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Sources of Women's History at the Vermont State Archives

*Writing to the governor seemed to be
the last resort for some women in
unbearable situations.*

By CHRISTIE CARTER

“**T**his is my D[y]ing testimony I am the One that gave the stuff [to] Fournier and for God sake free Mrs. Fournier . . . I did [it] to stop him from Dr[in]king,” wrote Effie Whalen to Governor Urban A. Woodbury from her jail cell. Effie and her friend Rose Fournier were convicted of poisoning Rose’s husband Fred in an 1894 trial that riveted Burlington for months. Although the two women had staunchly denied poisoning Fred, an abusive alcoholic, they were sentenced to twenty years in jail for manslaughter. Effie’s letter did not convince the governor of her friend’s innocence, however, and Rose remained in jail until Governor William W. Stickney pardoned her conditionally in 1901 because she had “spinal disease.”

A researcher investigating this murder case several years ago sought court records but was not aware of the range of potentially useful government records available. Several relevant court documents had been lost to fire and the researcher relied heavily on newspapers. Although the local newspaper coverage of the trial was extensive, it provided only a superficial understanding of the two women and their motives and left the researcher wondering if they were wrongly convicted. The search for information eventually led to the Vermont State Archives at the Office of the Secretary of State, and the exciting discovery that in its collection were letters from the two women written from their jail cells to Governor Wood-

bury (1894-1896) and Governor Edward C. Smith (1898-1900). The letters produced a stream of new questions, but the researcher also had a few more facts.

It is not unusual for students and historians to neglect government archives. This underutilization stems, in part, from a lack of archival outreach.¹ The following annotated bibliography illustrates Vermont State Archives holdings relating to women and suggests possible areas of research. It is intended to complement the valuable bibliographies by Faith Pepe ("Toward a History of Women in Vermont: An Essay and Bibliography," *Vermont History* 45, Spring 1977) and Marilyn Blackwell ("Women in Vermont: A Bibliography," *Vermont History* 56, Spring 1988) and to stimulate the interest of researchers in the Vermont State Archives as a source for the study of women's history. It is intended also to bring attention to the potential value of government records, in general, for women's studies.

The researcher willing to make a thorough search will find in government archives an extensive record of the activities of Vermont women. The Vermont State Archives hold executive and legislative records as well as a few judicial records and miscellaneous collections, all of which contain evidence of the many ways government has affected women and the many ways women have attempted to influence government. Gubernatorial records include correspondence from women of all walks of life as well as memoranda and minutes from a large number of agencies and commissions concerned with women's issues. Bills and laws concerning women can be found in the legislative records. Petitions to the legislature show that even when women could not vote, they vigorously exercised their right to petition. Vermont statutes provide a record of the changes in women's legal rights, and judicial records give fascinating accounts of how individual women were affected by the law.

This bibliography is organized according to groups of records: executive, legislative, judicial, and miscellaneous records. The executive records are subdivided into governors' records, petitions for pardon, and the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women. Subgroups within the legislative records are petitions to the General Assembly, house and senate journals and legislative committee records, laws, and the Order of Women Legislators. The judicial records are not subdivided. Miscellaneous records include journals of the Council of Censors, Vermont constitution records, state referenda, municipal records, lists of paupers and insane, the Houston photograph collection, trademarks, the records of Deputy Secretary of State Jean Baldwin, and the Stevens collection. What follows is not a complete listing of all records at the archives relating to women, but a selection of examples.

EXECUTIVE RECORDS

Governors' Records

Vermont statutes (3 V.S.A. §4) decree that the official correspondence of the governor be deposited at the Office of the Secretary of State. Governors' records after 1870 are organized at the State Archives by governor; earlier records are located in the Manuscript Vermont State Papers (MsVTSP). The MsVTSP were the original core of the State Archives collection and encompass ninety-six volumes of eighteenth and nineteenth century government records including petitions to the governor and general assembly, legislative committee reports and resolutions, grand lists, treasurer's records, governor's correspondence, and court records.²

Early gubernatorial records hold scattered information about the lives of Vermont women. For example, in a 1780 treasurer's account signed by Governor Thomas Chittenden (1778-1789, 1790-1797), the state paid Susannah Bush for weaving 27½ yards of "cloath" in 1774, a "Tory debt." In 1781 the Widow Spencer was paid "1 pound nineteen shillings and six pence hard money for keeping teams and fat cattle for this State." A 1780 land purchase ticket signed by Governor Chittenden records that Anne Holt had to forfeit land she inherited from her brother because of her "Treasonable Conduct." The plight of an impoverished black woman is evident from a 1780 treasurer's account signed by Chittenden in which Deliverance Squire was paid seventy pounds, ten shillings for "15 Days keeping a Negro Wench Charge[d] to this State also to making Coffin Digging a Grave and burying her."³

The economic hardships suffered by a number of wives of prisoners are articulated in letters to governors. Ann Fowler wrote Governor Richard Skinner (1820-1823) in 1822 requesting a pardon for her husband David, who was serving a jail sentence of thirteen years for counterfeiting: "My health is extremely ill and I am depleted of connexions and pecuniary funds." Her husband was not discharged until 1828, despite the fact that he saved the life of a jail keeper in 1821 by grabbing a club wielded by the leader of a prison insurrection.⁴ Another wife, Lucina Cady, asked Governor Skinner in 1822 to free her husband who was imprisoned for theft. Cady communicated her financial and emotional woes forcefully, though she apologized that her letter "is not written in style for the want of education."⁵

