

THROUGH A PAPER LOOKING GLASS: REALITY AND MYTHOLOGY
IN THE PERSONAL IDENTITIES OF PIONEER WOMEN,
1860-1930

A THESIS

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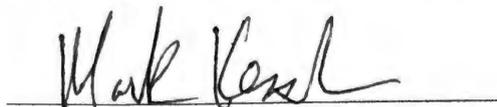
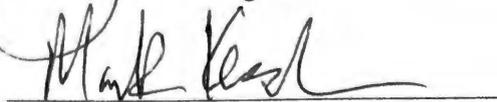
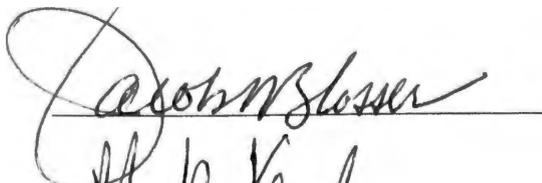
To the Dean of the Graduate School:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Mary Kathryn Fogle entitled "Through a Paper Looking Glass: Reality and Mythology in the Personal Identities of Pioneer Women, 1860-1930." I have examined this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts with a major in History.



Paul D. Travis, Ph. D., Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:



Department Chair

Accepted:



Dean of the Graduate School

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated with love to the two men in my life.

My father, David A. Fogle, who instilled in me a love for the red earth and an appreciation for the past.

My fiancée, Michael P. Deering, who appreciates and supports both.

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ABSTRACT

MARY KATHRYN FOGLE

THROUGH A PAPER LOOKING GLASS: REALITY AND MYTHOLOGY IN THE PERSONAL IDENTITIES OF PIONEER WOMEN, 1860-1930

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The purpose of this study was to analyze the identities and perceptions of pioneer women in the West between 1860 and 1930; specifically, this study addresses the Anglo women who settled in Texas, Oklahoma, Nebraska, Kansas, North Dakota and South Dakota. This thesis examines western women's reactions to the landscape of the West, the problems and successes of western marriages, the ability of western women to procure financial or political independence, and addresses the similarities and differences between the experiences of western civilian women and military officers' wives in the West. This work utilizes a wide array of primary and secondary source literature, including the Western History Archives at the University of Oklahoma and published diaries and memoirs, to show the transformation of women on the western frontier from a group governed by the rules of the Cult of True Womanhood into a group of independent, decisive, active women.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Numerous scholars of history and other disciplines have delved into the world of the pioneer woman in western America. Scholars such as Lillian Schlissel and Joanna Stratton have researched the diaries and writings of pioneer women in order to understand their experiences while other scholars such as Henry Nash Smith have considered fictional works in order to understand the cultural mythology of Americans during this period of westward expansion. My thesis combines these two methodologies to examine the role of western Anglo women on farms and ranches and observe the changes life in the West wrought upon them. Through comparison with the stories of writers who experienced life on western farms and wrote of their experiences, such as Willa Cather, Dorothy Scarborough, and Jennie Harris Oliver as well as western poets such as Minnie Morris Jouvenat and Jan Isabel Fortune, the works of western women present evidence of how these women perceived themselves and how they were transformed by their experiences of the West.

Other scholars have explored the writings of western women writers such as, Scarborough and Cather as they relate to farm life; however, there is a lack of analysis of their female characters as actors in a larger cultural experience shared by thousands of western farmer's wives and daughters. In her memoirs, Faye Cashatt Lewis wrote that

“truth can strike like lightning from the pages of a novel,” and we can observe many important common truths in the writings of western authors of fiction and non-fiction.¹ As William W. Savage, Jr. argues literature is derived from the mythology we create about ourselves and thus observing the fictional works of western women can help explain how western women fit themselves into a larger western mythology.² In addition the comparison of the mythology western women helped perpetuate through their stories and poems to the factual information presented in letters, diaries, and memoirs reveals that women’s mythology matches up surprisingly well with the historical record.

The volume of records available from pioneer women, the historians who study them, and the fictional works of pioneer daughters, has necessitated several limitations upon the scope of this project. My study of western women is largely composed on those who lived on farms and ranches on the Great Plains of the Dakotas, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. In addition I have restricted my study to Anglo- pioneers. The experiences of Native American, Mexican American, and African American women are equally valid; however, in the interest of keeping this project to a manageable size I have restricted the parameters of my study.³ It is my intent to return to these women at a later date.

A number of historians have explored literary sources in order to analyze the mythology Anglo Americans created to express their dreams and desires about life on the western frontier. Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* is one of the best known treatments of this mythology. While *Virgin Land* is useful

in defining and providing examples of the effects of the mythology in early American Literature, Smith devotes only one chapter of the book to the women of the western garden. In this brief chapter, Smith notes that the heroines depicted in western dime store novels, even those who initially appeared otherwise, were genteel and generally of a high social standing. For those heroines who were not immediately perceived to be of a high social standing, the author often inserted an inheritance, the discovery of high class parents previously unknown, or a period of time spent in the more civilized east. These females brought a sense of refinement and sophistication to the story.⁴ According to Smith, the well behaved, genteel ladies depicted in dime store novels were eventually able to make successful marriages with men of high social status and enjoy a pleasant home life.⁵ Such a genre reflects Horatio Alger's heroes who symbolically rose from rags to riches.⁶ Smith's analysis of dime store heroines thus reflects an extremely limited view of the western woman in fiction and does not reflect the hardships that often awaited women in the west.

Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, is another major work on the mythology of the garden. According to Marx, the great American garden became a symbol for abundance, and it was expected to provide leisure, freedom and harmony to its inhabitants.⁷ Despite the strength of this mythology, Marx indicates that personal experience with the garden removed these romantic ideals about nature and encouraged a more realistic view.⁸ Like Smith, Marx does not provide much information that is specifically related to the experiences of women in a pastoral

setting; however, his conclusion that life in the garden affects the romance of the pastoral life can be observed in the works of Jennie Harris Oliver, Scarborough and Cather, as well as poets such as Jan Isabel Fortune and Minnie Morris Jouvenat. Smith and Marx's masculine oriented perspectives on western life proved highly influential on succeeding generations of scholars.

With the rise of the women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s, new interpretations of the history of the West began to appear; however, even these new interpretations seemed to be oriented towards traditional notions of femininity. Barbara Welter's 1966 article "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," represents the beginning of historical analysis on a commonly referenced nineteenth century female stereotype. Welter's work argued that the Cult of True Womanhood required that women represent the four characteristics- piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. Welter's article presents a variety of primary source documents that confirm the necessity of these virtuous characteristics, including women's magazines, works of fiction, diaries, memoirs, and religious tracts from the Eastern and Midwestern regions in mid-nineteenth century America. Welter argued persuasively that the Cult of True Womanhood provided a model for women's behavior that was distributed in a wide variety of forms. Implicit in this argument is the belief that women received the model of the "true woman" and attempted to recreate the Cult of True Womanhood in their own lives.⁹ Like Smith and Marx, Welter's analysis remained a standard method of analysis for succeeding generations of scholars.

Julie Roy Jeffrey's work in *Frontier Women: "Civilizing" the West? 1840-1880* also provides an interesting analysis of the changes wrought on women by the frontier and owes much to Welter's analysis of the Cult of True Womanhood. Jeffrey's central conclusion is that women's roles in the West remained for the most part deeply connected to eastern norms, such as the Cult of True Womanhood. Jeffrey notes that she expected to find the West a place of transformation and freedom for women but instead found that women preferred to reinstate eastern gender roles as soon as possible. In particular, Jeffrey warns historians against seeing the West as a place of transformed gender roles for either pioneer women or their children.¹⁰ Jeffrey's argument has merit as some western women did wish to return to the Cult of True Womanhood. Not all women enjoyed or were suited to work outside the home as was often required by pioneer women. Nevertheless, in my research I found many women and men who appeared quite content to live outside the boundaries of traditional gender roles. As the West became more densely settled, pioneer women and their daughters did adopt more traditionally feminine work and cultural attitudes; however, some of them continued to do traditionally masculine work and others continued to control their economic lives through land ownership and marital decisions well after the period that Jeffrey's study addresses.

Another major scholar, Joanna L. Stratton, does not address the possibilities of change for women in the American West, but her work *Pioneer Women: Voices From the Kansas Frontier* presents evidence obtained from letters and autobiographies submitted by Kansas pioneer women or their family members describing their

experiences as pioneers and farmers in the early days of Kansas' statehood.¹¹ In particular Stratton includes several excerpts and quotes that illustrate the strong willed and resourceful nature of those women whose families survived the pioneer period. Many of the women report experiences similar to those described by writers of western fiction. Stratton's work addresses a wide array of circumstances and contextual information about pioneer life and is useful in contextualizing the events that inspired western writers and poets.

My research fills an important gap in Stratton's work, particularly the question of how these women perceived themselves. While Stratton addresses the factual circumstances facing pioneer women, her work fails to address what these women thought of themselves and their lives or even where they placed themselves in the larger context of the American story. Lack of evidence may be attributed to the fact that Stratton's sources, pioneer women from Kansas would have likely been modest in describing their role.¹² As scholar Elizabeth Hampsten notes, women who wrote letters to relatives and friends often assumed that other family members and friends would scrutinize the letters and thus wrote only what they wanted a large audience to read and thus women may have been disinclined to praise their own efforts in the settling of the country.¹³ In either case Stratton does not directly address questions about women's perceptions of their role within their family unit or the larger society.

Elizabeth Hampsten's excellent work, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910*, presents a variety of accounts between

female family members and friends as well as diary entries of Anglo women who settled in North Dakota.¹⁴ Hampsten analyzes the women's writings in comparison to males and those of women from other parts of the country.¹⁵ She argues western women primarily wrote about their relationships and their longing to see distant relatives and friends. In contrast, men wrote of the landscape around them and of the work they intended to do.¹⁶ This would appear to confirm the gender boundaries required in the Cult of True Womanhood. One literary scholar, Annette Kolodny argues that women wanted to tame the garden; thus this lack of female writing about the western landscape in North Dakota, as addressed by Hampsten is intriguing. Hampsten's argument is also contradicted in many diaries and letters of western women who wrote eloquently about the beauty of the land around them. Hampsten does provide several examples of female correspondences detailing the annoyance women felt with their husbands and with the traditional gender roles with which they were forced to comply.¹⁷ This helps to confirm fictional depictions of marriages in the works of western writers, such as Cather and Scarborough. Hampsten's analysis presents a complicated view of the forces capable of shaping western women.

Literary scholar Annette Kolodny explores this intersection between mythology and reality in her book, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630- 1860* and provides the reader with a counterargument against the scholars accepting of traditional views of women. Kolodny presents a broad analysis of a variety of sources, fictional and non-fictional, written by women about their experience

of frontier life in an attempt to understand the fantasies that these women created around themselves and their home lives.¹⁸ In addition, Kolodny also provides ample evidence of the ways in which women responded to their natural environment. While some women felt powerless and trapped by the wilderness around them, others found increased freedom in the wide open expanse of the western frontier. Western women were encouraged to move beyond traditionally female activities such as cooking and childcare because they were needed to work outside either in the fields or in town earning money to send to their families.¹⁹ According to Kolodny, women who moved west onto the frontier believed that they could create a civilized, home like, safe garden for themselves and their children. This drive to create a safe controlled garden manifested itself in flower beds and the transfer of plants and seeds from one home to another as families moved westward. Kolodny depicts western women as active decision makers interested in changing the land around them to suit their needs and their dreams, hardly the weak, gentle traditional women depicted by other scholars.²⁰ Kolodny's work, while much more broadly based than the one I propose, provides a valuable example of literary analysis as well as a broad picture into which the works of western writers can be placed.

In conjunction with Kolodny's work, Jennifer Bailey's analysis of depictions of women in the stories of Willa Cather displays the willingness of literary scholars to challenge traditional historical perspectives. In her analysis of Willa Cather's depictions of women, Bailey argues that the female literary response to life in the garden was to move away from traditional female gender roles. According to Bailey, literature written

by women about life in the pastoral environment often discouraged traditional gender roles because they were harmful to women.²¹ This area of disagreement prompts questions about whether or not pioneer women were satisfied in their roles as wives and mothers and whether they found their work satisfying. Bailey's conclusion regarding harmful gender roles is confirmed by descriptions of unhappy marriages and accounts from women who longed to spend fewer hours in dark, sod houses and more time outside in the wide open spaces of the plains

By the 1980s, some historians began to question the validity of the Cult of True Womanhood as a model for female behavior. In one article, historian Elizabeth Jameson discusses the problems of the Cult of True Womanhood as a proper goal for women. She concludes that women faced a variety of hindrances as they moved out of the Eastern urban centers that birthed the true womanhood stereotypes in the first place. The Cult of True Womanhood was certainly difficult for many Eastern women, including working women and immigrants to attain. In addition some Eastern women, such as woman suffrage activists, found the Cult of True Womanhood to be unnecessarily confining and refused to follow the rules for proper behavior. Nevertheless, this rigid stereotype of female behavior was more readily attainable and more popular in the Eastern cities than it would have been for Western women. Historian, Elizabeth Jameson states, "By virtue of class or ethnicity, most western women were not viewed as ladies by the proponents of True Womanhood."²² In addition to the class and ethnic barriers to the Cult of True Womanhood, western women found that practical concerns required them to leave their

homes and rigid definitions of female behavior. Jameson notes in her article that further study of women's understanding of their own agency and the behaviors they adopted was needed.²³

Despite some scholar's calls for new analysis of female agency, many historians and literary scholars continued to neglect the presence of women in the western garden.²⁴ Historian Glenda Riley offers an interesting explanation for the lack of scholarship on the active and complex role of women in western expansion. Riley argues that Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis specifically ignored women and their contributions to the American frontier. She notes that Turner depicted women as passive participants in settling the nation, merely walking alongside their male family members.²⁵ Riley argues that Turner's omission of women affected generations of writers and historians interested in the West. She notes that this lack of information encouraged authors to create a mythologized image of "Western Anglo" women as silently suffering victims of the harsh conditions and uncomplicated women incapable of making their own decisions.²⁶ Riley's conclusion about the lack of scholarship on women in the pastoral setting is enlightening when considering major scholars such as Henry Nash Smith and Leo Marx.

Another historian, Susan Lee Johnson confirms Riley's argument and argues that even modern historians have fallen victim to the mythology of the West that places men at the center of the western story. Johnson argues that western historians have proved reluctant to include women's experiences in the West in major western textbooks and that women's history remains segregated from the larger story of Anglo settlement in the

West.²⁷ With Riley's and Johnson's arguments in mind, the heroines of western fiction and pioneer diaries emerge with a new significance. These portrayals reveal complex women who are hardy survivors and independent women who were successful in a variety of enterprises.

Historian Mary Neth's "Gender and the Family Labor System: Defining Work in the Rural Midwest," presents an example of a successful analysis and comparison of both fictional and historical sources. Neth begins her article with a description of two of Hamlin Garland's heroines, Julie in "Among the Corn Rows" and Nina in "The Creamery Man." Neth argues that these character's experience of life in pastoral America are similar to the experiences of real women living in the Midwest in their relationships with family members, drive for a better life, and long term hard labor on farms.²⁸ Neth offers evidence that women in some cases viewed their work with pleasure and sought to instill the love of farming in their own children.²⁹ She also notes these women primarily accessed the land they worked through men, primarily their husbands and that they often viewed their labor as essential to running the farm; however, she does not comment on whether male property owners viewed women's work in the same manner.³⁰ Neth's perspective provides interesting evidence of how women viewed their labor, which would certainly affect how they viewed themselves. Her conclusions about finding pleasure in farm work seem interesting given the negative view expressed by generations of historians about the drudgery of farm life for women. Although Neth's work addresses

Midwestern farm women and literature about them, her conclusions about women's work is confirmed in the writings of women who went deeper into the West.

Joan M. Jensen's essays also provide context for the lives and problems faced by women on western farms. Jensen specifically addresses the work load and economic role of women on small farms.³¹ Jensen's study of working farm women is particularly interesting when observed through the lens of hardworking women such as portrayed in western fiction. In addition Jensen makes a number of astute comments regarding the historical treatment of women and the lack of knowledge about how women's work contributed to the farming family.³² These aspects of Jensen's research relate directly to my study of rural women through their own stories and narratives written about them.

In addition, the work of Michael S. Kimmel provides an excellent analysis of the ways in which males understood the western experience. According to Kimmel, males were encouraged to perceive the move to the West as confirming and enhancing their masculinity. Kimmel notes that by the 1840s, many white males believed their masculinity was threatened by increased industrialization and the feminization of American culture. In order to fight this largely imagined threat to the male social order, men sought to impose even more strict gender and racial roles on women and minorities. In addition many engaged in hobbies such as baseball in order to prove their manliness. Kimmel notes that one of the most prized ways men could prove their worth was to move west where, presumably away from the feminizing influence of women, they could grow into strong male figures.³³ This argument raises interesting questions about the men who

moved westward with their wives and daughters. Were they, too, trying to escape female influence? This argument also raises issues about how women viewed the decision to move west. If their goal was to create the civilized garden of their fantasies as Kolodny suggests, did women support moving west regardless of male escape fantasies? Or did they too long for an escape from the increasingly rigid world of the industrial city?

Despite the increase in works about women and other minorities during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s there remain large holes in the historiography. In a 2007 book review, scholar Kim Warren ended her analysis with the comment, “making meaning of women’s frontier experiences is both compelling and unfinished.”³⁴ Historian Mary Louise Roberts, argues that scholars, “made a cult of that cult,” and calls for historians to reread and review Welter’s analysis of female identity. Roberts ends her article with the comment that scholars are still unraveling the ways in which women’s roles have changed over time and argues that scholars should be not irrevocably bonded to the Cult of True Womanhood as the only possible way of seeing nineteenth century women.³⁵ Another modern historian, Nancy A. Hewitt notes that the Cult of True Womanhood carried the seeds of its own destruction. Those women who attempted to conform to this stereotype internalized the belief that they were morally superior to men and that they had a valid role in reforming public life to more closely resemble their virtuous home lives. As Hewitt comments, this belief led women to enter the public sphere and gain influence over matters well outside the purview of the homemaker.³⁶ Another historian, Susan Armitage similarly argues that western women’s historians should see the story of

the West as a series of ventures in which women sought to redefine and create happy home lives for themselves outside of their homes and the Cult of True Womanhood.³⁷ The inevitable breakdown in the Cult of True Womanhood and the transition to new stereotypes of proper female behavior require further analysis.

Previous historians, Julie Roy Jeffrey included, have argued that women did not become more independent as a result of their western experiences. In making these arguments historians have focused on modern examples of independence, such as the ability to vote or share equal work roles with males; however, I argue, as does Elizabeth Jameson, that the independent nineteenth century western woman did not act in the same manner as an independent twentieth century woman. Nineteenth century western women displayed agency and independence in a variety of ways, from delaying marriages to purchasing land to running a business to engaging in public activism within groups like the Farmer's Alliance.³⁸

My work directly addresses the need to re-examine the role of women in the American West. While the women who settled on western farms and ranches would have been familiar with the stereotypes perpetuated by the Cult of True Womanhood, it was nearly impossible for them to create the sort of lifestyle required by this stereotype. In addition to the practical difficulties of establishing the Cult of True Womanhood, western women also appear to have been uninterested in and dissatisfied with the role the Cult assigned them. The writings of women in the West display interest and interaction with their homes, their farms and ranches, and in some cases the entire region they inhabited.

Discontent with remaining inside dark soddies and shanties, western women left their homes and walked or rode out into the bright sunlight of the American West.

