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East Tennessee State University

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The Temperance Worker as Social Reformer and Ethnographer as Exemplified in the Life and
Work of Jessie A. Ackermann

A thesis
presented to
the faculty of the Department of Interdisciplinary Studies
East Tennessee State University
In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

by
Margaret Shipley Carr
August 2009

Dr. Marie Tedesco, Chair
Ms. Norma Myers Riddle
Dr. Tommy D. Lee, II

Keywords: Ackermann, temperance, WCTU, suffrage, women, feminism, travel writing,
ethnography

ABSTRACT

The Temperance Worker as Social Reformer and Ethnographer as Exemplified in the Life and

Work of Jessie A. Ackermann

by

Margaret Shipley Carr

This project used primary historical documents from the Jessie A. Ackermann collection at ETSU's Archives of Appalachia, other books and documents from the temperance period, and recent scholarship on the subjects of temperance, suffrage, and women travelers and civilizers. As the second world missionary for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Ackermann traveled in order to establish WCT Unions and worked as a civilizer, feminist, and reporter of the conditions of women and the disadvantaged throughout the world.

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My thanks to Lydia – my sweet, beautiful, extremely smart daughter. I appreciate your maturity in seeing that this project was important to me. I hope in some way to inspire you to use that wonderful intellect of yours and write your own thesis one day. I also thank my parents, neither of whom had much formal education, for encouraging and expecting me to go to school for as long as possible.

Thanks to the members of my committee, Ms. Norma Myers, Dr. Tom Lee, and especially Dr. Marie Tedesco, whom I have known as a colleague and teacher for many years. Without her patience and guidance, none of this paper would have ever been completed.

Finally, thanks to Jessie Ackermann.

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CHAPTER 1

“A GOOD CREATURE OF GOD”

INTRODUCTION

What began as a passing interest in the papers and artifact collection of Jessie A. Ackermann, a woman who claimed to have circled the globe eight times as a missionary for the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), developed into a project intended to reveal her views not only on temperance, but also on the status of women and diverse peoples in general in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her story is linked intimately with the larger story of the American temperance and suffrage movements. Many of the players in both groups were known to Ackermann and the boundaries between some of their individual activities became blurred. Ackermann was fortunate to have had the opportunity to travel the world and, in the context of her world view, wrote extensively about every country she visited.

Ackermann was the second round-the-world missionary for the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. She became one of the most widely-traveled women of her day and her fame spread throughout America, Australia, and other countries. She was sent out to organize WCTU chapters and to assist women in each location she visited with setting up independent unions of their own. She also worked as a journalist who sent articles to America recounting her adventures.

Frances Willard was the president of the WCTU during the time Ackermann became active with the group and essentially hand-picked her as the round-the-world missionary. As the WCTU changed under Willard’s guidance, Ackermann changed with it. The WCTU widened its scope of operations and attempted to find solutions to many of the social and economic issues of the day and attached itself to the suffrage movement, especially, but also worked with labor and

education movements. Ackermann took on the roles the WCTU asked her to take on, but she also possessed a keen sense of observation and an engaging style of writing that translated into her creating books, leaflets, and newspaper and magazine articles. She produced a number of pieces that were primarily descriptive of the lands she visited, but, more importantly, she was also attentive to the people of the land, especially the women and children. She provided commentary on living and working conditions in various places throughout the world in an attempt to bring to the attention of the middle and upper classes the conditions in which the poorer classes of both genders lived and to encourage financial and political assistance for them.

To tell the story of Jessie Ackermann, one must begin with the creation of the WCTU and examine the reasons for the organization's formation. The WCTU was the largest women's organization of the nineteenth century and came into being following the Women's Crusade of 1873-74. The Crusade mobilized great numbers of women intent on altering men's drinking behavior, closing down saloons, and eventually campaigning for prohibition. Men's excessive drinking had become increasingly widespread in the post Civil War period and women and children were suffering to a degree that is difficult to imagine.¹

Out of the temperance movement came a few women, including Jessie Ackermann, who found a voice that enabled them to expand their interests and influence beyond the temperance issue alone. Ackermann did not abandon her temperance work but frequently used it as a springboard to writing and lecturing about other issues such as labor, religion, pacifism, and the poor.

Other nineteenth century women traveled but few as extensively as Ackermann. There were missionaries such as Fanny Workman who traveled to the Himalayas with her husband

¹ Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 4.

spreading the Gospel. There were those such as Kate Marsden who worked among lepers in Siberia and who traveled in order to bring relief to people who suffered from serious illnesses. A number of women traveled for pleasure or for health reasons, and some sought notoriety more than others. Many wrote books (some several books) about their trips, and a number collected mementos as did Jessie Ackermann. These women's evangelical, mission, and pleasure trips have been interpreted by some scholars as examples of women's civilizing effect on non-Western cultures. Some women travelers did see themselves as superior and made certain to promote this idea among the native peoples they contacted and their peers in the West.²

Jessie Ackermann can be included in this group to an extent; however, much of her "civilizing" efforts were the result of her being a missionary for an evangelical Christian organization. Despite her mission, she was tolerant to a great degree of other cultures, religions, and lifestyles. Most of her civilizing efforts were directed at men and governments, rather than cultures as a whole; she found much in common with the women she met throughout the world and led efforts to change their health, financial, or educational status. She did not seem to have a tolerance for what she perceived as laziness and, like most of the WCTU membership, expected men to be sober, caring providers for the family.

Ackermann's writing style frequently disguises her mission. Her articles are very readable, and in addition to commentary on serious issues, they provide the reader with travelogue-style descriptions of the landscape, people, and culture. Many of her stories were originally written for the *Ladies' Home Companion* and later included in her books. She

² Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 23.

explains their origins but sells herself short by saying, “They are simply a series of rambling notes culled from many chapters in a rambling life.”³

³ Jessie A. Ackermann, *The World through a Woman's Eyes* (Chicago, 1896), 7.

