

Forest and 1st Avenue, Parsons, Kansas, a watercolor by Jules Tavernier made in August 1873.

HERMAPHRODITES AND GENDERLESS BEINGS: The Struggle to Transcend Gender Boundaries in Southeast Kansas, 1868–1874

by John N. Mack

In the spring of 1868, as the *Neosho Valley Eagle* went to press, the editor casually noted that since it was a leap year, it was “the year of jubilee—of repose to all young gentlemen!” It was a year in which, he asserted, “the ladies have the ‘say so.’” From later remarks it is clear that the editor intended his words to be a light-hearted attempt at humor. However, within a week he discovered that his words carried deeper meaning for some of his female subscribers. A woman calling herself “Lady Labette” responded in earnestness to his short comment in a letter to the editor published on May 16. She announced her pleasure in finding “one man in Kansas frank enough to acknowledge that women are smarter in one calling in life than man, if it is only in courting, for as a general rule, they are very rare who will pronounce her on an equality with man.”¹

Lady Labette went on to express her frustration with the state of gender relations in southeast Kansas. Behind her anger was the political issue of women’s suffrage that emerged in Kansas the previous year. In February 1867 the Kansas legislature passed two amendments, the first to give African American men the vote; the second to grant equal suffrage to women. Both amendments needed a majority vote from the white male electorate to become law, and they were placed on the ballot in November 1867. Both measures were soundly defeated statewide. Men in southeast Kansas voted two to one (535 votes opposed; 266 votes in favor) to deny African Americans the right to vote and three

John N. Mack teaches world history for the University System of Georgia through Georgia Perimeter College’s virtual campus. He received his PhD from the University of Kansas with an emphasis on Kansas history and has taught at several local colleges and universities, including the University of Kansas, Rockhurst University, Johnson County Community College, Barton County Community College, and Labette Community College. He lives in Olathe, Kansas.

1. *Neosho Valley Eagle* (Jacksonville), May 9, 16, 1868. The newspaper apparently began publication on May 2, 1868, but the first extant copy is the May 9 issue, which is identified as volume 1, number 2.

to one (584 votes opposed; 196 votes in favor) to deny the suffrage to women.² As Lady Labette explained, she had immigrated to Kansas believing that in the settling of a new geographical region men would be willing to reconsider the traditional strictures placed upon women by giving them new opportunities for both political and social activity. However, upon arriving and settling down, she and her female companions found themselves disappointed: "We thought when we emigrated to Kansas that we would find a home in one spot on the globe where a woman was (for the first time since she was banished from Paradise) considered equal to the lords of creation. But in that we were mistaken."³

As the debate that unfolded on the pages of the *Eagle* over the next few months demonstrated, not all women agreed with Lady Labette. In fact, some, such as "Mollie" from Erie, argued that they found great joy in fulfilling the passive position of "helper" that men were eager to assign to them.⁴ However, the fact that Lady Labette and her supporters were willing to publicly challenge the gendered vision of a patriarchal society suggests disagreement existed over gender roles within southeast Kansas families and communities. As "Firmness" explained in response to a letter to the editor in which Mollie had called Lady Labette demented and misguided, "I am one of those unfortunate demented creatures, who believes that woman's sphere should be enlarged, that she can and should be more useful, and that unless her sphere is enlarged, we as a people, and as a nation must sink to nothingness."⁵

The struggle over appropriate gender boundaries was particularly intense in southeast Kansas in the late 1860s and early 1870s, in the early days of settlement when the lack of available labor forced men to depend upon their wives in new ways even as it opened up new opportunities for women to expand their role in public society.⁶ In a candid observation, the

2. For an overview of how historians have interpreted the struggle to define gender in Kansas, see Carol K. Coburn, "Women and Gender in Kansas History. Review Essay," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 26 (Summer 2003): 126–51; for election results, see Daniel Webster Wilder, *Annals of Kansas, 1541–1885*, new ed. (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1886), 463.

3. *Neosho Valley Eagle*, May 16, 1868.

4. *Neosho Valley Eagle*, June 20, 1868.

5. *Neosho Valley Eagle*, July 11, 1868.

6. To be clear, my argument depends upon the theory that frontier conditions expanded the traditional notion of the women's sphere by challenging middle class ideals, including gender ideals. See Robert C. Haywood, *Victorian West: Class and Culture in Kansas Cattle Towns* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991); Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming*

Osage Mission Journal admitted that the requirements of farm life gave both new duties and opportunities to Kansan women: "'It is the wife [sic] occupation to winnow all manner of corn, to make malt, to wash and wring, to make hay, to shear corn, and in time of need to help her husband fill the muck-wain (or manure carts), to drive the plow, to load corn, hay and such other; and to go or ride to the market to sell butter, cheese, milk, eggs, chickens, capons, hens, pigs, geese, turkeys, and all manner of corn' . . . and . . . to bear and rear children."⁷

Although arduous, many of these duties expanded the boundaries of the domestic sphere to which urbanized white women in nineteenth-century America were confined; they also adjusted the level of control that a husband had over his wife by lessening her dependence upon him for survival.⁸ The *Oswego Independent* noted one aspect of the change in an article titled "Female Hunter." After relating the exploits of "a Mrs. W. M. Bowen," who had successfully shot three prairie chickens that had alighted in the cornfield next to her house, the paper asserted: "We mention this to show what the

Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2002). For an overview of the scholarship on the ideology of separate spheres and the cult of domesticity, see Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820–1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966): 151–74; Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *Journal of American History* 75 (June 1988): 9–39. For a broad analysis of the evolution of the cultural understanding of masculinity see E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Harper Collins 1993). My argument also depends on the unique attributes of southeast Kansas settlement by Civil War veterans who were intent on establishing communities of social order reflecting the cultural values of eastern society. See John N. Mack, "'United We Stand': Law and Order on the Southeastern Kansas Frontier, 1866–1870," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 30 (Winter 2007): 234–51; and Mack, "A Second Revolution: The Struggle to Define the Meaning of the Civil War in Southeast Kansas, 1867–1876," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 32 (Spring 2009): 2–17. For a counter argument that rural households up to about 1930 operated with flexible gender roles as both men and women bent gender ideals in order to deal with the necessities of earning a living from the land, see Joan Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Sally McMurry, *Transforming Rural Life: Dairying Families and Agricultural Change, 1820–1885* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

7. *Osage Mission Journal*, December 4, 1868. The quotation here is from "the oldest English book upon farming [by] Judge Fitz Herbert."

