

### Chapter 3:

#### Reluctant Suffragist:

#### Amelia Bloomer

Within the national suffrage movement, Louise R. Noun weaves Iowa history loosely through the efforts of Amelia Bloomer. Ardently advocating for temperance, Bloomer used various pen names to voice her concerns regarding the state of the country's morality. Present at Seneca Falls, Bloomer hesitantly began her suffrage journey with Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Bloomer gained national recognition traveling across New York with prominent Eastern women. Moving to Council Bluffs, Iowa in 1855, it was assumed by both the Eastern and Midwestern women, that Bloomer was interested in maintaining leadership in suffrage work. Elected by both the national and local levels to advocate for the women of Iowa, Bloomer often was less than involved. Considering herself retired, Bloomer was a reluctant suffragist through and through.

Exposed to the temperance reform movement throughout her childhood, Bloomer was an avid temperance advocate which then led to her involvement in woman suffrage. Bloomer preached temperance but practiced prohibition in her personal life. While temperance and prohibition are not interchangeable, temperance actually advocated for moderate drink while prohibition was the complete ban on alcohol. In 1842, Seneca Falls, New York, banned the sale of alcohol with help from the Washingtonian movement supporters who campaigned for an anti-liquor ticket. Bloomer was involved in the of the Martha Washingtons, the female auxiliary of the Washingtonians. The Martha



Washingtons is arguable where Bloomer began her suffrage career.<sup>115</sup> This was the first women's temperance society in Seneca Falls. Utilizing an anti-license campaign, paired with personal visits and leaflets, this society wanted to promote moral virtue. In July 1848, Bloomer attended the Seneca Falls Convention. However, Bloomer did not sign the Declaration of Sentiments because she rejected the extreme principles within the document.<sup>116</sup> Two months after the Seneca Falls Convention, Bloomer helped to organize the Ladies Total Abstinence Benevolent Society of Seneca Falls. The Ladies Total Abstinence Benevolent Society was the first independent society to be formed without a male counterpart in the Seneca Falls community.<sup>117</sup>

In January 1849, Bloomer continued her moral pursuit by co-editing *The Lily*. This newspaper was "devoted to the interests of women," and became affiliated with not only the ideas of temperance but also women's rights. Elizabeth Cady Stanton familiarized Bloomer to the Eastern suffrage movement with a piece she wrote in *The Lily*. While Bloomer allowed Stanton to publish articles in *The Lily*, Bloomer ultimately feared that Stanton held too radical of views.<sup>118</sup> Bloomer fully managed and financed *The Lily* until 1853, and she continued to publish letters of correspondence until March 1, 1856.<sup>119</sup>

Making headlines of her own in 1851, Bloomer responded to dress reform and literally made a name for herself. Amelia Bloomer is famously known for the article of

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<sup>115</sup> Louise R. Noun, "Amelia Bloomer, A Biography: Part I The Suffragist of Council Bluffs," *Annals of Iowa* 7, vol. 47 (Winter 1985): 582-583.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 588; Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 13.

<sup>117</sup> Noun, "Amelia Bloomer, A Biography: Part I," 588.

<sup>118</sup> Louise R. Noun, "Amelia Bloomer, A Biography: Part II The Suffragist of Council Bluffs," *Annals of Iowa* 8, vol. 47 (Spring 1985): 575-621.

<sup>119</sup> Noun, "Amelia Bloomer, A Biography: Part I," 617.

clothing dubbed "Bloomers." This dress reform was an open sign of resistance to the restrictions being placed on women physically via clothing as well as mentally through disenfranchisement. While the bloomer is named after Amelia Bloomer, it was first worn by a cousin of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and then Stanton herself. In defense of Stanton's peculiar dress, Bloomer wrote to a newspaper preaching her support. After this public defense, the garment was termed, bloomer. Also identified as a "Turkish dress," this costume provided women, "a knee-length tunic worn loose or belted at the waist over Turkish pantaloons...gathered at the ankle or hang straight."<sup>120</sup> Reflecting on the garment bearing her name, Bloomer wrote to a fellow suffrage worker, "[a]t the time Mrs Stanton adopted the dress I had never worn it, or seen it, and there was no 'Bloomer Costume' and consequently she did not adopt a 'Bloomer Costume.' She had worn the dress many months before the press gave a name to it."<sup>121</sup> Much like the invention of bloomers, Amelia Bloomer appears to receive more credit than due with regard to her suffrage activism.

After prodding, Stanton convinced Bloomer of the necessity for woman enfranchisement, but only as a means to an end. This end was the protection of society from intemperance. According to Noun, "Stanton told Anthony to take Bloomer's suggestions only with great caution because Bloomer did not have the spirit of a true reformer. Only with great effort and patience, Stanton claimed, had she even brought Bloomer up to her present position."<sup>122</sup> When involved in speaking arrangements with

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 595

<sup>121</sup> Amelia Jenks Bloomer, Letter to Elizabeth Boynton Harbert, Council Bluffs, Iowa, March 10, 1886, Folder 21 "Amelia Bloomer," Document 7, Harbert Papers, Huntington Library, 1863-1925, Photocopy, 2-3.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 604.

Stanton, Bloomer only advocated the temperance position.<sup>123</sup> Through the elevation of Amelia Bloomer due to her Eastern connections, Noun perpetuates the over inflation of the Eastern narrative in Iowa suffrage.

Bloomer neglected the call to action for woman suffrage from national women, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony as well. Anthony asked Bloomer to travel in April 1863 to New York to help form the Loyal Women's League. Bloomer turned down this invitation. In this same meeting, Iowa was attributed to 6,000 petitions in the campaign, surely not a result of the "work" by Bloomer. Again, these women called on Bloomer in 1866 regarding the American Women's Rights Association conference schedule.<sup>124</sup> Even when provided the schedule, Bloomer failed to attend this conference but was still named the vice president for the Iowa chapter of the National Association.<sup>125</sup>

After the American Equal Rights Association splintered due to the Fifteenth Amendment debates, Bloomer was asked to sign a call for the meeting of the American Woman Suffrage Association. Lucy Stone was concerned that the attack on the Fifteenth Amendment created alienation of anti-slavery advocates from woman suffrage. Through the creation of AWSA, Stone hoped to take in those estranged from Stanton and Anthony's approach. These ideals were expressed by Stone in a letter to Bloomer stating, "Without depreciating the value of Associations already existing, it is yet deemed that an organization at once more comprehensive and more widely representative than any of

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<sup>123</sup> Noun, "Amelia Bloomer, A Biography: Part I," 604, 606, 609.

<sup>124</sup> The American Women's Rights Association was later changed to the American Equal Rights Association.

<sup>125</sup> Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 32; Noun, "Amelia Bloomer, A Biography: Part II," 594-596.

these is urgently called for."<sup>126</sup> Upon signing the call for AWSA, an Eastern suffrage activist, Mary Livermore, urged Bloomer to attend the first meeting insisting, "*It is of the greatest importance that you should be there, [sic] for if you are not, Iowa will have no representation. I beseech you, do not fail to be at [the] convention [America Woman Suffrage Association organization, in Cleveland meeting, November 24-25, 1869].*"<sup>127</sup> Even with Livermore's pleading, Bloomer did not attend. Surprisingly enough, when it came time to name the vice president for the Iowa chapter, Bloomer was their pick.<sup>128</sup> This indicates that it was not an active member that the Eastern suffrage workers were looking for to represent other states, but rather women with whom they had connections.

