to take on the responsibility of wife and motherhood. Addie definitely fit many of these qualifications. Even more so, she reveled in stirring up conflict in the lives of those around her. Throughout her diary entries, Addie recorded instances of purposely and willfully hurting others’ feelings or using subterfuge to hide relationships or flirtations from others.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., May 18, 1883.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., April 17, 1881.

⁷⁰⁰ Ibid., September 25, 1882.

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., January 28, 1883.

Addie's dishonesty usually manifested in her relationships with her peers. Addie and her friends seemed to congregate and socialize in groups, then split off into pairs or smaller groups as the evening progressed. For example, one evening "Hiland and Trusdell came up after dinner and Hiland got Trusdell to go after Minna, but after he was gone he said all he wanted was to get him off some where he did not care where. We had a real good talk."⁷⁰² By all indications, Trusdell liked Addie very much, but she allowed Hiland to send him off and monopolize her time. Trusdell featured in another such scenario, when Addie recorded, "T. came there but we could not talk much for Henry was here."⁷⁰³ In these situations, Addie simply sent off one suitor in favor of another.

In other situations, though, Addie was more calculating. After taking a walk with John and some other friends, Addie parted ways with the boys "so we would come in town from opposite directions. Then there could not be any talk."⁷⁰⁴ It was unclear what people from the town would talk about, as according to Addie she only walked and talked with the boys, but she attempted to cover it up anyway. Perhaps it was because she was already involved with another boy, Elmer. She went on to record, "Nell don't want me to write to John if I go with Elmer but she don't seem to care how much John and I flirt."⁷⁰⁵ Again, Addie put her own feelings first and played with the emotions of others.

At one point, Addie seemed to feel bad about her two-timing ways, and wrote, "I met Soper and John and took a walk I told John that it was the last time and that I would meet him and then take a walk."⁷⁰⁶ This reversal, though, did not last long, as she continued, "he [John] said he would come to our house he wanted to know if he could come Sunday night. I told him

⁷⁰² Ibid., January 14, 1883.

⁷⁰³ Ibid., May 19, 1883.

⁷⁰⁴ Ibid., August 6, 1884.

⁷⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid., August 8, 1884.

he could.”⁷⁰⁷ Whatever her relationship with others, Addie had no problem making time for John.

In putting her ambitions above all else, Addie exemplified the “girl problem” in many ways. After all of her social machinations, she still took offense when someone did the same to her. She scornfully wrote on November 26, 1885, “Elmer wants me to go home after the dance but I aint going to for I like to torment anyone he has two girls on his hands now.”⁷⁰⁸ When Elmer retaliated against Addie and stood her up for a Christmas dance, Addie scowled, “I waited for him and it spoilt my Christmas,” but still went to the dance with someone else and “had a big time.”⁷⁰⁹ In her disregard for others, Addie sometimes got hurt, but always made sure to take revenge.

With all of the trouble that Addie caused, and her complete disregard for the feelings of her friends and suitors, it would stand to reason, based on the prescriptive literature, that Addie would not have any long-term relationships, but instead, she seemed to always have a suitor. She even got married after many years of courting and flirting. All of the girls surveyed, except for Rhoda, had longer-term relationships, some of which led to marriage and some of which ended earlier. None of the girls other than Addie wrote very emotional accounts of their courting, so much of what made the relationships work or not work was not recorded. Sometimes relationships seemed to be based on proximity or community ties. As mentioned previously, Mary Pascoe eventually married a neighbor, the brother of her sister’s husband. The peers that Mary associated with were classmates and family friends. Addie and Rhoda had wider social circles, due to their more advanced age and their experiences in teaching, but mainly they knew

⁷⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁸ Ibid., November 26, 1885.

⁷⁰⁹ Ibid., December 25, 1885.

other girls and boys who attended their churches and social meetings. Relationships grew out of friendships cultivated in the normal course of rural life.

These relationships would hopefully lead to marriage as part of their natural progression. Despite the independence of many rural girls, marriage was the ultimate goal for most of them. Marriages solidified ties between families, provided care and support for females in farming communities, and created the next generation of farmers. But marriage was more than a financial or familial contract. By this time, companionate marriage had become the standard, and girls boys sought out partners based upon mutual affection and compatibility. Finding the perfect companion, though, was challenging. The standards that dictated what made a good husband or wife were created by prescriptive literature and advice, but those ideals could hardly all be present in one person. Ellen Rothman found that for women seeking a husband, “the ideal man, then, was a contradiction in terms: he must be aggressive, masterful, and sure of himself; yet he must be deferential, gentle and pure.”⁷¹⁰ This difficulty was compounded in a rural setting, as the ideal farmer had to encompass certain skills necessary to successfully run a farm, and the wife had to be able to manage a farm home as well. The ideal farm husband had to provide security for the family, both economic and familial.⁷¹¹ To that end, rural women “were advised to choose a husband who was skilled in a trade and husbandry and had steady habits,” which were “the primary ingredients of women’s happiness.”⁷¹² Prospective husbands expected their future wives to be passive, yet seek out the best match possible, which “made courtship fraught with tension.”⁷¹³

⁷¹⁰ Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 200.

⁷¹¹ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 93.

⁷¹² Ibid.

⁷¹³ Ibid.

This tension between ideals and reality made choosing a marriage partner quite complicated. For a girl trying to decide with whom to spend the rest of her life with, courting allowed for a sort of trial run in selecting a mate. Girls could spend time with different young men in a safe environment and learn what they were looking for in a husband. As Rothman noted, “ideals of love could not be compromised, no matter how difficult of achievement they seemed to be. They were the only foundation—the only chance—for a happy marriage.”⁷¹⁴ Carrie, Addie, Rhoda, and many other girls sought out love in many places, working toward the goal of eventually marrying.

Prescriptive literature about courting often portrayed it as a manipulative act. Instead of an enjoyable time to get to know another person, courting was a means to an end. According to one author, “it is one of the greatest desires of a young woman—and it is, it may be said, characteristic of her—to get as many beaux as possible, and if one of them asks her to marry him she often accepts him, because she knows she is getting old and fears none of the others will ask her.”⁷¹⁵ Desperation was to be avoided, but as the grandmother giving advice about accepting marriage proposals noted, sometimes a little assertiveness was necessary.

Some authors went so far as to call courting a “trap” to get a husband. In an article by “a bewitching little widow,” the woman advised, “Invite a nice young man to tea, set him a laughing every five minutes during the evening, let him have six kisses, and you’ll be his wife after twenty similar operations. It was never yet known to fail when properly administered.”⁷¹⁶ In this scenario, the woman was the instigator, initiating the interactions which led to a marriage proposal.

⁷¹⁴ Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 202.

⁷¹⁵ “The Engaged Girl,” *The Walker News*, April 13, 1883.

⁷¹⁶ “How to Get a Husband,” *Marion Register*, September 4, 1867.

Proposing, though, was the purview of the man in the relationship.⁷¹⁷ Another prescriptive writer noted the difficulty of having to face the family of a suitor when coming to court her. “One of the chief compensations of a woman’s life,” he wrote, “is found in the fact that she does not have ‘to go a courting.’”⁷¹⁸ Even though many girls took more of the initiative, young men still had to pick the girl up at home and ask permission from the girl’s parents in order to court her. This added layer of complication made relationships and potential marriages even more difficult to think about achieving.

In getting from courtship to marriage, the girls surveyed here met many challenges. Carrie Markle had at least one serious relationship, possibly even an engagement, before becoming engaged and marrying her husband, Edward Davis. Throughout 1866, Carrie had a relationship with a young man named Dan. This relationship was fraught with conflict. In many of the entries that Carrie wrote in her diary about Dan, the two fought frequently, although she did not write about what. Dan never seemed to make Carrie happy, although they continued to see each other for more than a year.

On April 17, 1866, Carrie wrote, “I am so lonely this eve wish I could see whom I wanted to. Dan spent the evening.”⁷¹⁹ She did not specify who she wanted to see, and confessed to being lonely even when Dan came to visit. On subsequent visits, Carrie and Dan argued frequently. A month later, her entry read, “Dan spent the eve little bad feelings but all right before he went home I hope.”⁷²⁰ These visits continued, with Carrie writing on more than one occasion, “Dan spent the evening here did not have a very pleasant visit.”⁷²¹ She added to one

⁷¹⁷ George Hudson’s *The Marriage Guide for Young Men* cataloged at length the proper steps to be taken by men throughout the courtship, engagement, and marriage process.

⁷¹⁸ “Going Courting,” *Rochester Post*, January 5, 1877.

⁷¹⁹ Carrie Markle, April 17, 1866.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*, May 22, 1866.

⁷²¹ *Ibid.*, June 7, 20, 22, September 9, 1866.

entry, “whose fault I know not,” indicating that she took some responsibility for the problems between herself and Dan.⁷²²

The unhappy experience went on for some time. Carrie mourned in her diary, “I am not contented or happy nor have been for some time.”⁷²³ Dan would visit and leave angry, or even refuse to come to events that he said he would attend.⁷²⁴ Their tumultuous visits culminated on January 27, 1867, when Carrie wrote, “Dan was here to dinner wanted to sever the engagement.”⁷²⁵ She had never mentioned being engaged to Dan, so this particular entry came as somewhat of a surprise. At this point, though, one or both of them changed their minds, as she continued, “did not think best to so would not.”⁷²⁶ Although the engagement did not end there, it eventually did, as Carrie began courting another young man.

Carrie treated Edward Davis, her eventual husband, differently in her diary than she did Dan. She referred to him as “Mr. Davis” throughout, rather than by his first name. He also visited less frequently than Dan, at least according to the frequency of mentions in Carrie’s diary. He called on Carrie and took her out for various outings, including driving her to school and taking her to town for “trading.”⁷²⁷ The relationship was not perfect, evidenced by one particular entry in which Carrie recorded, “Mr. Davis spent the even [sic] came late I was mad,” but far fewer instances of arguments appeared with Mr. Davis.⁷²⁸

Carrie and Mr. Davis’ eventual marriage will be discussed later, but overall, their courtship appeared to progress in a very standard manner. Carrie’s truncated diary entries left much to be discovered about the nature of their relationship and how they came to be married.

⁷²² Ibid., June 7, 1866.

⁷²³ Ibid., June 19, 1866.

⁷²⁴ Ibid., June 23, July 16, August 5, 1866.

⁷²⁵ Ibid., January 27, 1867.

⁷²⁶ Ibid.

⁷²⁷ Ibid., July 19, 1867; July 31, 1867; November 21, 1867.

⁷²⁸ Ibid., September 17, 1867.

Carrie lived far from her parents, although the Franciscos served as surrogate parents in their absence. It is not known whether Carrie's parents traveled to Champaign County for the wedding, or if the newlywed couple made any attempt to travel to Michigan. In early 1867, Carrie traveled back home to Michigan to visit family, and perhaps made wedding arrangements then, before severing ties with her family of birth to begin a new family with her husband.

Mary Pascoe, again being relatively young for a serious relationship, said little about romantic feelings in her diary. Other than the small mention of her "first love," there were few other remarks about young men. She may have had romantic feelings for one of her teachers, Mr. White, but the reference was not overt. She wrote, "Mr. White and his brother stayed till afternoon he then bade us farewell and left not expecting to see each other for two or three months at least he lived here six months he is now going to Madison to school good bye."⁷²⁹ While not directly related to any sort of relationship or flirtation, Mary appeared to have strong feelings for Mr. White, although such a pairing seemed unlikely.

Rhoda Emery had more adult feelings regarding young men, but due to family restrictions, she did not pursue a serious relationship. Rhoda was ambivalent about marriage throughout her diary. This manifested itself in anxiety about what would seem to be her sister's impending marriage. In a particularly distressed entry she wrote, "Clara is to leave us soon...I know that shouldn't make me feel bad but it does. It seems to me we won't be sisters any more as we have been; and we have been through so much pleasure and otherwise together and never failed to be sisters, and I am lonesome."⁷³⁰ For Rhoda, marriage indicated a severing of the familial bond between the sisters, one that would never be the same again. Rhoda displayed sadness over Clara's new role later, noting, "Clara is so engrossed with her own affairs that she

⁷²⁹ Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, April 1, 1871.

⁷³⁰ Rhoda Emery, April 16, 1894.

scarcely seems the same sister she used to be. That may be and I suppose is my fault though for she doesn't know how much I would like her confidence nor how truly she can never be happier than I hope she will be."⁷³¹ Clara's marriage seemed like a betrayal, as Rhoda remained trapped within her parents' home.

Rhoda's loneliness permeated her diary entries at times. She mourned the fact that she did not have many friends and felt herself getting older and less engaged in relationships than she used to be.⁷³² Her only semi-serious courtship was with Wellington Clay, a young man with whom she corresponded on a regular basis. Wellington, or Will as she called him, was close to Rhoda, but marriage was not discussed in her diary. According to a family source, Rhoda's father disapproved of Will as a suitor for Rhoda due to a facial deformity.⁷³³ As family was extremely important to Rhoda, marriage to Will would never have been considered.⁷³⁴ She maintained a lively correspondence with him, though, and they discussed many issues and common interests.

Wellington came to visit Rhoda in 1893 and they "had a very good visit."⁷³⁵ The rest of their interactions happened in letters. Will lived in St. Paul for a time, then moved to Hutchinson, Minnesota. She recorded in her diary how much she wanted to hear from him, although he seemed to write on a fairly regular basis.⁷³⁶ Will discussed what was going on in his life and sought advice from Rhoda on various matters. He even wrote to her about other girls he visited

⁷³¹ Ibid., September 29, 1894. Clara was married to Frank D. Wood in 1899. 1900 Federal Census. Year: 1900; Census Place: Oronoco, Olmsted, Minnesota; Roll: 779; Page: 1A; Enumeration District: 0112; FHL microfilm: 1240779. Ancestry.com. 1900 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2004. Accessed 11 April 2013.

⁷³² Ibid., January 16, 1894.

⁷³³ Librarian Information, Wellington S. Clay Letters to Rhoda Emery, 1893-1950, Rhoda J. Emery and Family Papers, Minnesota Historical Society. See also Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm*, 103.

⁷³⁴ Rhoda's father, who already had banned her from several social functions, also kept a tight grasp on her interactions. On January 5, 1894, she wrote, "I got a letter from Y last evening. Pa objects." Whoever this individual was, Rhoda's father did not even want her to receive correspondence from him or her.

⁷³⁵ Rhoda Emery, September 10, 1893.

⁷³⁶ Ibid., April 19, 1894.

with, including an amusing story about escorting two girls home. The girls lived in an unfamiliar part of town, and Will wrote, “we kept walking on and on and I was expecting them to stop at nearly every house and say ‘this is where I live’ but nary a time did they til we had got about two miles and a half. They had a laugh at me but I will get even with them. The next time I am going to ask the girl that lives next door to the church and then I will know what I am doing.”⁷³⁷

Apparently, Wellington did not have much luck at the time with girls other than Rhoda.

