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*I am simply one who loves the past and is diligent in investigating it.*  
K'ung-fu-tzu (551-479 BC) *The Analects*

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1944 Vice Presidential Race	Andrew Yuan
Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, New Hampshire	
Women's Roles in Greek Tragedy	Summer Shapero
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Napoleon's Artists	Ray Zhou
St. George's School, Vancouver, Canada	
John Leighton Stuart	Rongxin Meng
Yew Chung International School of Beijing, Beijing, China	

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## THE CRUSADING SPIRIT OF THE WOMEN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION

Zoe Tang

### Introduction

In the winter of 1873, 70 women, walking two by two, solemnly marched forth from a Presbyterian church in Hillsboro, Ohio, and arrived at a saloon. Leading the band was Elizabeth "Mother" Thompson, daughter of Ohio's former governor, Allen Trimble, and by then the wife of a highly respected judge. The women knelt on the sawdust floors and met the drinking men with quiet prayers. During the 50 days that followed, the praying band of women paid daily visitations to drinking places in Ohio.<sup>1</sup> Carrying Bibles in their hands, they tenaciously remained in prayer until the alcohol sellers capitulated and signed a pledge to quit their business. If denied entrance, they knelt on the snowy pavements before the doorways, against the frigid, biting wind.<sup>2</sup> Those praying bands of women, later known as the Women Crusaders, crippled the liquor traffic in 250 towns in Ohio.<sup>3</sup> The movement created a great sensation and gained publicity through newspaper coverage, setting off a chain reaction in various states, most notably

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Indiana, Michigan, and Illinois. In one year, the Woman's Crusade swept across 21 states from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, with an estimated participation of 150,000.<sup>4</sup> At the zenith of its force, however, the Woman's Crusade lost energy and fizzled. No more praying and persuading in the saloons; the movement burnt out just as abruptly as it had ignited.

Less than one year later, though, in 1874, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) sprung from the ashes of the Woman's Crusade and mustered strength. Founded by members of the Woman's Crusade, the WCTU aimed to carry along the work of the Crusaders and bring total abstinence to the country. The WCTU established 1,117 local unions within five years of its inception, reached a membership of 500,000 in the 1910s, and eventually developed into an international organization working for labor laws, prison reform, child welfare, public health, and many other social reforms aside from temperance.<sup>5</sup> It helped in the campaign to ratify the 18th Amendment in 1919, which prohibited the manufacture, sale, and transportation of beverages containing more than 0.5 percent alcohol throughout the country. Though the 18th Amendment was repealed by the 21st Amendment in 1933, it was the first constitutional amendment that came to fruition because of women's participation.

Thompson passed away in 1905 at the age of 89, never having the chance to witness the birth of the 18th Amendment. Yet, her spirit continued to inspire and animate activist women in the WCTU. When those women recalled their journey on the road to prohibition and the franchise, they thought back to the initial crusade at Hillsboro that triggered their organization's founding. The members of the WCTU never forgot Thompson. She was celebrated and emulated for her gentle character and unyielding faith. Why was the Woman's Crusade movement so significant to the WCTU, given that it flamed out so shortly after its ignition? To answer this question, this paper examines the WCTU's self-published organizational histories to explore how it has framed its own founding and development. The flame of the Woman's Crusade extinguished in 1874, but the WCTU would inherit its

religious spirit along with its participants' conservative ideals of womanhood, both of which would infuse the core of the WCTU's strategies and tactics as it worked to outlaw liquor.

#### Alcohol Consumption and Temperance Efforts Before the Woman's Crusade

In the decade before the Crusade movement, the consumption of alcohol had reached an unprecedented level. While adults in the 1770s consumed an average of 3.5 gallons of alcohol per year, the number rose to 7 gallons per year in 1873, quadruple the average rate of alcohol consumption per person today.<sup>6</sup> According to the *Annual Report of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, 1901*, the number of liquor stores increased by 154 percent in the decade preceding the Crusade, while the U.S. population increased only by 23 percent.<sup>7</sup>

