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The grassroots diffusion of the woman suffrage movement in Iowa: the IESA, rural women, and the right to vote

by

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Major: History

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Table of Contents

Introduction: “Eventually, Why Not Now?”	1
Chapter 1: The Beginnings of Woman Suffrage in Iowa, 1870-1900	9
Chapter 2: Waking Up the Women of Iowa, 1900-1914	29
Chapter 3: The Suffrage Bill and Beyond, 1914-1920	65
Conclusion: “A Partnership Was Needed to Get By”	99
Bibliography	104

Introduction

“Eventually, Why Not Now?”

Strapped to the back of Carrie Dean Pruyn’s “broad Buick” was an old sheet with the slogan “Eventually, Why not now” painted on it.¹ Pruyn had written the words in black paint “so it would show up good.”² On a hot day in May 1916, Pruyn and four other suffragists crammed into her car and took off across Ida County, Iowa, the sheet billowing behind them “for all to see.”³ Pruyn took her car out that day because a year earlier, the Iowa General Assembly had passed a bill that placed a suffrage amendment on the June 5, 1916 primary ballot. If suffrage leaders could convince a majority of Iowa’s voters to support the amendment, woman suffrage would become a reality in the state. Suffragists initiated one of the most widespread grassroots campaigns to secure the vote for women in Iowa.

On the road between Galva and Holstein, Pruyn’s party met carloads of other suffragists agitating for the cause. Stopping at every farmstead and town they crossed, the women got out of the car and began to speak to anyone—male or female—who would listen. “We talked with women washing, women canning, women surrounded by little children,” she recollected.⁴ Some farm women listened intently and asked questions about the suffrage campaign. Others did not “have a ghost of an idea what the word suffrage meant or why in the world we should want to go to the polls and vote like the

¹ Carrie Dean Pruyn, “Suffrage Reminiscences, Sept. 1936,” Carrie Dean Pruyn Papers, State Historical Society of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa [hereafter SHSIC].

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

men did.”⁵ The party answered doubtful farm women with “words and speeches...learned from Mrs. Catt and the higher ups.”⁶ Pruyn vividly remembered standing “one foot on a bobwire [sic] fence,” talking “a blue streak to some blue overhauled farmer.”⁷ Some men were polite and took suffrage literature home with them while others told the suffragists to “go home and wash their dishes and take care of their children.”⁸ While Pruyn may not have persuaded every person she met that day to support the cause, she noted that the idea of woman suffrage had “stirred up the people, women especially.”⁹ The movement may have been “a raw idea at first,” but Pruyn made sure to educate farm people about it in the hopes of securing the rural vote in June.¹⁰

Generations of historians have studied the woman suffrage movement in the United States. National histories such as Eleanor Flexner’s *Century of Struggle* and regional and state histories comprise a large body of secondary work.¹¹ Familiar names

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ See, Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States* (New York: Atheneum, 1972); Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle, *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage: Selections from History of Woman Suffrage, edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joselyn Gage, and The National American Woman Suffrage Association* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978); Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 1 (New York: Fowler & Wells, Publishers, 1881); Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 2 (New York: Fowler & Wells, Publishers, 1881); Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 3 (Rochester, N.Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1887); Susan B. Anthony and Ida H. Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 4 (Rochester, N.Y.: Susan B. Anthony, 1902); Ida H. Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 5 (New York: National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1922); Ida H. Harper, *History of Woman Suffrage*, Vol. 6 (New York: National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1922). For an example of a monograph that contains primary documents from the woman suffrage movement, see, Anne Firor Scott and Andrew MacKay Scott, *One Half the People: The Fight for Woman Suffrage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975). Other monographs that deal with the national suffrage movement include, Jeff Hill, *Defining Moments Woman suffrage* (Detroit: Omnigraphics, Inc., 2006); G. Allen Foster, *Votes for Women* (New York: Criterion Books, 1966); Ellen Carol DuBois, *Woman Suffrage and Women’s Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman*

such as Stanton, Anthony, Stone, Shaw, and Catt fill the pages of these works. In addition, scholars have analyzed the movement through the lens of class, race, geography, ethnicity, and in relation to reform movements such as temperance.¹² While a plethora of secondary sources about the woman suffrage movement clearly exists, historians have failed to focus any substantial degree of attention to the involvement of

Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965). Regional and state histories abound as well. See, Genevieve G. McBride, *On Wisconsin Women: Working for their Rights from Settlement to Suffrage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Louise R. Noun, *Strong-Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman-Suffrage Movement in Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1969); A. Elizabeth Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee* (New York: Octagon Books, 1978); Carol Cornwall Madsen, *Battle for the Ballot: Essays on Woman Suffrage in Utah, 1870-1896* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1997); Dornida Risessen Reed, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in South Dakota* (Government al Research Bureau: State University of South Dakota, 1958); Steven M. Buechler, *The Transformation of the Woman Suffrage Movement: The Case of Illinois, 1850-1920* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 1986); Gayle Gullett, *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women's Movement, 1880-1911* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Rebecca J. Mead, *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Beverly Beeton, *Women Vote in the West: The Woman Suffrage Movement, 1869-1896* (New York: Garland Pub., 1986); Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *Votes for Women!: The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee, the South, and the Nation* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995); Kendra S. Shiffman, *The State-By-State Diffusion of Woman Suffrage Legislative Success from the Western United States* (master's thesis: Brigham Young University, 1998).

¹² For a discussion of class in the woman suffrage movement, see, Susan E. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign against Woman Suffrage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997). For more nuanced studies of the woman suffrage movement, see Lee Ann Banaszak, *Why Movements Succeed or Fail: Opportunity, Culture, and the Struggle for Woman Suffrage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). Banaszak compares the Swiss suffrage movement of the mid-twentieth century with the United States suffrage movement. She believes that commonly shared beliefs about suffrage held the movement together in the United States and that the movement successfully allied itself with abolition, populism, and progressivism. Jean H. Baker's *Votes for Women* also provides a useful series of more recent articles regarding a more geographically, ethnically, and racially diverse look at woman suffrage. See Jean H. Baker, ed., *Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Linda Lumsden examines the suffragists use of petitions, pageants, open-air campaigns, parades, and picketing to achieve the right to vote in her monograph, Linda Lumsden, *Rampant Women: Suffragists and the Right of Assembly* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1997). Martha Solomon analyzes the woman suffrage press and how it gave women an avenue through which to publicize suffrage events, issues, and ideologies. Martha M. Solomon, *A Voice of Their Own: The Woman Suffrage Press, 1840-1910* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1991). Finally, Marjorie Spruill Wheeler compiled an excellent set of articles dedicated to the study of suffrage in terms of race, gender, politics, ethnicity, and geography. See Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, ed., *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement* (Troutdale, Ore.: NewSage Press, 1995). For a comparison to the temperance movement, see Janet Z. Giele, *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage, and the Origins of Modern Feminism* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995).

rural women. Historians from Eleanor Flexner to Anne Firor Scott to Ellen Carol DuBois rarely mention rural women in their works, if at all.

Likewise, scholars who study rural women have virtually ignored their involvement in the suffrage movement. Only a few historians of rural women write about woman suffrage in their work, and their opinions about it differ substantially. According to historian Barbara Handy-Marchello, “there is no evidence” of rural women participating in the woman suffrage movement.¹³ In fact, Handy-Marchello asserts that most “men and women, were impassive.”¹⁴ She argues that suffrage leaders refused to organize rural women into an effective suffrage association, noting that they failed to see “their rural counterparts as allies, as intelligent women with strong credentials in community organization, as the source of change in rural communities.”¹⁵ On the other hand, Mary Neth argues that rural women displayed an enthusiastic interest in the movement. She notes that a popular monthly magazine, *Farmer’s Wife*, supported the woman suffrage movement during the early-twentieth century. Reports within its pages showed that rural women actively participated in the woman’s movement and rural reform in the Midwest.¹⁶

While historians give conflicting assessments of the involvement of rural women in the woman suffrage movement overall, in Iowa, farm women were neither ignorant nor uninterested in it. They may not have formally joined the movement, but they did interact with it in their daily lives, especially as suffragists adopted more dramatic tactics to bring

¹³ Barbara Handy-Marchello, *Women of the Northern Plains: Gender and Settlement on the Homestead Frontier, 1870-1930* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2005), 97.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 229.

their message to rural areas. True, a significant disparity existed between more urban, educated, well-to-do women with leisure time to devote to the cause and rural women who, on the other hand, had less education, money, and free time and spent most of their time engaged in farm work.¹⁷ Nevertheless, between 1870 and 1920, suffragists gradually adopted direct and creative methods of suffrage work in order to give publicity to the movement. They hoped to convince rural people of the benefits of woman suffrage and align them to the cause, because the fate of suffrage depended on the rural vote. In Iowa as in the rest of the Midwest, suffrage for the state's women came down to a referendum vote. Suffragists knew that they had to convince a majority of the state's population to support the cause in order to guarantee a suffrage victory. Therefore, suffrage leaders turned their attention to the rural population. They actively and directly sought the support of people on the farm to support the ballot for women, arguing that women required the right to vote as a protective measure for the home and family. Not until World War I did suffragists modify their message with a patriotic twist. For their part, rural men and women came out in droves to hear about suffrage and learn about its benefits. Demonstrating a high level of curiosity and enthusiasm, rural people wholeheartedly engaged with the movement. Farm people read about it in newspapers, listened to suffrage speakers, and encountered suffragists at county fairs, Chautauquas, and other social events. They were keenly aware of the woman suffrage movement and developed strong convictions both for and against it.

¹⁷ The biographies of fifty Iowa suffrage leaders appear in the Iowa Women's Suffrage collection at the State Historical Society of Des Moines. Most of the women were eastern transplants who had brought their pro-suffrage views with them to Iowa. See, Box 7, DM Iowa Women's Suffrage Records: 1838-1940, [hereafter DMIWSR] MS 071, N 20/3/1, State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, Iowa [hereafter SHSIDM].

The reasons why rural women became interested in the suffrage cause remain unclear. A new meaning of political involvement may be necessary for understanding how rural women crossed into this new political landscape. Historian Jenny Barker-Devine provides helpful insight into rural women's activism, tackling the issue of rural women's political involvement during the latter half of the twentieth century. She posits that scholars of rural women must identify a new concept of "relational feminism" in which rural women "sought power over resources and the ability to bring about change by relating their activism to everyday experiences as mothers, as farm workers, and as members of the agricultural community."¹⁸ Mutuality, according to Barker-Devine, explains their role within the family and larger rural community. Women saw themselves as vital partners of the farm household who provided important economic support to the prosperity of the family and community. Farm men accepted women's involvement within the agricultural community, and rural women could participate in political activities under the pretense of the traditional model of farm families.¹⁹

Between 1870 and 1920, suffrage leaders in Iowa gradually infused ideas of mutuality and equal partnership into their messages to rural women. At first, suffragists were hesitant to step outside of their suffrage clubs to spread this message, but slowly they began to publicize the movement. The first chapter highlights the last thirty years of the nineteenth century, identifying key women's groups that supported the cause and discussing the ways in which local suffrage societies experimented with new methods to

¹⁸ Jenny Barker-Devine, "'Our Cherished Ideals': Rural Women, Activism, and Identity in the Midwest, 1950-1990" (PhD diss., Iowa State University, 2008), 20. For more on Barker-Devine's discussion of mutuality, see the first chapter of her dissertation entitled "What makes an Activist? Farm Women, 'Mutuality,' and American Agriculture."

¹⁹ Barker-Devine, "Our Cherished Ideals," 19-20.

connect with rural people. Chapter two covers the first decade and a half of the twentieth century and explains how suffrage leaders at both the state and local levels pursued even more spectacular methods of suffrage work in order to attract rural people to the cause. Eventually, suffrage leaders took their message to the streets by organizing a massive grassroots automobile campaign, one of the first ever in Iowa's history. Finally, the third chapter details the peak of suffrage work in Iowa—the 1916 suffrage bill campaign. During the spring of 1916, suffrage leaders held nothing back as they worked to secure a woman suffrage amendment to the state's constitution. By that point, they had fully tailored their message to one of protection and rural development. By illuminating the ways rural women could improve life for their children, husbands, and communities by voting, suffrage leaders echoed rural reformers who identified farm women as equal partners with their husbands on the farm and asserted that women were the driving force behind efforts for “rural uplift.”

During an era of progressive reform in the United States, suffragists in Iowa managed one of the most wide-ranging grassroots campaigns in the state's history. Suffrage leaders exerted significant effort and spent thousands of dollars to secure woman suffrage. Through propaganda and other direct campaign methods, they brought the message of woman suffrage to the people of Iowa. In the process, suffragists listened to the desires of rural women and modified their approach to suffrage work in order to reach them. They raised questions of power, gender, and community as they argued that rural women deserved the right to vote because of their mutual partnership in the family and community. Armed with the ballot, rural women would neither contest traditional gender roles nor become radical political activists, argued suffrage leaders. Instead,

enfranchisement would allow rural women the opportunity to improve rural conditions and strengthen family life.

Chapter 1

The Beginnings of Woman Suffrage in Iowa, 1870-1900

On April 21, 1870, L. W. Meyers, editor of the Wapello *Republican*, a small-town newspaper in southeast Iowa, wrote a reply to Joseph Dugdale's call to attend Iowa's first equal suffrage convention. "I am and my wife is also heartily in favor of the cause of equal rights, and it give[s] me great pleasure to write in the call you suggest, and to aid it in any way we can," he wrote.²⁰ Dugdale, a well-known advocate of the peace and equal suffrage causes, had written to Meyers to invite him to a woman suffrage convention in Mount Pleasant on June 16 and 17, 1870. As word of the equal suffrage meeting spread during the spring of 1870, curiosity among Iowa's residents grew. When the convention began on June 16, the hall filled to its capacity of almost twelve hundred people. Over the next two days, every session had a packed audience. The convention became the first organized meeting of suffrage sympathizers in the state of Iowa, and out of it came the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association, or the IWSA. Henry O'Connor, Iowa's Attorney General, became the first president and Amelia Bloomer its first vice president.²¹ The movement for woman suffrage had officially come to Iowa.

Between 1870 and 1900, the woman suffrage movement in Iowa grew slowly but steadily in the state. During these three decades, the movement developed the most among prominent women of the state, in the state government, and in local communities. Helping Iowa's suffrage leaders along the way were national leaders in both the American Woman Suffrage Association, or the AWSA, and National Woman Suffrage

²⁰ L. W. Meyers to Joseph Dugdale, April 21, 1870, D879, Joseph Dugdale Papers, SHSIDM.

²¹ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 133-40.

Association, or the NWSA. Lucy Stone and Julia Ward Howe lead the AWSA while Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton held top positions in the NWSA. The two groups had splintered apart shortly before the Mount Pleasant convention over a dispute regarding African American voting rights.²² In fact, representatives from both organizations came to Mount Pleasant to ensure that the newly formed IWSA remained independent from national affiliation.²³ For ten years, the NWSA and AWSA operated separately but still worked to promote woman suffrage across the United States. Back in Iowa, the organization of the IWSA in 1870 gave credibility to the cause and provided publicity to the curious Iowa resident. Getting the word out about suffrage provided its leaders the foundation needed to secure the ultimate suffrage victory—an amendment granting women the right to vote. Between 1870 and 1880, the IWSA expanded its efforts in the state, attempting to reach political leaders and prominent individuals in the state. As the twentieth century approached, suffrage leaders turned their attention to the cultivation of local suffrage sentiment within the state’s rural communities. These suffragists realized early on that support among the people was the most important factor in securing the vote for women in Iowa.

Suffrage opinions developed gradually in the state between 1870 and 1890. Four months after the Mount Pleasant convention, the first local suffrage society formed in Des Moines. Only the most “influential ladies of the city” attended the meeting.²⁴ Early in 1871, national leaders, such as Lucy Stone and Susan B. Anthony, spoke across Iowa

²² The dispute arose over the Fifteenth Amendment that granted the right to vote to African American men. The NWSA argued that women deserved suffrage along with African American men while the AWSA held that women should wait to fight for enfranchisement until after African American men received the right to vote.

²³ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 138.

²⁴ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 149. Quote comes from the *Des Moines Register*, Oct. 30, 1870.

and helped draw out crowds interested in woman suffrage.²⁵ When in October, Keziah Anderson of Taylor County cast a Republican ballot, the election judges decided that she had a legal right to vote under the Fourteenth Amendment that defined her as a citizen.²⁶ The following February, suffrage supporters in the Iowa General Assembly introduced a woman suffrage amendment in the House along with a bill to submit the amendment to the General Assembly during its session in 1873. The amendment called for the deletion of the word “male” from the voting qualifications listed in the state constitution. After receiving a favorable recommendation in committee, the House put the measure up for a vote four days later, on February 21. Over three hundred people packed the House chamber to hear debate on the bill. To most people’s surprise, the measure passed the House by a sizable majority.²⁷ It moved on to the Senate, where a month later, on March 29, the woman suffrage amendment received prolonged debate. While one pro-suffrage senator pointed out that the people of Iowa had to make the final decision regarding a woman suffrage amendment, another anti-suffragist argued that Iowa needed to keep the vote away from “ignorant and indifferent” women “whose very name is frailty.”²⁸ Anti-suffrage sentiment prevailed, and the woman suffrage amendment failed by four votes.²⁹

Despite the setback in the General Assembly, suffragists in Iowa continued to find ways to strengthen the cause. In 1878, a woman suffrage petition circulated among the members of the General Assembly. Signed by prominent suffrage leaders such as Mary Coggeshall, Martha Callanan, and Narcissa Bemis, the petition outlined the reasons why

²⁵ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 158-63.

²⁶ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 174-75.

²⁷ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 206-217.

²⁸ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 217.

²⁹ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 218.

the women of Iowa required the right to vote. “We earnestly appeal to every [legislator]...to ask himself these questions,” wrote the women.³⁰ “If I were a woman, how should I...choose to be taxed and governed without my consent? Should I be willing to owe to the despotic will of women alone all my personal rights, all my property rights, my right to guard my own dearest interests and those of my children?”³¹ Echoing future arguments about woman suffrage, the petition pointed out that tax-paying women deserved full control of their property. In addition, the right to vote gave women the ability to protect the family and “promote the welfare of State and Nation.”³² The petition closed with a final plea to Iowa’s legislators: “We most sincerely ask that this question involving the best interests of both men and women be given to the lawful voters of Iowa to decide.”³³ The request sounded quite similar to the 1872 suffrage bill that had failed in the Senate.

Eight years later, the IWSA received a boost when the Iowa Grange endorsed woman suffrage.³⁴ The Grange, or Patrons of Husbandry, had formed in 1867 as a secret society for people tied to farming and agriculture. Women played an integral, yet subordinate role in the group by holding offices designated only for women. As early as 1873, woman suffrage had been a topic of intense debate among Grangers in the United States. In 1885, perhaps at the insistence of its female members, the Iowa Grange pledged

³⁰ “To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the State of Iowa,” Legislative Petition, 1878, Folder 20, Box 6, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Donald Marti, *Women of the Grange: Mutuality and Sisterhood in Rural America, 1866-1920* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 115.

its support of an amendment to the Iowa constitution granting woman suffrage.³⁵ While the action seemed to stem from a desire to attract more members to the group, the IWSA nevertheless had made an important ally among the farm organizations of the state.³⁶

As suffrage leaders in Iowa continued to work for woman suffrage in the state, they maintained strong relationships with leaders from the two national associations. In the late 1880s, however, suffrage leaders in the AWSA and the NWSA began to consider the formation of one national alliance. In 1887, the two camps began discussing the details of a merger. Facilitated by Alice Stone Blackwell, daughter of Lucy Stone, the unification of the two associations occurred at a joint convention held in 1890. The National American Woman Suffrage Association, or the NAWSA, became the official association of all national activities, helping to consolidate suffrage work and improving cooperative efforts among state and national leaders. Elizabeth Cady Stanton became the first president and held the position until 1892 when renowned suffragist Susan B. Anthony took the helm. Anthony quickly took notice of a young, energetic woman from Iowa who possessed supreme organizational and speaking abilities. Anthony developed a strong friendship with the woman, Carrie Chapman Catt, and the two remained close friends until Anthony's death in 1906.³⁷

With the creation of the NAWSA, the woman suffrage movement had taken a huge step forward. In addition, the cause received vital support from two other women's groups with members at the state and national levels. The Women's Christian Temperance Union, or the WCTU, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs began

³⁵ Marti, *Women of the Grange*, 20, 41.

