

## Review Essay Series

# Women and Gender in Kansas History

by Carol K. Coburn

### EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

This essay on women and gender is the eighth in our series on writing about Kansas history. Woman's place in Kansas and in Kansas history has been of intense interest to historians for some time. One reason for this is the national spotlight that has shone on each of the many attempts to secure basic political rights for Kansas women in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Major leaders such as Olympia Brown, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton campaigned vigorously for suffrage in Kansas in 1867. Although that attempt failed, these leaders maintained a supportive role until suffrage was achieved. But the place of women and the struggles to achieve political equality are only one part of the story.

A major goal of "Women and Gender in Kansas History" is to reflect on the different perspectives, concepts, and approaches that have propelled the history of women to the center of the transformation of western and Kansas history. As Professor Carol K.

**H**istorian Susan Armitage opened the first Women's West Conference in 1983 by evoking an image and lyrics familiar to most native Kansans. Describing the traditional view of the West as a mythical place "where seldom is heard a discouraging word" and where "the skies are not cloudy all day," she described "a cast of heroic characters [who] engage in dramatic combat, sometimes with nature, sometimes with each other. . . . they are mountain men, cowboys, Indians, soldiers, farmers, miners, and desperadoes, but they share one distinguishing characteristic—they are all men. They are also, except for the Indians, overwhelmingly white." The women, if present at all, were voiceless and passive and typically described briefly as belonging to one of two categories: "bad women" who worked the saloons and brothels but had hearts of gold, or "good women" who were stoic drudges or selfless, angelic helpmates who sacrificed everything for their men.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage, "Editors' Introduction," in *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 3. This conference, August 10–13, 1983, in Sun Valley, Idaho, and one the following year, January 12–15, 1984, in Tucson, Arizona, are viewed by many historians as the catalyst for defining and initiating western women's history as a separate field of historical study. Two major anthologies were published from the two conferences: Armitage and Jameson, eds., *The Women's West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987); and Lillian Schlissel, Vicki Ruiz, and Janice Monk, eds., *Western Women: Their Land, Their Lives* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988). Also published with essays from many of the same authors who attended the Women's West conferences during the mid-1980s was "Women on the Western Frontier," a special issue of *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies* 7 (December 1984).

*Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 26 (Summer 2003): 126–51.



*An artist's typical early-twentieth-century rendition of a woman of the West.*

Coburn points out, historians of women and gender have pioneered in the study of cultural diversity, as we see in the ordeals of German immigrant women, of Mexican women trying to make homes in railroad houses, and of African American women who built a network of clubs that provided opportunity for leadership and social action.

Some scholars have utilized the lens of feminism to raise new issues and to depict a very different Kansas. As Coburn indicates, "The development and metamorphosis of feminist scholarship has provided a model to interpret history through the filter of gender by viewing the world through the eyes, documents, and perspectives of the women who lived it." As a result, the historical work Coburn describes gives us a different view of women's roles in the family, in productive processes, in defining society in Kansas, and in social activism. We now can see the dynamic, productive parts that women have played in Kansas history, and often we see it through their eyes.

In her insistence on the importance of religion in the study of women and of women's role in promoting the development of religion in Kansas, Coburn makes an important point. Likewise, her argument that the study of women and gender in the twentieth century has been neglected suggests opportunities for new research. Such studies must continue to produce a multicultural history. But also it must strike out in new directions by examining the urban experience of women. In this way we can, as Coburn suggests, continue the paths that scholars have laid out in the past thirty years as well as forge new ones of our own.

*Pam G. Napier*  
University of Kansas  
*Wagon Wheel*  
Kansas State Historical Society

The scholarship on women and gender in Kansas history has in many ways reflected the dynamic and significant shifts and "re-visioning" that have been part of the changing historiography of American social history, women's history, and western history, particularly during the past thirty-five years. Women's history was not even acknowledged as a separate field of scholarship prior to the 1970s. Few if any historians thought about women at all, and if they did, they saw them only as subordinate players to men in the larger American story. In many ways the methodological approaches in the historiography of women and gender in Kansas have paralleled the sequence of change and "discovery" that American women's history and western women's history have experienced during the past three decades.

For western history this developed as follows: although the male narrative was paramount, the exception always was the "special woman" approach to history, which often consisted of a biographical account of an "exceptional woman" or a token female (e.g., Sacajawea, Annie Oakley) who made her mark in the male world of the Old West. Eventually, women were included in a "single subject or group" approach to western history (e.g., pioneer mothers, schoolmarms), where a single paragraph or, in a magnanimous gesture, an entire twenty-page chapter was devoted to the contributions of women in a four-hundred-page, book-length treatment of major historical events, implying that the influence or contribution of all women could be summarized generically because all women thought and acted alike. Likewise, the "add women and stir" approach placed women in the narrative throughout the text but still on the margins (toiling behind the scenes, often nameless and faceless) supporting (or hindering) the exploits and achievements of men on the frontier.<sup>2</sup>

Fortunately, during the past two decades historians of American women and western women have begun creating scholarship that not only uncovers and integrates information about women and their activities and influences, but more importantly places women beyond the roles of "victims" or "objects," making them subjects or actors in history—creators and shapers of American western history and culture. Historical content *and* perspective have shifted dramatically. The development and metamorphosis of feminist scholarship have provided a model to interpret history through the filter of gender by viewing the world through the eyes, documents, and perspectives of the women who lived it. Discovering and utilizing primary documents, particularly women's private writings, feminist scholars have transformed the historiography of women and gender, creating new content and methodology in western women's history. Utilizing the lens of gender to interpret and analyze women's lives, activities, writings, and experiences, historians have gone beyond female invisibility and Old West stereotypes to create scholarship that uncovers and integrates information about women and their influences into the larger context of western history.<sup>3</sup>

2. Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 145–80. For a more recent detailed historiography of the academic development of feminist scholarship in women's history, see *Women's Review of Books* 20 (February 2000): 12–18.

3. Although there are now many published anthologies of primary documents written by western women, one of the earliest was Christiane Fischer, ed., *Let Them Speak for Themselves: Women in the American West, 1849–1900* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1977). For an excellent bibliography that includes a separate chapter on Kansas sources, see Susan Armitage, Helen Bannan, Katherine G. Morrissey, and Vicki L. Ruiz, eds., *Women in the West: A Guide to Manuscript Sources* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1991). Another book that integrates primary documents with the author's interpretations is Glenda Riley, *A Place to Grow: Women in the American West* (Arlington Heights, Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1992).

In 1980 historians Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller published their review essay “The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West.” Besides providing an important discussion about how western women’s history challenged the male narratives of the Old West, they called for a more “inclusive western history” that not only incorporated women but also added a “multicultural approach.”<sup>4</sup> By the end of the decade and after four major conferences on western women’s history explored the “theoretical and methodological implications,” a new body of scholarship existed that had begun to explore the multicultural history of western women. According to Elizabeth Jameson, scholars had begun to identify and challenge the one-dimensional images that characterized “Euro–American women as civilizers and helpmates, hell-raisers and ‘bad’ women; American Indian women as princesses and squaws; Asian–American women as dolls and as oppressed wives; Black women as victims and matriarchs. . . . [while] historians of Mexican–Americans have grappled with the stereotypes of the maternal Virgin.”<sup>5</sup>

Besides challenging the cherished myth of the lone white male “winning the west,” historians of western women have further revised the content *and* perspective on the new multicultural West. Defining this revision to include gender and the cultural diversity of western peoples, historian Peggy Pascoe wrote that this new perspective also challenged another “cherished principle of Old Western History: . . . the belief that the West was somehow freer, more democratic, more individualistic, and more egalitarian than the East.”<sup>6</sup> Echoing the sentiment of Vicki Ruiz, Elizabeth Jameson, Susan Armitage, and Valerie Matsumoto among others, Pascoe challenged historians in the 1990s to view the history of the West as “a crossing of three central axes of inequality—race, class and gender—in American history.” Furthermore, she promoted a western history defined less by geography and more as a “frontier of interactions among the various cultural groups who lived in or passed through the area,” encouraging historians to examine the role of western women as “intercultural brokers” who often mediated between two or more very different cultural groups.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, the goal of many historians of western women’s history has been to continue to expand the historical scholarship by creating new narratives, making connections, and integrating the history of women into the larger contexts of western history, women’s history, and American social history.<sup>8</sup>



*Scholars have begun to challenge the one-dimensional images that have characterized women throughout history, such as American Indian women depicted as “princesses” or “squaws.” Such is the case in the above sketch of Waconda, described as “the beautiful Indian maid” in a ca. 1930s history of Waconda Springs.*

One of the largest memoir collections from Kansas women can be found in the Lilla Day Monroe collection of pioneer stories published in a narrative, descriptive form by her great-granddaughter Joanne Stratton, in *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981).

4. Joan M. Jensen and Darlis A. Miller, “The Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West,” *Pacific Historical Review* 49 (May 1980): 173–213.

5. Elizabeth Jameson, “Toward a Multicultural History of Women in the United States,” *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society* 13 (Summer 1988): 761.

6. Peggy Pascoe, “Western Women at the Cultural Crossroads,” in *Trails: Toward a New Western History*, ed. Patricia Nelson Limerick, Clyde A. Milner II, and Charles E. Rankin (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 41.

7. *Ibid.*, 55.

