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THOU SHALT NOT VOTE: THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMAN'S SUFFRAGE IN NEBRASKA

A Thesis

Presented to the

Department of History

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Masters of Arts

University of Nebraska at Omaha

by

Laura McKee Hickman

December, 1997

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THESIS ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Masters of Arts,
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee

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Chairperson David Simon
Date Dec. 3, 1997

THOU SHALT NOT VOTE: THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE IN NEBRASKA

Laura McKee Hickman

University of Nebraska, 1997

Advisor: Dr. Simmons

During a constitutional history course, I chose for a research project the passage of Nebraska's woman suffrage law in 1917. As I began to collect sources, however, it quickly came to my attention how few secondary sources existed, and that those sources were quickly becoming outdated. I did find, in that first search, manuscripts in the State Historical Society Archives.

As I began to ponder a topic for a thesis, my aborted research provided a starting point to my question: when most western states had passed female suffrage amendments by 1913, including all of Nebraska's neighbors to the north, south, and west, why did Nebraskans continue to reject proposed amendments? A search for manuscript collections of the Nebraska anti-suffragists, however, proved futile. I then focused my attention on the state supreme court case which granted Nebraska women partial suffrage by nullifying an anti-suffrage referendum. Complete records of *Barkley v. Pool* were included in the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association manuscript collection at the state historical society.

Reading the testimony record of the court case, I made a serendipitous discovery. The anti-suffrage leadership made full testimony of their organization, membership, and goals. Along with existing studies of ethnic and religious tendencies in the early twentieth century toward woman suffrage, I was able to respond to the question of why Nebraskans rejected woman suffrage. The study begins with a look at nineteenth century attempts to pass woman suffrage in Nebraska then turns to the first major twentieth century campaign, an amendment brought to the ballot by an initiative in 1913. Its failure is analyzed in terms of the growing anti-suffrage movement, the large German population of the state, and the movement's connection to prohibition. The final stage of the movement begins with the 1917 partial suffrage law, passed only after the beginning of World War I, the referendum filed with the secretary of state by the anti-suffragists, and the nullification of that referendum by the state supreme court.

Contents

I. Introduction	1
II. Nineteenth Century Campaigns	5
III. Twentieth Century Campaigns	27
IV. Opposition	47
V. Partial Victory	72
IV. Equal Suffrage	97
<i>appendix A: map of Nebraska, 1871</i> <i>appendix B: map of Nebraska, 1881</i>	
Bibliography	109

I

Introduction: *Thou Shalt Not Vote*

“Just by nature women wasn’t intended to wear pants or vote. . . .

“I think maybe it says that some ‘ers in the Bible. Give me time, I bet I could find it: ‘Thou shalt not vote.’ . . .

“I ain’t denying you haven’t got heads on you and Lord knows all of you know your own mind, but polls is no place for women folks.”¹

Written by an Elmwood, Nebraska author in the 1930s, the above exchange was intended to be amusing. Two decades earlier, the argument was not a joke. The place of women in society and their role in politics was an extremely divisive issue during the early years of the twentieth century.

In most existing studies of the struggle to gain female suffrage, Nebraska’s story is a short footnote. It is usually noted that in 1917 the women of Nebraska were granted presidential suffrage by legislative act, with few, if any, other details. The fascinating complexities of the struggle in Nebraska have been obscured by this scant attention. A daughter of the state is left wondering why, when every other Western state had long since adopted woman suffrage, Nebraskans consistently defeated similar measures; or why Nebraska women did not, in fact, cast votes for any office more significant than the school board in 1918.

A simple perusal of the woman suffrage collection in any library reveals numerous state studies from across the nation. There is no published history of Nebraska’s struggle other than a few journal articles, notably Ann Wiegman Wilhite’s

¹ Bess Streeter Aldrich, *Song of Years* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, [1939] 1991), p.111.

“Sixty-Five Years Till Victory: A History of Woman Suffrage in Nebraska.” Thomas Chalder Coulter’s unpublished dissertation “A History of Woman Suffrage in Nebraska, 1856-1920” also provides an overview of Nebraska’s woman suffrage history.² Both works, however, were written in the late 1960s in the first flush of the feminist movement. In the three decades since then greater insight not only into the suffrage movement but also into the anti-suffrage movement has been gained. The strength of Nebraska’s anti-suffragists is key to this state’s suffrage history, but also carries national significance, particularly in terms of the regions with large German populations.

The story of the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association’s road to victory covers the years 1856-1920, sixty-four years. The lower house of the territorial legislature passed a woman suffrage bill following an address by Council Bluffs resident Amelia Bloomer, but the bill was soundly defeated in the territorial Council. The nineteenth century saw two other attempts to secure the ballot for women by constitutional amendment, both of which failed by large majorities. By the twentieth century the issue had become somewhat more acceptable to Nebraskans. In 1917, Nebraska’s legislature passed a woman suffrage act. Four years earlier, the last in a long series of constitutional amendments to grant the vote had failed ratification amid rumors of election fraud which were substantiated by the state Attorney General. A new means of constitutional change had been used to present the 1913 amendment—initiative. This process was highly

² Ann L. Wiegman Wilhite, “Sixty-Five Years Till Victory: A History of Woman Suffrage in Nebraska,” *Nebraska History* 49 (Summer 1969): 149-163; Thomas Chalder Coulter, “A History of Woman Suffrage in Nebraska, 1856-1920,” (Ph. D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1967). See also James E. Potter, “Barkley versus Pool: Woman Suffrage and the Nebraska Referendum Law,” *Nebraska History* 69 (Spring 1988): 11-18.

preferred by all reformers because the criteria for passage were less stringent than a legislative route for amending the state's constitution. Even so, suffragists failed to gain the required majority despite the growing popularity of their movement.

Sympathetic legislators proposed a limited presidential suffrage bill in early 1917. A powerful Senate faction poised to defeat the bill when international events began to shift Nebraska politics. United States entry into the war against Germany led to strong anti-German sentiments in the state. Some of the strongest opposition to woman suffrage in the state's population, and in the state senate, came from the powerful German community. The power of their opponents eroded, suffragists were able to negotiate the passage of the limited suffrage law of 1917.

The opposition did not accept defeat, even on a limited basis. Using the new referendum process, anti-suffragists gathered over 30,000 names in three months. The referendum petitions blocked the law until it could be reviewed by the voters in the next election. But the Nebraska Suffrage Association would not accept defeat either. The leadership demanded the opportunity to review the signatures, first as a threat to publish the names of the signers, but soon found such tactics unnecessary. Many of the signatures appeared forged, and preliminary investigations found evidence of extensive fraud, including improper collection of signatures, minor and deceased signers, and addresses which did not exist.

The association entered a writ of injunction against the Secretary of State with the Third District Court in Lincoln to enjoin the referendum. In *Barkley v. Pool*, the court found in favor of the plaintiffs, nullifying the referendum. The Nebraska Association

Opposed to Woman Suffrage appealed the decision which was finally settled by the Nebraska State Supreme Court in 1919. The court's decision gave women the opportunity to vote for presidential electors, and for any local or state issue or office not created by the state constitution.

The story is a fascinating study of Progressive era politics in Nebraska, of the political effects of the First World War, and of the constitutional changes occurring in the state in 1920. It also contains elements which are immediately applicable to modern themes. The anti-immigrant attitudes, and those attitudes' expression in law, is an issue which has resurfaced with a new face. The proper collection of signatures is another issue raised by the woman suffrage referendum. *Barkley v. Pool* provided the first clarification of the qualifications for petition circulators, an issue recently revisited by the state. Woman suffrage enlarged the electorate by fifty per cent both nationally and locally, arguably the largest enfranchisement in United States and certainly in Nebraska's history.

II

Nineteenth-Century Campaigns

Most Nebraska historians date the state's woman suffrage movement to July 4, 1855, when Council Bluffs resident Amelia Bloomer addressed a large crowd at the Douglas House—young Omaha's only hotel. Following Bloomer's Omaha activities, Nebraska came close to being the first United States territory to extend suffrage to women in the post-Seneca Falls era.¹ Sixty-five years later, Nebraska women still struggled for equality. The long struggle encompassed a period of dramatic economic and social change in the nation—changes which transformed the woman suffrage movement. The early Nebraska suffrage movement was a frontier phenomenon which metamorphosed by the twentieth century into a middle-class, urban, progressive, and nativist moral reform crusade.

Following Bloomer's hotel speech, the Nebraska territorial legislature invited her to “deliver an address on Woman's Rights, or any other subject you may select.” The *Chronotype* reported that the legislature's response to Bloomer's resulting address had “met with much favor,” especially in the area of property rights, and while many legislators continued to “doubt the policy for women to vote, . . . who can draw the line and say that naturally she has not the right to do so?”²

¹ Amelia Bloomer, “First Female Suffragist Movement in Nebraska,” *Transactions and Reports of Nebraska State Historical Society*, vol. 1, ed. Robert W. Furnas (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1885), pp. 58-60. New Jersey extended the vote to female property owners in the first democratic rush of the Revolutionary War, but withdrew the right after only a few years.

² *Ibid.*, p. 58.

One legislator unable to draw that line was General William Larimer who championed a doomed woman suffrage bill. It passed the House, but the upper house, the Council, never read the bill until the penultimate day in session. On the final day, opponents of the bill presented General Larimer with a petticoat, “over which there came near being a general melee.”³ The opportunity to pass woman suffrage in the territory of Nebraska was lost. Neither Bloomer, an Iowa resident, nor General Larimer, whose manhood had been called into question, pursued the issue in later sessions.⁴ Subsequent efforts met a similar fate. The issue was discussed during the constitutional convention in 1867, but the convention defeated the resolution for woman suffrage in the new state. The first Nebraska legislature also introduced suffrage bills, with as many as nine pro-votes in the Senate, but none passed.⁵

In 1871, the people of Nebraska launched a movement to rewrite the state’s constitution. Moral reforms such as compulsory education, prohibition, and woman suffrage appeared as issues at the constitutional convention along with such economic proposals as the liability of stockholders and prohibition of local aid to corporations. Despite Governor David Butler’s vocal support of woman suffrage and his wife’s invitation to Susan B. Anthony to speak to the Nebraska legislature, the convention decided by a narrow margin (six to six) to turn both it and prohibition, the most

³ Ibid., p. 60; the Council seems to have been preoccupied with a debate over moving the capital from Lincoln to Omaha.

⁴ Clara Colby does note Bloomer’s continued lectures two years later in Omaha and Nebraska City in “Nebraska,” *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 3, ed. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage (Rochester, New York: Susan B. Anthony, 1886), p. 673.

⁵ Ibid., p. 674.

controversial issues, over to the voters. The 1871 vote on a woman suffrage amendment lost by a four to one ratio, along with prohibition. But Nebraskans were not finished rejecting the work of the convention—the new constitution was also rejected, four to one.⁶

When new delegates convened in 1875, the issue seems to have been eclipsed by crop failures and locust plagues. During the constitutional convention, one delegate, General E. Estabrook, did lead a rally to add women to the suffrage by striking the word “male” from the voting qualification clause and replacing it with the word “person.” The opposition responded that women were too delicate and refined for the vices of political participation.⁷ Most organized effort favoring the passage of woman suffrage came from outside the state, with fifteen local lectures by such noted personalities as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Margaret Campbell of the National Woman Suffrage Association.⁸

As yet, Nebraska did not have its own suffrage movement, in spite of the fact that the National Association had turned its attention to a state by state struggle following the *Minor v. Happersett* decision in 1875. Prior to this supreme court decision, many suffragists had argued that the Fourteenth Amendment, by forbidding states to deny any citizen’s fundamental rights, gave women the right to vote. When tested, however, the

⁶ Addison Erwin Sheldon, *Nebraska, the Land and the People*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1931), p. 949; James C. Olson, *History of Nebraska* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1955), pp. 186-9; Colby, “Nebraska,” *History of Woman Suffrage*, p. 680; Thomas Chalder Coulter, *A History of Woman Suffrage in Nebraska, 1856-1920* (unpublished dissertation, Ohio State University, 1967), p. 18.

⁷ Ann L. Wiegman Wilhite, “Sixty-five Years Till Victory: A History of Woman Suffrage in Nebraska,” *Nebraska History*, 49 (Summer, 1969), pp. 151-2.

⁸ Colby, “Nebraska,” *History of Woman Suffrage*, pp. 680-1.

court decided that while women were citizens, this did not necessarily entail the right to vote.⁹ Federal support of enfranchisement effectively blocked, the National Association turned its focus to state campaigns in the hope of gaining support in enough states to influence the national government.

A leader in the movement to organize for women's rights in Nebraska was Erasmus M. Correll, founder of Thayer County, the city of Hebron, and the first newspaper of that area, the *Hebron Journal*. In 1879, Correll devoted a section of the paper to women's issues. Two years later he founded a second publication in Lincoln, the *Western Woman's Journal*. As a member of the Nebraska House of Representatives in 1880, he presented the woman suffrage amendment that became the central focus of the newly organized Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association.¹⁰

Two short-lived earlier attempts to organize for woman suffrage in Fairbury and Alexandria were finally replaced by Correll's permanent organization in Hebron in 1879. He helped found the association following a speaking engagement by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in Hebron. By 1881, thirty-nine other county and local associations had been formed along with a state suffrage association. Newspapers became the medium of communication due to the difficulties of organizing through a sparsely populated region with poor transportation and little money. The Hebron

⁹ *Minor v. Happersett* (US Reports 21 Wallace 162 [1875]). Sandra F. VanBurkleo, "No Rights But Human Rights, The Emancipation of American Women," *Constitution*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Spring-Summer 1990), p.11, compares the *Minor* decision to Justice Taney's *Dred Scott* decision where the court found that individuals could be citizens but also be denied any share of the political power. In the absence of any specific amendment, "judges in the 1870s steadfastly refused to 'find' women's rights within the federal constitution."

¹⁰Colby, "Nebraska," *History of Woman Suffrage*, pp. 683-8; Coulter, pp. 17-18.

Journal, *Omaha Republican*, and *Osceola Record*, along with the *Western Woman's Journal*, became the official voices of the movement.¹¹

Along with Correll, a second leader in the suffrage movement began to organize in Beatrice, Nebraska, in the 1870s. Clara Bewick Colby moved to Nebraska from her Wisconsin home with her new husband who opened a law office in 1872. Colby had been one of the first women to graduate from the co-education program (the same courses as a regular men's degree) at the University of Wisconsin in 1869. Her degree, along with five other women's, had been withheld by an administrator who rejected co-education, but Colby finally received her diploma, and studied and taught history and Latin at the university until her marriage.¹² In Beatrice, Colby founded the library to which she invited speakers, including Stanton and Anthony, with whom she formed a life-long friendship. In 1883, Colby founded the *Woman's Tribune* which became the official paper of the Nebraska Suffrage Association. After Colby moved to Washington, D.C. in 1888 when her husband was named Assistant Attorney General, it became the official paper of the National Woman Suffrage Association for one year. Colby's career in the woman suffrage movement continued to have national and even international significance until her death in 1916, just four years before she would have witnessed the culmination of her life's work—a national amendment giving women the vote.¹³

¹¹ Coulter, pp. 22-5.

¹² *Notable American Women 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 1, ed. Edward T. James (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 355-7.

¹³ Olympia Brown, *Democratic Ideals: A Memorial Sketch of Clara B. Colby* (Federal Suffrage Association, 1917), pp. 58-65; Peggy A. Volzke Kelley, *Women of Nebraska Hall of Fame* (Omaha: Nebraska International Women's Year Coalition, 1976), p. 17.

Colby's years of work in Nebraska are most significant in terms of the amendment vote of 1882. She helped organize the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association in July of that year, and presided over it from 1885 to 1889. During the 1882 attempt to enlarge Nebraska's electorate, she served as vice president under Harriet Brooks, the first president of the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association. Colby also continued to serve the campaign as publisher of the *Tribune*.¹⁴ E.M. Correll began the process in January, 1881, in his capacity as a state representative by introducing H.R.(house roll) 59, an amendment to strike the word "male" from the voter qualification clause of the state constitution. The House passed the amendment with the required three fifths approval only after a bit of drama. Following the roll-call, H.R. 59 lacked just one vote to carry. At the last possible moment, P.O. Heacock of Richardson county arrived and proclaimed "aye" in response to the proposed amendment.¹⁵

The Senate Committee on Constitutional Amendments next received the proposition. Arguing for the opposition, Senator Church Howe claimed, "I would like to see the moral influence of women at the polls, but I would not like to see the immoral influence of politics in the home circle." He went on to argue that because God made women the bearer of children, "her life is almost necessarily a home life . . . training her children to be good men and pure electors. Therein her influence is all-powerful."¹⁶

Such sentiments were wide-spread among the senators. Many politicians opposed

¹⁴ Colby, "Nebraska," *History of Woman Suffrage*, pp. 682-3n.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 685-6; *House Journal*, 16th session, 1881, p. 128, 137.

¹⁶ Colby, "Nebraska," *History of Woman Suffrage*, pp. 685-6.

the extension of the vote to women because of the threat of the unknown; what would women do with the vote? Ironically, the vote shows just the opposite sentiment. On the controversial issue of woman suffrage, it would appear that the senators were so sure of the agreement of the populace on the place of women, that the chamber passed the amendment, twenty-two to eight. One senator explained his affirmative vote, after he opposed the bill all the way through the legislature, as “consistency” because he expected the amendment to fail ratification.¹⁷

Not as convinced of failure, the suffragists began a massive organization effort through the summer of 1882 at county fairs and local picnics. The National Woman Suffrage Association lent its support by holding its annual convention in Omaha September 26-28.¹⁸ Suffragists, however, faced some major hurdles in Nebraska, including apathy, not only of voters but of many women, and organized opposition by the Brewer’s Association.¹⁹

The eventual defeat of the 1882 amendment by 50,693 to 25,756 must be understood in terms of political procedure. Most states required a majority of the greatest number of votes ever cast on any issue to amend their constitutions.²⁰ Nebraska’s procedure was somewhat less strict; it merely required a majority of the votes cast in the last governor’s election. Because all mis-marked and unmarked ballots counted as a no

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 685n-686; Alan P. Grimes, *The Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp. 92-8, i-x, suggests that legislatures frequently turned the politically challenging issue of woman suffrage over to the voters to avoid the backlash from either side of the controversy.

¹⁸ Colby, “Nebraska,” *History of Woman Suffrage*, pp. 686-9.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 691.

²⁰ Grimes, pp. 78-80.

vote, the actual percentage of the male population opposed to giving women the vote may not have been as overwhelming as the count would imply.²¹ Of course, having been excluded from the poll, the percentage of women opposed to the vote can never be known. Furthermore, charges of fraudulent ballots to defeat the amendment were leveled, but largely ignored.²²

Following the defeat of 1882, the Nebraska suffrage associations did not again wage a full scale campaign until 1913. In the intervening years, attempts to introduce similar amendments to the legislature failed repeatedly. Neither major political party was willing to take a firm stand on the issue. There was no clear advantage for either party to support the expansion of suffrage to women. The voting behavior of such a large groups of people could not be predicted. Therefore, the only noteworthy suffrage campaign between 1882 and 1913 involved the formation of a third party—the Populists. The Populist Party convention was held in Omaha in 1892, and was attended by both Susan B. Anthony and Anna Howard Shaw.²³

The Populist support for reform measures, and the suffragist's frequent rhetoric that voting women would reform the nation, might lead one to assume woman suffrage would be embraced by the new party's platform. However, in the Omaha platform there was no mention of women's rights, and Stanton and Shaw played no significant role at

²¹ Colby, "Nebraska," *History of Woman Suffrage*, pp. 693-5.

²² National American Woman Suffrage Association, *Victory! How Women Won It: A Centennial Symposium, 1840-1940* (New York: The H. W. Wilson, Company, 1940), p. 73.

²³ Grimes, pp. i-x, 80-98; Coulter, pp. 110-17.

the party convention.²⁴ The Populists were much more interested in economic than moral reform. Although both woman suffrage and prohibition had been linked to farm reform a year earlier, neither issue ever made the Populist Party platform.²⁵

These attempts to pass suffrage, from Amelia Bloomer to the Populists, though unsuccessful, fulfilled the necessary process of bringing the public awareness necessary for eventual success. The process also highlighted the nineteenth century themes of woman suffrage in the western regions of the United States. For most Nebraska citizens, woman suffrage was simply not an issue in the nineteenth century. This was especially true in the more established counties and among the middle class members of society.²⁶

The more established societies of the United States, and Nebraska, fully embraced the Victorian ideal of true womanhood. Domesticity was the key concept for women's role—a role most Americans believed women were biologically pre-disposed to fulfill, and therefore a role pre-ordained by God. Creating a clean, comfortable home for the family and nurturing children to adulthood defined women's universe. But true womanhood not only cooked and cleaned, it became the symbol for morality and virtue, of all that was good in America. To a growing number of women in the nineteenth century though, moral guardianship began to have implications beyond the home.²⁷

²⁴ Grimes, pp. 80-85; one year later, in Colorado's vote on a suffrage amendment, the Populists played a key role in the suffrage victory.

²⁵ Jack S. Blocker, Jr., "The Politics of Reform: Populists, Prohibition, and Woman Suffrage, 1891-92," *The Historian*, 34 (August 1972), pp. 614, 618-19.

²⁶ For a discussion of woman suffrage as a western phenomenon see Grimes, "introduction," pp. i-x.

²⁷ Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty: A History of Women in America* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), pp. 95-102, 119-144.