³⁶ Marti, *Women of the Grange*, 115.

³⁷ Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 216-220.

to take up suffrage work during the late-nineteenth century. The WCTU, founded in 1874 to promote temperance, first endorsed woman suffrage in 1879 when Francis Willard became president of the national organization.³⁸ In 1883, the WCTU adopted a resolution calling for “equal and unlimited suffrage for women.”³⁹ The Iowa branch of the national WCTU—called the WCTU of Iowa—began its association with the IWSA sometime around the national endorsement. Its members supported the IWSA’s suffrage referendum demand and cultivated suffrage sentiment in rural areas.⁴⁰ Where no official suffrage organization existed, especially in remote villages, the WCTU helped keep pro-suffrage opinions alive through its activities.⁴¹

In addition to support from the WCTU at the state and national levels, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs became an important ally to the suffrage cause in the United States and Iowa. Formed in 1890 from a conglomeration of literary and other women’s societies, the General Federation espoused a wide variety of causes, from setting up libraries to promoting education and social reform.⁴² Although the General Federation did not officially endorse woman suffrage until 1914, suffrage sentiment had existed among local clubs as early as the late-nineteenth century.⁴³ In Iowa, the club movement had begun in the late 1850s with a handful of women’s literary societies.⁴⁴ As more people continued to settle in Iowa, the number of women involved in club work increased dramatically, and in April 1893, members of the Des Moines Woman’s Club

³⁸ Giele, *Two Paths*, 64.

³⁹ Giele, *Two Paths*, 105.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Giele, *Two Paths*, 107.

⁴² Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Homes & Meyer Publishers, Inc., 1980), 95.

⁴³ Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*, 111.

⁴⁴ Jennie June Croly, *The History of the Woman’s Club Movement in America* (New York: Henry G. Allen & Co., 1898), 451.

called upon clubwomen from across Iowa to form the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs.⁴⁵ Immediately, the state association joined the General Federation.⁴⁶ The Iowa Federation wanted to improve life in the state by "founding libraries, beautifying villages, purifying social life, [and] raising the standard of education."⁴⁷ Although Iowa's clubwomen did not admit to supporting woman suffrage outright, many clubs disguised their interest in the cause by claiming to study benign subjects such as civil government, politics, American history, and "social questions by means of original papers, lectures, and discussions."⁴⁸ The topics of interest to clubwomen in the Iowa Federation indicated a keen desire to learn more about issues related to their rights as disenfranchised citizens. The Iowa Federation, along with the WCTU of Iowa, continued to help develop suffrage sentiment in the state into the twentieth century.

While the IWSA, WCTU of Iowa, and Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs worked for woman suffrage on the state level, suffrage work in small communities kept the woman suffrage movement alive at the ground level. Grassroots organization in the state exposed higher numbers of rural Iowans to the suffrage cause than did the state association. Pockets of pro-suffrage sentiment promoted the cause within specific areas throughout Iowa, and the woman suffrage movement gained vital local publicity. For many small-town suffragists, the most important goal of their work was to bring the suffrage message to the men and women of Iowa and allow them at least to consider its merits. During the late-nineteenth century, a high percentage of Iowa's residents came

⁴⁵ Croly, *The History of the Women's Club Movement*, 464-65, 468.

⁴⁶ Croly, *The History of the Women's Club Movement*, 468.

⁴⁷ Croly, *The History of the Women's Club Movement*, 478.

⁴⁸ See the section on Iowa in, Croly, *The History of the Women's Club Movement*, 451-79. The quote is taken from page 472.

from rural backgrounds and engaged in farming and other agricultural pursuits. Finding ways to reach the rural population, therefore, became an important aspect of suffrage work in Iowa. While dramatic demonstrations eventually brought attention to the suffrage cause throughout the state, early on, most suffragists took a behind-the-scenes approach to their suffrage work and operated through local suffrage societies. Beginning in the early 1890s, these neighborhood groups vied for the support of rural Iowans by utilizing the existing structures in which rural people socialized, received news, and expressed their beliefs.

Small suffrage clubs made sure to carry the suffrage message to rural residents who lived in the surrounding areas. In 1892 in “a little country village of only forty-six inhabitants” called Doon, suffragists held a “crowded meeting” that drew “people for many miles.”⁴⁹ Those who gathered in Doon collected ten dollars for the cause, pledged another ten dollars, and then called another meeting. Attendees at the second meeting collected another thirty-two dollars for suffrage.⁵⁰ In Dunlap, Iowa, population one thousand, suffragists “obtained columns in ten weekly and two daily papers of the county.”⁵¹ In Independence and Charles City, suffrage societies attempted to flood their small communities with pro-suffrage sentiment. The Independence Political Equality Club organized after a suffrage lecture delivered at a local Baptist church in December 1889. “A goodly number attended” the meeting, and afterward, those present decided to form an official club.⁵² Narcissa Bemis, who signed the 1878 petition to the Iowa

⁴⁹ “The Banner Club of Iowa,” *Woman’s Column*, 1892, Box 21, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Newspaper clippings, Dec. 1889, found in the Independence Political Equality Club Minutes, Folder 9, Box 6, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

legislature, became the first president, and the organization remained open to both men and women.⁵³ In Charles City, eighteen men and women met at the home of M. L. Lane on November 7, 1891 to form the Charles City Political Equality Club. Lucy Littel became the group's first president.⁵⁴ Both suffrage clubs met monthly in a member's home.⁵⁵

The work of the two societies immediately took a serious tone as the women wanted to act in the most "official" manner as possible. Charles City's women immediately adopted a constitution that outlined the purpose of the organization and the duties of the officers.⁵⁶ They also sent for a copy of Robert's Rules of Order as soon as possible.⁵⁷ In addition, the suffrage clubs tackled questions that involved a high degree of critical thinking. In January 1892, Charles City's women discussed the question "why should not President be elected by popular vote same as Governor of State" as well as why "should United State Senator be elected in a different manner than Congressman."⁵⁸ Replies to both questions were "there is no reason why he should not" and "we see no reason why," respectively.⁵⁹ In Independence, the issue of citizenship came up in March 1890. The town's high school principal lead the discussion, and the women quoted the definition in Webster's dictionary and the Fourteenth Amendment in their responses. The group decided that woman "is a citizen and the courts have said so time and time

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Secretary's Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, Nov. 7, 1891, SHSIIC.

⁵⁵ See, Secretary's Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, SHSIIC; Independence Political Equality Club Minutes, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Secretary's Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, Nov. 21, 1891, SHSIIC.

⁵⁸ Secretary's Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, Jan. 2, 1891, SHSIIC.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

again.”⁶⁰ Clearly, these women were not ignorant or indifferent to politics. Instead, club members displayed a high level of interest in political matters. They wanted to know more about political affairs, especially regarding voting rights and the election of high officials. They understood the key issues of the time and debated them with keen insight and intelligence.

Despite their desire to learn about politics, the members of the suffrage societies proceeded cautiously into the world of government affairs. For most of the members, a single question burned in the back of their minds: could women enter politics while remaining a loving, respectable mother and wife? Political Equality Club members in Independence and Charles City debated the question quite often. On February 7, 1890, the Independence Club opened the question box, a container in which members could submit inquiries to the entire group. On a piece of paper, one of the women had written, “will the ballot in the hands of women interfere with their domestic duties?”⁶¹ After a discussion, one of the women suggested that the group vote on the matter. The secretary reported that “no was the emphatic vote of the entire club to the question proposed.”⁶² The women in Independence had struck a contentious concern among women both for and against woman suffrage. Many anti-suffragists feared that with the ballot, women would abandon their families. Even vocal suffragists like those in Independence faced the question with a degree of uncertainty. Did women possess the ability to serve the family while participating in political activities? Could women live in both the public sphere of politics and the private sphere of the family? For the Independence Political Equality

⁶⁰ Independence Political Equality Club Minutes, page 17, March 7, 1890, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁶¹ Independence Political Equality Club Minutes, page 16, Feb. 7, 1890, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁶² Ibid.

Club, at least, the answer to those questions was a resounding “yes.” Despite the enthusiastic vote that took place in Independence in February 1890, the issue continued to plague suffrage leaders into the twentieth century.

Concerns that suffrage would interfere with domestic responsibilities did not deter people from visiting the political equality club meetings. In both Independence and Charles City, a steady stream of guests attended the societies’ monthly meetings. At the first social of the Independence Political Equality Club, each club member invited four guests to the event. Nearly one hundred women attended. At the social, one clubwoman read an article regarding the property rights of women in Iowa while others presented papers about women in the ministry and the legal rights of women in Nebraska.⁶³ While the account did not indicate who visited the social, a handful of farm women no doubt enjoyed the day’s activities. In addition to socials, visitors showed up at most of the Independence Club meetings. In January 1891, the secretary reported that a small number of visitors joined the regular membership.⁶⁴ In Charles City, the club usually entertained two or three visitors at each meeting. However, in June 1894, sixteen women visited the club during a regular meeting. “The entire afternoon was voted a great success intellectually and socially,” recorded the secretary.⁶⁵

Few details exist about the people who attended the Charles City and Independence suffrage meetings. Yet, the presence of visitors raises questions about the nature of political activism among the rural population. Most likely, rural people could

⁶³ Newspaper Clipping, 1889, found in Independence Political Equality Club Minutes, Folder 9, Box 6, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁶⁴ Independence Political Equality Club Minutes, page 25, Jan. 20, 1891, Folder 9, Box 6, DMISWR, SHSIDM.

⁶⁵ Secretary’s Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, June 6, 1894, SHSIIC.

neither afford annual club dues nor devote enough leisure time to attend every meeting.⁶⁶ Daily chores and distance kept them away. However, despite these limitations, rural Iowans could not curb their curiosity about the woman suffrage movement, and they took time out of their day to attend a suffrage meeting. The circumstances under which people visited the suffrage club remain uncertain. Perhaps a farmer or his wife came to a suffrage meeting if he or she had already made plans to go to another engagement in town. Maybe a farm woman attended a club function because a suffragist-friend had extended her a special invitation. Whatever the motivation, a number of people from within and outside the community gathered with both political equality clubs and heard the woman suffrage message firsthand. When they returned home afterward, these people no doubt told their friends and family about what they had encountered, helping to spread word about woman suffrage beyond the established circles of suffrage sentiment.

While local political equality clubs entertained visitors regularly, they also made sure to disseminate the suffrage message through community institutions in their area. Religious organizations proved early allies to the movement. In Independence, the Political Equality Club held a party honoring the eightieth birthday of Susan B. Anthony. They invited three members of the Ladies' Aid Society to provide musical entertainment.⁶⁷ Over in Charles City, the club made a special visit to the WCTU in February 1892, and the president of the Political Equality Club presented a paper entitled

⁶⁶ Although neither the Charles City nor Independence Political Equality Clubs list their dues in their minute books, other political equality clubs did. In Chariton, Iowa in 1900, the dues for the local political equality club were fifty cents a year. In addition, the officers required each member to purchase a subscription to the *Woman's Standard* and other suffrage publications. On top of those expenses, members had to pay for special suffrage dinners. The money requirement alone made membership for farm women impractical if not impossible. See, Chariton Equal Suffrage Society Minutes, Folder 2, Box 3, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁶⁷ Newspaper clipping, found in the Independence Political Equality Club Minutes, Folder 9, Box 6, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

“Woman Suffrage” to the group.⁶⁸ In November 1896, the society enjoyed an article written by a Charles City woman about two “excellent sermons on womans suffrage” delivered in the Congregational and Presbyterian churches.⁶⁹

In addition to tapping the resources of community institutions, the Political Equality Clubs also utilized the printed and spoken word to spread the suffrage message. In January 1892, the members of the Charles City Political Equality Club received a letter from the IWSA. The state association asked the group to distribute petitions throughout their community and secure as many signatures as possible.⁷⁰ Just two weeks later, members reported that they had obtained 125 names.⁷¹ That the club effectively canvassed their community and found over one hundred supporters speaks to the growing suffrage sentiment in Iowa. In addition to petitions, suffragists in Charles City and Independence used suffrage lectures and newspaper articles to promote the cause. In February 1893, the Charles City Club received a letter from a woman in the county who wanted to know if the society could arrange suffrage lectures in various places in the area. The group chose its secretary, Anna Mahara, to write letters to a number of towns in the county, hoping that “some advantage might be gained” from hosting a suffrage speaker.⁷² The secretary did not include any report on whether or not the club eventually secured a lecturer. A month later, the Independence Club “decided to try to get a column

⁶⁸ Secretary’s Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, Feb. 27, 1892, SHSIIC.

⁶⁹ Independence Political Equality Society Minutes, page 13, Nov. 28, 1896, Folder 9, Box 6, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁷⁰ Secretary’s Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, Jan. 2, 1892, SHSIIC.

⁷¹ Secretary’s Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, Jan. 16, 1892, SHSIIC.

⁷² Secretary’s Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, Feb. 22, 1893, SHSIIC.

in the ‘Bulletin-Journal’ to devote to woman suffrage.”⁷³ The club appointed Bemis and a Mrs. Lamb to interview the editors of the *Journal* on the subject to ascertain their feelings about woman suffrage.⁷⁴ The suffragists in Independence did not mention the outcome of their meeting with the editors, but most likely, the editors allowed some suffrage articles to appear in the *Journal*.

Newspapers, suffrage lectures, and petitions were all effective means of distributing the suffrage message, but suffragists hesitated when considering other, more direct, forms of suffrage work. In September 1891, the Independence Club discussed “the question of holding a county Suffrage Convention...during October.”⁷⁵ Perhaps the women feared a negative response or expected a low turnout because they quickly “decided not to attempt so great an undertaking.”⁷⁶ Although initially cautious about high-profile suffrage work, suffragists in Independence continued to mull over different ways to disseminate the suffrage message among rural Iowans. They realized that efforts to connect directly with farming and small-town people made the cause more tangible to them. Eventually, both clubs decided to target the county fair as a specific event that large numbers of rural people attended. The fair provided a suitable forum not only to distribute the suffrage message but also to meet rural people in a location familiar to them.

In 1892, both the Charles City and Independence Political Equality Clubs brought the woman suffrage movement to county fairs. In Independence, suffragists initially

⁷³ Independence Political Equality Club Minutes, page 49, March 16, 1893, Folder 9, Box 6, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Independence Political Equality Club Minutes, page 31, Sept. 22, 1891, Folder 9, Box 6, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

balked at the idea that the Buchanan County Fair was an appropriate place to discuss woman suffrage. In May 1892, Mrs. Barnett, a member of the Independence Club, gave a report on the “committee on women’s day at the Fair.”⁷⁷ While some of the members were favorable to the idea, others “were doubtful about introducing Politics into a county fair.”⁷⁸ The club decided to consider the matter further before making definite plans.⁷⁹ Perhaps club members feared an unenthusiastic reaction from the rural people who would attend the local county fair. Maybe they felt that fairgoers would criticize their choice to eschew traditional feminine roles and behave politically in a public space. Whatever the case, three months later, Barnett reported that the club had secured September 15 as “Women’s Day” at the county fair. One woman made a motion to spend nine dollars on suffrage literature for distribution on Women’s Day, and the club appointed three women to attend and hand out the leaflets. Barnett also sent notices of the suffragists’ plans to all the newspapers in the area.⁸⁰

The same year that the woman suffrage movement came to the Buchanan County Fair, suffragists in Charles City attempted to infiltrate the Floyd County Fair. In June 1892, the Charles City Political Equality Club decided to form a committee, contact the fair board, and ascertain “whether the County Fair Association would give some day as Woman’s Day.”⁸¹ The committee successfully secured September 14 as the suffrage day, and a month later, the club decided to have a Mrs. De Voe as the fair’s suffrage

⁷⁷ Independence Political Equality Club Minutes, page 40, May 21, 1892, Folder 9, Box 6, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Independence Political Equality Suffrage Club Minutes, page 42, July 16, 1892, Folder 9, Box 6, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁸¹ Secretary’s Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, June 18, 1892, SHSIIC.

speaker.⁸² The club asked the Floyd County Fair Association to build “a small platform for the speaker,” find a band to signal her arrival, and arrange “any other matter in detail that might come under consideration.”⁸³ While the club’s secretary did not report the outcome of Woman’s Day at the 1892 Floyd County Fair, it must have impressed fairgoers and the fair association, because in January 1893, the director of the Floyd County Fair Association agreed to pay ten dollars to secure a suffrage lecturer for the 1893 Woman’s Day.⁸⁴ The director’s willingness to pledge financial support to the suffrage cause indicates either an increase in pro-suffrage opinion in Floyd County or at least a high level of curiosity among fair participants.

In addition to work at the county fair, suffragists in Independence and Charles City brought their message to farmers in other ways. In February 1892, the Charles City Club received an invitation to attend a meeting of the Farmers’ Alliance. The group appointed one member to “give a short address or essay on ‘Co-operation,’ and another on ‘Woman’s Equality.’”⁸⁵ The women also agreed to hold an open discussion on woman suffrage, allowing members of the Farmers’ Alliance the opportunity to ask questions about the movement.⁸⁶ Ticked by the chance to talk about suffrage with a seemingly willing audience, the club made sure to purchase “suitable badges” to wear at the event.⁸⁷ While the Charles City suffragists failed to disclose how the meeting and discussion session went, the visit was probably pleasant.

⁸² Secretary’s Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, July 9, 1892, SHSIIC.

⁸³ Secretary’s Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, Sept. 3, 1892, SHSIIC.

⁸⁴ Secretary’s Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, Jan. 18, 1893, SHSIIC.

⁸⁵ Secretary’s Book, Charles City Political Equality Club Minutes, Feb. 13, 1892, SHSIIC.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

While the Independence Political Equality Club did not visit a farm organization during the 1890s, it did hold one of its meetings at a farm outside the city. “One of the most delightful meetings in the history of our Club was held at the home of Mrs. L. [Lizzie] D. Curtis,” recorded the secretary in June 1893.⁸⁸ Curtis had invited the club to meet at her home with the members of the Hazelton Political Equality Club, a suffrage society from a small town north of Independence. Delighted by the invitation, the women chartered a coach to carry them to the Curtis farmstead. When the visitors from Independence arrived, “Mrs. Curtis gave us a cordial welcome.”⁸⁹ After introductions, the two suffrage societies proceeded with a regular meeting full of speeches, reports, and new business. Curtis invited the guests to stay for a full lunch, during which the secretary reported much “conversation” and merriment.⁹⁰ The joint session held between the Independence and Hazelton Political Equality Clubs not allowed the two groups an opportunity to socialize and relax; it also facilitated a meeting in which members from both clubs could share ideas for suffrage work. The two societies could also offer support to each other in the work they did for the shared cause and plan cooperative efforts to bring the suffrage message to the rest of the rural county.

Spreading the suffrage cause throughout Iowa was the primary goal of local suffrage societies like those in Independence and Charles City. Newspapers, petitions, speakers, county fair work, and visits to farm organizations conveyed the suffrage doctrine to rural Iowans. Using multiple sources to distribute pro-suffrage sentiment increased the number of people who could hear about woman suffrage. As the nineteenth

⁸⁸ Independence Political Equality Club Minutes, page 50-52, June 16, 1893, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

century ended, suffrage leaders continued to seek creative ways to give publicity to the movement. Eleanor Stockman, a suffragist in Cerro Gordo County, devised an ingenious scheme that engaged farmers in the movement and gave vital financial support to the national organization. In the fall of 1900, the NAWSA organized a suffrage bazaar in New York City at Madison Square Garden. It asked each state association to contribute something that represented the state. At the annual suffrage convention of the IWSA, Stockman suggested that Iowa send as many hogs as possible to the bazaar. The idea took hold among the suffragists present, and the group appointed Stockman in charge of accepting pig donations. When leaders in the NAWSA heard of Iowa's pork plan, they wrote to Stockman and encouraged her to sell the hogs at market and send the money earned instead. Stockman agreed to collect the hogs and put them to market in Chicago. She arranged to have the train car bound for Chicago decorated in suffrage yellow.⁹¹

Stockman immediately began to canvass Cerro Gordo County for farmers willing to donate a pig for the New York suffrage bazaar. The collection started slowly, but soon she had raised forty-four dollars and garnered sixteen hogs. A few weeks later, she had received thirty-eight head of swine and ten loads of corn. Word of Stockman's efforts spread throughout Iowa, and other suffrage supporters pledged money for the bazaar. The IWSA reported that one Blackhawk County farm woman, in the midst of remodeling her home, sent five dollars for "pig money." She also included a note that read, "I have carpenters, farm hands, and my own family to cook for; I expect a stone mason

⁹¹ "Iowa Women and Hogs," *Cedar Rapids Republican*, [1900], Eleanor Stockman Scrapbook, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; "Dear Iowa Friends," Nov. 15, 1900, Eleanor Stockman Scrapbook, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

tomorrow, a painter and plumber most any day.”⁹² Despite her busy schedule and home construction expenses, she had taken the time to contribute to the suffrage cause. The IWSA thanked the woman for her generous donation and challenged other suffragists in Blackhawk County to match her donation. “None of you are busier than she is, few of you as busy.”⁹³ Hog donations continued to pour in, and at the close of the campaign, Stockman proudly reported that suffragists in Iowa had raised four-hundred-sixty dollars and garnered ninety-five hogs. Her contribution to the bazaar was the second highest from any county in the United States.⁹⁴ “This shows what a determined woman can do,” declared the IWSA. “It also shows how Equal Suffrage is regarded among the most substantial men of our state, the...farmers, for they are the ones who are contributing the most of this car load.”⁹⁵ Suffrage leaders also deemed Stockman’s canvass of Cerro Gordo County a success. Stockman proclaimed that she had “many pleasant incidents,” and that “she was courteously and cordially received and will always hold in her heart a warm place for the farmers of Cerro Gordo county.”⁹⁶ The Iowa hog episode highlights how suffragists pursued innovative means of attracting support, both financial and political, for the suffrage cause. Stockman reached into the hearts and wallets of farmers in Cerro Gordo County, gaining rural allies to the cause and public support of the movement.