Despite his interactions with other girls, he still held out hope in a courtship with Rhoda. She mentioned, “I got a letter from Will Clay when I got home. He...offers to get me a bicycle for \$25. I want it awfully.”⁷³⁸ Although she did not accept the bicycle, it would have been an expensive gift for just a friend.

Will continued correspondence with Rhoda, and he offered to send her a photo of himself in exchange for one of her, customary for friends and courting couples.⁷³⁹ Shortly after, though, Rhoda decided to end their correspondence temporarily. She confided in her diary, “I got a letter from Will Monday. The third I have received from him since I came down, but I have concluded not to answer this one; and don’t know whether I do right or not but hope I do. Anyway it seems right now.”⁷⁴⁰ She may have rethought her position, as a few weeks later she wrote, “I wish I could hear from Will.”⁷⁴¹ Rhoda never ended up marrying Will, or anyone, and had few other opportunities.

Addie Crouch played a much different role in courtship and relationships. Clearly, Addie had many flirtations, but some of them became more serious. Throughout the diary, Addie’s

⁷³⁷ Wellington S. Clay to Rhoda Emery, manuscript correspondence, 1893-1950, Rhoda J. Emery and Family Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, February 26, 1894.

⁷³⁸ Rhoda Emery, May 28, 1894.

⁷³⁹ Ibid., August 17, 1894.

⁷⁴⁰ Ibid., September 29, 1894.

⁷⁴¹ Ibid., October 16, 1894.

flirtations slowly grew into courtships, then most fell apart. The most serious of the relationships recounted in Addie's diary were with three young men, Hiland, Trusdell, and Elmer. She also had more than passing references to Burton and John. All of these boys featured prominently in Addie's life, but in the relationships Addie was the driving force. Prescriptive literature warned girls not to flirt and to be demure, but in reality, girls like Addie asserted themselves in friendships, romantic and otherwise, in order to establish relationships and work toward eventual marriage.

Addie's main relationships did not start until 1883, two years after she began writing a daily diary. Trusdell and Hiland were her two steady courtships, which happened simultaneously. The two men were together many times, and often came to visit Addie together, which caused problems at times. Her friendship with Hiland vacillated frequently between positive and negative. For example, on January 24, 1883, she recorded, "Hiland was up and what a talk we had he is as good as gold though."⁷⁴² Right next to the entry, in different writing, were the words, "what a big fool I was to think so Aug. 17 83."⁷⁴³ Apparently, Addie reconsidered her feelings in the intervening months.

Throughout 1883, Addie saw both Hiland and Trusdell on a regular basis, sometimes on the same day. On February 11 she remarked, "Hiland was up this afternoon we had quite a spark. Trusdell came here this evening and stayed till one."⁷⁴⁴ She even entertained three gentlemen in the same evening, as on March 2, when she wrote, "Trusdell was here awhile today we played checkers we had quite a talk. Hiland was here a short time this evening he was here when John came and I never saw a boy get on such a train in my life... John stayed till three we had a good

⁷⁴² Addie Crouch, January 24, 1883.

⁷⁴³ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid., February 11, 1883; the term "spark" can be used to indicate a courtship. *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1383.

visit.⁷⁴⁵ Addie never seemed to feel any remorse for hurting the boys' feelings, as Hiland's were in this exchange.

The relationship between Addie and Trusdell best exemplified the "girl problem" in Addie, as she very overtly manipulated him, then did not go on to marry him, or even continue a relationship with him. In May of 1883, Addie confessed to Trusdell that she did not care for him as much as he did for her. She wrote, "I told him that I lied when I said I loved him but thought he was in fun so did not care what I said back. He said he ment [sic] it and that he loved me yet but that he thought I was fooling him all along."⁷⁴⁶ Addie believed that Trusdell's confession of love was simply a joke. Despite the fact that she did not love him, she still continued to flirt and spend time with him, as she continued in her entry, "he stayed till after nine and he talked till he got me good natured he said I was his own and should be always."⁷⁴⁷

Trusdell was not deterred by Addie's attitude, and they continued to see each other even though Addie had little nice to say about him. On June 4 she wrote, "Trusdell came up long before dark...O how he acted I was ashamed of him he acted so soft."⁷⁴⁸ She did not specify what she meant by "soft" in this context, but it was clearly a negative attribute for a man. She referred to him as such several times throughout the diary.⁷⁴⁹ Others were aware of how Addie treated Trusdell, including a male friend named Asa who told Addie he knew, "I did not care a thing for Trusdell but wanted to fool him."⁷⁵⁰ Trusdell might have known this truth, but refused to accept it, as he cared deeply for Addie.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid., March 2, 1883.

⁷⁴⁶ Ibid., May 26, 1883.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁸ Ibid., June 4, 1883.

⁷⁴⁹ Ibid., June 10, 24, 1883.

⁷⁵⁰ Ibid., June 22, 1883.

Addie finally finished her manipulation of Trusdell later that summer, writing that she was “sick” of letting Trusdell come over and finishing with “By by forever T.”⁷⁵¹ She wrote a few weeks later, “One thing I forgot to say anything about and that is T. I have had to stop flirting with him for awhile on account of the talk people begin to talk about it.”⁷⁵² Again, community disapproval made an impact on Addie, as she modified her behavior in order to meet community standards. She eventually made amends with Trusdell, writing, “Trusdell stoped [sic] here for a drink and he stayed a while we had a settlement...”⁷⁵³ After this point, he was largely absent from further diary entries.

Addie’s last major relationship recorded in her diary was with Elmer, throughout 1884 and 1885. Elmer did not treat Addie very well, but she continued to see him anyway. Some of his actions included leaving Addie with his parents while he went to visit another girl, refusing to visit after he promised he would, and being “hateful,” in Addie’s words.⁷⁵⁴ Addie’s recollection of Elmer’s actions provided a recognition of her own bad behavior. She wrote on one occasion, “he is just as contrary as he can be even worse than I am.”⁷⁵⁵ She also made excuses for Elmer when confronted by his actions. She recorded, “I believe he gets worse and worse every time he comes. Had a good time all the same.”⁷⁵⁶ It did not matter to Addie that Elmer was mean, as she still enjoyed his company.

Addie’s boldness with boys should have made her undesirable, according to prescriptive authors, but she continued to have many friends, both male and female. Addie’s record of teaching, participating in community activities, and helping out at home with her responsibilities

⁷⁵¹ Ibid., June 30, 1883.

⁷⁵² Ibid., July 15, 1883.

⁷⁵³ Ibid., July 20, 1883.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., July 13, August 23, October 19, 1884.

⁷⁵⁵ Ibid., October 19, 1884.

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid., October 18, 1885.

made her a typical rural girl, despite her rather fickle nature with the opposite sex. As evidenced by the written record of her diary, Addie was an overly emotional girl, and this led to many of her confrontations with other girls and boys. Her extreme emotions could be seen in dramatic diary entries, such as when she wrote, “I vow eternal vengeance on T.” after a fight with Trusdell, or when she discussed Elmer’s other female friend, recording, “Elmer had to go and see his girl a Miss De Lancey I did not care but I hate her almost. O no I don’t either.”⁷⁵⁷ Even with her volatile nature, Addie still retained her status as a respected girl in her community.

Addie also had to make decisions about the type of relationship she would have with the young men with whom she associated. Susan Cahn noted, “making decisions about sexual restraint and expression proved difficult, requiring an accurate assessment of the benefits of short-term gratification versus the long-term respectability earned through moral conformity.”⁷⁵⁸ This very conundrum presented itself in conversations Addie had with her boyfriends. The degree to which Addie engaged in physical relationships is unclear, as she never specifically mentioned sex, but she did make some veiled references to physical contact of a more intimate nature.⁷⁵⁹ She did write about kissing and the consequences that came with the act. She kissed either Hiland or Trusdell (the exchange is unclear), then had to deal with the other finding out about it. She also wrote about an exchange with Trusdell, recording, “when we were alone he was bound I should k. [kiss] him but heaven forbid such a think [sic] I say at least with him.”⁷⁶⁰ In her flirtation, she still maintained that measure of respectability necessary to retain good community standing.

⁷⁵⁷ Ibid., February 25, 1883, November 22, 1885.

⁷⁵⁸ Susan K. Cahn, *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 6.

⁷⁵⁹ Addie said she “fooled with” a boy, and also talked about boys “getting her good natured,” which could be references to heavier physical relationships. Addie Crouch, November 12, 1884, May 26, 1883, September 14, 1884, October 19, 1884.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid., June 4, 1883.

Addie Crouch's recorded long-term relationships did not lead to marriage, but she eventually married another man in Iowa in 1891, six years after she ceased to write a daily diary.⁷⁶¹ In an example of how a serious courtship transitioned into marriage, correspondence between D.E. (Daniel Enyart, or "Gene") Denman and his future wife (as well as other young women) showed how a life-long commitment grew from a youthful relationship. Gene was involved with Armedia Carlock, who would eventually become his wife, yet still carried on a prolific correspondence with several other young women in the meantime.⁷⁶² The letters between Gene and his "girlfriends" showed some of the types of flirtations girls and boys used, and how they often did not lead to anything serious.

It is clear from most of the correspondence that the girls Gene exchanged letters with knew he might have been committed to someone else. Mollie Dunlap confronted Gene about the subterfuge and wrote to him, "I received your letter a week or so ago but have neglected answering on account of having company which I presume you had thought of before. I could not have answered without her knowing it and I thought best not to let her know any thing about our correspondence."⁷⁶³ Another girl, Minnie Hull, referred to another girl as well, responding, "You said that you had the sore mouth I feel awful sorry for you I expect that your girl bit you in the mouth or are the girls up there the biting kind?"⁷⁶⁴ The letters from Minnie and other girls tended toward flirtatious, such as the aforementioned letter. Louisa Lee wrote to Gene that a friend, "looked as sweet as a peach and I guess that you know how sweet that is don't you."⁷⁶⁵

⁷⁶¹ "Iowa, Marriages, 1809-1992," index, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1/XJ5F-XWG> : accessed 20 Mar 2013), La Martino Paul and Adda A. Crouch, 28 Jan 1891.

⁷⁶² Scope Note and Family History, Carlock/Denman/Irvin/Porter Collection, McLean County Museum of History, Bloomington, Illinois.

⁷⁶³ Mollie Dunlap to D.E. Denman, D.E. Denman to Young Women, Box 1, Folder 18, Carlock/Denman/Irvin/Porter Collection, Archives Collection, McLean County Museum of History, February 12, 1881.

⁷⁶⁴ Minnie Hull to D.E. Denman, August 3, 1882.

⁷⁶⁵ Louisa Lee to D.E. Denman, May 28, 1881.

Gene also gave out his picture regularly, as two of the girls wrote to him about his looks.⁷⁶⁶

Apparently Gene had not met any of these girls in person, but only corresponded with them.

The girls Gene wrote to, particularly Minnie Hull, seemed aware of his nature and did not want to get seriously involved with him. In answering one of Gene's letters, Louisa Lee responded, "if you don't want to correspond don't do it. It don't make any difference to me do just as you please."⁷⁶⁷ Minnie Hull especially did not trust Gene's machinations, and responded to his flattery by writing, "I do not know whether you meant what you said or not I have half a notion not to believe it. It is awful easy for any one to talk isn't it."⁷⁶⁸ Minnie asserted herself romantically in their exchanges, writing, "I am a very independent girl as you will find out if you haven't already found it out now do not get mad because I am showing my independence a little."⁷⁶⁹

Minnie finally revealed to Gene her intentions about their relationship in December of 1882 when she wrote,

Well I will say as to the question you asked me you wanted to know if I would be shocked if you asked me if I cared any thing for you more than a friend I was a little shocked when I read your letter. I do not think I ought to answer that question it ought to be you to answer for yourself. We have corresponded a long time and I have found you so far to be a gentleman in every respect and so I had no other intention than amusement and friendship when we commenced to correspond. I have nothing to say about it.⁷⁷⁰

This letter from Minnie was dated just a few weeks before Gene married Armedia, with whom he also carried on correspondence. Gene clearly had intentions of beginning a relationship with Minnie, based on her response, but she would not accept his overtures.

⁷⁶⁶ Hattie Birkett to D.E. Denman, August 30, 1881; Minnie Hull to D.E. Denman, May 24, 1882.

⁷⁶⁷ Louisa Lee to D.E. Denman, May 28, 1881.

⁷⁶⁸ Minnie Hull to D.E. Denman, September 25, 1882.

⁷⁶⁹ Ibid., November 25, 1882.

⁷⁷⁰ Ibid., December 13, 1882.

Along with his many other correspondence partners, Gene also wrote frequently to Armedia (Media) Carlock, whom he would marry in 1883. As could be expected, Gene and Media's relationship was fraught with arguments. Their courtship began as early as 1877. In the earliest of their correspondence, Gene attempted to break off their relationship, much to Media's dismay. She wrote in a letter to him, "I would just say emphatically to begin with that I do think a great deal of you and would have much rather had you continue your visits but you thought best not to and you have given your reason," which was not stated in the letter.⁷⁷¹ Based on the content of the letter, Gene seemed to think that they were too young to settle down, but Media emphatically responded, "I think I am old enough to know my own mind and not change it unless I thought you cared nothing for me, and then I should try to although it would be very hard for me to do."⁷⁷² Her strong feelings prevented her from wanting to end their correspondence.

Regardless of their conversation, Gene and Media continued a relationship, but they also continued to question their status as a couple. Their split this time seemed to be based on a transgression of morals, perhaps of a sexual nature. Gene wrote, "I have been thinking about this matter seriously and think it better that we cease to think to become anything more than friends at the present."⁷⁷³ His reasoning, as he continued was, "I never thought you be so weak as to give way in that way and I believe that I always [had] more confidence in you than you had in me."⁷⁷⁴ The reference was not explicit, but likely had to do with one or both of them proceeding in a sexual manner before marriage. This type of behavior was not uncommon. Grey Osterud noted, "most courting couples were allowed a substantial degree of freedom from adult supervision.

⁷⁷¹ Media to Gene, A. Carlock—D.E. Denman Corr., Box 1, Folder 22. Carlock/Denman/Irvin/Porter Collection, Archives Collection, McLean County Museum of History, December 8, 1877.

⁷⁷² Ibid.

⁷⁷³ Gene to Media, June 30, 1878.

⁷⁷⁴ Ibid.

Courtship was quite informal.⁷⁷⁵ Evidence from other diaries corroborated the fact that girls were able to socialize frequently, even throughout the night, with both sexes. These friends and neighbors even spent the night at each others' houses, which would have allowed many opportunities to participate in intimate activities.