As the economy modernized, women had less control over the quality of the home. Children, rather than being educated at home, attended schools for longer periods of time. Women began to demand control of the school boards and policies. In Nebraska, women were granted school suffrage in 1869, the second state to do so.²⁸ Urban homes transformed women's duties from production of food and clothing to consumption. Again, women's control over the economic decisions and the quality of the product was lost. The progressive era reforms calling for government regulation over such things as meat packaging received female support because of this loss of control.²⁹

Such responses necessitated a female activism which, in maintaining the ideal of domesticity, ironically contradicted the ideal of many women by demanding their involvement in the public sphere, and even worse, in the dirty world of politics. This contradiction shaped the "woman question" well into the twentieth century. The woman's role was changing along with massive changes in every sector of society. But the effects of industrialization on the home and family were of great concern to most Americans. This domain, of course, was viewed as the responsibility of women; its disintegration would mean the end of free civilization. To most Americans the debate over the woman question was no minor issue; it lay at the foundation of their continued existence as a society. Such attitudes explain why both men and women opposed the changes woman suffrage would bring.

²⁸Colby, "Nebraska," *History of Woman Suffrage*, p. 675; Wilhite, "Sixty-five Years Till Victory," *Nebraska History*, 49 (Summer 1968), p. 151. School suffrage allowed tax-paying women with children of school age to vote for school board members.

²⁹Ruth Pollak (producer), *One Woman, One Vote* (New York: The American Experience, PBS video, 1995).

However, a growing number of women and men in the late nineteenth century did support woman suffrage, but mainly as a means of moral reform—bringing women’s superior virtue and morality into the public sphere, especially to improve areas impacting home life and children.³⁰ Though a few radical women, such as Susan B. Anthony, advocated woman suffrage as part of a larger movement to completely change the role of women in American society and bring total equality, few others adopted such radical ideas.

Suffrage organizers tended to work in the Eastern United States and in the urbanized regions of the West. Support for suffrage, though, came from the less populated, frontier regions. Western states passed the same suffrage amendments which faced defeat after defeat in the East. Early suffrage histories adopted Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis and applied it to women’s history to explain this phenomenon, though Turner and his students largely ignored the role of women on the frontier.³¹ In the past thirty years, however, historians have begun to question not only the validity of the Turner thesis, but its application to women’s history. While it is obvious that suffrage was a western phenomenon, democracy, or equality between the sexes, somehow being created out of the hardships of frontier life began to be seriously questioned. Dee

³⁰ Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider, *American Women in the Progressive Era, 1900-1920: Change, Challenge, and the Struggle for Women’s Rights* (New York: Doubleday Publishing, 1993), pp. 169, 241-243.

³¹ Merle Curti’s *The Making of An American Community: A Case Study of An American Community in a Frontier County* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1959), pp. 438-41 finds a pioneer state representative who campaigned for woman suffrage in Wisconsin, but otherwise the study categorically ignores the role of women, as does John D. Barnhart’s *Valley of Democracy: The Frontier Versus the Plantation in the Ohio Valley, 1775-1818* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), pp. 3-7; Barnhart

Brown's *Gentle Tamers* was one of the first attempts to analyze the role of women in western societies. Brown portrayed the western woman as the great civilizer, gently taming the wildness out of the western towns as they brought cleanliness, morality, and basic etiquette to the frontier. Giving women the ballot in the western states, therefore, may have been an attempt to empower women to clean up the town.³²

Though the frontier may not have created democracy, it is clear that the role of women in the western societies differed from that of women in the more established eastern societies. In Nebraska, Clara Colby believed that "the heroism of wives whose very isolation kept them hand to hand, shoulder to shoulder, and thought to thought with their husbands" made "the rights of self-government with women who had . . . left home and kindred and the comforts of the older states" more acceptable to the men.³³ Women in western communities did have more independence than their eastern sisters. While western women rarely engaged in economic activity outside the realm of "women's work," more western women could, and did, support themselves. Contrary to popular belief, women on the frontier did not marry early, nor quickly remarry after divorce or death. From taking in borders to prostitution, many women supported themselves.³⁴ A

argues that the frontier provided equality, opportunity, and freedom from discrimination, but he never attempts to apply this thesis to women on the frontier.

³² Dee Brown, *The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West* (New York: J. P. Putnam and Sons, 1958), pp. 251, 297-8; Joan M. Jensen and Darlis Miller, "The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review*, 49, no. 2 (May, 1980), pp. 173-213.

³³ Colby, "Nebraska," *History of Woman Suffrage*, p. 671.

³⁴ Nor were frontier women scarce, or outnumbered by men. Jensen and Miller, pp. 190-4; Glenda Riley, "'Not Gainfully Employed': Women on the Iowa Frontier, 1833-1870," *Pacific Historical Review*, 49 (May, 1980) no. 2, pp. 237-264.

few women homesteaders established their claims without husbands. Esther Carter Griswold-Warner, a two time widow with three children emigrated to Nebraska and filed a homestead claim in 1864 in Lancaster County. She was a successful farmer, and an avid suffragist, until her death in 1901.³⁵ Female homesteaders were often very successful farmers. In some areas of Colorado, female homesteaders maintained occupancy more often than men.³⁶

These experiences may have helped shape western society, but determining exactly how they did so is difficult. Suffrage historians have tended to explain the western suffrage phenomenon by an analysis of changing ideology, an area more difficult to document than economic, political, or social change.³⁷ Whatever the cause, western Nebraska's frontier counties supported suffrage in much greater numbers than the eastern regions of the state.

The 1871 vote for an amendment to extend suffrage to women failed 3,502 to 12,668. Only two of Nebraska's thirty-seven organized counties supported female suffrage. Dawson county's population was 103; its official vote on the amendment was four in favor, zero against. The low voter turn-out signaled either apathy or the difficulty of polling on the frontier. Fillmore county also supported woman suffrage. Out of a total population of 238, the qualified male voters gave thirty-four votes favoring the amendment to eight opposed. In a total state population of 122,993 (70,425 of which

³⁵ James C. Olson and Richard C. Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), p. 163.

³⁶ Jensen and Miller, p. 183.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-4.

were male), these two counties represented a very small portion of Nebraskans. Dawson county especially represented the frontier. It had been organized only ten years earlier and had one of the smallest populations of Nebraska counties. Those longer established, and especially the three most heavily populated eastern counties of the state, voted heavily against woman suffrage. Douglas county electors favoring the amendment were outnumbered 371 to 1,872; Otoe county suffragists were outnumbered 265 to 885, and Richardson county rejected the amendment 244 to 1,150.

Ten years later, Nebraska's size and number of counties had expanded considerably, but the issue of woman suffrage had become more acceptable—the amendment lost by a mere two to one ratio (50,693: 25,756). The demographics of the counties supporting the amendment had not changed. Ten of the eleven counties which favored suffrage were in the newly organized central region of Nebraska; eight had been organized within ten years of the vote.³⁸

In both amendment votes, the smaller, newly organized counties were much more likely to vote in favor of woman suffrage than the more established regions. However, in both cases counties with smaller populations and just as newly established as those voting in favor of suffrage, voted against the amendment. Therefore, because the phenomenon

³⁸ See Appendix A and B for placement of counties. *The Nebraska Blue Book and Historical Register*, ed. Addison E. Sheldon (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1915), pp. 752-4; "Vote by Years of Constitutional Amendment for Extension of Suffrage," "clippings" file, Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska. Hereafter cited Nebraska Suffrage papers. Sylvia Nimmo, "Maps Showing County Boundaries of Nebraska, 1854-1925," (Papillion, Nebraska: Sylvia Nimmo, 1978); *The Vital Statistics of the United States*, Ninth Census, vol. II (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), pp. 536-7. It is also interesting to note that none of the counties bordering Wyoming or Colorado, where female suffrage existed, voted in favor of the amendment in 1882.

was not consistent, other factors must have also influenced how different societies responded to the idea of women with a vote.

Prohibition was one factor which became tied to the issue of suffrage. The two issues became inseparable in the eyes of many Americans due to the argument used by anti-suffrage organizations that giving women the vote would inevitably lead to the passage of prohibition. The idea did have some basis in fact. The national membership overlap of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the National Woman Suffrage Association was quite high.³⁹ Both organizations saw as their ultimate goal the moral reform of society, and certainly the WCTU saw in female suffrage a means to end alcohol abuse through legislation. Unfortunately, the issues were not so clear from within the organizations. Serious divisions erupted between and within both groups of reformers. Purists and militants drove many more moderate visionaries from the organizations and frequently made cooperative efforts impossible.⁴⁰

Though Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Anthony, and Lucy Stone all began their careers in temperance societies, and Francis Willard and many other WCTU leaders were pro-suffrage, little cooperation existed between the two movements for many years.⁴¹ The temperance movement found its support mainly among the pietistic religious communities. For example, the trustees and financial supporters of the Nebraska Anti-Saloon League came overwhelmingly from the Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian

³⁹ Grimes, p. 88.

⁴⁰ Robert E. Wenger, "The Anti-Saloon League in Nebraska Politics, 1898-1910," *Nebraska History*, 52 (Fall 1971), pp. 284-5.

⁴¹ Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1986), pp. 88n-89.

churches of Omaha and Lincoln. The religious, patriotic, and nativist views of the league could easily have clashed with the kinds of change woman suffrage would bring to home life. Believing that “suffrage carried the onus of secularism and sexual immorality,” the more conservative members of anti-liquor societies strongly opposed the incorporation of woman suffrage into their agendas.⁴² The progressive wing of the WCTU, however, did support woman suffrage, and by 1879 endorsed it as a goal. The anti-suffragists, though, continued to find a place within the organization.⁴³

Nor were all suffrage associations firmly in favor of temperance. The Oregon suffrage society disassociated completely from anti-liquor issues, declaring instead for personal liberty.⁴⁴ The Nebraska Suffrage Association never seems to have made a stand one way or the other. However, the rhetoric of the entire campaign pitted pro-suffrage forces against the “liquor interests.” Every amendment defeat was blamed on the breweries’ control of legislators and the “uninformed immigrant” population. Colby wrote, in her account of the defeat of 1882: “the saloon element was determined to defeat the amendment.” She went on to blame the amendment’s overwhelming failure on “men who were selling woman’s birth-right for a glass of beer.”⁴⁵ Nebraska suffragists faced a two-front war. Prohibition came to be seen by many immigrants, particularly Irish and German, as an old-stock reaction against their culture. The “uninformed immigrant” therefore rejected woman suffrage as anti-foreign. The Anti-Saloon Leaguers rejected

⁴² Ibid.; Wenger, pp. 267, 270-4, 288.

⁴³ Gusfield, p. 93.

⁴⁴ Abigail Scott Duniway, *Path Breaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in Pacific and Coast States*, 2nd ed. (Portland: James, Kerns, and Abbott, Company, [1914] 1970), pp. 95-8.

⁴⁵ Colby, “Nebraska,” *History of Woman Suffrage*, p. 691.

giving women the vote because their goal to purify the community and elevate its value system did not involve bringing politics into the home.⁴⁶

Dr. George Miller's Omaha *Herald* became the voice of such sentiments. A strong Democrat, Miller expounded during the 1882 amendment campaign on the evils of the Republicans, the party of social change following the Civil War, whose corruption was "accompanied with the odious fanaticism of woman's rights and prohibition."⁴⁷ Anyone attempting to change the social structure faced a fierce fight from Dr. Miller and like-minded Nebraskans. Not only did these conservatives fear the social changes inherent in equal suffrage, but they were convinced that no real woman would want the vote.⁴⁸

These conservatives were blind to, or more likely, reacting against, the massive changes already occurring in American society. Rapid industrialization and urbanization, with the consequent economic and social problems, mark the years following the Civil War. By the turn of the century, a growing number of Americans began to recognize the human cost of the gilded age. Calls for moral reforms of every kind represent one aspect of the progressive era. Granting women suffrage became not only one of the those oversights that needed to be addressed, but more importantly, it became a means of

⁴⁶ Wenger, pp. 274-6, 288; Anna Howard Shaw, *The Story of a Pioneer* (New York: Harper Press, 1915), pp. 248-52, 313; Colby, "Nebraska," *History of Woman Suffrage*, p. 689n.

⁴⁷ *Omaha Herald*, April 16, 1882, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴⁸ Sheldon, pp. 595, 602-3.

introducing “the morality and humane concern that the state of American society needed so badly.”⁴⁹ By 1905, the progressive movement had representation in both political parties, but was especially strong in the Democratic Party. In Nebraska, this would mean an end to Republican control of state government.⁵⁰

Such extensive party realignment is often caused by the disruption of social or economic change. Nebraska’s gross domestic product increased between 1890 and 1910 by 200 per cent, from 1.2 billion to 3.8 billion dollars. This economic growth was accompanied by urbanization. Nebraska’s population in the same years grew by only 12.4 per cent, but the number of cities with a population over 2,500 grew from 16 to 27 while the rural population decreased from 59.2 per cent in 1890 to 53.5 per cent in 1910.⁵¹

Nebraska’s women were profoundly affected by industrialization and urbanization. The low population growth in the state indicates a decreasing birth rate. In the nation as a whole during the nineteenth century, birth rates dropped by over 40 per cent.⁵² Because of Nebraska’s agricultural economy, the state’s birth rate would have been slower to decline, and probably by a less dramatic rate, but the urbanization occurring in the state would immediately correlate to fewer children per urban woman.

Another cause of declining birth rates was the growing number of college graduates, many of whom were women. The University of Nebraska had two graduates

⁴⁹ Richard Hofstadter, “The Meaning of the Progressive Movement,” *The Progressive Movement, 1900-1915* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1963), pp. 2-9.

⁵⁰ Olson, pp. 186-9; progressives such as Aldrich and Norris soon gained control of the Republican Party, however.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 280, 258-9.

⁵² David Morgan, *Suffragists and Democrats: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in America* (Ann Arbor: Michigan State University Press, 1972), pp. 49-50.

in 1873, both male. In 1880, seven men graduated with one female. By 1900, the numbers had grown dramatically, especially for women: fifty-nine men and forty-six women took degrees that year.⁵³

Working class women did not share these opportunities. But in a more urban setting, their experiences were also changing. Many more were finishing high school by the 1890s. Nationwide, the number had tripled, especially in the cities.⁵⁴ The number of women entering the work force had also increased dramatically. A Nebraska historian at the turn of the century connected the phenomenon: “the rapid growth of the industrial activity of women has spread their desire for suffrage.”⁵⁵ In factories, female workers faced new challenges. Suffragists pointed to the conditions in these factories as evidence of the necessity of the vote for women to protect themselves from greedy capitalists. Anna Howard Shaw wrote: “Around me I saw women overworked and underpaid, . . . not because their work was inferior, but because they were women.” Her solution to the situation was to remove the stigma of disenfranchisement.⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, industrialists also formed a voting bloc against woman suffrage.

In Nebraska, the degree of industrialization was nowhere near that of most eastern states, but more women were employed than ever before, and in a greater variety of jobs. Progressive reformers addressed these socio-economic changes with limited legal reforms

⁵³ The Students of the University of Nebraska, *The Sombrero* (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1874, 1881, 1900).

⁵⁴ Morgan, pp. 49-50.

⁵⁵ Albert Watkins, *History of Nebraska, From the Earliest Explorations to the Present Time with Portraits, Maps and Tables*, vol. 3 (Lincoln: Western Publishing and Engraving Company, 1913), p. 285.

⁵⁶ Shaw, p. 151.

for women, such as the right to control their own wages, to enter into contracts, to sue, to testify in court, and to claim their children and property in divorce settlements. Many of these rights had been recognized in Nebraska in the 1870 Married Woman's Property Act, championed by Governor Butler during the failed campaign for woman suffrage.⁵⁷

Equally important, women were entering politics in the state by the turn of the century. The state supreme court endorsed the election of a female school board member after women gained the school vote. Then in 1910, Gertrude Jordan ran for Cherry County treasurer and won. Her opponent refused to concede the seat to a woman, claiming that because she could not vote for the office, she was not qualified to fill the office. In *Jordan v. Quible*, the state supreme court upheld Jordan's right to hold the office of county treasurer, in spite of the fact she could not vote for herself.⁵⁸

The social, economic, and political changes occurring throughout the nation were changing the role of the family in society. The traditional views of the family were much slower to alter. Many felt threatened by the changes and tenaciously clung to the old ways of life, and the endangered roles of women. Again and again individuals arguing the pros and cons of woman suffrage reverted to the rhetoric of the delicate nature of women, and the ultimate damage to the family and to society which would be caused by allowing women into the male sphere of politics. An Omaha *Herald* editorial claimed, "should woman neglect her home to join the giddy turmoil of the world, either the

⁵⁷ Grimes, pp. 78-80; Morgan, p. 55; Othman Abbott, "Struggle for Woman's Rights in Nebraska," *Nebraska History*, XI (July-September, 1928), pp. 152-4.

⁵⁸ Bayard Paine, "Decisions Which Have Changed Nebraska History," *Nebraska History*, XVI (1935); See *Crosby v. Cones* (15 Neb 444) and *Jordan v. Quible* (86 Neb 417).

propagation of the world would ultimately cease, or the mortality of children . . . would multiply infinitely.”⁵⁹

Joseph Gusfield suggests that status politics are by nature symbolic struggles: “As status groups vie with each other to change or defend their prestige allocation, they do so through symbolic rather than instrumental goals.” During the progressive era, Gusfield found ‘mugwumps’—college-educated men of old families—lost status to people they saw as morally inferior.⁶⁰ Because mugwumps maintained the political power, it was this group the woman’s movement had to turn to for acceptance. Increasingly suffragist rhetoric pandered to the old stock, middle class fear of the new immigrant cultures, and of social change. By the early twentieth century, the woman’s movement had been transformed. At Seneca Falls the movement had begun with the most idealistic of goals: human and civil rights, modeled on the declaration of independence, extended to women. By the turn of the century, in order to achieve their goal, suffragists appealed to the nativism, racism, and elitism of the men holding power by arguing that a female vote would counter the undesirable votes of new immigrants in the North, and African-Americans in the South.⁶¹

In the late nineteenth century, several western states passed woman suffrage. Nebraska’s neighbors to the west did so: Wyoming and Colorado, along with California

⁵⁹ *Omaha Herald*, October 1, 1882, p. 2, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁶⁰ Gusfield, pp. 21-23.

⁶¹ Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), pp. 43-57; Steven M. Buechler, *The Transformation of the Woman Suffrage Movement: The Case of Illinois, 1850-1920* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1986), pp. 26-8; Morgan, pp. 72-7.

and Idaho in the nineteenth century, and in the twentieth century Kansas and the Dakotas completed a horseshoe surrounding Nebraska. Passage by the territorial legislature in 1855 would have been the least complicated means of bringing woman suffrage to Nebraska; no popular vote would have been necessary. But Nebraska was not as sparsely populated, nor as unevenly male populated, as Wyoming, the first United States territory to pass woman suffrage. Failure by the territorial government to enfranchise women created the need to turn to the electorate for acceptance. It is one of the odd features of the woman's movement, and an apparent paradox of democracy, that voting and civil rights can be legally withheld from one group of people by another. The definition of democracy has changed dramatically since the nation's inception as the electorate was enlarged again and again. When African-American males were enfranchised by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, no campaign was necessary because ratification was made a prerequisite not only for the reconstruction of the southern states, but for the admittance of western states, including Nebraska. Even the voting rights movement for southern blacks in the 1950s and '60s did not require those with the vote to approve the expansion of the electorate. Never before, or since, has such a large group of Americans had to beg for admittance to the exclusive club of the electorate.⁶² After being blackballed in the campaigns of 1871 and 1881, Nebraska suffragists entered a period of hopeful waiting in the decades surrounding the turn of the century. It was 1913 before a new attempt to pass a suffrage amendment was embarked upon in the state of Nebraska.

⁶² Passage of the Twenty-sixth Amendment in 1913 gave eighteen to twenty-one year olds the right to vote only after acceptance by the existing electorate; there was no campaign on the scale of the suffragist's.

III

Twentieth-Century Campaigns

By 1913, suffrage campaigning had gone through extensive changes.

Increasingly, suffragists appealed to the anti-immigrant fears of the powerful middle class. The level of organization within the state and the country increased dramatically with the aid of modern transportation and communication. Other changes were brought about by divisions at the national level, which shifted the focus of many suffragists away from the state campaigns, and toward a national amendment, and by the United States' declaration of war against Germany in 1917. All of these changes helped to transform Nebraska's suffrage movement in the twentieth century.