As the twentieth century approached, suffragists in Iowa faced an uphill battle.

While they had experimented with public methods of suffrage work with varying degrees

⁹² “Pig Money,” Eleanor Stockman Scrapbook, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ “Iowa Women and Hogs,” Eleanor Stockman Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; “Dear Iowa Friends,” Eleanor Stockman Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Newspaper clipping, Eleanor Stockman Scrapbook, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

of success, they had still failed to garner widespread support of the movement across the state. Most of the time, they kept the cause contained within prominent social circles and hesitated to fully engage rural Iowans in their work. Despite their cautious approach toward public agitation for woman suffrage, suffrage leaders had prepared the way for future grassroots development in Iowa, and from that foundation, suffrage leaders continued their work at the state and local levels. They realized that in order to ensure that women had the right to vote in the state, they needed the Iowa legislature to pass a suffrage bill endorsing an amendment to the Iowa constitution. The path to securing an amendment required a state referendum in which a majority of voters in Iowa, comprised mainly of rural men, passed the bill. At the dawn of the twentieth century, suffrage leaders wiped their brows and got to work, spreading the suffrage message even further into the countryside and employing even more creative—and dramatic—methods to achieve results. In the process, suffrage leaders became comfortable speaking directly to rural Iowa in order to spread their message.

Chapter 2

Waking Up the Women of Iowa, 1900-1914

The dawn of the twentieth century ushered in a new era of the woman suffrage campaign in Iowa. Suffrage leaders were no longer content to meet in each other's parlors and discuss the lesson for the day in closed quarters. They were ready to extend the movement beyond the comforts of their well-to-do lives, and they desired to bring the suffrage doctrine to the people of the state for better or worse. In order to reach the rural men and women of Iowa, suffragists across the state took existing methods of suffrage work and enhanced them, making them more dramatic and public in the process.

On the national level, in February 1900, Carrie Chapman Catt, Iowa's renowned suffrage leader, had assumed the presidency of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. At forty-one years old, Catt seemed the ideal replacement for Susan B. Anthony. Born in Wisconsin, Catt had moved to Iowa in 1866 as a seven-year-old child. She grew up on a farm near Charles City with her parents. After graduating in 1880 from Iowa State Agricultural College in Ames, Catt settled in Mason City to serve as principal of the town's high school. She married Leo Chapman, a newspaper editor, in February 1885 and began writing her own column entitled "Woman's World." Tragedy struck in August 1886 when Chapman died suddenly from typhoid fever. After her husband's death, Catt struggled to find meaning in her life. A year of soul searching convinced Catt to leave newspaper work for the suffrage movement. Beginning as a professional lecturer in the fall of 1887, Catt honed her abilities as a speaker and organizer in Iowa for three years. Shortly after speaking at the first NAWSA convention in 1890, Catt married George Catt, a fellow Iowa State alumnus, and settled in New York City. Her suffrage

work continued to grow, and by the end of the decade, she had managed suffrage campaigns in Idaho, Colorado, South Dakota, and California. In addition, she gained a reputation as a charismatic lecturer and an apt campaign director.⁹⁷

While Catt's sharp wit and dynamic speaking skills wowed audiences across the country, her managerial abilities proved to be her biggest asset. When Anthony decided to retire in 1900, two candidates for president of the NAWSA emerged—Catt and Dr. Anna Howard Shaw. While Shaw was a mesmerizing speaker, she lacked the supervisory gifts that the job required.⁹⁸ Anthony believed that the national association needed an adept organizer rather than a thrilling lecturer, so she handpicked Catt to become president of the NAWSA. For four years, Catt led the movement with her astute ability to forge large numbers of women into a single, unified body. Her vision for the suffrage movement included definite, well-laid plans of work at both the local and state level. Organization became a key tenet of those plans, as Catt struggled against schedule conflicts and volunteers with half-hearted commitments to the movement. Despite all her efforts, no state won a suffrage victory during the four years of her presidency.⁹⁹ She resigned in 1904 to care for her ailing second husband. He had fallen ill early in the year and died shortly after Catt left office. After his death, Catt remained a central figure in the fight for woman suffrage at the international level. She joined the International Woman Suffrage Alliance in June 1904, leading its efforts until 1923.¹⁰⁰ Catt's departure left the top office of the NAWSA open, and in 1904 suffrage leaders turned to the woman that

⁹⁷ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 225-41; Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 235-38.

⁹⁸ Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 248.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 235-38.

Catt had bested for the presidency four years earlier. Dr. Shaw came to the helm of the NAWSA at a moment of great potential for the national organization.

The new century also held promise for suffragists in Iowa, both at the state and local level. Local suffrage leaders began to look beyond the walls of their comfortable homes and considered the prospect of bringing the suffrage movement to the women of Iowa. Grassroots work remained limited early in the century as leaders gradually adjusted proven suffrage methods. While remaining true to the foundation built by nineteenth-century suffrage pioneers, they sensed that subtle modifications in their work could improve their chances of securing a victory in Iowa. Instead of keeping the suffrage message contained, suffragists sought ways to carry the cause to the larger public. They executed concerted efforts to reach out to community institutions, especially the church, school, and press. By quietly distributing their message through these channels, suffragists hoped to educate the people in their localities about the cause and gain more support.

In southern Iowa, the members of the Chariton Equal Suffrage Society spent considerable time spreading the suffrage message throughout the rural communities in Lucas County. As the county seat, Chariton was the hub of government, trade, and sociability. The women of the Chariton Society used the town's existing community institutions to reach the county's residents. They put notices about their monthly meetings in the three most prominent newspapers of the county, the *Patriot, Record-Herald*, and the *Leader*.¹⁰¹ By advertising the meeting times and locations, the women gave subscribers some idea of the activities of the suffrage group. In addition, the women

¹⁰¹ Chariton Equal Suffrage Society Minutes, Oct. 12, 1908, Folder 2, Box 3, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

hoped that advertising their meetings would increase the membership of the society. Club members supplemented this publicity by trying to place suffrage literature directly into the hands of rural people. In September 1901, a committee formed to “interview the editors of our town papers, and ascertain if our leaflets could be sent out with the papers.”¹⁰² After discussing the matter with the editors, the committee reported a month later that it “would be impossible to distribute leaflets through the newspapers.”¹⁰³ Undeterred, the women turned to rural mail delivery, appointing a Mrs. Stewart and Mrs. Hahn to “see mail carrier in regard to having them distributed on rural route.”¹⁰⁴ Plans to deliver the leaflets through the mail failed as well, and committee members investigated the matter for another three months. Finally, in March 1902 teachers at a local school agreed to distribute suffrage leaflets among their students and to anyone else who visited the school.¹⁰⁵

Even though newspaper and mail delivery of suffrage leaflets proved unsuccessful, the Chariton suffragists continued their drive to reach rural communities in Lucas County. Perhaps one of the members alerted the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, or the IESA—formerly the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association, or the IWSA—of the group’s activities, because the state organization became involved in the situation, sending a letter in April 1902. In it, the state secretary urged the Chariton Equal Suffrage Society to send its members throughout the county and organize into smaller suffrage societies. After discussing the secretary’s monumental proposition, the women decided

¹⁰² Chariton Equal Suffrage Society Minutes, Sept. 17, 1901, Folder 2, Box 3, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁰³ Chariton Equal Suffrage Society Minutes, Oct. 15, 1901, Folder 2, Box 3, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁰⁴ Chariton Equal Suffrage Society Minutes, Nov. 5, 1901, Folder 2, Box 3, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁰⁵ Chariton Equal Suffrage Society Minutes, Feb. 18, 1902, Folder 2, Box 3, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; Chariton Equal Suffrage Society Minutes, March 4, 1902, Folder 2, Box 3, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

that they could “do nothing in that line at present.”¹⁰⁶ Instead, they charged each member to travel throughout the county and distribute suffrage leaflets.¹⁰⁷ Chariton’s secretary did not mention the outcome of this countywide distribution operation, but the entire episode demonstrated the tenacity of the suffragists of Chariton. Denied access to the newspapers and mail, they pressed forward with their leaflet circulation plan. Eventually, they found a school willing to support the suffrage cause. Yet, when the suffragists received orders to step up their efforts and organize the entire county, they declined to follow them. Sending leaflets to county residents was respectable work for suffragists. They could remain within the proper sphere of women’s work without threatening their honor as respectable women. At this point, interacting face-to-face with rural women was not appropriate work for suffragists.

Not only did Chariton’s teachers favor equal suffrage, the ministers of the town supported the movement as well. In fact, many clergy across the state embraced the suffrage movement and spoke about it during their church services. The IESA in turn focused a great deal of its work on churches, hoping to capitalize on the support of ministers in communities large and small. In Chariton, the suffrage society proposed to send copies of suffrage publications to area clergy as early as 1906. That fall, Virginia Branner stated “that she would pay half the expense of sending ‘Progress’ to the preachers and teachers of our city if the society would pay the other half.”¹⁰⁸ The society accepted her proposal and paid their portion of four dollars. A year later, suffragists in Chariton again voted to send copies of “The Woman’s Standard,” Iowa’s state suffrage

¹⁰⁶ Chariton Equal Suffrage Society Minutes, April 1, 1902, Folder 2, Box 3, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁰⁷ Chariton Equal Suffrage Society Minutes, May 6, 1902, Folder 2, Box 3, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁰⁸ Chariton Equal Suffrage Society Minutes, Sept. 17, 1906, Folder 2, Box 3, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

paper, to ministers in the town. The decision was not unanimous, as some in the group “thought there might be others who would read and appreciate it more than the preachers.”¹⁰⁹ Clearly, some members recognized that not all clergy members in Chariton gave the cause their unqualified support. The group’s secretary did not record any of the concerns voiced that day, but there must have been some. Despite a small hesitation among the women, the majority agreed that potentially securing the church as an ally was more important. By targeting churches in their suffrage work, the women operated on the grassroots level of their community institutions.

During the twentieth century, the state suffrage organization also focused on developing close relationships with churches and other community entities. The IESA found early support among Protestant churches in the state. Since the end of the nineteenth century, Protestant churches had opened their doors to suffrage activities, and during the twentieth century, the IESA hosted almost every annual convention in a Protestant church.¹¹⁰ Around 1910, IESA officers created a committee on “church work” to direct suffrage efforts relating to religious institutions.¹¹¹ In addition, suffrage leaders strove to cultivate friendships with Iowa’s clergy, and the state association invited numerous religious figures to speak at their annual conventions. At the 1908 convention, Reverend Jennie Bartholomew of the Universalist Church in Boone gave a spontaneous

¹⁰⁹ Chariton Equal Suffrage Society Minutes, Dec. 16, 1907, Folder 2, Box 3, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹¹⁰ See, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, Folder 3, Box 9, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1914-1917, Folder 5, Box 9, DMIWSR, SHSIDM. The suffragists usually found themselves at a Methodist or Universalist Church.

¹¹¹ Iowa Equal Suffrage Association Fortieth Annual Convention Program 1911, page 5, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 41, DMIWSR, SHSIDM. Because Dr. Nina Wilson Dewey reported on church work during Wednesday afternoon’s session, the date that organized church work began falls around 1910.

speech entitled “Politics Everywhere” to convention delegates.¹¹² Reverend Anthony Slothower welcomed state convention delegates to Corydon in 1910.¹¹³ A year later the pastor of Perry’s Christian Church, Reverend C. H. Strawn, provided the official welcome to convention delegates while Reverend B. W. Burleigh of the Congregational Church in Perry and Reverend Howland Hanson of the First Baptist Church in Des Moines addressed attendees during one of the evening sessions.¹¹⁴ By inviting church leaders to attend its state meetings, the IESA clearly emphasized the role of the church in suffrage work and relied upon the support of Iowa’s clergy. State suffragists realized that if prominent community members, such as ministers, joined the movement, those community leaders could use their standing to further the cause. The suffrage movement could best reach people at the grassroots level by converting those who were most influential in the community.

In addition to Iowa’s clergy, state suffrage leaders also invited other well-known community men and women to the annual suffrage conventions. Mayors, newspaper editors, women’s club presidents, and WCTU officers made frequent appearances at IESA meetings. At the 1908 IESA convention in Boone, the president of the Boone WCTU addressed attendees.¹¹⁵ The editor of the *Boone News Republican*, Mr. S. G. Goldthwault, welcomed delegates to Boone on behalf of the press.¹¹⁶ Two years later, Corydon mayor D. S. Murrow gave an “Address of Welcome” to those present, and J. J.

¹¹² Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 9, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹¹³ Iowa Equal Suffrage Association Thirty-Ninth Annual Convention Program 1910, page 4, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 28, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹¹⁴ Iowa Equal Suffrage Association Fortieth Annual Convention Program 1911, page 8, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 41, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹¹⁵ Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 9, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹¹⁶ Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 3, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

Sterling, editor of the *Wayne County Democrat*, provided a “Welcome from the Press.”¹¹⁷ Suffragists at the 1912 IESA convention, held in Des Moines, received warm greetings from Mayor James R. Hanna, Mrs. F. C. Waterbury, representative of the City Federation of Women’s Clubs, and Mr. Harvey Ingham, editor of the *Des Moines Register*, Iowa’s largest newspaper.¹¹⁸ By inviting prominent men and women to their meetings, suffrage leaders hoped to expose them to the suffrage cause and potentially win them over as supporters of the movement. Initiating and developing relationships with these community officials was a key component of the IESA’s strategy to reach those opposed, indifferent, or ignorant of the suffrage movement. Mayors, editors, ministers, and club officers held sway among the residents of their hometowns, and gaining their support created a vital link between the IESA and the state’s rural population.

At the 1911 IESA convention, held in Des Moines at the Unitarian Church, suffragists went beyond just inviting community leaders. They highlighted the work done by two well-known women’s groups, the WCTU of Iowa and the Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs. Since the late-nineteenth century, the WCTU had been an active partner in the suffrage crusade, and suffragists used their ties to the WCTU to further their cause. For example, in 1903, the Chariton Equal Suffrage Society had some leftover suffrage leaflets to give away. Knowing that Mrs. Stinson, one of the club’s members, had a daughter involved in the WCTU, the club sent her the remaining leaflets, asking her to “distribute [them] in the WCTU at Lucas and Cleveland.”¹¹⁹ Social connections among

¹¹⁷ Iowa Equal Suffrage Association Thirty-Ninth Annual Convention Program 1910, page 4, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 28, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹¹⁸ Iowa Equal Suffrage Association Forty-First Annual Convention Program 1912, page 3, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 57, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹¹⁹ Chariton Equal Suffrage Society Minutes, May 5, 1903, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

members of the two organizations allowed the exchange of ideas, workers, and printed materials to occur frequently. By 1911, the WCTU of Iowa had publicly pledged to work for the suffrage cause, and the IESA was grateful. The IESA resolved that they appreciated “the action of our sister organization, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, in planning to devote their energies to the cause of suffrage during the coming year” and offered its thanks.¹²⁰

In addition to the WCTU, the Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs joined the equal suffrage cause in 1911 at their Ninth Biennial Convention in Sioux City. Delegates to the convention passed a resolution favoring woman suffrage by an overwhelming majority, becoming the first federation of women’s clubs in the United States to adopt a suffrage resolution. Instantly, the IESA gained fifteen thousand new suffrage workers.¹²¹ President Lola A. Miller noted that the vote “was a step forward in club life.”¹²² Soon after the convention, Miller called together all of the past presidents of the Federation to gather their thoughts on the future direction of the organization. The presidents requested that Miller “have equal suffrage presented at each district meeting to be held that fall [1911]” and that affiliated clubs hold one suffrage program a year.¹²³ That fall, each of the eleven district chairpersons organized two suffrage programs to take place in two towns located in the district, disseminating information about the woman suffrage movement to attendees. According to the proceedings of the Tenth Biennial Convention,

¹²⁰ Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 51, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹²¹ Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 60, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹²² Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs [hereafter IFWC], *An Account of the Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs, 1893-1927*, page 79, Folder 1, Box 1, Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs Collection, 104/1, Iowa Women’s Archives, University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa [hereafter IWAUI].

¹²³ IFWC, *An Account*, page 78, IWAUI.

rural women made up a significant portion of those who attended the programs.¹²⁴

Addressing the state suffrage convention a year later, Miller declared that “suffrage sentiment in women’s clubs has increased wonderfully during the past few years.”¹²⁵ The Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs continued to support the woman suffrage cause at their next biennial convention, held in Cedar Rapids in May 1913. Delegates at the Eleventh Biennial Convention passed a resolution in which the Iowa Federation again declared its support of equal suffrage, backing up newly elected president B. B. Clark’s affirmation of the Federation’s support for the cause.¹²⁶ State leaders encouraged local clubs to continue organizing programs on woman suffrage, attempting to align more women at the local level to the suffrage cause.

Indeed, suffrage sentiment had grown in Iowa during the first decade of the twentieth century. Local suffrage societies gained ground in their communities by distributing leaflets and other suffrage publications to well known individuals. Ministers, teachers, mayors, newspaper editors, and other high-ranking officials became targets of suffrage work. At the local level, suffragists inundated newspapers, schools, and churches with suffrage publications and arguments. At the state level, the IESA requested that local community leaders attend the convention and address the crowd. By inviting these prominent individuals, the IESA garnered local publicity for the cause and hoped to increase the number of influential suffrage advocates. In addition, endorsements by the WCTU of Iowa and the Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs galvanized the IESA. Not

¹²⁴ “Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs: Yearbook 1911-1912,” page 91, IWAUI.

¹²⁵ “Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs: Yearbook 1911-1912,” page 91, Folder 2, Box 5, Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs Collection, 104/1, IWAUI; Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 60, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹²⁶ IFWC, *An Account*, pages 83-84, IWAUI.

only had the group gained thousands more suffrage workers; it had formed a crucial three-way alliance that suffragists hoped would be strong enough to defend against any future anti-suffrage attacks.

Even though suffrage leaders had stepped up their efforts to increase suffrage sentiment across Iowa, they had failed to extend the suffrage message beyond prominent community members with time and money to devote to the cause. More importantly, they had never garnered widespread publicity for the movement. Local newspapers did publish articles regarding suffrage, but those articles typically reported on suffrage meetings, legislative actions, and other mundane details. Suffragists usually debated the cause among themselves, rarely taking their discussions to larger audiences in isolated areas. Suffrage leaders recognized already that in order to agitate the people of Iowa about suffrage, they needed to take their message directly to their doorsteps. In addition, suffragists asserted that the best way to disseminate information about the movement was to confront Iowa's residents at some point during their daily lives. The most critical aspect of this work was to educate rural men and women of the countryside about the suffrage cause. For the first time, suffrage leaders embraced the need to establish face-to-face relationships with rural Iowans. As the end of the first decade of the twentieth century approached, a subtle, yet powerful shift in the methodology—and ideology—of suffrage work in Iowa began to take shape.