There are numerous published primary source documents from women who wrote about their lives in the West in addition to those discussed by Stratton, Webb, and Jensen. Martha Farnsworth kept a diary from the time she was fifteen until the year before she died at fifty-six. Farnsworth recorded the hardships of life in Kansas during the late nineteenth century and wrote about a variety of subjects both personal and political.³⁹ In addition, other women like Mollie Dorsey Sanford kept diaries about life in the West and provide ample information for analysis.⁴⁰ Another useful work for scholars is Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw's published collection of interviews conducted by the Works Progress Administration, as well as various memoirs written by pioneer women and their children.⁴¹ In addition the final chapter uses a number of published primary sources from the wives of military officers in the West. These interesting accounts provide ample information and points of comparison to the works of civilian women in the West.⁴²

In addition to published primary sources, a number of archives are available to provide additional primary source materials. In particular, the poems, letters, diaries, and newspaper articles of pioneer women collected in the Western History Collection archives at the University of Oklahoma proved particularly useful. These archives contain numerous documents written by or about pioneer women and provide much of the traditional primary source material. In addition the South Dakota Historical Society has

numerous primary sources, including the membership records of the South Dakota Farmer's Alliances by county, online for scholars to use. These records provided integral information for the third chapter of this thesis.

In addition to the letters and diaries of pioneer women, the works of fictional writers such as Willa Cather, Jennie Harris Oliver, and Dorothy Scarborough provide further points of access into the minds of pioneer women. Cather, Oliver, and Scarborough all lived on western farms and wrote about their experiences in works of fiction. Scarborough spent several years of her childhood living in Texas and wrote her most famous novel, *The Wind*, from her memories of life on the semi-arid plains.⁴³ Cather spent her formative years on a farm in Nebraska.⁴⁴ Her most famous character, *Antonia*, was based on a real life friend of Cather's from her childhood in Nebraska.⁴⁵ Jennie Harris Oliver spent most of her life living on an Oklahoma farm. Although Oliver is better known for her poetry she also wrote short stories about women in Oklahoma including the one discussed in Chapter Three, "It Is Morning."⁴⁶ Cather, Scarborough and Oliver experienced the hardships and joys of life on western farms and ranches and used these experiences in their fictional works. The stories of Oliver, Cather, and Scarborough suggest much about their perceptions of women's roles and life on a western farm or ranch. Each author reveals women who are uncomfortable with their roles as wives and mothers and each displays numerous female characters who are transformed by life in the West.

How did the women who went west see themselves? Did they believe that they were going west to plant the seeds of civilization? Did they actively choose to go west alongside their families or did they merely follow the more socially, politically, and economically powerful men upon whom they depended? How did they feel about their familial relationships especially with their husbands? Did they, like Scarborough's heroine, Letty, regret that they had married or that they had come west in the first place? How did they feel about their work on farms or in towns? What did they think about their lack of political or economic control upon the land they labored? How did they see the natural world that surrounded them? What impact did life on western farms have on farmer's wives and daughters?

The first chapter of my thesis is focused on the way in which women viewed the natural world around them. If as scholar Michael S. Kimmel argues, men saw the west as a place of escape from the feminizing influence of civilization, how did the women who eventually went west with them perceive the new environment? Did they, as some scholars indicate see it as a harsh and inhospitable climate that would gradually sap them of their very lives? Or is Annette Kolodny correct in her argument that women found the West to be a blank slate upon which they could happily make their dreams a reality?

In the second chapter of my thesis, I explore women's intimate family relationships. What were western marriages like and how did women interact with their husbands, fathers, and brothers? What role did women play in the decisions their husbands made about moving west, buying land, selling crops, etc.? Did being married

on a farm always mean that women lost their sense of self and their ability to make independent decisions as some author's stories indicate? Or were western gender roles more liberal and interchangeable than those in other regions of the nation? Did women define themselves as wives and mothers or did they see themselves as independent actors pursuing their own destinies?

The third chapter of my thesis focuses on women's work in relation to that of men. Numerous scholars have noted that women's work was central to the maintenance and success of western farmers; however, few have detailed whether women considered their work to be valuable or whether they enjoyed it. How many women, like *Ántonia*, longed to work outside of dark and dirty sod houses like men but were required to remain indoors tending to food and children? For those who worked outside their homes, in the fields or in other occupations, how did they feel about their work? Could western women gain financial independence in the rugged West? In addition, this chapter addresses to some extent women's participation in the public sphere. Western women, primarily those who lived or worked on farms and ranches, participated in local Farmer's Alliance groups or for other causes such as woman's suffrage, or Prohibition.

The fourth chapter of my thesis addresses a different group of women who also found independence and opportunity in the West. Military officers' wives experienced many of the same problems and successes as their civilian counterparts; however, their elite status and relative privilege allowed these women to more readily accept all the

West had to offer them. Their experiences provide an interesting counterpoint to those of their civilian sisters.

In addition to traditional primary source documents such as letters and diaries from pioneer women or their family members I utilize the fictional works of authors and poets who experienced and wrote about their experiences of life on western farms. I compare the perceptions and experiences revealed by both private writings and public fictionalized accounts and analyze the views of women presented in each. I suggest that the image we have long held of the brave but silent pioneer woman selflessly placing herself in harm's way for the benefit of the nation is inaccurately simple. The women who moved west faced a complex and varied world and responded to these demands as complex human beings. While some pioneer women may have agreed with and accepted the traditionally accepted view of gender roles for women, for others the combined pressures of life out West and traditional views of women were unacceptably confining. While some of these women merely longed to escape their duties others actively sought to flee their bonds and take power into their own hands. In any case, further study of the views of women themselves in the American garden and their role in their family life and the life of the nation is needed.⁴⁷

CHAPTER II

THE RED EARTH: WOMEN AND THE WEST

“Oh, do not seek this red land
Unless it be for staying;
(The red, red earth the jealous gods have alchemied
for you!)-
And do not drink its red dew
With any thought of straying;
The gods have dyed its tawny waters, too.”⁴⁸

For most of American history, the women who went west have been incorrectly seen as meek and helpless victims of circumstances beyond their control. Whether under threat from Indians, the poor decisions of male family members, drought, flood, or fire, women especially those who traveled in the first wave of westward migration have been perceived as frightened victims suffering in the wilderness.⁴⁹ Even more recent historians have fallen victim to this mythology. One modern scholar, Elizabeth Hampsten argues, “nature as something external to be accommodated, fought, appreciated, or responded to in the many complex formulations of our literature and mythology... was not in the pioneer woman’s understanding.”⁵⁰ One scholar, Annette Kolodny, suggests that one of the primary reasons women may appear in western documents as victims of circumstance is that stories followed the mold of the captivity narratives told by early colonial settlers, however, it also seems probable that this mythology is a result of traditional female gender roles, which did not account for strong independent females.⁵¹ Whatever the

reason for this myth concerning helpless women unwillingly transported West, real pioneer women often exhibited considerable strength and courage. The landscape of the West provided women with new opportunities to act as independent decision makers and gain new visions of freedom. Women did face extreme hardships and suffering in the West as previous scholars have suggested; however, while they may have expressed sadness or anger at their hardships, women could and did take control of their lives in a way that the meek and timid female depicted in many captivity narratives would have been unable to do. In addition many women openly preferred life in the West to life in the supposedly more female-oriented East. Western women found the West to be a place of both physical beauty and the freedom to enact change in their own lives.

In light of the often oversimplified manner in which historians and the general public have viewed western women, the novels of western women present an interesting and enlightening counterpoint. Dorothy Scarborough's master work *The Wind* provides evidence of the varied and complex responses of women to the western experience. In Dorothy Scarborough's *The Wind* we observe the reactions of two different women to life in the lands of the West. *The Wind* is often cited as an example in literature that condemns the West as an unsuitable for women. In this novel, the heroine Letty, a traditional Southern woman, is driven mad and ruined by her experience of western hardships. Despite this reputation, *The Wind* can also be read as a treatise on the personality traits necessary to survive in the West. While Scarborough noted in letters and interviews that her personification of the wind was influenced by her mother's descriptions of the

hardships she faced during Scarborough's early childhood in Sweetwater, Texas, she also recalled that her own mother survived and flourished in this western environment where her heroine, Letty failed.⁵² Scarborough's Letty provides but one example of a woman's experience in the semi-arid plains of Texas and should not be called up as evidence that all women were unsuited for western life.

The heroine of *The Wind*, Letty is described as a fragile, sheltered Southern belle. On the other hand, the other major female character in the novel is Cora, Letty's sister-in-law. Unlike Letty, Cora is a strong female character capable of thriving in the harsh environment of the West and running the financial affairs of her family.⁵³ While Letty finds the parched plains to be intimidating and unwelcoming, Cora is vocal about her preference for life out West. When her husband becomes concerned with a long drought killing their livestock, Cora notes that the little family could always move farther West in a covered wagon if Texas proved unprofitable.⁵⁴ Cora is not the only woman in *The Wind* who appears to be immune to the terror of the western wind that plagues Letty; an elderly pioneer woman Letty meets informs her that though the West is a hard place to live, it is also a land of opportunity for women and their families.⁵⁵ Letty is unprepared and unable to cope with life there but other women found the region to be a land of opportunity. Women like Cora were able to help their husbands and their children to build new lives there. The rugged nature of life in the West helped them to become strong and independent decision makers. Letty acknowledges this in the novel's conclusion in a period of introspection before her madness fully takes over. Scarborough writes, "If she

hadn't been there, Lige would have married some western girl, sturdy and plucky and gay (happy or optimistic), who could have helped him as he needed her."⁵⁶ Letty's conclusion that Western life required pluck and a sturdy disposition should be the obvious lesson of the novel. Women in the West faced considerable hardship; however, determination and a love for the land also provided far greater opportunities for women to influence their own destinies.

Letty's acknowledgment of her own failure to adapt to life in the West points to a message that many readers undoubtedly missed regarding Scarborough's intent in *The Wind*. While the popular novel can be read as a tragic account of the problems faced by women in the western, Letty's fate was clearly not shared by all women. Cora and the elderly grandmother Letty meets are positively affected by life in the West, as was Scarborough's own mother. Thus *The Wind* should be read as a treatise on the necessity or presence of strong and independent women in the trans-Pecos. After all it seems unlikely that the West would have ever become a civilized part of the United States, if large numbers of women had succumbed to madness as Letty did. Letty was a weak and fragile woman when she journeyed west and her life only exacerbated her weaknesses. For other women like Cora and the elderly pioneer, the region acted as a proving ground. Through their experiences of the harsh environment, they and other women like them were able to adapt, prove their strength, and gain independence from traditional female gender roles.

The acceptable image portrayed by historians and writers of women migrating westward is similar to that of Letty, the unwilling and fearful woman accompanying her

husband and children. One respected historian, Lillian Schlissel argued that women, particularly those who were older, dreaded going West; however, she also noted that young women and girls appeared to enjoy their journey.⁵⁷ In contrast, other scholars and primary sources, too, display women who actively supported decisions to go West regardless of their age. Historian, Sheryll Patterson- Black notes that many of the women who went west did so, not as victims of manly dreams, but as part of a complete family undertaking intended to provide the family's children with access to a better life.⁵⁸ Another historian, Joana L. Stratton noted that some Kansas women traveled from the East either without the assistance of males or encouraged reluctant husbands that the West was a land of opportunity--displaying their willingness to adopt the region as their new home.⁵⁹ According to literary scholar, Annette Kolodny, for excited young women the West appeared as a blank slate upon which they could project dreams of a homey, feminine garden without the seemingly sexualized imagery present in male accounts of the garden.⁶⁰ Kolodny notes, "While men sought new Edens and created new Arcadias for themselves...altering the landscape to make it comply with their dreams...women patched Pine Tree quilts...and cultivated small gardens in order 'to render home a paradise.'"⁶¹ While much of the scholarly focus has been on the reasons that men ventured to the frontier, it is clear that women had their own imagined visions of western life. The notion that women were active participants, whether alone or as part of a family unit, in the decision to go west contradicts much of the common perception that women were unwilling travelers.

Terri Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw's collection of excerpts from the narratives recorded by the WPA interviewers in Oklahoma during the Depression also yield ample information about women who went west willingly to farm or ranch. Several of the women reported they moved into the territory with other members of their families and appeared to be excited, if not about the move itself, then by the opportunities they were sure they would find in Oklahoma. One recalled that she and her widowed mother traveled from Texas to find better land for their small family, and remembered with pride that she rode nearly the entire way. The older woman and her teenage daughter appear to have enjoyed their journey together. Another woman reported that her family moved to the West on the advice of a doctor who believed that her health would improve if she were able to lead a "wilder, freer life." She too, looked forward to a change of scenery and a new freer life in the West. One woman noted that she, her father, her brother, and sister all made the run on the Cherokee strip and acquired claims near one another in an effort to acquire a large spread of land for farming and ranching.⁶² The motivations for westward travel were varied; however, it is clear that women were not exclusively passive parties within their families. Women were active participants in the decision-making process and many expressed joy about their movement westward.

There is ample primary source evidence that women were excited by their westward journey. Many female travelers recorded their first reaction to the region in diaries or memoirs. This is especially applicable to those women who were fortunate enough to go West by stage or later by train instead of covered wagons. One young

woman noted that her interest in seeing her new homeland extended to asking to sit “up-top” with the driver of her stage. She wrote, “The sensation of swift motion and aloftness, the keen air of the October morning’s dawn, the unusualness and unexpectedness of that phase of my journey-it was intoxicating!”⁶³ She later wrote of her disappointment when she had to take her place inside the stage the next day.⁶⁴ Another woman, interviewed as part of the WPA narrative project remembered that she was immediately enchanted with Oklahoma’s landscape. She told the interviewer, “It was the prettiest sight I ever saw. All that tall grass waving. . . .”⁶⁵ Similarly, Mollie Dorsey Sanford recorded her reaction to the beauty of the Nebraska prairie in her diary. She wrote, “The landscape was beautiful. The prairies look like a vast ocean stretching out until the earth and sky seem to meet.”⁶⁶ She also wrote, as their journey began, that she believed the trip out West and the life the West offered to them would be a blessing especially to herself and her sisters.⁶⁷ The women who travelled towards sunsets in the waning years of the nineteenth century found a landscape of enchantment and in later years remembered their great joy at their first sight of natural landscape.

Even those women who were reluctant travelers could be seduced and inspired by the topography. One woman said, “It might seem a cheerless life, but there were many compensations. . . the attraction of the prairie, which simply gets into your blood and makes you dissatisfied away from it; the low-lying hills and the unobstructed view of the horizon; and the fleecy clouds driven by the never failing winds.”⁶⁸ Another noted her initial resistance to moving west vanished as she and her husband traveled along the trail

towards their future home in Kansas. She noted that on their arrival they believed they had “found God’s own country.”⁶⁹ In the introduction to her memoir, Faye Cashatt Lewis states, “Who is left to tell, if I do not, what it was like to live in a spot uncrowded and unpolluted, where solitudes transcended loneliness to become precious nurturings for the human spirit?”⁷⁰ Although her descriptions of unpolluted new lands excludes Native Americans from the western landscape, Faye Cashatt Lewis was undoubtedly echoing the feelings and perceptions of other western women of the landscape as a transcendent place filled with opportunity for western women and their families.

While some women were confined indoors; by circumstance or rigidly minded husbands; many western women had close contact with the natural world on a daily basis. While women did not in many cases work outside as males did, there were other opportunities such as riding and hunting that allowed western women to experience the West’s landscape. Women looked forward to these events which freed them from their duties within sod houses, shanties, or “dugouts” and in many cases included time for socializing with other local pioneer women. The ability to leave one’s home and experience life in the West played a distinct role in western women’s vision of themselves as free and independent individuals.⁷¹

One of the most common ways that women experienced the West’s terrain, was through the necessary use of horses to get from place to place. The necessity for travel and ready availability of horses allowed women to view the West unencumbered by wagons or trains driven by males. The psychological impact of knowing that one could

mount up and ride across the open plains as far as one wanted or needed played a major role in women's conceptions of themselves as independent actors. This argument is confirmed by a wide variety of primary sources and mentions of horseback rides across the prairies appear in most pioneer diaries and memoirs. Many western women were accomplished riders and enjoyed riding across the open plains alone or with friends.⁷² Faye Cashatt Lewis recalled that she and her family often spent time exploring the land around her homestead. Although she noted that her mother was sometimes confined to their prairie home, even she was able to spend at least a few afternoons a week walking with her children. The Lewis children, Faye included, also broke colts to ride and appear to have spent significant amounts of time outside on horseback riding for pleasure and hunting various plants and roots for the family to eat.⁷³ That young Faye was able to spend her time breaking and riding horses also displays the erosion of traditional gender roles in the West.

Other women who grew up in the West recounted similar stories about themselves and their siblings. One woman recalled that she and her sisters rode side saddle and wore riding skirts as a result of their mother's wish to maintain appearances but she also reported that she and her sisters could "jump ditches or fences, swim a creek and herd a bunch of cattle with any boy." She told her interviewer that she loved to ride and was clearly proud of her cattle herding ability.⁷⁴ Another woman similarly recalled that she and her sisters always had access to horses to ride and remembered with great pride that as her family became more prosperous the girls had access to a surrey and a buggy.⁷⁵

Another interviewee reported that it was her job to go to town for the mail on Saturdays as a young woman and that she learned the fastest route to town and back.⁷⁶ Bess Cobb, a North Dakota homesteader wrote to her family back home that she spent most of her time riding and planting her garden. She informed them with pride that she had a new bronco that she was breaking to ride.⁷⁷ Similarly Mollie Dorsey Sanford recorded that she “felt like a bird uncaged” when riding across the prairies of Nebraska. She later wrote that one of her many suitors asked her to ride out with him. While she didn’t particularly like the man, she was unable to resist the lure of an afternoon on horseback.⁷⁸ The ability to ride across the open prairie whether in service to their family or for their own pleasure provided western women a sense of freedom and control over their lives. Women, especially those engaged in breaking their own horses, gained the ability to control their own location and travel. While their Eastern sisters were confined to homes by the Cult of True Womanhood,⁷⁹ western women could at any point mount a horse or pony and be miles away from the homestead in a matter of a few minutes.

Some women also recorded and remembered other outdoor experiences as a pivotal part of their western experience. Mrs. Rose Staubus, for example, remembered a camping trip to the Cherokee Strip with her family with great pleasure in an article published in her local Oklahoma newspaper in the 1950s.⁸⁰ Many women also used their spare time to establish gardens, both for pleasure and to help feed their families. Women created their own version of the garden by planting seeds and cuttings around their new homes. Often these seeds came from friends or family members who had remained back

East or they were transported along with the family.⁸¹ The planting of gardens allowed women to create their own personalized western realities, so long as the weather cooperated, of course. This interaction, as well as more activities like horseback riding provided western women with opportunities to experience and influence their new western homes.

Sometimes a love for the West had nothing to do with one's outdoor activities. Some women appear to have loved the western landscape from the beginning and seemingly with little reason. The poem, by Oklahoma poet, Jennie Harris Oliver that opened this chapter portrays an intense love of the land. The "red earth" that infected Oliver's blood and colored her poetry also infected other women who loved the West that was supposed to have destroyed them. One young woman whose mother lived with her on her homestead for several years over the disapproval of the patriarch of the family noted that her mother loved living on the prairie with her and even enjoyed hearing the coyotes at night.⁸² Although she did not offer an analysis of her mother's love of the prairie it seems probable that part of her love of prairie life might have been connected with the distance of a controlling male. Perhaps Oliver's red earth is also symbolic of this freedom. There is a certain undeniable sense of freedom in the notion that one is alone with only the red earth below and the blue sky above.