Several years later, their correspondence continued. From the content of the letters, it is unclear why Gene and Media entered into a relationship at all. Very few nice words passed between the two, and both accused each other of various misdeeds. For example, Media wrote to Gene, "my advise [sic] to you after you have gone with a girl to be very careful of the remarks you make about them, if you have any respect for them or yourself either. I'm giving you this advice for your future use, free of charge, not wishing you to treat other ladies with as much disrespect as you have me."⁷⁷⁶ When Gene tried to make amends, pleading, "I am really sorry for each and every unkind or act that you have ever received at my hands," Media responded, "I think just as little of your ways as I pretend."⁷⁷⁷ Half a year later, their conflict went on. Media told Gene, "seemed as if you did and said every thing you could to think of to make me miserable... why it was I know not. I think it was very wrong of you to do so."⁷⁷⁸ Up to a few weeks before their marriage, the couple denied there would even be a wedding, but by the time they actually got married Media and Gene seemed to have settled down, although evidence in the correspondence would indicate that they attempted to keep the wedding a secret.⁷⁷⁹

Media and Gene's long term correspondence showed how young men and women conducted themselves in a much more personal way than other sources could show.

⁷⁷⁵ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 107.

⁷⁷⁶ Media to Gene, July 8, 1881.

⁷⁷⁷ Gene to Media, December 7, 1881; Media to Gene, December 11, 1881.

⁷⁷⁸ Media to Gene, July 26, 1882.

⁷⁷⁹ On February 6, 1883, Media wrote to Gene, "I didn't hardly understand whether you intended telling your folks or not... You must tell them all about it I don't think it would do not to tell them." This may have been about their impending marriage which took place three days later. Scope Note and Family History, Carlock/Denman/Irvin/Porter Collection.

Correspondence showed how couples could develop “mutual trust [based] on candor and commonality,” as Grey Osterud noted of Ellen Rothman’s work.⁷⁸⁰ In Media and Gene’s case, candor clearly showed through their letters, but trust was not as prominent. Their youthful relationship, both flirtatious and contentious, eventually led to marriage, although many such relationships did not, evidenced by Gene’s other pen pals, as well as Rhoda Emery’s correspondence with Wellington Clay.

Through correspondence, though, girls had an opportunity to explore the bounds of a romantic relationship through the safety of the written word. The expectation of privacy for letters was low, as post changed hands many times before reaching its intended destination. However, feelings and thoughts that could not be expressed verbally, for various reasons, could be conveyed in letters. Addie Crouch, for example, carried on an extensive correspondence with John, all the while continuing relationships with other boys at the same time. The two exchanged pictures and even visited at times, but their written exchanges were the bulk of their relationship.

Correspondence played a large role in other courtships, and even friendships, as well. Part of Carrie Markle’s courtship with her soon-to-be husband happened through letters, particularly when she returned to Michigan to visit her family in the fall of 1867. She wrote in her diary, “No letter! How disappointed Oh! Oh dear me!”⁷⁸¹ About a week later, the letter finally came, and she recorded, “had a letter from E. Davis...answered Davis letter.”⁷⁸² The anticipation of receiving a letter outweighed the feeling of finally getting the correspondence. Girls also enjoyed getting notes from family and friends in the mail. Rhoda Emery spent a lonely evening “looking over my old diarys [sic] for consolation” due to the fact that she “expected a

⁷⁸⁰ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 8-9.

⁷⁸¹ Carrie Markle, October 10, 1867.

⁷⁸² *Ibid.*, October 18, 1867.

letter from home to-night but did not get any.”⁷⁸³ Bonds created through correspondence could create lasting friendships and relationships which sustained girls throughout periods of absence.

The final goal of most girls’ relationships, epistolary or otherwise, was marriage. As mentioned earlier, marriage led to stability and safety for most young women, and gave them the opportunity to start their own family outside of their family of origin. Prescriptive literature confirmed this goal as the proper course for girls, holding up marriage as the ideal for every woman. “Why should not girls be married?” asked one author. “Marriage is an institution possessing both human and divine sanction, which it would be quite impossible to withhold without the co-operation of young women.”⁷⁸⁴ The idea that girls wanted to get married the natural progression into adulthood.

Marriage, though, was not easy for anyone. In order to maintain a happy and healthy marriage, both parties had to consider the needs of the other. According to a *Harper’s Bazar* article reprinted in the *Champaign County Herald*, “two people who think each of his or her own especial comfort can make it worse than a purgatorial condition.”⁷⁸⁵ Likening marriage to “any other association, bond, or partnership,” the author concluded that “two people who are each naturally unselfish, or who love each other sufficiently to cultivate unselfishness, or who are unselfish from principle, may make marriage a state of beatitude.”⁷⁸⁶ Even when the couple was perfectly matched, according to one author, “there is more or less of disillusion, especially, perhaps, to the wife, and, when all the glamor is gone, danger to the family begins.”⁷⁸⁷ Over time, the happiness of marriage could fade, and then “the sense of duty is all in all to the wedded

⁷⁸³ Rhoda Emery, June 9, 1892.

⁷⁸⁴ “To be Rich and to be Married,” *Grant County Herald*, July 14, 1868.

⁷⁸⁵ “Happiness of the Married,” *Champaign County Herald*, November 14, 1888.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁷ “Dangers in Married Life,” *Sidney By-Way*, September 29, 1888.

pair.”⁷⁸⁸ Marriage required work, and strong emotions were not the only factor in sustaining the long-term partnership.

The worst outcome of a troubled marriage was divorce, which all writers denigrated. “There is no condemnation too severe,” wrote the author of “The Divorce Evil,” “for men or women who enter the marriage state with the idea in their minds that if they do not like it they will take advantage of the law that allows them to escape.”⁷⁸⁹ Girls could not enter into a marriage lightly, as marriage bonds lasted for life, and also, “it is the wives who suffer the most from such sundered relations.”⁷⁹⁰ Despite the idealized nature of marriage, all of the warnings against it would have made many girls consider their options.

Not marrying, while an option, was not popular or very socially acceptable. Carrie Markle and Addie Crouch enjoyed their singlehood, but then fulfilled the societal obligation of marriage. Mary Pascoe wed earlier than the other girls, entering into a partnership and establishing her own home. Ellen Rothman noted that “most middle-class Americans continued to see marriage as the only natural and desirable state for an adult woman...it was marriage, and only marriage, that completed and fulfilled a woman.”⁷⁹¹ These three girls, and many others, acknowledged and accepted this same expectation. Even women who did not marry usually accepted this as well. Kathryn Hunter found in her study of rural single women in nineteenth-century Australia that “none of the farm women in this study was single by choice.”⁷⁹² Some of the women expressed disappointment over this fact, but others simply saw it as a fact of life.⁷⁹³ Rhoda Emery remained single her whole life, but the choice was not only hers. Family

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁹ “The Divorce Evil,” *Sidney By-Way*, November 9, 1889.

⁷⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁷⁹¹ Rothman, *Hands and Hearts*, 252.

⁷⁹² Hunter, *Father's Right Hand Man*, 69.

⁷⁹³ Ibid.

obligations and over-protective parents added to the pressures of attempting to find a partner. Rhoda referred to herself as an “old maid,” the typical language of the day for an unmarried woman.⁷⁹⁴ The term was loaded with negative connotations, but remaining unmarried was not always a bad thing for a woman.

“An Old Maid’s Confession” in the *Prairie Farmer* painted a different picture of “spinsterhood.” She wrote, “My life is a pleasant one. No one annoys me. No husband calls me ‘my love’ in company, and ‘old brute’ at home!...I do as I please, go where I please, think, breath, cough, sneeze, sleep and eat as I please.”⁷⁹⁵ This characterization sounded positive, but in reality, women had few opportunities to exercise freedoms. In fact, in the estimation of most prescriptive writers, “old maids” were either grumpy nuisances or a prudish complainers. The “Symptoms of Old-Maidishness,” according to one author, included excessive cleanliness, affinity for animals, and self-consciousness regarding appearance. “When a woman begins to say that she’s resisted many an offer—that’s a symptom,” listed the writer, who clearly had an overly negative view of unmarried women.⁷⁹⁶ The author went on to record, “when a woman begins to say what a dreadful set of creatures men are and that she wouldn’t be bothered with one for all the world—that’s a symptom...when a woman begins to go to bed with her stockings and a flannel night-cap on—that’s a symptom.”⁷⁹⁷ This less than flattering description of old maids served as an archetype of how most people viewed unmarried women.

There was hope for old maids, though, as many authors believed there to be many opportunities for them to do good work in society. What the previous author took as negative qualities, another writer held up as positive. Being “particularly reserved toward the other sex”

⁷⁹⁴ Rhoda Emery, July 22, 1893.

⁷⁹⁵ “An Old Maid’s Confession,” *Prairie Farmer* 40 (October 9, 1869), 331.

⁷⁹⁶ “Symptoms of Old-Maidishness,” *Grant County Herald*, May 18, 1869.

⁷⁹⁷ Ibid.

and “humane to the animals around her,” were good attributes according to the writer of “A Good Word for Old Maids.”⁷⁹⁸ He continued, “In short, I have always found that neatness, modesty, economy and humanity are the never-failing characteristics of that terrible creature—an old maid.”⁷⁹⁹ The positive qualities of unmarried women seemed to be some of the same as those of wives. If everything a man wanted in a partner was present in an old maid, why then was she unmarried?

For one prescriptive writer, the burgeoning “Woman Movement” was responsible for the status of such good women as old maids. The unmarried woman had such positive qualities that she turned them toward other pursuits rather than marriage. “The modern old maid,” according to Fanny Fern, the author, “takes care of herself, instead of her sister’s nine children, through mumps, and measles, and croup, and chicken-pox, and whooping-cough, and lung fever, and leprosy, and what not. She don’t work that way for no wages, and bear toleration day and night. No sir!”⁸⁰⁰ Fern sought to break the stereotype of the long-suffering old maid who was the family work-horse, filling in wherever necessary to take care of other family members. Instead, “if she has money, she teaches, or she lectures, or she writes books or poems, or she is a book keeper, or she sets type, or she does anything but hang on the skirts of somebody’s else husband, and she feels well and independent in consequence, and holds up her head with the best, and asks no favors.”⁸⁰¹ The sudden independence of unmarried women was due to woman’s rights, or that “awful bugbear, ‘Woman’s Rights!’ which small-souled men, and I am sorry to say, narrow women too, burlesque and ridicule, and won’t believe in, till the Juggernaut of Progress knocks them down and rides over them, because they will neither climb up on it, nor get out of the

⁷⁹⁸ “A Good Word for Old Maids,” *Marion Register*, January 8, 1868.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁰ Fanny Fern, “The Old Maid of the Period,” *Rochester Post*, September 16, 1871.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*

way.”⁸⁰² Although the movement for women’s rights was not popular with all people, Fanny Fern believed that soon the image of spinsters would be shifted to a more positive one.

Despite growing respect for unmarried women, no matter how small, Carrie, Mary, Addie, Minnie, and most other rural girls focused on marriage as a life goal. Rhoda Emery was the only girl who did not, and at times seemed sorry about that fact. Early in her diary, she mentioned the wedding of a friend. She wrote, “Marne C. and Harvey Brockway were married Thursday. She is only fifteen. I pity her some but I still almost envy.”⁸⁰³ Rhoda herself was eighteen years old at the time, and most likely knew the hardships, both physical and mental, which could come from marriage, and for a girl to begin a such a young age, Rhoda pitied the situation, but at the same time, had feelings of jealousy as well. “Just think,” she continued, “she can stay home now as long as she lives and she will have in her husband at least one true friend.”⁸⁰⁴ Rhoda recorded these words when she was particularly lonely, away from home and disillusioned with teaching. Perhaps the specific circumstances of the situation prompted her envy, as she rarely wrote about wishing to be married. In fact, she wrote to her brother Jim in 1893, “I really can’t conclude whether we Berkshire’s are all getting to be old maids and baches or whether our contemporaries are all getting married too young.”⁸⁰⁵ At that point, Rhoda did not seem too concerned whether she would get married or not, as she was still young, although a month later she lamented in her diary, “Here I am, a poor cross old maid of twenty-one. I am tired and discouraged.”⁸⁰⁶ Rhoda’s negativity about her marital status seemed to coincide with the times she was most frustrated and lonely in her work. But overall, her lack of a husband

⁸⁰² Ibid.

⁸⁰³ Rhoda Emery, January 13, 1890.

⁸⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁰⁵ Rhoda Emery to Jim Emery, James Emery to Family Letters, 1885-1928, Rhoda J. Emery and Family Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, June 21, 1893.

⁸⁰⁶ Rhoda Emery, July 22, 1893.

allowed Rhoda to pursue a career in teaching, similar to the story of the “modern old maid” in the prescriptive literature.

Of the girls that did get married, only Carrie was still writing in her diary when the wedding occurred. On December 2, 1867, she wrote unemotionally, “Pleasant day was married to E. Davis small party.”⁸⁰⁷ The event was marked by nothing more than a get-together of friends. Carrie’s diary ended in 1867, with one of the last entries being Christmas Day. She recorded, “Christmas had 100 for a present from Davis to get a watch had turkey for dinner.”⁸⁰⁸ From that point, Carrie began her life as a married woman.

While Addie Crouch did not get married until well after she finished recording a diary, she still mentioned the weddings of others, usually in a negative fashion. For Addie, weddings were simply another social occasion, and in the cases of both weddings she wrote about, she was excluded from the proceedings. On September 1, 1883, she wrote, “Payne has come and they are to be married...Nellie and I were at work most of the time in the bedroom fixing Lib a dress she could ware to be married in for she cant wear any of hers she is so big. But they had Effie and May stay to the wedding and we were left out, but never mind.”⁸⁰⁹ Addie’s help did not grant her an invitation to the wedding which she waved off, but was most likely angered due to the mention of the incident in her diary. She also did not specify why Lib needed a larger wedding dress, but perhaps she was pregnant. Maybe Addie was privy to that information, and so was excluded from the wedding. On another occasion Addie wrote, “Carrie is to be married tomorrow evening she has invited a good many but slighted me. ‘Well alls well that ends well.’”⁸¹⁰ Again, Addie was excluded from a social event, but no reason was given in the diary.

⁸⁰⁷ Carrie Markle, December 2, 1867.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid., December 25, 1867.

⁸⁰⁹ Addie Crouch, September 1, 1883.

⁸¹⁰ Ibid., December 31, 1884.

Addie's callous attitude toward other girls may have been the reason, but it cannot be known from her written record.

Even though Addie did eventually get married, her attitude exemplified the "girl problem" in rural life. She spent evenings out with boys, alienated friends, and even disobeyed her parents, all for the sake of flirting and having fun. An article in the *Brodhead Independent* asked "Where is my Daughter To-night," and listed many of the activities in which Addie took part. "Too many girls," wrote the author, "find some excuse to leave their homes pleasant evenings. No sooner out of sight of the domicile than they hunt up a girl companion and make a bee-line for places where men congregate, in the expectation of 'catching a beau,' or getting up a flirtation, rarely disappointed in accomplishing one or the other."⁸¹¹ The author of the article could have been writing about Addie.