CHAPTER 2

“A NATION OF DRUNKARDS”

THE RISE OF TEMPERANCE MOVEMENTS

In the early days of the United States, drinking spirits was a common daily activity for many people. Businesses and individuals owned distilleries and manufactured alcohol on a routine basis. Individuals drank alcohol for its intoxicating effect and because other beverages available to them were unappetizing or presented a potential health hazard. Frequently, the water supply was polluted or contained a great deal of sediment, milk was difficult to preserve, tea had fallen out of favor, and coffee was very expensive. Alcohol was easily manufactured, could be stored for long periods of time, and was viewed by many as an investment or method of generating income through the preservation of one’s grain crop.¹

Even though large numbers of persons drank alcohol, the population did not perceive this to be a cause for concern. Drinking began to be identified as a problem as increasing numbers of persons – predominately men – drank to excess. Generally, drinking in small quantities, and not with the intention of becoming intoxicated was acceptable, but public drunkenness and its associated behaviors were increasingly condemned by society. According to W.J. Rorabaugh, by the nineteenth century, clergymen and temperance crusaders saw America as a nation of drunkards and noted that the United States was “among the most addicted of nations.”²

In the late seventeenth century, Puritan clergyman Increase Mather “taught that drink was ‘a good creature of God’ and that a man should partake of God’s gift without wasting or abusing

¹ W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 69.

² *Ibid.*, 5.

it,” but that man “must not ‘drink a Cup of Wine more than is good for him.’”³ Wine may have been a gift from God, but the abuse of that gift was perceived as the Devil’s work. Cotton Mather, Increase’s son and also a clergyman, saw “inebriation was a source of social unrest, as a sign of divine affliction and as a warning of eternal damnation,” according to Rorabaugh.⁴ Mather was also very concerned about the increased drinking among the upper classes whom he believed should remain temperate and sober as examples to others.

During colonial days, Americans drank rum, beer, wine, and cider. Cider consumption was very high; Rorabaugh notes that, “so much cider was drunk that colonial Americans probably ingested more alcohol from that beverage than from their much more potent rum.”⁵ Drink was tied to most aspects of daily life including religion, politics and the workplace. Politicians, who regularly supplied drink to voters (who expected no less at election time), hoped to sway election outcomes through the influence of alcohol. Workers expected their drinks at break time and accepted alcohol as payment. Many Americans believed alcohol sustained them throughout the heat of the summer work day and warmed up those working in the wintertime elements. Ian Tyrrell says, “Thus an attack on liquor was an assault on some of the basic structures and values of colonial and early republican society.”⁶

Many Americans drank every day – before breakfast and before work; they took liquor breaks during the work day, refreshment during the heat, hot toddies when it was cold, afternoon drink breaks, a drink with every meal, and ended the day with the nightcap by the fire. Drink

³ Ibid., 30.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., 9.

⁶ Ian R. Tyrrell, *Sobering Up: From Temperance to Prohibition in Antebellum America, 1800-1860* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1979), 16.

was pervasive at every social occasion including weddings, funerals, dances, horse races, barbecues, fairs, and the harvest. It was used to seal business deals and given as gifts. Work and play intermingled and play often included drink.⁷ However, the population was still rather small and concentrated along the east coast. Class structure was still very much in place, and the upper classes monitored the drinking habits of their servants, slaves, and the lower classes.⁸ The high cost of rum also contributed to restricting the amount of alcohol consumed by the lower classes.

Distilled spirits had been an integral part of the economy and rum was plentiful until the Revolutionary War. During the war, it became scarce and even more expensive as the molasses to make the rum became more difficult to obtain. Rum remained a symbol of British colonialism and thus Americans made a shift to domestic beer, cider, and whiskey. Rum returned to favor in the 1820s, and as the price fell it became more affordable to people of all classes. These lower prices increased demand that resulted in increased production of spirits. Wealthy and poor alike were able to purchase more drink allowing everyone to drink more frequently and many to drink to excess more frequently. Public drunkenness became more widespread and began to become an issue of concern among many, especially the clergy.⁹ In New England and other areas with large apple crops, the drink of choice became hard cider. Whiskey became more successful elsewhere due in part to increased numbers of Scottish, Irish, and Scotch-Irish immigrants who had been experimenting with distillation for 200 years, which had honed their skill in making high-quality liquor. This skill was especially suited to the frontier where it was more profitable to turn excess corn into a liquid that was easier to transport to markets.¹⁰

⁷ Ibid., 18-19.

⁸ Rorabaugh, 26-27.

⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰ Ibid., 69.

The problem of controlling liquor consumption was compounded by the importance of the tavern to the community. The tavern served as a multi-use facility; in addition to providing food and lodging to travelers, the tavern was a meeting house, court room, and venue for conducting business deals. Because the tavern was so important to the functions of the community, the upper classes ensured that it “should be well regulated, orderly, and respectable, and that only men and women of good moral character should open them,” according to Rorabaugh.¹¹ These regulations resulted in landowners and even members of the clergy becoming tavern owners.

However, the upper classes, regardless of the examples they set, were losing control of the taverns. Individuals began to sell liquor without licenses and cities began to issue more permits to run taverns. With the rise in the numbers of taverns in business, the upper classes and clergy did not have enough resources to oversee them all. Increases in the numbers of establishments selling liquor combined with lower prices resulted in increased numbers of persons drinking larger quantities of alcohol.¹² Changes in the public’s perceptions of alcohol use became evident. As the population grew and settlements expanded farther from the urban centers of the East Coast, excessive drunkenness became prevalent and began to be perceived as a social problem.

From the earliest times of civilization, alcohol or the “water of life” as Brian Katcher describes it, was used as a medicine, not as a beverage. The American colonial population agreed that alcohol was healthy when consumed in moderation, that it supplemented the diet, and that it was beneficial as a remedy for a variety of ailments. However, medical and scientific

¹¹ Ibid., 27.

