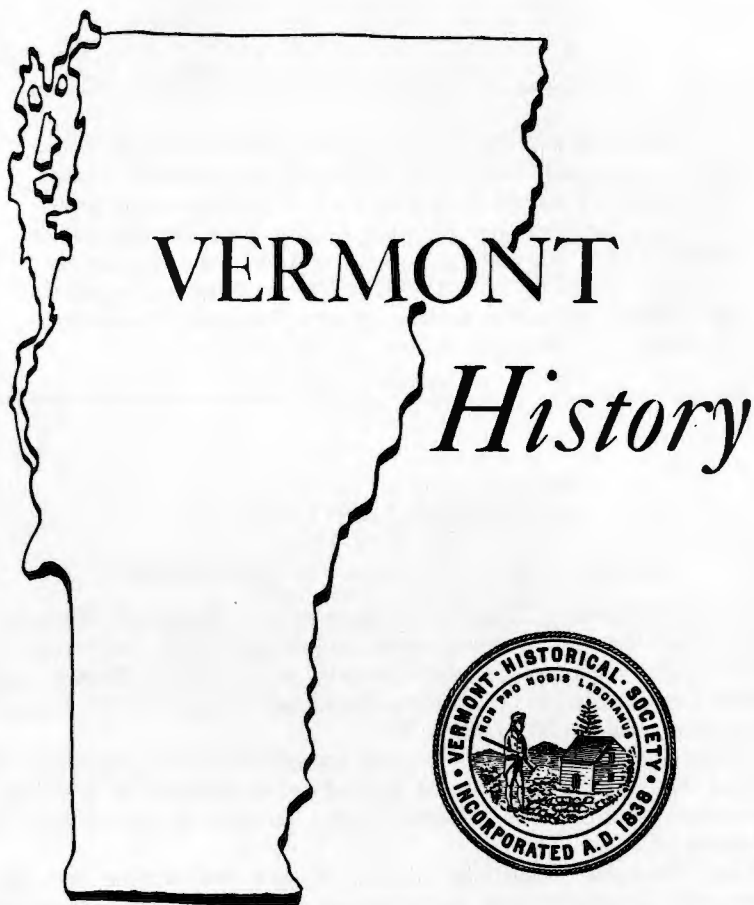


SUMMER 1984

VOL. 52, NO. 3



The PROCEEDINGS of the  
VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



The war responded not only to "the quantity of alcohol consumed by Americans, but also reflected anxieties about other disquieting aspects of nine tenth century life."

## The Women's War Against Rum

By DEBORAH P. CLIFFORD

On March 9, 1874, an editorial in the Burlington *Free Press* announced the beginning of the Vermont woman's temperance crusade. Two days earlier Dr. Diocletian Lewis, a popular temperance lecturer, arrived unexpectedly in St. Albans. He was scheduled to speak in Montpelier the following day, but when local temperance supporters learned that the great Dio Lewis would be in their town for several hours, they determined to take advantage of his presence and hold a meeting that very afternoon. Accordingly, at three o'clock several hundred people gathered in Academy Hall to listen to the famed orator. Lewis had gained his reputation when in December, 1878, he fired the women of Hillsboro, Ohio, with his lecture on "The Duty of Christian Women in the Cause of Temperance," into launching a temperance uprising. The day after his exhortations, enthusiastic women had marched singing through the streets of the town asking all the liquor dealers to sign a pledge to cease selling intoxicating beverages. For the rest of the winter these women had continued with song and prayer to demand that saloon keepers give up their business and that their patrons give up drink. The news of their success spread, and the Woman's Crusade against the saloon broke across the eastern and western states sending respectable women, including the wives of ministers and doctors, lawyers and businessmen, out into the streets to demonstrate and protest.<sup>1</sup>

The women who gathered in Academy Hall on that late winter afternoon were especially eager to learn from Dr. Lewis how they might organize themselves to launch an attack on the numerous liquor-selling establishments which flourished illegally in St. Albans. Since 1852 Vermont law prohibited, except for medicinal purposes, the sale and manufacture of alcoholic beverages. The years following the Civil War witnessed

a dramatic increase in the violations of this law, particularly in the larger towns. Burlington, having come out strongly for prohibition in the 1850s, had become by the 1870s a testament to the measure's failure. The seemingly orderly town of six thousand had mushroomed into a city of twice the size where saloons and brothels flourished. In Rutland an attempt to crack down on the illegal sale of liquor in the winter of 1874 met with a mild outbreak of mob violence. The bustling railroad town of St. Albans contained close to forty stores, restaurants, and hostelrys which dispersed liquor. Temperance leaders in these towns were disturbed, not only by the increase in the illegal liquor traffic but also by the violence and disorder which apparently accompanied it.<sup>2</sup>

Following Dio Lewis' lecture in St. Albans the Woman's Temperance Association emerged, organized according to Dio Lewis' "Plan" which had been so successful in Ohio and other midwestern states. The two hundred members divided into three committees: the first "to enlist the sympathies of the selectmen and trustees" for the cause; a second "to obtain pledges from property holders that their buildings shall no longer be leased for unlawful purposes;" and the third, a committee of fifty who agreed to visit liquor dealers and the homes of the poor suffering from intemperance to obtain personal pledges.<sup>3</sup> This last committee attracted the most courageous people, those so determined to confront the evil of intemperance as to defy propriety and venture into places normally considered unsuitable for respectable, middle class women.

Most of the visits to saloons and other establishments which sold liquor were accomplished discreetly by the women in groups of two or three. However, according to one account, on an early spring day fifty members of the St. Albans Women's Temperance Association marched through the streets of the town, singing as they marched. Adopting for at least one day the more extreme tactics of their midwestern sisters, they visited a number of hotels and saloons, obtaining pledges from the proprietors.