8. The evolution of the "domestic sphere" and the discursive nature of the discussion over "women's work" in the nineteenth century have been noted by many historians. As gender studies scholar Laura Edwards has explained, "The ideology of separate spheres, with its sharp distinction between men and women's work, did not just reflect the results of economic and political change. It was also a powerful political tool that different groups of people marshaled to shape the course of historical events." See Laura F. Edwards, "Gender and the Changing Roles of Women," in William L. Barney, editor, *A Companion to 19th-Century America* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 236.



The struggle over gender boundaries was intense in southeast Kansas in the early days of settlement, when men were forced to depend upon their wives in new ways as they worked together to build stable, orderly communities. Many women immigrated to Kansas believing as they helped settle a new geographical region men would be willing to reconsider traditional gender roles and accept their involvement in political and social spheres. Pictured are men and women going about daily life on the frontier in Mound Valley, Labette County, in 1873, four years after the town's founding.

women of Kansas can do, when they try. In the East it would be considered a good shot for a man who was an experienced sportsman.”⁹

The number of men filing for divorce on the basis of “abandonment” in the late 1860s and early 1870s in southeast Kansas also suggests that many women understood well the freedom these newfound responsibilities and opportunities afforded them. The *Osage Mission Journal* noted, in reporting George Rich’s petition for a divorce from his wife Amanda (whom he had married less than two years earlier in June 1868), that even though “he has ever since conducted himself toward you as a faithful and affectionate husband . . . you disregarding your duties as wife have been willfully

absent from him for more than one year last past without any cause or justification on your part.”¹⁰

Wives were not the only ones in southeast Kansas to explore the contours of evolving gender relations. Some daughters followed the example of their mothers and pushed the edges of social conformity by challenging the authority of their fathers. In 1870 a notice appeared in the *Southern Kansas Advance*, in which Jacob Ebert entreated his fellow Chetopans “not to trust or harbor my daughter Barberry Ebert . . . as she has left my home without cause or provocation.”¹¹ An interesting poem in the *Oswego Register* pointedly warned men of the collusion occurring between their wives and daughters. Titled “Fowl Rebellion; Or, Women’s Rights in a Poultry

9. *Oswego Independent*, October 5, 1872.

10. *Osage Mission Journal*, February 24, 1870.

11. *Southern Kansas Advance* (Chetopa), July 27, 1870.



Newspaper editorials written by the women of southeast Kansas in the late 1860s and early 1870s urged men to recognize that because frontier life demanded new responsibilities of women it also necessitated new freedoms. Many of the duties of farm life that fell to women expanded the boundaries of the domestic sphere to which urbanized white women in nineteenth-century America were confined. Such work also adjusted the level of control that a husband had over his wife by lessening her dependence upon him for survival. In their responses some Kansas men expressed the same concerns portrayed in this 1869 cartoon, "The Age of Brass: Or the Triumph of Woman's Rights," namely that politically empowered, cigar-smoking women would vote for "the celebrated Man Tamer, Susan Sharp Tongue" and "for sheriff Miss Hang Man." Cartoon courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Yard," the poem dramatized a conflict between a hen and her chick over the hen's acceptance of abuse from the rooster. After exposing the manifold faults of the rooster, the chick finally persuades her mother to leave him. She then expresses her great joy in their new circumstances:

Well, mother, I'm glad you've waked up at last,
 feared you'd sleep on till the good time was
 past;
 That forever you'd run at his nod and his beck;
 But now you're my free, darling, blessedest
 mother,
 Well rid of one rooster,—pray don't get
 another!
 You and I are both able to care for ourselves,
 I'll bet you, dear ma, we'll live on the top
 shelves. . . .

For my part, I've seen so much trouble and
 strife,
 I vow and declare I'll never be a wife;
 I hate—yes, I hate all tyrannical men,
 Independent I'll live, a single old hen!¹²

Thoughts like these accentuated a deeply rooted anxiety felt by many southeast Kansan men about their own masculinity. Since their identity as "men" was constructed around the ideal of a passive "woman"—for as editor John Horner reminded his readers, "He is not a man that hath not a woman"—the presence of strong, assertive women not only threatened the patriarchal structure of the community they were seeking to build, it also called into question the very nature of their own

12. *Oswego Register*, July 30, 1869.



The heated rhetoric coming out of southeast Kansas accentuated a deeply rooted anxiety felt by many men about their own masculinity. Since their identity as “men” was constructed around the ideal of a passive “woman,” the presence of strong, assertive women not only threatened the patriarchal structure of the community they were seeking to build, it also called into question the very nature of their own masculinity. If women could operate in the realms of men, who would be left to mind the laundry and watch the children? This cartoon, a companion to “The Age of Brass,” illustrates the fears of many men in southeastern Kansas who saw coming “The Age of Iron: Man as He Expects to Be,” when men would be forced to take up tasks no longer performed by the lady of the house, now occupied with life outside the domestic sphere. Cartoon courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

masculinity.¹³ Furthermore, any movement away from traditional gender boundaries added to the danger that immigration could slow and sorely needed new settlers would make their homes elsewhere.