8. A recent anthology that demonstrates the multicultural character of the American West is Jameson and Armitage, *Writing the Range*. Another multicultural anthology that is not focused exclusively on western women but includes many essays analyzing the multicultural ethnicities of women in the West is Ellen Carol DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz, eds., *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History*, 3d ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000). For a good regional anthology describing women’s experiences within a regional focus, see Lucy Eldersveld Murphy and Wendy Hamand Venet, eds., *Midwestern Women: Work, Community and Leadership at the Crossroads* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997). Two regional encyclopedias also have many topics and themes that focus

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explored by western  
historians was  
women's responses  
to traveling the  
western landscape.*

The purpose of this essay is to examine the scholarship on women and gender in Kansas history in light of the contributions of feminist scholarship and the “new western history” that incorporate new approaches to gender and explore the connections among diverse peoples, events, power, and influence.<sup>9</sup> Although not all of the mentioned scholarship will have a feminist perspective, I would argue that most articles and essays have been influenced by and/or benefited from the explosion of scholarship in American women’s history. Through the examination of published articles, essays, and books devoted to Kansas women’s lives and experiences, it is possible to trace the historiographic trends in content and perspective over the past thirty-five years. What have been the themes or focus of research on women and gender in Kansas history and how have they been influenced by the developments in western women’s history? How has the research methodology changed? What themes need further analysis and what new topics must be explored to expand the scholarship on women and gender in Kansas history?

To explore these questions and provide an overview of the scholarship on women and gender, this essay will address the major topics and themes utilized by historians who have been writing in the field during the past three decades. These thematic categories are not meant to be equal in coverage since some have been developed much more extensively than others, but all encompass an ongoing and growing body of research on women and gender in Kansas history including emigration and travel, family and women’s networks, social activism and politics, and work and economics. Where appropriate, I have included major works in American women’s history or western women’s history that influenced the history of Kansas women or provided a rich context from which to draw. Finally, this essay proposes suggestions for expanding and/or plumbing new areas of research to further broaden the scope of study on women and gender in Kansas history.

Before discussing individual themes and scholars’ works, it is important to discuss a few books that have served as markers of change and progress in studies on women and gender in Kansas. Because of their variety and broad perspectives on Kansas history, four anthologies and a comprehensive bibliography provide examples of change and serve as important representative collections that document trends in historians’ approaches to women and gender in Kansas history. These books, collections of significant writings both with and without analyses, also illustrate the growing emphasis on women and gender that increased with each subsequent publication. Initially published in 1974 and revised in 1987, the *History of Kansas: Selected Readings* edited by George L. Anderson, Terry H. Harmon, and Virgil W. Dean began to incorporate some readings about women and gender. The 1987 revised version included an early example of feminist scholarship: “The Women’s March: Miners, Family and Community in Pittsburg, Kansas, 1921–1922” by Ann Schofield, originally published in 1984 in *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains*. The author deftly placed the actions of ethnic, working-class Kansas women within the broader contexts of labor, class, and gender

on women and gender. See Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod, eds., *Encyclopedia of the American West* (New York: Macmillan, 1996); Richard Sisson and Christian Zacher, eds., *Encyclopedia of the Midwest* (Ohio State University Press, forthcoming 2004).

9. For definitions, examples, and discussion of the “new western history,” see Rita G. Napier, “Re-thinking the Past, Reimagining the Future,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 24 (Autumn 2001): 218–47.

history. In 1985 Rita G. Napier edited *History of the Peoples of Kansas: An Anthology*, writing in her preface that “Kansas’ past was made up not of a single culture nor a single society, but of many.” Describing the importance of “gender, race, and ethnicity,” Napier firmly stated, “These are the focus of this anthology.” In 1990 Paul K. Stuewe edited *Kansas Revisited: Historical Images and Perspectives*, a book of essays giving special emphasis to “Kansans of color and Kansas women.” In 1992 Homer E. Socolofsky and Virgil W. Dean created *Kansas History: An Annotated Bibliography*. This important and comprehensive source included a wide variety of topics and scholarship that incorporate race, ethnicity, and other markers of Kansas social history, including significant sections on women and gender. In the most recent Kansas history anthology, *Kansas and the West: New Perspectives* published in 2003, editor Napier further explored race, class, gender, and environment “to provide a more complete, more inclusive view of the past.”<sup>10</sup>

#### EMIGRATION AND TRAVEL

One of the earliest themes to be explored by western historians was women’s responses to traveling the western landscape, encountering native peoples, and enduring the daily grind of emigrant life. Journals, letters, and memoirs of women traveling to or across Kansas document the anxiety, loneliness, adventures, and courage of women who left eastern comforts to spend weeks, if not months, confined to bouncing wagons or walking through heat, rain, and wind as they headed to unknown territories to begin a new life far from family and friends. “[A]n amazingly diverse lot” of women traveled west including “missionaries and tourists, wives of outlaws . . . ranchers and reformers, doctors and nuns.”<sup>11</sup> Influenced by economics, availability of agricultural land, health, or adventure, more than 350,000 people, mostly families, traveled the overland trail to California and Oregon between 1841 and 1876. In the 1870s and 1880s travelers often ended their journeys on the prairies of Kansas, Nebraska, Minnesota, and the Dakotas.<sup>12</sup>

Two books published in 1979 were particularly influential in suggesting new ways for historians to interpret and analyze how gender influenced the travel diaries, journals, letters, and memoirs that document the experiences of western women. Although other books followed in the early 1980s, *Women and Men on the*



*Journals, letters, and memoirs of women traveling to or across Kansas document the anxiety, loneliness, adventures, and courage of women who headed to unknown territories to begin a new life. Katie Bowen (above) recorded “A Faithful Account of Everything” as she traveled down the Santa Fe Trail in 1851.*

10. George L. Anderson, Terry H. Harmon, and Virgil W. Dean, eds., *History of Kansas: Selected Readings* (Lawrence: Division of Continuing Education, University of Kansas, 1974, rev. 1987); Rita G. Napier, ed. (with Carol Coburn), *History of the Peoples of Kansas: An Anthology* (Lawrence: Division of Continuing Education, University of Kansas, 1985); Paul E. Stuewe, ed., *Kansas Revisited: Historical Images and Perspectives* (Lawrence: Division of Continuing Education, University of Kansas, 1990); Homer E. Socolofsky and Virgil W. Dean, comps., *Kansas History: An Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992); Rita G. Napier, ed., *Kansas and the West: New Perspectives* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003).

11. Virginia Scharff, “Introduction,” in Dorothy M. Johnson, *Some Went West* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), xx. Of particular note is the essay about the German Sisters, captured by Cheyennes in western Kansas in 1874.

12. Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West: 1840–1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), xi, 27.

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*Overland Trail* by John Mack Faragher and *Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West 1840–1880* by Julie Roy Jeffrey were important new additions to the scholarship. When Glenda Riley's *Frontierswomen: The Iowa Experience* and Lillian Schlissel's *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* followed in the early 1980s, the door opened to new types of analysis. These historians and soon others saw gender as an important marker in travel journals and memoirs. Evidence suggests that many factors such as marital status, age, available kinship networks, and the distance traveled all influenced women's enthusiasm for emigrating west. Additionally, both the content and linguistic style in travel writings provided important gender markers for analysis. Gender work roles and traditional family rituals and interactions often changed under the stress of travel and the constant adaptation needed to survive. Male travelers tended to simply list the day's events with little emotional input, describing their personal activities or fighting and conflict between males. Women's journals, on the other hand, were far more descriptive, not only in variety of content but also in documenting emotions and feelings about the daily events and experiences on the trail and in describing family and relational values.<sup>13</sup>

Fears and anxieties as well as hopes and dreams poured forth from Kansas women who wrote about their experiences. Lawrence native Elizabeth "Bettie" Duncan and family made the decision to move west in 1867. Describing her anxious but determined feelings before the trip, on June 24 Bettie wrote, "The dreaded day has at last come . . . but I must and will brace up and fare the best I can." Her sorrow was compounded a few months later when her six-year-old daughter, Katie, died en route and had to be buried on the trail. An all too typical scenario, childhood deaths were an ever-present companion during the strenuous trek and especially tragic for mothers who often felt a particular responsibility as caregivers to keep their children safe.<sup>14</sup>

Traditional gender work roles often blurred during the stresses of travel and unpredictability of daily life on the trail. As they did on the family farm, women often performed "male work," and to a far lesser degree, males performed some "women's work." Although in the beginning of the trip gender roles were strictly divided, the longer the time on the trail, the more women expanded their work roles. Women often took turns driving the wagon or the stock, helped push heavy wagons up steep hillsides, and always were expected to help the group "keep moving."<sup>15</sup>

13. For information about Kansas women and western women's experiences, see Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1862–1865* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); *On Kansas Trails: Traveling with Explorers, Emigrants and Entrepreneurs* (Lawrence: Division Of Continuing Education, University of Kansas, 1986); Lillian Schlissel, *Women's Diaries of the Westward Journey* (New York: Schocken Books, 1982); Sandra L. Myres, *Westering Women and the Frontier Experience 1800–1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 98–140; John Mack Faragher, *Women and Men on the Overland Trail* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979); Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 3–78.

14. Katie H. Armitage, "'This Far Off Land': The Overland Diary, June–October, 1867, and California Diary, January–March, 1868, of Elizabeth 'Bettie' Duncan," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 12 (Spring 1989): 13–27. Besides the Duncan diary other published diaries include Leo E. Oliva, ed., "'A Faithful Account of Everything': Letters from Katie Bowen on the Santa Fe Trail, 1851" *ibid.* 19 (Winter 1996–1997): 262–81; Joseph W. Snell, ed., "By Wagon From Kansas to Arizona in 1875: The Travel Diary of Lydia E. English," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 36 (Winter 1970): 369–89.