¹² Ibid., 32-33.

investigations into the effects of alcohol on the human body began to show its detrimental effects. During the 1720s, some scientists began to classify alcohol as a poison and doctors began to study the West Indies Dry Gripes, which was actually lead poisoning that resulted from drinking rum made in lead stills.¹³

Dr. Benjamin Rush produced one of the most serious indictments of the damaging effects of alcohol and led a post-Revolutionary campaign against distilled spirits. He conducted an extensive study of the effects of alcohol and produced a pamphlet, “An Enquiry into the Effects of Spirituous Liquors upon the Human Body, and their Influence upon the Happiness of Society.” Rush was certain that the validity of his arguments would convince the public of the dangers of alcohol and cause the population to cease its use. Brian Katcher reports that Rush was certain that ““the good effects of our labors will appear in the next generation. Habitual drunkards are beyond the influence of reason, but young men will feel its force upon this subject and act accordingly.””¹⁴ To the men of the Enlightenment, these studies proved that drinking too much alcohol caused illness, and they saw Rush’s scientific inquiry as a sign of progress – of rational thought prevailing over tradition. Some educated Americans began to give up spirits, but the majority still believed that drink was healthful. Many laborers and other workers continued to expect rum or other spirits as part of their wage, and despite arguments by Rush and others, members of the upper classes continued to drink.¹⁵

Rush was not alone in his denunciation of the ill effects of alcohol on the human body. In 1829 Dr. William Sweetser produced “A Dissertation on Intemperance,” which won a

¹³ Ibid., 39.

¹⁴ Brian S. Katcher, “Benjamin Rush’s Educational Campaign against Hard Drinking,” *American Journal of Public Health* 83, no. 2 (February 1993): 273, <http://www.ajph.org/cgi/reprint/83/2/273> (accessed March 22, 2009).

¹⁵ Rorabaugh, 46-48.

premium of \$50 by the Massachusetts Medical Society. In this document, he examined the abuse of distilled spirits and noted that, “It is this species of intemperance, which is now exciting such intense and anxious interest among a large class of our enlightened population.”¹⁶ As a physician, he described in detail the deleterious effects of alcohol on the various systems of the body. He paid special attention to the digestive and neurological systems and asked, “Can we imagine that the nice structure of the brain will remain unharmed, and that the derangement of the organs of digestion, which is almost universal in the intemperate, communicates a morbid impression not only to the brain, but also to various other important organs.”¹⁷

Sweetser was among the early critics of strong drink to point out the sad influence of intemperance on the moral character of its victims saying, “Wife, children, friends, are not only neglected, but often maltreated by the drunkard.”¹⁸ He continues by suggesting that the habits of the parents influence the behavior of the child, noting the importance of impressing on mothers the necessity of temperance for the welfare of the child and asks, “If the habits of nursing females are always such as tend to the well-being of those they nourish?”¹⁹

In addition to the medical reasons for abstaining from alcohol use, merchants began to see the benefits of a sober workforce and in the 1740s to 1760s many began to end the practice of providing drink to their employees during the work day.²⁰ In his document, Sweetser criticized the practice of providing drink to those in one’s employ: “Another very common source of the habit of intemperance among the lower orders of community is the prevalent

¹⁶ William Sweetser, *A Dissertation on Intemperance* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, and Co., 1829), 10.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 12-15.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 55-57.

²⁰ Rorabaugh, 36.

custom among our farmers, mechanics, masters of vessels, &c. of daily allowing grog to those in their employ. Now nothing is gained to any concerned by such practice, but a great deal is lost.”²¹ An intoxicated worker could not perform well and, therefore, the employer did not realize a profit or benefit from his employee’s labors. A sober worker was more reliable and produced more efficiently. The country was experiencing the effects and enjoying the progress of the Industrial Revolution and individuals became focused on accumulating individual wealth and producing goods. Drinkers wasted money and squandered capital and other resources. At the height of the country’s drinking binge, Americans rushed through their meals in order to get to the bar as quickly as possible. In the early days of commercialism, some of these same Americans now rushed through their meals, not to go to bars, but to go to work. Leisure time was to be used productively by reading or improving oneself.

Katcher reported that one pamphlet warned that, “Intemperance and idleness usually go together.”²² Time was to be used productively. Time spent incapacitated due to being drunk was time wasted. According to Tyrrell, “By instilling in individuals the ethic of self-improvement and by educating Americans to value sobriety and industry above all else, reformers hoped to create the conditions for permanent moral and material progress in America.”²³ The temperance movement received support from entrepreneurs who, according to Rorabaugh, “stood to gain directly from a more disciplined, sober work force.”²⁴ Temperance began to be perceived as a means to social progress.

²¹ Sweetser, 78.

²² Katcher, 203-204.

²³ Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 7.

²⁴ Rorabaugh, 36.

In addition to the health and economic benefits of temperance, reformers were intent on saving the drinkers' souls. Rorabaugh says, "Preachers soon saw that the Lord intended them to lead a great revival, to cleanse the nation of sin and to prepare for judgment."²⁵ The Quakers were among the first religious groups to condemn liquor, but their actions were in line, not only with religious dictates, but with their interests in education, commerce, and reform. Quakers had cautioned against drink as early as 1706 and instructed their membership not to drink in public houses nor to take the auctioneers alcohol because the prices of goods increased when they did so.²⁶

The Methodists also opposed liquor. Not as educated as Quakers and drawing their membership from the lower classes, the Methodists rejected liquor as part of their policy of questioning the status quo and old traditions. Their rejection of drink was related to John Wesley's rationalism and restructuring religion through method. Rorabaugh says, "Methodists saw the drinking of spirits as a hindrance to the process of reordering and purifying both the church and society."²⁷

A faction within the temperance movement suggested that one should not drink, even though there is Biblical documentation that Jesus did so. It implied that he and writers of the scripture lacked the advanced scientific knowledge of the 1830s regarding the detrimental effects of alcohol on the body. Others suggested that Jesus and the apostles merely went along with what was common practice for the times in which they lived. Yet another group argued that even though Biblical persons consumed wine, alcoholism was not the problem then that it was

²⁵ Ibid., 205.

²⁶ Ibid., 37.