The solution to the problem, according to the author, was parental guidance. If mothers "will take more interest with their daughters and try to entertain them evenings with reputable young men, good books, and kind motherly talk, instead of letting them run here and there, without knowing where they are or what company they are in, there would be far less of this street running."⁸¹² Addie wrote very little about her parents, especially her mother, in her diary. The influence her father and mother had over her seemed minimal, if her diary entries are representative of daily life. Parental support, which Addie had little of, was necessary to cultivate proper young girls, but too much influence, as in the case of Rhoda Emery, led to unhappy young women with few options for socialization. Despite this, both Addie and Rhoda, as well as Carrie, Mary, Minnie, and the other girls, ended up as respectable wives and mothers, or in Rhoda's case, as a well-regarded teacher and school administrator. When girls completely stepped outside

⁸¹¹ "Where is my Daughter To-night," *Brodhead Independent*, May 6, 1881.

⁸¹² *Ibid.*

of the bounds of propriety, social and cultural taboos could be broken, involving young women's lives and reputations. The next chapter will discuss the extremes of the "girl problem" and how it affected the lives of girls and their families.

CHAPTER 6. EXTREMES

As this project has demonstrated, rural girls in the nineteenth-century Midwest acted in ways both within and outside of social prescriptions that identified the “ideal” woman. Middle-class prescriptive literature pushed girls to become perfect wives and well-educated adults, but on farms, the ideology differed significantly. The most important thing a girl could become on a farm was useful. Rural girls regularly took part in education, work, and socialization, but all the while contributed to their families, before finally becoming as adults productive members of the rural community themselves. But where many girls simply took various paths to becoming the archetypal rural woman, others bypassed the entire system. Some women refused to contribute and became useless to their families through their own self-centeredness and vanity. Others transgressed with sexual relations made public through premarital pregnancy, prostitution, and infanticide. These women were no longer simply “problem girls,” but instead attacked the fabric of rural society.

The extremes of girls behavior affected more than simply singular families. Individual girls’ troublesome behavior, while irritating to immediate family members, made little impact on others, but more serious transgressions harmed the economic well-being of the community. Economic necessity drove nearly all interactions in rural areas, and women and men often played equal roles in these exchanges. The family economy depended on everyone, including fathers, mothers, sons, daughters, and hired help, to make ends meet. Behavioral and sexual misconduct threatened the balance of labor so important to farming families. Girls who did not contribute to their families could cause the unit to disintegrate into debt and disorder. Similarly, young women who engaged in premarital sex and became pregnant disrupted a closely maintained system of

family exchange, in which girls married to attain adulthood and transfer their economic worth to their husbands.

Behavioral extremes could manifest in different ways. One way that rural girls could completely disavow the rural ideal was through uselessness. Parents expected farm daughters to provide help and support in housework and farm work. As demonstrated earlier, women like Rhoda Emery, Addie Crouch, and Carrie Markle provided needed help to the household through chore work, and also provided financial help by contributing wages earned through teaching to the family income. In Rhoda Emery's case, her family desperately needed this to make ends meet. Although these girls maintained separate wages and purchased material goods for themselves, their work was largely a function of what was needed by the family at that time. Girls who did not contribute in some way to the family could become financial drains on the family. Even if the family had enough money, uselessness could contribute to the moral decay of the girl and family as well.

May Lindley, later Nelson, exemplified the rural ideal gone wrong. May grew up on a farm, but had many material and social goals for her life, none of which involved working as a farm wife. May never mentioned doing any type of work in the journal she kept for many years as a young woman, whether farm work or household chores. She also received an education, but did not put it to use for the furtherance of a career or within the household. Instead, May acted as a socialite, going from one event and one suitor to another without any real goals for the future, other than seeing the world and eventually marrying a handsome man.

While many farm girls would not have had the opportunity to act this way, even if they wanted to, the circumstances surrounding May's behavior stemmed mainly from class. The Lindley family was a farming family, but apparently a wealthy one. The family was well-off

enough to send May to high school and college in another city and also to hire help for the farm and home. Instead of putting time and energy toward a career or farm work, May Lindley focused on activities that were important to her, but not necessarily to a typical farm girl who wanted to marry and would eventually stay on the farm. To complicate matters, May also had a very high opinion of herself, which she recorded in her diary in many entries. Her emphasis on her physical appearance and her aptitude for the various activities she engaged in, as well as the near endless stream of young men trying to court her, showed that May thought little of the social prescriptions of modesty and humility for young women.⁸¹³

May Lindley was born in August 1869 to parents James And Sarah Lindley. She grew up in a home with several siblings. Her father was a farmer in Champaign County, Illinois, and he eventually expanded the farming operation into orange groves in Florida.⁸¹⁴ From a few mentions in her diary, it would seem that May had little interest or responsibility within the home. For instance, she mentioned, “Mamma goes to Ohio on a visit. Lizzie Malahn is helping us. I think she is nice and like her she will do most anything for me.”⁸¹⁵ In 1883, May would have been fourteen years old, old enough to help out around the home in the absence of her mother, indeed even old enough to assume full responsibility for the home. Instead, the family hired help, and May took advantage of that fact.

When she got older, instead of staying at home to help with the work, May attended high school in Urbana, the nearby big city, and while there, boarded with her uncle. Later, she would attend the University of Illinois, also in Urbana.⁸¹⁶ Throughout her education, she was very

⁸¹³ May Lindley Nelson, manuscript journal, 1877-1909, Box 60, Special Collections, Champaign County Historical Society, Urbana Free Library, Urbana, Illinois.

⁸¹⁴ In November, 1886, May mentioned her father and uncles taking a trip to Florida. When they returned, she remarked that they had “purchased an orange grove. Think of it.”

⁸¹⁵ May Lindley Nelson, July 1883.

⁸¹⁶ Ibid., 1884.

interested in literature and art. As a child she wrote stories and performed plays for the neighborhood. She mentioned in 1879 that “Nell [a friend] and I wrote beautiful novels but they never were published. We read, read, everything we can get our hand on.”⁸¹⁷ She also described a theatrical put on by herself and Nell in 1881, in which they performed a play for a group of friends.⁸¹⁸

May’s interest in creative activities led her to an education in art at the University of Illinois. While there, she entered some of her pictures into a fair or art show. Due to her boundless enthusiasm for her own work, though, she was less than thrilled with the results. In September of 1887 she recorded “My pictures this figure piece ‘Despair’ and ‘Moonlight on the Rhine’ were entered wrong so recd. no money but I believe they received premium 1st only were debared [sic] by the mistake. I shall not take them again, so much trouble for the glory—though they received unbounded compliments—they were beyond a doubt the finest there.”⁸¹⁹ May’s remarks about her high estimation of her own work showed a pattern of behavior unsuitable for a typical rural girl. Young women were supposed to be humble and selfless in regard to their own persons and not speak so highly of themselves. An article in the *Champaign County Herald* warned girls to be modest, cautioning them not to argue their opinions too loudly. For a modest girl, if “her opinion is asked, she gives it hesitatingly, not doubtfully, and if not accepted, never allows herself to utter a contradiction...her opinion is not lost or defeated by so doing.”⁸²⁰ May did not live up to the standard of a “modest” girl, due to her argumentative opinions about her own talents.

⁸¹⁷ Ibid., 1879-1880.

⁸¹⁸ Ibid., 1881.

⁸¹⁹ Ibid., September 1887.

⁸²⁰ “Picture of a Modest Girl,” *Champaign County Herald*, June 4, 1879.

May also had a very high opinion of herself physically. While at school, she had the opportunity to be judged by different people. She wrote in 1884, “They call me, I hear it even among the girls, the prettiest girl in the College. And how much fun do I have.”⁸²¹ Her appearance encompassed her personal value, and she took great pride in being found beautiful by her peers. In the late nineteenth century, parents and advisors discouraged girls from focusing on outward beauty and instead placed value on internal qualities. According to historian Joan Jacobs Brumberg, “many parents tried to limit their daughters’ interest in superficial things, such as hairdos, dresses, or the size of their waists, because character was considered more important than beauty by both parents and the community.”⁸²² Girls like May, who only valued themselves by their looks and dress, “were likely to be accused of vanity or self-indulgence.”⁸²³ The characteristic of vanity was a shameful and sinful aspect of girls’ lives and advisors urged them to avoid it.

Prescriptive literature warned against placing too much emphasis on physical appearance, as it was not a helpful indicator of the kind of woman being described. The *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye* printed an article called “Pretty Women,” which argued “prettiness is a vague sort of substantive, very loosely applied to womankind in a manner generally designed to be indefinitely complimentary...the term is merely conventional.”⁸²⁴ A woman’s appearance, then, was much less important than her general attitude and disposition. The article finished, “Every man, not unconquerably a dolt, prefers beyond measure a fine woman without personal charms to the

⁸²¹ May Lindley Nelson, November 1884.

⁸²² Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997), xx.

⁸²³ Ibid.

⁸²⁴ “Pretty Women,” *Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye*, April 14, 1876.

fairest goddess radiant with insipidity.”⁸²⁵ Accordingly, a woman should be kind, humble, and modest, rather than rely on her physical appearance to be attractive to men.

Focus on outward appearance could even be considered a physical hindrance. An article in the *Tolono Weekly Herald* described a woman that “is so superlatively beautiful, that even gentlemen are afraid to engage her in the ordinary routine of business, least it should provoke criticism, and women will not have her about their households for the same reason.”⁸²⁶

According to the article, “the woman is in danger of starving, because her striking appearance always invites comment.”⁸²⁷ While this author clearly exaggerated the idea that physical beauty

was detrimental to a woman’s personality, the standard was prevalent in the prescriptive

literature. A writer warned, “a young woman’s plainness—which, by the way, saves her from a

great many annoyances and dangers—need detract nothing from her loveliness if only her

disposition is amiable, her mind cultured, and her heart kind and pure.”⁸²⁸ For the ideal girl,

beauty was secondary to more inner characteristics in courtship and marriage, and physical

attractiveness could serve as a hindrance to a young woman’s development. The *Boscobel Dial*

also noted, “It is pleasant to be handsome, but all beauty is not in prettiness. There is a higher

beauty that makes people love us tenderly... Good people are never ill looking.”⁸²⁹ Even the

homeliest of women would be beautiful in the eyes of their peers if they dedicated themselves to

helping others.⁸³⁰

May Lindley had a wide variety of suitors before finally meeting the man that she would marry. She received several engagement offers, and even considered a few of them. One man

⁸²⁵ Ibid.

⁸²⁶ “The Trials of Beauty,” *Tolono Weekly Herald*, February 8, 1878.

⁸²⁷ Ibid.

⁸²⁸ “A Homely Woman’s Charm,” *Youth’s Companion*, reprinted in *Brodhead Independent*, January 28, 1881.

⁸²⁹ “What is Loveliness?” *Boscobel Dial*, April 30, 1875.

⁸³⁰ A *Prairie Farmer* article described such a woman as “perfectly irresistible,” despite the fact that “her complexion was sallow” and “her gray eyes small and sunken.” “Beauty,” *Prairie Farmer* 58 (March 6, 1886): 156.

named Millard (also referred to as M. or Mr. P) was exceedingly persistent in his attempts to marry May. On Christmas Day of 1883, she noted, “He gave me a great number of expensive presents on the tree but nothing that I could not accept. After we came home, he asked me very nicely and so earnestly to be his wife, and of course he said he loved me dearly, etc.”⁸³¹ A week later, he gave her a ring which she accepted “on conditions,” which she did not specify.

Millard seemed to be a fine choice for May, but several barriers stood in the way of marriage. First of all, her family did not care for the match. After Millard gave her the ring, she confessed to her journal, “Mamma and Arie are not pleased, think he is too much older than I am (he is 33 or 35, some where there).”⁸³² They even went as far as to try to bribe her to not marry him. In September of 1884, she confessed, “My people say I can go to college if I will give up Millard. They think it is all for my good.”⁸³³ Another barrier to the marriage was May’s own ambivalent attitude about getting married so soon. She felt that she was too young and had not experienced enough to be married yet. She eventually broke it off, to Millard’s dismay, noting “How can I help wanting to see some of the world first?”⁸³⁴ Although she worried that she might have made a mistake, May ultimately decided that she could not marry someone at so young an age. Millard went west instead and ended up getting employment as a mail agent.

Even though May did not fulfill the role of dutiful farm daughter in household responsibilities, she did take the advice of her family on many occasions. Millard was not the only problematic man in May’s life. Throughout the years 1884 to 1887, May saw a number of young men, several of whom did not meet familial approval. May’s uncle, whom she lived with while attending school, forbade her to see G.W. Morrow, the nephew of a professor at the

⁸³¹ May Lindley Nelson, December 25, 1883.

⁸³² Ibid., New Year, 1884.

⁸³³ Ibid., September 1884.

⁸³⁴ Ibid.

University of Illinois, as “he has had a bad life—whatever that may be.”⁸³⁵ Another man, “L.,” was forbidden to visit, as May’s uncle declared him “wild.” L. very much wanted to marry May, and “he says he loves me ‘above heaven and earth.’ ...says I am his first, best and only darling, etc. says will get married at the parsonage and defy Uncle’s folks and my people too.”⁸³⁶ May’s family may have been correct, because when May told L. that she could not see him anymore, he had an extreme reaction. According to May, “he swore at me and threatened me! Dared to I called Uncle and he came in to show him out and behold! He was nowhere to be seen.”⁸³⁷

Besides her uncle, her mother also played a guiding role in her life. May allowed her mother to read letters she wrote to various suitors, and stopped writing to some when her mother saw fit.⁸³⁸

May had no shortage of suitors even after the ill-fated relationship with L. She received gifts of jewelry, cards, and even pets (a bird and a kitten from two different men). But she was not willing to settle for any of these men. She noted, “I wish to enjoy myself not to get married for a long while.”⁸³⁹ By September of 1887, she met a Mr. Nelson who would change her mind. Nelson fed May’s need for attention to physical attributes. In her journal, May continually made mention of the fact that people believed her to be beautiful and Mr. Nelson to be handsome. One of her friends commented that she and Nelson “made a handsome couple,” while another remarked that he was “the finest looking man she met and ‘with a certain style of his own that was so taking.’”⁸⁴⁰ Of all of the qualities that May looked for in a future mate, attractiveness seemed to be one of the most important. She mentioned the relative attractiveness of all of the men with whom she had relationships.

⁸³⁵ Ibid., November 1884.

⁸³⁶ Ibid., June 1885.

⁸³⁷ Ibid.

⁸³⁸ In July of 1885, May noted, “Mamma thinks I ought to stop writing so I will.”

⁸³⁹ May Lindley Nelson, August 1885.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid., February 1888.