Although many women were able to enjoy open, western prairies, others were restricted to their homes by young children or men intent on maintaining rigid gender roles. While men were expected to spend large amounts of time outside, women could be

confined to sod house, shanties, wagons, or other types of shelter, such as dugouts, often with small children or household chores that required their constant attention.⁸³ In some ways this confinement was likely circumstantial, because some women had more experience with household chores or lacked the upper body strength to work with heavy farm equipment; however, it is also probable that some men intentionally confined their wives or daughters to the home in order to reinforce gender stereotypes that kept women subservient to men.⁸⁴ Some women protested against their exclusion from outdoor work and rigid gender roles. Historian, Mary Neth presents an interview with a North Dakota woman who expressed her great displeasure with her then deceased husband's enforcement of rigid gender work roles. Although her husband's death left her with several young children to support, Neth notes that she spoke about her life on the farm with much greater pleasure after her husband's death allowed her to expand her work to the outdoors.⁸⁵ This confinement and corresponding responses of dissatisfaction appear in the letters and diaries of many western women. The confining nature of women's work in the home appears to have removed the opportunity for women to engage emotionally with the wilderness that surrounded them.⁸⁶ Women like Letty left alone in a sod house were understandably unable to feel totally at home in the West. While some were able to engage emotionally with their western homes, after the death of their husbands or after family circumstances changed to allow them to have greater interaction outdoors, it appears likely that traditional gender roles are to blame in accounts of women who found the West to be a frightening environment.

One of the other sources for female dissatisfaction with western life for women, was the undeniably lonely nature of life as a homesteader or rancher on the plains. Whether they traveled west with their husbands or journeyed West on their own women in the West were often alone on isolated farms or ranches. It is partially this isolation that drove Scarborough's heroine Letty into madness. The loneliness and isolation of life in the West offered women both opportunities and hardships. Women accustomed to being surrounded by close family units and friends in towns and cities back East found they were suddenly and disturbingly alone with their children and husbands. This loneliness could drive a woman, like Letty mad and this appears to have been a reality of which western women were aware. One woman recalled a neighbor in her childhood that died as a result of her constant anxiety about the safety and security of her family in the West.⁸⁷ Despite the prevalence of the image of the woman driven mad in western scholarship and fiction, this mention was the only primary source reference to women driven to death by madness in the region. Historian, H. Elaine Lindgren takes on the stereotype of the woman driven mad by the loneliness of the West and argued that she found little actual evidence that women were driven to insanity by western life.⁸⁸ The variety of human experiences makes it likely that some women would have been mentally unable to cope with life in the West; however, this appears to have been an isolated occurrence. It appears that loneliness, while difficult for anyone living isolated farms and ranches, was not the major emotional catalyst previous scholars have portrayed it to be. Although scholars are silent on this issue, it seems probable that women, already

isolated on farms and ranches, who were confined to sod houses unable to experience the prairie around them, were more likely to find life in the West unbearable.

For other women; however, the loneliness and hardship of western life allowed them to rebuild and change their perceptions of themselves. This loneliness could work as a starting point for women to begin rebuilding their personas and their lives.⁸⁹ The isolated nature of western life allowed women to face danger on their own and gain valuable confidence in their own abilities. For example, Mollie Dorsey Sanford wrote that she believed that the wild outdoor life she and her sisters led in the West “strengthened our physical faculties, and the privations, our powers of endurance.”⁹⁰ One woman noted that she often stopped when out of the house on errands, got off her horse and beat rattlesnakes to death. She indicated to her interviewer that she viewed this activity as a public service to other settlers and appeared to be unconcerned by the possible danger in attacking poisonous snakes. This lack of concern displays confidence in her abilities and skills.⁹¹ Another Oklahoma woman wrote that she and her family killed seventeen rattlesnakes on their land in the first year alone and she herself on at least one occasion beat a snake to death with a buffalo horn. She, too appears to have been confident in her ability to take control of a possibly dangerous confrontation.⁹² Another woman remembered her mother racing bareback across the plains to warn her brother of an impending attack by an outlaw group.⁹³ In many cases the courage of these women saved their families considerable problems and physical damage. While these experiences were undoubtedly frightening, women thus learned to rely upon themselves

instead of male relatives or friends. For some women the loneliness of life on western farms and ranches provided them with important opportunities to make decisions and act independently of their perceived social or familial roles.

For some women, their relationship with the red earth and their confidence in their own mental and physical prowess increased to the point that they longed to own their own property. While primary source evidence of women as homesteaders in the large area of this study is difficult to obtain several scholars have addressed the phenomenon of the girl homesteader in their work. Joan Jensen notes that land ownership was often difficult for women, especially those who were married, to obtain on their own terms. The laws of the United States before 1850 did not allow married women to own their own land and in many areas even as legal barriers decreased married women had difficulty claiming their own property. Nevertheless western women were in many cases more likely to own their land than similarly situated women in the East. Widows in the West were often left land by their husbands and as increasing numbers of women went West with their families or alone, women began bringing suits to gain access to land through homesteading laws. Thus, the Homestead Act of 1862 allowed single and widowed women to homestead.⁹⁴ This change in land ownership laws allowed women to legally procure and maintain their own piece of the West.

Just as with the original decision to move west, women also played an active role in the decision to file a homestead claim. Sheryll Patterson-Black notes that women chose to homestead on the frontier seem to have been dissatisfied with their previous lifestyle

and that they often expressed the belief that homesteading would offer them opportunities unavailable in other parts of the West. In other cases, women were inspired to move west by their female friends and relatives who had already taken homesteads there. One woman noted that she was prepared for life as a homesteader by her mother, who had claimed land in an 1891 land race. Another young woman wrote that she and her friends were persuaded of the value of homesteading by reports from other groups of young women who filed on adjoining claims and worked together to improve their land. Patterson-Black estimates that women homesteaders were approximately five to ten percent of the homesteading population in Colorado and Wyoming. While some of these women moved before their claims were proved, others stayed on their homesteads long enough to or receive fee simple title to their claims.⁹⁵ Patterson-Black indicates that in some areas women homesteaders were slightly more likely than their male counterparts to successfully claim their land. She notes that those women who were unsuccessful at homesteading left for the same reasons and often in the same time frame as males whose homesteads failed, thus counteracting the myth that women were less capable homesteaders than men. She also includes several specific examples of women who homesteaded either on their own or with friends or relatives, including four sisters who homesteaded on adjoining claims and a woman who homesteaded in Nebraska with her children after leaving her husband.⁹⁶ Although Patterson-Black's statistical data is not inclusive of other parts of the West, her research does show that women desired land and that some were successful in procuring and maintaining homesteads without males.

Another scholar, Anne B. Webb asserts that women also homesteaded in the Midwest in surprising numbers. She estimated that one unmarried woman homesteaded for every five unmarried men in Minnesota and roughly two thousand, four hundred women homesteaded without husbands in the state from 1863-1889 and gained title to their land.⁹⁷ While Webb's data like Patterson-Black's covers a much broader area than my limited study, both authors indicate the presence of women who chose to homestead without the influence of husbands. This information contradicts the common mythology that women were reluctant pioneers dragged West by male relatives.

H. Elaine Lindgren also provides evidence of women who homesteaded in the Dakotas; some of them lived on their homesteads for the remainder of their lives. Although Lindgren's analysis is confined to women who filed for land and excludes those who purchased land from a former homesteader or those who took charge of a claim that was held in a male's name, her book *Land in Her Own Name: Women as Homesteaders in North Dakota* includes a large number of women who actively chose to homestead either temporarily or permanently.⁹⁸ Lindgren's work takes historians to task who have ignored women homesteaders. Early in her book, Lindgren notes that hotel owners in Dallas, South Dakota, provided a separate barracks for single women who participated in a land run.⁹⁹ This use of a full building as a female barracks displays the large number of women who wanted to homestead. Lindgren notes that her research showed that many women homesteaded near relative's or friend's claims, some of whom were also female. In some cases, all the women in a given family acquired their own homesteads. Due to the

restrictions of the Homestead Act, only single or widowed women typically filed for homesteads.¹⁰⁰ For single women, who accounted for eighty-three percent of female homesteaders, claims could serve as either permanent homes or investments that women could sell or trade.¹⁰¹ For widows homesteading offered both a home for children and an occupation. Lindgren notes that widowed women especially those with young children found homesteading to be a good alternative to other available occupations. Through obtaining land, widows could provide for their families while retaining independence and control of their own financial and social affairs. In addition, women who lost their husbands during the homesteading process could have the land title transferred to their name and continue to farm or ranch.¹⁰² Although some women lost their homesteads either as a result of failure to “prove up” or through marriage, other women retained control of their homesteads and some continued to live on their homesteads, either alone or with their husbands or children, for most of their lives.¹⁰³ Although there is no comprehensive study of women homesteaders for the entire Great Plains and Prairie regions, the cumulative information presented by Jensen, Patterson-Black, and Lindgren provides ample scholarly evidence that women chose to procure their own homesteads and exhibited the will to live on western farms and ranches, even when males were absent.

In some cases land-owning women faced public stigma, although this does not appear to have been as rampant as one might expect. Sheryll Patterson- Black suggests that two land owning women were lynched although in both cases there was some sort of

criminal mischief in which the women were allegedly accused. One, Elizabeth Taylor, of Nebraska, was lynched after she was accused of hiring a young man (who was never found) to shoot some men who had been taking timber from her claim. The other woman Ella Watson of Wyoming was hanged following a dispute with local cowboys.¹⁰⁴ While other women may in some cases have faced some public stigma for their land ownership, western society appears to have adapted to the notion that women could act as independent landowners.

There is some primary source evidence of women who longed to own their own private piece of the West. We can observe one example of two female property owners in the Lida White Collection of the Western History Archives at the University of Oklahoma. Miss Lida White of Oklahoma wrote a series of letters to a real estate agent regarding the purchase of a significant section of land during the early twentieth century. Miss White taught school in Wyoming but she and her sister bought several pieces of land near their childhood home in Oklahoma with the intent of returning to farm the land.¹⁰⁵ Another western woman decided to buy a farm near her brother's after a visit to Kansas. She wrote of her frustration at realizing that water was initially impossible to get on her piece of land but refused to vacate the area. Instead she hired a "water witch" and men to dig a sixty-five foot well.¹⁰⁶ Women who wanted to own a piece of the red earth required both determination and stamina, but both the White sisters and other women landowners appear to have been satisfied and pleased with their investment in the West.

Land ownership could provide both a tie to the land as well as much needed financial stability.

Although their experiences in the West were varied, as a whole many western women found the region to be a land of opportunity. Such women could enjoy both the physical landscape of the West and the emotional space that western life provided. The joys of a gallop across the open plains and the thrilling danger of a coiled rattlesnake, provided women with opportunities to act independent of husbands or other family members. Women could and did take action to help their families and themselves to excel in the rugged West. In some cases women enjoyed the West so much that they were willing to work to acquire their own piece of the earth. In only very limited cases did women have excessively negative perceptions of western life and almost none found that the West ruined their lives. Western women perceived the West to be both a place of physical beauty and freedom from rigid gender roles and restrictions. In the West women found a place of great hardship, great beauty, and great opportunity.

CHAPTER III

GYPSY LOVE: WOMEN IN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

“Twas gypsy love a-calling you that drew you to my tent;
And gypsy love will follow you wherever your steps are
bent,
But O, my love, my path is free-over the hill and
down-
While yours is ever the old road-the prim straight road
to town.”¹⁰⁷

In nineteenth century America women were most often defined by their marital relationships and by their husband's social standing. Similarly in historical study women have been examined largely in relation to the dominant males in their lives. One modern historian, Elizabeth Hampsten notes it has been assumed by historians that women are somehow not as “real” as their masculine counterparts and thus the realities of their lives are also perceived to be less important to the study of history.¹⁰⁸ Since women are so often defined and identified through their relationships with men by society, many scholars have ignored the question of whether or not women also defined themselves by their relationships to men. While father-daughter, brother-sister relationships are undoubtedly also of interest, the most easily accessible view of women's perceptions of themselves in relation to males comes from women's descriptions of their marital or romantic involvements. The writings of western women reveal relationships at all ends of the romantic spectrum; wives battered by violent and abusive men, to husbands who led

their wives into dangerous and in some cases criminal activities, to more positive marital relationships in which the wife enjoyed equal if not superior decision-making powers over her husband.

Just as the experience of life out West changed farmers and cowboys, it also provided their wives, sisters, and daughters with transformative experiences. For many women one of the first manifestations of their newly found independence can be observed in their marital relationships. Women who moved west began to define themselves and their marriages in new and different ways as a result of their experiences on the western frontier. Through the study of the diaries, letters, memoirs, and the works of fiction of western men and women one can both observe how westerners perceived marital bonds and the growing independence of women.

For many women, both in the West and in other parts of the country, marriage meant maltreatment and neglect. In some cases women wrote in anger about the treatment they received at the hands of neglectful and sometimes cruel husbands. Fannie Dunn Quain, one of the first female doctors in South Dakota, recorded the story of her own birth as she had been told about it by her mother. Her mother gave birth in a driving snowstorm with a blanket over her head in order to keep off the snowflakes coming through the walls of her poorly constructed home. Throughout the birth the husband and father was nowhere to be found. Nor, according to Quain, could he be relied upon in other circumstances. Despite her success as a physician, Fannie Dunn Quain also wrote bitterly of her own marriage, which ended when her husband left her for a younger

woman.¹⁰⁹ Quain's bitterness and anger at both her mother's marriage and her own are palpable to the modern reader. Her family's history of neglectful and unhappy marital relationships appears to have been a sadly common phenomenon in nineteenth century America.¹¹⁰ Although Fannie Dunn Quain's recollections are largely centered on the emotional pain she felt towards her husband and father, women involved in destructive relationships often faced physical dangers as well.

We can observe another example of a marriage gone wrong in the diary of Martha Farnsworth. Farnsworth's first marriage to Johnny Shaw was incredibly unhappy. Farnsworth entered the marriage with high hopes of marital bliss but within a few days her diary noted that Johnny was angry with her and that he had a terrible temper. The young bride continued to note arguments and vicious outbursts from Johnny in the following months and years.¹¹¹ Her unhappy marriage to Johnny Shaw was exacerbated by his ill health and the necessity for Martha to work outside their home to earn money. Martha wrote often that she longed to escape the marriage but could not abandon her fatally ill husband even after the death of their only child.¹¹² When Johnny's death finally freed her from her marital bonds, Farnsworth wrote, "Tonight I am a widow. I am free. My heart would cry out in very joy, because it is freed from a wretchedly miserable life. . ."¹¹³ For some women the only release from a poor marriage was a death, either their own or their husbands.

In addition to women who recorded their own poor marital experiences, other women wrote of the cruelty of their friend's and neighbor's husbands. A plethora of

letters to relatives back East contain references to husbands who drank constantly, beat their wives and children, and abandoned their families. In many cases the women expressed sympathy and outrage at the treatment of the females in question; however, there appeared to be little way of stopping the tide of abuse.¹¹⁴ One woman recalled an incident to a WPA interviewer. She told a story about a neighbor woman who nearly fell into her stove while she was giving birth. A Native American boy who worked for the family saved her life by running to a neighbor's home and fetching a woman to come to her aid. Throughout this process her husband sat in the yard of their home doing nothing and appeared to be totally disinterested in the condition of his wife or child.¹¹⁵ Although it would have been unusual for a male to assist in the birth of his children, it seems strange and cruel that he would have failed to seek help for his wife from a neighboring farm. In an interview with Lida White, an Oklahoma woman, Lila Lindsay, included an anecdote about a neighbor Emma Drew, who was beaten and thrown out of an upstairs window by her husband, later to die from exposure.¹¹⁶ Women married to uncaring or abusive husbands faced the danger of physical harm; although they recorded the circumstances of the abuse, there appeared to be little that other women could do to protect their friends and neighbors. According to Elizabeth Hampsten, even other males (to their credit) made comments regarding the poor treatment of frontier women by uncaring or brutish husbands. In some rare cases, males might intervene on behalf of a suffering woman.¹¹⁷ In most instances, however, social ostracism was the only weapon concerned friends and neighbors could wield against abusive men.¹¹⁸ Martha

Farnsworth's dairy contains several references to friends and neighbors who had unhappy unions. Several of these tales of woe include the information that the women in question left their husbands and in at least one case remarried someone else.¹¹⁹ Divorce and widowhood both presented escapes for western women trapped in bad marriages.

We can observe several other unhappy and destructive relationships in the memoirs of another western physician, Dr. Francis A. Long of Nebraska. Dr. Long recalled that the first country call he received as a young doctor was to treat a farmer's daughter who was apparently having what Dr. Long called "hysterical convulsions." Dr. Long blamed her illness on her recent marriage to a man he described as a brute.¹²⁰ Dr. Long also noted his visit to the home of a minister whose wife was hysterical. Dr. Long wrote that after questioning the minister, he admitted that he had knocked his wife down in an argument. The minister never paid for the doctor's visit although whether this was a result of his embarrassment or for a different reason, is not discussed by Dr. Long.¹²¹ In each of these cases Dr. Long attributed the poor health of the woman to her destructive relationship with a man.

In another instance, which Dr. Long or his publisher thankfully "saved" in print, Dr. Long wrote of his experiences at the death bed of a young German farmer. With the death of the farmer imminent, Dr. Long advised him to make a will. The young man wished to leave his homestead to his wife for the care of their children; however, his elderly father was concerned that the widow would remarry and disinherit the children. According to Dr. Long, the young wife responded:

“Have I not had troubles enough in my married life?. . . Have I not had trouble enough with one man? I want no more the rest of my life!. . . Take your property and do with it what you please! I can make my living. . . I have slaved here all these years and if it had not been for my work Johannes (the farmer) would not have anything today.”¹²²

Later, Long noted that the wife eventually remarried, taking as her new husband a hired man who had worked for her. The physician, however, fails to explore her reasons for remarriage. The reader can posit several possibilities.¹²³ The young wife may have simply been lonely, or she may have desired a father for her young children, or she may have needed assistance working her farm. It is also possible that her marriage represented a genuine love match-one of affection- fostered by the need for men and women to work together in close quarters to maintain a successful farm. Her choice of a hired man as opposed to another land owner or more prestigious male may also be interpreted as an attempt to shift the power in her new marriage more firmly in her own direction. Marrying a socially inferior male may have provided her with the ability to insist on certain behaviors or a balance of power more conducive for equal relations.¹²⁴

In works of fiction from western writers, there appear to be similarly negative depictions of married life. As a child of the West, Willa Cather was able to observe the nature of marriage and gender roles first hand and her works of fiction reflect the reality of their childhood experiences. In her famous novel *My Ántonia*, marriage is depicted as a supremely undesirable experience for women. Like many real western women, some of the married women in *My Ántonia* suffer at the hands of their husbands. There are multiple examples of women whose husbands are unfaithful causing their wives

significant emotional pain and social embarrassment. One slightly humorous example is “Crazy Mary” whose husband Ole Benson becomes obsessed with Lena Lingard. “Crazy Mary” threatens Lena Lingard with a knife and chases her across the prairies seeking vengeance for the loss of her husband. While Jim Burden, the narrator, is careful to point out that “Crazy Mary” had developed mental and emotional problems before this event, one cannot help but wonder how much her neglectful husband had to do with her mental problems. Another unhappy couple, the Cutters, argue constantly over money, family issues, and Mr. Cutter’s frequent affairs with the hired girls. In addition the title character Ántonia, who is pregnant, is abandoned by her fiancé. After the birth of her illegitimate child, Ántonia marries a local farmer who allows her to control their small farm. When the narrator, Jim Burden, visits her on her family’s farm, Ántonia appears happy and in control of herself and her family’s economic future. Like the German farmer’s wife discussed by Dr. Long, Ántonia appears to have concluded that marriage is more positive when the woman has some control over her husband.¹²⁵ In each of these relationships women suffer at the hands of cruel, neglectful, and unfaithful husbands. It appears that even in fiction western women often found “connubial bliss” to be an undesirable state of affairs (little if any bliss) unless one could exercise some control over one’s husband.