Early in the 19th century, rising consumption of alcohol had already struck an alarm bell in many localities, convincing the general public and a number of state legislatures of the need to regulate liquor traffic. The American Temperance Society was formed in Boston in 1826, and the Washingtonian Society was founded in Maryland in 1840; together these temperance organizations carried out the early battles against alcohol. In the 1850s, the "hatchet brigades," in which women hid hatchets under their shawls to break apart wine barrels in saloons, campaigned against the liquor trade in their own communities. They marched to the saloons in two groups; one distracted the barkeepers through arguments, and the other broke apart wine barrels at the back of the saloon. Liquor gurgled and flew onto the street in tiny streams as crowds watched in awe.<sup>8</sup> Throughout their existence, the "hatchet brigades" were only successful on regional scales and never reached a nationwide magnitude. By 1855, 13 states had passed prohibition laws, but many were loosely enforced or repealed shortly after their enactment. Only three states, Maine, Vermont, and New Hampshire, remained "dry" by 1875.<sup>9</sup> In 1874, Thomas Hill, head of the Unitarian parish in Portland, Maine, was disillusioned of the effectiveness of Maine's prohibition laws after

witnessing young men staggering drunkenly through the streets of Portland and said that his "faith in the Prohibitory Law was greatly shaken."<sup>10</sup> In effect, the enforcement of state prohibitions laws was by no means strong enough to eliminate the sale of liquor.

Between 1861 and 1865, the Civil War put temperance efforts on hold and gave liquor traffic legal sanction under wartime emergency. After the war, returning veterans and new waves of immigrants resumed their drinking habits. Like a double-edged sword, the war raised the level of alcohol consumption, but also sparked women's engagement in humanitarian services and aroused their consciousness of their potential in civic reforms. According to Helen E. Tyler, the author of one of the WCTU organizational histories, a significant number embarked on the temperance movement after the war; in fact, the temperance efforts after the Civil War were predominantly marked by female leadership.<sup>11</sup>

#### The Woman's Crusade and the Hurdles It Faced

The Woman's Crusade experienced great success for the first few months, but it became clear that the movement was far less successful in cities for several major reasons. First was the resistance from saloon keepers, who became increasingly successful at defending themselves through publicity campaigns and the courts. Saloon keepers formed alliances, and some even exploited the Crusades as a money-making tool. Furious mobs posed a second threat and demoralized the Women Crusaders. Religious diversity in cities reduced the Crusaders' ideological support. Last but not least, inconveniences that the praying bands brought to cities roused criticism. Altogether these factors were sufficient to crush the Crusades and led to their demise.

Many saloon keepers in rural areas surrendered to the women as they were shocked by the novelty of the Crusade movement. "The eyes of hardened men filled with tears, and many turned away, saying that they could not bear to look on such a sight," an editor of a Boston newsletter testified.<sup>12</sup> These bar keepers' assertiveness was greatly weakened after they were emotionally

affected by the women's moral persuasion. In contrast, in urban areas, saloon keepers had heard much about the praying bands through news coverage and had been anticipating their arrival. They knew the women wanted to undermine their business and they prepared to fight back, even if they risked looking less humane by rejecting the women's pledge. Saloon keepers planned counter attacks, shielding themselves with lawyers, refusing to submit to the women's prayers, and exploiting the Crusades as a money-making tool to enhance the liquor business.

Many barkeepers sued for damages and trespassing on the grounds that the crusade movement was an infringement on their property. In Portland, when 15 women protesting in saloons refused to stop praying, the bar keeper summoned the police and the women were arrested under the charge of "behaving in a disorderly manner."<sup>13</sup> In Cincinnati, the crusaders' efficiency was permanently impaired after they faced legal sanction. After forty-three women crusaders were sued and arrested, they never again marched in such a large group, in order to keep within the confines of the law.<sup>14</sup> So long as state legislation was unresponsive to the cause of prohibition, the saloon keepers' tactic of appealing for legal protection was successful.

Moreover, saloon keepers coordinated and spread their own pledge to defend the sale of liquor. Dealers in Columbus, Ohio formed the Columbus Liquor Dealers' Association and ordered bar owners to resist the visitation of the praying bands and refuse to sign any pledges from the women. As a result of their resistance, the Crusade movement ceased within a month in Columbus. Some saloon keepers pretended to display their magnanimity by allowing the women to pray in their bars, but in fact they were shrewdly capitalizing on the women's crusade as a source of attraction to make profits. When the women crusaders drew a large crowd before several saloons in Dayton, the bar keepers began to dispense free drinks, and liquor flowed as freely as ever. The method of propagating their business by taking advantage of the praying bands spread to Chicago. A saloon keeper hired three women to pose as crusaders and proposed that he would hold two "prayer



meetings" every week.<sup>15</sup> While the Crusaders were determined to dissolve the liquor business, the saloon keepers mockingly used their efforts to increase sales.