Bloomer's contributions to the woman suffrage movement in Iowa can be summarized by her work from 1855 to 1873. On April 15, 1855, Bloomer and her husband arrived in Council Bluffs, Iowa.<sup>129</sup> Bloomer first lectured on the temperance movement and presented several afterwards on women's rights. Often Bloomer was more comfortable with the security of relying on her pen to inform Council Bluffs of her dissatisfaction than her speech. Her first lecture on woman suffrage was on December 7, 1855, claiming that enfranchisement was a "natural right."<sup>130</sup> She was the first Iowa

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<sup>126</sup> Lucy Stone, Letter to Amelia Bloomer, August 19, 1869, Documents 56-57, Correspondence, Amelia Bloomer Collection, Council Bluffs Public Library, Photocopy

<sup>127</sup> Mary Livermore, Letter to Amelia Bloomer, November 15, 1869, Document 59, Correspondence, Amelia Bloomer Collection, Council Bluff Public Library, Photocopy.

<sup>128</sup> Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 108.

<sup>129</sup> Dexter Bloomer was a lawyer, land agent, receiver of public lands (1861-1873), and an insurance agent. He also served on the Board of Education and was the President of the Council Bluffs School Board. He was the founder of the Council Bluffs Public Library, board member at the CBPL, and the mayor in 1869 and 1870. See, Noun, "Amelia Bloomer, A Biography: Part II," 579-580.

<sup>130</sup> Historical speaking "natural rights" are referred to rights not delegated by law, but by given to individuals by a higher entity.

resident to speak on behalf of woman suffrage. While Bloomer spoke in small towns throughout Iowa, she did not find a proper audience. Instead, most individuals were interested in seeing the well-known Eastern woman, not to listen to her speak. Bloomer wrote to *The Lily*, "I judge that the Spirit of Reform does not dwell here; if so, I have not found it out, though I have kept a constant lookout for it."<sup>131</sup> While Bloomer claimed to seek out reformers like herself, she often rejected invitations to speak on woman suffrage locally. Requested on December 28, 1855, Bloomer was to deliver a lecture on woman's rights or a subject of her choosing, "at the Hall of the House of Representatives on any evening that suits your Convince [sic] during the sitting of the [Iowa] Legislature."<sup>132</sup> Bloomer did not travel to the capital city, Des Moines, until 1870; therefore, this request by the legislature was either rejected or ignored.

Once the Civil War began, Bloomer was assigned an honorary role in the state sanitary commission. She was to attend the Ladies State Sanitary Convention in Des Moines to show support for Annie Wittenmyer. Wittenmyer, president of the Iowa State Sanitary Commission, had come under scrutiny for possible corruption. Though Bloomer served as the Council Bluffs delegate, she did not attend the convention. She was merely a placeholder and kept silent regarding women's rights.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Amelia Bloomer, *Lily*, August 1, 1855.

<sup>132</sup> [L. Hursh, H.C. Anderson, Wm. Clancy, A.F. Salisbury, B.R. Fulsom, C.B. Smith, Wm. Farmer, James N. Decker, J. Sterling Morton, A. Milton Thayer, A.A. Bradford, Thomas Gibson, Thos R. Hare, John W. Sherman, M. W. Rider, C. W. Pierce, Wm. E. Moore, P. C. Sullivan, C. McDonald, W. A. Finney, Jerome Hoover, E. B. Chinn, S.A. Chambers, A.D. Kirk and W. B. Beck], Letter to Amelia Bloomer, December 28, 1855, Document 35, Correspondence, Amelia Bloomer Collection, Council Bluffs Public Library, Photocopy.

<sup>133</sup> Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 24-29.

Requested on four separate occasions to address the Iowa Knights Templar, Bloomer appears to have ignored these opportunities to speak.<sup>134</sup> While it is impossible to know if she did, in fact, attend these meetings, it is more than likely that she did not. This can be gleaned by two separate letters from temperance advocate, Jacob T. Stern. Addressing Bloomer on July 20, 1866, Stern requested Bloomer to address the Templars regarding temperance.<sup>135</sup> Less than one month later Stern insisted that Bloomer speak to Harris Grove.<sup>136</sup> Due to the close proximity in time that these letters were received paired with the change in language one is able to infer from this correspondence that Bloomer was unwilling to attend events as requested.

Through Bloomer's Eastern connections it was assumed by both Eastern suffrage workers and Iowa suffragists that Bloomer would continue her suffrage efforts in her new home state. After fourteen years of Iowa residency, however, Bloomer had still not visited the capital, but reached out to Savery regarding interest in an organization for woman suffrage in Des Moines. Throughout 1869 to 1870, Bloomer and Savery were in contact regarding a woman suffrage convention. Savery invited Bloomer numerous times to come to Des Moines, but Bloomer refused. When Savery offered to come to her, Bloomer still was noncompliant. Bloomer's interest towards Iowa suffrage can be

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<sup>134</sup> The other two letters were from Streamer requesting an article be written on Virtue and Temperance, and Deforest asking Bloomer to speak to Magnolia, Iowa. Frank M. Streamer, Letter to Amelia Bloomer, March 27, 1866, Document 52, Correspondence, Amelia Bloomer Collection, Council Bluffs Public Library, Photocopy; J. L. Deforest, Letter to Bloomer, June 19, 1866, Document 53, Correspondence, Amelia Bloomer Collection, Council Bluffs Public Library, Photocopy.

<sup>135</sup> Jacob T. Stern, Letter to Amelia Bloomer, July 20, 1866, Document 39, Correspondence, Amelia Bloomer Collection, Council Bluffs Public Library, Photocopy; the Good Templars originated from the Order of the Sons of Temperance.

<sup>136</sup> Jacob T. Stern, Letter to Amelia Bloomer, August 10, 1866, Document 54, Correspondence, Amelia Bloomer Collection, Council Bluffs Public Library Photocopy.



garnered from an article posted in the *Daily Iowa State Register*. Referring to herself as “retired from the field of active labor in [the] woman’s cause,” Bloomer’s lack of urgency was apparent.<sup>137</sup> On March 24, 1870, Bloomer finally attended a legislative debate regarding woman suffrage and the Iowa State Constitution, but acted only as a spectator. Bloomer rarely attended conventions or meetings, especially those in Iowa.

By June 1870, the Iowa Woman Suffrage Society was established at the Mount Pleasant conference. Historian Noun describes Bloomer’s thoughts towards this Mount Pleasant convention as “displeased,” however, it appears as though Bloomer was more unconcerned.<sup>138</sup> Attorney A. P. Lowery wrote to Bloomer of this upcoming meeting, “Marshall County is going to open the ball for Women’s Rights in Iowa on the 25<sup>th</sup>...in the capacity of [a] County Convention.”<sup>139</sup> The founder of the Mount Pleasant convention, Joseph Dugdale, sent a formal invitation to Bloomer. Bloomer responded, “[t]here will be enough without me, and I shall not be missed...so I readily yield to others, both in matters of work and judgment.”<sup>140</sup> This lack of interest and effort can be seen further by Bloomer in her writing, “Should I call a convention here I imagine [sic] the friends at Mt Pleasant would think the distance too great to come, would they not? I have not written to the friends in Des Moines, because I suppose you [Dugdale]... would do so

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<sup>137</sup> Amelia Bloomer, Written February 2, 1870 to *Woman’s Journal*, *Daily Iowa State Register*, February 23, 1870, 2.

<sup>138</sup> Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 138.

<sup>139</sup> “To open the ball” does not refer to an actual dance, but rather to set things in motion for woman suffrage in Iowa; A. P. Lowery, Letter to Amelia Bloomer, May 14, 1870, Correspondence, Amelia Bloomer Collection, Council Bluffs Public Library, Photocopy.