In addition to husbands who treated their wives badly, other women were led down dangerous and lawless roads by the men they loved. William Tilghman, a famous Oklahoma Marshall, recorded accounts of two women who became outlaws under the guidance of their male lovers in his recollections of life in Indian Territory during the late

1890s. According to Tilghman, Mrs. Jennie Winters, a 23 year old married woman ran off with Zip Wyatt, one of the most notorious outlaws in the Territory. Wyatt's partner also brought a woman, Buck-skin Mable, with him. The women visited stores under the pretense of getting supplies and looked to see if the store clerk was armed. If the clerk was unarmed Wyatt and Black would then rob the establishment. The group continued their crime spree for over a year before they were caught. The women were tried but not indicted and were released. This account indicates several things about marital relationships in the West.¹²⁶ Since Jennie Winters was willing to leave her husband to live on the run with a known outlaw, it seems unlikely that she was happy or satisfied with her marital relationship. Additionally, neither of the women was convicted of any crime despite their active role in planning and assisting in robberies. This may indicate that juries of the era were unwilling to prosecute women; however, it may also indicate that law enforcement officials recognized that women could be led astray by more powerful males.¹²⁷

Later in his career, Tilghman received a plea from a lady outlaw named Irma Risk who argued that she had been led astray by her stepfather and her lover. Risk believed that by explaining her situation Tilghman, who was at the time a well-respected Marshall, would be able to convince the judge to show her mercy. Risk wrote that her stepfather and later her lover had pushed her unwillingly into a criminal lifestyle. Risk described multiple attempts to remove herself from the criminal world her stepfather and her lover inhabited; however, she was unable to hide from the men and was pulled from the new

legal jobs and homes that she attempted to establish.¹²⁸ It is unclear what happened to Risk after she wrote Marshall Tilghman; however, the preservation of the letter in the Tilghman collection displays at the very least that Tilghman, or his wife Zoe, was interested in the account. The Tilghman Collection yields other stories about women led astray by husbands or lovers. In A.M. Morphew's "Early Days in the Cherokee Nation at Keystone and Tulsa," preserved in the collection we find another lady outlaw, Jennie Stevens, who under the influence of her husband stole horses in the Territory. Although Buck-skin Mable and Jennie Winters, escaped their outlaw days relatively intact, Jennie Stevens was shot and killed by her husband.¹²⁹ In each of these stories, we observe women who are led into a dangerous lifestyle by the men in their lives. It is clear that romantic relationships presented dangerous situations for women, whether they were dealing with alcoholism, neglect, or criminal lovers.

For the majority of the nineteenth century, marital relationships were modeled on the Cult of Domesticity or the Cult of True Womanhood.¹³⁰ According to this model, women were responsible for caring for children and the home, while men were responsible for working outside and acting as the economic support of the family. This model also required that women be subservient to the dominant males in their lives, first to their father and as they became adults to their husbands. Many of the women who recorded strained marriages as well as those who recorded the poor relationships of others, were victims of this model. The danger posed to women by the Cult of True Womanhood is clear to the modern reader and in time the danger became more obvious

to western women as well. The hardships of western life, as well as the wide open imaginative space of the West allowed western women to explore new models for their intimate relationships. Some of these women chose to forgo marriage and the Cult of True Womanhood entirely while others postponed marriage until a suitably open-minded male appeared. In addition those who married unwisely might still seek legal freedom from their husbands or find themselves free of controlling husbands through widowhood.

We can observe western uneasiness with traditional marital relationships in Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*. Lena Lingard, a pretty young girl who befriends and later has a brief romance with the narrator, Jim Burden, explains in no uncertain terms that married life does not appear to be beneficial to her. Lena states, "I've seen a great deal of married life and I don't care for it. I want to be so I can help my mother and the children at home, and not have to ask lief of anybody."¹³¹ She later clarifies her position and informs Jim that once men become husbands, they begin enforcing rules and regulations on their wives. For Lena this loss of self and choice is absolutely unacceptable.¹³² Later in the book, Lena reveals that she believes her mother lost personal identity to the social identity of wife and mother. She tells her little brother, "It will please her for you to think about her name. Nobody ever calls her by it now."¹³³ Lena's mother and many of the other married women Cather presents have lost their personal identities. They have become wives and mothers and are not regarded as people in their own right. It is obvious to a contemporary reader why a bright young girl like Lena would seek to avoid this fate. In his description of summer evenings in the little town where he lived, Jim states, "the

married people sat like images on their front porches, and the boys and girls tramped and tramped the board sidewalks.”¹³⁴ Once someone is married it appears that one becomes an image of a previous self. The unmarried children are depicted as vibrant and active while the married couples have lost their vitality. Jim also explains that the young men of the town intended to marry young ladies from the same town and live in “a brand-new little house with the best chairs that must not be sat upon, and hand painted china that must not be used.”¹³⁵ This overly formal vision of married life is hardly a positive one. Marriage in the perception of western fiction writers appears to be a wholly undesirable state of being because it limits both men and women to strict gender roles. As the sensitive child of a western woman, Cather had firsthand experience with these rigid gender roles and saw the damage that these imposed upon her mother and their neighbors. This almost entirely negative view of marriage was shared by other westerners, both male and female.¹³⁶ Traditional marriages as governed by the Cult of True Womanhood appear to be detrimental and undesirable to many western women.

Historian Michele J. Nacy notes that the ideology of true womanhood popular in the eastern homes of many women was particularly ill-suited to the hardships of life on the western frontier. Nacy argues that the rugged nature of life in the West forced women to abandon the ideals of true womanhood and adopt more realistic definitions of women’s roles.¹³⁷ Similarly Lillian Schlissel observed that emigration produced dislocation in women’s work roles and in their social expectations. These changes tended to affect women more than men and created an opportunity for women to break out of traditional

female roles in their intimate relationships.¹³⁸ According to Elizabeth Hampsten, even in relationships with non-abusive husbands, women recorded frustration with their spouses. Some women expressed annoyance with their husband's jobs, or lack thereof, or with their lack of interest in assisting their wives with household work.¹³⁹ With this ideology of true womanhood inaccessible and ineffective in dividing labor on western farms women were able to adopt and adapt to new visions of themselves as independent decision makers within their intimate relationships.

One of the most effective occasions for a woman to break out of the Cult of True Womanhood was the death of her husband. Many western widows appear to have been surprisingly pleased at their husband's demise and many turned previous unsuccessful ventures into flourishing investments. Alberta Constant recorded the experiences of several female friends and neighbors from her hometown in Oklahoma. Her interviews include a number of references to women who turned unsuccessful farms and businesses into profitable investments after their husband's deaths granted them financial control.¹⁴⁰ One western widow whose husband died in Indian Territory continued to run their cotton farm after his death with the help of her daughters. She was successful enough in this enterprise to send her children to school at least some of the time, a luxury many western children did without.¹⁴¹ Another WPA interviewee, recalled a neighbor, Julia Nevins, who ran a successful ferry service after her husband died in a drunken brawl.¹⁴² Widowhood appears to have allowed western women to take financial control of their lives which proved to be profitable for women and their children.

Historians also relate several examples of western women who parlayed the tragedy of widowhood into financial and personal success. Historian, Mary Neth presents an interview with a North Dakota woman who expressed her frustration with her late husband's insistence on rigid gender roles. When his death left her with a farm to run and several young children to provide for she spoke of her life with much greater pleasure and appeared to be happy with her life despite the various hardships of supporting herself and her small family alone.¹⁴³ In addition, Elizabeth Hampsten relates the tale of one woman who wrote of her abusive husband's funeral taking place on a Tuesday, but seemed to be much more emotionally invested in the installation of a new glass window the next day.¹⁴⁴ For many western women, therefore widowhood presented an opportunity to take control of economic affairs in their households and presented the means for personal satisfaction they had found their marital relationships lacked.

We also observe men and women who appear happier apart in works of fiction by western novels such as Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*. Couples like Jim's grandparents exist in a sort of frozen state and interact rarely if at all. They, and other spouses such as Mr. and Mrs. Gardener, appear to be happiest when leading totally separate and autonomous lives. In one memorable couple from the novel, Mrs. Gardener is depicted as playing a more masculine role than her husband. She is responsible for running the family's hotel and is clearly the decision maker. Mrs. Gardiner, and indeed Mr. Gardiner, appear as some of the only happy well-adjusted individuals in the novel.¹⁴⁵ Cather appears to be insinuating that a woman can be happy in her marriage only if her husband is not

involved in her daily life. Again, for western women, sources suggest that marital life is best enjoyed when women have the freedom to make decisions for themselves and their families.

While some women had to await their husband's death's in order to enact change in their intimate relationships, some western women were able to assume control of their marital and familial relationships through separation from their husbands. One woman wrote to her husband who had gone to California to pan for gold that if he did not come home soon she would divorce him. She added that she did not believe her husband could live without her (even though at the time it appears that he was doing so).¹⁴⁶ Although it is possible that this was mere bravado on the part of a disgruntled wife, it appears that at least some women were not particularly disturbed at the thought that they might find themselves husbandless if the man in question was unwilling to meet their needs. Initially one woman moved to Oklahoma with her husband but he determined that the family would return to Kansas after a short period. She returned to Kansas but shortly thereafter they divorced and the woman left for Oklahoma to operate a successful boarding house.¹⁴⁷ Western life allowed women to gain legal control of their own lives through a variety of means in the event that one's husband proved unwilling to engage in the kind of behavior women preferred and often may have needed.

The inherent problems with the Cult of True Womanhood in the West led other women to postpone marriage or engage in other types of intimate relationships. Historian, H. Elaine Lindgren also presents several women who appeared to be reluctant to marry,

especially if they believed that marriage would force them to give up their homesteads. One woman noted that her future husband pursued the marriage vigorously all through the winter and brought an engagement ring with him to her homestead when he visited in the Spring. She remembered that she was unsure about marriage because she was committed to homesteading and working her claim consumed most of her time. This does not appear to have been uncommon for many women, as Lindgren notes. Most single women in the Dakotas married for the first time at twenty-seven while many women in the general population of the United States married at the age of twenty-two. Interestingly some women homesteaders refused to marry until after their claims were proved up.¹⁴⁸ Choosing instead to support themselves independently, young women could delay marriage until a suitable male came along.

Western women also expressed ambivalence or reluctance to marry and submit themselves to husbands. Jan Isabel Fortune, the Texas poet whose poem appears in the opening of this chapter, wrote several poems expressing her affection for her lover but also wrote that they appeared to be on different life paths. At least in her poems, Fortune refused to abandon her hopes and dreams to marry or live with the lover who intended to travel down the “straight road to town.”¹⁴⁹ One woman homesteader, Effie Vivian Smith wrote about her attendance at a literary group and noted that she was excited to attend the next week’s conversation, entitled “Is Marriage a Failure?” That North Dakota pioneers were interested in putting such a question up for debate displays the lengths to which westerners were willing to question traditional gender roles. Effie noted with

apprehension that she had no idea what to say--displaying the ambivalence with which some women viewed the marital institution and the Cult of True Womanhood.¹⁵⁰ Other women chose to delay marriage indefinitely and continued to support themselves, either through their homesteads or through another profession.¹⁵¹ The ability to be economically independent through homesteading or other professions provided women with the ability to postpone marriage and thus select a suitable husband over an extended period of contact or to choose not to marry at all.

Mollie Dorsey Sanford's diary contains several interesting comments regarding her reluctance to marry anyone but the "right" man. Sanford had a number of suitors, as a young attractive woman in Nebraska, but she maintained that she would only marry a "good sensible fellow" who would get to know her before proposing marriage. Sanford was in no hurry to marry and she regularly questioned, at least in her diary, whether she should marry at all or if the state of spinsterhood was perhaps a better option. She wrote, "If I live to be an old maid, I will be one of the good kind that is a friend to everybody and everbody loves. If I ever do marry it will be someone I love very, very, very much. . ." ¹⁵² When Sanford met the right man, she investigated him thoroughly. It was clear she believed herself to be the one in control of the nature of their relationship.¹⁵³ Her long waiting appears to have paid off and she and By Sanford enjoyed a long and apparently happy life together first in Nebraska and later in Colorado.

Another woman, from Kansas, Martha Farnsworth, recorded a similar view of marriage. Farnsworth enjoyed a variety of different romantic relationships in nineteenth

century Kansas, including several engagements. When she finally married, she believed that Johnny Shaw would be an excellent husband and that he was the best of her suitors.¹⁵⁴ Shaw proved to be a disappointing husband, he was often ill and also drank to excess. Martha was required to support her small family as a result of Johnny's poor health. He appears to have been profoundly ungrateful for her support and care during their marriage, at least from Martha's perspective. She wrote on several occasions that she longed to divorce him but was unwilling to leave him to a certain death without her care. When Shaw finally died, Martha was determined to support herself and to avoid marriage at all costs.¹⁵⁵ It took Fred Farnsworth, who had known Martha since her marriage, a number of months to convince her that he would make her an ideal second husband. Martha picked the right man the second time around and her marriage to Farnsworth proved to be happy and successful. Martha was active in a variety of different political and religious organizations throughout her marriage while Fred appeared to support her interests.¹⁵⁶ In both the cases of Martha Farnsworth and Mollie Dorsey Sanford, it appears that waiting and analyzing one's potential marital partners resulted in a more positive marital relationship.

In addition to traditional relationships with husbands, western women also appear to have been interested in establishing sexual relationships with men without formal commitments. One early twentieth century young woman wrote a brief but clearly happy entry in her diary explaining how a young man she was in love with had slept in the same room with her and joined her in bed shortly before morning. Her cryptic entry does not

clarify what may have occurred between them that morning; however, the reader can surmise what activity a young couple might engage in under the covers.¹⁵⁷ Other women, including many single women wrote to friends and relatives seeking methods of contraception. These women wanted desperately to be able to control their own bodies and in some cases appear to have been successful passing along valuable, and illegal, information regarding birth control.¹⁵⁸ Faye Cashatt Lewis, a South Dakotan woman recalled that one of her neighbors had an illegitimate daughter that visited her mother and her new husband during the summers. Lewis did not appear to indicate that this type of activity was abnormal and her tone is similar to many of her other recollections about the various neighbors who lived nearby.¹⁵⁹ Western women established intimate relationships with men outside the institution of marriage and thus outside the influence of the Cult of True Womanhood. While women chose to marry and establish families, their willingness to engage in premarital relationships, displays their view of themselves as independent individuals.

Dr. Francis Long noted that he was frequently visited by young unmarried couples seeking some type of contraception or abortion. Long noted that he counseled the couples in question to marry and have the child rather than end the pregnancy. Although Long appears to have been relatively successful in his attempt to enforce traditional sexual norms, at least one young woman resisted both his efforts and the efforts of her family until she received the required assurances regarding the nature of their relationship from the young man in question.¹⁶⁰ Some westerners, like Dr. Long,

encouraged western women to engage in traditional forms of intimate relationships, such as marriage; however, it is clear that western women were interested in a variety of different intimate relationship models beyond marriage—many “ahead of their time.”

For some women, however, life in the West appears to have encouraged less rigid gender roles and work sharing. Joanna Stratton notes that the nature of life on the frontier required familial cooperation and thus men and women found themselves on far more equal footing than they were likely to have had in other parts of America. Wives assisted their husbands with traditionally masculine chores like field work, while men assisted their wives with household chores on occasion.¹⁶¹ This lack of gender division in labor also represents the breakdown of the Cult of True Womanhood. Western families found that in order to run successful agricultural operations, men and women needed to share work and decision making. It also appears that women were more satisfied with their relationships when they were able to share work and make decisions with their husbands. In an interview with a North Dakota farm wife, Mary Neth found that one woman expressed greater satisfaction about her experiences because she shared decisions acquiring in the process power as she worked equally with her husband. Comparison with other women provides ample examples of those who were unhappy with their husband’s enforcement of rigid gender roles and work divisions.¹⁶² Other women insisted that they and their male family members were equals in the homesteading process and shared workloads equally.¹⁶³ Those who shared in decision making and labor were able to break

out of the destructive Cult of True Womanhood and achieve greater satisfaction with their marital relationships.

As stated above, other women were dissatisfied with having an equal relationship with their husbands and sought to take complete control of the family's activities. A Kansas woman who grew up there observed that in her family her mother was in charge of the family's living conditions. She made all decisions concerning their home's location. The Kansan recalled, "Men were supposed to run their own homes in those days, but not men who married my mother. She was... what is called a captain."¹⁶⁴ In one interview, Lila Lindsay told Lida White that her neighbor Susan Perramon had sued for legal guardianship of her husband George because of his poor business decisions. Lindsay does not indicate whether Susan was successful in her law suit; however, the fact that she sued in the first place, displays an independence and competence that appears prevalent in many other western women.¹⁶⁵ Jennie Balls Baldwin Roberts, a North Dakota woman became well known in Fargo for her good business sense. Although her original investment was a homestead in her husband's name, numerous subsequent deeds referred to the owner as "Mrs. Roberts and spouse."¹⁶⁶ Although we don't know how Mr. Roberts reacted to his wife's investments, the placing of Mrs. Roberts as the dominant party in official land records displays the willingness of westerners to allow women into leadership roles even when they had living husbands. In 1910 a woman wrote in the contributions section of the magazine *The Farmer's Wife*, "If your husband slaps you, you slap him back...Demand money and keep asking until you get in. . . Keep on being

mean until he changes, it might take a year to break him.”¹⁶⁷ Whether or not other women followed this advice, it is clear that western women were able to use a variety of means to gain decision making power and independence from their husbands.

The people who went West in the late nineteenth century and their children appear to have undergone significant changes as a result of their experiences. Western women abandoned the ideology of true womanhood and began to adopt new roles as independent women. They increasingly expressed dissatisfaction with their marital relationships and in some cases chose to postpone or forgo marriage altogether. Despite these changes other women managed to shift their marital relationships toward greater equality and thus they enjoyed successful and happy marriages. Through the study of the letters, diaries, memoirs, and works of fiction by western men and women one may observe the failures and triumphs of western marriages.

CHAPTER IV

FULL OF GRACE: WOMEN AT WORK

“You pass me every little while
‘Mrs. Glower....’-
A creature whom you so despise-
But ‘tis not I-
The thing you scathe with loathing eyes
Is poverty...
My real self you do not know...
If life were all a summer sea
Then would my face
An image fair and placid be
And full of grace.”¹⁶⁸

Western women have been defined by generations of historians and lay people through their work on family owned ranches and farms. Many historians present women as unpaid and overworked laborers worn down by the hardships of life in the West. There is evidence that some women did find their work to be backbreaking drudgery; however, other western women recorded their belief in the value of their work and received significant financial returns for their hard labor. According to historian, Joan Jensen, eastern farmer’s wives helped keep family farms afloat through the sale of butter or eggs.¹⁶⁹ While western women were less likely to sell butter or eggs, they found a variety of different means to enhance their fortunes. Other western women chose to forgo traditional marriages, at least temporarily, in order to gain financial independence on their own. Work for western women presented ways to express oneself and in some cases gain

public recognition.¹⁷⁰ From midwifery to homesteading, western women were able to enter the work force and reap the rewards. In addition to entering the work place, western women moved into the public sphere through political activism in local Farmer's Alliances. Whatever the avenue to financial independence and public activity, women in the West transcended rigid gender roles and enjoyed significant successes in the waning years of the nineteenth century.

Jennie Harris Oliver,¹⁷¹ an Oklahoman poet and author explores one possible work avenue for western women in her short story "It Is Morning." This story centers around a mother (and secret adventurer) Rachel Nash. Although Oliver presents Mrs. Nash as tired and worn down living with her husband and teenage son on an Oklahoma farm, Rachel Nash is transformed in the reader's eyes into a decisive and creative woman. The transformation begins when Rachel Nash lies to her husband about failing to receive an inheritance check in the mail. Her husband, Ira, intended to use the inheritance to pay some of the family farm's rising debts but Rachel had instead given it to her daughter, Cynthia, to buy a wedding dress and furnishings for her new home. In an effort to recoup the money she gave to her daughter and to provide her son with books and clothes for school, Rachel plants dahlias behind her home. She tends the dahlias in secret throughout the long hot summer and into the fall until finally they are ready to be cut and sold to a local university. The funds from the dahlias allow Rachel Nash to send her son into town with enough money for books and a new set of clothes as well as a surplus to pay the family's debts on the cotton farm; the original inheritance check was intended for

this purpose.¹⁷² This story, although shorter in length than those addressed in the preceding chapters, provides ample evidence that women's work could provide women with opportunities for independence, self determination, and displays a will to make decisions.