²⁷ Ibid., 38.

during the nineteenth century.²⁸ Some temperance believers suggested that Christ and the apostles never drank and that drink is condemned in the Bible. John L. Merrill points out that temperance workers believed that “temperance reform was a religious duty, and that the campaign for total abstinence from all alcoholic drinks rested upon divine sanction.”²⁹ Presbyterian minister George Duffield supported the two-wine theory, which proposed that one type of wine was not intoxicating and a gift from God (the temperate wine). The sort of wine that was intoxicating only brought about intemperate behavior. Even though they were unable to prove this notion through scripture, Duffield and his supporters insisted that the intoxicating version was fermented, that the non-intoxicating wine was essentially grape juice and suggested that this grape juice was what Christ drank. Merrill says, “Duffield had hit upon an interpretation that would attract scores of adherents for decades to come.”³⁰

Even though literate members of the population were becoming aware of medical, moral, and economic reasons for abstaining from drink, most still believed alcohol was not unhealthy and were not willing to impose restrictions on its use. However, the saturation of cheap liquor began to create problems for the nation and its cities and towns. Taxpayers and the wealthy also began to resent the use of public funds that were spent in support of drunkards and their families. Reports of wife beatings and other abusive and violent activities alarmed the public that feared the chaos that might ensue if abusive and intemperate behaviors were left unchecked. Rorabaugh indicates that, “During the period of peak consumption, liquor induced wife beating,

²⁸ John L. Merrill, “The Bible and the American Temperance Movement: Text, Context, and Pretext,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 81, no. 2 (April 1988): 150-151, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1509551> (accessed February 4, 2009).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

family desertion, and assaults.³¹ The population began to perceive drink as being responsible for creating criminals and other delinquents. Americans were irritated with the social problems caused by excessive drink and many labeled alcohol as the root of various evils. According to Tyrrell, “For the temperance reformer, there was a simple answer: the excessive consumption of alcohol demanded the vigorous efforts of all those who cared for the moral welfare of the people of the United States.”³²

Excessive drinking by such a large segment of the population became so widespread an issue throughout the country and began to cause so many problems among families and workers in particular, that persons from all walks of life took up the temperance banner. The temperance movement played a distinctive role in shaping American culture and morals. Tyrrell notes, “Drink had been socially acceptable in colonial America, but in the first half of the nineteenth century, a revolution in social attitudes took place: drinking ceased to be respectable.”³³

Rorabaugh contends that, “The antiliquor campaign was launched about 1810 by a number of reform-minded ministers, who were evangelical Calvinists associated with the newly founded Andover Seminary,” and the movement may have begun with Monday night meetings where Justin Edwards, Moses Stuart, Leonard Woods, and Ebenezer Porter met to discuss social questions. These meetings produced antiliquor articles in the newspapers and in 1814 a groundbreaking temperance pamphlet. This pamphlet began to be used by ministers to prepare their sermons against alcohol. The public, who had ignored medical reasons for abstinence and

³¹ Rorabaugh, 89.

³² Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 5.

³³ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

were more receptive to moral rather than medical arguments, were, according to Rorabaugh, “captivated by emotional, moral exhortations warning that the drinker would be damned.”³⁴

The first national temperance group, the American Temperance Society (ATS), formed in 1826, required total abstinence from distilled spirits. For this group, the most disturbing aspects of intemperance were the excessive drinking habits of the lower classes. The ATS combined its methods with those of evangelical religion; Tyrrell says, “The American Temperance Society further imitated the efforts of revivalistic preachers and Bible and tract societies by sending to evangelical churches itinerant agents who preached the message of temperance reform.”³⁵ Justin Edwards, who helped form the ATS, supported having women joining temperance groups; he believed that if women could be elevated to equality with men within the society, their efforts would double the society’s influence.³⁶ The Massachusetts Society for the Suppression of Intemperance attempted to control lower class drinking through the enforcement of colonial laws against excessive drinking. They tried at first to convert the upper classes in hopes that they would set good examples to the lower classes and be encouraged to restrict their employees’ access to alcohol.³⁷ They rationalized that distillation is not mentioned in the Bible, only fermentation, and therefore, their beliefs were not contradictory to the Bible. The ATS and many other temperance societies used the model of religious conversion in describing their mission. Merrill draws parallels to revival activities: “Persons who responded by signing the temperance pledge were called ‘converts’ and gathered into groups modeled after the evangelical prayer

³⁴ Rorabaugh, 191-192.

³⁵ Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 64.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

meeting. Converts gave ‘testimonies’ and popular gospel hymns were sung with new temperance lyrics.’³⁸

Temperance supporters began to extend their call for a ban from distilled spirits to all alcoholic beverages and began to move toward teetotalism. According to Merrill, this new call to prohibition “accelerated in the early 1830s, gaining support at the national level in the summer of 1836 at the National Temperance Convention in Saratoga, New York.”³⁹

As Merrill notes, the New York State Temperance Society presented its teetotal platform in 1835:

‘Our views with regard to pure wine are, that the Bible sanctions is moderate use – that there can be no immorality in such use, under certain circumstances; but in our present condition with the fact that pure wine is fatal to the recovery of the drunkard, because it intoxicates, often forms the appetite for stronger drinks in the temperate, . . . we urge abstinence from all wine.’⁴⁰

As the temperance movement gained momentum, temperance societies became social groups but continued to work toward developing their skills of organization. In many cases, an agent was sent to a new town in advance in order to rally support for the cause in hopes of securing the support of some prominent person who would organize a local chapter responsible for circulating the pledge. July 4 was a popular date for pledge signing – symbolic of the individual’s independence from alcohol on the nation’s independence day.⁴¹

Temperance workers aimed to alter the old views that free men could drink and do as they pleased into the notion that they were not, indeed, free but chained to alcohol and were,

³⁸ Merrill, 147.

³⁹ Ibid., 148.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 151.

⁴¹ Rorabaugh, 193-194.

instead, selfish individuals. The drinker was now not of equal stature with the abstainer, nor was he regarded as a reliable worker, and reformers were certain that he was headed to hell.

Rorabaugh argues that “the essential source of the cause’s dynamism was its accordance with two central impulses of the era: an appetite for material gain and a fervent desire for religious salvation.” “Man could attain liberty only through self-control, self-examination, vigilance, the development of high moral values, and integration of himself into a moral society.”⁴²

Parallel to the rise of the temperance societies was a small printing industry devoted to publishing the personal narratives of reformed drinkers. Titles included: *The Life Struggle, Fall, and Reformation of T.N. Doutney* by Thomas N. Doutney, *A Long Voyage in a Leaky Ship; Or A Forty Years’ Cruise on the Sea of Intemperance: Being an Account of Some of the Principal Events in the Life of an Inebriate* by James Gale, *Cutting it Out: How to Get on the Waterwagon and Stay There* by Samuel George Blythe, and *The Wanderer brought Home* by John Colin. These publications generally followed the same format – describing the narrator’s early life as an innocent, his introduction to moderate drinking, his fall into drunkenness, and his salvation through the benefits of temperance. He had learned his lesson.