In December 1869 the *Osage Mission Journal* published the proceedings of a “convention of the bachelors of Osage Mission” that met to warn its younger members against the “captivating influence of Eve’s daughters.” Noting that “many of our veteran bachelors, who have

enjoyed the luxury of ‘single blessedness’ during a series of years, and who have resisted the devil, the world, and the woman . . . have recently fell victims to that terrible destroyer, and have been taken from our midst in the prime of life to be offered in *bloody* sacrifice on the altar of Hymen, never again to gladden our hearts with their usual smiles and cheerfulness, but on every occasion appear with care, gloom and sorrow depicted on their once happy faces,” the convention passed the following resolutions:

Resolved, That we, the bachelors of Osage Mission, hereby enter our solemn protest against any more of our brotherhood uniting themselves to the daughters of Mother Eve.

13. *Southern Kansas Advance*, April 5, 1871. The editor was actually quoting an old “Hebrew saying.” Historian Bruce Dorsey has noted, “Gender has functioned so that ‘man’ is constituted as the binary opposite of ‘woman,’ and ‘woman’ as the opposite of ‘man.’ In other words, what proves that a man is definitely a man is that he is not a woman.” See Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women*, 4. Note also the comment by Milton Reynolds, editor of the *Parsons Sun*, that “All great men, like Franklin, advocate early marriages; and all great men, with rare exceptions, have been men who married young” (*Parsons Sun*, July 8, 1871).

Resolved, That we pledge ourselves to take immediate steps to check the progress of the destroyer of our peace and happiness.¹⁴

Although it is highly likely this article was meant to be at least partially tongue-in-cheek, its underlying themes reappeared regularly in the reflections and editorials of early newspaper editors in Labette and Neosho Counties. These missives were part of a larger nineteenth-century genre of popular literature in which, as Laura Edwards has noted, “domestic writers bombarded their audiences with practical advice, heavy-handed prescriptions on appropriate womanly conduct, and syrupy sentimental fiction.” However, as Edwards made clear, we should not “mistake the genre’s melodramatic superficialities for historical insignificance.” Instead it is important to understand that these “domestic writers were involved in a profound ideological project.”¹⁵

In his study of nineteenth-century agricultural newspapers, Richard Farrell found that editors overtly addressed farm women, allotting an ever increasing amount of space to topics that appealed to female readers.¹⁶ Indeed, as Lisa Bunkowski noted in her study of emerging communities in Butler County, “newspapers in the West actively disseminated the more conventional paradigms of separate spheres and ‘True Womanhood.’ By defining the appropriate roles and behavior of women, purveyors of social norms clearly delineated the appropriate roles and behavior of men.” Editors’ motives were not always political, however, for as historian Lyn Ellen Bennett argued, “newspaper editors knew they had access to women and therefore catered to this female reading audience to encourage their interest in newspapers and by extension, purchasing newspapers.”¹⁷

An article titled “Ask the Old Woman,” which appeared in the *Oswego Register* in 1872, highlighted the unease over shifting gender boundaries felt by many men who had settled in southeast Kansas. The piece told the tale of a traveler “out west,” who happened upon an isolated log house in a clearing. Noticing that the owner

was sitting in the cabin’s open doorway, the traveler asks him for a drink of milk. The man responds, “Well, I don’t know. Ask the old woman.” As the subsequent dialogue reveals, this is the man’s response to every question. Noting the changing weather, the traveler inquires, “Think we are going to have a storm?” To which the man replies, “Well, I really don’t know. Ask the old woman—she can tell.” The traveler queries, “How much land have you got cleared here?” The man again responds, “Well, I really don’t know. Ask the old woman—she knows.” Finally, as a group of children appear, the traveler asks, “Are these your children?” The response remains the same, “Don’t know. Ask the old woman.”¹⁸

Once they arrived in southeast Kansas, men quickly discovered that many of the women upon whom they depended for survival, women like Lady Labette and Firmness who had taken on a good share of the homesteading task, were no longer content to remain passive and subservient to the needs and desires of the men around them, but instead demanded a more active role in constructing ordered societies. In southeast Kansas this desire for more direct participation in the structuring of society pushed many women to embrace the goal of female suffrage and to join the crusades of the early temperance movement.

Firmness connected women’s rights with the issue of temperance early in the debates over the role of women in southeast Kansas in her letter of July 11, 1868, in which she argued that “men alone, are a selfish set, thinking or caring but little for anything, unless for their own selfish ends and enjoyment.” It was this inherent pleasure-seeking mentality of men that led them to accept in their midst the presence of saloons, gambling halls, houses of prostitution, and the like. For, as she insisted, “Would woman’s vote or voice be heard in favor of distilleries and dram shops? of gambling halls? and prostitution? No! the noble nature of woman revolts at all these; but she submits, for she is in chains, and has no other alternative.” In fact, she concluded, when a woman was forcibly secluded in her home, “doing no good outside, the four walls that conceal her from God’s light,” it was inevitable that the community in which she lived would “see the Whiskey Demon with his attendance of prostitutes, casting their cursed, blighting influence over the land, destroying the peace and happiness of thousands.”¹⁹

14. *Osage Mission Journal*, December 9, 1869.

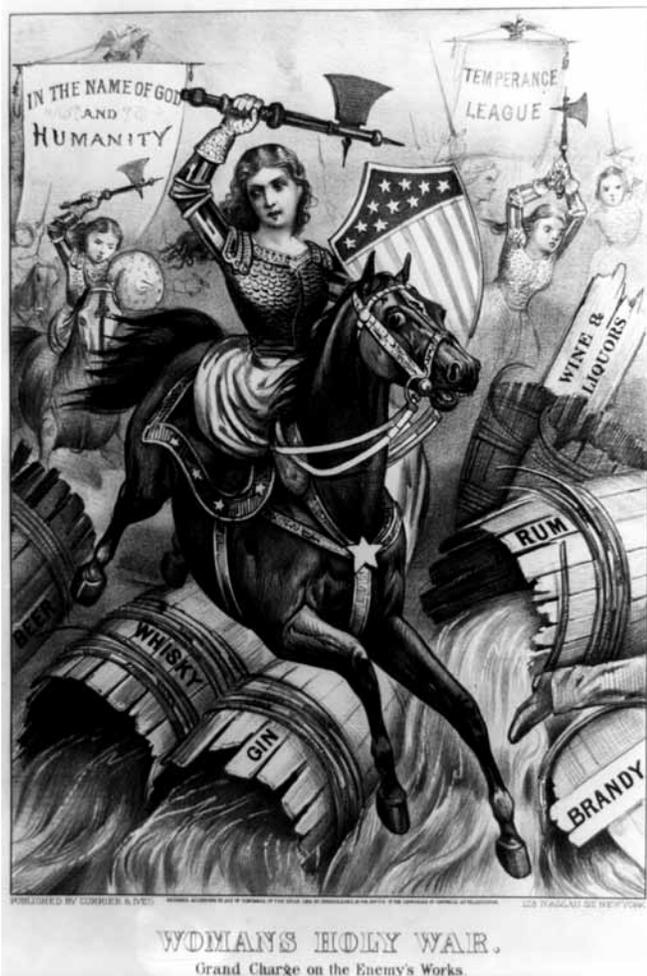
15. Edwards, “Gender and the Changing Roles of Women,” 224.