"It Is Morning" reveals a number of issues regarding women's work in the West. Rachel Nash's motivation for her lengthy tending of the dahlias is her love for her children and her wish that they have opportunities for luxuries such as education and pretty things that the family's poverty denied her. Her secrecy in planting and caring for the dahlias reveals her need for independence from her husband who continuously hounds her about the whereabouts of the vanished inheritance check. For Rachel Nash marriage is in some ways unbearably confining. Oliver informs the reader, "One never can tell about mothers. Rachel Nash-- she who had been Rachel Culpepper-- was at heart a gay adventurer. Ira (husband) was impatient with anything he thought 'nonsense'; she had had her lesson with him."¹⁷³ Working with the land, the red earth, allows Rachel Nash to regain control of her life. Oliver notes that Rachel was excited by the prospect of getting outside of her home and working on something of her own. This experience gives Rachel Nash a sense of ownership and achievement. Oliver poignantly writes, "Wild earth is a friend; turned earth is a revelation. Squeeze the waiting soil in your hands; sift it through your fingers. After its eager sun and dew, the soul of its dead grasses and the persistence of its blind, groping atoms have soaked through your palms, comes a strange, new courage precious and indescribable."¹⁷⁴ As a result of her careful and dedicated

tending, the dahlias bloom in large numbers and Rachel Nash instructs her teenage son, Joie, that he will collect the money for the dahlias, 25 cents for each bloom, and buy himself a new school suit and books and stay in town with his sister to attend school. Through her hard work, Rachel Nash provides her children with the necessities to start a better life and gains independence from the financial control of her husband. Just like Rachel Nash, real western women also found work that created opportunities for financial success and independent decision making.

The vast majority of western women were employed either working on land owned by their family members or that they owned themselves. While some women were confined to their homes by children, the requirements of the family, or husbands seeking to maintain traditional gender norms, other women were active participants in raising crops and livestock. Women worked outside their homes with their husbands and fathers helping to harvest crops and do other chores on frontier homesteads. Mary Neth notes that in her interviews with women in Wisconsin, North Dakota, and Iowa most women reported working outside either in the fields or the barnyards.¹⁷⁵ Several female WPA interviewees also informed interviewers that they and their female relatives and neighbors were often called upon to work in the fields alongside male relatives.¹⁷⁶ Some women recalled enjoying their labor; for example, one woman wrote that she preferred helping her father with the crops while her younger sisters helped her mother inside. This type of arrangement appears to have been quite common as other women mentioned similar experiences. One referred to herself as, “one of her father's boys” and noted that

she was given her own pony to watch the family's livestock and to ensure that all fences were in good repair. She too preferred riding the fence line to other more traditionally feminine work. Yet another woman revealed that she and her sisters were in charge of doing all the family's hunting because the patriarch was often too ill to do so himself. She recalled her experiences with pleasure remembering that she saw and did many thrilling and exciting things as a result of her ability to venture outside of her home and also the traditional female role.¹⁷⁷ In many different capacities, women were an integral piece in the economic puzzle of success for many western farms and ranches.

Other women had the task of transporting goods from family farms to markets or railroad towns. In one interview, a pioneer woman recalled that she with a neighbor's wife, was responsible for taking the two families' crops to sell on a nearby Indian reservation. While the interviewee remembered that she was on the journey, her friend always seemed to know what to do when something went wrong, be it with the wagon or the ponies. Apparently, however, she still enjoyed their periodic outings.¹⁷⁸ One widow recalled she continued to farm cotton and sewed for others to support herself and her four children. Forced to haul the cotton to local towns, she traded it for onions, sweet potatoes and other food to feed her family.¹⁷⁹ Women played active roles to make western farms and ranches financially successful; without their work and determination, many homesteads throughout the region would have failed.

In addition to work on land owned by a neighbors, friends, or family members, other women homesteaded and worked their own land. These independent and rugged

women were helped with farm or ranch work by male family members or hired help; however, in other cases women, often friends or sisters, homesteaded on adjacent pieces of land and assisted one another with the labor-intensive farm and ranch work. According to H. Elaine Lindgren, in the Dakotas, at least, women homesteaders were far more likely to manage their own homesteads than have a male friend or family member do so.¹⁸⁰ One pair of sisters, for example, shared chores on their adjoining homesteads, spent nights together, and alternated between claim shacks in which they slept.¹⁸¹ Another group of women, two sisters and a cousin were unable to find help to build barns on their claims. But nevertheless, they worked together to build barns on each other's claims.¹⁸² Another widow herded cattle while her daughter tended the family's dry goods store. It was difficult to make ends meet, she recalled, but she was apparently able to feed and house her children despite hardships.¹⁸³ With the example of female homesteaders, we see the extent to which western women were able to gain control of their personal fortunes. In turn, women homesteaders who came to own and manage their land independent of male influence, were able to gain financial and social independence. These rugged and resourceful women were testimonies to the self-reliance far removed from the cultural definition of the "women's sphere."

For some women who wished to postpone marriage or for those who rejected traditional marriages, the variety of jobs available to women in the West allowed them to support themselves beyond the pale of patriarchy. Teaching was one of the most common jobs for nineteenth-century women who worked outside the home.¹⁸⁴ Some

teachers were educated in regional colleges and universities and often sought teaching as means to supplement their incomes. Although difficult, these positions gave women an opportunity to earn money and to gain experience for themselves. Other women, some old and some young, were hired to teach school based on their ability to read and write.

Johanna Kildahl, a fifteen year old accepted a position to teach five students but had to acquire a certificate from the local government. The school superintendent was initially reluctant to give her the job; however, Kildahl refused to leave his office until he gave her the certificate. Upon obtaining her certificate, Kildahl boarded the train to the town nearest her home and then walked the remaining eighteen miles in the dark.

Although Kildahl was only able to maintain her position for a few weeks before she had to return home to nurse her ill mother, she later attended the University of North Dakota paying her tuition by teaching school.¹⁸⁵ Another woman noted in an interview that she was able to procure a position teaching piano to Native Americans in a Methodist School for Girls established in Oklahoma. She remembered that nearly all of the other teachers were also female. In addition, the former teacher noted that she and her students were able to spend evenings outside walking around town.¹⁸⁶ Although the indoctrination of Native Americans is not held in high regard by the modern reader, for these young women teaching in a boarding school for Natives allowed them to gain financial independence while enjoying freedom for leisure pursuits.

Teaching also provided a “space” for women to become community leaders and to influence the youth of the West. Dr. Francis Long of Nebraska recalled with

admiration that a local school teacher, Minnie Freeman, then in her teens, led her seventeen students to safety during a tornado. According to Dr. Long, Miss Freeman was widely praised for her courage as were other teachers in the area who attempted to keep students safe during frequent storms and tornadoes.¹⁸⁷ One teacher remembered that the town's social life revolved around the school and thus as an instructor she held a superior social position. She also observed that many of the female teachers climbed the social ladder by marrying into prestigious local families.¹⁸⁸ Women occasionally used their experience as teachers to gain other more prestigious positions. One teacher, for example, accepted a position as a Court Clerk in Ada, Oklahoma, after her marriage led her to abandon teaching.¹⁸⁹ For women, teaching was clearly a field in which they would be in demand and thus socially important in the local community; in short, it was an acceptable vocation for women who remained in the accepted "sphere."

Some teachers were able to parlay their financial independence into land ownership and prosperity. Lida White and her sister, Nancy, both taught school in the early 1900s in Wyoming, Illinois, and Oklahoma, but they bought land and rental properties in Montana and Oklahoma. The White sisters, with the help of real estate agents, also loaned money to potential home buyers and do not appear to have been at all demure in their requests for demanding payment of interest. These enterprising sisters were able to obtain land, including a homestead in Montana, and assume control of their financial affairs.¹⁹⁰ H. Elaine Lindgren's book, *Land in Her Own Name: Women as Homesteaders in North Dakota*, also contains several references to women who enhanced

their finances through combining teaching and homesteading. Sara Isaacson became a teacher in North Dakota, where pay was higher than in her hometown in Wisconsin. More than a teacher, she also filed a claim on land near that of her brother. She rented him the land for grazing and later sold it to local ranchers, gaining a return on her investment.¹⁹¹ It appears that other women, too, sold their land to non-relatives and used the money for other ventures and investments, perhaps opening a school or attending college.¹⁹² Land ownership helped pave the way for women to maintain or increase their financial independence as they entered the public sphere.

Although women were often confined to traditional, acceptable jobs, some were able to gain high levels of education and establish themselves in other prestigious careers. In the recollections of Dr. Francis Long, one may observe several female physicians who appear to have been well regarded professionally. One of these women doctors, Suzette LaFlesche, was mixed race, she had descended from an Omaha chief. Despite the probable social stigma of her racial and gender status, LaFlesche graduated from medical school with honors and became the tribal physician for the Omaha Indians. In addition to her medical practice, she succeeded in raising money to build a hospital for the use of the tribe and became a member of the Nebraska State Medical Association. Like LaFlesche, Phebe Oliver, acted as the Otoe Indian Agency physician for a number of years. As the only doctor in the county, Oliver reportedly visited the ill on horseback riding to homesteads as far as one hundred miles away from her home. Dr. Long maintained that Oliver was considered to be a competent practitioner and a good surgeon. In Kansas in the

spring of 1920, Martha Farnsworth and her Good Government Club recorded their interest in an article about the validity and effectiveness of female physicians. Farnsworth recorded their discussion and her approval of the 82 year old member, Mrs. Burlingame, who introduced the article to the group.¹⁹³ Western women often gained local prestige through their work as physicians, transcending the boundaries of gender and sometimes race that could have thwarted them professionally.

Still other western women entered the medical field through additional means, as doctor's assistants or midwifery. Maggie Long, the wife of the aforementioned Dr. Long, recalled that on one occasion her duties as her husband's assistant required her to contain a mentally unstable man in her husband's office until her husband arrived home. The sheriff of the town, according to Mrs. Long, simply marched the man into the office and ordered her to keep him there until the doctor could evaluate the prisoner-patient. Although she was surprised by the Sheriff's request, the doctor's wife successfully kept the erratic and possibly dangerous man in the doctor's office until her husband could determine his fate.¹⁹⁴ Other women entered the acceptable medical field as midwives. A woman, interviewed in the 1930s as part of the WPA project, informed the interviewer that her grandmother learned to be a midwife after her family's slaves were freed at the end of the Civil War, "for she had never learned to do anything useful in her life but look pretty, and she felt she must be useful now since the family was poor and had no slaves." Although she had never worked hard before, the woman reported that her grandmother was a highly successful midwife. She would climb onto a horse and ride more than one

hundred miles to deliver a baby. Despite primitive conditions, she apparently never lost a child or a mother during the twenty years she actively worked as a midwife.¹⁹⁵ Women enjoyed significant successes working as medical professionals in the West and went far beyond the constraints of the myth of “true womanhood.”

In addition to medical work, Faye Cashatt Lewis described the presence of female preachers who traveled throughout South Dakota and other parts of the West during the early 1900s. Lewis’s family housed two of these women during their stay and assisted them in gathering an audience for services. These women appear to have been fully employed in the business of preaching with no other income for support. They were well dressed, she recalled, and believed they must have been prosperous.¹⁹⁶ Although it is difficult to determine whether Lewis was correct in her assumptions about the financial affairs of these two women, her mention of them reveals that women looked to fields of employment beyond marriage and homemaking. Lewis’s experience of women acting in place of male preachers was shared by one Oklahoma woman who recalled in an interview that the Sunday school teacher, Mrs. Moore, performed at funeral services for her little sister when the minister was unavailable. Another woman employed on an Indian reservation held religious services and performed funerals for Native Americans whenever her employers, a missionary couple, were engaged in revivals away.¹⁹⁷ Women’s employment in a traditionally male-dominated field, working as religious officials, provides evidence of additional economic avenues available to working women in the West.

Women who possessed seamstress skills entered the service industry and found employment in the fields, or as cooks, domestic servants, and landlords. Still another somewhat common occupation for women who needed to support themselves was tending a boarding house. After her husband died, one inventive woman chose to move to Altus, Oklahoma, where she became the proprietor of a hotel. She told her interviewer with pride that she was able to provide room and board for five dollars and a “dandy” meal for twenty-five cents.¹⁹⁸ Women opened their own shops, served as cooks for railroad workers, worked as hired farm laborers, and washed and sewed for neighbors. Postmasters and journalists were open to women who gained greater influence in the communities they chose to call home.¹⁹⁹ Some women, like Mollie Dorsey Sanford changed jobs several times dependent on the needs of the community in which they lived. Sanford began work as a dressmaker, then became a teacher, then went back to working as a seamstress. She also earned money publishing verses for the local newspaper.²⁰⁰ Women, like Mollie, were ready and able to take up a variety of different occupations in order to support themselves. One woman (a WPA interviewee) noted that her mother learned to be a seamstress to support herself and her family.²⁰¹ Another owned her loom and provided income for her family through a combination of carpet weaving and selling sorghum.²⁰² Weaving was the vocation for a woman who supplemented her family’s income while her husband was away on cattle drives. When she was unable to weave because of rheumatism, she taught her son the craft, who continued to supplement the family’s income in this way.²⁰³ The fact that her son was willing and able to assume her

job (women's work), displays the breakdown of rigid gender norms on the frontier.

Frontier women were often willing to work outside of traditional norms to keep their families financially afloat and also to provide them with much needed income.

The nature of life in the West allowed gender roles to become nebulous, easily moveable, and blurred. Women who homesteaded near one another, divided chores based upon their particular preference. Some enjoyed working outside doing the fieldwork while mother worked at household chores. Men sometimes were absent; when this occurred a pioneer woman and a neighbor woman would work together to make sure that both homesteads were plowed and fields planted. Women reported doing a variety of different chores associated with both males and females. Women homesteaders in the Dakotas referenced males who worked inside the home watching children and cooking while they worked in the fields. Field work or animal herding were common women's chores while men were often required to help with household tasks. Some men appear to have preferred traditionally female jobs such as cooking to outdoor chores. Other women reported working at traditional masculine jobs such as breaking horses and driving wagons laden with crops to market.²⁰⁴ But it was the western experience, far different than East Coast urban culture, that served to alter rigid gender roles; this flexibility agreed to by women and men allowed each to move between roles as needs or circumstance dictated.

In some cases women parlayed their skills into public life working in county courts, post offices, and joining a variety of different political groups. As women

expanded their influence outside of isolated farms and ranches in the West, many joined social or political groups. Some sought to be part of the Women's Christian Temperance Union while others joined organizations like the Nonpartisan League for farmers and the women's suffrage movement.²⁰⁵ Martha Farnsworth, a Kansas pioneer woman, was actively involved in the woman's suffrage movement in her local community from 1894 to 1920. She wrote that she was particularly impressed by Annie Diggs and the other talented women involved in the national woman suffrage movement. Farnsworth was also active in the Women's Christian Temperance Union and kept newspaper clippings about Carry Nation in her diary.²⁰⁶ Although Farnsworth does not address her motivations for becoming actively politically through the suffrage and temperance movements, a review of her diary proves enlightening. Farnsworth's first husband treated her cruelly and on at least a few occasions spent the wages she brought home on whiskey.²⁰⁷ In 1912 regarding the passage of woman's suffrage in Kansas, Farnsworth wrote, "A glorious day, and 'there is sunshine in my heart,' for while I went to bed last night a *slave*, I awoke this morning a *free woman*,"²⁰⁸ Although as she aged her personal interactions took up an increasing amount of her time. Farnsworth continued to take an interest in political affairs until her death in 1922. Farnsworth and women like her played an important role in the passage of woman's suffrage laws and in other political groups like the WCTU.

One of the most active political groups in the West during the late nineteenth century was the Farmer's Alliance. Although not every county in western states established a Farmer's Alliance chapter, many rural counties formed local Alliances in an

effort to improve the lot of farm families.²⁰⁹ The Farmer's Alliance organization generally encouraged women to join and become publicly active. Scholars remain divided about the role of women within the Farmer's Alliance and the level of participation appears to have varied between both local chapters and states. Jennifer J. Bess argues in her thesis that a substantial number of women joined local Texas Alliance chapters; however, she maintains that once they joined the Texas Alliance they were restricted to traditional female activities such as baking and planning social gatherings.²¹⁰ In contrast, MaryJo Wagner found that the women in the Alliance were active members who "spoke at meetings, edited newspapers, lobbied legislatures, published novels, wrote political tracts, were elected to Alliance positions, ran for local office and in short engaged in all political activity legally allowed them."²¹¹ Scholar Marion Knox Bartheleme, similarly concluded that the women who engaged in writing letters to Populist and Alliance newspapers in Texas broke the ground for future involvement in the public sphere.²¹² Unfortunately a complete history of women in the Farmer's Alliance in the West has not yet been published. The few scholars who have worked on this issue, have restricted themselves, in some ways necessarily, to the study of a particular chapter, or state Farmer's Alliance organization.

The lack of an overarching study of women within this movement makes it difficult to analyze women's participation; however, the work of other scholars in combination with the wonderfully accessible online membership records of the South Dakota Farmer's Alliance chapters allows us to draw some conclusions about western

women's participation in the political sphere of the Farmer's Alliance.²¹³ The online records of the South Dakota historical society offer historians the opportunity to analyze the membership of the Alliance over a period of four, or in some cases, five years in the 1890s during the height of the Alliance movement. The membership records include member's names, their local chapter name, which years, if any, they paid dues, and in the case of women their marital status.²¹⁴ A brief analysis of the membership records of a few of South Dakota Farmer's Alliance chapters yields interesting information about women's participation in the Alliance.

The Beadle County Alliance membership roster included over a period of four years roughly 1,000 members. Of these members approximately 112 were women.²¹⁵ Of these 112 women the vast majority, 83% appear to have been married. Many had a discernable spouse listed in the records although interestingly in most cases neither spouse paid dues from 1890-1894.²¹⁶ Analysis of the larger Brown County Farmer's Alliance reveals striking similarities. The Brown County Alliance records indicate that 1,500 people were members over a period of 5 years. This larger group included roughly 130 women, or about 8% of the membership. Of these women, like the Beadle County Alliance, the vast majority were married. Dues paying in the Brown County Alliance was sporadic; many women did not pay dues at all, but one woman Mrs. Sarah Hatch paid dues for three years while her husband Frederick Hatch paid dues for only one year. It seems likely, given that both spouses could afford to pay dues separately, that the Hatch's were among the more economically successful members of the Alliance.

Smaller Farmer's Alliances also recorded female membership. The Custer County Alliance listed only 48 members between 1890 and 1894. Only three women were included as members, each woman was married to an Alliance member; however, each paid dues for at least 1 year independent of her husband. One even smaller Alliance in Roberts County obtained only 11 members, including two women who shared the same last name and thus were likely related in some way. Interestingly enough only four listed members paid dues at all. The reason for the complete lack of payment of dues in Custer County is unclear and further study is needed to explain the dues paying system in both this county and the others surveyed.

Women's membership ranged from 6% to 18% in the counties surveyed. This range may indicate that some Alliances were more welcoming to women than others. Despite their low numbers in some Alliances, women in South Dakota were able to join the Alliance in each of the counties surveyed. Their role within the organization once they joined likely varied, as it appears activity varied in other states. Further study in this area as well as a more general study of women within the Alliances of the West is certainly needed; however, we can conclude that women in the West could join their local Farmer's Alliances and thus gain an opportunity to express themselves politically during a period of time when women were generally unable to enter the political sphere.²¹⁷

The women of the West engaged in a variety of economic activities and political activities during the transition between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. While

some women chose to enter traditional female fields such as teaching or cooking, other women gained high levels of education and entered the field of medicine. Western women played an integral role on ranches and farms throughout the region and many happily transcended traditional gender roles in an effort to obtain economic success. The variety of fields entered by western women share a common characteristic; women could become successful in any field and many women gained the economic independence that allowed them to make decisions for themselves. The integral nature of women's work transferred into the political sphere with the formation of the Farmer's Alliance. Women in western states joined local Farmer's Alliances and thus entered the public sphere in an attempt to improve the lives of their families, friends, and neighbors. Western women courageously marched past the rigid gender roles that contained women in other areas of country and gained economic success and entry into the public sphere.

