

SILK, SUPPLIES AND SOCIALISM:  
HOW WOMEN EXERCISED PUBLIC POWER IN THE AMERICAN WEST, 1890-1920

A Thesis

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Master of Arts

By

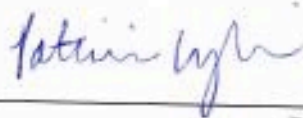
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## THESIS APPROVAL

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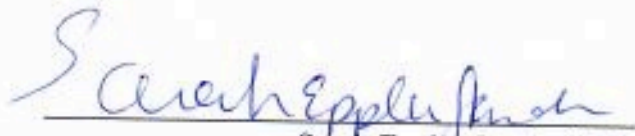
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To my dear friend Alisa Hodge, a true champion of women. Your memory inspires me to keep telling the stories of “ordinary” women who indeed change the world.

## Abstract

In my thesis, I reframe the long-held assumption that because women in the United States prior to 1920 were blocked from access to the vote, women did not exercise political or economic influence in their communities. I illuminate the lives of three women from Oklahoma, Utah and Idaho, who defied historical assumptions of the "women's sphere," leveraging the fluidity of power in western states and territories during the turn of the century to wield political, religious, social and commercial influence.

The history of women's political access in the American West has shown that women there had unique access to political, social, and commercial spaces in their communities and states. As women in the west expanded their assigned domestic roles, women's power and participation also grew on a national level. This new influence culminated in the national women's suffrage amendment, which passed in 1920. In Oklahoma, Idaho, and Utah, how did women navigate religious, commercial, marital, and political constructs to increase their participation in civic life, leading to state suffrage that pre-dated the national amendment?

Cora Diehl Harvey was the first woman elected to territorial office when she was elected as County Assessor in Oklahoma in 1891. Her election was challenged by members of her own Populist party, and she was later sued in court in regard to a bond she was forced to sign to ensure her seat. Cora divorced her husband and traveled as a single woman with the International Brotherhood Welfare Association, a socialist advocacy group speaking on the rights of the homeless. Cora's beginnings in politics in a territory with little political construction allowed her to move outside customary domestic roles.

Leah Mariah Gorton was the wife of George Washington Gorton, a Civil War pensioner in Soda Springs, Idaho. After Leah defied her parents in marrying George, together, the Gortons

built a business empire in the rural community and led civil groups. Later, as George's widow, Leah retained her standing in the business community and was active in political circles. Beyond her family's joint interests, Leah grew beyond her traditional role as wife and mother and strongly influenced her community, interacting with and reacting to both the local Mormon and Presbyterian churches.

Margaret Ann Caine was born in Salt Lake City in 1859, just as the Mormons were embarking on building a white American settlement in land populated by Indigenous peoples and trappers. Mormonism was straddling a line between isolationism and national participation as Margaret grew up and was educated in a culture that uniquely valued women's participation in religious spaces. Margaret was active in the state and national suffrage movements, represented Utah's women nationally at the World's Fair in Chicago and the International Council of Women in London and toured on behalf of the Utah Silk Industry, lecturing on the advantages of domestic silk production, one of her own commercial interests. As the first and only woman elected as Salt Lake County Auditor, Caine moved beyond her "sphere," working both within and outside of societal restraints to impact Utah and its economy.

Harvey, Gorton and Caine all utilized the newness of western political systems to leverage influence in their communities. Though excluded from traditional political and commercial spaces, each wielded power in addition to their "feminine" domestic power within their homes. These examples reflect that western spaces provided opportunities for women to participate in their societies in non-traditional ways.

In this project, I focus on understudied aspects of women's American western scholarship: contrasting access to power for women in different states, women's business' holdings and participation in commerce, and the ways women interacted with prevalent religious

and social movements. By studying Harvey, Cain and Gorton, I will be able to illuminate the ways these principles actually influenced women's lives, thereby changing the gendered power balances of their communities, states, and ultimately, the nation.

## Acknowledgments

It is impossible to describe how much of a team contributed to the creation of this project. First, I must thank the Charles Redd Center for Western Studies at Brigham Young University and the Office of Research, Creative and Scholarly Activities at the University of Central Oklahoma that provided funding for two research trips that had me up to my elbows in letters, diaries and town histories in public and university libraries, as well as state archives in Utah and Idaho. Much gratitude goes to Dr. Patti Loughlin, my Thesis Committee Chair, as well as the other wonderful members of my committee: Dr. Maria Diaz-Montejo, Dr. Katrina Lacher and Dr. Sarah Eppler Janda. Their support and mentoring was invaluable and inspiring. Particularly to Dr. Loughlin, so much thanks for believing in my work and encouraging me to think bigger. It has been such a gift to have a mentor to aspire to.

I am so grateful to my husband Pete and children Spencer, McKay, Rylee and Owen for their support and patience as I strove to bring these stories to life. There were many track meets, recitals, soccer practices, and basketball games that I attended with a source in hand, and their support of my project allowed me to merge these two parts of my life. Pete has learned more about western women's history than he could ever have imagined, and, as in all things, his partnership in talking through my theories and stories helped shape this narrative. I hope all of my family will remember this chapter of our family story as one that drives them to always be learning and to "never be satisfied."

Together my parents Bob and Carol Ridge have set an example that emphasizes the importance of scholarship and lifelong learning. I am grateful for their interest in and support of this project. My three brothers Rob, Steve and David Ridge also provided support in opening their homes to me while I traveled on research trips and providing advice and encouragement.



All three of my sisters were contributors to this project. Two sisters, Amy Graves and Jenny Babcock, accompanied me on research trips and acted as assistants, taking pictures, documenting and talking through details as I constructed these women's stories. My oldest sister Becky Malm has been my wonderful editor for at least twenty years, and her incredible writing skills have made my writing much better.

Last, I must thank my mother, Carol Ridge, and grandmother, Gayla Gorton Clark. Their family storytelling ignited my imagination as a little girl. And their own resilience in the face of adversity has pushed me far beyond this project. This story is about women, and I could not be more grateful for the women who have inspired and contributed to this project.



## Introduction

I stood at the Fairview Cemetery in Soda Springs, Idaho with my mother and grandmother in 2003. It was June, and the pastoral landscape of southeastern Idaho was beautiful. The cemetery felt peaceful, as it always did, and my mother and grandmother sounded reverent as they spoke of the family matriarch with all the names – Leah Maria Waylett Gorton. Her portrait hung in my grandma’s pristine living room, and her fabled history felt like it was part of me. I had heard the stories many times. How Leah left the Mormon faith of her parents to marry her dashing Civil War lieutenant, the Gorton Supply Store that the family ran together for all those years. But mostly, the reverence came from tragedy. I well knew the story of the “Four Little Girls” whose delicate tea cups adorned my grandmother’s china closet. Leah’s four daughters, ages four to eleven, all dead within two weeks of an 1890 Diphtheria epidemic. The women of my family often spoke of Leah’s tragic loss, and of her resilience, finding inspiration in her strength. I found it, too, and didn’t question the angelic, infallible role assigned to my esteemed ancestor by family folklore.

Leah’s identity, as most American woman of her time at the turn of the century, was tied to her maternity. The mother of eleven children, only four of whom survived to adulthood, family remembrance centered around Leah leading a family, and her incredible strength when her husband George left her a widow when she was only forty-four years old with five young sons to care for. While this resilience is certainly to be valued, cultural remembrance only highlighted part of Leah’s story. Her participation in her assigned private sphere of home and family and her obvious success there left those who remember her with nothing further to explore. However, Leah’s contribution simply isn’t limited to her role as wife, widow and mother. The historical record confirms a further reach, outside of the private Gorton family home

and into a broader community, filling a Presbyterian church, the welfare society of the Rebekah Lodge, and the thriving Gorton family business empire.

Why, then, is Leah's story tied so restrictively to her role as wife and mother? Because at the time of Leah's 1877 marriage, women's value in American society laid securely in her place in her domestic sphere. As Supreme Court Justice Joseph Bradley wrote in 1872:

The natural and proper timidity and delicacy which belongs to the female sex evidently unfits it for many of the occupations of civil life. The Constitution of the family organization, which is founded in the divine ordinance as well as in the nature of things, indicates the domestic sphere as that which properly belongs to the domain and functions of womanhood.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, Leah's private contribution was greatly hallowed by those who remembered her, and the lore that surrounded her story perpetuated her value in creating and maintaining her family.

However, in the American West, harsh environmental, political and social conditions necessitated a different kind of participation from its' women. As historian Jennifer Helton writes: "Conditions in the settler societies of the American West disrupted these gender roles...the ideal of a secure home with a doting husband and a submissive wife often crumbled."<sup>2</sup> Because of the uncertainty of life in a harsh environment, with unestablished social and political systems, cut off from traditional structures, white women in the West had unique access to power *outside* their domestic spheres. Necessity prompted them to active civic, religious, social, political and commercial participation. When the Progressive movement unfurled from east to west across the American landscape, white middle-class women of the West found Eastern vehicles to be effective in gaining expanded access to social constructs. Therefore, women in the West began to participate in political parties and movements, control commercial holdings and

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<sup>1</sup> *Bradwell v. The State*, 83 U.S. 130 (1872).

<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Helton, "'The Desire for That Measure of Justice: Consciousness, Political Expediency, and the Rise of Women's Suffrage in Montana and the West, 1869-1920,'" *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 71, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 46.

influence cottage industries, and advocate for social and political reform. While Eastern women surely participated and advocated, women in the West were the first to cast ballots, be elected to public office, and were a powerful part of political movements like Populism and suffrage.

It should not be surprising then, that in looking beyond Leah's valuable domestic contributions, there is more to be found in the influence she wielded in her fledgling community of Soda Springs, Idaho. In further investigations, I discovered that Leah held numerous leadership positions in social clubs in her community, participated in state politics involving the disenfranchisement of Mormons, and most surprising of all, managed a diverse business empire including mining supply stores, land management and an Opera House. When more of her story was uncovered, Leah was found to be a devoted and caring mother, but also a powerful political influencer, a societal organizer, and an astute businesswoman. Leah's contribution, therefore, was not strictly domestic.

Expanding the view to other western states who granted woman suffrage prior to the national amendment, I applied this same outlook to see beyond the domestic in the lives of ordinary western women to discover what unseen power they may have exercised in ways outside the gendered domestic norm. I discovered Cora Diehl Harvey, a young Oklahoma woman who at age nineteen was elected to territorial office, despite campaigns from both political parties to use her gender to argue against her valid election. Cora exercised personal autonomy in a number of waves when she eloped, then divorced, and later attached herself to the International Brotherhood Welfare Association, touring and speaking nationally on behalf of socialism and the plight of the hobo. To keep financially solvent, Cora bought and sold land in her native Oklahoma, solidifying her economic influence in Hinton, where she retired after a

spectacular separation from her cause amid lawsuits and scandal. Surely, Cora's influence in the state and even national socialist movement outpaced her domestic sphere.

In contrast, Utahn Margaret Ann Caine found ways to influence her Mormon community that were more typical for women of her time and place. Mormonism greatly valued women's domestic influences, as is evidenced by doctrine and preaching of the time. But Mormon women's exclusion from access to "priesthood power," or the authority to direct affairs of the church, has colored historian's understanding of the autonomy of Mormon women. These women lectured on religious topics publicly, organized and advocated for social causes and ran their own organizations. Their religious Relief Society meetings adjourned and then instantly reconvened as meetings of the Utah Woman Suffrage Association. Women's views were welcomed by many men in positions of authority, and the polygamous relationships viewed as so oppressive to the rest of the country actually granted women access to power over their own homes and families, as husbands tended to other wives and families and women were left on their own. This isolation also strengthened women's need for economic independence, necessitating access to careers, economic participation and business development.

Thus, Margaret Caine's Utah influence was, although not mainstream, a bit more understandable during her time. After an early widowhood, Margaret served with the state suffrage association and then campaigned and was elected to county office. Further, she became deeply involved in the state's revival of its silk production project. In this role she wrote, lectured, was appointed to state office, and traveled to the World's Fair in Chicago and the International Congress of Women in London. In her political and economic roles, Margaret built networks of collaborators, influenced state economics and pioneered women's participation in Utah politics. Margaret's role as a mother to her lone living son is evident in the fact that she

died only a few weeks after his death in 1929. Margaret surely was a devoted mother. But her role was not *limited* to her domestic life. On the contrary, Margaret's influence was evident in the obituaries and memorials that announced her death.

Clearly, as evidenced by these three women, feminine influence in the 1890s-1910s was not limited to a purely domestic sphere, despite national rhetoric. Yet historic memory largely discusses them as typically home-centered women. Why, then, is the depth of their stories forgotten, with only the surface of their contributions remembered and valued? Because the national expectation at this time was for women to contribute to building civilization in one concrete way: to establish Protestant, white values and organization on a chaotic and "wild" west through domestic devotion.

The value of understanding the depth of women's contributions to the forming of western towns and cities cannot be overstated. It is important to understand that women worked side by side with men in establishing social, political and commercial structures in the west, in many places replacing the economic and social situations of the Indigenous, Mexican, Spanish and French peoples already living there. This white tidal wave of emigration was pushed forward as much by women as by men. Our historical understanding of women as family-builders and men as civic-builders is simply not accurate in the decoding of western archival history. So, in the interest of telling a deeper story, this project narrates the lives of Leah Maria Waylett Gorton of Soda Springs, Idaho; Cora Diehl Harvey of Guthrie, Oklahoma; and Margaret Mitchell Caine of Salt Lake City, Utah. In examining their lives, the commercial, political and social contributions of these women beyond their homes will be analyzed. This work is done to broaden the understanding that western women were not simply instruments of husbands, families or social

trends. They were indeed historical actors, moving outside their assigned domestic realm to build communities in the fluidity of power that existed in the American West from the 1890s to 1920s.



## Chapter One

### Denying the Tropes: Historiography of Women as Historical Actors in the American West

When writing about women in the American West at the turn of the 19th century, historians have attempted to acknowledge their autonomy. Rather than being simple drudges, exploited sex workers, or married women with no options but to follow their husbands as the men “made” Western communities, historians have begun to describe women as actors in their own right, exercising some level of power over their lives. How much control did women have over where and how they lived, and how much did they participate in community building in the fluidity of power that existed in the parts of the West that were new to white settlement? Were Progressive women confined to influencing communities socially, through women’s clubs or religious participation? If not, how did women, with their limited access to public spheres, contribute to building Western communities economically and politically? To what extent was female participation in these spheres exceptional?

To further investigate these questions, this study describes the lives of three “ordinary” women living in the American West, and actions they took in the period 1890-1920 to influence new communities they were helping to build. In different ways, each of these women, mostly forgotten in historical writings, contributed to the building of their communities in ways typically female for the Progressive Era. But they also moved outside the domestic sphere of home or social advocacy to build community in political or economic ways. In examining these women’s lives, we begin to see that white, middle-class Western women weren’t as strictly limited in their spheres of influence as contemporary writers led us to believe.

First in this study is Leah Maria Gorton of Soda Springs, Idaho. Leah’s move with her husband to Soda Springs from Malad was in itself an act of autonomy, as Leah left her Mormon

faith to marry a “Gentile.” Once arrived in the community, Leah worked side by side with her husband George and other men to establish community entities including the First Presbyterian Church, public education, and social welfare groups like the International Order of Odd Fellows and the Rebekah Lodge. While George took the typically active role in politics, Leah was also his partner in building a mercantile and business empire in Southeastern Idaho, and following George’s passing, it was Leah, and not her twenty-one-year-old son, who took over the family business, growing and extending the family wealth as she worked for two decades following her husband’s death. Leah’s commercial contributions extended beyond what is typically regarded as a Progressive woman’s way of community building.

Next, the study examines the life of Utahn Margaret Ann Caine, another widow, this one Mormon, who had lost her husband as well as most of her children by her mid-forties. Shortly after Alfred’s death, Margaret became visibly active in Utah politics as a secretary to the Utah Woman Suffrage Association and later the first and only woman elected Auditor of Salt Lake County. Additionally, Margaret became heavily involved in the silk industry in Utah, forming and serving in a number of advocacy groups, writing and lecturing broadly, and representing Utah women to national and international audiences. Margaret’s influence went far beyond a typical white woman’s club activities.

Last, the study examines the radical life of Cora Diehl Harvey of Guthrie, Oklahoma. As the first woman to hold office in Oklahoma Territory, Cora leveraged third-party politics into a lucrative Recorder office, but had to fight to take her duly elected seat. Cora later divorced her husband, joined the Socialist Party, and traveled and lectured nationally on the cause of “the hobo,” advocating for the rights of the unemployed. When that endeavor fell apart over the basis of her

relationship with the President of the International Brotherhood Welfare Association, Cora retired back to Oklahoma, where she bought and sold real estate, never remarrying.

The lives of these three women show new ways to investigate how women accessed and wielded power in the still-forming communities and systems of the West. All three women lived in their states while they were still territories. Religious, educational and political parties and systems were still being designed and built. Into this gap, these three women stepped to contribute to their communities and causes in ways historians don't consider women to be actors. In discovering the power these women had, historians can anticipate new ways to investigate and write about how women helped to build the West.

Because of the under-studied and "ordinary" nature of the three women's lives, unique source material was accessed to build the story of how the women became players in their communities. Archival material from the Idaho Historical Society, Oklahoma Historical Society, Utah State University, the University of Utah and Brigham Young University was studied. Local libraries were also used. This included journals and letters and family writings on the subject, as well as the documents of women's clubs. New resources of digitized newspapers were broadly used in telling each woman's story, and the way their communities viewed and responded to them. Digitized probate records included legal cases about Cora's election and Margaret and Leah's husbands' wills and revealed what actions each woman took and how they used new court systems to access power. Government records described Margaret's activities with the Utah Silk Association. These traditional archival sources blended with newly digitized sources to tell a more complete picture of western women's lives.

Until the 1950s, American historians largely discounted or ignored women when writing the history of the American West. Frederick Jackson Turner had laid the groundwork for a

characterization of the west settled by cowboys, explorers, pioneers whose very nature drove them to explore and conquer. Ignoring the fact that the West already was inhabited by Indigenous peoples and European expansionists, this narrative demarcated American historicism for decades. Women, then, were late to the scene of American consciousness about its western past, and other than a few important Native women and some illusive stereotypes, women remained on the fringes of storytelling about its western past.

The first historian to attempt to add women into the tapestry of western lore was Dee Brown in his 1958 *Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old, Wild West*. The title alone reveals its author's viewpoint: that women, nationally recognized guardians of the country's moral virtues, had gone forth to "civilize" the west with its cowboys, mountain men and Native Americans. Brown addresses prostitutes, schoolteachers, Mormon plural wives, miners' and farmers' wives. Throughout, Brown's clear message is that women brought civilization to a wild, unmoored country full of men and natives without culturally constructed values and systems. He characterizes western women in this way: "The pioneer western female was certainly a woman of tenacity and quiet force...she contrived to create a home for her family and managed so that most of her brood survived."<sup>3</sup> This understanding of women's character and role in shaping life in the American west is the basis from which historians have endeavored to tell the story of feminine history in the west. Though groundbreaking in its topical focus on women, *Gentle Tamers* provided a basis for study which codified women's secondary roles, not as tamers of the landscape or shapers of the society, but as supporters of the men who did so, and timid influencers who quietly manipulated behind the scenes to bring civility to the west.

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<sup>3</sup> Dee Brown, *The Gentle Tamers: Women of the Old Wild West* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1958), 17.

In the 1960s as the feminist movement swept United States dialogue and politics, historians turned to new ways of studying American history. Finding new subjects and sources, they also began to interpret information differently. History interested in the American west followed these trends as scholars began to reflect on a period dominated in American consciousness by masculine interpretations. Previous writing on western or “frontier” history spoke of male archetypes: the “cowboy,” the “miner,” the “cattleman.” Now, female historians turned to the stories of the feminine experience in the west, utilizing new sources like diaries, newspapers, church and marriage records to characterize the female experience, and how women interacted with this vastly different environment. These explanations began a new dialogue in women’s history, allowing environmental factors to begin to explain gender power dynamics in a space where conventions had yet to be anchored. While these scholars expanded a new field of gender history, the earlier works focused on white women’s history, though some did begin to discuss Black, Latinx and Indigenous women.

Eleanor Flexner’s history of the suffrage movement, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement* in the United States, was first published in 1959, then revised in 1975. Though not exclusive to western history, Flexner’s work is a broad treatment of the transition in gendered political power structure. Additionally, she examines the movements by states, illuminating the ways women leveraged power in Oklahoma, Idaho and Utah prior to suffrage. Due to the timing of its composition, Flexner’s work is a reflection of the emergence of women’s history, and indeed, its first release predates the establishment of women’s history as a field of historical research. In her preface to the revised edition, she remarks on the emergence of women’s history, drawing on “the outburst of research and publications which has signaled the historical

profession's recognition, at long last, that women are part of the American scene."<sup>4</sup> Flexner's work, then, represents one of the earliest examples of "feminist history," as women's history written not just to write women back into the narrative, but to depict how women overcame male privilege and determined history, rather than just observing it. Flexner argues that American history to this point has largely overlooked women, specifically citing Morison's 1965 *Oxford History of the American People* as one leaving women and their accomplishments out of the American story.<sup>5</sup> Flexner links the women's movement of the 1970s to the suffrage movement, outlining the lessons of the movement applicable to the modern struggle. She shows how women's ability to organize and gain supporters for their movement came because of women's contributions to the war effort, their ability to articulate their argument, and their economic power as wage earners.<sup>6</sup>

Flexner introduces the African-American woman into the suffrage story, acknowledging the schism created between the gender movement and the abolition movement. Frances Harper remarked "When it was a question of race, she let the lesser question of sex go. But the white women all go for sex, letting race occupy a minor position...If the nation could handle only one question, she would not have the black women put a single straw in the way, if only the men of the race could obtain what they wanted."<sup>7</sup> Flexner also describes the growth in power of women's clubs as organizers, remarking specifically on the power of African American groups,

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<sup>4</sup> Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), x.