Two major campaigns occurred in the decade following 1910: an amendment was submitted to Nebraska voters in 1914; and, after the amendment failed by 10,000 votes, a partial suffrage bill passed both houses of the Nebraska legislature. Only an amendment to the state constitution could grant suffrage in the state elections, but in 1917, the Nebraska legislature granted women the right to vote in municipal and presidential elections. The act did not go into effect, however, until 1919 due to a referendum filed with the Secretary of State by the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage. In spite of the fact that Nebraska's women did not vote in the 1918 election for any office except the school board, many general histories of the suffrage movement have counted

Nebraska as a suffrage state after 1917, and counted Nebraska's electors as among those with a female constituency.¹

The twentieth century opposition continued to rely on the rhetoric of woman's place in society in arguments against giving women the vote. In a letter to the editor of the *Omaha Bee*, one citizen argued that in the suffrage state of Colorado, women had lost status since gaining the vote. Thirty-three per cent fewer women were married in the suffrage state than in Nebraska, and twenty-five per cent more were divorced, according to the author, a member of the newly created Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage.² Clergy members of another anti-suffrage organization published advertisements and pamphlets claiming that suffrage nullified the "ultimate purity and happiness" of women because it contradicted the basic teachings God laid forth in the Bible.³

¹ See for example, National American Woman Suffrage Association, *Victory! How Women Won It: A Centennial Symposium, 1840-1940* (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1940), p. 129, 162; Anne and Andrew Scott, *One Half the People: The Fight for Woman Suffrage*, ed. Harold Hyman (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1975), p. 167; David Morgan, *Suffragists and Democrats: The Politics of Woman Suffrage in America* (Michigan State University Press, 1972), p. 114; Doris Stevens, *Jailed for Freedom* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), p. 281; Mari Jo and Paul Buhle, *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1978), p. 415. Even the suffragists, in campaigns for a federal amendment after 1917, portrayed Nebraska women as influencing presidential electors. Elizabeth A. Taylor, *Citizens at Last: The Woman Suffrage Movement in Texas* (Austin: Ellen C. Temple Press, 1987), p. 47 reprints a suffragist map from 1919 showing Nebraska as having partial suffrage in 1917 and counting Nebraska's electors as those with female constituency. Other than the Nebraska suffrage histories (Wilhite and Coulter), only Thomas Jablonsky's *Home, Heaven, and Mother Party: Female Anti-Suffragists in the United States, 1868-1920* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishers Inc., 1994), p. 28-9 correctly relates the story of Nebraska's enfranchisement. Even general histories of Nebraska ignore the complexity of the enfranchisement of Nebraska women. Sheldon's *Nebraska: The Land and the People* never mentions the 1917 act, and Olson's *History of Nebraska* 1st edition never mentions woman suffrage, while Olson and Naugle's 3rd edition, not mentioning the partial suffrage act of 1917, incorrectly states, "women would have to wait until the 1920s to acquire the vote."

² "Letter to the Editor," *Omaha Bee*, August 24, 1914, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³ Nebraska Men's Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, "Nebraska Clergymen Condemn Suffrage," *Omaha*, 1914, (New Haven: Research Publications, Inc., 1977 no. 9329), p. 8.

Despite opposition by pietistic religious leaders and society matrons, the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association blamed the repeated failures in the legislature and among Nebraska voters on the uninformed immigrant. The president of the Nebraska Suffrage Association in the early 1910s, Dr. Inez Philbrick, vowed that if her home city of Lincoln were to poll the “best element,” suffrage would pass.⁴ At the national level, Dr. Anna Howard Shaw led the National Association with blatant sentiments of the superiority of the white Anglo-Saxon American: “There is not a color from black to white, from red to yellow, there is not a nation from pole to pole, that does not send its contingent to govern American women.” The fact that their right to vote was being denied by people these women felt socially superior to was a bitter pill to swallow. Following the South Dakota vote of 1890, Anna Howard Shaw wrote, “the fact that our Cause would be defeated by ignorant laborers newly come to our country was a humiliating one to accept.”⁵

In order to overcome the combined opposition of the social conservatives and the immigrant, the Nebraska Suffrage Association began to organize systematically from the state level down to the local. Each chapter was reorganized for greater efficiency, especially at the county level. In preparation for the 1914 state convention, each county delegation was asked to study the source of anti-suffrage sentiment in its own county and

⁴ “Heart to Heart Talk With Nebraska Suffragists,” *Omaha Herald*, August 1914, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers. Philbrick was also involved in the eugenics movement, birth control to improve the race.

⁵ Shaw, p. 248-52, 313.

suggest what campaign method seemed most effective to overcome it. Enrollment increased due to door-to-door campaigns for recruits and funds.⁶ Special events helped raise funds, such as the pig campaign and dollar march of 1915. In country districts, suffragists solicited a pig from every farmer for every year until suffrage became a reality for the women of the state. The dollar march began at the state convention in Iowa, raising money in a chain letter style which would network across the state.⁷

Furthermore, the campaigners began to receive training provided by the National Association and the suffrage states. A suffrage school, funded by the National Association, opened to train state suffragists.⁸ Helen Eacker of Kansas addressed the Nebraska suffragists with the warning to dress for success because “you cannot convince a man, even with the best of arguments if your gown sags.”⁹

Making such extensive organization possible were the advances in transportation and communication available by the early twentieth century. Automobiles especially broadened the suffrage campaign. The itinerary for one tour covered fifteen towns in southeast Nebraska in only four days.¹⁰ The ability to spread ideas and information is key to the success of any movement.

⁶ Draper-Smith, President Nebraska Suffrage Association, to county organizations, November 17, 1914, “correspondence” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷ E. M. Barkley, Report of Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association, 1915, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁸ National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) to Mrs. Harrison, 1913?, “correspondence” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; “Plan Canvass for Suffrage Campaign,” *Omaha News* May 23, 1917, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁹ “Good Clothes Essential to Suffrage Campaign,” *Omaha News*, December 6, 1912, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹⁰ “Suffragists Complete Tour: Four Days Campaign Ended at Milford Last Night,” *Lincoln Journal*, August 28, 1914, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

Nebraska's suffragists did not work in a vacuum; national and international events also shaped and reshaped the suffrage movement in the state. Within the national suffrage movement, a growing faction demanded that state campaigns be abandoned in favor of the national amendment, or the Susan B. Anthony amendment, as it was generally called by suffragists. A Federal Suffrage Committee was created within the National American Woman Suffrage Association, chaired by Nebraska's own Clara Colby. Eventually, this faction became an independent organization, the Federal Suffrage Association, led by Colby, Olympia Brown, and Francis Minor. The association also fought for woman suffrage through already existing amendments and through new interpretations of the constitution.¹¹

Alice Paul also broke from the National American Woman Suffrage Association after being expelled from the convention in December 1913. Her Congressional Union not only differed from the NAWSA in its focus on the federal amendment, but also because Paul's tactics were considerably more militant than those acceptable to the more mainstream association. The Nebraska suffragists, and many other state organizations, followed the lead of their national organization by denouncing "the action of picketing and all forms of militancy."¹² Where NAWSA leaders carefully avoided attacking either major political party, Paul and her organization brazenly denounced the Democrat's lack

¹¹ Brown, pp. 48, 58-9. The National Woman Suffrage Organization and American Woman Suffrage Organization had split in the nineteenth century over the question of support for black suffrage while woman suffrage continued to be denied. The two organizations reunited in 1890 to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

¹² Minutes of Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association Convention, November 4, 1917, "writings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

addition to its 1916 platform of a plank favoring woman suffrage, but only state-by-state. In 1917, Paul's Congressional Union became the National Women's Party.¹³

Also pushing the major parties to greater recognition of the issue was the growing number of female electors due to successes in the western states. By 1918, women had primary suffrage in thirty-six states that controlled 339 electoral votes.¹⁴ In that year's elections, Republicans gained control of both houses of congress, thus setting the stage for the passage of the national suffrage amendment the next year.

International forces also brought the suffrage movement more favorable attention. The entrance of the United States into World War I in 1917 brought thousands of women to the defense of the nation through factory work and voluntary associations.¹⁵ In Nebraska, the Women's Commission reported to the National Council of Defense that 300,000 women had registered as volunteers and eighty-five had taken the oath of loyalty to the constitution.¹⁶ The contributions of these women served to refute the charges that suffrage advocates were less than fully patriotic. Their participation in the peace movement before the war had given rise to the charge, but female support of the war effort did much to lessen its impact.

World War I had other social effects: anti-German sentiments and a need to conserve grain resources helped push the long-awaited prohibition amendment through congress and three-quarters of the states. Nebraska passed a prohibition act in 1917, mere

¹³ Morgan, pp. 90-141.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Annie L. Miller, Secretary of Woman's Commission of Nebraska, report to National Council of Defense, n.d., 1917?, "correspondence" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

weeks after the declaration of war. The brewery interests, long-time opponents of suffrage, were by no means destroyed by the passage of prohibition, but they were considerably weakened.¹⁷

In the meantime, in Nebraska, the suffrage movement continued its long struggle through two major campaigns in 1913-14 and 1917-19. The process began in 1911 due to a progressive era reform designed to bring greater power to the people of the state, the initiative. The Nebraska suffragists saw in the initiative the power to by-pass a legislature, specifically the senate, which was highly reluctant to deal with the controversial issue of woman suffrage.

At the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association annual convention in December 1912, delegates voted to approach a new amendment campaign from two fronts: an initiative campaign to add the issue to the 1913 ballot, and simultaneously to lobby the legislature to submit a state constitutional amendment to the voters in 1914. If either tactic failed, the amendment could still be submitted by the other approach. The retiring president, Dr. Inez Philbrick of Lincoln, opposed this method and led an attempt to concentrate only on the initiative in 1913, but the new president, Emily Draper-Smith, and her Omaha friends carried the vote for a dual process.¹⁸

The initiative process was considered a superior tactic to the legislative method of achieving a constitutional amendment. Some leaders of the Nebraska Woman Suffrage

¹⁷ Sheldon, p. 949.

¹⁸ "To Submit Suffrage Amendment to the People in 1913," *Omaha News*, December 6, 1912, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

Association were convinced that the legislative method would never lead to passage, “as our constitution requires a majority of all votes cast at the election to carry a question so submitted. An impossibility.”¹⁹ Furthermore, between 1876 and 1906, only one out of twenty-three proposed amendments received the required constitutional majority to pass. One Nebraska state supreme court justice declared, “it would seem under the construction adopted, it will be almost, if not quite, impossible to change the present constitution, however meritorious may be the amendment proposal.”²⁰

Therefore, the association focused most attention on the initiative process which required only fifteen per cent of the last gubernatorial vote, from two-fifths of the counties, with no county falling below five per cent. Once sufficient signatures had been collected, the issue would be placed on the next ballot and would require only thirty-five per cent of the total vote and a majority of those voting on the issue.²¹

The suffragists had a July 1, 1914 deadline to collect the required number of signatures for the November ballot. The election was considered a crucial time to submit the issue because no other major issues were planned for submission, particularly no issues dealing with prohibition.²² By the annual convention in December of 1913, the

¹⁹ Viola H. Harrison, Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association correspondence secretary, to Clara Savage of NAWSA, February 22, 1915, “correspondence” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²⁰ Robert D. Miewald, *Nebraska Government and Politics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), pp. 19-20. Nebraska legislators attempted to address this problem in 1906 with the Party Circle Law which allowed the state party conventions to register a vote for or against a pending amendment with a simple “x” in the circle on the ballot. The Nebraska state supreme court declared this process unconstitutional in 1918, but it helped pass nine out of fifteen proposed amendments, one of which was the initiative and referendum.

²¹ Viola H. Harrison, Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association correspondence secretary, to Clara Savage of NAWSA, February 22, 1915, “correspondence” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²² Mary H. Williams of Kenesaw, Nebraska, correspondence secretary, to Anna Howard Shaw, December 10, 1912, “correspondence” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

Nebraska suffragists reported to the national leadership that, “we find our petition of the required forty thousand voters about half secured, but with few counties fully organized . . . that must be pushed if we are to win in November, 1914—and we are.”²³

The Nebraska suffragists secured enough signatures to ensure a suffrage amendment would appear on the ballot in 1914, and then turned to an intensive organization and campaign effort at the county level to secure the passage of the amendment. Help came to the Nebraska suffragists in the three months before the election from not only the National Association, but also from surrounding states. Experienced organizers with rural campaign experience were sent to Nebraska by the NAWSA. Nebraska suffragists appealed to such notables as Jane Addams for speaking tours addressed to Nebraska’s factory workers.²⁴

Despite the outside aid and rush for organization, the amendment had to win a majority of votes cast on the amendment in order to carry. While the issue failed by over 10,000 votes, it is also obvious that the possibility of passage was becoming a reality in Nebraska: of over 191,000 votes cast, the margin of failure was only five per cent of the total vote.²⁵

Furthermore, while the issue passed mainly in counties with smaller total populations, it failed in the more heavily populated counties by very small margins. Of the forty-one counties which carried the issue, seventy-one per cent had populations

²³ Viola H. Harrison, Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association, to Mrs. Mary Ware Dennett, New York City, NAWSA, December 17, 1913, “correspondence” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²⁴ Ibid.; Emily Barkley to Jane Addams, September 23, 1914, “correspondence” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²⁵ Sheldon, p. 892-3n.

below ten thousand; of twenty-two counties with populations below five thousand, only seven failed to pass woman suffrage. In the more settled, urban, and populated counties, the issue failed by very small margins. In Douglas County, by far the most heavily populated region of Nebraska with a total population of 168, 546 in the 1910 census, the proposition failed by only 168 votes. The second most populated region, Lancaster County, actually passed the amendment by a comfortable margin, 1,531 to 1,101.²⁶

These statistics held true for the nation as well. Nebraska rejected woman suffrage in 1914 along with four eastern states; only the less populated, newer states of Montana and Nevada passed woman suffrage. Despite the five failures, though, there was a large minority favoring suffrage ranging from thirty-five to forty-six per cent in the eastern states.²⁷ The day of nation-wide woman suffrage was fast approaching.

But did suffrage really fail in Nebraska in 1914? Allegations were raised by a number of government officials, including the state's Attorney General, that the vote was tainted by fraudulent returns. Many of the votes were not tallied, according to these rumors, but no recount bill could pass the legislature because "interests" blocked the attempt. The general assumption of the suffragists was that those interests were the brewers.²⁸

With the chance of a recount blocked and an uncooperative legislature, the

²⁶ "Vote by Years on Constitutional Amendment for Extension of the Suffrage," "writings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; *Nebraska Blue Book*, pp. 752-4.

²⁷ Morgan, pp. 90-114.

²⁸ "Says Nebraska Carried and Was Counted Out," (*Lincoln Star?*), July 1, 1916; "Evidence of Foul Play Against Suffrage Piles Up," (*Lincoln Star ?*), n.d., "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; "Should Have Carried," *Suffrage Messenger* II, (July 1, 1916), p. 1; Wilhite, p. 159.

suffrage association had to turn its attention to the next best possibility for passage, a new initiative. However, Nebraska law mandated a three year waiting period before the issue could be resubmitted by initiative. Because Nebraska elections were biennial, the next initiative could not be submitted until 1918. In the meantime, the suffragists prepared through door-to-door recruitment and capital campaigns. They also continued to work the legislature every session.²⁹

The legislative lobbying led to limited success in 1915 with voting privileges for tax-paying women, on bond issues only, and the presentation of a municipal suffrage bill in the Nebraska legislature.³⁰ The House committee passed the bill unanimously with the support of William Jennings Bryan and the popular circuit preacher, Billy Sunday. The House passed and delivered the bill to the Senate, where it was defeated. Senators explained their negative votes to a Lincoln journalist: the issue was too important for legislative action; the voters had rejected female suffrage in 1914; and the wishes of the voters needed to be gauged.³¹ Not one gave as cause for his vote that women should not vote. The issue was becoming less moral, and more political.

The suffragists began to organize support for the 1918 initiative. Believing the “most influential and public spirited Nebraska women were . . . organized in Clubs[, t]he State Federation [of Club Women] was . . . the most powerful body of organized women

²⁹ Harrison, Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association, to Clara Savage, NAWSA, February 22, 1915, “correspondence” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³⁰ No title, *Nebraska Journal*, January 29, 1915, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³¹ “Municipal Suffrage Bill Recommended to Pass,” *Omaha Bee*, March 2, 1915; “Suffrage Bill Defeated,” *Lincoln News*, March 10, 1915, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

in the State.”³² Grace Mason Wheeler, a prominent member of the Nebraska Suffrage Association, began actively courting the Club endorsement during speaking engagements which took place each year from 1913 to 1915. In 1916 she asked NAWSA president Carrie Chapman Catt, an Iowa native, to address the Club women. Though the Federation never openly endorsed female suffrage, “a great number of their women are with us.” As were the State Teacher’s Union, Socialists, and “Labor people.”³³

The growing acceptance of the enfranchisement of women began to have an impact in national and state political party organizations. The progressives of both parties urged the inclusion of woman suffrage planks, especially George Norris among the Republicans. In 1911 the Nebraska Republican Party adopted woman suffrage as a plank, but that plank disappeared following the 1914 initiative defeat. The national party accepted a similar plank in 1916, but refused to endorse the national amendment.³⁴

Many Democrats also began to rethink their position on woman suffrage. Though traditionally the party of social conservatism, Democrats gained the White House in 1913 for only the third time since the Civil War. The desire to maintain dominance forced

³² Grace Mason Wheeler to Carrie Chapman Catt, August 18, 1916, “correspondence” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³³ Mary Williams, corresponding secretary of Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association, to Shaw, n.d., “correspondence” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers. The American Federation of Labor had supported woman suffrage since the 1890s.

³⁴ “Senator Norris Urges Planks: ‘Fundamental Rights Should Be Obvious to All Parties’ Declares Nebraskan,” *Woman’s Journal*, June 3, 1916, “clippings” file, Nebraska Woman Suffrage Papers; Emily Barkley to Boyd, NAWSA, March 28, 1916, and Williams to Shaw, December 1912, “correspondence” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

many Democrats whose sentiments were anti-suffrage to follow President Wilson's request that anti-suffrage activities cease.³⁵

Such political shuffling set the stage for the passage of partial woman suffrage by the Nebraska legislature in 1917, making the Nebraska Suffrage Association's plans for a 1918 initiative unnecessary. Progressive Republicans, Representative John N. Norton and Senator Charles Sandall, began the process with the simultaneous introduction of identical bills in both houses. H.R. (house roll) no.222 and S.F. (senate file) no.78 would amend section 1940 of the voter qualification clause and provide for separate ballots and ballot boxes for female voters. Separate ballots were necessary because the bill could only offer municipal and presidential votes—offices not created by the Nebraska constitution.

Both bills were sent to their respective committees on privileges and elections. The House committee was notably more favorable to its bill: the only proposed amendment asked for the addition of an "or her" to an uninclusive "his" in the wording of the new clause. The Senate committee, on the other hand, amended its bill by striking sections one and two of the bill in their entirety, leaving only municipal suffrage for Nebraska women. Senator Sandall decided to continue to push the bill and let the Democrats take the blame for its defeat.³⁶

³⁵ "Suffrage Bill Taking Its Course," *Omaha News*, March 16, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³⁶ "House Roll No. 222," "writings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; *House Journal*, 35th Session, 1917, pp. 127, 139, 218, 297, 331; *Senate Journal*, 35th Session, 1917, pp. 157, 165, 241, 417; "Suffrage Bill Taking Its Course," *Omaha News*, March 6, 1917; "Suffrage Bill Clipped of Wings," *Lincoln Daily Star*, February 28, 1917; "Suffrage Bill on General File," *Omaha News*, February 28, 1917; "Suffrage Bill to See Light of Day," *Lincoln Journal*, February 28, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

On the same day the Senate eventually killed the Sandall bill in committee, the House passed its twin and sent it to the Senate. The suffragists expected the Senate to be a stumbling block in the process, along with the unclear attitude of Governor Keith Neville on woman suffrage. Both hurdles were cleared on April 21, 1917 when the Governor signed the partial suffrage bill into law along with a prohibition bill.³⁷

How and why did Nebraska's staunchly anti-suffrage Senate suddenly decide to pass the Norton bill? The answer lies in the growing anti-German sentiments which marked American entrance into World War I just two weeks before the suffrage bill was signed into law. Under attack from many corners, the Senators of German descent were ready to make deals. An outspoken leader of the German Senators was President Pro Tempore John Mattes of Nebraska City. Mattes was also an outspoken opponent of woman suffrage. As chairman of the sifting committee, Mattes killed the Sandall bill by refusing to report it to general file. Senator Sandall turned to Lieutenant Governor Edgar Howard for aid, arguing "this is a question of too great importance to be smothered in committee." Howard ordered Mattes to release the bill, but Mattes replied, "I won't comply."³⁸

Pale with anger, Howard again ordered Mattes' compliance and stopped all business until he did so. The Senate floor addressed the stalemate in a twenty-one to twelve vote, overriding Lt. Governor Howard. The justification for the override was the

³⁷ "Suffrage and Dry Bill Signed," *Omaha News*, April 22, 1917; "Woman Suffrage Bill in Doubt," *Scotts Bluff Star Herald*, February 12, 1917; "Suffrage Bill Dies in Nebraska," *Minnesota Tribune*, March 29, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³⁸ "Senate Suffrage Bill Smothered," *Omaha News*, March 29, 1917; "Still Chance for Woman Suffrage," *Omaha News*, March 29, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

preservation of the jurisdiction and integrity of the sifting committee. Sandall attempted again to release the bill from Mattes' sifting committee, but the Senate denied the action, seventeen to fifteen.³⁹

Senator Mattes explained his actions: "No one can serve two masters successfully, and I believe the loss to womanhood and family will be greater than the gain to state and society." He went on to reject the idea that women would purify politics because no such phenomenon had occurred in Wyoming after thirty years of woman suffrage. Senator Mattes did not mention, however, the brewery he owned in Nebraska City, or the one his brothers owned in Des Moines, Iowa. The Brewer's Association and the general public consistently linked prohibition to woman suffrage; it is safe to assume Mattes did as well.⁴⁰

One week after Mattes killed the Sandall bill, war was declared on Germany, the country of his birth. Suddenly, the German-American community, its language, and loyalty to the United States came under question. Complicating matters, a bill to repeal the Mockett Law, an existing law mandating that schools offer German instruction if enough parents asked for it, was making its way through the legislature and was expected to pass.

The Norton suffrage bill passed the House and was presented to the Senate at this point. Mattes and his faction could again kill the bill by refusing to release it from the

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ *Senate Journal*, 35th Session, 1917, pp. 1037-8; *Portrait and Biographical Album of Otoe and Cass Counties, Nebraska*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Chapman Brothers, 1889) pp. 441-2.

sifting committee, but the rest of the Senate could vote for its release. In the previous vote for release, two pro-suffrage senators had voted against release and one had not been present. If these were added to the fifteen who had supported release of the Sandall bill, the Norton bill could be forced into general file.