CHAPTER V

LADIES OF THE REGIMENT: WESTERN WOMEN AND THE MILITARY EXPERIENCE

As has been discussed in previous chapters²¹⁸ many of the traditional images associated with the American West are male centered. The male centered vision of the West has proven particularly resilient in military history. Despite the prevalence of male centered images, women also populated the American West as the wives and daughters of soldiers and officers, as well as domestic servants. This final chapter addresses a specific group of women within the military, officers' wives. In keeping with the preceding portions of this work, I have chosen to focus on a group of Anglo women.²¹⁹ Despite some differences in experience, military officers' wives like civilians experienced the transformative nature of the West. Through the study of the diaries and memoirs of western military officers' wives we can observe both the circumstances of their lives in the West and their transformations into a strong and independent class of women.

The women who became officers' wives were as a group educated and middle class or upper class before their marriages. Michele J. Nacy argues that most military officers' wives would have perceived themselves as members of a higher class than the enlisted men their husbands commanded and notes that many of the letters of military officers' wives reflect their view of themselves as superior beings. Military officers' wives separated themselves socially from the other women of the regiment, laundresses

and enlisted men's wives.²²⁰ Anne Bruner Eales notes that for many of these elite, educated women, their arrival in the West was an assault both on their lifestyles and on their self-esteem.²²¹ This assault on their self-definitions appears to play into the transformations that these women experienced. Once their previous ideals were shed on the western trail, military officers' wives were able to adopt new visions of how their lives and marriages would or might evolve.

In some ways it is the background of these elite educated women that allows scholars to study them. Sandra L. Myres suggests that relatively few military officers' wives even had the opportunity to go west in the first place; however, this small group recorded and often published their accounts of military life in the region in greater numbers than one would expect. These women in many cases were able to write and record their experiences because they remained relatively free from the duties that made it difficult for western civilian women in the West to record their experiences. For example, Teresa Vielé's long-winded praise for life in Texas may have been nurtured by her lack of housekeeping duties. The Vielés had a cook, a scullion, and a slave to complete the household chores that many pioneer women struggled with in other parts of the West. In addition as a military officer, Vielé's husband did not participate in any type of farming or agricultural work, which meant Teresa Vielé had only the housework her servants could not do to occupy her time.²²² Other military wives' had servants, both female and enlisted males to help them with household duties. Additionally they were relatively well protected from Native American attacks unlike many civilian women. In

some cases, it appears that women became more aware of their assets and abilities in the West becoming more likely to step into the public sphere of publishing or public speaking. All of this contributed to the ability of military officers' wives to record and publish records of their experiences.²²³ Their higher level of education and social standing also helps explain why greater numbers of military wives were able to publish their memoirs and diaries themselves, rather than having later generations publish them as was more common for civilian women.

Many including Eveline Alexander expressed her polite disdain for the women her husband's fellow officers had married or for poor civilian women with whom they came into contact. Alexander revealed her high class background in her critique of the washerwomen and Mexican women her husband's fellow officers had married.²²⁴ Other military wives noted their own privileged background particularly in contrast to the more primitive style of living they experienced at western forts. Teresa Vielè noted that at the start of her journey as a newlywed to Texas, she had experienced little hardship or unpleasantness. Vielè concludes that this lack of experience led her to be overly optimistic about life as a military officer's wife on the western frontier.²²⁵ Some military officers' wives were undoubtedly uninspired by life in the West; however, for many of them such a life would prove to be a liberating experience.

In many cases the land, or terrain itself inspired military wives to long for increased individual freedom.²²⁶ In the beginning of her memoirs, Alice Blackwood Baldwin wrote of her first sight of a band of wild horses and noted how free and wild the

horses appeared in the distance. She also found visions of freedom in the landscape. Baldwin wrote, “we journey westward-ever westward-with thoughts of the land of Gold ever before us, and speculating as to what the outcome of our adventures was (*sic*) to be.”²²⁷ Officers’ wives were often able to experience the great outdoors in ways that their eastern counterparts were totally unable to imagine. Active young officers’ wives wrote of their avid interest in outdoor life and appear to have spent a significant portion of each day exploring the land around them.²²⁸ The freedom to ride across the open plains figures greatly in the new ideas that military officers’ wives began to adopt. Historian, Michele Nancy states,

“If frontier Army life provided officers’ wives with privations, it also provided them with rare opportunities for physical and personal freedoms... For example, the opportunity to ride horses over wide-open plains, to hunt with the troops, and to participate in camping trips provided officers’ wives with a rare enjoyment of what they saw as an almost complete freedom...”²²⁹

This freedom allowed women to observe the land about them and develop their own visions of the West.

To ride across the open plains of the West undoubtedly affected military wives’ visions of themselves as free and independent beings. The letters and diaries of officers’ wives often contain references to the pleasure they took from their ability to mount a horse and ride out on the land surrounding western forts.²³⁰ Alice Baldwin recalled that she and the other officers’ wives often enjoyed horseback rides outside the fort to nearby springs and rivers.²³¹ Other military officers’ wives also wrote of their interest in riding and seeing the country. Teresa Vielè noted that she and her husband often rode in the area

between the garrison and a local ranch at twilight.²³² Cavalry wife Eveline Alexander appears to have had a particularly close relationship with her horse, Zaidee, who was brought with the Alexanders as they moved across the western frontier. Alexander regularly wrote in her diary that she and Zaidee, accompanied by a soldier of the regiment, explored the area surrounding the trail and later the forts she called home.²³³ In addition, Alexander also related the tale of her hunting and killing a panther while on the trail with her husband. Alexander pursued the panther riding Zaidee until it climbed a tree and she shot it. Afterward, her husband insisted on calling her, "Eveline, the great panther killer of the prairie."²³⁴ Her pride in this event, as noted in her diary entry, was obvious as was her confidence in her own abilities as a rider and hunter. Ellen McGowan Biddle also wrote of her pleasure at daily rides. Biddle recalled that she was a daredevil rider as a young woman jumping fences in a manner that frightened her husband. She also wrote about her anger when her husband sold a horse that had nearly thrown her. Biddle argued that the horse had merely been cooped up in a pen too long and needed to be worked. When her husband realized that she intended to ride the mare again, he secretly sold the horse to a trader who was leaving the territory.²³⁵ The wide open spaces of the West allowed women to engage in a wide range of outdoor activities and allowed women to better experience the landscape of the West.

Many military wives became comfortable with life on the frontier, some to the extent that they wrote of their preference for western life. When her husband was recalled to the East, Eveline Alexander wrote that she longed to camp again in a tent and looked

forward to the return trip for that reason. She was also excited to see the Spanish Peaks, where she intended to buy land.²³⁶ Alexander was not the only military wife who saw promise in western lands. Historian Sandra Myers observed that references to the promising land and resources of the West are common in the diaries, memoirs, and letters of army wives.²³⁷ Ellen McGowan Biddle described the West as a new Jerusalem and often waxed poetic in her account of life in the West about the beauty and promise of the landscape.²³⁸ Teresa Vielé remembered that Texas in the mid-nineteenth century appeared to be a fertile garden suitable for many agricultural purposes. She described Texas as a land filled with flowers so numerous that they overgrew and obscured footpaths and trails.²³⁹ Other officers' wives, such as Martha Summerhayes, wrote of their longing to return to their life in a frontier fort when they returned to the East. Summerhayes wrote, "that fatal spirit of unrest from which I thought to escape...sometimes asserts its power, and at those times my thoughts turn back to the days when we were all Lieutenants together, marching across the deserts and mountains of Arizona. . ."²⁴⁰ This longing for the past and a more independent life displays the change wrought on military wives by life in the West.

In addition to the joys of riding and seeing the West, military women often found themselves alone and facing considerable dangers and problems. Alice Baldwin wrote of her loneliness and fear when she was left alone during an outbreak of cholera and smallpox in the frontier outpost. She was the only officer's wife left in the fort and with the death of the lower ranking officers and the absence of her husband, Baldwin was

responsible not only for her own small family unit but also for caring for the other sick military men as well. This was not Baldwin's only experience in dealing with dangerous situations on her own. She also remembered that when her husband and the other members of the regiment were called out of the fort by a report of an Indian attack, she stayed up all night guarding their home.²⁴¹ Defending one's home and family appears to have been a common activity of military officers' wives. Eveline Alexander and another military wife armed themselves when Native Americans attacked their camp in Colorado. Martha Summerhayes kept a gun at the ready when Native Americans attacked in order to shoot herself and her child if the Native Americans won the battle.²⁴² On another occasion when the men were called out to scout for Indians, Ellen Biddle and another officer's wife loaded their rifles and prepared to fight back if the Indians invaded the fort while the men were away.²⁴³ In many cases these women do not tell us what the effect of survival in dangerous situations had on their view of themselves; however, it appears likely that their successful survival in difficult situations strengthened confidence in their own abilities.

Women were also in danger when they left western forts to ride or travel across the open plains. Alice Baldwin recorded one frightening experience when she was out riding with a member of the regiment and a group of horse thieves spotted the pair and began chasing them. Baldwin remembered that while she was frightened she was able to maintain her composure and guide her horse back to the safety of the fort, despite the added dimension of losing her saddle during the wild ride.²⁴⁴ Other officers' wives like

Katie Gibson also exhibited courage when they or their loved ones were in danger. Gibson shot a buffalo as it charged toward her sister, also an officer's wife. Gibson wrote that the soldiers who had taken the two women with them on a buffalo hunt were initially angry with them for coming too close to the buffalo herd; however, George Custer himself complimented Katie Gibson on her marksmanship.²⁴⁵ Despite her occasional frailty, Ellen McGowan Biddle was more than capable of action in times of danger. On one occasion Biddle and her children were out for a drive, when Biddle realized that their driver was so drunk that he could not control the team of horses, which began to run at a quickened pace. Biddle instructed her children to lie down in the bottom of the carriage and then she climbed through the window and onto the driver's seat above. Although she was unable to stop the horses immediately, Biddle was able to guide the carriage back in the direction of the fort. Upon their safe arrival home, Biddle promptly fainted. On another occasion when Biddle and another military wife were stranded in the wilds due to a broken wagon wheel, they successfully avoided the Native Americans who pursued them through the use of cool heads and swift feet.²⁴⁶ On both occasions Biddle exhibited a calm exterior while in danger and then promptly exhibited her feminine delicacy with a fainting spell once the danger had passed.²⁴⁷ As women became accustomed to life in the West it appears that they were able to rise above societal restrictions on female behavior and respond quickly and calmly to dangerous situations.

The hardships of western life, as well as the wide open imaginative space of the West had an effect of officers' wives. Michele J. Nancy notes that the ideology of true

womanhood popular in the Eastern homes of many officers' wives was particularly ill-suited to the hardships of life on the western frontier. Nancy notes that the ideal of true womanhood required women to establish safe and proper homes for their husbands and children. While life in the West undoubtedly made establishing this ideal difficult, the nature of military life made it next to impossible. Nancy states, "The very nature of the frontier Army required that officers' wives endure the ramifications of shifting army policy, the temporary conditions of forts, and a nomadic lifestyle...Motherhood, housekeeping, and nursing were complicated by the physical institutional boundaries of the Army garrison."²⁴⁸ Nancy argues that the nature of life in the military on the western frontier forced military women to abandon the ideals of true womanhood and adopt more realistic definitions of women's roles. Instead of defining themselves in terms of this stereotype, military wives began perceiving themselves as an integral part of the regiment or garrison their husband commanded.²⁴⁹ With this ideology of true womanhood inaccessible to them, officers' wives had to adopt and adapt to new visions of themselves as independent decision makers within their intimate relationships.

Their experiences in the West in many ways encouraged military officers' wives to become more independent from their husbands. Officers' wives often took charge of the economic affairs of their families. Historian Anne Bruner Eales argues that many military officers' wives became accustomed to making the family's economic decisions independent of their husbands.²⁵⁰ Women like Martha Summerhayes, who were initially inclined to abide by their husband's proclamations, began making economic decisions for

their families after they arrived on the frontier often at the suggestion of other older and more experienced women. Thus Martha Summerhayes purchased a set of tin ware without telling her husband and resolved that in domestic matters, except those regulated by the military, she would make the household decisions.²⁵¹ Summerhayes and the other officers' wives learned to take control of the household decisions in part because of their domestic duties but also because life in the West allowed them greater freedom than their Eastern sisters.

The freedom of western life allowed women to experience independence and become accustomed to new responsibilities. Eveline Alexander made numerous diary entries discussing her sale of the family's goods whenever a move was necessary and then when her husband was ordered back East, Alexander considered purchasing land in the West for the family to live on. Alexander even went so far as to speak to several area landowners but decided to return East with her husband without buying land. Alexander also quipped that while her husband wrote her love letters in his absence, she responded with a listing of all of the things he should take care of in town.²⁵² This change allowed women to become independent decision makers and gain significant control over their family's lives.

In some cases the marital independence of military officers' wives allowed military families to abandon rigid gender roles inside their homes almost entirely. Military officers' wives reported having husbands who helped with domestic chores, including making the beds and cleaning the house. Other wives wrote that their husbands

were more than willing to help care for children or if they were at home to help their wives pack for their regular moves.²⁵³ Ellen Biddle's reminiscences include several references to her relationship with her husband. Biddle recalled that her husband relied entirely on her judgment and ingenuity in running their household and she had complete freedom to do what she wished.²⁵⁴ The ability of officers' wives to make decisions and enjoy equal relationships within their homes in turn made them more likely to act as independent decision makers outside their homes.

In some circumstances military officers' wives utilized their skills and authority in order to make military decisions. Michelle Nacy notes that in cases of illness or death, officers' wives were often able to take charge of the situation and organize a response.²⁵⁵ In one case, Eveline Alexander became concerned about the wellbeing of a soldier who had been wounded in a Native American attack. With one post doctor out on patrol and the other a known drunkard, she announced that the soldier would be moved to another local fort to receive medical care. She organized a contingent of a dozen armed soldiers and escorted the wounded man to the fort. Her judgment and authority in ordering enlisted men about appears to have been totally unquestioned.²⁵⁶ Another account of an officer's wife, Lydia Spencer Lane, was left in command of a sergeant and ten men at their post in New Mexico while he left the fort with the rest of the men scouting for Indians. Again we see no hint that her authority was questioned despite the fact that her husband could have left the sergeant who assisted her in charge.²⁵⁷ Even in peaceful occasions when forts were fully staffed, officers' wives were placed in positions of

authority. Faye Roe organized the regiment's band, ordering them nicer uniforms and instrumentation from John Phillip Sousa. Roe recounted that during concerts she had to be careful about brushing back her hair because the band would lift their instruments in anticipation that it was a cue to begin the concert.²⁵⁸ It appears that once women gained independence within their homes they, and their husbands, were able to expand this agency into the forts and posts they called home.

For many military officers' wives life in the West in general was a transformative experience. Anne Bruner Eales notes that the West was more "performance oriented" than the industrial East and women learned in this performance driven environment to value their own talents.²⁵⁹ Many officers' wives recognized that their experiences had transformed them into newly independent individuals. One of the most famous military wives in American history, Elizabeth Bacon Custer noted that life in the West transformed women and made them tough and resourceful.²⁶⁰ Alice Blackwood Baldwin stated in her memoirs that life in the West forced women to abandon their timidity.²⁶¹ Other women like Teresa Vielè anticipated what the women they would become before even leaving for the frontier. Vielè wrote, "Mars would have gloried in the wonderful female that my imagination loved to paint...She was a kind of tough, weather-proof, India rubber woman...who could travel over hundreds of miles of prairie on horseback...A strong energy of character sustained her through the direst emergencies, nothing could unstring her dauntless nerves. . ."²⁶² Although Vielè did not specifically discuss her personal changes, she does note that the West appears to alter individuals. She

is quick to note that she believes this change to be a positive one, with individuals becoming more adventurous and honorable.²⁶³ It is unclear whether all officers' wives were prepared or anticipated transformative experiences but it does appear that many of them believed that their transformations were a positive aspect of life in the West.

In some cases the ladies of the regiment found that they had been so transformed by their experiences that they longed to have success in their own right. Historian Michelle J. Nacy argues that military wives also wrote of their dissatisfaction with traditional female roles. Nacy notes that many wrote letters to their husbands requesting financial independence when they returned to the East.²⁶⁴ In some cases officers' wives were able to enjoy successes in publishing accounts about life out West. Ellen McGowan Biddle notes that one of her male friends was able to get a brief account of her experiences on the frontier published in European newspapers. Biddle was thrilled at seeing her words in print.²⁶⁵ While Baldwin and the other military wives were unable to obtain complete freedom it is clear that their western experiences in the West had changed them. As a result, they became increasingly unwilling to accept the limits placed on them by society and the ideals of true womanhood.

Michele J. Nacy notes that most military officers' wives came to define themselves and their life's work in terms of their military service. While military wives back East, could hope to achieve the goals of true womanhood, western military wives adjusted their views of themselves and came to the conclusion that they were a necessary and essential part of the military system.²⁶⁶ These military wives displayed their

independence and their interest in the military through activities on behalf of their husbands. While civilian's wives were more often limited to their homes, military wives often met important decision makers and they were not above attempting to enhance the reputation of either their husbands or their particular military branch. Upon their return to the East, officers' wives had many opportunities to express their views about military policy and life on the frontier. Their elite status garnered invitations to important events such as the White House reception Ellen Biddle attended on one of her visits East.²⁶⁷

When Martha Summerhayes spent several weeks in the East in 1887, she had the opportunity to meet and speak to President Grover Cleveland about her experiences. She also used the opportunity to inform the President about the hardships faced by military men in the West and to request better resources for her husband and his troops. Cleveland obviously listened to Martha as her husband, Jack, received a promotion shortly after their conversation as did his second in command.²⁶⁸ Anne Bruner Eales observed that other military wives such as Mrs. George Cook also asked powerful acquaintances for help in gaining promotions for their husbands.²⁶⁹ Elizabeth Bacon Custer spent the majority of her life after the death of her husband seeking to enhance and maintain his image as a hero. Elizabeth Custer wrote several books that combined her remembrances of their life in the West with Custer's letters and notes. These documents as well as interviews that she granted after his death have affected the way that generations of historians have considered and interpreted George Custer's military career.²⁷⁰ It is clear

that military ladies were able to shed the definition of true womanhood in favor of the more independent and expressive role they found as a ladies of the regiment.

Officers' wives did not restrict their activities to the defense of their husbands. Some became deeply involved in the careers and lives of the enlisted men with whom they came into contact. In some cases wives even intervened with their husbands and other officers on behalf of enlisted men who were charged with some offense.²⁷¹ These wives also wrote memoirs and kept diaries in order to glorify either their husbands or military life in general. Since Teresa Vielè divorced her husband her book mentions him only in passing; however, Vielè is careful to note that she found the rest of the military men she came into contact with to be brave and heroic gentlemen. She depicts the western military man as the savior of the nation and took the government to task for cutting military expenditures.²⁷² Ellen McGowan Biddle also notes the importance and heroism of the military out West and credits the presence of the military with making further settlement of the West possible in the first place. Biddle also notes that the wives of officers and enlisted men should be credited and respected for their contributions to the military campaigns on the frontier.²⁷³ It is clear the military wives became important advocates both for their husbands and for the military in general. Their advocacy was undoubtedly a result of their increased independence and self-assurance. The military appears to have been well served by their officers' wives. With the confidence they gained during their time in the West, the ladies of the regiment assisted with military matters both inside western outposts and upon their return to the east.