Mrs. E.G. Greene, later president of the state Woman's Christian Temperance Union, marched with the band that day. Many years afterwards she recalled how thrilled she and the other normally "quiet homemakers" had been by the thought that "thousands of mothers, wives and sisters elsewhere in the nation were keeping step with the same stirring battle hymn." She also remembered that under the inspiration of the march ran a sense of the "strangeness of the situation" and of the "mysterious call" to which they responded.<sup>4</sup> Mrs. Greene's recollection of the emotional impact of the march underscores the religious nature of the crusade and helps explain its appeal to middle class Protestant women, the "quiet homemakers" of St. Albans for whom commitment to the temperance cause had the characteristics of a religious conversion.

Women rallied to the anti-liquor crusade elsewhere in the state. In both Rutland and Montpelier Ladies' Temperance Societies had formed even before the women of Hillsboro, Ohio, considered banding together in the cause of temperance. Not until Dio Lewis had paid his visit to Vermont in early March, 1874, however, did they undertake the visiting of saloons. Throughout the Spring of 1874 other temperance societies formed in Burlington, Middlebury, Northfield, Brandon, and Vergennes. By April the crusade had reached its height in the Green Mountain State. The temperance women in Vermont were a relatively dignified lot compared to their sisters who marched through slums of some cities and forced their way into bar-rooms. (In Kansas two women used hatchets to demolish part of a saloon.) A Rutland woman probably reflected the attitude of the majority of these Vermont crusaders when she said she "believed in praying at home but not on the street."<sup>5</sup>

The Woman's Crusade in Vermont, as in other parts of the east and midwest, was a short-lived affair. By the middle of April the excitement had pretty well died down. Newspaper coverage, extensive during the height of the crusade, diminished, and the frequency of prayer meetings declined. With the diminution of activity on the part of the women, liquor dealers resumed full operations.<sup>6</sup>

If the Woman's Crusade did little to reduce the consumption of alcohol and drunkenness in Vermont or elsewhere, it had a profound effect on the women who participated in it. One British temperance worker, who visited the United States during the uprising, called it a "baptism of power and liberty" for American women. By providing an unprecedented opportunity to speak and act in public and to assume positions of leadership, the crusade gave these women a taste for public life which British women would not enjoy for many years to come. It struck a latent chord in many women who had long had deep concern about the affects of alcohol on their homes and communities, and it became a precursor of more deliberate actions to follow. Frances Willard, the great nineteenth century leader of the national Woman's Christian Temperance Union, later concluded that "the most significant outcome of this movement was the knowledge of their own power gained by the conservative women of the churches."<sup>7</sup> The significance of the flurry of activity in March and April of 1874 was not lost on the Vermont crusaders. The Montpelier Temperance Society on April 10, 1874, with the crusade at its height, declared that

We as wives, sisters, mothers, daughters, pledge ourselves anew, co-laborers as co-sufferers, to bring to our great work all the strength of our great love. . . . Our courage shall be equal to our desperate necessity; our perseverance shall be measured only by our love. Fully believing that if we use all the means the good God has given us, to remove the temptation which is the open gate to all crime, that our prayers will be answered.<sup>8</sup>

These women understood that they had embarked on a challenging mission, one which had the sanction of religion but which might lead them into situations rarely confronted by respectable women. But they felt the importance of their mission, which extended beyond the alleviation of drunkenness to include the elimination of all crime, would give them the courage to face the danger and meet the challenge with every means at their disposal.

Recent historical studies have held that the nineteenth century temperance crusade and the prohibition movement which followed it were not simply responses to the quantity of alcohol consumed by Americans but also reflected anxieties about other disquieting aspects of nineteenth century life. Of particular concern to many who observed the growing industrialism and commercialization of society were the dislocations and apparent collapse of public morality which accompanied these phenomena. Norman Clark, in his interpretive study of the temperance and prohibition movement, suggests that important dislocations experienced by Americans in the early nineteenth century included the stampede for cheap western land, the decline of the established church, the growth of industry, and improved methods of transportation. All of these undermined the security which had characterized American society. "The history of American society since the opening of the frontier," Clark writes, "has been a reaction to disorder and near chaos. In the years after 1814 Americans knew few of the certainties which are secured by an established religion, a sense of organic community, and strong government."<sup>9</sup>

Only the domestic hearth seemed removed from these disorders. As the guardians of the home, American women, beginning in the 1830s, rallied to the cause of temperance to protect the one place where they had power and influence. Furthermore, since drunkenness was regarded in the nineteenth century as primarily a male vice, it followed that the dependents of inebriate men, their wives and children, were the chief victims of this evil.

The cause of temperance apparently attracted large numbers of Vermont women even before the Civil War. Petitions and other records from that period reflect the consciousness of the threat posed by alcohol to the stability of family life. A petition signed by eight women in Shoreham, urging that licenses not be granted to innkeepers who sold intoxicating liquors, argued that if "such spirit-selling taverns are continued among us, is it not as certain that the peace and happiness of families will be destroyed, the usefulness of many of our husbands, brothers, and sons greatly impaired."<sup>10</sup>

Well before the Civil War some male Vermonters had accepted the fact that women had a favorable role to play in the temperance movement. In the early 1830s ninety-six women of Brookfield sent a letter of entreaty to a man about to open a shop urging him not to sell distilled spirits. His com-





*Women's Christian Temperance Union Temple, Burlington, Vermont. Courtesy of Wilbur Collection, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont.*

pliance with their request prompted a male temperance advocate to praise the women for their efforts. "My female friends," he told them, "I believe you have been the means of giving a more salutary impulse to the cause of temperance . . . than the most able addresses from our greatest men could have done."<sup>11</sup> Although women were active in the pre-Civil War temperance movement in Vermont as elsewhere, the idea of exclusively female temperance organizations did not take hold until the mid-1870s, when Dio Lewis and other male temperance leaders began urging women to act on their own.<sup>12</sup> For the next several decades women would lead the drive behind the crusade to rid Vermont and the nation of demon rum.

