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"When we get to voting": rural women, community, gender, and woman suffrage in the Midwest

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**“When we get to voting”: rural women, community, gender, and woman suffrage in the
Midwest**

by

Sara Anne Egge

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

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Agricultural History and Rural Studies

Program of Study Committee:
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Dedication

To Mark

In memory of Richard Hoebelheinrich

Table of Contents

List of Maps	iv
Acknowledgements	v
Abstract	ix
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: The Local Story	21
Chapter 2: Rural Women Made Community	74
Chapter 3: Woman Suffrage to 1910	115
Chapter 4: Woman Suffrage in Iowa, 1916-1920	179
Chapter 5: Woman Suffrage in South Dakota, 1914-1918	220
Chapter 6: Woman Suffrage in Minnesota, 1915-1920	266
Conclusion	289
Bibliography	296

List of Maps

Map of Clay County, Iowa	26
Map of Yankton County, South Dakota	31
Map of Lyon County, Minnesota	34

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Abstract

During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Progressive reform radically reshaped the nature of politics and political activism. It reinvigorated debates about the role of the state in the home and family, revealing new conversations about women and their rights. In this study, one Progressive reform, woman suffrage, intersects with conceptions of women as political activists and potential feminists. In particular, this project examines woman suffrage in a local and comparative context, assessing the cause in three counties in three states—Iowa, South Dakota, and Minnesota—in the Midwest. By employing this innovative framework, in which “place” and “locality” matter, this study argues that most people in the rural Midwest experienced Progressive reforms like woman suffrage through their local communities. As this project reveals, Progressivism took neither a unified nor continuous form. Instead, it was haphazard and sporadic, depending on the whims of people who engaged with the movement on their own terms and in their own ways.

In addition to reexamining the nature of Progressivism, this study also repositions the analysis of feminism among groups of women who exhibited feminist behavior without claiming the label. For these rural women, their activism came from their mutual positions on the farm, in the family, and within their communities. This project, then, analyzes the actions of rural women by redefining the term feminism to include their properly contextualized political and public behaviors. Although most rural women did not become outright suffragists, they did actively interact with the cause, both individually and collectively, for their own reasons and motivations. In the process, these rural women became political actors who engaged in feminist behaviors for the advancement of their family and community interests.

Introduction

During the fall of 1914, the editor of the *Dakota Farmer*, an agricultural journal published in Aberdeen, South Dakota, asked his female subscribers if they actually read each bi-monthly installment in its entirety. To his surprise, a flood of women from North and South Dakota, as well as a few from Montana and Idaho, responded enthusiastically that they not only enjoyed the journal but that they usually read it “from cover to cover.”¹ One woman explained that she had a vested interest in all aspects of the farm and farming. “Most women are as interested as the men,” she wrote, “and in order to be an intelligent partner in the business they must keep posted.”² Another woman wrote that the majority of farm women were as sharp and “up-to-date” as any “class of women.”³ Finally, one woman openly chastised the editor, writing that he was “surely a bachelor” for not realizing that women were really “the power behind the throne.”⁴ In particular, her letter resonated with a prominent campaign for woman suffrage brewing in South Dakota that fall. She cheekily pointed out that “when we get to voting we may occasionally creep around in front of the throne.”⁵ The vote, in her estimation, could allow women the opportunity to explore fully their roles as mutual partners on the farm. This simple letter to the editor reflected broader changes in the roles of women in relation to the family and state that took place during the early-twentieth century in the United States. It also acknowledged the Progressive Era

¹ Letter to the Editor, “Farm Women Intelligent and Up-to-Date,” Mrs. W. F. A., *Dakota Farmer*, Oct. 1, 1914, page 869.

² Letter to the Editor, “An Intelligent Partner,” Mrs. P. J. A., *Dakota Farmer*, Oct. 1, 1914, page 869.

³ “Farm Women Intelligent and Up-to-Date,” *Dakota Farmer*, Oct. 1, 1914, page 869.

⁴ Letter to the Editor, “The Power Behind the Throne,” Mrs. F. B., *Dakota Farmer*, Oct. 1, 1914, page 869.

⁵ Ibid.

transformation in politics and political culture that was reshaping patterns of political activism and involvement for men and women.

The woman suffrage movement in the United States has received important scholarly attention. Since Eleanor Flexner's *Century of Struggle* awakened interest in the fight to secure equal rights for women, scholars have identified its leaders and other major players, assessed its rhetoric and practical strategy, and analyzed its outcomes and legacies.⁶ In particular, historians also have examined the movement through a variety of perspectives and approaches. For example, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn discovered the role of African American women in women suffrage while Susan Marshall uncovered the ways that class shaped the movement.⁷ Other scholars, such as Beverly Beeton, Rebecca Mead, Marjorie Spruill

⁶ The first text to analyze the women's rights movement that emerged in the mid-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries was *Century of Struggle* by Eleanor Flexner. See, Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959). For assessments that rely on sociological insights, see, Elisabeth S. Clemens, "Organizational Repertoires and Institutional Change: Women's Groups and the Transformation of U. S. Politics, 1890-1920," *The American Journal of Sociology* 98 (Jan. 1993): 755-98; Lee Ann Banaszak, *Why Movements Succeed or Fail: Opportunity, Culture, and the Struggle for Woman Suffrage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); Steven M. Buechler, *The Transformation of the Woman Suffrage Movement: The Case of Illinois, 1850-1920* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986). For an examination of some of the practical strategies, such as petitions, pageants, open-air campaigns, parades, and picketing, used by suffragists, see Linda Lumsden, *Rampant Women: Suffragists and the Right of Assembly* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997). Martha Solomon analyzes the woman suffrage press and how it gave women an avenue through which to publicize suffrage events, issues, and ideologies. Martha M. Solomon, *A Voice of Their Own: The Woman Suffrage Press, 1840-1910* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1991).

⁷ For some examples of scholarship that views the woman suffrage movement in terms of class, race, other social movements of the time, see, Susan Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997); Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *Afro-Americans in the Struggle for Woman Suffrage* (PhD diss.: Howard University, 1977). Janet Zollinger Giele used a comparison of woman suffrage and temperance to elucidate the rise of feminism. Janet Z. Giele, *Two Paths*

Wheeler, Genevieve McBride, Stephen Buechler, Carol Cornwall Madson, and Gayle Gullett, investigated the movement through regional or state-specific studies in regions such as the West and South and in states such as Wisconsin, Illinois, Utah, and California.⁸ Woman suffrage, it may seem, has achieved vast and well-balanced scholarly consideration.

Despite the ostensible plethora of sources on woman suffrage, however, tremendous gaps and unanswered questions remain. Historians must undertake studies of woman suffrage that address novel and undiscovered aspects of the movement. In particular, the topic demands innovative studies that resituate the movement into complex frameworks and new contexts, especially in recognition of the contentious scholarly debates that mark the period known the Progressive Era. Forged in the wake of massive political, economic, and social transformations that brought unrest and upheaval to Americans at the turn of the twentieth century, Progressivism continues to ignite the curiosity of historians. According to Kristofer Allerfeldt, historians have debated and continue to debate the Progressive Era, including its

to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995).

⁸ Regional and state histories abound. For examples, see, Genevieve G. McBride, *On Wisconsin Women: Working for their Rights from Settlement to Suffrage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Louise R. Noun, *Strong-Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman-Suffrage Movement in Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1969); A. Elizabeth Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee* (New York: Octagon Books, 1978); Carol Cornwall Madsen, *Battle for the Ballot: Essays on Woman Suffrage in Utah, 1870-1896* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997); Dorinda Riessen Reed, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in South Dakota* (Vermillion: University of South Dakota, 1958); Buechler, *The Transformation of the Woman Suffrage Movement*; Gayle Gullett, *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women's Movement, 1880-1911* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Rebecca Mead, *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Beverly Beeton, *Women Vote in the West: The Woman Suffrage Movement, 1869-1896* (New York: Garland Pub., 1986); Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *Votes for Women!: The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee, the South, and the Nation* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995).

origins, characteristics, periodization, and most influential “progressive” individuals.⁹ They argue over the methods, ideologies, and results of the various reform movements that came to dominate American political, economic, and social issues after the Industrial Revolution. While some see it as a crusading interlude between rapid capitalist expansion and isolationist stagnation, others see it as the consolidation of power by the forces of conservatism or the birthplace of modern American liberalism.¹⁰ Scholars point out the fragmentary nature of period, concluding that progressivism was elusive. Yet, most historians define the movement as a response or reaction to tremendous political, economic, and social issues that changed the face of America and caused reform activities to increase dramatically. Although key definitive characteristics mark the movement, its origins, and outcomes, it never coalesced around one specific national leader, issue, or ideology.

In the midst seemingly endless scholarly debate, the subtle assertions of historian Robert Wiebe provide an important reminder for historians. In *The Search for Order*, Wiebe traced the profound economic changes that reshaped the political and social landscape of the United States.¹¹ He argued that during the Progressive Era, Americans saw the gradual formation of national centers through processes of urbanization, industrialization, and nationalism. Government underwent bureaucratization, authority became centralized, and

⁹ Kristofer Allfeldt, ed. *The Progressive Era in the USA, 1890-1921* (Burlington, Va: Ashgate, 2007).

¹⁰ See, Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Knopf, 1955); Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of American Political Thought Since the Revolution* (New York: Harcourt, 1955); Samuel Hays, *The Response to Industrialism, 1885-1914* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900-1916* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963); Michael McGerr, *A Fierce Discontent: The Rise and Fall of the Progressive Movement in America, 1870-1920* (New York: Free Press, 2003).

¹¹ Robert Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).

middle-class Americans living in these emerging cities joined together not by community but by profession. While Wiebe successfully outlined the transformations in nationalized urban centers that drove Americans to search for order, he also pointed out that, for many people living in the countryside—still a majority of people in many Midwestern states well into the twentieth century—locality and institutions of local community life, such as family, church, education, press, and local government, actually served as the primary way that these Americans experienced Progressivism. For example, in these small rural communities, politics and party identification were essential components for male identity. Local politics mattered more than national politics as political parties at the state and national levels lacked centrality and permanency. Politics, however, became a central component of life to Midwesterners during the Progressive Era. As historians Andrew Cayton and Susan Gray wrote, in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Midwesterners “tended to identify government, whether on the local, state, or federal level as the most reliable vehicle for realizing their visions for the future.”¹² Many times, those future visions used state power to promote a sense of the public good. For most rural citizens, then, their worlds remained contained within their local communities during the Progressive Era. Even as bigger farms, bigger corporations, and bigger buildings began to dominate America’s landscape, rural peoples relied on their local communities to see them through the tumultuous changes they experienced.

This study seeks to interrogate the complex intersection of overlooked perspectives and issues relating to the woman suffrage movement and lingering debates about the nature

¹² Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray, eds., *The American Midwest: Essays on Regional History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 19.

of Progressive Era reform. In order to elucidate these two broad bodies of historical scholarship, a critical examination of woman suffrage in a local context in the Midwest offers an innovative and complex approach. First, few scholars have undertaken a systematic examination of woman suffrage in the Midwest. While a handful of scholars have examined this region, most interpret the movement through short narratives or biographical assessments.¹³ Their studies fail to speak to each other in a broader, regional context. A comparative study of the woman suffrage movement in the Midwest provides a distinctive analysis of the movement's origins, ideologies, and transformations and deepens scholarly interpretations of woman suffrage in the United States. Second, analyzing woman suffrage provides merely the first step toward an innovative examination of the woman suffrage movement. By situating woman suffrage in a local context, the contours of local politics—including the institutions of community upon which local politics rested—become clear. Instead of a top-down approach in which the actions of a few important individuals at the helm of organized suffrage work are central, a view from the “bottom-up” incorporates a multifaceted and complex assessment of the movement with all its complications and nuance. In acknowledging the importance of locality in Progressive-Era reform as explicated by Wiebe, this study pays particular attention to those rural people living in small communities who were the targets of all the demonstrations, marches, propaganda, and other activity planned and executed by suffrage leaders. By deconstructing woman suffrage into a complex

¹³ Much of the scholarship on woman suffrage in the Midwest is theoretically limited or confined to only one state. See, for example, McBride, *On Wisconsin Women*; Reed, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in South Dakota*; Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*; Buechler, *The Transformation of the Woman Suffrage Movement*.

interplay of interests, political ideologies, and other cultural factors, this study embraces the conversations that took place among people from a diversity of backgrounds.

In this case, three states, Iowa, South Dakota, and Minnesota, provide a comparative assessment of woman suffrage in the Midwest and offer an original and novel approach that challenges conventional narratives of woman suffrage. Within the three states chosen for the study, one county in each state forms the basis of the local examination of woman suffrage as an example of Progressive reform. The three counties—Clay in northwest Iowa, Yankton in southeast South Dakota, and Lyon in southwest Minnesota—shared geographic, economic, ethnic, and agricultural similarities. Their settlement patterns reflected the westward migration that characterized the post-Civil War period in the United States. Many “Yankees,” or former northerners with Protestant religious affiliations, arrived in this tri-state region first, but soon immigrant groups from northern Europe sought agricultural livelihoods in the area. The complex set of interests, whether economic, political, or cultural, that developed as a diversity of peoples interacted with each other on these Midwestern prairies created a fascinating milieu in which to place an analysis of woman suffrage.

By refiguring the analysis of woman suffrage to the local communities of the Midwest, this study also uncovers new and innovative conclusions about the nature of Progressive reform. The major analyses of Progressivism chart the broad political changes, massive social transformations, and major economic reorientations that fostered significant reform movements, but they fail to examine the nature of reform itself. In debating the periodization of the Progressive Era, historians posit the starting and ending dates of Progressivism as though it were a unified and continuous period of reform. This study challenges these “bracketed” assessments of Progressivism that seek a beginning and an end.

Instead, the analysis of woman suffrage in local communities in the Midwest tests these simple constructions. Woman suffrage was not a unified or linear movement that spanned a specific set of dates but a series of disjointed and messy events and patterns of activity that at times resembled some sort of organization.

In addition, the local context or “place” factor played a tremendous role in the intensity, duration, and frequency of woman suffrage activity. As historian Mary Neth remarked, “place” is not just a geographic location. Instead, “place” is a multifaceted concept that embraces the cultural and social aspects of a landscape “with full peripheral vision” and incorporates a focused location as well as the margins.¹⁴ In Yankton County, on the one hand, a total of seven campaigns to secure a woman suffrage amendment to South Dakota’s constitution brought people living in small towns and the rural countryside into direct contact with suffrage advocates from the national, state, and local levels. These campaigns benefited from having a specific goal, and suffragists could speak of woman suffrage in direct and practical terms. On the other hand, woman suffrage activity in Clay County took place in abstract, informal, and infrequent ways. Since the first woman suffrage campaign took place in 1916, many early efforts to promote woman suffrage relied upon theoretical arguments of what suffrage leaders merely hoped to achieve. The case of woman suffrage in Clay County revealed the significance of individuals and groups of men and women determined to make woman suffrage an issue in their local communities despite the absence of organized, long-term, and sustained activities for the cause. Finally, Lyon County had extremely limited and sporadic encounters with woman suffrage. Compared to the people of Yankton and Clay

¹⁴ Mary Neth, “Seeing the Midwest with Peripheral Vision: Identities, Narratives, and Region,” in *The American Midwest*, 28.

counties, these Minnesotans encountered woman suffrage infrequently and dispassionately. Tellingly, the first official worker to organize Lyon County did not arrive until 1918, the year of South Dakota's seventh amendment campaign for woman suffrage and two years after Iowa's first. The local context—the individual leaders, ethnic patterns, political trends, social activities, and community institutions—had a tremendous influence on the nature of woman suffrage and, by extension, Progressive reform. This study underscores the contention that locality or “place” determined how people experienced Progressivism.

In all three counties, woman suffrage's close ties to other reforms, such as temperance, as well as the timing of organized activity on behalf of the cause, played pivotal roles in the promotion of woman suffrage. In all three states, key leaders of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, or WCTU, cast the fight for woman suffrage in moralistic terms that upheld woman's right to protect the home and family. This close connection between temperance and woman suffrage ignited passionate resistance from many people opposed to the extension of prohibition. In both Iowa and South Dakota, liquor interests went to great lengths to see woman suffrage defeated at the polls. In addition, the timing of these woman suffrage campaigns had as much to do with securing woman suffrage measures as the framework of the local context. In Iowa, the election of 1916 became caught up in the fight between prohibitionist and anti-prohibitionist forces. At the primary election that June, voters did not judge the woman suffrage amendment as a single issue but as another unwanted Progressive measure. Timing also played a significant role in the case of South Dakota's 1918 campaign when the entrance of the United States into World War I reshaped definitions of citizenship, patriotism, and women's activism.

Just as this study uncovers the nature of woman suffrage as a Progressive-Era reform, so too does it reveal new dimensions in the arguments made regarding female political activism. As Paula Baker pointed out, historians have illuminated how, during the nineteenth century, women gained important political skills, consciousnesses, and senses of meaning through increased involvement in women's organizations and clubs.¹⁵ By taking a broad approach to the term "politics," Baker concluded that politics were any "action, formal or informal, taken to affect the course or behavior of government or the community."¹⁶ As women grew political selves through this "political" and voluntary work in clubs and organizations dedicated to causes closely related to the home—such as sanitation, health, temperance, and child labor—they began to question the apparent distinction between male and female political worlds. When the Progressive Era reshaped the meaning of political involvement from partisan loyalty to an individual's relationship with the state, women shifted course toward ensuring social and cultural change by enacting direct policy measures. A stronger, more bureaucratic government offered women the opportunity to prevent and hopefully eliminate the social ills against which they had worked for so long. According to Baker, the domestication of politics ended the separation of spheres between men and women and reflected a cultural change in the nature of political participation.¹⁷

¹⁵ Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *The American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984): 621.

¹⁶ Baker, "The Domestication of Politics," 622.

¹⁷ Elisabeth Clemens noted that the fight for woman suffrage helped to explain one "of the most important institutional changes" in the political history of the United States. During the Progressive Era, politics shifted from the nineteenth-century "state of courts and parties" to a political scheme based on legislative activity and interest groups. New modes of political participation emerged in which lobbying, legislative politics, and the administration of the government trumped political parties and mass mobilization. See, Clemens, "Organizational Repertoires and Institutional Change," 757-60.

Numerous scholars reinforced Baker's conclusions. Sara Evans argued that American women reshaped the boundaries of the "public arena of politics" when they created new public spaces—voluntary associations—that bridged politics and the home.¹⁸ Through women's clubs, temperance unions, ladies' aid societies, and other female organizations, they re-envisioned the ways women could behave as "active" citizens. In fact, Evans chided historians for failing to confront meanings of citizenship and accepting standard definitions that politics were inherently male. Like Baker, Evans relied upon a broad view of politics that incorporated the increasingly important relationship women forged with the state. In fact, she argued that woman suffrage formed a vital strand of Progressive reform that perceived the feminization of government as a means of reform by creating novel and nurturing roles for the state. In addition to Evans, Susan Marshall echoed Baker's assessments of women and politics. In her book on the anti-suffrage movement, she argued that scholars shift their focus to women as political actors through their female organizations. Like Evans and Baker, she advocated the analysis of women's political development through their traditional domestic roles. She pointed out that historians must remove the "separate spheres" framework and pursue studies that broaden ideas of women as political actors in a variety of contexts.¹⁹ This study, then, extends from the work of scholars like Baker, Evans, and Marshall. In all three of the counties in this study, women reshaped politics through work in a variety of clubs, societies, and organizations. For example, most of the leading women's clubs in these three counties became proponents of government intervention on behalf of their causes, and, in the process, they gained prominent public, political roles.

¹⁸ Sara Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 154.

¹⁹ Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood*, 12-14.

As the meanings and structures of politics changed during the Progressive Era, so too did the constructions of female political identity and activism. Many historians have attempted to characterize and explain the ways women's expanded public roles complemented their increasing awareness of their inequality and political power. They have labeled any woman who exhibited "feminist" qualities as a "feminist" without much regard for the fine-tuned nuance and historical context in which the woman agitated for whatever causes she saw fit. This study, in which the local context is highly significant and influential, also applies the same level of precision to delineating, analyzing, and labeling the "feminist" behavior expressed by the women under question. A careful, specific, and historically accurate assessment of the activism displayed by the women in this study offers to broaden theoretical understandings of the terms "political activist" and "feminist." In fact, previous historical assessments of woman suffrage lack any theoretical nuance relating to how the cause complemented the formation of new public and political spaces occupied by women who sought the right to vote for a variety of reasons and from a diversity of identities. These studies construct a binary division between "feminist" and "non-feminist," leaving out those women whose behavior and expressed identities seemingly conflicted. For example, many of the women in this study actively sought strategies to improve life in their families, churches, and communities that many historians could consider "feminist." They ran for office, served as leaders on the governing boards of local institutions, and advocated for equal access for women to educational and employment opportunities. At first, a small group of rural women actively supported woman suffrage, but by the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, an impressive number advocated for the right to vote. Despite their efforts, these

women rarely identified as “feminists,” and no one ever called them “feminists.” These women, it may seem, resist categorization within a feminist theoretical model.

Other historians have added modifiers to “feminism” in an attempt to recast feminism in specific ways. Some have delineated “feminism” with modifiers such as “social,” “radical,” or “domestic.” Virginia Scharff advocated the use of “domestic feminism” in the case of woman suffrage in Wyoming, arguing that women either acted authoritatively within the confines of their sphere or seemed submissive but entertained the growth of feminist convictions.²⁰ Historians Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray eschewed feminism altogether, postulating that Midwestern women in particular sought public roles within the framework of the “republican good life” that embraced more traditional roles for women “as the upholders of private virtue.”²¹ They postulated that Midwestern women displayed a sort of “politicized domesticity” in which women embraced their domestic identities and transcended them to escape their marginalized status. In some ways, envisioning the women in this study as participating in the emergence of politicized domesticity can offer important theoretical insights. It aligns well with Baker and Evans’s emphasis on the domestication of politics in that, just as politics transformed, so too did women and their domestic identities become more political. A significant problem with politicized domesticity is that it eludes clear definition and does not adequately explain the shifting and complex identity that women forged and reshaped during the Progressive Era. Moreover, it removes women from the construction of their own political selves and assumes an overly simplistic analysis. The

²⁰ “Virginia Scharff, “The Case for Domestic Feminism: Woman Suffrage in Wyoming,” in *History of Women in the United States: Historical Articles on Women’s Lives and Activities*, Nancy Cott, ed., Vol. 19 (Munich: K. G. Saur Verlag GmbH & Co. KG, 1994), 36.

²¹ Andrew R. L. Cayton and Susan E. Gray, “The Story of the Midwest: An Introduction,” in *The American Midwest*, 13.

anticipated narrative reads that, as politics underwent domestication, so too did domesticity become political. The actual process by which women assumed increasingly political identities deserves deeper scrutiny.

The difficulty in defining the political activism displayed by these rural women derives from the inflexibility of the feminist label and the inadequacy of terms like “politicized domesticity.” Just as all “women” defy classification because of a myriad of interests, ideologies, and identities, so too does the activism of women.²² This study, then, seeks a new way of uncovering the activism of women, especially related to the fight for female enfranchisement. In particular, those rural women who advocated for the cause from their positions in their local communities—as farm women, church goers, club members, fundraisers, healthcare advocates, mothers, wives, and bearers of culture and ethnicity—form a central part of this study. By incorporating the histories of the individuals and groups of women who pursued enfranchisement in the three counties and three states under review, this analysis stretches the meaning of the term feminist to those rural women at the grassroots level whose fight for woman suffrage emerged in complementary yet separate ways. As MaryJo Wagner, in her study of women in the Farmers’ Alliance and Populist Party, asserted, the farm wives and mothers she studied did not “perceive a contradiction between domesticity and political work; rather, they incorporated the ideology of domesticity into the larger goals of Populism.”²³ According to Wagner, their lives were neither devoted solely to children or housekeeping nor to a single “feminine” cause. Many of the women in the

²² See the first chapter in, Denise Riley, *Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of “Women” in History* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988).

²³ MaryJo Wagner, “Farms, Families, and Reform: Women in the Farmers’ Alliance and Populist Party,” (PhD diss.: University of Oregon, 1986), 9-10.

Farmers' Alliance engaged in politics in complex and complicated ways.²⁴ Scholars must analyze women and their political behaviors on their own terms and in their own local contexts. They must account for the complex variety of activisms and acknowledge a new theoretical understanding that avoids ahistorical and sloppy uses of the term feminism.

The political identities of rural women provide an especially important addition to the examination of woman suffrage in the United States. A growing body of scholarship on rural women has uncovered a group of women bound by their ties to agriculture and the rhythms of farm life.²⁵ For some historians of rural women, the political behavior of rural women clearly fell outside of feminism. Katherine Jellison saw complex reasons why farm women maintained identities rooted in agriculture. She argued that these identities “had nothing to do with the development of a feminist ideology or any type of organized challenge to patriarchy.”²⁶ Mark Friedberger and William Pratt echoed Jellison, and they defined the activism of rural women as invisible within an agricultural context and argued that farm women’s activism “remained invisible, politically insignificant, and entirely unaffected by

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Few scholars of the woman suffrage movement have studied rural women’s approaches and responses to the cause. Ronald Schaffer, writing about woman suffrage in California, mentioned briefly that suffragists experienced difficulty in attempting to reach out to rural women, implying that practical obstacles such as distance and road conditions hindered attempts to include them in campaigns. He noted that suffragists used the press to infuse the message of woman suffrage with ideas of rural pride. He remarked that many rural voters were sympathetic—if not enthusiastic—about the cause. See Ronald Schaffer, “The Problem of Consciousness in the Woman Suffrage Movement: A California Perspective,” *Pacific Historical Review* 45 (Nov., 1976): 469-493.

²⁶ Jenny Barker-Devine, “‘The ERA is Their Bag, Agriculture is Mine’: Midwestern Agrarian Feminists in the Second Wave, 1964-1984,” unpublished paper presented at the Newberry Library, March 2010, in author’s possession, 22; Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 180.

feminism until the 1980s.”²⁷ Anthropologist Deborah Fink argued that in the Midwestern United States, agrarian ideology informed gender roles, defined household composition within an ideal nuclear farm family, and fostered patriarchal hierarchies in which men had ultimate power and control. The primary system of organization for rural women was kinship, and Midwestern rural women did not question the broad contours of their lives as wives and mothers. She argued that rural women married, remained deferential to husbands, and raised children to reach beyond their roots to new successes. Many rural women in her studies disdained a political voice and even ridiculed feminist activists. She cautioned against looking for visible, decisive actions or words that indicate feminism. Instead, she encouraged historians to see subtle shades of resistance within systems of male dominance and control.²⁸

While Jellison, Friedberger, Pratt, and Fink characterized the activism of rural women decidedly outside the boundaries of “feminism,” other scholars pointed to the mutuality experienced by rural women. Joan Jensen argued that while women failed to challenge outright the dominance of patriarchy, they experimented with and developed gender-based commodity production, community networks, and consumer culture, supported social reform, and developed self-conscious discontent. In her study of women in rural Pennsylvania in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Jensen elucidated their lives in three spheres of activity, including the household, the market or commercial sphere, and the public sphere, through activities in religion, education, and reform. These women did not emerge as free and equal

²⁷ Mark Friedberger, “Women Advocates in the Iowa Farm Crisis of the 1980s,” in *American Rural and Farm Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Joan M. Jensen and Nancy Grey Osterud (Washington, D.C.: Agricultural History Society, University of California Press, 1994), 224-234; William C. Pratt, “Using History to Make History? Progressive Farm Organizing During the Farm Revolt of the 1980s,” *Annals of Iowa* 55 (Winter 1996): 40-42.

²⁸ Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), xiv-xv.

as but were freer and more equal because of their positions on the farm and within the community. In addition to Jensen, Katherine Jellison, Mary Neth, and Nancy Grey Osterud advocated for a framework that recognized the role of “mutuality” on the farm. Jellison argued that farm women held an alternative vision of modern farm life, one in which their work as farm producers was central. Despite her view that rural women eschewed feminism, she effectively demonstrated that they saw themselves as equal partners “in mutuality” on the farm. Neth pointed out that bonds between family, neighborhood, and work created social and economic ties that linked members of farm families to their communities in integrated mutual support networks. Finally, in her study of rural New York in the nineteenth century, Osterud showed that rural women increasingly defined themselves through their relationships with men while urban women gradually defined themselves through their differences from men. Like Fink, Osterud asserted that kinship served as the most important system of identity for rural women. While she acknowledged that rural women occupied a position of dependency, she argued that their central role in the family cultivated strategies of mutuality in which women served as the vital complement to the men with whom they lived and worked.²⁹ As a theoretical model, then, mutuality best explains the viewpoints of the women who wrote to the *Dakota Farmer* to offer their opinions on the reading habits of rural women. They clearly believed themselves to be intelligent partners with their husbands. To at least one of women, the vote provided an avenue through which to reinforce and perhaps

²⁹ Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Joan Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women, 1750-1850* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Jellison, *Entitled to Power*; Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991); Fink, *Agrarian Women*.

enhance their central role in the farm family, especially if rural women used it to “creep around in front of the throne.” For these women, voting promised to strengthen and perhaps increase their significance to the family and community life in the rural Midwest.

Incorporating the historiographical assessment of rural women and mutuality offers useful dimensions into new constructions of feminism. Through their central positions on the farm, rural women eschewed systems of gender that relied on “separate spheres” and instead incorporated themselves as significant members of farm families and rural, local communities. While mutuality provides helpful theoretical insights, it fails to reformulate fully the discussion of feminism to the issue of political activism. The historiography of rural women does not deconstruct feminism in terms of the strategies of mutuality as practiced by rural women. Instead, these studies also rely on binary categorizations of “feminism.” They rightly point out that most rural women did not challenge patriarchy or the gendered system in which they inhabited the subordinated roles of wife, mother, and daughter. They also argue that many rural women rejected feminism and the overt political expression that most scholars identify as a major part of feminist behavior. Unlike previous historical treatments of rural women, however, this study relies upon an unprecedented analysis of feminism because it reconsiders and redefines the term to include the properly contextualized political and public behavior of rural women. This study recognizes that many rural women never sought to overthrow systems of patriarchy and dominance. Most never called themselves feminists. In fact, the evidence from these three counties reveals that although rural women showed much interest and curiosity toward woman suffrage, most never became outright “suffragists.” Instead, rural women—and men, for that matter—displayed a variety of

responses and reactions toward woman suffrage, from outright hostility to overt support. Most people fell somewhere in the middle, between opposition and advocacy.

In order to broaden current definitions of feminism into useful frameworks for the behavior and political activities of rural women in history, this study shifts the approach to feminism toward the behaviors of women, both individually and collectively, and characterizes it in historically appropriate terms. As scholar Ann Snitow stated, “there is an indescribable knot and blurry place where various things converge: community organizations, working-class women’s organizations, mothers’ movements, [and] women’s peace movements.”³⁰ She easily could have included rural women’s activities in relation to woman suffrage on her list. In addition, Snitow argued strongly that historians should redefine political life to include usually invisible female networks, noting the “collectivist” nature of these “traditional” movements and the power created as these women united.

The six chapters that follow illuminate and investigate the lives of the rural women who lived in Clay, Yankton, and Lyon Counties and their activities on behalf of woman suffrage. First, by emphasizing the contours of the local context, the variety of ethnicities, political values, social patterns, and class divides give complexity to this comparative study and ground the analysis in a specific “place” in the Midwest. Second, a clear assessment of the world rural women created through the myriad collective associations, such as community groups, women’s clubs, ladies’ aid societies, and other organizations, illuminates how women gained public and political roles in their local communities. After elucidating the local world and women’s increasingly visible presence in it, a comparative examination of

³⁰ Ann Snitow, “A Gender Diary,” in *Feminism and History*, ed. Joan Wallach Scott (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 517-27.

woman suffrage in the three counties serves as the focus for the rest of the study. Within each county, an analysis of the major debates and arguments, infrequent moments of work for woman suffrage, and prominent individuals and groups of women who advocated for the cause sheds light on the complicated nature of this Progressive reform. The third chapter investigates woman suffrage to about 1910, tracing the boom and bust cycles of varying intensities and durations these counties in South Dakota, Iowa, and Minnesota. Chapters four, five, and six each examine one county—Clay, Yankton, and Lyon—and trace chronologically the contours of woman suffrage until about 1920. By assessing woman suffrage in this comparative framework, a nuanced and complex analysis emerges that underscores the primacy of locality in the way people experienced Progressive reform and reaffirms the importance of specificity and historicity in examining female political activism. This new definition investigates the political activism of these rural women in historically specific contexts without using imprecise definitions such as “domestic feminism” or “politicized domesticity.” Even though the women in this study did not call themselves feminists, their behavior marked them as activists pursuing feminist agendas for the uplift and improvement of their families and communities.

Chapter 1: The Local Story

In September 1891, the editor of the *Lyon County Reporter* issued a challenge to the residents of the communities in Lyon County, Minnesota. With a recently constructed school building, electric lights, a new opera house, and “several beautiful new residences,” the people of the county had shed their frontier origins and become a vibrant center of economic prosperity.³¹ “We have reached an elevation now where we can talk of helping others,” lauded the editor, and he encouraged residents to form associations to promote the developing business interests of its county seat at Marshall.³² The article served as but one example of the rhetoric of progress, advancement, and development that characterized the rural Midwest during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. While the growth of rural communities accelerated tremendously during this period, tensions escalated as well, especially among people whose ethnic, political, religious, and social backgrounds clashed. In order to grasp a clear vision of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century history of the Midwest, scholars must account for both the rapid development of the rural economy and its accompanying infrastructure and the resulting conflicts that emerged among people whose heritages diverged significantly along ethnic, political, religious, and cultural lines.

Only with a clear vision of the local context can historians place an examination of the woman suffrage movement. The narrative lacks depth and dimension without a foundation in the history of these three counties. Along with developments in the communities of Lyon County, Minnesota, this chapter also elucidates the local context of two other counties—Clay in Iowa and Yankton in South Dakota. First, an assessment of the

³¹ “What Shall We Do Next,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Sept. 24, 1891.

³² Ibid.

outlines of each county's early history, beginning with Clay County, moving to Yankton County, and finishing with Lyon County, provides a chronological background and local context. Second, an examination of the subtle shades of ethnic development that characterized each of the three counties provides further perspective and dimension. Third, an overview of the major political issues present in these counties during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries—from populist reform to Farmers' Alliance organization to temperance legislation—colors the political landscape with vibrant tones and reveals the personal, direct nature of politics contested most vehemently at the local level. Fourth, an assessment of the church life of the three counties allows for a comprehension of the sense of the religious community first planted, then tended, and finally cultivated by the men and women who settled in these Midwestern counties. Fifth, the socio-organizational character of these counties sheds light on the efforts inhabitants made at sociability. They joined together in groups and clubs to cultivate civic spirit and confer over mutual interests. These four issues—ethnicity, politics, church, and sociability—serve as the nexus of political identity in the rural Midwest during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In a complex interplay, these four factors contributed to the ways in which people formed political selves. Elucidating these four aspects of life in the rural Midwest provides a context in which to place the movement for woman suffrage that developed during this period. In addition, this view of local history reveals the major divisions present in the rural Midwest, divisions created as a diversity of people from many different religious, ethnic, class, educational, and cultural groups interacted within the counties they called home. These divisions manifested most rigidly as a class distinction between town and country, the divide that shaped rural life most significantly in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Midwest.

Clay County

The boundaries of Clay County formed in 1851 when the Iowa Legislature enacted a bill to define the counties in northwest Iowa. Several counties became bounded political units that year, and three, including Clay, received the names of famous officers who died in the Mexican-American War.³³ From 1853 to 1858, Clay County existed merely as a county in name; the legislature “attached” it to Woodbury County, and all of its government business took place there. Not until 1858 did a large enough settlement exist in Clay County for inhabitants to apply for an official separation into its own organized county.³⁴ Rich agricultural lands had lured settlers onto the grassy prairie lands, and during the next fifty years, white men and women eventually occupied every corner of the county. The county boasted twenty-four square miles of potential farmland, with a soil consisting of a dark loam that beckoned agricultural improvement.³⁵ It also offered plentiful sources of water in the form of a fine collection of streams, lakes, and other creeks. The Little Sioux River cut the county in two from north to south.³⁶ Around these lakes and streams stood a few groves of trees that provided some timber for building houses, stores, and churches, but wood remained scarce during the settlement period.

As the first people appraised the geographical aspects of the county, they erected homes, cultivated farmland, and feared Indian attack.³⁷ From 1857 to 1862, settlers in

³³ Samuel Gillespie and James E. Steel, *History of Clay County, Iowa From Its Earliest Settlements to 1909, Also Biographical Sketches of Many Prominent Citizens of the County as well as its Illustrious Dead* (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1909), 47-48.

³⁴ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 48.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 56. For more on the Sioux uprising, see Kenneth Carley, *The Sioux Uprising of 1862* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1976); Duane P. Schultz, *Over the Earth I Come:*

northwest Iowa, southeast South Dakota, and southwest Minnesota—including the first inhabitants of Clay, Yankton, and Lyon Counties—worried about the threat of violence from the Indians living in the area.³⁸ Only after the federal government authorized an organized military intervention did the threat of Indian violence subside and the settlements in the area increase during the late-1860s and early-1870s. Over the course of the next thirty years, the population propelled the institutional development of the county forward. These settlers came with the intent to set up permanent farming operations on the rich agricultural lands of Clay County.³⁹ In 1860, Clay County had a mere fifty-two residents scattered in isolated hamlets. By 1867, the population had risen to almost four hundred people. Over the next three years, the county's population bloomed to over 1,500 residents. By 1875, the population had again increased astoundingly to 3,569 people. Every five years between 1885 and 1905, Clay County gained between two and three thousand people so that by 1905, the population stood at 12,711.⁴⁰ Township organization complemented this population growth as early as 1860,

The Great Sioux Uprising of 1862 (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); Jerry Keenan, *The Great Sioux Uprising: Rebellion on the Plains, August-September, 1862* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2003).

³⁸ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 147-49. In the spring of 1857, Indian bands roamed in along the eastern banks of the Missouri River, venturing boldly into white settlement. The inhabitants became nervous. When these Indians arrived at Smithland, the residents disarmed the Indians in the hope that without weapons, the Indians posed no threat to their homes and fields. However, forcefully removing their weapons "greatly enraged" the Indians, and they turned back, "vowing vengeance on all whites whom they should meet." As they approached the habitations of white settlers, they appropriated firearms, food, and other supplies. They stopped at two homes in what became Clay County, the Bicknell's and the Kirchner's. They requisitioned all the arms, took food and other provisions, and killed all their cattle. Not until the Indians had reached Jackson, Minnesota did organized military companies defeat this roaming group.

³⁹ *Centennial First Baptist Church August 10, 1867-1967* (n. p.: n. p., 1967), 2, Church Histories Collection [CHC], Clay County Historical Society, Parker Museum, Spencer, Iowa [hereafter CCHS].

⁴⁰ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 79.

and the process lasted about thirty years, mirroring this trend of population growth. Douglas Township formed in October 1860 and Sioux Township followed in September 1861.⁴¹ Other settlements popped up either before or after official township recognition, including one at Greenville and one at Gillett's Grove. Settlement increased dramatically after the Civil War, and Riverton, Summit, and Lone Tree Townships all organized in the 1870s. In 1871, amid negotiations for a proposed railroad, the county seat moved from the southeastern corner of the county at Peterson to the central location at Spencer.⁴² Surveyors platted the town beginning in April, and slowly, Spencer grew into an established center of market activity. The village officially incorporated in 1880.⁴³

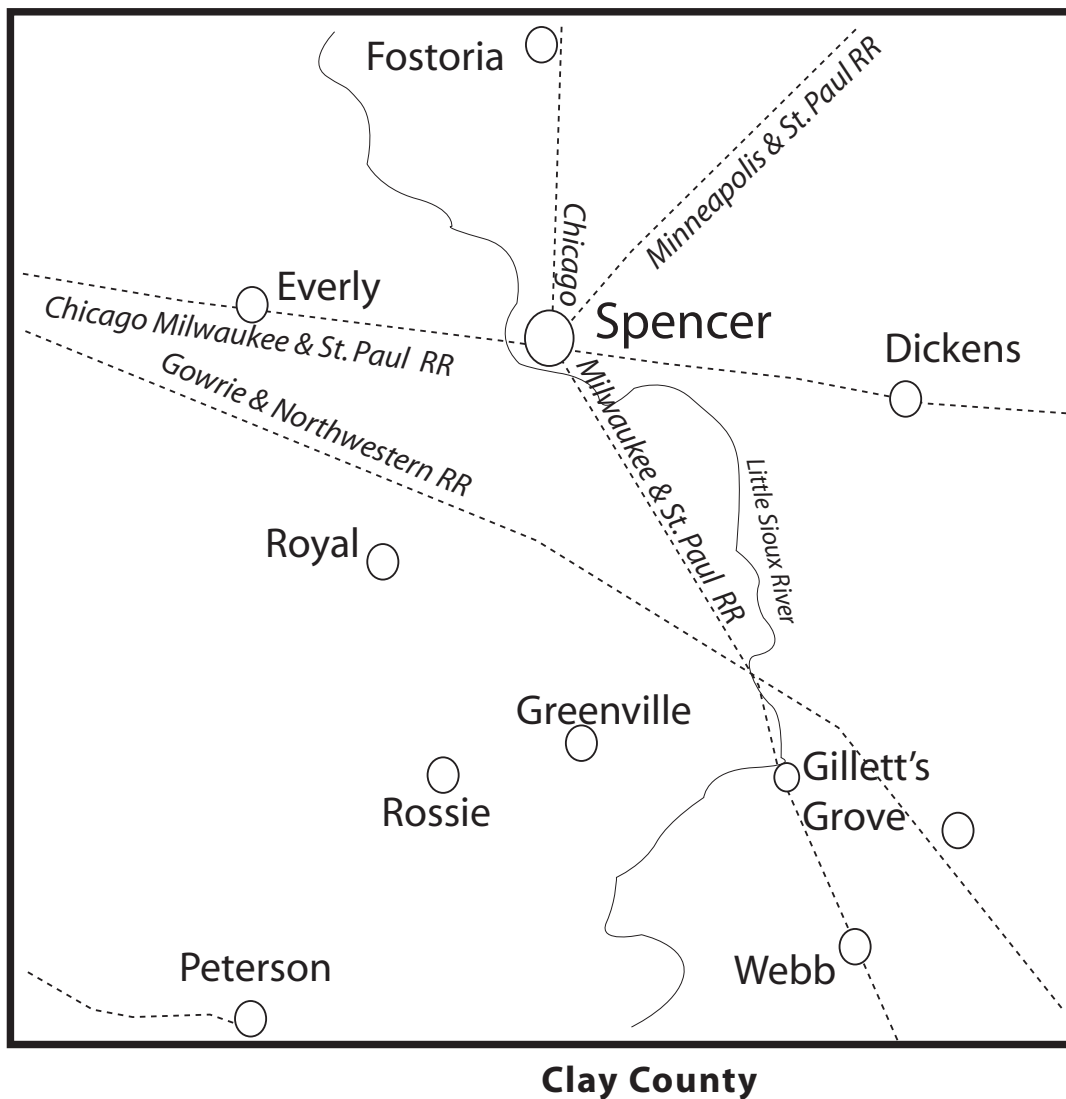
By the 1870s and 1880s, active agricultural settlements dotted the countryside of Clay County with farming families settling on isolated tracts and others settling closer together and forming small villages to serve as the nexus of neighborhood activity. Along with their homes, residents built community institutions, starting with the post office and continuing to banks, stores, saloons, schools, and local government buildings. By the early twentieth century, nine small hamlets dotted the landscape of Clay County along with Spencer serving as the county seat.⁴⁴ Towns offered local markets at which farmers could sell their produce and other goods and purchase supplies for their families. Rich, productive, and well-watered lands abundantly rewarded farmers who cultivated wheat, corn, and other grains.

⁴¹ Ibid., 60, 66.

⁴² Ibid., 88.

⁴³ *Centennial First Baptist Church*, 3, CHS, CCHS.

⁴⁴ G. W. Anderson, *Atlas of Clay County, Iowa, Containing Maps of the Townships of the County* (Mason City, Ia.: Anderson Publishing Co., 1919).



As shipping interests developed, farmers also added animal husbandry to their enterprises. Nutrient-rich grass grew plentifully, and farmers either fed it to their animals or cut, stacked, and pressed this “excellent substitute for tame hay” into transportable units for sale in eastern markets, realizing “handsome margins for their labor.”⁴⁵ Until 1878, farmers had to ship their produce from Fort Dodge at a considerable cost, but with the arrival of the first railroad to

⁴⁵ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 46

Spencer, farmers could sell products directly to distant markets in the east. This railroad, an extension of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul, gave the town and the county a new life. The railroad also fostered the development of dairying in Clay County, and soon “the excellence of the dairy products of Northwestern Iowa” became sought-after commodities “in the leading markets of the country.”⁴⁶ The Minneapolis and St. Louis railroad also added a line through Spencer by 1883.⁴⁷ A third railroad, the Gowrie and Northwestern, established a third line through the county in 1901.⁴⁸

Yankton County

Nestled along the Missouri River, Yankton County experienced white settlement as early as 1858. It began as a steamboat landing for ships carrying trade and other supplies into western territories.⁴⁹ After the federal government signed a treaty with some bands of Dakota Indians in 1851, a portion of the lands west of the present-day Big Sioux River came under American control. Slowly, white entrepreneurs and other adventurers invaded the territory, and by 1859, a genuine settlement, called Yankton, began. Two years passed, however, before the Organic Act created Dakota Territory and named Yankton as its capital.⁵⁰ In 1862, the first session of the territorial legislature passed a bill establishing Yankton as an organized county with official leaders and boundaries approximately twenty-four miles long both north to south and east to west. Yankton, the settlement along the Missouri River,

⁴⁶ Ibid., 47, 92.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 158.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁹ *History of Southeastern Dakota, Its Settlement and Growth, Geological and Physical Features—Counties, Cities, Towns, and Villages—Incidents of Pioneer Life—Biographical Sketches of the Pioneers and Business Men, with a Brief Outline History of the Territory in General* (Sioux City, Ia.: Western Publishing Company, 1881), 15-16.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 18.

became the seat of the county.⁵¹ It maintained a mostly frontier existence for the next eight years, “kept in a constant state of excitement in consequence of the Indian wars” that raged in nearby Iowa and Minnesota.⁵² The Civil War also stalled efforts to develop the territory, pushing back any substantial settlement until the late 1870s and early 1880s.⁵³

Those first settlers probably chose Yankton County for two reasons that resonate strongly with those of the first settlers in Clay county: its strategic location along important trade routes and the rich agricultural land surrounding it. Early trade in the territory centered in Yankton. Goods passed through the frontier town as they traveled up the river to forts and other military outposts along the Missouri.⁵⁴ Stage lines, running between Yankton and Fort Randall, Fort Pierre, and even Bismarck, made Yankton a hub of economic activity.⁵⁵ Along with an active trade network, Yankton County also boasted abundant agricultural potential. One early observer wrote, “Yankton is surrounded by an excellent agricultural country” that complemented Yankton’s booming river port.⁵⁶ The James River, which ran diagonally through the county from northwest to southeast, watered the land’s fertile sandy loam soil that promised to attract men and women who desired to farm.⁵⁷ As the Indian threat waned, the county’s farming activities developed, and early farmers planted small grains, corn, and

⁵¹ Donald Dean Parker, *History of Our County and State: Yankton County* (Brookings, S. D.: South Dakota State College, 1959), 21-Y.

⁵² *History of Southeastern Dakota*, 227.

⁵³ Jon Lauck, *Prairie Republic: The Political Culture of Dakota Territory, 1879-1889* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 3-7.

⁵⁴ Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 6-Y.

⁵⁵ *History of Southeastern Dakota*, 230-33.

⁵⁶ Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 6-Y.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 12-Y.

vegetables to feed the growing population. They brought cattle and other livestock, so farmers also cultivated flax as a food source for their animals.⁵⁸

The construction of railroad lines cemented Yankton's place of prominence in the developing territory. In 1868, a rail line between Yankton and Sioux City, Iowa, provided a major source of trade and a faster means of transportation with the East than steamboats. Over the next twenty years, the Chicago, Milwaukee & St. Paul, Chicago & Northwestern, and Great Northern railroads all built lines through Yankton County.⁵⁹ Most of these tracks connected Yankton to more established railway networks located in northern and eastern transportation hubs, thereby increasing its connections to sources of economic, political, social, and cultural development.

Between the late 1860s and 1890, Yankton County transitioned from frontier settlement to established town. The county's population rose dramatically over this period, known to many historians as the "Dakota Boom." Liberal land policy coaxed thousands of immigrants from northern Europe to the new territory. Over a half million people migrated to Dakota Territory, and the government distributed more federal land in the territory in this period than in any other place.⁶⁰ The promise of this cheap land and the lure of economic prosperity increased settlement in the region.⁶¹ These settlers came seeking to farm and sustain that agrarian livelihood for future generations. Yankton County, one of the first stops

⁵⁸ Ibid. During the first years of settlement, farmers across the county dug many artesian wells, with depths from 300 to 500 feet. Yankton County became well known for its extensive system of artesian wells, many of which still flow today.

⁵⁹ *History of Southeastern Dakota*, 26.

⁶⁰ Lauck, *Prairie Republic*, 7; John Hudson, "Migration to an American Frontier," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 66 (June 1976): 242-65.

⁶¹ Robert F. Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way it Was!: Being a Collection of Historical Columns* (Yankton, S. D.: Yankton Daily Press and Dakotan, 1998), 84.

on the railroad lines, experienced a staggering population increase. In 1861, the population barely registered above 250 inhabitants.⁶² In 1870, almost 2,300 people lived in the county.⁶³ By 1880, almost 8,400 people called Yankton home, and by 1890, Yankton County had reached 10,000 people.⁶⁴

As people poured into its boundaries, Yankton's residents began to plat the town northward away from the river. By 1870, Yankton boasted one hundred eighty buildings, one hundred of which were the residences of permanent occupants. The rest served the people as stores, offices, shops, banks, churches, schools, and other community and government buildings.⁶⁵ By 1872, four newspapers, including the *Republican Press and Dakotian*—later the *Press and Dakotan*—and the *Democratic Dakota Herald*, served the community, publishing local, state, and national news.⁶⁶ Two years later, in response to the overwhelming number of German immigrants, an immigrant began publishing a German-language newspaper, the *Freie Press*, in Yankton County. It enjoyed the largest circulation of any weekly paper published in Dakota Territory.⁶⁷

By 1890, Yankton County had reached its zenith. Yankton enjoyed a vaunted position as “Mother City” of the territory as Dakota's capital and political center, and politicians were regular members of Yankton's host of churches, fraternal societies, and civic groups.

⁶² Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 20-Y.

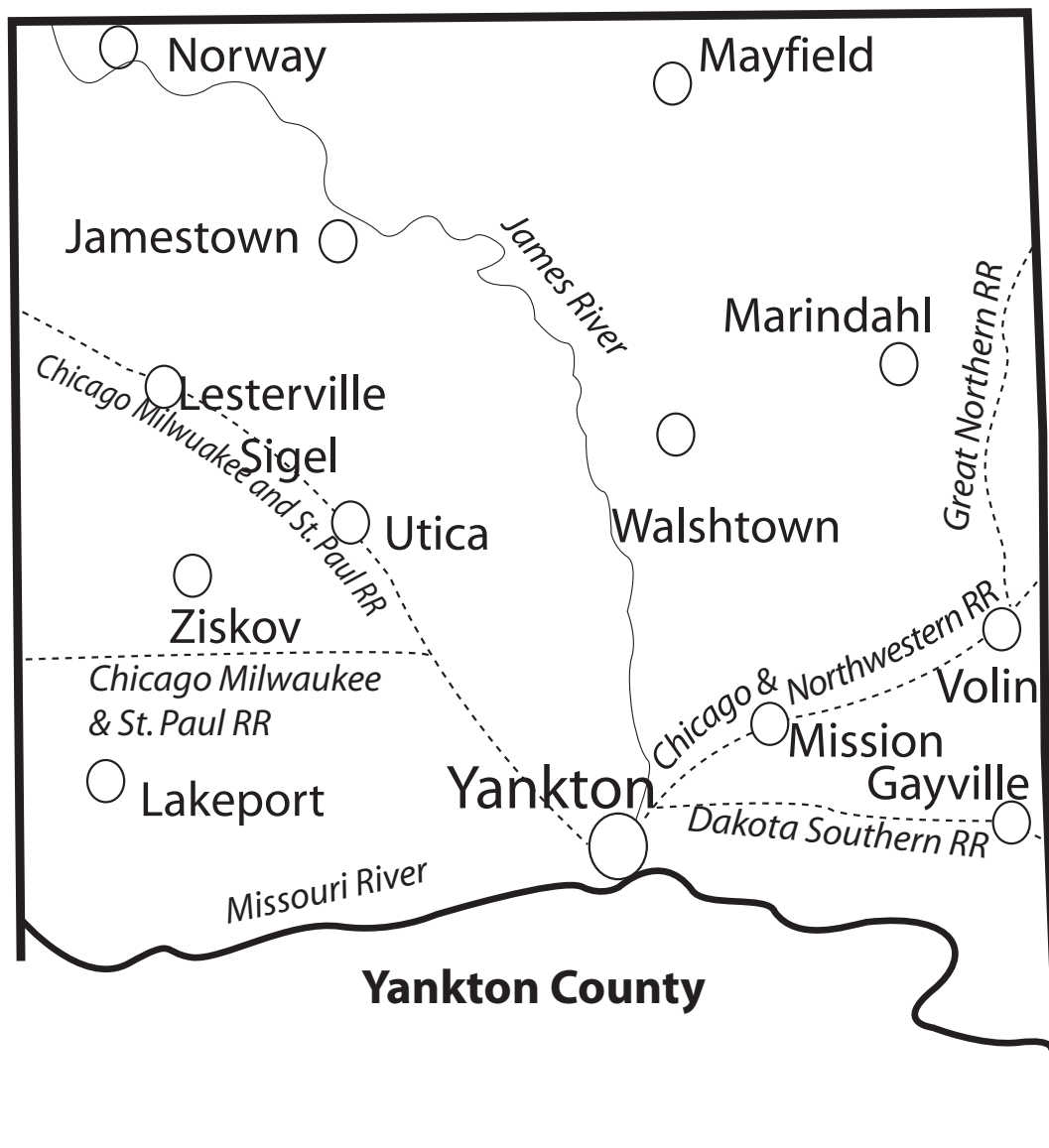
⁶³ *Ibid.*, 52-Y.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 52-Y; Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 80.

⁶⁵ Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 3-Y, 5-Y.

⁶⁶ Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 3-Y; *History of Southeastern Dakota*, 230-33.

⁶⁷ Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 27-Y.



Beyond the boundaries of its county seat, the county also experienced growth. Its population had ballooned to about ten thousand inhabitants, occupying nearly every corner of the county.⁶⁸ In addition to the county seat, Yankton boasted four substantial villages located

⁶⁸ Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 50-Y.

along important railway lines at Utica, Lesterville, Volin, and Gayville.⁶⁹ Moreover, ten other post offices served the county's mostly foreign residents at La Grange, Lakeport, Zizkov, Sigel, Norway, Jamesville, Mayfield, Walshtown, Marindahl, and Center Point near Turkey Creek.⁷⁰ Yankton continued to add to its infrastructure, and by 1887 it boasted five banks, seven church buildings, two breweries, and as many as twenty-four licensed saloons, a problematic number for many temperance advocates in the town.⁷¹ Its population continued to grow, and it even included a colony of one hundred African Americans who settled in the city by 1885.⁷² In Dakota Territory, only Deadwood had a population larger than Yankton's during this period of prosperity.⁷³

Yankton's political downfall began after a series of moves weakened its position in the territory and eventually the state of South Dakota. In 1884 the Surveyor General's office closed in Yankton and moved north to Huron, bringing with it many people whose business depended on the sale of land.⁷⁴ The biggest blow came in November 1889, when President Benjamin Harrison granted statehood to two separated states—North and South Dakota—carved out of Dakota Territory. Yankton lost its status as the seat of territorial government and as one of the largest towns in region. After 1900, Yankton County still saw small increases in population every ten years, but it never replicated the explosive gains it had

⁶⁹ Ibid., 23-Y.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 22-Y; "Briefly Told," *Press and Dakotan*, May 28, 1890. None of these post offices exist today.

⁷¹ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 127; Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 39-Y.

⁷² Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 80.

⁷³ *History of Southeastern Dakota*, 32.

⁷⁴ Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 28-Y; Jon Lauck, citing Gilbert Fite's *The Farmer's Frontier*, puts this date at 1883. Lauck, *Prairie Republic*, 8; Gilbert Fite, *The Farmer's Frontier, 1865-1900* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966).

made twenty years earlier.⁷⁵ This loss of status failed to resonate with Yankton's residents. On the opinion pages of the *Press and Dakotan*, the editor noted that "the possibility that Yankton might become a candidate [for state capital] has never received any encouragement here...the people have resolutely set their veto against even an intimation of a return to a former condition."⁷⁶ It seems as though Yankton's movers and shakers appreciated the less hectic lifestyle that small town life afforded them.

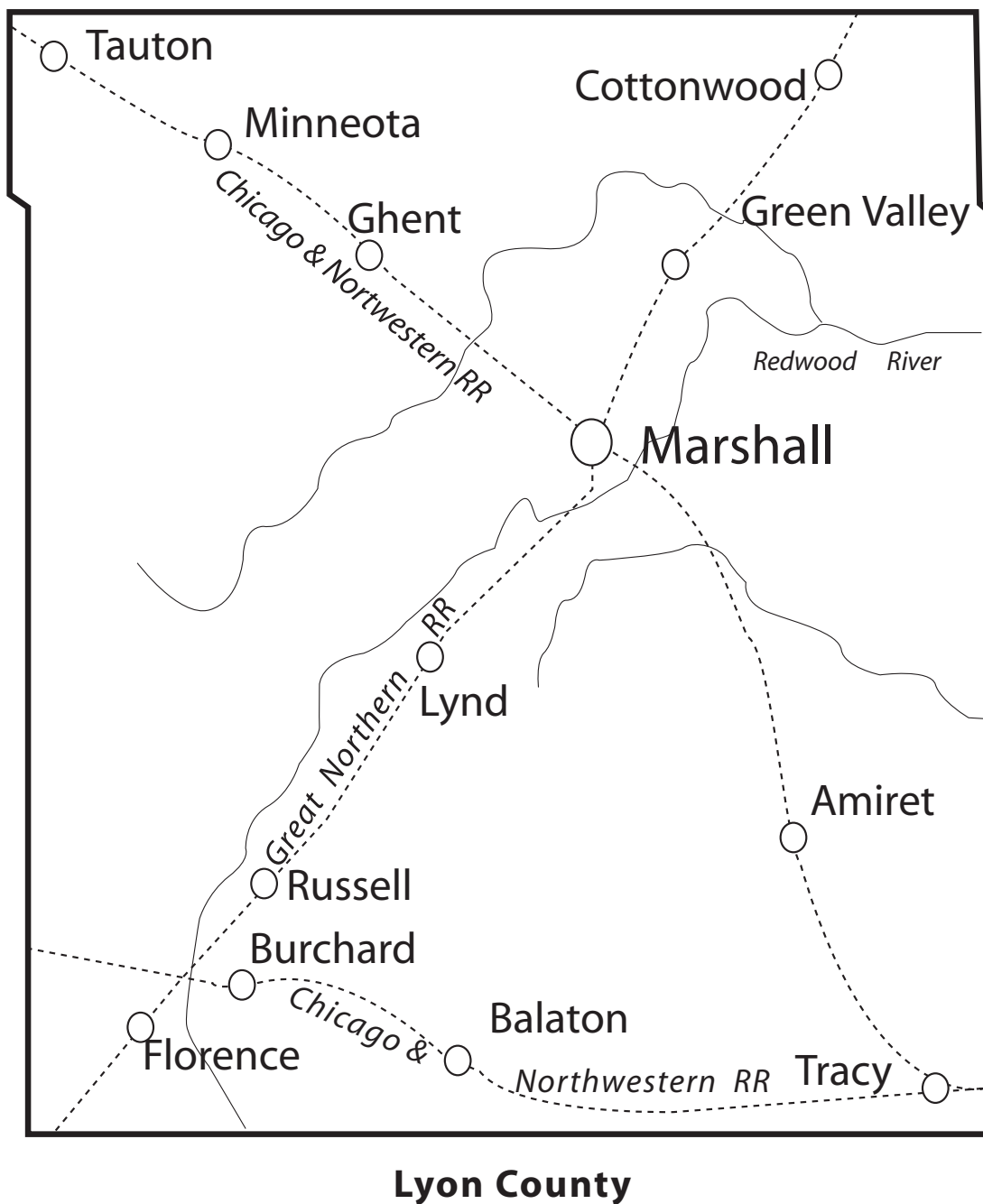
Lyon County

In addition to Clay and Yankton Counties, Lyon County, located in southwest Minnesota, also had a dynamic settlement period. By 1860, white settlers had entered the southwest corner of the new state of Minnesota, but little permanent settlement occurred until after the Civil War. Lyon County was the last of the three counties to receive permanent settlement, almost ten years after Yankton and Clay. With few navigable rivers and a soil comprised of less fertile glacial moraine deposits, southwest Minnesota experienced a late settlement in comparison to southeast South Dakota and northwest Iowa.⁷⁷ In addition to physical setbacks, the settlement of Lyon County stalled because of the threat of Indian violence that began in 1857 and escalated during the Dakota War of 1862. The Dakota, angered by the failure of the United States government to keep its promises, attacked white settlements.

⁷⁵ See, U. S. Census 1900, Historical Census Browser, accessed Sept. 20, 2011, University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center (2004), <http://fisher.lib.virginia.edu/collections/histcensus/index.html>.

⁷⁶ "The Capital Question," *Press and Dakotan*, June 2, 1890.

⁷⁷ John Radzilowski, *One Community, One Church, Two Towns: The Poles of Southwestern Minnesota, 1882-1905* (Marshall, Minn.: Southwest State University, 1991), 2; Torgny Anderson, *The Centennial History of Lyon County Minnesota* (Marshall, Minn.: Henle Publishing Co., 1970), 6.