It is clear by the end of their residence in the West that military officers' wives as a group had developed into strong, capable, independent women. The women who married military officers as a group were educated and socially elite. This elite status separated them from other women such as laundresses that populated western forts, and afforded them the ability to properly analyze and record their experiences of life out West. Officers' wives were also transformed by the rugged landscape around them. The necessity of horses to cross the harsh lands as well as frontier recreational activities, such as hunting game and panthers, forced these women to make executive decisions and taught them independent skills very different from those of their eastern sisters. While the landscape itself inspired thoughts of freedom and adventure, officers' wives constantly faced dangerous situations that required them to make independent decisions and take action to protect themselves and their families. Officers' wives used these new found decision making skills within their marriages and acted independent of their absent husbands in matters of finance and housekeeping after their move to the West. Furthermore, there is also evidence that officers' wives became active participants within western forts providing the military with their expertise and independence, acting as aides to the regiment and even serving as informal commanders on occasion. Finally, upon their return to society in the East, military officers' wives utilized their independent minds and persuasive powers to influence policy makers and military commanders. Through their words we can observe the transformation of military officers' wives from sheltered young women to strong, independent, decision makers. The memoirs, letters,

and diaries of officers' wives provide ample evidence that a new class of independent women was forged by the rugged nature of military life on the western frontier.

CHAPTER VI

INTO THE PAST: MYTHS AND REALITIES IN REVIEW

“Something, beyond, has laid its spell on me;
Something is promised, what I do not care;
I only know a fierce, prophetic longing
That causes me to hunger, and to dare.”²⁷⁴

Conclusion

When I first began this project I expected to find something simple, uncomplicated and easy to explain. What I found instead were women who were complicated, complex, and in many cases hard to read. There remain questions unanswered and words left unspoken throughout the primary source documents to which I had access. This, of course, is the problem with studying history. There is never really one Truth and our view of the past is necessarily skewed by our own perceptions and beliefs. The world we observe in archives, diaries, memoirs, letters and photographs is largely composed of shades of gray that contain hints of joys and sorrows, prejudice and tolerance, heartache and laughter. I have attempted to interpret and in some cases reinterpret the women who inhabited Texas, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through a variety of their writings. This work is without a doubt too brief to explain all the myriad experiences possible for women on the plains but I hope it will add to the growing body of scholars

interested in the study of those who have often been left out of the traditional history of the West.

Scholars in the past have assumed that men acted as the major force in the westward movement while women were reluctant travelers to the West. Scholars similarly assumed that women in the West were confined to their sod houses and had little interest or interaction with the land that surrounded them. My research has displayed women who were deeply interested in the West from the beginning of their trip westward to their eventual settlement on the western frontier. Women recorded their views of the West as a beautiful place in diaries and letters, remembered their pleasure at the westward journey in interviews, and wrote about their love for the land in poems and novels. Women also left their homes and experienced the western landscape through horseback rides across the plains. The difficulty of life on the Plains also made it necessary for women to leave their stoves and work outdoors on their own and with their male relatives. While the work could be difficult, some women enjoyed working outdoors and expressed pleasure at their abandonment of the traditional female gender roles that would have confined them to their homes. The hardships provided valuable opportunities for women to learn new skills and grow as individuals. Finally, a significant group of women filed homestead claims and became landowners in their own right. For women, the West could be both a land of beauty and a place of opportunity.

The West also provided women with opportunities to reexamine their marital options. Many women in the West and in other parts of United States in the nineteenth

century suffered at the hands of cruel and neglectful husbands. Western women recorded numerous examples of women who were beaten and neglected by their husbands. Some westerners, like Willa Cather, conclude that marriage was an undesirable state for women and advised avoiding it unless one could be sure that the balance of power was weighted in favor of the wife. The stereotype of the “true woman” who would be submissive to her husband and devote all her time and energy to her family proved to be unhealthy for western women, a fact that some recognized. Western women, especially those who were able to gain employment or claim their own homesteads, used their economic independence to postpone marriage either temporarily until they found a suitable mate or in some cases to remain permanently single. In addition, some fortunate women enjoyed equality in their marriages and were able to maintain control over their economic and personal identities.

Women in the West also gained opportunities to work, own land, and become active in local political groups. A large number of women lived and worked on farms and ranches and played an integral role in the success of them in the West. While the majority of western women lived and worked on land owned by their husband or father, some western women claimed homesteads and worked the homesteads themselves thus increasing their investment in the West. Women also labored in a variety of other fields as teachers, preachers, doctors, and midwives. Through these positions women could gain social prestige and access to higher class marital prospects. In addition women could gain economic independence working as cooks and seamstresses or through owning their own

hotel or boarding house. Women were able to enter a variety of occupations in part because gender roles in the West were nebulous. Women and men did whatever type of work was necessary to survive regardless of the traditional roles they were supposed to play. Some women became active in the political sphere through the WCTU and the woman suffrage movement or took positions within local governments. In the largely rural West, many women became active in their local Farmer's Alliances and contributed to the growth of the Populist Party.

The women who came West with military units experienced similar problems and opportunities for growth. Military officers' wives, like their civilian sisters, recorded their reactions to the grandeur of the West and enjoyed long rides across the plains. Military wives faced many of the same dangers that civilian women encountered and they faced the problems with skill and determination. Just as with their civilian sisters, the Cult of True Womanhood proved to be an unrealistic and unattainable goal for military wives and these women too pushed for more equal decision making power with their husbands. The long absences required of military men offered their wives ample opportunities to explore the West and make decisions without male interference. Military wives on occasion used their skills and expertise in military matters, commanding enlisted men in times of danger, intervening in matters of military promotions, and acting as unofficial representatives of their particular military branches. Their experiences of western life led women to increased independence and allowed them to make decisions for themselves.

Like their civilian counterparts, women in military forts were transformed by their experiences in the West.

The vast and complex mythology of the American West continually throws up road blocks in one's path and scholars are certainly not immune to the pull of the mythic garden. The red earth calls with all its seductive glamour, whispering of simpler times, of a heroic and romantic past where all men could be the master of their own plot of land and all women could be mistresses of clean, virtuous households. Scholars have in some cases assumed that men were the major victims of this mythological call of the green; however, despite the many problems with the realities of life in the West, it is clear that women heard the seductive whisper of the red earth and followed it westward to financial and personal successes as well. That we, as a modern nation, continue to attempt to return to the green through parks-local, state, and national-and the continued popularity of groups like the Boy Scouts of America that teach boys to be men by sending them to on campouts and the current local battles in housing divisions over xeriscaping should tell us that there remains much work to be done in understanding this critical piece of our national identity, especially in relation to women and other minority groups.

ENDNOTES

¹ Faye Cashatt Lewis, *Nothing to Make A Shadow* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1971), 4.

² William W. Savage, Jr. "Western Literature and Its Myths: A Rejoinder," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 22 (1972): 78.

³ Approximately 800,000 women came West according to scholars Cathy Luchetti and Carol Olwell. Of those 800,000 women, roughly 4,800 were Asian, 12,000 were African American and 6,000 were Indians. Luchetti and Olwell also include a variety of data including primary source accounts from minority pioneer women in their excellent work, *Women of the West* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1982), 14, 26.

⁴ Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1950), 112, 114. I wish to clarify my use of the term frontier here. This term has fallen into disfavor among historians in recent years because of its racist and nationalist connotations. In an effort to present the ideas of authors writing before this shift, I use the term frontier when speaking about authors who referred to the west as the frontier. In sections of my own analysis the term West will be used. The term West is capitalized whenever used in reference to the region of study and this capitalization will be utilized throughout. For a thought provoking article on the use of the term frontier among historians and lay people, see Patricia Nelson Limerick, "What on Earth Is the New Western History," in *Trails: Toward a New Western History*, eds. Patricia Limerick, Charles Rankin, and Clyde A. Milner, II (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991).

⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

⁶ Examples include *Ragged Dick, Helping Himself, The Young Adventurer, and From Farm to Fortune; or, Nat Nason's Strange Experience*.

⁷ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964) 3. For an interesting perspective and interpretation of Marx's Machine in the Garden, see Dorothy Ross. "American Modernities, Past and Present," *The American Historical Review*, vol., 116, no. 3 (June, 2011), 705-706, 710.

⁸ Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden*, 321.

⁹ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-152.

¹⁰ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: Civilizing the West? 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 5-7. In large part, transformations wrought upon women were inspired by the difficulty of western life. The West could be an incredibly difficult environment for people of both genders and survival required both growth and flexibility.

¹¹ Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1981) 25.

¹² *Ibid.*, 101, 111.

¹³ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself: The Private Writings of Midwestern Women, 1880-1910*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 15.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, x.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29-31.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 29-32, 71, 75-76, 188.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 111-113, 118-120, 127, 135.

¹⁸ Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630-1860*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 12-13.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21, 69-71.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 147.

²¹ Jennifer Bailey, "The Dangers of Femininity in Willa Cather's Fiction," *Journal of American Studies* 16 (1982): 395.

²² Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers, Women as Civilizers: True Womanhood in the American West," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 7 (1984): 2,4.

²³ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁴ Susan Lee Johnson, "Nail This to Your Door: A Disputation on the Power, Efficacy, and Indulgent Delusion of Western Scholarship That Neglects the Challenge of Gender and Women's History." *Pacific History Review* 79 (2010): 606, takes western historians to task over this issue.

²⁵ Glenda Riley. "Frederick Jackson Turner Overlooked the Ladies." *Journal of the Early Republic* 13 (1993): 220.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 225-226.

²⁷ Susan Lee Johnson, "A Memory Sweet to Soldiers: The Significance of Gender in the History of the American West," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 24 (1993): 495-498.

²⁸ Mary Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System: Defining Work in the Rural Midwest." *Journal of Social History* 27 (1994): 563-564.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 569.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 570.

³¹ Joan M. Jensen, *Promise to the Land: Essays on Rural Women*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), 12, 23,30,42,95, 97, 171,178-180, 190-191, 196,214.

³² *Ibid.*, ix, 27, 71, 170, 265.

³³ Michael S. Kimmel, *The History of Men: Essays in the History of American and British Masculinity*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 20-23, 45-47, 54, 57-59. In particular the chapter entitled "Born to Run: Fantasies of Male Escape from Rip Van Winkle to Robert Bly" provides an interesting and enlightening look into the mind of the mid nineteenth century Anglo male through works of fiction as well as factual data. One obvious example of the masculine model addressed by Kimmel is Theodore Roosevelt, who transitioned from a sickly boy into a strong, manly, militaristic figure after the death of his wife and a sojourn in the Dakotas.

³⁴ Kim Warren, "Gender, Race, Culture, and the Mythic American Frontier," *Journal of Women's History* 19 (2007): 240.

³⁵ Mary Louise Roberts, "True Womanhood Revisited," *Journal of Women's History* 14 (2002):150.

³⁶ Nancy A. Hewitt, "Taking the True Woman Hostage," *Journal of Women's History* 14 (2002): 158.

³⁷ Susan Armitage, Review of *Homelands: How Women Made the West* by Virginia Scharff and Carolyn Brucken, *Western American Literature* (2011):439-440.

³⁸ Elizabeth Jameson's article "Bringing it all back Home: Rethinking the History of Women and the Nineteenth-Century West," in *A Companion to the American West*, ed. William Devereaux (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2004), 11, presents both an excellent historiography of scholarship on western women and well written pleas for a more inclusive view of women's roles in the West.

³⁹ Martha Farnsworth, *Plains Woman: The Diary of Martha Farnsworth, 1882-1922*, Eds. Marlene Springer and Haskell Springer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986) iv-v.

⁴⁰ Mollie Dorsey Sanford, *Mollie: The Journal of Mollie Dorsey Sanford in Nebraska and Colorado Territories, 1857-1866* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1959).

⁴¹ Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma: Stories from the WPA Narratives*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007). For two interesting examples of pioneer memoirs see Faye Cashatt Lewis, *Nothing to Make A Shadow*, (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1971) and Francis A. Long, *A Prairie Doctor of the Eighties: Some Personal Recollections and Some Early Medical and Social History of a Prairie State*, (Norfolk, NE: Huse Publishing Company, 1937).

⁴² See Eveline M. Alexander, *Cavalry Wife: The Diary of Eveline M. Alexander, 1866-1867* (College Station: Texas A &M University Press, 1977); Alice Blackwood Baldwin, *The Army Wife on the Frontier: The Memoirs of Alice Blackwood Baldwin, 1867-1877* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Tanner Trust

Fund, 1975); Ellen McGowan Biddle, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife* (Philadelphia: Press of J.B. Lippincott Company, 1907); Lydia Spencer Lane, *I Married a Soldier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988); Frances M.A. Roe, *Army Letters from an Officer's Wife, 1871-1888* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1909); Martha Summerhayes, *Vanished Arizona: Recollections of the Army Life of a New England Woman* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979); and Teresa Griffin Vielé, *Following the Drum: A Glimpse of Frontier Life* (New York: Rudd and Carleton, 1858).

⁴³ Scarborough, Dorothy. *The Wind*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1925), v-vii.

⁴⁴ Gordon Tapper, introduction to *My Antonia* by Willa Cather (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918) xvii.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, xix-xxiv.

⁴⁶ Mary Hays Marable Collection. Oklahoma Authors File. Papers. University of Oklahoma Western History Collection, Norman, OK. The West required growth from Anglo settlers accustomed to life in Eastern cities and farms in other parts of the world. Women, in particular, were forced to abandon rigid attitudes and expand their horizons.

⁴⁷ The pioneer woman statue at Texas Woman's University presents an interesting if contradictory depiction of pioneer women. Facing westward, towards the frontier, she appears to stride unconcerned gazing at the land ahead of her. At first glance this depiction is unremarkable and expected, however; when one looks closely at her form there is clearly something wrong. The pioneer woman's torso seems oddly out of proportion, as though the sculptor was unsure what the female body looked like. If you look only at her middle section it would be easy to assume that one was looking at a male torso with oddly placed pectoral muscles. The more one looks the less the pioneer woman looks like a woman at all and the more she begins to resemble a pioneer man. Her left hand, placed delicately beside her neck appears to be an attempt to make her more feminine, implying perhaps that even as she strides westward she is thinking "Dear me, what have I gotten myself into?" The contradictions of the masculine torso and the delicate hand illustrate the flexible nature of the image of pioneer women. Western women were somehow expected to work like men and yet retain their feminine natures. The oddly formed depiction displays the breakdown in both of these roles. Neither traditional feminine nor masculine the pioneer woman is something in between caught between two different identities, lost perhaps in Marx's middle ground. This statue seems confused, as much of the literature about pioneer women is. One cannot help but wonder what a real pioneer woman would have seen when she looked at the statue. Would she have seen herself in the self-confident westward stride or in the delicate hand or would she have seen nothing familiar at all in the marble statue?

⁴⁸ Jennie Harris Oliver, "The Red Earth," in *Red Earth: Complete Collection of Poems* (Kansas City, MO: Burton Publishing Co., 1934), 13.

⁴⁹ Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her*, 27.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 76.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 33-34.

⁵² Dorothy Scarborough, *The Wind*, viii, ix, 3. Dorothy Scarborough was born in Texas and spent several years as a child living in Sweetwater, Texas. Scarborough later received a Ph. D. from Columbia University and wrote a book on American folklore. In addition to scholarly work Scarborough also wrote several works of fiction. Her works focus on the South or the West, and in some cases both regions through characters like Letty, who are Southerners transplanted West. *The Wind* is one her best known works, although she initially received criticism for her depiction of a negative western experience. Scarborough was careful to point out that Letty's response to the West is exceptionally poor as compared to those of the other female characters in the book. For an interesting analysis of *The Wind* as an effort to rescue Texas from the South by showing a southern character's inability to cope with western life see Nina Baym, *Women Writers of the American West, 1833-1927* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 32-33.

⁵³ Dorothy Scarborough, *The Wind*, 5, 69.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 93-94, 105.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 192-193.

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- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 289.
- ⁵⁷ Lillian Schlissel, "Mothers and Daughters on the Western Frontier," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 3 (1978): 30.
- ⁵⁸ Sheryll Patterson-Black, "Women Homesteaders on the Great Plains Frontier," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 1 (1976): 72.
- ⁵⁹ Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 38, 44-45.
- ⁶⁰ Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her*, xiii, 3.
- ⁶¹ Ibid., 54.
- ⁶² Terri Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw, *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 15-16, 40-41.
- ⁶³ Ibid., 36.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 37-38.
- ⁶⁵ Ibid., 17.
- ⁶⁶ Mollie Dorsey Sanford, *Mollie: The Journal*, 21.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid., 33.
- ⁶⁸ Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 56.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid., 44-45.
- ⁷⁰ Faye Cashatt Lewis, *Nothing to Make A Shadow*, viii.
- ⁷¹ The lack of trees on the open plains made it necessary for early settlers to build homes out of the most plentiful resource available to them, the earth. Settlers dug out hillsides when they were available and in other cases carved out dirt bricks and created homes out of the dirt.
- ⁷² Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 132-142.
- ⁷³ Faye Cashatt Lewis, *Nothing to Make Shadow*, 40, 45, 133-134.
- ⁷⁴ Terri Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw, *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 95.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid., 178.
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 159.
- ⁷⁷ H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name: Women as Homesteaders in North Dakota*, (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1991), 140-141.
- ⁷⁸ Mollie Dorsey Sanford, *Mollie: The Journal*, 25, 74.
- ⁷⁹ The Cult of True Womanhood, or cult of domesticity, required that women remain in the home to care for the home itself as well as any children the couple might have. The women who moved west in the late nineteenth century would have been deeply familiar with the Cult of True Womanhood; however, as this thesis argues the Cult of True Womanhood proved to be unbearably restrictive for many western women.
- ⁸⁰ Mrs. Kirby Williams, "The Staubus Family Moves- As Mrs. Rose Staubus Remembers," *Lincoln County Republican*, November 6, 1957. This newspaper article along with several others regarding pioneer women are contained in the Alberta Constant papers held by the Western History Archives at the University of Oklahoma.
- ⁸¹ Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her*, 48, 53.
- ⁸² H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, 40.
- ⁸³ Annette Kolodny, *The Land Before Her*, 9.
- ⁸⁴ Ibid., 56. During the nineteenth century, most male-female relationships were dominated by the concept of patriarchy which required women to be subservient to their male relatives.
- ⁸⁵ Mary Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System," 570-571. In addition, the work required of a widow with young children to support, would have likely left little time for grief.
- ⁸⁶ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only Yourself*, 76.
- ⁸⁷ Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 81.
- ⁸⁸ H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, 214. Despite the stereotypes depicted in literature by Owen Wister and Zane Grey and also in Clint Eastwood's westerns, surely men, too, were often lonely. In addition, see Lawrence Goodwyn's *The Populist Movement: A Short History of Agrarian Revolt in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). Goodwyn suggests the Alliance and Populist movements were

communal and that loneliness was thwarted on farms and ranches by a host of meetings and community activities.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only Yourself*, 47.

⁹⁰ Mollie Dorsey Sanford, *Mollie: The Journal*, 50.

⁹¹ Terri Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw, *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 78.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 128.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁹⁴ Jensen, Joan M., *Promise to the Land*, 1, 5-6. See also U.S. Congress, Homestead Act, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1862

⁹⁵ The Homestead Act of 1862 allowed the head of a family to claim a quarter section of public land provided that the person filing the claim stayed on the land for five years and paid a nominal fee. The claimant could also opt to pay a higher fee and if he or she only wanted to stay on the land for six months. Although the exact requirements changed over time the process for filing a claim remained the same. "Proving up" a claim refers to the process of obtaining fee simple title to the land after satisfying the residency and fee requirements. See U.S. Congress, Homestead Act, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1862. Homesteaders could also gain land under the Timber Culture Act of 1873. This Act gave a homesteader 160 additional acres of land if 1/4th of the "new" acres were planted in trees. This Act allowed single women to gain additional land along with men. See U.S. Congress, Timber Culture Act, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., 1873.

⁹⁶ Sheryll Patterson- Black, "Women Homesteaders on Great Plains," 68-69, 71-72, 77.

⁹⁷ Anne B. Webb, "Forgotten Persephones: Women Farmers on the Frontier," *Minnesota History* 50 (1986):135.