<sup>140</sup> Amelia Jenks Bloomer, Letter to Joseph A. Dugdale, May 7, 1870, Box 20, Folder 10, “Correspondence re: Mt. Pleasant suffrage convention 1870,” State Historical Society of Iowa, Des Moines, 1870-1880, Photocopy, 1.

if you thought desirable."<sup>141</sup> Many suffrage workers in Iowa were concerned with this first convention's location, believing that the meeting should be housed in a more central location and expressed these ideas to Bloomer. While Bloomer initially refused to attend the convention, she agreed to sign the call. Perhaps Savery's prompting effectively changed Bloomer's mind, as her attendance was noted. Chairing the Business Committee, as well as speaking at the Mount Pleasant Convention, Bloomer was then elected one of the vice presidents. Savery was selected as the secretary and Henry O'Connor was elected president.<sup>142</sup>

Amelia Bloomer indicated she was focusing her efforts in Pottawattamie County. According to D. C. Bloomer in the *Life and Writings of Amelia Bloomer*, his wife intended to provide, "aid and influence for the upbuilding [sic] and prosperity of this infant city [Council Bluffs]."<sup>143</sup> When examining the creation of the Council Bluffs Suffrage Society, this does not appear to be true. Hannah Tracy Cutler created this suffrage society when she visited the city in June of 1870. Ironically, even though Bloomer did not establish the woman suffrage society in Council Bluffs, she was named president. However, by 1871, she was no longer an officer in the Council Bluffs Suffrage Society, and it appears her activism in suffrage dwindled.<sup>144</sup>

Bloomer acted as a placeholder instead of an active woman suffrage society cabinet member. John Kasson, of the Iowa House of Representatives, requested Bloomer give a presentation on female enfranchisement at a legislative hearing. This speech was to

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>142</sup> "Amelia Bloomer, A Biography: Part II," 605-606.

<sup>143</sup> Dexter C. Bloomer, eds., *Life and Writings of Amelia Bloomer* (Boston: Arena Press, 1895), 222.

<sup>144</sup> Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 264.

help legislative members resolve the woman question in 1872.<sup>145</sup> While she prepared an address for the General Assembly, she did not deliver it. When examining the women who were elected to elevated positions within the woman suffrage societies, it seems as though these women originally acted as figureheads. Specifically, elected presidents appear to be more of a public statement to show approval for women's rights rather than playing a crucial role in suffrage societies. Mary Jane Coggeshall explained this phenomenon with regard to the Polk County Suffrage Society, "[w]ith the shortsightedness which marks many societies bidding for popular favor it chose for its first president one of the most prominent & fashionable society women of the city who was not present at the meeting...."<sup>146</sup> This woman then openly rejected the appointment as Coggeshall noted, "[i]n a few days this lady came out in card in the daily paper informing the public & the woman suffrage society that she had 'no sympathy with the movement.'"<sup>147</sup> With instances such as this, a correlation to the nomination of figureheads, such as Bloomer, can be inferred. Pointing to this placeholder status, Bloomer identified that acting as president of the Iowa Woman Suffrage Society was, "not very onerous," and that while she desired to officially retire from her suffrage duties she could "hold it until the committee [saw] fit to give [her] the opportunity."<sup>148</sup> At the end of 1873, Bloomer resigned her presidency of the Iowa Woman Suffrage Society.

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<sup>145</sup> Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, *History of Woman Suffrage: Volume 3*, 619.

<sup>146</sup> Mary Jane Coggeshall, "Two sketches of the Polk County Woman Suffrage Society," 1865, Reel 10, Document 19, Sketch 2, Coggeshall Papers. Women's Studies Collection, Schlesinger Library, 1.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> Amelia Jenks Bloomer. Letter to Elizabeth Boynton Harbert, Council Bluffs, Iowa, February 5, 1873, Folder 21, "Amelia Bloomer," Document 4, Harbert Papers, Huntington Library, 1863-1925. Photocopy, 2.

By 1874, Bloomer wrote to a friend exposing the lack of interest and urgency that Bloomer felt towards her Iowa woman suffrage work. When requested by woman suffrage workers to petition Council Bluffs, Bloomer refused. Writing, "I really have too little faith in them [petitioning] and too little enthusiasm in the work to take upon myself the labor of circulating a petition."<sup>149</sup> Bloomer then went on to blame her location for her lack of involvement in the suffrage cause. However, in Bloomer's other letters she considered herself to be, "[waging] a lonely battle in Council Bluffs...meanwhile woman suffrage was becoming a lively issue in other parts of the state."<sup>150</sup> The insincerity is deepened by a letter Bloomer wrote to a local newspaper stating that the movement did not need her because, "Iowa [was] awake on the Woman Suffrage question, and [would] give a good report of herself."<sup>151</sup> Bloomer relied on these various excuses of location and lack of necessity for her presence to justify her unwillingness to act.

Through the elevation of women connected to the East such as Amelia Bloomer, the Eastern narrative was perpetuated throughout the state. Utilizing familiarity rather than true local leadership women suffrage workers relied upon "known" women. This reliance is further seen in the historiography of woman suffrage through Eastern women requesting individuals they knew to contribute to the *History of Woman Suffrage* instead of local women. The strength of the Eastern narrative within the Iowa story of enfranchisement led to the assumption that Bloomer lent a vibrant voice within the local

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<sup>149</sup> Amelia Jenks Bloomer, Letter to Elizabeth Boynton Harbert, Council Bluffs, Iowa. February 9, 1874, Folder 21 "Amelia Bloomer," Document 6, Harbert Papers. Huntington Library, 1863-1925. Photocopy.

<sup>150</sup> Noun, "Amelia Bloomer, A Biography: Part II," 601.

<sup>151</sup> Amelia Bloomer, Written February 2, 1870 to *Woman's Journal, Daily Iowa State Register*, February 23, 1870, 2.

proceedings, when in truth she seemed a reluctant suffragist, at best. Due to her connections with Eastern women, it was assumed by all that Bloomer would continue her suffrage works in Iowa. Time and time again, Bloomer was rewarded with positions of power that would help determine Iowa's direction in the suffrage movement. Bloomer was an ardent defender of temperance although a lukewarm supporter of suffrage, and in turn a lack luster leader for Iowa women.

## Chapter 4:

“Highest Priestess of Suffrage in Iowa”:

Annie Nowlin Savery

Annie Nowlin Savery provided a strong undercurrent for Iowa woman suffrage. Self-educated, Savery was a principled woman drawn to civic duty. Lecturing throughout Iowa, she acted as an educator, and advocated for all. Savery was directly responsible for the formation of the Polk County Woman Suffrage Society, located in the heart of capital city. While once a leading spokeswoman in Iowa, Savery’s contributions have been erased from the *History of Woman Suffrage*. Standing by her principles ultimately led to the silencing of her voice in the suffrage movement.

Born in London, Annie Nowlin Savery moved to the United States as an infant. She married James Savery in New York in early 1853. Little is known of Savery’s life prior to her move to Des Moines in April one year later.<sup>152</sup> While residing there, Savery managed the hotel “Marvin House” until the couple sold the property. She was a self-educated woman and often advocated on behalf of female education, including funding a scholarship for women at Grinnell College in Grinnell, Iowa. Savery was also a founding member, and the only female member, of the Des Moines Library Association in 1866. By 1867, Savery enlightened the people of Des Moines on the repulsive conditions of the county jail. As a moral enforcer, Savery lobbied on behalf of those silenced by others.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>152</sup> Rachel Bohlmann, “Savery, Annie Nowlin,” in *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 438.

<sup>153</sup> Noun, “Annie Savery, Pioneer Feminist,” 3; Noun, *Leader and Pariah*; Rachel Bohlmann, “Savery, Annie Nowlin,” *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa*, (University of Iowa Press, 2009), 438-440.