The government called in its military forces, which quashed the uprising with swift and effective might.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ John Radzilowski, *Prairie Town: A History of Marshall, Minnesota* (Marshall, Minn.: Lyon County Historical Society, 1997), 6; C. F. Case, *History and Description of Lyon*

By 1870, the perceived Dakota menace had been effectively removed, and permanent settlement began in earnest. That year, the boundaries of Lyon County became established, and three years later, at the intersection of the Redwood River and the Winona and St. Peter Railroad Company, Marshall became the county seat. Named by the railroad, the town embraced its position as a central trading point. In 1888, a second railway line called the Willmar & Sioux Falls and built by the Great Northern—a direct competitor of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad that had a line in Yankton County—solidified Marshall’s status as a crossroads market town. The Great Northern also set up other towns in Lyon County, including Cottonwood, Green Valley, Lynd, Russell, and Florence.⁷⁹ By 1901, the Chicago and Northwestern felt pressure to secure its hold on the region, and it built another line from Redwood County to Marshall.⁸⁰ As settlers poured into Lyon County the population within its borders increased dramatically. Between 1880 and 1890, the number of people calling Lyon County home rose from 6,257 to 9,450.⁸¹ Over the next five years, the population jumped again, and Marshall enjoyed a rise in population of 1,211 in 1890 to 1,744 in 1895.⁸² New farmers engaged primarily in wheat production during the 1870s and 1880s. They could process their harvested wheat at one of the four flourmills in the county. Settlers established

County, Minnesota, Including a Farm and Business Directory (Marshall, Minn.: Messenger Printing House, 1884), 11-12.

⁷⁹ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 26; Case, *History and Description of Lyon County*, 16, 22; Arthur Rose, *An Illustrated History of Lyon County Minnesota* (Marshall: Northern History Publishing Company, 1912), 105; Anderson, *The Centennial History of Lyon County*, 38

⁸⁰ Raczilowski, *Prairie Town*, 28.

⁸¹ “Census Report,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Sept. 24, 1890. One historical record characterized the immigration to Lyon County as a “tidal wave.” Case, *History and Description of Lyon County*, 15.

⁸² “Census Report,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Sept. 24, 1890; “Around Home,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Aug. 24, 1895.

the earliest newspaper, the *Prairie Schooner*, which a future editor renamed the *News Messenger*, as early as 1873.⁸³

As more and more people settled in Lyon County, business leaders began to orchestrate its civic and cultural life. They cultivated a spirit of “boosterism” that engaged people in the promotion of Marshall as the market town and the county as prime agricultural land. In a newspaper article published in April 1895 and entitled “How to Make a Town,” the editor of the *Lyon County Reporter* wrote, “Everybody who lives in a village likes to see it grow and become an enterprising town... The pride the people take in their own town is commendable and necessary to its development.”⁸⁴ The editor cautioned inhabitants of Marshall to stay away from “feelings of envy, jealousy, or other improper motives” because they caused people to erect “obstacles in the way of those who would do good for their towns.”⁸⁵ Finally, he extolled citizens to support local businessmen, pointing out that “this is the class who build your desirable buildings, assist your public enterprises, and give character to your town.”⁸⁶ Articles like this rallied community members around the drivers of economic development. They imbued a sense of mutual cooperation and civic belonging that encouraged people to “boost” their town through the development of buildings, social organizations, and other civic elements. This optimism in future growth encouraged further promotion of Marshall as a regional market center.

Ethnicity

⁸³ Case, *History and Description of Lyon County*, 20; Marshall League of Women Voters, “Meet Marshall,” Box “Balatan Study Club, Good Thoughts Study Club,” Lyon County Historical Society, Marshall, Minnesota [hereafter LCHS].

⁸⁴ “How to Make a Town,” *Lyon County Reporter*, April 26, 1895.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

The first settlers to Clay, Yankton, and Lyon Counties brought with them their Yankee-Anglo roots from the Northeast and Midwest.⁸⁷ In Clay County, the first settled area was at Peterson, located in the southwest corner of the county. An early history noted that these settlers, transplants from New York were “sturdy and solid yeomen, who are active and progressive.”⁸⁸ Other settlers with Welsh ancestry received praise from early histories as “industrious, economical and naturally religious.”⁸⁹ At Greenville, the citizens hailed from Wisconsin, Illinois, and other midwestern states and brought with them their “intelligent and enterprising” natures.⁹⁰ Yankee dominance became established early on, shaping the political, social, and cultural character of the county. Eventually, they inhabited the geographic, economic, political, and social center of Clay County by settling in large numbers at Spencer. According to the town’s promoters, Spencer contained “a class of people who were public spirited, high minded and successful” and who had made the name of Spencer “synonymous with push, pluck and prosperity.”⁹¹

On the periphery of Clay County stood foreigners, mainly Germans and Scandinavians, and farmers, many of whom maintained an “outsider” status. Many foreign-born immigrants farmed in scattered plots across the countryside while others found work in small towns dotting the countryside. While the Yankee elite at Spencer depended on farmers, both foreign and native, for the agricultural products they produced, they also recognized

⁸⁷ In 1890, the population of Clay County was only about 18 percent foreign-born. U. S. Census Data, 1890, Historical Census Browser, accessed Sept. 20, 2010, University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/collections/>.

⁸⁸ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 64.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 158.

farmers as embodying a lesser role as producers with obligations to the economic and business interests. As long as farmers remained in their place, these Yankee businessmen could enjoy their skewed relationship and the bountiful economic rewards that followed. Early efforts to put “outsiders” in their place received tepid results. At the first board meeting of Spencer’s town officers in 1880, officials “immediately drafted and passed a number of ordinances.”⁹² They envisioned an ordered and well-run community but soon realized that “it was far from being an easy task to enforce them” when people outside the Yankee authority clashed frequently over the “restraints [that] these ordinances imposed.”⁹³ Over the next two decades, residents from inside and outside the town “grew to respect the laws,” and officials began to boast of Spencer’s “good order and citizenship.”⁹⁴ By the turn of the twentieth century, they rejoiced at their accomplishments, writing that they had taken the lead and turned the “broad, unbroken prairie” into a paradise “covered with churches, schools, fine homes, productive farms, live towns and a happy, prosperous people.”⁹⁵

In Yankton County, just as the railroads had origins in the East, so too did the first settlers. According to one early chronicle, “the society of Yankton is excellent, being mostly made up of persons who have enjoyed the advantages of Eastern society and education.”⁹⁶ Mostly merchants and proprietors, these early fortune seekers came to the county to take advantage of the trade economy that had developed. These settlers, whose biographies take up many pages in the county’s first histories, hailed from a variety of places. Most, however, had “Yankee” roots. For example, of the “prominent men” listed in one history written in

⁹² Ibid., 160.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 45.

⁹⁶ Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 6-Y.

1881, almost 70 percent listed their birthplace as a northeastern or midwestern state such as New York, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, or Ohio.⁹⁷ Many of these men served in the Union army during the Civil War. One notable arrival was former Civil War General John Blair Smith Todd, cousin to Mary Todd Lincoln.⁹⁸ Todd, along with the rest of his Yankee brothers, brought with him an identity that significantly shaped the way this midwestern community developed throughout the late-nineteenth century. It gave rise to a heightened sense of involvement among “Yankee” elite derived by a strong sense of inclusion and belonging.

Over the course of the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, massive immigration, both foreign and domestic, brought in new cultural, racial, and ethnic groups into Yankton County. In fact, Yankton County had a greater population of foreign-born individuals than did Clay County.⁹⁹ Many Yankee residents felt threatened by these “outsiders,” believing they could harm their attempts at establishing their version of order, community, and civic engagement. The failure of the Yankee elite to fight the removal of the state’s capital from Yankton reveals the depth of their desire to limit “outsiders.” They chose to let go of their political aspirations in order to maintain tighter control over who had legitimate business in Yankton.

⁹⁷ *History of Southeastern Dakota*, 368-82.

⁹⁸ Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 14-Y.

⁹⁹ In 1890, foreigners made up almost 39 percent of the population of Yankton County, compared to just 18 percent for Clay County. Lyon County’s percentage of foreign-born residents came a close second to Yankton County’s figure, at 32 percent in 1890. By 1910, the percentages of foreign-born people in Clay, Yankton, and Lyon Counties all had dropped, to 13, 22, and 35 percent, respectively. These percentages reflect the decrease in immigration after the turn of the twentieth century and the death of early foreign-born settlers to the region. These totals do not reflect many of their native-born children who continued to follow the “old country” traditions. U. S. Census Data, 1890, Historical Census Browser, accessed Sept. 20, 2010, University of Virginia, Geospatial and Statistical Data Center, <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/collections/>.

By refusing the capital position, they ended Yankton's ability to accept transient mobility, making it easier to identify those who belonged and those who did not. They moved to decrease the prevalence of "outsiders" and cultivate a sense inclusion that probably eluded them during Yankton's days as territorial capital.

Despite their attempts to inculcate belonging and "sameness," in Yankton, Yankees had to contend with two challenges to their dominance. First, a growing group of immigrants from northern Europe entered the United States during the late-nineteenth century, whose exodus to Yankton County brought them in search of land on which to replicate their former lives. These immigrants, mainly Norwegians, Swedes, and Germans from Russia, began to claim the rich agricultural lands in the countryside.¹⁰⁰ As Robert Swierenga noted, these major ethnic groups, especially the Germans and Scandinavians, made it a point to acquire and hold onto land in the country.¹⁰¹ Immigrants practiced chain migration, similar to the Yankees, but the variety and complexity of the people who came created a pattern of settlement like a "patchwork quilt." These immigrant groups settled in enclaves in a predictable pattern in which people from the same cultural or ethnic background came

¹⁰⁰ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way it Was*, 84. Karolevitz explains how Germans first came to Russia under the protection of Catherine the Great in 1773. These Germans settled along the Crimea and Black Sea regions following war with the Ottoman Empire. Germans continued to settle in Russia, especially in the Province of Odessa, after her grandson, Alexander I added further incentives to relocate. Although the arrangement worked well for almost one hundred years, it ended when Alexander II revoked German privilege in Russia and sought to "Russianize" the immigrants through mandatory conscription and other measures aimed to strip them of their cultural customs. Germans in Russia, dissatisfied with these new laws, began to look for a new place to settle. Their desire to migrate coincided with the "Dakota Boom," and many Germans from Russia saw great potential to build up their families in Dakota Territory. See also, Lauck, *Prairie Republic*, 8-9; Hudson, "Migration to an American Frontier," 246.

¹⁰¹ Robert P. Swierenga, "The Settlement of the Old Northwest: Ethnic Pluralism in a Featureless Plain," *Journal of the Early Republic* 9 (Spring, 1989): 79.

together in “pockets” or “clusters.” Typically, immigrant groups settled along lines delineated by their ethnicities, but many times further fragmentation based on religion occurred. These pockets also developed into a divide between town and country in which many foreign people settled in the country while Yankee elites remained in the town. By the turn of the twentieth century, Germans were the largest immigrant group, making up 14 percent of the population of South Dakota. Norwegian immigrants followed Germans in a close second. Of these two groups, native-born residents perceived Norwegians as more desirable because they learned English quickly and adapted to the social and cultural mores within their communities of residence.¹⁰² In addition, domestic immigration from outside groups provided further diversity to the milieu, including a colony of African Americans who settled at Yankton after the Civil War.¹⁰³ Subtle tensions developed among these ethnic and racial groups, reflected in the segmented settlement patterns. While one African American woman who grew up in Yankton County argued, “The feeling that exists between the two races is friendly in the extreme,” racial and ethnic conflicts remained a regular aspect of life in Yankton County.¹⁰⁴ On one hand, Yankton had become a county plentiful in ethnic and

¹⁰² Cayton and Gray, *The American Midwest*, 15; Frederick Luebke, “Ethnic Group Settlement on the Great Plains,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 8 (Oct. 1977): 412, 417, 427-28. Robert P. Swierenga, writing about the Old Northwest, provided an apt description of ethnic settlement patterns. “Over time, particular families from particular staging areas migrated over particular paths to particular destinations, bringing with them as part of their cultural baggage their particular values and folkways. Clustered settlements were the norm on the midwestern frontier. Families migrated to places where kith and kin had already settled and were able to help them with finding work and housing.” See, Swierenga, “The Settlement of the Old Northwest,” 76.

¹⁰³ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 80; Hudson, “Migration to an American Frontier,” 247.

¹⁰⁴ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 80. Karolevitz referred to an article written by African American high school student Kate C. Chapman entitled “The Yankton Colored People—How They Are Progressing.” She described the careers of three prominent African

racial diversity. On the other, its people neither celebrated nor embraced this cultural variety as a whole people, preferring to remain separate from groups that came from different national backgrounds.

Much like Clay and Yankton Counties, the first people to inhabit Lyon County came from east of Minnesota, from “Yankee” states like Connecticut, New Hampshire, New York, and Michigan.¹⁰⁵ Accordingly, the town of Marshall, nestled within an agricultural landscape, adopted an ethos similar to that of Yankton in Yankton County and Spencer in Clay County. As scholar John Radzilowski put it, the “history of Marshall can be characterized by consistent civic optimism.”¹⁰⁶ These Yankees envisioned a town equipped to serve its rich agricultural neighbors by processing, storing, and shipping farm products to remote markets. They valued local government, participated in voluntary associations, supported public education, and attended Congregational and Methodist churches.¹⁰⁷ By the mid-1880s, Marshall had gained a reputation as an “American” town, “intellectually and socially the equal of any community in the west.”¹⁰⁸

American businessmen, including Amos Lewis who developed a substantial real estate business in Yankton and Fred Baker who served as an assistant druggist at the largest drug store in the area. Despite success of these men, however, the overall attitude toward African Americans in Yankton County was one of passive indifference as long as African American maintained a healthy respect for the racial order.

¹⁰⁵ Radzilowski, *One Community, One Church, Two Towns*, 2; Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, xxiv, 11. The first permanent settlers in Lyons Township hailed from New York, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania. Most were originally immigrants themselves from Scotland, England, Germany, and Iceland. See, Anderson, *The Centennial History of Lyon County*, 41.

¹⁰⁶ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, ix.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 93-98; Case, *History and Description of Lyon County*, 20. In 1879, there were fifty school districts, most of which had winter and summer schools, in Lyon County.

¹⁰⁸ “Our County,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Nov. 16, 1894; Case, *History and Description of Lyon County*, 31.

While Yankees dominated early life in Lyon County, other ethnicities and nationalities also settled in the countryside of Lyon County during the 1880s. A divide emerged between town and country that manifested itself during settlement and influenced political, social, and cultural patterns over the next several decades. Between 1875 and 1910, the number of Norwegians immigrants increased to become the second largest group in the area, settling primarily in the countryside. They did establish a Norwegian Lutheran Church in Marshall.¹⁰⁹ However, by 1900 the number of German immigrants swelled in county, residing mainly in the country, but also in the county seat. By 1905 they made up 17 percent of the population of Marshall.¹¹⁰ These Germans were not unified. About half were Lutherans while the rest were Catholic or some other Protestant denomination.¹¹¹ Two other significant groups were the Belgians and French Canadians, who preferred to settle as groups on farmland north of Marshall near Ghent and Green Valley. Sprinkled into the ethnic mix were small numbers of Irish, Polish, and Chinese people. A few African Americans resided in Marshall, working typically as barbers.¹¹² By the end of the nineteenth century, Lyon County accommodated immigrants from a diverse set of ethnicities, religious affiliations, levels of education, and social classes. Yankees continued to dominate the business, political, and social spheres of the county from their position at the county seat of Marshall. By the early-twentieth century, however, the Yankee presence had declined as non-Yankee

¹⁰⁹ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 112.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 114-17.

Americans and more foreigners settled in Lyon County. By 1920, census records identified about 40 percent Yankee stock in the county.¹¹³

Lyon County's Yankee leaders became exceptional from Clay and Yankton in the ways they could overlook ethnic or class differences in order to secure an economic foothold for their town. The best example involves the construction of a Catholic Church in Marshall. Protestant, Yankee businessmen actually pledged their own money and directed the construction of the first Catholic Church. They recognized that their dream of becoming a regional market center depended on attracting laborers to their town. While Yankee businessmen did view their Catholic brothers with a mix of fear and suspicion, they placed more value on their presence as workers and contributors to the "progress" of Marshall and the rest of Lyon County.¹¹⁴

Across these three counties, tensions plagued residents as differences among ethnic, racial, and religious groups ignited old and new battles. Ironically, Yankees and European immigrants agreed that they established their communities for the same reason, to uphold the pillars of democracy and freedom. According to historians Susan Gray and Andrew Cayton, "both groups saw in the Midwest a promise of untrammled material and moral progress."¹¹⁵ What differed for foreigners was the definition of freedom; they sought the freedom to retain their European cultures and customs, not to assimilate as Americans. In Marshall, for example, many Yankees looked down on foreigners, especially non-Protestant foreigners. According to scholar John Radzilowski, the arrival of Norwegians, Germans, Belgians, Irish, and Poles, steeped in a sense of national identity, "deeply alarmed Anglo-Saxon Protestants

¹¹³ Ibid., 88-89, 192, 194.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 93.

¹¹⁵ Cayton and Gray, *The American Midwest*, 3.

who felt these ‘foreigners’ were out-breeding them.” Many Americans believed these “foreigners” racially inferior, threatening to weaken the gene pool.¹¹⁶ In addition to the native vs. foreign element, other rivalries among foreign groups brewed over the late-nineteenth century. Belgians and French-Catholics endured tense relationships in northern Lyon County, and Polish and Icelandic immigrants clashed elsewhere. Indeed, the intersection of “old” world and “new” world produced a range of conflicts along the boundaries associated with ethnicity, religion, class, and race. Moreover, these quarrels forced people to redefine their identities in nationalistic terms. An “American” became someone who spoke English, had white skin, and practiced a Protestant religion.¹¹⁷

Politics

As patterns of settlement shaped these communities into places with complex ethnic, racial, and social compositions, a variety of political beliefs and practices complemented the emerging milieu. Speaking of the Yankee settlers in southeastern Dakota Territory, historian Jon Lauck argued that they “embraced American democratic practices and a centuries-old republican tradition.”¹¹⁸ Yankees supported republican values by promoting personal qualities, upholding the welfare of the republic over individual interests, and living within agrarian virtues.¹¹⁹ Foreign-born immigrants, in contrast, embraced the individuality and difference of their cultural groups.¹²⁰ No matter what ethnic background, however, the inhabitants of these counties experienced their politics as a significant part of their daily lives. As Andrew Cayton and Susan Gray argued, Midwesterners increasingly turned to the

¹¹⁶ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 117.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 116-17.

¹¹⁸ Lauck, *Prairie Republic*, 5.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Cayton and Gray, *The American Midwest*, 3.

government to satisfy their political demands during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries.¹²¹ Newspapers displayed with clarity the central presence of the government and politics the lives of residents of Clay, Yankton, and Lyon counties. In all three counties, Republicans held a firm grip on local politics during the settlement period as Yankee migrants brought with them their ties to the Union and the Republican Party. With influx of immigrants with a variety of ethnic and religious customs, however, Democratic and reform parties gained traction by the end of the nineteenth century. In Clay County, two newspapers, the *Clay County News* and the *Spencer Reporter* published articles as early as 1871 and 1878, respectively, that favored the Republican Party. It also had a Democratic newspaper, the *Spencer Herald*, but it began later, in 1891, as more immigrant groups arrived in Clay County.¹²² In 1880, 80 percent of Dakota Territory, including Yankton County, voted Republican.¹²³ One early account of Lyon County reported that early “politics of the county...was about four to one republican” with county politics remaining “largely republican on general issues and important offices.”¹²⁴ Not until 1880 did Democrats in the county enter the field with a ticket of local candidates, and only a few particular cases of Republican Party division did Democrats win these early elections.¹²⁵ In Lyon County, the *Lyon County Reporter* emerged as a Republican newspaper, and the *News Messenger* formed

¹²¹ Ibid., 19. Cayton and Gray continue to point out that “nowhere in the United States was the competition between the established parties of Republicans and Democrats more intense or more evenly divided.”

¹²² Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 172-73.

¹²³ Lauck, *Prairie Republic*, 49.

¹²⁴ Case, *History and Description of Lyon County*, 16-17.

¹²⁵ In 1874, considerable resistance developed toward the Republican candidate, and a “Peoples” ticket emerged as a non-partisan option. According to Rose, “the contest following was a spirited one and the new party elected auditor, treasurer and court commissioner.” Rose, *An Illustrated History of Lyon County*, 114-118.

as the Democratic newspaper. During the 1880s and 1890s, both editors published political articles in every issue, and they took few pains to limit their attacks on the opposing party, especially over current political topics. For example, in March 1894, the editor of the *Lyon County Reporter* published a scathing opinion piece about the Democratic Party's stance on protective tariffs. According to the editor, the protective tariff favored by the Democratic members of Congress actually made large corporations millions of dollars. He pointed out that sugar refineries had made millions and looked to make millions more by a tariff that allowed them to drive up their prices. He continued, "Whiskey and tobacco [corporations] are coddled just as they want to be" while workers in mills and factories remained ignored by the Democratic Party.¹²⁶ The Democrats, according to the editor, had failed to protect those it had pledged to support. Direct attacks between political parties were common in the pages of this county's newspapers.

Politics and political participation interested people across racial, ethnic, class, and social lines in late-nineteenth-century rural America. Many people previously excluded from the political process—foreigners, farmers, Catholics, and other outsiders—put pressure on major parties and forced them to reconsider their political agendas.¹²⁷ Ethnic groups exhibited particularly clear voting patterns, although they did not always vote together across geographic lines. In general, Yankees, along with English, Scottish, and Welsh immigrants, voted Republican, and Scandinavian groups also supported this political party. On the opposite side of the spectrum, Irish and German Catholic immigrants usually went Democratic. Behind these broad political tendencies were numerous exceptions. In particular,

¹²⁶ "A Protective Tariff," *Lyon County Reporter*, March 16, 1894.

¹²⁷ Cayton and Gray, *The American Midwest*, 20.

German Protestants usually voted Republican, but scholars point out that stricter German Lutherans could and did support other political elements.¹²⁸ Whatever the case, many ethnic groups banded together to stake a claim in county politics. For example, in Lyon County, the large contingent of Scandinavian farmers established a precedent that guaranteed the position of county treasurer to a Scandinavian man.¹²⁹ Campaigns, elections, and other political matters clearly played a significant role in the lives of these early settlers, and they embraced their developing political culture by engaging with the process on multiple levels, from serving on local councils or in official roles to spreading gossip about opposing candidates. Newspaper editors published countless articles lambasting opposing political parties or uplifting their own.¹³⁰ In these three counties, the political landscape seemed wide open and full of possibilities.

Dissatisfaction with established political parties could and did foster the formation of new political affiliations and groups, and reports of a robust interest in political matters crept into newspaper reports in all three counties. The residents of Clay County enjoyed “lively” elections with “numerous candidates in the field.”¹³¹ Politics also meant frequent and direct

¹²⁸ Luebke, “Ethnic Group Settlement on the Great Plains,” 428-29. In Lyon County, Nancy Vargas found that German immigrants, heavily Norwegian townships, and Icelandic townships generally voted Republican. In contrast, Swedish, Polish, and Belgian townships generally voted Democratic during the late-nineteenth century. See, Nancy Vargas, “Election Patterns of Lyon County: Comparison Between Ethnicity and Voting,” Senior Seminar Paper, 1988, Southwest Minnesota State University, SMHC.

¹²⁹ Case, *History and Description of Lyon County*, 20.

¹³⁰ Kathleen Neils Conzen also pointed to the economic role of newspapers in the politics of local communities. She wrote, “The local newspaper’s vital booster role in stimulating local settlement and investment has long been recognized, as has its centrality to the political campaigns that were often little more than local development projects in different guise.” See, Kathleen Neils Conzen, “Pi-ing the Type: Jane Gray Swisshelm and the Contest of Midwestern Regionality,” in *The American Midwest*, 93.

¹³¹ “Lively City Election,” *Spencer Herald*, March 18, 1914.

contact with candidates and their politics during campaign periods. In Yankton County, the editor of the *Press and Dakotan* published his observations of an April 1890 election, remarking, “All day long the various candidates and their friends have been right at the scene of action, and every voter, as he approached the polls, has been the center of a gathering of enthusiastic workers, each of whom had some ticket to offer.”¹³² The saloons remained closed that day, and the editor noted that “considerable scratching was done” and “earnest work has been done on both sides.”¹³³ In Lyon County, a county correspondent from Cottonwood reported tongue-in-cheek in October 1892, “Politics are being discussed on every street corner in this village, and the election will be great fun. We hope however it will not send any of them to St. Peter.”¹³⁴ Politics also blurred the alleged line between private and public life. In an 1892 campaign in Lyon County, a political issue drew an “interesting, if not entirely novel” crowd to public campaigns.¹³⁵ The editor of the *Lyon County Reporter* noted a “large attendance of women at the political gatherings.”¹³⁶ According to the report, the women desired to inform themselves on the most pressing political questions of the campaign, especially the tariff issue. In essence, the editor argued, the housewife belonged at the center of the debates because she was the treasurer of home, and she was the first to know whether prices rose or fell. She knew the true meaning of tariff revenue and free trade; she was intimately aware of the influence politics had on the home. As the editor summarized,

¹³² “Democracy Wins,” *Press and Dakotan*, April 7, 1890.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ “Cottonwood Chips,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Oct. 13, 1892.

¹³⁵ “The Women Know,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Oct. 27, 1892.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

“The political interest manifested...is a most encouraging sign of the times. It shows that the strong, if generally silent, forces of the home have been aroused to activity.”¹³⁷

The entrance of third parties into the political spectrum in the late-nineteenth century reflected the ethnic, religious, and cultural diversity of the people who inhabited the Midwest. It also responded as a clear indictment of the two-party system and its perceived failure to meet the needs of farmers and other laborers who experienced tough economic times during 1880s and 1890s. During the 1890s, the Populists and Farmers’ Alliance pushed for legislation that favored farmers. By the 1900s, a loose coalition of progressive-minded people sought to reshape the American political system by limiting corruption, attacking big business, and pursuing social reforms. Many times these third party and reform alliances included women and their political and social concerns, creating a “movement culture” based on cooperation and the family.¹³⁸ Clay, Yankton, and Lyon Counties all had local branches of the Populists, or People’s Party, that popped up during the early 1890s.

In Yankton County, rural voters grew enamored with the Farmers’ Alliance during the early 1890s. At the second annual county picnic held in the eastern part of the county in June 1890, the Farmers’ Alliance hosted several speakers, including Ben Terrell of Texas.¹³⁹ Newspaper reports indicated that men and women attended in family groups, giving the picnic a “large attendance of people from all parts of the country”¹⁴⁰ At the gathering, people had strung up the flags from their native countries, in addition to the American flag which

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Rebecca Mead, *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 1-3, 11.

¹³⁹ “The Alliance Picnic,” *Press and Dakotan*, June 13, 1890.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

they gave “a little more prominence that [sic.] the others.”¹⁴¹ The speech makers roused the farmers by arguing that the government deprived farmers of their rights. In an apt illustration, Terrell told the crowd that the government was like a cow fed by the farmer, who was “barefooted and ragged under both parties.”¹⁴² The farmer did not enjoy the milk provided by the cow, but instead had to turn it over to bond holders and other creditors.

Lyon County had the strongest third-party political movement of the three counties. In Lyon County, the Farmers’ Alliance brought the first radical change to county politics during the election of 1890. Prior to that date, the Republican Party had encountered only minor opposition, but during the period leading up to the election, the Farmers’ Alliance attracted supporters dramatically. This organization received ample treatment in these counties’ established Republican and Democratic newspapers, although Republican media outlets were especially worried about any partnership between the Democratic Party and the People’s Party. The editor of the Republican *Lyon County Reporter* argued suspiciously that “the People’s party campaign is being pushed in the normally Republican states not for the sake of that party, but for the benefit of the Democrats.”¹⁴³ As early as September 1890, members of the county’s Alliance considered nominating a state ticket. The Republican newspaper, the *Lyon County Reporter*, urged the Alliance to give up this “cantankerous enmity” and go back to the Republican Party “to which most of them belonged.”¹⁴⁴ The editor warned Republicans who considered leaving the party that, by joining the Alliance, they gave up their presence in established political networks located in county precincts and

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ “Will You Be A Catspaw,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Oct. 13, 1892.

¹⁴⁴ “Did It Pay?” *Lyon County Reporter*, Sept. 3, 1890; “Alliance Capers,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Oct. 15, 1890.

threatened to divide the Republican Party's strength, cause contention, and secure failure for themselves.¹⁴⁵ Despite these warnings, many Republicans defected for the Farmers' Alliance. For leaders of the Republican Party, who only a few years earlier had enjoyed the dominant position in Lyon County, the "fusion" party represented sinister schemes against their leadership. In a tribute to the Alliance's growing popularity, the *Lyon County Reporter* continued its attacks on the Farmers' Alliance during the period before the 1890 election. In another article the editor wondered if, like farmers, lawyers, merchants, or saloonkeepers should organize in an attempt to govern the country. He cut down the Farmers' Alliance, arguing that "combination is all right, and farmers can get as much advantage out of union as any other class."¹⁴⁶ Characterizing the conflict as a battle among different classes, the editor admonished farmers for thinking that that one class could rule another. "The country will never allow any one class to run the government in special interests," he wrote.¹⁴⁷

Despite the vitriolic accusations spun by newspaper reporters, the Alliance rallied impressive numbers to its cause in Lyon County. In some places, such as the heavily Norwegian Vallers, the Democrats announced that they had cancelled their convention to vote the Alliance ticket.¹⁴⁸ Members of the county Farmers' Alliance nominated a full ticket, and all except two of its candidates were farmers. At the November 1890 election, the Alliance ticket achieved remarkable success.¹⁴⁹ Although the campaign had been "bitter and one of the most hotly contested in the history of the county," in the end, the Farmers' Alliance made incredible gains, winning the county's nominees for governor, congressman,

¹⁴⁵ "Did It Pay?" *Lyon County Reporter*, Sept. 3, 1890.

¹⁴⁶ "Class Politics," *Lyon County Reporter*, Sept. 24, 1890.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ "From Vallers," *Lyon County Reporter*, Oct. 15, 1890.

¹⁴⁹ "What is the Alliance," *Lyon County Reporter*, July 15, 1891.

superintendent of schools, and two county commissioner positions.¹⁵⁰ Two years later, the People's Party joined together with the Farmers' Alliance to secure the election of three more county positions.¹⁵¹ The success of the Farmers' Alliance was short lived, however, and many new Alliance politicians found they could not loosen the grip of seasoned Republican and Democratic legislators on political affairs in the state. By July 1891, newspaper editors in Lyon County noted that the "statesmanship of the Alliance leaders" had been "so shaken up...[after the first session of the legislature] that it is very hard for one who wants to understand this agricultural uprising to ascertain what ails it, or what remedies are proposed."¹⁵² By 1892, the fledging Farmers' Alliance, along with the People's Party, pledged to aid the Democrats. The *Lyon County Reporter* referenced South Dakota Alliance President Henry Loucks in an article relaying the Alliance's new plans. "While we, the People's party—will draw one vote from the Democratic party," quoted the newspaper, "we will draw nine from the Republicans, and that is the party I want to defeat."¹⁵³ Republican newspaper editors in Lyon County continued to attack the Farmers' Alliance, but the organization had begun to run out of steam. The editor of the *Lyon County Reporter* continued to publish articles that criticized the Alliance up until 1894, despite the fact that the county voted Republican that year. In November 1894, he took aim at the Australian ballot system proposed by the populists. He complained that the ballot was a "useless formality" that mixed up people when they attempted to vote. He argued that people had repeatedly confused the Republican and Populist candidates on the ballot or even had failed to mark the

¹⁵⁰ Rose, *An Illustrated History of Lyon County*, 121.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² "What is the Alliance," *Lyon County Reporter*, July 15, 1891.

¹⁵³ "Alliance Plans," *Lyon County Reporter*, Feb. 18, 1892.

ballots at all. “The Australian system needs simplifying,” he wrote.¹⁵⁴ The editor’s condemnation of the Australian ballot failed to mention, however, that despite these flaws, voters in Lyon County had returned to their former political tendencies, electing Republican candidates to nearly position on the ballot that year. Apparently, Lyon County’s voters had mastered the Australian ballot at least enough to give the Republicans a majority.¹⁵⁵

Temperance reform and prohibition were also significant, hot button political issues in Clay, Yankton, and Lyon Counties. Even when communities did not have a Women’s Christian Temperance Union, people still debated its merits, considered its possibilities, and voted on it in many local elections during the late-nineteenth century. State law dictated whether local option or statewide rulings determined prohibition in each county, but in these three counties, local option decided the consumption of alcohol. Only after 1914 did Iowa and South Dakota debate and pass statewide prohibition laws, rendering woman suffrage and prohibition similar, and seemingly directly related, issues until then.¹⁵⁶

In Clay County, the presence of the saloon and politics collided in significant ways at the local level. One election in particular pointed to the prominence that county residents gave to temperance. In the spring of 1881, Spencer held a city election. Two men vied for the position of mayor, and accounts of the election painted the race in terms of temperance. In fact, the historical reports of the election failed to mention the actual political affiliations of the two men, Jacob Merritt and W. C. Gilbreath. Instead, people referred to the two candidates as “the candidate on the anti-saloon ticket” and the “candidate on the ticket in

¹⁵⁴ “Australian Ballot,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Nov. 9, 1894.

¹⁵⁵ “Republican Victories,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Nov. 9, 1894.

¹⁵⁶ Eileen L. McDonagh and H. Douglas Price, “Woman Suffrage in the Progressive Era: Patterns of Opposition and Support in Referenda Voting, 1910-1918,” *The American Political Science Review* 79 (June, 1985): 415-435.

favor of saloons.”¹⁵⁷ After officials counted the ballots, W. C. Gilbreath, the “candidate in favor of saloons,” won by a landslide, indicating Spencer’s early acceptance of saloons and drinking.¹⁵⁸ By 1883, however, temperance forces had managed to strengthen their position in Spencer, and residents elected the anti-saloon candidate, E. E. Snow, in “a splendid victory.”¹⁵⁹ A year later, the results reversed, and the saloon candidate won the race. For the next twenty-five years, temperance forces dominated the local political landscape in Spencer, electing representatives who opposed the saloons. One account noted that residents held the “last big fight on the question of the saloon or no saloon” in 1898 with a resounding defeat of the “saloon element.”¹⁶⁰ Temperance forces maintained firm control of local politics in Spencer into the early-twentieth century.

In Yankton County, temperance forces clashed strongly with saloon owners and liquor interests as early as 1870. By that year, in the town of Yankton alone there were twenty-four licensed saloons and two breweries. Yankton also served as the headquarters of Adler, Ohlman & Company, an importer and distributor of Kentucky whiskey, brandy, gin, and wine to the rest of Dakota Territory.¹⁶¹ Temperance proponents fought against these pillars of vice, and in November 1889, South Dakota voters passed legislation that enacted statewide prohibition. In Yankton County, residents voted against the measure 1,251 to 768, but “dry” forces had prevailed and all liquor establishments had to shut their doors. The

¹⁵⁷ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 95.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. According to newspaper reports published later, businessmen in Clay County typically favored the “well regulated saloon” over the “illegal sale of liquor” because saloons brought money into the county’s economy. “Ballot Right System,” *Spencer Herald*, March 13, 1912.

¹⁵⁹ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 95.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 95.

¹⁶¹ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 127.

residents of Yankton County lamented the loss of the saloons, and the *Press and Dakotan* noted that the loss of property value in Yankton was greater than in all the balance of the state after Sioux Falls.¹⁶² Prohibition in South Dakota lasted until 1897, when a statewide election repealed the measure and reopened saloons and breweries in Yankton County. The number of saloons in Yankton never again reached 1870 totals, and temperance forces continued to seek legal measures against pro-alcohol forces into the twentieth century. Local option laws also allowed villages and other small communities to dictate their own temperance laws, so at different times and in different places, temperance statutes could prohibit the sale of alcohol in one village while allowing it in another. For example, on one hand, Gayville, located in southeastern Yankton County, went “dry” by a community vote in 1905. Volin, Mission Hill, and Lesterville, on the other, voted to retain their saloons that same year.¹⁶³ Utica also remained a “wet” village, a fact that played out in 1914 when a legal battle over the right of the town of Yankton to grant licenses for saloons wound up in the state’s supreme court. During the trial proceedings, the town’s saloons had to close, and all of Yankton’s liquor ended up in a locked warehouse. For almost five months, residents of Yankton flocked to Utica—the closest “wet” spot—in order to drink. Utica’s businesses prospered during the time, but law enforcement officials struggled to maintain order. Eventually, “drunkenness and disorder go so bad” that Utica’s police officers issued a message to Yankton to “keep its undesirables at home.”¹⁶⁴ Finally, the court ruled against the proposed measure, and saloons again opened in Yankton with proper licenses intact. Prohibition forces, however, never slowed in their efforts to eliminate alcohol from their

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 124, 127, 219, 221, 226.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 127.

midst, and they celebrated victory in 1916 when the state legislature passed a bone-dry law that went into affect in July of the next year.¹⁶⁵

In Lyon County, temperance forces had flourished prior to the formation of the WCTU, although they failed to ban saloons because the local government benefited from the money liquor licenses provided.¹⁶⁶ In addition, a growing population of Catholic Germans, Belgians, and French-Canadians pushed to keep Lyon County “wet.” During the 1890s, temperance and liquor interests fought back and forth in local elections, and for two years, from 1896 to 1898, the temperance forces won local elections and kept many of the towns “dry.” In Cottonwood, for example, during the spring of 1895, temperance meetings fostered debate about the prospect of temperance in the village. The series of gatherings paid off because in April 1895, voters in Cottonwood, along with Balaton and Ghent, passed an act that outlawed saloons in their villages.¹⁶⁷ However, by 1898, forces that wanted the income from liquor licenses made a comeback, and until 1910, the county remained “wet.”¹⁶⁸ Despite all the good intentions and work from temperance forces, led by the WCTU, most people in Lyon County drank, whether the law forbade it or not, and third-party prohibition candidates failed to win many positions.¹⁶⁹ Even the most vitriolic supporters failed to keep their temperance oaths. Charles C. Whitney, one of the first Yankee settlers and the editor of the *News Messenger*, published temperance material constantly. His public support of

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 72.

¹⁶⁷ “Cottonwood Currants,” *Lyon County Reporter*, March 15, 1895; “Temperance Topics,” *Lyon County Reporter*, April 5, 1895. These were not the first temperance meetings held in Cottonwood. Other meetings popped up during the summer of 1892, when temperance sentiment again enjoyed favor among the people living there. “Cottonwood Chips,” *Lyon County Reporter*, June 16, 1892.

¹⁶⁸ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 126-30.

¹⁶⁹ Rose, *An Illustrated History of Lyon County*, 128.

temperance and the WCTU failed to curb his drinking, and the *Lyon County Reporter*, a rival newspaper, did not hesitate to report that Whitney had been arrested “for disorderly conduct from excessive use of liquor.”¹⁷⁰

Church

Linked extremely closely to politics was religion. Forming churches was a slow business, as a mobile and fluid population made forging social and religious bonds difficult. Religion, however, was central to the lives of the people in these Midwestern communities, and it overlapped with politics regularly. Historian Robert Swierenga argued, “The church was more than a religious meeting place; it was a cultural nest, integrating families, social classes, and nationality groups. It gave members a cultural identity and status and socialized them into the community...Rural life truly was church centered.”¹⁷¹ Echoed scholar John Lauck, “Religion linked...settlers to long-standing Christian traditions, gave meaning to settlers’ lives, acted as a social stabilizer and source of community interaction, and provided moral guidance.”¹⁷² Ethnicity also informed the creation of churches. According to Karl Raitz, ethnic settlements in the Midwest soon evolved into communities based on church affiliation. These churches played a significant role, acting as “instruments of identity reinforcement.”¹⁷³ In these three counties, lay and professional preachers conducted church services as soon as there were people to listen to their sermons.

In Clay County, the church became the rallying point around which settlers established their ties of sociability. Most of the first settlers belonged to the Methodist,

¹⁷⁰ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 125.

¹⁷¹ Robert Swierenga, “The Little White Church: Religion in Rural America,” *Agricultural History* 71 (Autumn, 1997): 417.

¹⁷² Lauck, *Prairie Republic*, 60.

¹⁷³ Karl Raitz, “Ethnic Maps of North America,” *Geographical Review* 68 (July, 1978): 346.

Congregational, and Baptist churches. A handful of other churches also influenced religious life in the county, including the Friends, Lutherans, and Catholics. The variety of church denominations reflected the diversity of people with differing ethnic, class, and social backgrounds, but regular church attendance transcended these divisions as most Clay County residents attended a church in their neighborhood. Part of their reason for forming churches early and often came from “a feeling of lonesomeness at being separated from any place” and a “desire to be as near each other as practicable” by sharing “comforts and pleasures” together in “social intercourse.”¹⁷⁴ Soon, the settlers grew to know “each other intimately,” forming friendships based on bonds of community, neighborhood, and mutual interest.¹⁷⁵ These bonds of sociability informed much of the social organization that took among women in the church and in other community organizations.

Many members of the first churches in Clay County spent the first twenty years of their existence without a permanent home for worship, gathering informally in schoolhouses and each other’s homes for prayer, devotions, and song. Members of Baptist, Congregational, Catholic, and Methodist Episcopal churches all engaged in this type of service until they could establish official congregations in the 1870s and 1880s. Many times, traveling preachers served as the only avenue for formal Christian worship, and in Clay County, Methodist circuit riders and Congregational ministers visited various settlements intermittently between 1855 and 1871.¹⁷⁶ The Free Baptists organized in makeshift quarters as early as 1866.¹⁷⁷ The first church formed in Douglas Township in 1869 among the Welch

¹⁷⁴ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 64.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 75, 93.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 93.

settlers located there. Known as the Welch Pioneer Baptist Church, it served as the only official house of worship until 1873, when the Methodist Episcopal congregation at Spencer erected a church structure.¹⁷⁸ The Welch Pioneer Baptist Church had a short life, burning down after a lightning strike early in the twentieth century. The congregation never reconstructed the building, and former members scattered afterward, joining other area churches.¹⁷⁹ By the late 1870s and early 1880s, congregations across Clay County constructed church buildings. Congregationalists established themselves early, and in 1872 the First Congregational Church of Spencer organized informally. During the 1880s and 1890s, Congregational churches at Peterson and Dickens formed congregations.¹⁸⁰ In addition to the Congregationalists, two denominations of Baptists called Clay County home. Until 1911, the Free Baptists and “Regular Baptists” operated separately, but that year these two congregations merged to form the First Baptist Church of Spencer. There was also a Baptist Church at Peterson.

The Methodist, Lutheran, and Catholic churches also flourished during the late-nineteenth century in Clay County. Methodist churches popped up across Clay County, in Spencer, Peterson, Dickens, Fostoria, Webb, and Everly.¹⁸¹ At Everly, a town surveyed and platted in 1884 with the sole intent of attracting immigrants, a Methodist Episcopal church

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Parker Historical Society, *The History of Clay County, Iowa* (Dallas: Curtis Media Corporation, 1984), 32.

¹⁸⁰ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 75.

¹⁸¹ “Our Church” Pamphlet, Folder 3, Box 1, CHS, CCHS; John S. Welle and Nancy Jo Welle, *Fostoria Diamond Jubilee, August 1, 1987: Our 75th Year*, 8, CCHS; Paul Swaim, *Webb, Iowa 1976* (N. p.: N. p, 1976), 16, CCHS; [Peterson Historical Committee], *Peterson Iowa 1856-1980* (Marceline, Mo.: Walsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1980), 124, CCHS; Everly Centennial Committee, *Through the Years: Everly, Iowa Centennial 1884-1984* (Lake Mills, Ia.: Graphic Publishing Co., Inc., 1984), 100, CCHS; Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 75, 93, 150.

began in 1886. In 1909, a group of Baptists at Langdon voted to incorporate with a Methodist congregation that met about four miles northeast of Langdon, adding another Methodist congregation to the county.¹⁸² The Methodists also had a country church, called the Maple Grove Methodist Church, in Clay Township.¹⁸³ In addition, German immigrants established a separate German Methodist Episcopal church in 1895.¹⁸⁴ Sprinkled among these churches were Catholic, Lutheran, and Friends churches, and Lutherans had a noteworthy presence in Clay County. Records indicate that they organized churches at Everly, Peterson, and Spencer. At Everly, a handful of farming families met sporadically in each other's homes as early as 1892. In 1907, a German Lutheran Church organized out of the large German population that had settled there. Eventually they moved to Spencer and organized into a congregation, calling themselves St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church. Later they changed their name to First English Lutheran Church.¹⁸⁵ In Peterson, German immigrants organized to form St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church in April 1888. In Spencer, three ethnically distinct Lutheran churches—the German, Danish, and Swedish churches—held services in the county

¹⁸² *Centennial First Baptist Church*, CHS, CCHS. In addition to the Baptists, small congregations of Reformed, Welch Calvinist, and Friends formed during the late-nineteenth century in Clay County. The First Reformed Church grew near Everly, and its ladies formed a Ladies' Aid Society in 1916. The Zion Welch Calvinist Church in Douglas Township, near Linn Grove. The Greenville Friends Church began in a sod house in the early 1870s. In 1902, members constructed a permanent building in Greenville. Men and women shared the duties of pastor of the Friends church, and between 1902 and 1912, married couples served the church as "co-pastors." Little other evidence about these churches' activities exists. See, Everly Centennial Committee, *Through the Years*, 94, CCHS; "Old Welsh Church," Folder 12, Box 1, CHS, CCHS; [Greenville Historical Committee], *Greenville, Iowa, USA: Celebrating 125 Years of Postal Service, May 1871-May 1996* (John Welle: JW Designs, 1996), page V13, CCHS.

¹⁸³ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 79.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 94. This history, written in 1909, exclaimed that the German Methodist Episcopal church, located on West First street, had "grown in numbers and is now one of the most important churches of the city."

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 154-57; "First English Lutheran Church," Folder 9, Box 1, CHC, CCHS.

seat.¹⁸⁶ Eventually, Bethany Lutheran Church emerged when these three ethnic churches combined into one congregation.¹⁸⁷ Finally, in Spencer, a group of Catholic families organized services as early as 1879. They constructed Sacred Heart Church in 1884, becoming “very prosperous” with forty-four families making up its membership.¹⁸⁸ At Everly in Clay County, about thirty immigrant families formed St. Mary’s Catholic Church in 1898.¹⁸⁹

Informal religious services began almost immediately in the settlement in Yankton County. Preacher C. D. Martin gave the first sermon in February 1859.¹⁹⁰ By 1870, the Methodist, Protestant Episcopal, and Congregational denominations had established churches in the area.¹⁹¹ As more foreign immigrants entered the county, they formed their own country churches. The Norwegian Lutheran Church proliferated in the countryside, especially east and north of Yankton.¹⁹² By 1890, about ten Christian denominations held services in communities across Yankton County, and their names and affiliations reflected the diverse ethnic and religious backgrounds of the newcomers to the area. Even among members of the same ethnic group, religious tendencies varied and many times opposed each other. By the same token, shared religious affiliation could not bring together members of different ethnic or national groups. Advertised in the newspaper were the Congregational Church, Christ Church, Baptist Church, Methodist Episcopal Church, Catholic Church, Scandinavian Evangelical Lutheran Trinity Church, German Evangelical Zion Church, German Lutheran

¹⁸⁶ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 124.

¹⁸⁷ *Centennial History of Bethany Lutheran Church* (N. p.: n. p., n. d.), CHC, CCHS.

¹⁸⁸ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 186.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 154-57.

¹⁹⁰ Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 18-Y.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 6-Y.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 7-Y.

Church, and German Reformed Church.¹⁹³ The large settlement of African Americans also brought a branch of the African Methodist Episcopal Church to the town, and by October 1885, the congregation had raised enough funds to build their own church.¹⁹⁴ As these church groups continued to grow, a clear dichotomy emerged between denominational developments. Among the townspeople in the county, the Methodist Episcopal and Congregational churches garnered the highest membership and most prominent civic leaders. In the countryside, Norwegian, German, and other immigrants gathered at local meeting points, such as houses or school buildings, and pledged their affiliations to Lutheran or Catholic churches. In particular, Catholic churches emerged in the county seat and in the countryside where pockets of German, Polish, Czech, and Irish immigrants settled.¹⁹⁵ The division between town and country gained further dimensions as religious preferences became fractured by ethnicity and separated people into various factions.

Norwegian Lutherans in Yankton County exemplified the factional aspect of church creation. By 1860 in Yankton County, the Norwegians began to form congregations, the vast majority Lutheran. Before these newly arrived farmers had regular pastors, they held prayer meetings in various neighborhood homes.¹⁹⁶ By 1863, attempts at organization formed the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church, but poor transportation networks and long distances kept services scattered and made religious efforts piecemeal. It took another four years for three Norwegian Lutheran Churches to form, including a church south and east of Gayville, a congregation at Gayville, and a group at the James River in the northwestern part

¹⁹³ “Church Directory,” *Press and Dakotan*, June 2, 1888. See also, Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 8-Y, 24-Y; Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 50-52.

¹⁹⁴ “Aid Is Asked,” *Press and Dakotan*, March 22, 1890.

¹⁹⁵ “Church Directory,” *Press and Dakotan*, June 2, 1888.

¹⁹⁶ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 53.

of the county.¹⁹⁷ In 1889, the James River congregation split over religious doctrine, forming two groups called the James River church and the Meldal or Norway church.¹⁹⁸ Another church, the Tronhjem Evangelical Lutheran, formed near Marindahl, north and west of Volin, in 1872. It split into two congregations in 1882.¹⁹⁹ While these congregations gained official recognition, attendance fluctuated with the seasons and foundered when poor roads, bad weather, and other constraints kept the traveling preacher away.²⁰⁰

In Lyon County in 1872 a Congregational minister conducted the first church services in Marshall under a tent that also served as a saloon.²⁰¹ By 1875, a Methodist congregation officially organized, followed shortly after by an Episcopal church.²⁰² Informal groups of Lutheran began to form in the countryside as early as 1872 as Norwegian immigrants brought with them their religious preferences. In 1872, Norwegians in Nordland Township founded a church called the Hemnes Lutheran Church after the town from where most of them had come. In 1879, a group of Icelandic Lutherans formed a congregation near Minneota. Naming their church St. Paul's Lutheran, the Icelanders pledged their organization not only to upholding the Lutheran faith but also to cultural advancement in the Icelandic community. Congregants erected the first permanent structure in 1884, and, in addition to religious services, the building also hosted cultural activities on weekdays. By 1886, an Icelandic cultural association, called the Progressive Society, joined with the church to promote

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ YCHS, *History of Yankton County*, 131.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 140, 142.

²⁰⁰ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 53.

²⁰¹ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 72, 75.

²⁰² Ibid., 73-74.

cultural events.²⁰³ In addition to Icelanders, Norwegian Lutherans settled in enclaves north and west of Marshall, although in 1888 another Evangelical Lutheran church emerged among German settlers in Marshall.²⁰⁴ As Lutheranism flourished in Lyon County, Catholic sentiment grew as well. In 1881, Bishop Ireland of St. Paul organized a massive Catholic colony near Ghent in northwest Lyon County, reserving five townships for settlement there. In addition, he added Catholic settlements near Nordland and Eidsvold, two primarily Norwegian villages, and attracted Belgian and French-Canadian immigrants to the Catholic enclaves.²⁰⁵

Society and Sociability

As settlers encountered people from different ethnic, political, and religious backgrounds, they did so in an arena created by social bonds of family, neighborhood, and community. During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, people joined organizations in vast numbers, forming groups along lines fragmented by ethnicity, politics, religious affiliation, and gender. The array of societies reflected the diverse backgrounds and preferences of the people who settled these three midwestern counties. For the most part, the Yankee elite formed organizations with other Yankee elite. Norwegian Lutherans typically socialized with other Norwegian Lutherans. Notable exceptions did arise in both town and country. In town, people working together on similar business interests may have transcended ethnic, religious, or political lines in order to promote their economic pursuits. In

²⁰³ Anderson, *The Centennial History of Lyon County*, 45-47; Charles Vandersluis, *Ninety Years at St. Paul's* (Marshall, Minn.: Ousman Printing, Inc., 1977), 10.

²⁰⁴ Case, *History and Description of Lyon County*, 38-39; [Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church], "Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church Centennial Anniversary 1888-1988," Box "Balatan Study Club, Good Thoughts Study Club," LCHS.

²⁰⁵ Case, *History and Description of Lyon County*, 51.

the country, sometimes people living in scattered areas had to turn to their closest neighbors for support despite differences in religion, politics, or ethnicity. Even though socio-cultural factors played a somewhat limiting role in the types of groups that formed, they also promoted the formation of a mosaic of opportunities for community involvement. When viewed together, these organizations, despite their distinctions, often shared the same purpose of civic improvement, mutual interest in improving community institutions, and a desire for sociability.

One of the first societies to organize in each of the counties was the Grand Army of the Republic. Many former Union soldiers contributed with enthusiasm to the activities of this group.²⁰⁶ In Clay County, the Grand Army of the Republic organized in February 1883.²⁰⁷ Yankton County had a strong chapter that drew members from country and town. Like Yankton County's Civil War veterans, men in Lyon County formed a post of the Grand Army of the Republic. In addition, fraternal societies, such as the Free Masons and the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows, also enjoyed an active membership in all three counties. Men with upstanding Yankee reputations in the community typically pledged to these two groups. In Clay County, the Masons established a chapter in Spencer as early as June 1872.²⁰⁸ Dickens had an Odd Fellows lodge that formed in 1890. Men in Dickens also formed a Modern Woodmen of America chapter around that time.²⁰⁹ Everly's men organized an Odd Fellows Lodge in 1897 and a Mason's Lodge in February 1899. In Yankton County,

²⁰⁶ Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 26-Y.

²⁰⁷ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 174, 177.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

the Masons organized in 1862.²¹⁰ In Lyon County, the male elite also formed these fraternal associations during the late-nineteenth century, including the Masons in 1874, the Odd Fellows in 1879, and the Modern Woodmen of America in 1891.²¹¹ The Odd Fellows formed later and not only in the county seat but also in small towns. While men met and socialized in public, fraternal organizations that emphasized brotherhood and male solidarity, women remained on the sidelines, given limited entrance into this male-dominated social sphere.

In terms of gendered community involvement, fraternal organizations served as the exception more than the rule. In many cases, women and men came together in the same organizations for a variety of reasons. Sometimes, ethnicity bound groups together and formed the creation of social networks. At Everly in Clay County, the large German immigrant population created a German social society, called *Unterhaltungs Verein*, or Entertainment Association, in 1901. Composed of men, women, and children, the society soon boasted 341 members.²¹² The society organized a variety of social events, including “entertainments, lectures, and public meetings.”²¹³ In addition, Clay County residents enjoyed a variety of institutes, literary societies, and debate clubs that developed during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. Fostoria had a debating society in the late-1890s. Members met in the local schoolhouse or in each other’s homes. At one meeting in particular, the *Clay County News* reported that the debate “on Friday at the Wise school house resulted in favor of the Negatives.” The newspaper report failed to mention the topic of

²¹⁰ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 87-88. The Odd Fellows formed the first Lodge in Dakota, Dakota No. 1, in 1885. See also, Lauck, *Prairie Republic*, 71.

²¹¹ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 107-108. For a broader view of the emerging fraternal societies in Dakota Territory during the 1880s, see, Lauck, *Prairie Republic*, 52.

²¹² Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 157.

²¹³ *Ibid.*

the debate, but it probably had an aspect of gender in it for the paper declared that the “old maids” present “got hot” over the result.²¹⁴ After the debate, the women of Fostoria must have raised quite a stir for a second article noted further agitation that the negatives won the debate, arguing, “it is poor policy...to sit as a judge on debate and hold prejudice.”²¹⁵ In Yankton County, a desire for intellectual engagement brought people together. The Willow Dale Literary Society organized just east of Yankton in late 1903. It hosted sessions at a neighborhood schoolhouse on Friday evenings.²¹⁶ Men and women in Lyon County also debated similar topics in their respective literary societies. In March 1893 at Florence, a group of young adults met to organize a debating society. For their first topic, they chose to discuss the resolution “that a woman can fill a man’s place.”²¹⁷ According to reports, the “discussion was hot and animated and the speakers on both sides made some hitting remarks.”²¹⁸ At the close of the meeting, the judges decided unanimously for the affirmative side of the argument. The Florence literary and debating society continued to meet intermittently throughout the 1890s.²¹⁹

The shared agrarian lifestyle in the country also brought men and women together in social organization. In Clay County, a Patrons of Husbandry or Grange existed from 1875 to 1878. It accepted both men and women as members, although men held key offices while women served in supporting roles. The Patrons of Husbandry enjoyed only a limited time in Clay County, argued one commentator, because it “did not prove either profitable or

²¹⁴ “Fostoria,” *Clay County News*, Jan. 6, 1898.

²¹⁵ “News of the County,” *Clay County News*, Jan. 13, 1898.

²¹⁶ “[Local News],” *Dakota Herald*, Jan. 12, 1904.

²¹⁷ “Florence Flashes,” *Lyon County Reporter*, March 30, 1893.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*; “Florence Flashes,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Feb. 2, 1894; “Florence Flashes,” *Lyon County Reporter*, April 26, 1895.

beneficial generally.”²²⁰ Gradually, members dropped out and it “became a thing of the past.”²²¹ Lyon County residents also organized agricultural associations during the late-nineteenth century. They formed a Patrons of Husbandry in 1874, but it “never accomplished much more than ordinary farmers’ clubs.”²²² In addition, as early as 1874 prominent farmers in the county created an agricultural society that planned the annual county fair held at Marshall. Eventually, farmers in small neighborhoods organized clubs, including two in Nordland Township among the Norwegians who settled there. Eventually, these farmers’ clubs morphed into the Farm Bureau, which came to Lyon County in 1918.²²³

Back in Clay County, a year after the Patrons of Husbandry disbanded, Clay County’s farmers formed the Clay County Agricultural Society. W. C. Gilbreath, the pro-saloon candidate for mayor, became the group’s first secretary. Under the direction of the Agricultural Society, members organized exhibitions of livestock and other farm products. Initial interest in organizing a county fair began with this farmer group, although local entrepreneurs also supported a fair for the money it could bring to local businesses.²²⁴ By the 1890s, farmers in Clay County also met annually in Farmers’ Institutes. At these meetings, participants, both men and women, could discuss “subjects of interest to the tiller of the soil.”²²⁵ Women took a prominent place in the society, and by 1897, women leaders organized separate proceedings, called the “Woman’s Congress,” in which they discussed

²²⁰ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 163.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Case, *History and Description of Lyon County*, 19. For more on women and the Grange, see, Donald Marti, *Women of the Grange: Mutuality and Sisterhood in Rural America, 1866-1920* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

²²³ Anderson, *The Centennial History of Lyon County*, 48.

²²⁴ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 145.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 142.

and debated issues ranging from their children's education, domestic economy, and advances in food preservation and gardening.²²⁶ By 1907, the farmers' institutes had outgrown their original quarters and purchased the old Methodist Episcopal church. In the basement they displayed stock and poultry while on the main floor they hosted speakers and other entertainment. Many of the stockholders who pledged to the purchase of the building were businessmen who appreciated the move's economic value. That same year, members also enrolled in a "Short Course" sponsored by the Iowa State Agricultural College in Ames. Participants, especially women who raised chickens for sale or consumption, displayed particular enthusiasm for the annual poultry show.²²⁷ The organization of farmers reached a high point in February 1913, when the early framework of the Farm Bureau formed in Clay County. Dubbed the Clay County Improvement Association, the group met at the courthouse in Spencer and hired a county agent, W. F. Posey, who devoted his time to "further the agricultural interest of the county."²²⁸ Curiously, the first president of the Clay County Improvement Association was a woman, Mrs. Peter Johnson. Under her direction, the Improvement Association garnered widespread respect and enthusiasm in Clay County. Four thousand people, just about a third of the county's total population, attended the first picnic held at the Clay County Fairgrounds in 1913.²²⁹ As early as January 1914, township chapters

²²⁶ "Farmers' Institute," Jan. 28, 1897, *Clay County News*; "Farmers' Institute," Feb. 4, 1897, *Clay County News*; "Farmers in Session," Feb. 18, 1897, *Clay County News*; "Canning," Feb. 25, 1897, *Clay County News*; "Domestic Economy," March 11, 1897, *Clay County News*.

²²⁷ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 142.

²²⁸ Parker County Historical Society, *History of Clay County*, 19; Swaim, *Webb, Iowa 1976*, 68, CCHS.

²²⁹ Parker County Historical Society, *History of Clay County*, 20; "County Improvement Association," *Spencer Herald*, Sept. 17, 1913; "Picnic Great Success," *Spencer Herald*, Oct. 1, 1913. The editor of the *Spencer Herald* estimated that about three thousand people turned

of the Clay County Improvement Association formed, providing further organization and opportunities for sociability among Clay County's residents.²³⁰ By April 1915, thirteen of the sixteen townships had chapters of the Improvement Association, and members, both men and women, participated in a range of activities, including short courses, picnics, corn shows, soil fertility demonstrations, and other social meetings.²³¹

Town vs. Country

By the late-nineteenth century, Midwesterners had become self-conscious about the variety of ethnicities, races, political practices, and social groups present in their communities. Large numbers of outsiders, especially Catholics other and foreign-born farmers, contested the alleged authority of Protestant, Yankee elites.²³² All of these disputes, discords, and conflicts centered on the class divide between town and country. As historian Michael Goldberg argued, the "worlds of farm and town represented a cultural divide that ethnic ties could not erase."²³³ Long distances, difficult terrain, and the demands of the farm operation meant that farmers and their families rarely went to town. When they did, they contrasted markedly among their counterparts who lived and worked in town, especially in terms of dress, language, manners, comportment, and knowledge. For farm women in particular, a trip to town often came with embarrassment and stress as most towns lacked spaces in which they could spend long periods of time while their husbands visited various businesses during their stay. Newspaper editors in Clay, Yankton, and Lyon counties

out to enjoy roast ox, football games, and a surprise lecture by Dean Curtis of the Iowa Agricultural College. See also "Clay County Picnic," *Spencer News*, Sept. 30, 1913.

²³⁰ "Clay County Improvement Association," *Spencer Herald*, Jan. 21, 1914.

²³¹ "M. W. A. Posey's Boost," *Spencer Herald*, April 23, 1915.

²³² Cayton and Gray, *The American Midwest*, 18.