In 1908, it became apparent that suffragists had altered the way they approached agitating for the right to vote. Iowa suffrage leaders gave the woman suffrage movement a heaping dose of publicity when they organized a parade and open-air meeting to coincide with the annual convention of the IESA scheduled for late October in Boone.

Planning for the event began in August. Eleanor E. Gordon, president of the IESA, remembered walking home after a poorly attended suffrage meeting, thinking to herself that something “must be wrong with our propaganda or else it would not be true that only a half dozen of already convinced women will attend a Suffrage meeting.”¹²⁷ That night she wrote to the president of the Boone suffrage club, Rowena Stevens. After brainstorming about what to do, Gordon suggested holding a parade. She reasoned that the parade could benefit the cause, “even if we are accused of imitating the English Militants.”¹²⁸ Stevens prepared the local arrangements, despite objections from some of the executive officers, including Mary Coggeshall. Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, president of the NAWSA, even agreed to speak at the open-air meeting, along with two visiting English suffragettes.

The day of the parade dawned a cold and windy Thursday. So much dust blew that Coggeshall suggested organizers cancel the parade because “it will be impossible to carry our banner or the flag.”¹²⁹ Despite the inclement weather, Gordon insisted the parade begin as scheduled. A few minutes before noon, the president of the Boone WCTU thanked the delegates for inviting her to walk in the parade, proclaiming that she “gladly accepted on behalf of the WCTU.”¹³⁰ As soon as she closed her remarks, the group—about thirty in all—formed a long column in front of the Universalist church. Promptly at noon, the parade began. The Boone band led the procession, followed by an automobile containing Dr. Shaw and the two English girls. Two by two, the women marched down Boone’s main street. Participants in the parade carried signs that read

¹²⁷ Eleanor E. Gordon, “Suffrage Parade,-Boone, Iowa,” Folder 6, Box 3, MS 071, DMIWSR, SHSIDM

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 9, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

“Political Alliance, Not Defiance” and “Taxation without Representation is Tyranny, as True Now as in 1776.”¹³¹ The parade stopped at the intersection of Eighth and Story Streets for the open-air meeting. Dr. Anna Howard Shaw delivered a rousing address to an assembled crowd. After the parade had ended, Coggeshall remarked, “It wasn’t so bad, after all.”¹³² One observer of the parade remarked that the parade had “done more to advance the cause of political equality in Boone than all the Suffrage clubs, all the conventions, all the lectures and debates” had ever done.¹³³ Indeed, most suffragists decided that the parade served successfully as the first public display for the cause in the state.

The triumphant outcome of the Boone suffrage parade galvanized state suffrage leaders. A year passed during which many suffrage workers in Iowa pondered the use of militant tactics in the suffrage campaign. In October 1909, the IESA met again for its annual convention, and attitudes toward militancy had warmed considerably. During the convention, Julia Clark Hallam of Sioux City gave an address entitled “The Advisability of Adopting Suffragette Methods.” While praising past suffrage methods, she advised that suffragists incorporate militant tactics in their work. She encouraged Iowa’s suffragists to “invade the legislative halls,” making disturbances despite the threat of arrest.¹³⁴ The recording secretary of the meeting noted that a “Very spirited discussion

¹³¹ One-hundred years later, on October 25, 2008, the Boone Historical Society along with the Unitarian Church organized a reenactment of the 1908 suffrage parade in Boone. The reenactment organizers accurately portrayed the parade down to the number of and message on each sign carried during the 1908 parade. The author attended the parade and took pictures of the signs recreated for the reenactment. Photographs in author’s possession.

¹³² Gordon, “Suffrage Parade,” SHSIDM.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ “Mrs. Hallam’s Speech Wins Presidency,” Newspaper Clipping, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, DMISWR, SHSIDM.

followed.”¹³⁵ Hallam’s speech convinced many delegates not only to elect her into the presidency of the IESA, it also allowed her to push for a “legislative obstruction resolution.”¹³⁶ Not every suffragist desired the militant label, however. Mary Craig, elected vice president under Hallam, stated that she “was not willing to be classed as a suffragette or a militant suffragist” but planned to assist other officers as they carried out their duties.¹³⁷

Between 1909 and 1911, not much came from the promise of using militant tactics in Iowa. The reality of storming into the Iowa General Assembly and facing arrest did not sit well with most suffragists. Militancy in the suffrage movement did not appeal to most Iowans either.¹³⁸ Suffrage leaders continued to pursue a plan that emphasized connecting to the people of Iowa by invading their daily lives. At the 1911 convention of the IESA, delegates passed a resolution that identified the key tenets behind their suffrage methods. The suffragists asserted that after “careful study of suffrage throughout the state we believe that the most effective method of securing our end is by education and organization, directing special attention to those localities where the senators and members of the house have in the past voted against the passage of the suffrage amendment.”¹³⁹ By going into those areas, they many times came face-to-face with rural

¹³⁵ Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹³⁶ “Mrs. Hallam’s Speech Wins Presidency,” DMISWR, SHSIDM.

¹³⁷ Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹³⁸ Countless newspaper articles across Iowa distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate suffrage activities. Iowa editors came down hard on militant suffragettes in England, advising Iowa suffragists that they “can win more votes by the tactics they have adopted than by the way of the Militant method of their British sisters.” Quoted in, *Journal* (Decorah, Iowa), Sept. 17, 1913, Suffrage Scrapbook, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM. See the Suffrage Scrapbook listed above for more examples of anti-suffragette sentiment.

¹³⁹ Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 51, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

men, as constituents and potential voters, and rural women, as potential benefactors of the right to vote.

Bringing the suffrage message to rural people required suffragists to reevaluate the tried-and-true methods of suffrage work. While suffrage leaders continued to lecture, distribute printed materials, and build alliances, they also stepped out of their work routines. They created a Press Bureau through which the IESA distributed suffrage articles to “over one hundred newspapers in our state” each week.¹⁴⁰ Mary Safford, president of the IESA from 1911 to 1912 and a Des Moines minister, made sure that her lecture schedule included stops in rural areas as she planned her cross-state lecture tour. She made it a point to arrange speaking engagements at community-wide celebrations, including anniversaries, dedications, and other public events. In November 1911, she spoke at the First National Bank in Cherokee about forming men’s and women’s suffrage leagues.¹⁴¹ At Dallas Center, she spoke during a “big suffrage celebration.” People from “al [sic] the surrounding towns” planned to join the celebration, and many looked forward to the picnic dinner that followed the program.¹⁴² Finally, the Men’s League of Perry planned to host a “monster banquet and rally” to promote the suffrage cause throughout the county.¹⁴³ Planners promised to make it “a big county event” with the “largest crowd at the rally ever assembled in Dallas county to support such a movement.”¹⁴⁴ Safford had intended to speak, but illness kept her away. “In her place,” recorded one newspaper, “G. A. Wrightman secretary of the Iowa State Manufacturers

¹⁴⁰ “Something Doing in Iowa,” 1912, Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁴¹ “The Safford Lecture,” *Cherokee Times*, Nov. 30, 1911, Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁴² “Suffrage Picnic at Dallas Center,” Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁴³ *Des Moines Capital*, April, 1911, Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁴⁴ Newspaper clipping from Perry, April 1911, Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

association, spoke,” and his speech was “filled with arguments and points which held the attention of the good sized audience [and]...left them with thoughts” to consider.¹⁴⁵

When one woman jumped up and began to sing a suffrage song called “Happy Day,” “so great was its hold upon the audience that the singer was interrupted by applause when the suggestion that all those should vote who pay taxes was made.”¹⁴⁶ Dynamic speeches and memorable songs proved useful to ignite suffrage sentiment among the Dallas County crowd. Despite Safford’s absence, the rally no doubt captured the attention of attendees and helped spread word of the suffrage cause.

Safford extended her lecture tour to include speaking engagements at local festivals and dedications. She spoke about suffrage at Corydon’s “Old Settlers Day” in 1911. A strong western wind made it difficult for attendees to hear her talk, but “her pleasing personality and her good commonsense in the arguments that she used were persuasive.”¹⁴⁷ In Forest City, Safford spoke during the dedication ceremony of a suffrage flag. Allegedly the first suffrage flag-raising in the world, the event featured a band playing patriotic songs to an assembled crowd in the city’s park as they watched “a flag bearing only six stars representing the six suffrage states...run up the pole,” noted one newspaper article.¹⁴⁸ While no one at the settler’s day or the flag raising noted how many people attended either event, at the very least a curious crowd of onlookers seems to have formed to witness the events. Whether Safford converted huge numbers of

¹⁴⁵ Newspaper clipping, May, 1911, Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ “Corydon’s Old Settler’s Day,” 1911, Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁴⁸ “Iowa Has First Flag Raising for Suffrage Cause,” Newspaper clipping, Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

spectators also remains unclear, but she probably held their attention for long enough to allow them to consider her perspectives on suffrage.

While Safford traveled to meet Iowa's people where they carried out their daily activities, suffrage leaders also presented their message at events that attracted high numbers of rural men and women. Each summer hundreds of thousands of rural Iowans flocked to the Iowa State Fair in Des Moines and to various Chautauquas held throughout the countryside. Building on their work at smaller county fairs, suffragists realized that the State Fair provided an especially important avenue through which to reach rural women. Farmers and ranchers showed livestock, women brought their best recipes for judging, and entertaining acts kept people at the fair until late into the night. The IESA made sure to present propaganda about the suffrage cause at the fair. They maintained a Suffrage Cottage through which they distributed suffrage literature and offered women a place to cool down and use the restroom.¹⁴⁹

In addition to their cottage work, suffragists also planned dramatic expressions of suffrage sentiment. In 1910, the IESA organized a suffrage rally to take place at the State Fair.¹⁵⁰ A year later suffrage leaders decided to advertise for the cause by distributing yellow balloons containing the words "Votes for Women" on them. The balloons promised to be a "unique feature of the suffrage campaign," and suffragists hoped to "attract the attention of State Fair crowds to the fact that there is a suffrage cause to be

¹⁴⁹ *Des Moines Tribune*, June 9, 1912, Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; Iowa Equal Suffrage Association Fortieth Annual Convention Program 1911, page 7, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 41, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; "Display Suffragist Slogan on Balloons," Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁵⁰ Iowa Equal Suffrage Association Thirty-Ninth Annual Convention Program 1910, page 6, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 28, DMIWSR, SHSIDM

promoted in Iowa.”¹⁵¹ Suffragists also organized a formal program in their tent in which IESA members lectured and musicians played. Suffragists saved the most attention-getting tactic for “Suffrage Day” at the State Fair. According to reports, “State Fair authorities have prohibited any addresses to be made from the automobiles, but to circumvent that order and reach the people they [suffragists] will distribute the dodgers by the thousands among the State Fair visitors.”¹⁵² The writer pointed out that “automobiles gaily decorated...for the distribution of lurid colored leaflets containing arguments in favor of woman suffrage” drove around the grounds, and women handed out the materials to anyone on foot.¹⁵³

Suffrage work at the State Fair continued to gain momentum in 1912. The *Des Moines Tribune* reported that the “suffragists of Iowa will be conspicuous at the State Fair this year.”¹⁵⁴ In addition to the usual cottage work, suffragists met in the Equitable Building to discuss additional plans. They decided once again to distribute suffrage literature from automobiles throughout the State Fair grounds and to hold public addresses during the afternoon.¹⁵⁵ No evidence exists regarding how many people attended the suffrage lectures or received suffrage leaflets, but clearly, visitors to the State Fair encountered the suffrage movement at some point during their stay at the grounds. Whether they saw a “Votes for Women” balloon, heard a suffrage speech, or stopped to rest in the Suffrage Cottage, fairgoers came across suffrage propaganda.

¹⁵¹ “Display Suffragists Slogan,” Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁵² “Mr. and Mrs. Robins Make Addresses,” Newspaper Clipping, Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ *Des Moines Tribune*, June 9, 1912, Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

While suffrage leaders brought their message to the State Fair, they also turned their attention to Iowa's Chautauqua movement. Chautauquas had emerged in 1874 from the Sunday school movement in New York State. Soon, Chautauquas spread throughout the country. Participants enjoyed a wooded camp environment in which men and women interacted together in pursuit of intellectual opportunities and discussed political and social issues. Because it lacked traditional gendered structures, the Chautauqua experience allowed women a "wider range of behaviors."¹⁵⁶ Consequently, women could raise political questions on moral grounds, including woman suffrage. As early as 1892, speakers such as Susan B. Anthony and Jane Addams debated the merits of woman suffrage at Chautauquas across the country.¹⁵⁷

During the second decade of the twentieth century, woman suffrage emerged as a popular topic of Chautauqua debates in Iowa, and men and women both used the Chautauqua platform to discuss the issue. "The suffrage cause will be heard from the Chautauqua platforms in Iowa," proclaimed one newspaper article. "As a part of the quiet suffrage campaign conducted by the official board of the Iowa Equal Suffrage association, noted suffrage speakers will appear on Chautauqua platforms throughout the state."¹⁵⁸ The IESA even invited two suffragists from Chicago, Georgia Waugh McCullough and Jane Addams of Hull House fame, to headline at Chautauquas across Iowa. IESA President Mary Safford spoke at a Chautauqua near Humboldt, and one

¹⁵⁶ Jeanne Halgren Kilde, "The 'Predominance of the Feminine' at Chautauqua: Rethinking the Gender-Space Relationship in Victorian America," *Signs* 24 (Winter, 1999): 449-486.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ "Iowa Chautauquas will Hear about Woman Suffrage," Newspaper Clipping, Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

editor reported that there were more than one thousand people in the audience.¹⁵⁹ She even had the founder of Humboldt, S. H. Taft, join her on the platform because he was well known for speaking on suffrage forty-four years earlier.¹⁶⁰ In Vinton, a ten-day Chautauqua “ended in a grand climax when the thousands of steady patrons were entertained in one day by...Governor Hadley of Missouri.”¹⁶¹ He drove all the way to Vinton to speak on woman suffrage. Arguing that woman suffrage was inevitable, he asked, “The women run things now, so why not let them vote and be done with it?”¹⁶²

While prominent individuals drew large crowds to Chautauquas, lesser-known community leaders spoke as well. At a Chautauqua near Perry around 1912, Robert Goldsmith lectured on suffrage. A newspaper covering the Chautauqua noted that Goldsmith “gave unanswerable reasons why woman should have the ballot and to the evident delight of his audience he refuted successfully the objections (not reasons, for there are none) against suffrage.”¹⁶³ The editor continued to praise the Chautauqua lecture, writing that the speeches “are proving most interesting and the one today will have a greater interest because of the subject treated.”¹⁶⁴ Woman suffrage apparently was a hot topic among those who went to Chautauquas in Iowa, and speeches on the subject raised curiosity among the rural classes. Suffrage speakers used the Chautauqua setting to attempt to convince rural people to support the suffrage cause and gain converts.

¹⁵⁹ “Iowa Has First Flag Raising,” State Suffrage Scrapbook, Folder 1, Box 2, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ “Hadley Indorses Progressive Move,” Newspaper Clipping, Vinton ca. 1912, State Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ “Chautauqua at Perry,” Newspaper clipping ca. 1912, State Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

By mid 1912, suffrage sentiment had spread remarkably throughout Iowa. Boone residents had watched a long column of suffragists march in the cold for the cause four years earlier. Suffrage leaders such as Mary Safford traveled throughout the state, speaking at flag raisings, community celebrations, and county picnics. Visitors to the Iowa State Fair had heard about the cause during formal suffrage programs or had collected leaflets from passing automobiles filled with women. Chautauqua patrons had seen countless platforms on which suffragists declared why women required the right to vote. Suffrage leaders took notice of just how effective these new, more dramatic methods of suffrage work had been in reaching the ears of thousands of people. While suffragists could not say with certainty the number of converts they had made or even how many people had stopped to consider the right of women to vote, they knew that their actions had caused a stir among people in Iowa. Something was going on in Iowa, noted one newspaper editor, because “women all over the state are waking up.”¹⁶⁵

In order to capitalize on the growing suffrage sentiment, the IESA planned an automobile tour to travel throughout the state during the summer of 1912. Devised by President Mary Safford, the tour featured numerous automobiles full of eager suffragists ready to confront Iowa’s rural hamlets. Early that summer, one newspaper proclaimed that with “the sides plastered with ‘Votes for Women’ decorated with yellow banners and distributing ‘rainbow flyers’ broadcast the suffrage auto is about to be launched in Iowa.”

¹⁶⁶ Banners and pennants also adorned the cars as suffragists planned their journey to

¹⁶⁵ “Something Doing in Iowa,” 1912, Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁶⁶ “Suffrage Auto Launched Soon,” Newspaper clipping, 1912, State Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

depart from Des Moines and travel to surrounding towns ‘in earnest.’¹⁶⁷ Dividing the carloads into two groups—those visiting large towns and those going to small villages—the caravans left Des Moines to begin the tour in July, 1912. One group headed to Highland Park and Valley Junction while another made its way east to Mitchellville. A woman cornetist, Dr. A. C. Sargeant, played as the cars approached each stop on the tour, signaling to those on the edge of town that the suffrage auto drew near. After passing out the colored flyers full of arguments regarding woman suffrage, several women spoke to an assembled crowd. In Mitchellville, for example, suffragists arrived at about four o’clock in the afternoon and pulled up beside the city’s bank.¹⁶⁸ Sargeant played a cornet solo to call a crowd together. Mitchellville’s mayor, W. A. Porter, arrived on the scene late because he had been at work on his farm outside of town. Finally, one newspaper reported, someone “lassoed” Porter off his farm and brought him to town where he “made a nice little speech of introduction and welcome, after which addresses were made by Rev. Mary Safford, Morton Welday, and George A. Wrightman.”¹⁶⁹ Apparently, not many people witnessed the suffrage auto tour in Mitchellville because the town had received no prior notice of their arrival. “They should have given us some warning of their coming,” wrote an observer, “and there would have been more people out.”¹⁷⁰

The Mitchellville tour stop highlighted the problems that arose when urban suffragists did not account for differences in rural life. It exposed the first definite miscalculation that arose when city-dwelling suffrage leaders traveled to unfamiliar rural

¹⁶⁷ “Suffrage Auto,” DMIWSR, SHSIDM; “Suffrage Auto Ready for Start,” Newspaper Clipping, 1912, State Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁶⁸ “The Suffragists Were Here,” July, 1912, State Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

communities. First, when the suffragists arrived in Mitchellville, they had to wait because the mayor was not in town. He was a farmer who did not work in an office or store in Mitchellville. He could not take a short walk down the block to greet the suffragists, and suffrage leaders failed to take into account the distance factor when planning their visit. Second, the Mitchellville newspaper editor pointed out that because the town did not know when the suffragists planned to arrive, only a small crowd gathered to listen to the suffrage speakers. Perhaps most of the town's citizens could not see the tour because they had to work. Moreover, those who lived out of town could not drop their work and drive to town in enough time to hear the speeches. The distance alone was probably too great, and rural people could not abandon their farm work so easily. Despite the suffragists' failings, however, their visit was at least the first step in bringing the suffrage message to rural women.

While suffrage leaders traveled throughout Iowa on automobile tours, developments within the state's political parties gave the IESA hope that a suffrage victory in Iowa was approaching. A large group of suffragists attended the Republican state convention in July 1912, handing out fans with suffrage slogans printed on them. Perhaps the fan tactic paid off, because at the convention, delegates adopted a plank that recommended that the "general assembly of Iowa, as soon as possible, submit to the voters of the state a constitutional amendment providing that the state constitution be amended by striking from section one of article two the word 'male.'"¹⁷¹ Upon reading the plank to those present, "the most enthusiastic cheering" from the suffragists could be

¹⁷¹ "Suffragists Elated Over the First Victory," *Des Moines Tribune*, July, 1912, State Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

heard.¹⁷² Shortly after Iowa's Republican convention, the Upper Des Moines Editorial Association met in Des Moines. Mary Safford spoke at the gathering and asked for the group's endorsement of woman suffrage. After debating the measure, the delegates approved a resolution that called for the opportunity to allow Iowa's voters to consider a suffrage amendment to Iowa's constitution.¹⁷³ With two groups publicly calling for a statewide vote on a suffrage amendment, Iowa's suffrage leaders turned to the Democratic Party to round out a successful month. On July 25, the Democrats slyly adopted a plank that pledged the party's approval of initiative and referendum on issues of public reform. While they did name suffrage specifically in the plank, the Democrats did not directly endorse suffrage.¹⁷⁴ Even though Democrats failed to endorse suffrage outright, suffrage leaders claimed victory in gaining the support of both the Democratic and Republican Parties for an eventual statewide suffrage referendum.