Reports to Governor William Slade (1844-1846) from town clerks provide statistics on district schools, including the number of children in each school and the salaries of male and female teachers. The reports indicate that women's salaries were sometimes less than a third of their male counterparts.⁶

In Governor Erastus Fairbanks's records (1852-1853, 1860-1861) are letters from a female nurse from Tunbridge and a female physician's assistant from Fairfax offering their services in the Civil War. Other letters to the governor relate the willingness of women to work as nurses in the war.⁷

The records of Governor Urban Woodbury (1894-1896) contain letters of recommendation addressed to county examiners of teachers, indicating gradual improvement of women's positions as teachers. The Woodbury records include several pleas for pardon, many from women. There is also a letter from Sarah Walton (1896) telling about the impoverished condition of women and children in Tunbridge. A few 1895 letters wrestle with the propriety of incarcerating the murderer Mary Wetherbee with inadequate separation from the men at Rutland's Vermont House of Correction.⁸

Governor William Stickney (1900-1902) received several letters from suffragists. In 1902 Mrs. Sarah Clay Bennett of Kentucky, representing the National American Woman Suffrage Association implored Stickney to follow his conscience and do what he could to give the presidential vote to women. Laura Moore, Secretary of the Vermont Woman Suffrage Association, wrote Stickney in September 1902 asking him to support the municipal suffrage bill in his farewell message to the General Assembly. Stickney did not.⁹

It is difficult to glean Stickney's views on suffrage from his correspondence, but he did write Laura Moore in 1901 recommending a Reverend Reardon as a suitable person to arrange a lecture, as "he holds the same views that are promulgated by your association." The Stickney records also include correspondence concerning the Vermont State Library Commission. Created in 1892, the library commission provided one of the first opportunities for women to serve in state government. In a 1902 letter to the governor, Commissioner Susan H. Smith reported on the traveling library program and suggested that compensation of library commissioners be similar to that of other hardworking civil servants.¹⁰

Laura Moore also wrote Governor John McCullough (1902-1904) asking him to state his position on women's suffrage. McCullough's Secretary of Civil and Military Affairs, Edward L. Bates, responded that the governor was ill and could not answer. The McCullough records also contain letters to Vermont delegates, many of them women, to the World's Curfew Congress held by the "Boys and Girls National Curfew Association." The purpose of the Congress was to extend the "Home Building, Child Saving and Crime Reducing features of the Curfew Reform."¹¹

Writing to the governor seemed to be the last resort for some women in unbearable situations. For instance, Sarah Reed wrote McCullough

complaining that she had become crippled because of abuse from Herbert Reed. Pleas for pardon in the McCullough records include a 1902 letter from Mrs. E. J. Rice, an inmate at the Vermont House of Correction at Rutland who wanted to be released to give birth, as well as letters from a New Jersey woman who begged for a pardon for her son. When the son's pardon was refused, his mother wrote some very unflattering remarks about the governor and his state.¹²

Among Governor Horace Graham's records (1917-1919) is correspondence concerning the Board of Charities and Probation, particularly between the governor and Emily Dutton Proctor, who belonged to a group appointed by the governor to raise and disburse funds for the board. The board was created in 1917 to supervise "dependent, delinquent and rejected children." The correspondence contains discussion of fundraising for needy children and individual cases of need.¹³ The board was one of many agencies used by upper- and middle-class women to perform social work.

Governor Percival Clement's records (1919-1921) contain letters and petitions from men and women (mostly women) across the country urging him to call a special session of the legislature to ratify the nineteenth amendment to the U.S. Constitution granting suffrage to women.¹⁴ In July 1920 Clement issued a proclamation explaining his reasons for refusing. Clement stalled women's suffrage on the grounds that the Vermont constitution would be violated. He argued that the legislature can only propose changes to, not alter the constitution; changes must be decided by a statewide referendum. Clement's opposition to women's suffrage may have been linked to his sentiments against the temperance movement, which was vigorously supported by women.

In the records of Governor William Wills (1941-1945) is material on the role of Vermont women in Civil Defense during World War II. A number of women worked for the Vermont Council of Safety, and Wills's correspondence details their work. These women encouraged the planting of victory gardens and helped prepare their communities for possible enemy attack. For example, Marjorie S. Guzelman, a Vermont Council on Safety staff member, delivered a radio address on April 1, 1942, in which she warned "it can happen here" and asked everyone to be on the lookout for enemy activity.¹⁵ Governor Wills's records also contain a survey of Vermont's daycare needs.

Governor Deane C. Davis's records (1969-1973) include correspondence on various abortion bills as well as a letter from Davis explaining his views on abortion. The early years of the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women are also documented in Davis's records. The commission was created by Governor Philip H. Hoff in 1964 and re-established by Gover-

nor Davis's Executive Order No. 15 in 1969.¹⁶ Governor Hoff's records are located at Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont.

The records of Governor Richard A. Snelling (1977-1985) contain documentation of women's participation in state government, including correspondence, memos, and reports from Sister Elizabeth Candon, Commissioner of the Agency of Human Services (1979-81); Gretchen Babcock, Acting Commissioner of Banking and Insurance (1984-85); and other female state office holders.¹⁷ Contemporary gubernatorial records customarily contain the files of department and agency heads as well as those of the governor.