16. Richard Farrell, “Advice to Farmers: The Content of Agricultural Newspapers, 1860–1910,” *Agricultural History* 51 (January 1977): 209–17.

17. Lisa Miles Bunkowski, “The Butler County Kansas Vigilantes: An Examination of Violence and Community, 1870” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2003), 50; Lyn Ellen Bennett, “Living on the Edge: Families in Crisis in Nineteenth-Century Kansas” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1996), 56.

18. *Oswego Register*, May 2, 1872.

19. *Neosho Valley Eagle*, July 11, 1868.



In southeast Kansas the desire for direct participation in the structuring of society pushed many women to embrace movements that demanded a rethinking of gender roles, including campaigns for female suffrage and against alcohol. The temperance fight is depicted in this 1874 cartoon as a holy war, and the women waging it are clothed in the mannish armor of knightly crusaders. Many men who opposed women's involvement in the crusades did so precisely because of the "tremendous power" that the temperance movement was giving to women in their communities. Cartoon courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

Some historians have argued that the temperance fight was a conservative movement premised in women's domestic status and designed to advance middle-class ideals, and not primarily a way to challenge gender roles or boundaries.²⁰ However, as Nancy G. Garner has written regarding the Kansas movement, "central

20. This is the argument of Michael Goldberg in *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997). For a contrary argument, see Robert Smith, *Prohibition in Kansas: A History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986).

to the crusade was a rethinking of gender roles."²¹ The immigration that characterized post-Civil War settlement in Kansas, at least in this geographical region, was heavily influenced by the question of appropriate gender roles. As the 1868 debate in the *Neosho Valley Eagle* mentioned at the beginning of this article reveals, men and women alike in the state's newly emerging communities were deeply concerned about the proper place of women in society, and as a result, were keenly interested in the related temperance cause.

The idea of temperance as a moral crusade in southeast Kansas first manifested itself in 1869 in Chetopa, where, according to the *Chetopa Advance*, "a rousing and enthusiastic meeting of the friends of temperance was held at Spaulding's Hall on Tuesday evening last." At this meeting "the best and most substantial citizens of the place . . . evinced, in most decided language and action, a determination that public drunkenness and riotous conduct should not be permitted to disgrace our community."²² Established before the Civil War as a trading city, Chetopa was populated by antebellum merchants trying to cultivate a trading relationship with the indigenous peoples who lived less than twelve miles to the south, in the newly established Indian Territory. In this last stop before the territory, a lucrative business in "spirits" developed, and it was the rowdiness associated with the flourishing taverns and bars that motivated some of Chetopa's citizenry to call public meetings in the cause of temperance. By 1869 the town's founding fathers, intent on creating a new image for themselves, had embarked on a new course emphasizing sobriety.²³

Chetopa was not the only city working to establish control over the liquor trade. The *Osage Mission Journal* reported that the citizens of Ladore, in response to a tragedy its citizens had endured at the hands of drunken railroad workers, "have determined that the law shall

21. Nancy G. Garner, "'A Prayerful Public Protest': The Significance of Gender in the Kansas Woman's Crusade of 1874," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 20 (Winter 1997-1998): 217.

22. *Chetopa Advance*, February 17, 1869.

23. A desire to set themselves apart from the "native peoples" who were stereotypically referred to as "drunks" by the white settlers also drove the city fathers of Chetopa to embrace the movement to curtail drunkenness. It is interesting to note that, according to my research among the newspapers of southeast Kansas in the late 1860s and 1870s, the papers published close to the border tended to emphasize the negative nineteenth-century stereotypes of American Indian males as perpetual "drunks" more so than those that were published further north. A good example of the kind of rhetoric towards Native Americans that frequently appeared in southern Labette County papers is found in the *Chetopa Advance*, January 20, 1869: "the women tend the ponies, do the cooking, pack the baggage, tend the babies, do all the drudgery, and keep strictly within their 'sphere' while 'free male citizens' tend to politics, support the family ? and get drunk."

be executed restraining and regulating the sale of intoxicating liquors and that some regard shall be had for the observance of that 'higher law,' . . . which has declared that good order, sobriety, safety to life, limb and honor, are infinitely greater importance to any community than pandering for filthy lucre's sake to the debased tastes and passions of those who, unfortunately for themselves, are slaves to strong drink."²⁴ Just as many women had taken up the abolitionist cause, in an attempt to free slaves from their bondage, women in southeast Kansas, too, would now play a dominant role in freeing their communities from slavery to alcohol and the societal ills that came with it.