Mobs constituted another crushing force to the Crusades. As women campaigned in saloons in Dayton, "a band of hoodlums" assaulted them with "crackers and bologna." As time passed, the mob turned into a riot and was suppressed by the police. Yet the police force ordered the women as well to "cease their street work," bringing the Crusades to an end. Similar scenes of violence occurred in Cleveland and Chicago. Two Crusaders in Cleveland were chased by a mob and both were injured. A mob of 5,000 in Chicago spat at them, showering them in tobacco juice, causing many to trip and fall.<sup>16</sup> Like in Dayton, the mobs were repelled by the police force, but at the cost of the praying work of the Crusaders. Already demoralized by the mobs' malign remarks, the Women Crusaders complied with legal sanction.

Traffic interruptions were especially disturbing in large cities, as confrontational protests could easily break the social order. A journalist observed that "sidewalk prayer-meetings would be attended with many serious inconveniences, and subject to many interruptions and annoyances."<sup>17</sup> When the National Temperance Society convened in New York in March, 1874 to discuss the method that should be employed against intemperance, they excluded the strategies of the "Ohio movement."<sup>18</sup> Reasons were not explicitly expressed, but clearly the Crusade movement had brought significant inconvenience to New York's public, so society members were reluctant to adopt it as a strategy.

Religious diversity in cities produced further dissenting voices towards the women. To those who shared the same evangelical beliefs and doctrines, the women's prayers were undeniable, sublime messages from God. Yet when other religious denominations were present, unanimity was not so easily reached. Such was the case in large cities. In Cincinnati, religious leader Rabbi Issac Wise, Pastor Kroell, and Pastor Eisenlohr fiercely denounced the Crusades with an incensed German crowd at a German Saloon-keepers' Association meeting.<sup>19</sup> Religious leaders, who provided

vital support to the women crusaders in rural areas, turned against them in cities as they disapproved of the women's viewpoint.

The failure of the Crusades in cities caused the movement to fizzle out. These demoralizing effects, adding onto the dissenting voices from religious leaders, undermined the women's ideological righteousness. Most importantly, the Crusades seemed to be overmatched by the defense from saloon keepers, who utilized alliances, laws, and exploitation of the Crusades to make it impossible for the women to achieve the effect they needed to enforce total abstinence.

#### The Role of the Woman's Crusade in the Origin of WCTU

Though the Woman's Crusade disintegrated just like other local temperance efforts before it, it planted the seeds of change. Few men in authority saw what Thompson and her fellow Crusaders had sown, much less all that those seeds would reap, but a few did. Henry Blair, a U.S. Senator from New Hampshire, spoke of the Woman's Crusade as "a great moral commotion, in which woman escaped and learned her power, never again to be caged."<sup>20</sup>

The Woman's Crusade inspired the organization of the Women's Christian Temperance Union. Samuel Unger, a historian who wrote his dissertation on the history of the WCTU in 1933, explains that a national women's organization to promote the temperance movement was first proposed and organized by Women Crusaders at a National Sunday School Assembly in Chautauqua, NY, in August, 1874. Those Crusaders organized the first WCTU convention in November, 1874. The name "Women's Christian Temperance Union" had been first used by the crusaders of Fredonia in December, 1873, and was later adopted by the national organization at its founding in 1874.<sup>21</sup> Scholarly historians and organizational historians agree on the connection between the Woman's Crusade and the WCTU, although the latter add more rhetorical flair to the description. Elizabeth Putnam Gordon, a WCTU member, whose 1924 history of the WCTU was commissioned by the organization, writes of its origin: "It is an organization of Christian women banded together for the protection of

the home, the abolition of the liquor traffic and the triumph of Christ's Golden Rule in custom and in law; and it is the lineal descendant of the great Women's Temperance Crusade of 1873-1874."<sup>22</sup> These types of flourishes display the values that the WCTU aims to embody. By examining certain emphases and omissions in WCTU organizational histories, one can discern the core spirit of religiosity and conservative womanliness in the WCTU.

In the foreword of her 1924 history, *Women Torchbearers*, Gordon makes clear that her work is "dedicated to the home-loving and progressive members of the WCTU." As an organizational history, her volume memorializes the values, tactics, and leaders the WCTU celebrated in the glow of the ratifications of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Amendments in 1919 and 1920. Furthermore, Gordon explicitly claims that her hope in writing this book was to help the next generation understand the spirit of the "marching mothers of the Crusade" and the history of the WCTU.<sup>23</sup> The central purpose of her book is thus to praise the crusading ethos of the WCTU; her evidence is selected and presented to serve this purpose. *Women Torchbearers* reveals how the WCTU wants people to perceive it as an organization.