Mr. Nelson would eventually marry May and take her off the farm. Nelson was a jeweler in town, and had actually played a part in May breaking off another relationship (May gave back an engraved bracelet to a former suitor and had the engraving removed by Mr. Nelson at the jewelers). The two of them had a rocky relationship at first, and even broke off ties for a time. Nelson decided to go to Michigan for work in 1888, and intended to say goodbye to May before he left. He ended up leaving without saying goodbye, and May was devastated: “How could he! That ends it all. He intended to do so. I don’t care. Yes, I do care that is the worst of it. How could he.”⁸⁴¹ Somehow this transgression was forgiven, though, and by January of 1889, he was back, and in April proposed marriage. In June of 1890 they married.

Although initially ambivalent to marriage, May succumbed to Mr. Nelson’s charms. She recorded her feelings in relation to the engagement in her journal. She wrote, “I do love him well enough to marry him, much and much better and differently than any of the others. We are so happy. We love each other so well and passionately perhaps we would be happier if we did not so well...”⁸⁴² Her meaning was unclear, perhaps a veiled reference to premarital sexual activity, but she acknowledged the difference between her feelings for Mr. Nelson and previous suitors. On the eve of their wedding, May quoted Nelson as saying, “I mean to make you happy God helping me darling.”⁸⁴³

May Lindley Nelson exemplified a farm girl who did not fulfill the typical expectations. Rather than work hard at home and get an education on the side, May focused almost solely on men and relationships, preferring to be a showpiece rather than a productive member of the farm home. She even admitted to a potential fiancé, “I knew nothing of housework (how to run a house I mean).” The fact that she did not do housework spoke to the type of upbringing she had,

⁸⁴¹ Ibid., August 18, 1888.

⁸⁴² Ibid., April 7, 1889.

⁸⁴³ Ibid., June 3, 1890.

which was one not advised by prescriptive literature of the day. The *Champaign County Herald* ran an article in 1882 titled “The Education of Girls” which argued that all girls needed to learn household duties as part of their education. The author argued, “sensible mothers are beginning to desire that their daughters should learn not only the accomplishments, but the practical as well. A young girl ought to be taught thoroughly every one of the duties devolving on the housewife.”⁸⁴⁴ As a young woman educated in art, she would not have had this type of training unless her mother had given it. Another article reinforced this idea, arguing “teach them, if you can afford it, music, painting, etc., but consider them as secondary objects only.”⁸⁴⁵

Courtship and etiquette manuals also denigrated a focus on arts in women’s education, as home-making education, rather than arts, created suitable wives. In *The Modern Art of Making Love*, author James S. Wilson argued, “she may be a good wife, and yet know nothing of French or the piano; but she cannot properly fill the place of a wife, if she is destitute of domestic knowledge.”⁸⁴⁶ The fact that May Lindley freely confided to a potential fiancé that she did not have any household experience would have been a major detriment to her marriage potential. Also, the types of activities that May preferred were not conducive to making a good home. A woman who “takes pleasure in passing her time in idleness...visiting ball-rooms and theatres...reading novels...beware of her! A lazy, uncomfortable drone, she is not fit to take proper care of herself, much less to be the companion of a good husband, and at the head of a family,” wrote Wilson.⁸⁴⁷

May Lindley was at the far end of the spectrum of “uselessness,” as she did not contribute materially or financially to her family’s home and farm. Not only that, but she did not

⁸⁴⁴ “The Education of Girls,” *Champaign County Herald*, March 29, 1882.

⁸⁴⁵ “Proper Education for Girls,” *Champaign County Herald*, August 29, 1883.

⁸⁴⁶ James S. Wilson, *The Modern Art of Making Love and Complete Manual of Etiquette, Love, Courtship and Matrimony* (Chicago: The Saalfield Publishing Co., 1881), 25.

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

receive an education in matters that would be useful to her in home life and marriage either. Despite the fact that in light of May's personality and actions, she would not have been considered a suitable choice for a farm wife, she had many dates and marriage proposals, and eventually did get married in June of 1890. The *Prairie Farmer* commented on these types of relationships, based on appearances rather than deeper feelings. The article "Loveliness" argued, "It is the true loveliness of your nature that wins and continues to retain the affections of the heart. Young ladies sadly miss it who labor to improve their outward looks, while they bestow not a thought upon their minds...though you may not be courted by fop and sot, the good and truly great will have to linger in your steps."⁸⁴⁸ May received a lot of attention for her beauty, but as demonstrated earlier, several of the men she courted turned out to be far from gentlemen. Even John Nelson, the man she married, was not always the type of man that she would have preferred. In at least the first few years, the marriage was rocky, and May recorded several volatile arguments, even confessing that she wished she had not gotten married. She wrote in February of 1891, "John is angry again, so I suppose will stay out—he thinks that makes me feel badly and it does. He stayed so late was afraid he was killed. Mamma was very angry on my account was afraid if I should be sick and as alone. I feel like I cannot forgive him!...I am unhappy wish I had never married. When he came home he was sorry and I was about sick."⁸⁴⁹ Whether or not this unhappiness came from May's perceived deficiencies as a wife cannot be said, but at least at first, May and John did not have the perfect union.

Whatever May's transgressions may have been, they were relatively minor. Coming of age at the end of the nineteenth century, May more closely exemplified a twentieth-century girl, who, as Brumberg observed, "began to think about beauty and the self in ways that were more

⁸⁴⁸ "Loveliness," *The Prairie Farmer*, July 4, 1868.

⁸⁴⁹ May Lindley Nelson, February, 1891.

external than internal.”⁸⁵⁰ Women behaved outside of social prescriptions in many ways, but these prescriptions often did not alter the realities of life. The fact that May was not proficient in housekeeping did not keep her from an education or fulfilling relationships. Some transgressions, though, went beyond behavioral quirks. Prescriptive writers urged young women to remain modest and not have intimate relationships with men. Premarital sex was only alluded to in most of the prescriptive literature, but it was possibly the most extreme form of bad behavior a girl could commit. Brumberg noted that strict Victorian prescriptions held virginity as “a ‘jewel’ or ‘treasure’ worthy of preservation until it was appropriately (and legally) sacrificed at marriage on a sweet ‘hymeneal alter.’”⁸⁵¹ By middle-class standards, this was necessary for marriage, so girls needed to hold on to their virtue.⁸⁵²

Despite this fact, premarital sex in rural areas was relatively common, although it is difficult to quantify the number of couples who participated. Through her study of the diary of Martha Ballard, historian Laurel Thatcher Ulrich found that intercourse and pregnancy before marriage were rather common throughout the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century New England community in which Martha lived.⁸⁵³ Similarly, Grey Osterud noted that while “premarital chastity was accepted as normative,” the breach of that norm happened often and provoked much discussion among community members, and as such, “the silence about sexuality which pervaded urban middle-class culture in the Victorian period was not complete in the rural community.”⁸⁵⁴ Many people talked when young women broke sexual taboos. Diarists, though,

⁸⁵⁰ Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 70.

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁸⁵² *Ibid.*

⁸⁵³ See Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990), 147-161.

⁸⁵⁴ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 111.

declined to write much on the topic, as young women were reluctant to record such information.⁸⁵⁵

The diaries of Carrie Markle, Mary Pascoe, and Rhoda Emery made little to no mentions of sexual activity. Addie Crouch made allusions to premarital sexual activity in regard to correspondence with a friend. Upon hearing the news that an acquaintance, Mina, had given birth to a child, she remarked, “I don’t think I would have wrote it if I had been her for she has not been married 8 mon. till the 22 of Dec.”⁸⁵⁶ By mentioning that Mina gave birth to a child less than nine months after her marriage, she alleged that premarital sex had taken place. She did not openly condemn Mina, but instead questioned the sensibility of making that knowledge known. Historian Mary Odem has noted that in rural areas “neighborhood gossip and various rituals of public shaming also served as checks on sexual impropriety,” and Addie seemed to know that particular piece of social advice.⁸⁵⁷

Pregnancy was the most obvious signifier that premarital sex took place, and generally if marriage took place before the baby was born, it did not cause much scandal. The child would be considered legitimate and would be taken care of.⁸⁵⁸ According to one source, “thirty percent of all brides gave birth within eight and a half months of marriage” in the eighteenth century, and evidence showed that this continued in rural areas into the nineteenth century.⁸⁵⁹ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich found that in eighteenth-century Maine, while families may have disagreed over the correctness of premarital sex, all community members agreed on certain terms. First, “marriage

⁸⁵⁵ See Judy Lensink, *‘A Secret to Be Buried’: The Diary and Life of Emily Hawley Gillespie, 1858-1888* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 90-91.

⁸⁵⁶ Addie A. Crouch, manuscript diaries, 1881-1885, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, August 28, 1884.

⁸⁵⁷ Mary Odem, *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 45.

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 44-45.

⁸⁵⁹ John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 73.

should certainly follow, if it did not always precede, conception,” and “that fathers as well as mothers were responsible for children born out of wedlock.”⁸⁶⁰ When couples met these conditions, they corrected any potential questions about paternity and who was economically responsible for the child. As Ulrich noted, “sexual activity was connected with a comprehensive transition to adulthood, to good citizenship and economic productivity.”⁸⁶¹ The new family unit fulfilled the next stage in the life cycle, as the couple would provide for their child, who would later supply necessary labor and assistance.

When pregnancy out of wedlock was not made legitimate through marriage, it led to a host of questions about the identity of the father and the reputation of the woman. The paternity of a child could always be questioned or denied, but the maternity was certain. Adoption was one avenue to rectify the situation, and Joan Jensen found an increase in adoptions in rural Wisconsin, as “most communities were unwilling to accept responsibility for supporting children out of wedlock.”⁸⁶² Adoption allowed the unmarried woman to ensure her child would be taken care of without having to assume the burden herself.

In extreme cases, women could take matters into their own hands to rid themselves of the unwanted pregnancy or resulting child. Abortion was one way that women could eliminate an unwanted pregnancy. In her work *When Abortion Was a Crime*, historian Leslie Reagan noted that throughout history women desired and had abortions, and many of these women achieved the right to control the terms of motherhood in this way.⁸⁶³ Women could obtain abortions in several ways in the nineteenth century. Older, more experienced women passed down knowledge

⁸⁶⁰ Ulrich, *A Midwife's Tale*, 158.

⁸⁶¹ Ibid.

⁸⁶² Joan Jensen, *Calling This Place Home: Women on the Wisconsin Frontier, 1850-1925* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006), 209.

⁸⁶³ Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 44.

of herbal methods, including different plants and chemicals known to be abortifacients, through the generations of their families.⁸⁶⁴ There were also medical procedures that could be performed by a professional or by the pregnant woman herself.⁸⁶⁵ The act of abortion, though, could be dangerous to the mother, particularly without the skill or supervision of a doctor. Stella Dart, a woman in Olmsted County, Minnesota, was listed in a coroner's report having died from "septic peritonitis [sic] resulting from an abortion induced by herself," a bacterial infection. The procedure for a manual abortion such as this usually required a sharp object inserted into the uterus, and the chance of infection was very high.⁸⁶⁶ Rural women especially had a difficult time procuring safe abortions, due to the lack of professionals available in the country, as noted by Joan Jensen in her study, "The Death of Rosa," about a young, unmarried woman who died from a botched abortion.⁸⁶⁷

Infanticides were another way of eliminating an unwanted birth. They present an interesting situation historically. Many times, the act was perpetrated in secret, leaving little to no evidence of birth at all. Other times, authorities discovered the act, but no clues remained as to who the parent was. While it might have been common knowledge among the community who was pregnant, infanticide cases were often presented as mysteries. The *Olmsted County Democrat*, from Olmsted County, Minnesota, published a record of an unknown infanticide in 1892. According to the paper,

The body of an infant was found last evening back of H.W. Stebbins' place on West College street, in an alley or unused street. It was discovered by Mr. Stebbins in company with another person, who on emptying a pail of ashes which they came across, found it to contain the body of a dead child. Marshal Kalb was notified and to-day Coroner Mosse

⁸⁶⁴ D'Emilio and Freedman, *Intimate Matters*, 63.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶⁷ Joan Jensen, "The Death of Rosa: Sexuality in Rural America," *Agricultural History* 67 (1993): 1-3.

examined the remains and ordered them interred in the Potter's field. As near as can be determined, it is a clear case of infanticide but there is no clue to the guilty parties.⁸⁶⁸

The unidentified infant was buried nameless and without parentage. Another case in Olmsted County involved the same officials attempting to find out the details behind a child murder. After a townspeople found the body of an infant face-down in the ground in East Rochester, the coroner ruled the death an infanticide, but the authorities found no evidence of parentage.⁸⁶⁹ It is unclear how difficult it would have been to ascertain the perpetrators behind these infanticides, because several factors complicated the dissemination of such information. Women could have hidden their condition by clothing or by staying out of sight of nosy neighbors. Also, pregnancy was a delicate topic, and community members would have been reluctant to make accusations or inquiries.

In other cases, the parties were found out and brought to trial. Coroner's inquests provide a window into the legal process for identifying and prosecuting suspected infanticides. In Olmsted County, Minnesota, the coroner identified several cases of infanticide. In one such case, someone found the suspected child of Henrietta Bladron abandoned in privy. Bladron had denied being pregnant, but it had been suspected by everyone around her. The coroner's inquest showed that the child had died from "cutting wounds," allegedly inflicted by the mother.⁸⁷⁰ Another case in 1889 accused Minnie Parker of leaving her child in a privy, and the child "died from the want of proper attention."⁸⁷¹ Through an autopsy, a coroner could determine whether the child died from natural causes or was mistreated by another party. In most cases, though not all, the perpetrator was the mother. One Olmsted County indictment record from 1882 listed two

⁸⁶⁸ "Infanticide," *Olmsted County Democrat*, April 21, 1892.

⁸⁶⁹ "Infanticide," *Rochester Post*, May 17, 1878.

⁸⁷⁰ Coroner's Inquest, May 15, 1886, Olmsted County Coroner's Reports and Indictment Records, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota, May 15, 1886.

⁸⁷¹ *Ibid.*, January 24, 1889.

perpetrators, Mary Griffin and Nate Conway, in an infanticide case. The document identified Mary Griffin as the mother, and although the record did not specify, presumably Nate Conway was the father. They were indicted for “feloniously without the authority of law and with malice aforethought killed an infant female child, said then and there being the daughter of the said Mary Griffin and not named by then and there strangling an choking said child with their hands about said child’s neck.”⁸⁷² The circumstances surrounding the deaths of these children was unknown. Maybe their mothers were single and wanted to avoid the embarrassment of bearing an illegitimate child, or perhaps they were overworked and overtired mothers who could not physically or emotionally care for another child. One case in Grant County, Wisconsin, though, provided the details of how a family could conspire to conceal a pregnancy, and the legal ramifications of such an act.