The school language law became the suffragist's vehicle to success, much to the surprise of their opposition. One leading suffrage opponent observed: "We were all very busily engaged in other work when we learned that this bill for presidential suffrage had been introduced in the House and the Senate . . . we felt secure because we did not think the legislature would dare to pass a bill so soon" after the voters rejected the amendment in 1914.⁴¹ The executive committee of the Nebraska anti-suffragists spoke in Lincoln three or four times before returning to their homes assured that the suffrage bill had been killed, only to discover a few days later that the partial suffrage bill had passed.⁴² In a deal with the German senators, suffragists helped kill the Mockett Law repeal bill in exchange for the German's support of suffrage.⁴³ Passage made Nebraska the nineteenth state offering full or partial suffrage to women; half of all U.S. states and 172 presidential electors had female constituencies.⁴⁴ Unfortunately, Nebraska women did not vote until the 1920 presidential and state elections, and the 1919 municipal elections.

⁴¹ *Barkely v. Pool*, testimony, pp. 5535-7, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ "Still Chance for Woman Suffrage," *Omaha News*, March 29, 1917; "Germans Dupe Woman," *Hamilton O News*, July 28, 1917; "We Should Worry," *Lincoln Daily Star*, n.d., 1918?, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony p.5538, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴⁴ "Suffrage Marches On," *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, April 30, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

After saving the school language law with suffragist support, Senator Mattes pulled a double-cross. Aided by the German-American Alliance and the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, he initiated a referendum movement. With ten per cent of the legal (last gubernatorial) vote, or 29,147 signatures, and five per cent of the vote from two-fifths (38) of the state's counties, the anti-suffragists could suspend the new law until it could be placed on the ballot at the next general election in 1918. Though anti-suffragists swore in a court of law there was no connection between their referendum and the German coalition in the state legislature, the man they turned to for aid in preparing the petitions, Senator John F. Moriarty of Omaha, was closely allied with Senator Mattes and the other anti-suffragists and anti-prohibitionists.⁴⁵

Over the next four months, anti-suffragists canvassed the state, and eventually collected 32,986 signatures representing five per cent of fifty-four counties.⁴⁶ It was a daunting task, requiring a massive organization effort carried out by the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage. In order to increase each petitioner's productivity, incentive was offered by the NAOWS at five cents per name. Unfortunately, greed often led to dishonesty as petitioners provided incomplete and untrue information to prospective signers. Many small towns reported dishonest practices among petition collectors who rode the morning train into town and quickly left

⁴⁵ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, p. 5548, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; Sheldon, p. 946-7n.

⁴⁶ "Germans Dupe Woman," *Hamilton O News*, July 28, 1917; "Anti-Suffragists Have Petition Ready," *Omaha Bee*, July 19, 1917; "Referendum Petition on Woman Suffrage Out," *Omaha World Herald*, June 6, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

town in the evening after their practices were questioned.⁴⁷ Suffragist activities did not go unquestioned either. Two young boys busy collecting signatures in downtown Omaha reported being harassed by two women who told the boys they ought to be arrested for working for a bunch of crooks.⁴⁸

On the July 24 deadline, anti-suffragists filed their petitions with Secretary of State Charles W. Pool. Pool filed the petitions, thus ending the hopes of many women to vote in the next election.⁴⁹ Instead, the male voters would decide the fate of the women. The Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association was not yet ready to concede defeat. During the campaign, the suffragists had planned to copy, list, and publish the names of the petition signers in their respective counties. Secretary Pool, however, refused to allow the petitions to be used for such tactics, though some believed the action was deserved. Within days of filing the referendum, the office of the Secretary of State received requests from the suffragists for copies of the petitions to authenticate the signatures. There had been widespread allegations during the referendum campaign of misleading and fraudulent signature collection.⁵⁰

The Nebraska Suffrage Association hoped to find enough evidence of improper collection to nullify the referendum and secure women's vote. The Secretary of State,

⁴⁷ "Get 5c for Each Referendum Petition Signer," *Omaha News*, June 10, 1917; "Suffrage Items," *Chadron Journal*, July 20, 1917; "Suffrage Referendum," *Nebraska City Press*, July 12, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴⁸ "Anti-Suffragist Workers Say Suffragists Threatened Them," *Omaha Bee*, July 13, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴⁹ "Pool Files Petition," *Omaha Bee*, August 16, 1917; "Petition Filed," *Brewster News*, July 27, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁵⁰ "Publish Names of Signers," *Oshkosh News*, June 6, 1917; "Cannot Copy Names on the Suffrage Referendum," *Beatrice Express*, June 26, 1917; "The Signing of Petitions," *Lincoln Journal*, July 26, 1917;

however, seemed very unwilling to allow for this possibility. The suffragists first did battle with Pool over eight names collected in the city of Norfolk. The eight men requested the removal of their names from the petition, but the Secretary of State refused, saying he did not think he had the authority to do so. The suffragists won that battle, and one week later the names were removed.⁵¹ The battle, though, was only the first minor skirmish in the war that followed. The final standoff would reach the state supreme court when Nebraska suffragists filed an injunction against the Secretary of State. Had Pool been willing to review the petitions for fraud and had used his authority to deny the referendum, Nebraska women would not have had to wait two years to vote. His failure to do so seems to stem not from malice toward the suffrage movement, but from uncertainty over the limits of his authority. The initiative and referendum law provided no clear directions for review by the secretary of state.⁵² Furthermore, Pool was not a lawyer, but a journalist. He had co-founded and edited the Johnson County *Journal* for nearly forty years, and served as a state representative, before filling the office of secretary of state. Nor did he have any precedent for reference; the referendum was a very new tool and there had never been a challenge to the authenticity of a petition.⁵³

“Suffragists to Get Copy of 33,000 Names on Petition,” Omaha *World Herald*, August 23, 1917, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁵¹ “Try to Prevent Vote on Suffrage,” Lincoln *Star*, October 12, 1917; “Want Names Off Petition,” Kearney *Hub*, October 13, 1917; “Pool Return Petition,” Nebraska *City Press*, October 17, 1917, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁵² James E. Potter, “*Barkley vs. Pool: Woman Suffrage and the Nebraska Referendum Law*,” *Nebraska History* 69 (Spring 1988), p. 14.

⁵³ A review of the Johnson County *Journal* issues from 1917 and 1919 reveal very little attention paid to the suffrage issue at all. Three lines marked the passage of the limited suffrage act by the Nebraska legislature and five lines announced to Johnson County’s female residents they could now vote. “Legislature News,” *Johnson County Journal*, May 3, 1917, p. 1; “Women Get Right to Vote,” *Johnson County Journal*, March 13, 1919, p.1, Johnson County Historical Society, Tecumseh, Nebraska.

The transformation of the woman suffrage movement between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries made the issue more acceptable to many Americans, often for less than ideal reasons: nativism, and anti-immigrant attitudes permeated the movement. The growing success of the suffragists began to threaten other segments of the population, particularly brewers, who used their considerable power and influence to block the extension of the franchise. Therefore, in 1917, when most general woman suffrage histories credit Nebraska with partial suffrage, Nebraska women were still denied the ballot. It would require one more massive campaign by the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association to finally secure political power for the state's daughters.

IV

Opposition

The extension of suffrage to a new and very large segment of the population implies the partial loss of one group's power to a new group. As the possibility of female suffrage became more real, those individuals most threatened by the shifting prestige organized against the suffragists and used every force at their disposal to stop the extension of the franchise. While the rhetoric of their campaign was overwhelmingly moral in tone, underlying that rhetoric was a power play.

The woman suffrage counter-movement has often been distorted by studies relying solely on the perspective of the suffragists. Particularly women of the anti-suffrage movement have been portrayed as mere puppets of the more powerful brewery and industrial interests, or as society matrons unaware of the difficulties faced by poor women. More recent studies of the anti-suffragists have revealed that the men's organizations were often mere subsidiaries to the women's organizations, and the female leadership, very much aware of the life faced by poor women, simply disagreed that the vote was the means of achieving change for women.¹ Nebraska's female anti-suffragists clearly fit this model.

Determining why individuals opposed the enfranchisement of women is less clear. Members of anti-suffrage organizations were not the only citizens opposed to the

¹ Manuela Thurner, "Better Citizens Without the Ballot: American Anti-Suffrage Women and Their Rationale During the Progressive Era," *Journal of Women's History* (Spring 1993), pp. 33-4.

extension of the ballot. Had thousands of politically unorganized Nebraska voters not been opposed to woman suffrage, no anti-suffrage organization could have stopped the amending of the state constitution. Suffrage failed to pass in Nebraska for many reasons, but most importantly because a large segment of the population supported the anti-suffrage associations. Opposition among the general population seems to have stemmed from certain religious and ethnic groups. Nebraska's anti-suffrage organizations in general were supported by the same groups. All were primarily concerned with the preservation of their culture and values.

Nineteenth century voters tended to identify with their religious and ethnic group because their cultural perspective and religious teachings formed shared values.² This trend continued into the early twentieth century as party affiliation continued to be heavily defined by religious affiliation.³ The values embraced by the Democratic Party included laissez-faire economics, personal liberty, and social conservatism. The party platform, therefore, consistently rejected prohibition, tariffs, and woman suffrage. In Nebraska, the Democratic coalition combined Catholics, German Lutherans, Southern migrants, and some wealthy.⁴ These groups then would have made up much of Nebraska's anti-suffrage vote.

² Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics 1850-1900* (New York: Free Press, 1970), pp. 7-34, 51.

³ Frederick C. Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics: The Germans of Nebraska, 1880-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), p. 66, see also pp. 79, 87, 115.

⁴ Robert Wallace Cherney, *Populist and Progressive in Nebraska: A Study of Nebraska Politics, 1885-1912* (Ph. D. diss., Columbia University, 1972), p. 385; Frederick C. Luebke, *Nebraska: An Illustrated History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), pp. 185-7.

Nationally, immigrant religious groups tended to be affiliated with the Democrats, the party of personal liberty. Although German sectarians tended to identify with the Republican ideology, about fifty-five per cent of German Lutherans and members of the German Reformed Church joined the Democratic Party. Native religious groups, Baptist, Methodist, Congregationalist, and Presbyterian, which tended to be more pietistic, voted overwhelmingly Republican, the party of purification, politically and morally.⁵ In turn-of-the-century Nebraska, these native religious groups made up about thirty-six per cent of the state's population.⁶

The religious group most cohesive in its rejection of woman suffrage and most overwhelmingly Democrat despite ethnic differences, was the Roman Catholic Church. Whether Irish, Polish, French, Dutch, Bohemian or German, Catholics voted Democrat in huge percentages.⁷ In 1906, over twenty-nine per cent of Nebraskans claimed affiliation with the Catholic church, by far the largest single denomination in the state.⁸ During the 1914 initiative campaign, the Nebraska Suffrage Association attempted to address the Catholic opposition by publishing a pamphlet with testimonials by Catholic priests favoring woman suffrage. A prominent Catholic lawyer among the opposition responded with his own pamphlet, "Lest Catholic Men Be Misled." He argued that a "good Catholic" would never support the movement because Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, president

⁵ Kleppner, p. 70; Cherney, p. 353-7. The sectarian, or splinter evangelical groups, tended to be pietistic, while the Lutheran and Reformed churches were more ritualistic.

⁶ *Nebraska Blue Book*, p. 759.

⁷ Kleppner, p. 70.

⁸ *Nebraska Blue Book*, p. 759.

of the NAWSA, “spurns all male authority—even St. Paul who she claimed enslaved women.” Nor would a “good Catholic woman” embrace feminism.⁹

Another Nebraska Catholic who joined the struggle against suffrage was Senator John F. Moriarty. A leading member of the Democratic Party, Moriarty served in the Nebraska senate in the 1911 and 1917 sessions.¹⁰ Moriarty created the petition used in the referendum to nullify the 1917 suffrage law and helped the anti-suffrage association secure the services of an experienced referendum organizer.¹¹

The most conservative of the Catholics, though, were the German Catholics. In response to the progressive era reforms, the German-American *Central-Verein*, a national organization, formed a union to reform society in its conservative mold. The union pledged to destroy the inroads of socialism and to work against those Catholics calling for greater Americanization of the church. “German Catholics, in particular, were convinced that the surest bulwark to the immigrant’s religion was the maintenance of his traditional cultural heritage against the forces of Americanization.”¹² The *Central-Verein*’s greatest concerns included the secularization of American society and the separation of church and state, but the maintenance of the traditional culture would lead the German Catholics to fight for the inclusion of their language in public schools, to battle against prohibitionists, and to maintain the traditional family structure and spheres

⁹ L.F. Crofoot, “Lest Catholic Men Be Misled,” November 2, 1914, n. p., “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹⁰ Obituary of John F. Moriarty, n. d. “clippings” file, *Omaha World Herald*, Omaha Public Library.

¹¹ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, p. 5541, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹² Philip Gleason, “An Immigrant Group’s Interest in Progressive Era Reform: the Case of the German-American Catholics,” *American Historical Review*, 73 (December, 1967), pp. 370-3.

of influence. To most Germans, politics should remain a male sphere.

Whether Catholic or not, in Nebraska the German culture was the largest non-English ethnic group. Germans made up nearly fifty-four per cent of the foreign born population of Nebraska, and over twenty-three per cent of the total population in 1910.¹³

During the referendum against the limited suffrage act of 1917, German-Americans were repeatedly blamed for organizing the petition drive.¹⁴ At the height of war hysteria, the use of anti-German rhetoric would play nicely for the suffragists to push the patriotic into the suffrage camp. The *Woman Citizen*, the national organ of the NAWSA, reported that the German-American Alliance had publicly stated its involvement in Nebraska's referendum to nullify woman suffrage.¹⁵ No conclusive records exist to prove whether Nebraska's German-Americans were truly involved in the anti-suffrage referendum campaign, but their biographer, Frederick Luebke, found that "most Germans in Nebraska were united in their opposition to woman suffrage and prohibition."¹⁶ Like many other Germans in the United States, Nebraska Germans saw in reform movements such as prohibition and woman suffrage a tool to destroy their traditional culture. Woman suffrage became connected to prohibition as a means to secure its passage. Furthermore, it was seen as a threat to German values as well as

¹³ Cherney, pp. 401, 403, 390; Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics*, pp. 1-15.

¹⁴ See for example, "The Teutonic Touch in Nebraska," *Woman's Journal*, August 25, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹⁵ "Germans Fighting Suffrage in Nebraska," *Woman Citizen*, June 30, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹⁶ Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics*, p. 50, 87, 115.

demoralizing to women who would be removed from their proper sphere.¹⁷ In the 1882 vote for a woman suffrage amendment, precincts with a German population of over fifty per cent rejected the amendment by a ten to one ratio. Overall, the amendment was rejected by two to one.¹⁸ In 1917, the passage of the woman suffrage bill was nearly foiled by the German-American coalition in the Senate led by Senator John Mattes of Nebraska City, owner and founder of Mattes' Brewery. The bill was saved only by a deal which passed suffrage to save a German language bill.¹⁹

German opposition to woman suffrage was therefore a true culture conflict; it was an attempt by the new immigrant stock to preserve their way of life threatened by the greater political power of the old stock, Anglo-Saxon, immigrant. The dual issues of woman suffrage and prohibition further developed the German self-consciousness as a minority group because of the group's cohesiveness in votes on these issues, just as attacks on language united the German community.²⁰ While woman suffrage was an important part of that struggle, its importance lies not so much in what it symbolized in terms of the family, but in its power as a tool in the passage of prohibition.²¹ That is not to say that the German population was without power. Prior to World War I, the German-Americans were very strong socially and politically. German newspapers had a huge circulation (there were fourteen in Nebraska and forty in the nation), the language

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 128-130; Luebke, *Nebraska* pp. 178-80; Thomas J. Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven, and Mother Party: Female Anti-Suffragists in the United States, 1868-1920* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishers Inc., 1994), pp. 65-7.

¹⁸ Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics*, p. 133.

¹⁹ See chapter two, p. 40-41.

²⁰ Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics*, pp. 140, 182-3.

²¹ Ibid., p. 124; Chemey, p. 1.

was taught in many grade schools, and the German-American Alliance provided for political organization. This organization was key in preventing the passage of prohibition in Nebraska for many years.²²

The movement to prohibit alcohol had a long history in the state. Advocates of prohibition argued that its passage would create “a social order universally congenial to entrepreneurial capitalism.”²³ During the constitutional convention of 1871, the prohibition amendment received thirty-seven per cent approval in spite of the fact that a major source of income for the state was agricultural products used in the production of alcohol. By the mid-1880s, a Prohibition Party had formed and offered candidates for governor and other offices. Prohibition sentiments grew steadily toward the turn of the century. But the growing popularity of the issue also caused greater controversy as Nebraska’s major political parties grappled with the issue, often dividing their constituencies. The Democrats were most adversely affected by prohibition in 1916 when the state party split because party progressives, led by William Jennings Bryan, formed a prohibition faction against the traditional anti-prohibition party.²⁴ Prohibition passed in Nebraska in 1917, and across the nation in the next year, due in part to United States entry into World War I. This occurred with the full support of the Nebraska suffragists. The 1917 state convention adopted a prohibition resolution: “whereas the conserving of all grains . . . is needed by our allies and vitally necessary to the winning of

²² James Clifton Child, *The German-Americans in Politics, 1914-17* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1939), pp. 7, 18-19; Sheldon, p. 918.

²³ John J. Rumbarger, *Profits, Power, and Prohibition: Alcohol Reform and the Industrializing of America, 1800-1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 7.

²⁴ Olson and Naugle, pp. 215, 228-9, 274-5, 277.

the war . . . BE IT RESOLVED, that the Nebraska Womans (sic) Suffrage Association in state convention assembled urges upon the United States Congress . . . the passage of . . . prohibition.”²⁵

Nor were German-Americans the only group opposed to prohibition. L. F. Crofoot, a leading anti-suffragist along with his wife, was also president of the Nebraska Prosperity League, a pro-liquor campaign organization.²⁶ Senator Moriarty’s work with the anti-suffragists during the petition drive may have been equally motivated by self-interest as Catholic conservatism. He was the attorney for many of Omaha’s saloon-keepers.²⁷ Many other immigrants, along with the Germans, saw prohibition as an attack on their culture—and woman suffrage as the weapon. Women waged prohibition battles throughout the country and in Nebraska. In 1873, Carrie Nation, the hatchet-wielding crusader, rallied the women of Lincoln who entered the saloons by the hundreds to pray and sing for the end of the evils of alcohol. It required a city ordinance to protect the barkeeps from the ladies. The Brewer’s Association, with many others including prohibitionists, believed that giving women the vote would result in prohibition. In Nebraska suffragist’s 1913 initiative campaign, the Brewers quietly spent large amounts of money advertising against the extension of the franchise.²⁸ The Association saw “the unreasoning interference of women” as one of the largest obstacles to “rational

²⁵ Minutes of Annual Nebraska Woman’s Suffrage Association, November 4, 1917, “writings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²⁶ Sheldon, p. 911.

²⁷ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, p. 5553, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²⁸ Governor’s Commission on the Status of Women, *Nebraska Women Through the Years 1867-1967* (Lincoln: Johnson Publishing Company, 1967), pp. 22-3; Eleanor Flexnor, *Century of Struggle: The*

temperance reform.”²⁹ Even after the passage of prohibition, many continued to see the breweries’ involvement in the petition drive to nullify woman suffrage as a “last ditch effort to repeal prohibition.”³⁰

The political power of the German-Americans and the Brewer’s Association was seriously curtailed when the United States joined the Great War. As xenophobia gripped the nation, anything associated with Germany became anathema. Both suffragists and anti-suffragists smeared their opposition with connection to German imports: anti-suffragists were portrayed as mere fronts for the brewery gangs; suffragists were in league with socialists.³¹ German-American political power decreased dramatically as their loyalty came under question, and the issues they had fought against for so long gained in popularity. The Democratic party adopted both prohibition and woman suffrage in 1918, causing a mass exodus by German-American voters until the 1920s.³² But there was nowhere else to turn.

Nebraska had fifteen breweries and one distillery in 1917, most of which were in Omaha. That city’s mayor, Jim Dahlman became the spokesman for the anti-prohibitionists.³³ Mayor Dahlman was the front man for the city’s political machine run

Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 307.

²⁹ “New Woman and the Temperance Problem,” *Yearbook of the United States Brewer’s Association* (New York: United States Brewer’s Association, 1912), pp. 178-9.

³⁰ “Brewery Gang Postpone Suffrage,” *St. Edward (Nebraska) Advance*, August 3, 1917, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³¹ Anne M. Benjamin, *A History of the Anti-Suffrage Movement in the United States from 1895 to 1920: Women Against Equality* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1991), pp. 180-90. See for example, Crofoot, “Lest Catholic Men Be Misled,” November 2, 1914, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³² Cherney, p. 336.

³³ Sheldon, pp. 907, 916.

by Tom Dennison and Frank Johnson. Johnson's predecessor, Edward Rosewater, published the *Omaha Bee*, a paper which tended to oppose women's participation in politics until Rosewater's death in 1906. The nineteenth century machine depended on alcohol, gambling, and prostitution. Female suffrage posed a clear threat to the machine.³⁴ The twentieth century machine did not take a clear stand on woman suffrage, although Dahlman, by now termed the "perpetual mayor," stated his favor for the extension of the ballot. Dahlman considered women as qualified as men to vote, but feared that women would usher in prohibition, the only reason, he claimed, that he would vote against the extension of the franchise.³⁵

The unorganized anti-suffragists of Nebraska therefore included a large segment of the population including German-Americans, Brewers, and others opposed to prohibition, Catholics and other ritualistic religions, immigrants, and the traditional Democrats. These segments of the state's population may not have had the time or money to donate to an anti-suffrage movement, but they were predisposed to vote against the woman suffrage amendments.