Compared with the wave of uprisings which swept like prairie fire through the small towns of the midwest in the winter and spring of 1873-74, the Woman's Crusade in the Green Mountains was a relatively tranquil affair. Yet the Vermont Crusade spawned a permanent woman's temperance organization.

The immediate impetus for a national temperance organization grew out of a convention of Sunday School teachers held on the shores of Lake Chataqua, New York, in August, 1874. The women who attended included several veterans of the Crusade, and as they shared experiences around the eve-

ning campfire, the idea grew of perpetuating and uniting their scattered efforts. Before the teachers parted, they issued a call from the lakeside campground for a temperance organizational meeting in Cleveland the following November.<sup>13</sup>

No record places any Vermont Crusaders at the gathering on Lake Chataqua, but a full delegation from the Green Mountain State arrived in Cleveland on November 18, 1874, where they joined representatives of fifteen other states at the first national convention of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.<sup>14</sup> The significance of this gathering impressed every woman present, for, with the exception of the numerically insignificant National Woman Suffrage Association, this represented the first time that a national woman's organization had specifically excluded men from membership. The meeting encouraged men to attend certain sessions and to lend their advice when asked, but men could not vote, hold office or participate in debate. The great strength of the WCTU was that it gave women a sense of solidarity and a public forum through which they could articulate their moral and religious values and press for reform. In addition, the WCTU became the major training ground for women in public life. It enabled them to exercise their skills as speakers, writers, and organizers and to become visible as leaders in cities and towns across the nation.<sup>15</sup>

Despite the radical nature of the ban on male membership, everything else about the gathering in Cleveland on that late fall day was thoroughly conventional. The delegates, mostly respected churchwomen, represented the various Protestant denominations, particularly the Methodist, Congregational, Presbyterian and Baptist churches. The proceedings maintained an air of dignity, and the goals the delegates agreed upon underscored the conventional tone. They emphasized reliance on prayer and moral suasion as the surest way to rid the nation of the curse of alcohol, and they strongly endorsed the importance of temperance education for the young and several other objectives, including opposing the election of intemperate men to office and banning liquor and wine from official banquets.<sup>16</sup>

Three months after the Cleveland convention a group of one hundred and fifty Vermont women, including seventy-five delegates from eighteen towns, braved the nearly impassable roads caused by a week of bad February weather to gather in Village Hall, Montpelier. There they organized a state WCTU, as an auxiliary to the national Union. According to one delegate, the gathering excited considerable interest and surprise, "it being so unusual for women to get up anything that looks like thinking and acting for themselves."<sup>17</sup> The first convention of the WCTU in Vermont had no less dignity than the parent gathering in Ohio. In common with the delegates in Cleveland, those who convened in Montpelier on February 17, 1875, had been chosen by the Protestant churches in their com-

munities.<sup>18</sup> Although a number had participated in the Crusade the spring before, for many of the delegates this was their first experience working for the temperance cause.

The plan of action put forward at this first convention of the Vermont WCTU closely followed the one agreed to by the national Union. It included the formation of chapters in every city, town and village and the establishment of children's temperance societies. It encouraged frequent mass meetings, reminiscent of the Crusade, and the circulation of pledges and temperance literature. The plan also urged private visitation of those who drank and those who sold liquor as well as teaching temperance education in the schools.<sup>19</sup>

As payment of dues and adherence to the temperance pledge were the only requirements for WCTU membership, we will never know what membership meant for most women. The speeches and writings of the leaders of the state Union made it clear that the members understood the vulnerability of their sex to the evils of drunkenness, yet only rarely do they reveal any personal experience with alcoholism. The report of the WCTU convention held in Rutland in 1875 briefly noted that a Mrs. Warren of St. Albans "related touching incidents of her sufferings from the effects of intemperance in her family."<sup>20</sup> But such accounts are rare. A Mrs. Cole of Burlington gave a more typical address in 1878. She lamented that

At our very door we see the desolating effects of intemperance. We see it in the degraded manhood reeling through our streets, in the debased intellects and poverty, want and privation which reign in the homes whose inmates are addicted to this terrible vice. We see it in the thinly clad shivering forms of the wives and children of the inebriate. . . . Intemperance is the fruitful soil from which spring so many others, that whatever we do to promote total abstinence principles will deal an effective blow at many vices.<sup>21</sup>

The vice of alcoholism Mrs. Cole described did not touch her personally. Its victims were not members of her household or those of her fellow temperance workers, but in their view represented the poor and wretched of society, the "degraded men" and "thinly clad" women and children whose "want and privation" resulted from intemperance rather than contributing to it. The women of the WCTU held the sin of drinking responsible for many of the ills of society, and if this evil did not touch them directly, it was nonetheless at their very doorsteps, visible through the curtains of their parlor windows.

Nationally the regular patrons of the saloon were known to be members of the urban working class, including many recent immigrants. In the years following the Civil War Vermont received an influx of foreigners as thousands of Canadians drifted through the state in search of employment. Many of these immigrants, who included English as well as French Cana-



dians, passed through on their way to the larger industrial centers further south, but enough remained in the Green Mountains to give rise to fears of congested cities, spreading slums and increased poverty and disease.<sup>22</sup> These conditions combined with the alien religion and culture brought by the French Canadians, the effects of the depression of 1873, and the fact that the most flagrant violation of the prohibitory law occurred in these same towns, particularly Burlington and St. Albans, all moved Vermont women toward temperance reform. These pious and self-consciously respectable Yankees felt threatened by aliens coming into Vermont when so many of their own kind continued to emigrate. If they could force these newcomers to lead temperate lives, surely the poverty, crime and other evils threatening the purity of the Green Mountains could be done away with and, less obviously, the native Yankee group would continue securely in control.