By 1871, in villages, towns, and cities throughout southeast Kansas, literary societies had formed in which people gathered, typically one evening a week, to discuss the important issues of the day. Ordinarily, the debates were a time for the leading men of the community to show off their oratory skills. In the city of Labette, however, when the decision was made to discuss the question of temperance—"Which is the greater evil, war or intemperance?"—women took the lead. As the *Labette Sentinel* reported, "Several of the debaters were young, and made their 'maiden' speech, receiving applause from the hearers, especially the ladies."²⁵ In April noted temperance speaker Fannie Allyne visited Oswego and spoke to a packed audience in the Methodist Episcopal Church "on the subject of temperance." In May the *Tioga Herald* printed a poem titled "The Drunkard's Daughter" in which the author argued strongly that because it was women who bore the brunt of alcohol's scourge, it was women who should take the lead in opposing it:

Go, to my mother's side,
 And her crushed spirit cheer,
 Thine own deep anguish hide,
 Wipe from her cheek the tear—
 Mark her dimm'd eye, her furrowed brow,
 The grey that streaks her dark hair now,
 Her toil-worn frame, her trembling limb,
 And trace the ruin back to him
 Whose plighted faith in early youth
 Promised eternal love and truth—
 But who, foresworn, hath yielded up
 This promise to the deadly cup,

And led down from love and light,
 From all that made her pathway bright,
 And chained her there, 'mid want and strife,
 The lowly thing, a Drunkard's Wife,
 And stamp'd on childhood's brow so mild,
 That withering blight, a Drunkard's Child. . . .
 Tell me I hate the bowl!
 Hate is a feeble word—
 I loathe, abhor—my very soul
 With strong disgust is stirr'd
 When e'er I see, or hear, or tell
 Of that dark beverage of hell!²⁶

Events in southeast Kansas paralleled those in the nation. As women throughout the Northeast worked together to close down saloons, women in southeast Kansas began to challenge the men in their community. It seems to have started slowly, but by the winter of 1872, newspapers were reporting a series of stories about women entering saloons to find fathers, husbands, and brothers and bring them home. The *Tioga Herald* was the first to report the phenomenon occurring in the towns of southeast Kansas: "It would appear from what we learn of the saloon on the corner of Main and Fifth streets, that the ladies sometimes pay the concern an occasional visit. Not to drink, however, but to entice their male relatives home. This week one of these lady visitors while trying to get her brother out of the place, took umbrage at something and smashed in a window."²⁷

This was a bold move—one that challenged the geographical boundaries of patriarchal society. Saloons were no place for married women; only prostitutes frequented such establishments. In fact, so strong was the aversion to women in saloons that it had been put forward as a compelling reason to deny women the vote. In the debate over female suffrage that had emerged on the pages of the *Neosho Valley Eagle* in 1868, letter to the editor author Mollie wrote: "Think of a woman on election day, at the polls, amongst a class of men whom her husband might not associate with, without danger to his character; a woman cannot well be deaf and dumb and blind to all the obscenity, and low jokes of such a place, and keep her name spotless." For Mollie the very act of entering a saloon and/or associating with those who worked there stripped a woman of her purity and

24. *Osage Mission Journal*, June 2, 1870. For a discussion of the crimes in Ladore, see Mack, "United We Stand," 249–50.

25. *Labette Sentinel*, February 9, 1871.

26. *Tioga Herald*, May 27, 1871; for Mrs. Allyne's visit, see the *Oswego Register*, April 7, 1871.

27. *Tioga Herald*, February 10, 1872.



It was women who bore the brunt of alcohol's scourge, argued the crusaders and their supporters, and therefore it was women who should take the lead in opposing it. Wives, mothers, daughters, and sisters watched as their men and their communities were threatened by the saloon and the societal ills it harbored. In the 1878 "Down Hill Road," a mother sends her well-kempt son off into the world only to meet him again, after alcohol has taken its toll, at his grave. Tract courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

imperiled the essence of her feminine virtue. "Could she look up to her husband with the same respect and confidence she now does?," she asked. "No! verily, no!"²⁸

However, as women sought to guard the moral decency of emerging communities in southeast Kansas in the early 1870s, they began to redefine their role vis-à-vis the saloon and by extension their place in the public sphere. Instead of withdrawing from society to preserve their domestic tranquility, they engaged society in an attempt to extend the boundaries of their activities by saving their men and children from the corruption of disorder and chaos.²⁹ Thus, by the summer of 1872,

28. *Neosho Valley Eagle*, June 20, 1868. "Mollie" wrote to the editor from Erie, Neosho County; the letter was dated May 20, 1868.

29. Nancy Garner noted a similar historical phenomenon in her study of northeast Kansas women. See Garner, "A Prayerful Public Protest," 215–29.

southeast Kansas women came together to assert their demands.

The *Transcript* reported that the Jacksonville Temperance Society appointed a committee of three ladies to request the "Saloon Keeper" to desist from selling "Intoxicating liquors." On Saturday morning, July 6, the three members of the committee, Maria Ammerman, Hiddie Dement, and Kiziah Moaks, walked down the main street to the saloon and officially presented their "request" in the form of a written letter to the saloon owner:

Mr. Joseph Pittman, Sir:—In the name of suffering humanity; in the name of violated law; in the name of those husbands and fathers, who, with blasted reputations, wasted fortunes, and ruined health, are tottering on the brink of destruction; in the name of those brothers and sons who are fast brutalizing, and transforming into drunkards; in the name of those wives, mothers, and daughters, whose cheeks you have covered with shame and whose hearts you have filled with anguish, at the degradation of those they love; in the name of those unfortunate families whose means of subsistence you are unlawfully obtaining, or causing to be squandered, from whose hearthstones, you have already banished peace and happiness and are substituting in their stead, want, wretchedness and ruin; yes, in the name and on behalf of all classes of our long-suffering community,—we, the undersigned, a committee appointed for the purpose, at a public meeting of our citizens, do hereby respectfully, yet earnestly request and entreat you to abandon your unlawful traffic, and henceforth to refrain entirely from selling intoxicating liquors to our community.³⁰

Not all women were content to "make requests" of their local saloon keepers. The *Southern Kansas Advance* told the story of Justina Bookter, who tracked her husband down in the local saloon and, upon entering to find him playing cards, "went for those at the card table, giving all of them a severe caning." She then turned to her husband, who had somehow managed to avoid the attack, and upon seeing a drink in his hand, "dashed the