In addition to *Women Torchbearers*, this paper analyzes a second organizational history: *Where Prayer and Purpose Meet*, by Helen E. Tyler, a former editor of the *Union Signal*, the WCTU's official weekly magazine. Tyler was invited by the WCTU president, Leigh Colvin, to write a book to celebrate WCTU's 75th anniversary in 1949. To make the book look less like propaganda, Colvin argues in the preface that Tyler was not associated with the WCTU or other temperance organizations, and reiterates that she commissioned Tyler because of her "objective" point of view. This statement is questionable, because Tyler was obviously connected to the WCTU as the editor of its weekly magazine. Additionally, Colvin frankly mentions that she wanted Tyler to capture the Christian spirit underlying all WCTU activities and the "farsightedness and single purposefulness of the women" throughout the history of the organization.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, *Where Prayer and Purpose Meet* is similar to Gordon's book in that it also promotes the evangelical

spirit that the WCTU proudly displayed. These organizational histories are effective in showing the goals and character of the organization and helping readers to understand its fundamental values and the driving forces behind its actions.

### Eliza Thompson, the "Founding Figure"

Both WCTU histories recount the story of the Woman's Crusade through the perspective of Eliza Thompson. Both histories locate the organization's founding in Thompson's hometown, Hillsboro, Ohio, where she launched the first march on saloons. Dubbing Hillsboro "the Cradle of the Crusade Movement," the official histories crown Thompson as the "Crusade Mother."<sup>25</sup> In truth, WCTU glorified Thompson at the cost of other figures who contributed as much to the crusade movement, yet their roles were downplayed perhaps because they didn't possess the character that the WCTU admired and wanted to showcase to society.

The founder of the Woman's Crusade was not, in fact, Eliza Thompson, but Dr. Dio Lewis, a health and temperance lecturer and a minister from New York. He had a mother who had been frequently abused by her drunken husband, and in those situations she would pray in the attic of the house for hours. In the 1830s, Lewis's mother resolved to attack the liquor business that was undermining her home, and she led a band of women to protest saloons in Clarksville. They carried Bibles and hymn books in their arms, urging the drinkers to give up their business through prayers, songs, and tears. Lewis, inspired by his mother, imparted her praying tactics when he preached on Sunday evening at various churches around the country. In 1858, Illinois women decided to try out his tactics, and they successfully closed every saloon in their town, 39 in total. Two months later, women in Michigan organized and banished the liquor business. Nevertheless, these movements remained on local levels and didn't gain much public attention. Dr. Lewis responded to this discouragement by continuing to preach in churches about "The Duty of Christian Women in the Temperance Work" in the next ten years.<sup>26</sup> As a result of Lewis's itinerant preaching, two localities, Natick, Mass-

achusetts, and Manchester, New Hampshire, saw similar praying movements, but both movements eventually subsided without spreading more widely.

The turning point in Lewis's quest came in 1873. On December 22, 1873, in Hillsboro, Ohio, Lewis' sermon kindled the women's passion at the church in Hillsboro. Dr. Lewis inquired "how many of [the men] would stand as backers, should the ladies undertake the work."<sup>27</sup> Seventy women rose and declared that they were willing to try his plan, and a committee of men formed to support the women. Lewis suggested that six types of pledges be circulated at the bars—"total abstinence pledge," "dealer's pledge," "doctor's pledge," "druggist's pledge," "propertyholder's pledge," and "lawyer's pledge," challenging men in esteemed professions to consider alcohol use in light of their professed ethics. At this point, the crusade movement was set into motion. Ironically, a male launched the Woman's Crusade, whose mother invented the praying methods so crucial to the entire movement.

In the WCTU's organizational histories, however, Lewis's role is downplayed. The WCTU concentrates on the experience of Elizabeth "Mother" Thompson, a woman who found her voice through the crusade. According to Gordon and Tyler, Thompson would not have joined the temperance movement had she not felt called to do so by God. But Thompson was not present when 70 women in Hillsboro's Presbyterian church rose and declared that they were ready to embark on "God's business." The news of Lewis's sermon was conveyed to her by her 16-year-old son. Before Thompson could even reply, her husband chimed in and asked, "What tomfoolery is that?" Thompson promised that she would not be drawn in by Dr. Lewis, but later told her husband that "men had been in the 'tomfoolery' business a long time, and it might be God's will that the women should now take their part."<sup>28</sup> Later, according to the WCTU histories, Thompson went to pray to seek God's guidance to break the impasse between her and her husband, and her daughter rushed in and showed her Psalm 146, a page to which she had accidentally opened in the Bible. Psalm 146 celebrates God's sovereignty and almightiness: "Praise the

Lord...the Lord loves the righteous...but he frustrates the ways of the wicked."<sup>29</sup> That God has the power to crush the "wicked" and bring justice to society corresponded, in Thompson's eyes, to suppressing alcoholism. She interpreted the Psalm as approval from God, believing that God was on their side to enforce total abstinence. Thompson used religious faith, often the weapon of the deprived and vulnerable members of society, to challenge both her husband's authority and social norms that she and many other women believed to be toxic.