²³³ Michael Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 32.

discussed the differences between farmers and townspeople, especially in terms of the distinctly different economic situations of each group. Some editorials chastised people living in town who snubbed farmers who came to conduct business. “How do you greet the farmer when he comes to town?” asked the editor of the *Spencer Herald*. “Is your greeting such that he feels that he is with us, but not of us?”²³⁴ The editor in urging his fellow town dwellers to welcome the farmer with open arms revealed the sentiment against farmers shared by most residents in small towns across the Midwest. As Goldberg noted, townspeople used rude nicknames such as clodhoppers, hayseeds, and others to undermine farm people by pointing out their lack of social grace. Indeed, during the Gilded Age, the image of the ideal citizen shifted from farmer to businessman as the Americans began to covet practicality, optimism, and forward thinking rather than the agrarian myth. While townspeople ridiculed farmer people, farmers also treated townspeople with disdain, accusing them of collecting taxes and monopolizing county offices without regard to them.²³⁵

Issues of class existed within towns and within the countryside, but at the core, the divide between town and country ordered rural life more than other internal class problems. Many historians who study the Midwest struggle to define class within the rural context. Class existed in a sense as a product of or in conjunction with ethnicity, race, gender, and religious distinctions. While these factors of identity did influence class and played a significant role in explicating what class meant in the Midwest, they also tended to obscure class more than illuminate it. Class as economic difference manifested itself most clearly and directly as the divide between town and country, and rural people living in these three

²³⁴ “When the Farmer Comes to Town,” *Spencer Herald*, July 2, 1915.

²³⁵ Goldberg, *An Army of Women*, 33-37.

counties ordered their lives by this divide more than any other class-based distinction. Acknowledging this class divide between town and country provides the final piece to the puzzle of uncovering local context. A grasp of the geographic, chronological, and demographic development of these three counties, along with the ethnic, political, religious, social, and class elements of the peoples that inhabited these places, provides the context in which to place the efforts of women to create community in their respective locales.

Chapter 2: Rural Women Made Community

Yankton, Clay, and Lyon Counties experienced dynamic settlement and economic growth during the late-nineteenth century. White people displaced their native counterparts and settled the land in a kaleidoscope of farms, small hamlets, villages, and small towns. They plowed fields, harvested crops, and garnered economic rewards for their work. Merchants and businessmen shipped farm products to distant markets and used their resources to “boost” their locales. As people in these three counties worked, they also interacted socially. They became colleagues, neighbors, and friends, and they built community institutions on the bonds of social connections.

As people came together to cultivate the sense of community within these counties, they did so within perceived gender roles. Men typically held all political positions, owned the business and economic interests, and directed the civic activities of the county. In essence, they shaped the public identity of these counties in clear and substantial ways. Women also had a profound influence on the development of these communities, but they mainly acted in ways that many perceived as behind-the-scenes. The women of these three counties, however, regularly engaged in political events, issues, and other matters. They helped to cultivate distinct social characters for each of their counties, but they also did so in ways that undercut models of separate spheres. Many of their activities, while undertaken in separate and gendered women’s civic clubs, church societies, and other female-driven groups, garnered them public authority and a central place in the development of the “political” within their communities. Finally, working within these organizations politicized women, introducing them to political processes of elections, rules of order, and campaigning for a cause. As these women developed political identities, they remained committed to their

groups, working as a body dedicated to the advancement of the community's interests. Moreover, they achieved political visibility and public authority all while embracing their positions as daughters, sisters, wives, and mothers. They did not push the boundaries in name, but in practice, and they carved a space for themselves as political actors.

Although most women worked together within associations bonded by a shared concern or interest, there were a few exceptional individuals whose lives played out in the spotlight. Yankton County had a female physician, Dr. Jennie Murphy, who specialized in the treatment of children and women. She assisted in the creation of Sacred Heart Hospital, although her name failed to make it onto the list of founders. The community embraced Murphy, and she later served as the first female city commissioner.²³⁶ Other women became educators, teaching in public schools both in the town and in the country and at Yankton College. One woman, Dr. Alice Reynolds Kingsbury, became a well-known French professor at Yankton College for thirty-one years.²³⁷ Even women in less-than-respectable professions gained notice in the county. By the late 1880s, prostitution had developed into a flourishing business in the port town, and one madam, Maria Briggs, became well known for amassing a fortune of over thirty-five thousand dollars.²³⁸ In Clay County, exceptional women also gained notice. The first regular pastor of the Friends Church in Spencer, Mary Coffin, guided the church to distinction as “one of the prominent religious bodies in Spencer.”²³⁹ Ellen Reed served as county superintendent of schools from 1894, serving with near unanimous support before retiring in 1901. In 1904, Mary Riley became the second female county

²³⁶ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 75.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 172.

²³⁹ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 94.

superintendent of schools, serving for many consecutive years during the 1900s and 1910s.²⁴⁰ She traveled extensively from school to school for her job, analyzing educational standards, curriculum, and school work and publishing her findings in annual reports in the local newspapers. She gained notoriety and respect from her work and served at least two elected terms.

While these notorious individuals made interesting anecdotes in history books, their lives provided only a limited glance at the activities of women in these three counties. More significant are the nameless women who worked cooperatively and collectively through social, civic, and religious organizations to “better” their neighborhoods, churches, schools, and local communities. An investigation into these counties’ social activities yields a clearer vision of how these women shaped the world around them with the purpose and intention. As Clay, Yankton, and Lyon Counties grew from frontier conditions to settled places to established communities during the late-nineteenth century, their people developed a rich social life full of societies, clubs, and church activities. For the most part, as this “society life” flourished during the 1880s and 1890s in these counties, it became sharply marked by gender. In particular, women pursued social activities in patterns of involvement shared across Yankton, Clay, and Lyon Counties, through civic organizations, social clubs, and church societies. These “bonds of womanhood” formed social connections in two main ways. First, they formed civic clubs willing to use political means if necessary to advance the interests of their communities. Second, women’s efforts for community betterment emerged through informal clubs formed socially, especially through churches. After the family, these social organizations tied to civic improvement and social and church affairs formed the most

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 105-10.

important webs of fellowship, mutuality, and community involvement among the women of both town and country in these three counties.

Many of the first female organizations established in these counties began in the East as auxiliaries to fraternal societies that limited their membership to men only. In some cases, women formed auxiliaries to men's organizations. In Yankton County, the Women's Relief Corps, the equivalent to the Grand Army of the Republic, the Order of the Eastern Star, the corresponding group of the Free Masons, and the Rebekah Lodge, the complement to the Odd Fellows, organized a few years after their male counterparts. In particular, these female auxiliaries planned social activities in conjunction with the meetings of their fraternal brothers. At Dickens in Clay County, the Rebekah Lodge organized after the Odd Fellows formed in 1890. When it first met, an astounding seventy women became charter members.²⁴¹ The Order of the Eastern Star also organized in other places in Clay County, and at Peterson they met for the first time in March 1897 with fifteen charter members.²⁴² In Yankton County, the Rebekah Lodge had a robust social calendar, full of "meetings, dances, and other social events."²⁴³ In Lyon County, women also formed these auxiliaries, acting in supportive roles to these male societies. The Order of the Eastern Star organized in 1881, the Women's Relief Corps opened in 1890, the Rebekah Lodge began in 1895, and Minpah Lodge, the auxiliary to the Modern Woodmen of America, formed in 1896.²⁴⁴ These auxiliaries functioned in conjunction with their male counterparts, organizing socials, parties,

²⁴¹ Ibid., 74.

²⁴² Ibid., 153.

²⁴³ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 88.

²⁴⁴ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 108.

and other events in the community.²⁴⁵ The Women's Relief Corps took charge of the annual Memorial Day and Fourth of July festivities, riding in carriages during the parade and arranging flower displays in Marshall. At the turn of the century, newspaper reports indicated that ten thousand people attended these celebrations, and women stood at the center of the activities.²⁴⁶

While women in Clay, Yankton, and Lyon Counties enjoyed auxiliaries as one avenue to increase their sociability, they also pursued independent female organizations centered on various causes. The development of these societies not only pointed to a rich and intricate network of women bonded by common interests, mutually shared concerns, and increased sense of belonging; it also indicated the inauguration of a shared spirit of involvement imbued with purpose and the potential for political action through civic activity. Historians such as Anne Firor Scott and Sara M. Evans argued that these woman's clubs served as important foundations for public and political participation. Through their volunteer activities, club women constructed themselves as active American citizens.²⁴⁷ The most elite women's organization in Yankton County was the Nineteenth Century Club. It organized in January 1895 and Flora M. Swift served as the first president.²⁴⁸ Although their minute books and other records failed to survive, their activities made the pages of the county's newspapers. The Nineteenth Century Club devoted itself to educational and literary

²⁴⁵ One of the first socials held by the Women's Relief Corps in Lyon County, for example, was a "picnic tea" at the home of Mrs. W. T. Maxson on September 3, 1890. See, "Society," *Lyon County Reporter*, Sept. 3, 1890.

²⁴⁶ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 31, 105-106.

²⁴⁷ Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 1-4; Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 4-5.

²⁴⁸ Janet Davis Tripp, "Yankton's Nineteenth Century Club," *The Monthly South Dakotan* 2 (Feb., 1900): 168-70.

advancement, and members met weekly or biweekly to discuss a variety of topics related to art, literature, and history. Many of the members of this club later became the leaders of the suffrage cause during the various campaigns waged in the state between 1890 and 1918. During the spring of 1916, the Nineteenth Century Club changed its name, preferring to simplify it to “Woman’s Club.”²⁴⁹

The most recognized female organizations in Clay County were those that, similar to the Nineteenth Century Club in Yankton County, maintained the most public presence through civic involvement. Perhaps the club that carried out its activities in the most visible way was the Spencer Woman’s Club. The Spencer Woman’s Club organized in 1894 when a group of three women, Mrs. A. C. Perine, Mrs. Charles Squire, and Mrs. J. O. Thrush, who were “strong-minded women with a look toward the future,” met with the intent to form a woman’s civic organization.²⁵⁰ At their first meeting, they decided to study American history and biography “with papers and discussion.”²⁵¹ They also invited other women to join the club. Mrs. Ackley Hubbard served as the first president, and Mrs. Bois served as the first secretary. Attendance ranged anywhere from twenty to fifty members at each meeting, with lower numbers of women gathering during winter months when poor weather conditions

²⁴⁹ In January 1904, the Nineteenth Century Club posted announcements for its meetings. These notices provide an example of the typical meetings conducted by the Club. The Club discussed the following papers given by members: “England Under the House of Hanover,” “Art and Artists of Great Britain,” and “Wellington.” See, “[Local News],” *Dakota Herald*, Jan. 8, 1904; “[Local News],” *Dakota Herald*, Jan. 15, 1904; “[Local News],” *Dakota Herald*, Jan. 22, 1904. See chapter 5 for more on the Nineteenth Century Club and the woman suffrage campaign of 1914 and 1916. The name changed some time between February 1916 and April 1916. See, “Nineteenth Century Club Meeting,” *Dakota Herald*, Feb. 1, 1916; “Woman’s Club Gives Banquet,” *Dakota Herald*, April 21, 1916.

²⁵⁰ “History of Spencer Federated Woman’s Club,” loose paper in Spencer Woman’s Club Minute Book, 1894-1901, Spencer Woman’s Club Collection [hereafter SWCC], CCHS.

²⁵¹ Spencer Woman’s Club Minute Book, 1894-1901, page 10, SWCC, CCHS; Spencer Woman’s Club Scrapbook, page 2, SWCC, CCHS.

prohibited travel.²⁵² Each meeting opened with roll call, and most of the time each woman provided an “item of news or interest.”²⁵³ Many times, these “items” involved current events, and meeting minutes suggest that the members of the organization kept a close eye on affairs locally, nationally, and internationally. After roll call, the women ran their meetings with proper and diligent order. In the business portion of the meeting, group members discussed old and new business and considered the petitions of new members. The ladies then transitioned to the literary and social part of their program in which assigned members read prepared papers and served refreshments.²⁵⁴ Papers covered topics related to art, history, politics, and social matters.²⁵⁵

During the late-nineteenth century, the organization matured into a respected society in the community. In 1896, the members voted to join the Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs, and in 1901 they became a member of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs.²⁵⁶ Under the guidance of the “Village Improvement” Committee, established at meeting held in December 1897, the club constructed a plan of civic involvement for its members. Led by “Village Improvement” members Mary Cory, Carrie Squire, Mrs. Crandall, Mrs. Adams, and Mrs. Morgan, the Spencer Woman’s Club supported various projects with the aim to “uplift”

²⁵² The Secretary Pro. Tem. failed to the April 6, 1897 meeting of the group because of poor roads. See, Spencer Woman’s Club Minute Book, 1894-1901, page 58, SWCC, CCHS.

²⁵³ Spencer Woman’s Club Minute Book, 1894-1901, page 18, SWCC, CCHS.

²⁵⁴ For a “standard” meeting of the Spencer Woman’s Club, see the meeting minutes for February 21, 1899. Spencer Woman’s Club Minute Book, 1894-1901, page 114, SWCC, CCHS.

²⁵⁵ At the April 24, 1899 meeting, the women voted to have six meetings with papers that had “art” as the topic, six meetings with papers concerning “political & social” matters, and six meetings on “current events.” See, Spencer Woman’s Club Minute Book, 1894-1901, SWCC, CCHS.

²⁵⁶ Spencer Woman’s Club Scrapbook, page 2 SWCC, CCHS; Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 175.

civic life. First, they proposed to “secure a room on Main Street and furnish it with pictures, reading matter...to be used as a rest room for the country and town peoples.”²⁵⁷ Second, the committee recommended that the Club purchase trees to plant on the courthouse lawn. Third, the committee pressed members to obtain a lot in the village and transform it into Spencer’s first public park. Finally, the women suggested that the Club procure flower seeds and give them to schoolchildren to plant on the grounds of their respective schools.²⁵⁸

While the Spencer Woman’s Club engaged locally with internal advancement opportunities, they also considered matters of broader significance. In February 1896 the Club reviewed a bill introduced in the House and Senate of the Iowa Legislature that called for a system of traveling libraries.²⁵⁹ They officially supported the bill in February 1900, endorsing a resolution that urged the bill to undergo consideration in the Iowa Legislature during that winter.²⁶⁰ They sent the resolution to area newspapers to publicize their stance on this issue, and they wrote letters to their representatives to gain their support.²⁶¹ In addition to their public support of the library bill, they also shaped their program to reflect a group of women with political interests. They heard speeches from their members about political issues, including one given by Mrs. Buck in April 1901 on “Constitutional Developments of the United States.”²⁶² They also publicly supported female educational opportunities, child labor laws, the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, and compulsory education. In addition, the

²⁵⁷ Spencer Woman’s Club Minute Book, 1894-1901, page 79, SWCC, CCHS; Spence Woman’s Club Scrapbook, page 2, SWCC, CCHS.

²⁵⁸ Spencer Woman’s Club Minutes Book, 1894-1901, page 79, SWCC, CCHS.

²⁵⁹ Spencer Woman’s Club Minute Book, 1894-1901, page 33, SWCC, CCHS.

²⁶⁰ Spencer Woman’s Club Minute Book, 1894-1901, page 144, SWCC, CCHS.

²⁶¹ Spencer Woman’s Club Minute Book, 1894-1901, page 142, SWCC, CCHS; Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 176.

²⁶² Spencer Woman’s Club Minute Book, 1894-1901, page 188, SWCC, CCHS.

Woman's Club also supported the study of many timely topics, including home economics, childcare, and literary programs. They created two community art exhibits and organized a lecture course to come through Clay County in the early 1900s.²⁶³ In January 1901, the women received a communication from the State Federation of Women's Clubs, asking them to devote time to the study of home economics. The women, led by President Margaret Little, pledged to study home economics, and one member suggested that they organize a department club.²⁶⁴ They also supported other community institutions, including the Farmers' Institute. Between 1907 and 1911, the Club sponsored a baking contest at the annual gathering, giving the creator of the best angel food cake a one-dollar prize at the annual event.²⁶⁵ Interest in the affairs of farmers probably came from Club member Carrie Felt, who served as president of the Woman's Department of the Farmers' Institute and whose husband was the President of the Clay County Good Roads Association and also an active member of the Farmers' Institute.²⁶⁶ The Spencer Woman's Club enjoyed a respected position within the community. This organization, wrote one admirer, "has had its silent influence in the development of the home. The breadth of thought, purity of aim, deep interest in all matters

²⁶³ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 175-76.

²⁶⁴ Spencer Woman's Club Minute Book, 1894-1901, page 177, SWCC, CCHS. Margaret Little was also a prominent and active member of the Farmers' Institute. "Farmers' Institute," Feb. 4, 1897, *Clay County News*.

²⁶⁵ Spencer Woman's Club Minute Book, 1901-1911, page 178, SWCC, CCHS; Spencer Woman's Club Scrapbook, page 3, SWCC, CCHS.

²⁶⁶ "Good Roads Association," Jan. 1, 1904, *Dakota Herald*; Spencer Woman's Club Minute Book 1910-1915, page 53, SWCC, CCHS. Felt worked for the Farmers' Institute with support from fellow Spencer Woman's Club member Mrs. F. A. Squire. "Farmers' Institute," *Spencer Herald*, Feb. 7, 1912.

pertaining to the welfare of the home” tremendously influenced the community, “which has been bettered for what was in the hearts and in the discussions of its women.”²⁶⁷

Lyon County’s women also sought direct engagement in the civic affairs of their communities. Marshall’s women created a woman’s club similar to the women’s clubs in Yankton and Spencer. Calling themselves the Current News Club, these elite women, the wives and daughters of the business and political leaders, came together to pursue “progress” in their own right. Organized in 1874, the group became a federated club in 1876. In the by-laws, the Club outlined their objective as one “to awaken and sustain, in the members, an interest in literature, topics of general information and social concern, by means of study, readings, and discussion.”²⁶⁸ Members studied readings, engaged in fellowship times, and enjoyed a reputation as one of the first formal social organizations in the county. Scholar John Radzilowski argued that the women of the Current News Club participated in many other female organizations, including the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, or WCTU, school groups, and church societies.²⁶⁹ In similar fashion to the Nineteenth Century Club of Yankton County, a few members of the Current News Club supported woman suffrage but the group overall limited its political involvement over the course of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, taking stances on the movement only after the first decade of the

²⁶⁷ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 176. There were also women’s clubs that formed after 1915 in Peterson and Everly. At Everly, the women organized in June 1916 to “encourage intellectual development, to promote good fellowship and to work for the good of the community.” The first project sponsored by the group was the creation of a public library. The women undertook other endeavors as well, including giving scholarships to high school students in the area, promoting the arts, and undertaking beautification projects. See, Everly Centennial Committee, *Through the Years*, 117, CCHS.

²⁶⁸ Constitution and Bylaws, Current News Club Collection, Southwest Minnesota History Center, Southwest Minnesota State University, Marshall, Minnesota [hereafter SMHC].

²⁶⁹ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 72.

twentieth century. Most of their efforts revolved around matters relating to the home and family. At the January 1916 meeting, members discussed “Furnace Cooking” and “Electric Cook Stoves.” Later the women, led by district president Mrs. M. E. Mathews, flexed their political muscles, advocating for a curfew ordinance in Marshall and composing a clean-up campaign for refuse that had accumulated in vacant lots. They even sponsored a baby welfare week with the aim to curb common infant diseases. By World War I, the Current News Club became more political and publicized with their support of war work and the American Red Cross.²⁷⁰

As the pursuit of civic advancement and involvement flourished in these three counties so too did a desire for reform and uplift through the pursuit of knowledge. Among the most prominent women emerged the vision to establish libraries in their locales. This library movement emerged at a precise moment of concern, “occasioned to some degree by the nation’s rapid industrialization, urbanization, and immigration. The latter, immigration, was especially bothersome to community founders, for without an educated and enlightened citizenry, they reasoned, the republic could not survive.”²⁷¹ By erecting libraries, these women fashioned situated and embodied cultural spaces imbued with anxieties derived from their political persuasions. Through this “place,” typically located at the heart the community on one of the main streets of the town, these women articulated the democratic ideal by

²⁷⁰ “Noble Work of Women,” *Marshall News Messenger*, Feb. 4, 1916; “Current News Club,” *Marshall News Messenger*, Jan. 7, 1916; “Prevent Death Increase,” *Marshall News Messenger*, Feb. 18, 1916; “The Knitting Record,” *Marshall News Messenger*, Aug. 2, 1918; Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 168.

²⁷¹ Wayne A. Wiegand, *Main Street Public Library: Community Places and Reading Spaces in the Rural Heartland, 1876-1956* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011), 8.

promoting reading as moral achievement.²⁷² They also reached only a segment of the population, because, as librarian and author Wayne Wiegand noted, libraries reaffirmed frameworks of exclusion rather than “challenging patterns related to age, ethnicity, gender, and class.”²⁷³

In Clay County, women who later became members of the Spencer Woman’s Club ignited the interest of community members to start a library in the town. These women organized the Ladies’ Library Association of Spencer in 1883, and they housed their collections at the home of Mrs. H. C. Crary until they could afford to rent or purchase a permanent building. Mrs. Ackley Hubbard, who later became the first president of the Spencer Woman’s Club, became the first president of the Library Association.²⁷⁴ Fundraising efforts began when the women initiated a subscription system of one dollar per year. They also organized fairs, suppers, and other social events to raise money for the library. They accepted donations from personal libraries, and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union made a sizable contribution from their own library. The location of the library moved as space became available, first to another home, second to a drug store, third to a second-floor space above a store, and finally in a room located above the post office. By 1890, these women had raised five hundred dollars, and they purchased a small frame building on one of Spencer’s main streets. Shortly thereafter, the town council stepped in to maintain the property, but the women agreed to turn over their property only when Spencer’s residents voted in favor of a library tax that ensured the library’s upkeep. The women still bore the responsibility of staffing and managing the library’s daily activities. The Ladies’ Library

²⁷² Ibid., 5-9.

²⁷³ Ibid., 179.

²⁷⁴ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 169.

Association continued to collect books and other periodicals for their library until they had amassed over 3,500 volumes. By 1900, members of the Spencer Woman's Club pledged their support to the local library in the form of a fifty-dollar donation for new furnishings. The small library served the community until 1906, until Library Association members had secured a Carnegie library grant. The Spencer Woman's Club purchased furnishings for one of the rooms in the new library, buying tables and chairs costing about one hundred dollars. The Library Association donated their collection to the Carnegie library, and a woman, Annie Duple, served as Spencer's first librarian from 1906 to 1930.²⁷⁵

In Yankton County, elite women, bounded by social ties as the wives of territorial legislators and other leading citizens, created the Ladies' Library Association in 1873 and immediately began to procure books in order to build up a public library. Members sold "shares" to finance their work and hosted various fundraising events, including a sheet and pillow case party. By 1881, the women had acquired over six hundred volumes. Many people praised their collection for its wide range of topics while others criticized it because they felt the women had included too many works of fiction, which they considered a "waste of time."²⁷⁶ Despite their detractors, the women operated a successful public library until 1902 when Yankton's city council applied for and received funding to establish a library from the

²⁷⁵ Ibid.; Loose clipping, "Spencer Public Library started by Woman's Club," *Spencer Reporter*, April 1974, Spencer Woman's Club Minute Book, 1894-1901, SWCC, CCHS; Spencer Woman's Club Scrapbook, page 3, SWCC, CCHS. For a comparison to the Osage, Iowa library, see, Wiegand, *Main Street Public Library*, 47-75. At Osage, women served on the library board and as the first librarians appointed by the city council. Wiegand mentioned that the position of librarian was "so openly political" when he noted how quickly the council replaced librarians when political conditions did not favor their involvement.

²⁷⁶ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 68.

Andrew Carnegie foundation. Yankton's first librarian, a widow named Jessie Bartholomew, began her tenure in 1903.²⁷⁷

Elite women also concerned themselves with issues in education in Lyon County, and two served on the first Library Board formed in 1885. They endured criticism from some of the town's council members who believed that libraries were "an unnecessary luxury."²⁷⁸ In fact, during its early existence, the library survived only because of "public entertainments" organized on its behalf. Women directed most of the fundraisers, including one in April 1895 in which Maud Powell, a distinguished violinist, gave a recital.²⁷⁹ Women also staffed the reading room on Saturday afternoons and evenings, working hard to make it a "pleasant place to visit."²⁸⁰ They arranged its upkeep, furnishing it with wallpaper and electric lights in May 1895.²⁸¹ By 1900, the board had amassed over two thousand volumes and looked to the construction of a building to house their collection. Another less-well-known woman's club, the Art History Club, wrote to Andrew Carnegie in about 1900. He answered their request with a ten thousand dollar pledge for the library's construction. In July 1903, the women celebrated the completion of the library, located in the middle of the business district, a beacon of reason and progress in the up-and-coming town.²⁸²

In addition to clubs like the Current News, Woman's Club of Spencer, and the Nineteenth Century Club, other women's clubs developed out of the causes of national reform movements widely popular in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 68.

²⁷⁸ "Miss Powell Helps the Public Library," *Lyon County Reporter*, April 12, 1895.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ "Reading Room Notice," *Lyon County Reporter*, June 4, 1891.

²⁸¹ "Public Library," *Lyon County Reporter*, Oct. 12, 1895.

²⁸² Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 104.

temperance movement garnered particular attention among the women of these three counties. A public and politicized organization, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, or WCTU, named as its members the most prominent and respectable women. In Clay County, women joined the WCTU with enthusiasm as early as 1883. In addition to a vibrant union at Spencer, the county seat, the WCTU flourished in the small villages that dotted the countryside, including Peterson, Greeneville, Annieville, Pleasant Valley, and Barlow, and in the most rural townships, including Gillett Grove, Lincoln, Freeman, and Lone Tree. An umbrella union, known as the Clay County WCTU, orchestrated events to promote temperance among these groups.²⁸³ Led by a respected group of elite women, including President Mrs. E. N. Jencks, Treasurer Mrs. S. E. Thorine, and County Lecturer Reverend Martha Janes, the group enjoyed active participation through committee work on resolutions, entertainment, literature, and finance.²⁸⁴ As early as 1884, a large WCTU chapter at Spencer organized regular meetings among its members.²⁸⁵ That year, the group organized a total of six mass meetings and lectures for the residents of Spencer. In all, WCTU chapters held a total of nineteen mass events in the county during the year between April 1883 and April 1884. Other unions lacked large memberships, but they made up for their small numbers with dedication. At Riverton, a group of only six women, Mrs. C. A. Smith, Mrs. E. Logan, Carrie

²⁸³ “[The following is a report...],” *Clay County News*, April 17, 1884.

²⁸⁴ “Minutes of the Second Annual Convention of the Clay County Woman's Christian Temperance Union,” June 5, 1884, *Clay County News*. Most of the women of the WCTU were members of the most prominent families in Clay County. In particular, these families attended Congregational and Methodist Churches and supported Republican Party politics. “County Convention,” June 12, 1884, *Clay County News*.

²⁸⁵ “[The W. C. T. U. will meet...],” *Clay County News*, Jan. 18, 1884.

Ballard, Maggie Allen, Carrie Sayhew, and Maria Torbel met frequently at a local school house near their homes.²⁸⁶

In Yankton County, the WCTU organized locally in the winter 1879 and began its efforts at reform and improvement with simple practicality.²⁸⁷ In February 1881 the women furnished a couple of rooms in one of the central gathering points in town. Providing this space meant that women visiting from the country or traveling to another destination had a respectable and clean place to rest. They served refreshments and offered “the choicest and latest periodicals” for browsing by those who paused there.²⁸⁸ According to one account, the rooms were “commodious and comfortable” and “conducted in the coziest possible manner.”²⁸⁹ The community approved of these efforts, noting that “this practical step in the direction of Temperance reform deservedly meets with the encouragement of the citizens.”²⁹⁰

By 1883, the WCTU had become perhaps the most the respected female organization in Yankton County.²⁹¹ In addition to hosting the resting place in town, they also brought in national speakers to promote their cause. In August 1883, Francis Willard, president of the national WCTU, came to Yankton and spoke to a standing-room-only audience at the Congregational Church. Her message resonated with those in attendance as she argued that Yankton’s WCTU could only do so much work with so many licensed saloons in the county. “The saloon must go!” she insisted, and she pleaded with her audience to accept a lifestyle of

²⁸⁶ “W. C. T. U. in Riverton,” *Clay County News*, March 20, 1884.

²⁸⁷ *History of Southeastern Dakota*, 239.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 240.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ Parker, *History of Our County and State*, 26-Y.

total abstinence.²⁹² Her speech never wandered into other important issues of the period, including labor reform, social purity, or woman suffrage.²⁹³ Yankton County's WCTU eagerly embraced other reform issues, however, and by 1890 they began to advocate for woman suffrage. At the fourth annual county convention held in 1890, delegates met outside of Yankton at Mission Hill. Unions from Yankton, Volin, Gayville, Utica, Walshtown, and Mayfield attended the meeting. During the proceedings, an unnamed delegate led a Bible reading on "Equal Suffrage." Two other delegates, Matilda Vanderhule, and Flora M. Swift of Yankton presented items during the program. While Swift became the first president of the Nineteenth Century Club in 1895, Vanderhule became one of the leaders in the local campaign for the woman suffrage amendment in 1898.²⁹⁴

The WCTU also flourished in Lyon County. The WCTU formed among the Yankee women, and its most active chapter became the Marshall union, organized as early as 1886. In 1892, local WCTU officers formed a Young Woman's Temperance Union for all girls over fourteen years old.²⁹⁵ Early efforts were hesitant, but slowly, the women gained a political voice in temperance matters in Lyon County. One of their first resolutions, issued publicly in the *Lyon County Reporter* in August 1891, extolled its members to "use the power of the ballot we hold on educational questions."²⁹⁶ This local resolution echoed one that the district WCTU organization had issued in July, in which the delegates resolved "that we each

²⁹² Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 81.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ "A County Convention," *Press and Dakotan*, May 31, 1890. This county convention took place about a month after the district convention at which equal suffrage was also a topic of discussion. See chapter 3 for more on the 1890 district convention of the WCTU.

²⁹⁵ "Around Home," *Lyon County Reporter*, March 24, 1892.

²⁹⁶ "W. C. T. U. Resolutions," *Lyon County Reporter*, Aug. 20, 1891.

one use the right of suffrage in school matters.”²⁹⁷ The district resolution, however, contained two additional clauses. The first indicated that, by voting heavily in school elections, the women of the WCTU could ensure that “men may not say women will not use the ballot if ‘tis granted them.”²⁹⁸ The second argued that “whereas, women have equally with men, an interest in the welfare of our cities and villages...that we ask our legislators to grant us the ballot on all municipal questions.”²⁹⁹ That the Marshall WCTU omitted these last two clauses from resolution is telling. They hesitated to make any major statements that seemed too radical. A year later, however, in June 1892, the women had grown strong enough to agree to host the four-day-long district convention. One of their keynote speakers was Julia B. Nelson, president of the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association.³⁰⁰ Even though they did not support suffrage unconditionally at that point, they at least could give assistance in other, subtler ways.

In contrast to WCTU work in Marshall, early efforts in country areas found difficulty in carving out much respect for temperance. Near Wood Lake, a group of women attempted to provide alternative “evening entertainment” for the “boys” to “keep them out of saloons.”³⁰¹ However, as the *Lyon County Reporter* noted, the “low down cusses refuse to be entertained on any elevated plan.”³⁰² At Balaton, the WCTU quipped that the “women support the churches, men support the saloons.”³⁰³ In many other country villages, such as Minneota, Cottonwood, Westerheim, Ghent, Vallery, Fairview, Stanley, and Florence, the

²⁹⁷ “W. C. T. U. Resolutions,” *Lyon County Reporter*, July 15, 1891.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ “Around Home,” *Lyon County Reporter*, June 8, 1892.

³⁰¹ “Around Home,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Feb. 4, 1892.

³⁰² *Ibid.*

³⁰³ “Balaton Brieflets,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Jan. 12, 1894.

WCTU could not even organize a union because of ethnic and religious preferences that supported the consumption of alcohol.³⁰⁴

Despite the limitations the WCTU encountered in the countryside of Lyon County, it eventually enjoyed a wide reputation in Marshall. By 1894, the women involved in the WCTU there had developed a vision for their work within the broader community. One woman, who signed her name only as “R-----,” wrote a letter to the *Lyon County Reporter* in November. In it, she pledged to use her talents to better “my fellowmen” and save young men “from utter ruin.”³⁰⁵ As she praised the “grand and noble organization” of the WCTU, she chastised the community for permitting saloons in Marshall.³⁰⁶ She called on the men of the town to come together as “brothers...to better the condition of the less fortunate than ourselves...[by joining] with wives and mothers in this work of emancipating them.”³⁰⁷ Her carefully crafted appeal clearly defined the rationale upon which WCTU members worked. Their work was a “duty,” thrust upon them by the community itself when men could no longer control themselves and their vice. They had no choice but to act, argued the woman, when men could not see past the saloon door. Prominent men welcomed the intrusion of women in local politics rather seamlessly, and only two months later, the editor of the *Lyon County Reporter* encouraged the WCTU to step up their political actions. After voters in a county election chose C. M. Wilcox as village president in January 1895, the editor acknowledged that the WCTU delegations planned to petition the new president with reform initiatives, from the “nickel in the slot method of selling cigars” to outlawing the practice of

³⁰⁴ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 124.

³⁰⁵ “Our Duty,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Nov. 30, 1894.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

gambling among young men.³⁰⁸ The WCTU clearly enjoyed significant access to local politics.

These organized women's groups had a public presence in the community, bringing attention and visibility to the women who carried out work either in auxiliaries to fraternal societies or as part of reform and civic advancement movements. Examining these types of organizations provides crucial details into how women actively shaped their communities through gendered conceptions of civic—and political—involvement. While the exploration of the activities of these social groups gives insight, it also remains limited to an elite class of women with privilege, prestige, and social power. Historians must move past typically accepted sources of women's work and activism and consider other ways in which women came together collectively to create gendered spaces in which women could emerge as engaged civic participants and potential political actors.

Women from nearly every class participated in the social and spiritual life of the church. They may not have held leadership positions in the church's primary governing body, but women filled pews in greater numbers than men and cultivated female societies that played significant roles in the life of the church. With the variety of denominations, the religious life of Clay, Yankton, and Lyon Counties' residents flourished. Amid the growing fervor, the women within the broader church organizations created their own gendered societies. Female participation in Christian churches depended largely on the denomination, policies of the national governing body, and local leadership of the church. Despite the potential restrictions placed on their involvement, women found ways around their limited roles to develop a significant influence in their respective churches. Women served with

³⁰⁸ "Village Election," *Lyon County Reporter*, Jan. 4, 1895.

dedication in their churches, “playing essential roles in church organization.”³⁰⁹ While a shared religious affiliation brought these women together, they moved past simple mutual interests to develop strong social ties that lasted beyond generational shifts. In addition, their work within neighborhoods and communities fostered a sense of civic visibility and garnered public attention throughout the late nineteenth century. While women within the church-at-large remained confined to specific, limited roles, in these female religious groups, women gained another pathway to activism as beacons of Christianity pledged to the uplift of those around them. Finally, the formation of these female religious groups transcended class, ethnic, or other cultural distinctions. It became an almost ubiquitous presence in the social lives of women across these three counties, in both town and country. Women in virtually every Christian denomination created these groups and worked within them.

By 1890, the Methodists had become one of the most active and evident women’s religious groups in each of the three counties. The work of these “ladies’ societies” received prominent coverage in the society pages of the county’s newspapers, providing documented evidence of their visibility and presence in the social life of the area.³¹⁰ Many ladies’ aid societies engaged in what at first seemed to be inconsequential work, but the value behind it resonated within their churches. In Clay County, the women’s society at the Langdon Methodist Church, called the Glad Tiding Circle, gave critical financial support during times of church remodel and construction. Upon the completion of the first church building in

³⁰⁹ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 110.

³¹⁰ A cursory glance of the *Press and Dakotan* from about 1875 to 1900 reveals that the Methodist, Congregational, and Catholic ladies received on average weekly to bimonthly mention.

1906, the Circle contributed the carpets and window shades for the interior.³¹¹ They purchased paint and a “big board fence” for the church during the next few years. When church officials broached the idea of adding a basement, the women took the lead in fundraising efforts, hosting a bazaar that raked in over one hundred fifty dollars in profits.³¹² After parishioners raised the church off its foundations, excavated the ground, and put up basement walls, the Circle held a “shower for the basement” and an ice cream social to raise more money.³¹³ Finally, the Circle purchased the church’s furnace—an expense of over one hundred dollars—paying for it out of funds they earned by holding another bazaar. After all this work, the women received public praise in the *Spencer Herald*, which noted, “the neighborhood is indebted to the ladies for their good work and great credit is due to” them.”³¹⁴ While the amount of money they spent is impressive, the manner in which they raised the money is significant. They sold homemade goods, crafts, and other products in a visible, public way in the community.³¹⁵ The financial authority achieved by the Glad Tiding Circle sheds light on the ways in which women could transcend their limited roles in the church. These women played instrumental roles in the construction of their church, attaining a substantial degree of public visibility and power in the process. Their actions as a women’s group allowed them access to realms of influence that should garner consideration within discussions of female activism.

³¹¹ [Langdon Centennial Committee], *Langdon: Celebrating 100 Years, 1899-1999: The Langdon Legacy* (N. p.: n. p., 1999), CCHS.

³¹² Ibid.

³¹³ Ibid.; “Langdon,” *Spencer Herald*, Aug. 6, 1915.

³¹⁴ “Langdon,” *Spencer Herald*, Aug. 6, 1915.

³¹⁵ [Langdon Centennial Committee], *Langdon*, CCHS.

In another Methodist church in Clay County, the women of Grace United Methodist Church in Spencer also achieved financial authority, but they did so by participating in events central to the social events of the community. Beginning in 1918, the church provided food and served meals at the Clay County Fair. The work was “arduous,” but the women took pride that they had a part in what they named “the greatest county Fair in the world.”³¹⁶ They also reaped handsome financial rewards. In the first year, they raised almost \$1,150.00 after spending nearly \$340.00, earning more than “the entire net receipts of the Aid for the previous year.”³¹⁷ The Ladies’ Aid continued their work at the fair throughout the twentieth century. Methodist Ladies’ aid societies at Webb, Peterson, and Fostoria also worked in their communities, but little evidence exists to provide details of their efforts.

In Yankton County, the newspaper printed information about special programs and invitations to events organized by the Methodist women, in addition to their regular meetings. This group of church women met monthly to plan and organize a variety of social and fundraising activities. Since the congregation had organized in 1872, the Methodist women held bazaars every spring and fall. In April 1890, the Methodist ladies group hosted a bazaar in one of the largest shops in the downtown section of the county seat. They prepared for two months in advance, securing donations of fancy work and other displays from the members of their congregation.³¹⁸ The women also secured financial donations from twenty-five of the “leading business firms,” whose support they advertised on hand-embroidered

³¹⁶ “Grace United Methodist Church,” page 1, Folder 3, Box 1, Church Histories Collection, CCHS.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

³¹⁸ “Briefly Told,” *Press and Dakotan*, April 8, 1890.

quilts displayed prominently at the entrance to the bazaar.³¹⁹ After patrons moved past the advertisements, they could browse a table filled with art for purchase. Other tables held collections of aprons, quilts, comforters, dolls and other children's toys, books, canes, and clocks, all for sale to benefit the work of the Methodist women.³²⁰ Each evening, the ladies served a "liberal" supper that included a large spread and a slice of "Jack Horner's pie."³²¹ The editor of the *Press and Dakotan* reported that the bazaar attracted "a great deal of deserved attention" among the community.³²²

In addition to the work of these Methodist women, the Women's Foreign Missionary Society also carried out similar fundraising efforts in Yankton County. Isabel Whitfield, the wife of the Methodist preacher, organized the group, and, for whatever reason, she chose to form the society among the "colored people" of Yankton who were members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.³²³ Although the Missionary Society only lasted two years, its existence reinforces the claim that sociability and religious work among women could transcend categories of identity, including race, class, and ethnicity. The women met monthly in each other's homes and enjoyed much the same program as similar female religious societies, with devotions, prepared lessons, questions from the "mystery box," and light refreshments.³²⁴

Methodist women worked in much the same way in Lyon County as they did in Clay and Yankton counties. They organized bazaars, home festivals, luncheons and dinners, and

³¹⁹ "Briefly Told," *Press and Dakotan*, April 10, 1890.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² *Ibid.* See Chapter 3 for a second discussion of this bazaar.

³²³ Yankton County Historical Society [hereafter YCHS], *History of Yankton County, South Dakota* (Dallas: Curtis Media Corp., 1987), 123.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

other socials regularly. During the 1890s, they began to host an annual Harvest Home Festival in downtown Marshall, selling “fancy and useful articles” and “farm produce.”³²⁵ They also organized special events, such as Old Hat Socials and corn suppers at member homes or, in good weather, on the church lawn.³²⁶ These women garnered attention for their visibility in church fundraising endeavors and social activities. At Lynd United Methodist Church, the women’s society first met in 1893 and organized themselves as the Ladies’ Golden Rule Society. In addition to organizing social events for the community, something “much need[ed] at the time,” members met regularly in each other’s homes and engaged in fundraising efforts “making quilts, sewing carpet rags and even mending grain sacks.”³²⁷ When male church leaders expressed their decision to build a church, they took out loans to pay for the construction. The men soon found themselves struggling to make payments, however, and they turned to the Society for financial support. At first the women just covered the interest on the loans, but eventually they took responsibility for both the monthly bills and payments on the principle. Ultimately, the Society paid off the entire balance entirely from the proceeds of their fundraising activities.³²⁸ In addition to fundraising, the women also held strong beliefs about temperance, attaching a resolution to their constitution that expressed “their opposition to the liquor traffic in all its forms,” and their pledge “to be temperate in their own lives.”³²⁹ Perhaps, wrote one later member of the Society, the Ladies’

³²⁵ “Around Home,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Sept. 14, 1895.

³²⁶ “Around Home,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Feb. 25, 1892; “Around Home,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Aug. 4, 1893.

³²⁷ Mrs. C. H. Austin, “Women’s Work for the Church,” in “Lynd United Methodist Church Circuit Records and History 1867-1951,” SMHC.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

Golden Rule Society became the reason Lynd remained a dry exception in the heavily wet Lyon County.³³⁰

Like Methodist women, Congregational women also played an important role in the social life of their churches in these three counties. Congregational Churches in Clay County benefited from the work their women accomplished through their religious societies. In 1874, the Ladies' Aid Society at the First Congregational Church in Spencer began with fifteen charter members and a desire to raise money for a new church building.³³¹ It held a bazaar in the fall of 1875, and soon the bazaar became an annual tradition.³³² The congregation built its church that year, probably in part from the proceeds of the bazaar.³³³ The Ladies' Aid Society quickly gained "a continuous record of service to the church."³³⁴ They met regularly at the homes of their members, many times completing sewing projects for charity. They also cooked supper, often inviting their husbands and other male relatives. Their flagship fundraising endeavor remained the annual fall bazaar, "which is," reported one account, "always a huge success both financially and artistically."³³⁵ When the Congregational Church desired a new church building in the late 1880s, the Ladies' Aid Society contributed \$1,500 to its construction. The massive history of Clay County published in 1909 mentioned in detail the financial success experienced by women of the First Congregational Church of Spencer. It listed the exact amounts of money raised and distributed by the Society between 1892 and 1909. During that time, the Society gave about half of its income directly to the

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ "First Congregational Church Spencer, Iowa," Folder 5, Box 1, CHC, CCHS.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 192-94.

³³⁴ "First Congregational Church," CHC, CCHS.

³³⁵ Ibid.; Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 196.

church, or \$4,073.46 out of its accounts that boasted \$8,457.53.³³⁶ These Congregational women later parlayed this sterling reputation for service and organizing events into leadership roles in the woman suffrage movement in Clay County. Other Congregational Churches in Clay County recognized their women as well. The Peterson Congregational Church formed in March 1882, and shortly after, a ladies' aid society, called the Lady Helpers, organized among its women. One account gave no detailed description of the activities of this group, but made a point to mention, "Much credit must be given to the Lady Helpers for the noble way they have helped in the support of the Church, and in maintaining such a splendid idealism among their members."³³⁷ The statement indicated that these women not only contributed physically to their church through their financial donations; they also served as the respected centers of spirituality and moral wisdom within their church.

In Yankton County, the Congregational Ladies' Union organized in 1870.³³⁸ In addition to regular monthly meetings, the women hosted fundraising events similar to the Methodist bazaars, called "Kalendar Karnivals."³³⁹ According to one scholar, the Congregational Church could not have constructed its first church building in 1868 without the fundraising efforts of its women.³⁴⁰ After a generous donation from John Blair Smith Todd secured a location for the construction of the church, leaders faced dire financial problems. "We were poor," explained Ephraim Miner, a church trustee. "We wanted a

³³⁶ Gillespie and Steele, *History of Clay County*, 196.

³³⁷ "Congregational Church Peterson, Iowa Historical Sketch 1882-1944," Folder 5, Box 1, CHC, CCHS.

³³⁸ YCHS, *History of Yankton County*, 144.

³³⁹ "Briefly Told," *Press and Dakotan*, June 3, 1890.

³⁴⁰ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 50.

church, and we felt that in some way we must get it.”³⁴¹ With the lack of funding threatening to delay the project, the women of the church stepped up, leading the fund drive and raising enough money for construction to begin in the fall of 1869.³⁴² Just over twenty years later, the formally organized Ladies’ Union again played a pivotal role in the expansion of the church. By 1890, the Congregationalists had outgrown their first church, and members began to clamor for a new, larger church building. As they did before, the ladies took charge of fundraising efforts. “With the Ladies’ Union once again in the forefront of the money drive,” reported the *Press and Dakotan*, “\$19,434.25 was raised to convince the trustees to recommend” the construction of a new church. That the editor printed the exact amount raised for the entire community to see was no accident. He made a point to note that the women alone had raised almost 80 percent of the entire budget for the new church, including “all furnishings, equipment, and heating of the building.”³⁴³ The Congregationalists clearly depended on the financial support given by the women of their congregation. The contributions, both fiscal and social, that the members of the Ladies’ Union made to their church brought them significant recognition and influence.

At the Congregational Church of Marshall, an active cohort of women formed three organizations, including the Ladies’ Aid Society, the Young Ladies’ Aid Society, and the Women’s Missionary Society.³⁴⁴ During the 1890s, these women organized socials, dinners, and other events constantly. They also met weekly for regular business meetings in each other’s homes. At these meetings, members employed parliamentary procedures as they

³⁴¹ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 50.

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ “Briefly Told,” *Press and Dakotan*, June 13, 1890.

³⁴⁴ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 110-11.

planned their social activities, from dime sociables to picnics to oyster parties. They raked in impressive amounts of money from these endeavors, averaging about twenty-five dollars per event.³⁴⁵ In at least one curious case, the Congregational women put a political stamp on their event. On November 2, 1894, the women invited the community to an oyster supper at a building in downtown Marshall. The women wrote, “All parties are cordially invited to partake of an election stew. It will cheer the successful and soothe the downcast while waiting for returns.”³⁴⁶ In the next few issues of the *Lyon County Reporter*, no article mentioned how many people attended the supper or what political rhetoric enlightened the conversations that took place over supper. The Congregational women, however, created a political space in this moment, and they effectively planted themselves directly in the midst of the post-election proceedings. The women had facilitated a public, political event in the same manner they had fashioned other, “regular” social activities. In their estimation, there was no incongruence between the two.

In addition to Methodist and Congregational women, Lutheran women received the most visibility and publicity for their work in these three counties. For many Lutherans, ethnicity played a significant role in church formation. As early as 1894 in Clay County, the women of Bethany Lutheran in Spencer formed a Ladies’ Aid Society, called the Spencer Danish Evangelical Lutheran Women’s Association, in homage to their heritage. They met on average three times per week and planned events in order to raise money for their mission

³⁴⁵ Nearly every issue of the weekly *Lyon County Reporter* from the 1890s contained some sort of Congregational ladies’ society function. For examples, see “Around Home,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Nov. 3, 1892; “Around Home,” *Lyon County Reporter* May 17, 1895; “Marshall and Vicinity,” *Lyon County Reporter*, July 30, 1891; “Around Home,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Feb. 25, 1892.

³⁴⁶ “Around Home,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Nov. 2, 1894.

work.³⁴⁷ They gave money to everything from seminary schools to Indian mission projects.³⁴⁸ In Spencer, the women hosted suppers, bazaars, banquets, and other socials in order to raise money. They held other fundraising events throughout the year, including picnics, oyster dinners, and apron sales. At one supper held in 1915, the women earned over two hundred dollars. They used this money to provide clothing for area children's homes and financial assistance for mission projects from Oklahoma to Japan.³⁴⁹ At one bazaar, the women garnered over three hundred fifty dollars in profit, selling goods such as aprons, linens, tablecloths, and pillows. When the church needed a kitchen update, the women pledged two hundred dollars toward its construction. Later they paid three hundred dollars to pave the parsonage driveway.³⁵⁰

The Spencer Danish Lutheran Ladies' Aid later changed their name to St. Paul's Ladies' Aid Society, but they continued to contribute significantly to the growth and expansion of their church. Their active and continuous efforts elevated their presence both in the church and community. Like the women in the Methodist and Congregational churches in Clay County, the St. Paul's Ladies' Aid gained distinction by volunteering to serve outside organizations. First, they participated in the upkeep of the public restroom facilities in downtown Spencer. Second, the Ladies' Aid catered the meals of the Farmers' Bureau. Since no facility in Spencer could provide meals to groups as large as the Farmers' Bureau in the early-twentieth century, the ladies prepared the meals in the church's "cramped, ill-equipped

³⁴⁷ *Centennial History of Bethany Lutheran Church, CHC, CCHS.*

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

kitchen” and transported the meals to the basement of the Clay County Bank.³⁵¹ The members of Bethany Lutheran Church appreciated the work of its women, but early records contained little praise for its Ladies’ Aid Society. Not until 1955, when the Society purchased items valued at over three thousand dollars, did church minutes indicate any significant outpouring of gratitude toward the women.

Elsewhere in Clay County, German immigrants organized to form St. John’s Evangelical Lutheran Church in Peterson in April 1888. The women of the congregation became a visible element of the congregation immediately, forming the Ladies’ Aid Society of St. John’s and raising the entire budget necessary to furnish the church, including the church bell, altar, pulpit coverings, and rugs and carpets.³⁵² The Society broke up in 1902 but reformed in 1906. Their work in missions eventually led to prominent all-day mission festivals held in large tents during the 1910s.³⁵³

While Lutheran congregations in Clay County created extensive networks of ethnic, social, and religious connections, most of the work centered in the county seats or other “big” small towns in these counties. In Yankton County, however, Lutheran women organized outside the county seat, creating dynamic and long-lasting female religious organizations that sought to uplift their farms, families, churches, and neighborhoods. Their work mirrored much of the work done by their sister organizations in town. The Norwegian women of these congregations organized ladies’ aid societies. At Vangen, the women named their society the Ringsaker’s Kvindeforening after the town of Ringsaker, Norway, from where a majority had

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² [Peterson Historical Committee], *Peterson Iowa 1856-1980*, 129, CCHS.

³⁵³ Ibid.

come.³⁵⁴ They helped raise funds for the church's first pump organ and bell, purchased in 1887 and 1892 respectively.³⁵⁵ The women at Norway formed the Meldal Norwegian Lutheran Ladies's Aid in March 1888, and it became an active society. The women pledged to "spread God's word and sound doctrine, respect, [and] preserve it among ourselves and fellowmen."³⁵⁶ During the earliest years, the women walked from their farmsteads to the church, towing their children along with them. A few had horses or wagons to accelerate the journey. According to member records, the women did their work in each other's homes, including everything from formal business meetings to socials and bazaars. When they gathered the women did needle work, making pillowcases, doilies, aprons, dresses, and quilts. The Ladies' Aid collected these items for sale once a year at an annual dinner on Thanksgiving Day, an occasion that caused the size of the community to double to about five hundred people.³⁵⁷ One account reported that, "for some ladies, the day would begin at six o'clock in the morning, and back at home by eight or so in the evening, having had a very full and busy day."³⁵⁸

East of the Meldal Ladies' Aid Society, the Tronhjem Evangelical Lutheran church had an active group of parishioners. Formed in 1872 north and west of Volin, the church enjoyed a steady increase in membership for the next twenty years as Norwegians continued to enter Yankton County, and by the end of the nineteenth century, it had a robust calendar of activities.³⁵⁹ The social life of the congregation took shape along with the organization of the

³⁵⁴ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 53.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ YCHS, *History of Yankton County*, 130.

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸ Ibid.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 140.

Tronhjem Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Ladies' Aid, known simply as West Prairie, in December 1873.³⁶⁰ The women first met in a dugout home to discuss the need for mission work, a curious cause considering that most of them lived in sod homes that lacked most standard amenities. Nevertheless, these women, imbued with a Christian spirit, began to meet in formal meetings, traveling across the open country by horse and buggy or on foot.³⁶¹ When another group of women, who had settled north of the county line, also joined the West Prairie Ladies' Aid Society, together these women adopted a constitution and regular meeting schedule, gathering at least once a month for fellowship, needlework, and social exchange. The women began every meeting with devotionals conducted by one or two men of the congregation. The rest of their time went toward sewing overalls, shirts, and other garments. At certain times, the women held auctions and donated the money they garnered to their mission causes.³⁶² A sister organization developed in 1886 among the women who lived too far to join in the regular meetings at West Prairie. They formed the North Prairie Ladies' Aid Society and engaged in much the same work.³⁶³ By the mid-1890s, the two groups, West Prairie and North Prairie, had evolved into the centers of church and community social life. They organized auctions, ice cream socials, suppers, back sales and holiday events. Soon, they took over festivities for the Fourth of July, providing homemade ice cream and a huge community meal. Eventually they had to purchase large tents to provide enough shade for all the attendees. Not until 1920 did English replace Norwegian as the official language used by

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 138.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

³⁶² Ibid.

³⁶³ Ibid.

the women in these two organizations.³⁶⁴ These ladies' aid societies remained the women's only outlet for influence in their church until 1942, when woman received the right to vote in church affairs.³⁶⁵

Just as in Clay and Yankton Counties, ethnicity dominated the creation of Lutheran churches in Lyon County. At Marshall, a group of German women at Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church inaugurated a Ladies' Aid Society in August 1913. The women invested themselves wholeheartedly in the organization, making "a number of changes" to and engaging in "substantial discussion" about the proposed constitution submitted by the pastor.³⁶⁶ The women pledged themselves to uplifting their congregations and offering support to local benevolent organizations through their spiritual and financial gifts. At their monthly meetings, the women planned their fundraising activities, and they used their gains to pay for a number of improvements to the church, including installing electric lines in 1916, purchasing the first furnace in 1917, and papering windows in 1918.³⁶⁷ The women also organized the congregational picnic as early as 1916. The picnic was a massive endeavor attended by over two hundred people. The Ladies' Aid Society sold ice cream and lemonade at the picnic, raising substantial sums for their many projects.³⁶⁸ In Eidsvold Township, a Ladies' Aid Society formed among the Norwegian women there. In particular, these women promoted religious education for the youth in their community, and they organized a Norwegian school to meet during the summer months. They also conducted fundraising

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ [Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church], "Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church," Box "Balatan Study Club, Good Thoughts Club," LCHS.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

efforts, making quilts, selling food, and hosting other social events to raise money to pay their teacher's salary.³⁶⁹ At Minneota, Icelandic women at St. Paul's Lutheran Church formed a Ladies' Aid Society as early as 1890. The women visited the sick, promoted sociability in the church, and raised money for church building projects. This group provided most of the furnishings for the church, including the pews, pulpit, and two stoves. The group continued to support the church into the twentieth century, raising money through bazaars, dinners, and other social events. Early suppers required three-days preparation as the church had no running water and only a wood-burning cook stove in the basement. In 1911, the pastor announced that the congregation had run out of money. Church leaders appealed to the Ladies' Aid, and the women paid for the entire budget, keeping the church afloat that entire year.³⁷⁰ By 1916, the women voted to conduct their meetings in English, to the dismay of some of the first members who fought resolutely against the change. As one former member explained, "The Icelanders have always clung tenaciously to their customs and language and for some of them any digression from the old standards or customs was considered to be a sign of unfaithfulness."³⁷¹

As Protestant women developed an influential presence in the life of the Methodist and Congregational churches in Clay, Yankton, and Lyon counties, so too did Catholic women play a prominent role in their respective communities. In some cases, Catholic women worked without a title but still together to support the church. In Clay County, a group of nameless Catholic women at Sacred Heart Church in Spencer served suppers,

³⁶⁹ Anderson, *The Centennial History of Lyon County*, 49, 52-53.

³⁷⁰ Vandersluis, *Ninety Years at St. Paul's*, 10-11, 29-36, 38.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

hosted markets, and held other socials to raise money for their parish.³⁷² Through these activities, Catholic women gained significant reputations within their communities. In other cases, like in Lyon County, Catholic women in Marshall formed a social organization in 1899, called the Isabella Court of the Women's Catholic Order of Freeman, the sister organization to their male counterpart, the Columbus Court of the Catholic Order of Foresters.³⁷³ Through this group, these women probably carried out work similar to their Protestant counterparts.

In Yankton County, the two most well known groups of women were the Catholic nuns who came to the town to found lasting educational institutions. Two groups worked in Yankton, the Sisters of Mercy and the Benedictine Sisters. The Sisters of Mercy came to Yankton County in the mid-1870s, and by 1878 they had established a parochial elementary school for girls called the Academy of the Sacred Heart.³⁷⁴ With a curriculum of “music, drawing, painting, [and] plain and ornamental needle work,” the school found success at attracting pupils from the growing German Catholic population.³⁷⁵ Three years later, upon the urging of the local priest, the Sisters moved to enroll boys as well. In 1879, the Sisters of Mercy, riding high from the success of their elementary school, decided to pursue further educational institutions. They purchased land on the west side of the town and began construction of an impressive three-story building.³⁷⁶ Supporters had pledged to donate to the second school, but slow economic times halted intended financial gifts. With no other source

³⁷² “Notices,” *Spencer News*, Aug. 12, 1913; “Notices,” *Spencer News*, Sept. 16, 1913; “Sacred Heart Church Notes,” *Spencer News-Herald*, April 19, 1916.

³⁷³ Radzilowski, *Prarie Town*, 112.

³⁷⁴ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 61.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 59, 61.

of income, the Sisters borrowed heavily at high interest rates.³⁷⁷ For the next three years, the nuns enjoyed high reputations in the maturing town, but a scandal ended their tenure in Yankton. In the fall of 1882 one of the nuns, Sister Mary Paul, secretly married a Russian physician.³⁷⁸ The scandal sent shock waves through the community, and the Sisters, faced with potential expulsion, left in March 1883, amid a final blow in which the Sisters had to surrender ownership of their schools because they failed to meet the obligations of those high-interest loans.³⁷⁹

The Benedictine Sisters arrived in Yankton County after they answered a call from Bishop Martin Marty to fill the educational institutions left vacant by the departure of the Sisters of Mercy. Originally from Switzerland, these nuns brought with them the desire to educate and established a teacher's academy in the three-story building west of town.³⁸⁰ They also opened an orphanage unexpectedly in August 1891, after someone left a baby on their doorstep. The Sisters reached the pinnacle of their influence in Yankton County in 1897, when they formed Sacred Heart Hospital, the premier hospital in the area.³⁸¹ Finally, in 1905, they incorporated their hospital with their educational prerogatives, creating the Sacred Heart Hospital School of Nursing.³⁸²

In each county under investigation, Methodist, Congregational, Lutheran, and Catholic women formed female social organizations and engaged in visible work within their

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 59.

³⁷⁸ Ibid. Joseph Ward, pastor at the Congregational Church, performed the ceremony. He did not recognize Sister Mary Paul without her nun's attire.

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 59.

³⁸⁰ Ibid., 82.

³⁸¹ Ibid. For more on the origins of Sacred Heart Church, see Robert F. Karolevitz, *A Commitment to Care: The First 100 Years of Sacred Heart Hospital, 1897-1997* (Freeman, S. D.: Pine Hill Press, 1997).

³⁸² Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way It Was*, 78.

communities. They laid a foundation of female sociability and networking for later efforts to secure women's rights, especially the right to vote. Other denominations, however, proliferated in individual counties, and their work deserves mention. In Clay County, the Baptists played an important role in the religious life of their community. The First Baptist Church of Spencer celebrated the efforts of its women when it reported about its first efforts to secure a church building. In April 1887, the male church leaders reported the debt from the construction costs, nearly \$1,500, paid because they had borrowed money from the Ladies' Aid Society. In addition, the Ladies' Aid "came to the rescue again the next month," agreeing to cover the pastor's salary for the following month.³⁸³ In the 1890s, the Ladies' Aid Society probably helped pay for improvements to the building and lot, including the installation of electric lights, a church bell, and an alcove for the choir.³⁸⁴ One columnist, after reviewing the work of the Ladies' Aid in the Spencer Baptist Church, humorously wrote, "It has been a standing joke in some churches—and perhaps it is also true of the Baptist people—that the Ladies Aid is the financial bulwark of the church and the men lean heavily on their women folk."³⁸⁵ Elsewhere in Clay County, the Friends church had active female members and prominent female pastoral leadership. At Greenville, between 1902 and 1920 the Greenville Friends Church had at least six female co-pastors. These women led with their husbands and had a great deal of influence in church affairs.³⁸⁶ In Lyon County, women of the Episcopal Church gained recognition for their fundraising endeavors. At the James Episcopal Church of Marshall, the women contributed almost the entire budget necessary for the construction of

³⁸³ *Centennial First Baptist Church*, 12, CCHS; "Spencer Baptist Church Nearly 100 Years Old," *Sunday Times*, July 19, 1966.

³⁸⁴ *Centennial First Baptist Church*, 16, CCHS

³⁸⁵ "Spencer Baptist Church Nearly 100 Years Old," *Sunday Times*, July 19, 1966.

³⁸⁶ [Greenville Historical Committee], *Greenville, Iowa, USA*, page V13, CCHS.

the first church building. They also purchased the stained-glass windows and paid the costs of parsonage.³⁸⁷

Women in Yankton, Lyon, and Clay Counties formed civic organizations, worked through social organizations, and served as active members of their respective female church associations. They promoted an active agenda that sought to “uplift” or “improve” their communities through various plans, from planting trees to raising funds for their churches. The documented activities of these women affirm the social quality of their work and place them at the center of an emerging community life in the late-nineteenth-century Midwest. A final, less tangible aspect of their social role is the “neighboring” or “visiting” that women did. Historians, such as Mary Neth, have captured the importance of visiting in meeting the economic and social needs of farming families.³⁸⁸ Through informal yet frequent community gatherings, such as literaries, debates, school functions, holiday celebrations, and other such events, neighbors came together in common support. Neighbors truly knew each other’s “sorrows, joys, and troubles—helping each other in bad times as well as good, in every possible way.”³⁸⁹ Clay County had a variety of social groups that allowed women the opportunity to visit within their neighborhoods. Between 1900 and 1920, approximately thirty women’s clubs met socially in the county. For example, members of the Kill-Kare Club of Spencer spent hours enjoying fellowship and conversation over needlework.³⁹⁰ In Logan Township, the women organized the Loganette Club, and the members were quite an active group, holding lessons on topics such as “How Safe is Your Water Supply” and

³⁸⁷ Radzilowski, *Prairie Town*, 110.