15. Faragher, *Men and Women on the Overland Trail*, 66–87.

The blurring of traditional gendered work roles also crossed ethnic and racial lines. Linda Schelbitzki Pickle and I extensively researched German immigrant women who came to the Midwest. Pickle wrote that among German-speaking immigrants, women packed most of the baggage, and their role was central to the success of the family venture. "Physical work would be required of all women, no matter what their background." Recently arrived from Germany, Friederika Oesterreich Staatz and her husband traveled by wagon to Dickinson County, Kansas, in 1857. They continued to live in their wagon through the summer, where she gave birth to a child who died a few months later. The strain of an ocean voyage, pregnancy, childbirth, and the physical exertion required to travel and survive made life particularly difficult for immigrant women.<sup>16</sup>

Migrating west was not the only direction women traveled to reach Kansas. After the end of Reconstruction, Southern blacks headed north by the thousands. The Kansas Relief Association provided monetary aid for newly freed blacks leaving the South and coming to Kansas as part of the "exoduster" movement of 1879. In one year an estimated "twenty thousand to forty thousand penniless and ragged black men, women and children reached Kansas." Mrs. Henry Carter walked with her husband from Tennessee to Kansas, "she carrying bed-clothes and he the tools." Historian Nell Irvin Painter has documented the "prominent role" that black women played in the exoduster movement and their desire and willingness to migrate. The exoduster movement to Kansas was so strong among black women that many stated, "even if their husbands did not leave, they would."<sup>17</sup>

Euro-American women who left the "civilization" of the East often wrote about their encounters in the culturally diverse West. Travel journals reflected women's ideas and attitudes about the people who populated the American West. Historian Glenda Riley has analyzed hundreds of travel journals and memoirs, including many from Kansas women, and she wrote that women's early stereotypical, if not ignorant, assumptions typically reflect the writing in popular literature and newspapers of the nineteenth century. Based on their writings, some women modified their attitudes after contact with native peoples, although, according to Riley, white western women usually retained their negative attitudes about Mormons, Asians, blacks, or Mexicans when they encountered them dur-



*After Reconstruction, thousands of Southern blacks migrated north to Kansas, where they hoped to make a new start. The move to leave the South was so strong among black women that many stated, "even if their husbands did not leave, they would." Mrs. George Jenkins stands at her homestead in Clark County with her two daughters, Ethel and Myrtle Brown.*

16. Linda Schelbitzki Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers: Rural German-Speaking Women and their Families in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1996); Carol K. Coburn, *Life at Four Corners: Religion, Gender and Education in a German-Lutheran Community, 1868-1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992).

17. Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters* (New York: Norton, 1976); Paula Giddings, *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America* (Toronto: William Morrow, 1985). Quotation in William Loren Katz, *The Black West*, 3d ed. (Seattle: Open Hand Publishing, 1987), 167-77, 283-84.



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ing their travels.<sup>18</sup> Julie Jeffrey and other historians agree with Riley's descriptions of anti-Mormon sentiment, particularly among women. In the nineteenth century religious intolerance could be as vociferous as racial and ethnic prejudice. Traveling west by train and wagon to establish schools and hospitals for Native American and Hispanic peoples, Sister Monica Corrigan of Kansas City commented in her travel journal that she found the Mormons "a rather degraded looking set, but perhaps it is prejudice that makes me think so." Ironically, Sister Monica's self-awareness of her prejudice may have resulted from an encounter earlier that day when some Protestant travelers spent hours describing the "intolerable" aspects of Catholicism to her and her nun companions.<sup>19</sup>

Travel journals and emigration letters and memoirs have provided a unique understanding of who, why, and how a variety of racial, ethnic, and religiously diverse women journeyed across or emigrated west in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Having survived the journey, some women continued to write and share their experiences of setting up housekeeping and beginning homes on the Kansas prairies. For others, establishing their Kansas homes gave them initial opportunities or desires to reflect, out of a sense of pride or possibly loneliness, about their Kansas homes and family lives.

#### FAMILY AND WOMEN'S NETWORKS

Historically associated with the home and family, women have played out their gendered roles on farms, in small towns, and in cities—a central role in the family dynamic. Historian Elliott West, an expert on childhood and families in the American West, stated that "families are absolutely essential to understanding Kansas present and past—their day-to-day lives and survival, their societies, their sense of who they are, even the meaning they have found in the world around them. Kansas history without families is a contradiction in terms."<sup>20</sup>

Some of the earliest information about western women and Kansas women's lives came from surviving letters and memoirs written by early homesteaders corresponding with families back east or from men who wrote about their mothers and their growing up experiences.<sup>21</sup> During the past three decades historians have

18. Glenda Riley, *Women and Indians on the Frontier, 1825–1915* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984).

19. Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*, 147–78; Monica Corrigan, *Trek of the Seven Sisters* (Tucson: Carondelet Health Services, 1991). Quotation in Carol K. Coburn and Martha Smith, *Spirited Lives: How Nuns Shaped Catholic Culture and American Life, 1836–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 107. Catholic nuns' interactions and activities with the diverse peoples in the West can be found in chapter 4, "Expanding American Catholic Culture: The Trans-Mississippi West," 97–128.

20. Elliott West, "A Story of Three Families," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 19 (Summer 1996): 112.

21. Some of the earliest interesting published letters were written by Miami County homesteaders John and Sarah Everett. See "Letters of John and Sarah Everett, 1854–1864: Miami County Pioneers," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 8 (February 1939): 3–34; *ibid.* (May 1939): 143–74; *ibid.* (August 1939): 279–310; *ibid.* (November 1939): 350–83. See also Emory Lindquist, ed. and trans., "Letters of the Rev. and Mrs. Olof Olsson 1869–1873, Pioneer Founders of Lindsborg," *ibid.* 7 (Autumn 1955): 497–512, "I Think I will Like Kansas': The Letters of Flora Moorman Heston, 1885–1886," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 6 (Summer 1983): 70–95; John M. Peterson, ed., "The Letters of Edward and Sarah Fitch, Lawrence, Kansas 1855–1863," *ibid.* 12 (Spring 1989): 48–76; *ibid.* (Summer 1989): 78–100. For descriptions of women in the twentieth century, see Marlene Springer and Haskell Springer, eds., *Plains Woman: The Diary of Martha Farnsworth* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986); Stratton, *Pioneer Women*. For early descriptions of women's lives and families through the eyes

mined women's personal papers and begun interpreting how women viewed their gendered roles and their shared existence and "mutual dependence" with family and kinship networks. The scholarship has much to say about how western women and Kansas women from a variety of racial, religious, ethnic, and class backgrounds understood their familial roles as caregivers, workers, mothers, and wives who helped build the family farm and ranches and negotiated family life in cattle towns, mining communities, military installations, small towns, and cities throughout the state.<sup>22</sup>

Although Glenda Riley has explored western women's lives in a variety of milieus, she has focused extensively on woman's role in the family, particularly western women's experiences in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Attempting to challenge and replace the traditional and one-dimensional stereotypes of family women as "Drudges," "Pioneer Mothers," or "Gentle Tamers," prevalent until the 1970s, Riley identified gender ideology, regardless of marital status, as a major factor determining their duties and interests. She stated, "Not only did they manage their households and families; they were also charged with preserving family, religious, and ethnic traditions; and they served as family historians, producing family Bible records, quilts, and such 'women's' artwork as wedding or mourning pictures."<sup>23</sup> Women helped out during harvest or when male labor was scarce, and when possible they found "appropriate work" to supplement the family income, particularly during the twentieth century. In a series of articles for *Kansas History* in 1986, Riley utilized thirty-eight letters written by nineteenth-century Kansas women to friends and family in Pennsylvania and other eastern states. The letters, many published in eastern newspapers, provided rich detail of family life and often extremely positive images of the state describing "important elements in the shaping of the American dream," specifically the agrarian ideal of "paradise."<sup>24</sup>

Frank's folks have a nice lot -  
-the boy about two months old.  
I wish you could see our farm as it looks  
at this season of the year every thing  
is such a vivid green  
The children have bothered me  
so much that I could not write a  
good letter. Edith wanted to write  
a little to her cousin. I doubt if she  
will be able to read it. I hope you  
will encourage the children to write for  
it is so much easier for them than for  
older people. We all send our love  
to you and all the rest of family.  
truly yours  
Georgiana Packard

*Journals, diaries, and letters that women wrote as they came west provide insight to their personal experiences and perceptions. The above letter, written in 1877, is one of many that pioneer Georgiana Packard sent to relatives from her family's settlement in Butler County.*

of males, see Everett Dick, *The Sod-house Frontier, 1854-1890: A Social History of the Northern Plains from the Creation of Kansas & Nebraska to the Admission of the Dakotas* (1937; reprint, Lincoln, Neb.: Johnsen Publishing Co., 1954); John Ise, *Sod and Stubble: The Story of a Kansas Homestead* (1936; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1967).

22. For numerous examples including a variety of multicultural perspectives, see Jameson and Armitage, *Writing the Range*; Armitage and Jameson, *The Women's West*; Jeffrey, *Frontier Women*; Schlissel, Ruiz, and Monk, *Western Women*; Myres, *Westering Women*.

23. Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 2.

24. Glenda Riley, ed., "Kansas Frontierwomen Viewed Through Their Writings," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 9 (Spring 1986): 2-9; "Kansas Frontierwomen Viewed Through Their Writings: The Diary of Chestina Bowker Allen," *ibid.* (Summer 1986): 83-95; "Kansas Frontierwomen Viewed Through Their Writings: The Journal of Carrie Robbins," *ibid.* (Autumn 1986): 13-45; "Kansas Frontierwomen Viewed Through Their Writings: The Memoir of Georgiana Packard," *ibid.* (Winter 1986): 182-89. For additional information about nineteenth-century family life and women's roles in Kansas, see Stratton, *Pioneer Women*; James F. Hoy, ed., "A Window on Flint Hills Folklife Part 1: The Diary of Elizabeth Mardin," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 14 (Autumn 1991): 186-205.

