



"DANCE-HOUSE."

PROSTITUTION AND CHANGING MORALITY IN THE FRONTIER CATTLE TOWNS OF KANSAS

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IN VIEW of the fact that the American frontier of the latter 1800's has been the focus of much historical interest and research, it is curious to note that almost no historical research has been done on the role played by the demimonde in frontier town life and development. This gap is particularly glaring since it is widely known that prostitutes were among the first women to come to Western frontier towns, and that consequently they were an integral part of early frontier life.

Kansas frontier history is no exception. Although the Kansas boom towns of the 1870's and 1880's contained large numbers of prostitutes, who catered to the desires of the single young cowboys and frontier men, this group of Kansas pioneers has largely been ignored by historians and social scientists.

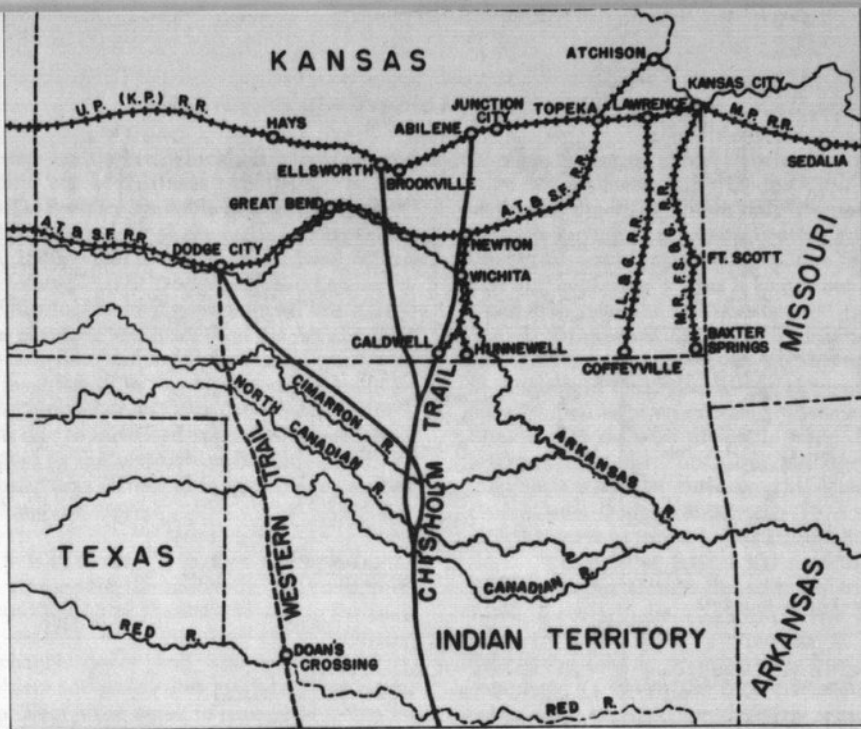
In this paper, the role of prostitution in the frontier cattle towns of Kansas (Abilene, Ells-

worth, Wichita, Dodge City, and Caldwell) is explored, using census material, city and court records, and newspaper articles from the cattle boom years. Particular attention is given to the change in the treatment and view of prostitutes by cattle town residents as the towns grew and developed. Before the subject of cattle town prostitution is discussed, however, a short review of the history of the Kansas cattle towns will be useful in providing the reader with the necessary historical and social context.

THE CUSTOM of driving large herds of cattle from the vast ranges of the Southwest to Northern cattle markets for a profit was well established by the mid-1800's. During the Civil War, it was suspended due to lack of manpower and regional hostilities. After the war, Texans began to drive their herds northward again, but soon discovered much to their dismay that Kansas, along with other Northern states had passed (and also enforced) quarantine statutes prohibiting the entry of Texas longhorns into the eastern portion of the state during the warm months. The reason for these statutes was that Texas cattle were carriers of a

Title-page photo: A contemporary artist has depicted cowboys relaxing at a dance hall in Abilene after a long cattle drive. Dance halls, saloons, and especially prostitution felt the influence of moral reform in the cattle towns as more families arrived to settle and the cattle business diminished.

For their advice and help in carrying out this research, the authors would like to thank Joseph Snell, Jack Traylor, Robert Dykstra, and Wayne Rohrer.



From 1867 to 1885 cattle from Texas ranches were driven north to the railroads in Kansas. The above map shows the principal trails along which the cattle were driven, the towns where the drives ended, and the railroads over which the cattle were shipped.

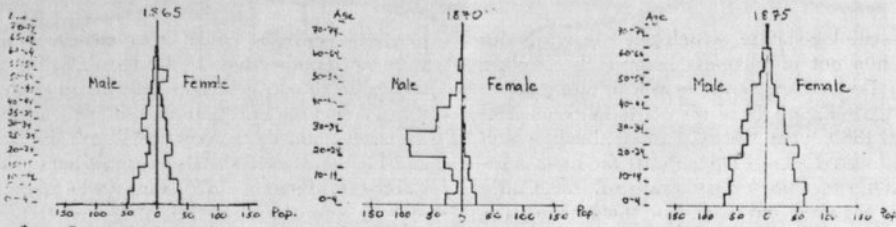
small tick which infected Northern domestic cattle with splenic fever (often called "Spanish" or "Texas" fever) and killed large numbers of them.

Early in 1867, however, it became apparent that the tracks of Union Pacific Railway, Eastern Division, would soon reach central Kansas, and several enterprising people seem to have hit upon the idea of establishing a cattle shipping center somewhere along the line. In February, 1867, a bill was passed by the Kansas legislature establishing a quarantine zone east of McPherson and north of Rice counties. Southwest Kansas was a "free zone" into which Texas cattle could be driven any time of the year. By September, 1867, the first east-bound rail shipments of Texas cattle left the newly built stockyards of Abilene. In spite of the fact that Abilene was northeast of the quarantine line, it became the first cattle shipping point because there was less resistance from townspeople in Abilene than there was in towns farther west. The governor of Kansas, well aware of the economic value to the state of the cattle trade, gave a semiofficial endorse-

ment of the Abilene site and approved a trail surveyed from the quarantine line to Abilene as provided by the law of 1867.

By 1871 the land around Abilene was beginning to fill up with farmers and their families, and opposition among them to the cattle trade grew. Anticipating the blockage of the Abilene trail (which was a northern extension of the Chisholm trail), the directors of the Kansas Pacific (formerly the UPED) made plans to move the cattle trade farther west to Ellsworth, where they consequently bought and enlarged the stockyards. During the summer of 1871, Ellsworth shipped a large number of cattle, and in 1872 it was second only to Wichita, which was south of Ellsworth (thus less far to drive from Texas) and had just gotten a railroad line in May, 1872.

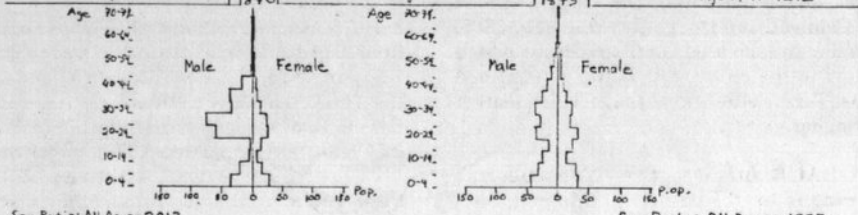
As the area around Ellsworth and Wichita became more densely settled, and as the quarantine line was moved westward the Santa Fe railroad saw a chance to capture the cattle trade farther west, and proceeded to build a huge stockyard next to its tracks at Dodge City. In 1876 a new quarantine line was approved by



Sex Ratio: All Ages - 1287
Age 14-49 - 1375

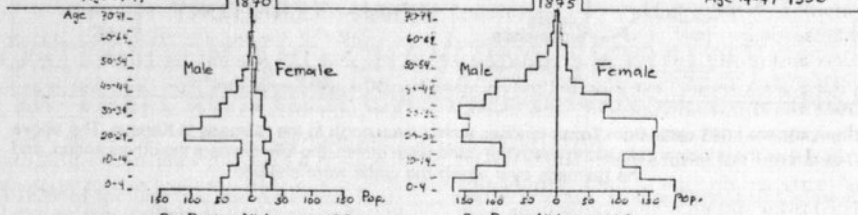
Sex Ratio: All Ages - 2365
Age 14-49 - 3270

Sex Ratio: All Ages - 1149
Age 14-49 - 1212



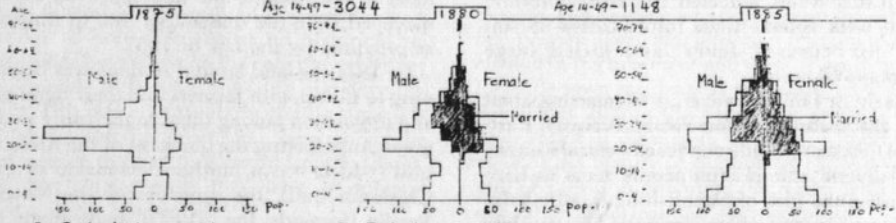
Sex Ratio: All Ages - 2013
Age 14-49 - 2500