³⁸⁸ Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 40-69.

³⁸⁹ The quotation comes from a settler in Beadle County, Dakota Territory, in, Lauck, *Prairie Republic*, 51.

³⁹⁰ “In Social Circles,” *Spencer News*, April 5, 1916.

enjoying social activities. They organized community picnics, complete with baseball games and homemade ice cream. The Loganette Club, argued one resident, “fostered long time friendships and a closeness of the neighbors.”³⁹¹ In Peterson Township, the Helping Hand Society formed among farmwomen with the objects of “mutual help and increased sociability.”³⁹² In Gillett Grove Township, the rural women organized pie socials, plays, carnivals, and basketball games through the Woman’s Home Circle.³⁹³ These examples show organizations formed to promote the social life of their rural communities, and they succeeded in tying neighbors together in bonds that provided mutual uplift and support. These sources address the significance of neighboring in cultivating social bonds, and they prompt historians to take notice of how women, at the center of neighboring and visiting, created another fundamental layer of community.

While the women in Clay, Yankton, and Lyon Counties—and in counties across the Midwest—made considerable contributions to their churches, civic organizations, and other social groups during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most rarely received credit for their involvement. Women typically worked behind-the-scenes, garnering little attention, but they did gain some notice through their social activities and money-raising activities, although subtle and nuanced. Most important, engaging in continual fundraising endeavors gave the women visibility and attention while raising substantial financial authority within their congregations. In addition, the women effectively blurred whatever perceived line between public and private existed by engaging in public ways with

³⁹¹ Helen Swanson, *Logan Township: A Little History, A Lot of Memories* (N. p: Helen Swanson, 2010), 52-53.

³⁹² [Peterson Historical Committee], *Peterson Iowa 1856-1980*, page 94, CCHS.

³⁹³ [Greenville Historical Committee], *Greenville, Iowa, USA*, page V6, CCHS.

community institutions and groups. Elucidating these minute gradations of female involvement challenges dichotomies of “feminism” and exposes fine interpretations of “activism.” Within this new framework that acknowledges female activism without naming it “feminist,” the activities of these women’s groups provide a clear context in which to place the woman suffrage movement.

Chapter 3: Woman Suffrage to 1910

On November 16, 1889, seventy-year-old Susan B. Anthony arrived in Yankton County, South Dakota. Almost two weeks earlier, Dakota Territory had split into North and South Dakota, and Anthony's entrance in the new state came at an opportune time. A brief period emerged in 1890 in which South Dakota's politicians debated the merits of various aspects of political participation and governance in the new state, including the voting rights of its citizenry. By cultivating strong support for woman suffrage among the inhabitants of the new state, Anthony hoped to persuade the state's leaders to enfranchise its women as they finished constructing their constitution. Instead of an interested body of potential advocates for the cause, however, Anthony found "little interest in her quest to achieve voting rights for women."³⁹⁴ Judge V. V. Barnes, a local judge sympathetic to the cause, relayed her a message warning her to postpone her trip. He sent a telegraph admitting that there was no individual or committee willing to endorse her visit, but Anthony traveled to the county anyway. When she stepped off the Milwaukee train and onto the platform, no one stood there to greet her. Anthony had to stand on that cold and lonely platform until a station wagon arrived to give her a ride to a local hotel, and she boarded at the Merchants Hotel at the intersection of Third Street and Broadway.³⁹⁵ Without a sponsor to provide assistance in navigating local affairs, Anthony found it impossible to arrange a lecture in the town, and the *Press and Dakotan* reported that Anthony spent her night in Yankton "at rest" in the hotel. The newspaper guessed, however, that had "she spoken, she would have said suffrage was a right bequeathed by nature belonging to both men and women...[and] that to vote was simply

³⁹⁴ Karolevitz, *Yankton—The Way it Was*, 81.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

to register an opinion.”³⁹⁶ Although Anthony encountered a community lacking support for woman suffrage, she did not give up her fight for woman suffrage in Yankton County. About seven months later she returned to the very county that had denied her the opportunity to press her vision of female enfranchisement on its people.

The woman suffrage movement in South Dakota, Iowa, and Minnesota developed unevenly and experienced a host of setbacks and problems during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. For every convert its leaders gained and for every small victory they enjoyed, the movement seemed to take two steps back. While the woman suffrage benefited from the efforts of individuals in each county who embraced it and attempted to instill its message with their neighbors and fellow community members, during the period between about 1880 and 1910, it failed to gain much traction. During these thirty years, the movement sputtered along, pushed forward and pulled backward in a series of “fits and starts” that underscored the inability of suffrage leaders, both at the state and national levels, to resonate woman suffrage with most people in these rural, Midwestern communities. Not until after 1910 did the cause shed its radical label and become a viable political and social reform. In essence, the thirty-year transformative experience that eventually rendered woman suffrage a desired political measure occurred rather haphazardly and without clear direction in the three counties under consideration, Yankton County in South Dakota, Clay County in Iowa, and Lyon County in Minnesota. In some cases, such as Yankton County, woman suffrage became a fairly constant, albeit unsuccessful political contest, with state amendment referenda taking place seven times between 1890 and 1918, although no woman suffrage amendment campaigns occurred between 1898 and 1910. In other cases, such as Lyon

³⁹⁶ Ibid.

County, during this thirty-year period residents suffered from a lack of opportunities to interact with an organized political campaign for woman suffrage. In between, people in Clay County debated the merits of the movement in informal, yet passionate ways. In all three counties, structured suffrage work waned from about 1895 to 1910.

Despite the absence of organized and well-ordered work in at least two of the three counties, the people in most of these rural counties discussed the prospect of woman suffrage quite regularly and with passion and conviction. They had a high degree of knowledge about the arguments surrounding it, and they debated it openly within the pages of newspapers and during spontaneous discussions in churches, schoolhouses, and other civic and social groups formed among their neighbors. Although most of the rural residents in these three counties viewed woman suffrage with a range of opinions—from hesitant unease to outright hostility—they nevertheless engaged with woman suffrage in frequent and informal ways that fall outside the conventionally accepted spaces that supposedly contain the narrative of the woman suffrage movement in the United States. By refocusing the discussion of woman suffrage to the margins, to the rural places, local neighborhoods, and informal social networks that formed the basis of community in the Midwest, the woman suffrage movement gains a deeper perspective and new dimensions. In addition, exploring woman suffrage in this way embraces multiple activisms on a spectrum between outright support and vehement opposition. Placing the discussion of woman suffrage in the context of these three Midwestern counties illuminates the ways in which individuals and groups of people contested, negotiated, and debated woman suffrage in significant and transformative ways.

Yankton County, South Dakota

In contrast to Clay and Lyon Counties, Yankton County engaged in organized woman suffrage activity in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Prior to 1910, inhabitants in Yankton County experienced the woman suffrage movement as serious campaign efforts three times, in 1890, 1894, and 1898. During these structured campaigns, people considered woman suffrage from a variety of perspectives derived from their identities as members of distinct ethnic, social, cultural, and political groups. Most of the chatter played out on the pages of the local newspapers, especially the *Republican Press and Dakotan* and the *Democratic Dakota Herald*. For example, in 1885, when the legislature considered a bill to enfranchise the women in Dakota Territory, the editor of the *Press and Dakotan* commented, “There is considerable agitation among some of our citizens over the possibility the bill allowing women to vote will pass in the legislature. It’s the novelty of the proposition that appalls the objectors. Very few women will vote if they have the chance.”³⁹⁷ Somewhat unexpectedly, the territorial legislature passed the bill, and woman suffrage seemed all but secured until Governor Gilbert A. Pierce, a former Chicago newspaper editor, vetoed the bill citing defects with its framework.³⁹⁸ The leaders of the National American

³⁹⁷ Ibid. The quote comes from the *Press and Dakotian* on February 12, 1885. Major J. A. Pickler, of Faulkton, introduced the bill into the territorial legislature in 1885. He had connections to woman suffrage as his wife, Alice, served as the Superintendent of the Franchise Department for the WCTU in South Dakota at the time. See, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Ida Hustad Harper, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 4: 1883-1900 (Indianapolis: The Hollenbeck Press, 1902), 552-53.

³⁹⁸ George Washington Kingsbury, *History of Dakota Territory*, vol. 2 (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1915), 1401-1403. Five years later, former residents of Dakota Territory still harbored resentment at the Governor. John A. Owen, a resident of Kingsbury County in 1885, commented in an editorial sent to the *Press and Dakotan* in June 1890, “Would it not be well for the voters of South Dakota to remember that their own legislature, the legislature of the whole territory, did give woman the ballot in 1885 and that the will of the people, as legally expressed through their own chosen representatives, was defeated by the veto of a governor who was an editor of a Chicago newspaper? An interloper from

Woman Suffrage Association, or NAWSA, later remarked that Pierce effectively disenfranchised “50,000 American citizens by one stroke of his pen.”³⁹⁹

Five years later, the editor of the *Press and Dakotan* watched closely as another bill to enact woman suffrage in the newly minted state of South Dakota came before the legislature. “The woman suffrage bill was referred to the general order of business, and will come up to-morrow,” wrote the editor in January 1890.⁴⁰⁰ The bill passed that spring and called for a vote on November 4 to amend the constitution. The first serious amendment campaign in the state began in earnest that February, directed at the state level by a loosely organized group known as the South Dakota Equal Suffrage Association, or the SDESA. Occupying the most prominent positions of the executive committee were members of the Farmers’ Alliance, including President Henry Loucks, and the WCTU, including President Helen M. Barker.⁴⁰¹ Because of the involvement of the WCTU in the 1890 amendment campaign, woman suffrage and temperance became entwined pillars of female moral reform in South Dakota. Despite the good intentions of its leaders, the SDESA suffered from a lack of organizational experience and almost no financial support. They soon recognized that they required assistance, and Loucks issued a personal call to Anthony to organize the state campaign. Anthony obliged, formed a committee with her as chair, and began raising funds for the work.⁴⁰² Because so much source material, especially newspaper reports and correspondence shared among suffragists and local advocates alike, exists from this

another state. If there is in the hearts of the men of South Dakota the element of chivalry they will not forget.” See “Woman Suffrage,” *Press and Dakotan*, June 18, 1890.

³⁹⁹ Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 543-44.

⁴⁰⁰ “Legislative,” *Press and Dakotan*, Jan. 30, 1890.

⁴⁰¹ Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 552-54.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 553-54.

campaign, a detailed examination of it provides the most effective example of how an organized suffrage campaign played out in the context of a rural Midwestern county in the late-nineteenth century.

As early as March 1890, the *Press and Dakotan* notified the residents of Yankton County that they could expect direct interaction with the movement through the six or more workers tapped by suffrage leaders to organize the state. “The executive committee of the state suffrage association,” reported the *Press and Dakotan*, “has arranged to put half a dozen organizers” in the state by April 1, 1890.⁴⁰³ Suffrage leaders tasked these organizers to divide up the state and create equal suffrage associations in every county. In addition to county suffrage work, the executive committee also planned to send speakers out into the field in an attempt to cultivate a “vigorous” lecture tour.⁴⁰⁴ They also secured funding from the NAWSA and other state suffrage organizations for the work of lecturers to canvass the state. By March 1890, the California Woman Suffrage Association had pledged to pay the salary and expenses of one lecturer, Matilda “Lillie” Hindman, from Pennsylvania.⁴⁰⁵ In addition, the South Dakota suffragists employed speakers who could identify with the ethnic and cultural patterns present in the state. In March 1890, they hired Julia B. Nelson from Minnesota to work specifically among the Scandinavian groups that had settled across South Dakota. The newspaper noted that donations of money poured into the campaign, and “the

⁴⁰³ “The Equal Suffrage Campaign,” *Press and Dakotan*, March 23, 1890.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁵ Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 554; “The Woman Suffrage Campaign,” *Press and Dakotan*, March 22, 1890. According to the NAWSA, California suffragists donated one thousand dollars to the campaign.

fund is continually being added to by contributions from friends of the cause outside of the state.”⁴⁰⁶

The matter of funding actually received more attention than just assessments of the movement’s apparent fundraising success in Yankton County. During the spring of 1890, one of the state’s first woman suffrage advocates, Marietta Bones, turned suffrage opponent when she found herself in a kerfuffle with Anthony over the way Anthony spent the donations to the South Dakota campaign. Bones wanted Anthony to hand over the money to the leaders of the SDESA and allow those suffragists to spend it, but Anthony refused, preferring to control the purchasing power of the organization. In a series of interviews, Bones accused Anthony of mishandling the nearly forty thousand dollars given to the campaign, and the dispute played out in the pages of the *Press and Dakotan*. According to Bones, “Miss Anthony has had the spending of \$40,000, but she has rendered no account as to where the money has gone.”⁴⁰⁷ She continued, “I know of many cases where money, sometimes in large amounts, has been sent to Miss Anthony, for which she has rendered no account and given no receipt.”⁴⁰⁸ Bones continued to attack Anthony and the woman suffrage campaign, arguing that woman suffrage was neither a political issue nor a “fit subject to be in a political platform, for no party ought to be opposed either to a social or personal reform” like woman suffrage.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ The Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association contributed to the financial support of Julia B. Nelson’s work during the South Dakota campaign. Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 772; “The Equal Suffrage Campaign,” *Press and Dakotan*, March 23, 1890.

⁴⁰⁷ “Mrs. Bones Talks,” *Press and Dakotan*, March 22, 1890.

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid.

Two months later, in May 1890, Anthony arrived in the state with no apparent worry of the accusations leveled by Marietta Bones.⁴¹⁰ An article published in the *Press and Dakotan* laid out Anthony's plans for the state. "The Ancient Exponent of Woman's Rights expects to conquer the Dakotas," remarked the author.⁴¹¹ She also revealed that she had more than just woman suffrage in South Dakota on her mind as she worked on this campaign. She hoped that victory in South Dakota could provoke a domino effect of success in other western states. "South Dakota will hold a constitutional convention next autumn," she explained, "which will result, we believe, in striking out the word 'male' from their constitution, thus giving us political rights. If South Dakota does this North Dakota will fall into line, and so, ultimately, will Kansas and several western states."⁴¹² With these goals in mind, Anthony took the 1890 woman suffrage campaign in South Dakota seriously, and she personally traveled with and endorsed her best speakers in the state. Many of these speakers, including Anna Howard Shaw and Carrie Chapman Catt, visited Yankton County and spent considerable time there. For seven months, from April to October 1890, Yankton County became somewhat engulfed in suffrage activity.

In Yankton County, women first supported the campaign through their work in organized societies. For example, the WCTU, with its direct ties to the leadership of the movement, pledged its support for the campaign at both the state and local levels, and Yankton County's WCTU was no exception. In April 1890 at the district convention of the

⁴¹⁰ Susan B. Anthony Diary, #000073, Reel 3, MSS17,559, Susan B. Anthony Papers, Manuscript Reading Room, James Madison Building, Library of Congress, Washington, DC. Her entries contained fairly mundane details. In one of her first entries, she wrote that she had a "good audience," and traveled with Anna Howard Shaw.

⁴¹¹ "Susan B. Says So," *Press and Dakotan*, April 4, 1890.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

WCTU, which members from Yankton County attended, woman suffrage enjoyed a prominent position of interest and discussion among the delegates. During one presentation, Julia B. King of Yankton, along with Anna A. Smith of Parker and Mrs. M. M. Davis of Centerville, spoke on the topic “Equal Suffrage a Protection to Purity.”⁴¹³

The first intensive push for woman suffrage in Yankton County occurred over a period of about six days, from April 9 to April 15, 1890, during which time Yankton County’s residents had the opportunity to hear distinguished speakers Anna Howard Shaw and Matilda “Lillie” Hindman give their opinions about the woman suffrage cause. Hindman began her speaking tour with an ambitious canvass of the county. Over a three-day period, from April 9 to April 11, she made visits to Mission Hill, Walshtown, and Lesterville before returning to the county seat for two more lectures on April 13 and April 15. In an interview with the *Press and Dakotan*, Hindman admitted that she encountered much opposition in among the farmers of Yankton County, but she hoped to “be of some assistance in overcoming the opposition to the movement which she says is apparent in this section.”⁴¹⁴ Despite the resistance she faced, Hindman maintained a positive outlook on her work. According to the *Press and Dakotan*, Hindman stated her “unswerving opinion that the question will be favorably carried this fall by a large majority.”⁴¹⁵ On April 11, the day Hindman engaged audiences at Lesterville, Shaw gave two lectures, one in the afternoon at the Congregational Church and one in the evening at the bazaar organized by the Ladies’ Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This bazaar was the same event at which the

⁴¹³ “W. C. T. U.,” *Press and Dakotan*, April 5, 1890. A month later, at the Yankton County WCTU convention, members again discussed equal suffrage. See chapter 2 for more information.

⁴¹⁴ “Miss Hindman’s Lecture,” *Press and Dakotan*, April 9, 1890.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*

women secured donations from twenty-five businesses and advertised their names on hand-embroidered quilts.⁴¹⁶ On that ordinary Friday evening at the local church bazaar, patrons could enjoy a slice of “Jack Horner’s pie” while listening as nationally renowned woman suffrage lecturer Anna Howard Shaw delivered her message.⁴¹⁷ The *Press and Dakotan* praised Shaw as “one of the most eloquent and successful speakers on the question of equal suffrage now in the field.”⁴¹⁸ Its editors promoted her lectures in three separate articles over the course of two days, noting that all “who can attend should hear her.”⁴¹⁹ While no one recorded the exact number of people who heard Shaw’s lectures, the degree to which the *Press and Dakotan* publicized her presence indicates that a large majority of the town’s population knew about and probably made a point to attend.

The flurry of activity that took place in Yankton County during those few days in April resonated with some residents. At some point during the month after Hindman’s and Shaw’s lectures, a group of people in Yankton County organized an Equal Suffrage Association. They met bi-monthly at the Methodist Episcopal Church and entertained speakers of both local and state reputation. On May 19, they expected to hear Helen M. Baker, president of the WCTU and state suffrage leader, at a meeting of their association.⁴²⁰ A month later, on June 23, these women, along with other “leading women of the state” met in Yankton and issued a call “for a mass convention of the friends of equal suffrage” to take place on July 8, one day before Yankton played host to a convention of the Independent

⁴¹⁶ “Briefly Told,” *Press and Dakotan*, April 10, 1890. See chapter 2 for more information on this bazaar.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid.

⁴¹⁸ “Another Equal Suffrage Speaker,” *Press and Dakotan*, April 10, 1890.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid.; “The Equal Suffrage Lectures,” *Press and Dakotan*, April 10, 1890; “Briefly Told,” *Press and Dakotan*, April 11, 1890.

⁴²⁰ “Briefly Told,” *Press and Dakotan*, May 12, 1890.

Party.⁴²¹ The editor of the *Press and Dakotan* noted wryly, “The political situation is rapidly becoming interesting.”⁴²²

By June 1890, the status of woman suffrage among political circles in South Dakota undeniably had reached a critical moment. Susan B. Anthony, as architect of the South Dakota campaign, had planned to align prominent politicians and political organizations to the cause in order to secure the votes required to pass the amendment in November. One of the largest groups in the state, the Farmer’s Alliance, pledged its allegiance with woman suffrage, and Henry Loucks, president of the organization, personally assured her of his support. Anthony even enlisted Elizabeth Wardall, wife of the Farmers’ Alliance Vice President, Alonzo Wardall, as state superintendent of press work for the campaign. Her plan backfired, however, in June 1890 when the Farmers’ Alliance and Knights of Labor formed a new party and called themselves the Independent Party.⁴²³ As separate associations, each group had endorsed and promised to “do all in their power” to pass a woman suffrage amendment, but as a single political party, they quickly discarded their affiliation with woman suffrage so as to give their party credibility among the field of Democratic and Republican candidates.⁴²⁴ Anthony seethed at the formation of the Independent Party, writing that the “Farmers Alliance Party...has ignored in its platform both Prohibition & woman suffrage, & for the avowed object of winning the votes of...Foreigners among them.”⁴²⁵ She had counted on their support, especially with the Democratic Party “planted” squarely

⁴²¹ “Women Issue a Call,” *Press and Dakotan*, June 23, 1890.

⁴²² Ibid.

⁴²³ Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 555-57; Dorinda Riessen Reed, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in South Dakota* (Vermillion: University of South Dakota, 1958), 29.

⁴²⁴ Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 556.

⁴²⁵ Susan B. Anthony to Alice Pickler, June 14, 1890, Folder 37, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS.

“against woman suffrage” and the Republican Party threatening to follow suit.⁴²⁶ Ten years later, Anthony still harbored a grudge against the merger of the Farmers’ Alliance and the Knights of Labor, calling it the “greatest disappointment of the campaign.”⁴²⁷

Despite this setback, the activities of woman suffrage organizers, workers, and lecturers continued to increase over the next four months. Press releases from the state headquarters indicated the resolve with which they worked as they arranged to send their best speakers “to every county and township in the state, and put suffrage literature, weekly, into the hands of every voter, both native and foreign.”⁴²⁸ With those directives, local suffrage advocates and state and national leaders attempted to infiltrate Yankton County with their messages. In particular, suffragists targeted two ethnic groups, Germans and Scandinavians, who made up large portions of the county’s population and typically could not read or speak English.⁴²⁹ Above all, state officers encouraged local suffragists to “do everything...honorable to forward the cause,” including holding suffrage debates, hosting yellow tea parties, preparing suffrage dinners, and promoting the suffrage cause through general publicity.⁴³⁰ Beginning in July and accelerating in August, September, and October, six different female lecturers employed by the woman suffrage campaign made significant inroads in agitating the people of Yankton County to support the amendment.

The work began with a return to the county by Susan B. Anthony in June 1890. In contrast to her visit in November 1889, her tour of the county in June produced favorable

⁴²⁶ Ibid.

⁴²⁷ Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 556-57.

⁴²⁸ “Headquarters Equal Suffrage Association of South Dakota,” Folder 42, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴²⁹ Ibid.

⁴³⁰ Ibid. Yellow was the official color of woman suffrage, so yellow descriptive of the tea parties referred to the decorations used at the party, not the color of the tea.

results. She spoke to a sizable audience in one of the largest venues in Yankton on a Saturday evening and received praise from those in attendance.⁴³¹ A month later, a second lecturer, Reverend J. T. McCrory, received significant attention in a report printed in the *Press and Dakotan*. In fact, the editor quoted his speech almost word-for-word. Addressing a “good sized audience on the enfranchisement of women” at the Methodist Episcopal church, McCrory labeled woman suffrage a “moral and social” reform that mirrored progressive achievements in technology.⁴³² Calling the telephone, steam engine, and electricity “marks of progress,” he argued that the woman suffrage movement, like all “grand reforms,” was “evidence of progress that cannot be overlooked.”⁴³³ Using the opening lines of the constitution, McCrory argued that women, as citizens governed by the same laws as men, deserved the right to participate in their government. He also distinguished woman suffrage as more than the “mere privilege of voting;” it was, he declared, “a revolution in the very foundation of things, or rather, it is to be a reconstruction upon the foundation our fathers laid.”⁴³⁴

While McCrory’s speech aroused audience members to the cause, it made contentious claims about what exactly constituted citizenship. It also underscored the degree to which nineteenth-century Americans held ambiguous and fluid conceptions of citizenship. Like McCrory, most people in the late-nineteenth century argued that women were citizens, but they did so despite the contradiction inherent in female disenfranchisement. In Yankton County, lecturers like McCrory illuminated this inconsistency in their speeches, and their

⁴³¹ “Briefly Told,” *Press and Dakotan*, June 2, 1890.

⁴³² “Equal Suffrage Lecture,” *Press and Dakotan*, July 2, 1890.

⁴³³ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

words pointed to a broader contest over democratic theory, legal rights, and political participation. Despite the claim of citizenship, women actually faced numerous limitations when it came to “active” participation in government. For example, in 1890 women in South Dakota could own land, dispose of separate property without the consent of their husbands, and seek divorce, but they could not act as administrators or executors of estates, gain custody of their children unless in cases of desertion, or sell property jointly held with their husbands. In addition, disenfranchised female landowners, labeled as citizens, had to pay taxes and could not control their earnings unless they lived separately from their husbands.⁴³⁵ In essence, the woman suffrage movement revealed the limitations of citizenship in guaranteeing legal and political rights. It also shed light on the prevailing, albeit contradictory, belief that women could and should enjoy citizenship without the assumed rights that accompanied it.

In addition to their work agitating for voting rights, woman suffrage advocates also challenged conventional interpretations of the role of women in the home, family, and community. Like the residents of Yankton County, most rural Midwesterners perceived women as bastions of the home, preservers of morality, and caretakers of the family and community. McCrory’s speech effectively revealed a serious aspect of the woman suffrage movement, an aspect that threatened a fundamental revolution in women’s perceived role as the safeguard of home and family life. The entrance of women into polling places signified more than just a physical reshaping of politics as a practice; it also reflected the anxiety and uncertainty experienced by the upheaval and change taking place during this transformative period in American history. As massive corporations began to dictate economic and political

⁴³⁵ Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 559-61.

policies with increasing authority, as massive immigration, accelerated urbanization, and new immigrant groups began to press for prestige and power in social, religious, and political matters, and as frontiers closed and never-ending expansion seemed a thing of the past, people grew uneasy with what they perceived as a challenge to timeless republican values.

At the core stood the family as the essence of American life. As a reform that promised to upend this foundational aspect of American identity, woman suffrage received significant criticism from those who deemed it radically unacceptable. In order to temper the alleged radical nature of woman suffrage, advocates later inverted the argument, asserting that the reform actually bolstered the home and uplifted the family by “cleaning up” politics and enacting legislation that could protect the interests of women without losing their coveted labels as wives and mothers. Although McCrory stressed the radical revolution woman suffrage could entail, most suffrage lecturers who spoke in Yankton County in the years following the 1890 campaign recognized that the best way to reach their audiences was to downplay the radical and transformative power of the reform by arguing that woman suffrage actually promoted the perpetuation of women’s traditional roles as wife, mother, sister, and daughter.⁴³⁶

Despite these inconsistencies, the woman suffrage movement in Yankton County pressed forward in its campaign to pass the amendment on November 4, 1890. The work progressed unevenly, with bursts of activity pressing the movement forward while lulls in activity threatened to move the cause back. Absent was any sustained, well-thought-out effort to promote woman suffrage throughout the entire county and for the duration of the

⁴³⁶ McDonagh and Price, “Woman Suffrage in the Progressive Era,” 420; Ellen Carol Dubois, *Feminism and Woman Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 67-69.

campaign. For example, suffragists followed the flood of activity in April and May with a period of over two months in which only two speakers, Anthony and McCrory, entertained audiences. Not until late August did activity pick up dramatically in the county. The correspondence left by suffrage lecturers and organizers who visited the county between August and October paints a vivid and complex picture of the attitudes of Yankton County's residents toward the cause. From hesitant interest to outright hostility, people in the county interacted directly with the organized movement for suffrage in complicated ways. The leadership for the local movement emerged from the elite women of the county, a dedicated but small group of local woman suffrage advocates who attempted to tap into established female social networks to promote the cause. In the end, local workers and state and national organizers experienced an uphill battle in their attempts to agitate and educate for woman suffrage in Yankton County.

Many suffrage advocates experienced difficulties as they campaigned over the rough South Dakota prairie. The conditions of rural life, from long distance to low infrastructure to limited educational opportunities to poor disposable incomes, created an environment that inhibited suffrage work and a people who lacked the time, means, and desire to become organized workers for woman suffrage. While most rural people failed to join the cause as members of the organized campaign, they were neither ignorant nor uninformed about it. In fact, they attended suffrage lectures, listened eagerly to speakers, and debated the cause among their friends and neighbors. They engaged with it on their own terms, encountering the movement from their positions as rural peoples and as political actors identified by their ethnic, religious, and social groups. Dated August 20, 1890, the first letter sent to headquarters from Yankton County echoed both the obstacles faced by suffrage workers and

the ways in which rural people approached the movement. Written by Dr. Nettie C. Hall, a state worker employed for the campaign, the letter expressed frustration, disappointment, and irritation. While Hall began on a positive note by describing the equal suffrage club she organized at Volin, she quickly turned to the obstacles she had faced while working in Yankton County. “I could organize wherever I get an audience,” she opined, “but it has seemed as though every thing conspires against me in this law.”⁴³⁷ She continued, “The people receive my kindly but there are so few in this place to do anything.”⁴³⁸ While Hall ably organized a club in Volin, she failed to do much of anything at the heavily-German Lesterville. The people “could not provide any place for a meeting,” she grumbled.⁴³⁹ At another event in an enclave of Catholic farmers, Hall traveled seven miles on horseback in the rain to lecture on woman suffrage. When she arrived, a “leading farmer” greeted her with the news that “there would be no one out” because of the weather, so she grudgingly turned around and rode all the way back to Yankton.⁴⁴⁰ Nine days later, Hall’s mood had greatly improved, and she shared her achievements in a letter to Susan B. Anthony. “I had a splendid audience last eve 8 miles in the country at a Farmers Alliance meeting,” she reported, noting that she had “made converts” among the attendees.⁴⁴¹ She also made sure to distribute

⁴³⁷ Nettie C. Hall to Elizabeth Wardall, Aug. 20, 1890, Folder 8, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴³⁸ Ibid.

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid. Hall experienced worse conditions and treatment after leaving Yankton County. At one stop, probably somewhere in Union County, two counties east of Yankton County, a “drunken Irishman took the floor and was...very insulting and not a man dared open his mouth for this man was a powerful fellow in physique besides the presence of three sons, one of whom drove the Sabbath School out doors, broke the stove, tore up the sheets, and smacked the door & windows.” Hall to Wardall, Oct. 23, 1890, Folder 8, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁴¹ Hall to Anthony, Aug. 29, 1890, Folder 8, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS. Even though the Farmers’ Alliance at the state level had abandoned the suffrage cause, suffragists still

literature among those members present and “puff” Anna Shaw for her upcoming talk in Yankton.⁴⁴² Hall’s letter displays the unfavorable conditions she encountered while in Yankton County’s rural places and exhibits the range of responses rural people gave to the movement. Only at her last lecture to the Farmers’ Alliance did she encounter an appropriate social group through which to spread her message.

Despite a successful time with the Farmers’ Alliance, Hall gave high priority to organizing the rural areas of the county, especially those places in which fresh converts could easily hesitate and slip back into reluctance. “A speaker or several should go to White Hall School...three miles from Gayville,” she commanded. “I heard I stirred them up the other day but I am the only one they have had.”⁴⁴³ In other places, such as Mission Hill, Hall directed Anthony to send more speakers to combat pockets of heavy opposition. “Mission Hill needs help badly,” wrote Hall, noting that “many of their best men are opposed.”⁴⁴⁴ While some villages like Mission Hill went decidedly against woman suffrage, organization and agitation continued to spark activity for the movement in other areas in Yankton County. At Gayville, the conversion of a prominent county official lent political and social authority to the movement when County Superintendent of Schools, Mr. N. Hills, volunteered to lead

attempted to drum up support among its members in local communities. Hall also repeated her experiences at the Farmers’ Alliance meeting in a letter to Elizabeth Wardall. After arriving in Yankton, she immediately rode into the country and “addressed a Farmers Alliance—large audience and a most interested audience. When I sat down a lady came to me and said you have made converts tonight. Of course it not being my meeting I could not organize to take up a collection, but feel that great good has been done.” She also expressed difficulty at securing a place to speak at another unidentified place on “the outskirts of Yankton.” She explained, “You know can have no chance here because the churches will not open to it and the hall costs too much for me.” See, Nettie C. Hall to Elizabeth Wardall, Aug. 30, 1890, Folder 8, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

the newly formed equal suffrage club there. As Hall explained, “He said he had been opposed to equal suffrage—bitterly—until he stood outside the window and heard me talk.”⁴⁴⁵ As converted woman suffrage advocate and well-known county official, Hills gave the movement influence, respectability, and authority.

Reaching the farm population proved not only critical to the success of the movement but also difficult for elite women whose class status complicated attempts to approach them directly. Suffrage advocates relied on the support of individuals respected by their farming communities and speakers who had experience as farmers to bridge the divide between town and country. Julia B. King, the wife of a fire insurance salesman at Yankton, elite WCTU member, and leader of the local campaign wrote to headquarters on August 19, 1890 with her concerns about reaching the farmers of the county.⁴⁴⁶ She wanted help in organizing a countywide equal suffrage convention to take place on or around September 5. In her letter, she pleaded with state officials to send her a host of speakers, including Hindman, Anthony, and Shaw. In addition, she pushed for continued county work from Hall. King explained that although the farmers were “wide awake...upon any questions of reform,” she preferred Hall to maintain a high level of activity among the farmers in the county.⁴⁴⁷ “The fact of her having been a farmer enables her to get hold of...that class. And her thorough acquaintance with the Farmers Alliance is also helpful,” noted King.⁴⁴⁸ By explaining her rationale for keeping Hall in the field, King also pointed to the more significant issue of rural class

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ Julia King’s husband, J. M. King, was an agent for the Hartford Fire Insurance Company’s Western Department. He also had some sort of business association with the St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company. J. M. King to William Bailey, Oct. 13, 1890, Folder 3, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁴⁷ Julia B. King to Bailey, Aug. 19, 1890, Folder 8, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid.

divisions in Yankton County. Because she did not enjoy the same background as Hall, she had to rely on her to connect on a specifically “rural” level to the farmers in Yankton County.

In addition to Hall’s work with the Farmers’ Alliance, county suffrage leaders pressed other speakers with rural associations into service for the cause, including former Iowan Carrie Lane Chapman Catt and Minnesotan Julia B. Nelson, whose ability to speak Norwegian made her a hot commodity as a suffrage speaker. In September 1890, Catt did work among Catholics who had settled near Volin, and she wrote to state headquarters that she had “good luck with Catholics down this way.”⁴⁴⁹ In addition to converting many Catholics to the cause, she made impressive fundraising gains, selling all of the seventy-two suffrage badges she had carried with her and collecting independently about two more dollars toward the work.⁴⁵⁰ Catt’s comments about securing Catholics as supporters of woman suffrage provide a striking counterexample to the assumed behaviors of this group. According to most woman suffrage advocates, Catholics generally opposed the cause, believing that it attacked the foundations of traditional family life. That Catt specifically identified Catholics in her audience speaks to the rarity and novelty of making supporters out of the members of this Christian denomination.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁹ Carrie Chapman Catt to “State Office,” Sept. 17, 1890, Folder 13, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Eileen L McDonagh and H. Douglas Price argued that Germans typically opposed woman suffrage because their traditional and cultural values placed women in the home and included alcohol as part of their daily life. Throughout her work as a suffragist, Catt believed that Germans, through their bonds to liquor interests and traditional family values, saw it to defeat woman suffrage at every opportunity. In Iowa, Catt indicated that the German-American Alliance and their ties to liquor interests in the state defeated the 1916 suffrage referendum. See chapter 4 for more details. McDonagh and Price, “Woman Suffrage in the Progressive Era,” 576-78.

While Catt bucked the trend and garnered support from Catholics near Volin, other suffrage speakers did not fare as well. Julia B. Nelson's canvass across Yankton County affirmed assumptions about those groups customarily opposed to woman suffrage, in this case Germans from Russia. It also revealed the hostility with which some rural immigrant groups viewed woman suffrage, the terrible conditions in which organization for the cause took place, and the loneliness experienced by even seasoned lecturers like Nelson. During the months of September and October 1890, Nelson worked almost exclusively in the most rural, isolated settlements across the northern half of the county, including Jamesville, Mayfield, Norway, and Mission Hill.⁴⁵² At Jamesville, Nelson reportedly found a settlement of "Russian German Mennonites who would not give a hearing to either man or woman on the subject of suffrage."⁴⁵³ She did not even leave the buggy she had hired when she arrived at the settlement, choosing to immediately turn around and ride the fourteen miles back to her hotel at Scotland in Bon Homme County. Apparently the hostility in Jamesville prevented Nelson from even getting out to stretch her legs for a moment. A couple days later, during her next trip across Yankton County, Nelson and the young man she hired to drive her to Mayfield became lost "on account of river and ravines" that cut the rugged, empty terrain and arrived at their destination having missed lunch.⁴⁵⁴ After giving her speech at Mayfield, Nelson had to ride back to Scotland in the dark with only a hungry stomach to keep her company. Sometime later, with the incidents at Jamesville and Mayfield behind her, Nelson

⁴⁵² Nelson entered Yankton County from the west, crossing the county line by livery team from Scotland to Mayville. She stopped at Jamesville and made arrangements to return to Norway on October 10. She spoke at Mission Hill a few days later, on either October 4 or 5. Mr. Nichols to William Bailey, Sept. 26, 1890, Folder 4, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁵³ Nelson to Bailey, Oct. 3, 1890, Folder 3, Box 6674 PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

took the train east to Clay County, which shared the eastern border of Yankton County, to speak to the people there. Only a few days later, she returned to Yankton County to visit settlements at Mission Hill and Norway. Although Nelson did not record her impressions of Mission Hill, she did reveal in a letter to state headquarters that her visit at Norway was “pleasant” and that, in fact, she had “made some converts among the Norwegians” there.⁴⁵⁵ Her letter indicated that a religiously themed argument persuaded the Lutheran Evangelical Norwegians at Norway most effectively, and she requested that officials at the state office send to the settlement a package of leaflets entitled “Jesus Christ the Emancipator of Women.”⁴⁵⁶ Finally, she also reported that a cousin who had failed to connect with her at Jamesville made the trip over to Norway to visit with her after the fiasco there. With a hint of disappointment, Nelson joked, “he will vote for equal suffrage and is probably the only one at J.[amesville] who will.”⁴⁵⁷ Nelson’s letters indicate both the opposition and hostility and the warmth and support woman suffrage lecturers encountered as they ventured into these fervently traditional ethnic and religious enclaves.

With the November 4 deadline looming in the back of their minds, state suffrage leaders sent Illinois-raised Emma Smith DeVoe to canvass Yankton County, and she developed a reputation as a charismatic and engaging lecturer during her tenure in the county. In October 1890, DeVoe gave a series of speeches in both the small towns of the county and in rural, sparsely populated areas of the countryside. Although the records fail to indicate at what places in the country DeVoe spoke, she received accolades for her “splendid

⁴⁵⁵ Nelson to Bailey, Oct. 13, 1890, Folder 4, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid. Shortly after Nelson left South Dakota that November, the members of the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association elected her president. Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 773.

lecture” and “splendid work.”⁴⁵⁸ One woman, who lived on a rural mail route with the simple address of “Box 695,” wrote to state headquarters to express her gratitude for DeVoe’s work in the small hamlet near where she lived. “She made a great impression,” wrote Mrs. J. M. Way, “now if she could come back we feel confident she could do splendid work here and we workers feel it is necessary [sic.] to do all that can possibly [sic.] be done now.”⁴⁵⁹ While officials at state headquarters did not issue a reply to Mrs. Way’s appeal, her letter revealed the earnestness and enthusiasm for the woman suffrage movement in an individual who lived in a rural, isolated countryside. Despite the long distances, limited means of travel, and few resources to secure speakers, woman suffrage advocates like Mrs. Way could still pledge significant support to the movement.

On the evening of the election, the *Press and Dakotan* published a report of the day’s political activities. Bright sunshine, wrote the editor, lent a comfort and softened “somewhat the feelings of opposing factions.”⁴⁶⁰ However, in reality, he confessed, the campaign had agitated “public sentiment up to a pitch well nigh beyond control.”⁴⁶¹ The women of Yankton, led by De Voe, worked “all day, in parties of five and six at the polls in the interest of the equal suffrage amendment.”⁴⁶² Preliminary reports indicated that “the amendment received more votes in the city than was anticipated,” although a small addendum hastily added to the bottom of the article noted “Broadway precinct, woman suffrage amendment,

⁴⁵⁸ J. M. King to William Bailey, Oct. 20, 1890, Folder 3, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS; Mrs. J. M. Way to William Bailey, Oct. 20, 1890, Folder 5, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁵⁹ Way to Bailey, Oct. 20, 1890, Folder 5, Box 6674, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁶⁰ “The Election,” *Press and Dakotan*, Nov. 4, 1890.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

196 against; 45 for.”⁴⁶³ Unfortunately, no rural precincts had reported their election totals by the deadline for publication. The next day, the *Press and Dakotan* reported in jest that certain old bachelors refused to vote for the amendment. “The women went back on me years ago, and I will not pour oil on the troubled waters,” remarked one “O. B.”⁴⁶⁴ In the end, the woman suffrage amendment failed to pass in both Yankton County and South Dakota. With a statewide vote of 45,862 in opposition and 22,072 in favor, the measure failed by a ratio of roughly two to one.

While the defeat of the amendment disappointed national and state suffrage leaders, what incensed them more was the passage of another amendment on the ballot. The measure effectively enfranchised male Native Americans in the state, a prospect that outraged suffragists who believed their status as upright and moral guardians of the family and home guaranteed them the vote over a group of “dirty savages.”⁴⁶⁵ “Of the two classes of voters,” suffrage leaders recorded dryly, “it seemed the men preferred the Indians.”⁴⁶⁶ Voters believed, however, that the language of the amendment confused them into passing it. In Yankton, the *Press and Dakotan* reported that men struggled to understand the ballot. “At several of the polls,” wrote the editor, “a great deal of argument was wasted in trying to obtain a satisfactory interpretation of the interest of the ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ clauses, in the proposed amendments at the head of the tickets.”⁴⁶⁷ The problem arose because the legislature had written the first two amendments in the affirmative while they stated the third amendment, the measure that enfranchised Native Americans, in negative terms. After a

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ “Briefly Told,” *Press and Dakotan*, Nov. 5, 1890.

⁴⁶⁵ I am using the terminology from Catt’s speech “Subject and Sovereign” discussed below.

⁴⁶⁶ Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 557.

⁴⁶⁷ “The Election,” *Press and Dakotan*, Nov. 4, 1890.

lengthy discussion, it seems a person with “legal opinion” settled the matter, and voting continued for the rest of the day in the county seat.⁴⁶⁸

To national suffrage leaders, the enfranchisement of Native Americans in South Dakota revealed a state with backward principles. In a speech entitled “Subject and Sovereign” and delivered two years later in 1892, Carrie Chapman Catt lambasted the enfranchisement of Native Americans. “For 400 years,” she declared, the American peoples have been trying to find a solution for what is known as an Indian problem.”⁴⁶⁹ When the government instituted the reservation system, she argued, the government promised “to give to each Sioux who would accept these gifts as conditions, that sacred right and privilege we call the American ballot—the last effort of a discouraged government, to win this people to peace and civilization.”⁴⁷⁰ The reservation system also opened more land for white settlement, and Catt claimed that nearly half of those who claimed land were “American women, and of these women an astonishingly large percent were the graduates of Eastern colleges...[and] self-reliant, independent, individualized American farmers.”⁴⁷¹ Pitting these white, American women against these “semi civilized, barbarous savages,” Catt illustrated how state politicians disrespected the woman suffrage movement in a story from the Republican Convention that took place during the summer 1890 in Mitchell. As the suffragists arrived, officials seated them behind a band, a row of chairs that held the families

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ “Subject and Sovereign,” speech, 1892 [dated 1888 or 1893 in archives, but this is incorrect as Catt states that “two years ago there was a woman suffrage amendment campaign in that state” on page 38], pages 1-2, Folder 3, Box 4, Carrie Chapman Catt Papers [hereafter CCCP], The New York Public Library, Stephen A. Schwartzman Building, New York, New York [hereafter NYPL].

⁴⁷⁰ “Subject and Sovereign,” page 6, Folder 3, Box 4, CCCP, NYPL.

⁴⁷¹ “Subject and Sovereign,” pages 9-11, Folder 3, Box 4, CCCP, NYPL.

of the delegates, and a group of men standing behind the chairs. They could neither see nor hear the proceedings well. When the matter of enfranchising a group of three hundred Native Americans came up, Republican Party officials put the question to a vote, and it carried unanimously. What happened next shocked the suffragists in attendance, as, according to Catt, a “man went out after the delegates and in they came, three full-fledged Sioux, with the moccasins still on their feet and their long, disheveled hair so full of inhabitants you could see them clear across the room. Were they put out of sight. Ah no! They were led in and honorably seated on the floor of that house.”⁴⁷² When the matter of endorsing the woman suffrage amendment came up, the suffragists asked for a hearing before the convention, but party officials did not grant their request. Instead, as Catt explained, “the chair adjourned the meeting and said, if anybody wanted to hear what the women had to say, they could stay, but most of them got up and went out.”⁴⁷³ Two years later, Catt was still appalled at the treatment the suffragists received that day. In her speech, she declared that the greatest insult to women was the measure that “lifted out of savagery, half barbarous Indians and made them the political rulers over the college bred, moral intelligent women citizens.”⁴⁷⁴

Catt’s indignation, along with the anger of other national suffrage leaders, led the NAWSA to limit its support of future amendment campaigns in the state. In fact, many national suffrage leaders did not want South Dakota to have another amendment campaign until its people shed their backwardness and became more favorable to woman suffrage. In addition, national leaders, especially Anna Howard Shaw, felt that unless suffragists conducted any campaign “along purely Suffrage lines, and completely divorced from every

⁴⁷² “Subject and Sovereign,” pages 40-42, Folder 3, Box 4, CCCP, NYPL.

⁴⁷³ “Subject and Sovereign,” pages 41-42, Folder 3, Box 4, CCCP, NYPL.

⁴⁷⁴ “Subject and Sovereign,” pages 45, Folder 3, Box 4, CCCP, NYPL.

other issue,” it had little chance of success.⁴⁷⁵ In her view, the intertwined nature of temperance and suffrage in the state signaled the death knell to any campaign before it even began. South Dakota’s suffragists, however, failed to heed her words, and in 1894 they elected WCTU state officer Anna Simmons as president of the SDESA. She served six years at the helm of the organization. In addition, the SDESA conducted most of its organizational work for its campaigns through the WCTU’s franchise department, led by Alice Pickler.⁴⁷⁶

When a bill to enfranchise the state’s women came before the legislature in early 1898, the NAWSA encouraged state suffrage leaders to abandon their plans for it.⁴⁷⁷ Despite their warnings, state suffragists pressed forward with the amendment campaign. Although a few individuals from national headquarters did give advice and offer some money, they greatly limited their support of efforts in South Dakota. In late 1897, Catt wrote a terse letter to state leaders, explaining that she sought to serve only in an advisory role by encouraging the organization of local suffrage clubs and emphasizing the significance of press work. The NAWSA conveniently could not fund any of this proposed activity, so Catt placed all major fundraising efforts in the hands of local suffrage leaders.⁴⁷⁸ She did dispense suggestions

⁴⁷⁵ Shaw to Clara Williams, Oct. 17, 1898, Folder 22, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁷⁶ Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 555-61. Neither the NAWSA nor most state workers discuss the campaign of 1894 in great detail. In their fourth history volume, they devote half a paragraph to the 1894 campaign. Little evidence, including correspondence, newspaper reports, or other documentation, exists in Yankton County regarding that campaign, leading to the conclusion that the campaign was not widespread there. South Dakota voters defeated the measure 22,682 to 17,010.

⁴⁷⁷ In a letter written during October 1898, Anna Howard Shaw chastised state worker Clara Williams for wanting additional aid, writing “If I have been correctly informed, the Amendment was asked for contrary to the advice of the National Society, which thought the State was not yet prepared for it.” Shaw to Clara Williams, Oct. 17, 1898, Folder 22, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁷⁸ Catt to Jane Rooker Breeden, Dec. 15, 1897, Folder 1, Box 3646A, Jane Rooker Breeden Papers, 1874-1932, SDSHS. The NAWSA gave a paltry one hundred dollars, in the form of

freely. She encouraged the formation of committees in towns that lacked an organized suffrage club, she pushed for each county to have precinct captains and press chairmen, and she explicated the benefits of training schools for interested local advocates.⁴⁷⁹ In a separate letter dictated to Simmons, Catt explained firmly that the NAWSA was not willing to participate in the 1898 campaign. Remembering the disagreements with the Farmers' Alliance President Henry Loucks and attacks from Marietta Bones, Catt wrote, "Our workers have felt that there had not been the co-operation there should have been on the part of the officers of South Dakota."⁴⁸⁰

With little support from the NAWSA, state and local leaders found themselves directing much of the campaign activity during the spring, summer, and fall of 1898. For the most part, the activities of the campaign remained nearly identical to those eight years earlier. At some point during the spring of 1898, the SDESA issued directives to the officers of local clubs across the state. In addition to attracting new members, holding public meetings, and collecting dues, state leaders also gave cautionary advice, learned perhaps during their trials in 1890. "Do not expect too great results at once," noted the suffragists. "Prejudices die slowly. Keep hammering away. You will be rewarded by victory after a sufficient service."⁴⁸¹ State leaders recognized that in order to achieve victory, they had to accomplish a most difficult feat: to change the minds of people whose response to the movement ranged from mere ignorance to staunch opposition. They knew that victory required a sustained

literature, to the campaign. The state suffragists raised fifteen times more, totaling about \$1,500.00, for the campaign. See, Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 557.

⁴⁷⁹ Carrie Chapman Catt to Jane Rooker Breeden, Dec. 15, 1897, Folder 1, Box 3646A, Jane Rooker Breeden Papers, 1874-1932, SDSHS.

⁴⁸⁰ Catt to Anna Simmons, [1898], Folder 20, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁸¹ "Directions to Officers of the Local Clubs Auxiliary to the South Dakota Equal Suffrage Association," Folder 24, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

campaign in which people encountered the movement on multiple occasions and in a variety of ways. Their advice also served as a critique of the NAWSA's direction of the 1890 campaign, which they believed piecemeal, hasty, and inconsistent, and they sought to create a better campaign in which efforts were sustained, constant, and effective.

Despite their best intentions, South Dakota suffrage leaders failed to drastically improve their campaign efforts in 1898. Suffragists could not raise sufficient financial resources, secure speakers of high caliber, and engage enough local suffrage advocates to ensure the passage of the amendment. In particular, as they did in 1890, they struggled to connect with rural people in the countryside, especially foreign-born immigrants who neither spoke nor read English. During both the 1890 and 1898 campaigns they hired Scandinavian-speaking lecturers like Julia B. Nelson, but in the 1898 they attempted to add reading materials in languages other than English. In July 1898, South Dakota suffragists requested from the NAWSA written propaganda in languages other than English, and Catt responded by writing "We have never had any literature in foreign languages."⁴⁸² She advised them to take existing pamphlets and leaflets to local printers who had the language skills they desired and request that they translate and print the materials.⁴⁸³ A month later, Catt again emphasized the importance of connecting with people outside of towns. She pointed to the work she did among rural people during the 1890 campaign, noting that some "of the pleasantest and best work I did was in the country and away from the railroad, and I believe our best hope lies with those people in all states."⁴⁸⁴ In a rare move in August 1898, the NAWSA agreed to sponsor one lecturer, Laura Gregg of Kansas, for the last two months of

⁴⁸² Catt to Williams, July 26, 1898, Folder 22, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁴ Catt to Williams, Aug. 29, 1898, Folder 23, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

the campaign and with the direction to work in the most rural, remote areas of the countryside.⁴⁸⁵ South Dakota suffragists hoped that Gregg, as an experienced lecturer, could work effectively at agitating whole counties to support the movement.⁴⁸⁶

In August 1898, as tensions simmered between the leaders of the NAWSA and South Dakota suffragists, work in Yankton County began in earnest among local advocates. A new generation of women emerged as the leaders of the movement, and among them, a group of women who had all married into the Vanderhule family orchestrated much of the activity. They reorganized the Equal Suffrage Association of Yankton County, disbanded shortly after the defeat in 1890, and they worked diligently to organize suffrage activities in the county. At the helm of the organizing work was Matilda L. Bramble Vanderhule, who, at fifty-nine-years old, lived in Yankton with her husband George, a retired druggist, and probably resided close to her twenty-seven-year-old daughter-in-law, Adena, who had married Matilda's

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid.; Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 557.

⁴⁸⁶ The NAWSA actually removed Laura Gregg from South Dakota almost two weeks before the election. Carrie Chapman Catt explained, "We are obliged to call Miss Gregg a little before election. The work we wish her to do cannot wait, but it will really make no different to S. Dak...I am just in receipt of a letter from Miss Gregg in which she says: 'On Monday evening last week there were eight present. Tuesday and Wednesday, I went to my places assigned, having to hire a livery to take me, only to find there were no meeting arranged [sic.], and that they would not entertain me. Thursday there were four present. Friday, fourteen, Saturday, eleven, the total collections have been \$1.17.' Miss Gregg makes no complaint...but I think it is an imposition upon us to expect us to pay expenses and salary of a valuable woman in a doubtful campaign, and then have no arrangements made, so that she can do her work. If there is no better opportunity for helpfulness than this for Miss Gregg, it seems to me she might just as well be sent home now...it is a pity that time should be wasted. I realize fully, however, the difficulty of our women trying to make all these appointments, without having had the benefit of previous campaign experience." See, Carrie Chapman Catt to Clara Williams, Oct. 24, 1898, Folder 20, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS. Clara Williams must have sent a rather resentful reply requesting that Gregg remain in the state, because Catt sent a another letter, dated November 7, 1898, that allowed the speaker to stay, but only a few days longer. She remained unimpressed by the South Dakota campaign, noting that keeping Gregg in South Dakota "could not make a feathers difference in the result." See, Catt to Williams, Nov. 7, 1898, Folder 20, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

eldest son, Clarence.⁴⁸⁷ By that year, Clarence had taken over as druggist for his father. In addition, Matilda had two sons, Ernest and Delmar.⁴⁸⁸ Delmar married Elizabeth, or Lizzie, and worked as a painter in Yankton.⁴⁸⁹ George's brother and Matilda's brother-in-law, Ross Vanderhule, married Leah, and together they settled into farming at Marindahl in northeast Yankton County.⁴⁹⁰ Matilda also had a sister-in-law named Ruth, who worked as a dressmaker in Yankton.⁴⁹¹ In a fascinating web of familial and kinship relations, organized work for the cause emerged among these women with a flurry in August 1898. In particular, Matilda and Adena Vanderhule directed local suffrage activities in the county.

On August 4, 1898, Matilda, as leader of the Equal Suffrage Association of Yankton County and acting director of the county's suffrage activities at Yankton, wrote a letter to state officer Clara Williams that outlined a proposed county lecture tour by notable suffrage speaker Emma A. Cranmer. Matilda planned for Cranmer to make a square, entering Yankton County from the east, crossing the southern half of the county from east to west, traveling north, and then crossing the northern half of the county from west to east, ending her route by traveling back south to the county seat at Yankton. Matilda arranged for lectures at thirteen places in Yankton County, including both small towns and rural, remote areas with

⁴⁸⁷ U. S. Department of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States: Schedule of Population, 1880*, Yankton County, Dakota Territory (Washington, DC: U. S. Department of the Census, 1880), page 25.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁸⁹ U. S. Department of the Census, *Twelfth Census of the United States: Schedule of Population, 1900*, Yankton County, South Dakota (Washington, DC: U. S. Department of the Census, 1900), 49A, Sheet 13.

⁴⁹⁰ Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910—Population*, Yankton County, South Dakota (Washington, DC: Department of Commerce and Labor, 1910), 8B.

⁴⁹¹ U. S. Department of the Census, *Tenth Census of the United States*, 26.

only schoolhouses to serve meeting places.⁴⁹² Despite Cranmer's extensive canvass of Yankton County, Matilda still felt that more work had to take place, especially among Scandinavian farmers in the countryside. "There are four or five places where the Scandinavian women [lecturers] could do work," she informed state headquarters.⁴⁹³ Social connections dictated the ease or difficulty with which Matilda could make inroads with Scandinavians who lived as farmers in Yankton County. In the case of Marindahl, Matilda relied on her brother-in-law, Ross, and sister-in-law, Leah, to assist her with work there. "I know that Ross. R. Van Der Hule will do all that is necessary at Marindahl," she wrote.⁴⁹⁴ In other places, such as Gayville, Center Point, and Norway, Matilda faced more difficulty as she lacked local associations or familial bonds there. At Norway in 1890, Julia B. Nelson had found success among its Norwegian residents, but in 1898, Matilda lacked any intimate tie to the locals there. While she recognized the importance of securing the people of Norway as woman suffrage supporters, she also admitted that she was "not...able to get any hold there to make it possible to send a lecturer."⁴⁹⁵ Adena, Matilda's daughter-in-law, also expressed frustration as she attempted to organize effective work in the countryside through the Equal Suffrage Association of Yankton County. "We are a very small club and most of the members are not over burdened with wealth," she explained to state headquarters.⁴⁹⁶ In addition to their financial woes, Adena admitted that club members struggled to engage rural

⁴⁹² Matilda L. Vanderhule to Williams, Aug. 4, 1898, Folder 8, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS; Matilda L. Vanderhule to Williams, Aug. 5, 1898, Folder 8, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS; Matilda L. Vanderhule to Williams, Aug. 9, 1898, Folder 9, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS; "Cranmer Ends Clay Co. Tues. Aug. 16," Folder 8, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁹³ Matilda L. Vanderhule to Williams, Aug. 5, 1898, Folder 8, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁹⁴ Matilda L. Vanderhule to Williams, Aug. 11, 1898, Folder 9, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Adena L. Vanderhule to Williams, Aug. 22, 1898, Folder 6, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

people. “I have not been able to get a single club organized outside of town,” she wrote, although she pointed out that she had “tried hard enough, most we could do would be to furnish entertainment and a place...to speak” for any more potential lecturers.⁴⁹⁷

While Matilda and Adena struggled to spread the suffrage message to rural people in Yankton County, they turned their attention to the county seat to advertise Cranmer’s upcoming lecture tour. Matilda plastered “hangers” and other posters in stores and shop windows across town and made sure to secure “the best place in the city for Mrs. Cranmer’s lecture.”⁴⁹⁸ For half a month, from August 16 to August 30, 1898, Cranmer agitated the residents of Yankton County through a series of lectures. At the end of her tour, Cranmer wrote a report of Yankton County to state headquarters, claiming her work “a great success.”⁴⁹⁹ According to her account, she got along well with farmers in the county because her message was not one of complete support but one of refrained opposition. At the end of each lecture, she reportedly told a joke that warned the men in attendance, “if you can’t vote yes don’t you dare to vote on the measure. I think we’ll win by opposers not voting.”⁵⁰⁰ In addition, she praised Matilda Vanderhule, writing that she “makes things come to pass.”⁵⁰¹ She also noted that the “school house campaign,” which reached farmers and others living in the countryside, was “doing more good than anything else.”⁵⁰² At Mission Hill, the place where Nettie C. Hall faced outright opposition in 1890, Cranmer enjoyed a lecture at a

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Matilda L. Vanderhule to Williams, Aug. 11, 1898, Folder 9, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

⁴⁹⁹ Emma A. Cranmer to Williams, Aug. 30, 1898, Folder 20, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁰¹ Ibid.

⁵⁰² Ibid.

“splendid church” with a full house, “more than half voters...[and] collection & subscription nearly \$18.00.”⁵⁰³

While people in Mission Hill supported Cranmer’s lecture, other places in the county were less welcoming because of their cultural and ethnic backgrounds. At Walshtown, populated heavily by ethnic Germans, Cranmer encountered a scene that made her cringe. As she explained, “Had to pay for my entertainment at Walshtown where they talked, cooked & slept—German.”⁵⁰⁴ Despite these differences, Cranmer declared that she got along “first-rate however collections in school houses small.”⁵⁰⁵ Small financial gains did not upset Cranmer, however, for she felt the real profit came from the “making lots of votes.”⁵⁰⁶ As she prepared to leave Yankton County, Cranmer advised local leaders to work with sustained momentum, hosting socials, speakers, and other events through which to raise funds and awareness for the cause.⁵⁰⁷ Cranmer’s lecture tour in Yankton County stirred up at least some sentiment for woman suffrage. On September 10, 1898, Mayfield resident Fred L. Richter wrote to the SDESA officers with an encouraging message. “In view of the promise to ascertain as nearly as I possibly could how each voter in precinct no. 7 Yankton County stands on the Woman Suffrage question will say, I have inquired into the matter some during the past two weeks and find that your chances of victory in this precinct are very good.”⁵⁰⁸ Richter also assured

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Fred L. Richter to Williams, Sept. 10, 1898, Folder 10, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

state leaders that he felt that “not only precinct no. 7 but the whole county is yours by a large majority.”⁵⁰⁹

Richter’s assessment came as Matilda Vanderhule, along with her daughter-in-law Adena, initiated the final phase of campaigning in the county to activity among foreign-born immigrants living on farms in the countryside. After communicating with state headquarters for over a month, in September 1898 Matilda finally secured a Norwegian-speaking lecturer, Mrs. Evald, for work among the Scandinavians living near Gayville. Despite her success at bringing in Mrs. Evald, Matilda was not satisfied. “Is there a German speaker for this state?” she inquired of state officials on September 10, 1898, explaining that there “are a great many of that nationality here.”⁵¹⁰ Her daughter-in-law, Adena, seconded Matilda’s request for more Scandinavian-speaking lecturers for the county, especially in the northeast corner near Mayfield and Marindahl, in a follow-up letter written about a month later.⁵¹¹ In addition, she brought to state officials’ attention the presence of several anti-suffragists, a problem that threatened to quash support for woman suffrage not only in Yankton County but also across the state. One anti-suffragist in particular, Mrs. Crammell of New York, had entered Yankton County in early October 1898. In addition to having a large supply of anti-suffrage literature, “which she is scattering,” noted Adena crossly, Crammell also spoke across the county in all the towns along the railroad.⁵¹² According to Adena, Crammell’s message was downright rude. “She said here that she represented the Christian women of New York State,” steamed

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid.

⁵¹⁰ Matilda L. Vanderhule to Williams, Sept. 10, 1898, Folder 10, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

⁵¹¹ Adena Vanderhule to Williams, Oct. 4, 1898, Folder 17, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

⁵¹² Ibid.

Adena. “Don’t you think they had better call her home?”⁵¹³ In addition, Adena reported that Crammell “said that all the equal suffragists were Atheists and immoral women too.”⁵¹⁴ Clearly upset at the scene made by Crammell, Adena demanded more woman suffrage literature from state headquarters to counteract the anti-suffrage rhetoric spread by Mrs. Crammell.