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In “The Elegant Dugout: Domesticity and Moveable Culture in the United States, 1870–1900,” historian Angel Kwolek-Folland explored family life and women’s roles and their understanding of gender, domesticity, and homebuilding activities. Also focusing much of her analysis on Kansas women’s writings, Kwolek-Folland moved beyond examination of the “emotional and political” toward analyzing the “personal or cultural significance” of domestic space, stating that domesticity and the frontier home provided “an essential link between personal and cultural womanhood.” Whether in an “elegant dugout” in western Kansas or a wood-framed home in Topeka, many women saw their homes as personal and cultural statements about their values, beliefs, and ideals—many of which had been transplanted and carried with them from their eastern roots—comforting and keeping them connected to their idea of “civilization.”<sup>25</sup>

Childbirth, childrearing, and nurturing have been and continue to be an integral part of women’s family role. Traditionally, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century rural families had more children than did urban families, since a large labor source, or lack of it, could make or break a family farm. During the nineteenth century rural women gave birth approximately every two years and could expect to lose one or two children through miscarriage or stillbirth or to accident or disease.<sup>26</sup> The presence of death, for mother or child, added additional stress to an already physically exhausting nine-month process that might be repeated six to eight times during a woman’s life. As women gained control over their reproductive capacity in the twentieth century, they lost control of the birthing process and the birth room.

A number of historians have documented that folk healing and midwifery were practiced extensively in Kansas and the Midwest until the early twentieth century, particularly by European immigrants and their female descendants. An honored profession, healing and birthing skills typically passed from mother to daughter or a close female relative. Gesche Mahnken Block, or Grandma Block as she was affectionately known, cared for the sick and delivered many babies during a forty-year period in Miami County, Kansas. Upon her death in 1911 a county commissioner said of her, “In cases of sickness, she was usually the first to offer her services. She will be sadly missed in our community. Grandma Block was one of the noblest women I ever knew.”<sup>27</sup>

The birthing room was considered the domain of women, and often female kin or neighbors would assist the midwife or doctor with the labor and birthing process—frequently providing prenatal care before the birth and staying on afterward to care for the family and new baby, allowing the new mother a few days to recuperate. The transition from midwives and in-home births to male doctors and eventually hospital births came first in the cities but was slow and more difficult for many rural Kansas women who resisted the travel to hospitals and the

25. Angel Kwolek-Folland, “The Elegant Dugout: Domesticity and Moveable Culture in the United States, 1870–1900,” in *Kansas and the West*, ed. Napier, 117–33, originally published in *American Studies* 25 (Spring 1984): 21–28.

26. Carroll D. Clark and Roy L. Roberts, *People of Kansas: A Demographic and Sociological Study* (Topeka: Kansas State Planning Board, 1936). This book contains vital information on births, deaths, birthrates, rural versus urban data, and other demographic information for Kansas; it also compares Kansas trends with national trends.

27. Coburn, *Life at Four Corners*, 92; see also Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers*; Timothy J. Kloberdanz, “The Daughters of Shiphrah: Folk Healers and Midwives of the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 9 (Winter 1989): 3–12.

more impersonal treatment in institutions with male doctors. As midwives disappeared or were regulated out of their profession by the growing presence of male doctors and the growing political clout of the American Medical Association, Kansas women adjusted and came to see male doctors and hospital births as safer than home deliveries and an important twentieth-century marker of middle-class status and urban culture.<sup>28</sup>

After the birth of the first child, women became caregivers for decades; childrearing duties were rarely absent and were simply part of each day's activities. Because of the demands of rural life, the family farm functioned as both an economic and social unit. Both parents were involved in childrearing although for men this typically began later when children were old enough to provide farm labor. Scholars disagree on the harshness or leniency of rural childrearing practices, and often ethnic and cultural traditions influenced childrearing practices for the first and second generation of immigrants. Age, gender, and sometimes sibling order determined children's roles and responsibilities. With children of both sexes present in the family, fathers typically trained sons to help with large farm production, and mothers trained daughters in household tasks and other female work responsibilities such as gardening and tending small animals, particularly chickens. Aunts, uncles, grandparents, and sometimes older siblings also served as caregivers and mentors for rural children. However, in a family where there was not a balanced gender mix, young boys might be assigned household duties if older brothers provided the needed outside labor, and young girls might assist with crops if males were absent, particularly during times of planting or harvest when extensive amounts of physical labor were needed in short periods of time. Although childrearing practices varied from family to family, parents modeled gender roles and taught children early the importance of work and of duty to the family unit. Children provided important sources of labor for the family farm, and in turn the family supplied the arena in which crucial lessons in gender expectations and responsibilities were defined and acted out by parents and extended kin. For rural families, many of these gendered expectations and responsibilities would not change significantly until after World War II.<sup>29</sup>



*Childbirth, childrearing, and nurturing have been and continue to be an integral part of women's family role. Parents, older siblings, and extended family often served as mentors for rural children. In this 1916 photograph, "Aunt Vera" tends to her family's children in Murdock, Kingman County.*

28. The many excellent sources on midwifery and women's health issues include, for example, Richard W. Wertz and Dorothy C. Wertz, *Lying-In: A History of Childbirth in America* (New York: Free Press, 1977); Judith Barrett Litoff, *American Midwives: 1860 to the Present* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978); Judith Walzer Leavitt, *Brought to Bed: Childbirth in America, 1750–1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

29. Elliott West, *Growing Up with the Country: Childhood on the Far Western Frontier* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 158–61; see also Coburn, *Life at Four Corners*, 81–88; Ann E. Birney, "Her Father's Son: Girls Doing 'Boys' Work on Great Plains Family Farms and Ranches, 1915 to 1980" (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 2002). For a broader treatment of American childhood, see N. Ray Hiner and Joseph M. Hawes, eds., *Growing Up in America: Children in Historical Perspective* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985). Two edited books, C. Robert Haywood and Sandra Jarvis, eds., *'A Funnie Place, No Fences': Teenagers' Views of Kansas, 1867–1900* (Lawrence: Division of Continuing Education, University of Kansas, 1992), and Marilyn Irvin Holt, ed., *Model Ts, Pep Chapels, and a Wolf at the Door: Kansas Teenagers, 1900–1941* (Lawrence: Division of Continuing Education, University of Kansas, 1994), contain primary documents that describe life as experienced by Kansas teenagers.

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Although the letters of nineteenth-century Kansans John and Sarah Everett and Edward and Sarah Fitch document the presence of mutuality and respect in what appears to be companionate marriages, other Kansas women found marriage and family life far from the romantic ideal. Like other western women, Kansas women experienced their share of abuse and abandonment. In her article "Battered Pioneers," Betsy Downey chronicled the physical battering experienced by western women, whose geographic isolation from family and kin made the abuse easier to inflict and more difficult to leave. Downey wrote, "Patriarchal concepts of the family, closely linked to ideas about gender roles, contributed to wife abuse." Glenda Riley agreed, stating that "family structure was, after all, patriarchal with its attendant implications of the male's right to dominate a female, control her, and coerce, her." In her fascinating article on women and crime in Kansas City, Donna Cooper Graves writes that murder was sometimes the result of "one last desperate act of self-defense."<sup>30</sup>

Even under less violent circumstances women suffered the stigma and economic constraints of gender. Using Douglas County, Kansas, as a location that "closely resembled national trends," Lyn Ellen Bennett labeled desertion as "the most often cited grounds for divorce" since it "was not unusual for a husband to abandon his wife and children in the West." Bennett summed up her research by challenging the western myth of egalitarian ideals, stating that "western divorce was neither more liberal nor more readily available than its eastern counterpart."<sup>31</sup>

Women's kinship, ethnic, and religious networks gave them sustenance and strength as well as physical support with the myriad of domestic and childcare duties and during times of stress. However, women's networks often went beyond domestic issues, particularly in rural and small towns. Church and school activities provided important outlets for Kansas women, whether they were urban or rural. These important networks helped them survive isolation and stress and provided important social outlets, giving women an excuse to forego personal family responsibilities and enjoy opportunities to socialize with other women in female-defined work endeavors. Church socials and school picnics pulled women out of the home but usually to perform domestic duties in a larger social network.<sup>32</sup>

Although many women's activities involved consumable or nonpermanent goods and services in the home, more than any other activity quiltmaking

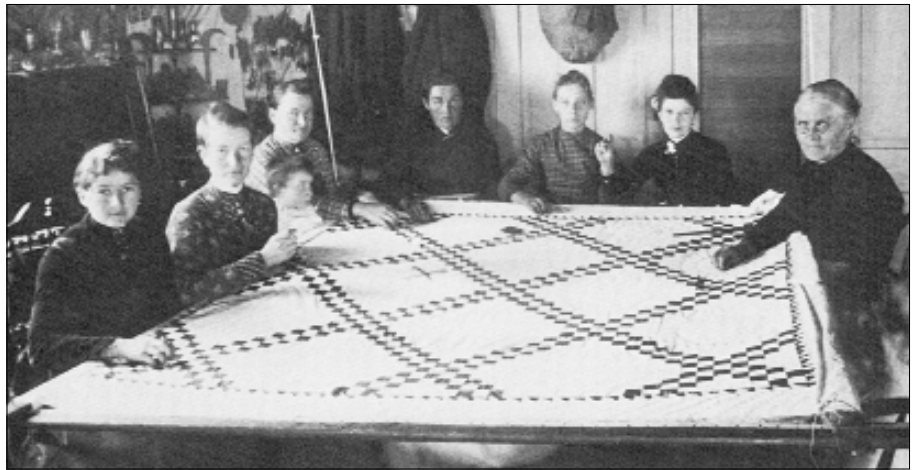
Many of the entries are written by girls and women who provide the readers with insightful, if not amusing, portraits of growing up female in Kansas between 1867 and 1941. For a poignant narrative by a young, disabled woman and her experiences of courtship and marriage, see Ellen Payne Paullin, ed., "Etta's Journal, January 2, 1874–July 25, 1875," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 3 (Autumn 1980): 201–29; *ibid.* (Winter 1980): 255–78.

30. Betsy Downey, "Battered Pioneers: Jules Sandoz and the Physical Abuse of Wives on the American Frontier," *Great Plains Quarterly* 12 (Winter 1992): 31–49; Riley, *The Female Frontier*, 96; Donna Cooper Graves, "'We'll Fight It Out Fair Right Now': Homicide, Felony Assault, and Gender in Kansas City, Kansas, 1890–1920," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 26 (Spring 2003): 38.