The infanticide case of Louise Wagner, et. al. was a stark example of the end result of the “girl problem,” and the extreme measures that a family could take to rectify the situation. In a rural community, options for an unwed mother were limited, and the Wagner family explored the ways that Louise could take care of an embarrassing situation. The case was brought before the circuit court of Grant County, Wisconsin, and although no one was convicted of the crime, the Wagner family had to deal with the unpleasantness of a trial which brought their family problems into the public.

Louise Wagner was born in 1863 in Grant County, Wisconsin. Her parents Jacob and Margaret Wagner were immigrants from Germany. She had four siblings and was part of a

⁸⁷² Mary Griffin and Nate Conway Indictment, 1882, Olmsted County Coroner’s Reports and Indictment Records, Minnesota Historical Society.

farming family.⁸⁷³ At some point in 1897 or 1898, Louise became pregnant. Although she was in her mid-thirties at the time, she was still a single woman and a dependent member of her father's household. According to the trial transcript, Mr. Wagner was unwilling to let Louise give birth or raise the child in his home. Louise was to be sent to Milwaukee to a home called the House of Mercy to give birth, and she would then give up the baby for adoption in Milwaukee. One witness in the trial remarked that "Mr. Wagner would raise a row and throw them out of house and home (if Louise had the baby at home)."⁸⁷⁴

What Mr. Wagner did not know was that Louise was miserable at the House of Mercy in Milwaukee and begged her sister Mary to bring her home. Mary retrieved Louise from Milwaukee and "they had kept her secreted in the house for three weeks unknown to her father and brothers."⁸⁷⁵ When their mother discovered the subterfuge, she sought alternate arrangements for Louise outside of the home. The Wagners then put Louise into the care of a neighbor with limited midwifery experience. Mrs. Belcher, the midwife, met Louise as "Minnie Williams," a pseudonym to hide her identity. Mrs. Belcher admitted, "I haven't practiced midwifery very long I have washed and dressed four babies," but she was the only person willing to take in and care for Louise (for a fee), as her family would not allow the child in their home.⁸⁷⁶

What happened once the child was born remains shrouded in mystery. In the transcript for the affidavit, Constable Amos Dunne testified that Mary Wagner, Louise's sister, told him that a stranger approached Mary and proposed buying Louise's baby. The man refused to identify himself, but allegedly told Mary, "I understand your sister Lou is in trouble" and "I

⁸⁷³ Jacob Grant and Family, Year: 1870; Census Place: Liberty, Grant, Wisconsin; Roll: M593_1717; Page: 265B; Image: 137; Family History Library Film: 553216. Ancestry.com. 1870 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009. Accessed 28 April 2013.

⁸⁷⁴ State of Wisconsin vs. Margaret Wagner, et. al., 1898. Grant Series 26, Box 2, Transcripts, 1894-1900, Grant County Clerk of Circuit Court, Wisconsin Historical Society, Platteville Research Center, Platteville, Wisconsin.

⁸⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁶ Ibid.

would like the child as we have not child that is if she wants to dispose of it but I don't want her to know who has got it.”⁸⁷⁷ Mary also told this story to Jacob Miller, the Marshall of Grant County. She also told Marshall Miller that they secretly handed off the baby to the stranger who was hidden in the wood shed of the Wagner farm, presumably to keep Mr. Wagner from finding out about it.

When the child could not be found, about two weeks after the birth, the Sheriff of Grant County offered a reward for any information regarding the baby of Louise Wagner. The baby was said to have been known to be healthy for up to a week after the birth. A \$50.00 reward would be given to anyone who could produce the child or the body of the child. Several days later, authorities charged Louise, along with her sister Mary and her mother Margaret, “with feloniously and of their malice aforethought kill and murder an infant female child.”⁸⁷⁸

From the evidence provided in the affidavit, including the aforementioned testimony from various people close to the Wagner family and the birth, the court agreed “that the crimes as charged in the affidavit for criminal warrant herein has been committed and that there is probable cause to believe the defendants Margaret Wagner and Mary Wagner guilty thereof.”⁸⁷⁹ At some point, the prosecutor removed Louise as a defendant and placed the blame solely on her mother and sister.

Although the court initially found enough evidence to arrest and hold Margaret and Mary for trial, and jailed them until that time, over a year later, the case fell apart. The district attorney attested, “I have been unable to discover or obtain sufficient competent evidence of the corpus delicti of the offense charged in the complaint to sustain a verdict of guilty in said case against

⁸⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁷⁹ State of Wisconsin vs. Margaret and Mary Wagner, December 1, 1898. Wisconsin Circuit Court (Grant County), Criminal Case Files, 1850-1898, Series 80, Drawer 32, Box 11, Platteville Research Center, Platteville, Wisconsin.

the said defendants.”⁸⁸⁰ In other words, the district attorney could not prove that an infanticide had actually taken place, so there was no longer a case.

The mysterious case of Louise Wagner and her child brought to light many of the issues that could come from the “girl problem” in rural areas. First, premarital sex came with consequences, including pregnancy and community ostracization. Multiple witnesses in the infanticide affidavit testified to knowing that Louise was pregnant. According to one witness, “it was generally known in the city” that Louise was with child, and another “heard it talked a good deal on the streets that Miss Louise Wagner was in the family way.”⁸⁸¹ Community members may well have known about the pregnancy, but would have been unlikely to do or say anything about the situation. In an analysis of a similar infanticide case, Pamela Riney-Kehrberg noted that the community was well aware of the girl in question’s pregnancy, but “feigned ignorance.”⁸⁸² Also, there did not seem to be much if any concern for the father’s identity. Louise admitted that the father’s name was Joe, but he was not identified or accused of having any part in the child’s disappearance. Louise herself, and her pregnant body, remained the only visible proof of premarital sex.

Second, the trial emphasized the dependent nature of Louise, a single woman. Louise was in her mid-30s at the time of the birth, but still subject to the will of her father, the head of the household in which she lived. Since her father would not allow the child in the home, he sent Louise away to give birth and to give away the baby. Despite her age, Louise remained a “girl” in her father’s home. Also, Louise was not the first named defendant in the trial. In the criminal case “State of Wisconsin vs. Margaret and Mary Wagner,” Louise’s mother and sister were the

⁸⁸⁰ State of Wisconsin vs. Margaret and Mary Wagner, March 6, 1900.

⁸⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸⁸² Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play, and Coming of Age in the Midwest* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 195.

named principals, and Louise was not mentioned. It is unclear why, possibly because her mother and sister were legally responsible for her, and therefore responsible for the death of the child.

Third, the accused homicide of the Wagner infant illustrated to the community the greatest extent of the “girl problem.” Having noted that Louise was not chronologically a “girl,” she was still treated like a girl due to her unmarried status and residence in her parent’s home. In an article on infanticide in the eighteenth-century and how it was portrayed in literature, Johanna Geyer-Kordesch noted that pregnancy and, in some cases, subsequent infanticide represented “the loss of innocence and the transition to responsibility and identity.”⁸⁸³ For Geyer-Kordesch, although marriage, spinsterhood, or even premarital pregnancy represented acceptable choices for women, the murder of an infant was “irreconcilable not just with the law and its legally defined punishments, but with how women were idealized.”⁸⁸⁴ The act of infanticide was a complete rejection of societal norms for women at a time when social prescriptions may have accepted premarital pregnancy in limited circumstances.

It is not known whether Louise could have married the father of the child or found other arrangements for the child. It is even possible that the father was well-known in the community, or married already, which would have led to more shame for Louise. What is known is that her transgression into premarital sexual activity led to shame in the community, and the subsequent criminal trial implicated the entire family. The point of encouraging girls to maintain chaste and modest relationships before marriage was to prevent this type of situation from happening. Somewhere along the way, Louise failed to find a marriage partner, and by becoming pregnant out of wedlock, probably affected her chances of ever marrying. Louise did not ever marry, and

⁸⁸³ Johanna Geyer-Kordesch, “Infanticide and the erotic plot: a feminist reading of eighteenth-century crime” in *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment, 1550-2000*, Mark Jackson, ed. (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002), 94.

⁸⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

lived by herself in Grant County for the remainder of her life. It is unclear whether she received a punishment for the infanticide, or any other repercussions for the event.

The stories of May Lindley and Louise Wagner present very few similarities on the surface, but both represent the “girl problem” taken to its logical extreme. Both May and Louise acted in ways that not only went against the prescriptive literature of the time, but were the complete opposite of expectations for young women. May bucked the trend by remaining a showpiece rather than a productive member of her family home. Despite this, she married and later conformed to what was considered appropriate behavior for women. Louise engaged in premarital sexual activity and had to deal with the consequence of becoming pregnant. Although Louise was not technically a “girl,” she had the characteristics of a dependent young woman, held to the standards of the parent’s home where she lived. The extreme measures the Wagner family took to conceal the pregnancy and resulting child would have been a cautionary tale for other young women in the community.

Community influence was a large part of the reason for refraining from activities considered improper for women. As one case from Grant County, Wisconsin shows, the community could take part in the prosecution of certain acts deemed criminal. In a case file from 1871, a Joseph Woodward filed a complaint against Martha Buck and O.W. Brush for committing “open and gross lewdness and lascivious behavior on divers other times and days before and after that time did commit said crimes against the form, force and effect of the statute in such case made and provided, and against the peace and dignity of the State of Wisconsin.”⁸⁸⁵ No context surrounds these claims, and it is unknown exactly what Martha and O.W. did to warrant this accusation, or what stake Joseph Woodward had in bringing charges. But the fact

⁸⁸⁵ State of Wisconsin vs. O.W. Brush and Martha Buck, Wisconsin Circuit Court (Grant County), Criminal Case Files, 1850-1898, Series 80, Drawer 2, Box 1, Wisconsin Historical Society, Platteville Research Center.

that a man and woman would be arrested for inappropriate sexual contact helps to show the attitudes that late nineteenth century rural people held about sexual activity and community standards.

According to census data, Martha Buck was 18 years old in 1870 and living with another adult single woman, 58 year old Harriet Wilson, in Boscobel, Wisconsin.⁸⁸⁶ As a 19 year old woman at the time of the incident, Martha straddled the line between girl and woman, but the law clearly indicated that she was an adult responsible for her own actions. Her identity as a “girl” would have been compromised by the alleged sexual act that thrust her into the public eye as a disgraced woman.

The main difference between this case and the Wagner case was the familial intervention into premarital sexual activity. Louise Wagner was a grown woman, living with her family when she gave birth to an illegitimate child. According to the infanticide affidavit transcript, Louise was sanctioned by her own family for her transgression of becoming pregnant. Leslie Reagan has noted that girls usually sought help from family, particularly mothers, when facing a premarital pregnancy. The parents of a pregnant girl “had a strong interest in protecting their daughter and themselves from the shame associated with single motherhood.”⁸⁸⁷ In Louise’s case, her family refused to have the child born in the household and sent her away for the birth. When complications arose, they found another place for her to stay, then made arrangements to have the child adopted (however shady the circumstances may have been). Martha Buck, on the other hand, received a public complaint made against her in the circuit court. She had to face legal ramifications for her sexual transgression. Louise faced her own public scrutiny through the

⁸⁸⁶ It is possible that Harriet Wilson was a relative or even her mother. Her census record listed her as Harriet H.B. Wilson, and the “B” possibly stood for Buck. Harriet might have remarried, or perhaps had Martha out of wedlock herself.

⁸⁸⁷ Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime*, 27-28.

accusation of infanticide, but her family bore the brunt of the sanction, as her mother and sister were the ones accused and incarcerated for the alleged act of infanticide.

That communities would go to such lengths to sanction premarital sexual activity and pregnancy showed that these actions were highly problematic for the rural community. Sexual transgressions went against the system of morals and expectations laid out for young women in prescriptive literature and through family and community ties, and pregnancy out of wedlock broke down the rural economic system. If young women did not marry their baby's fathers or surrender their children for adoption, their families had to assume responsibility for the newborns, as well as continue the care of their grown daughters. The sanctions against premarital sex were also highly gendered. Sexual promiscuity required two partners, but in the case of Louise Wagner, only one, the female, was brought to question over the actions.

May Lindley Nelson did not suffer any legal or community sanctions for behavior that went against societal prescriptions, but she had to live with some possible personal problems, such as an unhappy marriage at times. Even though she married off of the farm, middle-class advisors still agreed that women were responsible for household and child-rearing duties. With no real skills, she would have no choice but to stay in the marriage where she was not always fulfilled. She did, however, go on to have at least three children with John and he continued his jewelry business. By 1930, the couple lived with one of their adult unmarried daughters in Los Angeles, California.⁸⁸⁸

The extremes of the "girl problem" presented difficulties for the rural community in several ways. The presence of premarital sexual contact could bring about single mothers or increased abortions and infanticides, while "uselessness" among young women could send

⁸⁸⁸ John Nelson and Family, Year: 1930; Census Place: *Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California*; Roll: 133; Page: 5B; Enumeration District: 47; Image: 839.0; FHL microfilm: 2339868. Ancestry.com. 1930 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2002. Accessed 28 April 2013.

women off the farm and into cities away from family farm work, such as the case of May Lindley Nelson. The crux of the “girl problem” was the fear that young women would become enamored of another way of life and create disorder in rural families and communities. The examples of May Lindley Nelson and Louise Wagner show the ways this could happen and the effects it had on the people involved.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

Rural girls in the late nineteenth-century Midwest used strategies for education, work, and socialization that allowed them to continue to be useful to their families, yet retain a modicum of independence, with which they made connections to peers and their communities. By urban, middle-class standards, these girls were problems for society. Their relationships, particularly with the opposite sex, did not live up to the expectations for the morally superior Victorian girl, and their work and contributions to the farm and home defied the societal expectation for girls' duties. But girls like Carrie, Mary, Addie, and Rhoda all were important economic and social components of their families of origin, and above all else, their duty to family and farm made them the ideal girls in the eyes of their parents and communities.

By the last few years of the nineteenth century, new social movements that advocated for women's rights began to challenge the preconceived expectations of the Victorian culture. In 1880, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, noted American suffragist, gave a speech titled "Our Girls." In this speech, Stanton outlined society's changing expectations for young women, stemming from the burgeoning women's rights movement. Girls, according to Stanton, "have awakened to the fact that they belong to a subject, degraded, ostracised [sic] class: that to fulfill their man appointed sphere, they can have no individual character, no life purpose, personal freedom, aim or ambition."⁸⁸⁹ The middle-class, Victorian ideal for women, which posited that girls should be highly refined, decorative showpieces in the home, no longer fulfilled the "coming girl." This girl wanted education, a career, and to be "an independent, self-supporting being, not as to-day a helpless victim of fashion, superstition, and absurd conventionalisms."⁸⁹⁰ The coming girl would

⁸⁸⁹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Our Girls," speech text, Winter 1880.

⁸⁹⁰ Ibid.

usher in a new era for women in which they hoped to have more of a voice in politics, careers, and education.