One of the first self-help groups in the country arose from the lower classes. It was known as the Washingtonians, taking its name from the nation’s first president; according to Tyrrell, it “catered especially to largely working-class drunkards seeking to renounce the bottle.”⁴³ The Washingtonians formed in May 1840 when six drinkers in Baltimore took a pledge among themselves against the use of liquor. As they made efforts to convert alcoholics, word of their methods spread to New York. Members were asked to speak to groups outside

⁴² Ibid., 200-202.

⁴³ Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 8.

Baltimore, and they, as Tyrrell says, “acquired a mass following without precedent in the history of temperance reform.”⁴⁴ The membership of the Washingtonians foreshadows that of the modern-day Alcoholics Anonymous – everyone was welcome regardless of class, work status, respectability, or religious persuasion and it was a self-supporting group of drinkers who wanted to change themselves, not others.

The Washingtonians also began the custom of the “experience meeting” (which is in many ways comparable to AA’s speaker meetings) during which members would tell their stories under the assumption that a former drinker sharing his experience would be more believable and forceful to the drunk. The former drinker had one thing in common with the “wet” alcoholic – he knew exactly what sorts of experiences the drinker had known. This was in stark contrast to the other temperance societies – most of their membership had never taken a drink at all. It was also different from the temperance societies in that individual members blamed drink, not the economy or other factors, for their situation. Some Washingtonians had brought themselves literally out of the gutter and nearly all had been injured by alcohol in some way.⁴⁵

According to Ruth Alexander, the Washingtonians considered four tasks essential. They provided aid to the needy and worked “to persuade both hardened and moderate drinkers to sign the pledge of total abstinence.” They also instructed mothers on how to prevent children from intemperate habits and “took messages of inspiration and moral fortitude to recently reformed groups of young men.”⁴⁶ They knew from experience that the families of drunks probably

⁴⁴ Ibid., 160.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 160-161.

⁴⁶ Ruth M. Alexander, “We are Engaged as a Band of Sisters’: Class and Domesticity in the Washingtonian Temperance Movement, 1840-1850,” *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 3 (December 1988): 766, <http://www.jstor.org/1901529763-785> (accessed February 4, 2009).

needed help and visited the homes of drinkers, including places their neighbors were afraid to enter. They set up temperance societies for young people and were also willing to bring female former drinkers into their fold. Many carried banners that proclaimed, “Let the Rising Generation Be a Temperate One.”⁴⁷

The Washingtonians, an all-male group who were primarily artisans, saw that sobriety was essential to their economic well-being. This attitude is exemplified by one member, John W. Oliver, who returned to Baltimore where he encountered his former friends who had continued to drink and became destitute while he was saved through his teetotalism.⁴⁸ Many Washingtonians wanted to restore their stations in society as respected artisans; they did not expect to fail and, therefore, set themselves as examples of success to their brethren who might still be drinking. They made personal visits to the new convert in order to advise and counsel him and to remind him that he was not alone in his battle against the bottle. New converts were immediately put to work within the group, enabling them to aid their own personal causes through helping others. They actively searched for drunks to convert, worked with newly-released convicts to keep them from returning to drinking, and helped converts find work. The Washingtonians were active during an economic depression but found ways to offer material assistance to less fortunate converts. They set up reading rooms, had social gatherings, and contended that, “Mental idleness ‘begat intemperate habits’ as much as did physical idleness.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ibid., 771-774.

⁴⁸ Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 170-171.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 172-177.

The Martha Washingtonians, who served as a type of women's auxiliary group to the Washingtonians, worked alongside the men in their efforts to assist fellow drinkers. These women came from the same sorts of artisan and working-class backgrounds as did the men. The Marthas were more sympathetic to men than many other temperance groups and, according to Alexander, believed that "the drunken husband, father, or son was believed to be both physically addicted to the substance of alcohol and unable to break away from social companions or settings that encouraged drink."⁵⁰

Despite their best efforts, the Washingtonians began to fragment by 1845 primarily because of the relationship between it and the older temperance groups. Early on, the two factions worked more cooperatively, but as they merged, members from groups such as the ATS began to take over the Washingtonians and turn it into a mirror of the old societies. One primary difference in the attitudes of the Washingtonians and the old societies was that the Washingtonians merely abstained from the personal use of alcohol; they (like modern AA members) were focused on maintaining their own sobriety. The ATS and other groups focused on the sobriety of others and began their quest toward legal prohibition.⁵¹ Some new groups arose and took on a few of the goals of the Marthas; they primarily worked to help each other during times of misfortune and illness and to promote temperance.⁵²

Another factor that contributed to the demise of the Washingtonians was the formation of the Sons of Temperance (whose core sixteen members were Washingtonians); it and a New York group made efforts to make the Washingtonians more respectable and began barring the vulgar

⁵⁰ Alexander, 774.

⁵¹ Tyrrell, *Sobering Up*, 199.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 777-778.

and lower classes from attendance at meetings and social events. It quickly changed from a temperance group to a prohibition group.⁵³

Although the Washingtonians disbanded, the Marthas and other women had begun to realize that a great deal of their want and misery was due to the drinking habits of the men in their lives – husbands, brothers, and fathers. As these women became more and more frightened about their economic instability and the safety of themselves and their children, they began to become more and more empowered. Tyrrell states, “The intemperance of men vitally affected women, because the law gave women no protection against a drunken husband.”⁵⁴ The old temperance organizations had been organized, dominated, and led by men, but women began to see that for their own well-being, they must become more public, more vocal, and more political. These goals led to increased numbers of women taking the public platform, and organizations such as the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union began turning out speakers and writers such as Jessie Ackermann.

⁵³ Ibid., 203-205.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 181.