Three months after the two major political parties in Iowa called for a suffrage referendum, the IESA met in Des Moines for its annual convention. "We rejoice in the great advancement of woman suffrage sentiment in the past two years," the women declared, "and in the light of these achievements we propose to repeat our appeals to the law makers of Iowa for the submission of a constitutional amendment giving women the franchise."¹⁷⁵ The women wanted an amendment to Iowa's constitution that would grant them the right to vote in all elections, including those for county, state, and federal

¹⁷² "When They Meant It," *Des Moines Tribune*, July 11, 1912, State Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁷³ "Corn Belt Editors in Suffrage Camp," Newspaper clipping, July 1912, State Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁷⁴ "Opinion is Divided on Suffrage Deal," Newspaper clipping, 1912, State Suffrage Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁷⁵ Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 82, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

officeholders. In order to accomplish this, the legislature had to pass a bill that put a referendum on suffrage to the voters of Iowa. Finally, during the spring of 1913, both the House and Senate of the Iowa General Assembly voted in favor of putting a suffrage amendment to a vote by the people. It was the first time that both houses had approved a suffrage resolution in the same session.¹⁷⁶ Because Iowa's constitution required that all amendments clear the legislature twice in successive sessions, suffragists had to play the waiting game until the next session of the Iowa legislature met again during the spring of 1915.¹⁷⁷ In the meantime, the IESA continued to push its members to work directly with rural Iowa. Its leaders quickly stepped up their appeals to the people of Iowa, planning an extensive automobile campaign large enough to reach rural people in all corners of the state. Conceived by Flora Dunlap, a rising star among Iowa's reformers, the campaign opened a new dialogue between urban suffragists and rural men and women. For the first time, suffrage leaders attempted to tailor their campaign to fit the demands of rural life.

Planning began during the summer of 1913, under the direction of Mrs. Pleasant J. Mills of Des Moines. A graduate of Grinnell College, Mills enjoyed upper-class life in the capital city. Time and money allowed her to devote herself to the suffrage cause, and she took upon herself the task of planning an arduous automobile tour across the state. Mills composed a grueling schedule, and suffragists visited three towns each day—one in the morning, afternoon, and evening.¹⁷⁸ Crossing the state twice, the caravan would make twenty-five stops. Sending notices to hundreds of Iowa newspapers, Mills advertised the

¹⁷⁶ "Woman Suffrage Bills Presented to Iowa Legislature," Folder 19, Box 6, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁷⁷ See, David D. Schmidt, *Citizen Lawmakers: The Ballot Initiative Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 235.

¹⁷⁸ "Woman Suffrage Tour," *Columbus Junction Safeguard*, Sept. 4, 1913, Scrapbook, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

intended route the suffragists planned to take. She also announced each stop on the journey, making sure to tell the newspapers to expect excellent suffrage speakers. She even secured a journalist, Bert Mills of the *Des Moines Capital*, to ride with the women and write about their experiences.¹⁷⁹ Clearly, suffragists had learned from their earlier mistakes. They had done their homework, planning months in advance and giving ample warning of their arrival. They also made it clear that their intent was to spread the suffrage message to “the people” of Iowa—rural men and women who had limited knowledge of the suffrage cause. Word spread quickly of the auto tour. “The Iowa Suffrage Association will inaugurate a two weeks’ speaking campaign beginning Sept. 1,” noted the *Clarion Monitor*. “The trip will be made in automobiles and at each of the twenty-five towns to be visited open air meetings will be held. The purpose is to inform the people regarding the suffrage cause.”¹⁸⁰ The *Adel News* summed it up best: “The advocates of equal suffrage...counted upon attracting public attention...At present it is a campaign of agitation and education.”¹⁸¹ With plans for the tour in hand, the suffragists organized a grand send-off to mark the beginning of their two-week endeavor.

At half past two on September 1, 1913—an “excessively hot day”—Governor George W. Clarke spoke to a small crowd on the courthouse lawn in Adel, his hometown.¹⁸² Plastered with suffrage colors, Adel was the inaugural first stop of the automobile campaign. Nearly everyone in attendance wore a yellow “Votes for Women” badge, and pennants with the same message found eager hands among those in the gathering. “The

¹⁷⁹ “Progress of the Suffrage Cause,” *Creston Plain Deal*, Sept. 9, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁸⁰ *Clarion Monitor*, Aug. 20, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁸¹ *Adel News*, Sept. 10, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁸² *Adel News*, Aug. 28, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; “A Fine Suffrage Meeting,” *Adel News*, Sept. 3, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

audience was well sprinkled with men, who showed a keen interest in the proceedings,” noted one account of the day.¹⁸³ Flora Dunlap followed the Governor and spoke to the crowd about why they had decided to hold such a public display for suffrage. “All we must do is let American men know that American women really want the ballot,” she declared, “To me, voting is more than a right. It is a duty. It is the duty of women to know that our water supplies, sanitary conditions, schools...and other things are as they should be.”¹⁸⁴ The right to vote was a necessary tool to protect the family, home, and children, argued Dunlap. In order for women to ensure the safety and security of their loved ones, they required access to the ballot. For Dunlap, voting was not a matter of right or even equality; instead, the role of women as mothers and caretakers of society deemed it a vital instrument of their work. At the close of Dunlap’s speech, the crowd bid the suffrage tour farewell. Two cars, a Packard and a Cadillac, carried the suffragists out of Adel and onto their next stop.¹⁸⁵

Riding a wave of optimism, the suffragists pulled into Guthrie Center at two o’clock the next afternoon. Mills had arranged for Dunlap and the Reverend Everett Dean Martin, pastor of the Christian Science Church, to speak at the local school. As soon as Dunlap approached the podium to speak, the students began to hiss and stamp their feet. Undaunted, Dunlap continued with her talk. Indifference turned into shame as the students “realized the discourtesy they had shown to the strangers.”¹⁸⁶ When Martin mentioned that suffragists wanted to abolish the “sweat shop where children are worked

¹⁸³ *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, Sept. 8, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ “Iowa Equal Suffragettes Here,” *Audubon Advocate*, Sept. 4, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁸⁶ “School Pupils Show Suffragists Discourtesy,” *Creston Adv[ertiser] Gaz[ette]*, Sept. 4, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

so hard for such little pay,” some of the girls “were in tears before the speakers had ended.”¹⁸⁷ As soon as word of the lack of respect suffragists encountered hit the presses, Guthrie Center’s superintendent issued his own version of the meeting. “Rank misstatements and glaring falsehoods” characterized newspaper accounts, he declared, and the students did not engage in any disrespectful acts.¹⁸⁸ Despite the superintendent’s attempt at damage control, newspapers across Iowa printed news about the saga for days afterward.¹⁸⁹ Some editors commented that the children needed to learn some manners, while others blasted the suffragists. “The school room is not the place for things of this kind,” wrote the editor of the *Clinton Herald*. “The suffragists laid themselves open to severe criticism by reason of their act.”¹⁹⁰

Hoping to find a better reception elsewhere, the suffragists left Guthrie Center and headed toward Audubon. The tour entered the city early on the evening of September 2 and held a “fine public meeting” in the city’s park.¹⁹¹ Astonishingly, three hundred people turned up to hear the suffragists, and Martin and Dunlap spoke to the crowd. Lighting and thunder provided “fireworks for the occasion,” but no rain fell on the assembly.¹⁹² That such a large number of people traveled to Audubon to hear the suffragists on only the second day of the tour speaks to the high degree of curiosity about suffrage present in Iowa. What exposure they did have to the movement came through reports in their local newspapers or stories passed around the community. Most likely, a

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ “Guthrie Center School Denies Tale of Hisses,” *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, Sept. 5, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁸⁹ See, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁹⁰ Newspaper Clipping, *Clinton Herald*, Sept. 8, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁹¹ “Iowa Equal Suffragettes Here,” *Audubon Advocate*, Sept. 4, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁹² “Iowa Equal Suffragettes Here,” Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; “Suffragist’ Second Day Repetition of Success,” *Des Moines Register and Leader*, Sept. 2, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

majority of Audubon's population had never seen a suffragist let alone heard one speak. Iowa's suffragists had finally found an effective means of reaching Iowa's rural population, and people responded in large numbers.

From Audubon, the suffragists headed to Atlantic, arriving there at two o'clock the next day. Dunlap again spoke to a large audience in the city's park. Newspapers from surrounding towns must have advertised the suffrage tour's stop quite thoroughly, because representatives from nearby small towns gathered in Atlantic to hear the suffragists speak. Both the *Anita Tribune* and the *Wiota News Telegraph* reported that two men, P. J. Sampson and J. D. Cannon, attended the Atlantic meeting.¹⁹³ The *Tribune* reported that they "were very much pleased with the speaking." In Anita, "quite a number of our good citizens" favored equal suffrage, reported the *Tribune*, while in Wiota a large number of people believed that women should "have the same suffrage rights that they [men] have."¹⁹⁴ The *Wiota News Telegraph* and the *Anita Tribune* illustrated a phenomenon that took shape as the automobile tour made its way through Iowa's countryside. As word spread of the arrival of Iowa's suffrage leaders, people who lived in small towns near suffrage tour stops made a point to travel to hear the suffragists speak. Not every person from the surrounding area could attend the event, but select community members could go, listen to the suffragists, and report back to the community about what they encountered. The local newspaper even published the accounts of those who were there, giving wider circulation to the suffrage tour. Iowa's rural people were clearly

¹⁹³ Newspaper Clipping, *Anita Tribune*, Sept. 18, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; Newspaper Clipping, *Wiota New[s]-Tel[egraph]*, Sept. 10, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁹⁴ Newspaper Clipping, *Wiota New[s]-Tel[egraph]*, Sept. 10, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

interested in the woman suffrage movement and came out in droves to learn more about why women deserved the right to vote.

Not everyone welcomed the suffragists warmly, however. At Red Oak the following day, the city street commissioner rebuked Evangeline Prouty for throwing handfuls of yellow suffrage leaflets in the city's streets as she rode through in one of the cars. J. B. Graves stopped the car and yelled, "Look here, young woman, I don't want to see you scattering any more of those bills along the streets of this town!"¹⁹⁵ Prouty immediately ceased throwing the leaflets. Despite encountering the authority of Red Oak's city street commissioner, the suffragists managed to speak to a large crowd and received a sizable collection from those present. After leaving Red Oak, one newspaper editor noted that the tour was falling behind schedule because "there is considerable interest along the route of the tourists, over the coming of the women, and in several cases talks have been requested in towns not on the regular schedule."¹⁹⁶

As the tour maintained its grueling schedule across the state, the suffragists continued to garner widespread publicity for the cause. At an unscheduled stop in Stuart, Mills rented a drum from a bank cashier and hired two children to beat it. "While the big car rolled around the town the children beat it vigorously and shouted the slogan, 'Votes for Women!'"¹⁹⁷ Six hundred people came out that evening to hear the suffragists speak.¹⁹⁸ Prouty purchased a megaphone when the caravan passed through

¹⁹⁵ Newspaper Clipping, *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, Sept. 7, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁹⁶ "Suffragists Behind Schedule," *Des Moines Register and Leader*, Sept. 5, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁹⁷ Newspaper Clipping, *Des Moines Capital*, Sept. 2, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

¹⁹⁸ "School Pupils Hiss Speakers The Applaud," *Des Moines News*, Sept. 3, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

Kimballton.¹⁹⁹ They made a special stop in Villisca to celebrate the twenty-seventh old settlers' reunion. The newspaper reports that followed their journey praised the reception they had received in these small towns. One journalist wrote, "It's funny to note the different attitudes of towns along the way. Some are apathetic, others enthusiastic, but at no time has there been a bit of jeering or unpleasantness."²⁰⁰ Community pride trumped suffrage sentiment in small towns, and everyone helped the tour along whether or not they supported the suffrage cause.

Rural conditions also took their toll on the urban suffragists used to comfortable accommodations and easy access to a variety of foods. The *Des Moines News* ran a story about an incident that occurred near Avoca:

After driving fifty miles through the heat and dust, when you are fairly panting for iced melon, dainty salad and iced tea, how would you like to have a frowsy haired waitress, one hand on her hip, sing song out: "We have ham-and, bacon and, pork chops and..." "Why DON'T they have cantaloupe this time of year?" inquired the youngest suffraget... Mrs. Mills, used to summering at the mountains or seashore, admits this is her first experience in the jungles of her native state. But she is game all right and when the frowsy waitress asked the question [Eggs up or over?], Mrs. Mills looked her in the eye and calmly said, "Up."²⁰¹

The automobile tour introduced the urban suffragists to a world almost entirely new to them—a rural "jungle" lacking the familiar comforts of upper-class life—and their ignorance of rural Iowa showed when they sat down for a meal in a small café. The disparity between city Iowa and small-town Iowa, urban Iowa and rural Iowa became much clearer as the suffragists journeyed throughout the state. "The trip was quite a revelation to us on the attitude of the average Iowa citizen,"

¹⁹⁹ "Iowa Suffr Coming Today," *Creston Plain Deal*, Sept. 5, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁰⁰ "Suffragets on Tour Weary of Long Hot Rides," *Des Moines News*, Sept. 6, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*

noted Dunlap.²⁰² In the fall of 1913, suffragists attempted to bridge the gap on suffrage opinion that existed between the two worlds during the suffrage automobile tour.

Drawing two distinct worlds together proved harder than the suffragists may have realized, but they took advantage of every opportunity to promote the fight for the ballot. “At every farm house the chauffeur gives a loud honk honk and a handful of suffrage literature is deposited in the mail box,” wrote an observer of the tour.²⁰³ When the caravan passed a group of road graders near Stuart, the suffragists distributed leaflets among the workers.²⁰⁴ “Across the countryside those yellow posters ‘Votes for Women’ go flying,” reported another. “They light in the corn fields and scamper along in front of the farm teams.”²⁰⁵ Suffragists brought their message directly to rural Iowans by confronting them as they worked, traveled, and even at their homes. They bombarded the countryside with suffrage materials and hoped that their efforts would convince rural men and women to support woman suffrage. As they pressed forward the cause, suffragists spoke to anyone willing to listen, placed leaflets in any open hand, and confronted anti-suffragists head on.

The first direct test of anti-suffrage sentiment occurred between Mrs. Pleasant J. Mills, the tour’s organizer, and the editor of the *Afton Star-Enterprise*, O. T. Meyers. In August 1913, he published an article calling the suffragists

²⁰² “Suffragists Are Back From Big Auto Trip,” *Des Moines News*, Sept. 15, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁰³ “School Pupils Hiss Speakers The Applaud,” *Des Moines News*, Sept. 3, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

“short-haired,” radical feminists, and sarcastically lamented that Mills had not arranged a stop in Afton. “The women have certainly overlooked a great bet,” wrote Meyers. “They are going through Afton without even a rear platform speech.”²⁰⁶ Meyers assured his readers that the women of Afton could not care less about the suffrage cause. “They are too busy putting up fruit, tending garden and looking after their homes to pay much attention to voting.”²⁰⁷ He argued, however, that the respectful women of Afton did not like “to be snubbed” and called on the suffragists to make time for Afton’s women.²⁰⁸ He added that the suffragists would at least be “a curiosity” in the town.²⁰⁹

Back in Des Moines, suffrage leaders did not appreciate Meyer’s mockery of the movement. Dunlap immediately wrote to Meyers and assured him that they did indeed have time to spend in Afton as they traveled between Creston and Osceola on September 5.²¹⁰ Meyers wrote of the letter he had received the day before the suffragists planned to arrive. “The ladies will never know how much we appreciate the fact that they will stop here,” smirked Meyers.²¹¹ He feigned disappointment as well. “Miss Dunlap assures us that they all have long hair. We are sorry to hear this. [We] had hoped they would be the short haired brand.”²¹² Again, Meyers painted suffragists as radical women who had little in common with their rural counterparts.

²⁰⁶ “Suffragists Miss a Good Town,” *Afton Star-Enterprise*, Aug., 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ “Suffragists Are Coming,” *Afton Star-Enterprise*, Sept. 4, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid.

Ridiculing the suffrage leaders turned out to be an unfortunate move for Meyers. As soon as the women arrived in Afton that day, Mills sought out Meyers. She asked him to introduce the suffrage speakers, but Meyers, dumbstruck, merely replied that he was not a good public speaker and could not assist the women. Dunlap made sure to let her long, red hair wave in the breeze as she spoke, a fact of which Meyers keenly took notice. The tone of his woman suffrage editorials changed dramatically as soon as the suffragists had departed from Afton. “We are certainly glad to have them stop at Afton,” he wrote. “Miss Dunlap is a good speaker and seems to be thoroughly in earnest with the work.”²¹³ He also noted that a majority of the community enjoyed the event. “It was the first time many of our citizens had seen a real live suffragist and quite a crowd gathered to hear what they had to say.”²¹⁴ While Meyers did not declare his support for suffrage, he did acknowledge that the cause had its merits.

After the showdown at Afton, the suffrage tour faced little opposition during the final leg of the route. On September 6, the suffragists reached Chariton and spoke to a huge crowd that had turned out for the event. Allegedly, a small group of young men had carried eggs with them to throw during the meeting, but Mayor J. C. Seward caught wind of the plan and quelled the intended riot. The *Des Moines Capital* noted that the “boys had come to throw eggs but they remained to cheer.”²¹⁵ Three days later, five hundred people attended the meeting in Fairfield, and the suffrage caravan received warm

²¹³ “Suffragists Here Friday,” *Afton Star-Enterprise*, Sept. 11, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Newspaper Clipping, *Des Moines Capital*, Sept. 8, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

receptions in Burlington and Davenport.²¹⁶ In Washington, the suffragists drew over three hundred people to town. The *Journal* reported, “Every available seat was taken by the women and older men, while the others stood around the wall, drinking in the suffrage doctrine with eager ears.”²¹⁷ The final suffrage rally took place in Indianola on September 13, 1913. In two weeks, the suffrage automobile tour had visited thirty towns and spoken to approximately 7500 people in central Iowa.²¹⁸ Less than a month after the suffrage tour ended, the IESA elected Flora Dunlap as its president. Dunlap’s election ushered in a new generation of suffrage leaders in Iowa. With connections to the Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs, Dunlap gave the IESA a wider base of support and more means by which to disseminate suffrage materials.²¹⁹

While Iowa’s suffrage leaders successfully adopted dramatic tactics that garnered more publicity for the suffrage cause, other states experienced success using state suffrage referenda. Illinois passed a woman suffrage bill in 1913, granting them the right to vote in presidential elections. Nevada and Montana fully enfranchised women in 1914.²²⁰ Iowa’s suffragists seemed next in line for a suffrage victory. By the middle of 1915, suffragists had received the greatest opportunity to secure a victory for woman suffrage in Iowa. In February 1915, the Iowa legislature cleared the statewide suffrage referendum a second time. At last, a suffrage bill would go to the people of Iowa for a

²¹⁶ “Suffrage Tourists Speak in Southern Iowa City,” *Des Moines Register and Leader*, Sept. 10, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; “Suffragists Here,” *Burlington Gazette*, Sept. 10, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; “The Suffrage Issue,” *Des Moines Tribune*, Sept. 15, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²¹⁷ Newspaper Clipping, *Washington Journal*, Sept. 12, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²¹⁸ “Suffragists Home Again From Tour Across the State,” *Des Moines Capital*, Sept. 15, 1913, Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²¹⁹ Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 95, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; IFWC, *An Account*, pages 83-84, IWAUI; “Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs Yearbook 1916-1917,” page 21, Folder 3, Box 5, IWAUI.

²²⁰ Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 261, 268.

vote. The IESA encouraged its members to redouble their efforts. “These are crucial times in Iowa,” recorded the IESA’s secretary in 1915. “We urge every woman to realize the importance of subordinating all less important matters to Suffrage work... We recommend the use of every legitimate agency for publicity and propaganda work.”²²¹ Suffragists immediately began preparing for the most comprehensive grassroots campaign ever conceived in the state, and work commenced shortly after. Suffragists relied upon the experience they had garnered from the first decade-and-a-half of the twentieth century. They continued to use newspapers, speakers, and automobile tours to bring the suffrage message to rural Iowans. They relied upon local efforts of organization for the cause as well as the state work of the IESA. The suffrage bill campaign, however, was the culmination of suffrage work in Iowa. It brought suffrage leaders face-to-face with rural Iowans, forcing them to tailor their work toward a population that had only just begun to consider the merits of their cause.