The Snelling records also include an abundance of material on issues relating to women. In 1982, Snelling was swamped with letters from women across the country protesting the National Governors Association decision to hold its annual meeting in Oklahoma, a state that had not ratified the proposed Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). In Snelling's records are letters for and against the ERA as well as material concerning legal issues surrounding the ERA. Correspondence between Snelling and members of the Vermont League of Women Voters highlights their differences and agreements.¹⁸

The Snelling holdings on the economic conditions of single female parents concentrate on issues such as child support enforcement, job training programs for "displaced homemakers," and opportunities for women in non-traditional trades. The struggle to form state policy toward women in poverty was related in a 1983 memo from Carol Drake, Senior Policy Analyst for the State Planning Office, to Nancy Knox, Special Assistant to the Governor. Drake stated that "the implication that poverty and the female sex are now, or will be, inextricably linked" was unfair to women. She stressed the importance, in formulating policy, of recognizing the source of women's poverty: women are poor "when they are forced to assume sole responsibility for the care of children." If possible, Drake suggested, fathers should help take care of children; if not, the state should provide assistance. Drake hoped that public discussion of the issue could be "focused so that first, we are not in the position of asking for help for the weaker, dumber women of the world who cannot help themselves and must beg for the sympathy and assistance of the strong, almighty male."¹⁹

The Snelling records also contain correspondence, memos, reports, and minutes of meetings concerning the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, with considerable material on domestic violence. In a 1980 memo to Phoebe Morse, Snelling expressed his concern about wife abuse: "I really bet you we could do more to end wife-abuse by finding

and helping the sick guys who act out their torment than we can simply by trying to find safe havens for their victims. My bet is that when the abusers no longer can 'get at' their wives, or girlfriends . . . they simply take up with someone new and beat the hell out of them."²⁰

Petitions for Pardon

The Manuscript Vermont State Papers contain petitions to governors ca. 1778 to 1880, requesting pardon for those imprisoned for crimes such as rape, adultery, bigamy, and prostitution. They are resources for studying women as criminals and as victims of crime. The petitions convey contemporary attitudes towards various crimes and towards women and their role in the family; many of them stressed the economic hardship of having a breadwinner in jail.

Although the petitions are biased in favor of the petitioner, they provide information about particular cases, give the length of the sentence, and note whether the prisoner was discharged. An 1833 petition for pardon was submitted by a man convicted of assaulting his wife. He was required to pay a total of seventy dollars or stay in jail and he had no money. His petition was promptly followed by one from his wife pleading with Governor William Palmer (1831-1835) to keep him in jail, and another from residents of their hometown echoing the wife's plea. A number of petitions by convicted adulterers date from the 1830s and 1840s. During those years men and women convicted of adultery could be sent to jail "not exceeding three years and be fined not exceeding one thousand dollars, or either of said punishments, in the discretion of the court." Laura Fargo was one such petitioner. Sentenced to two years at the Vermont State Prison for adultery, she filed petitions for pardon in 1836 and 1837; her pardon was refused.²¹

Governor's Commission on the Status of Women

The Vermont State Archives hold records of the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women (established in 1964 and re-established as the Governor's Commission on Women in 1986), which include minutes of meetings, correspondence, and publications primarily from the 1970s. These records also contain extensive material on the proposed Equal Rights Amendment including 1976 testimony before the senate judiciary committee, and files describing the ERA's possible impact on the rights of widows and married women, military service, child custody, and labor.

LEGISLATIVE RECORDS

Petitions to the General Assembly

The Vermont State Archives have a sizeable collection of temperance

petitions to the General Assembly, primarily from the 1830s. In the early 1830s the petitions tended to be handwritten, but as the movement gained momentum, in 1836 and 1837, many petitions were pre-printed and mass produced. The number of female petition-signers attests to the fact that women were a significant force in the Vermont temperance movement, and, though deprived of the vote, found means to express themselves. Some temperance petitions were signed only by women, such as the 1836 petition of Lucretia A. Walker and other "Ladies of Brattleboro." Other towns, such as Greensboro in 1836, submitted petitions with the signatures of men on one side and women on the other. An 1837 Wilmington petition has columns for "Legal Male Voters," "Adult Females," and "Minors (Male and Female)." Men and women are thoroughly integrated on other petitions, such as an 1837 petition from Peacham. The myriad formats of petitions perhaps indicate uncertainty surrounding the importance of a woman's signature compared to a man's.²²

Other types of petitions to the General Assembly include an 1823 petition by Hannah Day requesting passage of a special act allowing her children to choose a guardian. Joseph Day, whom Hannah divorced in 1819, "wasted his property in idleness and intemperance." Hannah Day stated that he snatched the earnings from his children (aged fifteen, thirteen, and nine), "wasting them in his vicious habits." The 1823 *Journal of the General Assembly* states that the judiciary committee reported "that the prayer thereof ought not to be granted."²³

The archives also hold some suffrage petitions, including 1904 petitions in support of granting the vote to women in municipal and presidential elections.