The next day, a huge assembly of women gathered at the church and chose Thompson to lead their march. The assembly's decision that day, as well as the WCTU's rhetorical choice to hold up Thompson as its founding hero, was in response to the Psalm that Thompson had found and brought to the meeting, to her identity as a gentle, religious woman, and to her respectability as the daughter of a former governor and the wife of an esteemed judge. WCTU president Francis Willard later recounted:

By common consent Mrs. Eliza J. Thompson, a gentle-mannered lady of sixty years, from youth an earnest Christian and always prominent in charitable works, was selected to lead the chosen band on its first visit to the saloons. She was a wife, mother, and grandmother, loving and beloved, with marks upon her face of the grief which renders sacred, which disarms criticism, and, in this instance, has a significance too deep for tears.<sup>30</sup>

In the WCTU's narrative of its inception, Thompson is front and center because she exemplified the ideal of conservative womanhood by participating in the holy mission of temperance work to defend the sacred institutions of marriage and family from the corruption of "demon rum." More than a catalyst to the Woman's Crusade, Christian faith justified women's activism in the public sphere, not as a radical trespass into the province of men, but as an act of devotion to a tradition of values in the province of womanhood.

#### Religion in WCTU Identity and Practice

The WCTU carried on the religious spirit of the Woman's Crusade by incorporating it into its own motto and founding

documents. The WCTU's national motto, "For God and Home and Native Land," self-evidently places religion in the front seat. The "Declaration of Principle," the founding document of the WCTU, drafted by Frances E. Willard at the first national convention in 1874, is imbued with religious rhetoric: "We believe that God created both man and woman in His own image, and, therefore, we believe in one standard of purity for both men and women." The WCTU justified its work by alleging that they were empowered by God to regulate men's and women's drinking habits. The declaration resounds with references to Divine power, such as "His Kingdom," "His laws," "the Gospel of the Golden Rule," "the Gospel of Christ," and "the power of Divine grace," all illustrating the founding members' intention to link the organization with religious ideals. Willard later compared the organization's cause to that of Joan of Arc, making clear that the WCTU members were willing to sacrifice for the temperance cause, which they firmly believed to be God's business.<sup>31</sup>

Gordon emphasizes throughout her history of the WCTU that prayer remained central to its mission even as it moved beyond the praying bands of the crusades. Prayer became part of the WCTU's formal rituals and functioned as an antidote to members' fears. Following the WCTU's first national temperance convention, each subsequent national convention began after a half-day of prayer. Much like a miniature church, the WCTU incorporated prayers into its organizational agenda to instill resolve and enthusiasm in its members. Like Thompson, who prayed for guidance before deciding to march to the saloons, Willard knelt in prayer before she attended temperance meetings in the South. Worried that her speech might be defamed by "the extreme prejudice of the South against women's public work," she leaned on her faith for confidence and fortitude to face the hurdles that were to come.<sup>32</sup>

In Gordon's account of the passage of the 18th Amendment in Congress, she describes how the WCTU members prayed, still reciting Psalm 146 as they awaited news of its passage. Before the House of Representatives passed the referendum bill for National Constitutional Prohibition in 1917, a large group of WCTU

members waited at the entrance and repeated Psalm 146 under their breath.<sup>33</sup> This was the very Psalm that inspired Thompson to join the temperance cause in 1873. In setting this scene, Gordon highlights the link between the WCTU's victory in passing the 18th amendment and the spirit of "Mother Thompson" as its founding figure.

"Womanliness first—afterward what you will."

The WCTU's leaders believed that the spirit of motherhood, an antidote to the "loveless" male disposition, would remedy social vices caused by men.<sup>34</sup> Frances Willard and Mary Livermore each grew up in a patriarchal family with a domineering father. Willard retained a bitter memory of her father committing "an act of unthinkable cruelty" when he sold all of their family possessions to wipe out the memory of her sister's death.<sup>35</sup> Livermore's father imposed a Sunday regime on the family so strict that he forbade anything but reading the Bible and praying. Livermore bitterly recalled that she harped "on the frailness of the hope of salvation and...frequently felt a bitter regret that I had ever been born."<sup>36</sup> In both cases, the authoritative rule of the father in the domestic sphere had led those women to value motherly love and care.