²²¹ Annual Convention Meeting Minutes, 1915, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1914-1917, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

Chapter 3

The Suffrage Bill and Beyond, 1914-1920

“Iowa Women in the Country,” the flyer proclaimed, “the ballot should be yours not only by right of citizenship—it should be yours by virtue of the increasing need of your family for protection.”²²² The flyer, published by the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, or the IESA, during the spring of 1916, targeted rural women and their moral duties to family and community in its message. The flyer emphasized that farmers should support woman suffrage because rural women would use the vote to protect the integrity of the farm family. In addition, the flyer targeted rural women as well, declaring that farmers needed their wives’ assistance at the polls to dispose of corrupt leaders and replace them with good government. The message was clear: by supporting woman suffrage, farmers not only displayed their patriotism and belief in honest government, they also affirmed the right rural women had to protect their families.

The flyer, one of thousands of handbills, leaflets, and posters distributed throughout Iowa during the spring of 1916, points to a pivotal moment in the state’s woman suffrage movement. A year earlier, the Iowa General Assembly had passed an amendment that, if ratified by the voters of Iowa, granted women the right to vote. Legislators in the House had placed the “suffrage bill,” as people grew to call it, on the June 1916 primary election ballot. Suffrage leaders in the IESA realized that in order to secure victory, they needed to garner the support of voters from across the state of Iowa. The largest bloc of voters—almost 70 percent of the state—came from rural areas. The IESA immediately recognized that the suffrage amendment’s success or failure hinged

²²² “Iowa Women in the Country,” Folder 3, Box 13, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

upon the support of rural women. Only rural women could connect state and national suffrage leaders to male voters from rural households.

During the spring of 1916, Iowans witnessed one of the most comprehensive grassroots campaigns in its history. Canvassing door-to-door, suffrage workers brought their message to farming communities across the state. They plastered billboards with suffrage information. They spoke at churches, during Chautauquas, and in rural neighborhoods in every township in every county of Iowa. The vast amount of work that suffragists, from national figures to state workers, did during the spring of 1916 demonstrated that they believed rural women were the crucial element to securing victory in June. National and state suffragists vigorously and directly sought the support of rural women in Iowa during the 1916 suffrage amendment campaign. At the close of the campaign, suffrage leaders turned toward the impending war in Europe to assert their patriotism and serve the war effort. They hoped that their support of the war would grant them the right to vote. They continued to reach out to rural women through committees on agriculture and efforts to Americanize foreign-born populations in rural areas.

The road to securing a suffrage referendum in Iowa had been bumpy. Before 1913, each legislative session had ended with broken promises from lawmakers, failed suffrage legislation, and disappointed suffrage leaders. Victory arrived in 1913 when both houses of the Iowa General Assembly finally voted in favor of an amendment for woman suffrage during the same legislative session. Suffragists in Iowa had to wait another two years for the legislature to pass the bill a second time and place it on a ballot for a vote by the male citizens of Iowa. While Iowa experienced its share of setbacks, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, or the NAWSA, had been dealing with its own

internal conflict between 1904 and 1915. According to historian Eleanor Flexner, while President Anna Howard Shaw's "devotion was complete and her gifts were many... administrative ability was not among them."²²³ Under Shaw's direction, the NAWSA had fractured into competing groups embittered with jealousies. National suffrage leaders, desperate for a cooperative effort among state and national movements, began calling for Catt's return to the presidency of the NAWSA in early 1914. She agreed to accept the position in December 1915.²²⁴

Catt's return as president of the NAWSA came during a time of surprising development in the woman suffrage movement in Iowa. Suffrage leaders in Iowa rejoiced at the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that the Thirty-Sixth Iowa General Assembly gave them in February 1915. After waiting two years, on February 12, the Senate voted in favor of submitting an amendment to the people of Iowa on woman suffrage.²²⁵ The Allen-Ring amendment called for the removal of the word "male" from the suffrage provisions in the Iowa constitution.²²⁶ The House followed suit on February 23, passing the bill with eighty-four "yes" votes and nineteen "no" votes. Representatives George W. Ball, Edmund K. Greene, Herbert C. Ring, and Orville C. Lee all gave rousing speeches for suffrage. Representative Roy D. Nordyke of Richland pushed for a "special election bill" that allowed Iowans to vote on the measure at the primary election on June 5, 1916.²²⁷ Representatives in the House passed the Nordyke-Allen resolution with a strong

²²³ Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 248.

²²⁴ Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 272-73.

²²⁵ "Annual Address by Mrs. Ida B. Wise Smith," *Forty-Second Annual Convention of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, page 25, Box 11, Women's Christian Temperance Union of Iowa, IWAUI.

²²⁶ "Flora Dunlap," Folder 23, Box 7, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²²⁷ "Suffrage, 1915 Yearbook pg 147," unpublished document, Folder 25, Box 1, Iowa Suffrage Memorial Commission, Collection 23/3 [hereafter ISMC], IWAUI.

majority, and the “suffrage bill” became an official measure on the primary ballot.²²⁸

Related state suffrage leaders began preparing for the most important fight any had seen in their entire careers.

Planning started slowly as suffrage leaders secured the funds necessary to carry out the intense grassroots campaigning they had planned. The IESA met in October 1915 to discuss the details of their fundraising efforts. Flora Dunlap, president of the IESA, reminded its members that “women with a high grade of intelligence... must be compensated for” their work. In addition, the IESA needed money to pay for the immense amount of suffrage literature Dunlap wanted. “Iowa should be strewn knee deep with literature,” she proclaimed.²²⁹ At the convention, Dunlap also read an important letter from the Nebraska Suffrage Association. In it, Nebraska’s state organization offered Iowa’s suffragists the “heartiest co-operation in her labor for the ballot and contributing toward the Campaign fund.”²³⁰ The letter contained a short, yet ultimately powerful, warning. The Nebraska Association pledged to assist the Iowa campaign in any way so that “Iowa might profit by Nebraska’s mistake in failing to reach the rural voter.”²³¹ In acknowledging their failed attempt at passing a suffrage amendment, Nebraska’s suffragists clearly identified rural men and women as the key for a suffrage victory in Iowa. Without their support, any suffrage bill in Iowa would fail.

²²⁸ “Woman’s Suffrage,” *Forty-Second Annual Report of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, Iowa City, Iowa, Sept. 28-Oct. 1, 1915, *Proceedings of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, page 148, Box 11, Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Iowa, IWAUI.

²²⁹ Annual Convention Meeting Minutes, 1915, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1914-1917, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid. Nebraska’s referendum failed by about ten thousand votes in 1914.

On December 21, 1915, Catt met with Flora Dunlap. Catt pledged the financial support of the NAWSA for the Iowa campaign. She also agreed to send a group of national workers to the state during the spring 1916, even pledging to pay out of her own pocket for one national suffrage worker to spend five months in Iowa. She visited the state three times during the suffrage campaign, spending a month touring the state on a speaking tour. For Catt, a favorable vote on the suffrage amendment in Iowa meant more than just enfranchising the women of Iowa. She hoped that Iowa's example would force national leaders of the Democratic and Republican Parties to stop dragging their feet about suffrage and recast their existing suffrage resolutions into stronger endorsements of the cause in the United States.²³²

Sometime around Dunlap's meeting with Catt in December 1915, the IESA issued a revised "Plan of Organization and Work for the Woman's Suffrage Campaign in Iowa." The plan adopted a system similar to one used by political parties in the state. The Board of Directors of the IESA appointed a county chairman to head each county organization. Officers in each county organization included the chairman, a secretary, a treasurer, and a press chairman. In addition to the county organization, each township or ward had a chairman. The county chairman also created new suffrage organizations where none had existed.²³³ The "Plan for Organization" suggested that the county chairman "may secure a speaker, advertise a mass meeting...asking the audience to sign enrollment cards, all

²³² Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 253.

²³³ Iowa Equal Suffrage Association [hereafter IESA], "A Plan of Organization and Work for the Woman's Suffrage Campaign in Iowa," page 1, Folder 16, Box 1, ISMC, IWAUI.

those signing having the right to vote.”²³⁴ Enrollment numbers let state suffrage leaders know where suffrage sentiment was strong and where it needed to be developed.

The IESA went further than just instructing county organizers to form new suffrage clubs; suffrage leaders wanted propaganda about the June 5 primary to invade the daily lives of Iowans in every corner of the state. The “Plan of Organization” instructed the press chairman to “keep in close touch with the newspapers of the county and see that every item of suffrage news is given the widest circulation possible.”²³⁵ Besides soliciting newspaper editors, the IESA encouraged county organizers to distribute pamphlets and leaflets “at all public places, especially where a crowd has gathered... [such] as granges, homecomings, [and] short courses.”²³⁶ The IESA also asked ministers to “introduce suffrage into their discourses” and singers to “use suffrage songs as encores.”²³⁷ Other suggestions included arranging a “poster squad” to display suffrage pennants in garages, shops, and other places of business and creating a resolutions committee to request that church societies, civic organizations, and other groups endorse suffrage.²³⁸ Finally, the IESA charged each township or ward chairman to go door-to-door with their suffrage message. The “Plan for Organization” instructed organizers to “leave literature at every house... Give every one... a chance to talk it over with you.”²³⁹ Clearly, these directives display the scale the IESA hoped its efforts would take during the spring of 1916. The “Plan for Organization” demonstrated that suffrage leaders refused to go down without a fight.

²³⁴ IESA, “A Plan of Organization,” page 2, IWAUI.

²³⁵ IESA, “A Plan of Organization,” page 3, IWAUI.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ IESA, “A Plan of Organization,” page 4, IWAUI.

²³⁹ IESA, “A Plan of Organization,” page 6, IWAUI.

With a detailed plan to the next five months in hand, in December 1915, suffrage leaders of the IESA launched an extensive grassroots campaign to ensure that Iowa voters would pass the suffrage amendment on June 5, 1916. While the “Plan of Organization” looked unstoppable on paper, suffragists now faced the daunting task of actually carrying out their plans. They realized that persuading hundreds of thousands of men from across the state to vote in favor of the suffrage amendment would to be their biggest challenge. While suffragists had increased public knowledge of the suffrage movement during the first decade of the twentieth century, they had not convinced every male Iowan to support the cause at the ballot box. In addition, anti-suffrage forces converged on Iowa in early 1916. The Iowa Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, or the IAOWS, formed in January 1916 in an attempt to derail suffragists’ efforts to pass the suffrage bill. Two months later, male anti-suffragists created the Iowa Association of Men Opposed to Woman Suffrage, or the IAMOWS. Pledging to uphold the sanctity of womanhood and the place of women in the home, the two groups began to spread their anti-suffrage message throughout the state.²⁴⁰

Countering the efforts of anti-suffragists in Iowa, the IESA pushed local suffrage leaders to connect on an individual level with every resident of their county. The “Plan of Organization” cautioned county organizers to have as many men as possible fill out enrollment cards pledging their support to the cause because “it gives every one a chance to consider equal suffrage at least once. Some people never have.”²⁴¹ The IESA understood that the majority of those people ignorant to the suffrage fight in Iowa came

²⁴⁰ Libby Cavanaugh, “Opposition to Female Enfranchisement: The Iowa Anti-Suffrage Movement” (Master’s Thesis, Iowa State University, 2007), 61-63.

²⁴¹ IESA, “Plan of Organization,” page 6, IWAUI.

from rural backgrounds. In 1900, the United States Census reported that Iowa's rural population comprised 74.4 percent of the total population. In 1910, the percentage dropped only slightly to 69.4 percent of the population, still making rural Iowans the majority.²⁴² In order to ratify the suffrage amendment to the Iowa constitution on June 5, 1916, Iowa suffragists especially needed to reach out to rural men of voting age. In order to ally these rural men to the suffrage cause, IESA suffrage leaders focused a great deal of their attention on rural women.

The IESA received invaluable support during the suffrage campaign from two well-established organizations in Iowa, the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs and the WCTU of Iowa. Since 1911, the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs had maintained a high level of support for the woman suffrage movement. In 1916, the group created a new subdivision of the Civics Committee. Entitled "Rural Welfare," the subdivision formed "a central exchange for the growing number of Rural Clubs" that had joined the Federation.²⁴³ Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Iowa Federation experienced a noticeable increase in the number of rural clubs that joined its ranks at the same time as the statewide message to ratify the suffrage bill gained intensity. The Federation also issued a statewide decree, stating that clubwomen had a moral obligation to serve the suffrage cause. President Lola A. Miller called on the Federation's seventeen thousand members to "put aside all prejudice, tradition and habit of thought."²⁴⁴ She encouraged each

²⁴² US Census Bureau, "Table 1: Urban and Rural Population: 1900 to 1990," (Oct. 1995), <http://www.census.gov/population/censusdata/urpop0090.txt>, accessed Nov. 24, 2008.

²⁴³ "Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs Yearbook 1916-1917," page 21, Folder 3, Box 5, IWAUI.

²⁴⁴ "Iowa's Women Do Great Work," *Boone County Democrat*, Boone, Iowa, March 13, 1916, Ericson Public Library, Boone, Iowa [hereafter EPL].

clubwoman to “give generously of [her] time, money, and strength to further this cause and to do this work in Iowa now.”²⁴⁵

The WCTU of Iowa followed not far behind the Iowa Federation of Women’s Clubs. Of the twenty-three district organizations in the state, fifteen either engaged in direct suffrage work or contributed to the suffrage campaign financially. Many of the districts even complained that suffrage work took time away from work for other causes like prohibition and moral reform. The twenty-third district alone raised almost two hundred dollars for the suffrage cause. The fifteenth district reported that over “one hundred suffrage lectures were delivered; 1,000 posters used during the campaign, and 2,500 pages of suffrage literature were distributed.”²⁴⁶ WCTU of Iowa members in the fifth district “talked suffrage, sang suffrage songs, decorated our homes, fences and trees with suffrage posters.”²⁴⁷ The group distributed four hundred posters and leaflets throughout the district, held three suffrage institutes, and adopted the motto “we expect to be...suffragists Till we die.”²⁴⁸ The WCTU of Iowa became so active in the suffrage campaign because of the inextricable link between equal suffrage and prohibition in the minds of Iowa voters. In an address to the Forty-Second Annual Convention of the WCTU of Iowa, Ida B. Wise Smith stated, “Woman’s suffrage can never be differentiated from the liquor question.”²⁴⁹ According to Smith, liquor interests feared that an overwhelming majority of women in Iowa supported prohibition and, with the

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ “Corresponding Secretary’s Report,” *Forty-Third Annual Report of the W. C. T. U.*, Fort Dodge, Iowa, Oct. 3-7, 1916, *Proceedings of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, page 44, 46, Box 11, Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Iowa Collection, IWAUI.

²⁴⁷ “Corresponding Secretary’s Report,” *Forty-Third Annual Report of the W. C. T. U.*, page 121, IWAUI.

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ “Annual Address by Mrs. Ida B. Wise Smith,” *Forty-Second Annual Convention of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, Iowa City, Iowa, Sept. 28-Oct. 1, 1915, *Proceedings of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, page 23, Box 11, Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Iowa Collection, IWAUI.

ballot in hand, could spell disaster for the liquor industry. Smith warned attendees that liquor interests in other states had already paid off political machines, attempting to secure the failure of any woman suffrage legislation. Smith promised members that a woman suffrage campaign in Iowa would uncover the lengths to which the liquor interests could go to deny women the right to vote. She encouraged the WCTU of Iowa to prepare itself for an arduous fight.²⁵⁰

While both the Iowa Federation of Women's Clubs and the WCTU of Iowa contributed immensely to the suffrage campaign during the spring of 1916, the IESA provided the driving force behind the movement. IESA leaders realized that in order to secure victory in June, they needed to persuade rural women to support the movement. IESA leaders reasoned that if rural women favored the suffrage amendment, their husbands, brothers, and fathers of voting age would as well. Because these women lived on farms isolated from towns or large cities, suffragists relied primarily on the written word to reach them. The most effective means proved to be county newspapers. Until June 1916, the IESA sent suffrage articles to thousands of newspapers across the state, requesting that their editors publish as much on suffrage as possible. Boone County, the location of the 1908 suffrage parade, had three different newspapers, the *Boone County Democrat*, the *Boone County Republican*, and the *Boone County Independent*. During three months in the spring of 1916, these three newspapers exploded with suffrage material. A closer look at the role newspapers played in disseminating information about the woman suffrage movement in Boone County provides intriguing insight into the messages state suffrage leaders sent to rural women across Iowa.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

Located in central Iowa, the city of Boone, county seat of Boone County, contained a thriving city-center and a population of over twelve thousand residents in 1916. Prior to the June suffrage referendum, city dwellers had become accustomed to hearing about woman suffrage. An active Political Equality Club, led by Rowena Stevens—an organizer of the suffrage parade—met frequently. The IESA held its annual state convention three times in Boone, in 1908, 1913, and 1919.²⁵¹ Because Boone had hosted these events, city dwellers most likely remained aware of woman suffrage activities in Iowa throughout the early-twentieth century.

While residents in the city of Boone had experienced suffrage events, Boone County's farming communities had less exposure to the woman suffrage movement. Rural families many times could not afford the time and money necessary to travel to Boone for every suffrage event. In addition, many farm families undoubtedly lived in closer proximity to one of the other ten small towns located within Boone County than to the city of Boone itself. Farmers and their families many times chose to carry out their business in the town nearest their farm, most likely making trips to the city of Boone sporadic and interactions with the suffrage movement rare. However, with the population of rural Boone County at nearly 17,500, local and state suffrage leaders realized that they could not disregard Boone's rural communities if they hoped to carry the county in June.²⁵²

In order to reach Boone's rural people, state leaders sent suffrage literature to Boone's three newspapers, and the editors published suffrage material in almost every

²⁵¹ Lona Ingham Robinson, "A Birdseye View," Folder 23, Box 6, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁵² "Population of Boone 12,263," *Boone County Democrat*, June 3, 1915, EPL.

issue of their newspapers. The *Boone County Democrat* contained the largest number of suffrage articles. Headlines splashed throughout its pages advertised both state and local suffrage activities. One piece of state suffrage literature highlighted the new “eggless, butterless, milkless cake” developed by Mrs. Pleasant J. Mills of Des Moines. For a ten-cent donation to the suffrage campaign, Mills promised to send homemakers her secret recipe.²⁵³ Another state suffrage promotion featured Mrs. Jansen Hanes, mother of four and suffragist. She explained why, as a mother, she desired the right to vote to pursue her interest in the “conservation of the child and the preservation of the home.”²⁵⁴

In addition to publishing state suffrage literature, the *Boone County Democrat* followed the suffrage campaign on the local level. It announced the arrival of a national suffrage organizer, Mrs. Grundy, to Boone and published word-for-word the program of a suffrage institute organized by the Boone County WCTU in early 1916.²⁵⁵ It even published a lengthy piece written by the Boone County Suffrage Association. Entitled “Appeal by the Boone County Suffrage Assn.,” county suffragists argued women deserved the right to vote to “improve the conditions that surround the home.”²⁵⁶ Other states that had granted woman suffrage, according to the “Appeal,” have brought a “better, cleaner, and more independent note into politics.”²⁵⁷ Groups such as the Iowa

²⁵³ “Attention, Housekeepers of Iowa!” *Boone County Democrat*, April 17, 1916, EPL.

²⁵⁴ “Woman Suffrage and the Home,” *Boone County Democrat*, March 27, 1916, EPL.

²⁵⁵ “Mrs. Grundy Here on Suffrage Plans,” *Boone County Democrat*, March 9, 1916, EPL; “W. C. T. U. Suffrage Institute,” *Boone County Democrat*, Feb. 28, 1916, EPL. From March 1916 to early June 1916, the *Boone County Democrat* ran a total of sixty-seven items related to the Iowa campaign for the suffrage amendment. Published twice a week, the *Boone County Democrat* most likely published most, if not all, of the suffrage material sent to it by state suffrage leaders. With its slogan “A Newspaper Without a Muzzle,” the *Boone County Independent*, published nearly as much suffrage material. In a three week period, the newspaper carried three almost full-page pieces on the suffrage amendment campaign in Iowa.