House and Senate Journals and Legislative Committee Records

Bills relating to women's issues, from the beginning of Vermont's statehood to the present, can be traced in the house and senate journals. Contained in the journals are bills concerning marriage and divorce, the education of women, and women's suffrage. The archives has an unpublished subject index to committee reports in the house and senate journals. Some committee reports contain in-depth discussion of specific legislation. For example, an 1852 "Report of the Committee on Education" responded to a petition calling for women's vote in school meetings: "It is quite probable that, were the power granted . . . even the tax-paying portion of the sex would no doubt, in most instances, choose to entrust the advocacy of their views and interests to a male relative or friend, rather than to do violence to a natural sense of delicacy." An 1869 petition by the Protestant Episcopal Church in Vermont expressed outrage

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that “the number of Divorces is to the number of marriages as one to nineteen” and asserted that the “Law of Divorce” permitted “successive polygamy.”²⁴

The archives also holds more recent legislative committee reports not published in the journals. The 1972 report by the Joint Committee on Equal Rights of Women examined effects on Vermont statutes of adoption of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment. The report reviewed all Vermont laws pertaining to women’s issues including the legal rights of married women, divorce laws, criminal laws, and laws concerning children born out of wedlock. The legislature has changed many of these laws since 1972 to conform to the proposed amendment, despite its defeat: children born out of wedlock are no longer “bastards”; wives as well as husbands are required to support their insane spouses; husbands as well as wives of prisoners are exempt from prosecution for aiding their spouses’ escape; the minimum marriageable age for a groom with the consent of a parent or guardian has been lowered from sixteen to fourteen years to conform to the minimum age for a bride; and divorce and alimony laws no longer assume that the husband is the only financial provider.²⁵

The legislative history of laws and bills concerning women can be traced in the legislative committee minutes that date from 1917 to the present. House and senate rules require legislative committee minutes and records of action on bills to be deposited at the Office of the Secretary of State. For example, the unsuccessful H.218 in 1971-72, which



The 1935-1937 Vermont General Assembly included fifteen women among 248 House members, and one woman among thirty members of the Senate. This photograph of Vermont women legislators was taken in 1935. Courtesy of Vermont State Archives.

proposed liberalizing the abortion statute, can be tracked in the records of action and the minutes of the house and senate health and welfare committees and the judiciary committees. Impassioned testimony is preserved in these records. There are also letters on the bill, including a letter from a woman telling the story of her illegal abortion.²⁶

Laws

Vermont laws are rich with possibilities for research. The archives hold copies of original acts passed by the legislature from 1800 to the present. The acts contain the original wording of bills and changes made by the legislators; the original acts can be studied for legislative intent. *Vermont Statutes Annotated (VSA)* contains all current Vermont statutes as well as notes on the history or source of the laws. Title fifteen of *VSA* covers domestic relations and has chapters on marriage, the rights of married women, desertion and support, adoption, annulment, and divorce. Histories of laws concerning women can also be traced in the predecessors of *Vermont Statutes Annotated: Compiled Statutes of Vermont, General Statutes, Revised Laws, and Public Statutes. Acts and Resolves passed by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont* (hereafter referred to as *Laws of Vermont*), from 1778 to the present, are also important resources.

An "Index to the General and Special Legislation of the State of Vermont," compiled in 1894 by Albert Cross, is a useful aid for finding laws passed prior to 1894 relating to the rights of married women, divorce, dower and curtesy, children born out of wedlock, rape, polygamy, and other topics.

Vermont Corporations: An Index to Private Corporations Formed by the Legislature, edited and compiled by D. Gregory Sanford (1987), can be used as guide for finding the charters of private corporations such as the "Ladies Aid Society," "Ladies Library Association," "Home for Friendless Women," and the "Home for Aged Women."

The Governor's Commission on Women published several handbooks on the subject of women and the law including "Legal Rights of Women in Vermont" and "Economics of Divorce in Vermont." Laws affecting women have been changing so rapidly that "Legal Rights of Women in Vermont," published in 1985, is currently being revised. Other sources for women and the law are listed in the Blackwell and Pepe bibliographies.²⁷

ORDER OF WOMEN LEGISLATORS (OWLS)

The records of Vermont OWLS and its successor, the Vermont Women's Legislative Caucus, include correspondence, minutes of meetings,

biographical sketches, photographs, and other memorabilia. The Vermont branch of OWLS was formed in 1936 and remained active until 1980, when the women's legislative caucus was formed. These records are a rich source, particularly for the 1930s and 1940s, of the history of Vermont women legislators. A quotation from the minutes of a 1947 meeting evokes the spirit of the OWLS: "Mrs. [Consuelo] Bailey spoke briefly, contrasting the present, when women rank with men in the halls of congress and in our state legislatures, with the days when her great-great-grandmother was fined \$300 for visiting a sick daughter on Sunday. . . . In closing all joined hands and sang, 'Auld Lang Syne.'" ²⁸

JUDICIAL RECORDS

A few early Vermont court records are located in the Henry Stevens, Sr., collection at the Vermont State Archives. The Stevens collection is a large group of eighteenth and nineteenth century Vermont documents collected by Henry Stevens, Sr., in the mid-nineteenth century, which was recently acquired by the archives. (The collection is described on pp. 45-46.) Many of the court cases in the collection are incomplete, fragmented, and not conducive to an in-depth study of individual cases. They nevertheless contain a wealth of material including probate records, bills of divorce, chancery court records, and other miscellaneous court records. One interesting piece is an 1811 pre-nuptial agreement between Elisha Yeoman, a widower, and Phinelia Freeman, a widow. They declared the "utmost confidence in the purity and ardency of each others affections" but abdicated all claims upon their respective estates. There is also an 1817 Chittenden County bill of divorce. Stephen and Mary Bayley were married in 1812 but Stephen "wilfully deserted" Mary two months later and "went to parts unknown." At that time divorces were granted for "impotency, adultery, or wilful desertion for three years; and also, when either party shall have been absent seven years, if unheard of during that time,"; also "for intolerable severity." ²⁹