CHAPTER 3

“FOR GOD AND HOME AND NATIVE LAND”

THE WCTU

Many of the temperance societies of the early nineteenth century dissolved, disbanded, or merely disappeared due to lagging membership rolls. The Washingtonians, a group of reformed drinkers, became subsumed by the Sons of Temperance and lost their identity. Local groups and state societies tried to carry on, but the Civil War took the public’s attention away from the temperance movement. Following the war, however, the movement saw its greatest increases in membership and influence. The economic prosperity that followed the end of the war gave rise to the opening of many saloons which, in turn, increased the numbers of drunken men on the streets and their endangered families at home. Ruth Bordin states, “Temperance advocates in general, and women in particular, held the saloon to be a mortal threat to home and hearth. Only a minority of families was actually undermined by the poverty or debauchery of drunken husbands, but almost all women felt threatened by the aggressively male atmosphere of the saloon and tavern.”¹

Male drinking, which had become tied to the masculine identity, “gave rise to the American temperance movement, the longest, most popular social cause of the nineteenth century,” according to Catherine Gilbert Murdock.² Most of these alcohol abusers were men – men who ostensibly were responsible for the women and children in their lives. This was the natural order of things in the views of church-going colonial and antebellum Americans. In accordance with the vision of the American founding fathers, men were expected to take on the

¹ Ruth Bordin, “A Baptism of Power and Liberty: The Women’s Crusade of 1873-1874,” *Ohio History, The Scholarly Journal of the Ohio Historical Society* 87, no. 4 (Autumn 1978): 398, <http://publications.ohiohistory.org/> (accessed February 7, 2009).

² Murdock, 4.

patriarchal role of provider and protector for their wives, children, and sisters. In the United States, women's relationships with their spouses fell under domestic law, which came from English common law, and, according to Rachel Elizabeth Bohlmann, "presupposed a hierarchical relationship and took for granted that all adult women, married or single, came under the regulation of an adult male relative."³ If they failed in this obligation, for whatever reason, the entire family faced financial ruin, homelessness, starvation, and perhaps death. During the nineteenth century, a significant cause of such familial distress was excessive drinking by the man of the house.⁴

Men's drinking in general had increased across all classes in the country, but women of the middle classes became the leaders of the movement designed to rid the world of the cause of their despair – alcohol. Women had attempted to find a home within the early temperance societies – the American Temperance Society, the Daughters of Temperance, the Good Templars, and the Washingtonians. All these groups either accepted male members, were attached to a men's society, or became subsumed under a male-dominated group. Prior to the Women's Crusade, women's roles in the temperance battle were usually subordinate to those of men and reflected the nineteenth-century ideology that assigned to men and women sharply defined sexual "spheres," with men in the outside world and women in the home.⁵

One might wonder what may have triggered such numbers of women to engage the liquor industry in all-out warfare at this time. Murdock states, "Alcohol abuse in the nineteenth and

³ Rachel Elizabeth Bohlmann, "Drunken Husbands, Drunken State: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union's Challenge to American Families and Public Communities in Chicago, 1874-1920" (PhD diss., The University of Iowa, 2001), 36.

⁴ Murdock, 9.

⁵ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2, Part 1 (Summer 1966): 159, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2711179> (accessed May 29, 2009).

early twentieth centuries existed on a scale Americans today have trouble conceptualizing. Public drunkards were a pathetic, everyday spectacle in villages and cities throughout America.”⁶ The Panic of 1873 contributed to the sense of economic instability “which women already identified with the growing saloon culture,” says Bordin.⁷ A National Temperance Convention took place in Saratoga Springs, New York, in August 1873. These conventions – generally under the auspices of the American Temperance Society – had been held sporadically since 1833.⁸ Also, the Ohio constitutional convention agenda included an item regarding liquor licensing. The movement already had made some headway and the desperation many women felt had been building for some time while their shaky economic and legal status was further threatened by the financial condition of the country. Women were waging a war against saloons and their keepers because as Bohlmann notes, they “were confronting an evil they saw as a personal threat to themselves and their families.”⁹

Personal narratives and lectures by individuals who had been drunkards or had been affected by the drinking habits of a family member brought the issue of excessive drinking into public view. Bordin reports that in December of 1873, Diocletian Lewis, a homeopathic practitioner, gave a temperance lecture for the citizens of Hillsboro, Ohio, entitled “The Duty of Christian Women in the Cause of Temperance.” He told the story of his own drunken father and how forty years earlier his mother had prayed and appealed to the saloon owner to close his business. He asked why, in 1873, women could not do the same. He is reported to have given

⁶ Murdock, 4.

⁷ Bordin, 399.

⁸ August F. Fehlandt, *A Century of Drink Reform in the United States* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1904), 76.

⁹ Bohlmann, 21-22.

this talk 300 times and to have caused some immediate, but short term, saloon closings. The women of Hillsboro embraced his message, and the next day 200 or so lined up at the church and marched on saloons while singing “Give to the Winds thy Fears.” Crusade activities generally began with a public meeting and a speaker’s message followed by “street work,” which could mean circulating petitions or marching on saloons. The crusaders entered the saloon, prayed, and requested that the saloon keeper close his establishment. This method succeeded in closing several saloons, at least for the short term.¹⁰

The movement was bolstered by press reports in Cincinnati, Chicago, and New York. The rapid spread of the cause, according to the WCTU, “was summarized by Sarah K. Bolton of Cleveland, a successful writer of the day: ‘In fifty days it (the Crusade) drove the liquor traffic, horse, foot, and dragoons, out of two hundred and fifty towns and villages, increased by one hundred percent the attendance at church and decreased that at the criminal courts in like proportion.’”¹¹ However, the saloonkeepers and their patrons did not give in easily. The women of the crusade were in real, physical danger when they marched; rotten food was thrown at them, as well as bricks, beer, and chamber pot refuse. They were threatened with being run over by carts and endured the foul language of the tavern keepers and their customers.¹²

The majority of the crusaders were upper and middle-class women who brought with them their middle-class values and concerns for their version of “home life” to the public. Bordin states, “As a consequence of their high social standing and their sense of righteous womanhood, these crusaders, like other reformers of the era, felt a keen sense of the justice of

¹⁰ Bordin, 394-395.

¹¹ Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, “Crusades,” Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, <http://www.wctu.org/crusades.html> (accessed February 7, 2009).