31. Lyn Ellen Bennett, "Reassessing Western Liberality: Divorce in Douglas County, Kansas, 1867–1876," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 17 (Winter 1994–1995): 274–87; see also C. Robert Haywood, "Unplighted Troths: Causes for Divorce in a Frontier Town Toward the End of the Nineteenth Century," *Great Plains Quarterly* 13 (Fall 1993): 211–21.

32. See Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers*; Murphy and Venet, *Midwestern Women*, Coburn, *Life at Four Corners*; see also Coburn, "Ethnicity, Religion, and Gender: The Women of Block, Kansas, 1868–1940," *Great Plains Quarterly* 8 (Fall 1988): 222–32; Ellen May Stanley, "The Process and the Achievement of the First Lane County, Kansas, Women's Club," *Prairie Scout* 6 (1996): 61–79.

brought generations of familial and non-familial women together, creating a legacy that many times outlived the creators. Viewed as more than warm and functional remembrances from the past, quilts have become important markers of Kansan women's "values, interests and experiences of the society in which they were produced." Scholars in history, anthropology, art, and folklore have begun to look at women's artworks as important cultural markers and valued material culture that tell much about the past. The spring 1990 issue of *Kansas History*, and the subsequent publication of *Kansas Quilts & Quilters*, explore and analyze the rich social, historical, cultural, artistic, and emotional aspects of a historically important gendered activity for Kansas women.<sup>33</sup>



*Although many activities provided networking and socializing opportunities for frontier women, quilting more than any other endeavor brought women together, creating a legacy that many times outlived the creators. The quilting bee pictured here took place in the 1890s in Pendroy, a small town in North Dakota.*

Although women's networks were important social connections for Kansas women, other scholars remind us that some women experienced "limited community" because of geographic isolation or racial, religious, and ethnic segregation. In his analysis of Thurman, Kansas, Joseph V. Hickey described the typical decline of Kansas towns in the twentieth century as decade after decade they lost population, social life, economic opportunities, and eventually disappeared. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg described "The Limits of Community" in her engaging chapter on Martha Friesen of Hamilton County, Kansas. Isolated in sparsely populated southwestern Kansas and continuing to practice her Evangelical Lutheran faith among households of Russian Mennonites, Friesen lacked female connections and a social network.<sup>34</sup>

Although sharing many of the same gendered roles and duties within their families, Mexican and African American women often were shunned and/or harassed by Anglos and European immigrants. They formed separate kinship and racial/ethnic networks that provided social, economic, physical, and religious communities and served as a bulwark against racial and ethnic prejudice that effectively segregated them from other Kansans in rural and small towns as well as larger cities. Henry J. Ávila documented life for Mexican Americans in turn-of-the-century Garden City, Kansas. Struggling to create a home for her family out of a "dugout or tie house" provided for Mexican workers on the Santa Fe railroad, María Rodríguez watched helplessly as two of her children died from exposure

33. "The Kansas Quilt Project," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 13 (Spring 1990): 80; Barbara Brackman et al., *Kansas Quilts & Quilters* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1993).

34. Joseph V. Hickey, *Ghost Settlement on the Prairie: A Biography of Thurman, Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995); Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, "The Limits of Community: Martha Friesen of Hamilton County, Kansas," in *Midwestern Women*, ed. Murphy and Venet, 6-91.

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during the winter. Later, working migrant jobs during sugar beet season, the family was given a two-room “chicken house” virtually unlivable before hours of cleaning.<sup>35</sup>

In her essay “‘We All Seem Like Brothers and Sisters’: The African American Community in Manhattan, Kansas 1865–1940,” Nupur Chaudhuri described how the segregated community courageously pulled together creating the necessary economic and social support system needed to survive and thrive in the frequently hostile, white environment. Except for Nicodemus and a few other African American towns in rural Kansas, the vast majority of black women and their families lived in the eastern cities of Lawrence, Manhattan, Junction City, Topeka, Atchison, Leavenworth, and Kansas City, where many thriving African American communities existed in segregated, but often culturally rich, environments.<sup>36</sup>

#### SOCIAL ACTIVISM AND POLITICS

It was from their central role in the family that women moved into the public arena in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Kansas. Although the time, place, and nature of their social activism and political aspirations would vary based on race, class, ethnicity, and religion, Kansas women moved their influences and activities outside the family, utilized existing women’s networks, and created new ones in efforts to critique, challenge, support, and at times change the social and political agendas in the towns, the state, and in the nation.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries many Kansas women expanded their domestic duties to become social activists, and in some cases advocates for political change involving three issues: temperance, suffrage, and Populism. As white middle-class women in Kansas began to acquire higher levels of education and more leisure time and were informed by prescriptive literature about women’s moral authority, if not superiority, compared with men, they began to emulate their eastern peers and see their domestic and cultural roles expanding from the home into the public realm. Utilizing the correspondence of early pioneer women, Nicole Etcheson described the earliest political motivations that encouraged some women to migrate to Bleeding Kansas in support of the antislavery movement.<sup>37</sup> In a more comprehensive examination of women’s political agendas, June O. Underwood discussed the educational and political importance of women’s organizations in “Civilizing Kansas: Women’s Organizations, 1880–1920.” She described how town-building activities throughout the state included not only male economic boosterism but also a wide variety of female so-

35. Henry J. Ávila, “Immigration and Integration: The Mexican American Community in Garden City, Kansas, 1900–1950,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 20 (Spring 1997): 22–37; see also Robert Oppenheimer, “Acculturation or Assimilation: Mexican Immigrants in Kansas, 1900 to World War II,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 16 (October 1985): 429–48.

36. Nupur Chaudhuri, “‘We All Seem Like Brothers and Sisters’: The African–American Community in Manhattan, Kansas, 1865–1940,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 14 (Winter 1991–1992): 270–88. For a more complete treatment of race relations in Kansas, see James N. Leiker, “Race Relations in the Sunflower State,” *ibid.* 25 (Autumn 2002): 214–36.

37. Nicole Etcheson, “‘Labouring for the Freedom of this Territory’: Free-State Kansas Women in the 1850s,” *ibid.* 21 (Summer 1998): 68–87.

cieties and organizations that supported and advocated building schools, churches, charities, political and reform societies, and organizations.<sup>38</sup> Participating in church or community activities and philanthropy was a gendered activity, with single-sex organizations prevalent until the early twentieth century. Because of this gender separation women gained autonomy, political acumen, and independence as officers and policy-makers for their organizations—authority that would have been denied to them in mixed-gender groups. However, as one western historian noted, “Their attempts to effect change were always contested.”<sup>39</sup>

In *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas*, Michael L. Goldberg described Kansas as a home to reformers and agitators of all kinds, many of whom were women. Addressing temperance, suffrage, Populism, and other political issues, Goldberg focused on the private and public lives of men and women, rural and urban, and how their understanding of gender affected electoral politics in late-nineteenth-century Kansas. In his conclusion he stated, “Gender discourse, dynamic, ever shifting, and yet superficially immutable, was both a minefield of potential disasters and a treasure trove of possibilities.”<sup>40</sup>

Historian Nancy G. Garner, who has extensively researched the Kansas Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, wrote that Anglo-Protestant women “fully accepted the assumptions promoted by nineteenth-century gender roles that assigned virtue, nurture, and idealism” to them. Although Catholics, racial minorities, and ethnic immigrants were the usual targets, these women also expected Anglo-Protestant males to live up to standards of masculinity, independence, and honor associated with white, male manhood. In her article “‘A Prayerful Public Protest’: The Significance of Gender in the Kansas Woman’s Crusade of 1874,” Garner documented one year in the active crusade that was grounded in Protestant religious moral authority and brought fifty-six thousand Anglo-Protestant women throughout the United States into saloons to sing, pray, and attempt to close them. Eastern Kansas women joined in droves in the larger cities of Leavenworth, Manhattan, Lawrence, and Fort Scott, while the towns of



Women moved into the public arena in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to create and support social and political change in their world. Temperance, suffrage, Populism, and even socialism were on agendas of these early activists. The many Kansas reformers included Etta Semple and Laura Knox

38. June O. Underwood, “Civilizing Kansas: Women’s Organizations, 1880–1920,” *ibid.* 7 (Winter 1984–1985): 291–306.

39. Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874–1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), xvii. For further discussion on women’s social activism in the West and throughout the nation, see Riley, *The Female Frontier*, 148–201; Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990); Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women’s Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

40. Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997); Goldberg, “Non-Partisan and All Partisan: Rethinking Woman Suffrage and Party Politics in Gilded Age Kansas,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 25 (Spring 1994): 21–44.