Another reformer, Mary Livermore, also wrote about the increasing independence of young women. In 1883, she asked “What Shall We Do With Our Daughters,” pondering how to appropriately teach young women how to conduct themselves in the changing social climate. These “fair, bright girls, who are the charm of society and the delight of home,” would have many more opportunities to do something with their life other than only becoming a wife and mother.⁸⁹¹ In fact, according to Livermore, “above the titles of wife and mother, which, although dear, are transitory and accidental, there is the title of human being, which precedes and outranks every other.”⁸⁹² No matter what else, a woman would always be a human, and “the woman who lives up to a noble ideal of womanhood cannot make her life a failure, albeit she may be no man’s wife, and no child’s mother.”⁸⁹³ Livermore no longer wanted the titles of wife and mother attached too firmly to that of woman.

Livermore specifically criticized those to whom she referred as “superfluous women,” women who did not contribute anything to society. Superfluous women, “hasten to wash their reputations of the taint of ‘strong-mindedness’” and regarded their intellects as “like the candles inside Chinese lanterns, are of use only to light up, and show off to advantage, the pretty devices outside.”⁸⁹⁴ The very woman that Livermore criticized was the ideal woman of the Victorian middle-class, who concentrated on appearance and manners rather than becoming useful. Although Livermore did not specifically address rural girls in her writings, based on the examples provided in this study, it would seem that the ideal farm woman already met

⁸⁹¹ Mary Ashton Rice Livermore, *What Shall We Do With Our Daughters? Superfluous Women and Other Lectures* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1883), 15-16.

⁸⁹² *Ibid.*, 167.

⁸⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 203.

Livermore's high standards. Livermore concluded, "as long as women are taught to believe that a life of ease is better than work; that they are born into the world to be the dependents of men, and not to stimulate them to high endeavor," then women would continue to occupy a position of social degradation.⁸⁹⁵

Rural girls like Addie, Rhoda, and Carrie, already held high ambitions. Farm daughters were independent in many ways, with character and purpose all their own. Parents taught girls the value of work, and they were responsible for a considerable load of labor inside and outside of the country home. Farm women worked within a system of mutuality with men, where families valued all farm tasks as equally necessary. This did not necessarily mean that rural girls were early feminists. Young women on farms were still subject to a rural patriarchy, in which their fathers and husbands expected them to be "useful" at all times, helping contribute to the family financially and materially. The middle-class ideal for women never really made sense for farm girls, but as national reformers sought to refine the norm, how would life on the farm change, or would it at all?

By the turn of the twentieth century, advisors to rural areas had other concerns. The rural to urban transition, already begun by the late nineteenth century, increased the number of opportunities available for young women off of the farm. This, coupled with an increase in attention to the perceived problems of rural life, led reformers to pay closer attention to making rural life more attractive to boys and girls. Tasked by president Theodore Roosevelt in 1908, the Country Life Commission instigated government investigation into farming and rural life, and sought to modernize farms and farm homes in order to bring them up to the standards deemed appropriate by an urbanizing society. Progressive social and economic reformers viewed farm

⁸⁹⁵ Ibid., 204-205.

life as backward, and the Country Life Commission worked to bring all aspects of rural life to a more modern ideal.

One of the main foci of the Country Life Movement was the improvement of agricultural techniques to bring farmers into the “modern era.” According to historian Mary Neth, “‘Progressive’ farming meant that farmers would adopt the scientific methods, new technology, and consumer goods developed and recommended by experts.”⁸⁹⁶ Along with Progressive farming methods came more modernized home-making. New household technologies could allow for women to become more efficient in the home, and the Country Life Movement stressed such modernization techniques as a means of keeping women on farms.

As such, education for farm women began to take on the cause of modernization. The field of domestic science, already present in many land grant institutions, focused on efficiency and management techniques in farm homes. Women were challenged to become the best homemakers that they could be by applying scientific methods to the work of keeping a home. Historian Andrea Radke-Moss noted that domestic science programs allowed land grant universities to live up to their standard of coeducation, meaning the education of males and females together. She wrote, “by combining the need for scientific domestic training with the notion of women’s moralizing and refining influence, land-grant colleges provided an environment favorable to the implementation of coeducation, at least in theory.”⁸⁹⁷ Women educated in these universities, then, remained within the proper middle-class ideal while still providing needed knowledge and support to their farming families. This was not always easy,

⁸⁹⁶ Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 97.

⁸⁹⁷ Andrea Radke-Moss, *Bright Epoch: Women and Coeducation in the American West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 7.

though, as scientific housekeeping was often expensive and impractical for farm wives who had already been keeping house for many years without these “improvements.”

Martha Foote Crow was one such reformer who looked closely at the lives of country girls and how they could be improved through these Progressive methods. Overall, the Country Life Movement believed rural living to be superior to urban, but also believed that the backwardness and lack of opportunities in rural communities drew children to cities. Crow saw girls as essential to solving the rural problem. She wrote, “for if the rural question is the central question of the world, and if the social problem is the heart of the rural problem, and if the failure of the daughter’s joy and usefulness threatens the farmstead,--then once more in the history of the world has the hour struck for women.”⁸⁹⁸ If girls could embrace and enjoy country living, many of the problems of rural life could be solved.

The duty of farm girls, according to Crow, was to “take her place in the farmstead or the farmstead will lack one of its component parts and fall to pieces... The young woman on the farm must grow up with the idea that she is essential to the progress of country life and therefore of the national life, and that a career is before her just as much as if she were aiming to be an artist or a writer or a missionary.”⁸⁹⁹ The girls in this study already held a sense of duty to their families and farms, despite also having other jobs outside of the home. Crow acknowledged the extensive amount of work that farm women performed, calling them “super-women” and noted that few people could live up to the standards of hard work set by country girls.⁹⁰⁰ By applying this work to improvement, country girls could save rural life.

⁸⁹⁸ Martha Foote Crow, *The American Country Girl* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1915), 20-21.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰⁰ Ibid., 88.

Stanton, Livermore, and Crow all articulated a small but growing sentiment that women played a role equally important to that of men in many aspects of life, and women should be acknowledged as such through new political, economic, and social opportunities. These new roles differed from the idealized image of women from the antebellum era, where women served as mistresses of their homes and used their moral superiority to perpetuate that ideal, never venturing into the public sphere. What many advisors failed to recognize, though, even rural reformers, was that the rural home and community rarely met any of these standards as presented by advisors. Country Life reformers feared that the isolation and drudgery of farm life would drive girls to the city, and in some cases that may have been true. By 1920, the urban population of the United States surpassed the rural population for the first time in American history, and a portion of the new city-dwellers were formerly rural women. Particularly in poor farming families, job opportunities in cities lured many young women away from the countryside. According to Joan Jensen, rural girls had valuable work and life skills due to their farming and community experiences which translated into such positions as domestic servants, seamstresses, and clerical workers.⁹⁰¹

For those that did not leave the country, the children of farm girls raised in the late nineteenth century reaped the benefits of the changes brought about in their mothers' generation. The changes in social norms, combined with the independent rural spirit, allowed the next era of young people more freedoms and opportunities, even though many such children remained in rural areas and on farms. One obvious example was the nineteenth amendment, which allowed women the right to vote. Historian Sara Egge found that many rural women actively supported the woman suffrage movement, despite the national campaign's relative ambivalence toward the

⁹⁰¹ Joan Jensen, *Calling This Place Home: Women on the Wisconsin Frontier, 1850-1925* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006), 416-418.

countryside. Farm women, though, agitated for the right to vote based on their position as productive members of farming families and active community members. For these women, suffrage would give them the opportunity to make decisions important to the farm and institutions they valued, such as local schools.⁹⁰² Voting for rural women equaled an official and public stake in matters in which they already had a significant part.

The changes to farming and rural life were not all overwhelmingly positive, though. Major developments in agricultural technology and governmental intervention in the early twentieth century pushed the introduction of agribusiness, which, according to Mary Neth, “dissolved the practices of interdependence that characterized rural society.”⁹⁰³ As such, the ideology of farming families changed from one of mutuality to one of more greatly separated gender roles, devaluing women’s productive labor and focusing on their role as household consumers. Men and women on farms accepted and rejected these ideological changes as necessary to their way of life, but overall, the family farming system was fundamentally altered.⁹⁰⁴

The introduction of new homemaking technologies also facilitated a change in women’s productive roles on the farm. Historian of technology Ruth Schwartz Cowan challenged the notion, originally made prevalent by the Country Life Movement, that labor-saving devices actually decreased the household labor that women performed. Instead, by removing women from the production of certain materials in the home and by increasing standards for the proper care of the home, household technologies brought about more labor for women.⁹⁰⁵ As

⁹⁰² Sara Egge, *‘When we get to voting’: rural women, community, gender, and woman suffrage in the Midwest* (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Iowa State University, 2012), ix, 12-13.

⁹⁰³ Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 5.

⁹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁹⁰⁵ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 100-101.

governmental reformers advocated for women's role as consumers of labor-saving devices, farm women saw a different future. Unwilling to give up the role of producer, women instead embraced new roles by taking advantage of new field technologies to help with the crops and by exploring other options to earn money for the family, such as employment in town.⁹⁰⁶ In this way, farm women retained some economic power despite the changes to the family farm. Well into the twentieth century, rural women continued to fight for their position as productive members of the household. As historian Jenny Barker-Devine has discovered, women worked in agricultural organizations, particularly in the post-World War II era, and "emphasized working partnerships between husbands and wives, women's work in agricultural production, and women's unique ways of understanding large-scale, conventional farming."⁹⁰⁷ Even with the substantial changes to American agriculture, the rural-to-urban transition in the early twentieth century, and the reformers' emphasis on women's roles as consumers, farm women drew on nineteenth-century notions of mutuality and productive capacity to maintain and improve their family enterprises.

Girls who grew up on farms in the twentieth century looked up to the examples of their predecessors. As grown women, Carrie, Mary, Addie, and Rhoda had the opportunity to pass along their own ethic for work and education to their sons and daughters. Although Rhoda did not have any children of her own, she had a similar impact on her nieces and nephews, as well as her much younger brother. Carrie Markle Davis, as mentioned previously, was married in 1867. She and Edward Davis had four or five children and resided in Philo, Illinois, retaining close ties with the recently widowed Rhoda Francisco. Edward died sometime before 1900, leaving Carrie

⁹⁰⁶ Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), xxi.

⁹⁰⁷ Jenny Barker Devine, *On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women's Activism since 1945* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013), 3.

living with several of her adult children. Carrie never held another occupation; her teaching career ended with her marriage. She did serve as head of household after her husband's passing, though, and listed "landlady" as her occupation in the 1900 census.⁹⁰⁸

Three of Carrie and Edward's children remained with Carrie throughout their adulthood. Her unmarried sons George and Charles and single daughter Mary all held jobs while living with their mother. Interestingly, Mary was a school teacher for at least part of her life and apparently never married. She was listed in the census data as living with her mother until Carrie's death in 1925, then remained living with her brothers as the head of the household.⁹⁰⁹ Mary Davis was an example of the "coming girl," who had a career and was not forced into a marriage based upon economic necessity. Her position as a teacher allowed her an income and the ability to help take care of her aging mother well into adulthood, then manage the household after her mother's passing.

Mary Elizabeth Pascoe married her neighbor, Richard Stephens, in 1876 at the age of 21. The Stephens moved from Wisconsin to Iowa and eventually had three children, all boys. By 1920, Richard had passed away, and the three sons had moved out of their home of origin. Mary then lived with three other unmarried women in Iowa until her death in 1939.⁹¹⁰ Mary's children went on to participate in various enterprises. Oldest son Wilbert began a farm and family in

⁹⁰⁸ Caroline Davis, Year: 1900; Census Place: *Urbana, Champaign, Illinois*; Roll: 241; Page: 6A; Enumeration District: 0033; FHL microfilm: 1240241. Ancestry.com. 1900 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2004. Accessed 6 June 2013.

⁹⁰⁹ Mary B. Davis, Year: 1920; Census Place: *Urbana, Champaign, Illinois*; Roll: T625_298; Page: 14A; Enumeration District: 49; Image: 1112. Ancestry.com. 1920 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2010; Year: 1930; Census Place: *Urbana, Champaign, Illinois*; Roll: 410; Page: 1B; Enumeration District: 74; Image: 677.0; FHL microfilm: 2340145. Ancestry.com. 1930 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2002. Accessed 6 June 2013.

⁹¹⁰ Mary E. Stephens, Year: 1920; Census Place: *Perry Ward 3, Dallas, Iowa*; Roll: T625_486; Page: 7B; Enumeration District: 16; Image: 375. Ancestry.com. 1920 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2010. Accessed 6 June 2013.

North Dakota, while middle son Lescoe remained in Iowa after serving in World War I.⁹¹¹

Youngest son Stephen DeWitt studied at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and eventually created an introduction and analysis of his mother's diary. Mary represented most closely the ideal woman of the time, marrying young without any career or higher education, yet those values still translated through the generations to her children, particularly to Stephen, for whom education proved very important.⁹¹²

Addie Crouch married farmer Martin (or Lamartin) Paul in 1891. They had three daughters as of 1900, Fannie, Ruth, and Sara. The unfortunate loss of the manuscript census records from 1890 makes tracing the Paul family somewhat difficult. Martin Paul was previously married to a woman named Annie sometime before 1880.⁹¹³ They had at least one child, Lucy. Annie died in 1888, and Lucy died as a girl in 1894.⁹¹⁴ Addie and Martin's oldest child, Fannie, was born in 1887, indicating that she was not Addie's biological daughter, but Annie's instead. Addie took on Fannie as her own daughter, and most likely Lucy too, but the records confirming that arrangement are no longer accessible.⁹¹⁵

⁹¹¹ Wilbert L. Stephens, Year: 1930; Census Place: *Koenig, Mclean, North Dakota*; Roll: 1738; Page: 2B; Enumeration District: 54; Image: 883.0; FHL microfilm: 2341472. Ancestry.com. 1930 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc., 2002; Lescoe Pascoe Stephens, World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918, Registration State: *Iowa*; Registration County: *Dallas*; Roll: 1642995. Ancestry.com. *U.S., World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917-1918* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2005. Accessed 6 June 2013.

⁹¹² Stephen DeWitt Stephens, University of Wisconsin Yearbook, 1915, Ancestry.com. *U.S. School Yearbooks* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010. Accessed 6 June 2013; Dr. Stephen DeWitt Stephens, Introduction. Mary Elizabeth Pascoe, manuscript diary, 1871, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

⁹¹³ Lamartin Paul, Year: 1880; Census Place: *Prairieburg, Linn, Iowa*; Roll: 351; Family History Film: 1254351; Page: 16B; Enumeration District: 252; Image: 0035. Ancestry.com and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 1880 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010. Accessed 6 June 2013.