The writings and speeches of the temperance women in the early years of the WCTU suggest that other factors than reform issues drew women into the unions. Chief among these perhaps was the opportunity for companionship. One Vermont union leader observed that at the time of the Crusade "Christian women were known but little to each other outside denominational lines." She noted that the formation of "praying bands" of women in towns across the country in the winter and spring of 1874 had provided a rare opportunity for members of the Protestant churches to befriend one another. Then the formation of the WCTU created a chain linking these bands one to another and providing an opportunity for a wider range of comradeship.<sup>23</sup>

In the years following the Civil War the sewing machine, cookstove and other appliances were easing routine tasks for housewives. These years also saw a significant growth in the number of women attending school. For the middle class housewife, who profited most from this increased leisure and education, an organization which provided an opportunity for friendship with other women as well as a challenging outlet for her talents and energies had a strong appeal. Temperance reform had the added advantage of being an acceptable cause for women to espouse. Unlike the suffrage movement, which directly confronted the issue of female equality, the drive to curb drunkenness posed no threat to the traditional wisdom that woman's place was in the home. Furthermore, the backing of the Protestant clergy gave the cause a religious sanction which added to its respectability.

Frances Willard, the dynamic and beloved president of the national WCTU from 1879 until her death in 1898, best understood the value of persuading conservative women to work for a respectable cause. By awakening their latent capabilities as writers, speakers and organizers she saw that

*Frances Willard*



they could become the unwitting instruments for the advancement of their sex. Willard's commitment to the progress of American womanhood was reflected in her "Do everything" policy which she inaugurated soon after she became WCTU president. Her predecessor, Annie Wittenmyer, had focused the WCTU on gospel temperance with its emphasis on prayer, moral suasion, and reform of the individual. By contrast, Willard was anxious to get the women of the unions working for a variety of social causes from temperance legislation and the education of children to prison reform and woman suffrage. Willard made a personal plea for her "Do everything" policy at the annual meeting of the Vermont WCTU in September, 1880. "There's a work for you, and a work for me, something for each of us now to do," she told her audience. "Go out into the highways and hedges of sin," she admonished, "petition the Vermont legislature to remedy flaws in the prohibitory law, write articles on temperance for your local newspaper, see that temperance is taught in both the Sunday and the public schools."<sup>24</sup>

For a time, at least, Frances Willard could be proud of the way the Vermont WCTU responded to her challenge. In the decade between 1878 and 1888 the state Union grew from 466 to 2,375 members. These years witnessed a period of active and progressive leadership at the state level, as a number of remarkably gifted women would exert their talents on behalf of temperance as organizers, speakers, writers, and lobbyists.

By and large these women were native-born Americans of Anglo-Saxon Protestant stock, with more than a third born outside Vermont. (See Table 1.) Most were married, and the little information concerning their fathers and husbands suggests they came from professional classes.

Although information about schooling exists for slightly more than half, twenty-two, leaders of the "White Ribboners"\* all but two acquired an education beyond the level of the common schools. Of these women seven attended academies or high schools; another fourteen studied in seminaries or institutes while three went on to college. Since the majority of the women received their education in the 1860s, when higher education was closed to women in Vermont and was very limited elsewhere, the level of education attained by these women seems impressively high. A large number of women who supplied leadership for the Vermont WCTU were professional educators; seventeen of forty had taught school for extended periods, many at the high school level. Another two had professional experience in the journalism and nursing. Many had taken active roles in other social movements besides temperance, including suffrage, abolition, and missionary work.

The portrait of Vermont leadership corresponds closely to the findings of scholars who have examined the WCTU. Ruth Bordin in *Woman and Temperance*, a study of the national movement, concludes that prominent "White Ribboners" in the nineteenth century were usually economically prosperous, native-born Protestant women of the middle or upper class with a high degree of education. A much larger proportion of the national leadership in these years had attended college and undertaken professional careers than the Vermont sample suggests.<sup>26</sup> Certainly the Vermont leadership was not out of the mainstream with respect to its high level of talent and experience. It possessed the potential to handle the variety of reform endeavors on behalf of temperance which Frances Willard included in her "Do everything" policy.

In conformity with Willard's conception of the WCTU as a training ground for developing women's latent talents, the most valuable contribution Vermont made to the program of the national Union was the inauguration of "county institutes" or conventions of temperance women at the regional level for the express purpose of developing the skills necessary for effective field work. Mary Greene, a one-time Crusader from St. Albans and president of the state Union in the early 1880s, initiated the plan of transforming county WCTU conventions into temperance workshops. In the spring of 1882 a call issued for a "Gospel Temperance Institute" in Bridport in late

---

\*The term "White Ribboner" refers to a small white satin bow which each member of the WCTU was supposed to wear pinned to the front of her dress.