Savery began her public commitment to suffrage in early 1868.<sup>154</sup> Becoming the first woman in Des Moines to take a public stand on women's enfranchisement through her speech "Angels and Politicians," Savery was a pioneer in the woman suffrage movement. Local newspapers, such as the *Daily Iowa State Register*, took a keen interest in Savery's suffrage efforts. Thrusting herself into the public sphere, Savery then focused her energies on forming a permanent suffrage society in the capital city. Savery felt as though she needed a seasoned orator and organizer to help form the society. The women involved in local suffrage efforts were the true leaders behind suffrage, although, it appears that they did not have the self-assurance necessary to move forward without reaching out to other suffragists. Two years later, Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell contacted Savery regarding the creation of a woman suffrage society in Iowa. Fearing that she did not have the expertise necessary, Savery reached out to Bloomer. Savery requested, Bloomer to at least teach her the skills necessary to create a society if Bloomer was unwilling to help.<sup>155</sup> Savery expressed these concerns to Bloomer in a letter:

The matter is left wholly with me to decide, and, as I have previously informed you, as I have no great ambition in the lecturing line, but only do it under a species of compulsion, I have therefore about concluded—that we ladies better club together and give our people that which they seem to want.<sup>156</sup>

Unable to convince Bloomer of the needs of Iowans, Savery became impatient. "The more I think of it," she wrote, "the more stirred up I feel. It is shameful for the women of

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<sup>154</sup> This was the same year, 1868, that the Fourteenth Amendment was passed. The Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship and some argued implied voting rights.

<sup>155</sup> Annie Savery, Letter to Bloomer, January 25, 1870, Correspondence, Document 63, Amelia Bloomer Collection, Council Bluffs Public Library, Photocopy.

<sup>156</sup> Annie Savery, Letter to Bloomer, February 14, 1870, Correspondence, Document 73, Amelia Bloomer Collection, Council Bluffs Public Library, Photocopy.

our State to thus fold their hands when there is so much of God's work to be done."<sup>157</sup> After giving countless invitations and receiving multiple rejections, Savery traveled to Council Bluffs, and convinced Bloomer to actively aid in the woman suffrage cause in Iowa. On March 29, 1870, the pair attended the Iowa House of Representatives to listen to the proceedings.<sup>158</sup>

Literature on Savery focuses on 1870 as the peak of her work for woman suffrage. During this year Savery spearheaded the establishment of a suffrage society in Polk County, as well as served on the National Woman Suffrage Association's executive committee. This suffrage society was key due to its close proximity to the Iowa State Legislature. In order to form the Polk County Suffrage Society, Savery requested a conference, and Bloomer and Hannah Tracy Cutler signed the call. While Bloomer claimed to have founded this suffrage society, she merely spoke at the meeting. Bloomer left the convention early, leaving behind Savery and Cutler to establish the Polk County Suffrage Society on October 25, 1870, with the aid of Mary Jane Coggeshall. Savery proposed the constitution and made the motion to form the permanent society. Bloomer also left Coggeshall and Savery to figure out funding for the hall that was used.<sup>159</sup>

While Savery was self-conscious regarding her ability to lecture, during 1870, she was invited to address many organizations, including the Polk County Pioneer Club, the State Grange, and the Des Moines Knights Templar, on the issue of women's rights. Savery focused on the moral issues of anti-polygamy, anti-slavery, and temperance to

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<sup>157</sup> Annie Savery, Letter to Bloomer, February 6, 1870, Correspondence, Document 64, Amelia Bloomer Collection, Council Bluffs Public Library, Photocopy.

<sup>158</sup> Noun, *Leader and Pariah*, 44-45; Noun, "Annie Savery, Pioneer Feminist," 6-7; Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 137.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-158.



appeal to the audience of the Knights Templar. "How fitting that a society in whom the widow and orphan have always found a friend should be among the first to recognize the great acknowledged want of the world—the moral influence of woman at the ballot box."<sup>160</sup> The theme of morality rang throughout Savery's speech. Savery offered the State Grange, an agricultural organization that accepted women within their ranks, as an example of a society attentive to the movement towards equality. Sharing, "[t]he State Grange tells me they want me, and I have only to obey. Do you know that the Grangers number one hundred thousand Iowa alone! And about a million in the United States and women have some voice and vote as men!"<sup>161</sup> Through the examples of the Knights Templar and the State Grange, Savery expressed the widening support of female enfranchisement.

With the rise of the New Departure in other parts of the United States, Savery expressed her qualms with this technique in 1870. The New Departure was an approach first created by Virginia and Francis Minor in 1869, and is described by Flexner as "contending that the Constitution and its amendments already gave women the right to vote and that no enabling legislation by the states permit them to do so was necessary..."<sup>162</sup> Savery believed that woman suffrage should not be won by default. Instead, Savery wanted female enfranchisement in writing within the state constitution. Victoria Woodhull, an outspoken woman far before her time, took up the New Departure technique exposing the suffrage efforts to her eccentric views regarding sex. Woodhull

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<sup>160</sup> Annie Savery, "Speech to Des Moines Knights Templar," *Daily Iowa State Register*, February 26, 1870, 4.

<sup>161</sup> Annie Savery, Letter to Lizzie, Wednesday A.M. n.d., Folder 93, "Annie Savery," Document 5, Harbert Papers, Huntington Library, 1863-1925. Photocopy.

<sup>162</sup> Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 161.

was an ardent supporter of sexual freedom, and “free-love” became her rallying cry. Historian Diana Pounds describes this social movement as “Nineteenth century free lovers [who] favored open sexual encounters between willing partners and felt that state had no jurisdiction over marriage laws.”<sup>163</sup> Making her fight for suffrage known, Woodhull presented “her” argument for the broad interpretation of the Fourteenth Amendment before Congress in December of 1870.<sup>164</sup> While Woodhull’s actions upset the national plan for a federal amendment and upstaged NWSA, Anthony staunchly supported Woodhull and invited her to speak at the suffrage convention. The Woodhull scandal caused derision within the already divided Eastern NWSA and AWSA organizations. January 17, 1871, aligning with AWSA’s narrow approach, Savery expressed her concerns with peripheral issues being attached to the suffrage movement instead of focusing on the vote. Unbeknownst to most suffrage scholars, Savery only became a supporter of Woodhull after failed attempts at promoting AWSA’s enfranchisement only campaign.<sup>165</sup> After nine months, Savery came to support the expanded Fourteenth Amendment. She switched her stance to align with the majority of the Iowa suffrage delegates. Meanwhile, the Polk County Suffrage Society publicly declared its detachment from anyone involved in suffrage works that would be construed as demeaning the role of marriage, denouncing the very person who helped establish the society.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Pounds, “Booze, Ballots, and Wild Women,” 65.

<sup>164</sup> Her is placed in quotations because the technique adopted by Woodhull was not her original idea, but in fact the New Departure created by the Minors.

<sup>165</sup> Annie Savery, “Christian Charity and Mrs. Grundy,” *Daily Iowa State Register*, October 21, 1871, 4.

<sup>166</sup> Noun, *Leader and Pariah*, 53.

Radical social questions were beginning to fuel the suffrage debates.<sup>167</sup> Calling into question many suffrage supporters' justification of female enfranchisement as a means of protection of morality, the Woodhull debacle created many rifts in the suffrage movement in Iowa. Savery began to lose public support as a result of her association with Stanton and Anthony. She "stoutly declared her intentions to work with anyone who supported the suffrage cause."<sup>168</sup> After this public declaration, Savery called a convention in Des Moines of the Iowa State Suffrage Society on October 19, 1871.

Savery was determined to continue suffrage activism, and was quickly put to the test after Henry O'Connor resigned as president from the Iowa Woman Suffrage Society, due to the free-love scandal. Savery's altruistic nature became apparent when she was left to save the plummeting society.<sup>169</sup> At this convention, Bloomer was chosen as president, Martha Callanan treasurer, and Savery remained the corresponding secretary. Savery was supposed to speak on the IWSS floor regarding the efforts of Iowans but was interrupted with a shriek to adopt an anti-free-love statement.<sup>170</sup> After this intrusion, Savery spoke on the *ad hominem* about the Woodhull scandal. Identifying free-love as a scarecrow created to defer the issue of woman suffrage, Savery articulated that "few either practice or preach what the newspaper calls free-love," to assume that "every woman in the universe,

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<sup>167</sup> AWSA (Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell) believed that it was through the vote alone that woman suffrage would become reality. By upholding the morality of women and fighting for issues such as divorce, these supporters embraced the idea for men that the role of women would not be changing. NWSA (Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony) promoted that woman suffrage would encompass all social issues pertaining to women.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>169</sup> Noun, "Annie Savery, Pioneer Feminist."

<sup>170</sup> This issue was brought forth by Nettie Sanford in the Resolutions committee, following the Association's rejection of her statement she then stole the floor from Savery that same evening.

as soon as she is granted the full rights of citizen, will at once abandon her home and children and become the lewd thing she now professes to despise” was asinine.<sup>171</sup> Savery went on to discuss the preposterous associations of moral corruption that the women involved in suffrage faced due to the free-love scarecrow.

Addressing ballot corruption and power, race and class, political opinion, and Christianity, Savery’s speech encompassed all issues for which Iowa woman suffrage received backlash from. Describing the power of the ballot as the “sacred gift of liberty” that has been “withheld from one half of the people of this government” solely based on sex, Savery questioned what would happen if the roles were reversed.<sup>172</sup> One typical argument opposed to female enfranchisement was the corrupting factor of the ballot at the hands of women. In order to keep them morally pure, they had to remain without a voice in politics. Savery countered this argument by questioning, “Has the ballot corrupted these [God-fearing] men? And yet, most of them vote.”<sup>173</sup> Applying this logic, Savery then pointed out that clearly the government would then be run by “demagogues and thieves” maintaining their power through disenfranchising “every man that you suspect might be contaminated by voting.”<sup>174</sup> Looking to class differences, Savery expressed the need for woman suffrage was most needed for those voices being silenced at the bottom of society.<sup>175</sup> “But I turn to another class, who outnumber these as the

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<sup>171</sup> Annie Savery, “The Free Love Scarecrow,” *Daily Iowa State Register*, October 21, 1871, 4.

<sup>172</sup> Annie Savery, “The Power of the Ballot,” *Daily Iowa State Register*, October 21, 1871, 4.

<sup>173</sup> Annie Savery, “Will the Ballot Corrupt Woman?,” *Daily Iowa State Register*, October 21, 1871, 4.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> This identification is of key importance. The assumption of a woman suffrage fighter is equated to a prominent, rich woman who has too much time on her hands. In Savery’s

leaves outnumber the branches. They may be found in all the workshops of the world; they nurse the child in the drunkard's home..."<sup>176</sup> Identifying the drunkard's home, Savery discussed the ever-important connection of enfranchisement and temperance.

Speaking to the sentiments of Henry Ward Beecher and Bishop Simpson, Savery explained the moral importance of woman suffrage.<sup>177</sup> Beecher held "it to be a shame, that they who have the instinct of purity and divine remedial mercy, more than any other class should withhold their hand from that public legislation" He then furthered this sentiment through "declar[ing] that woman has interest in legislation more than man."<sup>178</sup> Savery identified the purity of instinct in Bishop Simpson's view. "Both of these men vote, they know something of the corrupting influence of politics, and yet they think that politics and society will never improve until the pure instincts of woman find expression in the ballot, which is the only power, which will make their opinions respected."<sup>179</sup> Through confrontation of politicians, Savery found that woman suffrage was favorable among the likes of 90 percent of the men; although collectively these same men when

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case she was a prominent woman, but she championed for all fighting for female enfranchisement.

<sup>176</sup> Annie Savery, "The Rich and the Poor," *Daily Iowa State Register*, October 21, 1871, 4.

<sup>177</sup> Henry Ward Beecher was the first president of AWSA. Serving as clergyman for the Congregationalist church, Beecher was a strong support of temperance and abolition; Bishop Matthew Simpson was a Methodist clergyman and dubbed the "High Priest of Radical Republicans." Simpson wrote a letter to Anthony expressing his support of woman suffrage and the attempts at amending the state constitution. See, National Woman Suffrage Association, *Report of the Sixteenth Annual Washington Convention: March 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup>, 1884* (Rochester, New York: Press of Charles Mann, 1884), Pamphlet, 123.

<sup>178</sup> Annie Savery, "Henry Ward Beecher's View," *Daily Iowa State Register*, October 21, 1871, 4.

<sup>179</sup> Annie Savery, "Bishop Simpson's View," *Daily Iowa State Register*, October 21, 1871, 4.

influenced by Republican party leadership disappointed once again. Therefore, it is no surprise that women were faced with the continuous cycle of legislative letdown.<sup>180</sup>

Through the assurance of virtuous intentions, Savery stated, "The question of woman's voting is purely a political question and is the only question that the woman's suffrage party [has] raised."<sup>181</sup> Identifying the hypocrisy within the woman suffrage movement, Savery found that with instances such as the free-love scandal, Iowa women simply cut off the "problem." Writing to the *Daily Iowa State Register* Savery expressed this immediate disconnect as "[i]f one breath of suspicion rests upon a woman, they will draw their steps aside, or at least receive her with coldness. I think that as a suffrage party, claiming equal opportunities for women, that we should feel as that good motherly woman..." accepting all.<sup>182</sup> Savery embraced all individuals who supported woman suffrage, and refused to exclude Woodhull for her personal life choices. Savery opposed the Palladium resolution, a biblical resolution that expressed the sanctity of marriage, not for what it stood for, but because it "diminished the dignity of the association."<sup>183</sup> She felt this resolution was being used as a guise to deny the acceptance of female enfranchisement. Morality and the vote were not in opposition from Savery's perspective. As a result, the Polk County Woman Suffrage Society then announced that Savery no longer represented their suffrage cause.<sup>184</sup> This formal split exemplified the rift between

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<sup>180</sup> Annie Savery, "The Politician's View," *Daily Iowa State Register*, October 21, 1871, 4.

<sup>181</sup> Savery, "Christian Charity and Mrs. Grundy," 4.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Louise R. Noun, "Annie Savory: A Voice for Women's Rights," *Annals of Iowa* 1, vol. 44 (Summer 1977): 22.

<sup>184</sup> Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 202.

treasurer Callanan and Savery and ultimately harmed the county society by taking away their orator.

One month after this split, Savery wrote to the *Daily Iowa State Register* pointing to the duplicity of the Polk County Suffrage Society.

The Woman Suffrage party is made up of the mothers, wives, and daughters, who believe that the marriage bond is to the social what the Constitution is to the political union...the woman suffrage cause because of its inherent justice can well afford the company of Victoria Woodhull. But from carping friends, who in the name of Christianity offer us a menace with their friendship, we shall ask to be delivered. Such friends of woman's cause have yet to learn the first rudiments of Christian charity...<sup>185</sup>

Woman suffrage in Iowa specifically focused on the woman as the moral enforcer, the uplifter of society. Anti-suffrage elite women claimed that this argument of uplifting society would cause women to lose their ability to influence within the home. Through Polk County's direct rejection of women such as Woodhull, Savery believed that this society was not exemplifying their Christian roots.

Unwilling to be silenced like Bloomer, in 1872 Savery and Elizabeth Boynton Harbert attempted to petition and speak before the General Assembly. Iowa suffrage workers still feared the issues associated with Woodhull, and requested Stanton, Anthony, and Woodhull remain out of Iowa during the state legislative session.<sup>186</sup> Having gained permission and affirmation that Senator Richards would put forth a motion to hear on behalf of Savery and Harbert, the women were surprised to learn that the Senate was unwilling to allow them to speak. Instead of placing the motion to speak

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<sup>185</sup> Annie Savery, "Tempest in a Teapot," *Daily Iowa State Register*, November 19, 1871, 4.

<sup>186</sup> Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 203.

in front of the General Assembly, Richards expressed the sanctity of marriage argument utilized by the Polk County Suffrage Society, claiming that Iowa could not allow the ignominy of woman suffrage to stand.<sup>187</sup> Coupled with Richards' argument and the lobbying of the Polk County Suffrage Society, Savery and Harbert were kept off of the Senate floor. The General Assembly met on March of 1872 and voted upon the woman suffrage amendment. Receiving 22 to 24 against, Savery was blamed by Iowa women for the suffrage amendment defeat.<sup>188</sup>

Savery began her suffrage journey with frustration at the lack of enthusiasm from Bloomer. She used this momentum to create the Polk County Suffrage Society and to become a loud voice for the enfranchisement movement. Utilizing her connections to the *Daily Iowa State Register*, Savery was able to not only promote her woman suffrage agenda, but advocate for women regardless of their personal lives. Believing the woman suffrage should be a unifying cause that accepted all into their ranks with enfranchisement as the common goal, Savery was a "high priestess" of woman suffrage in Iowa. While Savery was ultimately ousted, due in part to the Woodhull scandal, she still attempted to stay connected to the suffrage movement. Presenting before the General Assembly, writing letters, arranging speakers, applying for a United States consul position Savery continually pressed the gender boundaries. In 1874 Savery advocated for women in law by became a law student at the State University of Iowa and graduating with honors in the Spring of 1875.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 211-214.

<sup>188</sup> Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 211-220; Gallaher, *Legal and Political Status of Women* 185; Noun, *Leader and Pariah*, 48-55.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 57-65.



## Chapter 5:

"Mother of Woman Suffrage in Iowa":

Mary Jane Whitely Coggeshall

Mary Jane Coggeshall wielded both her tongue and pen for Iowa woman suffrage. Coggeshall was a working mother acting as both editor and essayist; she embodied the woman suffrage movement. Dubbed the "mother of woman suffrage in Iowa" by Carrie Chapman Catt, it is surprising that little is written about her within the early suffrage works. Piecing together lectures written by Coggeshall and her newspaper presence, as well as interactions noted by Noun, her extensive activism for Iowa women is clear.<sup>190</sup>

Coggeshall learned to question the structural subordination of women and the unequal treatment of African Americans at a young age. Witnessing her mother, Lydia Whitely, working to help sustain the family, she learned that gender roles were more fluid. Her father, Isaac Whitely, a farmer, was an anti-slavery advocate and the farm acted as a stop for the Underground Railroad. Raised a Quaker, Coggeshall experienced more inclusive roles of women within the church and the public sphere.<sup>191</sup> Allowing women to hold meetings and preach publicly, the Quaker faith gave rise to women influential in the move to woman suffrage, namely the Grimké sisters and Lucretia Mott. Theologian Carole Dale Spencer expressed the connections of the "Quaker theology [as] foundational to the women's rights movement" due to the faith's "strong advoca[cy] for

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<sup>190</sup> Lisa Mott, "Coggeshall, Mary Jane Whitely," in *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 93-94.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

gender equality."<sup>192</sup> While gender equality was expressed in the goals of Quakerism, often times in practice this was not enacted, perhaps leading to Coggeshall's conversion to the First Unitarian church after her move to Iowa. Coggeshall's religious and abolitionist upbringing shaped her future activism within the women's movement.

Coggeshall stuck to her abolition principles and married John Milton Coggeshall in 1857 at the age of 21.<sup>193</sup> Her husband's Quaker family background mirrored her own: both families had relocated to Indiana fleeing slave states. The Coggeshalls moved to Iowa after the birth of their second child. Settling in Des Moines, Coggeshall arrived three years before Savery's first speech on woman suffrage was given in the capital. Their family grew in size, with the birth of four more children.<sup>194</sup> In their new home John served as a member of the Des Moines City Council, and was a prominent business man. Coggeshall converted to the First Unitarian Church and was an active member of the Unity Circle.<sup>195</sup> Coggeshall's activism did not waver when she was widowed nine years after the birth of her sixth child.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Carole Dale Spencer, "Quaker in Theological Context," in *The Oxford Handbook of Quaker Studies*, ed. Stephen W. Angell and Pink Dandelion, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 154-155.

<sup>193</sup> The Union Historical Company, *The History of Polk County, Iowa: Containing A History of the County, its Cities, Towns, & c., Biographical Sketches of its Citizens, War Records of its Volunteers in the late Rebellion, General and Local Statistics, Portraits of Early Settlers and Prominent Men, History of the Northwest, History of Iowa, Miscellaneous Matters, &c., & c.* (Des Moines: Union Historical Co., 1880), 790.

<sup>194</sup> Their first child died after birth and was unnamed. Clair was born in 1862 and Anna in 1865. The Coggeshalls' remaining children George (1867), Carl (1872), Harris (1876), and Corinne (1880) were all born in Iowa. See, Mott, "Coggeshall, Mary Jane Whitely," 93-94.

<sup>195</sup> Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 153.

<sup>196</sup> The Union Historical Company, *The History of Polk County, Iowa*, 790.

The true beginning of Coggeshall's Iowa woman suffrage work started with the Polk County Suffrage Society in 1870. This society first came together through the invitation of Annie Savery following the Mount Pleasant Convention. Savery, Amelia Bloomer, and Coggeshall all took part in the initial meeting to establish a committee "on permanent organization" for the Polk County Suffrage Society.<sup>197</sup> Coggeshall was selected as chairman, and Savery also served on the committee. While Bloomer called for this first meeting, she departed early, leaving Coggeshall and Savery to pick up the pieces. According to Noun, "the meeting adjourned after Mrs. Savery and Mrs. Coggeshall had passed through the audience taking up a collection to pay for the hall."<sup>198</sup> This appointed committee then officially organized the Polk County Suffrage Society on October 25. The society "always maintained the most successful organization" and is described by *History of Woman Suffrage: Volume 3* as "never fail[ing] to hold its meetings regularly each month since that time [October 1870]."<sup>199</sup> Coggeshall was appointed as the recording secretary for the esteemed suffrage group.<sup>200</sup>

Coggeshall became an editor for multiple Iowa newspapers. Beginning with the editorship of the *Woman's Hour* from 1877 to 1878, Coggeshall also acted as a society reporter for the *Daily Iowa State Register* and editor of *The Woman's Standard* from 1886 to 1888. Bridging the disconnect felt by women in the West and Midwest toward the suffrage movement's connection to the East, lectures and papers such as *The Woman's Hour* and *The Woman's Standard* allowed for local women to intertwine

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<sup>197</sup> Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 155.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>199</sup> Stanton, Anthony, and Gage. *History of Woman Suffrage: Volume 3*, 614

<sup>200</sup> Mott, "Coggeshall, Mary Jane Whitely," 93.

enfranchisement with their rural lifestyles. *The Woman's Hour*, founded by the Polk County Suffrage Society, ran its first issue September 26, 1877. Published during the Des Moines Industrial Exposition, the first issues were devoted to, "the cause of political equality, which means the interests of both sexes."<sup>201</sup> Expanding the purpose of the paper one year later, *The Woman's Hour* continued to espouse political equality by, "asking for the ballot that woman may thereby more successfully cope with the evil of intemperance, from which she is the greater sufferer—advocating [for] her perfect education, industrial and legal equality."<sup>202</sup> This specific newspaper outlet was established to avoid censorship and to share freely opinions and happenings of suffrage issues in the capital city.

In order to spread the importance of "health, purity, social culture, temperance, the schools, the state, and the laws in their relation to women, and the home," *The Woman's Standard* was created. Founded by Martha Callanan and editor Coggeshall in October 1886, this newspaper was the official organ for the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association.<sup>203</sup> The goals of the *Standard* were twofold: first, the paper was to alert the women of Iowa that they were being oppressed; second, to embolden these women to rise and fight their oppression.<sup>204</sup> Appealing to the people of Iowa, *The Woman's Standard* targeted urban, middle-class white women, as well as the rural population. Featuring updated laws, convention announcements, farming articles, and opinion pieces, this newspaper exemplified the differing needs and diversity of Iowans.

<sup>201</sup> *The Woman's Hour*, Vol. 1, No. 1, September 26, 1877, Des Moines, Iowa.

<sup>202</sup> *The Woman's Hour*, Vol. 2., No. 3, September 17, 1878, Des Moines, Iowa.

<sup>203</sup> While *The Woman's Standard* ran from 1886-1911, Mary Jane Coggeshall was the editor from 1886-1888.

<sup>204</sup> Stephanie Grossnickle-Batterton, "Lock the Granary, Peggy: Rhetorical Appeals to Rural Women in *The Woman's Standard*, 1886-1911," *Annals of Iowa* 4, Vol. 75 (Fall 2016): 351-375.

Coggeshall was raised on a farm, so it is no surprise that in her speeches she employed the language of rural Iowans to convey what was occurring in the movement. “We stand now at the closing of a year of great gains to us. Our state lecturer and organizer has provided herself not only a seed sower but a reaper as well, and hosts of new societies have spr[un]g up in her path and we can sing our harvest home amid stacks of garnered sheaves.”<sup>205</sup> Having lost Carrie Chapman Catt who moved to the East, Coggeshall now identified Catt’s “return” to Iowa in 1891. Calling for “a convention in every county in Iowa,” there is no surprise that these conventions helped form new suffrage societies.<sup>206</sup> Through expressing woman suffrage as the base for which all other moral reform measures are built, Coggeshall continued the metaphor:

What would we think of the farmer who was in earnest to raise a good crop of corn upon his promising acres but who was content to turn the soil with an old-fashioned plow with wooden mould board drawn by a yoke of oxen when a steam plow running a dozen furrows was obtainable but he would take no pains to secure it because the wooden plow & the yoke of oxen had been left to him by his father. Women are cultivating what is of more value than corn or wheat. They are raising boys & girls & need to be able to put the mother heart into the laws.<sup>207</sup>

She explained that when we do things out of habit, we limit ourselves. Using this argument Coggeshall shifted focus to the vital necessity for mothers to participate in crafting laws for the wellbeing of their children.

Through the social teachings of the patriarchal household utilized in representative government, Coggeshall believed women were taught that they were not of

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<sup>205</sup> Mary Jane Coggeshall, “Presidential Speech Before IESA Convention, Ames,” December 3, 1891, Reel 10, Document 2, Coggeshall Papers, Women’s Studies Collection, Schlesinger Library, 5.

<sup>206</sup> Noun, *Strong-Minded Women*, 236.

<sup>207</sup> Mary Jane Coggeshall, “IESA Convention Panora,” November 9, 1905, Reel 10, Document 9, Coggeshall Papers, Women’s Studies Collection, Schlesinger Library, 10.

value and thus did not hold an important place in society. "What think you of the success of that family where there is a rather good but very busy father, a large flock of children and no mother. Suppose this father declares before his household and before high heaven that the complicated machinery of his modern home needs [sic] no other manager than himself, and resents any offers of help as an insult to his high prerogative."<sup>208</sup> By ignoring the role of the mother, Coggeshall identified the impracticality put forth by the patriarchal household structure.

Practical knowledge of the familial structure during the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries depict the maternal role as the teacher of virtue. Since the eighteenth-century, the idea of Republican Motherhood burdened women with the role of dutiful wives and mothers, obeying their husbands, caring for their children, and looking after all of the family members' spiritual well-being. In the nineteenth-century this dynamic shifted with the rise of jobs outside of the home and the newly developed middle class. The creation of "separate spheres" consisted of the public sphere for white men and the domestic or private for white women. This domestic sphere utilized many of the same ideals as Republican Motherhood. While this creation of spheres is identified as a national movement, women of the West and Midwest did not experience these same rigid roles. The Midwestern way of living required fluidity of gender as farming required a woman's role be expanded, albeit they were still seen as moral beings and were expected to teach and uphold virtue.<sup>209</sup> Coggeshall outlined:

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<sup>208</sup> Mary Jane Coggeshall, "Suffrage Club: Men Tramps vs. Women Tramps," 1894, Reel 10, Document 6, Coggeshall Papers, Women's Studies Collection, Schlesinger Library, 12-13.

<sup>209</sup> Sally G. McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement* (Oxford, MA: Oxford University Press, 2008), 14-18.

that the duties of the home should not be left undone, our next duty is to work for the larger home—society and as in our homes we try to make every step count, every effort tell in the largest results to our families, so in the work for the larger home—society, we would put our hands & our limited time upon the lever whose fulcrum is at the foundation of things.<sup>210</sup>

Women in suffrage utilized the White Cross Movement to promote the female enfranchisement through the principles of a single standard for men and women, religious backing, and temperance. Coggeshall identified how the government had enfranchised the immoral saloon and gambling house while simultaneously disenfranchised two-thirds of the church and half of the home.<sup>211</sup> By connecting the argument of moral enforcement to the importance of temperance, Coggeshall calls out the anti-prohibitionists which have plagued the success of Iowa female enfranchisement.

Similar to Savery, Coggeshall also expressed the work of female enfranchisement as being linked to Christianity. Coggeshall was a member in the Unity Circle, “the most active women’s group” in Des Moines and the “strongest force working for legalizing the suffrage for women.”<sup>212</sup> Preaching the Unity Club’s mission as “bringing into the practical working of a church club the liberal spirit, which the church [stood] for...”<sup>213</sup> Coggeshall stated, “so we are trying our best to find God’s way out of the wilderness into

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<sup>210</sup> Mary Jane Coggeshall “Before WCTU: What Has Our Society Done For the Franchise,” 1892, Reel 10, Document 3, Coggeshall Papers, Women’s Studies Collection, Schlesinger Library, 6.

<sup>211</sup> Mary Jane Coggeshall, “IESA Independence,” November 18, 1896, Reel 10, Document 7, Coggeshall Papers, Women’s Studies Collection, Schlesinger Library, 7.

<sup>212</sup> First Unitarian Church of Des Moines, “Our Roots in Social Justice,” First Unitarian Church of Des Moines: A Unitarian Universalist Church, 2018. <https://www.ucdsm.org/social-justice-overview/roots-social-justice/>

<sup>213</sup> Mary Jane Coggeshall, “Is Philanthropy a Science or a Fad,” n.d., Reel 10, Document Coggeshall Papers, Women’s Studies Collection, Schlesinger Library, 14.

the Promised Land & our road seems to be by the way of the State Constitution."<sup>214</sup> By equating lack of enfranchisement as being in the "wilderness," Coggeshall spoke to the neglect that women faced at the hands of government. Through identifying God as the answer, a moral connection was made. She embraced the state-by-state method adopted by woman suffrage organizations as the road to freedom.<sup>215</sup> Woman suffrage in Iowa found many supporters in religious circles including Coggeshall with her strong Protestant background.

Coggeshall's upbringing also led to her extensive fight in the Iowa Equal Rights Association. These Equal Rights Associations originated with the American Equal Rights Association in 1866, created through the "merging of the American Anti-Slavery Society and the women's rights movement."<sup>216</sup> The goal was to "secur[e] the ballot for African American males and all women."<sup>217</sup> Coggeshall acted as the president of the Des Moines Equal Suffrage Club in 1898 and delivered speeches throughout the state of Iowa to local Equal Rights Associations. Coggeshall was deeply involved in the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association. Her speech before the Equality Club of Eagle Grove discussed the movement toward women's enfranchisement as emerging from the abolition movement.<sup>218</sup> Furthering these ideas with other empowering speeches before Political Equality Clubs across Iowa, Coggeshall pointed out the "plight of women," "the yoke

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<sup>214</sup> Coggeshall, "IESA Ida Grove," 4.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Judith E. Harper, "American Equal Rights Association," in *Women's Rights in the United States: A Comprehensive Encyclopedia of Issues, Events, and People*, eds. Tiffany K. Wayne and Lois Banner, Vol. 2, Suffrage and a New Wave of Women's Activism, 1870–1950 (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2015), 9.