Sex Ratio: All Ages - 1327
Age 14-49 - 1350



Sex Ratio: All Ages - 2250
Age 14-49 - 3044

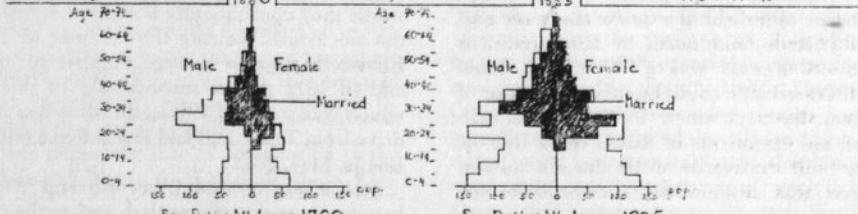
Sex Ratio: All Ages - 1040
Age 14-49 - 1148



Sex Ratio: All Ages - 3021
Age 14-49 - 3984

Sex Ratio: All Ages - 1789
Age 14-49 - 2041

Sex Ratio: All Ages - 1369
Age 14-49 - 1593



Sex Ratio: All Ages - 1700
Age 14-49 - 2655

Sex Ratio: All Ages - 1325
Age 14-49 - 1365

* Sex Ratio = $\frac{\# \text{ Males}}{\# \text{ Females}} \times 1000$

ABILENE
ELLSWORTH
WICHITA
DODGE CITY
CALDWELL

the state legislature, which put Ellsworth and Wichita out of business completely, leaving only Dodge City available as a shipping point. Dodge's monopoly of the cattle market lasted until 1880, when the town of Caldwell, which was located east of Dodge near the Kansas-Indian territory border, got a railroad line. Cattle were pastured and loaded on the Indian territory side of the border, in compliance with Kansas quarantine laws. The cattle trade in both Caldwell and Dodge City ceased in 1885, again due to increased rural settlement which resulted in the entire state being quarantined against Texas cattle and in the lack of a market for longhorn steers.

AS EACH of these five towns became centers for the pasturing, shipping, buying and selling of Texas cattle during the summer months, large numbers of enterprising merchants, dance hall and saloon owners, gamblers and prostitutes moved in and set up shop. They were quick to realize the potential for profit the Texas cowboy with his several months' pay and hunger for women, amusement, and comfort, represented. In the boom towns' early stages, then, their populations consisted primarily of single young men. Age-sex distributions and sex ratios compiled from the census records of the five cattle towns during their boom years show this very clearly (see chart p. 36).

As the sex ratios for the 20-49 (marriageable) age group show, there were often two to three times as many young men as women in the peak boom years of these towns. As is particularly evident in the case of Abilene, where the first census was taken two years before the town's boom period began, this huge imbalance was induced primarily by the coming of the cattle trade and reduced by its relocation to towns farther west as the 1875 census, taken four years after the last big shipping year in Abilene, shows.

The real extent of the sexual imbalance in these towns during the cattle driving season, however, was very probably not well reflected

Opposite page—Based on census figures, different age groups of the male and female populations of five principal Kansas cattle towns are shown graphically for the census years during the cowtown era. Notice the overwhelming ratio of males in the young adult groups during the early years.

in these censuses since transients generally were not enumerated. In Dodge City, for instance, in the 1875 census only 15 men were listed as having occupations centering around the cattle trade (three "cowboys," one "herder" and 11 "stock men"). This is somewhat understandable, since the 1875 census was taken in March, before most of the cattle men arrived. In the 1880 census, however, which was taken in the peak of the cattle driving season (June), only 76 men were enumerated whose occupations had to do with the cattle trade. But already in 1878, the *Ford County Globe* noted that 265,000 head of cattle were expected to be driven into Dodge during the 1878 season (250,000 were shipped in 1877), which would ". . . require at least 1,300 men to bring these cattle to Dodge. In addition to these 1,300, there will be 250 owners and buyers who will make their headquarters at Dodge during the season, or until their business is completed."¹ Given the fact that even more cattle were expected for the 1880 season (requiring more drovers), and that 365,000 cattle were actually driven to Dodge in 1882 (i.e., there was a steady upward trend in the number of cattle driven to Dodge during its boom period), it seems extremely unlikely that there should have been only 76 men in Dodge in June, 1880, with cattle-related occupations. Thus, during the summer months, the sex ratio was even more imbalanced than the census figures for Dodge show (there were anywhere from three to six times more men in the 20-49 age category than women). This same logic also applies to the other four boom towns, whose census enumeration of men with cattle-related occupations was always much lower than it logically must have been during the cattle shipping season.

THE ENUMERATION of female transients was not always very accurate, either. In some cases, the true occupation of these females was not recorded in the census, if an occupation was recorded at all. In the Caldwell census of 1880, for example, no females were listed whose occupation was "sporting," or "prostitution," but a crosscheck of Caldwell police court records for the summer of 1880 (giving the names of females fined for prostitution) showed that at least seven known pros-

1. *Ford County Globe*, Dodge City, May 7, 1878.

titutes were listed in the census, but with other occupational labels ("keeping house," "cooking," "dancing," "no occupation"). However, not all the prostitutes fined during June, 1880 (the month the census was taken), by the police judge were listed in the census; there were also seven prostitutes fined whose names were not in the census. Altogether, then, there were at least 14 prostitutes in Caldwell in June, 1880. But this number is probably still too low, although it is all we can be certain of. As notes in various cowtown newspapers imply, many prostitutes came to town in April and early May when the cattle shipping season was beginning, and left by the end of September. The following notes to this effect are typical of such notices in boom town newspapers:

Again the music of their heels is heard upon our jingling sidewalks, and the libidinous cooings of jipped doves² increase with the shadows of each succeeding nightfall.³

The knights of "the green cloth" are leaving in great numbers and so too, necessarily, the sisters of the "white hood."⁴

Ellsworth is rather quiet now: trade has not subsided so much in the city as in Nauchville.⁵ The sound of the harp has died out, the violin ceases its vibrations and the feet of the dancing maidens have taken themselves to Sherman and other places.⁶

Given this migratory pattern, it seems likely that most of the prostitutes who were fined sometime during the cattle shipping season were there for most of the summer. Going back to the Caldwell police court records of 1880, then, and counting the prostitutes listed in the census plus those additional prostitutes fined by the police judge during April, May, June, July, August, and September, the number of prostitutes who were likely in Caldwell during the shipping season is 37.⁷

In Caldwell's 1885 census (taken in March), only three prostitutes (known from police court records) were listed, although their occupation was not given. In addition to these, five other prostitutes were fined by the police judge in March, giving a total of eight prostitutes who were known to be in Caldwell at that time. However, adding these eight to those prostitutes fined from April 1 to September 30, 1885,

we get a total of 29 prostitutes who were probably in Caldwell during the summer months.⁸

In Wichita (the only other town besides Caldwell for which extensive and detailed police court records were available for a census year) in 1875, the census (taken in March) listed 26 women whose occupation was "sporting." Police court records showed that an additional five prostitutes were fined during the month of March, and 13 more were fined during April, May, August, and September⁹ putting the number of prostitutes who were likely in Wichita during the summer at 44.¹⁰

In Dodge City, the 1880 census (taken in June) listed six prostitutes ("sporting"), while the censuses of 1875 and 1885 both listed none. The newspapers, however, periodically estimated their numbers to be much higher than six. For example:

Dodge City is dull at the present time, and the town is relapsing into morality. At this writing there are only seventeen saloons and dance houses, sixty prostitutes, thirty gamblers and eighty cowboys in the whole town.¹¹

Does the Hays City Sentinel man know what the bible says about liars? The Sentinel editor reports "120 prostitutes in Dodge." Divide that number by three and you will get at the right number. However, since Dodge's wickedness is abroad in the land, we can stand almost any exaggeration. But we hate to see a man lie about a few—yes, girls.¹²

The morals of our city are rapidly improving. There are only fourteen saloons, two dance halls, and forty-seven cyprians in our metropolis of 700 inhabitants.¹³

If census enumerations of transients in the cattle towns did not accurately reflect their numbers (particularly during the cattle shipping summer months), they probably do reflect relatively well demographic changes in the nontransient town populations. As can be readily seen from the population graphs and sex ratios, the huge sex imbalances of the early boom years were reduced greatly in all the towns by the end of their boom years. Perhaps the greatest "equalizing" influence at work here was the tremendous increase in the proportion of children (the numbers of boys and girls under 14 were generally relatively equal) in the populations:

2. Prostitutes were often referred to in cattle town newspapers as "soiled doves."

3. *Wichita Weekly Eagle*, April 30, 1874.

4. *Ibid.*, September 10, 1874.

5. "Nauchville" was the name of Ellsworth's red light area.

6. *Ellsworth Reporter*, October 3, 1872.

7. According to the federal census of 1880, the population of Caldwell was 1,005.

8. According to the state census of 1885, the population of Caldwell was 1,970.

9. No records were available for June and July.

10. According to the 1875 state census, the population of Wichita was 2,580.

11. *Dodge City Times*, September 15, 1877.

12. *Ibid.*, August 17, 1878.

13. *Ford County Globe*, September 2, 1879.

Town	Census Year	Total Pop.	Number Children Under 14	Percent Children Under 14
Abilene (Boom Years, 1868-1871)	1865	444	245	55
	1870	525	143	27
	1875	894	467	52
Ellsworth (Boom Years, 1872-1874)	1870	452	132	29
	1875	498	215	43
Wichita (Boom Years, 1872-1876)	1870	689	235	34
	1875	2,451	1,076	43
Dodge City (Boom Years, 1875-1885)	1875	746	171	23
	1880	982	348	34
	1885	1,402	655	46
Caldwell (Boom Years, 1880-1885)	1880	972	366	34
	1885	1,237	883	71

This increase in the proportion of children in the town populations over such a relatively short period of time was due primarily to the steady immigration of new settlers, merchants, craftsmen, and laborers with their families as the towns expanded economically. Unfortunately, since marital status was not specified in either state or federal censuses until 1880, it was impossible to ascertain the proportion of married persons for all the towns. Both the Dodge and Caldwell censuses, however, showed some increase in the proportion of married persons in the 20-49 age group.