May asked every Union in Addison County to send five delegates, and the declared object of these meetings was the introduction of "systematic, intelligent and uniform methods." In her annual address before the meeting of the state Union in the fall of 1883, Greene explained that "county institutes should be more like training sessions than conventions." She urged that the written essays normally read at such gatherings be replaced by classes for the development of skilled temperance workers. The Vermont Union hoped that before long each county would hold similar institutes in the spring

TABLE 1  
Characteristics of Selected Vermont WCTU Leaders<sup>25</sup>

1. Marital Status			3. Highest Level of Education		
	%	No.		%	No.
Single	17	7	Common Schooling	9	2
Married	75	30	Some High School	77	17
Widowed	8	3	College	14	3
	<hr/>	<hr/>		<hr/>	<hr/>
	100	40		100	22
2. Place of Birth			4. Religious Affiliation		
	%	No.		%	No.
Vermont	63	22	Methodist	50	9
Other state	34	12	Congregationalist	16	3
Canada	3	1	Baptist	16	3
	<hr/>	<hr/>	Episcopalian	6	1
	100	35*	Unitarian	6	1
			Presbyterian	6	1
				<hr/>	<hr/>
				100	18

\*Totals vary because information on all items is not available for each woman.

with two days of solid work in which experienced and skillful workers would teach the delegates and members of the unions the best methods for promoting the cause of temperance. Although attended largely by women from local unions in each county, prominent WCTU workers from both inside and outside Vermont also participated in these meetings, thereby exposing the women from the smaller towns and villages to a range of female talent and experience hitherto unfamiliar to them.<sup>27</sup>

The experience of one Vermont farmwife illustrated the broadening ef-

fect of these institutes. A partially deaf woman in her sixties, Naomi Douglas rarely ventured beyond the limits of the town of Shoreham, a sprawling agricultural community on the shore of Lake Champlain. One day in late April, 1885, a member of the WCTU called on her and asked Naomi if she would give the opening address at the Addison County Institute scheduled in Shoreham early in June. Douglas agreed, against her better judgement, to give the talk, doubting, as she confided to her diary, her "ability to do it in a proper manner." After an anxious four weeks, during which she stole moments from her chores to prepare her speech, the dreaded day finally arrived.

Thursday, June 4, 1885, dawned rainy and cold, but the Congregational Church in Shoreham was filled with delegates from all over Addison County by nine o'clock in the morning. In addition a number of state officers, including President Mary Greene, along with Mrs. Almira Prindle, a noted evangelist from Buffalo, New York, had seated themselves in the austere pews. The convention opened with devotional exercises, and after the call to order at 10 o'clock, Naomi Douglas climbed into the pulpit to give the Address of Welcome. No record of what she said or of how the women received her talk remains, but in the evening when it was all over, she confided to her diary that a large number of delegates had been present "but not an audience of our people."<sup>28</sup>

For the first time in her life Douglas had emerged from the tight circle of family and community to confront a group of strangers from the awesome heights of a pulpit. Although she never went on to become a leader of the WCTU, Douglas did remain active in the organization and answered the call to speak now and again. Naomi Douglas' experience demonstrates the broadening influence of the woman's temperance movement which reached out to farm women in Vermont and encouraged them to exert their talents in a public cause.

The state leaders of the WCTU understood that these conventions accomplished far more than simply training their members to run meetings and speak in public. They also helped widen women's horizons, making them conscious of people and issues outside the narrow confines of village life. Esther Housh, president of the Vermont Union in the late 1880s, made a tour of the county meetings in the summer of 1888 and was impressed by the great advance the WCTU women had made since they began to work for the temperance cause. No longer were they "just women of Vermont, but women of the nation, a part of the great movement that is renovating society." In her annual report for that year Housh described her talks with farm women whom she had met at the institutes that summer. "Ask any of these women if they would like to go back to the old life - before fourteen years ago - and they will quickly answer 'No.' You could



not put them back, the little sphere would not hold them." The leaders of the national Union were also impressed by the success of the Vermont institutes, and before many years had passed these "schools of methods," as they came to be called, were adopted nationwide.<sup>29</sup>

The dynamic leadership of the Vermont WCTU during its decade of expansion manifested itself in other progressive ventures besides the development of county institutes. Although most local Unions emphasized gospel temperance, stressing a reliance on prayer and moral suasion, from the start the woman's temperance crusade had maintained the right of women to take action, including political action, to put an end to drinking. Frances Willard had long regarded the vote as potentially the most effective weapon available to temperance women. In 1876 she came out openly in support of woman suffrage, calling it the "home protection ballot." At first the national Union refused to endorse her stance on this question, but several state chapters, including Vermont, made hesitant attempts to obtain legislation giving women a limited franchise.

By the spring of 1877 the women of the Vermont WCTU had grown frustrated by their inability to persuade the state authorities to enforce the prohibitory law. In Middlebury, for example, it was common knowledge that three hotels and a number of saloons sold liquor. Yet when the women of the local Union visited these establishments, all but one of the proprietors refused to admit any wrongdoing. One man argued that "if the farmers were allowed to sell cider by the barrel, he ought to have the privilege of selling it by the glass." Angered by their failure to obtain evidence against the liquor sellers, the WCTU petitioned the sheriff of Addison County to arrest all the intoxicated people on the street and persuade them to reveal the names of those who had sold them liquor. The sheriff apparently ignored their request, for at the end of the summer liquor flowed in Middlebury as freely as ever.<sup>30</sup>

Finding themselves powerless before the law enforcement authorities, some WCTU members, particularly at the state level, began to search about for a more effective way to ensure obedience to the prohibitory statute. In the spring of 1877 their resolve to employ stronger methods received considerable encouragement from the speaking tour of Mrs. Emma Malloy, a popular temperance and suffrage lecturer. She swept through the state in March like a revivalist preacher, creating a sensation wherever she went. In Montpelier 400 men converted to temperance, at least temporarily, during her brief stay there. Among other matters Malloy spoke to the need for putting the ballot into the hands of women, thereby giving the cause of temperance "rights [that] the rum politicians were bound to respect." Apparently the "conservative drones in the temperance hive" did not like Mrs. Malloy, but the "progressive thinking people heard her gladly."<sup>31</sup>