Other Nebraskans became politically motivated against woman suffrage. Ironically, most of them were women. The suffragist movement, unlike almost any other civil rights movement in history, was not a struggle between the powerful and the

³⁴ Potter, p. 12.

³⁵ Rosewater debated Susan B. Anthony at Boyd's Opera House in 1881 during the National Suffrage Convention. Orville D. Menard, *Political Bossism in Mid-America: Tom Dennison's Omaha, 1900-1933* (New York: University Press of America, 1989), pp. 72-5, 123-4.

powerless; it was not a struggle between men and women. Nor was it a class struggle.

The leadership of the anti-suffragists and pro-suffragists shared the same social class, and neither group encouraged participation by non-white or non-Protestant groups. The leadership of both groups tended to be college educated, white, middle to upper class, Protestant, and very socially active.³⁶

The fallacy that women opposed to suffrage were society butterflies, with no real concept of the hardships faced by less fortunate women, has been exposed as mere rhetoric, or misconception, of the suffragists. In fact, female opposition had embraced the twentieth century womanhood—the extension of women into the public realm—to almost the same degree as their sisters fighting for the ballot. The major difference between the two groups of women was the extent to which they believed women could effectively contribute in the *political* realm. It was the belief of the anti-suffragists that the ballot would only hamper women's unique contributions to society.³⁷

The longest-lived anti-suffrage organization, the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women, listed the many philanthropic, charitable, educational, and civic activities of its female members.³⁸ The nineteenth century anti-suffragist spokeswomen, Catherine Beecher and Sarah Josepha Hale, had

³⁶ Thurner, p. 37; Susan E. Marshall, "In Defense of Separate Spheres: Class and Status Politics in the Anti-Suffrage Movement," *Social Forces*, 65 (December 1980), p. 311.

³⁷ Thurner, pp. 33-34, 38, 44-5; Marshall, pp. 328, 337-8.

³⁸ The MAOFESW was founded in May 1895 in response to suffrage victories in the 1890s. A petition with twelve signatures effectively killed a municipal suffrage bill in the state legislature that year, spurring anti-suffragists in neighboring eastern states to organize. See Marshall, p. 330 and Benjamin, pp. 1-7.

argued that women's sphere was entirely domestic.³⁹ Twentieth century anti-suffragists had moved beyond the Victorian era of home and hearth, and joined the era of progressive activism. Mrs. Josephine Dodge, founder of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, worked many years with the Legal Aid Society and the National Federation of Day Nurseries. Very much aware of the plight of poor women, she encouraged her membership to continue work in social reform and charity, and discouraged a total focus on the home. The General Federation of Women's Clubs, by far the most socially active group of women in the nation, refused to endorse woman suffrage for many years. Like the anti-suffragists in general, many club women feared that the ballot would only hamper the work of the clubs.⁴⁰

The leadership of Nebraska's anti-suffragists shared the civic-mindedness of the national associations. When war was declared on Germany in April 1917, many of the women went to work for the country. Mrs. William A. Smith became Chairman of the National League for Women's Service, "a non-partisan, non-political war organization."⁴¹ The anti-suffragists believed that once women became politicized their ability to reform society would be impaired because they would no longer be disinterested parties. "Women in politics would destroy charity."⁴² Many female anti-suffragists believed that their social contributions were equal, if not superior, to men's political work, and the

³⁹ Catherine E. Beecher, *An Essay on Slavery and Abolition, with Reference to the Duty of American Females* (Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, 1837) pp. 99-105 quoted in Thurner, p. 49.

⁴⁰ Thurner, pp. 38-40, 43; Benjamin, p. 104.

⁴¹ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, p. 5530, Nebraska Suffrage Papers. Nebraska's suffragist leaders also went to work for the war effort. Sheldon, p. 954.

⁴² Crofoot, "Lest Catholic Men Be Misled," November 2, 1914, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; Thurner, pp. 40-42.

ballot, by placing greater responsibilities on women and by destroying their role as neutral, non-political parties, would destroy their unique contributions to society.⁴³

Furthermore, the suffragists' lack of civic spirit and selfishness made it "easier to believe in the fallacy that the vote will change all the evils of the world, than it is to give hours [of] . . . unheralded work toward the amelioration of the conditions of women, children, and the unfortunate."⁴⁴ Anti-suffragists proved their point by comparing philanthropic statistics in eastern states, where there was no female suffrage, and western states with female suffrage. They concluded the suffragists were "anti-female, anti-family, and anti-American."⁴⁵

It was these sentiments which led to the creation of anti-suffrage organizations in Nebraska. The first was founded in March 1914 following a visit to Omaha by national leaders of the anti-suffrage association. During the 1914 suffrage campaign, Josephine Dodge, president of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, traveled to Omaha, along with other noted personalities speaking both for and against the issue. Theodore Roosevelt and William Jennings Bryan spoke for the amendment. Mrs. J.W. Crumpacker, an anti-suffragist from Kansas, joined Dodge and two veteran campaigners sent by the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women to fight the amendment in a campaign the *Woman's Protest* claimed was funded by the Nebraska Men's League Opposed to Woman Suffrage.⁴⁶ Out-of-state anti-suffrage

⁴³ Thurner, pp. 48, 51.

⁴⁴ Mary Ellen Swift, "Suffrage for Women a Handicap in Civic Work," *Woman's Protest*, 3(August 1913), p. 3, quoted in Thurner, p. 42.

⁴⁵ Thurner, p. 43; Marshall, p. 336.

⁴⁶ Benjamin, pp. 110-18.

associations, despite the arrival of these few relatively unknown campaigners, were not particularly worried about the outcome of the vote. Nebraska, like other states with large German populations, could be relied on to reject suffrage, which it did.⁴⁷ Also working in favor of the anti-suffragists was the confrontational and controversial nature of the National Suffrage Association president, Anna Howard Shaw. During her visit to Omaha during the 1914 campaign, Shaw physically attacked a state judge who refused to allow Nebraska women to vote for the office of superintendent. The anti-suffragists widely publicized the event: “Here is a woman from an eastern state who knows nothing about Nebraska statutes, refuting in positive language the opinion of a man who has spent years in the practice of the law.”⁴⁸

With the help of the more experienced organizers, a meeting was held at the home of Mrs. E. P. Peck and the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage was founded. Peck, after a brief period as chairman of the executive committee, became president of the association in September, 1914; Mrs. L. F. Crofoot was named chairman of the executive committee; the secretary was Mrs. William Archibald Smith, and the treasurer Mrs. Charles C. George. Other board members included Mrs. N. P. Dodge, Jr., Mrs. R. T. Hamilton, Mrs. C. S. Elgutter, Mrs. T. J. Mackaye, Mrs. C. F. McGrew, Mrs. C. Peters, Mrs. John H. Butler, and Miss Jessie Millard.⁴⁹ Like anti-suffrage associations in other states, the Nebraska association was staffed and run by women, and its

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 112, 169-70.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 118.

⁴⁹ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, pp. 1244, 5530-59, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; “Mrs. E. P. Peck Elected Anti-Suffrage Chairman,” *Omaha Bee*, September 20, 1914, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

membership was overwhelmingly female. The role of men in the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage was, like in the national and other state associations, marginal.⁵⁰

The first organized male opposition to the Nebraska suffragists came from Omaha in 1914. The Nebraska Men's Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NMAOWS) published its manifesto in July and August of the 1914 petition campaign for a suffrage amendment. Signed by prominent community leaders, most of whom had wives and daughters leading the Nebraska anti-suffragists, the manifesto carried affidavits signed by the city's preachers from various denominations. The first publication of the men listed their arguments against the extension of the franchise to women. They began with political arguments: "Franchise is a privilege of government granted only to those to whom the government sees fit to grant it;" it is not a right inherent with birth, nor is it a right connected to taxation. To avoid a complete rejection of the principles of Thomas Jefferson, the authors further claimed that woman suffrage was inconsistent with the vision of the founding father's republican government. Female suffrage was never suggested in the original constitution because our founders feared "an excitable and emotional suffrage" would destroy the republic, a danger the authors foresaw, in a veiled reference to the fifteenth amendment and the huddled masses fueling the cities' political

⁵⁰ Thurner, pp. 35-36; Marshall, pp. 329, 331; *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, pp. 5530-59, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

machines, by the over-extension of the franchise to “highly questionable” segments of the population.⁵¹

The men’s arguments concluded with moral issues. Women did not belong in the political realm because their place was the “realm of sentiment, . . . love, . . . gentler, kinder and holier attributes, that make the name of wife, mother, and sister next to the name of God himself.”⁵² The next month’s publication was wholly moral in tone. Adolf Hult, reverend of Immanuel Lutheran, claimed that “Suffragism [is] Gripped by Feminism.” Citing radical feminists’ views, Reverend Hult claimed that the suffrage movement had been taken over by “lust and immorality.” Fearing that the fall of woman meant the fall of the world, Hult asked, “must men put on the iron glove?”⁵³ Other arguments were more logical, such as that of Reverend John Williams of St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, which drew a distinction between the mainstream suffragists and the radical fringe. Nonetheless, he argued that the failure of the mainstream suffragists to suppress or refute the radicals was subversive to Christian morality, marriage, and home life.⁵⁴ The effects of woman suffrage on home life was a pervasive theme throughout the manifesto. The ministers claimed the Victorian ideal of domesticity was pre-ordained by

⁵¹ NMAOWS, “Nebraska Clergymen Condemn Woman Suffrage,” Omaha, 1914 (New Haven: Research Publications, Inc., 1977, no. 9329), pp. 2-5.

⁵² Ibid., p.10.

⁵³ Reverend Adolf Hult, “Suffragism Gripped by Feminism,” “Manifesto” of NMAOWS, Omaha, 1914 (New Haven: Research Publications, Inc., 1977, no. 9330), pp. 1-6. Radical suffragists cited by the NMAOWS included Ellen Key, Rosa Mayrider, Edna Kenton, Inez Milholland, Bernard Shaw, Havelock Ellis, and Emma Goldman whose essay, *The Traffic in Women and Other Essays on Feminism*, called for radical social change. See Benjamin, pp. 145-6.

⁵⁴ Reverend John Williams, no title, “Manifesto” of NMAOWS, Omaha, 1914 (New Haven: Research Publications, Inc., 1977, no. 9330), pp. 6-7.

God: “God meant for women to reign over home, and most good women reject politics because woman suffrage will destroy society.” Reverend Burdick of Ponca, Nebraska quoted scripture to prove that God simply forgot to list the commandment, women shall not vote.⁵⁵

The men’s anti-suffrage association became the Men’s League Opposed to Woman Suffrage by the November, 1914 election. Advertising, especially in the Omaha papers, was their main tactic to defeat the suffrage amendment. Their position focused on two major arguments: the passage of woman suffrage would compel women to serve on juries; and, again quoting the radical feminists, suffrage was simply the first step for women who demanded “FREEDOM and POWER” in their attempts to change “HOME and MARRIAGE.”⁵⁶

The Men’s League was not the only male group advertising in Omaha’s newspapers in 1914. The Massachusetts Men Opposed to Woman Suffrage argued that women’s inability to enforce the laws they would help make was objectionable. Nor was it in the interest of the state to more than double the electorate with a segment of the population with so little experience in business.⁵⁷ The men’s anti-suffrage associations were much smaller, less organized, and frequently subordinate to the women’s anti-

⁵⁵ Reverend Dr. Joseph A. Lampe, no title, and T. J. Mackay, “The Home,” and C. A. Burdick, “Woman Suffrage is Contrary to the Teachings of the Bible,” “Manifesto” of NMAOWS, Omaha, 1914 (New Haven: Research Publications, Inc., 1977, no. 9330) pp. 8-12.

⁵⁶ “Facts Which Nebraska Women Must Face,” Omaha *World Herald*, November 2, 1914, p.8, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers. The suffrage amendment would not have automatically changed the jury duty law, which specifically said “male”, nor would non-registered voters have been called for jury duty. In fact, Nebraska women could only serve on juries with the permission of the presiding judge until the mid-1960s.

⁵⁷ No title, n.d., Papers of Mrs. Othman A. Abbott, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.

suffrage organizations. Nebraska's female anti-suffragists reported that the Men's League "helped with the responsibility" of the 1914 counter-campaign, but their only help with the referendum campaign was financial.⁵⁸

The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage organized in 1911. Its leadership was entirely female, and its membership was over ninety per cent female.⁵⁹ The state anti-suffrage associations, like Nebraska's Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, paid an annual fee to the national body which, in turn, helped support the state level.

Local organizations were also founded. For example, Fremont, Lincoln, and Grand Island, Nebraska had very strong local chapters of the anti-suffrage association. The state association in 1914 had an active membership of between 1200 and 1300, only about 100 of whom were active, dues paying members. Many of the associate members belonged to groups affiliated with the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, such as the Men's League and the Wage Earner's League.⁶⁰ The Wage Earner's League represented female wage earners: clerks, secretaries, teachers, etc. Founded by May McNamara and Alice Gilchrist in 1911, its five hundred members worked with the Nebraska anti-suffragists.⁶¹

Why were so many women opposed to voting? The only reasonable answer must be that they feared the loss of something valuable in gaining the ballot. While a few

⁵⁸ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, p. 5551, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁵⁹ The NAOWS peaked in 1916 with a membership of 350,000 and twenty-five state organizations. Thurner, pp. 35-6; Marshall, p. 329-30.

⁶⁰ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, pp. 5530-59, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5532-33.

noble souls may have organized to preserve the charity anti-suffragists claimed would be lost if women entered politics, it is much more likely that many were drawn by concern over a loss more personal, a loss in status. Many women clung to the Victorian ideal because they feared the social change which would result from suffrage would bring a loss of the privileges and protections which had been accorded the weaker sex. Suffrage, they argued, would cause men to deny dependent women support and would cause a dramatic increase in divorce rates, forcing many into the labor force. Political responsibilities would overburden already busy women, and the image of the new woman would destroy the respect and status of wives and mothers.⁶²

Nationally, the rhetoric of the power struggle waged by anti-suffragists portrayed a concern with status. Anti-suffragists tended to support the laissez-faire philosophy of wages arguing that women tend to be paid less because their labor was worth less. Most believed in the preferential hiring of male breadwinners and the removal of women from industrial work. Female anti-suffragists fought to maintain the status and wealth of the men who protected them by preserving the industrial system. Similarly they opposed unions, reformers, socialists, communists, and anarchists, arguing that suffrage would empower these groups by giving a larger political voice to industrial workers and the foreign-born, and eventually bring an end to democracy and capitalism in the United States. Other arguments foresaw the growing power of the lower classes as respectable women's fertility would suffer due to the added burden of suffrage. Poor women, whose

⁶² Marshall, pp. 336, 339-341. Marshall argues that many modern women would find the anti-suffragist arguments more visionary than the suffragist's predictions of curing social evils.

votes would be controlled anyway, would greatly increase the power of the lower class. Eugenics and birth control for race improvement also found a place in the rhetoric of anti-suffragists.⁶³

One compromise was offered to the status-conscious anti-suffragists in 1911. A limited suffragist movement founded in Philadelphia would pass suffrage, but only for some women: the educated, or the middle-to-upper class women. Ironically, both camps resoundingly rejected the limited suffrage compromise as narrow-minded, parochial, and undemocratic.⁶⁴ Half measures were clearly unacceptable to either side. However, in 1917 while the Nebraska Senate was debating the woman suffrage bill, rumors began to circulate that the bill would exclude a certain segment of the female population: farm women. In its final form, the Nebraska suffrage bill made no mention of the exclusion of any women.⁶⁵

The Nebraska anti-suffragists seemed to share the views of the national organization. While active in the public domain, the women shied away from political work, even to stop the passage of suffrage. Mrs. William Archibald Smith reported her attitudes about working for Nebraska's Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage: "I was elected the first secretary of the organization and took the work I must say at first rather unwillingly because I did not want to become involved in political work, . . . [but] there

⁶³ Ibid., pp. 333-4, 342-5; Anastasia Sims, "Beyond the Ballot: The Radical Vision of the Anti-Suffragists," *Votes For Women! The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee, the South, and the Nation*, ed. M. S. Wheeler (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), pp. 105-28.

⁶⁴ Benjamin, pp. 147-51.

⁶⁵ "The Farm Woman," n. d., *Omaha World Herald*, and "Nebraska Women Still Hopeful," April 7, 1917, unknown source, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers. There is no proof of the rumor in the Senate record.

was a demand among a large majority of women . . . that we did not want to enter political life, that there should be an organization which would publicly express our opposition. . . . there was a principle involved.”⁶⁶ Such attitudes are key to an examination of the signature collection process because most of the women refused to carry the petitions themselves. Comparatively, during the suffragists 1914 initiative campaign, nearly all petitioners were female members of the Nebraska Suffrage Association. One anti-suffragist claimed the suffragists did not have to hire help because, “they have a great deal more time to spare than we have.”⁶⁷ The Nebraska anti-suffragists relied almost completely on hired circulators outside Omaha where there were nearly no women circulators. One exception to this rule was Maud May who personally took charge of the campaign in Fremont and almost single-handedly secured the quota of signatures for Dodge County. In Omaha a few women, particularly the anti-suffrage leadership, did circulate petitions. Mrs. C. C. George, treasurer of the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, claimed she “circulat[ed] petitions, not privately at all, but taking them down—for instance to the packing houses” and to several banks and mercantiles. Most of the circulators, however, were not loyal anti-suffragists, but men who needed to make money.⁶⁸

Like the national anti-suffragists, Nebraska anti-suffragists also had connections to moneyed interests. Among the membership of the women’s and men’s leagues were

⁶⁶ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, p. 5534-5, 5547, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5559.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 5550, 5557-9, 1249-50.

names associated with big business, particularly in Omaha: president of the electric company; grocers, seven bank presidents, numerous lawyers, the president of the Omaha Gas Company, and railroad and other mass transit company executives. Capitalists and industrialists, along with their wives and daughters, made up the leadership of the Nebraska anti-suffragists.⁶⁹ However, the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage categorically denied any fraternization: “the Nebraska association was wholly responsible for . . . themselves. . . . [they] initiated, conceived, and carried through the referendum alone.”⁷⁰

Nor would anti-suffragists admit any connection to the liquor interests. The treasurer of the anti-suffragist association claimed, “it is just as unfair to accuse the association of being supported by the saloons and the vice interests as it is to make the suffrage association responsible for such women as Rose Pastor Stokes and Vardaman, and LaFollette’s actions.”⁷¹ No analysis of the Nebraska petitions was ever attempted for connections to liquor interests, but in Ohio an analysis revealed strong ties to saloon-keepers and wet counties. In North Dakota, a dry state, the referendum attempt failed miserably. In every state suffrage campaign, some link to the liquor interests was charged against the anti-suffragist organizations.⁷² Nebraska had only been dry a few months when the referendum was initiated, so “liquor organizations [were still able to]

⁶⁹ Coulter, pp.127-34; Jane Jerome Camhi, *Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994), p. 108. See NMAOWS “Nebraska Clergymen Condemn Woman Suffrage,” Omaha, 1914 (New Haven: Research Publishers, Inc., 1977, no. 9329), p. 11 for member list of men’s league.

⁷⁰ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, p. 5547, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5552; Stokes and Vardaman were radical feminists.

⁷² Benjamin, pp. 170-90.

muster considerable strength.”⁷³ Many ex-saloon keepers and Germans were among the circulators or allied with the anti-suffragists for prohibition reasons according to some Nebraska newspapers.⁷⁴ The Nebraska anti-suffragists probably did not seek an alliance with the anti-prohibitionists, but the shared goals would have naturally brought those seeking to legalize alcohol into the anti-suffragist’s camp. The same is true of industrialists. Men and women who expected their status and income to decline because of the growing power of women would be more likely to join with the anti-suffragists.

By 1917 when the woman suffrage law passed in Nebraska, the state’s anti-suffrage association was in full force. Throughout the state, but especially in the largest cities of Omaha and Lincoln, the anti-suffragists had recruited, organized, and raised funds through teas, luncheons, balls at luxurious hotels, and junior auxiliaries at colleges. They set out to educate the public on the evils of suffrage through literature, advertising, public speaking, or even playing dirty on some occasions. The anti-suffragists broke into parades disguised as suffragists to make their opposition look foolish.⁷⁵

The Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage voiced the arguments of their national coalition. They appealed to those resistant to social change by evoking established social myths: political competition with men would lead to a loss of modesty and gentleness while forcing women to become more aggressive; suffrage would double divorce rates by causing discord within the home, and would destroy good wives and

⁷³ “Suffrage Referendum,” *Lincoln Journal*, June 23, 1917, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*; “Anti-Suffragists Gather Signatures for Referendum Petition,” *Omaha Bee*, July 11, 1917; “263 Circulators of Anti-Petitions,” *Omaha News*, February 15, 1918; “Antis to Renew Suffrage Fight,” *Omaha News*, April 22, 1917, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷⁵ Wilhite, p. 160; Marshall, p. 331; *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, p. 5535, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

mothers who would neglect the home; women would merely duplicate their husband's vote because they have no knowledge of government; and because of their physical inferiority, they would not be able to enforce the laws they would help create. Anti-suffragists also appealed to the nativist, racist, and class-based attitudes of early twentieth century society, but so did suffragists.⁷⁶ Nebraska anti-suffragists also appealed to the voters whose mandate against suffrage in 1914 had been cast aside by the 1917 legislature.