*Besides advocating temperance and suffrage, in the late nineteenth century some Kansas women took up the Populist banner.*

western Kansas had too few women to form crusades. These activities preceded by decades the work of the famous and often caricatured Carry A. Nation, who is most identified with temperance and often is pictured wielding her hatchet against helpless liquor bottles and stunned saloon owners in Kansas. Connecting alcohol consumption to domestic violence, prostitution, and female and childhood poverty, Kansas women challenged far more than “liquor by the drink” in open saloons. Other covert and sometimes overt subtexts of the temperance movement addressed the sexual double standard, women’s economic dependence, domestic violence, child abuse, and the legal nonstatus of married women.<sup>41</sup>

Woman suffrage campaigns in Kansas pre-dated but also co-existed with the women’s temperance movement, both lasting well into the twentieth century. In fact, many Kansas women worked for both issues because reformers believed that women voters could potentially influence other reform movement campaigns and goals. Although many western states gave women the vote before eastern states and national suffrage in 1920, scholars debate whether western egalitarianism or other self-interest created the trend.<sup>42</sup>

Kansas women have an interesting, if not special, place in the history of woman suffrage. Thanks to the untiring efforts of Clarina I. H. Nichols, who sat through daily meetings, influencing male legislators writing the first state constitution, Kansas women have been eligible to vote in school elections since statehood in 1861.<sup>43</sup> National figures Lucy Stone, Olympia Brown, Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton all stumped the state in 1867 and focused on passage of a referendum that would have removed the word “male” from voting requirements. The referendum failed but some of the national reformers left with lasting impressions of bad food, horrible roads, and shared quarters with unwelcome “guests.” In her memoirs, Stanton remembered being shaken awake by “long-

41. Nancy G. Garner, “‘A Prayerful Public Protest’: The Significance of Gender in the Kansas Woman’s Crusade of 1874,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 20 (Winter 1997–1998): 215–29. For a complete analysis of the Kansas WCTU, see Garner, “For God and Home and Native Land: The Kansas Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, 1878–1938” (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1994). For another treatment of Kansas and temperance and prohibition, see Robert Smith Bader, *Prohibition in Kansas: A History* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986). A more popular approach to the subject is Kenneth J. Peak and Patricia Peak, *Kansas Temperance: Much Ado about Booze, 1870–1920* (Manhattan, Kans.: Sunflower University Press, 2000). For a scholarly treatment of temperance throughout the United States, see Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873–1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981). For information on the contributions and thoughts of Carry Nation, see Robert Smith Bader, “Mrs. Nation,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 7 (Winter 1984–1985): 247–62; Fran Grace, *Carry A. Nation: Retelling the Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000). For Nation’s recently released papers, see *The Use and Need of the Life of Carrie A. Nation* (IndyPublish.com, 2002).

42. For the best discussions on this issue, see Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975); Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848–1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978).

43. Joseph G. Gambone, ed., “The Forgotten Feminist of Kansas: The Papers of Clarina I. H. Nichols, 1854–1863, Part One, 1854–April 7, 1855,” *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 39 (Spring 1973): 12–57; *ibid.*, “Part Two, April 21, 1855–1856,” 39 (Summer 1973): 220–61; *ibid.*, “Part Three, 1857–1863,” 39 (Autumn 1973): 392–444; *ibid.*, “Part Four, 1867–1868,” 39 (Winter 1973): 515–63; *ibid.*, “Part Five, 1869,” 40 (Spring 1974): 72–135; *ibid.*, “Part Six, 1870–1872,” 40 (Summer 1974): 241–92; *ibid.*, “Part Seven, 1873–1880,” 40 (Autumn 1974): 410–59; *ibid.*, “Part Eight, 1881–1885,” 40 (Winter 1974): 503–62.

nosed black pigs” and the fear of being “devoured by fleas” as she slept in the springless carriage to avoid “bed bugs” in her sleeping quarters.<sup>44</sup>

Lorraine A. Gehring’s and Wilda M. Smith’s research on women officeholders and suffrage provides an interesting assessment of the transition to female candidates as the state moved toward passing woman suffrage in 1912. Kansas was the first state to make women legal voters at municipal elections in 1887. That same year temperance advocate Susanna Madora Salter of Argonia was elected the first woman mayor in the world. Temperance battles between “wet” and “dry” men often tipped the balance in elections as they did a year later when Oskaloosa elected an all-female city council and mayor. Although often not taken seriously by males, these elections put Kansas in the national news and influenced other Kansas towns so that “by the turn of the century, sixteen towns had elected women mayors, most accompanied by all-woman councils,” thus paving the way for state suffrage in 1912.<sup>45</sup>

Besides advocating temperance and suffrage, in the late nineteenth century some Kansas women took up the Populist banner. Historians of Kansas have well documented the nuances between feminism and other political issues embraced by Kansas women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As with his gendered research on temperance and suffrage, Michael Lewis Goldberg broke new ground when he described how the shifts in gender definitions divided urban and rural contingents in Kansas and mirrored the larger divisions between Republicans and Populists nationally.<sup>46</sup> Although Annie L. Diggs, Mary Elizabeth Lease, and the noted spiritualist Prudence Crandall achieved national prominence during the Populist era in Kansas, many lesser-known Kansas women flocked to embrace the Populist political agenda. Historian Marilyn Dell Brady’s “Populism and Feminism in a Newspaper by and for Women of the Kansas Farmers’ Alliance, 1891–1894” documented the connections between the state Farmers’ Alliance and the national People’s (Populist) Party. Brady utilized women’s writings in the Alliance’s newspaper, the *Farmer’s Wife*, to demonstrate how Kansas women connected their feminist goals to the People’s Party, which by 1890 had become “the political arm” of the Farmers’ Alliance.<sup>47</sup>

Although less acceptable to Kansans than other political groups, the Socialist Party did have some advocates particularly in the ethnic enclaves of southeastern Kansas known as the Little Balkans. Historian Ann Schofield’s essay “An Army of Amazons” describes the “two to three thousand wives, daughters, mothers, sisters and sweethearts of radical striking miners” who stormed the coal fields advocating better wages and living conditions and admonishing strikebreakers in 1921. The *Topeka State Journal* feared that “even bayonets will not deter the strong, high-



*Kansas was the first state to make women legal voters at municipal elections in 1887. That same year temperance advocate Susanna Madora Salter (above) of Argonia was elected the first woman mayor in the world. “By the turn of the century, sixteen towns had elected women mayors, most accompanied by all-woman councils,” thus paving the way for state suffrage in 1912.*

44. Quotation in Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 149–50.

45. Lorraine A. Gehring, “Women Officeholders in Kansas, 1872–1912,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 9 (Summer 1986): 48–57; Wilda M. Smith, “A Half Century of Struggle: Gaining Woman Suffrage in Kansas,” *ibid.* 4 (Summer 1981): 74–95.

46. Goldberg, *An Army of Women*.

47. Marilyn Dell Brady, “Populism and Feminism in a Newspaper by and for Women of the Kansas Farmers’ Alliance, 1891–1894,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 7 (Winter 1984–1985): 280–90; see also Dorothy Rose Blumberg, “Mary Elizabeth Lease, Populist Orator: A Profile,” *ibid.* 1 (Spring 1978): 3–15; Rodney O. Davis, “Prudence Crandall, Spiritualism, and Populist-Era Reform in Kansas,” *ibid.* 3 (Winter 1980): 239–54.

Women's clubs  
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were disadvantaged  
by both race  
and gender, the  
opportunity for  
leadership and  
autonomy.

ly temperamental foreign women." An excellent example of feminist analysis and contextualization, the research wove together politics, class, community, and feminism to illustrate the gendered activities of these Kansas women, placing their activities within the larger contexts of labor history, women's history, and ethnic history.<sup>48</sup>

Although well-known socialists Eugene Debs and Mother Jones had visited the Little Balkans to agitate for change, so did a native Kansan who had embraced the socialist cause as a young woman. Kate Richards O'Hare, who identified with the struggles against corporate capitalism and workers' rights, was the daughter of an impoverished Kansas farm family in central Kansas who later moved to Kansas City, Kansas, to escape poverty. Inspired by the speeches of Mother Jones, she embraced socialist thought and traveled around the country as a speaker, agitator, and antiwar advocate, frequently contributing to the socialist newspaper *An Appeal to Reason*, published in Girard, Kansas. Sally M. Miller writes that it was only after conviction for violation of the Espionage Act and incarceration at the Missouri State Penitentiary that O'Hare moved beyond "ambivalence" toward feminism to "understand more fully the helplessness and subservience that women knew."<sup>49</sup>

No discussion of Kansas women's social activism and political influence would be complete without including research on the social activism of African American women and the civil rights movement. Because of what Randall Woods has labeled "parallel" institutional development resulting from both *de jure* and *de facto* segregation in the state, black Kansas women, like black men, used the churches, social clubs, and other organizations to support causes that impacted both race and gender parameters. Historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham wrote, "Largely through the fund-raising efforts of women, the black church built schools, provided clothes and food to poor people, established old folks homes and orphanages, and made available a host of needed social welfare services."<sup>50</sup>

Many community studies and research on integration in schools and public accommodations by Nupur Chaudhuri, James C. Carper, and Randall Woods, among others, have included the many activities of black women in Kansas.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Marilyn Dell Brady has researched and analyzed the importance of women's clubs that were prevalent in the larger cities of Kansas in the early twentieth century. The Kansas Federation of Colored Women's Clubs was networked to a powerful and influential national organization that "offered black Kansas women the opportunities for self-expression and education increasingly denied them by white society." By the 1920s Kansas women had opened "junior clubs," which placed the state organization in the "forefront of the junior club movement of the National Association of Colored Women and helped shape its directions."

48. Ann Schofield, "The Women's March: Miners, Family, and Community in Pittsburg, Kansas, 1921-1922," *ibid.* 7 (Summer 1984): 159-68; "An 'Army of Amazons': The Language of Protest in a Kansas Mining Community, 1921-1922," *American Quarterly* 37 (Winter 1985): 686-701.

49. Sally M. Miller, "Kate Richards O'Hare: Progression toward Feminism," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 7 (Winter 1984-1985): 263-79.

50. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 2.

51. Chaudhuri, "'We All Seem Like Brothers and Sisters.'" For a complete discussion of relevant articles, see Leiker, "Race Relations in the Sunflower State." For a specific discussion on one white woman's contributions, see Milton S. Katz and Susan B. Tucker, "A Pioneer in Civil Rights: Esther Brown and the South Park Desegregation Case of 1948," *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 18 (Winter 1995-1996): 235-47.

These organizations gave women, who were disadvantaged by both race and gender, the opportunity for leadership and autonomy. As their motto stated, they were “rowing, not drifting,” not passive victims of the world around them.<sup>52</sup>

## WORK AND ECONOMICS

One of the most significant thematic categories transformed by gender analysis and recent scholarship has been “women’s work.” The very label conjures perceptions of low pay, low status, and trivial influence and economic value. In his recent review essay on Kansas literature, Thomas Fox Averill lamented the “denigration of women’s literary work” and the work of women who “went beyond the classroom, clubroom, or editing desk” to create literature and poetry that rarely was recognized or taken seriously “in the context of their time and place.”<sup>53</sup> Most of “women’s work” has suffered the same fate of obscurity and denigration, even in an agricultural state such as Kansas that desperately needed the domestic and outside labors of women to create and maintain families, farms, ranches, small businesses, schools, hospitals, social agencies, and many other institutions across the state.