<sup>5</sup> Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, x.

<sup>6</sup> Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 145.

<sup>7</sup> Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 146.

who were rejected from the National Federation of Women's Clubs and instead formed their own Colored Women's League.<sup>8</sup>

This more modern inclusion of African American women in the story of the suffrage movement reflects the trend of the time, as black histories became more of interest and black stories received more attention from historians. It also represents the emergence of postmodern history, as social constructs were questioned and the writers of narrative were examined with more scrutiny. It also is predictive of the future postcolonial school of history which sought to shift the narrative from the elite to focus more on the stories of the subjugated.

Though not specifically tied to western women's history, Barbara Welter's *American Quarterly* "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" reflects the rigid social constructs surrounding middle to upper-class women of the period. These were the women most likely to make the journey west, and Welter addresses the expectations both men and women created for gender roles. She argues that women's magazines and religious literature placed tremendous pressure on women to center their lives completely in the domestic "sphere." Women were constrained by moral, religious and social obligations to keep their focus on what was naturally their right: as guardians of moral and family virtue. Welter argues that "by careful manipulation and interpretation [the women's magazines and related literature] sought to convince woman that she had the best of both worlds –power and virtue—and that a stable order of society depended upon her maintaining her traditional place in it."<sup>9</sup> Welter's argument that American women were expected and encouraged in domesticity rather than public place would have influenced many of those women traveling West and those to come after them. Certainly all three subjects of this

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<sup>8</sup> Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 193-194.

<sup>9</sup> Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1966):174, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2711179>.

study began primarily in the domestic sphere, before circumstances or interest forced them to look beyond.

Perhaps the most cited and most central argument in the study of suffrage history is Aileen Kraditor's 1965 *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*.<sup>10</sup> Kraditor, a self-described "radical historian" has been reflected on as one of the earliest woman's historians and feminist historians. Kraditor examined history for lessons of use in the new feminist movement., and in fact taught the first course in women's history in the country at the New School for Social Research in New York in 1963.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, Kraditor's arguments reflect not only the movement of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, but they tell a story of the feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s. Kraditor's research took her to a large body of as-yet unused primary source material which allowed her to write about "the ways that race, immigration and labor figured into white suffragists' efforts to enfranchise women."<sup>12</sup> Kraditor, therefore, was an early student of the intersectionality of race and gender and described the suffrage movement in a way that reflected the complexities of racial tension in the midst of the movement. She described the ways in which the suffrage movement reinforced white supremacy, and the arguments made by its proponents that suffrage would shore up the white vote, weakening the power of enfranchised black males. This allowed her to describe a campaign for democratic ideals that was full of anti-democratic rhetoric and policy. Kraditor included Black suffrage leaders who had been ignored by earlier historians.

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<sup>10</sup> Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965).

<sup>11</sup> Louise M. Newman, "Reflections on Aileen Kraditor's Legacy: Fifty Years of Woman Suffrage Historiography, 1965-2014," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14, no. 3 (July 2015): 292. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781415000055>.

<sup>12</sup> Newman, "Reflections," 291.



In 1967, Alan Grimes authored a seminal study attempting to answer why suffrage movements succeeded in the West in the late 1800s. Grimes enumerates the reasons historians had previously given for this success: a spirit of equality present on the frontier, the shortage of women necessitating suffrage as an enticement to come west, or even economic reasons. Grimes introduces a new argument, which has been the center of historical arguments about western woman suffrage ever since: “To a large extent, at least in the West, the constituency granting woman suffrage was composed of those who also supported prohibition and immigration restriction and felt woman suffrage would further their enactment.”<sup>13</sup> In *The Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage*, Grimes argues that suffrage was actually a tool in the hands of a movement seeking to impose Puritan values on western spaces. Since “morals are the work of women,” these activists pushed for suffrage in order to create a large number of voters who would favor their puritanical agenda: immigration reform and prohibition being chief among their causes.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1970s, the cultural and political movement advocating for equal economic and social power for women ignited a national focus on women’s history. This historical paradigm was marked by the encouragement to question authority and was fueled by greater numbers of women entering the academic dialogue. Women’s histories fell into categories of compensatory histories, filling in the gaps of previous histories focused on male narratives, and feminist history, showing how women were the driving force and factor of history. Compensatory histories simply added to the existing story, while feminist histories rewrote the story, emphasizing exceptional women and their voices. These were generally focused on elite women, whose privilege afforded them a platform for storytelling. Thus, women’s histories at

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<sup>13</sup> Alan P. Grimes, *The Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>14</sup> Grimes, *The Puritan Ethic and Woman Suffrage*, 8.

the time didn't always acknowledge or include the contributions of the underprivileged, including economic and racial minorities.

Beverly Stoeltje explored this new approach to history as it particularly applied to women of the west. Her 1975 article "'A Helpmate for Man Indeed: The Image of the Frontier Woman'" tackles the stereotypes of women's western history that limit current understanding of women's roles in building the west. Stoeltje argues that social adaptation in a new environment occurs as "behavior forms are drawn from cultural images already in the possession of the individuals."<sup>15</sup> Rather than reinvent cultural norms in the west, then, women brought their constructs with them, attempting to rebuild a society left behind. By exploring archetypes of refined lady, helpmate and the "bad woman," Stoeltje argues that rather than three separate responses to the frontier, women's role became enmeshed as a successful frontier woman: capable, brave, independent, but sexless. Virtuous western women weren't non gendered. They were feminine defenders of virtue, helpmates to men taming a wilderness. But like other Victorian women, their sexuality was not a factor in their success. "Given the demands of the environment, the refined lady image in its pure form could not survive. A transformation from female to nonsexual comrade was necessary. Perhaps the only woman who survived as a female was the bad woman."<sup>16</sup>

Julie Roy Jeffrey continued the explanation of western women's stories. In 1979, she argued that though women's stories varied, they certainly shaped the frontier experience. She explains: "New standards for female behavior emerging during the early nineteenth century and women's own expectations about their role in society helped to shape their reactions to the

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<sup>15</sup> Beverly J. Stoeltje, "'A Helpmate for Man Indeed: The Image of the Frontier Woman,'" *The Journal of American Folklore* 88, no. 347 (Jan-Mar 1975): 25. <https://doi.org/10.2307/539183>.

<sup>16</sup> Stoeltje, 40.

frontier.”<sup>17</sup> Jeffrey taps previously underused sources in the form of women’s personal histories and journals to describe what women’s lives were like, but also how they understood their own place in the American West. She shows that when women transplanted their Eastern culture in the new and untamed western environment, they learned to adapt cultural mores in order to find success and survive. She argues that industrialization, even as it spread to cash crop farming and the new availability of manufactured goods that replaced home production lowered the value of women’s contributions. Now women were not just physically dependent upon men for survival: they were also economically dependent upon them. Rather than a partnership in survival, women filled the family’s needs that were not essential for survival: education, culture and domesticity were all up to the woman of the home.

Jeffrey suggests that women’s claim over the cultural and moral survival of the country was prompted by their fall from importance economically. In a desperate clutch at relevance, middle-class women claimed and proclaimed the importance of domesticity, tranquility and morality. In this way, women laid hold on a role they argued was central to society’s survival. Rather than a retreat to privacy, then, women’s domain in the home was actually a power grab. But power wasn’t always what the retreat to domesticity meant in men’s interpretation. George Fitzhugh wrote: “‘Woman naturally shrinks from public gaze, and from the struggle and competition of life.’ Thus, each woman should have ‘a husband, a lord and master, whom she should love, honor and obey...In truth, woman, like children has but one right and that is the right to protection. The right to protection involves the obligation to obey.’”<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey argues that while women tried to bring their understanding of female roles to the West with them, the

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<sup>17</sup> Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women, the Trans-Mississippi West: 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey, 8.

environment and circumstances of the west required an adaptation and a claiming of power that often extended them beyond their domestic purity. In religious, economic and political life, women were pushed outside the “safety” and “purity” of domestic life to participate differently in Western society.

As women’s historical scholarship moved into the 1980s, scholars expanded the meanings of feminist history and explored more deeply the stories of women’s history in the West. Rather than a series of stories, women’s histories became arguments regarding what women’s power meant in a place where power was fluid and social constructs were still being built.

To begin the decade in 1980, Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller published “The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West” in the *Pacific Historical Review*. Jensen and Miller point out the lack of focus on women as topics of historical research. They decry the use of stereotypes, invoking Emerson Hough’s 1921 sunbonneted helpmate.<sup>19</sup> Jensen and Miller introduce demographic data to argue that women were present in greater numbers than assumed by previous historians and argue that demographics can be used as source material on underrepresented groups whose sources can be difficult to locate. They point out the dearth of research surrounding women’s economics, a lack that remains in place today. Also lacking is a deeper examination of women’s politics, aside from the suffrage movement, and women’s involvement in labor movements. All of these topics are examined in this study.

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<sup>19</sup> Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller, “The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West,” *Pacific Historical Review* 49, no. 2 (May 1980), 180. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3638899>.

Sandra L. Myers' 1982 *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915* explores the ways in which women's sphere expanded through necessity during western expansion. While she first responds to previous work on Western women, Myers explains the ways women's roles changed as they leveraged a lack of power structure into new opportunities for influence and independence. Myers describes the ways women exercised influence on building homesteads, civil projects, political movements and economics. Myers argues that although not all women took advantage of new opportunities to expand power and influence in the west, many instances occurred where women changed their roles as their society moved westward. She also shows how the expansion of women's contributions in the west led to political advocacy and the successful movement for woman suffrage: "During the pre-Civil War decades much of the attention of the women's rights advocates was centered in the newer Western areas where the leaders hoped that a freer, more egalitarian society might be more willing to accord rights to the women who had helped to open and settle the country."<sup>20</sup> Myers describes how women's contributions combined with a lack of entrenched political systems encouraged women's groups to push for formalized political equality in the west.

Sandra Myers summarized the conundrum facing American society as it migrated West: "Far from the familiar, stable communities of the East, out on the edges of civilization, families again had to become self-sufficient, and women had to assume new roles, undertake new tasks outside the proscribed sphere of woman's place."<sup>21</sup> The environment of the West, then, disallowed the separation of spheres, and instead threw both sexes into a difficult daily struggle for survival and civilization. The nature of the role western women were called to play called

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<sup>20</sup> Sandra L. Myers, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800-1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press: 1982).

<sup>21</sup> Myers, *Westering Women*, 216.

into question their very femininity. “If...a woman did such things [as lead expeditions, command troops, build railroads, drive cattle, ride Pony Express, find gold, amass great wealth, get elected to high public office, rob stages or lead lynch mobs] she was not a woman ‘in the true sense of the word’ but an exception, an aberration, a masculine rather than a feminine participant.”<sup>22</sup> In this study, I show how women moved beyond the feminine sphere of social advocacy to the male spheres of formal politics and business.

In 1986, Beverly Beeton’s work, *Women Vote in the West: The Woman Suffrage Movement 1869-1896* was published. Beeton’s work followed and drew from Grimes in its purpose: to explain why the western states achieved suffrage prior to their eastern counterparts, despite the national organizations’ locations in eastern states. She focuses on early victories in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Wyoming, Utah, Colorado and Idaho. Beeton argues that women were enfranchised in the West because of the usefulness of giving women the vote, rather than some radical shift in ideology as to the role women should play in political life. Women in the West were granted suffrage for five main reasons: as a means to advertise a specific area to attract settlers, as a recruitment tool to maintain political party supremacy, as a reaction to the enfranchisement of black men following the Civil War, as a way to recruit support for statehood campaigns, and because the unsettled territories created a safe place for political experimentation.<sup>23</sup> Beeton explains the dichotomy the American public faced in Margaret Caine’s time as they considered Mormon women and their early suffrage victories: “How could what appeared to be the most liberal view of women’s rights—suffrage—and the most enslaving

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<sup>22</sup> Myers, *Westering Women*, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Beverly Beeton, *Women Vote in the West: The Woman Suffrage Movement 1869-1896* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1986), vii.

marital arrangement–polygamy–develop and coexist in the same environment.”<sup>24</sup> This was the dichotomy that Margaret and others would combat with their presentations at national conventions. Beeton also argues that one of the reasons national suffrage suffered no successes between 1896 and 1910 was because the frontier was closed.

By examining the suffrage campaigns in these states, Beeton seeks to answer why it was won first in the West. Throughout her work, Beeton examines the suffrage movement in Utah, Wyoming, Colorado and Idaho, cross-referencing tactics and obstacles unique to each region. She deconstructs the mystery of suffrage in Utah, with its two separate achievements and the unique interaction of polygamy and statehood that alternately threatened and strengthened the suffrage movement there.<sup>25</sup> Beeton’s research relies heavily on personal correspondence, newspaper stories, and some emphasis on both church and legislative records. Beeton is interested in the tactics and people producing a positive suffrage outcome. My work builds on Beeton’s by looking at new individuals involved in the Utah movement: Margaret N. and Margaret A. Caine. I also show how Mormon women used their suffrage to exercise political power in the new state of Utah.

Lillian Schlissel, Vick L. Ruiz and Janice Monk edited *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives* in 1988, a collection of essays that are the product of a 1984 conference of the same title.<sup>26</sup> The compilation by noted historians like Sandra Myers offers introductions and commentaries by the editors and expands from white women of the west to include native and Mexican histories. This work is groundbreaking in its inclusion, and in integrating women’s

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<sup>24</sup> Beeton, *Women Vote in the West*, 23.

<sup>25</sup> Beeton, *Women Vote*, 23 and 47.

<sup>26</sup> Lillian Schlissel, Vicki L. Ruiz and Janice Monk, ed., *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988).

stories across cultures, uniting along gender lines. The editors criticize previous histories in ignoring other cultures and women, and in framing women in secondary roles. They also criticize previous historians' neglect of women's primary histories such as diaries and letters, and these are sources my work accesses to build narratives. Of particular interest to this study are two essays addressing the expansion of women's spheres: Robert Griswold's "Anglo Women and Domestic Ideology in the American West in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries" and "Family on the Western Frontier," by Lilian Schlissel.

Robert Griswold points out the problems with the historical framework with which Western women's histories have been written. He describes a false dichotomy question: Were women committed to a rigid definition of gender roles or not? Instead, Griswold argues for a less rigid examination of the "cult of domesticity" in examining western female lives. He states that much is to be gained from a broader examination: "If ideology is perceived as a cultural system and not as a cult...a more complex picture emerges of western Anglo women who were both brave and timid, resourceful and dependent, aggressive and retiring."<sup>27</sup> Therefore, women's lives aren't to be understood in terms of whether or not they fit into an expected set of responsibilities aligned with the "female sphere," but that the ideology of the time helped them understand their lives, whether they believed they fit in the framework or not. Griswold's understanding of western women and domesticity is interesting in that it allows for women to be their own interpreters of "domesticity" and how it shaped their chosen lives.

Later scholars benefited from the ground-breaking work of Joan Wallach Scott, whose article "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis" was published in 1986.<sup>28</sup> By

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<sup>27</sup> Lilian Schlissel, Vicki L. Ruiz and Janice Monk, ed. *Western Women*, 15.

<sup>28</sup> Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053–75. <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/91.5.1053>.



expanding the academic concept of Gender, Scott opened new areas of historical examination into gender. “One could now focus on the way in which gender influenced the full scope of past human activity, including those areas such as political life in which women had been conspicuously rare.”<sup>29</sup> This shift in women’s history is reflected in the new ways women approached writing suffrage in the West.

The Coalition for Western Women’s History has played a critical role in connecting historians and supporting scholarship of women, gender and sexuality in the American West. Thus, a compilation of the Women’s West Conference of 1983 appeared, edited by Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson. The work was an attempt to capture “pioneering efforts to reexamine the West through women’s eyes.”<sup>30</sup> The editors outline their purpose in asking whether the frontier was a liberating environment for women, and whether traditional roles and values were challenged in the West. Authors strove to utilize new sources that were inclusive of women’s points of view, as well as a multicultural perspective. In their first chapter, Armitage defines the importance of women’s history in the context of the west and seeks to separate women from traditional stereotypes often accepted about western women. Applicable to this research is Kathryn Adam’s chapter on domesticity in the semi-autobiographical works of Laura Ingalls Wilder. She illuminates the level of equality in the marriage of Caroline and Charles, discusses the characterization of Laura’s morality in context of expectations for juvenile feminine behavior, and Mary as a female archetype. Adams illuminates revered feminine qualities of the American west through the examples of Wilder’s individual women. Elizabeth Jameson’s chapter on marriage examines expressions of love and courtship in the epistolary

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<sup>29</sup> Daniel Woolf, *A Concise History of History: Global Historiography from Antiquity to the Present*, (Cambridge: University Press, 2019), 258.

<sup>30</sup> Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jameson, ed. *The Women’s West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).

relationship of Lena Olmstead and Oscar Philips and confirms how gender roles were reinforced through relationship communication. It also questions whether the west really liberated American women. She asks whether men recognized women's contributions and how women participated in community building. Jameson advocates examining more closely the daily, ordinary lives of women to fully understand how power worked in their lives. I expand on this approach in my examination of the lives of three ordinary western women, showing how ordinary women actually shaped the West.

In Glenda Riley's 1988 *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains*, she argues that women's lives in the west were shaped more by gender considerations than by region, as opposed to men's lives. She attributes that difference to the prevalence of female domesticity. Women's lives centered around home and family concerns regardless of place, whereas men's centered around economic production, which differed depending on environment. Women's lives were dominated and limited to domesticity, which restricted them to the private sphere. This meant that they shared experiences. Their day-to-day concerns were similar across geographic borders. One quote from Riley's work is particularly illuminating regarding the social dialogue surrounding female domesticity:

Most women did not find high standards of domesticity to be an insurmountable problem. Such standards were often more ideal than real. Although millions of words were spoken and written extolling the virtues of planned kitchens, professionalized homemaking, and the latest training in the domestic arts, not many women, eastern or western, actually achieved these goals. It is very likely that much of the talking and writing on behalf of domesticity was intended as an antidote to an opposing trend. That is, more and more women were widening their domestic sphere to include additional interests and activities, as well as paid employment."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1988), 72.

Riley argues that women's domesticity wasn't as prevalent as historians have believed, but rather that the national dialogue was a backlash to the already growing trend of women's expansion outside of the domestic sphere.

*So Much to Be Done: Women Settlers on the Mining and Ranching Frontier* added personal narratives to the historic dialogue in 1990. Editors Ruth Moynihan, Susan Armitage and Christiane Fischer Dichamp present the lives of women in the own words from California, the Rocky Mountains, and the Southwest. Themes relating to women as economic contributors and the tension between Eastern morals and role identifiers are explored. The editors once more attempted to add women's narratives into a male-dominated field of western American history.<sup>32</sup>

In 1992, Glenda Riley published a compilation of ten essays that addressed questions at the center of her decades-long research into women's lives in the West. The growth of her outlook from previous work is clear in the expansion of women Riley looked at. That is, her new work was much more multicultural than previous works had been. As a result, Riley places more emphasis in this work on the different experiences of women in the West, and the ways their lives were shaped by differing circumstance. She marks the changes western women underwent as large trends pushed women forward: search for higher education, participation in the market economy, social advocacy movements all swept women from the home in the later part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Riley addresses rural women's lives, and intrinsic in her choice of topic is the message that women's everyday lives mattered in discovering the history of the west.<sup>33</sup>

Beverly Beeton contributed a chapter entitled "How the West Was Won for Woman Suffrage" to the volume *One Woman, One Vote*, edited by Marjorie Spruill Wheeler and

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<sup>32</sup> Ruth B. Moynihan, Susan Armitage and Christiane Fischer Dichamp, ed. *So Much to Be Done: Women Settlers on the Mining and Ranching Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

<sup>33</sup> Glenda Riley. *A Place to Grow: Women in the American West*. (Arlington Heights: Harlan Davidson, 1992), 248.

published in 1995. In this work, Beeton continues her examination of the reasons for Western suffrage's success prior to national or Eastern and Southern passage. Though Beeton believes some men did support suffrage on ideological grounds, more importantly, western politicians recognized the expediency of women's involvement in politics prior to their eastern counterparts.<sup>34</sup> Beeton also notes that the territories were undergoing a fluid political situation and questions of political participation were being raised and debated as a matter of necessity. Therefore, eastern organizers viewed the western territories as the ideal testing ground for new definitions of citizenship.<sup>35</sup> In the chapter, Beeton pays particular attention to the peculiarities of the Mormon woman suffrage argument, discussing the intricacies of effects of Mormon woman enfranchisement, and the ways Congress worked to repeal enfranchisement once Mormon women voted to uphold polygamy. Beeton's research on Mormon women's enfranchisement lays the groundwork for my own study of the Caine women and their work with the Utah Suffrage Association.

The Coalition for Western Women's History produced a second anthology in 1997. Building on their earlier work, Susan Armitage and Elizabeth Jamison worked to expand history to become more inclusive of women and ethnic minorities. Recognizing the complications of trying to tell so many perspectives, they advocate moving beyond a linear timeline to better illustrative the confluence of experiences of a great variety of people who made their homes in the west.<sup>36</sup> To add to the history, historians in *Writing the Range* move beyond the earliest years of settlement when women were largely isolated to later years of community building when

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<sup>34</sup> Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, ed., *One Woman, One Vote*. Troutdale: NewSage Press, 1995).

<sup>35</sup> Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, ed., *One Woman, One Vote*. Troutdale: NewSage Press, 1995), 101.

<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage, ed. *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998) 5.

women organized to create social structures. This anthology's major contribution to the field was to suggest a new framework for inclusive history, giving rise to a broader base of historical researchers and their stories.