The divided response to Emma Malloy's plea for the franchise provides the first hint that not every leader of the Vermont Union favored such radical measures to forward the temperance cause. Backing away for the time being from demands for full suffrage, the women of the WCTU turned instead to requesting partial suffrage, the right of women to vote in school district meetings. Behind this demand lay a conviction shared by most temperance women that the most important work they could undertake was the education of children on the evils of alcohol. When simple persuasion failed to convince the school administrators of the need for such instruction, Vermont temperance women petitioned the legislature to allow them to vote in school meetings. The resolution passed at the annual meeting in Vergennes in 1879 postulated that since "the Christian women of Vermont should have more power and influence in suppressing intemperance," the WCTU would "petition the next Vermont Legislature to allow us to vote for school committees, hoping thereby to place temperance textbooks in our public schools."<sup>32</sup>


The proposed bill, introduced into both the House and the Senate the following year, passed without discussion. "Women shall have the same right to vote as men have in all school district meetings and in the election of school commissioners in towns and cities, and the same right to hold office in school affairs."<sup>33</sup> The support of the temperance women in this instance apparently convinced the legislators to try the experiment. \* The new legislation required women, as men, to pay taxes to exercise the vote.

In the end school suffrage never achieved much success for women in Vermont. Few women took advantage of the new law, in part because few qualified, as in most cases men controlled the family property and paid the taxes. The repeated admonitions of the state WCTU officers, urging those who did qualify to exercise their newly won privilege, made it clear that most of the eligible women failed to vote in school district meetings. Some district meetings occasionally had good turnouts, showing perhaps that there was safety in numbers. But it is evident from the generally unenthusiastic response that even "White Ribboners" in Vermont evinced little inclination for political involvement.<sup>34</sup>

Despite the rather lukewarm response of the membership to its political efforts, the leadership of the state WCTU, with strong backing from the national Union, determined to capitalize on its initial success with the Vermont Legislature. Two years after the passage of the school suffrage measure the General Assembly enacted the first temperance education law in the country. Mary H. Hunt, a Massachusetts woman sent to Vermont in the fall of 1882 by the National WCTU, conducted the lobbying effort on behalf

---

\*An effort to pass a similar law in 1878 without the support of the WCTU had failed.

	<p align="center"><b>Woman's Christian Temperance Union</b> <b>PLEDGE</b></p>
<p>"I hereby solemnly promise, God helping me, to abstain from all distilled, fermented, and malt liquors, including wine, beer, and cider, and to employ all proper means to discourage the use of and traffic in the same."</p>	<p>Conditions of membership: Signing total abstinence pledge and paying annual dues of \$1.00.</p>
<p>NAME.....</p>	<p>"I hereby solemnly promise, God helping me, to abstain from all distilled, fermented, and malt liquors, including wine, beer, and cider, and to employ all proper means to discourage the use of and traffic in the same."</p>
<p>DATE.....</p>	<p>NAME.....</p>
	<p>ADDRESS.....</p>
	<p>DATE.....</p>
	<p>Gentlemen may become honorary members by signing the pledge and paying \$1.00 dues.</p>

*Women's Christian Temperance Union Pledge Card. Courtesy of Wilbur Collection, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont.*

of such a measure. Recently appointed as superintendent of the Department of Scientific Temperance Instruction, Hunt was both a popular lecturer and an efficient organizer. Convinced that if the temperance crusade were to succeed, it must educate coming generations as to the physical and moral effects of alcohol on the human body, she determined that the most efficient way to ensure that such teaching reached every child was to insist that temperance education be required in all public schools. The national Union, undoubtedly aware of the effort Vermont was already making, selected the Green Mountain State for its initial attempt to push through such a law. Besides lecturing to numerous Unions throughout Vermont, Mrs. Hunt also presented her case to the joint Committee on Education. The legislature rewarded her efforts on November 13, 1882, when it passed a law requiring the study of physiology and hygiene in the public schools. The drive for compulsory temperance education in the public schools would prove one of the most successful political campaigns ever waged by the WCTU. By 1892 only three states had failed to enact such a law, and Vermont temperance women would always be proud of having led the way.<sup>35</sup>

The Vermont WCTU continued to support temperance legislation and other reforms sponsored by the national Union, including raising the age of consent for girls, municipal suffrage for women and the placing of matrons in women's penal institutions. But by the late 1880s there was a noticeable slackening of interest among the state leaders in political questions not specifically related to the enforcement and maintenance of statewide prohibition. The Vermont Union having led the way early in the decade with

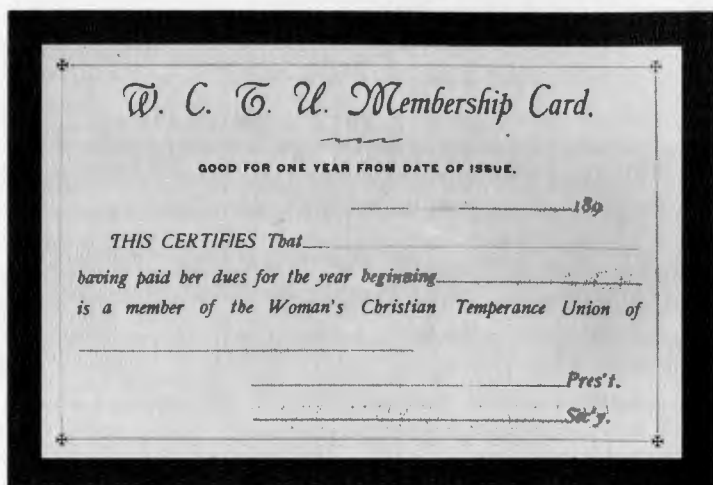
its sponsorship of school suffrage for women and temperance education legislation, adopted a more restrained attitude towards political action in the years that followed. Despite an expressed interest in seeing the prohibitory law enforced, Vermont women displayed an obvious reluctance to enter the political arena. One Addison County "White Ribboner" concluded that "It is safe to say that the majority of refined and intelligent women fear the right to vote more than they hope for it. If reform can be effected in some other way, they prefer by all means that other way."<sup>36</sup>