In the MsVTSP are a number of early- to mid-nineteenth century court depositions that concern women. In one 1808 case the heirs of Mr. Ebenezer Williams (who died in 1801) sued the heirs of Mrs. Mary Williams (who died in 1802). A number of neighbors testified that Mrs. Williams pressured Mr. Williams to make a will while on his deathbed. The neighbors testified that Mr. Williams often spoke of wanting to give half of his property to his father's family, but that Mrs. Williams insisted that she have it all, and in his weakened and delirious state he granted her desire. By law Mrs. Williams was entitled to "one third part of the real estate of her said deceased husband, in houses and lands . . . the remainder of the estate shall be disposed of according to the will of the deceased;

and where there is no will, according to law.” An 1809 act of the legislature granted the heirs of Ebenezer Williams a rehearing concerning the will.³⁰

The MsVTSP also contain records of an early abortion case. In an 1811 indictment against Jonathan Dorr, the state charged that Dorr “did wilfully, maliciously and wickedly, cut, tear, force, and sever the child of which the said Esther Gaby was quick and pregnant.” Dorr “being moved and seduced by the Instigation of the Devil did with sticks, stones, axes, scissors, forceps and other dangerous weapons” allegedly destroy the baby. Gaby testified that she thought she was pregnant and threatened suicide if Jonathan refused to abort her child. Although Dorr did not believe she was pregnant, he admitted he “administer[ed] medical aid for the sole and only purpose of pacifying her.” Dorr was convicted of simple assault, and fined \$400 plus court costs. In 1814 Dorr successfully petitioned the General Assembly for a remission of the fine. Prior to 1846, according to common law, abortion was legal until the “quickening” of the fetus, which is when the baby begins to move in the womb. If an abortion was committed after the “quickening” of the fetus, the abortionist could be tried for assault.³¹

MISCELLANEOUS RECORDS

Journals of the Council of Censors

The Vermont constitution called for the election of a thirteen-member Council of Censors every seven years. The council, to meet no longer than a year, reviewed the performance of the government to ensure the constitution was being followed and to propose amendments, if necessary. The State Archives hold transcribed journals of the Council of Censors from 1785 to 1869; the council was abolished in 1870.

In 1869, the Council of Censors proposed a women’s suffrage amendment to the Vermont constitution. Not all of the council members supported the amendment, however. In an attempt to mock women’s suffrage, Charles C. Dewey introduced a resolution proposing that women serve in the militia, but the committee on suffrage rejected the resolution. The 1869 journal contains an eloquent speech by Charles Reed in support of the rights of women that concluded: “After abolishing human slavery the next great conquest of the United States over wrong and error, will be to take woman from the feet of man and place her by his side.”³² The 1870 constitutional convention defeated the proposed suffrage amendment by a vote of 233 to 1.³³

Records of the Vermont Constitution

The Vermont constitution records contain pro- and anti-women’s suffrage petitions that were presented to the 1870 constitutional convention,

as well as journals and notes of the convention and records of roll call votes on the proposed women's suffrage amendment. The records also contain documents relating to the proposed Vermont Equal Rights Amendment of 1986.³⁴

State Referenda Records

The state referenda records contain material on statewide votes on a variety of issues such as liquor control, schools, and women's jury service. Documents relating to the 1942 jury referendum include the original proclamation of the secretary of state, which declared the outcome of the referendum, sample ballots, and original canvasses of votes.³⁵ Voting patterns on women's issues also can be gleaned from the referenda records.

Municipal Records

Although it was not until 1917 that taxpaying women were granted municipal suffrage, women were active in municipal affairs long before that year. Taxpaying women could vote in school meetings and serve on



Photographs of Hazel Wills and other governors' wives are included in the Vermont State Archives' Houston Photograph Collection. Here Mrs. Wills does patriotic service in a Victory garden during World War II. Courtesy of Vermont State Archives.

school boards starting in 1880, and in 1900 laws were passed allowing women to serve as town clerks, trustees of public libraries, superintendents of schools, and notaries public.³⁶

Vermont Municipalities: An Index to their Charters and Special Acts, edited and compiled by D. Gregory Sanford (1986), is a valuable aid for tracking municipal charters. The 1947 Burlington charter amendment allowing the appointment of police women is an example of woman-related municipal charter amendments.

Town Lists of Paupers (1829-36) and Town Lists of Insane (1835)

The town lists of paupers and the lists of insane are useful sources for the social historian. An 1828 legislative act directed the overseers of the poor to send to the house a "return of the number of paupers in their respective towns." The lists give the number of paupers, their cost to the town, and reasons for the pauperism such as "old age," "intemperence," "dwarf," and "mental derangement." An 1834 resolution by the General Assembly required town clerks to send information to the secretary of state on their towns' insane. The lists provide the age and sex of the insane and the symptoms, causes, and duration of the condition. Insanity was attributed to such influences as "high religious excitement," "sudden cold taken at childbirth," and "too much reading and study"; one Bradford man's insanity was allegedly caused by the distraction of his mother during childbirth. The lists resulted from a growing legislative awareness that settlement law was inadequate and that the state should share responsibility with the towns for the care of the poor and mentally ill.³⁷

Houston Photograph Collection

Among the photographs in the Houston collection are group pictures of Vermont women legislators from the 1930s-40s as well as class portraits of student nurses (1941-1943) and the New England Telephone and Telegraph Company women's bowling team (date unknown). There are a number of photographs of governors' wives including a depiction of Hazel Wills in her WINS uniform, providing patriotic service during World War II. (WINS may stand for Women in Nursing Services. The archives welcome readers with information about the WINS program.)