Town	Census Year	Age 20-49 Total Pop.	Number Married, Age 20-49	Percent Married, Age 20-49 of Total
Caldwell	1880	761	321	42
	1885	1119	645	57
Dodge	1880	691	317	46
	1885	892	436	49

The coming of immigrant families to the boom towns also precipitated the "exodus" of many of the single, adventurous frontier types who founded the boom towns and were their prominent citizens in early days. This is reflected in an editorial comment in one of the Dodge City newspapers in 1879, several years after Dodge's cattle boom had begun:

There is a class, still a large one . . . which looks with horror upon the approach of manners, customs and ideas tending to drive out the "frontier" characteristics of Dodge. To them, to live in the "wickedest city in the west" is a source of pride. They look with profound contempt upon a town whose police officers are not walking arsenals. They look back with regret to the time when "a drink was a quarter and a cigar two bits." They are not such bad fellows after all; but they do not long for a quiet life. They are not so many as they were. Some have lately felt the

cordon of grangers pressing upon them and they have flitted; some to Vegas, some to Silver Cliff, and some to Leadville.¹⁴

In summary, the following general picture of the cattle towns emerges: In their early days they were composed largely of single, adventurous frontier men who saw in the cattle towns an opportunity to make a fast buck. During the cattle driving and shipping months, huge numbers of transient cowboys invaded the towns, along with numerous prostitutes and gamblers. As the economy of the boom towns expanded with the opportunities and prosperity brought by the cattle trade, grangers, merchants, craftsmen, laborers and their families began to settle there and gradually the single frontier men moved westward.

NEWSPAPER articles, police court records and city council minutes show that, although prostitution was made illegal in all the boom towns after their incorporation, no attempts were made to actually suppress it in early cattle boom years. In fact, as the following article from the Dodge City *Times* well illustrates, the general aim of antiprostitution ordinances in early boom years was to financially support the city government and the police force through fines paid to the city:

The City Council of Dodge City have passed ordinances providing for the arrest and fine of all persons engaged in gambling and prostitution. . . . The city was running heavily in debt necessarily to keep up a large police force. The ordinary revenues of the city were not adequate to the demand of so great a force for so small a town. It is wise and proper that the class who entail this additional expense should meet it with their own contributions, and thus afford themselves protection under the wings of the law. We do not stop to inquire whether anything better could be done. We consider any form of vice under the restrictions of the law in some manner within the bounds of mutual protection. Its eradication is not a question. Where the carrion is there you will find the buzzard.

The fines are extended to the houses of ill-fame and those who inhabit them. The frail humanity will respond to the demand of the depleted city exchequer, remembering that the wages of sin is death. The "girls" will feel that they are not answering to the Great Tribunal, though their temporal care is under the brawny arms of a big policeman, who is sworn to protect the peace and dignity of the city. . . .¹⁵

That the antiprostitution ordinances were very successful in achieving the aims just described, is evident from various newspaper items:

14. *Ibid.*, March 18, 1879.

15. Dodge City *Times*, August 10, 1878.

The ordinances in relation to gambling and prostitution are being vigorously enforced. Over \$200 in fines have been collected [since August 10]. A sufficient amount will be collected to meet the expenses of retaining the police force, which was cut off one member.¹⁶

The city council, so the city treasurer informs us, at their last meeting determined, after an examination of the finances and income of the city,¹⁷ that it would not be necessary to levy any city tax for the present year. Where is there a city in the west of the respectable size and proportions of Wichita, that can make such a showing?¹⁸

Police court records from both Caldwell and Wichita show that the general procedure for collecting this money was that the city marshal would arrest prostitutes on approximately a monthly basis, escort them to the police court, where they routinely paid the minimal fine for being an "inmate" or a "keeper" of a house of ill fame. They were then generally not arrested by the police until the next month, and in some cases prostitutes were even arrested on the same day every month, an indication of the "licensing" nature of this procedure.

Various sources contained information showing that in the boom towns' early days, prostitutes were often looked upon with amused tolerance rather than righteous moral indignation. Cowtown newspapers were a particularly rich source of this material, and the fact that articles like those which follow were printed in public newspapers and did not subsequently evoke moral protest on the part of local town residents (many of whom in the early boom days were single men whose interests lay with the cattle trade), points to a relatively high level of tolerance:

Female Politician.—The other morning we witnessed the Marshall and assistant arguing a point with a woman. The point in dispute seemed to be the proper way to go to the cooler. The Marshall insisted on her walking and she insisted on being carried. As is always the way the women came out victorious. Drunk was no name for it.¹⁹

Two girls in a dance hall over the river had a quarrel about a fellow. The larger of the two finally, when it came to blows, got the smaller one under her arm, and was pulverizing her woman fashion, while the little one was quietly engaged in thrusting a knife into her antagonists apron. The wounds inflicted are severe, but the doctor thinks not necessarily fatal.²⁰

Fritzie has a black eye, caused by a heroic attempt to separate a half dozen pugilistic courtzezans who were in-

dulging in a free fight. When Fritzie interfered, Miss Fannie gave him two or three center shots about the head, closing one of his blinkers, and otherwise marring his beautiful countenance. Fritzie took it all without squealing, and now wears his black with as much pride as if it were a medal for some great achievement.²¹

For two nights the Dodge City Varieties have successfully presented the extravagant Can-Can to large and appreciative audiences. . . . The Can-Can was new to many, though jardin mabilization has become indigenous to American soil. The Can-Can does not deprave the moral taste of average Dodgeites or rangers—the ordinary life is presented in a condensed form on the stage. We cannot particularize the performers—we can-cannot do it. Every one acted well his or her part. The Varieties will be crowded tonight. Take a front seat, baldy, or you can-cannot see it—so well.²²

Scarlet Sluggers. A desperate fight occurred at the boarding house of Mrs. W., on "Tin Pot Alley," last Tuesday evening, between two of the most fascinating doves of the roost. When we heard the noise and looked out the front window, which commanded a view of the situation, it was a magnificent sight to see. Tufts of hair, calico, snuff and gravel flew like fur in a cat fight, and before we could distinguish how the battle waned a chunk of dislocated leg grazed our ear and a cheer from the small boys announced that a battle was lost and won. The crowd separated as the vanquished virgin was carried to her parlors by two "soups." A disjointed nose, two or three internal bruises, a chawed ear and a missing eye were the only scars we could see.²³

In addition to such newspaper articles, other sources also indicate that prostitutes were dealt with lightly by local officials in early boom town days. Case records of the Sumner county district court (case no. 113), for instance, relate that when George and Mag Woods (proprietors of the Caldwell Red Light Dance House) and Lizzie Palmer (a prostitute) were brought to court for obstructing the law and resisting arrest, their attorney handed the following note to Justice of the Peace Ike N. King on behalf of his clients:

APOSTROPHE TO THE COURT²⁴

Oh, Ike King
I hope you'll decide to my liking
For I'm sleepy and tired
And I want to be fired
Out of court (for a spell)
Over prairie and dell
Over morass and fell
Till I light in Caldwell
In the Leland Hotel
And sleep forty winks without waking
Oh, Ike King, Oh, hell.

16. *Ibid.*, August 17, 1878.

17. During the summer months in 1873, prostitute fines contributed approximately 56 percent of the city income from fines, which made up a large portion of the entire city income.

18. *Wichita Weekly Eagle*, August 28, 1873.

19. *Ellsworth Reporter*, May 16, 1872.

20. *Wichita Weekly Eagle*, June 21, 1872.

21. *Dodge City Times*, October 13, 1877.

22. *Ibid.*, July 6, 1878.

23. *Ford County Globe*, January 21, 1879.

The justice then wrote on the other side of the note:

He danced all night till broad daylight,
And defended the whores in the morning.

The case was dismissed.