The experience of the Burlington Union revealed the fundamental ambivalence. Despite support among the membership for enforcement of the prohibitory law and efforts to influence public officials, the members could not agree on the endorsement of the school suffrage measure. Four years later when the Burlington Union was asked to consider the addition of a department of franchise to the work of the state WCTU, it agreed to do so reluctantly. Many who voted in the affirmative "manifested a great aversion to exercising the ballot even if it was their privilege to do so," but expressed a reluctant willingness to assume this onerous duty if it served the temperance cause.<sup>37</sup>

Another factor which may have contributed to a decline in political activism, even by those leaders who favored it, was the opposition it aroused. In the mid-eighties certain influential "White Ribboners" began openly to demand the curbing of certain progressive tendencies which they saw developing at both the state and the national level. The leader of the conservatives, Anna C. Park, of Bennington, who had served as president of the Vermont WCTU from 1879 to 1881, was a firm opponent of the politicization of the woman's temperance movement. In the spring of 1877 as Emma Malloy swept through the state making her plea for temperance and suffrage, Anna Park made it very clear that she did not favor giving the ballot to women.<sup>38</sup> Park and her conservative supporters became increasingly outspoken in their criticism of the national policy of the WCTU, especially when it became clear that Frances Willard not only favored women suffrage but also wished the Union to openly endorse the Prohibition Party.

Willard's decision to ally the WCTU with a national political organization divided the membership even more than the issue of suffrage. In Vermont the first indication of such a rupture came at the annual convention of 1884 in Middlebury. Maria Hidden, an active supporter of the Home Protection Ballot and president of the Vermont Woman Suffrage Association, introduced a resolution which expressed "unfaltering loyalty to our beloved national President, Frances E. Willard," and endorsed "her action and the actions of the National Executive Committee in reference to the National Prohibition Party."<sup>39</sup> Although the resolution passed by a vote of sixty-four to thirty, a number of women later objected to it on the ground





*Women's Christian Temperance Union Membership Card. Courtesy of Wilbur Collection, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont.*

that it amounted to "an endorsement of a political platform and suffrage plank." A good many of the delegates were anxious to do neither. The next morning Hidden insisted that she had "had no thought of getting the convention to endorse women suffrage, but only meant in her resolution to endorse Miss Willard and her act" as dictated by the vote of the executive committee of the national WCTU. In the end the convention struck the objectionable clause which referred specifically to the Prohibition Party from the resolution, and the amended version passed unanimously.<sup>40</sup>

Quite apart from the lukewarm response of Vermonters to the Prohibition Party movement, many supporters of the WCTU quite rightly saw the dangers inherent in the alliance between temperance and woman suffrage. They feared that the influence of the WCTU on the temperance cause would suffer as a result. Such criticism proved valid, for ultimately the close association of the two causes did not benefit either.<sup>41</sup> For a time, however, the powerful pressure exerted by the national WCTU on the Vermont Union and the ready response of certain leaders at the state level forced a rather reluctant endorsement of Willard's Home Protection policy. In 1887 Willard herself came to Vermont, and at the annual meeting of the state Union she made a strong personal plea for support of her position claiming that she "would win others to see from her outlook but think not unkindly if they did not." Her powers of persuasion convinced the delegates to uphold



her stand on the third party issue, but many were obviously unhappy with the decision and with the state Union's endorsement of woman suffrage the following year. In 1889 Anna Park determined to withdraw from the WCTU, and taking a number of Vermont chapters with her she formed a splinter woman's temperance organization allied with a similar one formed on the national level. Park accused both the Vermont and the national Union of becoming partisan societies in the hands of a minority. Although only a few local Unions followed Park out of the WCTU, she had considerable support for her non-partisanship views. Membership in the state Union dropped by nearly 500 over the course of the next three years, and many local chapters decided to avoid the subject of politics altogether. (At the annual meeting of the Burlington WCTU in 1889, the members resolved that their Union would be non-partisan in its politics.<sup>42</sup>

On the national level where the non-partisan faction withdrew from the Union in 1889, it lost its power over WCTU policies. As a result the politicization in the nation at large became stronger than ever. In Vermont, which had a prohibition law, WCTU members had less need to find political solutions to the problems of drunkenness. Furthermore, by the mid-eighties towns like Burlington and St. Albans had recovered from some of the obvious social problems of the previous decade and the need for political action to control social ills seemed less urgent. In fact, by the end of the century a note of pride had crept into the writings of the WCTU women who turned to praising the Green Mountain State as a region untainted by the crime and poverty of the more industrialized states. Although the state Union would continue to attract a sizable membership, and was even persuaded to endorse a number of limited suffrage measures, the programs of most Unions emphasized gospel temperance and single issue reform which all but replaced Willard's "Do everything" policy.

A final reason the Vermont WCTU never recaptured its vitality of the early 1880s derived from its inability to maintain dynamic leadership. By the end of the decade a number of women who had worked hardest to build up the membership and broaden the program had left the state. Some, like Maria Hidden, appear to have been driven out by controversy, while others left for personal and professional reasons. By the late 1890s the Vermont Union faced competition for young and talented members from other women's organizations, a problem it had helped to create and which it shared with the national WCTU.<sup>43</sup> For a decade or more, however, the WCTU had been a vital force for enabling several thousand Vermont women to move away from the seclusion and protection of their homes to make their concerns felt in the public realm.