As the date of the election approached, Catt issued one last-minute order to the suffragists in South Dakota. “Keep a careful record of the returns both for your own sakes and our on the outside as well,” she directed.⁵¹⁵ “It is well taken how the foreigners vote, how the American population; how the Repub., Pop., and prohibitory parties, [but] sometimes remarkable facts are developed or rather discovered in the record of our votes.”⁵¹⁶ Of utmost importance to Catt was “whether it paid best to let the foreigner alone or to work with him.”⁵¹⁷ Engaging foreign-born immigrants, especially those who lived outside of towns and other small villages, had frustrated suffragists and complicated organizational efforts during both the 1890 and 1898 campaigns. That Catt seemed to reconsider the inclusion of foreigners in further campaign efforts appeared as both a matter of efficiency and an issue of ethnicity and status. For almost a decade, both national and state suffrage leaders, as elite, educated, and native-born women, had struggled to engage these rural immigrants in South Dakota, and Catt’s letter revealed that perhaps she no longer deemed them worthy of direct campaign efforts and the attention of suffragists. Catt’s request of South Dakota suffragists reflected a trend developing among national leaders of the movement, a trend that favored

⁵¹³ Adena Vanderhule to Williams, Oct. 17, 1898, Folder 16, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid.

⁵¹⁵ Catt to Williams, Nov. 7, 1898, Folder 20, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid.

policies of exclusion, especially of outsiders. By the late-nineteenth century, the national campaign for woman suffrage became as much about attracting supporters as it was about rejecting those allegedly opposed to the cause.

In November 1898, South Dakota's voters defeated the woman suffrage amendment by a vote of 19,698 in favor to 22,983 against. The NAWSA viewed the returns as a step in the right direction, noting that the "figures show unmistakably that the falling off in the size of the vote [as compared to 1890] was almost wholly among the opponents."⁵¹⁸ The election failed to produce a suffrage victory, however, and Catt blamed the defeat on voters who could not differentiate between the WCTU and the SDESA. In late 1898, Catt and the NAWSA decided to sever their relationship with the SDESA. Catt believed that as long as the SDESA shared an officer corps with the WCTU, no campaign could secure enough support for any woman suffrage measure in the state.⁵¹⁹ In December 1898, Catt issued a letter to leaders of the local suffrage clubs in South Dakota, requesting them to work solely with the NAWSA "in the interest of Equal Suffrage in South Dakota" and not with the SDESA.⁵²⁰ After two weeks of deliberation, Yankton County's local club, led by Matilda Vanderhule, pledged its support to the NAWSA instead of the state organization. In addition, Matilda confirmed Catt's suspicion that working with foreigners produced few tangible

⁵¹⁸ Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 558; Reed, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in South Dakota*, 51.

⁵¹⁹ Catt received a confirmation that the SDESA had no intention of cutting ties with the WCTU when the group elected Alice Pickler, former head of the WCTU franchise department, as president in 1900. Catt's letter to solicit support among the local clubs became significant in 1909, when the national organization finally had enough support to disengage the WCTU-directed SDESA from state affairs and install a new crop of suffrage workers who pledged to follow the directions of the NAWSA exclusively. [Overview of Work during the Nineteenth Century], Folder 30, Box 6679, PFP, SDSHS; Philena Everett Johnson to Alice Pickler, July 22, 1909, Folder 19, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS.

⁵²⁰ Matilda L. Vanderhule to Catt, Dec. 30, 1898, Folder 24, Box 6676, PFP, SDSHS.

results. She reported that, despite her efforts, she found “the county people slow to move.”⁵²¹ As she explained, “I have secured the names of different men & women throughout the county who are in favor of equal suffrage as I have opportunity, and have been but trying to get clubs organized and hope to be able to report some after awhile.”⁵²² Even though suffrage work stagnated in the countryside, Matilda found supportive newspaper editors in the county seat to publish “suitable articles in favor of equal suffrage.”⁵²³ Along with the *Press and Dakotan* and *Dakota Herald*, Matilda also received a pledge of assistance from the newspaper with the largest circulation in South Dakota, the German *Freie Press*. In addition, Matilda reported a host of activities under preparation by the local suffrage club to further the cause, including a debate and other “plans of interest.”⁵²⁴ With this expression of optimism, Matilda Vanderhule concluded her letter, the last known letter she sent in support of the cause in Yankton County. After the 1898 campaign, twelve years passed until Yankton County residents experienced another organized burst of activity for woman suffrage.

Clay County

While organized campaigns for woman suffrage in 1890 and 1898 punctuated the movement in Yankton County during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, an absence of structured demonstrations characterized the history of woman suffrage in both Clay and Lyon Counties. In Clay County, activities related to woman suffrage took place informally, outside the confines of an orderly campaign, until the first and only state amendment campaign in 1916. During the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, a

⁵²¹ Ibid.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Ibid.

⁵²⁴ Ibid.

few supportive representatives in the Iowa Legislature introduced bills calling for a woman suffrage amendment, but these men could never muster enough votes to force a statewide election. In addition, amendments to the state's constitution required the approval of two consecutive legislatures, making their passage extremely difficult when political sentiment changed, as it often did, between sessions. A small victory came in 1894 when the legislature granted women the right to vote on the issuing of municipal and school bonds.⁵²⁵ Suffragists had wanted full municipal and school suffrage that year, but legislators argued that those resolutions were unconstitutional. These men had little regard for woman suffrage, treating it with disdain and sarcasm and claiming that they voted against measures for the cause because their wives instructed it.⁵²⁶

Even though structured suffrage campaigning did not take place in Iowa during the late-nineteenth century, men and women in Clay County discussed, debated, and interacted unofficially with the cause in significant ways. As in Yankton County, sentiment in favor or against woman suffrage waxed and waned as individuals and small groups of people agitated for support as they were able. Although the movement was inconsistent and disorganized, it nevertheless grew in strength over the course of the nineteenth century. Sometimes, women conducted informal work for the cause. For example, in January 1884, a nameless group of

⁵²⁵ Spencer's women exhibited a high level of interest in elections over school bonds. In March 1912, the question of issuing bonds for the construction of a new high school came to a vote. After officials tallied the votes, the women in the county seat had narrowly approved of the measure by a vote of 281 for and 235 against. According to newspaper reports, "The ladies of the city having a vote were also active and as a result an unusually large vote was polled." In this case, the active participation of women in the election disproved assumptions that women would not vote if given the right. "Bond Issue Carries," *Spencer Herald*, March 6, 1912.

⁵²⁶ "Should Men Consult Their Wives?" *Clay County News*, July 17, 1884; Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 628, 634-36.

women began to circulate a petition among the residents of Spencer. They directed the petition to the members of the Iowa legislature, and they requested that the “right of suffrage be extended to the women of the state equally with the men.”⁵²⁷ According to the *Clay County News*, as they canvassed the county seat, the women brought up an argument about female enfranchisement and citizenship, similar to the one heard by those in attendance at J. T. McCrory’s lecture Yankton County during the summer of 1890. The “ladies of Spencer” argued that women were “always considered as citizens subject to all provisions of law that are binding upon the other sex...[and they] are graciously permitted to pay taxes on their property for the maintenance [sic.] of law and government.”⁵²⁸ With that tongue-in-cheek remark, the petitioners pointed out that while women had to “abide and live up to all official enactments,” they could not exercise any “right to a voice in determining of what those laws and enactment should be.”⁵²⁹ According to the editor, the citizenship without enfranchisement argument contained “no logical reason” and probably arose from “old and absurd” ideas.⁵³⁰ He blamed traditional English law and Biblical teachings that required women to remain silent in church for lulling men and women into “a kind of unthinking and unreasoning matter-of-course conclusion that men only are fit to exercise the elective franchise.”⁵³¹ While he did not directly endorse woman suffrage in the article, the editor of the *Clay County News* clearly demonstrated that opponents of the cause had little on which to stand.

⁵²⁷ “[The ladies of Spencer...],” *Clay County News*, Jan. 11, 1884.

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

Between January and April 1884, sentiment for woman suffrage grew in both Iowa and Clay County. The Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, or IESA, which formed in 1870, directed activity at both the county and state levels. In 1884, they hired Matilda “Lillie” Hindman—who later organized Yankton County during the 1890 campaign—to lecture in over seventy small towns in the state. By April, Hindman had visited Clay County and installed charismatic preacher Martha J. Janes as the president of the Eleventh District Woman Suffrage Association.⁵³² Soon thereafter, women in the county, under the auspices of the WCTU, joined together to work for suffrage. Temperance was an issue that had gained a strong following in the Midwest, and it was a significant issue in Clay County during the late-nineteenth century. In particular, residents of Clay County gave the WCTU a great deal of respect. As the editor of *Clay County News* noted, the people of the county gave their full support to temperance.⁵³³ However, the local WCTU union, with its focus on uplifting communities and instilling morality, shifted its focus toward woman suffrage as a concrete way to secure these goals. During the mid-1880s, the WCTU in Clay County began to discuss woman suffrage openly, and, as in many places across the country, the local WCTU provided the first forum through which discussions of woman suffrage took place. Nationally, the WCTU, led by Francis Willard, had given public support for woman suffrage by combining women’s revered domestic and familial roles with their political desires into a “home protection” program. WCTU leaders argued that women with the ballot could protect

⁵³² The leaders of the state woman suffrage association first named the organization the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association. In 1891, the society incorporated, changing its name to the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, or IESA. They gave no clear reason for changing their name at that time. Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 630.

⁵³³ “The Duty of the Hour,” *Clay County News*, April 17, 1884.

their families from the scourges of drunkenness, corruption, and immorality.⁵³⁴ These sentiments resonated with women in local communities, including Clay County, and by 1884, the members of the WCTU believed woman suffrage important enough to work for it publicly. Led by Martha J. Janes, this group introduced Clay County to woman suffrage slowly, through formal presentations and debates and informal discussions and meetings.

In May 1884, the WCTU of Spencer met in regular session at the Congregational Church. One of the members sent a report of the meeting to the *Clay County News*, and the editor published it in full on the front page. According to the author, the gathering started as usual, with devotional exercises, a review of upcoming measures that favored temperance, and other reports. As soon as the business portion of the meeting concluded, members began a formal debate on woman suffrage, with each speaker allotted fifteen minutes. Janes led the pro-suffrage charge, arguing in religious terms that women, created as man's equal by God, deserved the right to vote. Her arguments, remarked the author, were "so forcible and convincing that the negatives felt...they would as soon be caught stealing sheep as to" defend against her attack.⁵³⁵ Despite Janes's strong remarks, the opposing side rallied to espouse the negative argument. According to Mrs. E. N. Jencks, women, as "physically weaker than men," could not cast their ballots just as they did not hang around "billiard halls, saloons, and street corners."⁵³⁶ Mrs. E. S. Gilchrist echoed Jencks's statements, asserting that filthy polling places and little political interest among women rendered female enfranchisement

⁵³⁴ Holly Berkley Fletcher, *Gender and the American Temperance Movement in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 107. Genevieve McBride outlines clearly this transition from temperance to woman suffrage in Wisconsin in her book *On Wisconsin Women*. See, Genevieve McBride, *On Wisconsin Women: Working for their Rights from Settlement to Suffrage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993).

⁵³⁵ "Woman Suffrage," *Clay County News*, May 8, 1884.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*

undesirable. In addition, women armed with the vote threatened to destroy the home and family, for if women “had the ballot there would not be enough left to do the housework.”⁵³⁷ At the end of the meeting, Janes brought the debate to a close by holding a vote on the issue, and the author finally informed readers of her stance on the matter. “Mrs. Janes closed the debate by reviewing each and every objection separately,” the author remarked angrily, “and she had the audacity to claim and apply all of our forcible arguments as so many more for her side. The vote as taken stood unanimously for the affirmative.”⁵³⁸ Believing the negatives received unjust treatment at the hands of Janes, the author invited all in the community against woman suffrage to attend a second debate that promised to set the record straight.

A month later, the dispute over woman suffrage tore apart the WCTU at the county level. At the second annual convention in June 1884, Mrs. E. N. Jencks refused to continue as president of the organization, recognizing that under the influence of Martha Janes, the group had become intolerant of anti-suffrage advocates. The remaining members promptly elected Janes as their new president, and as her first order of business, she read a paper detailing why the ballot served as a necessary protection of the home, an argument aligned closely to Willard’s “home protection” program. In addition, the reformed officer corps proposed and secured a resolution demanding woman suffrage as a protection of the home, family, and community “from any rum power.”⁵³⁹ Through the process of attrition, the Clay County WCTU became a politicized organization in support of woman suffrage.

⁵³⁷ Ibid.

⁵³⁸ Ibid.

⁵³⁹ “Minutes of the Second Annual Convention of the Clay County Woman’s Christian Temperance Union,” *Clay County News*, June 5, 1884.

The debate that took place among members of the WCTU became a public sensation and fodder for further argument among Clay County residents. The pro-suffrage editor of the *Clay County News*, L. S. Merritt, gave advocates of the cause a weekly column, “in which to speak of liberty, equality, right, woman and temperance.”⁵⁴⁰ Suffrage advocate Martha Janes solicited Merritt for the column, but she pledged to publish any article, either pro or con, deemed “spicy” and thought provoking. Janes began the series with an essay she wrote entitled “Consistency a Jewel.” After reciting the Declaration of Independence, she declared that despite “this sacred declaration of principles, [there] has been and still is a living falsehood, a standing menace and disgrace to the American people.”⁵⁴¹ Women, as a majority of the citizenry of the United States, had neither representation in the government nor a voice in policies relating to taxation. The government, according to Janes, defrauded its female citizens and rendered them slaves to phony republican institutions. Until the government gave women the same rights to property, protection, and choice of vocation as men, the Declaration of Independence remained merely a piece of paper.⁵⁴²

Janes’s vitriolic attack on the American political system took Clay County by storm. Instead of tempering her remarks, Janes stepped up her provocative rhetoric. A week later, the *Clay County News* published a second column in which Janes equated disenfranchised women to “men-slayers, paupers, maniacs, idiots, and perpetual babyhood.”⁵⁴³ She called on men in the community to give women their full claim to citizenship so that they could rise above their deplorable political status. Janes’s twin articles certainly propelled people to

⁵⁴⁰ “Equal Suffrage,” *Clay County News*, May 15, 1884.

⁵⁴¹ “Consistency a Jewel,” *Clay County News*, May 15, 1884.

⁵⁴² Ibid.

⁵⁴³ “Reasons and Opinions for Woman’s Disenfranchisement,” *Clay County News*, May 22, 1884.

consider woman suffrage, but in addition to garnering supporters, she also incited the opposition. Two weeks after the first column, the *Clay County News* published a response written by “a negative.” Instead of coming down as either in favor or against woman suffrage, the author offered a nuanced interpretation of voting rights. While he pointed out that married women enjoyed protection from their husbands and did not require the vote, he believed that, because they lacked male representation, single women could and should vote. Ultimately, asserted the columnist, women, as benefactors of female enfranchisement, had to decide whether or not women could vote. Men had little choice but to vote as their female relatives desired. “My mother,” he reported, “does not want to vote, nor live to see the day when she can.”⁵⁴⁴

Janes continued to argue for the merits of woman suffrage during the summer of 1884 through the weekly columns published in the *Clay County News*. In addition to attacking the government for prohibiting the full development of women, as “intelligent, conscious, sentient, [and] responsible” people created in the image of God, Janes also explained why female enfranchisement promised to improve the political process. Republican political tradition meant that the government was merely a “large home composed of many smaller ones.”⁵⁴⁵ For over two hundred years, men of the republic had struggled to halt corruption, end vice, and destroy abuse, poverty, and crime in the home. With these failures threatening the entire foundation of government, Janes instructed men to “get out of the way of the women” and give her “rights as a conscious responsible individual...to protect the home.”⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁴ “A Negative Speaks,” *Clay County News*, May 29, 1884.

⁵⁴⁵ “Is Woman’s Ballot Necessary?” *Clay County News*, June 19, 1884.

⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

According to Janes, woman suffrage promised a restoration of civic virtue and a renewed pledge of service to the nation.

The public debate over woman suffrage revealed how people living in small, rural communities interacted with and responded to the woman suffrage movement. In contrast to the organized campaigns that shaped the cause in Yankton County, informal, somewhat sporadic events characterized activity in Clay County. Through established channels of female organization to small newspaper columns, the people of Clay County encountered woman suffrage as a hotly contested issue that could provoke a wide range of reactions on a spectrum that included outright support, nuanced interpretation, and direct rejection. Comparing the organized campaigns in Yankton County to the informal activities in Clay County underscores just how malleable, adaptable, and incongruous the movement was during the late-nineteenth century. Despite the informality with which the movement progressed in Clay County, its people repeated many of the same arguments on citizenship and home protection as those spread by suffragists in Yankton County. While they did not question its theoretical implications, they did recognize the contradiction inherent in female citizenship—that women did not enjoy all of its rights as guaranteed by the nation’s founding documents. In addition, they countered fearful predictions that women, armed with the ballot, abandoned their homes and families with arguments that highlighted how female participation infused politics with morality, justice, and social housekeeping.

While advocates such as Martha Janes attempted to direct the informal activities that shaped sentiments about woman suffrage in Clay County, she could not control the organic debates and discussions that materialized among its people. The men and women of Clay County took great interest in politics and political debates, and woman suffrage emerged as

one of the prominent political issues of the time. As woman suffrage became an increasingly prominent issue in 1884, men and women faced continued pressure to stake a position and defend it vehemently. Like so many other political and social reforms of the period, woman suffrage caused people to take sides and line up with those people who shared their vision of democracy and female civic participation. Woman suffrage elicited a range of responses. Many residents of Clay County retained a “middling” reaction to the cause—neither pledging support nor offering opposition—and took the stance of interested observers as the debates played out. A few people, however, adopted polar opposite viewpoints and ardently vowed to defend their positions. Over a period of eight months, a simple opinion piece published in the *Clay County News* transformed into a heated debate that eventually resulted in name-calling and personal attacks.

The seemingly harmless article came from the pen of Sioux Rapids resident George Coles. He had kept up with the outpouring of pro-suffrage articles appearing in the *Clay County News* over the summer of 1884, and he wanted to insert into the fray his own thoughts on the cause. Even though he resided in Buena Vista County, Sioux Rapids bordered Clay County on its southern edge, so Coles probably felt a close affinity to his northern neighbors. His first communication, dated July 3, 1884, took up two full-length columns on the front page of the *Clay County News*. It laid out a rationale that relied heavily on a Christian interpretation of marriage roles. It also pointed to the ferocity with which Biblical interpretations could influence political positions. He argued that just as Christ sat at the head of the Christian church so too did the husband control his wife. Any inversion of those roles threatened the values at the core of upright, Christian society: love, peace, and harmony. According to Coles, following the Bible’s specific instructions ensured a positive

and healthy relationship between a husband and wife. While the husband enjoyed the right to govern and protect his wife, she flourished when she served her husband and made him happy. “Each have different spheres,” he explained, arguing that when each party fulfilled their sphere, they perfected together “the whole, as the Creator designed they should.”⁵⁴⁷ He admitted plainly that women could preach, teach, and lecture, but in pursuing these activities, they reversed the dynamics of the relationship, degraded the union, and caused husbands to decrease their affection and love for their wives. Finally, he condemned woman suffrage advocates, claiming that they brought “untold misery,” divorce, discord, and irreparable harm to the family as the foundation of order and happiness in society.⁵⁴⁸ The devil himself had infiltrated the minds of suffragists, he asserted, and he urged his fellow Christians to reject woman suffrage as a blasphemous and sinful doctrine.

Coles expressed his condemnation of woman suffrage by invoking traditional interpretations that called for strict segregation between male and female familial roles. In his estimation, men and women occupied opposite, yet complementary positions, and his analysis pointed to a clear indictment of any woman who attempted to blur the line. As scholar Paula Baker noted, during the nineteenth century a large segment of the American population held beliefs similar to Coles. For these people, woman suffrage was dangerous; it represented a radical step away from the familiarity of women’s revered—and separate—role in the home.⁵⁴⁹ Men like Coles feared woman suffrage because they believed it promised to upend the social order. To them, female enfranchisement threatened a radical and

⁵⁴⁷ “Communicated,” *Clay County News*, July 3, 1884.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁹ Paula Baker, “The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920,” *The American Historical Review* 89 (June, 1985): 620, 638.

revolutionary change in the idea of “woman,” shifting it away from its complementary position with “man” and toward an autonomy of full citizenship that took “man” out of the equation. Many anti-suffrage articles, like the one written by Coles, painted a frightening portrait of a world in which sexual deviance replaced proper femininity.⁵⁵⁰ In the weeks that followed, other anti-suffrage advocates submitted articles that echoed his passionate avowal against woman suffrage. In one article, an author illustrated his claims using the story of Adam and Eve. He argued that God originally created woman as man’s equal, but Eve’s abuse of power led Adam into sin. He concluded that “family government has a bible precedent,” declaring that the husband was “the supreme ruler of the family” and that the wife had to pay for Eve’s betrayal by submitting entirely to his authority.⁵⁵¹

Coles’s and others’ binary assessment of conventional male and female spheres lined up well with dominant Victorian assessments that placed women within the home and men in public affairs.⁵⁵² On one hand, the vehemence and fervor with which he and others argued revealed a strong ideological adherence to traditional gender systems in Clay County. On the other, the tenacity with which they clung to these ideals of female inferiority and subjection exposed deeper tensions that threatened to upend the gendered order upon which they relied.

⁵⁵⁰ Linda Lumsden, *Rampant Women: Suffragists and the Right of Assembly* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), xxv; Ellen DuBois, “The Radicalism of the Woman Suffrage Movement: Notes Toward the Reconstruction of Nineteenth-Century Feminism,” in, *History of Women in the United States*, Nancy Cott, ed., vol. 19 (Munich: K. G. Saur Verlag GmbH & Co., 1994), 3-4.

⁵⁵¹ “Woman’s Sphere from a Biblical Standpoint,” *Clay County News*, July 31, 1884.

⁵⁵² For an assessment of the prescriptive literature of the early nineteenth-century, see Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer, 1966): 151-74; Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965); Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

In fact, the structured gender division for which Coles advocated functioned more as an ideal and less as a reality by the late-nineteenth century. Female reformers working for a variety of issues, including child welfare, divorce law, property law, temperance, and voting rights, already had begun to claim a permanent presence that recognized them as actors with equal access to public, political spaces. Moreover, the alleged “separate spheres” paradigm had failed to encapsulate the lived experiences of rural women for centuries, experiences in which regularly and frequently women stretched, bent, and broke the so-called line between the genders. Instead of affirming the reality of male and female familial relations, Coles’s article revealed the cracks that had weakened the system for years. His passionate opposition toward woman suffrage came as a desperate, last-ditch attempt to reinstate a gendered dynamic that never truly existed.⁵⁵³

The response to Coles’s article confirmed that woman suffrage support was prevalent among the residents of Clay County and Iowa. A month after the *Clay County News* published Coles’s letter, it printed a reply written by Charles M. Brooke of Toledo, located in Tama County in central Iowa. That Brooke issued a response from his residence in Toledo speaks to the wide circulation of the *Clay County News* and the appeal of articles on woman suffrage. Brooke argued that some husbands strayed from Christ’s command, failing to protect and love their wives unconditionally. In those situations, he claimed, wives had every right stop submitting to their husbands. In addition, he asserted that the Bible did not require women to remain silent in churches, noting that Paul’s admonition referred “to an ignorant

⁵⁵³ Historians of rural women have criticized the “separate spheres” ideology as purported by other scholars. See, Barbara Handy-Marchello, *Women of the Northern Plains: Gender and Settlement on the Homestead Frontier, 1870-1930* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005); Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*.

class of women, who were not competent to speak intelligently.”⁵⁵⁴ Brooke recognized that many morally upright and Christian women regularly spoke out on appropriate topics, especially temperance. In the hands of men, temperance foundered among “little petty societies” that failed to “overthrow the monster of intemperance.”⁵⁵⁵ Women, as members of the WCTU, painted a “different scene on the canvass,” and they deserved to “rejoice in the grandest [of] victories.”⁵⁵⁶ According to Brooke, Coles spoke against the cause from a weak theoretical standpoint, failing to account for the ways in which women had already uplifted politics through their moral and pious temperance work.

Brooke’s response prompted Coles to submit a second article to the *Clay County News* in September 1884. In an analysis similar to that of his first correspondence, Coles argued that the defined separation of male and female roles came from nature. Using the analogy of an electrical circuit, he positioned man as the positive and woman as the negative. Just as electricity sought equilibrium by moving from positive to negative, so too did “all of nature’s operations” strive for balance.⁵⁵⁷ The relationship between men and women assumed these natural principles in that, when a woman exercised power outside of her sphere, she effectively shut down the circuit she shared with her husband and threatened her “moral and social natures” as well as her “health” and the “physical operations of her body.”⁵⁵⁸ Woman suffrage neither benefited American society nor signaled progress. Instead, it blinded people like Brooke into believing that politics belonged to women as well as men.

⁵⁵⁴ “Woman Suffrage,” *Clay County News*, Aug. 7, 1884.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁷ “Woman Suffrage,” *Clay County News*, Sept. 4, 1884.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Coles's rebuttal incited more than just another response from Brooke. While Brooke issued a rejoinder a month later, two other correspondents made known their opinions in separate letters published in the *Clay County News*. The two writers hid their identities by signing with only initials, "H. M. H." and "A. N. G.," because, as they admitted in later correspondence, they were women. H. M. H. and A. N. G. attacked Coles for more than just his stance on woman suffrage. H. M. H. characterized his "two lengthy articles" as an "ungentlemanly assault" not only on women but also on all who sympathized with her struggle for equal rights as citizens.⁵⁵⁹ In addition, H. M. H. accused Coles of "indiscriminately" targeting "every woman regardless of her character or moral worth."⁵⁶⁰ A. N. G. went even further, calling him a "half baked lunatic" and an "old fashioned" foggy.⁵⁶¹ Apparently she knew Coles personally, for she predicted, "it is quite probable that in the near future Mr. Coles will be around kissing her babies (there are three of them)."⁵⁶² Finally, she chided Coles for wasting his time with ridiculous arguments against a cause that had gained significant support in the county. "Give us a rest," she directed.⁵⁶³

The debate between Coles and Brooke escalated through the winter of 1884 and 1885. Between November 1884 and February 1885, the *Clay County News* published seven more lengthy articles, three from Coles and four from Brooke.⁵⁶⁴ The argument between the two

⁵⁵⁹ "Strange Logic," *Clay County News*, Oct. 31, 1884.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁶¹ Ibid.; "Woman Suffrage," *Clay County News*, Nov. 6, 1884.

⁵⁶² "Woman Suffrage," *Clay County News*, Nov. 6, 1884.

⁵⁶³ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁴ "Rejoinder," *Clay County News*, Nov. 13, 1884; "Rejoinder," *Clay County News*, Nov. 20, 1884; "Woman Suffrage," *Clay County News*, Nov. 27, 1884; "Woman Suffrage," *Clay County News*, Dec. 11, 1884; "Brook's Rejoinder," *Clay County News*, Jan. 8, 1885; "Woman Suffrage," *Clay County News*, Jan. 22, 1885; "Brook's Rejoinder," *Clay County News*, Feb. 5, 1885.

men soon devolved into name-calling and personal attacks. While Coles went as far as labeling Brooke the “antichrist,” Brooke called Coles a blind, ignorant, and dishonest fool. Coles blamed woman suffrage for clouding Brooke’s mind and for everything from intemperance and divorce to murder, heathenism, and pure evil. The intensity with which Coles struck against the cause underscores just how unsettling and frightening it appeared to some rural Midwesterners. Woman suffrage did not just signify a mere change in electoral policy, gender, and political participation; it threatened to overthrow the family as the foundation of male dominance and the American political system. For people like Coles, woman suffrage was a highly radical and offensive reform movement. He promised to wield his “pen against woman suffrage as the great bane of human society, so long as the Lord gives me strength to do so.”⁵⁶⁵ Unfortunately for Coles, L. S. Merritt, the editor of the *Clay County News*, apparently had enough of the fight by February 1885, and he did not publish another letter from either man after that date.

The nine-month ordeal that played out in the *Clay County News* encapsulated the range of ideologies, arguments, and responses utilized by rural people in Clay County as they interacted with woman suffrage both abstractly and practically. As Coles relied upon theoretical analogies and Christian doctrine to reject woman suffrage, others like Brooke pointed to the proven ways women had improved American society, especially through their leadership in the temperance movement. H. M. H. and A. N. G. criticized Coles’s position from their perspective as disenfranchised female citizens, who believed such shortsighted and simplistic assessments of women’s political potential were extremely limiting and problematic. As the nineteenth century reached its end, small groups of women in Clay

⁵⁶⁵ “Woman Suffrage,” *Clay County News*, Nov. 27, 1884.

County continued to pressure their male relatives, neighbors, and community leaders to support women's right to vote. They also continued to exert authority through established networks of women's clubs, church groups, and other social organizations.

A final push toward sustained organization for woman suffrage occurred between 1897 and 1898 in Clay County, over ten long years after the work of Janes to promote woman suffrage. It came as a response to heightened efforts from state and national leaders to introduce and pass a bill that granted a statewide vote on woman suffrage amendment in the Iowa Legislature. As they promoted the bill, suffragists organized conferences to take place throughout northern Iowa.⁵⁶⁶ A local committee, led by Mrs. J. B. Shesler, Mrs. Hastings, and Mrs. Green, formed as early as May 1897, and they called a county convention to convene by the end of the month. Arguing that woman suffrage had could purify politics by encouraging moral improvement among men, the women called on all supporters who wished to discuss "important business concerning methods of work best suited to hasten the establishment" of woman suffrage in Iowa to attend.⁵⁶⁷ The first steps toward organization were tentative and hesitate, as the reporters noted that at the start of their first convention supporters did not even know which of the committee members served as the leader. By default, Mrs. J. B. Shesler emerged as the primary contact for the new group until attendees at the convention elected her their first president. Other people, including Mrs. F. A. Squire, a member of the Spencer Woman's Club and prominent participant in the annual Farmers' Institutes, and the Reverend Joseph Sopher of the Greenville Friends Church served in executive committee roles. In addition to addressing business matters, attendees also heard

⁵⁶⁶ Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 632.

⁵⁶⁷ "Call for Suffrage Conventions," *Clay County News*, May 20, 1897.

suffrage speakers, including Adelaide Ballard, president of the IESA. Most of the speakers, including Ballard, countered arguments that woman suffrage promised to radically reshape politics or renounce their femininity by claiming instead that women “see a means of suppressing vice and bettering the individual and the community.”⁵⁶⁸

By the fall of 1897, suffrage supporters in Clay County began to establish what appeared to be organized work. With only a week’s notice from the NAWSA, the Clay County Suffrage Association called a second convention to convene on September 14.⁵⁶⁹ Because of the last-minute orders, only a small group gathered for the convention. Still, claimed the *Clay County News*, the audience was “full of interest” at the speakers’ “interesting” comments.⁵⁷⁰ Six months later, suffrage activity appeared to move steadily along as the Clay County Association reported that its members planned to circulate a petition “asking the legislature to submit a constitutional amendment to the voters of the state providing for striking the word ‘male’ from the constitution.”⁵⁷¹ The advocates noted that although many men believed that women did not want to vote, they nevertheless desired to put the measure to a majority vote.⁵⁷² Only a few months later in April 1898 did the Iowa Legislature debate such a bill. Disappointingly for Iowa’s state suffrage leaders, the resolution failed by a single vote.⁵⁷³

While suffragists in the state consoled themselves after the defeat of the resolution, other women rejoiced. According to the *Clay County News*, Mrs. H. A. Foster, the leader of a

⁵⁶⁸ “Equal Suffrage,” *Clay County News*, June 3, 1897.

⁵⁶⁹ “Suffrage Convention,” *Clay County News*, Sept. 9, 1897.

⁵⁷⁰ “News of the Week,” *Clay County News*, Sept. 16, 1897.

⁵⁷¹ “News of the Week,” *Clay County News*, Jan. 27, 1898.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*

⁵⁷³ “Suffragists Will Wage an Active Campaign,” *Clay County News*, April 14, 1898.

loose coalition of Clay County anti-suffragists, gloated at the news, arguing that neither Iowa's nor Clay County's residents supported the cause nearly as much as suffragists had hoped. Foster explained that while early anti-suffrage efforts had amounted to sending out literature and employing a few workers, they planned to step up their presence in the county, organizing anti-suffrage clubs and meetings "whose only object will be to oppose the woman suffragists."⁵⁷⁴ Foster perhaps spoke knowing that suffrage advocates in the county had planned a county convention about a week later. In addition to Adelaide Ballard, the IESA President, attendees heard two local pastors voice their support of woman suffrage, including Mary Collson of the Unitarian church and Rev. T. M. House of the Methodist Episcopal Church. While reports failed to indicate how the audience responded to these local religious leaders, their endorsement of woman suffrage aligned these denominations strongly with the cause, with or without the approvals of their respective congregations. In addition, Clay County suffragists at the meeting deplored the Iowa Legislature's refusal to submit the woman suffrage issue to popular vote. Although they promised to "unite in a vigorous protest and demonstrate their convictions and strength of purpose" against the Legislature, the advocates failed to mention any of their plans in further detail.⁵⁷⁵ In fact, all outward signs of activity waned after the conventions and conferences organized by the Clay County Suffrage Association in the spring of 1898. They did not hold a fall convention that year, and county newspapers published only generic material that promoted general interest in woman suffrage for the rest of the year. After eighteen months of vibrant, visible, and fairly well organized advocacy for the cause, suffrage activity seemingly disappeared in Clay County.

⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁵ "County Woman Suffrage Conference," *Clay County News*, May 26, 1898.

Lyon County

Lyon County provided a compelling counterpoint to the interactions with and support for woman suffrage in both Yankton and Clay Counties. Minnesota neither experienced an organized woman suffrage amendment campaign at the state level nor enjoyed much of a strong state woman suffrage association during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. In fact, suffrage leaders later admitted that little “real effective work” occurred until well into the second decade of the twentieth century.⁵⁷⁶ Compared to South Dakota and Iowa, Minnesota’s woman suffrage movement suffered from a lack of advocates willing to devote significant time to the cause, a substantial shortage of financial resources, and a high degree of political hostility toward the cause. In sum, the woman suffrage movement failed to gain much traction in the state. While the Minnesota Legislature considered quite a number of bills for woman suffrage between 1875 and 1920, it almost always defeated the intended measures. It did pass a law in 1875 giving women the vote in school elections, which allowed women to serve as elected officials on schools boards. However, members of the Legislature rejected almost every other woman suffrage resolution.⁵⁷⁷ Worse still, in 1898, a measure passed by the Minnesota Legislature effectively ended any hope suffragists had to secure an amendment that enfranchised women to the state’s constitution. The bill reinterpreted

⁵⁷⁶ Ethel Hurd, *Woman Suffrage in Minnesota: A Record of the Activities in its Behalf Since 1847* (Minneapolis: Inland Press, 1916), 31. In *History of Woman Suffrage*, the leaders of the National American Woman Suffrage Association provided a short historical narrative of early efforts in Minnesota. The section was so short that in three paragraphs the writers summed up the breadth of suffrage activity in the state from 1865 to 1891. Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 772.

⁵⁷⁷ Nineteenth Amendment Celebration Committee, “Minnesota Woman Suffrage Chronology,” Folder 7, Box 7, Barbara Stuhler Papers, Manuscripts Collections, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota [hereafter MHS]; Barbara Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors: Clara Ueland and the Minnesota Struggle for Woman Suffrage* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1995), 22.

electoral policy by stating that any future amendments to the state's constitution required a majority of the highest vote total. In essence, the new law made amending Minnesota's constitution virtually impossible, for instead of accepting a simple majority of votes cast separately on each amendment, it required a majority of the "largest number of votes cast at that election."⁵⁷⁸ Minnesota viewed not voting on an amendment in the same way they viewed a "no" vote.

Despite the dire situation in Minnesota in the late-nineteenth century, fourteen of Minnesota's suffrage advocates met together in 1881 to organize a state association. They formed the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association, or the MWSA, and chose Sarah Stearns of Duluth as their first president. With the help of a few sympathetic legislators, the MWSA introduced a variety of suffrage bills to the Minnesota Legislature. In 1885, legislators defeated a measure that allowed women to vote for county superintendent of schools. In 1891, the MWSA attempted to secure a bill that gave women the right to vote for municipal officials. While it passed the Senate, the House killed it. Suffrage leaders did receive a small victory in 1898 when voters approved a measure that allowed women to vote in library elections and serve on library boards.⁵⁷⁹ However, the bill that rewrote voter turnout requirements for amendments to the state's constitution also passed that year, forcing the MWSA to seek alternative objectives. Led by President Julia B. Nelson, the MWSA carried out petition work, garnering the signatures of thousands of Minnesotans in favor of the cause.⁵⁸⁰ By the twentieth century, a few "old guard" members continued to push for a

⁵⁷⁸ Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 778-79.

⁵⁷⁹ Nineteenth Amendment Celebration Committee, "Minnesota Woman Suffrage Chronology," Barbara Stuhler Papers, MHS; Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 29-32.

⁵⁸⁰ Stanton, et. al., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 773.

suffrage amendment to Minnesota's constitution while a new group of suffrage leaders advocated for a bill that granted presidential suffrage directly to women without any amendment campaign.

Just as woman suffrage struggled to become a viable movement in Minnesota, so too did it founder in Lyon County. While Lyon County shared much in common with Yankton and Clay Counties in terms of social activity, church involvement, political orientation, and ethnic composition, it contrasted sharply over woman suffrage. While Yankton County residents experienced structured campaigns and Clay County's people informally but passionately discussed the movement, exhibiting a range of opinions in the process, the inhabitants of Lyon County remained almost silent on the movement during the late-nineteenth century. The lack of a well-organized state association no doubt inhibited county-level activities, but newspaper reports, records from women's organizations, and other evidence indicated that the people of Lyon County hardly ever interacted with or discussed the merits of the cause. Lyon County's experience with woman suffrage underscores the haphazard nature of the reform. In some cases it reached people on multiple levels while in others it failed to garner substantial attention.

Local newspaper reports revealed the few cases in which Lyon County gave consideration to the movement. During the summer and fall of 1895, the MWSA sponsored two suffrage organizers, Emma Smith DeVoe, who had worked in Yankton County during the 1890 campaign, and Laura Johns of Kansas, to canvass the state and drum up support for the movement.⁵⁸¹ Perhaps in response to their efforts, the Republican *Lyon County Reporter* published a series of six articles on woman suffrage. Beginning on October 12, 1895, articles

⁵⁸¹ Ibid., 773.

with the title “Should We Ask for the Suffrage?” appeared in the pages of the newspaper. Written by Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselear, a national woman suffrage correspondent, the articles referenced examples from across the country that painted a favorable picture of the movement.⁵⁸² From the wage-working women of New York who owned their own property but had no immediate political representative to the women enfranchised in 1893 in Colorado, Van Rensselear offered examples in a straightforward and diplomatic fashion. Neither provocative nor upsetting, her articles merely pointed out the key arguments for woman suffrage and presented them for consideration by the wider public. In comparison to Martha Janes’s acerbic and confrontational comments published in the newspapers of Clay County, Van Rensselear’s remarks were rather tame. She did highlight the plight of female property holders who lacked the ballot, but her intent in doing so was merely to provide “careful consideration” and a “respectful” summation of pro-suffrage arguments.⁵⁸³ The tone of Van Rensselear’s articles probably reflected the stance of the editor of the *Lyon County Reporter*, and perhaps the county’s residents more broadly, on woman suffrage. A week after publishing Van Rensselear’s first article, the editor published another article with little substance. “There has been much talk about ‘woman’s sphere’...[but] at any rate, whether woman has all the rights she wants or not, she has always attracted attention, and men have

⁵⁸² “Should We Ask for the Suffrage?” *Lyon County Reporter*, Oct. 12, 1895; “Should We Ask for the Suffrage?” *Lyon County Reporter*, Oct. 19, 1895; “Should We Ask for the Suffrage,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Oct. 26, 1895; “Should We Ask for the Suffrage?” *Lyon County Reporter*, Nov. 2, 1895; “Should We Ask for the Suffrage?” *Lyon County Reporter*, Nov. 9, 1895; “Should We Ask for the Suffrage?” *Lyon County Reporter*, Nov. 16, 1895.

⁵⁸³ “Should We Ask for the Suffrage?” *Lyon County Reporter*, Oct. 12, 1895.

made remarks about her.”⁵⁸⁴ The article was neither challenging nor inspiring in its rhetoric and argument.

Simplistic assessments aside, the distance between Lyon County residents and the woman suffrage movement only grew wider over the course of the late-nineteenth century. An episode in county politics displayed the majority opinion on the cause in April 1895. A group of Republican Party leaders, disappointed at the outcome of a recent school election, blamed the results on “the worst element in the community,” a group of women of “bad character” who, because of the “forbidden quality of their occupations,” voted for the most corrupt candidates on the ballot.⁵⁸⁵ Even worse, decried the *Lyon County Reporter*, the upright and moral majority of women voters did not counteract the ballots cast by this disgraceful bunch of miscreants. In a fateful decision, most of the honest women who had “right ideas of politics” failed to vote, believing that their positions as wives and mothers, along with their “ordinary interests” outside of suffrage, precluded them from participating.⁵⁸⁶ In essence, the report subtly asserted that the best way for proper women to exert their authority was through the home, not through the ballot box. In addition, the results of the election underscored the “hopelessness of woman suffrage as an element of reform.”⁵⁸⁷ Episodes like this one merely affirmed that women lacked “the proper grit for a reformer when sacrifices of ‘good form’ are demanded.”⁵⁸⁸ Enthusiasm for reform among women,

⁵⁸⁴ “Women,” *Lyon County Reporter*, Oct. 17 1895.

⁵⁸⁵ “Woman Suffrage,” *Lyon County Reporter*, April 19, 1895.

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

according to the author, was “skin-deep,” insincere, and weak; woman suffrage promised to endanger American politics more than uplift it.⁵⁸⁹

The Nature of Reform

Lyon County offers a striking contrast to the structured campaigns in Yankton County and the informal, yet lively, expressions of woman suffrage in Clay County. Comparing the forms the movement took in Yankton, Clay, and Lyon Counties reveals the dynamic nature of reform in local communities. While woman suffrage enjoyed national prominence and support in each of these three states, it varied tremendously among the counties under consideration. The study of woman suffrage in these three counties reformulates ideas regarding the nature of Progressive reform. Historians have spent much time and energy explaining Progressivism. They have elucidated the major incentives for reform, traced the key figures within the multitude of movements, and attempted to characterize the period. The Progressive Era and the reforms that dominated it, however, deserve further scrutiny. Progressivism defies easy analysis because of the variety and dissimilarity of reform movements. General or broad assessments of the period, then, fall short of fully capturing the Progressive spirit because they encompass issues and causes that, in many ways, competed against each other. For example, striving for order and efficiency in industry did not resonate among the women who advocated for the right to vote. Historians must undertake studies of the Progressive Era that elucidate specific reforms and that reveal the way that the local institutions and people shaped this drive to change.

The study of woman suffrage in Clay, Yankton, and Lyon counties reinvigorates debates about Progressivism because it produces a nuanced approach to assessments of

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid.

reform. In particular, grounding the study of woman suffrage in a local place sheds light on the nature of reform at the grassroots level. Simple periodizations, in which movements began and end at marked dates, obscure the complex ways people in these rural communities experienced reform. Woman suffrage developed haphazardly and unevenly in these three counties. As the case of Yankton demonstrated, some rural people experienced woman suffrage as a cycle of campaigns, planned out and executed by state and national leaders mostly outside of their community networks. For these residents, woman suffrage arose as a potential amendment and an issue for which they required an opinion in some form. In contrast, for the residents of Clay County, the lack of organized work on behalf of the woman suffrage caused it to remain more of an abstract desire advocated by individuals or small groups of men and women at sporadic points over the course of decades. In this case, woman suffrage emerged alongside other movements for reform, such as temperance, and became a part of debates about other issues and concerns. Finally, the case of Lyon County revealed a county in which inhabitants rarely discussed woman suffrage. In this case, the reform was fragmented and weak, a product of a people unwilling to engage with the cause in any meaningful way.

Using locality to uncover a nuanced interpretation of Progressivism should prompt historians to continue to pursue new approaches to this period of American history. Instead of attempting to characterize the period as a whole, scholars should move toward analyses that examine particular reforms, specific instances or issues, or other categories. Of utmost concern for historians should be studies that incorporate nuanced approaches to race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, gender, and class. They should seek analyses that uncover how people reacted to reform as these factors became more pronounced. In this regard, directing

studies toward the Midwest, with all its late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century demographic and social diversity, offers scholars a fantastic place in which to ground complex analyses. By comparing the ethnic, social, and cultural reactions of the people living in these three localities to woman suffrage, a more accurate assessment of Progressive reform emerges. Progressivism was less about generalities and more about what specific people from a variety of backgrounds attempted to do within a “spirit” of progressive reform. For most of the reform-minded people of this era, they had to rely on neighbors, friends, and kin—some of whom shared similar ethnicities, livelihoods, and cultures but many who did not—to promote any sort of change. Many times, especially in the Midwest, those issues that gained traction only did so because they were able to transcend differences of ethnicity, religion, or culture and resonate their cause with people different from them. As the study of woman suffrage in these three Midwestern counties reveals, finding people to support reform was a difficult and uneven process. It involved far more steps back than forward.

Chapter 4: Woman Suffrage in Iowa, 1916-1920

On February 14, 1911, the Spencer Woman's Club convened their regular meeting. They followed the usual order of business—roll call, approval of the previous meeting's minutes, reports from the standing committees, and the presentation of the literary program—but this meeting was special. The women dubbed it the “Susan B. Anthony Memorial Meeting,” and their topic was exclusively woman suffrage. Members Ethel Green, Mary Cory, and two other women delivered papers on various aspects of woman suffrage. Other women responded to roll call by relating interesting items about the cause or reading letters from enfranchised women in other states. In their scrapbook, members noted that discussing woman suffrage that day was no coincidence. Woman suffrage, they noted, “was making headlines.”⁵⁹⁰ They had organized the distinctive memorial meeting in recognition of a heightened consciousness of the movement, an awareness that had developed over decades and gradually taken hold of the men and women of Clay County. During the late-nineteenth century, the residents of Clay County had engaged with issues regarding woman suffrage passionately but also informally and abstractly. Their responses contained considerable variation because no official channel existed through which to direct their energy. In addition, many residents considered woman suffrage radical, dangerous, and undesirable, and they voiced that opinion without reservation. What changed by the second decade of the twentieth-century was not necessarily the amount of suffrage activity or the arguments cited. Instead, suffragists in Iowa could speak about the cause in real terms because they finally had a structured campaign and actual goal for which to work. As more people interacted with the movement, encountered pro-suffrage arguments, and read about the cause in newspapers and

⁵⁹⁰ Spencer Woman's Club Scrapbook, page 4, SWCC, CCHS.

other periodicals, they became familiar with woman suffrage. Familiarity with woman suffrage reshaped the movement from abstract issue into viable possibility.

Celebrating the life of Susan B. Anthony reflected a pattern of increased visibility and acceptance of woman suffrage in Clay County and Iowa. In 1913, two years after the women held their meeting, the Iowa Legislature passed a resolution that called for a woman suffrage amendment on the state's constitution. A second measure swept through the legislature two years later, elating suffragists who had deemed the requirements for an amendment campaign too difficult to attain. Securing the resolution over two consecutive sessions meant that, on June 5, 1916 at the primary election, a majority of the state's eligible voters could grant women the right to vote in Iowa. Members of the legislature had finally given Iowa's suffragists the opportunity for which they had worked diligently for decades. During the fall of 1915, the IESA, led by charismatic reformer Flora Dunlap, embarked on the single most important campaign in the history of suffrage in the state. State leaders recognized that victory depended upon a well organized, thorough, and highly publicized campaign in each of its ninety-nine counties.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁹¹ The amendment, dubbed Allen-Ring bill, called for the removal of the word "male" from the suffrage provisions in the Iowa constitution. The House followed suit on February 23, passing the bill with eighty-four "yes" votes and nineteen "no" votes. In order to allow women to vote in the November 1916 elections, Senator Roy D. Nordyke of Richland pushed for a "special election bill" that placed the measure on the primary election ballot on June 5, 1916. Representatives in the House passed a similar amended resolution with a strong majority, and the "suffrage bill" became an official measure on the primary ballot. "Flora Dunlap," Folder 23, Box 7, Des Moines Iowa Woman Suffrage Records [hereafter DMIWSR], State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa [hereafter SHSIDM]; "Suffrage, 1915 Yearbook pg 147," unpublished document, Folder 25, Box 1, Iowa Suffrage Memorial Commission, Collection 23/3 [hereafter ISMC], Iowa Women's Archives, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa [hereafter IWAUI]; "Woman's Suffrage," Forty-Second Annual Report of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa, Sept. 28-Oct. 1, 1915, Proceedings of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa, page 148, Box 11, Women's Christian Temperance

An organized amendment campaign changed the context in which work for woman suffrage took place in Iowa; it did not, however, mark a turning point in efforts to secure female enfranchisement. Instead, suffrage advocates recycled the methods and ideas propagated for years by the National American Woman Suffrage Association, or NAWSA, instituting a campaign unable to incorporate any degree of flexibility, nuance, or accountability for rural life. Historians who study woman suffrage have reinforced a narrative of woman suffrage that overlooks the deficiencies of the movement, preferring to highlight the heroic efforts of a committed group of elite women. The narrative follows an upward trajectory, one in which difficulty remains a constant presence, but, more importantly, one in which triumph ultimately defines the movement.⁵⁹² Historians must move past uncomplicated narratives, comprehending the movement as a complex body of interests, ideologies, and personalities and considering seriously its defeats and failures. An innovative analysis of woman suffrage at the county level reveals these nuances and accounts for the constraints and realities of rural life, important factors lacking in most conventional histories. In Clay County, local suffrage leaders envisioned an extensive campaign to canvass all residents. In the end, however, these advocates only worked with the people of small towns—primarily with the women living in the county seat of Spencer—but even those efforts were rather short and piecemeal. Most of the people in the county interacted only

Union of Iowa Collection [hereafter WCTUI], IWAUI; “Annual Address by Mrs. Ida B. Wise Smith,” *Forty-Second Annual Convention of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, page 25, Box 11, WCTUI, IWAUI.

⁵⁹¹ “Flora Dunlap,” Folder 23, Box 7, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁵⁹² For examples of this trend in the historiography, see, Flexner, *Century of Struggle*; Ellen Carol DuBois, *Woman Suffrage and Women’s Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*; McBride, *On Wisconsin Women*; Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*; Buechler, *The Transformation of the Woman Suffrage Movement*; Mead, *How the Vote Was Won*.

briefly with the campaign, and suffrage leaders failed to gain sustained support for the cause. The constraints and complications of country life combined with inadequate organization to impede efforts to connect with the people living in rural areas. By not accounting for the conditions of rural life, suffrage leaders failed to engage with most people in Clay County. In addition, they took for granted the complex political milieu in which rural residents viewed woman suffrage, a context that included a host of Progressive reforms promising to remedy societal ills in the early-twentieth century.

Prior to 1913, disappointment characterized the fight for woman suffrage at both the state and national levels. In Iowa, each legislative session had ended with shattered promises, futile legislative attempts, and disenchantment. Activity ebbed and flowed between about 1880 and 1910, and a lack of any sustained or concerted effort for woman suffrage had limited support for the cause. At the national level, activity had stalled, thanks to the inept organizational skills of president Anna Howard Shaw. Carrie Chapman Catt, one of the key players in the 1890 South Dakota campaign, had assumed the presidency of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, or NAWSA, in 1900 after Susan B. Anthony retired. She served until 1904, relinquishing her position when her second husband became ill. After his death, she turned her attention to the international movement for woman suffrage. Shaw won the presidency after Catt's departure in 1904, but her dynamic speaking skills could not make up for inadequate organizational abilities.⁵⁹³ As the NAWSA splintered into competing factions, individual leaders took over the direction of the campaigns in their respective states. Suffragists achieved suffrage victories in Washington in 1910, California in 1911, Arizona, Oregon, and Kansas in 1912, Alaska and Illinois in 1913, and Nevada and

⁵⁹³ Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 248.

Montana in 1914, but despite these accomplishments, members of the national executive committee agreed that by 1915, Shaw better served the movement in ways outside the presidency. By late 1915, NAWSA members called on Catt to return to the helm, and she accepted the position in December 1915.⁵⁹⁴

Catt's return as president of the NAWSA came in the midst of the woman suffrage amendment campaign in Iowa, with fundraising serving as the major concern for the IESA. In October 1915, members of the state organization met at their annual convention to discuss the details of their fundraising efforts. In order to secure "women with a high grade of intelligence" for the campaign, argued president Flora Dunlap, they "must be compensated for" their work.⁵⁹⁵ In addition, the IESA required large funds to purchase the massive amount of literature Dunlap envisioned for distribution. "Iowa should be strewn knee deep with literature," she proclaimed.⁵⁹⁶ In addition to internal fundraising efforts, the IESA also appealed to other states for financial support. One of the first states to endorse the campaign in Iowa was Nebraska, and at the convention, Dunlap read an important letter from leaders of the Nebraska Suffrage Association. In it, Nebraska's state organization offered Iowa's suffragists the "heartiest co-operation in her labor for the ballot and contributing toward the Campaign fund."⁵⁹⁷ In addition, the letter contained a short, yet telling and ultimately strong, word of warning. The Nebraska Association pledged to assist the Iowa campaign in any way

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid., 272-73; Ida Hustad Harper, *The History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 5: 1900-1920 (New York: J. J. Little & Ives Company, 1922), 625.

⁵⁹⁵ Annual Convention Meeting Minutes, 1915, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, Folder 5, Box 9, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid.

so that “Iowa might profit by Nebraska’s mistake in failing to reach the rural voter.”⁵⁹⁸ In acknowledging their failed attempt at passing a suffrage amendment, Nebraska’s suffragists clearly identified aligning the men and women who resided in the country as key for a suffrage victory in Iowa. Inadequate organization in these rural areas, Nebraska suffragists forewarned, spelled the defeat of any intended suffrage measure.

By late 1915, the NAWSA and the IESA began to organize the campaign through joint efforts. Newly reelected NAWSA President Carrie Chapman Catt invested personally in the work in Iowa, spearheading the early planning sessions. On December 21, 1915, Catt met privately with IESA President Flora Dunlap. Along with pledging financial support to the Iowa campaign, Catt also secured a group of national workers to canvass the state during the spring of 1916, promising to pay out of her own pocket for one national suffrage worker to spend five months in Iowa. Catt planned to visit the state three times during the suffrage campaign and devote her final stay, almost a full month, to traveling from county to county on a speaking tour. Catt’s financial and personal commitment to the Iowa campaign reflected more than a desire for victory in her home state. By late 1915 and early 1916, members of the nation’s two major political parties began to move past cautious, surface-level resolutions supporting the movement to the consideration of direct endorsements of the cause. Iowa’s Republican and Democratic parties had already expressed their support for a hearing on woman suffrage. In early July 1912, a large cadre of suffragists attended the Republican state convention, and, at the convention, delegates adopted a plank that recommended that the “general assembly of Iowa, as soon as possible, submit to the voters of the state a constitutional amendment providing that the state constitution be amended by striking from

⁵⁹⁸ Ibid.

section one of article two the word ‘male.’”⁵⁹⁹ A few weeks later, the Democrats adopted a plank that pledged the party’s approval of initiative and referendum on issues of public reform, naming woman suffrage specifically in the plank.⁶⁰⁰ Although neither the Republicans nor Democrats directly endorsed woman suffrage, Iowa’s suffragists perceived these resolutions as steps in the right direction. They hoped that eventually, with further agitation and education, state party leaders could take firm supportive stances on the cause. Catt held similar aspirations, hoping that the ballot for the women of Iowa could provoke national leaders of the Democratic and Republican Parties to shed their own lackluster opinions on woman suffrage and fully approve of the movement in their official party platforms.⁶⁰¹

In December 1915, the IESA issued a revised “Plan of Organization and Work for the Woman’s Suffrage Campaign in Iowa.” The directive adopted a hierarchical system of organization at the national, state, county, township, and, finally, ward level that mirrored the campaign structure used by most political parties. The IESA undertook most of the managerial issues and appointed county chairmen to head each county organization.⁶⁰² The county chairman in turn chose an officer corps, including a secretary, treasurer, and press chairman. Along with the county organization, the “Plan for Organization” instructed the

⁵⁹⁹ “Suffragists Elated Over the First Victory,” *Des Moines Tribune*, July, 1912, Suffrage Scrapbook, Folder 1, Box 2, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁶⁰⁰ “Opinion is Divided on Suffrage Deal,” Newspaper clipping, 1912, Suffrage Scrapbook, Folder 1, Box 2, DMIWSR, SHSIDM. According to suffragists, the Democratic Party’s resolution did not necessarily signify endorsement. “It seems to show that the [Democratic] Convention was not unfavorable to equal suffrage, yet it did not wish to commit itself in any way.” See, “Woman Suffrage Notes,” *Spencer Herald*, Aug. 14, 1912.

⁶⁰¹ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 253.

⁶⁰² I am using the terms “chairman” and “chairmen” purposefully, as the IESA used those words in their literature.

county chairman to select chairmen for each township or ward in the county. In addition to commanding this intricate unit of county officers, the task of organizing suffrage clubs throughout the county also fell to the county chairman.⁶⁰³ According to the “Plan for Organization,” drumming up support for the cause was simple. In addition to holding mass meetings among the residents of their county, the county chairman also could find entertaining speakers to engage audiences and secure the signatures of attendees on pledge cards. By following these instructions, the county chairman could assess local support for the cause, addressing those areas in which sentiment was weak.⁶⁰⁴

In addition to organizing suffrage clubs, county chairmen also had to put suffrage propaganda, in the form of pamphlets, flyers, and newspaper articles, in the hands of every resident of their county. The IESA envisioned a constant barrage of literature to descend upon Iowans and invade their daily lives. The state association instructed county officers to keep in especially close touch “with the newspapers of the county” to ensure that every article on woman suffrage received the “widest circulation possible.”⁶⁰⁵ In particular, newspapers served as the best avenue through which to reach the people living in the most remote, rural places. In addition to maintaining active connections with newspaper editors, the IESA also encouraged county organizers to distribute pamphlets and leaflets at widely attended public gatherings such as short courses, church meetings, and other social events.⁶⁰⁶ In particular, IESA directed county officers to target the churches in their counties, asking ministers to speak favorably about woman suffrage during their weekly sermons and choirs

⁶⁰³ Iowa Equal Suffrage Association [hereafter IESA], “A Plan of Organization and Work for the Woman’s Suffrage Campaign in Iowa,” page 1, Folder 16, Box 1, ISMC, IWAUI.

⁶⁰⁴ IESA, “A Plan of Organization,” page 2, IWAUI.

⁶⁰⁵ IESA, “A Plan of Organization,” page 3, IWAUI.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

to “use suffrage songs as encores.”⁶⁰⁷ State leaders also instructed the county chairman to form a resolutions committee to make requests of church societies, as well as other women’s, business, and civic organizations, to endorse suffrage directly and publicly.⁶⁰⁸ Furthermore, they suggested aligning business interests in the county to the cause by soliciting them to hang suffrage posters and pennants in their shops, stores, and window displays. Finally, the IESA charged township and ward chairmen with the arduous work of a door-to-door canvass of every farm, village, and town within their borders. In addition to leaving each voter a stack of propaganda, the IESA also instructed these organizers to stay and talk with each person willing to listen to their message.⁶⁰⁹ These directives clearly display the scale to which the IESA envisioned escalating its campaign during the spring of 1916. The “Plan for Organization” spelled out a comprehensive, structured, and well-organized model that offered a detailed plan for the work over the next five months. With official plans in place, suffragists had to tackle the daunting task of actually organizing a people who, for the most part, had never experienced an official amendment campaign.

The fight for enfranchisement began with slow, hesitant efforts, but the IESA benefited from invaluable support from two well-established organizations in Iowa, the Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs and the WCTU of Iowa. Since 1911, the Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs had maintained a high level of support for the woman suffrage movement.⁶¹⁰ In 1916, the Federation, of which the Spencer Woman’s Club was a member, issued a statewide decree, stating that clubwomen had a moral obligation to serve the suffrage cause.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ IESA, “A Plan of Organization,” page 4, IWAUI.

⁶⁰⁹ IESA, “A Plan of Organization,” page 6, IWAUI.

⁶¹⁰ “Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs Yearbook 1916-1917,” page 21, Folder 3, Box 5, Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs Collection, IWAUI.

President Lola A. Miller, called on the Federation's seventeen thousand members to "put aside all prejudice, tradition and habit of thought."⁶¹¹ She encouraged each clubwoman to "give generously of [her] time, money, and strength to further this cause and to do this work in Iowa now."⁶¹² In addition to the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs, the WCTU also stepped forward with their unbridled support. Since the late-nineteenth century, the WCTU in Iowa had supported woman suffrage in direct and indirect ways. In many cases, such as Clay County, the WCTU served as the center of suffrage activity in local places until the IESA could organize clubs devoted entirely to woman suffrage. However, by the twentieth century, suffragists in the state had attempted to divorce the twin issues of temperance and suffrage, and the WCTU served mainly in an auxiliary role to the movement.

Despite the lengths it went to establish its distinctiveness from the WCTU, the IESA relied heavily on the WCTU to support its county-level organizations. Of the twenty-three district organizations in the state, fifteen either engaged in direct suffrage work or contributed to the suffrage campaign financially.⁶¹³ Even though the state leaders attempted to distance themselves from temperance, the WCTU recognized the inextricable link between equal suffrage and prohibition in the minds of Iowa voters. During an address to the Forty-Second Annual Convention of the WCTU of Iowa, Ida B. Wise Smith stated, "Woman's suffrage can

⁶¹¹ "Iowa's Women Do Great Work," *Boone County Democrat*, Boone, Iowa, March 13, 1916, Ericson Public Library, Boone, Iowa.