In a *World Herald* editorial following the passage of the limited suffrage law, the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage claimed that the suffragists harassed and intimidated the state legislature into passing the bill “over the veto of the people. This is the worst blow to representative government that our country has received. . . . Legislators forget that they represent the people, not the suffragists.”⁷⁷ Antis further warned, “that when a handful of women seek to set aside the verdict of the voters at the polls they make more enemies for their cause than they suspect.”⁷⁸

Nebraskans opposed to woman suffrage set out to prove that claim with the referendum petition of 1917. Due to the wide-spread charges of fraud in that campaign, however, they failed to prove anything. It remains unclear whether, in an official election, suffrage would have been added to the state constitution by the people in 1917.

⁷⁶ Marshall, pp. 335-6; Benjamin, p. 54; Sims, pp. 105-28; Louis R. Noun, *Strong-Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1969), p. 50-3.

⁷⁷ Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, editorial in *Omaha World Herald*, March 23, 1917, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷⁸ Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, letter to the editor of *Omaha Bee*, February 1, 1917, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

Anti-suffragists, if not a majority, were certainly a very strong minority. They were not, however, a monolith. Anti-suffragists were divided on many issues: some opposed woman suffrage because it would strengthen prohibitionists, others rejected the massive social change they perceived as part of the suffrage agenda, and many women feared the ballot would destroy their social power because they would lose social deference and never really gain political equality. Taken as a whole, those opposed to woman suffrage made a powerful force in Nebraska.

V

Partial Victory

The referendum to nullify the partial suffrage law of 1917 was filed by Secretary of State Charles Pool in July of the same year despite allegations of illegal petition practices. Nebraska women could not vote unless the male voters rejected the referendum on the November 1918 ballot. The Nebraska suffrage association weighed three options in reaction to the referendum: to let the referendum go through and allow men to vote on woman suffrage; to desist from all attempts to win the ballot; or to initiate a campaign for a full suffrage amendment, a goal which had been set at the 1916 state suffrage convention.¹ In the meantime, however, a small group of active members of the association began to investigate the petitions filed by the anti-suffragists. Katherine Sumney, in particular, led an investigation which eventually exposed massive fraud by three circulators and caused the nullification of the referendum.

Sumney's suspicions of the legality of the petition surfaced during the campaign in her own neighborhood. A friend telephoned Sumney to tell her that a woman circulating petitions had told people it was *for* woman suffrage, and thirty thousand signatures were needed. The friend remembered Sumney speaking of an anti-suffrage petition which required that many signatures. Sumney asked to speak to the circulator, who gave the name Anna Stone and said she worked for the people at the City National

¹ Minutes of Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association, November 4, 1917, "writings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

Bank building, the headquarters of the anti-suffragist referendum campaign. Sumney informed Stone that women already had suffrage. Stone agreed but stated the petition was for full suffrage. Though Sumney tried to explain the true goal of the petition, Stone replied she must be mistaken and continued to circulate the petition down the street. Sumney found Stone “perfectly honest” but thoroughly mistaken, so she retraced Anna Stone’s path and found many who had signed the petition on the mistaken assumption that it was for full suffrage for women.²

As yet, the suffragists did not have any thought of challenging the legality of the petition. The first plan of the association was to collect the names of signers with the goal of publishing their names. Toward that end, Sumney was put in charge of a committee to create a card catalog of the petition signers. During the work, some of the volunteers began to notice that certain petition sheets had “an awful lot of ‘ss’ . . . or a lot of ‘AAs.’” The names appeared to be in alphabetical order.³ When Sumney took the time to inspect these petitions more carefully, she noticed a definite irregularity and began to investigate systematically by identifying which circulator’s petitions carried the anomalies.

The petitions of one circulator, Mr. A. O. Barclay, carried the most inconsistencies, including the fact that on many of his petitions, the signers’ names appeared in alphabetical order. Sumney began to investigate the neighborhoods in which

² *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, pp. 4173-5, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 4159.

Barclay collected signatures. Along with the frequent alphabetical order on Barclay's petitions, Sumney often could not find the supposed signers of the petitions at the given address. With the help of other women, she began to look for Mr. Barclay. He had reported three different addresses during the one month period of the referendum drive. The first two addresses yielded no one who had heard of Barclay. The third address, a rooming house, had rented to a Mr. Barclay who had since moved away.⁴ The woman who rented him the room described him as "middle aged and stout." In the meantime, Sumney had also received a description from the anti-suffragists: "a tall slender man, and young." Due to the questions raised by the investigation, much of the early research focused on Barclay. Not only were many of his petitions in alphabetical order, but many were in the same handwriting, and ninety-six signers never lived at the address given. Soon all his petitions were pulled from the card file because, "they showed such fraud it would not be necessary to investigate them."⁵

The early inspection was carried out by Sumney, Grace Crandall Richardson, and Henrietta Smith. They found such extensive forgery, it was decided to hire detectives from the election commissioner's office. Over the next six months a portion of the names on the petitions were checked and rechecked by the team of suffragists, election commissioners, and handwriting experts from local banks.⁶ Two thousand letters were mailed to Barclay's signers and various other circulators to identify further irregularities.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 4159-64; "Suffragists Hope to Prove Forgery of 2,500 Names," *Omaha Bee*, June 16, 1918, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁵ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, pp. 4164, 4185-9, 4456, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 4167-73; "Justice in Nebraska," *Woman Citizen*, February 23, 1918; "Nebraska Suffragists Win," *Woman Citizen*, July 19, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

Some questionable results could not be confirmed, but many others were proven.

Sumney and Richardson compared the signatures to registered voters and found four thousand signers were not registered voters.⁷

Each full petition carried twenty signatures. An example of five sheets carried the following comments by the investigators. Aside from the alphabetical order already noted on the Barclay petitions, names written “all by same person” were noted by investigators. At the address 920 North 27th Street was written “vacant lot.” Other addresses were noted as “in Graceland Cemetery,” or “cornfield, no such address.” The Mercer Hotel, given as one petitioner’s address, had been out of business since 1910. A. Anderson “says he did not sign,” Ed H. Kennedy signed twice, and M. J. Merrell signed four times. A. J. Love, Jr. was a “minor, aged 17.” Others claimed to believe they had signed a petition for woman suffrage.⁸ In order to nullify the referendum, 3,840 signatures had to be proven fraudulent. During the course of the investigation Sumney and Richardson believed they found 3,836 fraudulent signatures in Douglas county alone.⁹

On February 2, 1918, a meeting of the executive board of the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association was held at the home of Edna Barkley, president of the association. It was decided to carry the complaint to trial and that all the board members would sign as plaintiffs.¹⁰ A petition was filed with the third district court of Lincoln, Nebraska,

⁷ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, pp. 4167-73, 4185-9, 4456, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁸ “Referendum Petition” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁹ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, p. 4456, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹⁰ Minutes of Executive Board Meeting, February 2, 1918, “writings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers. “Petition in Equity,” “case papers” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers. Plaintiffs included Edna M. Barkley,

arguing “the said petition is insufficient in fact to comply with the requirements of the Constitution.” Specifically, the petitions lacked affidavits as required by law; many of the circulators were boys between the ages of eight and fifteen, too young to understand Nebraska law; forgery or fraud could be proven on twenty circulators, some of whom were not residents of Nebraska or the county in which they collected signatures, and all of whose petitions were therefore null and void; twenty-five counties, including Douglas (Omaha) and Lancaster (Lincoln), had numerous illegal signatures, making the counties insufficient for the referendum. Furthermore, the petition argued, the 1917 suffrage law was not eligible for referendum because, under the state’s constitution, the legislature had exclusive jurisdiction over the means by which the electors are chosen.¹¹ The petition therefore asked the court to enjoin Secretary of State Pool from submitting the referendum to the voters on the November 1918 ballot to avoid “a great irreparable harm . . . done to the plaintiffs and all others on whose behalf this proceeding is prosecuted.”¹²

Pool agreed with the suffragists that the petition was probably illegal, but made no attempt to declare it so. He withdrew from the suit as much as possible personally, but the anti-suffragists quickly took over the defense of their referendum.¹³ In reality, the

Gertrude Hardy, Katherine Sumney, Ida Robbins, Grace Richardson, Margarita Dietrich, Grace M. Wheeler, Ella Bower, Ellen Ackerman, Henrietta Smith, Inez Philbrick, Harriet M. Stewart, Mary Smith-Hayward, Mamie Claflin, Margaret T. Sheldon, Alice Howell, Ellen Gere, Eliza Ann Doyle, and Katherine McGerr.

¹¹ “Petition in Equity,” p. 1-11, “case papers” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; “Suffrage Society File Injunction To Keep Ballot,” *Lincoln Star*, February 14, 1918; “Suffragists File Suit To Kill Big Anti Petition,” *Omaha News*, February 14, 1918, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; Coulter, 163-70.

¹² “Petition in Equity,” p. 11, “case papers” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹³ Minutes of Annual Convention of Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association, November 4, 1917, “writings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; “Suffragists Win Nebraska Fight,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 13, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

case was not Barkley versus Pool, but Barkley versus Peck, president of the anti-suffragist association which intervened and filed a demurrer, a plea to dismiss the case for insufficient evidence. The anti-suffragists and their lawyers argued that women had no right to sue because there were no property rights involved; there was no claim that Pool had committed fraud; the injunction attempted to prevent the Secretary of State from performing an official duty, an action which can only be prosecuted in the name of the state; and that the question related to electors' rights to accept or deny a statute was a political question, not a property or civil rights question and was beyond the court's authority. Furthermore, a legal petition, the antis argued, could not be struck down simply because "one or more names of persons may appear . . . who were not duly qualified legal voters."¹⁴ The burden of proof, according to the antis, must lie with the plaintiffs in this case; only the names directly proven incorrect could be stricken. Therefore, the number of signatures and counties was adequate and there was no case.¹⁵

Unwilling to accept the research of the suffragists, the anti-suffragists demanded a court examiner be appointed to the case, a referee to follow the suffragists into thirty counties to collect evidence of forgery. Calvin A. Emery collected testimony and interviewed petitioners, finding evidence of massive fraud in the referendum petitions.¹⁶ In Richardson county, Emery found eighteen signers did not live in the county, and one

¹⁴ Demurrer to Petition, p. 1, "case papers" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Suffragists Win Nebraska Fight," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 13, 1919; "Anti-Suffrage Petition Trial is Underway," *Omaha Bee*, October 11, 1918, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

signer had been dead six months when the petition was circulated.¹⁷ Out of Barclay's two thousand petitions, the court found twenty-eight were in the circulator's handwriting, and eighty witnesses swore their names were forged on Barclay's petition. The petitions of J. F. Norton carried 172 fraudulent signatures, and J. P. McCabe's petitions showed 173 signatures in his own handwriting, 105 people who denied ever signing the petition, and three signatures of deceased men. The court ruled that all petitions circulated by these three men should be thrown out and issued arrest warrants for the two men who could be found.¹⁸

Other questionable petition practices were accepted by the court. The 800 signatures of Dick Kennedy, an illiterate man jailed for dealing dope shortly after the referendum campaign, went unchallenged by the court.¹⁹ The circulation of petitions by young boys was also accepted. The anti-suffragists swore that "some of the very best work that was done in that office was done by some of those boys."²⁰ Questionable misrepresentations also went unchallenged. Frank Kellogg, a member of the Men's League, was accused by the plaintiffs of telling potential signers that the petition was for woman suffrage. H. H. Garrow told the court he signed the petition only because he

¹⁷ "Dead Nebraskans Made To Sign," *Woman Citizen*, August 3, 1918, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹⁸ Telegram from Elmer E. Thomas, plaintiffs attorney, to the NAWSA, printed in "To Get Back Beer," *Woman Citizen*, June 15, 1918; "Nebraska Suffragists Win," *Woman Citizen*, July 19, 1919; "Dead Nebraskans Made to Sign," *Woman Citizen*, August 3, 1918; "Anti-Suffragist Agent Under Arrest," *Omaha News*, August 17, 1918; "Judge's Ruling Gives Nebraska Women Ballot," *Omaha News*, January 25, 1918, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹⁹ Telegram from Elmer E. Thomas, plaintiffs attorney, to NAWSA, printed in "To Get Back Beer," *Woman Citizen*, June 15, 1918, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, pp. 4176-8, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²⁰ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, p. 1275, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

believed it was to grant women suffrage. Mr. Kellogg countered, “I never told anybody that.” Kellogg testified that when men responded to his request for a signature that they were suffragists, Kellogg challenged, “well are you honest enough to let the voter decide?” Many responded by signing the referendum petition. When asked by the plaintiff’s attorney how he presented the petition, Kellogg responded that if the man did not ask what the petition was for, he did not tell them, assuming they could read the explanation at the top of the petition sheet.²¹ Other claims of misrepresentation centered on prohibition. Frank Schmidt and James Grant were both accused by suffragists of telling signers that the petition was to bring back beer.²²

The Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage claimed to have no knowledge of the fraud being perpetrated by their hired circulators. Mrs. George testified that the organization had every intention of creating an absolutely honest piece of work.²³ If minors, unregistered voters, or non-citizens signed the petition, it was beyond the power of the circulator to prove such information.²⁴ If some of the petitions were incomplete, Mrs. Crofoot explained, “some of the best men in Omaha, prominent business men, put their names down and took for granted that people could find out where they lived if they didn’t know.”²⁵ Nor did anti-suffragists give credence to the stories in many small-town newspapers warning residents to beware shady circulators.

²¹ Ibid., pp. 3820, 1233-5.

²² Ibid., p. 3820; Nebraska Suffrage Association telegram to NAWSA, n. d., “writings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²³ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, p. 1272, 5591, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 1052.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 3962.

W. N. Jamison, hired by the anti-suffrage association to manage the referendum campaign, recounted one story which warned Lincoln residents to “beware of the boy in the green cap, coming from the Third Ward the poorer, seedier area of Omaha. . . ., of the boy with the smooth talk.” Jamison discounted the story because it was referring to his own brother.²⁶

While the suffragists did not accuse the anti-suffrage leadership of deliberately attempting to commit fraud, they did level charges of turning a blind eye to the obvious irregularities. Katherine Sumney claimed to have appealed to Jamison and his secretary, Maud Paul, for help in locating Barclay, but claimed they had “passed all responsibility for having hired him.” Nor had they taken sufficient responsibility for checking the work of the circulators. Both Jamison and Paul noticed irregularities on Barclay’s petitions and confronted him with their suspicions. He assured them it was “all right” by explaining the alphabetical order had occurred on many of his petitions because he worked his way up one side of the street and down the other. When the suffragist’s attorney asked Sumney if, “people live in alphabetical order along the streets of Omaha, I suppose do they?” Sumney replied, “not that we have been able to determine.”²⁷

The irresponsibility of the people in charge of the referendum campaign seemed to stem from a lack of organization. There was no clear hierarchy or delegation of powers and responsibilities among the workers. In theory, Jamison was in charge of the main office where petitions were dispersed and collected. Hired for his experience

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 3141-2.

²⁷ Ibid., pp. 4189-90.

running a referendum campaign, Jamison had only six weeks to collect over thirty thousand signatures. When Jamison took charge he hired many circulators who began collecting petitions. He showed them how to correctly certify the petition and warned them against forgery. He asked each circulator to return to the office by four or five o'clock each day so the petitions could be witnessed and filed, and the circulator could be paid for the signatures collected.²⁸ In reality, Jamison was usually not in the office. He traveled throughout the state collecting signatures and even when in Omaha was often out of the office, leaving the secretary, Maud Paul, or whoever happened to be in the office, in charge. Many of the circulators had been hired before Jamison arrived, and Paul also hired many men. One circulator testified that there was rarely anyone in the office when he arrived, so there was no one to witness his signature.²⁹ Jamison denied control over the operation: "I was not necessarily supervising this work, there was (sic) other people supervising it besides myself. You put a man on a committee with a lot of women and a man hasn't much chance to say anything."³⁰

Crofoot hired Jamison and Paul, but gave them no direction of responsibilities. Paul considered Jamison in charge, but he gave her no clear instructions on running the office while he was away.³¹ When petitions were filed at the office, therefore, no one was given the final responsibility of reviewing the work for possible fraud or forgery. Jamison, Paul, and other anti-suffrage workers testified that they had discarded many

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3131.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5540-4, 3131, 3441-2, 3142-3, 3110-11.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3112.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5540-4, 5554, 3425.

suspect petitions, but Barclay's petitions somehow made it into the office of the secretary of state.³² Jamison swore he could recognize a forged petition simply by looking at it, but he saw very few of the petitions. When Paul brought some of Barclay's petitions to Jamison's attention, he had no chance to review the documents because they were already filed in the bank vault downstairs from the office. Once filed, Jamison had no control; it was a committee decision to accept or reject the signatures.³³ Jamison testified, "I wasn't really in charge."³⁴

The lack of organization by the anti-suffrage association was not a criminal offense. In his opinion, district court judge Leonard Flansberg added a special finding for the anti-suffragists stating that the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage had no knowledge of the fraud committed by the circulators when they filed the petitions.³⁵ The court did, however, negate the referendum by declaring over 4,600 signatures illegal; only 3,816 had to be invalidated to nullify the referendum. Flansberg declared all signatures collected by Barclay (2,275), Norton (1,306), and McCabe (1,075) null and void.³⁶

Numerous problems had already pushed the court case two months past the November 1918 ballot. Delays had been caused by the suffragists who frequently had

³² Ibid., pp. 3143, 1279-80, 5549-50, 3085, 3068-73.

³³ Ibid., pp. 3068-70.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 3074.

³⁵ "Judge's Ruling Gives Nebraska Women Ballot," *Omaha News*, January 25, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³⁶ "Nebraska Suffragists Win," *Woman Citizen*, July 19, 1919; "Court Holds for Nebraska Suffragists; Women Win Fight," *Beatrice Express*, January 27, 1919; "Judge's Ruling Gives Nebraska Women Ballot," *Omaha News*, January 25, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

halted proceedings in order to raise more money. The case cost the association over \$13,000 some of which was borrowed but much was raised by dollar campaigns.

Throughout the state suffragists asked their friends: Is your political freedom worth a dollar?³⁷ The anti-suffragists had also encumbered the case with numerous objections, all of which had to be transcribed, adding to the length and cost of the case. When it became apparent that the issue would not be resolved in time for the November ballot, the anti-suffragists asked for a decree from the trial court, fearing that if the referendum was not placed on the first applicable ballot, it could not be placed on any ballot. The court responded that adequate evidence of fraud had been submitted to bar the referendum from the election. The anti-suffragists appealed to the state supreme court but that court refused to take jurisdiction over the question until the district court had finished deciding it. The supreme court did rule that if the referendum were to be ruled valid, it could still be placed on the ballot “as early as it can be had, awaiting the judgment of the court.”³⁸

Not only did the court case keep the referendum off the 1918 ballot, it also kept women from voting in that election. Judge Flansberg decided that “though the referendum at this stage of the proceedings appears to be invalid and of no effect when considered *ex parte* from the testimony of the plaintiffs alone,” the defendants, by law, were entitled to be heard. So the injunction on the secretary of state was made permanent, and the suspension of the suffrage law held until the case could be fully

³⁷ Grace Wheeler for special finance committee to Madam, August 14, 1919, “correspondence” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³⁸ Barkley v. Pool (1918) 102 Nebraska 799.

adjudicated.³⁹ When the trial court's opinion was finally handed down in January, Judge Flansberg's ruling for the suffragists also demanded that the state and the anti-suffrage association pay the court costs, a \$5,000.00 bill due to the numerous technical objections placed by the anti-suffragist lawyers.⁴⁰ The earlier than expected ruling made a suffrage plan to ask the legislature for an emergency re-enactment of the partial suffrage law for spring elections unnecessary.⁴¹

Victory was in sight for Nebraska's suffragists, as well as women throughout the nation. The changing tide began to be mirrored in the relations between the suffragists and their opposition. When Mrs. James W. Wadsworth, Dodge's successor as president of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage and the wife of a senator from New York, offered to debate Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the NAWSA, Catt refused. Catt argued that since both parties had endorsed the national amendment, victory was imminent. The campaign was beyond the stage of debate.⁴² President Wilson had also endorsed woman suffrage as an important war measure. In a telegram to the Louisiana legislative committee on suffrage, Wilson urged, "I cannot help regarding the settlement of this question as of world-wide significance and as affording a standard by which to judge our present interest in the complete establishment of democracy."⁴³

³⁹ "Victory in Nebraska!" *Woman Citizen*, October 26, 1918, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴⁰ "Supreme Court Hearing on Suffragists Appeal," no source, March 15, 1918; "Suffragists Win Nebraska Fight," *Christian Science Monitor*, February 13, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴¹ "Court Holds for Nebraska Suffragists; Women Win Fight," *Beatrice Express*, January 27, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴² "Suffragists See Victory," *Lincoln Daily News*, February 14, 1918, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴³ "World Wide Significance," *Woman Citizen*, June 15, 1918, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

The President's declaration of woman suffrage as a war measure mantled the movement in patriotism, a tool used against the anti-suffragists during the trial. The suffragist attorney asked the treasurer of the Nebraska anti-suffrage association why she would work against one of the President's war measures. She responded, "it is just as patriotic to oppose the woman suffrage as it is for an advocate to promote it."⁴⁴ Also in the spirit of the Great War, anti-suffragists were attacked for being anti-democratic. Catt wrote in reference to the Nebraska referendum, there is an "anomaly of a land going to war to fight for democracy while an autocracy at home is attempting to take Democracy away from those who now have it."⁴⁵ The Nebraska suffragists echoed Catt's sentiments at their 1917 convention with a resolution calling for a federal amendment to secure democracy at home for the women making so many sacrifices in the war for democracy.⁴⁶