⁹⁸ H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, iii-v.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 5, 10-11, 25, 27.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 19-20, 36.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 47, 72.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 191-195.

¹⁰⁴ Sheryll Patterson- Black, "Women Homesteaders on Great Plains," 81.

¹⁰⁵ Lida White, Letter dated December 26, 1919, Lida White Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

¹⁰⁶ Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 49-50.

¹⁰⁷ Jan Isabel Fortune, "Gypsy Love" in *Black Poppies*, (Dallas: The Southwest Press, 1929), 5.

¹⁰⁸ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 4. A quick examination of scholarly sources focusing on one of our most famous early pioneer women, Rebecca Boone, reveals this bias. While her husband, Daniel Boone, has warranted numerous biographies and scholarly articles Rebecca Bryan Boone appears more often as the subject of juvenile fiction than as a serious scholarly topic.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹¹⁰ One of the most famous examples of a marriage gone wrong is Judy Nolte Lensink's *A Secret to be Buried: The Diary and Life of Emily Hawley Gillespie* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989). Gillespie spent most of her life in Iowa and thus is not addressed in this study. Although her relationship with her husband began positively, by the end of her life their relationship had soured considerably.

¹¹¹ Martha Farnsworth, *Plains Woman*, 61-62, 64-65, 71,80, 95.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 100, 109,115.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 90-92, 94.

¹¹⁵ Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 82.

¹¹⁶ Lila Lindsay , Interview, Lida White Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 119-120.

¹¹⁸ In nineteenth century America, there was relatively little official recourse for dealing with cases of domestic violence or neglect. The violence of male-dominated culture in the West often spilled over into the intimate relationships of men and women. The difficulty of creating and maintaining successful farms and ranches exacerbated this tendency towards violence. Women who lived in rural portions of the West especially, faced extreme hardships as a result of poor spouse selection. For an example, Oscar Ameringer's assessment in his autobiography of an "old" woman of thirty with no teeth, eczema covered hands, and a group of emaciated youngsters displays the physical manifestation of the hardships faced by some western women. See Oscar Ameringer's *If You Don't Weaken: The Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer* (New York: Holt Publishing, 1940), 232, and James R. Scales and Danney Goble's *Oklahoma Politics: A History* (Norman University of Oklahoma Press, 1982), 67 and finally, in Jim Bisset's *Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1904-1920*, (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 10-11.

¹¹⁹ Martha Farnsworth, *Plains Woman*, 143, 255-256.

¹²⁰ Francis A. Long, *A Prairie Doctor of the Eighties*, 59.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 62-63.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

¹²⁴ Sometimes marrying "an equal" or "beneath one's station" could prove beneficial for women concerned about ensuring an equal or superior balance of power.

¹²⁵ Willa Cather. *My Antonia*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1918), 102-103, 128-129, 188, 218. Willa Cather is one of the best known western female authors. Cather was born in Virginia but moved to Red Cloud, Nebraska as a young girl. Many of her works are set in the West, in Nebraska, Colorado and New Mexico. Cather's work on Nebraska particularly focuses on the variety of class and ethnic groups present in the Great Plains. There are numerous scholarly responses to her work including several feminist interpretations. For several interesting examples see Jennifer Bailey, "The Dangers of Femininity in Willa Cather's Fiction," *Journal of American Studies* 16 (1982); Beth Rundstrom, "Harvesting Willa Cather's Literary Fields," *American Geographical Society* 85 (1995): 217-228; and, in addition, Claudia Yukman, "Frontier Relationships in Willa Cather's 'My Antonia.'" *Pacific Coast Philology* 23 (1988): 94-105.

¹²⁶ William Tilghman's Memoirs, Box 2, Notebook 1, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma.

¹²⁷ The story of Jennie Borden, who allegedly "gave her parents 'forty whacks'" but as woman was found "not guilty" because women were believed to be unable to commit such crimes provides evidence that this may have been the case.

¹²⁸ Irma Risk, Letter, Box 1, Folder 29, William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

¹²⁹ A.M. Morphew, "Early Days in the Cherokee Nation at Keystone and Tulsa," Box 3 William Matthew Tilghman Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

¹³⁰ This terminology is discussed in the Introduction. The reader may wish to refer to Barbara Welter's article "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-174.

¹³¹ Willa Cather, *My Antonia*, 100.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 174.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹³⁶ For an interesting history of marriage and divorce in the West, see Glenda Riley, *Building and Breaking Families in the American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

¹³⁷ Michele J. Nacy, *Members of the Regiment: Army Officer's Wives on the Western Frontier, 1865-1890*, (London: Greenwood Press, 2000), 11-12.

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- ¹³⁸ Schlissel, "Mothers and Daughters on the Western Frontier," 29.
- ¹³⁹ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 119-120.
- ¹⁴⁰ Alberta Constant, Papers, University of Oklahoma Western History Collection, Norman, OK.
- ¹⁴¹ Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 27.
- ¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 40.
- ¹⁴³ Mary Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System," 571.
- ¹⁴⁴ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 70.
- ¹⁴⁵ Willa Cather, *My Ántonia*, 13, 111.
- ¹⁴⁶ Hampsten, Elizabeth, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 11.
- ¹⁴⁷ Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 35.
- ¹⁴⁸ H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, 110-111. As has been previously discussed, the Homestead Act of 1862 allowed the head of a family to claim a quarter section of public land provided that the person filing the claim stayed on the land for five years and paid a nominal fee. "Proving up" a claim refers to the process of obtaining fee simple title to the land after satisfying the residency and fee requirements. See U.S. Congress, Homestead Act, 37th Cong., 2nd Sess., 1862. Homesteaders could also acquire land under the Timber Culture Act of 1873. See U.S. Congress, Timber Culture Act, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., 1873.
- ¹⁴⁹ Jan Isabel Fortune, "Gypsy Love," 5.
- ¹⁵⁰ H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, 178.
- ¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 111-112.
- ¹⁵² Mollie Dorsey Sanford, *Mollie: The Journal*, 62.
- ¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 20, 71.
- ¹⁵⁴ Martha Farnsworth, *Plains Woman*, 6, 8-9, 35.
- ¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 48, 105, 111, 118.
- ¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 121-123, 127.
- ¹⁵⁷ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 24.
- ¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 106-111. The Comstock Act of 1873 limited the distribution of "obscene" material including information about birth control. See U.S. Congress, The Comstock Act, 42nd Cong., 3rd Sess., 1873.
- ¹⁵⁹ Faye Cashatt Lewis, *Nothing to Make Shadow*, 62. For those women who lived in urban centers, Victorian culture would likely have prohibited the open acknowledgement of an illegitimate child especially for a married woman.
- ¹⁶⁰ Francis A. Long, *A Prairie Doctor of the Eighties*, 103-106.
- ¹⁶¹ Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 57-58, 61.
- ¹⁶² Mary Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System," 571.
- ¹⁶³ H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, 217.
- ¹⁶⁴ Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 193.
- ¹⁶⁵ Lila Lindsay, Interview, Lida White Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.
- ¹⁶⁶ H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, 72-73.
- ¹⁶⁷ Janet Galligani Casey, "'This is Your Magazine: Domesticity, Agrarianism, and The Farmer's Wife,'" *American Periodicals: A Journal of History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 14 (2004): 196.
- ¹⁶⁸ Minnie Morris Jouvenat, "Illusion," *Wingshadows of Fancy* (Sherman, TX: Sherman Printing Co., 1899), 20.
- ¹⁶⁹ Joan Jensen, *Promise to the Land*, 171. To reiterate, my study focuses on Anglo women. Women of other minority groups adopted other methods of supporting themselves and their families.
- ¹⁷⁰ Hampsten, Elizabeth, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 80-81.
- ¹⁷¹ Jennie Harris Oliver is by modern standards a fairly obscure author and no modern scholars appear to have studied her work. Oliver wrote both poetry and short stories, most of which are set in Oklahoma, her home state for most of her life. Oliver's work is often centered on the landscape surrounding the characters

and several of her characters express their love for the land. An understanding of the mythology of the garden, is integral to the analysis of works like Oliver's. Leo Marx's work *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* explores the relationship between the lure of the garden and the intervention of technology and remains one of the best works in the field.

¹⁷² Jennie Harris Oliver, "It Is Morning," in *Best Short Stories from the Southwest*, edited by Hilton Ross Greer (Dallas: Southwest Press, 1931), 113-141.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁷⁵ Mary Neth, "Gender and the Family Labor System," 565.

¹⁷⁶ Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 70-71, 78.

¹⁷⁷ Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 145-146, 217.

¹⁷⁸ Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 99.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁸⁰ H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, 118.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁸³ Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 104.

¹⁸⁴ H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, 112-124.

¹⁸⁵ Elizabeth Hampsten, *Read This Only to Yourself*, 64-66

¹⁸⁶ Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 157-158.

¹⁸⁷ Francis A. Long, *A Prairie Doctor of the Eighties*, 44.

¹⁸⁸ Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 158.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁹⁰ Lida White, Letters to Hazelback and Bessent, Lida White Collection, Western History Collection, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK.

¹⁹¹ H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, 39.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 197, 202.

¹⁹³ Martha Farnsworth, *Plains Woman*, 285.

¹⁹⁴ Francis A. Long, *A Prairie Doctor of the Eighties*, 166-167.

¹⁹⁵ Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 179, 190

¹⁹⁶ Faye Cashatt Lewis, *Nothing to Make Shadow*, 119, 121-123.

¹⁹⁷ Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 179, 190.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁹⁹ H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, 117.

²⁰⁰ Mollie Dorsey Sanford, *Mollie: The Journal*, 68, 89, 97-98.

²⁰¹ Terri M. Baker and Connie Oliver Henshaw. *Women Who Pioneered Oklahoma*, 95.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 99.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

²⁰⁴ H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, 121-125 and Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers," 3.

²⁰⁵ H. Elaine Lindgren, *Land in Her Own Name*, 228-231.

²⁰⁶ Martha Farnsworth, *Plains Woman*, 131, 151.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 64-65, 71, 80, 95, 114-115.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 217.

²⁰⁹ Elizabeth Jameson, "Women as Workers," 6.

²¹⁰ Jennifer J. Bess, "Equal Rights for All and Special Privileges for None: Women's Participation in the Farmer's Alliance," (Master's Thesis, University of Houston, 1998). Some obvious exceptions to these roles included one of the most famous advocates of the Populist Movement, Mary Lease, who had a law degree and spoke often in public as well as Annie Diggs.

²¹¹ MaryJo Wagner, "Women in the Farmer's Alliance," (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Organization of American Historians, Washington, DC, March 22-25, 1990).

²¹² Marion Knox Bartheleme, "Women in the Texas Populist movement: Their letters to the 'Southern Mercury,'" (Master's Thesis, Rice University, 1994).

²¹³ This analysis is restricted both by time and the need to remain focused on the larger topic of women's roles in the West. Few historians have delved into the South Dakota Farmer's Alliance in the first place and none that I could find discussed the role of women within the Society. The recent decision of the South Dakota Historical Society to place membership records online should allow more historians to observe and analyze the nature of the organization. It is my intent to return to the subject of women within South Dakota Farmer's Alliance chapters at a later date.

²¹⁴ Married women appear to have been noted by most record keepers with the title Mrs. It is my assumption that women without this title beside their names, were more likely single women. In some cases married women appear to have joined with their husbands, although given the seemingly disorganized presentation of listed names it was difficult to tell whether a woman's husband was also an Alliance member. Single women in a few cases shared last names with other Alliance members, both male and female, confirming the argument that Alliance membership was a family affair.

²¹⁵ Beadle County, as well as the other counties selected for analysis here, was selected via the practice of listing all the counties in South Dakota alphabetically and then assigning them a random number between 1 and 66 (the number of counties). I then selected counties via a random number generator and determined gender based on the listed members names. This is clearly an imperfect method of determining gender; however, the membership records do not include a gender column and lacking other chapter records I decided that this was the most efficient means of counting the number of women in the selected counties. This method excludes those women who may have preferred to be addressed via their initials rather than their full names. In addition, I excluded any gender neutral names from analysis given that they might belong to males.

²¹⁶ Dues paying was sporadic in the Alliance rosters I surveyed for all but a few Alliance members. A quick survey of the records reveals that members paid dues either not at all or for one or two of the four years recorded. This may reflect a lack of consistent membership or alternatively suggests that farm families had difficulty procuring the necessary cash to pay their dues each year.

²¹⁷ Recent scholarship on the Farmer's Alliance or Populist movements is often disappointing because women and their roles within these agrarian movements are omitted. For example, Alicia E. Rodriguez's "Of Whom Shall the Third Party be Composed," in *Populism in the South Revisited: New Interpretation and New Departures* ed. James M. Beeby, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012): 56-81, discusses the Texas State Farmer's Alliance Convention in Dallas in 1891 but fails to ascertain if women were members, if they attended, or if they played any role at all in the proceedings.

²¹⁸ The reader will note that this chapter does not begin as the others have with a poem and analysis of a work of fiction. For reasons that are unclear military women do not appear to have been as interested in publishing poetry or works of fiction as civilian women. Since the purpose in including these pieces has been to enhance the reader's understanding of the experiences of western women, I have decided to omit fictional works in this section as I was unable to find a fictional piece written by a woman with western military experience. In addition, the nature of military life required military wives to move often and as such it was necessary to include other parts of the West in this chapter that are not included elsewhere.

²¹⁹ There is ample evidence of women of other races and classes in affiliation with the U.S. military in the West. However in the interests of maintaining as much consistency as possible it is my intent to focus on the white, middle class wives of military officers.

²²⁰ Michele J. Nacy, *Members of the Regiment*, 1-2.

²²¹ Anne Bruner Eales, *Army Wives of the American Frontier: Living by the Bugles*, (Boulder: Johnson Books, 1996), vii.

²²² Teresa Griffin Vielé, *Following the Drum*, 132.

- ²²³Sandra L. Myres, "Romance and Reality on the American Frontier: Views of Army Wives," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 13 (1982): 410, 425, 426.
- ²²⁴Eveline M. Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 36.
- ²²⁵Teresa Vielè, *Following the Drum*, 16.
- ²²⁶In some ways this transformative experience mimics the transformative nature of Letty's western experiences in Dorothy Scarborough's *The Wind*. Letty was negatively altered by the land and the atmosphere of the West. While none of the officers' wives, I analyzed revealed descent into madness as Letty experienced it, they were changed by their experiences.
- ²²⁷Alice Blackwood Baldwin, *The Army Wife on the Frontier*, 20.
- ²²⁸Ellen McGowan Biddle, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife*, 22, 29, 35, 50, 82-84, 89, 167.
- ²²⁹Michele J. Nacy, *Members of the Regiment*, 94.
- ²³⁰Anne Bruner Eales, *Army Wives of the American Frontier*, 77-79.
- ²³¹Alice Blackwood Baldwin, *An Army Wife on the Frontier*, 80.
- ²³²Teresa Vielè, *Following the Drum*, 150-151.
- ²³³Eveline M. Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 71.
- ²³⁴*Ibid.*, 35, 41, 55.
- ²³⁵Ellen McGowan Biddle, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife*, 22, 35, 82, 84, 89, 167.
- ²³⁶Eveline M. Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 124.
- ²³⁷Sandra L. Myres, "Romance and Reality on the American Frontier," 412.
- ²³⁸Ellen McGowan Biddle, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife*, 156-157.
- ²³⁹Vielè, Teresa. *Following the Drum*, 79-80, 124, 140-141. Of course Vielè's comments about the West as a garden echo the comments of Leo Marx in his work on the mythic garden of the frontier.
- ²⁴⁰Martha Summerhayes, *Vanished Arizona*, 289.
- ²⁴¹Alice Blackwood Baldwin, *An Army Wife on the Frontier*, 42-43, 67. Attacks by Native Americans were one of the most feared dangers on the Plains. While army wives at least had the comfort of a surrounding fort and the presence of trained military personnel to defend them, civilian women faced the threat of death or capture when Native Americans swooped down upon Western outposts and homesteads. A few of the civilian women captured by Native Americans recorded captivity narratives containing vivid descriptions of torture inflicted upon women by Native Americans. See James W. Parker's *The Rachel Plummer Narrative: A stirring narrative of adventure, hardship and privation in the early days of Texas, depicting struggles with the Indians and other adventures* (Palestine: Private Publisher: 1926) and Dr. Benjamin Dolbeare's *A Narrative of the Captivity and Suffering of Dolly Webster Among the Comanche (sic) Indians in Texas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986). Interestingly enough, despite their sufferings among the Native Americans, both women also recalled scenes of beautiful landscapes in their captivity narratives.
- ²⁴²Martha Summerhayes, *Vanished Arizona*, 110-111.
- ²⁴³Ellen McGowan Biddle, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife*, 86-87, 118-119.
- ²⁴⁴Alice Blackwood Baldwin, *An Army Wife on the Frontier*, 113.
- ²⁴⁵Katherine Gibson Fougera, *With Custer's Cavalry*, (Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Publishers Limited, 1968), 151-156.
- ²⁴⁶Ellen McGowan Biddle, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife*, 118-119.
- ²⁴⁷*Ibid.*, 68-69.
- ²⁴⁸Michele J. Nacy, *Members of the Regiment*, 7.
- ²⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 11-12.
- ²⁵⁰Anne Bruner Eales, *Army Wives on the Frontier*, 52.
- ²⁵¹Martha Summerhayes, *Vanished Arizona*, 14, 49, 64-65, 90-92.
- ²⁵²Eveline M. Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 121, 124.
- ²⁵³Michele J. Nacy, *Members of the Regiment*, 87.
- ²⁵⁴Ellen McGowan Biddle, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife*, 94.

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- ²⁵⁵ Michele J. Nacy, *Members of the Regiment*, 75.
- ²⁵⁶ Eveline M. Alexander, *Cavalry Wife*, 92-93.
- ²⁵⁷ Lydia Spencer Lane, *I Married a Soldier*, 100-101.
- ²⁵⁸ Frances M.A. Roe, *Army Letters from an Officer's Wife*, 338-340.
- ²⁵⁹ Anne Bruner Eales, *Army Wives on the Frontier*, 7-9.
- ²⁶⁰ Elizabeth Bacon Custer, *Following the Guidon: Into the Indian Wars with General Custer and the Seventh Cavalry* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994).
- ²⁶¹ Alice Blackwood Baldwin, *An Army Wife on the Frontier*, 25
- ²⁶² Teresa Vielè, *Following the Drum*, 14-15
- ²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 152.
- ²⁶⁴ Michele J. Nacy, *Members of the Regiment*, 90-93.
- ²⁶⁵ Ellen McGowan Biddle, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife*, 144.
- ²⁶⁶ Michele J. Nacy, *Members of the Regiment*, 16.
- ²⁶⁷ Ellen McGowan Biddle, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife*, 216-218.
- ²⁶⁸ Martha Summerhayes, *Vanished Arizona*, 254-256.
- ²⁶⁹ Anne Bruner Eales, *Army Wives on the Frontier*, 4.
- ²⁷⁰ Shirley A. Leckie, *Elizabeth Bacon Custer and the Making of a Myth* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1993), xiii, xvii-xviii and Elizabeth Bacon Custer, *Following the Guidon*.
- ²⁷¹ Anne Bruner Eales, *Army Wives on the Frontier*, 133.
- ²⁷² Teresa Vielè, *Following the Drum*, 174-175.
- ²⁷³ Ellen McGowan Biddle, *Reminiscences of a Soldier's Wife*, 208-210. One must take Biddle's comment about the heroic activities of the military for its activities in West with a grain of salt. Although the author focuses on an earlier era, military operations in Texas, at least, were often anything but heroic or gallant. See Gary Clayton Anderson, *The Conquest of Texas: Ethnic Cleansing in the Promised Land, 1820-1875* (Norman: The University of Oklahoma Press, 2005).
- ²⁷⁴ Jennie Harris Oliver, "Lure of the Desert," in *Red Earth: Complete Collection of Poems* (Kansas City, MO: Burton Publishing Co., 1934), 46.

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