Scholars of Kansas and western women have published extensively on women’s sizable contributions to family farms and ranches. Historically, both women and men tended to underrate and misrepresent the production and exchange of domestic goods. Listed only as “housewives” on state and federal censuses, women’s economic contributions became subsumed under “head of household” production records. Focusing on public visibility and the amount of monetary exchange, early historians created a “false status” that told little about what women did and the importance of that work to the family, community, and the outside world. More recent scholarship has rectified many early misperceptions.<sup>54</sup>

Throughout their life cycles rural Kansas women contributed to food production for family consumption as well as for sale. Researchers of rural America estimate that women were involved in one-third to one-half of the total food production on family farms. Well into the mid-twentieth century some rural women were tending huge gardens, performing all cooking and baking tasks, canning, butchering, rendering lard, making apple butter, and seeing to the production of milk, butter, cottage cheese, and eggs and nonfood items such as soap



*The Kansas Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs was networked to a powerful and influential national organization that “offered black Kansas women the opportunities for self-expression and education increasingly denied them by white society.” Elizabeth Washington (above) was a founder and leader of the state organization.*

52. Marilyn Dell Brady, “Kansas Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs, 1900–1930,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 9 (Spring 1986): 19–30; “Organizing Afro-American Girls’ Clubs in Kansas in the 1920’s,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 9 (September 1987): 69–73.

53. Thomas Fox Averill, “Kansas Literature,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 25 (Summer 2002): 144–65.

54. For examples of article-length analyses of women’s farm work and family contributions, see Cornelia Butler Flora and Jan L. Flora, “Structure of Agriculture and Women’s Culture on the Great Plains,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 8 (Fall 1988): 195–222; Nancy Grey Osterud, “The Valuation of Women’s Work: Gender and the Market in a Dairy Farming Community during the late Nineteenth Century,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies* 10 (September 1988): 18–24; Richard W. Rathge, “Women’s Contribution to the Family Farm,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 9 (Winter 1989): 36–52; Coburn, “Ethnicity, Religion, and Gender.”

*Often ignored and undervalued but vital to the farm economy was the field work performed by adolescent and adult women.*

and clothing. The list of activities is so extensive that the contemporary mind boggles at the amount of skill and toil needed to accomplish them.<sup>55</sup> Historian Joan M. Jensen asserted that “although the purpose may have been preindustrial, that of providing for the family, the means were commercial. And, the work was of major consequence in providing an economic infrastructure for the expansion of industrial capitalism.”<sup>56</sup>

Often ignored and undervalued but vital to the farm economy was the field work performed by adolescent and adult women, particularly during financial stress or harvest seasons. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg has researched “Women in Wheat Country,” describing women’s major economic contributions in western Kansas. Additionally, the author has researched women’s economic contributions during the devastating years of the Great Depression. Her book *Rooted in Dust: Surviving Drought and Depression in Southwestern Kansas* examines the farm and outside work that women, men, and families performed as they struggled to maintain farms and ranches when others fled the state during the Dust Bowl era.<sup>57</sup>

Historians confirm that gender roles and status affected the introduction of technology to the family farm—with women benefiting less and later than men. Having more control of family finances, males brought technology into large farming enterprises first; consequently, household, food production machines, and even electricity and indoor plumbing had to wait for many years after the introduction of trucks and tractors to farm life. However, historians state that both rural and urban women benefited from the acquisition of a family car since automobiles gave them unprecedented independence and mobility unknown to their mothers and grandmothers. The automobile opened the door for opportunities to visit “town” or family and friends without male supervision.<sup>58</sup>

As women’s mobility and independence increased, city life sometimes provided opportunities for rural girls to take jobs as live-in domestics to wealthy families in small towns or the growing urban centers in Wichita, Topeka, and Kansas City. Rural ethnic women honed their “womanly” skills and took domestic jobs for adventure and for financial and social independence, and compared with their male peers, they assimilated more quickly into middle-class American society. The German Lutherans of Block, Kansas, felt that being a “hired girl” provided young women important learning skills as future wives and mothers, and the job meshed well with religious and gender ideology about women’s roles. “The combination of urban lifestyle, financial independence, and the chance to

55. Riley, *A Place to Grow*, 147–96; Riley, *The Female Frontier*, 102–47; Pickle, *Contented Among Strangers*, 31–32, 53–57, 227–28; Coburn, *Life at Four Corners*, 88–89, 112–27; see also Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982); Rachel Ann Rosenfeld, *Farm Women: Work, Farm, and Family in the United States* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); Ruth B. Moynihan, Susan Armitage, and Christiane Fischer Dichamp, eds., *So Much to Be Done: Women Settlers on the Mining and Ranching Frontier* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990).

56. Joan M. Jensen, *Loosening the Bonds: Mid-Atlantic Farm Women* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 91.

57. Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, “Women in Wheat Country,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 23 (Spring–Summer 2000): 56–71; Riney-Kehrberg, *Rooted in Dust: Surviving Drought and Depression in Southwestern Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994).

58. Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913–1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993); Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (Philadelphia: Free Press, 1991).

live in homes of non-Lutherans afforded them a broad, rich educational experience unparalleled in the lives of their mothers or grandmothers."<sup>59</sup>

Although farm life and domestic activities provide the most numerous examples of women's economic contributions in Kansas, Angel Kwolek-Folland's research has provided a historical examination of the role of gender in work and economics and how women's roles influenced and shaped gender politics in a wide variety of work settings outside the home. Her 1998 book *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States* begins with the seventeenth-century fur trade and traces the history of women as workers, managers, and professionals through the twentieth century. The research provides a much broader level of understanding and analysis of "women's work."<sup>60</sup>

For Kansas women, urban or rural, schoolteaching became the primary occupation for many young females before marriage or for those who chose to remain single. Although wages were low, typically one-third to one-half of male teachers' wages, teaching gave women an opportunity for a profession and independent status, socially and economically. Kansas women followed a familiar pattern prevalent throughout the western United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where the demand for teachers always exceeded the supply available for large urban schools as well as the one-room schoolhouses that dotted the Kansas prairie. Educational historians have documented the teaching profession that began as a male occupation and changed into a female-dominated profession by the mid 1800s. Extensive demand, low wages, and women's perceived "natural" ability to nurture formed the triad of reasons that brought about the transition of the gendered occupation. Some women viewed it as a "calling" similar to a religious vocation, which gave them an opportunity to help in the "civilizing" of the American West.<sup>61</sup> In fact, one historian has argued that religious distrust and the desire to "save" the souls of the multicultural peoples of the West fueled rivalry and competition between Protestant schoolteachers and Catholic teaching nuns, expanding influence and power for both groups of women.<sup>62</sup>

Historians have given us interesting examples from the lives of Kansas teachers. Mary Hurlbut Cordier has examined personal narratives from schoolteachers in Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska, and these letters, memoirs, and interviews documented the daily lives, hardships, and the importance of these teachers to the



Well into the mid-twentieth century rural women were tending huge gardens, performing all cooking and baking tasks, canning, butchering, rendering lard, making apple butter, and seeing to the production of milk, butter, cottage cheese, and eggs. (Above) Women and children tend to typical chores on this Thomas County farm, ca. 1895.

59. Carol K. Coburn, "Learning to Serve: Education and Change in the Lives of Rural Domestic in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of Social History* 25 (Fall 1991): 109–22.

60. Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998); Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870–1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

61. Nancy Hoffman, *Woman's "True" Profession: Voices from the History of Teaching* (Old Westbury, N.Y.: Feminist Press, 1981); Polly Welts Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Joel Spring, *The American School, 1642–2000*, 3d ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001).

62. Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*, 103–4, 126–27.

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communities they served. Catharine Emma Wiggins and Nona Brown Thompson were only teenagers when they began teaching in Kansas in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—a situation all too common when requirements for a teaching license often consisted only of being slightly ahead of the students in age and/or knowledge. Describing the desire of faculty at Kansas State Agricultural College to create an “industrialist instead of a butterfly,” Virginia Railsback Gunn profiled women’s higher education in the 1870s and 1880s at a time when few young women went beyond the common school. Esther Burnett Horne provided a fascinating narrative of her education and life at Haskell Indian Institute in Lawrence in the 1920s and her subsequent life as a teacher at the Shoshone Wind River Reservation.<sup>63</sup>

Two historians have examined the lives and experiences of Kansas women doctors who trained and practiced in the early twentieth century. While teaching was the norm, being a physician was a radical career choice for Kansas women at the turn of the century. Former schoolteacher-turned-physician Mary Canaga Rowland attended medical school well after pioneering women but before tighter entrance exams and the expanding influence of male-only medical boards narrowed women’s access to medical education. Focusing on six women physicians, Gail L. McDaniel provided a broader perspective of Kansas women who struggled with prejudice and, at times, overt hostility as they “took a radical step, violating nineteenth-century norms for accepted female activity when they entered the public world of the male physician.”<sup>64</sup>

With the advent of World War II and the large numbers of males leaving for military service, Kansas women, like women across the nation, moved into war work. Caron Smith described the “Women’s Land Army” in which Kansas farm women were taught “to run and handle machinery safely, proper clothing, work-simplification methods in the home, and nutrition” in an effort to maintain food production during the war. Judith R. Johnson documented the lives of the Kansas “Rosie the Riveters” who worked for the three major aircraft manufacturers in Wichita. Spread out over three shifts and working nonstop, Kansas women “left their homes, schools, and offices to become riveters, welders, or workers in skilled jobs that previously had been denied them.” Women continued to be denied administrative jobs in the plants, and Johnson tells us that racial discrimination also prevailed and few black women were hired except as janitors. Johnson’s interviewees reported that at the war’s end most women left their high-paying war jobs, coerced in some cases and willingly in others, with the expectation that

63. Mary Hurlbut Cordier, *Schoolwomen of the Prairies and Plains: Personal Narratives From Iowa, Kansas, and Nebraska, 1860s–1920s* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1992); Kenneth Wiggins Porter, ed., “Catharine Emma Wiggins, Pupil and Teacher in Northwest Kansas, 1888–1895,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 1 (Spring 1978): 16–38; Nona Brown Thompson, “Teen-Age Teach” *ibid.* 12 (Summer 1989): 127–41; Virginia Railsback Gunn, “Industrialists Not Butterflies: Women’s Higher Education at Kansas State Agricultural College, 1873–1882,” *ibid.* 18 (Spring 1995): 2–17; Esther B. Horne and Sally J. McBeth, *Essie’s Story: The Life and Legacy of a Shoshone Teacher* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998). For additional information on education on the Great Plains and women teachers, see *Great Plains Quarterly* 11 (Fall 1991), a special issue devoted to the topic.