⁹¹⁴ Annie E. Paul, 25 September 1888, Ancestry.com. *Iowa, Cemetery Records, 1662-1999* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2000; Lucy D. Paul, 20 January 1894, Ancestry.com. *Web: Iowa, Find A Grave Index, 1800-2012* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012. *Find A Grave*. Find A Grave. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi>: accessed 6 June 2013.

⁹¹⁵ Paul Family, Year: 1900; Census Place: *Maine, Linn, Iowa*; Roll: 443; Page: 2A; Enumeration District: 0079; FHL microfilm: 1240443. Ancestry.com. 1900 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2004. Accessed 6 June 2013.

Like Carrie Davis' daughter, none of Addie and Martin's daughters got married or left the family home. Throughout the years, the girls stayed with their aging parents, providing help and support. Both Ruth and Sara had at least some college education. Martin outlived Addie by several years, and Ruth and Sara provided income to the elderly Martin and Fannie as a teacher and a telephone operator, respectively.⁹¹⁶ Ironically, Addie, the girl who showed the least amount of "duty" to her family, raised two very dutiful daughters. Ruth and Sara Paul had access to education and job opportunities not readily available to girls in the late nineteenth century, and they used their skills to provide for their family of origin.

Rhoda Emery, the only girl to never marry, managed to become the most independent, despite her crushing burden of duty in her younger years. In her diaries, Rhoda described her wish to further her education, and she was able to do so at the state normal school.⁹¹⁷ She also escaped her suffocating, if loving, family of origin and lived as a boarder in Rochester and St. Paul, Minnesota through her late twenties and thirties. By 1920, she was living as the head of her own household, with a young girl as a boarder.⁹¹⁸ After Rhoda's father Caleb and mother Helen passed away in 1927, her sister, Mary, who had never left her parent's home, moved in with Rhoda. Rhoda continued to work as a teacher, and even reached the rank of school administrator before her death in 1953.⁹¹⁹

⁹¹⁶ Paul Family, Year: 1940; Census Place: *Central City, Linn, Iowa*; Roll: T627_1175; Page: 6B; Enumeration District: 57-22. Ancestry.com. 1940 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012. Accessed 6 June 2013.

⁹¹⁷ Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play, and Coming of Age in the Midwest* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 110-111.

⁹¹⁸ Rhoda J. Emery, Year: 1920; Census Place: *St Paul Ward 6, Ramsey, Minnesota*; Roll: T625_853; Page: 7A; Enumeration District: 68; Image: 909. Ancestry.com. 1920 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010. Accessed 6 June 2013.

⁹¹⁹ Caleb C. Emery, 22 October 1927, Helen Mary Emery, 15 June 1927, Ancestry.com. *Minnesota, Death Index, 1908-2002* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2001; Rhoda Emery, Year: 1930; Census Place: *St Paul, Ramsey, Minnesota*; Roll: 1118; Page: 1A; Enumeration District: 184; Image: 101.0; FHL microfilm: 2340853. Ancestry.com. 1930 United States Federal Census [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2002; Year: 1940; Census Place: *West St Paul, Dakota*,

These rural women left a legacy of duty and usefulness, as well as that of vibrant social and occupational lives which allowed them to stretch beyond the boundaries of the societal ideal and create their own space in which to learn and grow as rural women. The records that they left allow for an in-depth examination of their hopes, fears, triumphs, and tragedies as they navigated through their lives, finding the best path to follow. Though not pioneers of the women's movement or early feminism, the girls made their own history by choosing lifestyles that worked for them and allowed them to achieve their goals, however broad or limited. Their individual stories create a rich history of girlhood and rural life in the late nineteenth century, and their contributions to that history allow readers a clearer vision of past Midwestern farm life.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Newspapers:

Boscobel Dial
Brodhead Independent
Cedar Valley Times
Center Point Lotus
Central City News-Letter
Champaign County Herald
Champaign County Union and Gazette
Grant County Herald
Linn County Register
Lisbon Sun
Marion Register
Mount Vernon Hawk-Eye
Olmsted County Democrat
Pine Island Journal
Rochester Post
Sidney By-Way
The Daily Rustler, Center Point
The Walker News
Tolono Herald

Farm Journals:

Country Gentleman
Farmers' Review
Prairie Farmer
Western Farm Journal
Western Rural
Western Rural and American Stockman
Western Rural and Livestock Weekly

Manuscript Collections:

(Mary) Susan Williams Diary, 1860-1861. Goodell Family History. Platteville Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Platteville, Wisconsin.

Addie A. Crouch Diaries, January 13, 1881-December 31, 1885. D9, f. 4-6. State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa.

Bullard, Marjorie Papers, 1896-1898. Minnesota Historical Library, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Carlock/Denman/Irvin/Porter Collection, McLean County Historical Museum, Bloomington, Illinois.

Carrie Markle Diaries, Special Collections, Box 90, Champaign County Historical Archives, Urbana Free Library.

Gale and Related Families Papers, 1813-1972. Minnesota Historical Library, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Grant Clerk of Circuit Courts, Civil Case Files, 1838-1888, Grant Series 12. Platteville Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Platteville, Wisconsin.

Grant County (Wis.) Superintendent of Schools, Rural School Records, 1867-1965, Grant Series 100. Platteville Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Platteville, Wisconsin.

Grant County Clerk of Circuit Court, Transcripts, 1894-1900, Grant Series 26. Platteville Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Platteville, Wisconsin.

Linn County, Iowa History Files, Carl and Mary Koehler History Center, Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Mary H. Murphy Diary, 1856-1857, SC 2174, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois.

Maude Crooker Diary, 1887-1888, Lucien Bonaparte Crooker Papers, Folder 1, SC 358, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois.

May Lindley Nelson Journal, Special Collections, Box 60, Champaign County Historical Archives, Urbana Free Library.

Minnie Mae Moon's Diaries, Moon Family Collection, Box 3, McLean County Historical Museum, Bloomington, Illinois.

Olmsted County, District Court, Coroner's Inquest Files. Minnesota Historical Library, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Rhoda J. Emery and Family Papers, 1842-1963. Minnesota Historical Library, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Sarah Irwin Bunn Diary, 1870, SC 211, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois.

Wisconsin Circuit Court (Grant County), Criminal Case Files, 1850-1898. Platteville Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Platteville, Wisconsin.

Wisconsin, Circuit Court (Grant County), Criminal Record Books, 1871-1926, vol. 1-2, Grant Series 65. Platteville Area Research Center, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Platteville, Wisconsin.

Advice Manuals:

Barr, Amelia Edith. *Maids Wives and Bachelors*. New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1898.

Crow, Martha Foote. *The American Country Girl*. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, 1915.

Duffey, Eliza Bisbee, *The Ladies' and Gentlemen's Etiquette: A Complete Manual of the Manners and Dress of American Society*. Philadelphia: Porter and Coates, 1877.

Etiquette for All, or Rules of Conduct for Every Circumstance in Life: With the Laws, Rules, Precepts, and Practices of Good Society. Glasgow: George Watson, 1861.

Hartley, Florence. *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette, and Manual of Politeness*. Boston: Lee and Shephard, 1872.

Hudson, George W. *The Marriage Guide for Young Men*. Ellsworth, ME: Published by the Author, 1883.

Kent, Charles H. *A Manual for Young Ladies, with Hints on Love, Courtship, Marriage, and the True Objects of Life*. Davenport: Published by the Author, 1881.

Lady F.H. *Coming Out; or, A Word in Season About the Season*. London: Hatchards, Piccadilly, 1883.

Routledge's Manual of Etiquette. London and New York: George Routledge and Sons, n.d.

Salmon, Lucy Maynard. *Domestic Service*. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897.

Spofford, Harriet Elizabeth Prescott. *The Servant Girl Question*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1881.

Tegg, William. *The Knot Tied: Marriage Ceremonies of All Nations*. London: William Tegg and Co., 1877.

The Economical Housewife. A Complete Practical Guide to Domestic Management for the Use of Both Mistress and Maid. London: Ward, Lock, and Co., n.d.

Urner, Nathan D. *Always: A Manual of Etiquette for the Guidance of Either Sex into the Empurpled Penetralia of Fashionable Life*. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1884.

Wilson, James S. *The Modern Art of Making Love and Complete Manual of Etiquette, Love, Courtship and Matrimony*. Chicago: The Saalfield Publishing Co., 1881.

Published Primary Sources:

Hart, John S. *In the school-room.: Chapters in the philosophy of education*. Philadelphia: Eldredge and brother, 1868. Accessed 16 February 2013 from *Making of America Books*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Library, 2005.

Livermore, Mary Ashton Rice. *What Shall We Do with Our Daughters? Superfluous Women and Other Lectures*. Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1883.

Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. "Our Girls." Speech text, Winter 1880.

Steel, W.C. *The Woman's Temperance Movement*. New York: National Temperance Society and Publication House, 1874.

Sypher, J.R. *The art of teaching school: a manual of suggestions for the use of teachers and school authorities, superintendents, controllers, directors, trustees and patrons of public schools and higher institutions of learning...* Philadelphia: J. M. Stoddart & co., 1872. Accessed 16 February 2013 from *Making of America Books*, Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Library, 2005.

Articles:

"Farm, Stock, and Dairy Journals," *The Palimpsest* 44 (1963): 341-360.

Anderson, J.L. "The Vacant Chair on the Farm: Soldier Husbands, Farm Wives, and the Iowa Home Front, 1861-1865." *Annals of Iowa* 66 (2007): 241-265.

Fry, John J. "'Good Farming-Clear Thinking-Right Living': Midwestern Farm Newspapers, Social Reform, and Rural Readers in the Early Twentieth Century." *Agricultural History* 78 (2004): 34-49.

Hacker, J. David, Libra Hilde, and James Jones. "The Effect of the Civil War on Southern Marriage Patterns." *Journal of Southern History* 76 (2010): 39-70.

Jensen, Joan M. "The Death of Rosa: Sexuality in Rural America." *Agricultural History* 67 (1993): 1-12.

Murphy, Donald R. "The Centennial of a Farm Paper," *The Palimpsest* 37 (1956): 449-480.

Smith, C.R.F. "The Iowa Homestead," *The Palimpsest* 11 (1930): 229-241.

Unpublished Secondary Sources:

Egge, Sara. *'When we get to voting': rural women, community, gender, and woman suffrage in the Midwest*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Iowa State University, 2012.

Griffith, Constance D. *The Sociological Significances of the Rural Newspaper in Iowa*. Master's Thesis, Iowa State University, 1921.

Van Derhoof, Jack. *Eastern and Mid-Western Agricultural Journalism, 1860-1900*. Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Columbia University, 1951.

Online Databases:

Ancestry.com, 1997-2013. <http://www.ancestry.com>.

Family Search, 2012 Intellectual Reserve, Inc. <http://www.familysearch.org>.

Historical Census Browser, University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, 2004. <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu>.

Books:

Alexander, Ruth M. *The 'Girl Problem': Female Sexual Delinquency in New York, 1900-1930*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995.

Baker, Willis C. and Patricia L. Miller. *A Commemorative History of Champaign County, Illinois: 1833-1983*. Champaign: Illinois Heritage Association, 1984.

Boydston, Jeanne. *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Brewer, Luther A. and Barthinius L. Wick. *History of Linn County Iowa: From Its Earliest Settlement to the Present Time*, vol. 1. Chicago: The Pioneer Publishing Company, 1911.

- Brigham, Johnson *Iowa: Its History and Its Foremost Citizens*. Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1915.
- Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls*. New York: Random House, 1997.
- Butterfield, C.W. *History of Wisconsin*. Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1881.
- Cahn, Susan K. *Sexual Reckonings: Southern Girls in a Troubling Age*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Cogen, Frances B. *All-American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989.
- Cott, Nancy. *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835*, 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Cowan, Ruth Schwartz. *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave*. New York: Basic Books, 1983.
- Culpepper, Marilyn Mayer. *All Things Altered: Women in the Wake of Civil War and Reconstruction*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2002.
- Davies, John D. *Phrenology Fad and Science: A 19th-Century American Crusade*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955.
- D'Emilio, John and Estelle B. Freedman. *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Devine, Jenny Barker. *On Behalf of the Family Farm: Iowa Farm Women's Activism since 1945*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013.
- Fellman, Anita Clair and Michael. *Making Sense of Self: Medical Advice Literature in Late Nineteenth-Century America*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981.
- Forman-Brunell, Miriam and Leslie Paris, eds. "Introduction" in *The Girls' History and Culture Reader: The Nineteenth Century*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011.
- Giesberg, Judith. *Army at Home: Women and the Civil War on the Northern Homefront*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009.
- Halttunen, Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

- History of Champaign County, Illinois. With Illustrations Descriptive of Its Scenery and Biographical Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers.* Philadelphia: Brink, McDonough & Co., 1878.
- Howard, Angela and Sash Ranae Adams Tarrant, eds. *Opposition to the Women's Movement in the United States, 1848-1929.* New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1997.
- Hunter, Kathryn M. *Father's Right Hand Man: Women on Australia's Family Farms in the Age of Federation, 1880s-1920s.* Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004.
- Jackson, Mark, ed. *Infanticide: Historical Perspectives on Child Murder and Concealment.* England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2002.
- Jellison, Katherine. *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.
- Jensen, Joan M. *Calling this Place Home: Women on the Wisconsin Frontier, 1850-1925.* St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2006.
- Jensen, Joan M. *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.
- Lensink, Judy Nolte. *'A Secret to Be Buried': The Diary and Life of Emily Hawley Gillespie, 1858-1888.* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989.
- Leonard, Joseph Alexander. *History of Olmsted County, Minnesota. Together with sketches of many of its pioneers, citizens, families and institutions.* Chicago: Goodspeed Historical Association, 1910.
- Neth, Mary. *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Odem, Mary. *Delinquent Daughters: Protecting and Policing Adolescent Female Sexuality in the United States, 1885-1920.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995.
- Osterud, Nancy Grey. *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Radke-Moss, Andrea. *Bright Epoch: Women and Coeducation in the American West.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008.

- Reagan, Leslie J. *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Riney-Kehrberg, Pamela. *Childhood on the Farm: Work, Play, and Coming of Age in the Midwest*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005.
- Rothman, Ellen K. *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America*. New York: Basic Books, 1984.
- Sage, Leland L. *A History of Iowa*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1974.
- Schwieder, Dorothy. *Iowa: The Middle Land*. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1996.
- Strange, Carolyn. *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995.
- Toynbee, Claire. *Her Work and His: Family, Kin and Community in New Zealand 1900-1930*. Wellington: Victoria University Press, 1995.
- Ulrich, Laurel Thatcher. *A Midwife's Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard, Based on Her Diary, 1785-1812*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.
- Walters, Ronald G., ed. *Primers for Prudery: Sexual Advice to Victorian America*, updated edition. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- Whites, LeeAnn. *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender: Augusta, Georgia, 1860-1890*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995.
- Willey, Malcolm Macdonald. *The Country Newspaper: A Study of Socialization and Newspaper Content*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1926.