In 2001, Holly J. McCammon and Karen E. Campbell collaborated to write a history of suffrage specific to the American West. Their work chronicles the movement from 1866-1919 and demonstrates that by the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment granting universal suffrage, thirteen western states already allowed women to vote, while only two eastern states had granted woman suffrage.<sup>37</sup> McCammon and Campbell therefore address the question of why western states were more likely than eastern and southern states to grant women suffrage. They track previous historians' explanations that women as guardians of American and puritan virtue needed the vote in order to spread morality and civilization into the "Wild West."<sup>38</sup> They devote much of the article to deconstructing previous historians' explanations of western universal suffrage as the "women for morality" argument. McCammon and Campbell argue instead that "gendered and political opportunities worked together with the ways in which the suffragists mobilized to convince male lawmakers and male electorates to extend democracy to women."<sup>39</sup> Rather than arguing that women had a "right" to vote, these advocates argued that women's assigned "domestic" and "moral" sphere necessitated their vote in order to capably guard national virtue, avoiding a challenge to widely-held assumptions of male-female roles. This argument appealed directly to Western voters and politicians, whose societies were rife with "ills" that needed addressing.

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<sup>37</sup> Holly J. McCammon and Karen E. Campbell, "Winning the Vote in the West: The Political Successes of the Women's Suffrage Movements, 1866-1919," *Gender and Society* 15, no. 1 (February 2001), 5-82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124301015001004>.

<sup>38</sup> McCammon and Campbell, "Winning the Vote," 57.

<sup>39</sup> McCammon and Campbell, "Winning the Vote," 57.

Sandra K. Schakel's 2003 compiled *Western Women's Lives* continues to expand the topic of research in western women's history by including multicultural topics and immigrant groups. Sherry L. Smith addresses women's landholding, particularly in relation to women homesteading. She describes how married women understood their role as homesteaders: "They saw themselves in partnership with their husbands and believed that outside farm work...demonstrated their importance to the family economy."<sup>40</sup> Schakel's work shows again how white women viewed their value in a rural economy dependent on family labor for survival. As all of the women in this study were single, Smith's description of women as contributors to economy is particularly important.

Rebecca Mead's 2004 *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* argues that the success of the movement was due to "unsettled regional politics, the complex nature of western race relations, broad alliances between suffragists and farmer-laborer-progressive reformers, and sophisticated activism by western women."<sup>41</sup> Mead includes problematic patterns of racism in the movement and shows how a second wave of suffragists successfully used modern tactics and changed the narrative to deemphasize prohibition in order to gain strength in urban areas. The fluidity of western political construction, she argues, made it a seedbed for constitutional conversations, with an open public dialogue arguing the basic points of political construction and participation, in contrast to the long-settled political establishments of the eastern states.

In 2008, Laura E. Woodworth-Ney contributed a volume to the "Cultures in the American West" series entitled *Women in the American West*. This book is an attempt to write

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<sup>40</sup> Sandra K. Schackel, ed., *Western Women's Lives: Continuity and Change in the Twentieth Century*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 2003), 189.

<sup>41</sup> Rebecca Mead, *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 2.

native American, Black and Latinx women into the story of women shaping the exploration and settlement of the west. She also writes about the complicated power dynamics that influenced the discussion of “spheres” in the gender dynamics of American families:

Women used the ideas of separate spheres and domesticity to establish some civic and public power, at least in matters that threatened the democratic values of the nation...Women active in reform organizations tended to be from white, middle-class, Protestant backgrounds...If the nation was a home protected by female domesticity, then women could acquire a role in the expansion of the nation. When expanding the national home...it would be the woman’s role to domesticate them.<sup>42</sup>

This work describes women’s leverage of their positions as moral guardians to cling to some form of power in a shifting economy.

In *Playing House in the American West*, Cathryn Halverson describes the way Western women express and understand themselves through the lens of domesticity. Because homemaking and home life dominates their existence, these women express value, virtue, authenticity and individuality through the ways in which they experience domesticity. With a new source for evaluation, Halverson examines how women understand themselves through their own literary writings across over a hundred years of settlement, existence and exploration. Halverson writes: “Making a case for their difference from not only the westerners who surround them but also the easterners to whom they direct their texts, these authors recruit and unorthodox domestic to present location and selfhood alike as far from the norm.”<sup>43</sup> Using women’s writings, including published diaries and letters, Halverson seeks to understand how western women understood their place and impact in a newly formed social structure. The value of her work is in her departure from valuation – these women writers describing themselves are neither “virtuous”

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<sup>42</sup> Laura E. Woodworth-Ney, *Women in the American West* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 108.

<sup>43</sup> Cathryn Halverson, *Playing House in the American West* (University of Alabama Press, 2013).

or “wicked,” according to their ability to live up to domestic standards. They are simply complex women writing of life as they experienced it in a difficult and male-oriented society.

Throughout the late 2010s, Farina King has written on historical issues relating to the intersection of Native American and Mormon identity for women. King’s scholarship is new in describing the Indian boarding schools, Navajo healing, and Mormon issues, beginning to examine what it meant to be Navajo, Mormon and female in the American West. King examines historical issues from a Native perspective rather than a European perspective, and she contextualizes Native experiences from the background of Native history.<sup>44</sup>

Sunu Kodumthara’s 2020 work focuses on the ways the success of the suffrage movement in the west impacted and mobilized a national anti-suffrage movement among women. Anti-suffragists who had experienced voting personally in Colorado and California vocally advocated against national suffrage, arguing that their experiences were “silly” or “detracting” and claiming that they voted only because the vote had been “thrust upon them” and that to abdicate the responsibility of the ballot now would be anti-American.<sup>45</sup> These women in the West feared immoral women casting votes, pulling women out of their homes into the public arena, and overall contributing to the decay of morality in the United States. Western women who unenthusiastically entered the political scene voted in representatives to demonstrate their protest, such as Alice Robertson, congresswoman of Oklahoma, who viewed her role as the

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<sup>44</sup> Examples of Farina King’s scholarship include “Ina Mae Ance and a Crownpoint Indian Boarding School Family,” *Journal of the West* 59, no. 3 (Summer 2020): 3-10; “Aloha in Diné Bikéyah: Mormon Hawaiians and Navajos, 1949 to 1990,” in *Essays on American Indian and Mormon History* edited by P. Jane Hafen and Brenden W. Rensink (University of Utah Press, 2019); “Indigenizing Mormonisms,” *Mormon Studies Review* 6 (2019): 1-16; and *The Earth Memory Compass: Diné Landscapes and Education in the Twentieth Century*, University Press of Kansas (October 2018).

<sup>45</sup> Sunu Kodumthara, “‘The Right of Suffrage Has Been Thrust on Me:’ The Reluctant Suffragists of the American West,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 202, no. 19, (2020), 607. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781420000341>.



guardian of American virtue in the political arena of the U.S. Congress.<sup>46</sup> Kodumthara draws mainly from the writings and speeches of the anti-suffragists, an enigmatic group of women who argued against women's political involvement by becoming involved politically.

In 2020, Cathleen Cahill published *Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement*. Rather than argue that minority women added power to the movement, Cahill describes how the addition of women of color changed its reach and influence.<sup>47</sup> She shows that the addition of capital, labor, and influence of these groups, added to their extensive experience with activism stemming from their discriminated status gave invaluable force to the white women already organizing. Cahill rightly points out that suffrage was an issue upon which women of many races could agree, and though there were obstacles to unifying, many found ways to work together on this important project. Cahill uses the stories of minority women to illuminate the intersection of race and gender in the suffrage movement, and to bring to light the complexities in which suffragists campaigned.

Perhaps the central thesis of the book is actually best articulated by one of the books' women focuses, Mabel Lee. Lee was a Chinese immigrant, member of the Chinatown community in New York City and a well-educated thinker and speaker on behalf of woman suffrage and Chinese inclusion. In a suffrage meeting in 1912, Lee encapsulated the book's central premises that intersectionality made minority women think differently about suffrage: "For Chinese women, suffrage was important, and they were clearly in support of it, but they also recognized that unlike their white sisters, the political arena was not the only site from

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<sup>46</sup> Kodumthara, "The Right of Suffrage," 614.

<sup>47</sup> Cathleen D. Cahill, *Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020.

which they were excluded, nor was their exclusion solely on the basis of their sex.”<sup>48</sup> The same could be said of the Native, African American and Mexican-American women Cahill highlights. For minority women, many groups enjoyed more power in their native societies than was offered to them by white America. For example, many Native societies organized matrilineally, and Hawaiian women shared political power before Queen Lili’uokalani was dethroned by white planters.<sup>49</sup> Cahill explains the nuanced power shifts that combined gender and race-based power structures in changing America in the years preceding woman suffrage. Cahill interweaves stories of individual minority women, including Marie Louise Bottineau Baldwin (Chippewa) who became the first Native American woman lawyer and influenced both Native rights and suffrage causes. Hispana Nina Otero-Warren, a divorcé who kept her married and Anglo last name for its clear advantages, advocated for Spanish language inclusion in New Mexico.<sup>50</sup> Motivations differed for minority groups, such as Carrie William Clifford’s argument that Black women needed the right to vote to defend their children from “death, degradation and destruction,” clearly suffered at the hands of racist white oppressors.<sup>51</sup> Cahill even describes “Dawn Mist,” a fictional Native American princess described to be part of the suffrage parade in 1913, but really a marketing production.<sup>52</sup> These women and others chronicled by Cahill demonstrate the nuances of women with varying world-views, experiences, and complicated problems trying to work together on their one commonality: an indignance at their exclusion from American political power. In addition to suffering as disenfranchised women, these minorities fought discrimination economically and socially as well. For the first time, Cahill

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<sup>48</sup> Cahill, *Recasting the Vote*, 32.

<sup>49</sup> Cahill, *Recasting the Vote*, 43.

<sup>50</sup> Cahill, *Recasting the Vote*, 54.

<sup>51</sup> Cahill, *Recasting the Vote*, 57.

<sup>52</sup> Cahill, *Recasting the Vote*, 71.

suggests that the extension of white supremacy was entangled with the issue of women's suffrage.

This assertion is furthered by Jennifer Helton in *Montana: The Magazine of Western History*. Helton chronicles the suffrage movement in the West with its three waves of success in Wyoming and Utah during Reconstruction, again in Wyoming and Utah as the state included suffrage in state constitutions, and then in Washington, California, Kansas, Arizona, Alaska, Oregon, Montana and Nevada from 1910 to 1914. Speaking of the Montana movement, Helton describes how white suffragists used racist arguments, "arguing that white women were more qualified for the franchise than immigrants, Black men, and uneducated poor white Americans."<sup>53</sup> In this same issue, Andrea Radke-Moss explains that in Wyoming, "Democrats' support for women's suffrage revealed their hopes of attracting more white voters into the territory in order to resist Black political equality."<sup>54</sup> Radke-Moss also describes how Mormon polygamy affected public acknowledgment of Utah's woman suffrage movement, as national interests in ending polygamy kept citizens from acknowledging anything the Mormons did in the name of progressivism. While tracking the dispute between Wyoming and Utah over which state's women actually cast the first ballot, Radke-Moss gives updated reports of why these questions continue to matter to Western women today.

Scholarship regarding women's involvement in the west has undergone several transitions. Early researchers laid the groundwork for feminist approaches to the topic, including women in the narratives. They began to write about women, including their stories. They also

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<sup>53</sup> Jennifer Helton, "The Desire for That Measure of Justice: Consciousness, Political Expediency, and the Rise of Women's Suffrage in Montana and the West, 1869-1920," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 71, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 46.

<sup>54</sup> Andrea Radke-Moss, "Some Light on an Old Topic: Uncovering the First Woman to Vote Dispute Between Wyoming and Utah," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 71, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 63.

reflected on women's power and framed suffrage and even survival as a "struggle." These female writers brought up new characters and revealed women as the drivers of the movement, questioning what women's roles were in westward expansion and the building of social structures there. Later authors built on the earliest feminist writings, but searched new sources including literature, diaries and oral histories to find female voices in a particularly male-dominated arena. The purpose of these histories was to guide women in a new push for equality in the form of the Equal Rights Amendment as they participated in "second-wave" feminism. Later scholars revealed new causal factors in the push for women's rights, and wrote outsiders back into the narrative. They expanded the story of women and suffrage in the American West to include Black, Native and Latinx populations.

With all that has been written about women in the west, questions remain. It's unclear how much autonomy, power and influence women exercised in western communities. How did women participate in and change economic systems? How did women shape political constructs in a new land that did not yet have European-style government and order? What was the role in women's advocacy and club work in teaching women to organize and lobby that laid the groundwork for woman suffrage? Most importantly, how did the lives of ordinary, rural women influence the shaping of the American West? How important was suffrage to these women and how much power did they wield in shaping their new communities? If women were participants outside the domestic sphere, why aren't historical writings on women in the West full of those stories? Through biographical sketching in the lives of three western women in Oklahoma, Idaho and Utah, these questions receive further illumination in this study.

## Chapter 2

“A Wonderful Record for Any Businessman:” The Financial Power of Leah Gorton

As an American woman living in the late 1800s, Leah Gorton’s power extended from the maternal guardianship of her home and children to her maternal guardianship of her community. Her role as a white middle-class woman was clear; she should espouse causes of domestic and moral concern and wield her influence toward community improvement, and Leah was involved in those endeavors. As the mother of eleven children, she certainly exercised maternal influence in her home. As a pillar of the Presbyterian community, she contributed monetarily and socially to the spiritual welfare of her congregation. And in her many leadership roles and associations in community organizing, Leah represented causes of moral concern and social welfare.

But in addition to her domestic, maternal influence, Leah had an even wider power in her community through her economic role in the growing frontier town. Her business enterprises, both in connection with her husband George, and following his death, prove that Leah’s influence wasn’t confined to the expectations of a nation ruled by the “Cult of Domesticity.” She reached outside the assigned female sphere, sometimes as the lone woman, in building the economic framework of her newborn community. Though she lived outside her husband’s political activities, Leah’s role was to support him. As a former Mormon herself, she must have held opinions, now lost to history, about the anti-Mormon political campaign he waged in partnership with the virulent anti-Mormon Senator Fred T. Dubois.

Leah’s mark on history is passive. Her voice is an echo through letters she received rather than wrote, in popular newspaper articles that described rather than quoted her, and through the stories told mainly of her husband. Leah is a shadow of what late 1800s community activism looked like. However, through an examination of these sources, we see that Leah exercised

authority and influence through her religious and family choices, her social activism, and her broad economic holdings. In these ways, Leah acted in ways both typically female and surprisingly male for a turn-of-the-century white middle-class woman. Leah's activities in the religious, social, political and financial sectors of her Idaho community demonstrate that she moved outside her assigned place to influence the shaping of her western environment.

### **Soda Springs: the crossroads of Western religions**

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, Soda Springs, Idaho was a confluence of cultural influences. As a resting place along the much-traveled Oregon Trail, Soda Springs offered mineral springs and refreshment of various kinds to travelers. Early trappers and missionaries frequented the valley in the 1840s and 1850s and following the Civil War, the area filled with emigrants. Parties headed to California, Oregon, and Utah all passed through the supply area. Prior to any white settlement, it was inhabited by the Shoshone Indians, with whom white settlers and the U.S. Government maintained a precarious relationship of mutual tolerance. This relationship resulted in the establishment of the military Camp Connor stationed in Soda Springs to protect government interests including emigrants and the mail route. The next influx of white settlement came with the Morrisites, a Mormon offshoot group that rejected then-prophet Brigham Young. A violent confrontation between the Mormons and Morrisites followed and resulted in the armed escort by the army under Brigadier General Patrick Edward Connor. Connor's expedition with 160 Morrisites to the site of Soda Springs resulted in the establishment of the Morrisite community.<sup>55</sup> Religion was a focal center for dialogue, with Mormons, former Mormons, and Presbyterians establishing religious roots in the community. With the Shoshone nearly annihilated by Connor and his men, by 1873, a roughly equal number of Morrisites and

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<sup>55</sup> Ellen Carney, *Historic Soda Springs: Oasis on the Oregon Trail*, Traildust Publishing Company, 85.

Mormons co-existed in the area. In 1880, the railroad was laid through Soda Springs.<sup>56</sup> When the Morrisite settlement began to dwindle, Brigham Young was poised to occupy the abandoned lands. In 1870, the “upper town” land was purchased by the Mormon church, laying the groundwork for a Mormon settlement.

The town grew up as a ranching center, transportation hub, and supply post for the surrounding gold and salt mines. The Oneida Salt Works was established in 1866, and by 1878, George W. Gorton was the superintendent of the project. Gold was discovered in 1870 at Mt. Pigsah, about 45 miles north of the town.<sup>57</sup> Families fought a harsh environment to create social systems and a political structure. Into this mixture of power structures, George and Leah Gorton raised a family, established businesses and grew family wealth. They also helped to found religious communities and provided for the social backdrop of Soda Springs. Together with George, and then independently following his death, Leah exercised power in her booming community. Using both socially accepted female and traditionally male forms of influence, Leah demonstrated ways for Western women to access power in southeastern Idaho.

### **Traditional Western wife and mother**

Leah Mariah Waylett was born in 1855 in Salt Lake City to Mormon parents, the first child of a young couple who met and married on the journey to America from their native Wales. As early converts to the church, the Wayletts followed Brigham Young’s planned exodus from the United States to the unsettled west, in what would eventually become Utah. Following several movements to establish Mormon settlements, the Wayletts relocated to the Mormon community of Malad City, Idaho, where Leah met and married George Washington Gorton, a

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<sup>56</sup> Carney, *Historic Soda Springs*, 18.

<sup>57</sup> Carney, *Historic Soda Springs*, 162.

miner and later superintendent of the Oneida Salt Works on November 3, 1877.<sup>58</sup> By August 1878, the couple was settled independently in Soda Springs and welcoming their first child, Henry Clay. Between 1878 and 1895, George and Leah became parents of eleven children, five of whom survived to adulthood. During this time, The Gorton family embarked in various business enterprises. The mainstay of the Gorton's economic security as well as the main contributor to their influence was the Gorton Supply and Mercantile Company, which was housed in two locations. The Gorton's main enterprise was established in the town of Soda Springs, while a satellite supply store was maintained to stock the mining establishments in the nearby mountains. The Gortons often took gold dust in payment from the miners.<sup>59</sup> George died in 1899, leaving Leah with six boys and an economic empire to manage. Leah continued to expand the family business holdings and her social influence until her own death in 1932.

George held several elected county offices during his life, including County Commissioner, Treasurer and assessor.<sup>60</sup> In 1902, their son Henry was elected County Treasurer.<sup>61</sup> He also served as a deputy U.S. Marshall, and was the force behind the incorporation of Soda Springs as a village in May 18, 1896.<sup>62</sup> The Gorton family was thus a political force in their section of southeastern Idaho, especially when George teamed up with Senator Fred T. Dubois in his disenfranchisement campaign against the Idaho Mormons.

In the fluidity of power that existed in late nineteenth century Idaho, Leah exercised power and influence over her family and community. At the time of her marriage, American social expectations dictated that Leah, a middle-class white wife, preserve her domestic sphere.

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<sup>58</sup> A.W. Bowen and Company. *Progressive Men of Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Fremont and Oneida Counties of Idaho*. Chicago: A.W. Bowen and Company, 1904. 175.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from Henry to George W. Gorton, July 27, 1897.

<sup>60</sup> Bowen, *Progressive Men*, 171.

<sup>61</sup> Bowen, *Progressive Men*, 172.

<sup>62</sup> Carney, *Historic Soda Springs*, 253.



In this role, she would have been expected to raise the children, care for the home, and potentially meet socially with other women to organize for relief or moral efforts such as church-building or advocating for community needs. And Leah certainly did these things. But evidence shows that Leah also exercised power in her community in additional ways that moved her outside the domestic sphere, in some ways “domesticating” her community but in other ways, simply building it economically.

### **Finding Religious Voice Outside of and Against Mormonism**

Soda Springs was a community that stood at the crossroads of conflicting religious influences. The early influx of religious groups shaped the region, but not all settlers were Morrisites and Mormons. Leah’s religious background provides an interesting lens through which the growing Mormon church’s complicated relationship with its women may be viewed. Though few records tell us exactly what Leah’s relationship with the Mormon religion was like following her marriage, she chose to marry outside the faith, married a man who would campaign enthusiastically against the growing political power of the Mormons in Idaho, and maintained her relationship with her Mormon relatives well into her adult life. Religion and politics were inseparably intertwined in Leah’s adult life.

To understand Leah’s interactions with the Mormon church, her parents’ involvement with the church must be investigated. William H. Waylett and Sarah Williams were both early converts to the Mormon church in Preston, England, and were amongst the first there to follow Brigham Young’s call for its members to gather to Zion, the “promised land” for church members in Salt Lake City. When asked by Brigham Young, the Wayletts went north to Brigham City and then on to Malad, Idaho to establish a Mormon presence there.<sup>63</sup> It was in Malad that

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<sup>63</sup> Lawrence G. Coates, Peter G. Boag, Ronald L. Hatzenbuehler and Merwin R. Swanson. “The Mormon Settlement of Southeastern Idaho, 1845-1900.” *Journal of Mormon History* 20, no. 2 (Fall 1994), 52.

Leah and George's paths came together as George worked as superintendent of the salt works near Malad. When the two married and moved to Soda Springs, they were part of the growing non-Mormon community known as "Lower Town."

By the time a Presbyterian congregation was organized in 1884, Leah and George were on the forefront of organizing the non-Mormon Soda Springs religious community. Missionary R.P. Boyd founded the First Presbyterian Church in Soda Springs in 1892. Building construction began in 1895, and in 1906, Leah Gorton donated \$25 to pay off the remaining building debt on behalf of the members.<sup>64</sup> Leah's effort combined with about twenty other town citizens, but aside from the Ladies' Aid Society's combined forty-one dollar contribution, Leah's was the highest alongside three other, notably male, church members.<sup>65</sup> Here we see how Leah's economic and religious influence combined to shape the town's social structure, providing the physical building and worship framework to provide social connections and community for the non-Mormons in town.

George and Leah's political life was defined by their religious outlook. Over time, George Gorton held the offices of United States Marshal, County Commissioner, County Treasurer and Assessor, school trustee, and in 1888, Representative in the State Legislature.<sup>66</sup> George's politics were heavily entangled with those of Fred T. Dubois, the Idaho Senator who built a crusade to disenfranchise the Mormon people in an attempt to curb their growing political power in southeastern Idaho. Because Gorton and Dubois saw Mormon block voting as an

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<sup>64</sup> Receipt, Leah Gorton to apply to indebtedness on Presbyterian Church and Manse, September 25, 1906.