⁶¹² *Ibid.*

⁶¹³ "Corresponding Secretary's Report," *Forty-Third Annual Report of the W. C. T. U.*, Fort Dodge, Iowa, Oct. 3-7, 1916, *Proceedings of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, page 44, 46, Box 11, WCTUI, IWAUI.

never be differentiated from the liquor question.”⁶¹⁴ According to Smith, liquor interests feared that an overwhelming majority of women in Iowa supported prohibition and, with the ballot in hand, could spell disaster for the liquor industry. Smith warned attendees that liquor interests in other states had already paid off political machines, attempting to secure the failure of any woman suffrage legislation. Smith promised members that a woman suffrage campaign in Iowa would uncover the lengths to which the liquor interests could go to deny women the right to vote. She encouraged the WCTU of Iowa to prepare itself for an arduous fight.⁶¹⁵

The plans created by the IESA began to trickle down to the county level as advocates carried the campaign to their local communities. In Clay County, organization for the 1916 campaign did not take place until April 1916, a long four months after Dunlap issued the “Plan for Organization,” but the campaign benefited from existing clubs of women who already had confronted and refined their beliefs on woman suffrage. The members of the most vibrant and active woman’s club, the Spencer Woman’s Club, became the local leaders of the 1916 campaign. Almost five years earlier, the Club had tackled the debates about woman suffrage and, through the process, had emerged as the group that aligned most with the cause. As early as their Anthony memorial meeting in 1911, the members of the Spencer Woman’s Club, as a civic-minded organization, had attained the reputation as a group of women who gave considerable, albeit hesitant thought to the merits of woman suffrage. Slowly, over the period of a year, they included more and more topics regarding women and

⁶¹⁴ “Annual Address by Mrs. Ida B. Wise Smith,” *Forty-Second Annual Convention of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, Iowa City, Iowa, Sept. 28-Oct. 1, 1915, *Proceedings of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, page 23, Box 11, WCTUI, IWAUI.

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*

their unequal status as part of their regular literary program. As early as 1912, the women engaged in structured debates and delivered polished papers that delved into issues centered on women and their quest for equal rights. At one debate in January 1912, the women argued whether or not “women should be co-workers with men and should receive the same remuneration for the same service.”⁶¹⁶ At another meeting held on October 15, 1912, the club devoted an entire meeting to “suffrage,” debating “arguments for and against.”⁶¹⁷ The meeting not only offered the Club’s members an opportunity to express their opinions as long-time friends and co-workers toward civic improvement; it also provided a comfortable and familiar setting in which to declare themselves at odds with each other. The minutes taken at the meeting, which the *Spencer Herald* published a day later, revealed a group divided. Just as many women presented papers for the cause as against it, and in a final vote, the members displayed their nuanced approaches toward the movement. While five women voted for woman suffrage, seven voted against it, and six indicated that they were neutral toward the prospect of voting.⁶¹⁸ The Spencer Woman’s Club served as a telling example of how women who shared a commitment to female political activism in civic affairs could align in different ways toward the cause. About as many women voted neutral as in favor or opposed, providing further complexity to constructing a female political identity toward the ballot. Binary assessments of “pro-suffragist” or “anti-suffragist” fail to explain the full range of responses with which these women engaged with woman suffrage. While the meeting

⁶¹⁶ Spencer Woman’s Club, 1911-1912 Program, SWCC, CCHS.

⁶¹⁷ Spencer Woman’s Club, 1912-13 Program, SWCC, CCHS.

⁶¹⁸ Spencer Woman’s Club, Minute Book 1910-1915, page 76, SWCC, CCHS; “Woman’s Club Hold Suffrage Meeting Tuesday Afternoon,” *Spencer Herald*, Oct. 16, 1912.

minutes taken that day offered no explanation of why those six women chose neutrality, they did reveal a group that probably enjoyed a variety of opinions of female enfranchisement.

Over the next three years, the members of the Spencer Woman's Club developed a closer allegiance with the cause, although not all members supported the cause outright. It took the constant agitation of the ardent suffrage advocates in the group to rally doubters. Led by Mary Cory, these advocates made sure to keep the issue a regular topic on the program. In addition, they also invited prominent speakers to rouse hesitant members. In October 1914, Cory issued a call to the IESA for one of their leaders to give a speech in Spencer. Flora Dunlap, newly elected president of the organization, answered and arrived at the county seat on November 1. At the Methodist Episcopal church, Dunlap presented her case to the entire community at the invitation of the Spencer Woman's Club. She spoke to a "large audience," and the *Spencer Herald* praised her as a "rapid-fire talker, and thoroughly posted on her subject."⁶¹⁹ Dunlap took care to distinguish suffragists in Iowa from the "suffragettes" in England, pointing out that Iowa's advocates were a "sane interpretation, based upon the equal rights of suffrage...the influence for good of the home and the state."⁶²⁰ In addition, she met "many ladies of Spencer" at Cory's home, and over tea and other light refreshments, she "gave a short talk on the inner working of the idea of equal suffrage."⁶²¹

While those in attendance at Dunlap's speech and reception did not record their thoughts in any minute book, her very presence among the ladies no doubt aroused consideration of the cause. It also probably led several women against or uncommitted to the

⁶¹⁹ "Woman's Suffrage Lecture," *Spencer Herald*, Nov. 4, 1914.

⁶²⁰ Ibid.

⁶²¹ Spencer Woman's Club, Minute Book 1910-1915, pages 160, 162-63, SWCC, CCHS; "Woman's Suffrage Lecture," *Spencer Herald*, Nov. 4, 1914.

movement to reevaluate their stance over the next year, for by January 1916, the club had officially endorsed woman suffrage. At their first meeting of the year and in response to the IESA's request to submit public resolutions in favor of woman suffrage, the members of the Spencer Woman's Club passed a resolution that described their position toward the impending vote on the proposed amendment. "We believe that the enfranchisement of woman is the next logical step in the progress of democracy," the declaration read, and members proclaimed their "cordial" endorsement of "the principles of equal suffrage."⁶²² They also moved to provide the resolution to the local newspapers for publication. Almost two months later, on February 28, they held a meeting devoted entirely to discussing the ensuing campaign. While members did not declare themselves suffragists, they argued that, as community members invested in the future of their homes, families, and civic institutions, they could ensure civic improvement with the ballot. Discussions of the right to vote centered not abstract claims that female enfranchisement was "right" or "just" but on topics such as "social service in small towns" and "our club as an aid to civic betterment."⁶²³ Their political identity toward suffrage emerged out of their devotion to uplifting their community, and they promoted that message over the course of the campaign.

The Spencer Woman's Club could assume this position because they enjoyed an established record of successful civic improvement projects. Under the direction of the Village Improvement Committee, which later changed its name to the Civics and Health Committee, the Club pursued a variety of causes that aimed to cure disease, clean up unsanitary conditions, and promote healthy living. As early as January 1912, Club members

⁶²² Spencer Woman's Club, Minute Book 1915-1925, page 22, SWCC, CCHS; "Spencer Club for Suffrage," *Spencer News*, Jan. 14, 1916.

⁶²³ Spencer Woman's Club, 1915-1916 Program, SWCC, CCHS.

wrote and published articles in the local newspaper that encouraged farmers, storekeepers, bakers, creamery workers, and other people who handled food products to maintain sanitary conditions. For example, the women encouraged farmers to keep their cows scrupulously clean, restaurant owners to maintain strict sanitary conditions in their kitchens, and storekeepers to cover their food with glass covers. “Will you do your part in the cause of health and cleanliness?” asked the women.⁶²⁴ The article and question posed at the end illuminated the position taken by the Club. While the farmer, storekeeper, and other food producers did the work of sanitation and health, the women of the community served as supervisors who oversaw their efforts. They explained this role in a resolution adopted on January 9, 1912. “Women direct a large percent of the buying,” they argued, noting that clean food was “essentially a woman’s cause.”⁶²⁵

Civic sentiment and a sense of leadership grew among the women over the next few years. In February 1912, they sponsored a series of films at the Farmers’ Institute that displayed the dangers of tuberculosis. Carrie Squire, a prominent member of the Club, also gave a talk entitled “The Menace of the Fly” at the meeting.⁶²⁶ A couple of years later, in July 1914, the women started the first garbage collection service in Spencer, asking housewives to subscribe to the service to ensure “less quarantine, more healthy children and happier house wives.”⁶²⁷ Along with their emphasis on sanitation, the Spencer Woman’s

⁶²⁴ Spencer Woman’s Club, Minute Book 1910-1915, page 49, SWCC, CCHS.

⁶²⁵ Ibid.

⁶²⁶ “Free Exhibition,” *Spencer Herald*, Jan. 24, 1912; “Farmers’ Institute,” *Spencer Herald*, Feb. 7, 1912.

⁶²⁷ Spencer Woman’s Club, Scrapbook, page 4, SWCC, CCHS; “Garbage,” *Spencer Herald*, July 8, 1914. Eventually, the city council passed an ordinance that required regular garbage pickup. Over two hundred fifty people signed up for the service in the first month. “City

Club also supported efforts related to healthcare. They undertook the first efforts for birth registration in the county, arguing that the practice assisted doctors in making proper diagnoses later. Shortly thereafter, the women partnered with the Extension Service of Iowa State College to promote a “Baby Health Contest.” A short time later they purchased furniture and other decorations to furnish one of the rooms at the hospital.⁶²⁸

In the midst of this outpouring of female civic activity, woman suffrage came to Clay County. As early as 1914 and 1915, the prominent newspapers published generic articles provided them by the IESA. In one article included in the July 9, 1915 issue of the *Spencer Herald*, the author concluded, “woman suffrage is only a question of time. It is coming.”⁶²⁹ After noting that the women in twelve states already enjoyed the right to vote, the article encouraged men to support women, not necessarily because they deserved equal rights but because, as wives and mothers, they ought to have the right to vote. A month later, in August 1915, both the *Spencer Herald* and the *Spencer News* published the first full-length articles that detailed the upcoming campaign for the woman suffrage amendment. Although planning was in its initial stages, the IESA hoped to conduct a “vigorous campaign...throughout the state.”⁶³⁰ In addition to emphasizing organization as a key toward victory, the suffragists also discussed their plans for fundraising. From general donations to organized fundraising events, the suffragists recognized that adequate financial support was important to ensuring a vibrant and widespread campaign. With those goals in mind, the IESA instituted its first

Council Passes Garbage Ordinance,” *Spencer News-Herald*, March 22, 1916; “What About Your Garbage?” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 3, 1916.

⁶²⁸ “Birth Registration,” *Spencer News*, March 24, 1914; Spencer Woman’s Club, Minute Book 1910-1915, page 167, SWCC, CCHS.

⁶²⁹ “Shall the Women Vote,” *Spencer Herald*, July 9, 1915.

⁶³⁰ “Suffrage Association,” *Spencer Herald*, Aug. 13, 1915.

fundraising campaign that fall, dubbing it “Iowa corn for Iowa women.” The fundraiser called on Iowa farmers, both men and women, to donate either a bushel of corn or the price of a bushel of corn toward the movement. With “golden yellow corn...[pouring] streams of golden coins in to the suffrage coffers,” the IESA hoped to raise money while simultaneously implicating Iowa’s farmers as significant supporters of the movement.⁶³¹

After months of preparation during the fall of 1915, by early 1916, suffrage advocates were ready to implement their plans. With civic authority and public visibility gained from well-publicized and received projects, the members of the Spencer Woman’s club emerged as the key organizers of suffrage work in Clay County during the spring of 1916. At the helm of campaign efforts stood the woman appointed county chairman, Mary Cory. As a long-time member of the Spencer Woman’s Club, she explained that her convictions in favor of woman suffrage developed slowly, “based no so much on the right of women to vote...but upon ordinary common sense.”⁶³² Her activism came not from any sort of equality argument but from the idea that women had a “responsibility of keeping the home pure, sanitary, morally clean, a fit place to rear children to become citizens of our great republic.”⁶³³ In that expectation, the ballot was not a radical proposition but merely another “weapon” for women to wield in their fight to safeguard the interests of the home. In her first act as county chairman, Cory appointed fellow members the Spencer Woman’s Club to serve on

⁶³¹ “Equal Suffrage Column,” *Spencer News*, Aug. 17, 1915.

⁶³² “Clay County Women Tell of Work Done,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 24, 1916. The *Spencer News* and the *Spencer Herald* consolidated on February 29, 1916, creating a single newspaper entitled the *Spencer News-Herald*.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*

committees for press, literature, and finance.⁶³⁴ Efforts started slowly, with Cory overseeing the printing of weekly or biweekly suffrage articles in the local newspapers. Published in early February 1916, the first article calling for female enfranchisement pointed to farm women as a significant segment of Iowa's rural population. "Farm women need the ballot," declared the missive, arguing that the estimated sixteen thousand "women farm owners and managers" required to vote to have more control over their "huge land investment."⁶³⁵ Other woman suffrage articles listed "twenty interesting facts about woman suffrage," argued that women were "loyal workers" and "big taxpayers," and claimed the ballot as a "home safeguard."⁶³⁶

The articles published in Clay County's newspapers provided regular literature in promotion of the cause. They also provided a basis upon which to develop face-to-face interactions with the residents of Clay County. The spark that ignited the first official organization for the campaign came with the arrival of nationally renowned speaker Ella S. Stewart, the former president of the Illinois Equal Franchise Society. In early April 1916, she gave a lively address at the Congregational Church, which welcomed her with open arms, despite the protests of a few who expected to see a "freak dressed in oddly-fashioned tweeds, a woman with hair askew and uncouth manner."⁶³⁷ In fact, Stewart's talk was "sane and clear and her points well taken," especially when she claimed that women as mothers and

⁶³⁴ "Getting Ready for the June 5 Battle," *Spencer News-Herald*, April 26, 1916. In all, newspaper reports publicly named sixty-four women as members of the woman suffrage campaign in Clay County.

⁶³⁵ "Farm Women Need the Ballot," *Spencer News*, Feb. 8, 1916.

⁶³⁶ "Twenty Interesting Facts About Woman Suffrage," *Spencer News*, Feb. 15, 1916; "Women Big Taxpayers," *Spencer News-Herald*, May 17, 1916; "Women Loyal Workers," *Spencer News-Herald*, May 17, 1916; "Ballot a Home Safeguard," *Spencer News-Herald*, May 17, 1916.

⁶³⁷ "Suffragette Here Sunday," *Spencer News-Herald*, April 12, 1916.

protectors of their children deserved a say in the condition of their schools, cleanliness of their food sources, and moral character of their communities.⁶³⁸ Stewart also met Spencer's elite women at the home of Mrs. E. M. Glasgow to discuss what the women of Clay County could do to support the cause. The IESA deliberately sent Stewart to Clay County with the hope that she could assist in organizing the local women there. Although the state association had appointed Mary Cory as county chairman as early as February, she had done little actual grassroots organization, and Stewart's lecture provided the pivotal moment for action.

On April 19, 1916, a week after announcing Stewart's speech, the *Spencer News-Herald* declared that "Clay County women have thrown their hats into the ring," noting that only a few days earlier, Cory had presided over the first official meeting of the Clay County Equal Suffrage Association.⁶³⁹ As her first order of business, Cory appointed committees for work on press, speakers, finance, literature, and publicity. In addition, she personally chose chairmen for the three wards in Spencer as well as some of the rural townships. She also informed attendees that she had secured Mrs. Raymond Brown, the former president of the New York Equal Suffrage Association, as the county's first speaker. Brown was a cousin of Mrs. H. E. Glover, another suffrage advocate and member of the Spencer Woman's Club.⁶⁴⁰ Further plans included decorating store windows with yellow and black posters with "Votes for Women" on them and holding a mass meeting close to the June 5 primary date. The women contacted the ministers in the county, asking them to preach in favor of woman suffrage on Mother's Day. Another couple paid for suffrage films to show at the two opera

⁶³⁸ "Clay County Women Organize Suff Club, *Spencer News-Herald*, April 19, 1916.

⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

houses in Spencer. Finally, the women hoped to organize a series of open-air meetings at various places in the country.⁶⁴¹

While suffrage advocates pressed forward with their official plans, they also brought their campaign connections to other social organizations that did not necessarily endorse woman suffrage. These women had the opportunity to spread their message to other women in the community informally, through a web of social and religious ties. For example, Spencer had an active bridge club, called the Improved Auction Bridge, or IAB, Club. On April 26, 1916, the same day that the *Spencer News-Herald* announced the plans of the Clay County Equal Suffrage Association and named those serving on committees and as ward and township chairmen, the newspaper also mentioned that Florence May Nichols “entertained delightfully” the members of the IAB Club.⁶⁴² Nichols was also a member of the Press and Publicity Committee for the equal suffrage campaign. Over the next few weeks, the IAB Club also gathered at the homes of two other suffrage advocates, Mrs. A. W. Chamberlain, who served on the Third Ward Committee, and Mrs. A. C. Perine, who worked on the Speakers Committee.⁶⁴³ Other publicly identified members of the campaign hosted social activities, including Goldie Rice, who, as a member of the Second Ward Committee, also served “an elaborate luncheon at tables graced with bud vases” to the women of the Dickens Embroidery Club.⁶⁴⁴ Reports of these gatherings did not indicate any discussion of or motion on the woman suffrage campaign, but, at the very least, the timing of these entertainments led to further awareness of the cause. Attendees had to know of their hostesses’ roles in public

⁶⁴¹ “Getting Reading for the June 5 Battle,” *Spencer News-Herald*, April 26, 1916.

⁶⁴² “Entertained Today,” *Spencer News-Herald*, April 26, 1916.

⁶⁴³ “Entertains at Bridge,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 10, 1916; “Club Meets at Perine’s” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 10, 1916.

⁶⁴⁴ “Mrs. W. R. Rice Hostess,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 3, 1916.

campaigning efforts and probably could not help but make subtle connections. In addition, for outspoken advocates, these gatherings could provide another means through which to convince their neighbors and friends to support the cause. Among these social groups emerged other clubs that had no ties to the campaign but discussed woman suffrage anyway. Members of the U-Go I-Go Club gathered just as the amendment campaign exploded in Clay County, and at their meeting, they conducted “several informal talks” on the movement.⁶⁴⁵ The gathering revealed the level of excitement surrounding the campaign. Woman suffrage was on the minds and lips of many people in Clay County.

Suffrage advocates also relied on their religious affiliations to promote the cause. The Congregational Church aligned early with the cause, hosting Ella Stewart’s lecture and serving as the location for the first organizational activity for the cause. Mrs. F. W. Fais, Mrs. Homer E. Pitcher, Mrs. H. J. Buck, Mrs. D. R. Robb, and Miss Belle Pitcher also met with prominent leaders of the Congregational Church of Spencer in late April 1916. At the meeting the mostly male attendees heard “interesting addresses on different phases of the suffrage problem.”⁶⁴⁶ They also took a straw vote in which only one man cast a ballot in opposition to the proposed amendment, although he later admitted that he did so only as a joke. Significantly, Fais was a member of the Second Ward Committee, Buck served as the chair of the First Ward Committee, and Dodd chaired the Speakers Committee for the suffrage campaign. In addition, all of the women were members of the Spencer Woman’s Club.⁶⁴⁷ The members of the Methodist Church also had ample opportunity to review suffrage arguments at their religious functions. Mrs. E. M Glasgow, chair of the Third Ward

⁶⁴⁵ “U-Go I-Go Meet,” *Spencer News-Herald*, April 26, 1916.

⁶⁴⁶ “Let Th’wimin Do Th’work,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 3, 1916.

⁶⁴⁷ “Getting Reading for the June 5 Battle,” *Spencer News-Herald*, April 26, 1916.

Committee, hosted a meeting of the Epworth League of Grace Methodist Church. Although reports failed to indicate that attendees discussed the amendment campaign, the event provided an important forum for advocates like Glasgow to share their work for the cause.⁶⁴⁸ Although not named in reports, the Congregational and Methodist Churches were probably the two churches to allow their women to host organized Sunday school classes with woman suffrage as their topic of discussion.⁶⁴⁹ Finally, the Baptist Church also experienced its share of campaigning but through the efforts of the local WCTU. On May 3, the WCTU of Clay County advertised its first ever suffrage institute meeting. According to Laura B. Hale, a state organizer of the WCTU, while the WCTU had held other institutes in the past, this special institute marked the first time that the WCTU had ever explicitly taken up work for woman suffrage.⁶⁵⁰

With informal discussions of woman suffrage taking place in the background, the official campaign moved forward with zeal and enthusiasm. The local equal suffrage association received support from the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association in the form of national suffrage organizer Mrs. Albert McMahan. They loaned her to the Iowa campaign for the month of May 1916, and she arrived in Clay County near the end of April. Along with Cory, McMahan planned to arrange an automobile tour, complete with open-air meetings to agitate suffrage sentiment in the county's villages and other small towns.⁶⁵¹ In addition to McMahan, other suffrage speakers and advocates visited Clay County, including Mrs. Frank Illingworth of Emmetsburg, Mr. F. F. Faville of Storm Lake, and J. Stitt Wilson of

⁶⁴⁸ "E. L. Entertained," *Spencer News-Herald*, May 24, 1916.

⁶⁴⁹ "Clay County Women Tell of Work Done," *Spencer News-Herald*, May 24, 1916.

⁶⁵⁰ "W. C. T. U.'s Meet Today," *Spencer News-Herald*, May 3, 1916.

⁶⁵¹ "Local News Notes," *Spencer News-Herald*, April 26, 1916.

California. With this variety of lecturers, local leaders expected “good work” to cause Clay County to “fall in line” with woman suffrage.⁶⁵² Illingworth visited a few of the rural villages of the county, including Everly and Dickens and made an address at a public meeting place in Lake Township. She also teamed up with Faville and Wilson for a grand mass meeting arranged for May 20 in Spencer. Over three hundred people attended the meeting and listened as the speakers tore down “time-worn arguments about woman’s place being in the home.”⁶⁵³ Wilson especially lambasted old-timers who claimed, “no one should vote who can’t fight, only the bad women will vote, and that women don’t want to vote anyway.”⁶⁵⁴ Times had changed and opinions had warmed to the movement, declared Wilson, and assertions that female enfranchisement led to divorce, discord, and family upheaval were the ridiculous rants of nostalgic old men. The ballot in the hands of women meant that women, as mothers, taxpayers, and teachers, could have a say in the moral uplift of future generations.⁶⁵⁵

By the end of May, campaigning grew to a fever pitch in Clay County, but despite the promise that the women were making “extensive plans” throughout the county, the primary location of suffrage activity was the county seat. It was there that Cory and her fellow suffragists posted fliers in store windows, organized mass meetings in churches, showed suffrage films at the local opera house, and hosted speakers almost every week between the middle of April and June 5.⁶⁵⁶ Suffrage advocates did make inroads in a few small towns

⁶⁵² “Suffs Now Hard At It,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 10, 1916.

⁶⁵³ Ibid.; “Two Suff Speakers Here During Week,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 24, 1916.

⁶⁵⁴ “Two Suff Speakers Here During Week,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 24, 1916; “Suff Worker Here Soon,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 17, 1916.

⁶⁵⁵ “Two Suff Speakers Here During Week,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 24, 1916.

⁶⁵⁶ “Getting Ready for the June 5 Battle,” *Spencer News-Herald*, April 26, 1916.

during the course of the campaign. Mrs. Illingworth of Emmetsburg had made visits to Dickens, Everly, and Lake Township, and four local advocates, Mrs. A. W. Chamberlain, Belle Pitcher, Mrs. H. J. Buck, and Laura Hale of the WCTU, made a brief tour of Rossie and Gillett Grove to address audiences there. They received “enthusiastic” welcomes from the crowds, who desired to learn more about this “popular subject of the day.”⁶⁵⁷ When assessing the amount of activity for woman suffrage in the county, however, Spencer clearly emerged as the center of effective suffrage work in Clay County, leaving the rest of Clay County woefully lacking. Early on, Cory and her group reported that they had plans for organization in the countryside, but she admitted that “the organization [t]here has been more complicated.”⁶⁵⁸ Unfortunately, Cory failed to elaborate the difficulties she faced. Perhaps she could not find chairmen to direct activities in their respective locales or maybe she encountered difficulty traveling to all corners of the county. Road conditions could deteriorate during periods of heavy precipitation, and at least one big rainstorm in mid-April hampered travel in the county for a short time.⁶⁵⁹ Overall, however, widespread travel difficulties did not seem a problem during the spring of 1916, as localized showers only sporadically passed through the county.⁶⁶⁰ In the end, the residents who lived in the most rural parts of the county received the least amount of attention and information from the campaign. Likewise, they gave little notice to the activities going on around them. Most of

⁶⁵⁷ “Suffs Now Hard At It,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 10, 1916; “Local News Notes,” *Spencer News-Herald*, June 14, 1916.

⁶⁵⁸ “Getting Ready for the June 5 Battle,” *Spencer News-Herald*, April 26, 1916.

⁶⁵⁹ “Good Roads Special Draws a Fair Crowd,” *Spencer News-Herald*, April 19, 1916.

⁶⁶⁰ “Weekly Weather Guess,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 24, 1916; “Weekly Weather Guess,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 31, 1916; “Weekly Weather Guess,” *Spencer News-Herald*, June 7, 1916. On June 7, 1916, the weather forecast called for thunderstorms. Prior to that report, the forecasts had called for mild to fair conditions with little to no rain.

the rural people in Clay County had only slight contact with the movement, and probably the majority never heard a suffrage speaker up close or read a suffrage pamphlet. The campaign devised by Clay County's suffrage leaders did not permeate the countryside as much as they had planned; it was neither as organized nor as widespread as suffrage leaders had hoped.

Ignoring the rural inhabitants in Clay County proved problematic as the campaign unfolded in Clay County. As envisioned by Catt and Dunlap, each county required significant agitation and organization, but, as efforts progressed, suffragists failed to work as extensively as they had hoped. As the June 5 election drew near, Cory and her committees continued to bring woman suffrage sentiment to Spencer. The rest of Clay County, however, had limited involvement with the cause. In all the reports of suffrage activity in Clay County, only one group of women outside of Spencer advocated for suffrage on their own terms. In rural Langdon, the Glad Tidings Ladies' Aid Society of the Langdon Methodist Church—those ladies who had previously paid for much their church's furnishings—announced that they planned to hold an “election luncheon” on June 5. They wrote, “All voters and their friends are asked to help the ladies in this enterprise as well as by their vote for equal suffrage.”⁶⁶¹ While Langdon's women took charge of their own suffrage event, no other group of women interacted with or promoted the movement in any noticeable way. Local newspaper reports confirmed that residents of the countryside were for the most part outside the realm of the county's major suffrage activity.⁶⁶² The *Webb Record*, the newspaper for the village of Webb, located in the southeast corner of Clay County, confirmed the silence of

⁶⁶¹ “Langdon,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 31, 1916.

⁶⁶² The newspapers I surveyed include the *Spencer Herald*, *Spencer News*, *Spencer Reporter*, and *Webb Record* from 1880 to 1920.

Clay County's rural residents on woman suffrage, with not one single mention of suffrage during the entire spring of 1916.⁶⁶³

As Clay County's suffrage advocates struggled to engage rural people with the movement, other developments complicated the election process. By mid-April 1916, questions arose over the requirements of the "special election," especially in terms of voter registration. In order to clarify the matter, Iowa's Attorney General, George Cosson, issued a two-part decision that required voter registration to cast a ballot on the woman suffrage amendment but allowed people to vote on the rest of the primary ballot without preregistration.⁶⁶⁴ The county auditor, A. W. Chamberlain, whose wife served on the Third Ward Committee of the local amendment campaign, had to scramble to ensure he had enough time and personnel to allow Clay County's voters the opportunity to register. After receiving some clarification from Cosson, Chamberlain reported through the newspapers that inhabitants of Spencer had to register on one of the dates he had arranged, including May 25, 26, and 27 and June 4 and 5. The law did not require voter registration for country residents who lived outside Spencer.⁶⁶⁵

While Chamberlain worked to provide ample opportunity for voter registration in Spencer, the added requirement illuminated a political dilemma brewing in Iowa that promised to have major ramifications on the fight for the woman suffrage amendment. In early 1915, the Iowa Legislature had passed a prohibition bill, and its provisions went into affect on January 1, 1916. Temperance supporters embraced the new bill while pro-liquor

⁶⁶³ See the *Webb Record* from January to June 1916 for more information.

⁶⁶⁴ "Spencer Voters to Register for June?" *Spencer News-Herald*, April 19, 1916.

⁶⁶⁵ "Demos Name Ticket for County Offices," *Spencer News-Herald*, April 26, 1916; "To Register Next Week," *Spencer News-Herald*, May 17, 1916; "Three Elections to be Held Monday," *Spencer News-Herald*, May 31, 1916.

interests pledged to stop at nothing to repeal the law. The race for the governorship that year boiled down to the two factions fighting each other to elect a leader that promised to either uphold or destroy the bill. The leading Democratic candidate for governor, W. T. Meredith, had already pledged himself to a “dry” ticket, leaving anti-prohibition Democratic interests scrambling to elect a “wet” candidate to the Republican ticket. Among the candidates fighting for the Republican nomination for governor, two men, George Cosson, the Attorney General, and William Harding, the Lieutenant Governor, emerged as frontrunners and bitter enemies over this temperance issue. Temperance advocates praised Cosson as the “strongest and most available candidate,” while liquor interests supported Harding.⁶⁶⁶ In a somewhat drastic move, many Democrats switched their party affiliation for the primary election so that they could vote in the Republican election and secure Harding’s nomination. “The fight for the Republican nomination for the governorship,” reported the *Spencer News-Herald* “has narrowed down to a clear-cut wet and dry issue.”⁶⁶⁷ As election officials in Clay County oversaw voter registration, they commented that they saw a substantial number of Democrats changing their party affiliation and taking special care to vote in the primary election.⁶⁶⁸ This heightened anti-prohibition sentiment among Democrats reshaped the composition of those planning to vote in the primary election, shifting the numerical advantage to the Democrats. These Democratic voters who specifically switched party affiliation to vote against temperance probably also shared an opposition toward woman suffrage for, as the WCTU

⁶⁶⁶ “An Open Letter,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 24, 1916; “Liquor is a Big Primary Issue,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 17, 1916.

⁶⁶⁷ “Three Elections to be Held Monday,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 31, 1916.

⁶⁶⁸ “To Register next Week,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 17, 1916.

had pointed out, many of them saw a direct connection between the countless women who supported both temperance and woman suffrage.

Linked to the governor's race and prohibition was a third political issue, the campaign for good roads, and it erupted among farmers just before the election. Iowa's roads had plagued travelers since the settlement period, and the early-twentieth century saw coordinated efforts to increase the maintenance and pavement of roads. On the surface, paved roads seemed a simple proposition, but farmers despised the prospect of the government implementing higher taxes for roads they did not necessarily want improved. Groups of farmers banded together, forming Farmers Tax-Payers' Leagues to protest against "extravagant taxation."⁶⁶⁹ Led by the *Iowa Homestead*, farm journals advocated for these leagues to support a gubernatorial candidate that opposed "hard roads," and their choice rested on Harding, who happened to be the "wet" candidate. As Catt later explained, many farmers read only farm journals like the *Iowa Homestead*, and they cast their ballots according to the recommendations presented in these publications. In Clay County, newspaper reports neither indicated the organization of a Farmers Tax-Payers' League nor any dissatisfaction with the good roads movement, but Catt believed that every county had a local organization.⁶⁷⁰

As the last few days of the campaign came to a close, state suffrage leaders engaged in last-minute efforts to ensure a victory on the amendment. They developed elaborate plans for a statewide automobile campaign to occur during the end of May 1916. A suffrage

⁶⁶⁹ Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement* (New York: Charles Scriber's Sons, 1926), 218.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 218; "Good Roads Special Draws a Fair Crowd," *Spencer News-Herald*, April 19, 1916.

newsletter promised to reach every single voter in the state during the canvassing efforts, describing it as the “most strenuous campaign of the sort ever attempted in Iowa.”⁶⁷¹

Suffragists bragged that “if there is a single voter who can go to the polls on June 5, and say that he has not heard the suffrage message in some form or other it will be because he can not see or hear or else he was out of the state,” and they promised that “every town and hamlet in the ninety-nine counties will be reached during these tours.”⁶⁷² Suffragists pledged to organize the automobile tours down to the last detail, predicting that the entire demonstration served as “a fitting climax” to the arduous “campaign work being done in each of the ninety-nine counties.”⁶⁷³ Despite their promises, suffragists did not deliver a “strenuous” automobile tour in Clay County. Not a single newspaper, woman’s club, church group, or other social organization reported any contact with the tour. In fact, local suffragists in Clay County seemed to run out of steam in the days leading up to the election, with no mention of any last-minute speakers, meetings, or other campaign tactics. Part of the problem came from the departure of Mary Cory, the chairman of the equal suffrage association, to New York to attend the biennial convention of the General Federation of Woman’s Clubs. She did not expect to return until the middle of June, well after the election had passed. Perhaps without her guidance, Clay County’s suffrage advocates struggled to finish what she had started.⁶⁷⁴

Cory’s departure, as well as a shift in attention toward the race for the Republican nomination for governor, opened the campaign to attacks from those in opposition to woman suffrage. In a lengthy letter to the *Spencer News-Herald*, a “prominent club woman” detailed

⁶⁷¹ “Elaborate Preparations For Automobile Campaign,” Folder 6, Box 10, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁴ “Mrs. Cory to New York,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 24, 1916.

her approach toward woman suffrage. Although the editor printed a disclaimer explicating his strong support for woman suffrage above her communication, he did publish her submission in full. What the mystery woman offered was not a vitriolic, heavy-handed attack on woman suffrage as an evil movement that promised to destroy families; instead, she gave a thoughtful and clear rationale why she did not believe women absolutely needed the right to vote. At the essence of her argument, she wove a complex indictment against the American political system. Involvement with the “corrupt” forces that determined politics did not uplift women but instead cast them down as merely “another spoke in the wheel of political machinery.”⁶⁷⁵ In addition, she claimed that suffragists had not sufficiently proven that female enfranchisement actually had improved politics by bringing moral guidance to the process, and she claimed that advocates had merely spoken in abstract, idealistic terms without offering any significant evidence to support their claims. In the process of her argument, she tore down conceptions of women as a single body of unified voters, all sharing the same interests, values, and motives. Were all women, she wondered, truly as intelligent, discriminate, and unselfish as they claimed to be? Finally, the woman pointed to the heart of the movement, asking why receiving the right to vote mattered so much to suffragists. She posed hard questions about what suffrage leaders actually hoped to accomplish with the ballot in hand, and she put the local movement on the spot to prove that women voters could fundamentally change American society for the better.⁶⁷⁶

In addition to this local rebuttal against woman suffrage, other advertisements attempted to undercut campaign efforts. On May 25, 1916, only ten days prior to the primary

⁶⁷⁵ “The Other Side of the Question,” *Spencer News-Herald*, May 31, 1916.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

election, a nameless group, rumored to be German-American liquor interests from eastern Iowa, paid for a full-page advertisement to appear many farm journals in the state. The advertisement proclaimed in bold, underlined letters, “To the Iowa Farmer!—Remember! Woman Suffrage Means High Taxes.”⁶⁷⁷ The subheading warned farmers that equal suffrage states had the highest tax rates in the country. It encouraged farmers to vote against the amendment to avoid “hysterical legislation, useless commission, uncalled for bond issues,” and higher taxes.⁶⁷⁸ This advertisement directly linked good roads to woman suffrage at a critical juncture in the campaign. Dunlap dismissed the advertisement, noting that “many absurd stories” circulated among newspapers and other sources right before the election.⁶⁷⁹ Despite her stance, Dunlap did instruct the ISEA to counteract the negative publicity, and the association issued rebuttals for publication in newspapers across Iowa in the days leading up to the election.⁶⁸⁰ Despite the IESA’s last-minute efforts, the suffrage amendment failed in Iowa by 10,341 votes.⁶⁸¹ The June 7 headline in the *Spencer News-Herald* read “Suffrage Amendment Thought Lost,” although the article below it pointed out that Clay County’s residents did pass the amendment, but barely, by only 124 votes. Of that margin, 76 of the

⁶⁷⁷ “To the Iowa Farmer!” *The Iowa Homestead*, May 25, 1916, page 25, Box 24, DMIWSR, SHSIDM. According to Catt, when someone scolded James M. Pierce, editor of *The Iowa Homestead*, for publishing such an incendiary advertisement, he merely replied, “I got \$600 for it.” See, Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 258.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁹ Dunlap to Catt, June 12, 1916, Des Moines, Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁶⁸⁰ Flora Dunlap, “A Final Word to the Voters of Iowa,” Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁶⁸¹ Effie Jones to Catt, June 30, 1916, Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM. In Yankton County, South Dakota the *Dakota Herald* informed its readers of the defeat of the amendment in Iowa. He also reported that voters cast more than three-hundred-thousand ballots, the “heaviest primary vote in this state for years.” Harding pulled about 50 percent of the total vote in the state. “Equal Suffrage Badly Defeated,” *Dakota Herald*, June 9, 1916.

votes came directly from Spencer.⁶⁸² Woman suffrage was not the only important issue on the ballot. While 662 people voted on the woman suffrage amendment, almost 1,660 people voted on the race for governor. In addition, Harding, the anti-prohibition Republican candidate, beat Cosson, the temperance candidate, by a total of 745 to 443, respectively. Clay County's residents clearly opposed the prohibitory legislation in place and the proposed good roads program and sought to elect in Harding a leader to repeal it.⁶⁸³ Curiously, despite the WCTU's predictions, these anti-prohibition Democrats, many of whom switched party affiliation for the primary election and took special care to vote, supported woman suffrage at least enough to secure the amendment in the county.

The defeat of the woman suffrage amendment deeply disappointed state and national suffrage leaders.⁶⁸⁴ Dunlap wrote a letter to Catt a week after the election. "The result of the election was very bitter," she said, "Many of us had worked so hard, and we had every reason to believe that the result would be favorable."⁶⁸⁵ She blamed the tax issue for contributing to the loss, but substantial unfavorable returns from four eastern Iowa counties along the Mississippi River ensured the amendment's demise.⁶⁸⁶ Had the four "wet" counties—Clinton, Scott, Dubuque, and Des Moines—not voted in the election, the amendment would

⁶⁸² "Suffrage Amendment Thought Lost," *Spencer News-Herald*, June 7, 1916. Maria McMahon, the organizer sent from Minnesota, later recorded her experiences in Clay County. She held a rather favorable view of the work accomplished there, writing that she believed that local leaders canvassed "much of the county." She cited the large gathering in Spencer at which a number of "prominent men and women spoke" as effective in generating support for the cause. She also noted, however, that Cory's departure to New York was "unfortunate" as it kept her from attending the most important events scheduled in the days leading up to the election. "Report of Twelve Counties Worked by Mrs. McMahon," Reel 1, 387-89, Microfilm, Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association [hereafter MWSA], MHS.

⁶⁸³ "How They Voted in Clay County," *Spencer News-Herald*, June 7, 1916.

⁶⁸⁴ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 254-56.

⁶⁸⁵ Dunlap to Catt, June 12, 1916, Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁶⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

have carried.⁶⁸⁷ As Catt later argued, liquor interests, led by the Anheuser-Busch Brewing Association, worked diligently to produce anti-suffrage propaganda and rally anti-prohibitionists to oppose woman suffrage.⁶⁸⁸ Thomas Ryan confirmed this pattern of “wet” opposition and “dry” support, arguing that voting trends on the 1916 referendum supported the contention that prohibitionists favored woman suffrage while anti-prohibitionists opposed it.⁶⁸⁹ While liquor interests played a decisive part in the failure of the amendment, they were not the sole cause of the defeat. The IESA also blamed rural foreigners for failing to counteract the adverse vote of these eastern “wet” counties. Ryan also substantiated this claim, noting that Germans and Germans-Americans, more than any other foreign ethnicity, opposed woman suffrage decisively. In particular, he found that German Catholics especially contested the amendment. According to Ryan, community size had less to do with the outcome of the election than did ethnicity, religion, and nationality.⁶⁹⁰ In their reports, county chairmen reaffirmed this perceived ethnic divide.⁶⁹¹ For example, in Ida County, located south of Clay County, suffrage advocates explained that townships dominated by Swedes “met little opposition” to the suffrage bill, while Danes and Germans “were not quite so much in favor of women voting.”⁶⁹² In other counties, suffrage organizers credited the Norwegian voters for supporting the amendment while deploring German voters for voting

⁶⁸⁷ IESA, “Notes on Equal Suffrage in Iowa For 1916-1917,” page 21, Folder 16, Box 1, ISMC, IWAUI.

⁶⁸⁸ Catt and Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics*, 217-18.

⁶⁸⁹ Thomas Ryan, “Male Opponents and Supporters of Woman Suffrage: Iowa in 1916,” *Annals of Iowa* 45 (Winter, 1981): 538-45.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 539-50.

⁶⁹¹ IESA, “Notes on Equal Suffrage,” page 22, Folder 16, Box 1, ISMC, IWAUI.

⁶⁹² IESA, “Notes on Equal Suffrage,” page 23, Folder 16, Box 1, ISMC, IWAUI.

against the measure.⁶⁹³ Perhaps, however, suffragists merely affirmed an outcome they had already come to expect. As early as February 1916, the IESA had received word that a German-American Alliance had formed to work against the movement began. In fact, Catt had written to Dunlap, cautioning her of the alliance and its eighty thousand members.⁶⁹⁴ She warned that the group's sole goal was to defeat prohibition and woman suffrage. Dunlap responded to Catt's message two days later with a casual confidence that came back to bite her later. She assured Catt that "a good many political men" downplayed the alleged strength of this so-called "Alliance."⁶⁹⁵ In a rather apt assessment, however, state WCTU President Ida B. Wise Smith warned in October 1915, "If there is a danger we face in Iowa...it is over-confidence"⁶⁹⁶

About a month after the election, Dunlap, President of the IESA, wrote to a friend in Nebraska about the 1916 suffrage campaign. She listed the reasons why the suffrage amendment failed in Iowa.⁶⁹⁷ With disappointment she wrote, "We did not have a good enough organization."⁶⁹⁸ Indeed, suffragists had not created as extensive and widespread a campaign as they had hoped. They suffered from anti-prohibitionist opposition but they also had not connected with enough rural voters from across the spectrum of ethnicities, cultures, and religions. The presence of an organized body of women, bonded by ties of mutuality and sociability, was not enough to entice them to push their campaign beyond the boundary of the town. In Dunlap's estimation, the suffragists had failed to reach enough ethnic voters to

⁶⁹³ Ibid.

⁶⁹⁴ Catt to Dunlap, Feb. 26, 1916, New York City, Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁶⁹⁵ Dunlap to Catt, Feb. 28, 1916, Des Moines, Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁶⁹⁶ "Annual Address," *Forty-Second Annual Convention of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, page 27, WCTUI, IWAUI.

⁶⁹⁷ Dunlap to Catt, July 1, 1916, Des Moines, Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid.

offset the liquor vote and carry the measure. Campaign efforts in Clay County exemplified Dunlap's conclusion. Although suffrage advocates concocted a vision of an extensive, wide-reaching campaign, they failed to carry out their plans to the degree to which they had originally intended.⁶⁹⁹

While the IESA struggled to come to terms with the defeat of the woman suffrage amendment, the state board of the WCTU began its own investigation into some peculiar irregularities reported after the election. The group paid the Des Moines Federation for Suffrage Election Investigation two hundred dollars to uncover any wrongdoings in the election.⁷⁰⁰ The Spencer Woman's Club supported the WCTU, and the corresponding secretary wrote their respective senator and representative "asking them to urge the legislature to investigate the question of fraud."⁷⁰¹ The results of the investigators astounded the WCTU and the IESA. The investigation alleged that more than 13,609 unregistered people cast votes on the suffrage amendment, even though the attorney general had required voter registration. In a few other precincts, a total of 2,289 votes cast on the amendment did not have a corresponding name recorded in poll books.⁷⁰² Investigators declared, "The WCTU can draw but one conclusion from this condition, that they were defeated out of their

⁶⁹⁹ Rose Geyer to Catt, Aug. 2, 1916, Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁷⁰⁰ "Donations for Suffrage Work," *Forty-Third Annual Report of the W. C. T. U.*, Fort Dodge, Iowa, Oct. 3-7, 1916, *Proceedings of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, page 66, Box 11, WCTUI, IWAUI.

⁷⁰¹ Spencer Woman's Club, Minute book 1915-1925, page 59, SWCC, CCHS.

⁷⁰² "Alleged Irregularities of Vote on the Woman's Suffrage Amendment in Iowa June 5, 1916," page 1, Folder 16, Box 1, ISMC, IWAUI.

rights to the ballot by fraud.”⁷⁰³ The WCTU threatened to hire a lawyer to force a recount of the ballots, but at some point, the group decided against any legal action.⁷⁰⁴

While the campaign to secure the woman suffrage amendment in Iowa proved a failure, it did have ramifications beyond Iowa’s borders. Strengthened by the defeat in Iowa, Catt returned to her home in New York City during the summer of 1916 a changed woman. Scholar Louise Noun wrote, “The Iowa situation...convinced Mrs. Catt that women faced insurmountable odds in most state referenda and that the time had come to concentrate on an amendment to the federal Constitution.”⁷⁰⁵ She traveled back to New York and began devising a plan that combined local, state, and national efforts into a coherent, cooperative “winning plan.” In September 1916, basing her views largely on what she had encountered during the Iowa suffrage campaign, Catt presented her plan to the executive committee of the NAWSA. She divided state associations into four groups, assigning them each a specific responsibility. Catt charged the IESA to pursue a bill for partial suffrage.⁷⁰⁶

By the fall of 1916, the woman suffrage amendment campaign had faded into memory in Clay County, but the members of the Spencer Woman’s Club were not satisfied to let the issue die. Although they may not have realized it, the campaign had stretched their identities into new territories of political activism. It had effectively politicized them in ways they had not imagined and from which they could never return. At the first meeting after their summer break, the women devoted the entire session to “Political Issues.” Four women who had worked directly for the campaign delivered remarks. The minutes taken during the

⁷⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁰⁴ “Alleged Irregularities,” page 3, IWAUI.

⁷⁰⁵ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 257.

⁷⁰⁶ Ibid.

meeting affirm that the women had shed any remaining hesitancy toward a political agenda, noting that the “political nature” of the program, including in-depth discussions of each party’s platform, proved highly interesting to the women.⁷⁰⁷ In the years that followed, the women discussed political matters at nearly every meeting. On October 31, 1916, the women passed a resolution favoring a federal woman suffrage amendment, and they instructed the corresponding secretary to send the resolutions to their respective senator and representative.⁷⁰⁸ On October 28, 1919, the women discussed the “legal status of women” and “the woman citizen” before concluding that men had as much at stake in demanding the emancipation of women.⁷⁰⁹ By March 1920, the women recognized the impending reality of their direct participation in politics, discussing papers on the “influence of my vote in federal government” and the “influence of my vote in local government.”⁷¹⁰

The entrance of the United States into World War I dramatically influenced work for woman suffrage in Iowa. By the spring of 1917, the IESA realized the war with Europe was coming, and they began to take measures to support the war effort. Anna Lawther, who assumed the presidency during the fall of 1916 after Dunlap gave up the position, sent out numerous circulars to county chairmen advising them of the position of the group. The IESA “stands for one ideal—service to the nation in both time of peace and in time of war.”⁷¹¹ She urged suffragists across the state to “co-operate with us in this new war service for which we are summoning all the women of Iowa who ideal of patriotism is to be ‘first in war, first in

⁷⁰⁷ Spencer Woman’s Club, Program 1916-1917, SWCC, CCHS; Spencer Woman’s Club Minute Book 1915-1925, page 48, SWCC, CCHS.

⁷⁰⁸ Spencer Woman’s Club, Minute Book 1915-1925, page 55, SWCC, CCHS.

⁷⁰⁹ Spencer Woman’s Club, Program 1919-1920, SWCC, CCHS.

⁷¹⁰ Spencer Woman’s Club, Minute Book 1915-1925, page 132, SWCC, CCHS.

⁷¹¹ Anna B. Lawther, Suffrage Circular, April 23, 1917, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

peace.”⁷¹² Patriotic women supported the war effort, and the IESA was one of the first groups to mobilize for it. Women across Iowa followed the IESA’s lead, including the Spencer Woman’s Club. As their political identity continued to develop, these women devoted significant time and resources toward work on the home front. Members sewed night shirts, sheets, and other linens for the American Red Cross, sold Liberty Bonds and War Savings Stamps, and supported soldiers fighting in France by donating to furlough houses.⁷¹³

As women pursued these patriotic efforts, they parlayed their experiences into direct demands for the vote. Lawther used the IESA’s stance on the war to promote the suffrage cause, and her words changed the rationale suffragists had used to argue for the right to vote. “Our war our sacrifice,” she proclaimed, “is made that the world may be made safe for Democracy...that the governed may hav [sic] a voice in their government... We as American women are asking for a voice in our government.”⁷¹⁴ Earlier suffrage arguments had asserted that women with the right to vote could clean up politics and protect their families. Now, Lawther took the argument a step further; enfranchised women could ensure democracy throughout the world. Denying women suffrage made the United States no better than the enemies they were fighting. Patriotic women, forced to sacrifice for the war, deserved the right to vote to make the world safe.

Suffragists also turned their war service to the education of the foreign-born citizen. A year earlier, the IESA had lost its most important fight for the suffrage referendum, and members blamed its failure on non-native people. Perhaps vengeance or a sincere desire to

⁷¹² Ibid.

⁷¹³ Spencer Woman’s Club, Scrapbook, page 4, SWCC, CCHS.

⁷¹⁴ Anna B. Lawther, Speech given at the 1917 Annual Convention, page 1, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 182, Folder 3, Box 9, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

root out spies drove their Americanization efforts. More likely, however, suffrage leaders realized that while they Americanized the alien, they could also instill the suffrage doctrine and ensure a favorable vote on future suffrage measures. Whatever the motivation, suffrage leaders focused a great deal of attention on Americanizing foreign-born Iowans. Lawther wrote, “The Americanization of the alien is perhaps the most important question confronting us to-day in this country.”⁷¹⁵ As the state organization spent a great deal of time on Americanization, so too did county clubs. The Spencer Woman’s Club routinely took up the “immigrant question” during its meetings. Interest in immigration ranged from sympathy at the “immigration journey” and the problems faced by foreigners upon their arrival to outright skepticism and suspicion of “enemies.”⁷¹⁶ Although the Club did not engage in overt discrimination toward foreign-born people, the IESA did encourage strong distrust on the part of its members. Lawther encouraged suffrage advocates to work directly with ignorant non-native women because “children of these foreigners are often allowed to grow up without respect...for this new country where they mistake freedom for license.”⁷¹⁷ The IESA even demanded a list of every non-English newspaper in every county of Iowa so that members could print articles about how to behave in America.⁷¹⁸

With its war service in full swing, the IESA became convinced that if the Iowa legislature passed another suffrage referendum, the people of Iowa would carry it. During the 1917 legislative session, the suffrage amendment bill passed with flying colors. The bill was

⁷¹⁵ Anna B. Lawther, Suffrage Circular, Oct. 4, 1917, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁷¹⁶ Spencer Woman’s Club, Minute Book 1915-1925, pages 57, 132, SWCC, CCHS.

⁷¹⁷ Anna B. Lawther, Suffrage Circular, April 21, 1917, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁷¹⁸ Anna B. Lawther, Suffrage Circular, March 1, 1917, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

scheduled to go before the legislature for its second vote at the 1918 legislative session. A clerical error in the Secretary of State's office, however, kept the bill from going to the legislature, and the 1918 session closed with no vote on the measure. Suffragists were outraged. Not until a year later did the legislature receive a suffrage bill, but by then, the federal suffrage amendment had passed Congress. In July 1919, the Iowa General Assembly called a special session to ratify the federal suffrage amendment. On July 2, the House voted ninety-six to five in favor; the Senate passed it unanimously, forty-five to zero. That August, Tennessee ratified the federal amendment, and women across the United States, including Iowa, gained the right to vote. Women in Iowa could vote after over fifty years of suffrage activity in the state.

The significance of the 1916 woman suffrage amendment campaign in Iowa stemmed not from its victories but from its shortfalls and eventual defeat. By uncovering this hidden layer of suffrage work at the county level, an innovative view of woman suffrage “from the ground” emerges. While suffragists envisioned a campaign among the people of Clay County full of ambition and hope, what emerged was a movement that did not permeate nearly as well as advocates had desired. Suffrage sentiment had grown as the movement shifted from abstract and informal discussion to potential reality, but suffragists were unable to meet people at their level during the campaign. Most of the most rural and isolated places in Clay County received little to no contact with the movement. At the most, a suffrage speaker might visit for an evening, but one occasional encounter did nothing to build a strong body of supporters. Meeting every voter on his doorstep to discuss the cause was more of a pipe dream than a practical reality, and suffragists failed to recognize the complexity of a campaign among a people divided into ethnic, religious, and social categories. Despite the

documented existence of a host of social organizations cultivated among rural people in Clay County, suffragists never partnered with those people outside of Spencer's town limits.

Moreover, woman suffragists viewed the campaign one dimensionally, failing to see voting patterns shift when allegiances changed under other political pressures. Woman suffrage was part of the host of reforms reshaping rural America during the early-twentieth century, and it could not be separated from the local political context in which it developed. Clay County's response to the campaign efforts of a small group of activist women revealed just how limited woman suffrage could be in the rural Midwest.

Chapter 5: Woman Suffrage in South Dakota, 1914-1918

On October 2, 1914, the Yankton Universal Franchise League, responsible for promoting woman suffrage throughout Yankton County, published an article in the *Press and Dakotan*. In it, the authors cast the fight for woman suffrage in broad terms of democracy, liberty, and citizenship. “Women need the duties and responsibilities of citizenship,” noted the authors, “in order that they may take an intelligent interest in the affairs of their country.”⁷¹⁹ Without the right to vote, women foundered as “half” citizens, struggling under the weight of political inferiority and indifference. Worse yet, the disenfranchisement of women poisoned democracy itself because it hindered the political system’s achievement of true greatness. In the context of devastating European war, this shortfall in American democracy was unacceptable. Not until women gained the ballot could “true” democracy demonstrate its “superiority over all other forms of government,” especially those clashing in Europe in 1914.⁷²⁰

Between 1914 and 1918, the deepening conflict of World War I and the outpouring of patriotic loyalty that followed, increasingly defined woman suffrage in South Dakota. It reshaped arguments both for and against the cause, positioning them in terms of democratic principles, citizenship, and patriotism. During three back-to-back campaigns, in 1914, 1916, and 1918, woman suffragists gradually incorporated into their arguments patriotic rhetoric and women’s contributions to the war effort. Exclusionary practices against foreigners, initially considered by national suffrage leaders during the late-nineteenth-century campaigns in South Dakota, became standard procedure among advocates of woman suffrage by war’s

⁷¹⁹ “Yankton Universal Franchise League,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 2, 1914.

⁷²⁰ *Ibid.*

end. In the process, the fight for female enfranchisement became less about the actual prospect of women voting and more about preventing “undesirables” from voting. By the 1918 campaign in particular, woman suffrage became so lost in a web of narrowed definitions of citizenship and accusations against German immigrants that its message of equality for all fell on deaf ears. While South Dakota’s voters passed woman suffrage in 1918, two years before women in the nation received the right, they did not do so out of a sense of justice or democracy. Instead, the bill that finally gave South Dakota’s women the right to vote reaffirmed the anti-German hysteria that promoted outright discrimination. Ironically, woman suffrage, with its promise of “true” democracy, became intimately tied to efforts that ultimately increased inequality and effectively disenfranchised thousands of people who had lived for decades in South Dakota.

Campaigning for woman suffrage in South Dakota compared to efforts in Iowa. In both states, inexperience plagued efforts to conduct the campaign at the local level, and most rural residents failed to connect with the cause in any meaningful way. In both states, prohibition measures, enacted alongside woman suffrage elections, shaped the tenor of the campaigns into one that cast liquor interests against temperance supporters and agitated “wets” to vote against woman suffrage. In contrast to South Dakota, Iowa’s suffrage leaders pitched the 1916 campaign in fairly straightforward terms that highlighted women’s domestic roles in protection of the home and family. They did not make any overt connections to war work or patriotism until after the United States entered the conflict during the spring of 1917. These local experiences shaped and reshaped the political climate in each state, producing a complex and complicated context in which to place a nuanced interpretation of woman suffrage in the Midwest.

A new generation of suffrage workers emerged during the first few years of the twentieth century, restyling woman suffrage in South Dakota. Their first move confirmed in dramatic fashion the separation of South Dakota's Women's Christian Temperance Union, or WCTU, and the National American Woman Suffrage Association, or NAWSA. At the close of the 1898 campaign, Carrie Chapman Catt had spearheaded efforts to undermine the WCTU's hold on suffrage in South Dakota, and, during the first few years of the twentieth century, the suffragists succeeded in distancing themselves from the association.

Transitioning to a new woman suffrage association proved difficult, however, as many WCTU officers also held leadership positions in the South Dakota Equal Suffrage Association and bitterly opposed divorcing temperance and suffrage. They admitted that they felt abandoned and unappreciated for the work they had accomplished in the state during the late-nineteenth century. The NAWSA, however, remained firm in its commitment to grooming a new generation of suffrage activists in South Dakota, encouraging the WCTU to promote the cause generally but not to introduce any new amendments in the legislature.⁷²¹ By 1909, the leaders of the WCTU expressed their frustration at the slow loss of power they had experienced over the previous few years. In a letter to Alice Pickler, head of the franchise department of the WCTU, Philena Johnson complained that a new crop of suffrage workers, with the support of the NAWSA, had taken over work for woman suffrage in the state. Although she was upset, Johnson realized that in order to conduct effective state campaigns again, they required national support, something they had lacked in 1898.⁷²² By

⁷²¹ NAWSA to Alice Pickler, Sept. 3, 1902, Folder 18, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS.

⁷²² Philena Everett Johnson to Alice Pickler, July 22, 1909, Folder 19, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS. The new group of suffrage workers apparently had a bone to pick with Pickler's leadership style in addition to the troubling confusion between woman suffrage and

June 1909, the NAWSA formally dissolved ties with the WCTU. Led by Pickler, the WCTU pledged to support the state association, reformed and renamed the South Dakota Universal Franchise League. After the 1910 election, members elected Mary “Mamie” Pyle of Huron to the helm of the organization.⁷²³

The 1910 campaign registered briefly in Yankton County, South Dakota. After finagling the bill through the state’s legislature, the leaders recognized that, without the WCTU at the helm, they had little organizational experience.⁷²⁴ The campaign did not pick up in the county until it was almost over, when on November 1, 1910, the *Dakota Herald* reported that Mary E. Craigie, a reformer from New York City, had entered the county to work on behalf of the amendment. South Dakota’s suffrage leaders apparently faced dire financial circumstances, as the editor, M. M. Bennett, noted that Craigie agreed to accept no payment for her services during the campaign. She pledged her time and talents to South Dakota because, as she explained, suffragists in the East believed South Dakota would be the next “western” state to pass a woman suffrage amendment, in line with Wyoming, Utah, Colorado, and Idaho.⁷²⁵ At a well-attended meeting held almost a week later at City Hall, Craigie took the floor to deliver a “fluent” and “convincing” speech to the crowd. More importantly, a sizable number of respected clergy from the community, including Father Link of the Catholic Church, Reverend F. V. Stevens of the Congregational Church, Reverend J. M. Tibetts of the Methodist Church, and Reverend Thompson of the Lutheran Church

temperance. The new workers claimed it “impossible to work with Mrs. Pickler, as she does so many things upon her own authority without consulting the rest of the executive committee.” See, Ella S. Stewart to Philena E. Johnson, May 19, 1909, Folder 19, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS.

⁷²³ Reed, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in South Dakota*, 55-56.

⁷²⁴ “Suffragists Uneasy,” *Dakota Herald*, Sept. 20, 1910.

⁷²⁵ “For Woman Suffrage,” *Dakota Herald*, Nov. 1, 1910.

followed her speech with statements of their own, explaining their favorable stances on the proposed amendment.⁷²⁶ Expressing their support for woman suffrage in a public forum, a highly political action, these church leaders confirmed the intimate connection between religion and politics in the Midwest. It no doubt galvanized their congregations to wrestle with their own opinions regarding woman suffrage, with most probably falling in line behind their spiritual leaders.

Other than the City Hall meeting at which Craigie attempted to stir up the people of Yankton County for woman suffrage, the 1910 campaign featured minimal active campaigning for the cause. The editor of the *Dakota Herald*, M. M. Bennett, provided the most public forum through which to promote the campaign, publishing a few articles in his newspaper during the last week of the campaign. One article, probably supplied as propaganda by the state association, indicated to voters that even a number of Roman Catholic clergymen supported the amendment. The missive quoted one priest in particular who believed that women with the ballot could alleviate social ills “as equal members of the social power.”⁷²⁷ Another article argued that women deserved the ballot even though few actively campaigned for it. Curiously, the article took the stance that women were not citizens and had “no voice or power of citizenship,” which gave them “no appreciation of the value of the ballot.”⁷²⁸ Only with the right to vote secured for the “gentler sex” could women actually call themselves citizens. Few other local voices echoed Bennett’s charge to support woman suffrage, and voters defeated the amendment handily that November. Curiously, a

⁷²⁶ “Suffrage Meeting,” *Dakota Herald*, Nov. 8, 1910; William John McMurty, *Yankton College: A Historical Sketch* (Yankton, So. Dak.: n. p., 1907), 134, 142.

⁷²⁷ “Favors Woman Suffrage,” *Dakota Herald*, Nov. 4, 1910.

⁷²⁸ “Women and the Ballot,” *Dakota Herald*, Nov. 1, 1910.

small suffrage club had formed in the remote outpost of Fullerville in the southeast corner of the county. Led by Mary Inch, the women provided the lone organized presence during the campaign, and the *Dakota Herald* commented cheekily about the club's last meeting held upon the rout of the amendment. "On hearing of their defeat," wrote the editor, taking the opportunity to exaggerate a bit, "Miss Inch served the following subdued menu: Crushed oats, beaten biscuit, mashed potatoes, shredded codfish, and whipped cream."⁷²⁹ Although Bennett's description of the meal poked fun at the women, his comments indicated that, at the very least, a few women in the county had supported the campaign.

While the 1910 campaign ended unimpressively, it did not deter suffrage leaders in South Dakota. Led by Mamie Pyle, a respected advocate for education and reform, suffragists reconstructed their state association into the South Dakota Universal Franchise League, or SDUFL. They attracted a new generation of young activists, willing to sacrifice their time and energy to securing a woman suffrage amendment. The two campaigns that followed, one in 1914 and one in 1916, tested the skills of this young group of workers and kept woman suffrage in the public eye. They also exposed the tensions brewing against foreigners, tensions heightened by the growing conflict in Europe. Although South Dakota voters and politicians did not make overt connections among patriotism, democracy, citizenship, and voting until the 1918 campaign, they did construct initial associations during the efforts to secure woman suffrage amendments in 1914 and 1916. Lingering questions about prohibition and local option liquor laws maintained a tense balance between the WCTU and the SDUFL, especially since the SDUFL relied on the organizational abilities of the WCTU in local communities. Local suffrage advocates also continued to contend with

⁷²⁹ "Fullerville Floaters," *Dakota Herald*, Nov. 11, 1910.

foreign-born voters who increasingly viewed the cause with hostility. To counteract opposing viewpoints, local leaders and WCTU members affirmed their stake in the political process and a democratic government by defining themselves in ways that emphasized their femininity, maternity, and womanhood.