# NOTES

The author wishes to express her thanks to the Vermont Woman's Christian Temperance Union for permission to quote from their papers now on temporary loan to Special Collections, Bailey-Howe Library, UVM.

<sup>1</sup> *Burlington Free Press*, March 9, 1874, p. 3. The principal sources for the national woman's temperance movement include: Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), and Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America* (Middletown: Conn., Wesleyan University Press, 1981).

<sup>2</sup> T.D. Seymour Bassett, "Urban Penetration of Rural Vermont, 1840-1880," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1982, p. 660; *Vermont Chronicle*, December 25, 1875, p. 2; and *Rutland Herald*, February 25, 1874, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred L. Dutcher Scrapbook, p. 29, St. Albans Historical Society, St. Albans, Vermont.

<sup>4</sup> Annual Report of Vermont WCTU, 1884, p. 3. An almost complete collection of these printed reports can be found in the WCTU papers (hereafter WCTU), Special Collections, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont, Burlington, Vermont.

<sup>5</sup> *Rutland Herald*, February 30, 1874, p. 3; Norman H. Clark, *Deliver Us From Evil: An Interpretation of American Prohibition* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, Inc., 1976), p. 73; and *Vermont Home Guards*, October 10, 1889, p. 2. *Home Guards* was the official organ of the Vermont WCTU. It began publication in 1885 as the *Vermont Bulletin* and changed names several times before assuming its permanent title. A nearly complete collection is in WCTU.

<sup>6</sup> WCTU, Annual Report of Vermont WCTU, 1884, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, p. 100.

<sup>8</sup> *Vermont Christian Messenger*, April 16, 1874, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Clark, *Deliver Us From Evil*, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Petition of Shoreham women, n.d. (before 1850), Shoreham Historical Society, Shoreham, Vermont.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in *Burlington Free Press*, March 25, 1874, p.3.

<sup>12</sup> In both Montpelier and St. Albans men served on advisory committees designed to aid the women in the formation of their own societies. See *Free Press*, March 9 and 10, 1874, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> Annie Wittenmyer, *History of the Woman's Temperance Crusade* (Philadelphia, 1878), p. 571.

<sup>15</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, pp. 156-157.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>17</sup> Wittenmyer, *History*, p. 572.

<sup>18</sup> This was the accepted method of recruiting members and organizing new Unions in the early years of the WCTU. See *Burlington Free Press*, September 26, 1878, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> Records of the WCTU of Vermont, pp. 3-6, Collections of the Vermont Historical Society, Montpelier, Vermont.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>21</sup> *Burlington Free Press*, September 26, 1878, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> Bassett, "Urban Penetration," p. 597.

<sup>23</sup> *Home Guards*, June, 1897, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Records of WCTU, Collections of the VHS, p. 253; and *Middlebury Register*, November 5, 1880.

<sup>25</sup> Biographical sketches of Vermont WCTU state and county leaders can be found in the combined June and July, 1893, issues of the *Home Guards* and the December, 1893, issue of the same paper. Photographs of the women are included. Biographical information exists for forty Vermont state and county leaders who were active between 1875 and 1893. In the latter year a series of sketches of past and present WCTU officers was published in two numbers of the *Vermont Home Guards*, the official organ of the state Union: Although the forty women selected for inclusion in this series do not represent a systematic sample (not all the officers who served in these years are included) and although the information provided for each one is incomplete, nevertheless from these studies a rough statistical portrait of the state leadership can be drawn.

<sup>26</sup> Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, pp. 163-175.

<sup>27</sup> *Middlebury Register*, May 19, 1882; Annual Report of Vermont WCTU 1883, pp. 19-20; *Union Signal*, July 10, 1883, p. 10.

<sup>28</sup> Diary of Naomi Douglas, April 23, 1885, and June 4, 1885, Shoreham Historical Society.

<sup>29</sup> Annual Report Vermont WCTU, 1888, p. 30; and *Union Signal*, July 1, 1887.

<sup>30</sup> *Middlebury Register*, March 3, 1877, p. 1, and August 31, 1877, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, March 17, 1877, p. 1; and *Woman's Journal*, March 17, 1877, p. 85.

<sup>32</sup> Records of the WCTU of Vermont, p. 205, Collections of the VHS.

<sup>33</sup> *Acts and Resolves Passed by the General Assembly of the State of Vermont, 1880*, p. 102.

<sup>34</sup> *Woman's Journal*, July 1, 1882; and Annual Report Vermont WCTU, 1892.

<sup>35</sup> Samuel Unger, "A History of the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union," Ph.D. Diss., Ohio State University, 1933, pp. 125-126.

<sup>36</sup> *Middlebury Register*, June 17, 1881, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Record book Burlington WCTU 1878-1884, Special Collections, Bailey-Howe Library, University of Vermont. The Middlebury *Register* carried frequent reports of the activities of the local WCTU, and the Mt. Holly or Mechanicsville record book is in the Collections of the VHS.

<sup>38</sup> *Woman's Journal*, November 1, 1879, p. 349.

<sup>39</sup> Annual Report Vermont WCTU, 1884, p. 21.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of suffrage movement in Vermont see Deborah P. Clifford, "The Drive for Women's Municipal Suffrage in Vermont, 1883-1917," *Vermont History*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Summer 1979), 173-190.

<sup>42</sup> Annual Report Vermont WCTU, 1887, p. 27; *Home Guards*, August, 1889, p. 2; and Record book Burlington WCTU, University of Vermont, 1889.

<sup>43</sup> *Home Guards*, March, 1902, p. 1.