¹² Bohlmann, 25.

their cause and their own moral superiority.”¹³ These were usually very conservative women, but nonetheless, Bordin relays, “they marched in the streets, formed picket lines to prevent the delivery of liquor to saloons, took down the names of the patrons, and organized and addressed mass temperance meetings,” Bordin continues.¹⁴ By organizing and participating in these activities, the women temperance advocates began to learn how to apply public pressure to the tavern owners and their patrons and began to force some sections of the men’s world to accept their demands. Most of these women had no leadership experience but learned quickly. Bordin says, “In a score of states women who had previously led quiet lives, who had always appeared shy and subservient to their husbands, were suddenly organizing, taking to the streets, getting locked into airless, smelly saloons, risking arrest and generally behaving as if nothing in their lives counted except their dedication to the temperance movement.”¹⁵ From these beginnings she continues, crusaders worked in “130 Ohio towns and cities, Michigan had thirty-six crusades, Indiana thirty-four, Pennsylvania twenty-six, New Jersey seventeen. The movement spread to twenty-three states in all.”¹⁶ The crusade spread to larger towns such as Chicago and Philadelphia. Saloons and breweries closed, and even though many would reopen by the autumn, women were beginning to discover what they were capable of accomplishing and as a result created the “first women’s mass movement in American history,” concludes Bordin.¹⁷

The successes of the Women’s Crusade and the newfound and freshly-honed skills the Crusaders had developed provided the impetus for the birth of a larger and more organized

¹³ Ibid., 400.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 401.

¹⁶ Ibid., 396.

¹⁷ Ibid., 396-401.

temperance society. Individual women such as Annie Wittenmyer, Mary Livermore, and Frances Willard began to emerge as leaders of the movement. Bordin notes the excitement evident in the first-hand accounts of crusaders: “The women themselves saw the Crusade as a watershed, an experience that changed their self-conception.” One Union Signal editorialist remarked that the Crusade ““meant a revolution in women’s work and in thousands of women’s lives.””¹⁸

Scholars agree that the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union emerged from the Women’s Crusade of 1873-74. The women of Fredonia, New York, were the first to visit saloons in December 1873 and were the first local group to call itself the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. The momentum of the Women’s Crusade led the reforming women to decide during the 1874 Chautauqua meeting to organize a national convention. At that meeting in Cleveland, the WCTU was formed. Its first officers were Mrs. Annie Wittenmyer, president; Miss Frances E. Willard, corresponding secretary; Mrs. Mary Johnson, recording secretary; and Mrs. Mary Ingham, treasurer. It adopted the slogan “For God and Home and Native Land” and chose the white ribbon as their symbol.¹⁹

The WCTU did not continue the saloon marches the Crusade had begun. Its approach was that of moral persuasion and, with its eventual attachment to the suffrage movement, taking legal action to prohibit the manufacture, distribution, and consumption of alcohol. However, the Union did continue with the crusaders’ notion that women were threatened because of men’s drinking. Bohlmann concludes that, “The WCTU also maintained a point that the Crusade

¹⁸ Ibid., 402.

¹⁹ Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, “Crusades.”

demonstrated, namely, that men of all classes, ethnicities and backgrounds, drank to excess and so all women remained at risk.”²⁰

The Women’s Crusade proved to groups of women across the country that they could have some control over their own lives and were in a position – even without the vote – to effect change within their homes and communities. For a number of years, middle-class and elite women exhibited an increasing interest in temperance and a decreasing tolerance for drunkenness. They were becoming increasingly vocal with their demands for protection in their homes and for their homes – protection from drunken husbands, brothers, or fathers and protection for their children, themselves, and their way of life.

Writers contemporary to the movement seemed to have an appreciation for the magnitude of the cause. Fanny DuBois Chase wrote in 1899 that her volume was not a complete history but could provide “glimpses here and there of a remarkable ‘woman’s movement’ in the interests of home and humanity, by one who has watched its progress from the notable ‘Ohio Crusade’ up to its present world-wide power.”²¹ Crusaders drew support from documents such as Benjamin Rush’s essay on ardent spirits, and Chase considered the publication of Rush’s work the beginning of the temperance movement. The WCTU was to its supporters the beginning of a “great epoch” and Chase uses the illustrations popular in the literature of the day in describing “the tears, the prayers of broken hearts, the suffering and wrongs of childhood under the drink curse, the helplessness of woman to protect her home” in order to solicit support for the cause.²²

²⁰ Bohlmann, 25.

²¹ Fanny DuBois Chase, *Glimpses of a Popular Movement; or, Sketches of the W.C.T.U. of Pennsylvania* (London: Leeds Press, 1899), 3.

²² *Ibid.*, 12.

Jack Blocker reports that in 1874 the WCTU elected Annie Wittenmyer as its first president. Wittenmyer had married a wealthy man, William Wittenmyer, who died in the early 1860s leaving Annie independently wealthy. Her economic good fortune made it possible for her to work in charity and war service which she left when men began to take over those organizations. She helped found the Ladies' and Pastors' Christian Union in 1868, published a journal, *The Christian Woman*, and began lecturing. Matilda Gilruth Carpenter, an associate of Wittenmyer's, led the Crusade in Washington Court House, Ohio, where eleven of the saloons closed and pledges were secured from the three liquor-selling druggists after less than two weeks of mass prayer and song. Blocker says, "For Wittenmyer, the Crusade was an indication of woman's special role in God's plan for the salvation of humankind." Perhaps reflecting on her own education, the demands of Civil War work, and experiences with missionary societies, Wittenmyer wrote to Matilda Carpenter, "My own thought is that God has been preparing the women of this land for work, for a long time."²³

Frances Willard was elected corresponding secretary during the first WCTU convention in 1874. By 1879, she had been elected president of the society and had begun her transformation of the group's mission. Willard remained in office as president from her election until her death in 1898. She had been trained as a teacher, had been a suffrage supporter, and, thus brought with her a great deal of political savvy and public experience.

Willard was born September 28, 1839, in Churchville, New York. She graduated from Northwestern Female College in Evanston, Illinois, in 1859; she became an instructor there and

²³ Jack S. Blocker, Jr., ed., "Annie Wittenmyer and the Women's Crusade," *Ohio History, The Scholarly Journal of the Ohio Historical Society* 88, no. 4 (Autumn 1979): 419-422, <http://publications.ohiohistory.org/> (accessed March 4, 2009).

served as its president and, later, dean when the school merged with Northwestern University.²⁴ She left her post at Northwestern in order to take the reins of the WCTU. Her leadership skills enabled women who had previously been relegated to maintaining a household and looking after children to gain enough self-confidence to wage a war against the curse of drink and the businesses and politicians associated with it.