²⁵⁶ “Appeal by the Boone County Suffrage Assn.,” *Boone County Democrat*, March 7, 1916, EPL.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Federation of Women's Clubs supported woman suffrage, noted the "Appeal," and women had the intelligence and moral character required to vote.²⁵⁸

While Boone's county newspapers ran many pieces of state suffrage literature espousing general pleas of support to all women in Iowa, the IESA specifically targeted farm women in newspapers with a rural readership. On March 20, 1916, the *Boone County Democrat* ran an article written by Mrs. Hiram K. Evans, the Auditor for the State Suffrage Board. In it, Evans wrote, "Iowa's farm women are the deciding factor in the election, and it is to them we must look for victory. They are the backbone of our state." She reminded suffrage workers that "the main thing is to impress upon the people the fact of the coming election."²⁵⁹ For Evans, farm women played an important, if not the most important role, in the suffrage campaign. Another piece of suffrage literature showed just how effective farm women could be as a political force with the right to vote. Entitled "How the Farm Women Can Use the Ballot," the article listed nine ways farm women could improve rural life through the ballot box. They could ensure "Better Country Roads, Better Transportation Facilities for Farm Products, Which Means More Money for You in the Bank... Better Public Libraries, [and] the Wise Expenditure of Tax Money Which You Help to Earn."²⁶⁰ Life in rural communities would improve, according to the article, and farm women would ensure it if they had the right to vote.²⁶¹

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

²⁵⁹ "Farm Women Great Factor," *Boone County Democrat*, March 20, 1916, EPL.

²⁶⁰ "How the Farm Women Can Use the Ballot," *Boone County Democrat*, April 24, 1916, EPL.

²⁶¹ While newspapers across Iowa carried suffrage materials, other journals supported the suffrage cause as well. Farm journals, including *Wallace's Farmer* and *Successful Farmer*, and their editors endorsed suffrage prior to the 1916 suffrage referendum. Since the focus on this paper is on suffrage leaders and their attempts to reach out to rural women, analysis of the role farm journals played in Iowa during the suffrage campaign does not appear here.

Other articles pointed to the importance of rural women to the state's economy. "The records of the state of Iowa show that \$350,000,000 worth of farm land is owned or managed by women," pointed out one article.²⁶² It noted that about sixteen thousand women owned and controlled farms outright and had access to over 2.5 billion acres of rich Iowa farmland. These farm women, the article recognized, were "resourceful and intelligent."²⁶³ Able problem solvers and responsible, tax-paying citizens, these sister agriculturalists worked on equal terms and assumed similar work to the average farmer. What they lacked was the right to vote. Without it, "woman with her millions of acres has no voice in the laws which determine her property rights, and perhaps the prosperity of her holdings."²⁶⁴ Property rights were an unalienable right, claimed the article, and women farmers required the opportunity to have a say about property laws in Iowa.

Pamphlets and leaflets addressed specifically to farm women contained a strikingly similar message, and state suffrage leaders relied upon their distribution as another avenue to reach rural communities of women. The NAWSA and IESA wrote many of the flyers in English, but suffragists in Iowa printed their literature in at least three other languages: Polish, Italian, and German.²⁶⁵ Countless flyers addressed rural women specifically, and many echoed the "rural uplift" message. With the title, "Iowa Women in the Country," one flyer listed nine "matters of vital interest to the Farm Woman." These matters included "the Consolidation of Schools, the Moral Standing of All Public Officials, the Age of Protection for your Daughters, and the Moral

²⁶² "Women Farmers Need the Vote," Newspaper Circulars, Folder 15, Box 2, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ See, Literature Scrapbook, Box 23, DMISWR, SHSIDM.

Atmosphere of All Places of Recreation and Amusement.”²⁶⁶ Borrowing heavily from a NAWSA flyer of the same title, the flyer united urban and rural women together as “sisters” in the movement.

The woman in the country has much the same reason for desiring the ballot that the town or city woman has. Farms are no longer isolated regions, nor are they inhabited by women differing from their city sisters. Good government, which is the direct result of the wise use of the ballot, is as much a matter of importance to the farm woman, as to any city dweller.²⁶⁷

The flyer displayed that the IESA attempted to draw farm women into the suffrage campaign not as outsiders, but as “sisters” who desired the ballot just as much as their urban counterparts. IESA leaders clearly did not ignore or marginalize rural women while campaigning to secure the suffrage amendment in Iowa.

The flyer ended its appeal to Iowa’s “women in the country” by hitting on a contentious issue: taxes. Anti-suffrage organizations prophesied that women with voting rights would institute more programs to help families, increasing taxes in order to pay for those programs. Iowa’s farmers dreaded the prospect of higher taxes, and suffrage leaders worked steadfastly to prove that woman suffrage could in fact curtail public spending by holding politicians to a high moral standard. The flyer pointed out that

The county and township officials, and their conduct of public affairs, affect directly every farm woman and child in this State. If taxes are too high, or tax money wasted, the woman feels the burden more keenly than the man, because the comforts and luxuries of the house, and the educational opportunities for the children are the first to be curtailed when high taxes and poor crops make sacrifice necessary.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ IESA, “Iowa Women in the Country” Folder 15, Box 1, ISMC, IWAUI.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

According to the flyer, high taxes actually hurt rural women and children the most. The IESA rationalized that since rural women desired the vote to protect their families, farm women would not vote to increase tax rates because it would jeopardize their families' security. In order to drive their point home, the IESA flyer ended with a warning to all farmers. "The farmer has reached the point where he needs the assistance of the FARM WOMAN at the polls, if he would protect his property from the avarice of the unscrupulous, and his family from vicious influences."²⁶⁹ Granting women the right to vote on June 5, the flyer stated, ensured that families remained protected and the home remained a bastion of morality and decency.

Another flyer hit on the issues of taxes, but it took a different approach to the problem. Entitled "Equal Suffrage Protects the Farm Family," the flyer began by asserting the valuable role farm women played in ensuring the survival of the family. "The farmer knows better than anyone else how his wife helps to earn and carry on the farm. When he dies, he leaves it without fear in her hands."²⁷⁰ While the farmer could trust his wife to continue farming when died, he could not guarantee that, as a widow, she could pay the taxes on the farm. By using a farmer's widow as an example, the flyer pointed to one of the most obvious contradictions women as citizens faced. It warned

But he leaves its [the farm's] taxes unprotected by a citizen's vote. His widow is considered a citizen with the taxes fall due. Her taxes are more likely to be raised than reduced. On election day she suffers from taxation without representation—she has no voice in saying how her taxes shall be spent.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ "Equal Suffrage Protects the Farm Family," Folder 1, Box 13, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

If he should die, the farmer placed the safety of his family in jeopardy unless women received the right to vote, according to the flyer. Farm women could make certain that tax rates did not increase, thereby ensuring the survival of the farm, but only if they had the right to vote on tax issues. Once again, IESA leaders asserted that taxes could not increase if the suffrage amendment passed on June 5 because rural women did not want to endanger their families' wellbeing.²⁷²

Other suffrage flyers carried a message of protecting the family's morality and purity. One flyer contained uppercase printing to emphasize the suffrage message: "SHE is responsible for the cleanliness of her home...SHE is responsible for the wholesomeness of the food. SHE is responsible for the children's health."²⁷³ In order to carry out her duties, women needed the right to vote. "Let them have a hand in...housekeeping," proclaimed the flyer.²⁷⁴ Another flyer directed at farm women came from the Illinois campaign. It found wide circulation in Iowa with the title "The Ballot for the Women on the Farm." Written by Ella S. Stewart, the flyer listed the multitude of ways women could use the ballot. From cleaning up rural prisons to electing fair county officials to improving rural roads and highways, farm women would "share richly" if enfranchised.²⁷⁵

Other pamphlets asked farm women to consider the ways they wished to reform rural society. "Farmers' Wives, Consider This" read the title of one pamphlet. Reminding women of the County Life Commission's work on rural life, the pamphlet pointed out that while the Commission had investigated the "lot of the Farmer's Wife...there was not

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ NAWSA, "Women in the Home," Literature Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ella S. Stewart, "The Ballot for Women of the Farm," Literature Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM

a woman on the whole board of inquiry.”²⁷⁶ The government controlled access to “practically everything that the farmer’s wife needs and wants to improve her lot” but left farm women without means to improve rural life for their families.²⁷⁷ “You want Better Educational Opportunities,” the pamphlet continued, “You Want Clean Amusements for Young People... You Want Modern Improvements... You Want Better Mail Service... You Want Better Prices for Your Products.”²⁷⁸ The pamphlet emphasized the concerns most dear to rural women. They needed the right to vote to protect their families and clean up politics. More importantly, they required the ballot to ensure that rural life continued to exist uncorrupted. The vote was a necessity and a duty and failing to secure it threatened the very fabric of rural society.

Flyers and pamphlets contained endorsements from prominent individuals from the various social circles in Iowa. Democratic candidate for governor E. T. Meredith openly supported the suffrage movement. “I believe her vote will be on the side of the home, the family, the coming generation, and I welcome the day when Iowa womanhood may vote along with men,” he wrote.²⁷⁹ Prominent religious leaders also publicized their favorable views of the woman suffrage movement. While most Protestant Christian churches had endorsed the cause early on, the position of the Catholic Church remained mostly indifferent.²⁸⁰ The IESA sought out Catholic leaders who believed in woman suffrage and used them to try to convert the larger Catholic population. Bishop Austin Dowling of Des Moines openly supported the movement and the IESA included

²⁷⁶ NAWSA, “Farmers’ Wives, Consider This,” Literature Scrapbook, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ E. T. Meredith, “A Woman’s Right,” Folder 13.2, Box 13, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁸⁰ See Chapter 2 for a discussion on Protestant churches.

statements made by him on a flyer entitled “Catholic Prelate Endorses Suffrage for Iowa Women.” Dowling stated, “I, for one, contemplate the prospect of equal suffrage in Iowa with satisfaction, and unless all signs fail there is no doubt the verdict of the people will at last give it to women.”²⁸¹ Declarations from Catholic leaders helped drum up support for woman suffrage among followers of Catholicism.

One suffrage leader even composed a song about the suffrage referendum campaign. Typically, the suffragists changed the words of well-known songs by inserting their own lyrics. While the lyricist did not note to which melody the new suffrage version belonged, a rousing tune no doubt accompanied the rhyme.

1.

I'm Glad I live in good Old Iowa
 Where they vote for Women's suffrage in the Spring
 Let us sing, let us sing, in the Spring.
 Well sing our songs and watch our manners,
 So the men will wave our banners
 In the Spring, let us sing, let us sing, in the Spring.

CHORUS—

O' Aren't you glad you live in Iowa
 Hoorah, Hoorah, on Iowa land
 Well take our stand
 To live and die or Iowa
 Come on, come on, come on, and work for Iowa.

2.

The time has come for us to labor,
 With our friends and with our neighbor,
 Every day, every day, so they say, so they say.
 We must talk to all our big brothers
 To the wives and to the Mothers.
 So they say, so they say, every day, every day.

CHORUS—

²⁸¹ “Catholic Prelate Endorses Suffrage for Iowa Women,” Folder 13.2, Box 13, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

3.

The fight of June will soon be coming
 Which will keep us all a running,
 To the polls, to the polls, by the shoals, by the shoals,
 Our faith must be so sure and steady,
 And our friends be ever ready,
 By the shoals, by the shoals, at the polls, at the polls.

CHORUS—

4.

Give votes to women, just keep singing,
 Keep it up and keep it ringing
 As we shout, as we shout, come on out, come on out
 Our men are faithful true and loyal,
 They will treat the women royal
 Come on out, as we shout, come on out, as we shout

CHORUS—²⁸²

The lyrics displayed the kind of action that suffragists had to take in order to secure the suffrage bill. They had to come together as a cohesive organization and “talk to all our big brothers,” friends, and neighbors.²⁸³ Suffragists sang this song and others like it as another way of attracting people to the suffrage message.

Distributing suffrage pamphlets, leaflets, and flyers, and requesting that newspaper editors publish suffrage literature went only so far in persuading rural men that they should vote for the suffrage amendment on June 5, 1916. As the “Plan of Organization” mandated, suffrage officials needed to go house-to-house, speaking directly to each family member—most especially the male voters—about the suffrage campaign. In Lucas County, Iowa, two sisters, Victoria Dewey and Virginia Branner, organized a “county caravan.” The caravan “visited every town in Lucas County” and

²⁸² Iowa Suffrage Song, Folder 6, Box 13, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁸³ Ibid.

featured “national speakers” as its way of enticing rural residents to travel to the closest town and see the caravan for themselves.²⁸⁴ While the account of the caravan failed to name those national speakers, it nevertheless illuminates the high degree of exchange among suffragists at the national, state, and local level. That national suffrage speakers traveled to each small town in Lucas County, Iowa, demonstrates that a fluid hierarchical structure characterized the woman suffrage movement in the United States.

While Branner and Dewey organized a countywide caravan in Lucas County, state suffrage leaders developed elaborate plans for a statewide automobile campaign to take place in May 1916, about one month before the June 5 primary date. A suffrage newsletter promised that “Iowans will witness something new in campaign methods when suffragists launch their automobile tour speaking campaign.”²⁸⁵ Suffragists opined that the tour would be so wide reaching that “if there is a single voter who can go to the polls on June 5, and say that he has not heard the suffrage message in some form or other it will be because he can not see or hear or else he was out of the state.”²⁸⁶ The automobile tour “will be the most strenuous campaign of the sort ever attempted in Iowa,” read the newsletter, “and every town and hamlet in the ninety-nine counties will be reached during these tours.”²⁸⁷

Suffragists had planned the county automobile tours down to the last detail. “Each automobile will carry at least three speakers during each day of the tour, one of who will come from outside of the county,” the newsletter proclaimed.²⁸⁸ Suffrage leaders

²⁸⁴ “Virginia M. Branner,” Folder 11, Box 7, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁸⁵ “Elaborate Preparations For Automobile Campaign,” Folder 6, Box 10, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

arranged to have both indoor and outdoor meetings to attract the most people, including town squares, meeting houses, or other public gathering places. In addition, “pennants, handbills, window cards and special decorations will announce the coming of the automobile parties at every stopping place during the tour.”²⁸⁹ Hundreds of merchants across Iowa pledged to decorate their windows with suffrage colors to “give due notice of the tours” in each locale.²⁹⁰ Suffrage leaders even boasted that every “cross state trail” had its “full quota of suffrage banners and pennants.”²⁹¹ Finally, the IESA paid for a number of huge billboards along the roadside to bring the suffrage message to occupants in passing vehicles. The newsletter predicted that the entire spectacle, “with the support to be given by the press of the state, will form a fitting climax to the strenuous campaign work being done in each of the ninety-nine counties.”²⁹²

The account of the countywide automobile tours revealed the grassroots strategies that suffrage leaders in Iowa employed in an attempt to inform as many voters as possible throughout the state. IESA leaders clearly believed that ratification of the suffrage amendment on June 5, 1916 hinged on the votes cast by male voters from rural communities. They realized that in order to gain support from rural men, they needed to appeal to rural women. Through county newspapers, pamphlets, flyers, and other printed materials, the IESA stressed that rural women were active partners—“sisters”—in the campaign to secure the vote for women in Iowa. Farm women needed the vote to protect the family and improve rural life, suffragists preached, and they carried that message directly to Iowans during the spring of 1916. Automobiles, billboards, speakers,

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

pennants, newspapers, flyers, and enrollment cards descended upon rural Iowa almost like locusts, infiltrating every home and introducing rural Iowans to the potential benefits that granting women the right to vote had to offer. Despite all the hard work and hours devoted to cause, one question remained unanswered: would Iowa voters—men, not women—actually pass an amendment to the Iowa constitution granting women the right to vote?

At first, the answer to the question seemed obvious. The suffrage movement in the United States had gained tremendous momentum since late 1915. Carrie Chapman Catt had replaced Dr. Anna Howard Shaw as president of the NAWSA in December 1915. She brought renewed hope of securing a federal amendment within seven years. She had even found enough time in her busy schedule to visit Iowa three times during the suffrage campaign. She spent a month touring the state, speaking to packed audiences in Waterloo, Council Bluffs, and Dubuque.²⁹³ Still, leaders throughout Iowa cautioned that anti-suffrage forces had joined with liquor interests to make sure the amendment failed. As early as February 1916, rumors spread that a German-American Alliance had formed to work against the movement. Catt had written to Dunlap, cautioning her of the alliance and its eighty thousand members.²⁹⁴ “There is a German-American Alliance in Iowa” and “this body is working its members hard to get them out to vote and to vote unitedly [sic] against prohibition and woman suffrage,” she wrote.²⁹⁵ Dunlap responded to Catt’s message two days later. “The 80,000 votes of German-American Alliance, of which you speak, seems to be rather a matter of opinion,” replied Dunlap. “A good many political

²⁹³ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 254-56.

²⁹⁴ Catt to Flora Dunlap, Feb. 26, 1916, New York City, Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

men think there are not nearly that many votes.”²⁹⁶ WCTU of Iowa President Ida B. Wise Smith, on the other hand, foreshadowed in October 1915, “If there is a danger we face in Iowa...it is over-confidence”²⁹⁷

Anti-suffrage groups struck the biggest blow to the suffrage campaign in Iowa on May 25, 1916, only ten days prior to the primary election. A nameless group of anti-suffragists, rumored to be German-American liquor interests from eastern Iowa, paid for a full-page advertisement to appear in many farm journals in the state. The advertisement proclaimed in bold, underlined letters, “To the Iowa Farmer!—Remember! Woman Suffrage Means High Taxes.”²⁹⁸ The subheading warned Iowa farmers that equal suffrage states had the highest tax rates in the country.

The History of Equal Suffrage States is the Story of Taxpayers’ Money Wasted—Money Thrown Away in Hysterical Legislation, Useless Commission, Uncalled for Bond Issues, Increased Election Costs—Taxes are Squandered Because of a Catering of Legislative Interests to the Irresponsible Elements Among Voters.²⁹⁹

The advertisement compared the tax rate in non-suffrage to suffrage states, providing figures that gave suffrage states a tax rate almost three times higher than non-suffrage states. “It is not your wife and daughter who will vote,” the advertisement declared, “but the women of towns and cities who have easy access to the polls and axes to grind. You, Mr. Farmer, must pay the bill.”³⁰⁰ Since the question of higher taxes had been an issue for farmers during the entire campaign, the advertisement only produced

²⁹⁶ Dunlap to Catt, Feb. 28, 1916, Des Moines, Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

²⁹⁷ “Annual Address,” *Forty-Second Annual Convention of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, page 27, IWAUI.

²⁹⁸ “To the Iowa Farmer!” *The Iowa Homestead*, May 25, 1916, page 25, Box 24, DMIWSR, SHSIDM. According to Catt, when someone scolded James M. Pierce, editor of *The Iowa Homestead*, for publishing such an incendiary advertisement, he merely replied, “I got \$600 for it.” See, Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 258.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Ibid.

more fear among rural male voters. According to Dunlap, during the “last two weeks of the campaign a very great deal of publicity was given the tax issue and many absurd stories were circulated.”³⁰¹ The ISEA scrambled to counteract the negative publicity the tax advertisement had garnered. Dunlap issued a statement that appeared in newspapers across Iowa on election day. She urged farmers to support the suffrage amendment because “sixteen-thousand women engaged in farming should have a voice in making the tax levy.”³⁰² Despite the IESA’s best efforts, the suffrage amendment failed in Iowa by 10,341 votes. They had spent just under forty thousand dollars on the campaign and now carried a deficit of ten thousand.³⁰³

The failure of the 1916 suffrage amendment deeply hurt the IESA and the groups that supported its efforts. Dunlap wrote a letter to Catt a week after the election. “The result of the election was very bitter,” she said, “Many of us had worked so hard, and we had every reason to believe that the result would be favorable.”³⁰⁴ She blamed the tax issue for the loss of two or three counties that the IESA previously had expected to carry.³⁰⁵ More devastating than the tax issue, however, was the unfavorable vote returned from the four river counties in eastern Iowa and many rural counties with large ethnic populations. First, the IESA revealed that had the four “wet” counties—Clinton, Scott, Dubuque, and Des Moines—not voted in the election, “the state would have carried for woman suffrage.”³⁰⁶ IESA leaders blamed foreign-born immigrants, especially anti-

³⁰¹ Flora Dunlap to Carrie Chapman Catt, June 12, 1916, Des Moines, Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³⁰² Flora Dunlap, “A Final Word to the Voters of Iowa,” Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³⁰³ Effie Jones to Carrie Chapman Catt, June 30, 1916, Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³⁰⁴ Flora Dunlap to Carrie Chapman Catt, June 12, 1916, DMIWSR, SHSI, Des Moines.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁶ IESA, “Notes on Equal Suffrage in Iowa For 1916-1917,” page 21, Folder 16, Box 1, ISMC, IWAUI.

prohibition German Americans in eastern Iowa, for the suffrage amendment's ultimate defeat. Second, the IESA singled out rural counties in which the foreign-born population failed to carry the amendment. In Mills County, a suffragist reported that she found "the rural German, as a rule, is opposed to suffrage for two reasons—first because he fears prohibition and second, because he has a deep grounded conviction that women are not wise enough to vote and should have no part in politics."³⁰⁷ In Guthrie County, suffrage leaders reported a situation "typical of the conservative farming communities of the state" with strong Danish and German majorities opposed to the amendment.³⁰⁸ In Ida County, townships dominated by Swedes "met little opposition" to the suffrage bill, while Danes and Germans "were not quite so much in favor of women voting."³⁰⁹ Suffrage organizers credited the Norwegian voters of Amsterdam Township in Hancock County for passing the suffrage amendment by seventy-one votes while German voters in Ell and German Townships voted against the measure by two hundred ballots.³¹⁰ Suffragists in East Potawatomie County reported that the county contained "too many men who had been 'born at Bingen, fair Bingen on the Rhine.'"³¹¹ To suffrage leaders, the foreign-born citizen had ensured the defeat of the suffrage amendment.