Another example of such laxity comes from Wichita. City records for 1872 included lists of prostitutes and gamblers from whom the city marshal had collected fines, along with the amount of the fines. For the period from August 5 to September 4, 1882, along with a list of ten "inmates" and two "keepers" of houses of ill fame, the marshal wrote a note to the city treasurer explaining that due fines were not collected from three prostitutes in the house of Ida May (a well-known madam in Wichita) because they had been sick. In Dodge City, prostitutes were not only treated with tolerance and amusement in early days—several of them in fact lived with prominent city officials, including the mayor of Dodge from 1877-1880, two policemen and the vice-president of the local bank and partner in the Long Branch Saloon.²⁴

All of this material, combined with the fact that only two relatively antiprostitution newspaper articles could be found in the years in which the above articles were published, shows fairly clearly that in the early days of the boom towns, sentiments of moral indignation towards prostitution were not of great dimensions or importance. On the contrary, prostitution was tolerated and regulated by the city fathers, who had no qualms about enriching the city treasury with "tainted money." In fact, keeping the prostitutes in business was regarded as one way of keeping the volume of cattle trade high—it was thought that cowboys would take their cattle to a town where they could enjoy themselves at the end of their drive. Thus, those who were promoters of the cattle trade (particularly businessmen) and participants in it were generally not morally outraged by the proportions of "sin" in their towns.²⁵

In early boom town years, the ratio of families to single transient and nontransient men was, as discussed above, very low. In later boom years, however, the proportion of families and children increased appreciably in the

towns and the sex ratio became much less imbalanced. This was primarily due to the influx of settlers who were ". . . pouring in from the north and east—homesteaders. The great majority come in wagons, bringing along their cattle, horses, farming implements and household furniture, and accompanied by their families."²⁶

These families not only settled on farms around the towns, but some of them also made their homes in the economically thriving towns. They were families of merchants and craftsmen as well as farmers. As the proportion of families increased, so did the number of churches, schools and students, social and church organizations, etc., all of which promoted values, goals, and life-styles quite different from those of the rowdy fortune-seeking single frontier men who founded the towns and promoted them as cattle trading and shipping centers, and from those of the transient young cowboys. The permanent settlers wanted a quiet, moral place to live where they could raise their children and make a good living. The transients and frontier men, on the other hand, were looking for adventure, excitement and quick, large profits; in the heyday of the cowtowns these were amply provided by numerous saloons, gambling rooms, dance halls, and whore houses. These institutions, while ensuring the patronage of the cowboy and thus contributing to the economic prosperity of the towns, were heartily disliked by many of the permanent settlers and their families because of their blatant propagation of "immoral," rowdy, adventurous, and at times physically dangerous life-styles and values which were opposed to the values of law and good order, morality, religion, and a sober, steady, upright life-style held by the settlers.

As the proportion of settlers with families increased in the boom towns, so did the proportion of people holding the above values and desiring a moral, sober, and orderly place to raise their families. Prostitution in the boom towns, on the other hand, represented pretty much the opposite of these values. Thus, the scene was set for continuous conflict between the respectable forces for morality and the supporters of the cattle trade who thought that the availability of amusements such as prostitution was an important factor in retaining the

24. Federal census records, Dodge City, 1880: Historical notes of Merritt Beeson, Dodge City.

25. Cf., also, Robert R. Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns* (Atheneum, N. Y., 1974), pp. 243-245.

26. *Wichita Weekly Eagle*, April 12, 1872.



Joseph G. McCoy (1835-1915), Abilene cattle dealer, was mayor of the city in 1871 when some citizens were attempting to put a stop to prostitution in Abilene. After laws providing for stiffer punishment were enacted, the town was noticeably less prosperous because of the loss of the cattle trade.

business of the Texas cowboys. This conflict was the dominant element in the history of prostitution and legislation concerning it in the Kansas cattle towns.

ALTHOUGH Abilene first gained some prominence as a cattle shipping point in 1868, it did not have a local newspaper until approximately two years later. Consequently no information on prostitution in Abilene in its first boom year exists. According to the city ordinance book, however, which begins in 1869, the first ordinance concerning prostitution was passed by the city council in 1870. According to this ordinance,

Any person who may be found loitering around houses of ill-fame, gambling houses or places where liquors are sold or drank without any legitimate means of support, or shall be the keeper or inmate of any house of ill-fame or gambling house, or engaged in any unlawful calling whatsoever, shall be deemed a vagrant, and upon conviction thereof may be fined in any sum not exceeding five hundred dollars, and unless such fine shall be paid the person so offending shall be committed to the common jail of the town, and shall work the same out on any public work of the town at the rate of two dollars per day for each day so committed.

The various sections of another ordinance passed the same day provided for fines from \$10 to \$100 for inmates of houses of ill fame,

\$25 to \$200 for brothel keepers, \$10 to \$100 for landlords who allowed the practice of prostitution on their premises, and \$10 to \$100 for persons discovered frequenting houses of ill fame. This ordinance was published in the *Abilene Chronicle* on May 19, 1870, and went into effect the following day.

This ordinance, however, was probably not strictly enforced by the city government—a situation which greatly disturbed the increased number of respectable citizens in the Abilene vicinity. By early 1871, the *Abilene Chronicle* reported that Abilene already had two schools, five churches, and a population of approximately 1,000. In 1871, Abilene's last year as a major shipping point for Texas cattle, the issue of prostitution became a hotly debated bone of contention between local businessmen and saloonmen, and the groups of respectable settlers around Abilene, headed by two reform-minded ministers, one of whom was the editor of the *Abilene Chronicle*.

In May, 1871, a new ordinance against prostitution was passed which was very similar to the previous ordinance, except that the fines, which were somewhat lower, were intended by the new mayor, Joseph G. McCoy, as "taxes" benefiting the city government. Soon after this ordinance was passed, the cattle trade-supporting mayor and his council began receiving protests from angry citizens. On June 1 the *Chronicle*, expressed its disapproval as follows:

Over one hundred respectable women of Abilene have petitioned the council to take active measures for the suppression of brothels, and we are assured by scores of reputable people that unless the city authorities carry the ordinance into execution, the permanent residents of the town will rise up *en masse* and drive them and their friends out *at all hazards*. There is trouble brewing. The people of Abilene are undoubtedly strong enough in numbers to control their own town, but we can as yet see no reason why they should organize a vigilance committee. The council and other lawful authorities we are confident will yet enforce the ordinances and laws, in spite of the mayor and his little squad. We say to the council and other officials, that the respectable people of Abilene are able to protect themselves whenever their officers fail to do so in accordance with their oaths. Let the law be rigidly enforced, and there will be no trouble.²⁷

In mid-June, two councilmen were elected to the city council to fill two posts which had been resigned in a controversy over liquor taxes in Abilene. They were elected on their

27. *Abilene Chronicle*, June 1, 1871.

antiprostitution stance, but could do nothing when, in late July, the other four council members approved the institution of the "taxing" or regular fining of prostitutes, the creation of a brothel district on the edge of town and the employment of two extra policemen to keep the peace in the district. The *Chronicle* attempted to state the feelings of Abilene's respectable citizens in the following article and others similar to it.

On last Tuesday I. L. Smith and J. A. Gauthie were elected to fill the places of the two councilmen who recently resigned. We heard of no other issue being made than the question of allowing disreputable houses to be run in town. The bagnios did not stand a ghost of a chance, the vote being almost unanimous against them. The council, now being unanimously opposed to the infamous dens, have it in their power to carry into effect the will of the people of Abilene. *Let them suppress the bawdy houses! If this is not done speedily we are informed by the most respectable people of the city that the citizens Protective Association will suppress them. . . . Enforce the law, and let it be known that there are true men and virtuous women in Abilene who are not afraid to condemn and put down the sinks of iniquity attempted to be carried on in their midst. Abolish the hells in Abilene, and the hell that McCoy believes is a few thousand miles off will take care of itself. The hells here are injuring the souls and bodies of the sinful, and lowering the tone of public morality far more than the hell of which McCoy seems to have but little fear. Again we advise our town authorities to enforce the ordinances. In this matter we but utter the sentiment of every honorable man and virtuous woman in Abilene.*²⁸

Men and boys are falling from virtue and honor almost daily—children are being ruined—the moral tone of society is being blunted—all because crazy McCoy and his friends have taken it upon themselves to establish and protect houses of ill-fame within the corporate limits of the town. McCoy after he had secured his election as mayor, declared that he was in favor of such houses—"if they are respectably conducted." Just as if a man could be a respectable thief, or a respectable debaucher of childish innocence—or a respectable scoundrel! And so McCoy attempts to make them "respectable" by throwing around them his protection as an officer of the law—and demoralizes the town council so that they say: Yes! We'll appoint two policemen to guard them and see that they are permitted to carry on their work of physical and moral death without hindrance or molestation! Yes, almost the entire community may become debauched—including little school children—and as councilmen we will disregard our oaths, *and sanction and aid* these characters in violating the laws of the state and ordinances of the town! Verily, Sodom was a paradise compared to the moral atmosphere now surrounding Abilene. How long will the 5,000 virtuous people of the county and town endure this state of things before they demand in thunder tones that their officers enforce the laws and ordinances? A community debauched is a community disgraced. A people who es-

teem money-making of greater consequence than virtue and honor, are almost beyond human redemption.²⁹

On August 2, 1871, another petition was presented by a group of citizens demanding the suppression of prostitution and the discharge of the two extra policemen. No action was taken until September, however, when the two policemen were discharged from their duties and an ordinance was passed closing down the town's dance hall.³⁰ About this time, the *Chronicle* reported that the prostitutes, pimps, and gamblers began leaving town in large numbers and predicted a better future for the town.

The last two weeks have also witnessed the decadence of gambling hells, closed mostly for want of "business." We hope that ere the frost compels us to cover our ears, the last gambling den will have "gone where the woodbine twineth." When these evils are once more eradicated, the good and Christian people of this community must see that they are never allowed to creep into our midst again. The permission heretofore of such characters and such wickedness, in Abilene, has injured the permanent prosperity of our city far more than some of our people are willing to admit. The settlement of the county has also been retarded from the same cause. No candid citizen will deny the facts. They cannot be hidden under a bushel. Every newspaperman, whether editor or reporter, who has ever visited the town, and said anything about the "dens" existing in this locality, has written of Abilene in a very unenviable light—often, it is true, exaggerating the facts. . . .