30. *Osage Mission Transcript*, July 19, 1872.

cup from his hand and 'went for' the saloon keeper."³¹ The *Neosho County Journal* reported that the local temperance society had sent "postcards" to the owners of nearby saloons warning that their members would be "'going for' the saloon keepers, if they don't give up the ghost, or in other words, stop disposing of spirits of the ardent variety."³² The ladies of the Oswego Temperance Society adopted a similar strategy by sending the following letter to each of the saloon keepers in Oswego:

SIR: You are hereby notified and warned that unless you desist from your pleasant nefarious [*sic*] business of selling whiskey to the ruin of the business and souls of the community, we shall visit your place of crime in a body on Thursday, March 5th, at 10 a.m. and invoke the aid and blessing of Almighty God to so enlighten your minds that you may be enabled to realize the great sin you are committing, and forever abandon your present wretched business.

Ladies Temperance Com.³³

With a reprinted *Scribner's* article on page one, the editor of Oswego's *Independent* was among the first in southeast Kansas to publicly acknowledge the challenge posed by women of the temperance movement to the patriarchal underpinnings of southeastern Kansan society. After decrying the absence of male leadership in opposition to the liquor trade and praising the role women were playing, he wrote: "It is a shame to manhood that it is necessary, it is a glory to womanhood that it is possible."³⁴ Similarly, the pastor of the Parsons Methodist Episcopal Church, the Reverend Gunn, publicly announced his support for the temperance crusade, as the women's activities were called, noting that "he would be proud to see his wife engaged in that war." He went on to argue that involvement in the crusades had the ability to "elevate and ennoble womanhood and make them feel the tremendous power they possess for good."³⁵ As such sentiments suggests, men, too, conceptualized the fight against alcohol along

gender lines. This realization helps explain why many men were *not* supportive of women's increased public activities. As just one example, the editor of the *Parsons Sun*, Milton Reynolds, himself a vocal opponent to saloons and the liquor trade, refused to allow his wife to participate in "the crusades."³⁶

Many men who opposed women's involvement in the crusades did so precisely because of the "tremendous power" that the temperance movement was giving to women in their communities. The Oswego *Independent* reported that a local preacher was protesting "against temperance reform on scriptural grounds," which, in his reading, limited women's influence to the home. The editor of the *Parsons Eclipse* publicly called for an end of the crusades, arguing that "the women's crusade will do inestimable damage." He was emphatically clear that his purpose was not to endorse the abuse of alcohol, for "habitual drunkenness should not be tolerated by any community." Instead, his opposition to the crusades was rooted in his perception that as a movement led by women it was prone to "excitement" and "enthusiasm." The issue of drunkenness should be dealt with according to "settled principles" and not by "fanatical propagandist[s]" who, if allowed to continue their work unchecked, would ultimately make the "evil we are seeking to remedy" grow "worse and worse." Since drunkenness was a man's problem, the editor of the *Eclipse* argued, it should be dealt with by men.³⁷

The editor of the *Independent* went a step further, lamenting that the crusades were a clear sign that women had lost "all faith in men."³⁸ As he told it, after having "long and patiently watched the efforts of their husbands, fathers and brothers in their efforts to rid themselves of this curse upon themselves," women were finally acting to emancipate men. They were "the slaves of Bacchus" and "the willing slaves of the whiskey king," said the crusaders, and had to be freed from "the chains" that "bound" them. This freedom would lead them to the recovery of their "manhood," which men had "gradually surrendered" to the "maddening effects of whiskey guzzling."³⁹

36. For a discussion of the crusade's impact on the development of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union in the late 1870s, see Nancy Garner, "For God and Home and Native Land: The Kansas Woman's Christian Temperance Union, 1878-1938" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1994), especially ch. 1, pp. 25-91.

37. *Independent*, April 4, 1874; *Parsons Eclipse*, June 11, 1874. These words were filled with cultural meaning in the nineteenth century as they were often used to refer to the unreliable character of women who were prone to both by reason of their unsteady feminine constitution.

38. *Independent*, May 9, 1874.

39. *Independent*, April 25, 1874.

31. *Southern Kansas Advance*, November 26, 1873. The saloon keeper complained to the local law authorities and Justina was fined three dollars for her aggressive behavior.

32. *Neosho County Journal* (Osage Mission), March 4, 1874.

33. *Independent* (Oswego), March 7, 1874.

34. *Independent*, May 9, 1874.

35. *Parsons Eclipse*, May 21, 1874.



Saloons were no place for married women; only prostitutes frequented such establishments. However, as women sought to guard the moral decency of emerging communities in southeast Kansas in the early 1870s, they began to redefine their role vis-à-vis the saloon and by extension their place in the public sphere. Instead of withdrawing from society to preserve their domestic tranquility, they engaged society in an attempt to extend the boundaries of their activities by saving their men and children from the corruption of disorder and chaos. Like the women pictured in this 1874 Harper's Weekly depiction of a "Woman's Crusade Against Intemperance," Kansas women entered saloons in protest. Drawing courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

These arguments are significant as they mimic those used by men to describe both their earlier role as defenders of the Union against the Confederacy and their current role as defenders of the independent patriotic farmer against the oppressive capitalist. Veterans of the Civil War in southeast Kansas had created their own identity around the concept of fighting the enslavement of the oppressed.⁴⁰ To now hear themselves called "slaves" and to be told that they must be "emancipated" by their wives and daughters was a clear assault on their own self-identity as men and by extension on the communities they had worked to establish. In other words, even as women were elevated and ennobled by the leadership they exercised in the battle against alcohol, many men were provoked to shame by the rhetoric of the movement.⁴¹

40. Mack, "A Second Revolution," 2–17.

41. In her examination of the temperance movement in northeast Kansas, Garner observed a similar response among the men of the

Men responded to the perceived challenge by aggressively reminding women of their "proper place" in society in a series of editorials that reasserted traditional patriarchal views of male-female relations published by several papers throughout southeast Kansas. Undoubtedly, interpreting these editorials and articles is complex. On the one hand, editors of local newspapers in southeast Kansas were not simply reporters but functioned as official spokesmen for their local communities and as boosters for would-be settlers.⁴² They understood that their papers were being

communities she studied. See Garner, "For God and Home and Native Land." It is hoped that as more analyses of local temperance movements in particular Kansas communities are completed by scholars it will be possible to determine the larger, region-wide patterns of response to this movement among Kansas men in general and among Civil War veterans in particular.