Trademarks

The archives have twenty volumes of the *Record of Trademarks and Names*, from 1898 to 1977. The trademarks illuminate the history of business in Vermont and provide indications of the audience targeted by each business. The history of women as consumers can be studied in the trademark records. The trademarks for cure-all pills such as "Moro's [blue] Pills for Men" and "Red Pills for Pale and Weak Women," registered

MONTREAL, CANADA. PARIS, FRANCE. BOSTON, U.S.A.

COMPAGNIE CHIMIQUE FRANCO AMERICAINE
 PRIX 50 CENTS SIX BOTTES \$ 2.50.
 Pour toutes les infirmités de la circulation

RECONSTITUE LE SYSTEME ET EMBELLIT LE TENIT
 NERVEUSES ET COMPLIQUEES PARTICULIERES AUX FEMMES
 LE REMEDE EFFRACE GUERIT TOUTES LES MALADIES

POUR LES FEMMES FAIBLES ET FAIBLES

DE FABRIQUE MARQUE

PILULES ROUGES

TRADE MARK

RED PILLS
 FOR PALE AND WEAK WOMEN

THE GREAT FEMALE REMEDY FOR BUILDING UP THE SYSTEM
 BEAUTIFYING THE COMPLEXION AND FOR THE CURE OF ALL NERVOUS AND
 COMPLICATED DISEASES PECULIAR TO WOMEN

Read inside circular for particulars and directions
 PRICE 50 CENTS SIX BOXES FOR \$ 2.50.
 FRANCO AMERICAN CHEMICAL CO.
 MONTREAL, CANADA. PARIS, FRANCE. BOSTON, U.S.A.

The Vermont State Archives contains records of trademarks registered with the State of Vermont. The trademarks of several businesses indicate products targeted primarily for women. Courtesy of Vermont State Archives.

in 1901, are classic examples of early advertising. Blue pills were a “great man remedy [and] will cure heart, lung, kidney, liver and nervous tendencies” and the red pills were “the great female remedy for building up the system, Beautifying the Complexion and the cure of all Nervous and complicated diseases peculiar to women.” Changing eating habits can be traced from “Howard’s Sausage, Made from Little Pigs” in 1924 to the Banquet “Cookin Bag” instant dinner registered in 1974.³⁸ Trademarks are also useful in tracing changing fashions and evolving family structures.

Deputy Secretary of State Jean Baldwin

The State Archives hold the records of Deputy Secretary of State Jean Baldwin (1977-1981). Although these records do not pertain to women's issues, they provide documentation of the career of Vermont's second female Deputy Secretary of State.³⁹

The Stevens Collection

The Stevens collection consists primarily of the personal papers of early Vermont statesmen. The collection, however, is an untapped source for Vermont women's history and warrants a brief description, although it deviates from this essay's focus on government documents. Persistence in searching the Stevens collection can uncover valuable material in studying the experiences of early Vermont women.

The letters of Sybil Stiles to her husband Ezra (Ezra Stiles, Jr., papers, 1779-1788) are rich with the details of family life. Sybil was the daughter of Samuel Avery who owned massive tracts of Vermont land and whose name is kept alive by Avery's Gore. Ezra was the son of Ezra Stiles, Sr., a clergyman and president of Yale College. Apparently, Ezra was absent often during a three-year marriage (1781-1784) cut short by his death. In letters to Ezra, Sybil expressed her longing for his return, the hardships involved in being pregnant and having a small child, and her deteriorating relationship with her father, which had much to do with "the bottle [going] round briskly." Her letters communicated a thinly veiled anger towards Ezra: "it is unnecessary to tell you . . . to let the pursuit of lasting Fame and unviolated Honour ever rival the meaner and less desirable thing *love* which you can enjoy at your leasure but such periods as the present are the times when you must acquire . . . and reputation to your posterity (that is if ever you have any)."⁴⁰

In a frantic letter to Ezra, sent after she heard that he and her father were wanted in Bennington for counterfeiting, she wrote: "I have just heard that governor Clinton is going to Bennington with a great army to murder you all."⁴¹ Letters from Sybil to her father, Samuel Avery, are in the Samuel Avery papers (1731-1806).

The Zoroaster Fisk papers (1826-1837) contain 1827 correspondence from Zoroaster's sister Alice who wrote home to Swanton from Oxford, New York, where she was studying to be a teacher. Alice wrote about her determination to learn to earn her living, spoke of her unvaried diet ("the only thing I have tasted this two weeks is indian jhony cake"), and related risqué stories. She told of taking "Morpheus" which "shed his gentle influence over my senses" and wished Steve Brown dead, a man who was a "devil in human shape," "yet . . . too subtle to expose himself to the law."⁴² Alice was a sharp and passionate woman.