Now, that a new era is opening up for Abilene, and her future growth in moral and material prosperity is assured, let us rejoice. Let every good citizen aid in giving morality the ascendancy. Personal virtue and purity are necessary to the real happiness and growth of a community. The fountain cannot rise above its source—if the people are impure, the town must be so likewise. Let the good work go on until the wickedness and sorrow of the old city shall be entirely submerged by the virtue and happiness of the new Abilene. So mote it be.³¹

In November the following article appeared in the *Chronicle* expressing satisfaction with the more moral state of affairs in Abilene.

It must be a source of satisfaction to the good people of our town and county to learn that McCoy's addition has played about out. The amount of crime, misery and damnation caused by the vile ulcer no human tongue can tell. If any of our citizens attempt the introduction of such houses here next year, and the officers of the law refuse to perform their duty in the premises, the citizens will have use for a considerable quantity of hemp. One element or the other must control. The devil's pimps have had their day—decent people will have a word to say hereafter.³²

29. *Ibid.*, July 20, 1871.

30. City of Abilene, "Minute Book," pp. 83, 86-88; *Abilene Chronicle*, September 7, 1871.

31. *Ibid.*, September 14, 1871.

32. *Ibid.*, November 16, 1871.

28. *Ibid.*, June 15, 1871.

In February, 1872, the Farmers' Protective Association publicly requested that the cattle drovers take their herds elsewhere to be shipped, as ". . . the Inhabitants of Dickinson [county] will no longer submit to the evils of the trade."³³

On May 24, 1872, a new ordinance concerning prostitution was passed by the city council, instituting stiff fines for prostitution: \$25 minimum fine for the first offence, \$50 for the second, and \$100 for any subsequent offence.³⁴ In 1873, when it was clear to even the farmers that Abilene was much less prosperous than earlier because of the loss of the cattle trade, the *Chronicle* reported that some moves were being made to try to recapture the cattle trade for Abilene, but only on the condition that "it can be accomplished without having the evils that have heretofore followed it."³⁵

SOON AFTER Ellsworth's incorporation as a city of the third class in the summer of 1871, the new city council met and passed the first city ordinances. Among these was an ordinance concerning loitering, gambling, and prostitution. The wording was almost identical to the Abilene ordinance and the fines ranged from \$10 to \$50 or 30 days imprisonment or both.³⁶

As noted above, the purpose of this and similar early ordinances was simply to collect fine money from prostitutes and gamblers, in order to pay for the increased police force necessitated by their presence—not to stop these activities. Ellsworth police court records show that only keepers of houses of ill fame were fined the \$10 minimum, whereas inmates were only fined \$5. In August, 1872, another ordinance concerning prostitution was passed by the city council. It was similar to the previous ordinance except that it emphasized that prostitutes loitering around *saloons* and *liquor shops* would be arrested and fined (\$5 to \$50), and that anyone who permitted prostitutes to loiter around their place of business, day or night, would also be arrested and fined \$5 to \$50. According to the police court docket, however, no one was actually arrested on these

charges until 1874.³⁷ During 1872 (the Ellsworth *Reporter* was not founded until December, 1871) and 1873, newspaper articles which referred in some way to prostitutes were either amused about their antics³⁸ or simply reporting "objectively" about some incident. By 1874 some sentiments of moral reform began to be expressed. City residents turned out the less reform-minded old mayor and all but one of the old councilmen in city elections, and elected a new council, which cut city officials' salaries, banned gambling, and increased the license fee of saloons to the legal maximum of \$500. In addition an ordinance was passed declaring bawdy houses to be "public nuisances" and it was stated that they would be "shut up." Further, section 13 of this ordinance very specifically stated that

Any person who shall within the limits of the city of Ellsworth appear in any public place in a state of nudity or in a dress not belonging to his or her sex; or in an indecent and lewd dress or shall willfully disturb or disquiet the peace, order and quiet of said city by rude and indecent behavior profane discourse and disorderly conduct or noisy and boisterous conduct . . . shall . . . be fined not more than fifty dollars.³⁹

Unfortunately, it is impossible to tell from the available evidence exactly how these ordinances were enforced, but from the evidence we do have, it seems that public sentiment against prostitution in Ellsworth did increase somewhat from 1872 to 1874, the period during which it was a major cattle shipping point.

IN THE CITY of Wichita, the familiar system of "taxing" prostitutes through regular fines was in operation by August, 1872, Wichita's first major season as a cattle town.⁴⁰ The fines were somewhat higher than in other towns: for being a keeper of a house of ill fame, a \$20 fine was assessed, and a \$10 fine accompanied conviction of being an "inmate." As a result of regularly fining relatively large numbers of prostitutes (during 1873, 155 prostitute fines were collected by the city) and collecting monthly saloon license fees, Wichita's city treasurer could report at the end of August, 1873, that the city income from fines

33. *Ibid.*, February 8, 1872.

34. *Ibid.*, June 6, 1872.

35. *Ibid.*, January 30, 1873.

36. Ellsworth "Ordinance Books," Ordinance No. 8; Ellsworth "Council Minutes," 1871.

37. Unfortunately, the police court records of Ellsworth are not complete. For some unknown reason, some are missing from the court docket book for the entire cattle town period. Thus, conclusions based on this evidence must be regarded as tentative.

38. See quotes pp. 38, 40.

39. Ellsworth "Ordinance Books," Ordinance No. 3, 1874.

40. Wichita city records, "Misc. Papers," city marshal's reports of fines collected, 1872.

was large enough to make the levying of general business taxes, common in other frontier towns at the time, unnecessary. Of the newspaper articles making some reference to prostitutes in 1872 and 1873, most showed either amusement at their antics⁴¹ or were simply matter-of-factly reporting events.⁴²

By 1873 some reform sentiment began to crystallize, especially among Wichita's "good ladies." The result was a petition (dated simply 1873) to the city council signed by 74 local women to suppress houses of prostitution in the city:

To the Mayor and Councilmen of the City of Wichita,
The undersigned Citizens of the city of Wichita do most respectfully but earnestly petition your Honorable body, that you take such steps as may be necessary or expedient for the enforcement of the Ordinances of the city relating to Bawdy houses and houses of ill fame, And that such houses now in existence in our city may be suppressed, and the inmates of the same dealt with according to law.

And we pray that if in the opinion of your city attorney the Ordinances now on record are insufficient to carry into effect the intention of the law under which our city is organized, that proper and sufficient Ordinances to that end may be immediately passed and rigidly enforced.⁴³

In spite of this show of unity by the respectable women in town, no action was taken by the city council, and the unofficial "taxing" system continued operation.⁴⁴ In 1874 the Wichita newspaper, in addition to two articles noting respectively the arrival and departure of the prostitutes, cowboys, and gamblers, carried the following article approving the punishment meted out by the law to local prostitutes, dance hall proprietors, bar tenders, etc., for their parts in an October, 1873, shoot-out at a local dance hall, causing the death of four persons.

Wichita is fast getting rid of that element which has proved such a curse to her prosperity, thanks to the county attorney and the improved sentiment of the place which is backing him up.⁴⁵ Rowdy Joe made a telling shot that night. It shot "Red" into eternity; himself out of the country; Anderson through the head; Beebe, Red's bartender into the penitentiary; Joe DeMerritt, Red's mistress, into the penitentiary; Rowdy Kate to parts unknown; and Smith, Omet and another into jail for perjury. "The mills of the gods grind slowly but they grind exceedingly small." Pat-

ten was sentenced for a year, Beebe for three years, and Josephine DeMerritt for ten years.⁴⁶

By 1875 moralist sentiment had increased to the point where the incumbent mayor, who had been lenient on local vices, was defeated in city elections and a man more sympathetic to the moralist cause became head of the city. Subsequently, in the summer of 1875, the city council banned dancing at the park or local beer garden⁴⁷ in response to sentiments like those expressed in the following letter to the editor of the *Eagle*:

That So-Called Beer Garden. The fashion in which that garden is run is a disgrace to the city, an outrage upon decent people, and a shame to our authorities. Quiet evenings are rendered hideous by the brawling of the lewd of both sexes, intermingled with a jiggling orchestra, horrible oaths and miscellaneous knock-downs. The merest child in the town is nightly made aware of the dark side of life, and innocence and virtue compelled to view the flauntings of shame and hear the revelings of the drunken and vile, in the most public manner. We have refrained from saying anything heretofore through these columns, hoping that a sense of decency upon the part of the council and city authorities would come to the rescue, but their actions prove the merest farces, making an unhappy contrast with the action of James C. Hope, who, when Mayor, without waiting for an ordinance or order of the city council, marched to the river bank and told Rowdy Joe and his rowdy crew to get away with their unfit enterprise, or he would pitch it into the river. . . . Have these officials the effrontery to tell us that they are unable to protect us from common nuisances? Bah! It is disgusting. Do your duty, or by resigning, acknowledge your incapacity; for we tell you in the plainest English, that this community will not much longer brook this nonsense from its servants, but will demonstrate that there is moral sense and decency enough left to protect the children and wives, the sons and daughters, against the brazen insolence of law defiers and their abettors.⁴⁸

Three additional newspaper articles referring to prostitution were all relatively objective and simply reported minor incidents.⁴⁹

On May 11, 1876, the *Wichita Eagle* reported that the city council had recently met and passed several ordinances for the suppression of houses of prostitution and of street-walking (this was the only article on prostitution in 1876). Such suppression was also demanded by Wichita citizens in two petitions, similar to the following to the city council, which are descriptive of the aspects of prostitution which particularly offended them:

46. *Wichita Weekly Eagle*, January 8, 1874.