42. I am indebted to one of this article's initial reviewers for the insight that newspaper editors, like Horner of the *Advance*, functioned as "boosters" by attempting to describe their towns as "settled"—that



Men in southeast Kansas responded to the temperance activities of their women, which they saw as a challenge to the right ordering of society, by aggressively reminding women of their “proper place” in newspaper articles and editorials that reasserted traditional patriarchal views. Feminine passivity was praised as the highest of qualities. True American women, one paper insisted, delighted in “the devotion, the poetry and the honor in keeping house.” Those women occupied by other pursuits, such as the one pictured in this 1871 stereo card, “Women’s Rights: The Rehearsal,” neglected their womanly duties to the detriment of their families.

read not only by those who had already immigrated but also by those who were considering immigration. It was thus important, in order to encourage continued settlement, that the communities of southeast Kansas be presented on their pages as civilized, developed, urbane communities in which the traditional gender boundaries of nineteenth-century America were both respected and enforced. However, the editors were also dealing with a growing group of Lady Labettes and Firmnesses in their midst, who insisted on reconstructing and reimagining these boundaries. Publishing articles championing the

is, as “civilized” in a way many would have “read” as middle-class. Certainly opposition to public drunkenness expressed this value as did a reiteration of the importance of maintaining traditional eastern gender norms. For more on the role of newspaper editors as “boosters,” see Don W. Wilson, “Barbed Words on the Frontier: Early Kansas Newspaper Editors,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 1 (Autumn 1978): 147–54; David Dary, *Red Blood and Black Ink: Journalism in the Old West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998); and Jeffrey L. Pasley, “The Tyranny of Printers”: *Newspaper Politics in the Early American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

traditional and thus proper role of women therefore served two purposes. It assured would-be immigrants that all was well on the southeast Kansas frontier when it came to gender and it reminded those who had already come of the “proper” way in which gender roles should be constructed in ordered, lawful societies.

When reading newspapers published in the 1860s and early 1870s in southeast Kansas, one is immediately struck by how much space is dedicated to the issue of gender. From at least the third issue onward of the *Neosho Valley Eagle*, male-female relations were a frequent theme. On May 16, 1868, in the first extant article published on the subject, the editor addressed the issue head-on by publishing a short piece titled “Woman.” The article expresses the combination of fascination and confusion many men were experiencing by comparing women to a “complicated machine”:

Her springs are indefinitely delicate, and differ from those of man pretty nearly as the work of a repeating watch does from that of a town clock. Look at her body, how delicately formed! Examine her sense, how exquisite and nice!—Observe her understanding, how subtle and acute! But look into her heart; there is the patchwork, composed of parts so wonderfully combined, that they must be seen through a microscope to be clearly comprehended.⁴³

In the same edition of the paper, the editor returned to this theme. Opining that “of all women she is most to be pitied who has a slow suitor,” he related the story with obvious approval and admiration of a “legendary puritan” who rode up to the door of the house where the girl he had chosen to marry resided, and, after announcing without delay “Rachel, the Lord hath sent me to marry thee,” received the prompt reply: “The Lord’s will be done!”⁴⁴

Other editors made similar use of their columns. The *Osage Mission Journal* published an article titled “The Quiet Woman” in September. There the editor reminded his readers that “quiet women” are “the wine of life.” Unlike “nervous, enthusiastic and talkative women,” the “quiet woman” does not agitate for her rights or seek her own interests. Instead, “she is wise and thoughtful, but loving and meek. . . . In sorrow, adversity, or illness, the quiet woman is nurse, counselor and friend. She soothes,

43. *Neosho Valley Eagle*, May 16, 1868.

44. *Ibid.*

comforts, and caresses, and is the unfaltering guide of the weak and erring, through her own noble and unerring instincts. . . . She moves silently and orderly; even her garments falling in soft harmonious flow. She does not irritate with questions, but surprises and pleases by her unobtrusive anticipations. She rarely speaks."⁴⁵ The picture painted here of the ideal woman stresses her passivity—she does not initiate but responds; she does not seek to fulfill her own desires but exists to fulfill the wants and needs of her husband. The *Neosho County Dispatch* was in complete agreement: "Let the wife only understand and have faith in her true position—that of women 'the helper.'"⁴⁶

The *Neosho Valley Eagle* published a short article titled "Married Life," which began with "good counsel from a wife and mother," on the front page of its November 21, 1868, edition. According to this article, allegedly written by a seasoned and experienced "old woman," it was the woman's responsibility to ensure her husband's fidelity:

It will not do to leave a man to himself till he comes to you, to take no pains to attract him, or to appear before him with a long face. It is not so difficult as you think, dear child, to behave to a husband so that he shall remain forever in some measure a husband. . . . A word from you at the right time will not fail of its effect; what need have you to play the suffering virtue? The tear of a loving girl, says an old book, is like a dew-drop on a rose; but that on the cheek of a wife is a drop of poison to her husband.—Try and appear cheerful and contented, and your husband will be so; and when you have made him happy, you will become so, not in appearance, but in reality. The skill required is not so great. Nothing flatters a man so much as the happiness of his wife; he is always proud of himself as the source of it. As soon as you are cheerful you will be lively and alert, and every moment will afford you an opportunity to let fall an agreeable word.⁴⁷