<sup>65</sup> Receipt, Leah Gorton to apply to indebtedness on Presbyterian Church and Manse, September 25, 1906.

<sup>66</sup> Faunda Bybee, *Now and Then: A Picture Book of Caribou County, Idaho*. Faunda R. Bybee, 1977. 113.

impediment to the future they envisioned for Idaho, they worked on a grassroots level canvassing the state and advocating against Mormon political rights.<sup>67</sup>

Her husband's political antagonism toward the religion of Leah's family must have caused at least instability in Leah's outlook on Mormonism. As a white, middle-class woman, Leah would have had little actual political power in her community. But records show that George and Leah attended public political events together. They also show a growing correspondence between Leah and her Mormon sister Mabel in Malad, never mentioning politics. Whatever George's campaign against the Mormons, it doesn't seem to have had an impact on Leah's relationship with her Mormon relatives, nor did it prevent Leah from hiring her Mormon sister to work in the store, notably after George's death.

### **Social Advocate and Women's Club Leader**

As was typical for middle-class women in the United States at this time, Leah was active in the social organizations and work of her community. Perhaps atypical was the extent of her involvement and the numerous leadership positions she held. Clearly, Leah was both an interested party in her community's social organization and causes, and a woman respected for her ability and resources to organize and create change. Interestingly, Leah is listed on the roles of at least ten social organizations through community publications and contemporary newspapers, but none of those organizations had political ties or goals. Aside from her formal organization participation, Leah, in times in partnership with George, also worked to organize their community informally and through charitable donations. In typically female ways, Leah exercised authority as she pursued maternal or moral causes in keeping with late 19<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>67</sup> Merle W. Wells, "The Idaho Anti-Mormon Test Oath, 1884-1892," *Pacific Historical Review* 24, no. 3 (August 1955), 235-252.

social expectations. In addition, her leadership and organization positioned her to contribute and build community in ways outside of normal feminine participation in its formality and autonomy.

George and Leah were early settlers in Soda Springs, and as such, their arrival predated formalized education, social and political structures. As previously mentioned, religious organizations had begun to organize in town, but George and Leah also participated in creating the framework for Soda Springs social programs and structures. The Gortons were both heavily involved in the establishment of the local school district. The one-room schoolhouse constructed in 1882 through the raising of local funds remained in use until 1900. The founding trustees of the school included eight men and Leah Gorton.<sup>68</sup> A bell presented to the district in 1891 by “the ladies of Soda Springs” was likely orchestrated by Leah or involved her efforts.<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps Leah’s strongest tie to formal community social work and organization was through the Rebekah Assembly. This club was a companion women’s organization to the International Order of Odd Fellows, of which her husband George was an active member. The Soda Springs chapter of the IOOF was organized in Soda Springs in 1893.<sup>70</sup> The Rebekahs were organized in Soda Springs in 1899, the year of George’s death. Leah was the charter Noble Grand. It is note-worthy that Leah Gorton was the charter member of the Leah Rebekah Lodge, which carried her name, marking the community’s respect for her organizing efforts. The timing of the group’s founding is remarkable, coming in the year of George’s death when Leah was left with the family’s business interests and children to manage. Clearly, Leah functioned under heavy burdens of family and community responsibility.

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<sup>68</sup> Carney, *Historic Soda Springs*, 132.

<sup>69</sup> Carney, *Historic Soda Springs*, 131.

<sup>70</sup> Faunda R. Bybee, *Now and Then*, 47.

The purposes of the Rebekah Lodge were to “visit and to care for the sick; to relieve the distressed; to bury the dead; and in every way to assist their own members.”<sup>71</sup> The Rebekahs were white women over the age of 18, including single and divorced women.<sup>72</sup> The Leah lodge met the first and third Wednesday of each month, and the Noble Grand had the power to call special meetings, preside over all meetings, enforce the rules of the organization, give the deciding vote on equal votes, and appoint officers and committees. These were organizational responsibilities, but the Noble Grand had further social duties: to visit members when they were sick, to visit the families of deceased members, and to assist in funeral services. The Rebekahs held fundraisers to support the needy but did not pay a weekly benefit.<sup>73</sup> Through this organization, Leah exercised the power of organizing community efforts on behalf of individuals and families.

An 1897 letter from the lodge at nearby Montpelier, Idaho implored Leah to come down to meet with the club: “Can’t you come for our next meeting on Friday morning...it is well worth all the trouble.” The letter mentions an examination, a basket picnic, and a parade, all social engagements and probably fundraising efforts by the lodge.<sup>74</sup> Mrs. Eastman, a fellow Lodge member, sent word to Leah while out of town with George that she was “lost” at Lodge without Leah there.<sup>75</sup> A short four months after George’s death, Leah was answering questions about the Rebekah Lodge to a Mrs. Underwood of Montpelier, Idaho.<sup>76</sup> Clearly, Leah was

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<sup>71</sup> “Constitution of Rebekah Lodges IOOF of Idaho,” Syms-York Co., Boise, pg. 3.

<sup>72</sup> “Constitution,” pg. 12.

<sup>73</sup> “Constitution,” pg. 6.

<sup>74</sup> Letter to Leah Maria Gorton, June 7, 1897.

<sup>75</sup> Letter from Mabel Waylett to Leah Maria Gorton, July 30, 1897.

<sup>76</sup> Letter from Mrs. Underwood to Leah Maria Gorton, April 21, 1899.

focused on the social work and was quick to return to it after mourning her husband's death. In October 1917, she attended the Rebekah Assembly for the state as the chapter delegate.<sup>77</sup>

Leah's club work continued for decades. In September 1917, she was one of the founding members and the first president of the Soda Springs chapter of the American War Mothers.<sup>78</sup> In 1923, she was still active in leadership, attending a district convention in Montpelier as one of three Soda Springs delegates and still listed as President.<sup>79</sup> She worked on behalf of the Woman's Benefit Association and American Legion Auxiliary.<sup>80</sup> She was the First Oracle of the Royal Neighbors of America, Camp #9294 organized on March 8, 1923. The October 17, 1912 *Chieftain* identifies Leah Gorton as the head of the Household department at the Annual Farmers Fair, representing the community's household goods production.<sup>81</sup> Leah was active in the American Red Cross during World War I, receiving finished goods from chapter members at her store for shipment to national headquarters.<sup>82</sup> Her club work was notably civic and charitable in focus, reflecting Leah's commitment to domestic and moral causes. At the end of her life, Leah was still leading several social aid and improvement societies. In 1929, her Women's Benefit Association hosted a turkey supper and in 1930, Leah was still hosting the Ladies' Aid Society in her own home.<sup>83</sup> Through her club work, Leah honed her skills in organizing people and resources and wielded social power over her growing frontier community.

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<sup>77</sup> "Local News," *Soda Springs Chieftain*, October 18, 1917.

<sup>78</sup> American War Mothers Membership Card, Caribou County, March 31, 1929 and January 1, 1930.

<sup>79</sup> "Successful Convention of District War Mothers Held in Montpelier," *Montpelier Bear Lake County News*, August 25, 1923.

<sup>80</sup> Carney, *Historic Soda Springs*, 253.

<sup>81</sup> "Fourth Annual Farmers Fair a Great Big Success." *Soda Springs Chieftain*, October 17, 1912.

<sup>82</sup> "Notice to Red Cross," *Soda Springs Chieftain*, January 24, 1918.

<sup>83</sup> "W.B.A. Has Turkey Supper," *Soda Springs Chieftain*, January 3, 1929; "Members of Ladies' Aid Hold Meeting." *Soda Springs Chieftain*, November 20, 1930 pg. 1.

In addition to organizing for education and welfare, Leah facilitated connections within her community. Leah's community organizing skills were recognized by that community, and she was often called upon to lead events. In April 1918, when local doctor Ellis Kackley, joined the US military to serve in World War I, Leah headed a committee to put on a community reception that numbered 350 citizens to honor the doctor before his departure.<sup>84</sup>

The Gortons also exercised significant social influence through their charitable donations, including one sizable bequest that came on the heels of personal tragedy. As was typical for western families, the Gortons experienced firsthand the elevated childhood mortality rate. Only five of the eleven Gorton children lived to age eighteen, and in 1890, the four Gorton daughters all died within two weeks of each other in a diphtheria epidemic. The Gortons had lost baby Georgie in 1885, and Leah refused to bury the rest of their daughters in the old Pioneer Cemetery with its elevated water table. Instead, George and Leah donated a parcel of land to the town for the new Fairview Cemetery, where Leah stated she wanted a park for "ladies to sit and meditate or to have a much needed rest."<sup>85</sup> With their donation of the land in 1890, the Gortons reaffirmed their commitment to the town, influencing even the locations for the residents' buried dead.

Through her community organizing efforts on behalf of education, religion and social work, Leah created the foundations of a western community built on traditional Christian American principles of self-sufficiency, charity, and enterprise.

### **"A Wonderful Record for Any Business Man"**

The Gortons' family mercantile enterprise began in 1889 with the purchase of Hezekiah Moore and Co. The supply store also acted as a wholesale operation and distributor. Perhaps the genius behind the Gorton family enterprises was the awareness of opportunities for expansion.

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<sup>84</sup> Bybee, *Now and Then*, 53.

<sup>85</sup> Carney, *Historic Soda Springs*, 253.

Over George's lifetime, additional holdings were procured that included a gold claim, a saloon and a sheep shearing plant. In 1885, George published a notice of location along with two other parties for 40 acres of mining ground at the mouth of Eagle Creek in the Carriboo Mountains.<sup>86</sup> The Gortons also held a ranch ten miles north of town.<sup>87</sup> George completed a purchase of the Louie Ardner Saloon, although it is unclear whether the saloon continued to operate as such or was remodeled into the store.<sup>88</sup> In 1896, George went into partnership with Frank Merrill on a steam sheep-shearing plant, the first in the United States. The mechanization of shearing enabled the sheep ranchers in the area to get wool to dealers within a month. By 1905, the sheep enterprise in the area had grown to 200,000 head of livestock.<sup>89</sup> The steam plant operated until 1915. These acquisitions all predate George's death in 1899.

George was the founder and main operator of the Gorton enterprises during his lifetime. But his political career and activism must have taken him from home often, perhaps compelling Leah's involvement. In order to surmise how Leah operated economically, several stages of her life need to be examined more closely. During George's life, in the settling of his financial affairs, and in the years that followed George's death until Leah's own retirement from business, Leah exerted economic influence in the region in a variety of ways.

It is somewhat unclear how involved Leah was in the Gorton supply operation prior to George's death. As George expanded the business, was Leah an active partner, a store clerk, or a business manager? Or was her attention more typically focused on raising her eleven children and working in her community? Though it is difficult to surmise the level of Leah's involvement in the absence of her personal correspondence, it seems clear that Leah was involved enough to

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<sup>86</sup> Notice of Location, October 1, 1885. Filed for record, October 22, 1885, Bingham County.

<sup>87</sup> Carney, *Historic Soda Springs*, 253.

<sup>88</sup> Bybee, *Now and Then*, pg. 113.

<sup>89</sup> Carney, *Historic Soda Springs*, 199.



successfully take over the family enterprise upon George's death. While George convalesced in California toward the end of his life, Leah would occasionally accompany him, and letters addressed to George from their oldest son Henry, aged nineteen, went back and forth from Idaho regarding the operation of the supply store. Henry notes in letters to his father that his responsibilities include bookkeeping, even running a miner down for owed money and discovering the miner was hiding gold dust that could be taken in payment.<sup>90</sup> By August 1897, two years prior to George's death, Henry was signing his letters, "General Manager," connoting that his role in the business didn't change with the death of his father.<sup>91</sup> It was Leah who took George's place as owner, operator and proprietor.

Following George's death, Leah was heavily involved in the settling of his business affairs. A letter from Turner and Jay, makers of "hats, caps, gloves and straw goods" dated February 3, 1899 is addressed to Mrs. Leah Gorton and acknowledges her letter of January 26 announcing her husband's death. From context, it is clear that the letter comes from business suppliers of George's. They indicate that Leah has inquired regarding the amount due the supplier and also requesting that she continue to work with them moving forward.<sup>92</sup> Additionally, a letter from Cosgriff Brothers Merchandise addressed to Leah on March 6 of the same year responds to an inquiry of hers into the sale of the mercantile company, including real estate.<sup>93</sup> Though Leah did not sell the property at this time, it was clear she was making inquiries into selling off her husband's business holdings.

Regardless of her investigation into selling off the family business and properties, it seems clear that Leah was financially solvent even after George's death. On April 27, 1900 and

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<sup>90</sup> Letter from Henry Clay Gorton to George W. Gorton, July 30, 1897.

<sup>91</sup> Letter from Henry Clay Gorton to George W. Gorton, August 15, 1897.

<sup>92</sup> Letter from Turner and Jay to Leah Maria Gorton, February 3, 1899.

<sup>93</sup> Letter from Cosgriff Borthers to Mrs. Leah Gorton, March 6, 1899.

then again on December 10 and 21 of that year, Idaho Senator Ralph Shoup attempted to intervene on Leah's behalf in accessing George's Civil War pension. After offering up evidence on March 29, 1901, and despite Senator Shoup's assistance, Leah's claim was rejected. Shoup cited the reasoning of the ruling party: "Widow not dependent."<sup>94</sup> Obviously, the War Department did not deem Leah as a widow in need of financial assistance.

In need or not, after George's death, Leah managed the growing enterprises as the head of the company, with their son Henry as manager. One of the main concerns of this study was to ascertain with whom the power of the business holdings resided following George's death. One writer in 1904 stated: "The extensive mercantile business with which Mr. [Henry] Gorton is connected is known as Gorton's Wholesale and Retail Supply Store, of which his mother, Mrs. Leah Gorton, is the proprietress."<sup>95</sup> What this power structure means requires further scrutiny. Evidence that Leah was an active manager of the business enterprises exists in the form of new businesses developed, titles she held, newspaper stories and most convincingly, legal paperwork.

First, several Gorton enterprises weren't even established until after George's death. Gorton's Hall was an entertainment center for the town that was completed in 1900, one year after George's death. Sometimes referred to as "Gorton Opera House," advertisements reveal it hosted balls, traveling artists, political speeches and local plays.<sup>96</sup> One advertisement beckons attendees for Frederick B. Collins, "The Human Snake," and another for the Madison Theater Company. It is also clear that after George's death, Leah became an investor in the newspaper. In 1917, the *Soda Springs Chieftain*, the local newspaper listed Leah Gorton as bondholder, the sole

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<sup>94</sup> George Laird Shoup Papers, Box 1, Idaho State Historical Society, Senator Shoup Record of Pension Cases, pg. 109.

<sup>41</sup>Bowen, *Progressive Men*, 171.

<sup>96</sup> Carney, *Historic Soda Springs*, 252.

interest-holder beyond the editor.<sup>97</sup> There is no mention of Henry or any of the other Gorton sons. Leah was such a central businesswoman in the area that in 1904, “Ira Hogan and company incorporated the Gentile Valley and Cattle Co. at the office of Mrs. Leah Gorton in Soda Springs.”<sup>98</sup> As hostess of this meeting, Leah established herself as a player in the major enterprises operating in the county.

Other evidences exist that describe how Leah operated in Gorton enterprises, particularly after George’s death. A note from the business which still lists George W. Gorton as “General Merchant” and dated May 24, 1899, less than five months after his death, is stamped with a paid stamp marked with Leah’s name. The presence of Leah’s name alone on a manufactured “paid” stamp marks her as the payee of debt under the enterprise. Existing letterhead from the store in 1908 reads: “Leah Gorton, Proprietress; H. C. Gorton, Manager.” Though this defining of roles certainly doesn’t tell us exactly how much power each partner wielded over the practice of the business, it certainly delineates that Leah was in control of the store.

The local *Soda Springs Chieftain* is full of references to Leah and her business enterprises. A 1905/1906 Report of the Clerk of School District No. 6 published in the *Chieftain* in 1906 enumerates the district’s expenses for the school year. Listed among janitor and teacher salaries, furniture purchases, and insurance, is a \$43 charge and a \$32 charge from Leah Gorton for “supplies and freight.” Leah is listed as the vendor, and is the only woman listed besides the female teachers and janitors.<sup>99</sup> In 1929, a public notice appearing in the *Chieftain* reveals another business holding Leah developed after George’s death. The notice states: “Anyone wishing gravel from my gravel pit east of town, please call on me or phone No. 2. Taking gravel without

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<sup>97</sup> *Soda Springs Chieftain*, April 19, 1917.

<sup>98</sup> Bybee, *Now and Then*, 400.

<sup>99</sup> “Report of Clerk of School District No. 6: Statement Showing the Receipts and Disbursements of the District from September 17, 1905, to June 5, 1906.” *Soda Springs Chieftain*, June 7, 1906 pg. 8.

my permission must stop. – Mrs. Leah Gorton.”<sup>100</sup> This notice is a rather assertive claim of property by a woman of the community. The singular ownership “my” connotes that this is Leah’s holding, separate from any of her sons. The local newspaper reports show that Leah was acknowledged by her community as the head of the Gorton family enterprise. In her obituary, the *Chieftain* wrote: “After her husband’s death, in 1889, she conducted his mercantile business 24 years, retiring nine years ago.”<sup>101</sup>

The most compelling newspaper evidence that Leah was an active party in the operation of the Gortons’ financial enterprise is the 1912 article announcing the opening of the Bank of Soda Springs. The article states:

Mrs. Leah Gorton, one of the leading business women of Idaho, was the first customer of the bank to make a deposit. Mrs. Gorton is the head of the large wholesale and retail mercantile operation which bears her name, and in which she has associated as active partners her sons...Mrs. Gorton is also interested in the Gorton Opera House, the active management of which is handled by her oldest son. Mrs. Gorton is also interested in a very productive ranch of large area, managed by her son George W...the commercial success of Mrs. Gorton in the many enterprises with which she is connected would make a wonderful record for any business man.<sup>102</sup>

This article shows that whatever level of active management Leah exercised over the businesses, the perception of her contemporaries was that she ran the empire, rather than her sons.

The probate records grant the most convincing argument regarding Leah’s place within the Gorton business holdings. George’s will was executed in 1897, listing Leah as his executrix in trust. At the time of George’s death in 1899, Leah filed with the probate court a petition to become executrix in trust of George’s estate for ten years. At this filing, the Gorton business holdings were valued at \$24,195.29 and some holdings were enumerated: the supply store and sheep shearing plant. George’s survivors included Leah and five sons: Henry Clay, 21; George

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<sup>100</sup> “Notice” in *Soda Springs Chieftain*, August 15, 1929, pg. 4.

<sup>101</sup> “Our Friend Mrs. Leah Gorton Passed Away,” *Soda Springs Sun*, November 24, 1932.”

<sup>102</sup> “Mrs. Leah Gorton,” *Soda Springs Sun*, September 28, 1916.

Waylett, 12; twins Ralph Shoupe and Rees Dubois, 10; and Jay Philip, 6, who would die in 1906, prior to the new court filings dividing the holdings. In July 1912, Leah and her surviving five sons petitioned the court for distribution of George's estate. At this time, the listed holdings are the Gorton Supply Store as well as shares of telephone stock that had been purchased after the previous filing. In 1912, the estate was now worth \$30,431, an increase of twenty per cent.

The probate record states:

That during the years since the appointment for your petitioner as executrix of this estate, she has been in possession of the same and has managed it to the best of her ability, with the view of maintaining its value and preserving it for herself and her sons aforesaid; that the mercantile business set aside as aforesaid for the support and maintenance of your petitioner and her children has been managed and conducted in the same way as during the lifetime of said decedent.<sup>103</sup>

This shows that Leah was the maintainer of the estate and managed it as she and George had done prior to his death. Leah proved herself an apt business investor and operator, maintaining and expanding the family holdings until her retirement, when the holdings passed to her sons.

## **Conclusion**

In all ways that white women exerted influence in America from 1890-1920, Leah Gorton was emblematic. She was a bastion of virtue, a religious, maternal figure to her family and community. As an organizer of social clubs and social work, Leah perfectly demonstrated a woman's expected place of authority: domestically. However, Leah extended beyond the domestic sphere of home and community virtue to exercise authority in other ways. Her position as a founder of her church and education systems placed her among men as an organizer of a fledgling society. Her economic power was felt by businessmen in her region, and her financial strength impacted the town in donations but also in the trajectory of its economic development.

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<sup>103</sup> Ancestry.com. *Idaho, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1857-1989* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015. Original data: Idaho County, District and Probate Courts.

One especially pertinent demonstration of Leah's impact was her early purchase of telephone stock. Her foresight in facilitating the development of modern communications for her town is an apt demonstration of how Leah created both typically female social change, but also wielded economic influence that impacted Soda Springs for years to come.

### Chapter 3

“That Brave Little Woman:”

Margaret Nightingale, Margaret Ann, and Mormon Women’s Power Spheres

In 1896, as Utah held its first elections as a new state, four women’s names appeared on the ballot for the first time. One of these names belonged to Margaret Caine, whose family name denoted deep Mormon roots from an early Mormon Welsh family. Margaret Caine, the first and only woman to be elected as Salt Lake County auditor, has a name that is echoed through early Utah history, mostly for its affiliation to the prominent John T. Caine. But scholarship has long confused the identity of this Margaret Caine, assuming the auditor and the politician’s wife were one and the same. However, the Margaret Caine who served as auditor was actually Margaret Ann Mitchell Caine, the daughter-in-law of John T. and Margaret Nightingale Caine and widow of their son Alfred. This Margaret’s circumstances, world-view and focus allowed her to rise in influence in Utah through her political career and work on Utah’s fledgling silk industry. In this work, Margaret impacted Utah politically, economically and even environmentally as she wrote, lectured, campaigned and advocate for women, the Democratic party and the production of silk.