47. Wichita city records, "Proceedings of the Governing Body," August 19, 1875.

48. *Wichita Weekly Eagle*, August 26, 1875.

49. *Ibid.*, April 22, June 3, July 29, 1875.

41. *Wichita Weekly Eagle*, June 21, July 19, August 2, 1872.

42. *Ibid.*, December 26, 1872, October 30, 1873.

43. Wichita city records, "Misc. Papers," 1873.

44. *Ibid.*

45. In 1873, as noted above, the same "element" was regarded as being responsible for the happy fact that no business taxes would have to be levied.

To the Hon. Mayor & Councilmen of Wichita

We the undersign petition your Hon. body to declare the Inmates of the House owned by W. C. Wardman on Water St. between Douglas Ave. & First St. are a nuisance for reasons disturbing neighbors after night by men calling at all hours loud talking knocking at the door causing respectable ladies to be in-sulted by parties who visit said house while passing on the street, calling at different houses knocking at doors demanding entrance day & night.⁵⁰

In spite of such agitation, more moderate forces regained control of the mayorship in 1877, and consequently the question of the suppression of gambling and prostitution was again brought up for discussion. Although gambling was banned after a heated battle in the city council, prostitution was not totally banned. In reaction, the county attorney, W. E. Stanley, on behalf of moralists in Wichita wrote the following letter to the city council, dated June 27, 1877:

To the Mayor and Councilmen of Wichita Kans.

Gentlemen, numerous complaints having been made to me against the keepers and inmates of bawdy houses for the violation of our statutes relating to prostitution, I have thought it advisable to address you this note.

When I was first elected County Attorney I adopted a policy which would not in any way interfere with the government of the city by its own officers, in such a way as they might deem proper unless in case of great exigency.

I now feel that that exigency has arisen.

Houses of prostitution are advertising themselves, by open doors in some of the most public streets of our city, prostitutes in half nude forms take their morning airings under the eyes of many of our most respectable citizens and flaunt the indicia of their "trade" in all public places and gatherings without hindrance from the authorities.

I am of the opinion that the time has come when these places of vice must be at least regulated if not entirely suppressed, and I am also of the opinion that as they are "city institutions" and as the city has received large financial benefits from this source, that they should be regulated through the city courts and by the city officials.

I hope you will give this matter your immediate attention. These complaints to which I have alluded come from a source which is entitled to consideration, and unless they are granted a hearing (heretofore refused them by the government of the city) I shall institute such proceedings as will give them the redress to which they are entitled under the laws of the state.⁵¹

In 1878 still another petition, similar to the earlier ones, was sent to the city council on this issue.

Although no city records exist, which might tell us whether or not these petitions were

heeded by the city government, it is clear that town sentiment toward prostitution had become increasingly negative and vocal since Wichita's debut as a cattle town in 1872.

BY THE TIME Dodge City became a major cattle shipping point (ca. 1875), it had already been a boom town of sorts for several years due to its proximity to huge herds of buffalo, which were slaughtered by hunters by the thousands. Their hides, bones and meat were sold and shipped at Dodge. The buffalo hunters who populated Dodge at that time were the rugged, rowdy frontier characters described earlier. For them "to live in the 'wickedest city in the west'" was "a source of pride."⁵²

Early newspaper articles about prostitution and prostitutes in Dodge clearly reflect this mentality and life-style. In 1877 (there was no newspaper in Dodge before 1877), of 11 articles about prostitution, nine expressed amusement about prostitutes' antics and the remaining two were simply accounts of minor events in which prostitutes were involved. According to city ordinance records, there were no prohibitions against prostitution at this time. In 1878, due to the high cost of law enforcement, ordinances were passed against gambling and prostitution, which provided ample fine money for adequate law enforcement.⁵³

The aim of this ordinance was certainly not moral reform, and the newspaper articles written about prostitution and prostitutes in Dodge during 1878 reflect this. Of 13 such articles, eight expressed a light, amused, and, at times, even paternalistic view of Dodge's "girls"; three were not comic, but also not condemning of local prostitution, one article asserted that prostitution and gambling were minor concerns compared to other crimes, and one article voiced approval of the anticipated control of prostitution in Dodge.

In 1879, of the four articles about prostitution, two were of a comic nature, one expressed approval of the annual spring return of the prostitutes, gamblers, and cowboys, and one asserted that although Dodge was "not the most chaste and refined city in every respect," it at least was honest about it and not hypo-

50. Wichita city records, "Misc. Papers," dated May 22, 1876, signed by 10 persons.

51. *Ibid.*, letter to mayor and councilmen from W. E. Stanley, June 27, 1877.

52. *Ford County Globe*, March 18, 1879.

53. Dodge City "Ordinance Book," 1878, Nos. 41 and 42.

critical like various other cities in the vicinity.⁵⁴ In 1880 there were only two newspaper articles on prostitution; one was an attempt by the editor of the *Dodge City Times* to "dishonor" the editor of the rival *Ford County Globe*: "The *Globe* editor makes frequent visits to Tin Pot Alley, we should judge, from his frequent allusions."⁵⁵ The other article was a neutral account of the murder of one man by another, their mutual attraction to the same prostitute being cited as a possible motive.⁵⁶

In the spring of 1881, a moderate reform mayor, Alonzo B. Webster, was elected to head the Dodge City government. He replaced James "Dog" Kelley, who had been mayor since 1877 and commanded the rank-and-file support of "a considerable remnant of the old frontier element with backgrounds similar to Kelley's—buffalo hunters, teamsters, ex-cavalrymen, and other so-called border characters."⁵⁷ Webster was supported by moderate businessmen and also moral reformers, and he immediately took action against "thieves, thugs, confidence men, and persons without visible means of support." Fines on prostitutes and gamblers were regularly collected and similar fines were levied on the saloons (which had been declared illegal by the state of Kansas in 1880).⁵⁸ In 1882, Webster was re-elected mayor without opposition and his moderate policies continued in effect. During Webster's term of office (1881 and 1882) only two newspaper articles about prostitution appeared; one was a neutral account of the death of a dance hall owner, who left all his property to his concubine⁵⁹ and the other was a neutral account of a woman who shot herself when her husband was reported to be flirting with local prostitutes.⁶⁰

In 1883 Webster decided not to run for mayor again, but recommended Larry Deger, a second generation German-American. Because of a business rivalry between Webster and a saloon owner named Harris, some of Webster's previous supporters nominated Harris for mayor. Dykstra concisely reconstructs the subsequent events:

54. *Ford County Globe*, March 11, 1879.

55. *Dodge City Times*, April 17, 1880.

56. *Ibid.*, November 20, 1880.

57. Dykstra, *Cattle Towns*, p. 216.

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 268-269.

59. *Dodge City Times*, July 28, 1881.

60. *Ibid.*, November 10, 1881.



"Squirrel Tooth" Alice, one of the Dodge City dance hall girls.

Two days later those who felt that Harris's candidacy menaced the reign of law and order initiated by Webster . . . met at the courthouse to organize an opposition slate. Having endorsed a two-years' war on vagrants and confidence men, the moderates wrote off any support from the old Gang rank-and-file [previous Mayor Kelly's supporters] still in town. But with Deger at the head of the slate, they could count on the German vote. For additional backing they turned to the moral reformers, who already favored Webster's tested moderate reformism over what Harris seemed to promise. In return for their active support, the radicals were able to extract some large concessions. Prostitution, while not to be abolished, would be stripped of its egregious trappings: whores were to be banned from saloons, no new dance houses would be permitted to open, and in return for a monopoly in the 1883 cattle season the one existing dance house would close down on November 1.⁶¹

Ultimately Deger and his proposed city council (including two rather radical moral reformers) were elected, and on April 23 the new governing body passed ordinances banning prostitutes from saloons, dance halls, and

61. Dykstra, *Cattle Towns*, p. 272.

other public places.⁶² Soon thereafter, Harris's saloon was "raided" by city police and three prostitutes were arrested. They were subsequently ". . . brought up before his honor Bobby Burns and he imposed a heavy fine on each of them for their disregard of the law."⁶³

This incident triggered what became known as the "Dodge City War." Since the ordinance banning prostitutes from dance halls was only enforced in the case of Harris's saloon while a number of others (including former Mayor Webster's) defied the law unmolested, Harris and his partner Luke Short felt they had been unfairly treated. For this reason Short exchanged gunshots with a policeman, and along with several sympathetic citizens was arrested and ordered by Mayor Deger to leave town. Short threatened to return to Dodge backed by force, causing the anxious citizens of Dodge to ask for state militia protection.