The *Southern Kansas Advance* sought to ground this conception of "passive femininity" in nature itself by arguing that "women are naturally less selfish and more sympathetic than men." According to a page-one column, "The Friendship of Women," "they have more affection



The rehearsal is "Off to the Lecture Room," leaving her husband behind to care for home and baby. Cards courtesy of the Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

to bestow, greater need of sympathy, and are therefore more sure, in the absence of love, to seek friendship. The devastating egotism of man is properly foreign to women." There were exceptions to be found within both genders, but "the cardinal contrast holds, that women are self-forgetful, men self-asserting; women hide their surplus affection under a feigned indifference; men hide their indifference under a feigned affection."⁴⁸

The editor of the *Oswego Independent* registered his agreement by arguing that "the loveliest adornment of perfect womanhood is unconsciousness of self." In fact, feminine passivity was more important than any other quality that a woman might possess. As he went on to explain, "If the woman possessed of this rare virtue be lacking in physical beauty, nay, even plain, there is a charm in her innocence and simplicity more potent than the smiles of the fairest featured siren that ever deluded the susceptible heart of man. . . . True beauty lies in the hidden perfection of the soul. . . . No feminine face is truly beautiful that does not wear, to a certain extent, an expression of contentment and repose."⁴⁹ The *Tioga Herald* added its weight to the ongoing social discourse by asserting that "the husband's interest should be the

45. *Osage Mission Journal*, September 17, 1868.

46. *Neosho County Dispatch* (Erie), June 29, 1869.

47. *Neosho Valley Eagle*, November 21, 1868.

48. *Southern Kansas Advance*, February 16, 1870.

49. *Oswego Independent*, November 2, 1872.



For many in southeast Kansas in the early days of settlement, the concepts of masculinity and femininity were static. Any attempts to challenge or change the basic gender order of the family or the larger community threatened the long-term viability of their plans to build lawful frontier communities, such as this settlement taking shape in Oswego in 1875. Their plans depended on continued immigration, which was contingent upon their ability to demonstrate to would-be settlers that their communities were well ordered and stable and that the same gender standards that governed life in the East were fully operative on the frontier.

wife's care, and her greatest ambition carry her no further than his welfare or happiness together with that of her children. This should be her sole aim, and the theater of her exploits in the bosom of her family."⁵⁰ These perspectives were reinforced in newspapers throughout southeast Kansas by a series of poetic celebrations of feminine passivity. Titled variously "A Maiden's Psalm of Life," "The Perfect Woman," "A Wife's Song," "The True Woman," "The Young Wife's Prayer," "A Happy Woman," and "The Old Maid's Psalm," these poems, many written by local would-be poets, advanced the patriarchal assertions contained within the prosaic editorials.⁵¹

So occupied were the editors with this theme that in announcing the election of Ulysses S. Grant to the presidency in 1868 the *Osage Mission Journal* rejoiced in the fact that his dutiful wife would accompany him

to the White House as First Lady. For, as the paper explained to its readers, "It is gratifying to know that the position is one which Mrs. Grant will fill with that true simplicity of an American woman." This simplicity assured Americans that "there will be no attempt to ape the grandeur of a regal court, and no vulgar striving after more sensation." Even more importantly, "Mrs. Grant is a lady, who has maintained through every event . . . a marked propriety of demeanor. She has been help-meet in days of adversity and has shared his honors without being dazzled by the position."⁵² Although the paper does not explain any further this reference to Mrs. Grant, the comparative structure of the endorsement indicates that the person of Mrs. Grant was embraced as a symbol of true femininity against women of wealth, power, and independent activity. Mrs. Grant was the opposite of the "advanced female," frequently disparaged in newspapers, who refused to accept her role in marriage and society. As General Grant epitomized the full masculinity of the Civil War veteran, his wife embodied

50. *Tioga Herald*, March 2, 1872.

51. *Osage Mission Journal*, September 2, 1869; *Southern Kansas Advance*, January 26, February 2, December 7, 1870; *Neosho County Dispatch*, January 20, 1871; *Oswego Register*, January 27, 1871; *Tioga Herald*, June 24, 1871.

52. *Osage Mission Journal*, December 4, 1868.

the simplicity of true American femininity. The editor of the *Transcript* used a reprinted article on page one to explain that true American women, such as Mrs. Grant, delighted in “the devotion, the poetry and the honor in keeping house.” His conclusion was thus set: “If they are not strong enough for the task, all that can be said is that they are not fit to be women.”

Such definitions of womanhood were matched with prescriptions for manhood in debates on any number of topics during the late nineteenth century. The *Kansas Democrat* out of Independence, for example, invoked traditional gender roles when lambasting another local paper, the *Erie Ishmaelite*, for its opposition “to every one who knows more than it does.” The editor of the *Ishmaelite* was, in the estimation of the *Democrat*, “one of those Hermaphrodites, that hadn’t pluck enough to be a man, and too little modesty to be a woman.”⁵³ He was, in other words, a genderless being, conveying none of the easily recognized, widely accepted values those living in communities in southeast Kansas depended upon as the foundation of their civil society.

According to the men who penned these editorials, the concepts of masculinity and femininity were static. Any attempts to challenge or change the basic gender order of the family or of the larger community violated their stated aims in choosing to settle in the region in the years immediately following the Civil War. A change in basic social order also threatened the long-term viability of their plans to build lawful communities on the southeast Kansas frontier. Such plans, in their minds, depended on continued immigration, which was contingent upon their ability to demonstrate to would-be settlers that the gender standards of the East were fully implemented in their communities. The image of women banding together, entering saloons, and making demands of men while threatening violence if their voices were not heeded, threatened the patriarchal images of society embraced by many male leaders in southeast Kansas. Although united in the desire for good order and social stability, and thus in their concern about the effects of drunkenness on their local communities, these men did not wish to see the women of their communities abandoning the social boundaries that had been prescribed for them. [KH]

53. *Osage Mission Transcript*, October 4, 1872; *Erie Ishmaelite*, March 17, 1871; *Kansas Democrat*, March 9, 1871.