64. F. A. Loomis, ed., *As Long as Life: The Memoirs of a Frontier Woman Physician, Mary Canaga Rowland, 1873–1966* (Seattle: Storm Peak Press, 1994); Gail L. McDaniel, “Women, Medicine, and Science: Kansas Female Physicians, 1880–1910,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 21 (Summer 1998): 103–17.

65. Caron Smith, “The Women’s Land Army During World War II,” *ibid.* 14 (Summer 1991): 82–88; Judith R. Johnson, “Uncle Sam Wanted Them Too! Women Aircraft Workers in Wichita During World War II,” *ibid.* 17 (Spring 1994): 38–49.

they should now return to their “normal” work in their homes.<sup>65</sup>

For many young Catholic Kansans who chose not to be wives and mothers and wanted to find meaningful, challenging work, joining a religious order provided its own unique experience of “family” and a life-long vocation. Similar to nuns across the United States who numbered more than two hundred thousand in 1965, Catholic sisters in Kansas built and/or maintained schools, hospitals, and social service agencies that provided generations of Kansans, Catholic and non-Catholic, needed support services in cities and small towns throughout the state. Sister Evangeline Thomas has extensively researched Kansas religious orders of women, and she provided *Kansas History* with an excellent overview in 1981.

Labeled by historians as some of the first female CEOs, Mothers Superior moved personnel and resources throughout the state and around the country. Far more active and independent than traditional historical narratives suggested, Catholic nuns often were some of the first white women sent into western towns and mining camps to provide needed services.<sup>66</sup> Since 1841, when four Sisters of the Sacred Heart arrived in Sugar Creek at the Potawatomi Mission, until the present day, Catholic sisters have created a legacy of institution building that has no rival in other religious organizations. Ursulines, Dominicans, Sisters of Charity, Sisters of St. Joseph, and Benedictines, among others, came to Kansas. In 1980 twenty-two hundred Catholic sisters were staffing and maintaining eighty-nine elementary schools, eighteen high schools, six colleges, and nineteen hospitals in Kansas. These numbers do not include homes for dependent children and the aged or centers for special education, family life, and retreat centers scattered throughout the state. Understanding the importance of analyzing and writing the history of nuns from a gendered perspective, historian Thomas wrote, “The heritage that these women religious have left to our state and our nation should not be lost or forgotten but rather woven into the fabric of American religious and social history.”<sup>67</sup>



*While schoolteaching was the primary occupation for many females, being a physician was a radical career choice for Kansas women at the turn of the century. Sabetha native Sara E. Greenfield (above) earned her M.D. in 1900 and practiced medicine in Topeka.*

#### FUTURE IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH ON WOMEN AND GENDER

During the past three decades historians of Kansas women have created a growing body of research that has reflected the influence of feminist scholarship and the latest scholarly revisioning on women and gender in American social history and western history. The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been most heavily researched, particularly in the areas of pioneer travel, homesteading experiences, rural life and family, women’s networks, and social activism. The research is important because it has added women (although mostly white) to the

66. M. Evangeline Thomas, “The Role of Women Religious in Kansas History, 1841–1981,” *ibid.* 4 (Spring 1981): 53–63. For other sources about Kansas nuns, see Thomas’s footnotes. For examples of broader, more national perspectives on the work of Catholic nuns, see Coburn and Smith, *Spirited Lives*; Mary Ewens, *The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Arno Press, 1978); Mary J. Oates, *The Catholic Philanthropic Tradition in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995); Tracy Schier and Cynthia Russett, eds., *Catholic Women’s Colleges in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).

67. Thomas, “The Role of Women Religious in Kansas History,” 63. Since this article was published, many historians have researched the historical role of sisters and are working toward Sr. Evangeline Thomas’s goal to integrate sisters’ activities into religious history, social history, and women’s history.



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narrative, reconceptualizing the roles and influences of gender in the structure and institutions of society. This time period and these experiences have focused on what have traditionally been the “mythic,” if not romanticized, time period and events in state history. To contemporary Kansans, these early Euro-American settlers and their activities represented the state’s perceived and sometimes real heritage of strength, courage, and equality that documented the importance of Kansas on the larger national stage in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the experiences of Kansas women of color—Hispanic, Native American, and African American—have yet to be fully developed, particularly when compared with the exceptional research in multicultural western women’s history described and documented earlier in this essay. Compared with some other states, Kansas may have less multicultural diversity in its population, thus it is even more imperative to understand the lives, contributions, and struggles of racial and ethnic minorities who have battled discrimination and segregation but continued to create culturally strong neighborhoods, organizations, and communities. Historians of Kansas women have a significant body of scholarship in multicultural western women’s history that can be utilized to further explore Kansas women’s lives and experiences in the nineteenth century, bringing the lives of women of color more fully into the narrative.

The dearth of research on Kansas women of color can be tied partly to the lack of research on urban women’s lives. Historians have focused extensively on rural or small-town experiences, but Kansas cities and urban women need much more in-depth analysis and research. Whether discussing the nineteenth or twentieth century, historians acknowledge that the culturally diverse populations of the state consistently clustered in the state’s urban centers often in racial or ethnic enclaves. Wichita, Topeka, Kansas City, and other smaller cities provide excellent sites for researching the lives and experiences of Kansas women of color. These stories have yet to be told.

Another underdeveloped area in Kansas women’s history concerns the lack of analysis of religion. With a few notable exceptions mentioned in this essay, historians have rhetorically placed the state within the “Bible Belt” but failed to explore the veracity *or* meaning of this assumption or how religious motivations and beliefs influenced or were influenced by gender ideology. This is particularly surprising since American religious historians have documented the overwhelming presence and numerical dominance of women in all Judeo-Christian religious groups in the United States. More importantly, scholars have described how women used their religious beliefs to expand Victorian gender parameters and create space for their values and influences in the public arena. In her essay “Women’s History *Is* American Religious History,” Harvard historian Ann Braude wrote, “Where women are present, religion flourishes, where they are absent, it does not.” Western historian Ferenc Morton Szasz has stated that religion “lies at the very heart of the western experience” and that for researchers to omit religion from historical analysis “ignores a central component of the human experience,

68. Ann Braude, “Women’s History *Is* American Religious History,” in *Retelling U.S. Religious History*, ed. Thomas A. Tweed (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 87–107; Ferenc Morton Szasz, *Religion in the Modern American West* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 2000), xii.

the historical locus of both personal and social vision.”<sup>68</sup>

Kansas women have played a role in religious groups as diverse as the Black Baptist Church’s women’s movement, the Pentecostal and Holiness movements, Catholic religious orders, the Catholic rural movement, Mennonite women’s peace organizations, Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, and National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods. They have served as nonordained, itinerant ministers, ordained Protestant and Jewish clergy, spiritualists, religious founders, faith healers, nuns, and New Age practitioners. The research possibilities are many whether analyzing the nineteenth or twentieth century.

The most notable absence in the scholarship on women and gender in Kansas history concerns the lack of research on the twentieth century, particularly the post-World War II era. Besides the need for further research on multicultural issues and religion, many if not most other mid- to late-twentieth-century topics remain unplumbed. Urbanization, suburbanization, technology, and changing social attitudes about race and gender have propelled Kansas women into expanded participation and leadership positions in all areas of society. The major social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, particularly the women’s movement, have changed females’ roles, expectations, and activities in the family, politics, higher education, and the job market, to name a few. A delightful exception to this thematic void is the recent publication of Beth Bailey’s *Sex in the Heartland*. Historian Bailey used Lawrence, Kansas, and the University of Kansas as the lens to describe and analyze the “revolution” of the 1960s that brought discussions concerning gender roles, drug use, birth control, and sexuality into living rooms and classrooms across the nation.<sup>69</sup>

Works such as Bailey’s, however, are only a beginning—much more needs to be done. The social movements and transitions of the late twentieth century have virtually changed or, at the minimum, influenced every major institution in American society. Consequently, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is time to examine and analyze these major shifts and influences in the lives of women in the post-World War II era by bringing them into the center of the narrative of Kansas history.

In summary, the past thirty-five years have been an exciting and stimulating period for researchers writing about women and gender in Kansas history. The quantity and quality of scholarship have expanded and improved in both content and analysis. However, it is time to expand upon and move forward from our “idyllic” nineteenth-century past into a broader analysis and understanding of women and gender in all aspects and time periods of Kansas history. Utilizing the recent scholarship in women’s history and western history, historians have access to large contextual frameworks to further understand and analyze women and gender in Kansas history. The scholarship during the past three decades has provided important inroads and models for contemporary historians to build on, and the potential for further research promises rich and rewarding possibilities.



*The experiences of Kansas women of color — Hispanic, Native American, and African American — have yet to be fully developed in the scholarship of western women’s history. (Above) An unidentified group of Hispanic women poses for a portrait in Topeka.*

69. Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).