Knowing that growing up in an alcoholic family is detrimental to children's development, WCTU members assumed their responsibility for teaching the correct values to children. Their mission "to train their sons and daughters in the cradle and around the home altars to forever abjure all that can intoxicate" was strikingly similar to the ideals of Republican Motherhood, which expected women to raise their children to be productive citizens loyal to the republic. A resolution passed at the 1875 convention claimed: "Resolved—That as the responsibility of the training of the children and youth rests largely upon woman, she ought to be allowed to open or close the rum-shop door over against her home."<sup>37</sup> Since alcohol was seen as a degenerative influence on morality, the power to exercise control over alcohol was crucial in mothering and raising citizens with the correct values.



Not limiting their activities to the education of children at home, WCTU members embarked on bringing the motherly spirit to the larger society. They sought to impede the liquor traffic through scientific temperance education in public schools and Sunday schools, which, compared to other forms of activism such as protests or political rallies, contained tinges of womanliness. The spiritual aspect of embarking upon temperance education was clearly influenced by perceptions of their identities as mothers. Compared to the saloons, schools were set for learning and reevaluating concepts, and children, unlike saloon keepers, were cooperative and malleable. The concept of scientific temperance instruction was influenced, if not closely intertwined, by the members' sense of motherhood. The educational programs that took place in society were extensions of education at home, an attempt "to make the world more homelike."<sup>38</sup>

As time passed, temperance education took place not only in schools but in the larger society, paving the road for constitutional prohibition. The WCTU distributed posters, motion pictures, and films portraying the adverse effects of alcohol. In her historical narrative, commissioned by the WCTU, Tyler praised the eight WCTU temperance motion pictures and seven films that widely circulated among schools and churches as the "only professionally made temperance pictures on the market."<sup>39</sup>

The WCTU's efforts paid off. In 1882, Vermont took the lead by becoming the first state to adopt an alcohol education law. In 1886, Congress passed the National Temperance Education law, offering federal funds to support the teaching of the physiological impact of alcohol in every public school. In twenty years, every state enforced laws that required temperance instruction laws in public schools.<sup>40</sup> Newspapers, including the Associated College Newspaper Publishers and the Georgia Weekly Press Association, barred liquor advertisements from their publications and prohibited liquor beverages to be served at their events.<sup>41</sup>

The WCTU's attitude towards immigrants presents a particularly telling case of selective history in the WCTU's self-published accounts. Around 3,100,000 immigrants arrived in the

country by the 1880s, many from cultures that normalized drinking. This posed a threat to the temperance efforts, but according to the WCTU histories, WCTU members helped to assimilate them to American cultures rather than treating them with nativist abhorrence. According to Tyler, WCTU educational programs combined English, American civics and history with temperance and religious teachings and were nondiscriminatory to all immigrant groups, welcoming Germans, Irish, Spanish, Italians, Mexican, and Chinese all alike.<sup>42</sup> In her telling, the WCTU's mission to bring motherhood into society extended to the organization's attitude towards immigrants as well. However, the WCTU in fact advocated deportation when immigrants violated liquor laws. Additionally, when immigrants failed to comply with total abstinence, a crusader claimed that the foreigners who didn't like the idea of prohibition could go back to their own countries.<sup>43</sup> The WCTU here, again, shaped its historical narrative to fit the womanly image that it sought to portray.

WCTU members affirmed differences between males and females, and they used the roles traditionally assigned to each to justify women's activism in the temperance cause. "Men alone will never gain the courage to legislate against other men," Willard declared, speaking to a female audience about the harm done by prostitution, another "vice" opposed by the WCTU. "Only women can induce lawmakers...to make the repetition of such outrages an impossibility."<sup>44</sup> Women's claim to sovereignty in those immorality lay in the gendered qualities valued in the Victorian Age, particularly the traditional womanly virtues of gentleness, empathy, and modesty. In Nashville, Tennessee, after Willard's address in a temperance meeting, a man told Willard that he and his friends were impressed by her speech. In particular, they were stunned by her "womanliness." She seemed to them "so sisterly and so motherly, with a divine mind," that "[she] is the embodiment of the qualities she said women should possess, womanliness first—afterward what you will." Later, in San Jose, California, when Willard lobbied for temperance, she was acclaimed for her womanly grace that accompanied her logical reasoning. Dr. Lemuel Murlin, president of Boston University, shared at the meeting a story about his

early encounter with Willard when he was a student at a university in Kansas: the students didn't look forward to Willard's lecture, Murlin recalled, but they had an "electric thrill" when they heard her speak. She "was in the prime of life, a charming personality, as well as a magnetic speaker," so powerful in her speech that she made the students realize the benefits of total abstinence to a degree they never did living in Kansas, a prohibition state.<sup>45</sup> In all three cases, Willard's womanly traits made the audiences more receptive to logical reasoning, which subtly defies the traditional expectation then that being argumentative, particularly about politics and public affairs, was not ladylike. The WCTU histories do not complain about that gender norm; in fact, they embrace those traditional gender norms and celebrate WCTU leaders for using them to their advantage.