The Ira Allen papers (1772-1809) contain correspondence between Ira and his wife Jerusha and Ira and Nancy Allen (Levi Allen's wife). There is additional correspondence between Nancy Allen and Levi in the Levi Allen papers (1772-1801). The Artemas Wheeler papers (1809-1824) contain correspondence between Artemas Wheeler and his sisters Patty, Lydia, Betsey, and Susan. The bulk of the Daniel Whipple papers (1764-1783) concerns Mary Whipple's administration of her husband Daniel's estate after his death. John Grout describes his abuse of his daughter (John Grout papers, 1766-1777), and there is a case of husband-beating in the Phineas White papers (1801-1832).⁴³

Isolated bits about early Vermont women are in the miscellaneous series of the Stevens collection, including an undated letter from Charlotte Hazen, a widow, who was cheated out of her inheritance and an 1819 letter from an older woman who left her husband to live with her sister, with the approval and understanding of friends and relations. Also included is a 1794 letter from a man who denied fathering a child but agreed to pay for the child's upkeep, as long as the child did not carry his name.⁴⁴

This essay has explored only the holdings at the Vermont State Archives. Other Vermont repositories also possess government records that are sources for women's history. The State of Vermont's Division of Public Records and Vermont county courts hold superior court records and early supreme court records. Special Collections at Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont, also has court records. A summary of supreme court cases can be found in *Vermont Reports*, located at the Vermont Department of Libraries in Montpelier. The *State Officers Reports* at the Department of Libraries are sources for statistical information on convicts at the state prison in Windsor and the house of correction in Rutland. The statistics in the *Reports* can be used in conjunction with court records to explore questions such as whether men or women were more likely to be convicted of adultery and to compare the length of sentences of men and women. U.S. Census records at the Department of Libraries and Bailey/Howe Library at the University of Vermont are rich with possibilities for women's studies; for example, census data can be useful in determining the extent to which Vermont women worked outside the home over the years and in identifying their occupations. The State of Vermont's Division of Public Records in Montpelier holds transcripts and tapes of public hearings on bills that concern women's issues. Municipal records, including minutes of town meetings, social service reports to mayors, and school records, can be found in municipal clerks' offices.

Public records reveal the evolving interactions of women, society, and government. As sources of diverse information about women of all classes, they provide a broader-based perspective than is available from many

other primary historical materials and serve as an important tool in the effort to construct a more inclusive understanding of Vermont's history.

NOTES

¹ Fredric Miller explored the neglect of archives in his article "Use, Appraisal, and Research: A Case Study of Social History," *American Archivist* 49 (Fall 1986): 371-392. According to Roy Turnbaugh in "Living with a Guide," *American Archivist* 46 (Fall 1983): 451, publishing guides does not necessarily increase use by scholars. A different aspect of this problem is pointed out by Constance McGovern in "Women's History: The State of the Art," *Vermont History* 56 (Spring 1988): 79. She suggests that finding aids in many archives are organized from a traditionalist perspective that makes it difficult to find information about women.

² See Marlene Wallace and John Williams, "Vermont State Papers: Rich Sources for the Study of Vermont History," *Vermont History* 38 (Summer 1970): 214-249.

³ Vol. 8, 19; vol. 9, 63; vol. 37, 95a; vol. 8, 199, Manuscript Vermont State Papers (MsVTSP), Vermont State Archives.

⁴ Vol. 72, 65, MsVTSP.

⁵ Vol. 72, 67, MsVTSP.

⁶ Vol. 88, 2a & b, MsVTSP.

⁷ Vol. 81, 39 & 18; vol. 82, 5 & 49, MsVTSP.

⁸ Examiners of Teachers; Petitions for Pardon; General Correspondence, Records of Governor Woodbury, Vermont State Archives.

⁹ Bennett to Stickney, 24 February 1902, 96; Moore to Stickney, 22 September 1902, 137, Records of Governor Stickney, Vermont State Archives. Deborah Clifford discusses Laura Moore's indefatigable work for women's suffrage in "The Drive for Women's Municipal Suffrage in Vermont, 1883-1917," *Vermont History* 47 (Summer 1979): 173-189.

¹⁰ Stickney to Moore, 30 September 1901, vol. 2, 65; Smith to Stickney, 26 September 1902, 140, Records of Governor Stickney.

¹¹ Moore to McCullough, 20 July 1904, 1048a; Bates to Moore, 26 July 1904, 1048c; McCullough to delegates, 9 June 1904, 306-317, Records of Governor McCullough, Vermont State Archives.

¹² Reed to McCullough, 5 May [1902], 1425; Rice to McCullough, 12 December 1902, 1430; Mrs. Stephen Casner to McCullough, December 1902-August 1903, 235-238, Records of Governor McCullough.

¹³ Charities and Probation, 1917-1919, microfilm no. S-3162, Records of Governor Graham, Vermont State Archives. The history of charitable work by middle-class women is examined in Marshall True's "From Relief Society to Mental Health Center: The Changing Role of the Howard in Burlington, Vermont," Occasional Paper Number Five (Burlington, Vt.: Center for Research on Vermont, 1981), and "Middle-Class Women and Civic Improvement in Burlington 1865-1890," *Vermont History* 56 (Spring 1988): 112-127.

¹⁴ Women's Suffrage, 1919-1920, microfilm no. S-3167, Records of Governor Clement, Vermont State Archives.

¹⁵ Defense, Women, 1941-1945, microfilm no. S-3203, Records of Governor Wills, Vermont State Archives.

¹⁶ Abortion, box 1A, folder 1, box 1B, folder 2, box 14B, folder 2, box 14C, folder 1; Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, box 7A, folder 24, box 23B, folder 20, box 3C, folder 23, box 14C, folder 43, Records of Governor Davis, Vermont State Archives.