As early as April 1913, South Dakotans sensed a new political trend emerging in the state. Third-party candidates and reformers created a progressive political milieu in which women's issues attained a voice. A host of progressive reforms made new headway among voters, although resistance made the transition haphazard and not uniform. For example, under local option laws, which had dominated state politics since the end of the nineteenth-century, each town could determine its stance on prohibition. In 1913, voters in the county seat of Yankton voted wet, along with about fifty other South Dakota towns that held local option elections that year. The following year, however, a complicated legal battle erupted in the state's Supreme Court, forcing all of Yankton's saloons to close for the duration of the trial and prompting imbibers to take their business to Utica.⁷³⁰ Local option laws reigned in South Dakota for the next few years, but the threat of prohibition kept liquor interests at the ready. Voters confirmed their fears in 1916, when they passed a progressive statewide prohibition law that went into effect the following July, just about a year before women in the state actually received the right to vote.⁷³¹ Even though Progressivism gained momentum slowly and at different times across South Dakota, it nevertheless influenced political matters during the elections of 1914, 1916, and 1918. Although independent progressive parties, such

⁷³⁰ "Yankton Goes Dry," *Volin Advance*, Feb. 26, 1914. Residents of some of the dry towns in the county, including Volin, lambasted Utica's saloonkeepers for "sinfulness" and impropriety, especially when reports revealed that Utica had two saloons but no church.

⁷³¹ See chapter 1 for a discussion of politics and temperance in South Dakota.

as the Bull Moose and Progressive Party, failed to effectively challenge the two-party system, the “progressive spirit” shaped politics tremendously as both Democrats and Republicans incorporated reform planks onto their platforms and spoke of “cleaning up” politics in the state.⁷³²

South Dakotans debated reform efforts often during the progressive period in state politics, including prohibition and woman suffrage. In 1913, the state legislature passed a bill putting a woman suffrage amendment on the November 1914 election ballot. Although a few lecturers canvassed the state during the fall of 1913, by early 1914, campaigning began in earnest. The staff at the SDUFL headquarters in Huron traded copious amounts of correspondence with a group of speakers they tapped to agitate the voters of the state. The SDUFL desired to turn over a new leaf in suffrage work and conduct the most efficient and organized campaign in the state’s history. Despite the organizers’ best intentions, however, the same problems plagued workers, especially a lack of support displayed by the men and women of local communities. In order to reach these most rural of voters, state leaders attempted to construct a thorough canvass of each county. For the counties located in southeastern South Dakota, the SDUFL, along with the WCTU chose Congregational minister and WCTU member Rena Bowers of Sioux City, Iowa to serve a lecturer and organizer.⁷³³ Staff members of the state organization arranged an optimistic schedule to take her to towns along the railroad, traveling west and north across the southeastern portion of the state. Between April 14 and April 19, Bowers’s schedule put her at four locations,

⁷³² “[The progressive ticket...],” *Dakota Herald*, Sept. 25, 1914.

⁷³³ Rena Bowers to Jean Wilkinson, Feb. 28, 1914, Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS.

Gayville, Yankton, Mission Hill, and Volin, in Yankton County and one, Irene, located just across the county line in Turner County.⁷³⁴

With her religious background and ties to the WCTU, Bowers turned her efforts to connecting to local chapters of the WCTU. Although most initially supported her efforts, the overpowering sentiments of their respective communities against woman suffrage caused them to renege on promises to aid her. Arranging her schedule caused countless headaches for the state association, as many small WCTU groups resisted her arrival. At Irene, Mrs. O. A. Anderson balked at the idea, writing that the Irene WCTU did not have “any kind of a house” in which for her to speak and only a “half dozen or so” members with limited financial resources with which to sponsor her.⁷³⁵ At Volin, Anna Steadman, president of the WCTU and a novice to campaign work, found herself in charge of woman suffrage efforts when the woman who previously had made arrangements moved abruptly to Minnesota. At first, Steadman politely hesitated to accept state headquarters’ commands, noting that “both churches have Easter programs” that promised to “take all attention” away from any potential suffrage event.⁷³⁶ Although she pointed out that the Volin WCTU supported woman suffrage, Steadman admitted that most of her fellow townspeople were not suffrage supporters.⁷³⁷ She reiterated her stance in another letter, replying that most of the members of the Volin WCTU believed woman suffrage a lost cause in the town. “They tell me there will be no one to hear

⁷³⁴ “Rena E. Bowers Dates,” Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS.

⁷³⁵ Mrs. O. A. Anderson to Mrs. Rice, March 16, 1914, Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS.

⁷³⁶ Anna Steadman to Mrs. Rice, March 23, 1914, Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS.

⁷³⁷ Ibid.

her,” wrote Steadman disappointingly.⁷³⁸ State officers kept up their requests of Steadman, however, and she reluctantly agreed to host Bowers on April 19.

Bowers enthusiastically awaited her trip to South Dakota, writing to the state WCTU that she hoped to organize a “campaign club” and drum up support in each town she visited. In addition, she wanted to hold rallies and parades, with participants holding banners containing mottos she devised, including “Our Mothers Are Citizens” and “Stand By Your Mothers Boys; She Has Stood By You.”⁷³⁹ Bowers clearly hoped to tap into conceptions of motherhood and highlight the revered place mothers held in American society on her tour. She could hardly contain her excitement, writing that, although the campaign required hard work and promised difficulties, she predicted victory in South Dakota in 1914. The staff of the state organization, however, failed to echo Bowers’s gusto. Jean Wilkinson, a state WCTU suffrage organizer, wrote despondently that they were discouraged at the complications they had experienced while attempting to compose speaker schedules. Just as in 1890 and 1898, the people residing in local communities failed to display much support for woman suffrage, producing “pitiful results” for the campaign.⁷⁴⁰

After only four days canvassing southeast South Dakota and encountering a serious lack of support for woman suffrage among rural South Dakotans, a disappointed Bowers

⁷³⁸ Wilkinson to Steadman, March 28, 1914, Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS; Steadman to Simmons, April 4, 1914, Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS; [State Headquarters] to Rena Bowers, April 6, 1914, Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS; Harry E. Rice to Wilkinson, April 9, 1914, Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS; Simmons to R. L. Fitch, April 10, 1914, Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS. Wilkinson also sent letters to Mrs. George Gilman in Mission Hill, Dr. Martha Cutts of Yankton, and Rev. Harry E. Rice at Gayville, asking for their support of a speaking engagement for Bowers in their towns. A small pox outbreak kept Bowers away from Gayville, and Cutts cancelled the meeting at Yankton with no explanation.

⁷³⁹ Bowers to Simmons, April 1, 1914, Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS.

⁷⁴⁰ [Wilkinson] to Bowers, April 1, 1914, Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS.

nearly quit the campaign altogether. “You guessed right,” she wrote to state headquarters on April 9, “that I would come home when I reached the end of my rope.”⁷⁴¹ Her first few stops in South Dakota had garnered a pathetic response, and at one town, only four women attended her lecture. She returned to Sioux City defeated but determined to regroup, making plans to complete her remaining engagements, including the one at Volin. She took the train to Yankton County about ten days later, stopping in Mission Hill in the hope that someone could assist her in organizing a lecture and meeting there. Unfortunately, she found no one sympathetic to the cause. Apparently whatever support garnered during the previous four suffrage campaigns at Mission Hill had evaporated almost completely by the spring of 1914. She managed to meet with a few members of a Mother’s Club that met in the area, but the women cringed at the prospect of directing a campaign among their neighbors. At the very most, Bowers wrote, “They will take up [the] study of suffrage if some one will direct them.”⁷⁴² The next evening, Bowers gave her lecture to a surprisingly full house at Volin, to the delight of Anna Steadman. As Bowers reported, the crowd made Steadman “so happy” and gave “her courage to go on in work.”⁷⁴³ Unfortunately, any activity Steadman directed on behalf of the campaign failed to gain public notice as no newspaper or other local publication mentioned any organized campaign in Volin. Indeed, the turnout at the lecture displayed a substantial amount of interest toward woman suffrage, but Steadman faced tough opposition

⁷⁴¹ Bowers to Wilkinson, April 9, 1914, Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS.

⁷⁴² Bowers to Wilkinson, April 20, 1914, Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS. In a curious turn of events, the *Press and Dakotan* reported on October 29 that the Mission Hill Mother’s Club discussed the matter of “equal suffrage” at a regular meeting. Although the article gave no further details, the fact that the women eventually discussed the matter displayed how attitudes toward woman suffrage changed over the course of the campaign. It also showed that campaigning must have proved effective in Mission Hill, although no record of it exists in the local newspapers. “Mission Hill Items,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 30, 1914.

⁷⁴³ Bowers to Wilkinson, April 20, 1914, Folder 20, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS.

when it came to actually convincing her friends and neighbors to vote in favor of the amendment bill. Four days after Bowers's speech, the editor of the *Volin Advance*, the local newspaper, wrote a short opinion piece that linked woman suffrage to divorce. Woman suffrage, the editor wrote, broke apart households when husbands voted for one party while wives voted for the other.⁷⁴⁴ Clearly, one speech on woman suffrage could not and did not persuade everyone in Volin to immediately support woman suffrage. In addition, Volin's suffrage lecture served merely as an isolated incident in Yankton County. Bowers failed to build upon her successful meeting at Volin, totally ignoring the rural people who lived in any of the other towns in the county. The campaign was off to a slow start.

During initial campaign efforts in the spring of 1914, suffrage leaders experienced a slew of disappointments and difficulties in motivating people in local communities to support the cause. This new generation of suffragists refused to back down, however, and by the summer of 1914, woman suffrage appeared to gain some ground. In Yankton County, a small group of men and women joined together to work for the amendment campaign, forming the Yankton Universal Franchise League as early as June 1914. Many of the women who joined the League were also members of the Nineteenth Century Club, including Kathryn Schuppert, who was president of the club and the League.⁷⁴⁵ As M. M. Bennett, suffrage supporter and editor of the *Dakota Herald* pointed out, the Yankton Universal Franchise League formed under the guidance of the SDUFL, which pressed forward a bold vision for county-by-county organization across the state, but it benefited from the leadership and

⁷⁴⁴ “[That equal suffrage doesn't work...],” *Volin Advance*, April 23, 1914.

⁷⁴⁵ “19th Century Club Meets,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 5, 1914; “Nineteenth Century Club Meeting,” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 6, 1914. The *Dakota Herald* article listed Kathryn Schuppert as president. Mrs. F. V. Stevens, the wife of the Congregational minister, was a past president of the organization.

organization of an already existing woman's club. Under the SDUFL's directions, suffrage advocates from counties without organized suffrage work traveled to nearby counties with suffrage clubs, activities, and other events to learn how to attract members, advertise on behalf of the cause, and promote woman suffrage as a necessary reform.⁷⁴⁶ At Yankton, the women began to meet regularly by late June 1914. Curiously, a report of one of their first meetings indicated no actual discussion of woman suffrage. Instead, its president, Kathryn Schuppert, regaled members with her experiences at the biannual gathering of the General Federation of Women's Clubs in Chicago, mentioning in rather star struck fashion that Carrie Chapman Catt attended one of the evening banquets. The league made no definite plans for suffrage work in the county except for discussing the possibility of hosting suffragist Flora "Fola" La Follette on July 14 while she entertained the county as part of the local Chautauqua.⁷⁴⁷ Clearly, these local advocates had much to learn about organizing a woman suffrage campaign.

The arrival of La Follette in Yankton County during the summer of 1914 reflected a larger trend in progressive politics and reform during the early-twentieth century. La Follette's father, Robert, had made a name for himself in national political circles as a vocal advocate for progressivism. As governor and later a senator from Wisconsin, he supported legislation that protected consumers and laborers and attacked corporate intrusion in government and "money trusts." He also supported a myriad of reform efforts, including

⁷⁴⁶ "Suffs. Getting Active in the State," *Dakota Herald*, June 19, 1914.

⁷⁴⁷ "Meeting of Franchise League," *Dakota Herald*, July 3, 1914; "Itinerary and Train Schedule," Folder 5, Box 1, E153, La Follette Family Papers, 1781-1988 [hereafter LFFP], LOC.

minimum wage, child labor laws, and woman suffrage.⁷⁴⁸ Residents of Yankton County echoed Robert La Follette's condemnation of big business and governmental corruption, and by 1914, progressive spirit was alive and well in the area. Progressivism was on the minds and lips of many local leaders who frequently took to the pages of the local newspapers to comment on what was wrong with society and explain how to fix it. In particular, many people spent a great amount of time discussing the "rural" problem, or the exodus of young people from farms and rural communities who left in an attempt to escape the perceived "backward" conditions of agrarian life. One article, published in June 1914 in the *Dakota Herald*, highlighted how to improve social conditions in the country. After attending the first County Life Conference at the agricultural college in Brookings, the author pointed out that "our farming conditions are not on a level with the general prosperity of the country."⁷⁴⁹ To entice young men and women to stay on the farm, farm homes needed modern amenities, such as running water, electricity, and good heating systems. In addition, rural school curriculums required revision so that boys and girls received an education that promoted farm life. Finally, farmers needed to construct a system of cooperation and marketing to improve their profits, increase their investments, and compete with corporate interests.⁷⁵⁰ County political contests also proved wide open to progressives, and the *Volin Advance* reported that a county-level Bull Moose party, organized in support of Theodore Roosevelt's departure from the Republican Party, had a full slate of candidates ready to throw their hats

⁷⁴⁸ Robert La Follette, *La Follette's Autobiography: A Personal Narrative of Political Experiences* (Madison, Wis.: The Robert M. La Follette Co., 1919); David P. Thelen, *Robert M. La Follette and the Insurgent Spirit* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1976).

⁷⁴⁹ "How To Improve Rural Life," *Dakota Herald*, June 26, 1914.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

into the ring and challenge the dominant two-party system.⁷⁵¹ Although newspaper editors speculated on the actual strength of the Bull Moosers in the state, they did acknowledge that progressivism promised to influence politics in 1914.⁷⁵²

The July 1914 Chautauqua appearance of Fola La Follette brought the first nationally recognized speaker for woman suffrage to Yankton County. La Follette's speech created a seismic shift in the local campaign because it provided the message that local advocates repeated through the remainder of the campaign in the county, giving them a foundation from which to demand the vote for women. Kathryn Schuppert, the president of the Yankton Universal Franchise League, also arranged to have Jean Wilkinson, the WCTU state organizer who had worked with Rena Bowers, and Mamie Pyle, the president of the SDUFL, at the event, bringing together an all-star team to represent the cause to local residents. Full of excitement, Schuppert predicted a "big day" for woman suffrage.⁷⁵³ M. M. Bennett, the editor of the *Dakota Herald*, also advertised La Follette's lecture frequently in the days leading up to it, promoting her as "one of the foremost woman suffrage speakers of the nation."⁷⁵⁴

Curiously, while Yankton's suffrage leaders waited in anticipation for the "big day" at the Chautauqua, La Follette dreaded another difficult speaking engagement. Her letters, written to family and friends during her Chautauqua tour of South Dakota, Minnesota, and Iowa, revealed an activist committed to her cause but suffering from stifling summer heat, difficult travel conditions, and a significant lack of sleep. In a letter written two days before

⁷⁵¹ "[Another big row...]," *Volin Advance*, July 30, 1914.

⁷⁵² "Call for Bull Moose Meeting," *Dakota Herald*, July 3, 1914.

⁷⁵³ Kathryn Schuppert to Wilkinson, July 11, 1914, Folder 22, Box 6677, PFP, SDSHS.

⁷⁵⁴ "Miss Fola La Follette," *Dakota Herald*, July 3, 1914; "Yankton Chautauqua at Garfield Park," *Dakota Herald*, July 3, 1914.

her address at Yankton, La Follette complained of local suffrage committees that added extra work to her already demanding schedule, including “suffrage celebrations, parades, in which they expect me to ride in the blazing sun & breath alkali dust for an hour before my lecture, [and] luncheons when I am expected to give a speech in addition to the Chautauqua lecture.”⁷⁵⁵ Yankton’s Universal Franchise League expected nothing less from La Follette, arranging for her to mingle with locals at a reception, give a short talk with business leaders, ride out to the Chautauqua park in an open-air vehicle, deliver her hour-long talk, and then enjoy tea with the members of the Yankton Universal Franchise League. Souring La Follette’s mood even more was an engine brake failure that delayed her train significantly, causing her to ride almost one hundred fifty miles through the South Dakota prairie in one-hundred-two-degree heat to reach her appointments.⁷⁵⁶

The Yankton Universal Franchise League never knew of La Follette’s complaints, and reports in the local newspapers revealed admiration for her “eloquence” and “sweet and womanly” demeanor. The *Press and Dakotan* reported that La Follette must have “inherited many of the talents of her father in presenting arguments that are convincing,” for her talk resonated among the attendees at the Chautauqua.⁷⁵⁷ M. M. Bennett, the avid supporter of woman suffrage and newspaper editor, used four full-length columns in the *Dakota Herald* to

⁷⁵⁵ Fola La Follette to Belle Case La Follette, July 11, 1914, Folder 7, Box 1, A11, LFFP, LOC.

⁷⁵⁶ Fola La Follette to Robert La Follette, [July 11, 1914], Folder 7, Box 1, A11, LFFP, LOC; Fola La Follette to George Middleton, July 10, 1914, Folder 7, Box 1, A11, LFFP, LOC; Fola La Follette to Middleton, July 11, 1914, Folder 7, Box 1, A11, LFFP, LOC; Fola La Follette to Middleton, July 15, 1914, Folder 7, Box 1, A11, LFFP, LOC. La Follette complained that suffragists at Huron forced her to ride in a parade, even though she pleaded to rest at the local hotel. She made it through her speech but admitted later that she nearly “keeled over” because she had slept only twenty minutes the night before.

⁷⁵⁷ “Comments on Chautauqua Work,” *Press and Dakotan*, newspaper clipping, Folder 9, Box 1, E151, LFFP, LOC.

provide a detailed description of La Follette's speech at Yankton. She linked democracy to woman suffrage, arguing that woman suffrage prevented despotism from gaining hold in world politics. La Follette also used progressive rhetoric, making the case that women required the ballot to "clean up" the nation's social problems, starting with sweat shops and evil corporations. She pointed out that, as more and more women had to make economic contributions to their families' incomes, they required the right to support the governmental programs they deemed worthy of their tax dollars, especially programs devoted to children and families.⁷⁵⁸ She challenged mothers to step up demands for female enfranchisement to protect the nation's children from vice and immorality. In essence, La Follette made an effective, but contradictory argument—in the democratic political system, women deserved the right to vote because they were equal with men, but they also required the ballot because of their "special role" as mothers and arbiters of morality. Although her visit reenergized Yankton's suffrage leaders, it exhausted La Follette. She was "frightfully tired" the next day, informing her husband that she refused to participate in any more extra activities, such as parades and receptions, that could weaken her further.⁷⁵⁹

A few years later, La Follette remembered her experiences on the Chautauqua circuit in a far different, and brighter, light. In an article, printed as part of a series entitled "The World of Busy Women," La Follette praised the Yankton audience, which she claimed was about a thousand people, for the eagerness they displayed to hear her speak, and recounted that the town stood "in line to paint itself a suffrage yellow."⁷⁶⁰ She also revealed that she

⁷⁵⁸ "Suffrage Day a Big Success," *Dakota Herald*, July 17, 1914.

⁷⁵⁹ Fola La Follette to Middleton, July 15, 1914, Folder 7, Box 1, A11, LFFP, LOC.

⁷⁶⁰ Fola La Follette, "The World of Busy Women: Suffragette on the Chautauqua Circuit," Folder 10, Box 1, E151, LFFP, LOC.

had visited Yankton during the 1910 amendment campaign four years earlier, discovering that, at the time, woman suffrage was not popular in the “conservative little town.” In fact, “certain interests” intercepted the advertisements sent by the state suffrage association to announce her speech and “made way” with them, which, as a result, caused La Follette to deliver her evening lecture to the one man present at the opera house, the janitor.⁷⁶¹ In sharing her impressions from the Chautauqua circuit, La Follette pointed out that Yankton’s townspeople had undergone a rapid transformation, from outright rejection to subdued acceptance of woman suffrage, in four short years, a change of sentiment that typically required a generation or more to occur. She credited the efforts of suffragists like her for maintaining a constant public conversation about the cause. More importantly, she commented on the ways in which public opinion shifted and transformed in the Midwest. At the core was a “real social democracy, a heritage of pioneer days,” expressed most clearly when men and women, as they often did, shared a “common cause” and constituted a “united audience.”⁷⁶² La Follette’s appraisal of Midwestern political ideology rested on her observations of the value in a shared sense of community, bonded by gendered, ethnic, and religious ties and constructed through interactions among neighbors, friends, and relatives. Women stood at the nexus of community building, and La Follette’s statements connected woman suffrage to women’s central place as civic promoters, school supporters, and church members in the community. During the fall of 1914, the Yankton Universal Franchise League often used the idea of “civic responsibility” in their propaganda, a notion helpfully constructed at least in part by La Follette on the Chautauqua platform.

⁷⁶¹ Ibid.

⁷⁶² Ibid.

As the Yankton Universal Franchise League rallied behind La Follette's successful lecture, events in Europe drastically reshaped the context in which their efforts to secure woman suffrage played out. By mid-August, men and women in Yankton County encountered the increasingly devastating war as soon as they opened the pages of their daily newspaper. Local newspapers issued frequent updates on the war effort, with headlines that declared, "France Declares War on Austria" and "German Soldiers are on the Move."⁷⁶³ At first, war announcements threatened to upstage woman suffrage events, including the lecture of Anna Howard Shaw, current president of the NAWSA, at Yankton. Shaw received second billing to war news, with the *Press and Dakotan* relegating her short advertisements to the last pages of their daily editions or obscuring them in the "Local and Personal" section.⁷⁶⁴ Local suffrage organizers relied on the *Dakota Herald*, with its pro-suffrage editor, to promote her talk, and he managed to work up three lengthy articles in her favor.⁷⁶⁵ Coverage of her speech also differed markedly between the Republican *Press and Dakotan* and Democratic *Dakota Herald*. While the *Press and Dakotan* remarked that a "large crowd, but disappointing proportioned as to comparative numbers of men and women present" had gathered at the Congregational Church to hear her speak, the *Dakota Herald* boasted that "a

⁷⁶³ The *Dakota Herald* and *Press and Dakotan* published regular updates on the war effort as early as European nations began invading each other. A series of four front-page headlines, printed over ten days in the semi-weekly *Dakota Herald*, revealed the frequency with which these newspapers printed stories on the war. See, "France Declares War on Austria," *Dakota Herald*, Aug. 11, 1914; "Austria-Hungry Declares War," *Dakota Herald*, Aug. 14, 1914; "Belgian Check German Advance," *Dakota Herald*, Aug. 14, 1914; "Germans Marching on Brussels," *Dakota Herald*, Aug. 21, 1914. For Yankton's literate residents, the war coverage served as sustained presence and continual reminder of the battles waged and lives lost across the Atlantic. It tied them personally to the war effort, a bond that only intensified for the next four years.

⁷⁶⁴ Advertisement, *Press and Dakotan*, Sept. 1, 1914; "Local and Personal," *Press and Dakotan*, Sept. 1, 1914.

⁷⁶⁵ "Rev. Anna Shaw Speaks Sept. 2," *Dakota Herald*, Aug. 28, 1914;

large assemblage” “comfortably filled” the church.⁷⁶⁶ The *Press and Dakotan* claimed her talk merely a “logical presentation of facts” while the *Dakota Herald* praised Shaw for her “pleasing delivery,” “delightfully candid personality,” and “wonderful virility and strength of character.”⁷⁶⁷ Despite the less than enthusiastic response elicited by the editor of the *Press and Dakotan*, he did appreciate her thoughtful presentation of “the position of woman kind in the present war situation.”⁷⁶⁸ The *Dakota Herald* affirmed Shaw’s stance on the war and related in full the illustration she used to clarify her thoughts on women’s role in upholding democracy during wartime. She warned the audience that, with the outbreak of war, foreigners across the country were “very anxious to take out their first papers of citizenship” and begin the process of becoming a citizen.⁷⁶⁹ In many cases, however, these foreigners had little concern about democratic principles or responsible citizenship. In one example, Shaw described the encounter between an immigrant and a judge, sent to test the foreigner’s petition for citizenship. When the judge asked the man to name of the president of the United States, he replied “Charles Murphy.”⁷⁷⁰ While Shaw probably devised the example for its shock factor, she used it to reposition women at the center of democratic principles, declaring that the average woman, moral, upright, and educated in the ways of democracy and liberty, knew the answers to such “ponderous questions” and deserved the right to vote over these ill-informed foreign voters.

⁷⁶⁶ “Dr. Anna Shaw Speaks,” *Press and Dakotan*, Sept. 3, 1914; “Dr. Anna Shaw Delivers Address,” *Dakota Herald*, Sept. 4, 1914.

⁷⁶⁷ “Dr. Anna Shaw Speaks,” *Press and Dakotan*, Sept. 3, 1914; “Dr. Anna Shaw Delivers Address,” *Dakota Herald*, Sept. 4, 1914.

⁷⁶⁸ “Dr. Anna Shaw Speaks,” *Press and Dakotan*, Sept. 3, 1914.

⁷⁶⁹ “Dr. Anna Shaw Delivers Address,” *Dakota Herald*, Sept. 4, 1914.

⁷⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

During the fall of 1914, campaigning for woman suffrage moved forward swiftly with the Yankton Universal Franchise League at the helm of activity. These women, led by Kathryn Schuppert, had come a long way since their early meetings in June. By September, they established weekly newspaper columns, edited by Edith Fitch, another suffrage supporter, in both the *Press and Dakotan* and *Dakota Herald*. As Fitch explained, she wrote the articles to “explain why thoughtful women are asking for a voice in public affairs.”⁷⁷¹ She mixed democratic rhetoric with comments that underscored women’s domestic and familial roles. Like La Follette, Fitch sought to make a somewhat contradictory argument in that she placed women at the center of ideals of liberty, democracy, and equality while maintaining their venerated, separate roles as wives and mothers. Fitch also updated readers about the work undertaken by the Yankton Universal Franchise League, including organizing clubs in other counties and drumming up support by visiting small towns in Yankton County. Fitch proclaimed that the formation of a suffrage organization in Yankton County marked the dawn of a “new order” among men and women. People had become enlightened in the past few years to women’s potential contributions through their active participation in community matters and civic issues. Recalling the community-building endeavors sponsored by women, including their work in churches, libraries, and other civic matters, Fitch declared that women shared equal civic responsibility with men and thus deserved the right to vote.⁷⁷² To Fitch, women were citizens without permission to act, and they required the “duties and responsibilities of citizenship” to allow them to become “active voting citizens” with a voice

⁷⁷¹ “Yankton Universal Franchise League,” *Press and Dakotan*, Sept. 26, 1914. The first suffrage article written by Fitch printed in the *Dakota Herald* a day earlier. It received front page billing from the editor, M. M. Bennett. See, “Universal Franchise,” *Dakota Herald*, Sept. 25, 1914.

⁷⁷² “Universal Franchise,” *Dakota Herald*, Sept. 25, 1914.

in the “affairs of their country.”⁷⁷³ Constant agitation in the county’s major newspapers brought recognition and publicity to the woman suffrage campaign. Fitch relied on a variety of arguments to bolster her claims, including women’s economic contributions to the home, women’s civic responsibilities, and women’s stake in a democratic government.⁷⁷⁴

While the Yankton Universal Franchise League maintained a public dialogue about woman suffrage through its newspaper columns, it also attempted to organize franchise leagues in other towns in Yankton County. In late September, members of the League, including T. A. Harmon, superintendent of schools at the county seat, Fitch, and Schuppert, traveled to Gayville to help residents form their own club. As the *Dakota Herald* reported, the occasion was festive, with songs, readings, and fiery addresses, which encouraged the people of Gayville to create an “enthusiastic” league.⁷⁷⁵ Three cars traveled to Gayville that day, a significant improvement from past campaigns. Speaking of the elections of 1914, the *Volin Advance* pointed out that the automobile “revolutionized methods of campaigning in county politics.”⁷⁷⁶ Instead of horses, buggies, and bicycles, members of political campaigns could conduct short, daylong trips, meeting voters efficiently and securing support quickly.

⁷⁷³ “Yankton Universal Franchise League,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 2, 1914; “Yankton Universal Franchise League,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 31, 1914.

⁷⁷⁴ “Universal Franchise,” *Dakota Herald*, Sept. 29, 1914; “Yankton Universal Franchise League,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 2, 1914. Edith Fitch reiterated much the same themes in her later articles. On October 9, she wrote, “Women also have the inherent right of free adult citizens in a democratic country...[and] of expressing their opinions on all subjects pertaining to that welfare and happiness where it will be occupied. We believe in Democracy and the development of the individual... We women are asking for the right to develop our talents, our characters, and our lives in our own way and according to our judgments.” See, “Yankton Universal Franchise League,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 9, 1914.

⁷⁷⁵ “Suffrage Meeting at Gayville,” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 2, 1914.

⁷⁷⁶ “[Only a little over two weeks...],” *Volin Advance*, Oct. 15, 1914.

As the campaign drew closer to the election date, the women pressed forward their vision of female enfranchisement as a measure that strengthened American democracy during a time of turmoil and war. Fitch spoke of the European conflict in her columns regularly, using it to illustrate how nations like Germany and Austria, corrupted by untrammled power, challenged ideals of democracy. Women, armed with the ballot, reenergized democratic principles because they gave powerful truth to axioms like “the consent of the governed,” the “voice of the people,” and “life, liberty, and equality.” According to Fitch, the United States, as a progressive, forward-thinking nation, had to embrace woman suffrage as a confirmation of these democratic freedoms in the face of enemies who threatened to destroy the heart of American political life.⁷⁷⁷ As Fitch added fire to the campaign through her rhetorical flourishes, the women of the Nineteenth Century Club embodied this spirit of progressivism and justice with a plan to support organizations preparing to send clothing and toys to the women and children who lost everything from the war in Europe.⁷⁷⁸ Positioning themselves as mothers who sought to care for children abandoned during the war, the women effectively combined their perceived role as maternal caregivers with their desire for democracy and justice.

According to local suffrage advocates, the election on November 3 tested the “divine spirit” of freedom, justice, and democracy, and individuals and groups who lined up on the side of woman suffrage supported these beloved tenets. As Fitch pointed out in her column, the WCTU and Federation of Women’s Clubs had endorsed the cause. She assured voters

⁷⁷⁷ “Universal Franchise,” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 16, 1914; “Yankton Universal Franchise League,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 17, 1914; “Universal Franchise,” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 20, 1914; “Yankton Universal Franchise League,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 24, 1914; “Yankton Universal Franchise League,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 31, 1914.

⁷⁷⁸ “Meeting of 19th Century Club,” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 27, 1914.

that just because the WCTU had played an important part in campaign efforts did not mean that prohibition was soon to follow.⁷⁷⁹ The editor of the *Dakota Herald*, M. M. Bennett, reiterated that claim, writing that the fact remained “that no one of the ten prohibition states have woman suffrage.”⁷⁸⁰ According to him, five states—Ohio, Colorado, Washington, Oregon, and Colorado—had prohibition amendments on their 1914 election ballots, but only one, Ohio, allowed women to vote on the measure.⁷⁸¹ After pointing to the weak link between woman suffrage and prohibition, Bennett took the strongest stance in favor of the amendment, advising his readers to vote with a resounding “YES” on the amendment. The editor of the *Press and Dakotan*, however, merely told his readers to “vote straight” on the amendment, giving no opinion on the matter. The *Volin Advance* gave the most ambiguous response to the proposed amendment, writing that while woman suffrage had not “greatly improved political conditions in the states” that had adopted it, its passage was inevitable, “if not at this election [then] at some date in the near future.”⁷⁸²

The day before the election, the *Press and Dakotan* published an editorial that argued that voters should approve the woman suffrage amendment only when the majority of women wanted the ballot. According to the author, most likely an outside contributor, at least 80 percent of women rejected the right to vote because they had no interest in political matters. While he provided no source for his statistic, he did resurrect arguments popular during the late-nineteenth century, that woman suffrage was a radical measure that forced

⁷⁷⁹ “Yankton Universal Franchise League,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 31, 1914.

⁷⁸⁰ “[Those who are fighting...],” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 13, 1914.

⁷⁸¹ “[Prohibition is an issue...],” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 16, 1914.

⁷⁸² “Those Referred Laws and Amendments,” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 23, 1914; “The Referred Laws and Amendments,” *Press and Dakotan*, Nov. 1, 1914; “The Laws and Amendments,” *Volin Advance*, Oct. 29, 1914.

women to assume political roles for which their womanly dispositions had not prepared them. Clearly familiar with woman suffrage arguments, the author instructed voters to ask their wives, daughters, and mothers whether or not they wanted the right to vote and then consider whether female enfranchisement had any hope of purifying politics, elevating women, or improving the home.⁷⁸³ Of all the articles on woman suffrage published during the fall of 1914, this article probably revealed the most prominent attitude on woman suffrage. While it did not rule out the prospect of female enfranchisement entirely—leaving room for the “inevitability” argument—it did insist that the women of South Dakota were neither ready nor willing to vote. By 1914, this type of opinion, following a sort of “middle of the road” approach, probably encapsulated the stance many South Dakotans took toward the cause, one in which woman suffrage was fairly familiar but still unwelcome. The results of the election confirmed the author’s sentiments. In Yankton County, 810 people voted for woman suffrage while 1705 voted against it. The measure lost in the state by about ten thousand votes.⁷⁸⁴ While the results made no overt connection to prohibition, the threat of its arrival, especially as progressive politics matured in the state, probably influenced “wets” to vote against the measure. Of the seven states that held elections on woman suffrage amendments in 1914, only two, Montana and Nevada, passed their respective measures.⁷⁸⁵

With defeat spoiling what was supposed to be a deserved victory, the Yankton Universal Franchise League dismantled, although some members reformed the league a couple years later. With the failure of the 1914 amendment campaign, the SDUFL pressed forward almost immediately with plans for another amendment campaign, which they

⁷⁸³ “So the People May Know,” *Press and Dakotan*, Nov. 2, 1914.

⁷⁸⁴ “‘Vote No’ Was Popular,” *Volin Advance*, Nov. 12, 1914.

⁷⁸⁵ “Suffrage Welcome to New States,” *Dakota Herald*, Nov. 17, 1914.

received on the 1916 election ballot. In Yankton County, the 1916 campaign was far different than in 1914. A new group of local leaders emerged, perhaps because disappointment from the 1914 campaign dissuaded previous leaders from reorganizing for activity or because advocates balked when remembering the strenuousness of the previous campaign. Whatever the reason, it kept former suffrage leaders, such as Kathryn Schuppert, the president of the Yankton Universal Franchise League in 1914, from constructing an arduous campaign to secure the amendment and created a limited and short-lived fight that year.⁷⁸⁶

In Yankton County, the work that took place on behalf of woman suffrage in 1916 emerged almost exclusively from suffrage organizers paid by the SDUFL. Not until August 1916 did the first speaker, Leslie Benedict, arrive in the county, and her speech, like so many before it, highlighted how the vote enhanced women's respected positions as wives and mothers. "Women today are asking for the vote in order that they may better attend to their own business—the business of the home and the children," she proclaimed.⁷⁸⁷ She also pointed out that women had significant influence in war matters fast becoming national priorities, including maintaining food supply, promoting health and sanitation, and providing outstanding educational conditions for the nation's children and future democratic leaders. After Benedict's speech, almost two full months passed until a second and final speaker,

⁷⁸⁶ Although Schuppert chose not to lead local campaign efforts in 1916, she did remain president of the Nineteenth Century Club, renamed the Woman's Club during the spring of 1916. She continued to support the cause, just not through the official line of work of the SDUFL. For example, at a banquet given by the Woman's Club and presided by Schuppert, the ladies of the Woman's Club presented a play entitled "In Men's Footsteps." The climax of the play came when a stalled vote for chairman of a council was resolved when a poor lady of the neighborhood found out that her husband had become a duke and, with her change of circumstances, was elected her chairman of the council. As reports showed, the play showed women's "capability" in "handling civic affairs, every present mutually agreeing that a gynococracy was an eventuality—so why not immediately."

⁷⁸⁷ "Leslie Benedict Lectures to Voters," *Dakota Herald*, Aug. 1, 1916.

Maria McMahon of the Minnesota Equal Suffrage Association, arrived to lecture in the county. She traveled to Mission Hill to give her talk, managing to stir up the crowd enough that afterward, men and women from the area signed petitions and drew up plans for a township canvass.⁷⁸⁸ About a week later, community leaders called together the residents of Mission Hill for a “fierce and terrific word battle” between the men and women of the town “in a fight for Equal Rights.”⁷⁸⁹ While reports failed to indicate the winner of the debate, they did reveal the serious consideration given the cause by the people of a rural township. McMahon also lectured at Volin, drawing a large crowd interested in her topic. Unfortunately, suffrage activity stopped at the departure of McMahon, as no source indicated further campaigning in Volin.⁷⁹⁰

While the efforts of two paid lecturers punctuated the promotion of woman suffrage in Yankton County, conversations erupted about the proposed amendment in the pages of local newspapers. In September, the editor of the *Volin Advance* remarked that, during the presidential campaign occurring between Woodrow Wilson and Charles Hughes, both candidates endorsed woman suffrage. The editor predicted, however, that Wilson and Hughes lacked actual support for the cause, reminding readers that “most campaign talk is forgotten after election.”⁷⁹¹ The editor of the *Dakota Herald*, M. M. Bennett, remained an advocate for woman suffrage, publishing an article in nearly every weekly edition in favor of woman

⁷⁸⁸ “Suffrage Activity at Mission Hill,” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 26, 1916.

⁷⁸⁹ “News Items,” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 19, 1916.

⁷⁹⁰ “Local News,” *Volin Advance*, Nov. 2, 1916.

⁷⁹¹ “Local News,” *Volin Advance*, Sept. 14, 1916; “The Rival Wooers,” *Volin Advance*, Sept. 14, 1916.

suffrage.⁷⁹² His support seemed to waver, however, when paying customers sought to publish anti-suffrage material. On November 2, the same day he printed three pro-suffrage articles in the *Dakota Herald*, he also ran an advertisement that declared “Woman Suffrage Means Higher Taxes.” The announcement, paid for by the Women’s Anti-Suffrage Association of South Dakota, claimed that women with the ballot supported programs and initiatives that cost taxpayers money.⁷⁹³ Perhaps Bennett merely sought to present both sides of the woman suffrage debate, but his support of woman suffrage, going back at least to the 1914 campaign, pointed to a stronger desire for financial gain.

While some anti-suffragists opposed female enfranchisement because they feared women’s political influence on tax rates, many more felt threatened by prohibition. At the 1916 election, two amendments, one securing woman suffrage and one establishing statewide prohibition, played off each other in the days leading up to the election. Despite the SDUFL’s best attempts to separate themselves from the WCTU, they could not achieve any real break, especially since they relied on WCTU workers to promote the cause where suffrage clubs did not exist. During the fall of 1916, newspaper reports painted a charged atmosphere brewing in South Dakota, especially as anti-prohibition forces stepped up attacks, both rhetorical and physical, on temperance advocates. Many times, woman suffrage became an unintended causality, as liquor interests failed to distinguish clearly between the two reforms. For example, in late October 1916, a group of unnamed assailants attacked Leslie Benedict, the suffrage lecturer who visited Yankton County in August, believing she

⁷⁹² “More Men and Better Votes,” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 19, 1916; “Suffragist Benedict Attacked,” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 26, 1916; “[Vote ‘yes’ on amendments...],” *Dakota Herald*, Nov. 2, 1916; “[One of the anti-suffrage associations...],” *Dakota Herald*, Nov. 2, 1916; “Do You Know,” *Dakota Herald*, Nov. 2, 1916.

⁷⁹³ “Woman Suffrage Means Higher Taxes,” *Dakota Herald*, Nov. 2, 1916.

was a prohibitionist. As the account explained, the town in which the assault took place went dry at the last election on a technicality, even though its residents, clearly angry at the outcome, “had very wet tendencies.”⁷⁹⁴ M. M. Bennett, editor of the *Dakota Herald*, ran a piece from the *Sioux Falls Press* that made an outright connection between prohibition and woman suffrage, the very issue suffragists attempted to avoid. As the article pointed out, women were less corrupt and prone to improper behavior, disposing them to support wholeheartedly moral and upright reforms like prohibition.⁷⁹⁵ Despite the lengths suffragists went to distinguish themselves from prohibition and the WCTU, the people of South Dakota still viewed them in the same terms.

In Yankton County, a vocal newspaper editor, F. A. Killian of the *Lesterville Ledger*, frequently commented on the links he perceived among statewide prohibition, woman suffrage, and government corruption. Lesterville, located in the northwest portion of the county, boasted a population full of first- and second-generation Germans. As a lone voice against the dominant political trends in the county, he used his newspaper to give an “outsiders” perspective to political developments in the state, attacking Republicans and Democrats as part of the “state political machine.”⁷⁹⁶ Killian published an article submitted by a local resident, Hans Helgerson, on October 27, 1916. “Like three peas in a pod,” he wrote, “politics, pie and pork are so closely associated that they look very much alike.” According to Helgerson, “professional politicians” gained support not by advocating for their

⁷⁹⁴ “Suffragists Benedict Attacked,” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 26, 1916. According to the report, Benedict had just checked into the local hotel when, “suddenly all the lights were extinguished and some one had pounced on her with a blanket. Her cries brought some farmer boys to the scene,” whose presence forced the assailants to flee.

⁷⁹⁵ “More Men and Better Votes,” *Dakota Herald*, Oct. 19, 1916.

⁷⁹⁶ “[The state political machine...],” *Lesterville Ledger*, May 12, 1916. See, “Three Ripe P’s,” *Lesterville Ledger*, Oct. 27, 1916.

constituents but by securing “pork” and taking as much of the “pie” as they could. Helgerson promoted the Non-Partisan League, writing that “we ought to take a lesson from the Farmers Non-Partisan League of North Dakota formed for the purpose of breaking party machine-power.” Like Helgerson, Killian also supported the Non-Partisan League and promoted principles of self-governance, such as the local option laws that allowed Lesterville to remain wet when other towns in the county went dry. He viewed the statewide amendment campaigns for prohibition and woman’s suffrage with disdain, believing that local communities ought to decide the policies under which they lived. To people like Killian, Helgerson, and the residents of Lesterville, the Non-Partisan League was politically attractive because it promoted individual interests and provided a forum to question and discard policies they felt forced upon them. For this reason, Killian predicted that the organization “will be watched with much interest by many South Dakotans.”⁷⁹⁷ During the fall of 1916, Killian expressed his political views easily, without fear of reprisal. However, as the United States edged closer to war during the spring of 1917, his attacks on the American political system weakened, especially as his friends and neighbors suffered under increased patriotic fervor and suspicions of treachery.

Despite efforts by men like Killian to undercut the dominant political forces in South Dakota, the election of 1916 produced the expected results. Increased national sentiment in support of prohibition and renewed “progressive spirit” carried the prohibition measure to victory but not the woman suffrage amendment, although it lost by its lowest margin ever,

⁷⁹⁷ “[North Dakota has...],” *Lesterville Ledger*, Sept. 22, 1916; “What is Local Option?” *Lesterville Ledger*, Oct. 13, 1916.

53,432 for and 58,350 against.⁷⁹⁸ Scholar Patricia O’Keefe Easton blamed Germans for voting substantially against woman suffrage, noting that seventeen of nineteen counties with a German population over 25 percent defeated the suffrage bill.⁷⁹⁹ Newspaper editor Killian accepted defeat shortly after the returns came in, writing sarcastically, “Election is over...now there will be no more howl of calamity; the country has been saved and Americanism stands unitedly [sic.] for America.”⁸⁰⁰ Although his short editorial claimed that, in the end, what all Americans merely wanted was a free government, it contained a hint of scorn and cynicism at an election cycle that once again had failed to reshape the dominant political order. While Killian stewed over his dreams dashed, he failed to notice a new political climate for future woman suffrage campaigns. With prohibition secured by state amendment, woman suffrage officially had become divorced from temperance and the WCTU, and the SDUFL could work without the shadow of prohibition darkening their efforts.⁸⁰¹

The entrance of the United States in World War I dramatically influenced politics across America. Patriotism rose to a fever pitch as men and women in their local communities strove to “do their part” to support the war effort. The war soon proved costly, both in terms of lives lost and resources consumed. Loyal American citizens proudly displayed their patriotic sentiments by supporting the war effort financially, buying liberty

⁷⁹⁸ “Majorities in State Reduced,” *Dakota Herald*, Nov. 16, 1916; “Prohibition Wins in Several States,” *Volin Advance*, Nov. 9, 1916. The *Dakota Herald* first reported that equal suffrage carried, but complete returns spelled the defeat of the amendment. “State Dry, Suffrage, Dillon Wins,” *Dakota Herald*, Nov. 9, 1916.

⁷⁹⁹ Patricia O’Keefe Easton, “Woman Suffrage in South Dakota: The Final Decade, 1911-1920,” in *History of Women in the United States*, Nancy Cott, ed., vol. 19 (Munich: K. G. Saur Verlag GmbH & Co., 1994), 629.

⁸⁰⁰ “[Election is over...]” *Lesterville Ledger*, Nov. 10, 1916.

⁸⁰¹ Patricia O’Keefe Easton, “Woman Suffrage in South Dakota,” 629-30.

bonds, supporting the American Red Cross, and recycling or saving goods and resources, such as clothing, food, and fuel. Purchasing liberty bonds was a highly public and visible act, especially in local communities. Newspaper editors from across Yankton County published not only the names of the individuals who purchased liberty bonds during the four drives that went through the area between 1917 and 1918; they also indicated the exact item or amount donated by each person or group. With each precinct in the county responsible for raising a certain amount, pressure among residents to go “over the top,” or buy more than the assigned quota, reflected the heightened level of patriotism in the county. People displayed their patriotism through their financial support of the war.⁸⁰² Community-wide celebrations, church services, school programs, and other events also adopted patriotic themes. At the Congregational Church in Yankton, members held a “patriotic meeting,” singing “patriotic hymns” and reading “patriotic verses.” The church also unveiled a service flag containing fifteen stars, representing the fifteen young men of the congregation who were serving in the armed conflict.⁸⁰³

Loyalty became the rallying point for new definitions of citizenship and political participation, and exclusionary policies emerged as a common practice. With Germany an avowed enemy with the purported aim to crush democracy and install authoritarian government, American men and women turned into amateur detectives, claiming to root out spies in their midst. In South Dakota, a large German population disturbed native-born

⁸⁰² “Liberty Bond Sale,” *Lesterville Ledger*, Nov. 2, 1917; “We Will Raise the Big Quota,” *Press and Dakotan*, April 5, 1918; “Over the Top in Whole State,” *Press and Dakotan*, April 15, 1918; “Yankton County ‘Over the Top,’” *Press and Dakotan*, April 16, 1918; “Latest Returns,” *Press and Dakotan*, April 17, 1918; “Lesterville ‘Over Top Bond Buying Day,’” *Lesterville Ledger*, April 19, 1918.

⁸⁰³ “Congregational Church Displays Fine Service Flag,” *Press and Dakotan*, Jan. 14, 1918.

residents who feared German plots to sabotage and disrupt war activities that supported American soldiers. While officials never uncovered an actual scheme among Germans living in the state, the threat of a potential outbreak was enough to stoke the fires of discrimination and prejudice. Fears of German treachery reached a boiling point during 1917 and 1918 in South Dakota, and Yankton County experienced its own share of turmoil over ethnic differences. Germans in the county had two possible options during the conflict: to remain in their separate enclaves, preserving their cultural traditions but keeping quiet until the war ended or to declare their allegiance to the United States, becoming loyal citizens who contributed wholeheartedly to war activities. Editors like F. A. Killian of the *Lesterville Ledger* had to make a quick choice to either support the war effort without reservation or remain an outlier and possible target for attack. Perhaps wisely, Killian chose the former, and on March 30, 1917 he wrote an article lambasting his neighbors who maintained any ounce of allegiance with Germany and the Kaiser. He advised those who defended German aggression, especially submarine attacks, to “abdicate this country” immediately or face the consequences.⁸⁰⁴ Much like the *Lesterville Ledger*, the rest of the newspapers published in Yankton County produced vitriolic attacks against disloyalty and overt displays of German culture. While Killian accused German soldiers of various atrocities, including the senseless killing of innocent women and children, M. M. Bennett used the pages in the *Dakota Herald* to warn ethnic groups to drop the hyphen. “There should be no such things as a hyphenated citizenship,” he wrote tersely.⁸⁰⁵

⁸⁰⁴ “[The Ledger is at a loss...],” *Lesterville Ledger*, March 30, 1917.

⁸⁰⁵ “[‘Damn the hyphen’ says our vitriolic friend...],” *Dakota Herald*, Aug. 1, 1916.

A subtle sense of inclusion and exclusion emerged in Yankton County, separating groups of people based on their perceived degree of “loyalty.” Considered least loyal among foreign groups who had settled in Yankton County were German immigrants and their children, especially those who clung tenaciously to their cultural traditions. Under the Espionage Act, passed in June 1917, acting against the war effort or impeding military activity could lead to a fine or imprisonment. The Sedition Act, passed in May 1918, strengthened portions of the Espionage Act and led to the convictions of thousands of alleged spies and traitors across the country. In South Dakota, anti-German sentiment ran rampant, and some German-Americans found themselves on the wrong side of the law when they shared opinions other than patriotic loyalty. In August 1917, officials arrested thirty-one Germans from Hutchinson County, north of Yankton County, who had signed a petition opposing the draft. Under the Espionage Act, the courts found twenty-seven of the men guilty.⁸⁰⁶ As the conflict in Europe deepened during the fall of 1917, F. A. Killian regularly published articles lambasting “Kaiserites” and “would-be Americans” who preached disloyalty and treason.⁸⁰⁷ For a man who only a year earlier had attacked the state’s alleged “political machine,” his editorials served to convince doubters of his unyielding patriotism. As early as January 1918, the newspaper with the largest circulation in the county, the *Press and Dakotan*, began to publish lists of “slackers,” or men who, for one reason or another,

⁸⁰⁶ “Twelve Held on Slacker Charge,” *Lesterville Ledger*, Aug. 17, 1917; “Germans Rounded Up,” *Lesterville Ledger*, Aug. 31, 1917; “In Re Hutchinson County,” *Volin Advance*, Sept. 13, 1917.

⁸⁰⁷ “Repression Approved,” *Lesterville Ledger*, Sept. 14, 1917; “[The socialist movement...],” *Lesterville Ledger*, Sept. 21, 1917; “Pacifists and Kaiserites,” *Lesterville Ledger*, Oct. 5, 1917.

successfully avoided military service and the draft.⁸⁰⁸ On January 12, county officials met to organize a Council of Defense, explaining to those interested that the United States had to transition from a “peace-loving state to a war machine.”⁸⁰⁹ By the end of January, the local Council of Defense issued orders that “all German enemies” in the county had to register with officials. All men still considered natives, citizens, or residents of Germany had to register, furnishing fingerprints and four photographs for identification purposes.⁸¹⁰

Despite these efforts to assuage fears of a potential German uprising, attacks against Germans in Yankton County continued throughout 1918. In March 1918, the editor of the *Dakota Herald* quoted the governor of West Virginia, John Cornwall, who said, “The fact there are hundreds of thousands, even millions, of enemies scattered all over our land, either conspiring to poison our soldiers or to poison public opinion that supports them; conspiring to dynamite industries making munitions and supplies for our army...[means]...a prolongation of the war and a large loss of life.”⁸¹¹ In another article in the *Press and Dakotan*, state defense officials encouraged Germans to speak only English, even in their closed church services.⁸¹² By June, the Committee of Public Information, a governmental agency responsible for propaganda, established a regular presence in the pages of Yankton County’s newspapers.⁸¹³ Worse than these verbal assaults, however, were physical attacks conducted informally by residents of Yankton County against outspoken Germans who

⁸⁰⁸ “List of Slackers for Yankton County,” *Press and Dakotan*, Jan. 7, 1918.

⁸⁰⁹ “Serve Kaiser or America,” *Press and Dakotan*, Jan. 12, 1918.

⁸¹⁰ “All German Enemies Required to Register,” *Volin Advance*, Jan. 24, 1918; “Registration Day Big Success in Yankton County,” *Press and Dakotan*, Jan. 28, 1918; “All German Alien Enemies Required to Register,” *Lesterville Ledger*, Feb. 1, 1918; “Lesterville People Register Freely,” *Lesterville Ledger*, Feb. 1, 1918.

⁸¹¹ “Secret Enemies at Home,” *Dakota Herald*, March 28, 1918.

⁸¹² “Should Learn English Tongue,” *Press and Dakotan*, June 7, 1918.

⁸¹³ “Beware of German Lies,” *Dakota Herald*, June 13, 1918.

refused to cut all ties to Germany and “Americanize.” At Lesterville, a group of masked men kidnapped the town’s German druggist, O. H. Carlson, and tarred and feathered him, leaving him alone with only his clothes in the middle of the country. After staggering to a local farm, he found a ride back to Lesterville.⁸¹⁴ Just west of Lesterville in Bon Homme County, authorities closed a mill operated by a group of German Mennonites when a customer accused the mill owners of conspiring to mix ground glass with corn meal in an attempt to maim their native-born neighbors.⁸¹⁵ Caught up in the turmoil of this anti-Americanism was the Non-Partisan League. After receiving support from editors like F. A. Killian during the 1916 elections, a few local farmers formed a branch of the Non-Partisan League in Yankton County in November 1917. It gained a small following among farmers with ethnic heritages who lived in the northern part of the county. By the spring of 1918, however, with tensions high, loyal “patriots” attacked the Non-Partisan League, accusing its members of associating with radical socialists. By the fall of 1918, the League had run out of steam in Yankton County, its few members preferring to toe a recognized party line than risk accusations of treason or espionage.⁸¹⁶

In this context of heightened anti-German hostility, hyper-patriotism, and war work on the home front, South Dakota’s state suffrage leaders sought to secure an amendment to

⁸¹⁴ “Details of Attack on O. H. Carlson at Lesterville,” *Press and Dakotan*, April 12, 1918; “Why Should They?” *Lesterville Ledger*, April 26, 1918. Carlson’s brother, A. B. Carlson, was the state’s attorney for Lincoln County, South Dakota. A. B. pledged to prosecute the offenders who had attacked his brother, but no one in the community ever gave up their identities.

⁸¹⁵ “Mennonite Mill Said To Be Closed Today,” *Press and Dakotan*, Feb. 18, 1918.

⁸¹⁶ “Non-Partisan League Meeting,” *Volin Advance*, Nov. 8, 1917; “[The organizing of the...],” *Lesterville Ledger*, Nov. 23, 1917; “Are Politics Dead?” *Lesterville Ledger*, Nov. 30, 1917; “[Organizers of the Nonpartisan league...],” *Volin Advance*, March 7, 1918; “Yankton Business Men Want to Help Farmers,” *Dakota Herald*, June 20, 1918.

the state's constitution granting women the right to vote. In January 1917, a bill providing for the submission of the amendment at the 1918 general election passed both the House and Senate with flying colors.⁸¹⁷ When the United States entered the war, however, the legislature sprang to action to ensure that aliens could not vote. In March, Republican governor Peter Norbeck called a special session to amend the woman suffrage bill, adding a clause that lengthened the residency requirement to become a citizen and limited the right to vote to only naturalized citizens. The revised amendment, Amendment E, not only enfranchised women; it also disenfranchised foreign-born residents who had not become full citizens. Many of these men only had their first papers, documents issued after six months that signaled their desire for citizenship after they met the required residency period. In theory, first papers served as a temporary step on the path toward gaining citizenship, but in reality, the state government rarely enforced the timeline. In many cases, foreigners lived for years on their first papers, participating in elections without actually possessing full citizenship. Anti-German sentiment prompted the government to tighten its citizenship requirement, and woman suffrage became caught up in the milieu.⁸¹⁸ The bill, dubbed the "Citizenship

⁸¹⁷ "Suffrage Amendment Again," *Dakota Herald*, Jan. 18, 1917; "Suffrage Up Again," *Volin Advance*, Feb. 1, 1917.

⁸¹⁸ Easton, "Woman Suffrage in South Dakota," 634-35. Newspaper reports directly linked the war to woman suffrage, referring to the revised bill as a piece of the legislature's "emergency 'war' legislation." "Dakota Suffrs Are Hopeful," *Dakota Herald*, May 16, 1918. Amendment E created three specific changes to South Dakota's Voting rights: "(1) To give to women the right and privilege of voting at all elections on equal terms with men... (2) To extend the period of residence required of an elector in this state from one year in the United States, six months in the state, thirty days in the county and ten days in the election precinct, as the constitution now provides, to five years in the United States, one year in this state, ninety days in the county and thirty days in the election precinct. (3) As to persons of foreign birth, it limits the right of suffrage to those who have actually become naturalized citizens; whereas the constitutional provision now in force grants the right of suffrage to persons of foreign birth who have declared their intention to become citizens conformably to the laws of

Amendment,” reshaped the composition of the campaign to enfranchise women in South Dakota. It reflected the trend toward exclusionary politics by identifying the ethnic groups undesired in politics. The amended bill elated state suffrage leaders. It effectively silenced suffrage opponents who did not want to appear favorable to Germans, and it turned woman suffrage into a patriotic war measure.

Linking woman suffrage and the war effort created an essential bridge to the activities women undertook in support of the war. As soon as the United States entered the war, women eagerly pledged their active service to the cause. Strategists pointed to women’s domestic role in the home as key to conserving resources, and the leaders of national women’s organizations, including the NAWSA, called on their members to do patriotic work for the country. As historian Sara Evans noted, woman suffrage “benefited deeply from the highly visible support of women for this extremely popular war.”⁸¹⁹ Newspaper editors in Yankton County commented on the NAWSA’s plans to support the war almost immediately after the United States entered the war. As the *Dakota Herald* reported, Anna Howard Shaw, former president of the NAWSA, served as the chair of the Woman’s Committee of the Council of National Defense, and she used her position to encouraged women to “concentrate on food production and conservation.”⁸²⁰ Echoing her words, the Woman’s Club in Yankton passed a series of resolutions, published in detail in the *Dakota Herald*. In addition to cooking the “simplest foods consistent with wholesomeness and health,” the women also

the United States upon the subject of naturalization.” “Election Notice,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 25, 1918.

⁸¹⁹ Evans, *Born for Liberty*, 169.

⁸²⁰ “Women Will Do Patriotic Work,” *Dakota Herald*, May 10, 1917.

pledged to dress simply and refrain from extravagance in entertaining and decorating.⁸²¹

Their promise to limit consumption set the tone for women's contribution to the war effort in Yankton County. As F. A. Killian explained in the *Lesterville Ledger*, women had a significant amount of influence in terms of food production, consumption, and storage. Early on, canning garden produce became a simple, yet symbolically patriotic contribution to the war.⁸²² Later, as the draft pressed men into military service, women stepped in to meet labor demands. As the *Press and Dakotan* noted, the increased number of women working in fields or in factories served as a clear indication of how much "woman power" existed in the country.⁸²³ Women even stepped into those roles critical to the dissemination of war news and information. By the summer of 1918, the wives of the editors of the *Lesterville Ledger* and *Volin Advance* began editing their husbands' newspapers when the army drafted both men into military service.⁸²⁴

As women committed themselves to conserving food and producing goods for the war effort, they also gained significant public attention for their work in the American Red Cross. A local branch of the Red Cross formed in the county seat by late spring 1917, and soon auxiliaries formed in the small towns throughout Yankton County.⁸²⁵ By enrolling as a member of the Red Cross, women pledged to raise money for the organization through

⁸²¹ "Women's Club Passes Resolutions," *Dakota Herald*, April 26, 1917.

⁸²² "[What can the women do...]," *Lesterville Ledger*, May 11, 1917; "Women Told To Can," *Volin Advance*, Aug. 2, 1917

⁸²³ "Women's Work in War Time," *Press and Dakotan*, Jan. 7, 1918; "Young Women are Doing Farm Work," *Dakota Farmer*, May 16, 1918.

⁸²⁴ "Local News," *Volin Advance*, June 6, 1918.

⁸²⁵ "Red Cross Meeting Tonight," *Lesterville Ledger*, June 22, 1917; "Red Cross Establish Local Branch," *Lesterville Ledger*, June 29, 1917; "Red Cross Notes," *Volin Advance*, Aug. 23, 1917; "Don't Neglect Red Cross Benefit," *Lesterville Ledger*, Nov. 16, 1917; "Red Cross Benefit a Grand Success," *Lesterville Ledger*, Nov. 30, 1917;

various fund-raising activities. They also knitted items such as clothing and hospital dressings for the soldiers overseas. While women's Red Cross work seemed rather ordinary, the local community highly valued it. Weekly progress reports updated residents on the number and types of articles knitted for the soldiers, many times listing the names of the individual contributors and what they produced. Joining the Red Cross signified patriotism, so women from a variety of ethnic, social, and class backgrounds sought membership. Moreover, the work proved attractive to women regardless of their socioeconomic status, as most every woman in the county had learned how to sew or knit at an early age. Knitting a scarf, sweater, or pair of socks for the Red Cross brought significant recognition to the contributions of women. In turn, these women refashioned their domestic roles into esteemed expressions of patriotism. A mere household chore transformed into a public display of political action, and women wasted no time in contributing to the Red Cross. For example, over the course of eight months the Lesterville branch of the Red Cross knitted six pairs of socks, six scarves, twenty-five sweaters, forty-eight bed shirts, forty-two pillows, forty-six pillowcases, twenty-four towels, twenty-four napkins, thirty-six sheets, and a variety of smaller items.⁸²⁶ That the *Lesterville Ledger* printed their remarkable output in detail served as public recognition of the women and their patriotic service to the war.