Not only were the anti-suffragists undemocratic according to suffragist rhetoric, their loyalty to the nation was suspect. Old allegations of anti-suffragist connections to Nebraska breweries took on new meaning as the nation entered a war with Germany. Suffragists argued that the referendum campaign and ensuing investigation was actually an anti-suffragist ploy to pull women from important war work.⁴⁷ Ironically, the suffragists, after calling for complete democracy for women, also joined the rally to disenfranchise twenty thousand other Nebraskans. Enemy aliens were exempt from the

⁴⁴ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, p. 5549, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴⁵ Carrie Chapman Catt, "Their Real Allies," *Woman Citizen*, September 1, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴⁶ Minutes of Annual Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association Convention, November 5, 1917, "writings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴⁷ "Suffragist Leaders Believe Move Was to Take Women From War Work," *Omaha News*, July 23, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

draft, but in the state of Nebraska foreigners who had filed their first set of naturalization papers could vote. Therefore, thousands of enemy aliens would not participate in the war in spite of the fact they had been voting for many years. The state's Council of Defense circulated a petition to deny citizenship to enemy aliens, indignant that soldiers in the trenches, and patriotic women, were denied the vote.⁴⁸

Other commentators drew connections between the referendum and the German-American Alliance. The editor of the *Lincoln Star* observed that, "the German alliance, having secured what it needed from the over-zealous suffragists [killing the attempted repeal of the Mockett German language law], had turned about to undo what it had permitted to be done as an expedient in the legislature, and was financing the circulation of the petitions." In his view neither side deserved the sympathy of the people because one side needed prosecuting and the other had played dirty politics getting the partial suffrage law passed in spite "of the fact that the people of the state had but two years earlier declared by a majority of 10,000 in a general election against woman suffrage."⁴⁹

The failure of some to realize that a general vote of men against woman suffrage was not necessarily a sign of democracy at work did not influence others who saw in the allegations of forged referendums a very serious crime against the people of the state. The organ of the Nebraska's Women's Clubs stated that "a victory for suffrage in this case will be a victory for the principles upon which democracy is founded and toward

⁴⁸ "Disfranchises 7,000 Voters Here," *Omaha News*, January 25, 1919; "Citizenship in Nebraska," *Woman Citizen*, February 2, 1918, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴⁹ "We Should Worry," *Lincoln Daily Star*, n. d., 1918, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

which it strives, liberty, justice and truth.”⁵⁰ The editors of the *Nebraska State Journal* saw the trial as a failure of the current system of referendum, a failure to ascertain public sentiments. “A large fund of money was raised by interests opposed to suffrage. Men were given money and told to get the petitions. There was no aggressive public sentiment in support of such a petition. There was only a pot of money.”⁵¹

In the meantime, Nebraska women had regained partial suffrage from the district court opinion handed down in January, 1919. It was not a general election year but many Nebraska cities were holding elections for offices and on important bond issues in which women could now have a say. Proponents of those issues encouraged women to register and vote, believing reform-minded women would favor city improvement projects.⁵²

Many city officials, however, were confused over the labyrinthine course of woman suffrage. Attorney General Clarence A. Davis received requests from Plattsmouth, Chadron, Hastings, and other cities holding elections that April for an opinion on woman suffrage. Assistant Attorney General, Judge J. B. Barnes, wrote in support of the partial suffrage law to remove, “any possible doubt that women might vote in Nebraska.”⁵³

Because the restraining order enjoining the secretary of state from granting women suffrage has been declared void, the 1917 law was finally in effect; therefore, “women of

⁵⁰ No title, *The Bulletin*, March, 1918, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁵¹ “The Suffrage Suit,” *Nebraska State Journal*, January 26, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁵² “Court Holds For Nebraska Suffragists; Women Win Fight,” *Beatrice Express*, January 27, 1919; “Limited Ballot For Women,” *Scottsbluff Republican*, March 7, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers. Bond issues in Lincoln and Scottsbluff on the April 1 ballot called for funds for the building of a new municipal hospital and a new county courthouse, respectively.

⁵³ “Opinion Assures Women Voting,” *Omaha News*, February 26, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

the lawful age who are citizens of the United States and of the state of Nebraska, are entitled to vote for candidates for city offices.”⁵⁴

The opinion did not, however, remove all confusion. The 1917 partial suffrage law gave all persons over the age of twenty-one voting rights, “provided, however, that no female person shall be permitted to vote for United States Senator, U. S. Representative, or for any officers specified and designated in the constitution of Nebraska.”⁵⁵ The wording of the law left unclear whether women could vote on constitutional amendments, a vital right if full suffrage were to be achieved in the state.⁵⁶

Twenty thousand women were expected to register by the March 29th deadline. Cities prepared for the influx of women at registration offices, and the Nebraska Suffrage Association helped to educate the new voters. To ease any trepidation Nebraska women felt about voting for the first time, Edna Barkley, in an open letter, informed the ladies which offices they may, and may not, vote for, showed a sample ballot, and explained how to register to vote. Barkley also encouraged women to bring a friend who may not be inclined to vote.⁵⁷ Despite the attempts at clarification, confusion continued to plague

⁵⁴ “Suffrage Law of 1917 Now in Force,” Omaha *World Herald*, February 28, 1919; “Nebraska Women to Vote First Time Next Month,” Burlington (Iowa) *Hawkeye*, March 16, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁵⁵ Nebraska Bill to Amend Section 1940, “writings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁵⁶ Local newspapers attempted to explain which offices and which women could vote April 1, with some major confusion over constitutional amendments. The legislature could only grant suffrage for those offices not created by the state constitution. Suffrage could only be extended to those offices by amending the constitution. The process of amending the constitution was provided for in the state’s constitution, so some believed voting on amendments required full suffrage. “What Ladies May Vote,” no source, March 21, 1919; “Ballot for Women Limited,” Louisville *Chronicle*, March 21, 1919; “Information for the Woman Voter,” Oshkosh *News*, March 21, 1919; “Women Can Vote in Spring Election,” (Sidney, Nebraska?), March 21, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁵⁷ No title, Seward *Blade*, March, 19, 1919; “Women’s Rights at Polls,” Clay Center *Sun*, March 20, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

the application of the suffrage law. Nebraska women who paid property taxes or had school-aged children had long held school board suffrage. Did the new law grant all Nebraska women the right to vote for school board members? Attorney General Davis ruled that because the office was created by the state constitution, only those women who held suffrage prior to 1917 could continue to elect school board members.⁵⁸

Suffragists were very pleased with the turnout at the April first elections of 1919. Nearly forty per cent of the voters were newly registered females, and in some cities the number of women equaled the men at the polls.⁵⁹ The women influenced key decisions in that first election. The defeat of a proposal to license pool halls was attributed to women voters, the new mayor of North Platte owed his office to female voters, and the new treasurer of the village of Havelock was a woman. Most importantly, women had proven false the anti-suffrage argument that even if given the ballot, women would not use it.⁶⁰ Other Nebraska women approached the new ballot with less practicality. A ninety-one year old Kenesaw woman who had devoted years of her life to suffrage and had organized the Adams County Suffrage Society as a pioneer, flew over her town with an American flag and a "Votes For Women" banner. Releasing them high over the city, she let them flutter to the rooftops below.⁶¹

⁵⁸ "Who May Vote," West Point *Democrat*, March 28, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁵⁹ "Women Poll Heavy Vote," no source, April 2, 1919; "Many Women Voted," *York Times*, April 3, 1919; "Women Flocking to the Polls," *Hastings Tribune*, April 1, 1919; "Sixty Per Cent Scotia's Women Cast Votes," Grand Island, April 3, 1919; "Women's Votes in Nebraska Heavy," *Woman Citizen*, April 4, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁶⁰ "Nebraska Women Prove Vote Right," *Omaha News*, April 3, 1919; "Women Exercise Privileges At Municipal Elections Tuesday," *Beatrice Express*, April 2, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁶¹ "Woman Aged 91 Fly With Creeth," (*Hastings, Nebraska?*), n. d., 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

The celebration may have been a bit premature; though the end-zone was in sight, it had not yet been reached. In an action which surprised the state's suffragists, the anti-suffragists filed a one hundred page brief arguing for the removal of the injunction placed on the referendum. Following the district court's opinion in January, the secretary of state withdrew completely from the case, but the anti-suffragist's appeal was not based on any new evidence.⁶² The anti-suffragists hoped to revive the referendum with a supreme court opinion allowing only those names proven fraudulent to be withdrawn from the petitions, or failing that, denying that women, as non-electors, could file a suit on a political question. Although other state courts had thrown out all petitions by fraudulent circulators, there was no precedent for Nebraska doing the same.⁶³ The spring elections of 1919 could not be withheld from the women, but those opposed to suffrage hoped that by the November elections of that year, the case would be decided in their favor. The case was not on the court's docket until the 1920 session, but a motion from the anti-suffragists advanced the case to June, 1919 so if the review favored the referendum, it could be placed on the November ballot.⁶⁴

Counsel's arguments were heard on June 6, 1919 in the Nebraska Supreme Court, and the decision was handed down on the 28th of the month. Upholding the district court

⁶² "Anti-Suffragists Rest," *Sioux City Journal*, January 23, 1919; "Final Suffrage Decision Friday," *Omaha News*, January 23, 1919; "Partial Suffrage Law Effective as Result of Decree," *Lincoln Star*, January 22, 1919; "Renew Fight Against Woman Suffrage Act," *Omaha World Herald*, April 29, 1919; "Suffragists File Their Brief in Supreme Court," *Omaha Bee*, April 29, 1919; "Interveners in Suffrage Case Go To Supreme Court," no source, January 22, 1919; "Would Advance Suffrage Appeal," *Omaha News*, March 16, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁶³ "Forty Days for Filing," *Omaha News*, January 26, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁶⁴ "Supreme Court Advances Case of Suffragists," *Omaha Bee*, March 20, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

opinion, Justice James Dean wrote an opinion which nullified the petitions of the three circulators because “the probative value of such certificate is destroyed, and none of the names appearing on such petition will be counted unless affirmatively proven to be genuine.” Furthermore, though the plaintiffs were not electors, they were citizens. The law read “‘any citizen’ may apply to the district court for a writ of mandamus to compel the secretary of state to file an initiative or referendum petition.” Anti-suffrage counsel had argued that the initiative and referendum statute had been copied from an Oregon statute and the Oregon supreme court held that women may not file suit because they were not electors. Dean argued that the Oregon justices’ decision was based not on the language of the statute, but on the former practice in the state.⁶⁵

The Supreme Court further clarified the 1913 law on the circulation of petitions. Qualification of circulators went unmentioned in the original law. Anyone, from citizens of another state to resident aliens, from criminals to non-registered voters, could circulate petitions in the state. Much stricter qualifications were added to the initiative and referendum laws. Circulators had to be at least 18 years of age and be a resident of the county in which they collected signatures.⁶⁶

For the first time in Nebraska, a fraudulent referendum had been voided by the courts. The suffragists proclaimed, “so complete a showing up of this conspiracy, . . . so

⁶⁵ Barkley v. Pool (1919), 103 Neb 629. See also, “Suffragists Win Victory,” *Evening State Journal*, June 28, 1919; “Suffrage Suit Argued,” *Norfolk News*, June 16, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁶⁶ Potter, pp. 13, 17. In 1969 and 1973 paid circulators were also outlawed.

signal a victory by going to the courts with a well prepared case, . . . [suffragists] have probably ended for all time this particular crime in Nebraska.”⁶⁷ Such hyperbole aside, the case did have wider, national significance. Ohio’s partial suffrage law had also been nullified in a referendum, and charges of fraud had also been leveled against the petitioners.⁶⁸ The illegal tactics used to kill suffrage at the state level convinced more and more suffragists of the need for a federal amendment. “It is the sort of tactics reported [in the Nebraska referendum case] that has turned suffragists from the state route forever.”⁶⁹ The evidence in that case began to be used to convince the members of the United States Congress to pass a federal amendment guaranteeing women the full ballot. Draper Smith traveled to Washington, D. C. with the evidence of fraud collected by the Nebraska Suffrage Association.⁷⁰

The state legislature also showed signs of pro-suffrage sentiments. One month after the district court voided the referendum, the House proposed a bill providing for the registration of female voters in Omaha. The next month a bill to submit to the voters a new constitutional amendment for full woman suffrage was recommended for passage by a House committee. However, along with several other proposed amendments, the suffrage amendment was killed because a constitutional convention had already been called in Lincoln for the end of the year.⁷¹

⁶⁷ “Nebraska Suffragists Win,” *Woman Citizen*, July 19, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁶⁸ Nebraska Suffrage Association telegram to NAWSA, n. d., “writings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁶⁹ “To Get Back Beer,” *Woman Citizen*, June 15, 1918, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷⁰ “Suffrage Leaders to Use Nebraska Evidence,” *Omaha News*, September 16, 1918, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷¹ “House Would Register Omaha Woman Voters,” *Omaha World Herald*, February 25, 1919; “Nebraska Bars Vote On Equal Suffrage,” no source, March, 1919; “Nebraska House Kills Suffrage Amendment

Nebraska suffragists requested that the full suffrage bill be set aside by the House.⁷² President of the national association, Carrie Chapman Catt, had advised Nebraska suffragists that securing a federal amendment prior to 1921 or 1922 seemed impossible. Therefore, the state organizations should continue to focus on state suffrage in 1920. At a special meeting of the state suffrage association in February 1919, there was an overwhelming consensus of the executive board, county associations, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and labor unions that a campaign for full suffrage at the state level in the coming year was ill advised. Suffragists cited voter apathy, as well as confusion at the polls should the referendum be upheld by the supreme court and placed on the ballot alongside a full suffrage initiative. They also hoped that the constitutional convention being called in Lincoln would deal with the matter more efficiently, especially because the new governor had stated his full support for woman's suffrage.⁷³

Omaha's club women, many of whom were also prominent suffragists, reached a similar conclusion. They refused a new campaign for full suffrage, obviously because they were "too tired" from the last set of campaigns. Instead, they put their faith in the constitutional convention and the federal amendment to grant full suffrage. The need for

Bill," Minneard ? *Tribune*, March 27, 1919; "Woman Suffrage Bill is Killed By Committee," *Omaha Bee*, March 27, 1919; "Woman Suffrage Bill is Killed by Committee," *Omaha Bee*, March 27, 1919; "Legislature Kills All Full Suffrage Bills," *Omaha News*, March 29, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷² "Suffrage Board Meets," *Omaha (World Herald?)*, February 26, 1919; "Women Suffragists To Decide if Contented With a Partial Vote," *Omaha Bee*, February 15, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷³ Minutes of Special Meeting of Nebraska Suffrage Association, Lincoln Hotel, February 27, 1919, "writings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

a federal amendment had become more and more popular because, “with only state laws if a woman votes in Nebraska and goes to Council Bluffs [just across the river from Omaha] to live, her vote is taken away from her.”⁷⁴ The attention of Nebraska suffragists turned to a new state constitution while they waited for the federal amendment.

Demands for a new state constitution dated to 1903 but lagged for over ten years. In 1915 the Nebraska Popular Government League formed and attempted to by-pass the legislature by presenting the voters with a convention plan in 1917. It succeeded in mobilizing the legislature which presented its own plan to the voters. The plan received overwhelming approval and special elections were scheduled to elect delegates. One of the main concerns of the convention would be to revise the amending procedure which had so hampered progressive era reformers in general and suffragists in particular. Proposals included reducing the majority needed to ratify amendments, reducing the number of signatures necessary for initiative and referendum petitions, enfranchising women and military personnel, along with forty-one other amendments, all of which were accepted.⁷⁵ The suffragists worked toward the election of delegates who would support full suffrage but otherwise were powerless to influence the outcome of the convention.

The election of delegates to the constitutional convention became another area of confusion under the 1917 partial suffrage law. The suffragists’ attorney, C. A. Sorenson, argued that the election took place during the primaries. It was a special election, one

⁷⁴ “Oppose Another Suffrage Fight,” *Omaha News*, February 27?, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers. See also “No Suffrage Campaign Say State Workers,” *Omaha News*, n. d.; “Shall Omaha Women Wage Another State Campaign For Suffrage—Oh My, No!” *Omaha Bee*, February 25, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷⁵ Miewald, pp. 21-22.

created wholly by the state legislature for political reasons, and did not even exist when the 1875 constitution was ratified. Therefore, there was no restriction on women voting in primaries.⁷⁶ The Attorney General disagreed. The partial suffrage law did not provide for suffrage on any office or issue which is provided for in the state constitution. Because the manner of choosing delegates to a constitutional convention was provided in the state constitution, women would not be allowed to vote in the election, nor would women be able to approve or reject the new constitution or its amendments. Full suffrage could only be achieved with the approval of male voters.⁷⁷

Sorenson and the suffragists did not take the announcement passively. The attorney warned that many women, either as individuals or as members of associations would attempt to protect their rights and make the effort to vote at the primaries.⁷⁸ Governor Samuel McKelvie attempted to defuse the situation with the help of the state legislature. House Roll 323 made recognition of Nebraska's female population mandatory at the constitutional convention. Though not allowed to vote, the women would be heard anyway.⁷⁹

By the summer of 1919 the federal amendment had made its way through both houses of the United States Congress, turning Nebraska suffragists' attention away from

⁷⁶ "Full Suffrage At Primary," *Nebraska State Journal*, July 28, 1919; "Women Can Vote At Primaries, Says Attorney," *Omaha Bee*, n. d., 1919; "Women's Rights in Primary," ? *News*, August 8, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷⁷ "Nebraska Plans to Give Women a Vote," Bismarck (North Dakota) *Tribune*, December 3, 1919; "Bar Women From Primary," *Evening State Journal*, August 12, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷⁸ "Bar Women From Primary," *Evening State Journal*, August 12, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷⁹ No title, *Beatrice Express*, April 18, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

the constitutional convention scheduled to convene in December. It seemed only a matter of time before Nebraska women would have full suffrage. By the end of the Great War, woman suffrage had become much less controversial. Both parties, at national and state levels, had endorsed the enfranchisement of women by federal or state amendments, and candidates for state and federal office pledged full suffrage for Nebraska women.⁸⁰ The Nebraska legislature had already proved its readiness to support a new full suffrage amendment to the state constitution. The only remaining question was by what means equal franchise would be extended to the state's women, federal or state.

⁸⁰ "Demos Compromise, Endorse Suffrage," *Hastings Tribune*, n. d., 1918; "Suffrage Briefs," *Woman Citizen*, October 20, 1918, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

VI

Equal Suffrage

In April of 1919, as many Nebraska women registered and voted in city elections for the first time, the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. After fifty years of organized campaigning for the ballot, the women of the state still waited for full suffrage from either a state or a federal amendment. The focus of the suffragist's celebration though was how far they had come in those years. The association had formed a few months after Wyoming women were enfranchised; they could now count most of the states as at least partial, and many full, suffrage states. In 1918, eight countries had extended the franchise to women: Australia, Germany, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Poland.¹ The jubilee celebration marked a turning point in the struggle; the movement faced imminent victory within the year. Within months both houses of the United States Congress passed a federal amendment for full suffrage and sent it to the states for ratification, and simultaneously, a constitutional convention was called in Nebraska. Full suffrage for the state's women became a major issue for the delegates at the convention.

In the early summer months of 1919, the women of the cities which had not held elections in the spring registered for the November ballot. A three million dollar bond issue to pave the county's roads would be placed before Omaha's female voters, but no

¹ "Hold Suffrage Meeting," Albion (Nebraska), *News*, April 3, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

other issue or office would be open to the women. Nor could women serve on the election board. According to the election commissioner, the law stated the board should be filled with “men of good repute.” Because the clause was not changed when the partial suffrage bill made its way through the legislature, the commissioner was obliged to uphold the law.²

The city’s papers were quick to note the new atmosphere at the official registration sites around Omaha. “Man registers usually in silence. Not so his helpmate. There was a noticeable chatter wherever a registration was going on.”³ Much ado was made by reporters about the requirement that women give their ages to register. The *Omaha Bee* proclaimed, “Tough Luck, Girls! You’ll Have To Tell Your Right Age To Vote. The day of your emancipation from the slavery of non-suffrage has arrived. You are to be permitted to suffer. . . . But, oh, fudge, girls, isn’t it just too mean for anything that the men put that clause in the law to tell your age and not fib about it? Darn them!”⁴ The Douglas County election commissioner felt that an accurate record of a female voter’s age was essential because women are able to change their height, weight and even complexion by their mode of dressing. Luckily women, the commissioner believed, in general were more honest than men.⁵ An active Omaha suffragist, Jessie DeForrest Woodruff Hubbard, declared that no woman had as yet balked at giving her age, though

² “Women To Vote Must Tell Ages,” *Omaha News*, May 23, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³ “Women Register For First Time In County’s History,” *Omaha Bee*, June 3, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴ “Tough Luck, Girls,” *Omaha Bee*, May 20, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁵ “Women To Vote Must Tell Ages,” *Omaha News*, May 23, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

one woman had refused to give her weight.⁶ A Nebraska City woman did refuse to give her age, but the concern portrayed by the newspapers that this would be a problem appears only to have provided a bit of sensationalism for the male readers.⁷

The Suffrage Association set out to educate the new voters on the issues and the candidates. In Lincoln at a pre-election meeting, the women discussed the importance of maintaining at least one woman on the school board, and Dr. Inez Philbrick explained the importance of the sewer bond to the county hospital.⁸ Mrs. Barkley addressed the Women's Club at the Nebraska City public library. After discussing the bond issue for that city, she encouraged the women to bring a friend to the polls. Political apathy on the part of women had long been an argument of anti-suffragists, so Mrs. Barkley hoped to prove the opposition wrong.⁹ Some women even ran for offices in the spring election. The township of Havelock elected a female treasurer over a male candidate, and women won seats on city school boards.¹⁰

Proponents of ballot issues also took the new voters seriously. Polling of women's attitudes began in Lincoln in the spring of 1919. The city clerk reported over seven thousand women had registered by late April of that year, and most

⁶ "Women Register For First Time In County's History," *Omaha Bee*, June 3, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁷ "Partial Vote For Women," *Nebraska City Press*, March 6, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Paper.