About a month after the election, Dunlap had gained some perspective regarding the suffrage campaign. Writing to a Mrs. Barkley from Nebraska, Dunlap listed the reasons why the suffrage amendment failed in Iowa. First, she said, "the liquor vote was out and went solidly against us." She noted that when Meredith, the Democratic

³⁰⁷ IESA, "Notes on Equal Suffrage," page 22, ISMC, IWAUI.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*

³⁰⁹ IESA, "Notes on Equal Suffrage, page 23, IWAUI.

³¹⁰ *Ibid*.

³¹¹ *Ibid*.

candidate for governor, publically supported the suffrage bill, his opponent, Harding, “grew alarmed and in self defense gave out the word to some of his organizations to defeat suffrage.”³¹² Dunlap pointed to another, more powerful, factor in the defeat of the amendment, “We did not have a good enough organization.”³¹³ The suffragists had failed to reach enough rural voters to offset the liquor vote and carry the measure. They especially had not found a way to reach rural areas with high foreign-born populations. Suffragists failed to fully bridge the disparity that existed between foreign-born rural peoples and native-born suffrage leaders.³¹⁴

While the IESA dealt with the outcome of the suffrage election, the WCTU of Iowa began its own investigation into some peculiar irregularities reported after the election. The group paid the Des Moines Federation for Suffrage Election Investigation two hundred dollars to uncover any wrongdoings in the election.³¹⁵ The results of the investigators astounded the WCTU of Iowa and the IESA. The investigation alleged that more than 13,609 unregistered people cast votes on the suffrage amendment, even though voter registration was a requirement by law. In a few other precincts, a total of 2,289 votes cast on the amendment did not have a corresponding name recorded in poll books.³¹⁶ The report declared, “The WCTU can draw but one conclusion from this condition, that they were defeated out of their rights to the ballot by fraud.”³¹⁷ The

³¹² Flora Dunlap to Carrie Chapman Catt, July 1, 1916, Des Moines, Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Rose Geyer to Carrie Chapman Catt, Aug. 2, 1916, Folder 2, Box 11, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³¹⁵ “Donations for Suffrage Work,” *Forty-Third Annual Report of the W. C. T. U.*, Fort Dodge, Iowa, Oct. 3-7, 1916, *Proceedings of the W. C. T. U. of Iowa*, page 66, Box 11, Women’s Christian Temperance Union of Iowa Collection, IWAUI.

³¹⁶ “Alleged Irregularities of Vote on the Woman’s Suffrage Amendment in Iowa June 5, 1916,” page 1, Folder 16, Box 1, Iowa Memorial Suffrage Commission, Collection 23/3, IWAUI.

³¹⁷ Ibid.

WCTU threatened to hire a lawyer to force a recount of the ballots, but at some point, the group decided against any legal action.³¹⁸

While the campaign to secure the woman suffrage amendment in Iowa proved a failure, it did have ramifications beyond Iowa's borders. Strengthened by the defeat in Iowa, Catt returned to her home in New York City during the summer of 1916 a changed woman. Scholar Louise Noun wrote, "The Iowa situation...convinced Mrs. Catt that women faced insurmountable odds in most state referenda and that the time had come to concentrate on an amendment to the federal Constitution."³¹⁹ She traveled back to New York and began devising a plan that combined local, state, and national efforts into a coherent, cooperative "winning plan." In September 1916, basing her views largely on what she had encountered during the Iowa suffrage campaign, Catt presented her plan to the executive committee of the NAWSA. She divided state associations into four groups, assigning them each a specific responsibility. In Iowa, Catt charged the IESA to pursue a bill for partial suffrage.³²⁰

Suffragists responded to Catt's instructions at the 1916 annual convention in Waterloo. Anna Lawther, a suffrage worker from Dubuque, addressed the audience during the convention on the "Future Work in Iowa." She recommended "that our Association uphold in Iowa the National work for the Federal Amendment, that we consider the feasibility of asking the Legislature for Partial Suffrage, with or without another resubmission."³²¹ Convention attendees agreed with Lawther and plans to

³¹⁸ "Alleged Irregularities," page 3, IWAUI.

³¹⁹ Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 257.

³²⁰ Ibid.

³²¹ Annual Convention Meeting Minutes, 1916, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1914-1917, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

petition the Iowa General Assembly formed. Her speech also made her an attractive candidate to run for president of the organization. After Dunlap had served as president of the IESA for three years, she decided to open the position to a younger generation. Lawther's bid for the presidency proved the winning one, and she began earnest suffrage work as soon as she returned to Dubuque. Her first order of business was to establish a new suffrage headquarters in her hometown.³²²

Lawther's publicity campaigns began shortly before 1917. Called the "Mile of Dime Strips," the first tactic involved a long cardboard piece with spaces for dimes. Lawther recommended that suffragists host a contest in their communities in which different groups raced to fill in all the spaces and reach a mile first. She particularly targeted rural areas through their use. "But in smaller towns and rural districts and in all places where sentiment is not active at present and where there is limited or no organization it will serve to advertise our cause and our needs in a simple and unaggressive way," she wrote.³²³ A few months later, in February 1917, Lawther encouraged county chairmen across Iowa to contact their local newspapers and request the opportunity to edit a suffrage edition of the newspaper. Four pages of plate material made up the paper, and the NAWSA pledged to defray the costs. "Expressions of opinion on suffrage from prominent local persons should be secured," wrote Lawther.³²⁴ The same week as newspaper editors published the suffrage editions, the constitutional committees of both the House and Senate in Iowa met in joint committee to discuss the

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Anna B. Lawther, "Circular to District Chairman," Nov. 21, 1916, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³²⁴ Suffrage Circular, no date, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

new suffrage bill for partial suffrage. It passed both branches with only one “nay” vote in each.³²⁵

The United States’ declaration of war significantly altered the nature of suffrage work in Iowa and modified the language of the suffrage argument. By the spring of 1917, the IESA realized the war with Europe was coming, and they began to take measures to support the war effort. Lawther sent out numerous circulars to county chairmen advising them of the position of the group. The IESA “stands for one ideal—service to the nation in both time of peace and in time of war.”³²⁶ She urged suffragists across the state to “co-operate with us in this new war service for which we are summoning all the women of Iowa whose ideal of patriotism is to be ‘first in war, first in peace.’”³²⁷ Patriotic women supported the war effort, and the IESA was one of the first groups to mobilize for it. Lawther used the IESA’s stance on the war to promote the suffrage cause, and her words changed the rationale suffragists had used to argue for the right to vote. “Our war our sacrifice,” she proclaimed, “is made that the world may be made safe for Democracy...that the governed may hav [sic] a voice in their government... We as American women are asking for a voice in our government.”³²⁸ Earlier suffrage arguments had asserted that women with the right to vote could clean up politics and protect their families. Now, Lawther took the argument a step further; enfranchised women could ensure democracy throughout the world. Denying women suffrage made

³²⁵ Anna B. Lawther, Suffrage Circular, Feb. 3, 1917, Des Moines, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; “Woman Suffrage Bills,” DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³²⁶ Anna B. Lawther, Suffrage Circular, April 23, 1917, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Anna B. Lawther, Speech given at the 1917 Annual Convention, page 1, Minutes of the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association, 1908-1919, page 182, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

the United States no better than the enemies they were fighting. Patriotic women, forced to sacrifice for the war, deserved the right to vote to make the world safe.

In addition to revising her suffrage arguments, Lawther also encouraged the IESA to form a Thrift and Agriculture Committee, modeled after the NAWSA's Thrift committee. She named prominent home economics faculty from Iowa State Agricultural College as members, including Katherine MacKay.³²⁹ On April 6, 1917, she wrote to suffragists across the state, pointing out that Iowa had an especially important role in increasing the nation's food supply. She promised to distribute bulletins from Iowa State Agricultural College in Ames about canning and preserving fruits and vegetables. She also secured the services of home demonstration agents. Lawther told suffragists to have luncheons, short courses on food conservation, and cooking schools in their towns, using home demonstration agents as teachers.³³⁰ At those functions, Lawther stressed that suffragists should take enrollments, serve the food, and promote the suffrage cause. Women came out in large numbers for the Free Demonstrations of Thrift and Economy in the Household. These workshops, held in towns across the state, displayed the latest processes in canning and economical cooking and stressed the importance of food as a war "munition."³³¹ The war in Europe allowed suffragists to combine their war service with suffrage work, giving them the opportunity to show their patriotism and gain supporters in the process.³³²

³²⁹ "State Thrift and Agriculture Committee," page 16, 1916-1917 Iowa Equal Suffrage Association Report, Folder 1, Box 13, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³³⁰ "State Thrift and Agriculture Committee," page 16, DMIWSR, SHSIDM; Anna B. Lawther, Suffrage Circular, April 6, 1917, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³³¹ "Suffragist Co-Operate with Ames," Suffrage Circular, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³³² Anna B. Lawther, Suffrage Circular, April 6, 1917, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

In addition to their work on the Thrift and Agriculture Committee, suffragists also turned their war service to the education of the foreign-born citizen. A year earlier, the IESA had lost its most important fight for the suffrage referendum, and members blamed its failure on non-native people. Perhaps vengeance or a sincere desire to root out spies drove their Americanization efforts. More likely, however, suffrage leaders realized that while they Americanized the alien, they could also instill the suffrage doctrine and ensure a favorable vote on future suffrage measures. Whatever the motivation, suffrage leaders focused a great deal of attention on Americanizing foreign-born Iowans. Lawther wrote, “The Americanization of the alien is perhaps the most important question confronting us to-day in this country.”³³³ She encouraged suffragists to work directly with non-native women because “children of these foreigners are often allowed to grow up without respect...for this new country where they mistake freedom for license.”³³⁴ The IESA even demanded a list of every non-English newspaper in every county of Iowa so that members could print articles about how to behave in America.³³⁵ Working off the 1916 suffrage referendum loss, the state organization spent a great deal of time on Americanization. Its members clearly believed that foreign-born Iowans posed serious obstacles in their work to secure another suffrage referendum.

With its war service in full swing, the IESA became convinced that if the Iowa legislature passed another suffrage referendum, the people of Iowa would carry it. During the 1917 legislative session, the suffrage amendment bill passed with flying colors. The bill was scheduled to go before the legislature for its second vote at the 1918 legislative

³³³ Anna B. Lawther, Suffrage Circular, Oct. 4, 1917, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³³⁴ Anna B. Lawther, Suffrage Circular, April 21, 1917, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

³³⁵ Anna B. Lawther, Suffrage Circular, March 1, 1917, Folder 1, Box 22, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

session. A clerical error in the Secretary of State's office, however, kept the bill from going to the legislature, and the 1918 session closed with no vote on the measure.

Suffragists were outraged. Not until a year later did the legislature receive a suffrage bill, but by then, the federal suffrage amendment had passed Congress. In July 1919, the Iowa General Assembly called a special session to ratify the federal suffrage amendment. On July 2, the House voted ninety-six to five in favor, and the Senate passed it unanimously, forty-five to zero. That August, Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to ratify the federal amendment, and women across the United States, including Iowa, gained the right to vote. Women in Iowa could vote after over fifty years of suffrage activity in the state.

The campaign for the woman suffrage amendment in Iowa highlighted the interactions that took place between rural women and suffrage leaders during the spring of 1916. The campaign served not only as a potential turning point in the fight for female enfranchisement, it also underlined just how important suffrage leaders considered the support of rural women to the suffrage movement. Suffrage leaders spent thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours attempting to connect with rural women and secure their allegiance to the cause. They utilized the written word in the form of newspapers as the primary means to reach isolated farm women. They distributed leaflets, pamphlets, and posters throughout the state. They erected signs along roadways that contained suffrage messages. They decorated their homes, toured the countryside in their automobiles, and spoke directly with farm women living in rural communities. They pleaded with, cajoled, and persuaded Iowa farm women to support the suffrage amendment not because women necessarily deserved the right to vote by their own merit. Instead, suffrage leaders tailored their message to fit the desires rural women held for the protection of families

and the improvement rural communities. Little evidence exists regarding how farm women responded to those appeals from suffrage leaders, but the fact remains that in 1916, suffrage leaders believed that rural women in Iowa played a crucial role in the suffrage campaign. They aggressively attempted to align rural women to the suffrage cause through any means possible in order to secure the rural vote.

After the failure of the suffrage bill campaign, suffrage leaders in Iowa turned their attention toward supporting the war effort. Coordinating efforts to increase the state's production of food as well as to Americanize foreign-born people in their midst, suffragists enlisted rural women directly in their war efforts. They held canning classes and served food at suffrage meals. Mixing war and suffrage work gave suffrage leaders the ability to promote the suffrage cause among rural women. Their message had changed since the 1916 suffrage bill, as well. No longer was the ballot just a tool to protect the family and secure the home. Instead, the ballot had become a war measure capable of spreading democracy throughout the world.

Conclusion

“A Partnership Was Needed to Get By”

In the late 1970s, an oral history research team traveled across Iowa to complete a series of interviews with elderly farm couples who had owned hundred-year farms. Historian Rebecca Conrad carried out most of the interviews, and she asked questions about a wide range of rural topics such as farm work, country schools, prohibition, small-town community events, and church activities. For whatever reason, she also asked the women what they remembered about the woman suffrage movement. Because little direct evidence exists about what rural women actually thought about the movement, Conrad's interviews are an invaluable resource.

When asked about woman suffrage, nearly every rural woman could recollect something about it. Born in 1907 in West Side, Iowa, Ruby Howorth was only thirteen years old when the United States ratified the nineteenth amendment. Although she could not vote during the 1920 election, she remembered that it “took a few years before the women went and voted, what I mean. They didn't just all crowd in. It wasn't that important [sic] to them.”³³⁶ However, she did clarify that she voted in every election as soon as she was old enough.³³⁷ Mary Renze who farmed with her husband near Roselle for over forty years, commented that she thought woman suffrage was “just great.”³³⁸ She recalled that she obtained the majority of her information about the movement from newspapers. The printed word was their lifeline to the outside world and therefore the

³³⁶ James and Ruby Howorth Oral History Interview Transcript, page 15, Folder 18, OH4, SHSIIC.

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Edward and Mary Renze Oral History Interview Transcript, pages 40-41, Folder 61, OH4, SHSIIC.

way she learned about the cause. “It was nice” to vote, she proudly exclaimed, “We were always Democrats.”³³⁹

Other women gave less enthusiastic assessments of the woman suffrage movement in the state. Orpha Deibert, who lived outside of Jerome for most of her life, “did not condone some of the more militant acts by women’s suffrage activists, such as Susan B. Anthony and Carrie Chapman Catt.”³⁴⁰ However, she did mention that she “appreciated the right to vote.”³⁴¹ When Conard asked Esther Grohe, who lived outside of Newell, Iowa in Sac County on a farm with her husband Ernest, about the suffrage movement, she replied that she had no recollection of any such activity in Iowa.³⁴² Her comments are curious because she spent quite a bit of time discussing the county fairs and Chautauquas in her area. According to Ernest, the Sac County Fair was the “most special event in the Grohe family” and they attended it annually for years.³⁴³ In addition, Grohe remarked that they used to spend as much as seven days at the Chautauqua, camping in a tent for the entire week. “That was real entertainment in those days,” she declared.³⁴⁴ Perhaps Iowa suffragists did not have a strong presence at the Sac County Fair or the area Chautauquas, but most likely there was a substantial organization because Sac County carried the 1916 suffrage bill by over four hundred votes.³⁴⁵ Maybe Grohe simply chose not to share her memories of woman suffrage in the interview.

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Orpha Deibert Oral History Interview Abstract, page 5, OH Project-1976, SHSIIC.

³⁴¹ Ibid.

³⁴² Ernest and Esther Grohe, Oral History Interview Abstract, page 8, OH 1, Rural Life, 1890-1920, SHSIIC.

³⁴³ Grohe Abstract, page 5, SHSIIC.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ “Suffrage Vote June 5, 1916” Map of Iowa, Catt Scrapbook, Box 12, DMIWSR, SHSIDM.

At least one woman not only remembered the woman suffrage movement, she also gave a long exposition on the subject. Margaret Weberg, who farmed with her husband near Denison, remembered that the local WCTU chapter joined forces with the suffragists, working for the ballot for women.³⁴⁶ She noted that people “were not much against suffrage work as they were against prohibition.”³⁴⁷ Still, men in the area felt that the “women didn’t know enough to vote” and they should “stay in the home.”³⁴⁸ She distinctly remembered the suffrage campaigns of 1916. “When it came to be voted upon, the men folk became vocal—then the women had to deliver electioneering and campaigning.”³⁴⁹ Back then, she stated, “you could tell a farm woman from a city woman by the way they dressed.”³⁵⁰ Those “city women” brought the suffrage message to Denison, relying upon farm women to educate the men in their communities about woman suffrage. Even though the suffrage bill failed in the state, “there wasn’t a feeling against it,” recalled Weberg.³⁵¹ In fact, woman suffrage was about equality. “A partnership was needed to get by,” she said, and farmers realized that the right to vote fit into the idea of mutuality and equality.³⁵²

Weberg’s statements about the mutuality experienced by rural women bring the story back full circle. Rural women, vital partners on the farm, understood the woman suffrage movement through a lens of equality, cooperation, and rural improvement. They wanted the ballot to protect their families from corruption and the evils that lurked

³⁴⁶ Bryan and Margaret Weberg Oral History Interview Transcript, July 2, 1978, page 20, Folder 5, OH4, SHSIC.

³⁴⁷ Ibid.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Ibid.

³⁵² Ibid.

outside their communities. They believed that with the right to vote, they could better serve their families as the defenders of morality, decency, and democracy in the world. Suffragists keyed into the desires of farm women for rural uplift and tailored their message to fit those desires. They actively sought the support of rural men and women, bringing their message to farming people in any manner they could.

Investigating the interactions that occurred between urban suffrage leaders and farm women in Iowa opens a new dialogue about the woman suffrage movement in the United States. No longer do conventional histories that detail a narrative about national or state leaders suffice in explaining the movement's importance. Analyzing key figures only gives half of the story of the woman suffrage movement. The other, less-well-known part comes from an examination of the rural populace—the women enlisted by suffrage leaders to support the movement and the men whose votes sealed the fate of suffrage legislation. In order to reach these people, suffrage leaders displayed a high level of grassroots political activism, revealing the intersection of ethnicity, religion, class, and gender around a contentious political issue. Highlighting the methods suffragists used and the responses given in return exposes a contested political terrain in which women served as the primary agents of agitation, education, and change in the countryside.

In addition, the diffusion of the woman suffrage movement in Iowa illuminates a rich portrait of early-twentieth-century America. In a political climate steeped with progressive reform, a group of activist women descended upon a rural population that at times had exhibited hostility toward the idea that women had the ability—and the right—to vote. Yet, they persevered by adopting arguments tailored toward an ideology that women served as vital partners in the farm family and rural community. While

maintaining that the ballot would reinforce the traditional, moral values of rural society, suffrage leaders displayed their activism and asserted their claims to the public sphere and the right to vote. In the process, they redefined the world in which rural women lived as bearers of the ballot and face-to-face examples of political activists.

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