<sup>217</sup> Mott, "Coggeshall, Mary Jane Whitely," 93.

<sup>218</sup> Mary Jane Coggeshall, "Two Versions," [1893?], Women's Studies Collection, Schlesinger Library, 9.



placed upon them by the government,” and “what they were to do about their dilemma.”<sup>219</sup> The inequality woman faced was not just the lack of voting rights, but the subordination endured since creation. Coggeshall framed the relegation of women as moral enforcers for men through the Adam and Eve story. Coggeshall utilized the stereotypes entrenched in women’s lives; she focused on the importance of not “emulate[ing] the foolish virgin.”<sup>220</sup> Pointing out that blind faith does not lead to universal good, Coggeshall instead insisted that we must wage our work individually and then through this work you will find those of like-mindedness.<sup>221</sup>

One organization with Christian backing involved in the fight for female enfranchisement in Iowa was the Woman Christian Temperance Union. Pledging woman suffrage support, the WCTU, led by Frances Willard, backed the evangelical mission of women gaining the right to vote.<sup>222</sup> Identifying the efforts of woman suffrage, Coggeshall explained, “we [Iowa suffrage workers] imagine that we have been the pioneers that blazed the way—cut down the mountains of prejudice bridged the chasms of ridicule, and helped to make possible the way for the outcoming [sic] feet of the sisters of the W.C.T.U.”<sup>223</sup> Advocating for the WCTU, Coggeshall noted that “if you will keep the men sober long enough for them to vote right, we will see to it that the power is put into the hands of women to help them stay sober.”<sup>224</sup> The Woman Christian Temperance

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<sup>219</sup> Coggeshall, “IESA Convention Panora,” 9.

<sup>220</sup> Coggeshall, “Is Philanthropy a Science or a Fad,” 13. “The foolish virgin” that Coggeshall is referencing the parable of the Ten Virgins found in Matthew 25:1-13.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Carolyn DeSwarte Gifford, “Frances Willard and the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union’s Conversion to Woman Suffrage,” in *One Woman, One Vote*, ed. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, 117-120.

<sup>223</sup> Coggeshall “Before WCTU,” 1-2.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 4.

Union had opened up a franchise department that suffrage societies clung to in hopes of establishing centers of influence throughout Iowa. This cooperation and utilization of the Woman Christian Temperance Union over time can be seen in Coggeshall's speech on the Political Advancement of Women in Norwalk, Iowa.<sup>225</sup> The WCTU played an extremely important role in Iowa suffrage work, and the West as a whole. Faced with anti-prohibitionists as suffrage's main competitor, enfranchisement workers in the West and Midwest embraced the WCTU for its widespread backing and similar values.<sup>226</sup> "The Temperance reform movement," described by Coggeshall, "spread almost like wildfire."<sup>227</sup> Often times women of the WCTU had already formed societies, and suffrage workers were taken into their ranks. Woman suffrage and the WCTU were not fighting each other for members because they often comprised of the same individuals. Coggeshall noted that in Iowa the WCTU and Equal Suffrage Association engaged in "precisely the same kind of work." and that throughout the years the organizations have worked "side by side...in harmony."<sup>228</sup> The pairing of the WCTU and woman suffrage successfully promoted morality.

Coggeshall's personal papers highlighted the impact and connections of many groups, including the Woman Christian Temperance Union, the Grange, Woman's Clubs, the Knights of Labor, as well as various religious organizations, to woman suffrage. Coggeshall emphasized the unity of women, no matter their association, as key to

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<sup>225</sup> Mary Jane Coggeshall, "Norwalk: Political Advancement of Women," 1905, Reel 10, Document 10, Coggeshall Papers, Women's Studies Collection, Schlesinger Library.

<sup>226</sup> Wheeler, *One Woman, One Vote*, 11-12; Egge, "Woman Suffrage is a Midwestern Story," 12.

<sup>227</sup> Coggeshall, "Norwalk: Political Advancement of Women," 3.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

garnering massive support and backing for suffrage. Coggeshall chanted, “[s]o we say all hail, to the women’s clubs, the missionary societies, the Christian Ass’ns, the King’s Daughters, & that greatest [sic] organization the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union.”<sup>229</sup> Coggeshall shows the universality of equal suffrage within different groupings in Iowa.

Coggeshall attempted to garner support for woman suffrage in the Iowa Legislature. Presenting the pro-suffrage argument before the Twenty-Seventh General Assembly on February 3, 1898, Coggeshall spoke on behalf of female enfranchisement. Witnessing both pro- and anti-suffrage sentiments, this legislative session had heated discussions on woman suffrage. Later, as reported in the *Woman’s Standard*, Coggeshall skillfully attacked the antis. The antis claimed that they were “taxed to their fullest capacity their mental, moral, and physical strength.”<sup>230</sup> While Coggeshall’s remarks were not transcribed in full, her other speeches used these same reasonings to negate the anti-argument and gain support for female enfranchisement.<sup>231</sup>

Coggeshall left a lasting impression on the Iowa history of woman suffrage. Initiating a lawsuit after women were barred from voting for a city bond election in 1908, Coggeshall successfully argued in favor of females wielding their voting rights. Partial suffrage on bond issues was made legal fourteen years prior for the women of Iowa. Coggeshall argued this partial suffrage was unjustly being withheld from the women of Des Moines through the city clerk not furnishing “separate ballots and ballot boxes for

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<sup>229</sup> Mary Jane Coggeshall, “IESA Convention Independence,” 5.

<sup>230</sup> Gallaher, *Legal and Political Status of Women in Iowa*, 211.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

each voting precinct."<sup>232</sup> This refusal occurred because the city solicitor believed that "women were not entitled to vote," and therefore made no accommodations for them.<sup>233</sup> The lawsuit initiated by Coggeshall was taken all the way to the Iowa Supreme Court. In *Coggeshall v. City of Des Moines*, the court found that "more than half of those entitled to vote were denied the privilege...[and] slightly injur[ed]...from the deprivation of this important right"<sup>234</sup> Deeming the election invalid, the court found in favor of the women of Iowa.<sup>235</sup> Through men pushing back on woman suffrage after partial enfranchisement was made legal, Coggeshall challenged the patriarchy through her lawsuit.

Coggeshall played an active role in Iowa woman suffrage until the day before her death. She was the mastermind behind a three-part pledge plan to help combat the legislative see-sawing of the General Assembly. The Joint Campaign Committee, a committee made up of members from the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association and the Men's League for Woman Suffrage, memorialized Mary J. Coggeshall, calling her a "pioneer in the suffrage cause, having given to it over forty-one years of able and continuous service, and was one of the prime movers and most deeply interested in the new plan of suffrage work which [the] committee...carr[ied] out...."<sup>236</sup> Upon her death,

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<sup>232</sup> *Coggeshall v. City of Des Moines*, July 7, 1908, in *Reports of Cases in Law and Equity Determined in the Supreme Court of the State of Iowa*, Vol. 138, ed. W.W. Cornwall (Chicago: T. H. Flood & Co., Publishers, 1909), 742.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> Lisa Mott, "Coggeshall, Mary Jane Whitely," *The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009), 93.

<sup>236</sup> Joint Campaign Committee, "History and Organization of Suffrage in Iowa, 1911-1917," 4.

Coggeshall demonstrated commitment to the cause through relegating \$15,000 to the woman suffrage cause.<sup>237</sup>

Like Savery, Coggeshall began her public suffrage efforts in Iowa, and, unlike Bloomer, Coggeshall placed Iowans as the focus of her efforts. Coggeshall saw the vote as a way of advancing the morality of women while pushing back on negative stereotyping. Working for woman suffrage until the day before her death, Coggeshall's dedication for Iowa enfranchisement of women is clear.

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