In addition to the Red Cross, women also participated in raising financial support for the war. The organizers of the Third Liberty Loan, inaugurated in April 1918, explicitly directed the women of Yankton County to take charge of the campaign. Leaders especially

⁸²⁶ "Red Cross Does Patriotic Work," *Lesterville Ledger*, Feb. 22, 1918. By the end of October 1918, the *Press and Dakotan* reported that women in the county had made 16,627 articles for the Red Cross in the past year. "Busy Year for the Red Cross," *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 25, 1918.

encouraged social clubs, ladies' aid societies, and other women's organizations to participate in the drive. Women managed the entire operation of the campaign, including five women on the executive committee, eight women on the town committee in Yankton, and twenty more women on various township committees.⁸²⁷ In addition to fundraising within their women's societies, committee members constructed a massive house-to-house canvass of each township, asking each family in their district to buy bonds. Over the course of a week, the women solicited their friends, neighbors, and relatives, raising \$62,000, about \$12,000 more than their quota, for the Third Liberty Loan campaign. As the *Press and Dakotan* proclaimed, "the loyal women of this county" had no one to credit for their success but themselves. Some of the largest contributions came from women's organizations, including the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Congregational Ladies' Aid Society, the Lutheran Ladies' Aid Society, the Woman's Guild at the Methodist Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Ladies' Aid Society.⁸²⁸ While these church societies had decades of experience raising funds for their congregation's budgetary needs, the war made their behind-the-scenes work highly visible and patriotic.

At the same time women contributed publicly to the war effort through the Red Cross and liberty loan drives, woman suffrage campaigning reached a crescendo in the county. The 1918 campaign was unlike any other campaign conducted in Yankton County because it

⁸²⁷ "Women Doing Their 'Best,'" *Press and Dakotan*, April 12, 1918.

⁸²⁸ "Women Work for Liberty Loan," *Press and Dakotan*, April 19, 1918. The editor noted in the article that he named only a few of the many church societies that purchased bonds. Each ladies' aid society listed in the article contributed fifty dollars. The Fourth Liberty Loan campaign, which took place in November 1918, also involved women. As the *Press and Dakotan* reported, 793 women in the county participated in the drive, raising an estimated \$127,000,000. See, "Women's Fourth Liberty Loan Report for Yankton County," *Press and Dakotan*, Nov. 2, 1918.

intimately linked woman suffrage to anti-German rhetoric and patriotism. The state president, Mamie Pyle, even admitted that she secretly hoped for the extension of the war past the election date, explaining that the propaganda diffused throughout the state could only work during wartime because of its message of woman suffrage as a war measure.⁸²⁹ The *Press and Dakotan* published a few of these articles in May 1918, but a more concerted campaign emerged in the county's newspapers by September 1918. The headlines of these articles explicitly pointed to the patriotic arguments devised by state suffrage leaders, including "Suffrage Flag Has Sixteen Stars," "Suffragists in War Work," "Woman Suffrage A War Measure," and "Amendment E Patriotic Act."⁸³⁰ Advertisements asked voters, "Are you 100 % American?" and then encouraged them to "Vote X Yes for Amendment E."⁸³¹ These articles contained a similar theme, pitting the "alien enemy" against the women "sacrificing so deeply for the world struggle."⁸³² Suffragists even used graphic representations to remind voters that Germans were to blame for the failure of the 1916 amendment, showing a map indicating the counties that defeated woman suffrage with their percentages of German population. Those counties with higher German populations typically voted against woman suffrage measures.⁸³³ Suffrage leaders never publicly recognized any sort of contradiction in their wartime messages. They never commented on how, in order to

⁸²⁹ Patricia O'Keefe Easton, "Woman Suffrage in South Dakota, 633-36.

⁸³⁰ "Suffrage Flag Has Sixteen Stars," *Press and Dakotan*, May 1, 1918; "Suffragists in War Work," *Press and Dakotan*, May 25, 1918; "Woman Suffrage a War Measure," *Press and Dakotan*, Sept. 30, 1918; "Amendment E Patriotic Act," *Press and Dakotan*, Sept. 30, 1918. There were other articles that promoted woman suffrage. "President Wilson to Mrs. Potter," *Volin Advance*, May 2, 1918; "The Soldiers on Suffrage," *Press and Dakotan*, Sept. 30, 1918; "Why South Dakota Women Want the Ballot," *Press and Dakotan*, Sept. 30, 1918.

⁸³¹ Advertisement, "Are You 100 % American?" *Volin Advance*, Sept. 26, 1918.

⁸³² "Amendment E Patriotic Act," *Press and Dakotan*, Sept. 30, 1918.

⁸³³ "How South Dakota Voted on Suffrage Amendment in 1916," *Press and Dakotan*, Sept. 30, 1918.

enfranchise women in South Dakota, they had to effectively disenfranchise foreign-born men, some of whom had participated in the political process in the state for decades. For a group claiming to promote justice and equality, these women were more than willing to strip the rights of others when the need arose.

While a fairly steady stream of newspaper articles promoted the cause in Yankton County, suffragists lacked much of a presence in the field. The 1914 campaign featured an organized group, the Yankton Universal Franchise League, which published weekly articles, organized lecturers, and traveled to small towns in the country. The 1916 campaign also had a suffrage league, although its membership and influence had dwindled in comparison to efforts in 1914. What changed in 1918 was a lack of any organized club devoted to leading local efforts to secure woman suffrage. The war occupied women's time and efforts, and many of the women had no extra energy to give toward any sustained activity for the cause. The only speaker advertised to give a lecture in the county was Carrie Chapman Catt, who by then had returned as president of the NAWSA. Although she intended to speak on October 14 at the county seat, she cancelled her visit when she contracted influenza. With Catt's cancelation, no lecturer visited the county during the 1918 campaign, a noticeable decrease from the speaking engagements carried out during previous campaigns.⁸³⁴ Finally, state suffragists reported that they conducted vast petition work, mailing petitions to women

⁸³⁴ "Famous Suffrage Woman Coming to Yankton," *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 7, 1918; "Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt," *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 8, 1918; "Carrie Chapman Catt Opera House Meeting Postponed!" *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 9, 1918.

across the state. No record of any women undertaking or signing petitions in Yankton County existed, however, although in other parts of the state, petitioning proved effective.⁸³⁵

In the end, the lack of an organized group of local suffrage advocates in Yankton County did not harm the cause. In fact, the fervor of patriotism in the county did more to advance the amendment than a vocal woman suffrage element could have. Newspaper reports reflected the major issue of the election, and it had nothing to do woman suffrage. Instead, as one article noted, the election had everything to do with “100-percent American voters of South Dakota” defeating any ethnic group or party that stood against the war effort.⁸³⁶ Another article pointed directly to loyalty as the litmus test for any candidate or issue on the ballot. In the case of Amendment E, it was a measure “essential to the welfare and progress of the state” and a “call to the loyal citizens which should have the support of every 100-per cent American.”⁸³⁷ The United States, as a nation at war, had to silence those who stood against democracy and liberty and uplift those causes, such as woman suffrage, that symbolized the very essence of those principles. Even President Wilson articulated his support for woman suffrage as a war measure, and the *Press and Dakotan* reported two full paragraphs of a speech in which he illuminated America’s vaunted role in the conflict as “the great, powerful, famous democracy of the west” chosen to lead a “new day” for democracy.⁸³⁸ This democracy, however, required women to “play their part in affairs

⁸³⁵ Easton, “Woman Suffrage in South Dakota,” 635. According to Easton, 95 percent of women asked to sign a petition in 1918 did so, an indication of their readiness to vote.

⁸³⁶ “Election Only a Week Away,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 28, 1918.

⁸³⁷ “Noted Men of South Dakota for Suffrage,” *Press and Dakotan*, Nov. 4, 1918. Other articles echoed this “loyalty” argument, including “How Campaign Looks at Close,” *Press and Dakotan*, Nov. 4, 1918.

⁸³⁸ “Half a Democracy,” *Press and Dakotan*, Oct. 5, 1918.

alongside men and upon an equal footing with them.”⁸³⁹ The editor of *Press and Dakotan* used President Wilson’s words as a challenge to his readers, daring them to stand “by our idealism, by our generosity, by our willingness to support our beliefs with our lives” and stop living as “half a democracy.”⁸⁴⁰ In sum, anti-German rhetoric, patriotic sentiment, and calls for “full” democracy shaped the 1918 woman suffrage campaign into an election based on loyalty and “100 percent Americanism,” not solely on arguments for female enfranchisement. When officials tallied the votes, Amendment E passed by a wide margin, earning 64 percent of the votes cast in the election.⁸⁴¹ The *Lesterville Ledger* reported that the election was “one of the most intense that the state” had ever experienced, and people were happy when it was over.⁸⁴²

The countries fighting in World War I announced an armistice on November 11, 1918, a few short days after the election. Women in South Dakota had gained the right to vote during an election fraught with anti-German hysteria but also full of praise for the patriotic contributions of women. It was an election unlike any in South Dakota for it played out in an entirely novel context. Woman suffrage became a war measure and symbol of democracy, and its lasting legacy was one of contradiction. While suffrage advocates preached ideals of justice, equality, and liberty for all, they quickly brushed them aside when

⁸³⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁴¹ “1918 South Dakota,” reel 00017, South Dakota Correspondence, LOC; Easton, “Woman Suffrage in South Dakota,” 636-37. According to reports catalogued by national woman suffrage leaders, “This foreign vote had weighed heavily in all prior defeats, but in 1918 there was a better and bigger campaign and the war had strengthened the bill for woman suffrage. The majority for woman suffrage was 19,286.

⁸⁴² “[‘Politics’ are adjourned since the election...],” *Lesterville Ledger*, Nov. 8, 1918. Among the residents of Mission Hill, “nearly a full vote was out,” with woman suffrage winning “by a good majority” there. “Mission Hill Department,” *Press and Dakotan*, Nov. 7, 1918.

necessity arose and nativist sentiments clouded judgments and stoked fears. They sought the disenfranchisement of a group of men for whom voting was an assumed right. In comparison to the 1914 and 1916 campaigns, the war drastically changed the context in which woman suffrage played out. In 1914 and 1916, the threat of prohibition significantly influenced the campaigns for woman suffrage. Suffragists relied on tried-and-true arguments about the ballot as an extension of the home and of the duty of women as responsible citizens. They exalted women for their “special roles” as wives and mothers while simultaneously proclaiming their equality with men. By 1918, however, patriotic calls for men and women to “do their part” to support the war effort replaced arguments about female equality and their revered domestic roles. As woman suffrage shifted to reflect changing political trends, campaigning for the cause in Yankton County adapted to the pressures of war. While an organized body of local advocates practically disappeared by 1918, the recognition of women’s contributions subtly reinforced the claim for female enfranchisement that these supporters had advanced for years. Woman suffrage in South Dakota was a product of the circumstances in which it developed, and it succeeded less on its own merits and more because of the direct connections made to concepts of patriotism, democracy, and liberty.

Chapter 6: Woman Suffrage in Minnesota, 1915-1920

At the September 8, 1917 meeting of the Current News Club, a federated woman's club located in Marshall, the county seat of Lyon County, Minnesota, the members voted to devote their entire energies to supporting the American Red Cross. The United States had entered World War I that spring, and the women supported the war effort wholeheartedly. They donated their meeting room in City Hall to the Red Cross, and they pledged their time to making clothing, bedding, and other garments for American soldiers at war overseas.⁸⁴³ As the recording secretary noted, the women had spent their summer hard at work, meeting at the home of Mrs. M. E. Matthews and sewing sheets and pillowcases for the Red Cross. They suspended their regular social activities, usually full of programs and an array of refreshments, to support war activities. This kind of activism garnered public attention and patriotic praise. It also fell in line with the type of work the women pursued as a federated club with a vested interest in community development. Throughout the fall of 1917, the Current News Club committed itself to the Red Cross and war work, although they did make time for a few other civic interests, which included visits to the local schools whenever possible and the Americanization of foreigners in their midst.⁸⁴⁴ The activity of the Current News Club during the fall of 1917 exemplified the issues and causes that members supported during the second decade of the twentieth century. Civic responsibility was the impetus for their work, and World War I merely amplified their public presence. Curiously, in the midst of this outpouring of civic awareness, the members of the Current News Club never left any

⁸⁴³ Current News Club, Secretary's Minute Book 1913-1920, Volume 5, no date, page 136, SMHC.

⁸⁴⁴ Current News Club, Secretary's Minute Book 1913-1920, Volume 5, Oct. 14-18, 1917, page 138, 140, SMHC.

record of a debate or argument regarding woman suffrage. Unlike the Spencer Woman's Club and the Yankton Woman's Club, the Current News Club never once entered into the discussions about the cause, its members never taking a stance either for or against it.

The silence of the members of the Current News Club on woman suffrage reflected the absence of suffrage activity in Lyon County during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. No organized movement existed in the county, partly a product of a state suffrage association hampered by a legislature with strict requirements for passing amendments to the constitution. An intended measure had to receive a majority vote of the entire number of ballots cast at the election, rendering an amendment granting woman suffrage to Minnesota's constitution practically impossible. The small state suffrage organization also suffered from limited resources, making promotion of the movement difficult. In comparison to Iowa and South Dakota, then, Minnesota presented a sharp contrast, as Minnesotans had limited engagement with woman suffrage between about 1870 and 1915. Suffrage activity stagnated until concerted efforts to enact a federal amendment trickled down to Minnesota. Only after 1915 did Minnesota enter the national conversation that emerged over the cause. Even after woman suffrage came to Minnesota, however, campaign efforts were piecemeal and inadequate. Suffragists faced the daunting task of educating a population with almost no experience or engagement with the movement.

State suffrage leaders not only struggled to connect with Minnesotans across the state; during the second decade of the twentieth century, their association degenerated into competing factions as legislative defeat, conflict, and in-fighting divided officers. Part of the discord erupted over a slew of disappointments in the legislature. Beginning in 1907, the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association, or MWSA, submitted a series of measures calling

for an amendment to the state's constitution. They pursued this strategy despite the rigorous standards for securing an amendment to the state's constitution. During each legislative session, suffragists spent countless hours lobbying the members of the legislature, but their efforts seemed to matter little when it came time to vote. In both 1907 and 1909, the Senate voted against the intended amendments, although a reconsideration bill failed in 1909 by only three votes. In 1911, a huge celebration in honor of Susan B. Anthony ended in disenchantment when the Senate again defeated the proposed bill by only two votes.⁸⁴⁵ Measures to secure a state suffrage amendment failed again in 1913, 1915, and 1917, although in 1915 and 1917 the MWSA also supported resolutions for presidential suffrage through legislative decree. In both cases, the federal suffrage bills failed by only a handful of votes, leaving suffragists increasingly bitter after each loss.⁸⁴⁶

While the state legislature continued to rout the efforts of state suffrage leaders, the state association also foundered under weak leadership and personal conflicts. According to historian Barbara Stuhler, by about 1910 the MWSA fell into a period characterized by a lack of stability and inefficient management. A few individuals did organize a dozen new clubs in smaller communities, including Marshall, but efforts were short-lived. At the annual

⁸⁴⁵ Nineteenth Amendment Celebration Committee, "Minnesota Woman Suffrage Chronology," Folder 7, Box 7, Barbara Stuhler Papers, MHS.

⁸⁴⁶ Nineteenth Amendment Celebration Committee, "Minnesota Woman Suffrage Chronology," Folder 7, Box 7, Barbara Stuhler Papers, MHS; Maud Stockman to Miss Savage, Jan. 31, 1915, Reel 1, 240, 242, Microfilm, Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association, [hereafter MWSA], MHS; Clara Ueland to Mary Sumner Boyd, Jan. 17, 1916, Reel 1, 413-14, MWSA, MHS; "Report for Legislative Work," 1917, Reel 9, 397-99, MWSA, MHS. Stockman had "grave doubts" about the success of the bill in 1915, explaining that although suffragists had a strong presence in the Senate chamber and enjoyed wide publicity in the capitol city's newspapers, the measure still seemed to lack the necessary majority. Her prediction became a reality when the bill to give women the vote for presidential electors received a majority vote in the House but not the required two-thirds majority for passage. In 1917, a measure to grant women presidential suffrage failed by only four votes in the Senate.

convention of the MWSA in 1912, a faction emerged in protest of the perceived failures of the MWSA. These women believed that the association had failed to emphasize an effective and widespread plan for organization, and they formed a competing group called the Minnesota Equal Franchise League, or the MEFL.⁸⁴⁷ The MWSA attempted to mend fences with the MEFL in 1913, but personalities continued to clash among the leaders of the two organizations. The conflict even played out at the national level when, during the 1912 NAWSA convention, both the MWSA and MEFL arrived with the intention to serve as the sole representatives of woman suffrage in Minnesota.⁸⁴⁸ Not until 1914 did the MEFL accept an offer made by the MWSA to become an auxiliary member, although the MEFL preserved its executive autonomy from the larger suffrage association. As internal strife divided the state association, organizational efforts at the county level deteriorated, and some of the clubs initiated in 1912 disbanded in the process. At Marshall in Lyon County, whatever suffrage club existed probably broke up sometime around 1913, shortly after the fissure.⁸⁴⁹

⁸⁴⁷ Stuler, *Gentle Warriors*, 77-78.

⁸⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 67, 77-79; Sophie Kenyon to Anna Howard Shaw, March 10, 1913, Reel 1, 164-167, MWSA, MHS. In addition to the MWSA and the MEFL, the Scandinavian Woman Suffrage Association served as another organization in Minnesota that attempted to gain support for the cause. Organized in 1907 by physician Ethel Hurd, the association's purpose was to attract Danish, Finnish, Norwegian, and Swedish descendants as members, influence Scandinavian legislators to support woman suffrage, and raise money for a woman's building at the State Fair. The Scandinavian Woman Suffrage Association did not have a local branch in Lyon County.

⁸⁴⁹ "List of Clubs Paid," [1912], Reel 9, 432, MWSA, MHS; "Suffrage Clubs," 1912, Reel 9, 436, MWSA, MHS; "Clubs Paid Before June 30, 1912," Reel 9, 438, MWSA, MHS; "Appointment Charts, Dec. 31, 1916" Reel 10, 29-30, MWSA, MHS. Marshall's club, as listed in the records of the MWSA, had fifteen members. The documentation in the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association Collection failed to list their names, although state leaders indicated that Fannie I. Hand was the secretary. Although unclear, the number of members indicated that perhaps that the members of the Current News Club prominently made up the ranks of the suffrage club. The records of the Current News Club, however, did not reveal any link to the state suffrage association. Whatever club emerged in 1912

Between about 1910 and 1914, the MWSA suffered from the absence of a strong leader. Individuals emerged at various times to pursue a project or an assignment, but no one rose to prominence in the organization. Eventually, one woman, Clara Ueland, organized a series of massive and highly successful public demonstrations for woman suffrage. During 1914, she oversaw the largest suffrage parade ever coordinated in Minneapolis and directed publicity at the Minnesota State Fair that year. In October, delegates to the MWSA's annual convention elected her its president, and she served at the helm of the association until the ratification of the federal amendment in 1920. Like Carrie Chapman Catt, Ueland had a knack for organization, and she immediately laid out plans to divide the state by legislative districts. Managing the state in this manner proved useful because it allowed suffragists to work directly with the constituents of any legislators who opposed woman suffrage measures. Ueland also stressed the mobilization of public opinion toward woman suffrage, and she hoped that, with local organization, the cause could become direct and immediate to the people, especially men, of Minnesota. Finally, Ueland increased fundraising efforts to support a duo of organizers who had participated in campaigns in other states. As early as August 1915, the MWSA hired Maria McMahon to work in and around the twin cities area. By January 1916, a second worker, Rene E. Hamilton Stevens, joined the MWSA's organizational efforts, spending a portion of her time in southwest Minnesota near Lyon County.⁸⁵⁰

disbanded shortly after its creation. By 1916, the MWSA noted that Lyon County had no organized club for woman suffrage.

⁸⁵⁰ Stuler, *Gentle Warriors*, 82-91; Clara Ueland to "Suffragist," Jan. 17, 1915, Reel 1, 232-33, MWSA, MHS; Ueland to "Suffragist," Aug. 5, 1915, Reel 1, 291-92, MWSA, MHS. As Ueland explained in a letter dated January 17, 1915, the MWSA hosted an "Organization Day" on February 15, Susan B. Anthony's birthday. The plan called for chairmen appointed

With Ueland at the helm of the MWSA, state suffrage leaders refined their goal in relation to the wishes of the NAWA and other state campaigns occurring nearby. Ueland recognized fairly quickly that the strict requirements for modifying the state's constitution made any potential campaign for a woman suffrage amendment risky and costly. Catherine McCullough affirmed Ueland's sentiments in a letter sent in February 1915, writing that Minnesota's constitution was "displeasing" and difficult to amend. She guessed that perhaps only the constitutions of Illinois and Indiana were harsher.⁸⁵¹ McCullough, along with other prominent national suffragists, urged the MWSA to follow the example set by Illinois and secure a bill giving presidential suffrage to women by legislative action. By the end of 1915, Ueland and the MWSA had concocted a plan that endorsed female enfranchisement by legislative order over a state amendment.⁸⁵² In addition, Ueland emphasized work at the county level to supplement district organization. Ueland put McMahon, and later Stevens, in charge of this organizational effort, and her first targets were the counties bordering Iowa and South Dakota. As Ueland explained, Iowa and South Dakota were both campaign states with amendments scheduled for statewide election in 1916, and she hoped to agitate Minnesotans

for each precinct and local advocates directed to conduct house-to-house canvasses of each precinct. The MWSA modeled their organizational directives on the scheme adopted by suffragists in New York. The organizational efforts parallel ideological shifts in the MWSA. With the rise of the Congressional Union and Alice Paul, Ueland was impressed by the publicity a well-timed parade or demonstration could generate. Although she eventually renounced picketing, Ueland at least entertained the idea of supporting the Congressional Union in its earliest forms.

⁸⁵¹ McCullough to Ueland, Feb. 15, 1915, Reel 1, 250-51, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁵² Ueland to [No Recipient], Dec. 27, 1916, Reel 2, 334, MWSA, MHS.

to the activities for woman suffrage taking place among their southern and western neighbors.⁸⁵³

By the spring of 1916, the MWSA had made strides under the leadership of Clara Ueland and her effective organizational abilities. The association had raised funds to employ two seasoned workers in the field and seemed ready to invigorate the people of Minnesota with sentiment favorable to woman suffrage. While state suffrage leaders began the year full of hope and enthusiasm, they soon realized that they had their work cut out for them when it came to fomenting grassroots support for the cause. As Barbara Stuhler noted, even though the MWSA recognized the efficacy of local organization, its leaders foundered when it came to aligning rural women to the cause. Stuhler admitted that rural people probably had little time or energy to devote to woman suffrage because of the “practical hurdles of farm chores and distance from towns,” but the fact remained that, until the late 1910s, suffragists failed to connect in meaningful ways to rural women in Minnesota.⁸⁵⁴

Rene Stevens entered the field during the spring of 1916, and her initial letters revealed an overwhelming majority of people with little knowledge of or willingness to devote themselves to woman suffrage. She began her organizational work in southwestern Minnesota in the counties of Nobles, Rock, and Lincoln, encountering a few people willing to listen to her message in small communities scattered across the area. Typically, she identified one or two women in the county who claimed to support the cause, although some of these women later reneged on their promises when other responsibilities arose. For

⁸⁵³ Ueland to “Suffragist,” Aug. 5, 1915, Reel 1, 291-92, MWSA, MHS; Ueland to “Suffragist,” Nov. 23, 1915, Reel 1, 371-72, MWSA, MHS; “Plan for Work for Suffrage District Association,” [1916], Reel 10, 3, MWSA, MHS; “President’s Address, 1916,” Reel 8, 95-100, MWSA, MHS; Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 88-89.

⁸⁵⁴ Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 108.

example, at Kinbrae, a tiny rural community located in Nobles County, south of Lyon County, Stevens contacted Leone Erie after she gave a speech on woman suffrage at a local farmer's club meeting. Erie pledged to organize the township in which she lived, but she admitted that her service was only temporary as she planned to move to Montana a few months later. She also pointed out that her neighbors in Nobles County suffered most from a "crying need" of information about woman suffrage.⁸⁵⁵ In Lincoln County, just west of Lyon County, Stevens gave a speech at a large Swedish Lutheran church. The minister and his wife both professed to support woman suffrage, but they admitted that the women of their congregation were "unenlightened" when it came to the cause.⁸⁵⁶ While Stevens met a few advocates for woman suffrage during her tour of southwestern Minnesota, these incidents were isolated and more the exception than the rule. For the most part, she found the women of Minnesota sympathetic but unwilling to devote significant time and energy to the cause. Her visit to a women's group in Luverne, located in Rock County, exemplified the pattern she experienced. As she explained, the women "were interested and would like to do things but they of course have family duties and the family attitude toward suffrage has not yet advanced to the point of making any self denials so that mothers' path is roughly strewn with stumbling blocks but more work."⁸⁵⁷ In the middle of her tour in southwestern Minnesota,

⁸⁵⁵ Leone Erie to [MWSA], May 24, 1916, Reel 1, 672, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁵⁶ "Excerpts from Mrs. Stevens' Letters from Worthington for Minnesota Board Mtg." March 19, 1916, Reel 1, 472-74, MWSA, MHS; Rene Stevens to Ethel Briggs, March 25, 1916, Reel 1, 483-85, MWSA, MHS; Briggs to Stevens, March 28, 1916, Reel 1, 489, MWSA, MHS; Stevens to Briggs, April 5, 1916, Reel 1, 516-20, MWSA, MHS; Stevens to Briggs, April 7, 1916, Reel 1, 530-31, MWSA, MHS. There was also a "Norwegian congregation" in Lincoln County that Stevens identified as a potential place for a speech and organizational efforts, but the correspondence indicated that Stevens never visited the women of that church.

⁸⁵⁷ Stevens to Ueland, April 5, 1916, Reel 1, 514-15, MWSA, MHS.

Stevens received orders to postpone her work and travel directly to Dubuque, Iowa to assist with campaign efforts in that city. McMahon, the other organizer in Minnesota, traveled at the end of April to northwest Iowa, arriving in Clay County shortly thereafter.⁸⁵⁸ Both McMahon and Stevens remained in Iowa through the defeat of the amendment bill there.⁸⁵⁹ Stevens wrote animated letters back to MWSA leaders, and she shared freely of her thoughts and opinions about the people she met and the campaign efforts she undertook while in Iowa and, later, South Dakota. On June 1, four days before the primary election in Iowa, she wrote a letter to Ethel Briggs, the office secretary. “I’m telling you privately, if suffrage wins next Monday it will be by the simple grace of God—or else the rest of the state is different from the four counties I’ve been in...I’ve raged at the indignity of having to ask every old Tom, Dick, and Drunk to let me vote, but after hearing Lucy [Price, an anti-suffragist] tonight it seems to me it must be a good deal harder to have to ask them not to let me vote because I’m so inefficient, bungling, and expensive...That’s all there was to her little spiel and she said it as tho [sic.] she did not believe it—still it won a round of hearty applause.”⁸⁶⁰

The abrupt departure of Stevens to Iowa meant that the residents of Lyon County were without her presence during the spring of 1916, leaving conditions there woefully lacking in any organization in support of woman suffrage. Records indicated that the MWSA knew of not one single advocate of the cause in the county, and local newspaper reports

⁸⁵⁸ For more information on McMahon in Iowa, see Chapter 4. [MWSA] to Mrs. G. L. Jacquot, May 19, 1916, Reel 1, 646-47, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁵⁹ Stevens to Briggs, April 16, 1916, Reel 1, 562-63, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁶⁰ Stevens to Briggs, June 1, 1916, Reel 1, 767-68, MWSA, MHS.

confirmed an acute paucity of activity for woman suffrage.⁸⁶¹ When state suffrage leaders faced the prospect of work in the county, as they did in May 1916, they had to rely on previously identified woman suffrage supporters living in nearby counties. That month, the NAWSA instructed each state association to see that the Republican and Democratic parties in their respective states insert a woman suffrage plank in their platforms. Minnesota responded swiftly, and Ueland issued a letter to local suffrage leaders across the state to arrange meetings with the delegates slated to attend their respective party conventions. For the seventh congressional district, two delegates, Tom Davis and E. F. Whiting, resided in Lyon County. Without any connection to Lyon County, however, the MWSA had to call on Mrs. G. L. Jacquot of Lincoln County to visit the men. The MWSA admitted to Jacquot that “these towns are really not in your district (since you live in the 2nd Congressional District) but you are the only suffragist we know of” living near Lyon County.⁸⁶² In addition, the MWSA subtly hinted that they recognized that Jacquot was a poor substitute for an advocate actually from Lyon County with potential social or community ties to the two men. The state association merely hoped that Jacquot could convince the delegates that there was possibly support for woman suffrage in Lyon County.⁸⁶³

After the defeat of the woman suffrage bill in Iowa, Stevens returned to southwest Minnesota to continue her canvass of the residents living there. She also began to plan a

⁸⁶¹ The newspapers in Lyon County included the *Lyon County Reporter* and the *Marshall Messenger*. There was no significant mention of woman suffrage in the pages of these newspapers in 1916.

⁸⁶² [MWSA] to Mrs. G. L. Jacquot, May 19, 1916, Reel 1, 646-47, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.*; Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 122-23. As Barbara Stuhler noted, Ueland traveled to both party conventions during the summer of 1916, but both Republicans and Democrats agreed that woman suffrage was a state issue and refused to put an endorsement of the cause on their respective planks.

convention to take place in that corner of the state. A large gathering of suffrage supporters promised to generate significant publicity and attention to the cause. In addition, Stevens hoped to bring awareness to campaign efforts taking place in South Dakota and the impending election there. After consulting railroad schedules and road conditions, Stevens settled on Pipestone, located in Lincoln County, for the site of the convention, and she scheduled the assembly for August 3rd and 4th.⁸⁶⁴ While residents in Lincoln County received a hearty dose of activity on behalf of woman suffrage that summer, the convention served more as an isolated incident rather than an impetus for sustained suffrage work. Stevens readily admitted that during the planning process “the border work” was not “greatly helpful or desired” and that the residents of many towns turned down the opportunity to host the convention because they did not have the desire, resources, or time to promote woman suffrage. Even at Pipestone, Stevens encountered much hesitancy as she attempted to make plans, especially when it came to local residents having to sacrifice their time, energy, and homes for the convention. Only after direct confrontations at the offices of the leading businesses and newspapers and a series planning sessions among a few interested women of the town did Stevens drum up the support required to put on the affair.⁸⁶⁵

⁸⁶⁴ Stevens to Briggs, June 26, 1916, Reel 1, 800-802, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁶⁵ Stevens to Briggs, July 3, 1916, Reel 2, 3-7, MWSA, MHS. With a fair bit of cynicism and frustration, Stevens related a typical conversation with the women she encountered in Pipestone in a letter dated July 3, 1916. “Do they want the vote? O yes, they were ‘born suffragists,’ Do they want the Convention? O, dear lady—why how could you I-I uncle John—When did you say?—Yes—uh, thoughtfully, August, yes, August! Uncle John’s coming in August and I’m going to the Lakes! And why I don’t think you could get a soul to hear you!! Seems as tho’ [sic.] everybody’s interested in something else more’n [sic.] they are in suffrage.’ (Little nervous laugh—Bracing up and with conviction) ‘But it’s coming! Oh it’s coming—nothing can stop it!’”

In the process of planning for the convention, Stevens contacted the newspapers published in neighboring counties, including Lyon County. On July 20, 1916, Stevens reported that she had made the jaunt over to Marshall to visit with the editors of the *Marshall News Messenger* and *Lyon County Reporter*. Both editorial staffs admitted that they had not run any material on woman suffrage up to that point, but they promised to advertise the upcoming event at Pipestone.⁸⁶⁶ A couple days before the convention commenced, a group of MWSA officers, including Ueland, left Minneapolis for Pipestone. Traveling as a caravan of automobiles, the women stopped along the way at various towns, holding impromptu meetings and stirring up people to the cause. As Ueland later reminisced, the automobile canvass was a “triumphant tour.” Unfortunately, the route chosen by the state leaders avoided Lyon County entirely.⁸⁶⁷ Of Lyon County’s newspapers, only one actually published an article advertising the upcoming convention. On July 26, the *Lyon County Reporter* gave the matter a three-paragraph-long write-up, spending more time naming the eminent speakers, including two senators and Pipestone’s mayor, on the program than informing the people of the county about woman suffrage. The *Marshall News Messenger* missed the deadline for the event entirely, printing a short piece the day after the convention took place. Neither article named the women from Lyon County who attended the convention, but one did guess that

⁸⁶⁶ Stevens to Briggs, July 20, 1916, Reel 2, 79-81, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁶⁷ “On to Pipestone,” Reel 8, 154, MWSA, MHS; “President’s Address, 1916,” Reel 8, 95-100, MWSA, MHS. The women made stops at Lakefield, Slayton, and Woodstock. Barbara Stuhler explained that such a large group of MWSA leaders traveled to Pipestone to counteract criticism leveled at them for supporting the Congressional Union. The MWSA had endorsed the Congressional Union as organized by Alice Paul in 1915 but still maintained its allegiance with the NAWSA. Ueland’s “triumphant tour” was a sign that the Union’s call for attracting publicity could coexist with the NAWSA’s policies. See, Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 131-38.

some women in the county probably were interested enough to go.⁸⁶⁸ The convention passed successfully in Pipestone, and, about a week later, Stevens shipped the leftover supplies back to state suffrage headquarters. She received word shortly afterward that the MWSA had voted to send her to work the South Dakota campaign underway that year. She promptly headed west, assisting with campaign efforts in Aberdeen.⁸⁶⁹

While the departure of Stevens again initiated a lull in work for woman suffrage among the residents of southwest Minnesota, by January 1917, efforts at the state level increased with the introduction of the federal woman suffrage bill in the legislature. For the men and women of Lyon County, woman suffrage remained a distant issue. That same month, the MWSA compiled reports of its district leaders and suffrage workers. Not a single resident from Lyon County made their lists, providing a striking confirmation of the absence of work on behalf of the cause in the county.⁸⁷⁰ The MWSA probably worried little about ignoring Lyon County, however, as they had their own internal issues to address in 1917. First, in January they were horrified to learn that the MEFL had persuaded a member of the House to introduce a woman suffrage amendment to the state's constitution. The MWSA opposed any attempt to amend Minnesota's constitution because of its harsh requirements, but the MEFL saw the intended measure differently. The MWSA swiftly intervened, contacting legislators friendly to their stance and instructing them to vote against any bill

⁸⁶⁸ "Suffragets Will Meet on Next Thurs. and Fri.," *Lyon County Reporter*, July 26, 1916; "Suffrage at Pipestone," *Marshall News Messenger*, Aug. 4, 1916.

⁸⁶⁹ [Briggs] to Stevens, Aug. 10, 1916, Reel 2, 182, MWSA, MHS; Stevens to Briggs, Aug. 21, 1916, Reel 2, 190-193, 196-97, MWSA, MHS; Ueland to Stevens, Aug. 26, 1916, Reel 2, 200, MWSA, MHS. A short time after Stevens arrived in South Dakota, she received word from state leaders in New York that they desired her there to assist with efforts.

⁸⁷⁰ "Legislative District Leaders," Jan. 1917, Reel 10, 37, MWSA, MHS; "Federal Amendment Workers," 1917, Reel 10, 36, MWSA, MHS.

proposing a constitutional amendment.⁸⁷¹ While the House passed the bill, the Senate voted to indefinitely postpone it, giving the MWSA the opportunity to focus on presidential enfranchisement in the legislature. Second, the MWSA had to confront a faction of women sympathetic to the picketing and radical tactics employed by the National Woman's Party, or NWP, led by Alice Paul. Initially, the MWSA had supported Paul when she directed the Congressional Union, a committee of young suffragists within the NAWSA. Ueland believed Paul's strategies for public agitation useful when applied in specific cases, such as the Pipestone convention. In January 1917, the NWP, formerly the Congressional Union, began picketing the White House, demanding Wilson and the Democratic Party support woman suffrage. At the MWSA convention in November 1917, a faction of NWP advocates banded together and planned to vote in a Board of Directors favorable to NWP. As the MWSA later explained, the issue at the 1917 state convention was "'Picketing or Anti-Picketing?'—pure and simple."⁸⁷² Although the Alice Paul supporters attempted to inundate officer elections that year, Ueland and a majority of her followers retained their positions. The result, according to Ueland, was a decided victory for the MWSA and its close relationship with the NAWSA.⁸⁷³ Third, the MWSA had to consider its position in regard to the United States' entrance into World War I. Minnesota had a large population of European immigrants, and

⁸⁷¹ Briggs to Stevens, Jan. 15, 1917, Reel 2, 390, MWSA, MHS; Ueland to A. H. Peterson, Jan. 18, 1917, Reel 2, 396, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁷² "State Convention," Nov. 16-17, 1917, Reel 3, 56-59, MWSA, MHS. As the MWSA reported, "the State Association came to the conclusion that no one holding office in the Woman's Party could ethically hold office on its Board and prepared a ticket based on the fact that it held one policy only—that of the National Association. The Woman's Party sympathizes comparatively weak in the State numerically, desired to procure a controlling number of women on the State Board who were favorable to their policies and prepared a ticket to that effect." Ueland won the presidential position by a vote of 181 to 53.

⁸⁷³ Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 138-42.

the MWSA had to tread carefully among the allegiances of their membership. President Ueland soon steered the state association toward a resounding commitment to war work, especially when Governor Joseph Burnquist appointed her a member of the Food Production and Conservation Committee in April 1917.⁸⁷⁴ At their state convention that year, the topic of all discussions and speeches was “loyalty.” The MWSA reported that “there is not question of the loyalty of the mass of Minnesota’s women—their record for Red Cross work, for food conservation effort, for Americanization is their entire validation.”⁸⁷⁵

Finally, with the goal of securing federal woman suffrage by legislative decree in hand, the MWSA composed a new plan for organization. It contained two major directives for work in each county in Minnesota: circulating petitions and securing endorsements from prominent local groups and societies. The MWSA sent the blank petitions to the suffrage advocates with whom they had connected during the spring of 1916. They gave each person a specific quota of signatures, typically a majority of the number of men who had voted at the most recent election. They also instructed these local leaders to target specifically the most “influential men and women” of their counties.⁸⁷⁶ Finally, the MWSA ordered advocates to send the completed petitions directly to their respective legislators. While the MWSA undertook petition work during the summer and fall of 1917, they also requested that local and state organizations pass resolutions favoring woman suffrage. Already in April 1917, a number of associations at the state level had endorsed woman suffrage, including the State

⁸⁷⁴ Catt to Executive Council, Feb. 5, 1917, Reel 2, 417-18, MWSA, MHS; Ueland to “Suffragist,” April 27, 1917, Reel 2, 479, MWSA, MHS; Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 151-54. As Stuhler noted, Ueland also became a member of the home economics committee. She was the only woman to serve on the Food Production and Conservation Committee.

⁸⁷⁵ “State Convention,” Nov. 16-17, 1917, Reel 3, 56-59, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁷⁶ Ueland to Winifred Bartlett, Oct. 11, 1917, Reel 2, 786, MWSA, MHS.

Dairyman's Association, the State Local Option Association, the State Editorial Association, the Good Roads Conference, the State Letter Carriers' Association, the State Federation of Women's Clubs, the Minnesota Educational Association, the Minnesota Christian Endeavor Union, and the Farmers' Grain Dealers Association.⁸⁷⁷ A year later, the Nonpartisan League endorsed woman suffrage, providing additional support of a political movement growing significantly in the state, including among farmers in Lyon County.⁸⁷⁸

The MWSA laid out its plans for petitioning Minnesotans and seeking endorsements from leading organizations during the spring of 1917; perhaps not surprisingly, no one in Lyon County took up these directives for over a year. By that point, the MWSA had shifted its strategy slightly to supporting national efforts to secure and ratify a federal amendment for woman suffrage while still seeking legislative action in Minnesota. In June 1918, the MWSA sent out a series of letters to the members of the legislature in order to ascertain how legislators planned to vote on any ratification bill or separate woman suffrage measure. Three men, John B. Gislason, K. Knudson, and Fred F. Norwood, represented the seventh legislative district and resided in Lyon County. Curiously, in a county decisively lacking in any organized activity for woman suffrage, all three men answered the question "may we expect your support?" with a resounding "yes." Norwood even added an additional note, writing, "I most surly [sic.] stand for the ratification of the suffrage amendment, first, last,

⁸⁷⁷ Clara Heckrich to Mary Sumner Boyd, April 5, 1917, Reel 2, 470, MWSA, MHS. Carrie Chapman Catt had appealed to state leaders as early as May 1917, urging them to undertake petition work among the residents of their respective states. In addition, she directed suffragists to persuade local, state, and national associations to pass resolutions in favor of woman suffrage. See, Catt to "Presidents and Congressional Chairmen," May 18, 1917, Reel 2, 558-60, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁷⁸ "Passed by the Non-Partisan League," April 1918, Reel 9, 258, MWSA, MHS.

and all the time” and signing it “Yours for victory.”⁸⁷⁹ Shortly after receiving these responses from Lyon County, the MWSA sent a young organizer named Grace Randall to Marshall. On July 20, 1918, Randall traveled by train to the county seat, and Lyon County received its first visit from an official suffragist. Unfortunately, Randall left little record of her time in the county, only remarking that she met with interested women, legislators, and other political candidates at two places, Marshall and Minneota. Of the men with whom she met, James Hall, a candidate for the Senate, was the only man to offer hesitant support for the cause. Only after he learned that the other candidates for the position wholeheartedly endorsed woman suffrage did he quickly give any favorable remarks.⁸⁸⁰

Even though Randall did not mention it in her letters, her visit to Marshall and Minneota must have ignited sentiment among a few people with whom she spoke. The members of the Current News Club did not take up the mantle of woman suffrage together, and their records failed to indicate her visit at all. However, at least two prominent women of the group, Mrs. M. E. Matthews, whose home provided a base for Red Cross work during the summer of 1917, and Laura Lowe, stepped forward independent of their ties to the Current News Club to direct initial efforts in Marshall. To Matthews the MWSA finally sent its blank petitions for Marshall in August 1918, requesting two separate quotas, one for men and another for women, of at least half of the 625 voters at the last election.⁸⁸¹ The state

⁸⁷⁹ Ueland to John B. Gislason, June 1, 1918, Reel 3, 399, MWSA, MHS; Ueland to K. Knudson, June 1, 1918, Reel 3, 401, MWSA, MHS; Ueland to F. F. Norwood, June 1, 1918, Reel 3, 396, MWSA, MHS. Norwood was a member of the Nonpartisan League. Minder to Ueland, Oct. 16, 1918, Reel 3, 832-33, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁸⁰ “Yellow Medicine and Lyon Co. Senators,” 1918, Reel 9, 139, MWSA, MHS; Heckrich to Grace Randall, July 11, 1918, Reel 3, 568, Randall to Heckrich, July 12, 1918, Reel 3, 569, MWSA, MHS; Randall to Heckrich, July 20, 1918, Reel 3, 572, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁸¹ [Names of People Sent Petitions], Aug. 1918, Reel 3, 587, MWSA, MHS.

association instructed her to obtain the signatures of prominent women first so that the men could “know the women of their town are for it” and then enlist the support of farm women for canvassing less-well-known farm families in the country.⁸⁸² Two short months later, a second woman in Marshall, Laura Lowe, wrote to the MWSA requesting “literature on the woman suffrage question and also for plans for conducting the campaign here in Marshall.”⁸⁸³ Apparently Lowe had written to state headquarters twice before but had received no replies. She had also submitted a resolution passed by Marshall’s Congregational Ladies’ Aid Society, of which she was a member, in July 1918. The resolution favored the ratification of a federal woman suffrage amendment and passed by a margin of twenty-eight to fifteen. The corresponding secretary of the MWSA, Clara Heckrich, apologized to Lowe, explaining that her records regarding Marshall were “somewhat mixed.”⁸⁸⁴ She promised to send instructions, pamphlets, and information about the petition work underway in the county.

During the fall of 1918, woman suffrage finally came to Lyon County, Minnesota. Randall’s visit had touched off a period of heightened activity in the county, and, under the direction of Lowe and Matthews, petition work produced substantial results. While the county’s newspapers failed to cover the petition drive, Lowe wrote to state headquarters a month after Matthews had received the petitions, noting that the duo had secured three hundred eleven women’s signatures but only one hundred thirty men’s. As she explained, the influenza outbreak that fall prohibited them from visiting many homes under quarantine. In

⁸⁸² Ueland to [No Recipient], Aug. 1918, Reel 3, 585, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁸³ Mrs. George G. [Laura] Lowe to Ueland, Oct. 14, 1918, Reel 3, 808, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁸⁴ “Presented to Congregational Ladies’ Aid by Laura W. Lowe, Chairman,” July 24, 1918, Reel 9, 319, MWSA, MHS; Heckrich to Lowe, Oct. 15, 1918, Reel 3, 818, MWSA, MHS.

addition, she expressed disappointment in the number of men's signatures she had obtained, remarking that while "soliciting the men we encountered considerable opposition."⁸⁸⁵ She also encountered difficult road conditions and poor weather during her canvass, cutting her tour of the rural areas of the county short. Although Lowe was disappointed in the outcome of the petition, she hoped the numbers could help the state headquarters in their efforts.

Ueland personally replied to Lowe's letter a few days later, congratulating her on her success at obtaining women's signatures and sympathizing with the difficulties that the influenza epidemic had caused her. "We think you have done very well indeed," she proclaimed, although she did encourage her to attempt one last time to increase the size of the men's petition.⁸⁸⁶ Unfortunately, Lowe could not undertake any additional petition work on behalf of woman suffrage. She contracted the influenza virus shortly after her last letter and turned over the remaining materials to another prominent club woman, Stella Cook. Unfortunately, Cook refused to direct the petition drive, writing that other affairs "engaged" her fully.⁸⁸⁷

Randall's time in Lyon County also included a visit to Minneota, a small town located north of Marshall in a region heavily settled by Norwegian immigrants in the late-nineteenth century. The women of that village did not immediately respond to woman suffrage, in part because of the influenza outbreak that fall. Eventually, suffrage advocates in Minneota, led by Harriet Sanderson and Mrs. W. H. Doen, introduced suffrage resolutions among the established women's clubs and organizations in the area. What emerged was a

⁸⁸⁵ Both the *Marshall News Messenger* and the *Lyon County Reporter* did not cover the canvassing undertaken by the two women. Lowe to Heckrich, Nov. 12, 1918, Reel 4, 131, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁸⁶ Ueland to Lowe, Nov. 19, 1918, Reel 4, 243, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁸⁷ Stevens to Lowe, Jan. 21, 1919, Reel 5, 225, MWSA, MHS; Stevens to Stella Cook, Jan. 21, 1919, Reel 5, 218, MWSA, MHS; Cook to Stevens, Jan. 26, 1919, Reel 5, 319-20, MWSA, MHS; Stevens to Cook, Jan. 30, 1919, Reel 5, 391, MWSA, MHS.

body of rural women whose political sentiments lined up fully in support of the cause, and, in November 1918, four women's social clubs, the Fortnightly Club, the News and Art Club, the Eidsvold Red Cross Auxiliary of Minneota, and the Nordland Auxiliary of the American Red Cross, submitted their resolutions endorsing the ratification of a federal amendment.⁸⁸⁸ Two months later, Sanderson wrote to the MWSA, informing them of three more groups that had endorsed woman suffrage. By the middle of 1919, the MWSA listed nine of the leading women's organizations in Lyon County in support of woman suffrage.⁸⁸⁹ While Sanderson encouraged groups to pass woman suffrage resolutions in Lyon County, Doen proceeded with petition work at Minneota. Like Lowe, she ran into trouble during the influenza epidemic, explaining that at least a dozen people of the small town died during her canvassing efforts. She also pointed out that her quota included fifty men serving overseas and unable to sign the petitions. She requested that the MWSA consider the numbers she had garnered, including 79 men out of the 246 who voted in the last election, sufficient enough to meet the quota she had received.⁸⁹⁰

While suffrage activity had blossomed in Lyon County during the fall of 1918 and winter of 1919, it began to wither as the MWSA turned back to matters in the state

⁸⁸⁸ Endorsements, Nov. 1918, Reel 9, 320-21, MWSA, MHS; Harriet Sanderson to Randall, Nov. 23, 1918, Reel 4, 324-35, MWSA, MHS; Heckrich to Sanderson, Nov. 26, 1918, Reel 4, 360, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁸⁹ Sanderson to Randall, Jan. 21, 1919, Reel 5, 235-36, MWSA, MHS; Stevens to Sanderson, Feb. 7, 1919, Reel 5, 515, MWSA, MHS. These groups were the following: the Lyon County Auxiliary of the American Red Cross, the Marshall Congregational Ladies' Aid Society, the Minneota News and Art Club, the Fortnightly Club, the Get-To-Gether Club, the Fordland Auxiliary of the American Red Cross, the Friday Exchange Club, the Eidsvold Auxiliary of the American Red Cross, and the Alpha Camp Chapter of the Royal Neighbors of America. "List (Incomplete) of Resolutions, 1919" Reel 9, 353-54, MWSA, MHS.

⁸⁹⁰ Mrs. W. H. Doen to Ueland, Jan. 16, 1919, Reel 5, 155-57, MWSA, MHS; Ueland to Doen, Jan. 22, 1919, Reel 5, 255, MWSA, MHS; Doen to Ueland, Feb. 2, 1919, Reel 5, 438-39, MWSA, MHS; Ueland to Doen, Feb. 5, 1919, Reel 5, 459, MWSA, MHS.

legislature. In January 1919, the MWSA celebrated when a resolution calling on the United States Senate to secure a federal suffrage amendment passed overwhelmingly by a vote of one hundred to twenty eight. However, matters quickly turned “catastrophic” when, as Ueland explained, “so much enthusiasm and strength developed” that one representative, under the direction of a mysterious group called the Minnesota Equal Suffrage Constitutional Amendment League, used the opportunity to cleverly sneak in a vote on a bill amending the state’s constitution.⁸⁹¹ The measure passed by a large majority, leaving Ueland and the rest of the MWSA disheartened. The state association again had to reach out to their friends in the legislature to ensure that the state amendment measure did not interfere with the presidential suffrage bill pending in the legislature. Ueland was able to corral her supporters, and she triumphantly reported to the NAWSA in March that not only was she able to squash the state woman suffrage amendment but that she had secured victory for the presidential woman suffrage bill in Minnesota’s legislature as well.⁸⁹² Two short months later, President Wilson called Congress into a special session to assess postwar issues. Included on the agenda was a federal amendment granting women the right to vote, which the House passed in May and the Senate in June. Governor Burnquist called a special session of the Minnesota legislature on September 8, 1919. The state House voted for ratification one hundred twenty to six; the Senate followed shortly after with a margin of sixty to five. As Barbara Stuhler reported, the whole process took no longer than thirty minutes, and Minnesota became the fifteenth state to ratify the amendment. Almost a year later, Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to ratify

⁸⁹¹ Ueland to Catt, Jan. 23, 1919, Reel 5, 282-83.

⁸⁹² Nettie Shuler to Ueland, March 4, 1919, Reel 5, 641, MWSA, MHS; Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 168-70.

the woman suffrage amendment, and women in the country, including Minnesota, finally had received the right to vote.⁸⁹³

Woman suffrage was never a prominent issue in Lyon County. In fact, the first organizer to visit the county on behalf of woman suffrage arrived shockingly late—in July 1918. Newspapers, the records of church societies and women’s groups, and community histories revealed a people with little enthusiasm for the cause until just before suffrage leaders had secured its passage. In addition, conditions at the state level hampered efforts for women suffrage that played out in Lyon County. In the case of Minnesota, a small and weak state suffrage association languished during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, and only under the leadership of Ueland did efforts improve. Strict requirements for amending the state’s constitution also hampered their work, and not until 1915 did activity on behalf of the cause develop in the state. Only with the organizational skills of Ueland, who worked alongside Carrie Chapman Catt to support a federal woman suffrage, did the MWSA attempt any meaningful activity on behalf of the cause. While the state association undertook organized work after 1915, woman suffrage in Lyon County was stagnant and unimpressive. As the records of the Current News Club revealed, the women of Lyon County exhibited only late interest toward the cause. Unlike the women of the Spencer Woman’s Club and the Yankton Women’s Club, the members of the Current News Club preferred to keep intact the boundaries between them and political life. Although a few women emerged briefly to support petition and endorsement work in the county, they did not pursue a sustained plan in favor of woman suffrage. Lyon County’s experience with woman suffrage contrasted considerably to Clay and Yankton Counties in that its people had significantly less contact

⁸⁹³ Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 175-80.

with the movement during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Only a brief period of work emerged, and even those efforts were rather small. Elucidating the contours of woman suffrage in Lyon County supports the contention that progressive reform varied tremendously as local contexts shifted and changed.

Conclusion

The passage of the Nineteenth Amendment produced somewhat mixed results for the women of Clay, Yankton, and Lyon Counties. On the surface, the lives of these rural women changed little because of the right to vote. They did not become candidates for office in large numbers, and they did not flood the polls with their newly gained access to the franchise. Instead, the women of these rural, Midwestern counties incorporated the right to vote into their existing networks of power, using it to support the issues that had concerned and continued to concern them both before and after 1920. The date of the Nineteenth Amendment did not act as some sort of clear marker of time or neat periodization for these women. It did not signal the end of some historically constructed reform period, and it did not compel them to curb their activities on behalf of their churches, schools, and other community institutions because they had secured the ballot. The case of the Clay County Farm Bureau provides a compelling example of a group of rural women who pursued an activist agenda with the same gusto and spirit as rural women had prior to 1920.

In 1913, farmers and their wives in Clay County formed the Clay County Improvement Association. The group soon hired an agricultural agent, W. F. Posey, who served the group until about 1919. By that year, the Improvement Association had reconfigured itself into the Clay County Farm Bureau and hired Charles Martin as the county agricultural agent. By the end of November 1919, the Farm Bureau had almost fifteen hundred members and included an executive committee of officers who hailed from across the county.⁸⁹⁴ In addition to soil fertility projects, the Farm Bureau also sponsored work on

⁸⁹⁴ Charles Martin, "Annual Report of County Agricultural Agent," Nov. 20, 1919-Nov. 30, 1920, Box "1913-1920," Clay County Extension Service, Spencer, Iowa [hereafter CCES].

crops and livestock.⁸⁹⁵ Over the course of the next two years, the Farm Bureau brought women and their concerns into the organization. In 1921, the Farm Bureau hired a home demonstration agent named Ruth G. English. Initially, she focused on poultry culling, an issue that most Clay County farm women viewed with suspicion. English worked hard to convince the farm women with whom she worked that diseased birds proved detrimental to the overall health of the flock. She also gave out “much information...on poultry house construction,” encouraging these rural women to provide well-ventilated and clean places for their hens to lay eggs.⁸⁹⁶

English carried through on her projects into the 1920s through sixteen local township units, one for each township in Clay County. Each township had a set of township officers that managed the work undertaken in relation to the Farm Bureau. Curiously, the Farm Bureau stipulated that the person who occupied the vice-president position for these local township units had to be a woman. As the annual report of 1922 explained, “The object of the townships electing a woman vice-president is to provide a chairman to head up the womans [sic.] program of work in the township. In reality, there are two township chairman in each township, one man and one woman.”⁸⁹⁷ As women inhabited a visible place on the executive board of this community association, they gained valuable experience in dealing with public issues.

By 1922 the women who served as vice-presidents for their respective township associations soon witnessed an explosion in the number of people who became members of

⁸⁹⁵ Charles Martin, “Farm Bureau Record and 1921 Annual Report of Charles W. Martin, County Agricultural Agent, Ruth G. English, Home Demonstration Agent,” Dec. 1, 1920-Nov. 30, 1921, CCES.

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸⁹⁷ Ruth English, “Narrative Annual Report 1922,” Box “1913-1939,” page 1, CCES.

the Farm Bureau and utilized its services. Between 1921 and 1922, the attendance at Farm Bureau meetings had already risen from almost seven thousand total people to approximately fifteen thousand. In fact, English pointed directly to the source of this increase in active participation in the Farm Bureau. The heightened interest in the township meetings, wrote English, came from the “forty-three womans [sic.] community clubs of the county. In these organizations, over eight hundred women are active members. Their cooperation assisted greatly in increasing attendance at local meetings by providing part of the program, in the way of music, plays etc., and frequently refreshments.”⁸⁹⁸ English’s observation of the forty-three clubs created by and for rural women displayed the power women had in determining the course of community life. The annual reports indicated that once these women’s clubs gave the Farm Bureau their endorsements, the organization took off. Even poultry culling, an issue that generated considerable hesitation from farm women only a year earlier, had become one of “the most profitable and popular lines of work given in the county.”⁸⁹⁹ In addition, the women in each township used the expertise provided by English to pursue projects in which they had keen interest. By the end of 1922, women in the Farm Bureau focused most on projects related to gardening and canning, poultry culling, and preparing nutritious school lunches. By the end of 1923, the Clay County Farm Bureau supported a resolution to elect two women to serve on its countywide executive committee. While the gendered nature of these positions remained unclear, by the mid-1920s, rural women in Clay County had gained a visible and active presence in the largest and most well known farmer’s organization in the county. In turn, they spearheaded a number of groundbreaking projects in

⁸⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹⁹ Ibid., page 3.

their rural townships, including a hot lunch program in almost 80 percent of their rural consolidated schools and the creation of Child Health Clinics to assure that the rural children of the county received proper nutrition and health care.⁹⁰⁰

The collective organization of rural women in the Farm Bureau revealed the power and influence women maintained after the Nineteenth Amendment gave them the right to vote in 1920. For these rural women of Iowa, enfranchisement did not seem to change the broad contours of their lives. They defined themselves in terms of the fundamental kinship relations they maintained, and they never sought to upend the agrarian lifestyle that depended on a patriarchal structure. Their subtle and seemingly behind-the-scenes activities on behalf of their communities served as sources of influence and power for these women. In many ways, these Farm Bureau members exhibited a similar pattern of mutuality and partnership as the women writing to the *Dakota Farmer* about ten years earlier. They participated in the Farm Bureau as rural women did, pursuing projects related to their positions as wives and mothers on the farm. Yet, for the Farm Bureau to fully take hold in the county, it required the support of its rural women and their intricate network of community groups. Perhaps the woman who offered her opinion to the editor of the *Dakota Farmer* was correct; women really were the “power behind the throne.” At the very least, their collective organization, honed through decades of participation in ladies’ aid societies, library associations, women’s clubs, and other social groups, reflected the vital role women played in the creation and maintenance of local communities during the Progressive Era and beyond.

⁹⁰⁰ Ruth English, “Narrative Annual Report,” Dec. 1, 1922-Nov. 30, 1923, page 1-10, Box “1913-1939,” CCES.

The fight for woman suffrage did not resonate with every rural woman, despite the best efforts of national, state, and local advocates to bring their messages of equality and justice for women to their doorsteps. Even after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, rural women did not flock immediately to the polls. Simon Michelet, an attorney from Minneapolis who served as Minnesota Senator Knute Nelson's personal secretary from 1918 to 1923, sought to document and explain the reluctance of women to the vote. As a close associate to Nelson, he no doubt worked closely with Ueland and the rest of her suffrage supporters since Nelson was a vocal advocate for woman suffrage. Michelet probably handled the all of the petitions, letters, and other correspondence that supporters directed to Nelson during their petition drives between 1918 and 1919. Michelet's research became part of a national movement that worked to uncover why electoral participation dropped in the 1920s. He created the national "Get-Out-The-Vote" campaign in the early 1920s with the expressed aim of curbing the "Stay-At-Home Vote," a segment of the population that included many women.⁹⁰¹ During the 1920s, the League of Women Voters, the group formed by Carrie Chapman Catt and other suffrage leaders upon passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, pledged its full support to Michelet and his "Get-Out-The-Vote" campaign.⁹⁰² Michelet paid particular attention to rural women in his research. As he noted, for many women in the 1920 election, unfamiliarity with voting procedures kept farm women away from the polls. It was not until the 1928 election cycle that the women's vote became a

⁹⁰¹ Correspondence, Folder 4, Box 1, Simon T. Michelet and Family Papers, MHS.

⁹⁰² Ruth Morgan to Simon Michelet, Aug. 5, 1924, Folder 5, Box 1, Simon T. Michelet and Family Papers, MHS.

central issue in the outcome. He credited national debates about prohibition and church-related matters during the 1928 presidential election for encouraging rural women to vote⁹⁰³

Examining the woman suffrage movement in Clay, Yankton, and Lyon counties revealed new dimensions about the importance of “place” in the study of Progressive-Era reform. It showed the variety of experiences women had, especially in terms of the intensity, duration, and frequency of the reform. The individuals and groups who supported the amendment had much influence on the course and direction of woman suffrage in each county. The presence of organized campaign activities also directly determined how and in what ways rural men and women interacted with and responded to the movement. Moreover, local politics and the issues that resonated among residents in each of these counties, from prohibition to good roads to gubernatorial politics, had much to do with the ability of woman suffrage to gain or detract supporters. Finally, this study elucidated the importance of ethnicity and religious identity to woman suffrage. The ethnic diversity of the Midwest exposed the variety of responses that people developed toward woman suffrage. It showed how contempt of foreigners drastically influenced campaigns for woman suffrage, especially during the campaigns in South Dakota from 1914 to 1918. In particular, a subtle strand of analysis displayed how suffragists grappled with and ultimately used to their favor the exclusion of foreigners from woman suffrage. By pitting themselves against foreigners, these women used nativist rhetoric to argue for their moral right to the ballot. As this study has emphasized, scholars cannot overlook the significance of local communities forged by the strictures of cultural, ethnic, and religious traditions.

⁹⁰³ Simon Michelet, “The General Election of 1928,” unpublished manuscript, Folder 7, Box 2, Simon T. Michelet and Family Papers, MHS.

The women who participated in the Farm Bureau in Clay County and the studies of rural women voting by a native Minnesotan display that securing woman suffrage was neither the beginning nor the end of the activism of these rural women. The ballot added another tool for these women to improve their communities, a role in which they had excelled for decades prior to 1920. In fact, the activism they developed as members of small, rural communities revealed new ways to elucidate the contours of female political activism. Instead of relying on simple binary distinctions inherent in imposing the feminist label, scholars must evaluate women's political behavior at face value. By examining the activities women pursued on behalf of their communities and families, scholars can carve out a new dimension of feminism by dismantling uncomplicated assessments of female behavior and evaluating it on its own terms. This study, then, focused on what these rural women did, how they did it, and what the outcomes were. It evaluated individual and collective behaviors of women and placed it in historically appropriate terms and did not label women as feminists unless the women self-identified as such. By pushing feminism and the study of female political activism onto new intellectual paths, this study incorporated nuanced, complex, and complicated analyses of women's individual and collective behavior. Finally, it brought the historiography of rural women and their positions of mutuality into the discussion of feminism. Rural women did not challenge their subordinate roles in farm families or patriarchal communities, but they did exert themselves in subtle, yet powerfully influential ways through their mutual positions on the farm and in the family and their collective organizations.

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