Women were not free to participate in public places; they were expected to remain within the boundaries of the home sphere. There was, of course, a faction who wanted to enter the public sphere above all else. For a large majority of the membership of the WCTU, was not necessarily interested in entering the political arena – even with the vote; the women’s concerns focused on providing good homes for their families, especially their children. They expected their spouses to provide for the household, as was implied in the marriage contract. Most would have agreed that they held up their end of the bargain – managing the household (regardless of size), raising the children, and making themselves available to their husbands. Whether they chose to participate in the public sphere or remain tied to the home, women now had a choice. According to Bordin, “The women’s crusade represented a new stage in this expansion of the legitimate sphere of female activity. Women now joined the temperance movement in numbers that eclipsed their participation in any previous reform.”²⁵

This move into the public sphere demanded that women train themselves to become good public speakers. Carol Mattingly reviews through the lens of rhetoric the methods Willard used and the opportunities she afforded her disciples. The skills Willard taught the women under her influence spread to still more women as they became more and more confident. Bessie V.

²⁴ Women Working, 1800-1930, “Frances Elizabeth Willard (1839-1898),” Harvard University Library, http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/ww/people_willard_frances.html (accessed March 4, 2009).

²⁵ Bordin, 399.

Cushman, a WCTU member, insisted that, regardless of how many printed pieces the union printed, they would still need accomplished speakers. The individual, as a speaker, was far more effective in generating excitement and support for the group, which resulted in increased membership overall.²⁶

Moreover, women may have preferred to learn their public speaking and organizational skills from other women. Willard was successful in her efforts to deny men admission into the organization with the reasoning that the women would not develop their skills rapidly enough; she was probably fearful that men would take over the leadership of the group, which might not only remove her from office, but surely would change the character of the group throughout. As the women taught each other, the better-educated women emerged as leaders, and speakers learned to work before different kinds of audiences – rich, poor, prisoners, international groups, and others.

Willard apparently had an uncanny ability to understand women from all classes and walks of life. Even though she worked toward bringing numbers of hesitant women into the public sphere, she comforted them through her repeated counsel, ““Womanliness first – afterward what you will”” and her understanding of her “speakers’ primary need to dismantle resistance to women’s messages by presenting a reassuring feminine persona.” She made certain the speakers’ appearances were acceptable and gave detailed instructions on how to stand and whom to address.²⁷ In addition to strengthening the public speaking skills of WCTU members, Willard encouraged good writers; the WCTU needed their abilities to spread the word via leaflets, books, magazine articles, and newspaper stories. She and Annie Wittenmyer produced

²⁶ Carol Mattingly, “Woman-Tempered Rhetoric: Public Presentation and the WCTU,” *Rhetoric Review* 14, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 47, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/465660> (accessed February 5, 2009).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

very specific documents that were essentially training manuals – *How to Conduct a Public Meeting* and *Do Everything: A Handbook for the World's White Ribboners*.

The WCTU, in common with most of the early temperance societies, focused its attention on the drinking habits of the poor and working classes. If upper-class drinking was criticized at all, it was framed in the context of its effect on the lower classes. Middle and lower-class women had fewer resources at hand than did their wealthy counterparts and could not afford the economic disaster that came with a drunken husband. Joseph Gusfield describes the WCTU's ambitions, "If the lower classes and the immigrants will acquire the habits and social codes of the native middle classes, their problems will be solved."²⁸ The WCTU did not focus on reforming middle-class drinkers; it felt it had to hold its own class up as an example of sobriety and decency.

Frances Willard was instrumental in changing the methods and, in some ways, the direction of the WCTU. She had been active in the suffrage movement and brought her political acumen to the Union. The WCTU adopted Willard's personal motto of "Do Everything" as an indicator of the interconnectedness of its cause to other social issues including suffrage, labor, education, and human rights. The WCTU reports that, "by 1896, twenty-five of the thirty-nine departments of the WCTU were dealing with non-temperance issues. However, temperance, especially in terms of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, was the force that bound the WCTU's social reforms together."²⁹

²⁸ Joseph R. Gusfield, "Social Structure and Moral Reform: A Study of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union." *The American Journal of Sociology* 61, no. 3 (November 1955): 225, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2772134> (accessed February 17, 2009).

²⁹ Woman's Christian Temperance Union, "Frances Willard," Woman's Christian Temperance Union, <http://www.wctu.org/crusades.html> (accessed February 7, 2009).

The WCTU was the dominant women's organization of the nineteenth century; its efforts focused not only on temperance and prohibition but other social issues such as suffrage and labor laws. The WCTU had the support of the Knights of Labor and, in turn, supported the eight-hour day and the six-day week. Murdock states, "The Woman's Christian Temperance Union dominated the dry movement in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. It was the most popular, and by many accounts the most progressive, women's association of the nineteenth century."³⁰ In addition to its other social improvement projects, the WCTU operated a center at Ellis Island designed to aid incoming immigrants.³¹ Much of its literature included anecdotes about immigrants – especially their children – who removed the shackles of drink from their lives and went on to economic success. The literature presented cautionary tales designed to warn immigrants and young people not to associate with the wrong sorts of persons or take the chance of guilt by association. The WCTU also provided support and resources for issues connected to "family finances, leisure time, male violence in the family and marital rape, religious training of children, a man's political representation of his family through the vote, marital separation or divorce (acceptable to many Union women in cases of drunkenness), and child custody," according to Bohlmann.³²

The WCTU enjoyed a great deal of success in America. There began a worldwide interest in the temperance movement and, as a consequence, the WCTU began sending out missionaries to various foreign lands to evangelize and to set up new unions. The first WCTU worldwide missionary was Mrs. Mary Leavitt, who left the U.S. for the Sandwich Islands and Australia in 1884. Willard wrote, "We proceeded at once to send out Mrs. Mary Clement

³⁰ Murdock, 9.

³¹ Gusfield, "Social Structure," 224.

³² Bohlmann, 36.

Leavitt, who started a work in the Sandwich Islands. Mrs. