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The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in the Pacific Northwest

The Battle for Cultural Control

DALE E. SODEN

At 3:00 p.m. on March 1, 1915, Governor Moses Alexander signed House Bill 142, which would make Idaho a dry state as of January 1, 1916. He used four pens, then gave one to his granddaughter and the rest to the Reverend Will Herwig, president of the Anti-Saloon League, and Nettie Chipp and Mollie Vance, representatives of the North Idaho and South Idaho Woman's Christian Temperance Unions. To commemorate the moment, a news service took moving pictures for its newsreel, and the WCTU ladies present sang temperance lyrics to the tune of "It's a Long Way to Tipperary."¹ The passage of this legislation marked the culmination of a remarkable period of reform and social activism in the history of the Pacific Northwest. Idaho joined Washington and Oregon, which had both passed legislation in 1914 designed to change the social ethos of a region that had been a veritable frontier only a couple of decades earlier.²

The campaign for prohibition ended with a remarkable triumph for Victorian and Protestant culture in the face of considerable opposition. And of all the groups that participated in this grassroots effort, none played a larger role than the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. For just over four decades, thousands of women in the Pacific Northwest had fought against "demon rum" by trying to destroy what they hated most—the saloon. Yet images of the axe-wielding Carrie Nation attacking bars and of blue-stocking

Protestant women thumbing their noses at seemingly anyone who did not see the world in their terms have often obscured a more complete picture of the role of the WCTU in American history, let alone in the history of the Pacific Northwest.

The women of the WCTU did not concern themselves solely with prohibition. Since the 1870s, women throughout the nation had collectively spent hundreds of thousands of hours planning, organizing, speaking, lobbying, and working for legislation, public policy, and public awareness regarding social issues that affected not only their own homes and their own children but their larger communities as well. And this proved equally the case in the Pacific Northwest. From the establishment of town libraries and coffeehouses, to prison reform and higher wages for working women, WCTU members sought social reforms on the basis of a biblical vision of social justice. Women directed intensive lobbying efforts at the state level to ban cigarettes and "impure literature"; they successfully changed the curriculum of public schools in order to educate youth about the deleterious effects of alcohol, and they exerted significant pressure on legislators to provide social services for unwed mothers. In short, these women in the temperance union attempted to shape the culture that was emerging in the Pacific Northwest in the latter part of the 19th century.

The history of the WCTU helps illumi-

nate the clash between conventional Victorian society and the violent, male-dominated society that existed first in the mining and logging camps then in the emerging urban communities of the Pacific Northwest. As women migrated to these new communities, they brought with them a determination to tame the wild frontier culture. Many of these women banded together in organizations such as the WCTU in order to institute reform. Far from being alone in their fight, WCTU members were supported by thousands of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, who established local churches, synagogues, social service agencies, schools, colleges, and health care institutions. With organizations ranging from the Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations to orphanages and rescue missions, the Victorian middle class and most specifically women attempted to take control of the culture of the Pacific Northwest. Rallying around the concept of "home protection," the women of the WCTU challenged the dominant male culture of the Pacific Northwest. They combined piety with a commitment to reshaping society.³

In attacking the dominant male culture, women of the WCTU across the United States established what the historian Barbara Epstein has called a "protofeminist culture throughout the organization."⁴ And this seems equally true in the Pacific Northwest. The activities of the WCTU offered hundreds of women the opportunity to step into leadership positions, engage in public



On March 1, 1915, Governor Moses Alexander signed House Bill 142, which would make Idaho a dry state as of January 1, 1916. Members of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union witnessed the signing. (Idaho State Historical Society)

speaking, lobby legislators, and challenge a culture that not only denied them the vote but also attempted to restrict their activity to solely the domestic sphere.

Although WCTU members in the Northwest shared concerns with women in unions throughout the country, they also faced additional challenges: the frontier was a particularly inhospitable environment for the establishment of a Victorian Christian culture. By the 1870s and 1880s, the region was about as far from genteel as one could imagine. Rough and bawdy, wild and open, Northwest communities often resembled what one might expect in a Hobbesian state of nature. Young adult males between the ages of 20 and 40 often constituted approximately 90 percent of the population in a mining or logging camp. It is not surprising that prostitution, gambling, and alcohol abuse were a part of the social ethos of western communities from the very beginning. The saloon provided the most visible community gathering place and institution. For example, in Shoshone, Idaho, in 1884, the community boasted 13 saloons and two churches, neither of

which had ministers.⁵ From Pocatello and Moscow, Idaho, to Ellensburg, Washington, and Grants Pass, Oregon, early western social life focused on the saloon and consumption of alcohol. With this emphasis on drinking, problems related to alcohol abuse quickly became apparent. The historian Norman Clark also linked the development of serious social problems related to alcohol with the coming of the transcontinental railroads in the Pacific Northwest in the 1880s. Clark found the situation in the small community of Kiona, Washington, located on the rail line between Walla Walla and Yakima, to be typical:

Kiona had only one saloon, and four hundred railroad workers came in every night and all day Sunday to drink. The saloon was so crowded that citizens of Kiona could hear noise all over town. There was standing-room-only in the saloon, and the dead-drunks were thrown into the back yard like so many soggy sacks to retch there in full view of the townspeople.⁶

In 1891, the *Spokane Falls Review* reported that the saloon atmosphere consisted of floors covered with peanut shells and spilt beer; air permeated with tobacco smoke; and a smell so bad that

a monkey that had "escaped from an animal act and died under the floor of the Casino Theatre . . . was not discovered until a year later when some repairs were being made."⁷

In the Northwest, Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in the late 19th century found themselves virtually overwhelmed by an emerging urban culture based primarily on alcohol consumption, gambling, prostitution, and other inexpensive recreational activity ranging from unregulated theaters and movies to dancehalls, racetracks, and amusement parks. Religious groups expressed their concern about the pervasiveness of alcohol and saloons. For example, in 1892 the Presbyterian synod, meeting in Spokane, observed: "The territory . . . is peculiarly liable to the ravages of intemperance. The people live under a high state of pressure in their eager rush after wealth, causing often great nervous depression which calls for the dangerous stimulants supplied by intoxicating liquor."⁸ Even labor groups objected to the prominence of the saloon in the community. When the railroads came to Snohomish, Washington, the Knights of

Labor attempted to shut down the saloons because children were being served.⁹

This dominant male culture proved to be especially dangerous for women. Working women, unmarried women, and single mothers were particularly vulnerable. According to the historian Peggy Pascoe, Protestant women were “appalled by the overwhelming masculine milieu of western cities and influenced by the Victorian belief that women should be pious and pure moral guardians, [and they] set out to ‘rescue’ female victims of male abuse.” In cities throughout the West and Pacific Northwest, women set about trying to establish a “middle-class Protestant woman’s vision of moral order in their new communities.”¹⁰ To that end, the WCTU in the Pacific Northwest played a major role in the battle to protect women and children.

To appreciate the impact of the WCTU on the Northwest, one must understand the origins of the WCTU. Most historians point to the Women’s Crusade of 1873-74 as the key event that triggered the establishment of the WCTU. Partly inspired by the many mid-19th-century impulses for social reform, women across the country attempted to change public policy by marching, singing, and praying on the premises of local saloons. In many cases, these women overcame a great deal of fear to enter saloons and pray for the proprietor, and on several occasions they were successful in closing down the saloon—at least temporarily. For example, in March 1874, many women in Portland, Oregon, rallied against the saloons of their community as part of the Women’s Crusade. Dramatically marching into the saloon district, women challenged proprietors to see the evil of their ways and customers to reform their habits. Although the effort failed to generate long-term momentum or an infrastructure to sustain the activity, it had an enormous influence on many women throughout the coun-

try. The crusade’s vision and its example of political activism motivated hundreds if not thousands of women to think differently about what they should do about social problems in general and about the alcohol problem in particular.¹¹

In the aftermath of the crusade, women in New York state met to establish a temperance organization, and out of those meetings emerged the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Annie Wittenmyer served as the first president. She quickly focused her attention on a strict temperance program that emphasized education through evangelical persuasion. However, by the late 1870s, Frances Willard emerged to successfully challenge Wittenmyer on a platform that would broaden the reach of the WCTU into a number of areas beyond temperance. As president, Willard advocated female suffrage, birth control, prison reform, and fair treatment of prostitutes and other women in the courts. She urged the adoption of the eight-hour workday and a living wage for all workers. Willard’s activism stemmed from her belief that individuals should work for the implementation of God’s kingdom on earth.¹² Frances Willard wanted to link the WCTU with the National Prohibition Party and later the Progressive Party. She also pushed hard for the WCTU to become active in child labor issues as well as to become an advocate for women who were being oppressed by the Industrial Revolution. Willard’s indefatigable spirit and relentless energy helped the WCTU membership grow from approximately 27,000 members in 1879 to more than 150,000 by the time of her death in 1898.¹³ According to one historian, by the end of the 19th century, Willard had built the WCTU into “one of the most powerful vehicles in the United States for addressing women’s issues and producing strong, independent women, who entered the public world, determined to change it.”¹⁴

As leader of the national organization,

Frances Willard played a significant role in establishing the WCTU in the Pacific Northwest. In 1883, four years after being named president of the organization, Willard made a trip to California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho (the latter two still territories). She hoped that her visit would support local reform efforts and also enhance the prospect of turning the WCTU into a truly national movement. Willard energized women wherever she went and proved to be just the boost necessary to establish chapters of the WCTU throughout the region. The *Portland Oregonian* reported that thousands were turned away when Willard spoke in venues filled to capacity. On June 15, 1883, she presided over the initial meeting of the first Oregon chapter at the First Methodist Episcopal Church. Six days later, she spoke in Olympia, and she made stops in the following days in Tacoma and Seattle.¹⁵

Seattle residents—probably out of both conviction and curiosity—came to hear this woman pronounce on the state of moral affairs in their city. According to one account,

Yesler’s hall was packed—it was jammed, until every door and window had to be opened, and people climbed up the sides of the house, hung on by the windows, and scaled the sides of neighboring piles of lumber, to see and hear a small part of what passed within. Dozens came and went away, unable to get within sound of the voices, and there were constant appeals for the speakers to speak louder. Two such buildings could not have held the people who came.¹⁶

As one would expect, several of Seattle’s clergy were in attendance, including the pastor of the Plymouth Congregational Church and the Reverend William Harrington of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Representatives from the newly established Portland and Seattle chapters of the WCTU brought greetings. But perhaps most surprising were the other luminaries who made significant remarks on that June evening. Thomas Burke, one of the most influential business leaders in early Seattle history and

later chief justice of the Washington State Supreme Court, welcomed Willard and commented that "women have fearfully suffered because of the ravages of intemperance, and it is proper that they lead in this reformation." The chief justice of the territorial supreme court, Roger Greene, followed with several minutes of remarks that underscored the importance of the temperance movement in the Pacific Northwest.¹⁷ Kirk Ward, editor of the *Seattle Chronicle*, followed Chief Justice Greene with his own assessment of the moral state of Seattle in the 1880s.

The future great battle in this country must be fought upon the temperance line. This question is becoming more and more a factor in the political issues of the day and the banner of this grand cause obscured and hidden, and of little thought hitherto, will become the heart and center principle about which shall be marshaled the hosts of religion, of education, of right living and of human happiness.¹⁸

And finally, L. J. Powell, president of the University of Washington, addressed the throng in Yesler's Hall, saying that it was the proudest moment of his life to welcome such a champion as Frances Willard, who

comes to help us throttle the monster who is doing such a terrible work of destruction here. . . . Open your eyes and you will see the harvest of destruction and death being constantly reaped. Our sons and our daughters are going down to dishonored graves. . . . In the name of twenty-five hundred children of our city who are in danger of being destroyed I say welcome!¹⁹

Clearly, in the late 19th century members of the burgeoning Seattle middle class admired social activists like Willard. And for her part, Frances Willard did not disappoint her audience. "Without any sign of fatigue, or strain of voice, or effort at effect," according to one observer,

she related anecdotes of the old crusades, rapidly sketched the careers of different persons and reviewed the effects of long campaigns, appealed to all to unite and arm for the cause, and showed to all capable of judging that no weak and timid mind, but a chosen general and trained leader stood

before them urging on to a relentless crusade against what she regarded as the worst enemy of man.²⁰

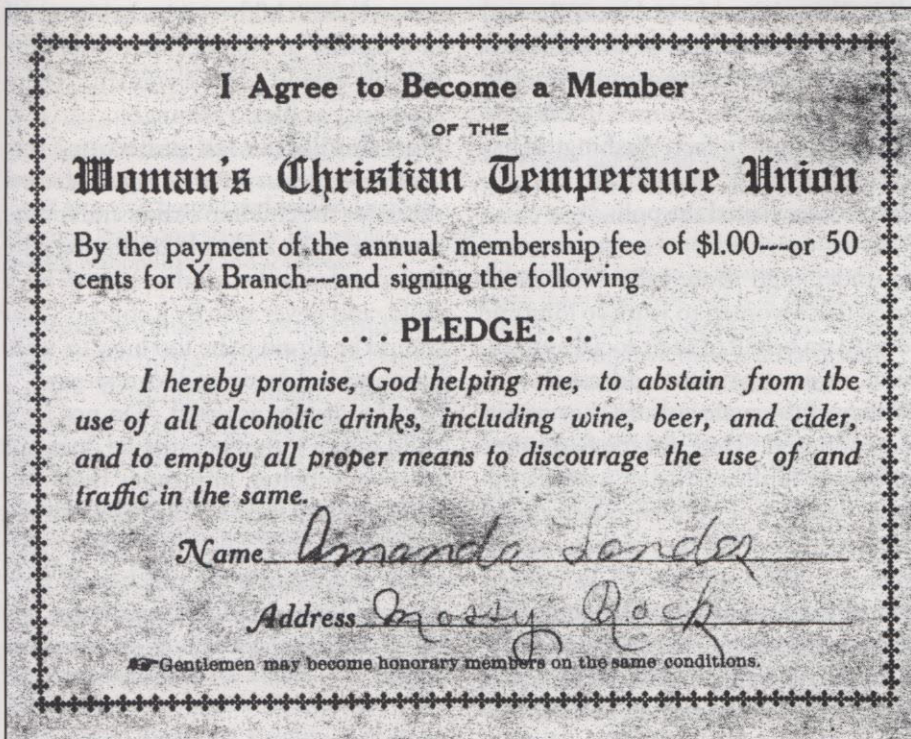
Frances Willard challenged the audience to accept the fact that "we need the courage of Christ's gospel which has raised woman to her place of equality beside man and treated her as a peer, Christ, has done this."²¹ Everywhere she went, Frances Willard spoke before large crowds. On July 12, she spoke in Walla Walla; while there, she accepted an invitation to address a group of women in Lewiston, Idaho. Unfortunately, Willard was barred from speaking because of an outbreak of diphtheria. However, miscommunication led her to believe that the event had been canceled because of opposition to temperance. In a spirit of defiance she forged ahead and met with women in a private residence anyway; as a result a union was established and officers were elected.²² She continued her work in eastern Washington until July 23, when she arrived in Spokane Falls. Inspired by Willard, women in community after community organized chapters of the WCTU.²³

These new branches of the WCTU offered women the chance to take on new responsibilities. For example, Mary Bynon Reese provided remarkable leadership in the early years, and her story suggests some of the difficulty associated with working in the Pacific Northwest compared with other parts of the country. Born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, in 1832, Reese found herself caught up in the Women's Crusade of 1873-74 and was arrested with 32 other women. From that point on, her life's work revolved around temperance issues in the WCTU. Appointed a national organizer for the WCTU, Reese came to the Pacific Northwest in 1886. Through an interpreter, she spoke to Nez Perce Indians about the ill effects of alcohol, and she visited lumbermen in their camps in an effort to persuade them to give up drinking. Reese estimated that she traveled more than six thousand

miles, "hundreds of which were by wagon, stage and private conveyance, some by canoe with the Indians, and some on horseback through otherwise inaccessible places."²⁴ Named an honorary president of the Western Washington WCTU, Reese remained in the Seattle area, where she passed away in 1908.

Two other individuals, Lucia Faxon Additon and Narcissa White Kinney, gained prominence and provided key leadership in Oregon. Additon lived in Lents, Oregon, and became a leader in the industrial department of the WCTU. She wrote extensively and traveled across the country lecturing on issues of labor legislation. In the first decade of the 20th century, she frequently visited factories and sweatshops. One observer commented that she "has on her tongue's end sermon after sermon on the subject of [sweatshops] that should be thundered into the ears of men of influence until they could find no rest for the body or soul until the evil is abolished."²⁵ Narcissa White Kinney first became involved in the WCTU in Pennsylvania and by the 1880s was a national lecturer for the union. During her speaking tour she met Marshall Kinney from Astoria, Oregon, whom she eventually married. She moved to Oregon in 1888, where she worked tirelessly to establish community libraries, summer schools, and local chautauquas. In 1894 she was elected president of the Oregon WCTU, and she served in that capacity until her death in 1899.²⁶ Clearly, the Pacific Northwest proved to be a nurturing environment for a generation of women who attempted to express their commitment to social reform.

Not only white women participated in this reform activity. African American women established their own chapters of the WCTU. In Seattle, for example, the Frances Harper Union formed in the mid-1880s; it was named after the first published African American woman novelist and abolitionist. A



A Woman's Christian Temperance Union pledge card. (WCTU Records, WSHS)

former slave, Emma Ray, led the Seattle chapter after she moved to the city in 1889. Known for their outreach, the women in this chapter cleaned homes for the sick and poor, "washed their clothes, scrubbed for them, [and] did whatever tasks needed doing," according to the historian Esther Mumford.²⁷ They also worked tirelessly among Seattle's prostitutes and frequently visited both men and women in jail. Unfortunately, the work of the chapter met resistance from the pastor of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Seattle, who reportedly wanted the women to spend less time with the impoverished and more time raising money to pay off the church mortgage. Apparently this opposition led to the temporary disbanding of the chapter before the end of the century. However, encouraged by nationally prominent African American women leaders, the Seattle chapter reorganized in 1899.²⁸

Although the reach of the African American women in the WCTU remained relatively restricted, the efforts of the largely white chapters extended

broadly into the life of Northwest cities. In Seattle, one of the most visible symbols of the battle for cultural control came with the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in 1909. Held on the grounds of the University of Washington, the exposition was billed as the first dry world's fair in the country. Several efforts to circumvent the law prohibiting alcohol from being served within two miles of the state university were defeated.²⁹ The WCTU maintained a booth at the exposition and distributed literature about the evils of alcohol. Apparently the union also supported a "purity worker," who sought to identify and give aid to girls and young women vulnerable to the unwanted advances of young men. On June 9, fifteen thousand bouquets were distributed with cards proclaiming the evils of alcohol. July 28 was designated as Temperance Day at the fair, and six hundred Loyal Temperance Legion children marched about the grounds carrying banners and flags while singing temperance songs.³⁰

Perhaps less dramatic in the battle for

cultural control were the many efforts both to provide alternative social experiences as well as to raise self-consciousness about unacceptable behavior. The *Spokesman-Review* described in some detail how much work went into making one children's oratorical contest a significant social event. Like many others of the same type, the competition took place at a local church. The organist played a vigorous march as four contestants, all having won a gold or silver medal in previous competitions, proceeded to their places on the platform. After the invocation, a WCTU member read the Ninth Psalm. Someone sang a solo, then a local family added to the festivities with music from the organ, violin, guitar, and mandolin. All four contestants delivered what were described as superb oratorical performances on topics related to temperance and prohibition. Eleven-year-old Charley Mills drew particular praise for his oration, "You Can Stop It If You Will." After judges deliberated for a half hour, they declared the evening's winner to be Olga Giles for her address entitled "The Martyred Mother."³¹

The effort to promote abstinence among children centered on essay contests, particularly in the public schools. The 1923 annual report for the Pierce County WCTU in Washington State estimated that during the 10-year period prior to the adoption of the Eighteenth Amendment, schoolchildren in that county had written more than three thousand essays per year on the harmful effect of alcohol and cigarettes on the system. In fact, the antinarcotic arm of the WCTU continued to be exceptionally active in the 1920s. In its efforts to educate children, the WCTU continued to circulate copies of the state's tobacco laws in public schools. In 1923, 19 Sunday schools observed Anti-Cigarette Day, and essay contests, as well as the traditional oratory contests, continued to prove popular in both Sunday schools and public schools. Pierce County scheduled 16 public speaking events for children through the year.

The women who wrote the report expressed pride in the fact that Pierce County essayists had won three of the prizes offered for the best essays in the state. And a staggering 8,675 temperance essays were submitted throughout the public schools in various competitions.³²

But of course it was at the ballot box that the battle for cultural control manifested itself most directly and pushed women into the public sphere as never before. The struggle for temperance was inextricably connected with the fight for suffrage. The historian G. Thomas Edwards has detailed the complex dynamics between suffragists such as Abigail Scott Duniway and the WCTU. Duniway feared that the temperance issue would frighten too many men away from voting for woman's suffrage and consequently sought to maintain a distance between the two movements. However, that proved impossible given the fact that the WCTU was obviously committed to gaining the right to vote.³³ By 1896, women had secured the right to vote in Idaho; Washington voters approved woman's suffrage in 1910, and Oregon followed in 1912.

In all three states, momentum continued to build for various forms of local option and ultimately statewide prohibition. The WCTU spent thousands of hours organizing rallies and educating people about the positive impact of temperance on the social environment. In Seattle in 1914—and on many occasions thereafter—the WCTU sponsored “committees of 100,” which were composed of businessmen and women dedicated to registering voters and distributing literature. Working with the Anti-Saloon League and local churches and grange halls, the WCTU helped organize billboard campaigns, hired singers and speakers, and participated in parades of automobiles, brass bands, and hundreds of young people who marched with torches at night on behalf of Prohibition. Without question, the

critical elections of 1914 went the way that they did because of the efforts of women in general and more specifically because of the women in the temperance union. In fact, Washington had a record turnout: 94.6 percent of registered voters visited the polls.³⁴

To understand more fully what motivated these women to work so long and so hard on behalf of their social and cultural vision, one must address the dynamics of the male culture they so bitterly opposed. “Here, for the first time,” according to the historian Barbara Epstein, “groups of women pitted themselves against what they saw as institutions of male culture.”³⁵ In address after address, pamphlet after pamphlet, the women of the WCTU attempted to raise an awareness of the tendency of young males to engage in violence toward others, the consequences of which were disastrous for women and children and contrary to the most basic values of Western civilization. For example, most chapters of the WCTU developed what they called the Mercy Department. Inspired by the biblical verse Micah 6:8, “What doth God require of thee but to walk humbly, deal justly and love mercy,” these departments offered a devastating critique of male behavior and produced literature that was distributed in public schools. At the Washington State WCTU convention in 1907, leaders exhorted delegates to “study and learn how to live so as to avoid complicity with cruelty in good[s], dress, and personal relations.”³⁶ Speakers pleaded with WCTU members to lobby their state legislators to enact laws that would mitigate a culture of violence.

Prohibit! Enforce all the good laws you have and work for more and better ones. For love's sake, enforce the law against the man who abuses his horse, as God enforces the law of fire again[st] the child who puts his hand in the flame. Next session of the legislature you will be asked to help secure advanced Mercy legislation.³⁷

Union women repeatedly expressed

concern that children were being raised in a culture of violence that would inevitably extend toward women. “There are pests, as flies, vermin, etc. . . . that must be killed in self-protection,” one leader wrote in 1907. “For our own sakes, for the children's sakes and for the creature's sake, it should be done swiftly and painlessly by adults. NEVER by a child, and never seen by a child. . . . You should be afraid to be too busy to ‘walk humbly, deal justly and love Mercy.’”³⁸ Another leader asserted, “Do not let a child hurt a kitten because he does not know any better, any more than you would let him hurt another baby, for the same reason.”³⁹ WCTU leaders also spoke out against the practice of vivisection (experimental operations on living animals) as well as hunting for sport.

Union leaders constantly referred to the horrendous social consequences that resulted from saloons. And almost invariably it was women and children who were harmed. Margaret Platt, the WCTU state president, excoriated the state for its unwitting contribution to the problems plaguing society.

The state cannot under the guise of a license delegate to the saloon business a legal existence, because to hold that it can is to hold that the state may sell and delegate the right to make widows and orphans, the right to break up homes, the right to create misery and crime, the right to make murderers, the right to produce idiots and lunatics, the right to fill orphanages, poorhouses, insane asylums, jails and penitentiaries and the right to furnish subjects for the hangman's gallows. . . . In view of all that we have quoted and much more of equal importance that might be quoted, we are led to wonder if to license the saloon is unconstitutional[;] how can any one conscientiously continue to support a political party which clings to the license policy and give protection to the saloon.⁴⁰

Frustrated with society's blatant hypocrisy, WCTU women in the Northwest continued to use their publications to speak out against male-dominated culture. In a typical editorial, an unnamed writer lamented:

Always the protection of the men! Always planning to make it safe and easy for the man of lust and vice. What of his unfortunate victim? What of the slaves herded in those dens of vice? What of the young girls, thousands of them innocent and unsuspecting, who under one pretext or another are lured into vice, bought and sold and held in the most loathsome slavery? The whole system is abominable and accursed.⁴¹

Echoing Abraham Lincoln's House Divided speech, Margaret Platt, president of the Washington union, implored members to compare this cultural war with the previous generation's civil war:

Friends, today is duty's hour; in this struggle for the eternal right we dare not purchase peace at the price of compromise. We must wipe every stain from our starry flag; we must once again strike the shackles from our slaves and free our land, this time from saloon domination. We cannot exist half drunk and half sober. Old Glory cannot at once protect the saloon and the home; its fold must no longer float over licensed wrong at the cost of our boys and girls. Comrades, we stand forever and uncompromisingly for our one country and one flag, the land of the sober and the flag of the home.⁴²

In many ways, the themes of liberty and equality dominated the worldview of a significant number of women who joined the WCTU. Recent scholarship on Frances Willard suggests that she was driven by egalitarian concerns. According to one historian, "The ideal of women's equality was both fundamental to Willard's vision of a renewed society and a longstanding basis for her reform activities."⁴³ Certainly Willard's focus on female equality was reflected in the writings of WCTU women in the Pacific Northwest. One spokesperson wrote in 1909:

There are no virtues, no vices which belong solely to one sex or the other. We are simply following tradition in making such divisions. It is time Christians realize that the greatest of false prophets is tradition. A good woman does not want to be a man but she wants to be [a] free woman.⁴⁴

Margaret Platt frequently encouraged the women in the union to think of themselves as equal partners with men.

In a 1902 address, she focused on the need to break down the double standard when it came to expectations for moral behavior:

We expect our girls to grow up in purity and honor. . . . Why not expect and demand honor and purity of our boys as well. Why not teach our boys that vice is as black and abhorrent in man as in woman; why not teach them that dishonor is of sexless cast; why not teach them that sin stains one soul as black as another; there is no favoritism with God; sex nor wealth, nor social position. . . . We condemn in unmeasured terms the moral fall of a woman—why do we condone the errors of her brothers and pass them over lightly as sowing of 'wild oats.'⁴⁵

This double standard extended to the law as well. Union literature is peppered with columns and articles that emphasize the importance of women's rights, especially the right to vote. But the WCTU also focused on other legal restrictions, particularly laws regarding community property that favored husbands over wives. "Justice to all regardless of race, class or sex, is what the women of the W.C.T.U. stand for," claimed Sophie Clark, franchise super-

intendent for the West Washington Union. "All community property should be under joint control, or so divided that each partner has control of his or her half as separate property."⁴⁶ Clearly the WCTU reinforced for two generations of women a view of society that demanded more attention to the meaning of equality. Motivated by concerns for personal safety and the well-being of their children, women who joined the WCTU seldom shied away from the larger social implications of their crusade.

Although WCTU interest in banning alcohol is generally recognized among historians, this broader social vision of the organization is less acknowledged. The WCTU in the last two decades of the 19th century developed a remarkable social agenda as well as an organizational apparatus that affected most every community in the region. Focused on social issues related to women, children, and the home, the WCTU vision stretched well beyond the obvious concerns over the impact of alcohol on domestic life. The WCTU certainly preceded many of the efforts associated

Women from the WCTU marched for temperance in Seattle. (Weber and Stevens photo, 199.63.2.25, WSHS)



with the Social Gospel movement and the Progressive period, and the connections between the movements remain to be studied. Like most Social Gospel leaders, WCTU strategists, significantly influenced by Frances Willard, used a combination of moral suasion and legislative reform. The first approach employed lectures, sermons, tracts, rational argument, and pleas to the conscience in order to change behavior, especially that of young men. Women believed fervently in their mission to alter the way in which young men and women thought about alcohol specifically and moral purity in general. It was estimated that in 1889 the Oregon WCTU distributed as many as 150,000 pieces of literature at fairs and other gatherings.⁴⁷

In most communities, the WCTU developed several strategies for delivering its message and providing alternatives to the saloon. In La Grande, Oregon, the WCTU raised \$1,000 to build a drinking fountain in the center of the city.⁴⁸ Many women worked long hours to establish reading rooms in their communities, places where young men could thoughtfully reflect on their choices regarding behavior and moral responsibilities. Some of these reading rooms evolved into the first libraries in the small towns across the Pacific Northwest. For example, in December 1888, the WCTU in Boise, Idaho, proudly opened the first library in the city.⁴⁹ Likewise, WCTU women in Auburn, Washington, opened the community's first library in 1904 and also funded the city's first public drinking fountains.⁵⁰ Long before Starbucks, the WCTU promoted the coffeehouse as a social gathering place, a healthy alternative to the saloon.

In addition to trying to provide places for young men to gather, WCTU women sought to help young women who were alone or vulnerable to the perils of the city. In many communities, WCTU women provided support services for any woman who was stranded in the

city.⁵¹ Union members often met in coming trains for the purpose of identifying young women who were coming to the city looking for work but were without friends, family, or financial support. In Spokane, in 1909, Ida Crippen, the superintendent of the Eastern Washington WCTU, implored a group of women to take up rescue work among young girls. "Every Christian woman can be a power in the uplifting of her family and neighborhood."⁵²

Some union members did even more to defend their fellow women. The Portland WCTU lobbied the city to hire a female matron for the local jail in order to help protect women who might be vulnerable to mistreatment by both male prisoners and prison officials.⁵³ And in 1893, after intense lobbying by the WCTU, the Washington state legislature approved the Police Matron Bill for the protection of women prisoners.⁵⁴

The WCTU was particularly well known for its commitment to providing shelter for women with children. In Portland, for example, the WCTU organized what was known as the Baby Home in Portland in 1888. The home evolved into a refuge for single mothers. According to one contemporary observer,

It offers the shelter of a Christian home—the safeguard of Christian care—to the unfortunate class to whose rescue this enterprise stands committed. This institution is not a reform school; it is not a hospital, and yet in its work for the reformation of lost womanhood it must include these in its ministries. It does endeavor to guide and control young girls early abandoned to the chance companionship of the street; it does care for the necessities of maternity and helpless infancy born to an inheritance of sin and shame.⁵⁵

The union's lobbying efforts paid off when the state awarded \$5,000 over a two-year period to the WCTU to help establish the home.⁵⁶ Tacoma members established the White Shield Home, the maintenance of which was a major project for the WCTU for many years. The state generally provided \$1,000 an-

nually, but the WCTU constantly appealed to the public for more financial support. In 1922, the Portland chapter of the WCTU established the Children's Farm Home near Corvallis, Oregon. The home provided a place for children who were abandoned or could not be supported by their parents. By the spring of 1926, five cottages had been constructed, and for decades the Children's Home remained a source of pride for the WCTU.⁵⁷

The Central Portland Union also established what was known as the Woman's Exchange, which provided clothing and other forms of aid. A few years later, the chapter organized a kindergarten, day nursery, and sewing school to support working women. Young girls had the opportunity to work with adult members of the WCTU on social welfare activities. In many communities throughout the Pacific Northwest, hundreds of girls gave flowers to the ill and attended funerals. These flower missions expanded into distributions of food, clothing, and linens for the poor. The historian Susan Hincken estimated that in 1905 the Oregon WCTU gave away 5,000 plants and floral arrangements, 170 items of clothing, and a modest amount of food. By 1913, the total of items distributed had risen to 13,961 floral gifts, 2,634 garments, and 7,789 pounds.⁵⁸ The *Gem State Signal*, the official organ of the South Idaho WCTU, published a poem that helps convey the vision behind the effort to bring flowers to those who were incarcerated:

Bring flowers to the captive's lonely cell,
They have tales of the joyous woods to tell;
Of the free blue streams, and the glowing
sky,
And the bright world shut from his languid
eye;
They will bear him a thought of the sunny
hours,
And a dream of his youth—bring him
flowers, wild flowers.⁵⁹

The WCTU members' commitment to improving conditions for working women extended to the fight for higher wages. In 1913, the Oregon state presi-

dent, Ada Wallace Unruh, attempted to live on the \$4 per week that was commonly accepted as the average wage. She found it virtually impossible to survive on such a low wage and argued that a "logical relationship between hunger and lack of moral courage" existed.⁶⁰ Throughout the nation, WCTU women engaged in charitable and reform activities, but few of them faced the same challenges that their sisters in the Pacific Northwest faced. Women in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho attempted to engage miners, lumbermen, railroad workers, soldiers, and sailors with their message of temperance.⁶¹ For example, the efforts to change the behavior of lumbermen often required women to go directly into the camps. The work of one woman, Ms. Brackett, the county superintendent for Grays Harbor, Washington, is instructive:

[She] made 50 visits to men and boys from mills and camps who were sick in Hoquiam hospital. She distributed 5,000 pages of literature, English and foreign. She gave out four foreign Bibles and nine English testaments. She circulated a small library of nine books to lumbermen, visited two camps . . . [and] gave lodging to seven men leaving the hospital.⁶²

One report estimated that more than 21,000 seamen a year came through Puget Sound ports. In an effort to dissuade these men from engaging in immoral behavior, WCTU members provided reading material and opened their homes to some of the sailors.⁶³ In a 1912 report on their work among railway men, WCTU women estimated that the 14 Oregon unions had distributed more than 3,500 pages of literature as well as handed out more than 300 Bibles.⁶⁴

Changing the lives of seamen, railway workers, and lumbermen proved more difficult than WCTU members had anticipated. However, the women did make progress in the realm of public education. They convinced legislators to require school districts to adopt what was known as scientific temperance curriculum. The purpose of the cur-

riculum was to teach about the nature of alcoholic drinks and other narcotics. Advocates asserted that, in addition to being provided with a moral framework that emphasized abstinence, young men and women needed to learn about human anatomy in order to understand the impact of alcohol on the body. Proponents urged that teachers be required to pass an examination on the subject and that the curriculum be taught as thoroughly and diligently as other subjects.

Led at the national level by Mary Hunt, the WCTU's national superintendent for the Department of Scientific Temperance Instruction, the curriculum movement swept the country in the mid-1880s. Hundreds of thousands of Americans debated the merits of temperance education, and in the end, every state in the union approved legislation.⁶⁵ In the Pacific Northwest, legislation mandating temperance instruction passed first in Oregon in 1885 and then in Washington and Idaho after WCTU women had circulated hundreds of petitions, sponsored lectures, and kept the issue alive in the press with letters to the editor.⁶⁶

The scientific temperance movement stimulated debate about a number of other health issues associated with the public schools. Women from the union raised concerns about fermented food; playground supervision; visits by district health officers, nurses, and dentists; and the administration of medicines. They proposed that schools have increased ventilation, access to natural light, and separate gathering rooms for inclement weather.⁶⁷ In an era when tuberculosis, small pox, and Spanish influenza often proved deadly, the importance of public health cannot be overestimated. Problems with enforcing inclusion of the antitemperance material in the curriculum ultimately led to its elimination from the public school curriculum. However, as the historian Edison Putnam asserted in his study of the Prohibition movement in

Idaho, "The significance of the accomplishment is easy to overlook, yet the children who grew to maturity under the influence of temperance education ultimately led Idaho into the prohibitionist camp in the following generation!"⁶⁸ And Norman Clark drew much the same conclusion about the effect in Washington State. He stated that "when the people of Washington voted for anti-drink measures in 1914, 1916, and 1918, they had been exposed to over three decades of formalized, official anti-drink instruction."⁶⁹

At some level, the great hope that an element of God's kingdom would come into being with the prohibition of alcohol proved illusory. Prohibition was unenforceable over the course of the next several decades, and participation in the WCTU across the nation finally began to wane in the 1930s, although even today the organization maintains chapters in all three Pacific Northwest states.

In retrospect, the efforts of the many women who worked on behalf of a vision for cultural reform should be seen as remarkable for many reasons. That first generation faced considerable obstacles; from the lifestyles of the miners, the lumbermen, and sailors to the lack of an established institutional church, the Pacific Northwest provided a particularly challenging environment for the women in the union. When Frances Willard came to the region in the 1880s, there was much about the region that must be defined as a frontier uncivilized. Yet in spite of these obstacles, women for several decades were motivated by a view of God's kingdom that led them to work to persuade their fellow citizens to change the habits of their lives and to attempt to change the political and social structures of their community. By the 1930s, in spite of the failure of Prohibition as a formal piece of social legislation, the cultural ethos of the Pacific Northwest was much different than it had been 50 years earlier. The rough and bawdy

Temperance Songs and Poems

WCTU members composed songs that were intended to inspire a vision of justice as well as to convey women's deep frustrations regarding the state of society. For example, Oregon women adopted lyrics written by Narcissa White Kinney and sung to the tune of the hymn "A Thousand Years."

A temperance state we yet shall call it,
Oregon—land of martyr's tears.
Oregon, saved for God and country,
Shall banish saloons a thousand years.

Chorus

A thousand years of sober people,
A thousand years of the strong and brave,
This, the glad song we teach our children,
Alcohol has found its grave.

Chorus

Courage brave hearts! God's time is coming!
Stand by your homes and banish fears!
Never again will we drink the poison,
And we'll banish saloons a thousand years.

Chorus

Carry the word to tempted mortals;
Stop the flow of mothers' tears,
Justice and truth shall rule the people,
And banish saloons a thousand years.⁷⁰

The official Idaho WCTU song expressed a similar activist position and a hopeful picture of the future if both men and women would commit themselves to changing the state laws in order to change the nature of society.

The gem of all our mountains grand,
Idaho, my Idaho.
The fairest state in all our land, Idaho, my

Idaho.

Thy sons and daughters are the best,
For all that's true, they stand the test,
We'll sing thy praises East and West, Idaho
my Idaho.

The drink curse has been doomed at last,
Idaho, my Idaho.
And Satan's ranks are falling fast, Idaho, my
Idaho.

Thy people brave have met the foe,
The Cause is theirs, they fully know,
And now they say saloons must go, Idaho,
my Idaho.

Our loyal band of women true, Idaho, my
Idaho.

The Women's Christian Temperance "U",
Idaho, my Idaho.
Will ne'er give up the fight at hand
Till no saloon is in thy land,
For God and home we firmly stand, Idaho,
my Idaho.⁷¹

In a work typical of those that appeared in publications throughout the region, anger, despair, and social challenge are evident. In lyrics that remind one of the great folk songs of social protest, WCTU members exhorted themselves and the society to take up the cause.

What Will Become of Our Children

Wrung from the lips of the mothers of men,
Charged with an anguish others may ken,
Rises the heart cry of Rachel again,
What will become of our children?

Drink-shadowed firesides of village and farm
Summon the guards of the hearth stone to
arm,

Lifting to heaven that cry of alarm,
What will become of our children?

Down in the hell of the city retreat,
Voiced in the jargons of alley and street,
Rum-ridden millions the question repeat,
What will become of our children?

Born in the wedlock of passion and drink,
Sin-set and sick ere they learn how to
think,
Damned to defeat from the cradle's whit
brink,
What will become of our children?

Slaving for sustenance others should earn,
Buying with blood what the dramshops will
burn,
Robbed of their birthright to play and to
learn,
What will become of our children?

Troubled, the far-visions prophets of state,
Ask themselves, How can the nation grow
great?
Ask, as they scan the red records of fate,
What will become of our children?

Herod still slays—and in the hovel and hall
Poor little brothers of Bethlehem fall;
While from His manger Christ challenges
all,
What will become of our children?

Answer, O land on which heaven has
smiled!
Answer, O Church of the Bethlehem Child!
Speak, if the Rum-Beast is left to run wild.
What will become of our Children?

Gird thee, O Church! And arouse thee, O
State!
Else be the woe of the millstone they fate!
Banish the Beast! Let the glad years relate
What will become of our Children?⁷²

world of the railroad, seaport, and mining camp had given way to a culture shaped by a dominant middle and professional class. Although only one of several constituent elements in the worldview of the middle class in the Pacific Northwest, Christianity should not be underestimated as an influence that helped shape the terms and the issues

regarding cultural struggle. And the WCTU should not be underestimated as an organization that helped determine the approach that thousands of women in the Pacific Northwest took to the social issues of the day.

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