⁸ "Women Discussed Candidates," *Lincoln Journal*, April 6, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁹ "Explained Suffrage Law," *Nebraska City Press*, April 23, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹⁰ "Nebraska Women Prove Right To Vote," *Omaha News*, April 3, 1919; "Woman Is Appointed To Board," *Valley Enterprise*, April 11, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

overwhelmingly favored a measure which would close theaters on Sundays. Even among groups which had traditionally opposed the extension of the franchise to women, discussion turned to the use of the ballot to promote their own agendas. Despite extensive work by many Catholics against woman suffrage, a Lincoln paper reported, "it is believed that Catholic and Jewish ladies are registered near 100 per cent." Lincoln's Catholic women were expected to oppose a bond issue for a new hospital because they hoped to protect the Catholic-run hospital, St. Elizabeth's. Jewish women, on the other hand, were expected to support Sunday amusements.¹¹ There were other indications that the state's Catholic population had begun to accept the idea of woman suffrage. The Bow Valley lodge of the Catholic Knights of America held a debate on the pros and cons of woman suffrage, a subject chosen by the members.¹²

With thousands of women voting and numerous cities holding elections on various issues and offices, the confusion over the limits of the partial suffrage law grew. The question of school board suffrage for non-tax-paying women without school-age children arose again after the spring elections. The Lancaster county attorney stopped the attempts by Havelock women to vote for the school board until he could deliver an opinion on the question. Despite the attorney general's opinion to the contrary, Lancaster's county attorney granted all women the school board vote, though the opinion

¹¹ "Heavy Woman Registration," *Lincoln Journal*, April 27, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹² "Will Debate Woman Suffrage at Bow Valley," *Hastings News*, April 10, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

failed to close the dispute, even within that county.¹³ Even after the November elections, election commissioners across the state appealed to the attorney general for clarification on specifically what offices and issues women could vote in the coming decade.¹⁴

The continued confusion over the partial suffrage law gave further impetus to a movement within the state for a federal amendment granting all women full suffrage. The Omaha Equal Franchise Society, affiliated with the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association, focused specifically on the passage of a federal amendment. In the fall of 1918, the state's suffragists had helped to send Draper-Smith, former president of the Nebraska Suffrage Association, to Washington, D. C. to present to members of congress the evidence of fraud they had collected from the anti-suffrage referendum. Despite the effort, the amendment failed to pass in both houses. In February, 1919, the amendment was again voted on in the congress, failing the senate by only one vote.¹⁵ Almost immediately the issue was back before congress. In May of the same year, the federal amendment passed the House by a margin of 304 to 89. On June 4, the Senate passed the amendment seventy in favor to thirty against.¹⁶

Between the two votes of 1919, the new congress, voted in at the mid-term elections of 1918, had taken office. The early war-time popularity of the Democrats had

¹³ "Women Discussed Candidates," *Lincoln Journal*, April 6, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹⁴ "Gives List of Officers Women Cannot Vote For," *Omaha Bee*, November 25, 1919; "Nebraska Women Vote Only For President and Vice-President," *Omaha Bee*, November 22, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹⁵ "Expenses Large in Woman Suffrage Fight," *Omaha News*, February 11, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹⁶ Morgan, pp. 140-1; "Suffragists Say Not Surprised," *Omaha World Herald*, June 5, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

dissipated by armistice day, making possible a massive turnover in both the federal and state legislatures. The Democrats in 1918 had supported the national prohibition amendment, causing wet Republicans to return to their own party. Germans, angry over Wilson's involvement in the war against their fatherland, strongly supported Republican candidates, especially in Nebraska where the Democratic governor's State Council of Defense had attacked enemy aliens by circulating a petition to disenfranchise them.¹⁷ Until the 1918 election, Nebraska's representation in the House was even: three Democrats and three Republicans. After the election, the three Democrat representatives lost to Republicans.¹⁸ Despite President Wilson's late conversion to the cause, it was the newly elected Republican congress which passed the federal amendment in June, 1919, and sent it to the states for ratification.

The vote in the U.S. Senate occurred, however, without the support of one of Nebraska's members. Democratic Senator and acting Minority Leader Gilbert Hitchcock, along with nine other senators from suffrage states, voted against the amendment in spite of an appeal from President Wilson and from the Nebraska legislature, and extensive lobbying by the Nebraska suffragists.¹⁹ The editor of the *Omaha News* wrote, "had every man, woman, and child in the state" asked Senator Hitchcock to vote for the amendment, he would not have done so. He went on to apologize for voting for Hitchcock and

¹⁷ Olson and Naugle, p. 283.

¹⁸ Coulter, p. 179.

¹⁹ No title, Grand Island, January 20, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; Flexnor, p. 326; Sheldon, p. 958; Notes on Executive Board Meeting of Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association, February 2, 1918, "writings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

“pray[ed] the good Lord to forgive me for so doing.”²⁰ The second Nebraska senator, progressive Republican George Norris, had long been on record in favor of woman suffrage.

Ellen Harn, a high-flying, ninety-one year old suffragist from Kenesaw, led the campaign for a special session of the Nebraska legislature to ratify the amendment. She petitioned the governor to call a special session of the legislature arguing, “I have passed my 90th birthday. For 70 years I have tried unavailingly to secure my rights as a citizen.” Citing her various family members who had fought and sometimes died in every American war since the Revolution, and her own forty years as a teacher on the prairies of Nebraska, she asked, “have I earned the right to vote?”²¹ Republican Governor Samuel McKelvie did not immediately respond. Stating that he would like to wait to see if other states called special sessions, the governor delayed. On July 23, over a month after the governors of Montana and Kansas called special sessions, Nebraska’s special session convened. On the 29th, the legislature was called to order by the governor who, already knowing that the Republican dominated legislature was favorably predisposed, stated he would be disappointed if there was not a unanimous vote for woman suffrage. After three days to read the amendment and to deal with other small issues, the Nebraska legislature voted on July 31, 1919. Both houses unanimously supported the amendment, leaving

²⁰ “On Suffrage,” *Omaha News*, n. d., 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²¹ “Asks Session of Legislature for Suffrage,” *Omaha Bee*, June 10, 1919; “Suffragist Asks Special Session,” *Omaha News*, June 10, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

“Hitchcock’s continued opposition without moral support or leadership.”²² The key figures in the suffragist association were invited to witness the signing in the midst of a convention in the capital city celebrating the association’s jubilee.²³

The ratification was made official in August, making Nebraska the fourteenth state to ratify. Nine states had ratified in June, three in July, and Montana and Nebraska in August. By December nineteen states had ratified the amendment, and the National Suffrage Association was desperate for funds to campaign in the remaining states. Having achieved its *raison d’etre*, the Omaha Equal Franchise Society voted its \$1000.00 bank balance to NAWSA president, Carrie Chapman Catt. The society then prepared to disband.²⁴

The ratification of the federal amendment far from secured, suffrage work within the state continued with a focus on the constitutional convention which convened in Lincoln in December, 1919. The Nebraska Suffrage Association lobbied the convention for full voting rights for women. However, if the federal amendment failed to be ratified before the new constitution was presented to Nebraska voters, women would not be able to vote on any full suffrage amendment, and would need the approval of the state’s male

²² No title, Grand Island, January 20, n. d., “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers. Potter, p. 11 suggests that the anti-suffrage forces had been so discredited by *Barkley v. Pool*, the legislature could vote no other way.

²³ Stevens, p. 349; “Legislature in Session To Pass U.S. Suffrage Act,” *Creighton News*, July 31, 1919; “Extra Session of Legislature Urged By Women,” *Omaha Bee*, June 11, 1919; “See Legislature Sign Suffrage,” *Lincoln Star*, July 29, 1919; “Women Prepare Big Luncheon For Suffrage Jubilee,” *Lincoln Star*, July 26, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²⁴ “Omaha Women Vote \$1000 to National Suffrage Fund,” *Omaha Bee*, December 19, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; NAWSA letter to “Dear Suffragist,” December 4, 1919, “writings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

voters to achieve their goal.²⁵ Therefore, a back-up plan was proposed by pro-suffrage members of the legislature. Senator Petrus C. Peterson of Lincoln and Representative George D. Mathewson of Shickley planned to present a new suffrage amendment to the voters in November 1920 should the constitutional convention fail to grant full woman suffrage.²⁶

Like the ratification of the federal amendment in Nebraska, however, the constitutional convention entered into very little debate over the extension of the franchise. The Nebraska Republican party had long favored female suffrage, and in fact, their 1919 convention in Lincoln had included many female delegates. The Democrats in 1918 also expressed favor for, "equal political rights for women." Even third parties, such as the Prohibition Party, endorsed full woman suffrage.²⁷ Rather than include equal suffrage in the body of the new constitution, though, the convention presented woman suffrage, along with numerous other issues, forty-one amendments in all, to the people for separate ratification.²⁸ Two pending amendments, one at the state level and one at the federal level, were poised to offer full suffrage to Nebraska women. If the federal amendment could be ratified prior to the special election scheduled for September, 1920 to ratify the state's new constitution, then Nebraska women could not only have a say in

²⁵ "Nebraska Women Want Suffrage," Yankton (South Dakota) *Press*, December 12, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²⁶ "Full Suffrage in Two Years, Plan State Senator Has Introduced Amendment That, If Carried Will Grant It," Omaha *News*, January, 28, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²⁷ Sheldon, pp. 952, 968-9.

²⁸ "Full Suffrage In Nebraska Basic Law," Milwaukee *News*, January 30, 1920, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

their own political rights, but on numerous other issues brought to the constitutional convention, and on the framework for the state government.

The drama played out in the legislatures of the last states to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment. Tennessee, the thirty-sixth and last state to ratify, became the site of a major battle between the suffragists and their opposition who poured into the state. Scheduled to begin debate August 9, the legislature voted on August 18, 1920. The upper house ratified the amendment twenty-four to four, and the lower house joined it with forty-nine in favor of ratification and forty-seven against.²⁹ On August 26, at eight in the morning, there was an official proclamation adding the amendment to the United States constitution. The right of citizens to vote could no longer be denied by the United States, or by any state, on the basis of sex.³⁰ Just weeks later, on September 21, all Nebraskans voted on a new constitution. Out of a total vote of 80,899 on the issue of woman suffrage, 47,471 men and 18,012 women favored the extension of suffrage. Just seven years earlier the issue had remained so controversial that the men had clearly rejected giving the ballot to women. In 1920 only 14,462 men and 954 women voted against woman suffrage.³¹

Not many women used the ballot in 1920. Just under 62,000 men voted on the new constitution. Only 19,000 women used their voting privileges.³² In 1919 a Columbus reporter warned women not “to demand too much—control elections without

²⁹ Morgan, p. 141.

³⁰ *The United States Constitution*, 13th ed. (Washington, D. C.: Commission on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution, 1991), p. 29; Coulter, 172-90.

³¹ *Nebraska Blue Book*, pp. 101-2.

³² *Ibid.*

reference to men's wishes; nominate female candidates to important positions."³³ The warning seems to have been taken to heart. In the next two elections only three women were elected to the Nebraska legislature, all in the lower house.³⁴ The apathy many women felt about their voting rights may have signaled more subtle discrimination. Social attitudes about the role of women continued to define young women's self-perception as second-class citizens.³⁵

Despite numerous areas of inequality, the woman of the 1920s searched for fulfillment and freedom not through legal, economic, and social change, but through new gadgets designed to free her from the drudgery of house work. While the burden of house work was dramatically lightened, true freedom continued to elude many women. Opportunities in jobs, wage increases, and promotions were systematically denied women. Suffrage for women married to alien residents of the state of Nebraska continued to be denied, even if the woman was a natural-born citizen of the United States. Nebraska's registration form required all married women to prove their husband's citizenship.³⁶ Other state laws also remained sex-biased, such as those requiring jury duty, and ironically, the poll tax. All "men over twenty-one and under fifty" had to pay \$2.50 to vote. Because the law stipulated only men, women were exempt from the tax.³⁷

³³ "And Now the Women," *Columbus News*, March 7, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³⁴ Elizabeth Cox, *Women State and Territorial Legislators 1895-1995* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc., 1996), pp. 179-82.

³⁵ Women have not actively pursued their political rights. Male participation in elections has been consistently higher in all major elections. Schneider, pp. 244-5.

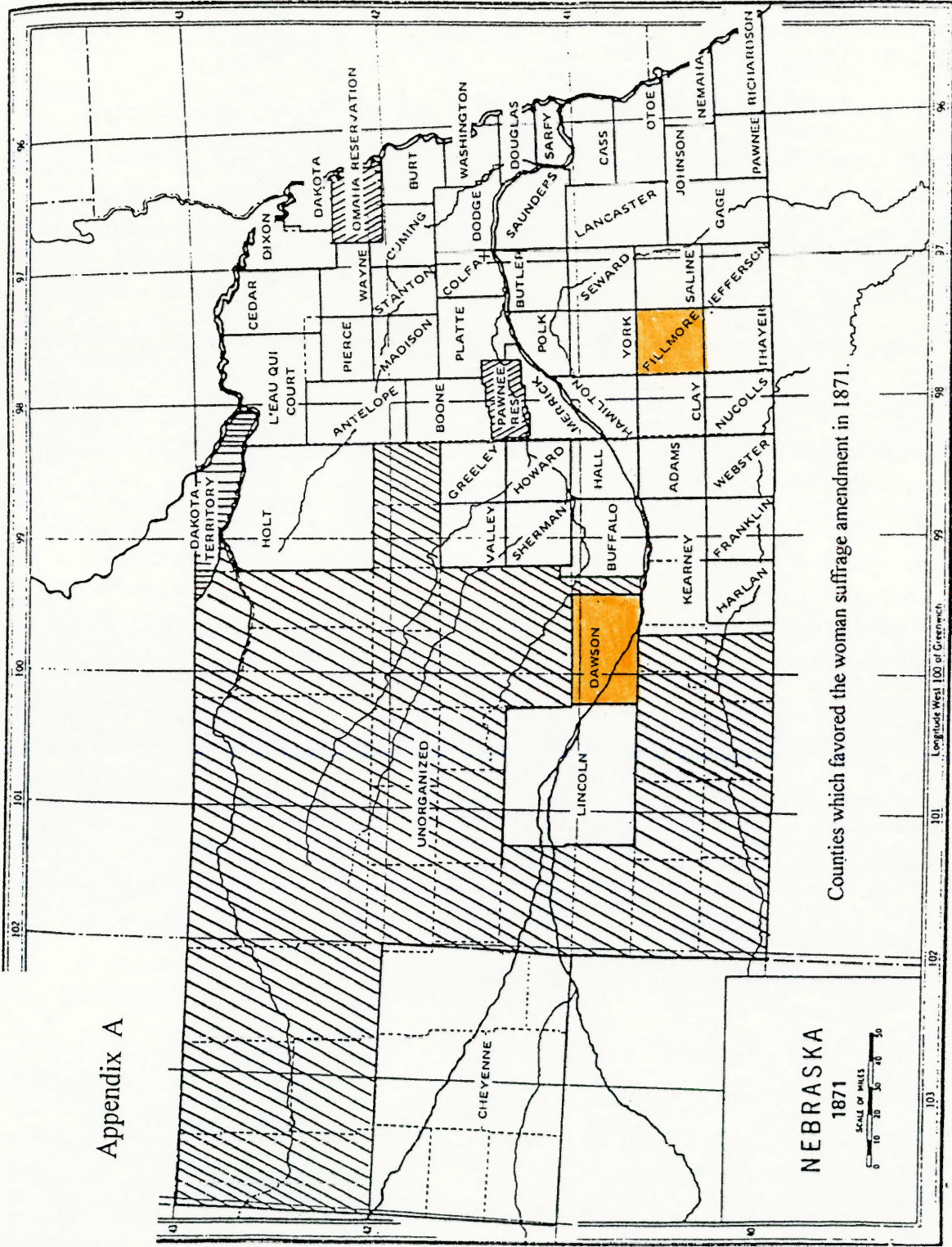
³⁶ "Partial Vote For Women," *Nebraska City Press*, March 16, 1919, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³⁷ Paine, pp. 214-15.

The decline of female activism can be attributed mainly to the changing American culture. Many historians see the 1920s as a watershed, the dawn of modern America. For the first time the majority of Americans lived in urban areas, which stimulated a consumer economy and promoted materialism; by the end of the decade most drove automobiles, spent the evening listening to the same radio programs and advertisements, and had at least seen an airplane. As all Americans longed for a “return to normalcy” with President Harding, society in general rejected the lofty idealism symbolized by President Wilson specifically, and the progressive era in general. Many suffragists, such as Carrie Chapman Catt, believed that associations for women’s rights were no longer necessary. Although the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association automatically became the League of Women Voters following the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, the role of the transformed association was much more limited than its predecessor.³⁸ Though it was not only women whose activism declined during the roaring decade, the daughters of the suffragists left unfinished the women’s movement. The campaign for equal voting rights was only the beginning of what would eventually become in the 1970s an attempt to fulfill the dreams of Susan B. Anthony and the other radicals of the nineteenth century: social and economic equality matched to political and legal equality.

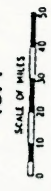
³⁸ “Nebraska,” *Woman Citizen*, November 15, 1919, “clippings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; Mary Dietrich to Rose Young of *Woman Citizen*, October 11, 1919, “writings” file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

Appendix A

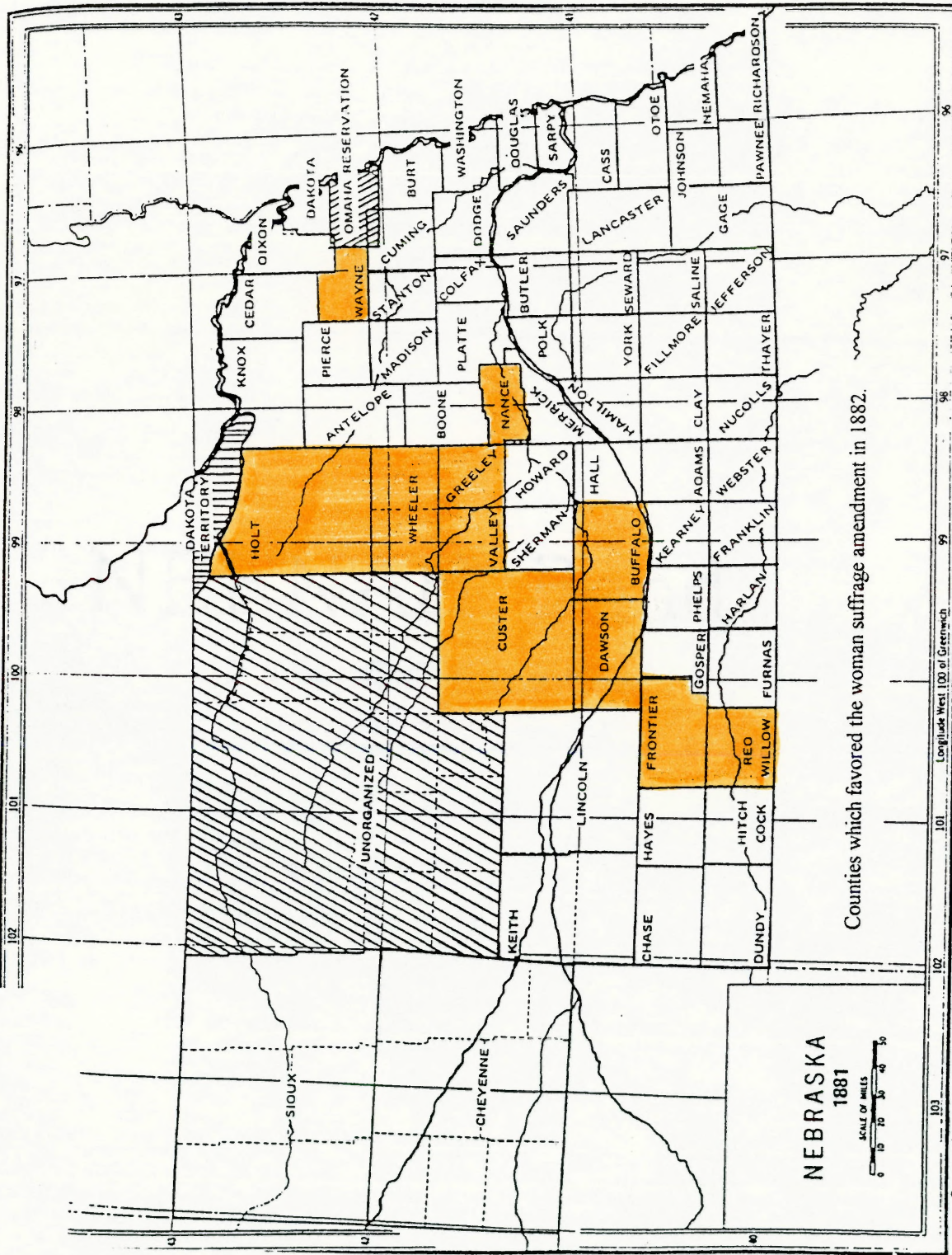


Counties which favored the woman suffrage amendment in 1871.

NEBRASKA
1871



Appendix B



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