Ultimately a satisfactory solution was worked out and Short returned peacefully and resumed business activities in Dodge. However, the wide newspaper coverage of this "war," even by New York and Chicago newspapers had put Dodge in a bad public light, which upset high officials of the Santa Fe railroad, which had promoted Dodge as its major cattle shipping point. The railroad officials therefore demanded that certain moral reforms be made in Dodge, and if they were not ". . . the company would revoke Dodge's status as a division terminus and major cattle shipping point and defer substantial additional facilities scheduled for construction there."⁶⁴

The reforms the railroad asked for, closing of businesses on Sundays, the banning of music in saloons and dance halls, and the restriction of gambling to back rooms, were passed by the city council⁶⁵ but soon ignored in practice. However, ". . . moral reform gained momentum in the Dodge City War—if only because the experience greatly emboldened and solidified local radicals."⁶⁶

One indication that the tide of moral reform was beginning to turn was the conversion of two very influential Dodge citizens, who had formerly been supporters of the antimoralistic

Kelly faction, to the moralist and prohibitionist cause—the editor of the Dodge City *Times* and a local lawyer. They both aspired to leadership in the Republican party, which had become increasingly proreform due to settlers' immigration into the county. This new moralistic tone was beginning to be reflected in newspaper articles in 1883. After the Dodge City War, numerous articles similar to the following appeared in the Dodge papers:

Closed. The glaring, glittering and hifalutin in Dodge is closed—wound up—suspended. The music hall and the dance hall are of the forgotten past. The last relic of the frontier has given up the ghost. The city council on Friday last passed ordinances requiring the closing of all business on Sunday and abolishing music and singing in saloons and dance halls. The proprietors did not wait until the ordinances became legal by publication, but promptly closed saloons and business houses on Sunday last, having previously discharged musicians and singers. This voluntary obedience to the municipal mandates is highly commendable. Ordinances on gambling and prostitution already exist, and an official order only is required to put these laws in operation. Gambling is now conducted in back rooms, and we presume this vice will be reached by monthly raids, and consequently monthly fines. In a measure, gambling is shorn of its splendor, the stringent ordinances operating against the business as conducted formerly. The business of gambling will in the future be done on a moderate scale. The music in the gambling halls was an attraction that lured the Dodge visitor, and therefore the hurrah character of the games has been shorn. Prostitutes will probably ply their business, but many of them have left the city, not desiring to be subjected to the extreme penalty of the law on this vice.⁶⁷

This action was supported by the respectable citizens as the following indicates:

And the dance hall must go; and whisky must go—and what thing on earth won't go when the proper force or remedy is applied! The "dance hall" is a peculiar "institution" of the primary conditions of the far west, and its toleration within the region of civilization has been a question of much comment. Practically, dancing has not been carried on for some months in the "halls" in Dodge, but all else, of these fruitful sources of trouble and disorder, has been done. It is to eradicate, eliminate and destroy these elements of vice that the wisdom of good society is directed. A preliminary step has already been taken, a temporary injunction has been granted restraining the conduct of "dance halls" in Dodge City. The contest will come up in the June term of the District Court, but we believe before that time no public sentiment will dare to offer to sustain the issue on the side of the "dance hall." Now, the prevailing opinion is against the longer indulgence of one of the "border institutions." The time has past when the "dance hall" can claim any degree of sufferance. Society revolts, and the respect of decency and good order must be given. All of the vices in this city have been conducted in the most flagrant and notorious manner, and

62. Dodge City "Ordinance Book," Ordinance No. 70.

63. *Ford County Globe*, May 1, 1883.

64. Dykstra, *Cattle Towns*, p. 274.

65. Dodge City "Ordinance Book," 1883.

66. Dykstra, *Cattle Towns*, p. 274.

67. Dodge City *Times*, September 6, 1883.

whatever vice cannot be totally eradicated must be taken from the gaze of the young or the tempting influence of older people. It is time a higher and stronger moral influence was being exerted in Dodge City.⁶⁸

When, on top of all this debate, it became known that the owners of a saloon on one of the principal streets of Dodge intended to turn it into a dance hall, the city council passed an ordinance prohibiting dance halls in Dodge.⁶⁹

In the winter of 1884, the Kansas legislature passed a new Texas cattle quarantine law, making it illegal to drive and ship Texas cattle from points within the state. In the spring of 1885, legislation was passed strengthening the state prohibition law. Both of these events ultimately strengthened the moralists' position in Dodge. This was well expressed by the district court judge in a communication to the governor of Kansas, who had been urged to send militia troops to Dodge to enforce prohibition laws. According to Judge Strang, Dodge City is in a transition state and will come all right soon of itself. The quarantine law passed last winter is quietly working out the salvation of Dodge City. The festive cowboy is already becoming conspicuous by his absence in Dodge, and ere long he will be seen & heard there, in his glory, no more forever. The cowboy gone the gamblers and prostitutes will find their occupations gone, and, from necessity, must follow. The bulk of the saloons will then die out because there will be no sufficient support left, and the temperance people can close the rest as easily as they could in any other city in Kansas.⁷⁰

The Dodge newspapers agreed with Strang's opinion as the following comments about the moral state of Dodge illustrate:

Two more whisky shops have closed, and only a few remain in the business of secretly dealing out poison. We shall soon be able to announce that all illegitimate business has closed. And still Dodge City prospers.⁷¹

... Of the moral condition of the town it is no longer necessary to speak. The improved condition of our social affairs is gratifying. . . .⁷²

The moral and law-abiding class in Dodge City is large and rapidly increasing. . . . The second class, the open violators of law is not so numerous as formerly.⁷³

Although prostitution was not totally suppressed in Dodge (in 1886, for instance, the *Times* makes reference to an incident in which a colored prostitute was shot while enticing a

client to her "den"), by the end of the cattle-town era, its dimensions had been reduced and it was no longer openly engaged in within popular dance halls and saloons, but had gone private and covert at the demand of the respectable citizens of Dodge.

BY THE TIME Caldwell became a cattle shipping center in 1880, it was already a fairly large town of approximately 1,000 inhabitants.⁷⁴ According to the *Caldwell Post*, by 1880 the town had five churches and 155 pupils in its public school, indicating the presence of a relatively large proportion of families.⁷⁵ The land to the north of Caldwell was pretty well settled by then, and already in 1874, local farmers had resisted the idea of having a cattle shipping center in the vicinity. Thus, by the time of Caldwell's debut as a cattle town, it had lost some of the wild frontier character of places like Abilene or Dodge in their first cattle town years. This general demographic situation gave the Caldwell moralists a head start, so to speak, along with the fact that the state prohibition law was passed in 1880. By October, 1880, Caldwell had a temperance association with a membership of about 100, and the prohibition amendment passed in Caldwell by 45 votes (only adult males voted)⁷⁶ although saloons were still tolerated in Caldwell.

In 1879, in anticipation of the coming year's cattle trade, the Caldwell city council passed an ordinance "relating to offenses against chastity, morality and decency." This ordinance provided for a fine of \$50 to \$100 for keeping "a house of ill-fame, or other place resorted to for the purpose of prostitution, or lewdness," and a fine of \$5 to \$25 for being an "inmate" of such a house.⁷⁷ Police court records, however, show that no prostitutes were fined in 1879, although several newspaper articles indicated their presence:

Mag Woods, a notorious Wichita prostitute, in company with several pieces of feminine frailty, made a descent from that unchristian city on our little village last week, and temporarily located on the creek, outside the city limits. What success she met with in seducing Suckers to

68. *Ibid.*, March 27, 1884.

69. Dodge City "Ordinance Book," Ordinance No. 83, May 22, 1884.

70. Judge J. C. Strang to Gov. John A. Martin, July 5, 1885, General Correspondence, "Gov. John Martin Papers," Archives, Kansas State Historical Society.

71. *Dodge City Times*, May 14, 1885.

72. *Ibid.*, May 21, 1885.

73. *Ibid.*, September 17, 1885.

74. Federal census, Caldwell, 1880.

75. *Caldwell Post*, January 8, 1880; *cf.*, also, pp. 36, 39.

76. *Caldwell Post*, October 21, 1880; *Caldwell Commercial*, August 19, October 28, November 4, 1880.

77. *Caldwell Post*, August 21, 1879; Ordinance No. 16.

visit the camp is a problem that can only be solved by the bulk of her pocket book.⁷⁸

There is a rumor that three city lots, of enormous dimensions, were transferred by a citizen of our town to a piece of Wichita frailty.⁷⁹

Several ladies of easy virtue now reside in Caldwell—so we are informed.⁸⁰

Throughout 1880, approximately 76 fines were collected for being an "inmate" (generally \$5) and 20 were collected for being a "keeper" (\$10). The "tax" nature of these fines was evident from the fact that the same prostitutes were fined with regularity.⁸¹ During this year three newspaper articles noted that various prostitutes had been fined, and the following letter from an unnamed Caldwell

place their headquarters. It is a well-known fact—as any Western man can testify to—that the greatest curse frontier towns have ever had has been the so-called "dance houses" or "hurdy-gurdies." The lowest, both male and female, congregate at these places; the vilest of liquors are there dealt out, and everything is done that will bring the worst passions of mankind into action. In fact, the class of persons who run "dance houses" are such as a respectable sportsman and gambler would not associate with. The females as a rule, have some "low-down" male, as a lover, who is too lazy to work and too much of a coward to be anything but a "sneak-thief," who depends upon the wages of their shame for a livelihood, and urge these female friends on to commit crimes which they would not do otherwise—In fact, a "dance house" if permitted to exist in our midst, will bring to our city a class of cut-throats, thieves, etc., which we do not desire, and for this, if no other reason, the city authorities should at once take measures to close all such places.⁸²



A gun battle in 1881 resulted in the temporary banning of saloons, gambling, and prostitution in Caldwell. Above, one of the Caldwell saloons in the 1880's.

citizen concerning the recent opening of the first dance hall in Caldwell, was published:

Editor Caldwell Post:

Dear Sir:—Knowing the detriment that a "Dance House" would be to Caldwell, if allowed in our city, the writer of this article visited the "Red Light Saloon" last Saturday night. The scenes there presented reminded me of the early times in Cheyenne, when murder ran riot and the pistol was the only argument. It is true that the assemblage was sober, orderly and quiet Saturday night—but we must remember that it was composed chiefly of men who visited the place merely out of curiosity. Then again, it is a new thing, and has not yet accumulated the crowd of pimps, hangers-on and deadbeats, who generally make such a

In January, 1881, some of Caldwell's citizens circulated a petition calling for the suppression of houses of prostitution because they could not be adequately controlled and because their presence was an insult to the residents of the town. The issue came to a head late in 1881 when a gun battle took place in Caldwell between some drunk cowboys and several town people in which a saloon keeper and former mayor was killed. As a result angry citizens demanded immediate banning of saloons, gambling, and prostitution, and the city council obliged.⁸³ In February, 1882, however, these injunctions were rescinded by the coun-

78. *Caldwell Post*, September 4, 1879.