¹⁷ Human Services (Agency of), box 85, folder 369; Banking and Insurance (Dept. of), box 3, Records of Governor Snelling, Vermont State Archives.

¹⁸ ERA, box 19, folder 92, box 20, folder 92A; League of Women Voters, box 153, folder 500, box 19, folder 92, Records of Governor Snelling.

¹⁹ Drake to Knox, 2 December 1983, box 20, folder 92, Records of Governor Snelling.

²⁰ Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, box 19; Snelling to Morse, 20 May 1980, box 19, folder 92, Records of Governor Snelling.

²¹ Vol. 85, 28, MsVTSP; vol. 85, 40c, MsVTSP; *Laws of Vermont: Coming Down to, and Including the Year 1824*, 257.

²² Temperance Memorials (1836), Vermont State Archives; also vols. 63-65, MsVTSP.

²³ Vol. 56, 251, MsVTSP; *General Assembly Journal*, 1823, 96.

²⁴ *House Journal*, 1852, 353; *House Journal*, 1869, 318.

²⁵ Vermont General Assembly, Joint Committee to Study Equal Rights of Women, *Report of the Joint Committee to Study Act no. R-97 of the 1971 Adjourned General Assembly* (Montpelier, Vt.: Legislative Council, 1972). Also, *Vermont Statutes Annotated*, Title 15.

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²⁶ House and Senate Health and Welfare and Judiciary Committee Records, 1971-1972, Legislative Committee Records, Vermont State Archives.

²⁷ Carol Brown recently wrote an unpublished essay, on file at the archives, on "Women and the Law: An Historical Perspective on Dower in Vermont," which is a history of dower and curtesy from a lawyer's perspective.

²⁸ Meeting Minutes, March 17, 1947, box 2, folder 1, Records of the Order of Women Legislators/ Women's Legislative Caucus, Vermont State Archives. The archives also have on file the unpublished essay "History of the Vermont Branch of OWLS, 1936-1973" by Susan E. Drown, Margaret Hammond, and Mildred Hayden.

²⁹ Pre-nuptial agreement, 1811, box 3, folder 3, item 2, Miscellaneous Series; Bill of divorce, 1817, box 2, folder 8, Chittenden County Court Records, Henry Stevens, Sr., Collection, Vermont State Archives; *Laws of Vermont*, 1805, 164.

³⁰ Vol. 72, 6-9, MsVTSP; *Laws of Vermont*, 1779, 360; *Laws of Vermont*, 1809, 24.

³¹ Vol. 72, 31; vol. 50, 237, MsVTSP; *Laws of Vermont*, 1846, 34; Frank H. Olmstead, "Abortion Choice and the Law in Vermont: A Recent Study," *Vermont Law Review* 7 (Fall 1982): 299; *Schenectady Gazette*, 14 January 1989.

³² Dewey's resolution, 533; Reed's speech, 537, *Journals of the Council of Censors* (transcripts), Vermont State Archives.

³³ Records of Roll Call Votes, 1870, box 1, Records of the Vermont Constitution, Vermont State Archives. Harvey Howes, the only man to vote for the amendment, explained his position in the pamphlet *A Last Resort* (Fair Haven: D. Lyman Crandall, 1870).

³⁴ 1870 Constitutional Convention, box 1; ERA material, box 4, Records of the Vermont Constitution.

³⁵ Boxes 1 and 2, State Referenda Records, Vermont State Archives.

³⁶ *Laws of Vermont*, 1917, 92; *Laws of Vermont*, 1880, 102; *Laws of Vermont*, 1900, 29-30.

³⁷ *Laws of Vermont*, 1828, 6-7; *Journal of the General Assembly*, 1834, 186-187, 194; Marshall True, "Social Service in Vermont: The Community and the State," Center for Research on Vermont, Occasional Paper Number Five; Lorenzo D'Agostino, *The History of Public Welfare in Vermont* (Winooski: St. Michael's College Press, 1948), 198-219.

³⁸ Moro's pills, vol. 1, 34; Red pills, vol. 1, 31; Howard's Sausage, vol. 4, 111; Cookin Bag, vol. 20, 5, *Record of Trademarks and Names*, Vermont State Archives.

³⁹ Helen E. Burbank was Vermont's first female Deputy Secretary of State, serving from 1927-1947 and from 1949-1965. Burbank was appointed Secretary of State October 15, 1947 to fill the vacancy caused by the resignation of Rawson C. Myrick and served to January 6, 1949.

⁴⁰ Sybil to Ezra Stiles, undated, box 1, folder 6, Ezra Stiles, Jr., papers, Henry Stevens, Sr., Collection.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Alice to Zoroaster Fisk, 20 July 1827 and 19 August 1827, box 1, folder 2, Zoroaster Fisk papers, Henry Stevens, Sr., Collection.

⁴³ Grout to ?, undated, box 1, folder 7, item no. 13, John Grout papers; Douglas King to White, 8 January 1804, box 2, folder 1, item no. 3, Phineas White papers, Henry Stevens, Sr., Collection.

⁴⁴ Hazen to ?, undated, box 2, folder 7, item no. 1, Miscellaneous Series; woman who left husband, 4 March 1819, box 1, folder 8, item no. 27, Miscellaneous Series; Francis C. Goodale to ?, 22 August 1794, box 1, folder 4, item no. 20, Miscellaneous Series, Henry Stevens, Sr., Collection.