The WCTU displayed its motherly spirit in the décor of its temperance meetings. Members often decorated the meeting rooms with furniture reminiscent of home, "replacing the dusty halls of early nineteenth-century reform meetings...with auditoria adorned with bunting, curtains, cushions, plants, pictures" to establish an ambiance of the birth family, which were often associated with warmth and care. At times, especially when prohibition was on the ballot, they would decorate polling places with flowers and mottos like "the father's constituency is his family." In Marion, Ohio, the WCTU opened a lunchroom on election day, serving the male voters, with the banner "WCTU Free Lunch For All" hung across the City Hall.<sup>46</sup> In bringing the image of the home into the public sphere, specifically into premises of political engagement, the WCTU empowered women's activism in provinces traditionally closed to them, and they used their traditional role as custodians of virtuous homes to gain more independence from men's leadership.

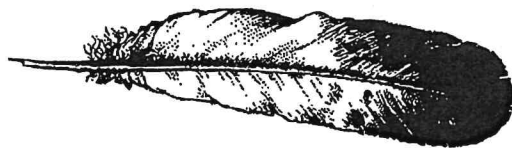
The WCTU eventually grew to favor women's suffrage, less as a matter of equal rights and more as a strategy to bring about prohibition. Anna Shaw, a member who supported women's suffrage, once argued, "The distiller is armed with the ballot, the brewer is armed with the ballot, the saloon keeper is armed with

the ballot...the home maker, the child rearer, is powerless against such a foe without the ballot."<sup>47</sup> In 1875, Frances Willard drafted a resolution that openly supported women's franchise, based on the justification that "women are among the greatest sufferers from the liquor traffic" and that "[the liquor traffic] is ultimately to be suppressed by means of the ballot."<sup>48</sup> Opposition arose at the WCTU's 1876 national meeting. Anti-suffragists criticized Willard for endorsing women's right to vote, even for the temperance cause, and an influential member went up to her and scorned her for acting like a "scout."<sup>49</sup> Willard drafted another resolution in 1878 to assure the conservative faction that suffrage was not the WCTU's goal, and that the WCTU remained "thoroughly committed against in any way affiliating with the woman suffrage movement as being irrelevant to our work." Yet, this controversy divided the organization for many years. As late as the 1889 national convention, twelve Iowa associates led by J. Ellen Foster formally seceded from the WCTU to protest the union's favorable attitude towards suffrage. They established their own organization, the Non-Partisan Woman's Christian Temperance Union, in Iowa, and it functioned for several years before the women returned to the WCTU.<sup>50</sup>

Even though many members of the WCTU continued the suffrage campaign and pro-suffrage eventually became a major plank in the organization's platform, the controversy reveals how the WCTU's commitment to traditional values and gender norms, rooted in their fervent Christianity, both advanced and fractured their cause. Indeed, the WCTU's eventual advocacy of women's suffrage departed from the beliefs and objectives of its founding mothers. Among the 911 recorded crusade meetings in 1873, only one group, in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, advocated suffrage.<sup>51</sup> "Mother Thompson," along with many other early participants in the crusade movement, had already shown that their interest in the temperance movement was in fulfilling their religious duties, not in gaining political rights, and not in the least to overthrow men's dominance in home or society.

## Conclusion

The Woman's Crusade fizzled out in less than a year, but the WCTU took up its spirit and campaigned for total abstinence until the passing of the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment. The crusaders became respectable models for the WCTU, because they were the embodiments of the religious ideals and conservative womanhood that the WCTU deemed essential to its strategies. Their religious spirit not only justified the crusaders to enter the public sphere and become independent leaders, but also acted as a unifying force among WCTU's members. Describing themselves as "mothers" and behaving in a lady-like manner allowed both crusaders and the WCTU members to appeal to the general public and win conversions. These two features of religiosity and womanliness, carried on in the spirit of the Women's Crusade, continued to shape the identity and practices of the WCTU for decades in its fight against the traffic of liquor.



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Putnam Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers: The Story of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union* (n.p.: National Woman's Christian Temperance Union Publishing House, 1924), 6, <https://archive.org/details/womentorchbearer00gord/page/20/mode/2up>.