In 1890s Utah, four decades after the first Mormon pioneers arrived, the expectation for white middle-class women was that they would build community in a very particular way. The groundwork for settlement had been laid. The first years of struggle for survival, plotting and planning cities, early negotiations with Native tribes, and organization of worship had been completed. Now the immigrants sought to expand and strengthen community through church organizations. The wards, relief societies, retrenchment associations and even mercantile co-ops operated through an established church structure of communication and leadership. Women’s role in this structure was strictly defined, though liberally applied. Mormon women, like other white, Christian, middle-class women of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, bore and raised children, operated

family homesteads, and as their time and energy allowed, contributed to community groups for welfare, advocacy and social development. However, there were other expectations of Mormon women. The Mormon church was not simply an avenue for worship, nor was it merely a social structure for relationship-building. Instead, the Mormon church was an avenue by which community business, social, welfare and even political relationships were forged, patterned and strengthened. Therefore, Mormon women were not simply wives, mothers, and church-goers. They were lecturers, sermonizers, welfare strategists, public affairs officials, education advocates, and social workers. As such, Mormon women moved outside the domestic sphere to an involved and complex socio-religious structure that encompassed most, if not all, of their lives.

### **Two Margarets**

In this environment, Margaret Nightingale Cain was the outlier. A mother of thirteen children, eleven of whom survived to adulthood, Margaret gave herself to more traditional patterns of influence. As one family biographer wrote, “Margaret became the mother of thirteen children, so it can be seen that it took good management to keep things going at home.”<sup>104</sup> Over the course of their sixty-one year marriage, Margaret’s husband John ran the Salt Lake Theater, worked as the Managing Editor of the *Salt Lake Daily Herald*, participated in Utah’s Constitutional Convention, elected as County Recorder, and served as a member of the US Congress. In 1854, he served a mission in the Hawaiian Islands, leaving her home with two young children and no income.<sup>105</sup> Surely, Margaret was a woman of tenacity and energy, and this was directed toward the survival of her family and the support of her husband. Margaret

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<sup>104</sup> Margaret Nightengale Caine Patrick, “Margaret Nightengale Caine,” 2.

<sup>105</sup> “Reunion of Descendants Program,” July 2, 1950, William Caine Patrick Papers, MS 0148, Box 2, Special Collections and Archives, Marriott Library Manuscripts Division, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.



rarely reached out to influence her larger community, but there was one time Margaret was persuaded to serve outside her home, when in 1889 close family friend Emmeline B. Wells convinced her to serve as president of the newly organized Utah Suffrage Association.<sup>106</sup> Margaret's qualification to serve lay in her identity as a non-participant in plural marriage. The national suffrage organization had conveyed its disinterest in being associated in any way with the practice. In the Utah Suffrage Association's first meeting, by-laws were approved which authorized the group's president to call and conduct meetings, and to sign and authorize any writings and meetings of the organization on the topic of suffrage.<sup>107</sup> On January 21, 1889, Margaret and her co-leader Emily Richards reported two hundred enrolled and paid members to the national organization.<sup>108</sup> Margaret had given up the president's seat by May 1891.<sup>109</sup>

In 1892, while residing in Washington, DC, while her husband John served as Territorial Representative to the US Congress, Margaret received word from friend Harriet Taylor Upton home in Salt Lake City that she had been voted Vice-President for the Utah Wimodasis organization. The Wimodasis organization was for wives, mothers, daughters and sisters, and as a typical women's organization during the Women's Club movement, it organized for advocacy and social advancement. Margaret's response reflects her view of her role in her society. Though she was appreciative of the honor and felt "the greatest interest in every movement calculated to benefit woman and place her in her true position in the world," Margaret felt she didn't have the qualifications to lead. "Having been blessed with a large family of children my early

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<sup>106</sup> "Emmeline B. Wells Diaries," January 8, 1889, <https://www.churchhistorianspress.org/emmeline-b-wells/1880s/1889/1889-01?lang=eng>.

<sup>107</sup> *Woman's Exponent*, January 15, 1899, 2.

<sup>108</sup> Jill Mulvey Derr, Janath Russell Cannon, and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, *Women of Covenant: The Story of Relief Society* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1992), 138.

<sup>109</sup> "W.S.A. Salt Lake County," *Woman's Exponent*, May 15, 1891, 7.

womanhood was necessarily wholly devoted to my family and therefore I have had no experience in public affairs.”<sup>110</sup>

In contrast, Margaret Ann Mitchell was born the oldest of twelve children to Frederick and Margaret Mitchell in Salt Lake in 1859. Frederick was a businessman with coal interests in Northern Utah, and Margaret was active in their Mormon community. Their daughter Margaret Ann attended private schools and the University of Deseret, marking her as well-educated in comparison to many females in the United States at this time, when many colleges excluded women. In 1873, Margaret’s family accompanied her father on a church mission to the Hawaiian Islands, granting an expansion of her world view. When the family returned to Utah, they moved to Coalville to be nearer the mining investments.<sup>111</sup> Here Margaret met and married Alfred Caine in 1859, making Margaret Nightingale Caine her mother-in-law.<sup>112</sup>

Alfred’s father John T. Caine was active in politics and included his sons in his work. Though Caine was often absent from home serving in Washington, DC, advocating for Utah statehood and serving as a congressman there, Alfred and his brothers worked in local Utah politics at home. Alfred worked as Chief Clerk of the *Salt Lake Herald* but was also involved in political meetings of the People’s Party of Salt Lake County.<sup>113</sup> In January 1890, Alfred attended a party convention where he served as representative of the Second Ward, and in October of that year, he spoke in a Mill Creek political rally of the party, with his father speaking at a similar rally in nearby West Jordan.<sup>114</sup> While Alfred organized political efforts and edited the paper, he and Margaret tried to grow their family while suffering a series of tragic setbacks. Their first

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<sup>110</sup> “Unpublished letter to Mrs. Harriet Taylor Upton,” Box 2, William Caine Patrick Papers, University of Utah Marriott Library Manuscripts Division, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>111</sup> Annie Wells Cannon, “A Tribute: Margaret Mitchell Caine,” *Relief Society Magazine* 17, no. 1 (Jan. 1929): 9.

<sup>112</sup> Annie Wells Cannon, “A Tribute: Margaret Mitchell Caine,” 10.

<sup>113</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, July 22, 1890, 5.

<sup>114</sup> “People’s Political Meetings,” *Deseret News*, October 24, 1890.

child Frederick was born in 1884 and nearly outlived his mother, but the three children who followed were all lost in infancy: first Alfred Henry was born in 1885 and died just shy of his second birthday. Maggie, named for her mother and born in 1888 did not survive birth. In the final blow, Helen born in April 1889 died of the measles just past her first birthday, leaving Margaret and Alfred with one surviving son.<sup>115</sup> It was therefore a final devastation in a series of tragedies when Margaret's husband Alfred died of typhoid fever just months after they lost Helen.<sup>116</sup> This left Margaret to care for six-year-old Frederick alone.

Margaret served as executrix to Alfred's estate and sold personal property and real estate to meet the financial obligations of Alfred's death.<sup>117</sup> Here, Margaret stood at a crossroads. At thirty-one-years old, Margaret's options were limited, but in some ways, they expanded with Alfred's death. No longer obligated to support her husband, but needing work to do, Margaret searched for a place to contribute, and she found it in political and business enterprises that committed her to the public sphere in Utah for the remainder of her life. Margaret's ability to influence her community was in part a product of the Mormon feminist movement.

The establishment of Mormon women as an empowered and voiced member of the Mormon church community was formally established in 1842 with the organization of the Relief Society by founder Joseph Smith. In contrast to other religions of the time, Mormonism was a truly American faith, with emphasis on individuality and agency. Mormons believed they worked out their own salvation directly with God without intervention by priests or other

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<sup>115</sup> "Margaret Ann Mitchell Caine," Family Search, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Accessed July 13, 2022, <https://www.familysearch.org/tree/person/details/K2MH-PHQ>; "Died," *The Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, Utah), June 12, 1890, 7.

<sup>116</sup> "Alfred H. Caine," *The Salt Lake Herald*, (Salt Lake City, Utah, December 30, 1890, 4.

<sup>117</sup> Ancestry.com, *Utah, U.S., Wills and Probate Records, 1800-1985* [database on-line], Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015; "In the Probate Court," *The Salt Lake Herald* (Salt Lake City, Utah), February 1, 1891, 8.

religious leaders. Additionally, women were encouraged to speak publicly on religious topics. The organization of the Relief Society, though similar to other women's organizations in its aims, gave women a singular point of power in its ministry. By this organization, women were for all intents and purposes ministers, an uncommon role for a woman in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century America. Women not only spoke in their own Relief Society meetings, but in congregational meetings as well.<sup>118</sup> In addition to public speaking, women practiced spiritual gifts, such as speaking in tongues, healing, and performance of ordinances. When Joseph Smith organized the group in 1842, he invested divine authority in the group, lending the women legitimacy in the eyes of the church community. This allowed women a public space in which to operate and the authority with which to do it. As the Church moved away from isolationist policies of economy and marriage and closer to American religious tradition at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, some Mormon women felt they lost power in their communities<sup>119</sup>. Though women were beginning to participate in advocacy efforts at the time, Mormon women's power expanded at a faster rate than other American women, as was evidenced by the winning of suffrage for women in Utah in 1870, fifty years prior to the enactment of suffrage for women on a national level.<sup>120</sup>

As the march toward female participation continued through the 1870s and 1880s, Mormon women continued to voice concerns and opinions relating to political, economic and moral issues. As explained by Madsen, "In asserting their own voices in public pursuits traditionally dominated by men, women were expressing the full impact of their 'emancipation'

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<sup>118</sup> Jill Mulvay Derr, Carol Cornwall Madsen, Kate Holbrook and Matthew J. Grow, ed., *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society: Key Documents in Latter-day Saint Women's History* (Salt Lake City: The Church Historian's Press, 2016), xxii.

<sup>119</sup> Elizabeth Mott, "Mormon Canonizing Authority and Women's Gender Theologies, 1890-1942," *Journal of Mormon History* 43, no. 1 (2017): 112.

<sup>120</sup> Derr, Madsen, Holbrook and Grow, *The First Fifty Years*, xxxvi.

from tradition-bound gender expectations and creating [a] new vision of womanhood.”<sup>121</sup>

Madsen also points out that Utah was early in expanding the “woman’s sphere” as women found places in higher education, employment, and financial independence. But Hall argues that women leveraged their sphere of influence as women to expand it. Just as other American women did in their progressivism, Mormon women “argued that, to protect the home environment, they were required to address problems in the larger community.”<sup>122</sup> Hall explains that Mormon women used the Relief Society organization as their unique vehicle for expansion.<sup>123</sup> Lisa Olsen Tait reports that during the period from 1850 to 1900, women blessed the sick, performed religious rituals, prophesied, and performed other spiritual tasks that were closed to women of other religions.<sup>124</sup> Indeed as scholar Catherine A. Berkus notes, Mormon women should be studied as historical actors, women actively working in advocacy or advancement of themselves or their cause.<sup>125</sup>

Thus, when Margaret A. Caine found herself a widow at the outset of 1891, her options were wider than her mother-in-law had experienced just a few decades earlier. Without the care of a large family, Margaret had the resources to devote to contributing outside her home, and Mormon Utah welcomed women’s participation in unique ways. As Margaret looked ahead, she found avenues for contribution in early campaigns for woman suffrage, the seismic political shifts of statehood party politics and in the movement revitalizing the Utah Silk Industry.

### **Margaret Ann, Suffrage and State Politics**

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<sup>121</sup> Carol Cornwall Madsen, “The New Woman,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2020): 91.

<sup>122</sup> Dave Hall, “A Crossroads for Mormon Women: Amy Brown Lyman, J. Reuben Clark, and the Decline of Organized Women’s Activism in the Relief Society,” *Journal of Mormon History* 36, no. 2 (2010): 208.

<sup>123</sup> Hall, “A Crossroads for Mormon Women,” 208.

<sup>124</sup> Lisa Olsen Tait, “What is Women’s Relationship to the Priesthood?” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (2021): 5.

<sup>125</sup> Catherine A. Berkus, “Mormon Women and the Problem of Historical Agency,” *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 71.

Margaret's first participation in public advocacy was in the Utah Woman Suffrage Association that her mother-in-law had helped establish. It may seem surprising that Margaret's political involvement began just months after her husband's death, while she was still settling his estate. On May 15, 1891, Margaret addressed the Salt Lake County branch of the Woman Suffrage Association, where she "spoke briefly but earnestly in defense of woman's rights, defining what [she] considered her privileges and advocating earnestness and determination."<sup>126</sup> Notably, Margaret's mother-in-law was no longer serving as president at the time of this meeting, just two years after its organization. The group's August meeting produced Margaret's appointment to write an article on republicanism or democracy for the group's next meeting.<sup>127</sup> For the year 1892, she was nominated and elected to serve as Assistant Secretary for the organization.<sup>128</sup> Interestingly, the organization's other officers were all older, from fifty-eight to seventy-two years old. She helped organize and instruct a W.S.A. branch in Bountiful, Utah in February 1892.<sup>129</sup> Margaret was present and involved when, in May 1895, Susan B. Anthony and Rev. Anna Shaw visited the Utah chapter on a speaking tour. After reports from the various county organizations, and following addresses from Anthony and Shaw, Margaret moved to adopt a resolution that passed in support of the cause of suffrage.<sup>130</sup> The following day, Margaret accompanied Anthony, Shaw and others along with Emily S. Richards and Dr. Ellen B. Ferguson to Ogden for a suffrage meeting with chapters in the northern part of the state.<sup>131</sup> In March of 1896, Margaret was serving as Secretary for the State Suffrage Association and planning and

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<sup>126</sup> "W.S.A. Salt Lake County," *Woman's Exponent*, May 15, 1891, 7.

<sup>127</sup> "W.S.A. S. L. Co.," *Woman's Exponent*, August 1, 1891, 7.

<sup>128</sup> "Salt Lake Co. W.S.A.," *Woman's Exponent*, December 1, 1891, 6.

<sup>129</sup> "W.S.A. Reports," *Woman's Exponent*, April 15, 1892, 6.

<sup>130</sup> "The Cause of Suffrage," *The Salt Lake Herald*, May 15, 1895, 5.

<sup>131</sup> "W.C.T.U. Reception," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, May 16, 1895, 3.

advertising meetings in public notices.<sup>132</sup> Her suffrage work entwined with her silk and political work throughout the next decade, culminating in her 1899 trip to the International Council of Women in London, where she lectured on sericulture to an international audience.<sup>133</sup> Margaret made connections, organized, wrote and spoke as she worked for the cause of suffrage.

Margaret first found a voice and a platform as she campaigned and served in office in the growing Democratic Party as Utah began establishing its footing as a new state. As statehood became likely following the Manifesto ending polygamy in 1890, Margaret became involved in political organizing. When the wards met in July 1895, Margaret was appointed as a member of the Executive Committee and as an alternate delegate to the Democratic territorial convention.<sup>134</sup> A month later, Margaret was advanced from alternate to delegate.<sup>135</sup> Margaret's way into Democratic leadership probably came through her father-in-law John T. Caine, Chairman of the Territorial Party.<sup>136</sup> Caine spoke at the State Convention and revealed his sentiments regarding women's participation in state politics: "While we regret that the ladies cannot vote at the first state election, we are glad to have them with us. We welcome them to our councils, to stand side by side with us where our hearts can beat in unison for Democratic success."<sup>137</sup> Margaret certainly had a champion in her father-in-law, or at very least, one not averse to women's inclusion, if not promotion, in state political machines.

Margaret was not a passive observer at the Convention in Ogden in September 1895. Rather, she took an active role. At the outset of the convention, immediately following opening remarks by John T. Caine and Convention Chairman Abraham O. Smoot, an Organization

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<sup>132</sup> "State Suffrage Association," *Woman's Exponent*, March 15, 1896, 5.

<sup>133</sup> Andrew Jenson, *Latter-Day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake: Deseret News, 1941), 181.

<sup>134</sup> "Second Ward Society," *The Salt Lake Herald*, July 3, 1895, 8.

<sup>135</sup> *Salt Lake Tribune*, August 20, 1895, 6.

<sup>136</sup> "Three Invincible Candidates Nominated," *Salt Lake Herald*, September 6, 1895, 1.

<sup>137</sup> "Three Invincible Candidates Nominated," *Salt Lake Herald*, September 6, 1895, 1.

Committee was appointed to serve for the following term and election. One delegate from each county was nominated, and immediately twenty-six men were appointed to serve. Then, a Dr. Hunter made a motion “That a woman member of this committee at large be appointed.” The woman appointment was Margaret Caine.<sup>138</sup>

It is worth considering the reasons Margaret, of the women attendees, should receive appointment to a position of responsibility with a voice in the conducting of the Convention. Certainly, her proximity to party leadership was established. But also in her favor was the extensive work she’d done and the network she had built on behalf of the silk associations of which she served. Margaret must have been known amongst her peers as an able, and available, female candidate. This was solidified as the convention continued with her appointment of Chairman of that Executive committee, which reported back to the convention with a plan for organizing the county committees for the upcoming election effort.<sup>139</sup>

The 1895 Democratic Territorial Convention held on the eve of statehood (achieved in 1896) preceded the unsuccessful campaign that fall. Few Democratic candidates claimed victory. But Margaret was heavily involved in the effort. And she was not afraid to mix politics with religion, as had been done for a half century in Utah. One report appearing in the *Argus* complained that Margaret used a religious gathering for political purposes in Payson: “Mrs. Margaret Caine...had a meeting of ladies called from the Mormon pulpit, and when they were assembled, held up a Republican and Democratic ticket, and said: ‘These names on the Democratic ticket are our friends; they are our people. Labor with your husbands to have them vote for the friends of this people.’”<sup>140</sup> Margaret was simply continuing the tradition of Mormons

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<sup>138</sup> “Three Invincible Candidates Nominated,” *Salt Lake Herald*, September 6, 1895, 1.

<sup>139</sup> “Three Invincible Candidates Nominated,” *Salt Lake Herald*, September 6, 1895, 1; “Convention Notes,” *The Salt Lake Herald*, September 6, 1895, 6.

<sup>140</sup> *The Argus*, October 26, 1895, 5.



to mix politics and faith, but she was learning that the State of Utah was to be run very differently from the Territory of Utah. In public notices accounting for Democratic Party expenses, Margaret drew funds on behalf of the committee for expenses incurred on behalf of the campaign.<sup>141</sup> Clearly, Margaret was in the thick of Utah state politics.

The 1896 election of the brand new state of Utah held a new opportunity for Margaret. With statehood came the reinstatement of women suffrage in Utah, and Margaret, along with other Utah women of all faiths, enjoyed a new opportunity to not only vote but to stand for office. In September 1896, the state party reorganized for the upcoming election, and on the heels of its loss the preceding year, the Democrats prepared for success. When the First Precinct Democratic primary took place in June 1896, Margaret was one of fifteen delegates elected to the state convention.<sup>142</sup>

The idea of women participating in politics in Utah was widely accepted. Women had previously held the right to vote in Utah, before it was stripped by the Edmunds-Tucker Act. With its reinstatement in the new state constitution, women were able to once again enter the public domain. Additionally, the Mormon church structure fostered cooperation and participation. Women and men were accustomed to collaborating on religious and civic projects and together were building a community in the desert.

Of course, women's role in Mormonism reflected women's role in the country at large, and controversy swirled over the dangers that would come with removing women from private spaces to the dangers of the public one. It was no different within Mormonism, where in December 1868, Relief Society President Sarah M. Kimball warned against female political participation in her annual message: "The class of women who have given rise to this feeling are

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<sup>141</sup> *The Salt Lake Herald*, December 16, 1895, 3.

<sup>142</sup> "First Precinct," *The Salt Lake Herald*, June 2, 1896, 5.

those who roused...for a place in the senate and all public offices and responsibilities neglecting her first and highest duty, that of making home happy [sic].”<sup>143</sup> Once Utah saw the introduction of women to elections and office-seeking in 1896, the response was still mixed. Good or bad, gender was at the center of the novelty that marked Margaret’s 1896 campaign.

Margaret attended the Salt Lake County Democratic Convention on September 19, where she was the first appointee to the committee on permanent organization and order of business.<sup>144</sup> This committee met to formulate guidelines and by-laws for the conducting of the convention, and their proposal was immediately adopted upon presentation to the convention. At the convention, J. R. Letcher nominated Margaret as the Democratic candidate for County Auditor, and her nomination was uncontested. Her office was the only uncontested nomination of the convention.<sup>145</sup> By the convention’s close, three women Democrats held nominations for county offices.<sup>146</sup>

A ringing endorsement for Margaret appeared the next day in the *Salt Lake Herald*, the newspaper that had been her deceased husband Alfred’s former employer. “The nomination...of Mrs. Margaret Caine, was simply a recognition of worth. This little lady will make the county the best auditor it will ever have. She is thoroughly educated and is a Democrat among Democrats. Since the division on party lines she has worked incessantly for the success of the party. Mrs. Caine is a petite little woman with winning ways and a smile for every one, and when she gets to campaigning for herself, and the balance of the ticket, the opposition candidate will know that he is having the merriest kind of a contest for the place.”<sup>147</sup> Despite the gendered and

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<sup>143</sup> Derr, Madsen, Holbrook and Grow, *The First Fifty Years of Relief Society*, 292.

<sup>144</sup> “Choice of Democrats,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, September 20, 1896, 1.

<sup>145</sup> “Choice of Democrats,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, September 20, 1896, 3.

<sup>146</sup> “Choice of Democrats,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, September 20, 1896, 1.

<sup>147</sup> “Mrs. M. E. Caine,” *Salt Lake Herald*, September 21, 1896, 8.

somewhat condescending tone of the article, it highlights the respect Caine had garnered as a party worker. Caine's nomination also prompted discussion among Republic party workers that perhaps a female Republican candidate should be nominated, although this never materialized. One proposed reason was that women Republicans were less anxious to serve the public than women Democrats.<sup>148</sup>

Margaret's campaign began in earnest just a few days after her official nomination when she spoke along with another Democratic female candidate, Mattie Hughes Cannon, and several others at the Democratic State Convention in Provo on September 25.<sup>149</sup> Her speech directly preceded one given by her father-in-law, and her speech proclaimed she was "proud to call herself a Democrat." At the convention, she was also appointed secretary of the committee on permanent organization and order of business for the state.<sup>150</sup> This solidified her place in state Democratic leadership. In October 1896, Margaret was continuing her campaign at Democratic rallies in Sandy and at rallies within municipal wards in Salt Lake county.<sup>151</sup>

Republicans contended with the gender issue as they campaigned. One public comment in the *Salt Lake Tribune* stated, "When ladies aspire to political offices and become candidates, they waive the right to claim especial courtesies on their account because of their sex. Hence the relative claims of Margaret A. Caine and I.M. Fisher for the office of County Auditor should be weighed on the sole ground of fitness for the place. Suppose that Mrs. Caine, equipped just as she is, were a man, would any Republican vote for her and against I.M. Fisher? Hardly."<sup>152</sup> Clearly, Utah Republicans worried that the new female vote would come down against them if

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<sup>148</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, September 24, 1896, 8; *Salt Lake Tribune*, September 24, 1896, 8.

<sup>149</sup> "Democratic State Convention at Provo," *Wasatch Wave*, September 25, 1896, 3.

<sup>150</sup> "Wild Enthusiasm at Provo Yesterday," *Salt Lake Herald*, September 25, 1896, 2.

<sup>151</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, October 14, 1896, 8; *Salt Lake Herald*, October 18, 1896, 8.

<sup>152</sup> *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 2, 1896, 4.

women voted solely on gender considerations. Democrats responded with “Turn down I.M. Fisher by electing that brave little woman, Mrs. Margaret A. Caine for auditor. She is competent and deserving and a good Democrat. Vote for Mrs. Caine.”<sup>153</sup>

Margaret was not the only woman engaged in the election. Women participation yielded conversation across the state, including comments in the *Salt Lake Herald* on the “wave of enthusiasm” from new women voters. This story defended women as independent thinkers, arguing that they weren’t campaigning just as their fathers and husbands told them to do, but that since women weren’t brand new voters, having enjoyed the privilege for seventeen years previously, they were more skilled at casting their ballots. The article claimed that “now it is no longer a question of religion but of politics, of which they are making a deep study...they have formed clubs for the purpose of studying the great silver question.”<sup>154</sup> Further, women appreciated their voting rights and the writer cited Margaret’s appointment to the state executive committee as evidence that “our women will not only take an active interest in the coming election, but that their power is already being felt by our local politicians.”<sup>155</sup>

When election returns came in, Utah voted overwhelmingly Democratic. 80 per cent of the popular vote went for William Jennings Bryan, and Democrats carried most state offices. Margaret came in with 8,575 votes, winning by 2,070, comparable to Democratic victories in the clerk, treasurer and recorder offices.<sup>156</sup> As she had in the 1895 campaign, Margaret filed expenses, this time for \$25.50, including expenses in canvassing.<sup>157</sup> The *Woman’s Exponent* exulted in the female victories. Martha Hughes Cannon won her bid for State Senate, Mrs.

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<sup>153</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, November 3, 1896, 8.

<sup>154</sup> “Woman in Politics,” *Salt Lake Herald*, September 13, 1896, 9.

<sup>155</sup> “Woman in Politics,” *Salt Lake Herald*, September 13, 1896, 9.

<sup>156</sup> “The Official Count,” *Salt Lake Herald*, November 13, 1896, 6.

<sup>157</sup> *Salt Lake Herald*, December 1, 1896, 5.

Eurithe LaBarthe for State House, and Margaret had won her Auditor race. The *Exponent* endorsed the women heartily: “These are all women in the prime of life, with good mentality and manifest activity, and capability in other positions, and it seems a foregone conclusion that they will acquit themselves well and do honor to the cause of equal suffrage.”<sup>158</sup> Utah women clearly saw significance in the election of female candidates and forecast national suffrage success.

The meaning of Margaret’s participation in Utah Democratic Party politics can be found in the ways she expanded her influence. Margaret traveled throughout Salt Lake County as she campaigned, but she also visited other counties including Utah and Cache with the state party convention and as she traveled and lectured on behalf of Utah women’s suffrage. As she made political connections, Margaret wove a web of influence that allowed her to reach women and men across the state. When she wrote articles and published notices in newspapers, she gained recognition for her causes, but also for herself. In this way, Margaret found a way to amplify her voice as Utah created its political foundations.

### **Margaret Ann, Sericulture’s Champion**

Mormon women needed a means by which to present themselves to the nation, showcasing their autonomy and combating negative stereotypes. Some of the women leadership found that avenue in the silk industry. By the time Margaret was a teenager, the Mormons in Utah had a complicated relationship with the rest of the country and the federal government. The Mormons, driven west by violence against them in at least four U.S. states culminating in the assassination of their founder Joseph Smith, viewed Americans in the east as a hostile group intolerant of religious practices and refusing the religious freedom its Constitution promised. Mormons in Utah were now isolationist, fleeing the U.S. government that had failed to protect

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<sup>158</sup> *Woman’s Exponent*, November 1, 1896, 5.

them, only to find that their newfound home in the deserts of Utah had become part of the country they fled. Americans, on the other hand, viewed Mormons with curiosity and suspicion. Tales of witchcraft and buried scripture commingled with the adulterous practice of polygamy to make the Mormons a spectacle in the minds of many Americans. After the Utah War, with the arrival of the transcontinental railroad looming with its invasion of “outside” influences from non-Mormons, leader Brigham Young doubled down on Mormon isolationism, including the church’s economic system. Young preached Mormon self-sufficiency, and encouraged his followers to experiment in enterprises that would keep them independent of the possibly corrupting influences from the East and West. Out of this quest for Mormon self-sufficiency, the silk experiment was born.<sup>159</sup>

Through her participation and leadership in the silk industry, Margaret built and expanded her networks of influence in Utah. At Margaret’s first noted involvement in the sericulture movement in 1892, the Mormons had been trying to produce silk for forty years. Several organizations led efforts to secure and plant mulberry trees, distribute eggs, educate producers and secure legislation in support of the industry. Still, silk produced only nominal successes. As the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair approached, Mormon women saw their opportunity to achieve progress on at least two fronts: to expand their fledgling silk enterprise, and to present a new understanding of the character of the Mormon woman to the country. They combined their efforts towards both goals.

The organization of Mormon participation in the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair was a major outcome of LDS women’s participation in the silk industry. The fair occurred just three years after the 1890 Manifesto which ended the Church’s participation in plural marriage. The nation’s

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<sup>159</sup> For more on the Utah silk industry, refer to Sasha Coles, “Homespun Respectability: Silk Worlds, Women’s Work, and the Making of Mormon Identity,” (PhD diss., UC Santa Barbara, 2021).

outlook on Mormon women emphasized the “backwardness” of polygamy along with the assumption that all Mormon women were subjugated non-participants in a culture of punishing patriarchy. The World’s Fair presented Mormon women with their first chance to change the narrative and tell their own story<sup>160</sup>. Thus Mormon women’s participation in the fair was paramount to presenting a “new” Mormon woman with power and opportunity, with autonomy and influence, and with a business interest in their still-building community. Notably, the fair fell halfway between the Manifesto ending polygamy in 1890 and the granting of women’s suffrage in Utah in 1896. Surely, women’s efforts in the fair connected to their expanding political influence in Utah, and Margaret’s involvement allowed her to once again grow in her ability to contribute to the state and to women’s causes.

The women tasked with that job were appointed in October 1892. In the organizing meeting, the Board of Managers for the World’s Columbian Exposition to be held in 1893 were appointed, and by-laws drawn. Margaret became secretary to the organization that was to prepare Utah’s exhibit.<sup>161</sup> As such, she served as spokesperson for the board, with her name on notices and announcements printed on papers throughout Utah. Radke-Moss notes that the women in leadership of this committee were connected to political and church authority, as well as other causes such as suffrage and welfare advocacy. Their participation on the committee was an extension of their other public efforts.<sup>162</sup> In conjunction with the fair, the women of Utah participated in the Congress of Women, where they held public meetings of the Relief Society

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<sup>160</sup> Andrea G. Radke-Moss, “Mormon Women, Suffrage and Citizenship at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair,” in *100 Years of Women’s Suffrage*, Dawn Durante, ed., (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2019) ch. 2, para. 2. <https://ereader.perlego.com/1/book/2382807/9>.

<sup>161</sup> “The Ladies at Work,” *The Salt Lake Herald*, October 16, 1892, 5.

<sup>162</sup> Radke-Moss, “Mormon Women, Suffrage and Citizenship, ch. 2 para.5 and 6.

and Young Ladies Mutual Improvement Association, enjoying a public forum for expressing Mormon feminine thought and autonomy.<sup>163</sup>

Silk production, then, was a vehicle by which Mormon women captured the American public's attention, and once it held a captive audience, female representatives set out to convince America that they were far from the lowly, oppressed drudges of Western frontier life that had been characterized as the Mormon woman. Instead, the women spoke freely and intelligently about the fledgling silk enterprise. They understood the science of production and provided the labor. They had organized and lobbied, and they came to the Fair with goods to showcase. More on display was the character of the Mormon woman as an independent-thinking, productive, intelligent contributor to a culture of industry and progressivism.

In conjunction with this effort, Margaret served on the Executive Committee that organized a grand Columbian ball given in January 1893 to raise funds for the exhibition. In this capacity, Margaret served alongside several men, in a cooperative cross-gender push for fundraising.<sup>164</sup> In February 1893, the Salt Lake County World's Fair board published their gratitude for donations in the *Salt Lake Herald* under Margaret's name.<sup>165</sup> Margaret's constant communication with the public demonstrated in a succession of public notices reveals her savvy in building connections and goodwill for her cause of sericulture, and by extension, woman suffrage.

After the success of the fair, Margaret's support of the silk industry continued and expanded. In 1894, she led efforts for another demonstration at the 1894 California Midwinter

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<sup>163</sup> Radke-Moss, "Mormon Women, Suffrage and Citizenship, ch. 2 para.10.

<sup>164</sup> *The Salt Lake Herald*, December 18, 1892, 6.

<sup>165</sup> "Thanks for Contributions," *The Salt Lake Herald*, February 26, 1893, 8.



International Exposition.<sup>166</sup> Elected treasurer, Margaret helped raise \$121.50 for the women's fund and raffled off the silk dress exhibited at the Chicago Fair. As the representative of the committee attending the fair, Margaret wore the silk dress pattern that was on exhibition at the Chicago fair "as a practical exhibit of what kind of dress goods can be produced and manufactured in Utah."<sup>167</sup> There was some difficulty in the care of specimens for exhibition and who was to take charge of them. The Utah legislature and governor allowed the World's fair exhibit to be sent ahead for display in California, but employed Alonzo Young, the general agent who had acted in Chicago, to travel as an assistant carer to the committee's selection of Mr. McGuire. The committee was dismayed at the interference, as they replied to this news: "The committee relied upon the fact that said resolution vests in them the possession of this exhibit...upon the employment of trusted agents to care for the same. They have already employed as agents, Mr. Don Maguire, Mr. James Cushing and Mrs. Margaret Caine."<sup>168</sup> Relying on Caine's reputation, the letter continues simply "The advisability of the selection of Mr. Maguire and Mrs. Caine will be apparent to you."<sup>169</sup> The Committee, then, resented the interference with the uninvolved legislative body in distrusting its selections of caretakers for the exhibition goods. Margaret, the sole female caretaker, clearly had a reputation of dependency that the Committee relied on to sway the legislature away from their recommended "assistant."

The Midwinter Fair was another success for Margaret, Utah silk, and Mormon women, when Utah's exhibit won fourteen prizes. Her silk exhibit won first prize and a gold medal. In

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<sup>166</sup> Sasha Coles, "Homespun Respectability: Silk Worlds, Women's Work, and the Making of Mormon Identity" (PhD dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2021), 241.

<sup>167</sup> "The Midwinter," *The Salt Lake Herald*, February 14, 1894, 6.

<sup>168</sup> "The Midwinter," *The Salt Lake Herald*, February 3, 1894, 5.

<sup>169</sup> "The Midwinter," *The Salt Lake Herald*, February 3, 1894, 5.

conclusion, the *Salt Lake Tribune* states, “The committees in charge of the Utah exhibit are highly pleased with Mrs. Caine’s management of the affairs in connection with the display.”<sup>170</sup>

When the Utah Territorial Fair occurred in October 1894, it was Margaret once again organizing and taking charge of the “woman’s department” of that fair, displaying an array of home-produced silk products, including another live demonstration. Perhaps because the fair was hosted at home, perhaps because the display was solely devoted to women’s interests, Margaret did not have male cooperation or supervision at this fair. She worked as chair with two unmarried female assistants, with two additional unmarried female demonstrators.<sup>171</sup>

In addition to Margaret’s contributions in physically hosting and organizing the Utah silk display, she began to write extensively on behalf of the sericulture movement. In Henry A. Culmer’s pamphlet published in conjunction with the California Exposition, Margaret contributed a section on sericulture that once again built support and simultaneously separated sericulture from its Mormon roots. With no connection made in the pamphlet to Mormon support or origin, Margaret described the potential for silk production in Utah as growers overcame limitations of climate, training and trees to produce silk for the country. Her army of ready women workers in Utah, Margaret claimed, needed assistance to achieve the goal of ending America’s reliance on foreign silk.<sup>172</sup> This treatise aimed to build support for legislation providing financial support to the sericulture enterprise.

At around this same time, Margaret authored a treatise of another kind published in the *Woman’s Exponent* in February 1894. The *Exponent* was the vessel for Mormon women’s writings, which evolved into a voice speaking on behalf of women’s rights and suffrage.

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<sup>170</sup> “Fourteen Times a Winner,” *The Salt Lake Herald*, August 12, 1894, 6.

<sup>171</sup> “Woman’s Work,” *The Salt Lake Herald*, October 9, 1894, 3.

<sup>172</sup> Coles, “Homespun Respectability,” 243.

Margaret's article described the benefits of sericulture and details pertaining to its requirements. She wrote to convince more Mormon women to become involved in silk production and so beyond giving a history of silk production in Utah, Margaret wrote glowingly of the quality of silk produced and of the industry's early successes from selling eggs and cocoons to France during a failure of worms there to the use of Utah silk thread in shoes sold at the local Z.C.M.I. store in Salt Lake. She argued that sericulture work was interesting, artistic work and especially suited to women whose "loving care...makes it more than mere labor," and whose gentle hands were exactly suited to the precise work of reeling the produced thread."<sup>173</sup> In arguing that sericulture was destined to succeed in Utah, she explained that mulberry trees were already growing, the climate was good for raising silkworms, and there were "hundreds of woman anxious to engage."<sup>174</sup> Margaret concluded: "We feel that if the women of Utah can receive some assistance and will take hold of this industry, which is so particularly adapted to women and permanently establish it, it will give labor of a profitable nature to many of our women and be a great benefit to the nation."

In 1894, Margaret collaborated with Margaret Salisbury, Emmeline B. Wells, and Zina D.H. Young, all women of solid church and political connections to establish the Utah Woman's Silk Association.<sup>175</sup> Its purpose was to lobby for legislation granting financial support to silk growers in the form of a bounty on each home-produced pound of cocoons.<sup>176</sup> Board meetings were held every two weeks, along with semi-annual meetings of the membership. They collected information from silk growers across the territory and conducted their own experiments in silk,

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<sup>173</sup> "Sericulture," *Woman's Exponent*, February 1, 1894, 2.

<sup>174</sup> "Sericulture," *Woman's Exponent*, February 1, 1894, 2.

<sup>175</sup> "Editorial Notes," *Woman's Exponent*, April 15 and May 1, 1894.

<sup>176</sup> Coles, "Homespun Respectability," 244.

aiding in promoting its production to other Utah women.<sup>177</sup> Margaret also toured Utah lecturing on the benefits and requirements of silk production.<sup>178</sup>

With statehood, at the start of 1896, the sericulturists saw some momentum build to sway the legislature to organize on their behalf. Margaret posted notices in the local papers that more action was coming: “In view of the work we expect to accomplish during the coming year in establishing the silk industry in the State; arrangements will be made for holding a meeting of the Utah Woman’s Silk Association during the conference rates, the time and place will be published in the daily papers.”<sup>179</sup> The Utah State Senate passed legislation in March creating the Utah Silk Commission, (USC) a board of five to promote sericulture in the new state and including a bounty on cocoons.<sup>180</sup> Margaret was appointed to the panel, along with Zina D. H. Young, Mary A. Cazier, and Ann C. Woodbury, all Mormons, and Isabelle Bennett, a non-Mormon also interested.<sup>181</sup> Margaret served as secretary.<sup>182</sup> Thus, from the outset, the USC sought to disassociate itself from religious or political party affiliations. The panel’s duties included “distributing information about best practices, providing eggs and seeds to interested parties, hosting reeling courses, and recording relevant data.”<sup>183</sup> The panel commenced work immediately, but as they were in the midst of cocoon season, they determined they could only publish instructions, though they were “very anxious” to have a productive first year. In what was surely one of her earliest acts on the commission, in April 1896 Margaret published notices that the commission could furnish eggs to those wishing to start production. Petitioners needed to

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<sup>177</sup> “The Culture of Silk,” *The Salt Lake Herald*, January 23, 1895, 3.

<sup>178</sup> *The Salt Lake Herald*, November 11, 1894, 11.

<sup>179</sup> “Sericulture,” *Woman’s Exponent*, March 15, 1896, 4.

<sup>180</sup> Utah State Senate, *An Act for the Establishment of Sericulture in the State of Utah*, Senate Bill No. 112, 1896 Session.

<sup>181</sup> “Appointments,” *The Argus*, April 18, 1896, 1.

<sup>182</sup> *The Salt Lake Herald*, April 26, 1896, 8.

<sup>183</sup> Coles, “Homespun Respectability,” 244.

provide information about their sources of mulberry trees, and Margaret also encouraged the planting of additional trees.<sup>184</sup>

The following year, the Commission authored and published a thirty-page booklet with full instructions on establishing and operating a home-produced silk operation. Topics covered included cultivation of mulberry trees, the silk worm, raising the worms, taking care of the seed, hatching, and reeling. The instruction manual had Margaret's stamp of enthusiasm and exhorted beginners to commence and reap the benefits of work to produce Utah's fine quality silk.<sup>185</sup> The instructions included sketches and diagrams encouraging growers.

The USC operated until expiration of the bill in 1906. The panel published articles and notices, toured and lectured, hosted classes and produced an exhibit for the Tennessee Centennial and International Exposition of 1897.<sup>186</sup> They circulated pamphlets and reports describing proper cultivation and production practices along with statistics. They kept records of state funds. In its third biennial report authored by Margaret for 1903 and 1904, the Commission received \$3000, which was spent on silk worm egg distribution, instruction, experimental work and office expenses.<sup>187</sup> In those two years, the Commission approved bounty applications for 8,647 pounds of cocoons. The report shows that the board was collaborating with federal officers of the Department of Agriculture, including the procurement by the Secretary of mulberry trees from Italy.<sup>188</sup> The tone of Margaret's report is pure positivity in the future of sericulture in Utah: "We

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<sup>184</sup> "An Important Industry," *Salt Lake Herald*, April 26, 1896, 8.

<sup>185</sup> "Sericulture: Instruction in the Art of Producing Silk" Series 5880, Box 1, Folder 1, State of Utah Special Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>186</sup> Coles, "Homespun Respectability," 246.

<sup>187</sup> Silk Commission Biennial Report, Series 5880, Box 1, Folder 1, State of Utah Special Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>188</sup> Silk Commission Biennial Report, Series 5880, Box 1, Folder 1, State of Utah Special Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

are glad to be able to say that at no time has the interest in both the state and the nation for the development of silk been greater than at the present time.”<sup>189</sup>

The cause of the USC was not entirely divorced from the Mormon church. In 1898, Margaret spoke at a Young Women’s Mutual Improvement Association meeting on sericulture. Though she began her remarks on a religious subject, urging the young ladies to marry within their faith, she pivoted to sericulture and encouraged the girls to take the time to “study to learn how to raise good silk,” and to understand their duty in establishing the Kingdom of God.<sup>190</sup> Though the USC had given sericulture a non-religious venue of action, Margaret didn’t hesitate to continue to tie sericulture to God-given duty.

The USC and silk industry in Utah met almost insurmountable roadblocks that culminated in the termination of government-sponsored production in 1906. Along with disease and unpredictable climate issues of frosts and droughts, lack of mulberry trees and a lack of proof of profitability resulted in the loss of popular support.<sup>191</sup> The legislation supporting the USC was repealed in 1905.<sup>192</sup>

While silk culture eventually failed, Margaret’s participation and advocacy yielded benefits for her personally and for Mormon women generally. In economic development in Utah, Margaret carved a space for herself and others, magnifying her participation and political appointments to expand her stage and amplify her voice. Though many formal areas of political and business participation were closed to women in 1890s Utah, Margaret found space in the confluence of forces that was state-building. She spoke, wrote and demonstrated on behalf of her

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<sup>189</sup> Silk Commission Biennial Report, Series 5880, Box 1, Folder 1, State of Utah Special Archives, Salt Lake City, Utah.

<sup>190</sup> “Our Girls,” *Young Woman’s Journal* (Salt Lake City, Utah: 1898) vol. 9., 137, BYU Digital Collections, <https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/YWJ/id/24030/rec/2>.

<sup>191</sup> Coles, “Homespun Respectability,” 252.

<sup>192</sup> “Utah Abandons Silk Culture,” *Deseret Evening News*, March 1, 1905, 5.

cause. Her influence was wielded on behalf of Mormon women, and their participation in the Utah economy as well as their transformation in the minds of American popular opinion all forged as a result of her confidence in the silk worm.

### **Two Margarets Remembered**

Perhaps the most revealing evidence of the divergence of paths of Margaret Nightingale and Margaret Ann Caine lies in the newspaper articles announcing their respective deaths. On July 16 1911, the *Salt Lake Telegram* announced the death of Margaret Nightingale under the simple headline of her name. The first sentence notes Caine's relevance by virtue of her relationship with her husband. A brief life sketch is included about where she had lived and how many children she had borne. Nothing is mentioned of her suffrage work. Margaret Ann, on the other hand, was announced on November 7, 1929, with the headline "Former County Auditor Dies."<sup>193</sup> The article notes Margaret's church work, political office, and position in the silk industry. It also tells of her attendance at the International Council of Women and participation in the Chicago World's Fair before listing her survivors.<sup>194</sup> The dichotomy of these memorials illustrates the shift in Utah women's value over the course of these women's lives. Margaret Nightingale, defined by her family, was mourned as a noble mother, whereas Margaret Ann was remembered as a politician, economist, and public worker. These spaces, opened by women like Margaret, would remain for Utah and Mormon women to participate in the building of the state of Utah.

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<sup>193</sup> "Former County Auditor Dies," *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 7, 1929, 7.

<sup>194</sup> "Former County Auditor Dies," *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 7, 1929, 7.

## Chapter 4

“Regardless of Sex”:

How Cora Diehl Harvey Accessed Male Public Spaces to Amplify Female Perspective  
When Cora Diehl was elected at age twenty-one as Recorder of Deeds in the newly-

organized Oklahoma Territory in 1890, she was the first and only woman to be elected to public office in the territory. Cora’s early political participation foreshadowed what would become a life spent in advocacy, beginning in the Populist Party, and then as she embraced socialism and worked for the International Brotherhood Welfare Association. The life of Cora Diehl Harvey was emblematic of Gilded Age activism among women, though Cora’s methods were unorthodox for her time. Her story is notable in the ways she asserted power as political doors continued to close in front of her. From third-party politics to advocating for social reform on a national stage to her own control over her marital relationships, Cora leveraged legal tools to expand her influence into male spaces in ways unexpected for a woman.

Cora Victoria Diehl was born in Pennsylvania in 1869 before migrating to Kansas with her parents as a child. Her father was a farmer, and her mother kept the house. Cora’s parents were politically active, and Cora attended meetings of the Greenback Party in Great Bend, Kansas before joining the Populist party.<sup>195</sup> Henry and Maggie moved with Cora and a second daughter Hilda, born in Kansas, to the Oklahoma Territory and by 1890, were settled in Guthrie.<sup>196</sup> The family was part of a movement of Populist party members that had been active in Kansas and brought their politics south to the Oklahoma Land run.<sup>197</sup> Many families migrated for another fresh start in Oklahoma, viewed as one of the last remaining “frontiers” with a

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<sup>195</sup> “City and County Cullings,” *The Great Bend Register*, July 20, 1893, 3.

<sup>196</sup> Ancestry.com. *Oklahoma, U.S., Territorial Census, 1890 and 1907* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2007.

<sup>197</sup> Benson, *Reform and Retaliation*, 25.



plethora of possibilities. Populist Kansans looked to build a new economic system in the unsettled land, favoring the farmer and the laborer rather than the railroader, the banker or the speculator.

### **Third-Party Politics**

In the Populist party, Cora found access to political spaces previously closed to women. The Populist movement rose in prominence in the 1880s Midwest, Rocky Mountain and Plains states.<sup>198</sup> The third-party rise was attributable to the financial failure and subsequent desperation of many farm families as the result of a series of setbacks that caused regional distress. First came droughts that caused crop failures and by extension, foreclosure. Second, the price of farm products fell by over sixty percent between 1864 and 1896.<sup>199</sup> Additionally, the emergence of Gilded Age politics with monopoly power and “Robber Barons” controlling both mainstream parties in the United States caused the agrarian poor to feel their lack of power over national politics. These farmers united to advocate for higher food prices, lower railroad fees and better property mortgage policies.<sup>200</sup> Economics was the main plank of the Populist party, but underlying the economic failures of its party members was a feeling of hopelessness and frustration. Farmers felt they were losing a societal war with the wealthy: big business, railroad conglomerates, and Wall Street seemed to be flourishing, while their hard work was consistently unrewarded. As Miller wrote: “Populism was the ideology of those disillusioned with the panaceas of Gilded Age development.”<sup>201</sup> Miller’s study reveals that those left behind by

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<sup>198</sup> Jeffrey Ostler, “Why the Populist Party was Strong in Kansas and Nebraska but Weak in Iowa,” *Western Historical Quarterly*, 23, no. 4 (November 1992): 451.

<sup>199</sup> Ostler, “Why the Populist Party was Strong,” 455.

<sup>200</sup> “Populism,” Kansas Historical Society, accessed October 28, 2021, <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/populism/15160>.

<sup>201</sup> Worth Robert Miller, “Oklahoma Populism: A History of the People’s Party in Oklahoma,” (PhD diss., University of Oklahoma, 1984), xi.

Progressive Era prosperity formulated the party platform in response to their economic disparity. The Populist Party had grown in Kansas during the decade of the 1880s while between 1885 and 1889, one-half of western Kansas farms had failed.<sup>202</sup> All of these issues fueling populism affected Cora and her family. The outlook of the party reflected the Diehls' experiences, and they were early participants in the movement.

In Oklahoma, the influence of farmers moving onto Native American land created a rich seedbed for the rise of Populist politics. Oklahoma had settled differently from other western states: it had been designed to keep out speculators, and although not fully successful, Oklahoma was settled more "fairly" than other states, allowing access for many smaller, agrarian farms.<sup>203</sup> Miller explains how populism addressed economic inequality just as labor parties did so. "For agrarians, labor, especially in agriculture, becomes the only legitimate source of wealth."<sup>204</sup> These agricultural laborers sought a shift of power to the farm worker. Oklahoma farmers constructed an adversarial relationship between laborer and manager: the poor, hard-working farmer up against the wealthy conglomerations of banks and railroads who were their access to mortgages for land and transport to markets for their products. This extended to Oklahoma ranchers, as "cattle kingdom" culture favored large enterprises over small family farms who battled for land and resources. Oklahoma Populists viewed corporate ranchers as sanctioned by the territory government. In early Populist newspapers in Oklahoma, the party advocated for health and safety legislation, the eight-hour work day, nationalization of the railroads, telephones and telegraphs, abolition of child and convict labor, greenbacks, silver, a postal savings system

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<sup>202</sup> Megan Benson, "Reform and Retaliation: Cora Diehl and the Logan County Election of 1891," *Oklahoma Politics* 4 (October 1995): 25.

<sup>203</sup> Miller, "Oklahoma Populism," 2.

<sup>204</sup> Miller, "Oklahoma Populism," 12.

and preserving land for future settlers.<sup>205</sup> Many of these causes would echo through Cora's speeches for decades. By 1890, the populist movement in Kansas had produced an election result that allowed the populists to control the state senate.

The Populist party was unique in that women were centrally important and involved in the movement. Women such as Annie Diggs and Mary Elizabeth Lease became important orators and representatives not just for women, but for the Populist party at large.<sup>206</sup> In Oklahoma, Cora became a vocal advocate of the Populist party in canvassing, stump speeches and her eventual political campaign. Even after she lost office, Cora continued to speak locally on behalf of the party. Women at the turn of the century were assigned a domestic sphere in which they were culturally responsible for the moral climate of the nation, to address societal ills, and to create homes as centers of morality and civil education. Mary Jo Wagner points out how populist women gained access to party politics as symbols of these assigned roles: "as part of their roles as educators and the upholders of morality, [women] spoke untiringly about the economic issues of the...Populist Party."<sup>207</sup> Wagner shows that women's moral role in the nation legitimized her participation in party politics. Additionally and exclusively, Populist women spoke on economic issues because as laborers on the family farm and those responsible for family finances, women were qualified to address issues related to finances. Because economy was linked to poverty, women saw that these issues fell within their moral sphere of responsibility, and they advocated to correct fiscal and political policies that adversely affected families.<sup>208</sup> Education was a central focus of the Populist party, and as women educated

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<sup>205</sup> Miller, "Oklahoma Populism," 25.

<sup>206</sup> O. Gene Clanton, *Kansas Populism* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1969), 80.

<sup>207</sup> Mary Jo Wagner, "Farms, Families and Reform: Women in the Farmers' Alliance and Populist Party" (PhD diss., University of Oregon, 1986), 67.

<sup>208</sup> Wagner, "Farms, Families and Reform," 69-70.

themselves on national issues of money and economy, they began to enter the public sphere to speak and advocate for their families and communities. Women wrote to criticize politicians and legislation that hurt farm families, and they used literature, poetry and songs to create empathy for farm families.<sup>209</sup> Last, women's central and partnering role on family farms translated easily to the political movement. Women and men shared labor on the farms, and difficult farming conditions required that women work alongside their husbands and sons. Because poor farm families couldn't afford to hire additional laborers, women and girls' importance climbed as the economy plummeted. Family survival depended on family labor, and women were equal partners in providing it.

Populists were moral in their arguments, appealing to personal virtues while attacking formal Church systems. Rejecting Christian systems, populist leaders favored humanitarianism and criticized the popular "Gospel of Wealth" as a "perversion" of Christianity.<sup>210</sup> Many Kansas Populists represented the Social-Gospel movement and rejected the Social Darwinism that the Oklahoma Land Runs so aptly displayed. This anti-class, anti-wealth stance created a tide which many populists rode to the socialist party in later movements.

Relocating to Guthrie by 1890, the Diehls, including their twenty-one-year old daughter Cora, were a part of the claiming of lands for white settlement. When Territorial governor George Steele called for the first territorial elections to elect county officials in February 1891, the People's Party, the political arm of the Populist movement, advocated for the first time in Oklahoma. Women were particularly active in this faction.<sup>211</sup> Cora canvassed the local towns,

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<sup>209</sup> Wagner, "Farms, Families and Reform," 99.

<sup>210</sup> Clanton, *Kansas Populism*, 67.

<sup>211</sup> Benson, *Reform and Retaliation*, 27.

organizing chapters of the People's Party, giving stump speeches.<sup>212</sup> Locally, both Republican and Democratic leaders and newspapers tried to sway Populists back into their corners, but the Democratic party was successful at "fusing" with the People's Party to overcome Republican tickets. This "fusion" came about on January 23, 1891, when both parties met and nominated a common candidate for all county offices. Cora Diehl, who had experience as deputy Register of Deeds in Kansas, was nominated for Logan County Register of Deeds.<sup>213</sup> The People's Party adopted the motto "Equal Rights to All, Special Privileges to None," and Democrats pledged their support. Also working in Cora's favor was the 1891 Logan County style of partisan balloting, which favored fusion candidates because their candidates were listed on both Populist and Democrat ballots.

There was a general lack of political coverage of Diehl's campaign. Surprisingly, given that deeds were being registered every day in Guthrie as land acquisition was booming, not much is written about Cora or her opposition during the campaign, with one newspaper noting that her opponent, "war hero M.D. Losey...was a happy selection. No man in the county has more friends than Losey."<sup>214</sup> Cora won the election with fifty-three percent of the vote, and became the territory's first woman to hold elected office.<sup>215</sup> However, Cora's battle wasn't over yet. The Populist party had made room for women, but the Republican party used her gender as the basis of challenging election results, filing suit that her sex excluded her from qualifying to hold public office. The response from the county commissioners is puzzling: in a hotly-contested political

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<sup>212</sup> "Woman is Elected Hoboes' Secretary: Former High Priestess of Populist Party Now Worker for Unemployed, Mrs. Cora Diehl-Harvey, as a Girl, Led Farmers by Power on the Stump," *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 10, 1911, 40.

<sup>213</sup> Benson, *Reform and Retaliation*, 30.

<sup>214</sup> Benson, *Reform and Retaliation*, 31.

<sup>215</sup> Benson, *Reform and Retaliation*, 32.

contest in which partisan politics were so extreme that incoming office-holders had to blast the county records out of the bank in which they'd been locked, two People's Party members who had been elected as commissioners voted to declare her election illegal on the basis of her sex.<sup>216</sup> This interesting fact reveals the extent to which genderism superseded party politics. A statement was issued by the Logan County Farmers' Alliance, stating in part: "We nominated and elected Cora Diehl (not as an ornament to grace the ticket) but a young woman having the necessary qualifications to fill the office by virtue of her ability and experience and that her election to said office would result in a benefit to the public at large."<sup>217</sup> In relating the story in a political meeting in 1911, Cora told that "The court held that a candidate elected was an officeholder, regardless of sex, whereupon Miss Harvey bases her claim as the first woman officeholder in the United States."<sup>218</sup> Ultimately, the Oklahoma Territorial Supreme Court decided in favor of Diehl in January 1892, at which point the County Commissioner, also a member of the People's Party, reluctantly turned the records over to Diehl. She then filled her office for seven months before standing for re-election.

As Cora campaigned to be elected again in 1893, several factors worked against her. First, the Farmers' Alliance and by extension the People's Party were under suspicion of favoring anarchy and sympathizing with the Coffeyville bombing. Second, the Farmer's Alliance abandoned women's suffrage as a part of their platform. Third, the balloting process was reformed, and Logan County adopted the Australian system of voting. The ballot was now public, and a candidate could not be listed for two separate parties. Cora was then listed as a

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<sup>216</sup> Benson, *Reform and Retaliation*, 32.

<sup>217</sup> Benson, *Reform and Retaliation*, 33.

<sup>218</sup> "Hobo' Delegates Decide on Reforms." *The Washington Herald*, September 3, 1911, 2.

Democrat on the ticket, finally losing in the reelection bid.<sup>219</sup> The reigning dominant parties had found a way to exclude her from the political stage, and Diehl never held public office again. In 1893, she was included in *A Woman of the Century: Leading American Women from All Walks of Life*.<sup>220</sup>

Political opponents' persecution of Cora didn't end with her time in elected office. On March 15, 1895, suit was filed against Cora by the new County Commissioner of Logan County, a Republican, accusing her of withholding state funds from the treasury. This action cited a bond signed by Cora on March 5, 1891, certifying her election. According to the plaintiff, this bond had specified that any collection fees that Cora collected over her term that amounted to over \$2500 be turned over to the state. Court records reference the amount due as \$1700.67 and include Cora, her father, and ten other men who had signed to uphold her election. Interestingly, the bond is filled out in a template, in which all male pronouns had to be struck out to accommodate her gender. Cora responded through her attorney George Gardener, defending her execution of office and asserting that the signed bond, which she states was signed under duress, did not specify any such turnover of funds.<sup>221</sup>

Cora's response to the complaint illuminates another interesting factor in her contested election. Cora asserts that the Board refused to grant her the office to which she had been elected until she had signed the bond, and that no other elected official had been so required. The response asserts: "the said bond and undertaking was...demanded and extorted from the said

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<sup>219</sup> Benson, *Reform and Retaliation*, 37.

<sup>220</sup> Benson, *Reform and Retaliation*, 37.

<sup>221</sup> *Logan County vs. Cora V. Harvey, et al*, Territorial Court of Logan County, Oklahoma.

Cora V. Harvey...by the said Board of County Commissioners by virtue of the color of their office, without any authority of law.”<sup>222</sup> She states that the bond is therefore void and illegal.<sup>223</sup>

Such puzzling legal action reveals the extent to which those in power fought Cora’s legal election result, and how far they went in exerting unprecedented restrictions on access to the rights and rewards of her elected office. The judge decided against Cora, at which time she filed for a new trial.<sup>224</sup> This legal action, in which her father was named as a co-defendant as co-executor of her bond, did not stop her from participating in political and social reform, though it provided her an education in the extent of the opposition against her. Cora’s advocacy for and participation in the Populist party pushed her into a space previously closed to women: the political arena of Progressive Politics. Throughout her Populist party participation, Cora leveraged its openness to female participation into positions of power unlikely for a woman at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **New Advocacy**

Progressive Era women were expected to act as matriarchs of society, morally guiding their households and extending their influences into communities. Women commonly exerted this influence through social advocacy, working to further common causes of moral concern to the nation. Many of these women were fueled by a religious evangelism, others by a sense of virtuous responsibility to correct the social ills of the time. Popular women’s clubs worked on issues such as suffrage, literacy, poverty, temperance, prison reform and unemployment. In this way, American women, excluded from participation politically, exerted influence over public policy and social structure. This was the era of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and

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<sup>222</sup> *Logan County vs. Cora V. Harvey, et al*, Territorial Court of Logan County, Oklahoma, 54.

<sup>223</sup> *Logan County vs. Cora V. Harvey, et al*, 54.

<sup>224</sup> *Logan County vs. Cora V. Harvey, et al*, 62.



the National Woman Suffrage Association, with women such as Carrie Chapman Catt, Jane Addams and Ida B. Wells-Barnett leading major women's organizations. Cora, however, took a political stance on social issues. Rather than join with other women, writing letters and speaking to other women on these topics, Cora took more extreme action, entering an arena that was generally male.

Following her short stint in public office, Cora didn't pause in her political participation. She traveled and spoke for the Farmer's Alliance, sometimes accompanying the more noted Mary Lease. The *Guthrie Daily-Leader* reports her participation in local clubs and speaking engagements, and her name went up for nomination as Enrolling Clerk for the 1897 session of the territorial legislature, where she received one vote and was the only woman nominated.<sup>225</sup> In 1894, Cora spoke at a community gathering and gave "a scathing denunciation of the two old parties."<sup>226</sup> On July 21, 1895, three months before the birth of her daughter Helen, Cora addressed a Populist party meeting.<sup>227</sup> She spoke to the Loyal Patriots of America as the featured speaker on January 10, and on January 17, 1897, she spoke at the local suffrage club.<sup>228</sup> On February 7 of the same year, the *Daily Leader* reported that she had been engaged by the "free silver" legislators to deliver a series of lectures on financial issues. The article noted that she was qualified, describing her as "a practical and eloquent speaker...well-equipped by an exhaustive study of the subject, to expound the wisdom and necessity of a return to the financial system of the fathers."<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> *Guthrie Daily Leader*, 12 January 1897, 2 and *Guthrie Daily Leader*, 23 January 1897, 1.

<sup>226</sup> *Guthrie Daily Leader*, 6 September 1894, 4.

<sup>227</sup> *Guthrie Daily Leader*, 21 July 1895, 4.

<sup>228</sup> *Guthrie Daily Leader*, 10 January 1897, 4. *Guthrie Daily Leader*, 17 January 1897, 4.

<sup>229</sup> *Guthrie Daily Leader*, 7 February 1897, 1.

While Cora continued her political work, she also exercised an unusual autonomy in her marriage choices. En route to the Chicago World's Fair on July 17, 1893, it was reported in the *Guthrie Daily-Leader* that Cora had married thirty-six-year-old John Nolan Harvey, editor of the *Oklahoma City Road Builder*.<sup>230</sup> Their daughter Bessie was born in October of 1895. At the time of the 1900 census, Cora and her four-year-old daughter Bessie were living with her parents Henry and Maggie and sister Hilda in Guthrie.<sup>231</sup> No mention is made of James. This period of Cora's life is more mysterious, but articles in 1901 noted that Cora supported the library and the literary club during this time.<sup>232</sup> All of these activities were typical of women of her time, but Cora's next endeavor in social and political advocacy was more radical and non-traditional and reflected the limitations placed on her due to her gender.

### **Socio-Political Reform**

To understand Cora's foray into socialist politics, it is necessary to examine the formation of the International Brotherhood Welfare Association (IBWA), its founder James Eads How, and its ties to the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). James Eads How, the inheritor of a railroad fortune, lived in privilege and was educated at Harvard and studied theology. How became enthralled with the cause of the "hobo," a descriptive term commonly used at the time for unemployed vagrants who rode the trains transcontinentally as migrant workers. These impoverished men existed at the bottom of society, and in the early twentieth century, How set out to improve their conditions. He rejected his privileged lifestyle and adopted the life of the hobo, using his inheritance to found the IBWA in order to rally and advocate for the rights of the

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<sup>230</sup> "Will See the Fair Together," *The Guthrie Daily Leader*, 18 July 1893, 3.

<sup>231</sup> Year: 1900; Census Place: Guthrie, Logan, Oklahoma; Page: 1; Enumeration District: 0136; FHL microfilm: 1241339.

<sup>232</sup> *Guthrie Daily Leader*, 2 March 1901, 1. *The Guthrie Daily Leader*, 2 March 1901, 1.

worker. Researchers have explained How's approach to advancing a socialist outlook on economic disparity. "How fashioned his organization around a millennialist vision of hoboes," as Todd DePastino describes in *Citizen Hobo*, "that derived from the social gospel and Christian socialism."<sup>233</sup> How exalted the hobo as the symbol of an emerging "classless society" that the United States should aspire to create. Rather than advocating directly in a violent or revolutionary way, How believed in education and uplift, publishing the *Hobo News*, establishing "Hobo Colleges" and creating social welfare programs in the form of unemployment resources and food pantries.<sup>234</sup> Eventually, How's St. Louis organization spread to large cities in the Midwest and then stretched both east and west. The IBWA's public message was that the hobo wanted the settled, traditional, marital life, but that the economic system was keeping him from being able to attain it.<sup>235</sup> In September of 1907, in the *Washington Times*, How tried to recharacterize the hobo in national consciousness: "These men are traveling workmen. I want to organize the traveling workmen just as any other laborers are organized."<sup>236</sup>

From its beginnings based on self-improvement and communal uplift, the IBWA became affiliated in the public and government consciousness as a socialist and even anarchist enemy of the state. First, one of How's disciples, Ben Reitman, led the Chicago organization and in addition to espousing the tenets of the IBWA, became involved with anarchist Emma Goldman as both lover and manager. Emma was widely regarded as an enemy to American patriotism. Second, the IBWA was powerfully connected to the IWW movement. The two groups never incorporated, but rather vied for hobo support while trying to maintain separate identities.

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<sup>233</sup> Todd DePastino, *Citizen Hobo: How a Century of Homelessness Shaped America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), accessed November 1, 2021, ProQuest Ebook Central, 106.

<sup>234</sup> DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 106.

<sup>235</sup> DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 112.

<sup>236</sup> "Wanders Can Do Good Work if Properly Directed; How Thinks. *The Washington Times*, September 16, 1907.

However, the groups in their aims and their constituency were inextricably linked in many minds, and when the government cracked down on the IWW in 1917, the IBWA struggled to claim its independent identity. For example, one hobo Eric Anderson was arrested in 1917 for public speaking and selling the *Hobo News* without a permit. His arrest revealed that Anderson, and many others, were dually-linked to the IWW and IBWA.<sup>237</sup> Raids on both parties continued, and by 1918, DePastino explains the governmental interpretation of the relationship between the two groups. “Federal intelligence officials considered the IBWA to be a front group ‘used to camouflage meetings of radicals.’”<sup>238</sup> Rather than an independent advocacy group, law enforcement officials viewed the IBWA as a puppet organization of the radical IWW. An ideological shift had crept into the IBWA *Hobo News* following the first world war, and its stated goals became: “‘make us masters of the machinery of production instead of its slaves’” and “‘abolish the landlord, the lendlord, and the capitalist’” and to “abolish classes.”<sup>239</sup> This tone, clearly more revolutionary, led to the IBWA’s further link with the IWW in popular consciousness.

One of How’s main points was to educate the public on the rights and condition of the hobo, and here is where the secretary of the IBWA, Cora Diehl Harvey, became involved. At some point between 1901 and 1907, Cora had been converted to the national cause of workers’ rights. She became an advocate for laborers as well as the unemployed and became the national secretary of the IBWA, and she returned to Oklahoma in January of 1911 to attend the state

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<sup>237</sup> DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 108.

<sup>238</sup> DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 108.

<sup>239</sup> DePastino, *Citizen Hobo*, 108.

convention of the Socialist party.<sup>240</sup> It seems Cora was unafraid to espouse and proclaim the socialist agenda.

Cora first appeared on the national scene as an advocate for the IBWA in a *Chattanooga Daily Times* article on February 17, 1907, though according to the article, her appearance on stage was by chance, when the booked speaker failed to appear. Cora spoke on marriage and preached that marriage would “save the vagrant.” She also advocated for more flexible divorce laws, stating: “The law butts into our private affairs...and says we can’t get a divorce. People unhappily married ought to be privileged to separate and seek affinity elsewhere.”<sup>241</sup> In 1907, she presided over a St. Louis meeting of the IBWA, where marriage and divorce were again discussed. Cora’s words weren’t recorded, but a newspaper article noted that she was dressed “in new gown and hat.”<sup>242</sup>

An article in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* reporting her speech to the Women’s Christian Temperance Union in 1908 outlines Cora’s political platform at the time. This speech links socialism and temperance, as Cora says once the “people” own everything, it will be in their control to eliminate the liquor problem, and that removing social classes will remove the temptation of the wealthy to flaunt their wealth with expensive wines.<sup>243</sup>

In 1909, Cora continued her advocacy for the unemployed by presenting, before they were ready to receive them, her suggestions to the Board of Freeholders in St. Louis regarding a new city charter and the need to address the unemployed. In her proposal, she advocated for equal pay regardless of sex, municipal employment for the unemployed, and municipal

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<sup>240</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, September 10, 1911.

<sup>241</sup> *Chattanooga Daily Times*, February 17, 1907, 23.

<sup>242</sup> *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 11, 1907, 8.

<sup>243</sup> *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, May 25, 1908, 4.

cooperation, describing herself as a socialist who was waiting for others to be educated enough to join the socialist movement.<sup>244</sup> Later that year, Cora appeared before a New York State commission investigating a piece of unemployment legislation, testifying that there were 200,000 unemployed people in New York willing to work.<sup>245</sup> Marguerite Martyn, who commented on Cora's submission to the board in *The St Louis Post-Dispatch* noted "Mrs. Harvey sees in this occasion an opportunity for women to assert themselves and gain recognition which may lead to power in politics."<sup>246</sup>

In September 1911, the IBWA met in convention in Washington, D.C., where a split in leadership broke down the organization's legitimacy. Cora spoke at the convention, claiming that a labor "trust" would prevail over the current "trust of capital."<sup>247</sup> In the proceedings, Cora pushed for and had passed a resolution of the group condemning President Theodore Roosevelt's support of the steel industry, and also succeeding in striking down a resolution calling for the unemployed to be provided with employment services at military recruitment stations, calling the plan a deception to prey on the unemployed and coerce them into military service.<sup>248</sup> Cora was an important figure, as the secretary and only female delegate present. One newspaper, referring to her as "Miss Cora Harvey" and calling her a "college girl" and suffragist, one-time County Recorder of Logan, Oklahoma, named her the most "interesting figure" of the national meeting.<sup>249</sup> A female attendee at the convention said of her: "You never would think from looking at Miss Harvey that she was identified with an organization of hoboes...but so far as I

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<sup>244</sup> *St. Louis Dispatch*, April 24, 1909, 3.

<sup>245</sup> *The Buffalo Times*, November 13, 1909, 5.

<sup>246</sup> *St. Louis Dispatch*, April 24, 1909, 3.

<sup>247</sup> *The Washington Post*, September 5, 1911, 1.

<sup>248</sup> *The Washington Post*, September 5, 1911, 1.

<sup>249</sup> *Hutchison Gazette*, September 3, 1911, 1.

know her only occupation was as an employee of their order.” The article described her: “She is a pretty and well dressed young woman...her ideas are dreamy and socialistic.”<sup>250</sup>

On February 2, 1912, Cora was the headline speaker at the Hobo Convention in Cincinnati, and labeled Wall Street figures as the enemy of the organization.<sup>251</sup> She said in part, “These men have been forced out onto the road by economic conditions, and every one of them would take a job under proper working conditions.” She then appealed to the nation’s sense of the sanctity of womanhood by warning: “Some day there will also be women hobos if economic conditions remain the same as they are.”<sup>252</sup> In December 1912, Cora appeared in Washington again, this time to present to Congress a plan to give the machinery acquired by the United States for construction of the Panama Canal to the Transcontinental Construction Company in order to employ more jobless.<sup>253</sup>

The IBWA continued to advocate politically by drafting and proposing national and state legislation. At a February 1913 meeting in St. Louis, it was decided to draft three bills to introduce to the state legislature on “right to work,” city industry and city labor exchanges.<sup>254</sup> In September of that year, How and Cora traveled to Washington to endeavor to see President Wilson and propose legislation to him. The bills included the enfranchisement of the homeless, the establishment of free employment bureaus, and free public transportation to work.<sup>255</sup> Cora again went before civic authorities in January 1914 in Chicago to claim emergency government

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<sup>250</sup> *The Oklahoma Leader*, February 8, 1912, 7.

<sup>251</sup> *The Herald-Press*, February 2, 1912, 2.

<sup>252</sup> *Lincoln Journal Star*, February 1, 1912, 8.

<sup>253</sup> *Enterprise-Times*, December 7, 1912, 1.

<sup>254</sup> *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, February 23, 1913, 6.

<sup>255</sup> *Evening Star*, September 6, 1913, 26.

funds to provide for the unemployed. In her testimony, Cora warned she was willing to “make...a demonstration to lead a procession of the workless through the streets.”<sup>256</sup>

In February 1915, the IBWA met in Sacramento and set up local headquarters there.<sup>257</sup> The convention spoke on free transportation to jobs, shorter working day, abolition of the vagrancy law and the prohibition of convict labor. In 1916, they traveled to her home state of Oklahoma to organize the group there.<sup>258</sup> Also in 1916, Cora spoke at a convention and said that real brotherhood couldn't exist as long as big business pitted each person's economic interest against another's. She appealed to her audience's religious sensibilities, saying that none of them could practice true Christianity as they were in competition with each other.<sup>259</sup>

In 1918, the IBWA's radical section established the Migratory Workers Union, financed by James How, but not controlled by him. The warring factions of the party created conflict and at the 1922 convention, when the presiding chair refused to recognize How and the moderates. The product of the rift was a new periodical, the *Hobo World*, and the IWW and IBWA continued to fight for control of the social argument. These newspapers and their distributors sought to spread a revolutionary propaganda, inciting followers to overturn the economic and political systems that were crushing the migratory worker. The counterculture espoused by many hobos warred with the “down and out” narrative the social organizations were advocating in order to gain popular support.

The crack in the movement was already revealing itself by the convention in New Orleans on February 1, 1913 in which James Eads How vied for control of the organization with

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<sup>256</sup> *Wilkes-Barre Times Leader, The Evening News* January 22, 1914, 3.

<sup>257</sup> *Oakland Tribune*, February 12, 1915.

<sup>258</sup> *Oklahoma State Register*, February 24, 1916.

<sup>259</sup> *The Boston Globe*, July 24, 1916, 8.



Jefferson Davis. How and Cora both advocated for a more socialist bent, and Cora's remarks in the meeting were definitely of a revolutionary sentiment: "if there must be blood-letting, let it come, for it is blood-letting now as conditions are."<sup>260</sup> This split of the party between socialist and more conservative lines weakened its national standing, and Cora's espousal of socialist tendencies were denigrated in the national press.<sup>261</sup>

Cora's important participation in the International Brotherhood Welfare Association places her at the center of Progressive politics, as she utilized the roles open to her to maintain and express political power on a national stage. Though several articles commented on Cora's clothing as she lectures, testifies, organizes and advocates, most commenters noted that it is unusual for a woman to have the platform she had created. By utilizing a social cause assigned to her by American society at the turn of the century, Cora succeeded in making her voice heard in a country that did not yet allow her to vote.

### **Personal and Marital Relationships**

Cora's association with the IBWA ended somewhat spectacularly, with a lawsuit for "breach of promise" and exposé given to *the Los Angeles Times*. In the 1924 article, Cora accused How of dishonoring their marital engagement, several times abandoning wedding ceremonies and plans and finally marrying another woman while Cora waited with her parents in Atlantic City for him to arrive for their wedding. In the narrative, How described the way Cora and her husband and daughter arrived in St. Louis around 1906 and helped him start the IBWA. He claims she was soon divorced but that their engagement had only been contracted around 1919. How's explanation is that Cora had become spiritualized, that after he spoke at

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<sup>260</sup> *Vicksburg Evening Post*, February 1, 1913, 10.

<sup>261</sup> *Vicksburg Evening Post*, February 1, 1913, 10.

conventions, she would stand and “confine her remarks solely to religion.” After considering this change and difference of opinion over religion, How stated that he broke the engagement shortly after it had been formed.<sup>262</sup> Cora filed a \$100,000 lawsuit for breach of promise in St. Louis circuit court on September 29, 1924.

Over the twenty years of their partnership in running the organization, Cora was often referred to as a speaker, secretary and organizer of the IBWA, and articles often commented on her gender as remarkable since it was unusual for a woman to participate at such length in the political arena. However, little reference is made to Cora in academic work on the IBWA, with How as sole organizer, president and benefactor in most narratives.

Following her separation from James Eads How and the IBWA, Cora moved home to Hinton, Oklahoma, with her mother and sister, but there remains some mystery regarding the marital and maternal relationships Cora founded.<sup>263</sup> It is unclear where her daughter Helen was from the time her mother began touring with the IBWA in 1907, when she was a young adolescent. After their divorce in approximately 1910, no mention is made of James, nor is he to be found on any other census records. Perhaps Cora was able to maintain a full-time mothering relationship with Helen, or perhaps Helen spent most of her time with her father. In any case, local newspaper records indicate that Helen visited her mother and her Aunt Hilda in Hinton in 1957 and 1958, prior to Cora’s death on November 19, 1961,” so at some point Helen and Cora maintained a relationship.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>262</sup> *The Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 1924, 30.

<sup>263</sup> Year: 1930; Census Place: *Hinton, Caddo, Oklahoma*; Page: 7B; Enumeration District: 0034; FHL microfilm: 2341629

<sup>264</sup> *The Hinton Record*, January 2, 1958, 1 and *The Hinton Record*, January 2, 1958, 1 and *Oklahoma Vital Records Index*, accessed October 21, 2021, <https://ok2explore.health.ok.gov/App/DeathResults>.

Cora's romantic relationships provide an interesting reflection of women's personal power in the early decades of the twentieth century. Her comments on behalf of the IBWA and her participation in the discussion surrounding marriage and divorce reveal her commitment to men and women's personal powers in the starting and ending of marriage contracts. Cora vocally complained about limited access to divorce for women, and her personal decision to separate and divorce her husband proved she fully embraced women's rights to make these choices. Additionally, the nature of her marriage entered into as an elopement reflects that Cora, unlike many women of her time, was not interested in allowing anyone to interfere with her marital plans. Rather than involving her parents in her engagement and marriage plans, Cora snuck away to be married. This espousal of personal power sets her apart from women of the time.

However, Cora seemed to contentedly carry on a long-term engagement with James Eads How, one that eventually ended in disappointment. The narrative shows that over and over, How committed to different wedding plans and dates, each time making excuses to withdraw from them. Though in her first marriage, Cora was fully in control in beginning and ending the marriage contract, her actions with regards to How show a more typical secondary, subservient role that women often played in romantic relationships.

### **Property Holdings**

Throughout her life, Cora maintained property holdings that kept her economically independent. A 1909 article in the *Perry Republican* noted that she owned a farm northwest of Perry.<sup>265</sup> She placed an advertisement to rent a Perry property for pasture or for oil and gas in May 1925.<sup>266</sup> In 1925, Cora purchased several town lots in Hinton, with the reported intention of

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<sup>265</sup> *The Perry Republican*, January 28, 1909, 3.

<sup>266</sup> *The Perry Journal*, May 13, 1925, 4.

improving them.<sup>267</sup> In August 1928, Cora and her sister Hilda Diehl were deeded their parents' land parcel in Guthrie.<sup>268</sup> Her ex-husband John Harvey also deeded a property in Perry, Oklahoma to her in 1928.<sup>269</sup> In 1933, Cora acquired two lots in Muskogee, which she leased to Leo Hantz.<sup>270</sup> Newspaper notices reflect that perhaps Cora and Hilda lost property in a mortgage foreclosure in 1939, but filed suit in 1942 to resolve the title on the property.<sup>271</sup>

Cora's early property-holdings existed at a time when it was illegal for married women to possess property in Oklahoma. But Cora's divorced status allowed her to broker deals and exchange properties in an equal footing with the men she often dealt with. Cora and her sister, two single women, managed their real estate holdings throughout the twenties and thirties, managing to maintain their land during the difficult dust bowl and depression years. This reflects Cora's ability to leverage power out of the existing legal restrictions on women, maintaining her own financial independence.

### **“Has Anybody Here Seen Cora?”**

One article in Oklahoma reveals what history has done with the stories of ordinary women like these. Running under the headline “Has Anybody Here Seen Cora?” the *Daily Oklahoman* ran a story disavowing any acquaintance with the native Oklahoman or her story. The short entry refers to a *Washington Times* article about some of Cora's national advocacy that connects her to her Oklahoma roots.<sup>272</sup> In response, the paper claims Cora's Oklahoma identity is an aspersion cast on Oklahoma by Eastern elites.

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<sup>267</sup> *The American-Democracy*, February 11, 1925, 2.

<sup>268</sup> *Oklahoma State Register*, August 16, 1928, 7.

<sup>269</sup> *Miami Daily News-Record*, December 28 1928, 2.

<sup>270</sup> *Legal Record*, January 18, 1933, 2 and *Legal Record*, February 6, 1933, 2.

<sup>271</sup> *Hennessey Clipper* October 19, 1939, 6 and *Hennessey Clipper*, November 19, 1942, 8.

<sup>272</sup> “Has Anybody Here Seen Cora?” *Daily Oklahoman*, February 8, 1918.

The *Oklahoman*'s complete lack of claim to Cora's early successes has some possible explanations. First, Cora's national campaign wasn't widely well-received. Her socialist message was too radical for most Americans, and the Progressivists stopped short of where Cora tried to go with equal employment, unemployment benefits and other social reforms. The IBWA that Cora worked so hard for became tied to the IWW, with its radical and violent agenda and tactics. For this reason, it's possible that Oklahoma tried to rescind its claim to Cora.

Or possibly, the article was sincere. It was printed in 1918, twenty-eight years after Cora's territorial office victory. It was possible that in its new statehood, Oklahoma was far enough from its territorial beginnings to have forgotten all about Cora. Having left Oklahoma somewhere between 1903 and 1907, Cora had not been a resident for over a decade. However, in 1913, an article appeared in the *Perry Enterprise-Times* announcing Cora's arrival for some of her political canvassing and reminding readers of her Oklahoma connections.<sup>273</sup> It seems unlikely that the state had completely forgotten its first female office holder.

Whatever the reason that a statewide newspaper that still exists today chose to write, print, publish, and distribute a story rejecting Cora as an Oklahoma, the fact remains that it happened. This willful forgetting of the past, though certainly not limited to Cora, or even to women, is problematic as it presents one crucial question to the historian: how many women's stories have been purposefully forgotten or written out of history? What other stories of women, perhaps unpopular for their causes or for their participation on the public stage, exist that could give us greater understanding of this period of western settlement? If Cora were so successfully written out of history, what other stories of marginalized groups exist only in archives and newspapers that have yet to be discovered? To answer these questions, historians must continue

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<sup>273</sup> "A Early Day Resident Visits With Us," *Perry Enterprise-Times*, September 25, 1913.

to broaden source material to uncover these stories to find out the real truth of who built the West.

Cora Diehl Harvey, the first woman elected to public office in the territory of Oklahoma, was emblematic of Progressive Era women who sought a voice in the public conversation. Cora aligned herself with the Populist party, the one party that provided a strong, visible avenue for female participation. Holding public office despite various legal actions to withhold the office and discredit her not only gave her access to political power but laid precedence for the legality of female public servants in Oklahoma. Advocating on a national stage for a major social cause made others take note of the female orator and organizer, whose skills advocated for better conditions and more freedom for the unemployed. Her tight control over her marriage contract shows that she was willing to assert her personal power in her relationships, demonstrating that though atypical, women could, in fact, control their family conditions. In these ways, Cora Diehl Harvey reflects the growing power of women in political and social life in the early decades of the twentieth century.

### **Conclusion:**

Leah, Cora and Margaret: How Three Women Accessed Power Outside the Domestic Sphere

Leah Gorton, Margaret Caine and Cora Harvey were historical actors, whose choices and behaviors helped shaped their communities and the broader perceptions of women in the American West. Rural, white, middle-class women in the West were expected to fulfill a domestic role, with a focus on home and family concerns. Yet each one found space outside the domestic sphere to impact their communities more broadly, bringing about local, statewide and even national change. Connecting threads in the histories of these women reveal how they found access to public spaces, and the ability to extend their influence beyond their immediate families. These women shaped their communities, and several factors helped them do it.

First, all three women were white. Undoubtedly, racial privilege allowed these women access to spaces that would have otherwise been closed to them. Participation in politics, public speaking, organizing in social clubs and religious spaces were all partly dependent on white identity. Two of these women were one generation removed from immigrants, yet their white identity and Americanization granted them acceptance in social, political and religious spheres. Had these women's families migrated from Asia or Mexico, their stories would have unquestionably been different. Additionally, all three women were firmly middle-class. Though each worked and worked hard for subsistence, none existed in the poverty that so regularly defined western women's lives. The advantages of a well-established husband or connections through family or church positioned each of these women to make an impact more broadly. Without John T. Caine, would Margaret have been positioned for public office? Without parental support and exposure to the Populist party, would Cora have been involved and recognized as an ideal female candidate? Without the connections of a decade of business building, could Leah

have maintained a complex family enterprise? Positioning and connections certainly allowed these women to build influence.

Second, all three of these women reached the height of their influence when they were unmarried. Examining each case reveals that their single status positioned them to exercise autonomy over their own lives. Cora, for instance, reached this apex of power twice: once, as a lone woman elected to public office in 1890, and later as she toured nationally on behalf of the IBWA. At her first peak, she was a single woman. During her touring, she was divorced. In both cases, Margaret exercised autonomy of choice, with no husband to dictate or restrict her access to public spaces, and no husband to overshadow her voice. Leah stepped into the main role of Gorton family business proprietor after the death of her husband. Though her role in the business prior to George's death is unclear, it is obvious that she had a greatly expanded role following his death. Margaret began her suffrage campaign involvement after Alfred's death, and all of her political and economic speaking occurred once she was widowed. Truly, these woman's ability to operate on a wider stage has a connection to their single status.

Third, both Margaret and Cora, the two women who held political office, operated within a third-party political system, or a fusion ticket. The instability of party politics as well as the transition from territory to state created a fluidity of power, opening space for marginalized groups to gain access. The People's Party, so popular in western rural America at this time, shifted the balance of the Republican and Democratic parties, and were particularly welcoming to women. Would Cora or Margaret have found a platform in the two-party system. It's likely those chances would not have existed.

Last, there is a separate element of personality and resilience that is apparent to me, as the historian who has spent so many hours pouring over the women, their words, their stories, and



the things people wrote about them. Beyond racial identity, race, and opportunity, there was a force of personality that drove these women to do remarkable things. All three suffered major marital setbacks which isolated them from the access to power most white married women gained through their husbands. All three lost children, though information on a second child of Cora's is difficult to verify, and therefore, not included in this study. Cora suffered public humiliation on a national stage with the rejection of James How, the lawsuit, and public scandal that followed. Leah and Margaret both lost beloved husbands, and were left as single, widowed mothers, left to gain economic stability for themselves and their children.

These hardships were not uncommon for women in the American West. Death was present always, with life expectancy low and infant mortality rates high. The pure struggle of creating financial stability for families was difficult in the west under the best of circumstances, and women involved in early state and community building created subsistence out of literally nothing. However, in context of the obstacles faced, Margaret, Leah and Cora carried on with resilience and strength, not limiting themselves to maintaining families, but going forward to influence their communities beyond their homes.

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