79. *Ibid.*

80. *Ibid.*, November 6, 1879.

81. *Caldwell "Police Court Docket,"* 1880.

82. *Caldwell Post*, May 20, 1880.

83. *Ibid.*, December 22, 1881.

cil under pressure and personal threats from the business community, who feared their trade would suffer.⁸⁴ On the other hand, the promorality forces did achieve the removal of "that sink-hole of iniquity, the Red-light dance house . . . from the corporate limits of the city."⁸⁵

In April, 1882, a new mayor and council were installed, who promptly increased the fines on prostitution and other illegal professions and broadened the definition of prostitution to include not only keepers and inmates of houses of ill fame, but also "any woman living in a hotel or tavern, or in apartments or rooms in this city, who shall entice or attempt to entice prostitution, or who shall follow the calling of prostitution for gain, in the city. . . ."⁸⁶

By July, 1882, the Red Light dance house (the only dance hall in town) was closed down completely. It had been bought by a committee of citizens, who had raised money for the cause by asking residents for contributions. Once the building was deeded over to a representative of the committee, it was ". . . closed up, the keeper of it, Mag Woods, going to Wichita, and the girls scattering out over the country, some taking private houses and others going to Wellington and Hunnewell."⁸⁷

During 1884 and 1885, there was considerable agitation in Caldwell over the prohibition issue,⁸⁸ and moral "radicals" seem to have concentrated most of their efforts on this problem. There was no new legislation on prostitution, nor did any articles on the subject appear. Two petitions, however, were submitted to the city council in 1884 demanding "the abatement of a nuisance house of ill-fame run by one Dell Black"⁸⁹ and "the suppression of house of Ill-Fame on lot No. 107 Main Street."⁹⁰ These petitions were referred to the city marshal and the assistant marshal respectively for action. Police court records show that prostitutes continued to be regularly fined during these years.

In the spring of 1885 (1884 was Caldwell's

last big cattle-shipping year) the *Caldwell Journal* noted with satisfaction that

The bevy of soiled doves formerly inhabiting the second story of one of the Main street business blocks were invited to leave the city. They went. There are a few more that could be spared without really damaging the peace, quiet and good morals of the city.⁹¹

By no means all of the prostitutes left, though. Police court records showed that 62 prostitution fines were collected during 1885. At the end of the year, however, militant moral reformers formed a "Law and Order League," which demanded that city and county officials enforce the laws that would make it difficult for gamblers and prostitutes to conduct business. At a community meeting on December 28, 1885, this general aim was endorsed by some 300-400 Caldwell citizens. The city council responded by declaring that all ordinances would be enforced strictly. Accordingly, the *Sumner County Press* noted that

The citizens of Caldwell propose to be as good as their word in driving out the hard cases from their town, and Mr. sheriff Henderson's little brick boarding house received quite an acquisition from that city this afternoon to wit: Ellen Robinson, Laura Jones, Cola Bright, and Jesse Phillips. They had a trial and were fined \$100 each and six months in the county jail.⁹²

The increasingly moralistic atmosphere of Caldwell was reflected in a comment in the *Caldwell Journal*, April 1, 1886, where the editor noted that the Red Light dance house was turned into an agricultural implement shop and telephone exchange, and that ". . . the open saloons and gambling dens give way to the progress of civilization, the Red Light gives way to the march of morality." In a similar vein, the *Caldwell Free Press* expressed approval of the new, more moral state of affairs:

If we desire our population to increase by adding from the best citizens from the east, we must make society congenial to them, and if we do that, we will hear less about the strait jacket of the law. Now let us take a broad charitable comprehensive view of the situation, it is all a matter of opinion according to the stand point from which we view it; we hear reference made to the case of a few harlots—they have been delt with just as our statesmen deal with the tariff question, there is a light duty laid on some articles to encourage importation, and there is a duty laid on for revenue only, and there is a prohibitory duty. . . . We have in our midst some 600 bright intelligent, innocent children, as there is in any city east, west or anywhere else. Can we afford to have them come daily in

84. *Caldwell Commercial*, February 2 and 9, 1882; *Caldwell Post*, February 9, 1882; Dykstra, *Cattle Towns*, pp. 286-287.

85. *Caldwell Post*, March 16, 1882.

86. *Ibid.*, May 4, 1882.

87. *Ibid.*, July 6, 1882.

88. Dykstra, *Cattle Towns*, pp. 287-292.

89. *Caldwell "City Council Records,"* May 5, 1884.

90. *Ibid.*, December 1, 1884.

91. *Caldwell Journal*, April 23, 1885.

92. *Sumner County Press*, Wellington, December 31, 1885.

contact with evils, even if the law does bear down hard on twenty or thirty law-breakers. We would be glad to see every gambler and other law-breaker reformed and become good citizens and fit example for the association of our young men and boys, and it is with feelings of pride that we can say to the readers of the *Free Press* that the year 1885 closes upon Caldwell without a saloon or open gambling den, as far as we can learn, and with sincere hopes and belief that this condition will continue.⁹³

IN LIGHT of this material it seems fairly clear that the same general change in treatment and perception of prostitutes and prostitution occurred in the cattle towns from the beginning to the end of their boom years. In the early boom years of the cattle towns, prostitutes were generally regarded with amused tolerance by the adventuresome single male town residents to whom they were simply a part of frontier cattle town life. To these early residents the maintenance of traditional marital restrictions on sexual activity was not an important part of their frontier life-style and self-concept. In fact, some carousing and "wild" behavior was expected.⁹⁴

This situation in the cowtowns changed when families began to predominate in and around the towns. For these people, maintenance of traditional marital restrictions on sexual activity was a very important part of their more Victorian concept of respectability and their ideal of the moral, God-fearing life, as was evidenced in many of the petitions and newspaper articles of late boom years. The openly practiced prostitution of the early boom town days was clearly a threat to these traditional notions of proper behavior and morality, since it obviously represented exactly the opposite of these ideals of sexual exclusivity, emotional intimacy, high valuation of procreation and child rearing within the monogamous unit. As was also made clear in various petitions and newspaper articles, prostitution was regarded as presenting bad role models for children, whose parents wanted them to adhere to traditional (*i.e.* their own) moral values and behavior patterns.

The ensuing conflict between these "frontier" and "respectable family" elements with respect to prostitution can be seen as a process which defined the boundaries between deviance and conformity. This process was ini-

tiated by the increasingly numerous settlers' families who saw prostitution as a threat to their desired way of life. It was characterized by periodic confrontation and negotiation between the opposing groups, resulting in various types of compromises, which in time broke down and led to renewed confrontation, negotiation, etc. As late boom town newspaper articles (particularly in Dodge) showed, the effect of these attacks on prostitution was first, to increase the sense of rightness among the settlers' families of the values and life-style they adhered to and strove for, and second, to decrease the threat by making prostitutes go underground or by effecting prostitutes' departure because of increased punishment; and when either of these occurred, impetus for the other also gained momentum. Along with this "snowball effect" the increasing numbers of respectable settlers in the towns led finally to a definition of the boundary between sexual deviance and conformity which was more in line with traditional 19th century moral ideals than those that had characterized early cattle town life.

This change, of course, did not take place exactly the same way in all the towns, and the force of antiprostitution attacks, as well as the effects of these attacks, differed somewhat from town to town. These differences were related to the type and number of settlers who came to the towns. Abilene, for instance had a large contingent of very religious people, who had come there with their church pastors from the East to settle,⁹⁵ and the struggle against prostitution in Abilene was consequently particularly vigorous and effective. In Dodge City, on the other hand, prostitution was tolerated longer because the Dodge area remained relatively unsettled until the 1880's, and hence, it retained much of its frontier character until then. Also due to the nature of the surrounding land, cattle and sheep ranching was carried on around Dodge, and the cowboys employed on these ranches were not particularly strong supporters of the more traditional moral ideals of the farmers who settled around the other cattle towns. In Caldwell, the forces for moral reform were already relatively strong by the time of its first shipping season. This was due to a combination of factors including its well established rural settlement and, consequently,

93. Caldwell *Free Press*, January 2, 1886.

94. Dodge City *Times*, February 2, 1878.

95. Dykstra, *Cattle Towns*, p. 258.

relatively high proportion of families, and the passage of the state prohibition amendment in 1880, Caldwell's first big cattle shipping year. Hence, in Caldwell, even in early cattle town years, irate citizens made moves to ban prostitution, and continued agitation until the cattle shipping years were past.

These differences, as well as the above de-

scribed similarities, illustrate the fact that the more important it was to cattle town residents that traditional marital limits on sexual activity be adhered to, the more vigorous was the attack on prostitution; and this confrontation was important in the process of defining the boundaries of legitimate sexual behavior in the boom towns.