<sup>2</sup> Helen E. Tyler, *Where Prayer and Purpose Meet* (Signal Press, 1949), 15, accessed October 25, 2021, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015071649276&view=1up&seq=3&skin=2021>.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Jack S. Blocker, "Separate Paths: Suffragists and the Women's Temperance Crusade," *Signs* 10, no. 3 (1985), 462, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174261>.

<sup>5</sup> Tyler, *Where Prayer*, 53; Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers*, 181.

<sup>6</sup> Livia Gershon, "A Brief History of U.S. Drinking," JSTOR DAILY, <https://daily.jstor.org/a-brief-history-of-drinking-alcohol/>.

<sup>7</sup> Blocker, "Separate Paths," 462.

<sup>8</sup> Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers*, 10.

<sup>9</sup> "Liquor Control in the United States," CQ Researcher, <https://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/document.php?id=cqresrre1928080700>.

<sup>10</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, "Personal," March 7, 1874: Accessed November 12, 2021, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015030616430&view=1up&seq=195&skin=2021&q1=temperance>.

<sup>11</sup> Tyler, *Where Prayer*, 17.

<sup>12</sup> Mary F. Eastman, *The Biography of Dio Lewis*, 155, [https://archive.org/stream/biographyofdiole00east/biographyofdiole00east\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/biographyofdiole00east/biographyofdiole00east_djvu.txt).

<sup>13</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, "Religious Intelligence," May 16, 1874, 415, accessed November 12, 2021, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015030616430&view=1up&seq=378&skin=2021&q1=temperance>.

<sup>14</sup> Samuel Unger, *A History of the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union*, 18, accessed April 13, 2022, [https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws\\_olink/r/1501/10?p10\\_etd\\_subid=63337&clear=10](https://etd.ohiolink.edu/apexprod/rws_olink/r/1501/10?p10_etd_subid=63337&clear=10).

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 15, 19.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, "The Temperance Crusade," March 21, 1874, 259, accessed November 12, 2021, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015030616430&view=1up&seq=233&skin=2021&q1=temperance>.

<sup>18</sup> *Harper's Weekly*, "Religious Intelligence," March 28, 1874, 275, accessed November 12, 2021, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015030616430&view=1up&seq=250&skin=2021&q1=temperance>.

<sup>19</sup> Unger, *A History*, 18.

<sup>20</sup> Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Gordon, foreword to *Women Torch-Bearers*.

<sup>24</sup> Tyler, foreword to *Where Prayer*, vi, v.

<sup>25</sup> Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers*, 21, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Eastman, *The Biography*, 62.

<sup>27</sup> Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers*, 23.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>29</sup> *Bible Gateway*, accessed April 13, 2022, <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm%20146&version=NIV>.

<sup>30</sup> Eastman, *The Biography*, 159.

<sup>31</sup> Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers*, 14, 28.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth B. Clark, "Organized Mother Love': Moral Governance and the Maternal State in Late Nineteenth-Century America," in *Women, Church, and State: Religion and the Culture of Individual Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, 12, [https://scholarship.law.bu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=clark\\_book](https://scholarship.law.bu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=clark_book).

<sup>35</sup> Frances E. Willard, *A Great Mother: Sketches of Madam Willard* (Chicago, 1894), 65.

<sup>36</sup> Mary A. Livermore, *The Story of My Life, or the Sunshine and Shadow of Seventy Years* (Hartford, CT, 1899), 56.

<sup>37</sup> Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers*, 38, 164.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>39</sup> Tyler, *Where Prayer*, 255.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-68.

<sup>41</sup> Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers*, 58.

<sup>42</sup> Tyler, *Where Prayer*, 85.

<sup>43</sup> Unger, *A History*, 218-219, 21.

<sup>44</sup> Tyler, *Where Prayer*, 79.

<sup>45</sup> Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers*, 20, 42.

<sup>46</sup> Clark, "Organized Mother," 25, 27.

<sup>47</sup> Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers*, 170.

<sup>48</sup> Tyler, *Where Prayer*, 40.

<sup>49</sup> Gordon, *Women Torch-Bearers*, 163.

<sup>50</sup> Tyler, *Where Prayer*, 47, 101.

<sup>51</sup> Earl C. Kaylor, Jr., "The Prohibition Movement in Pennsylvania, 1865-1920" (PhD diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1963), 193-94, [https://www.jstor.org/stable/3174261?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3Aflab6528add0755ed18d20174bc80254&seq=4#metadata\\_info\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/3174261?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3Aflab6528add0755ed18d20174bc80254&seq=4#metadata_info_tab_contents)

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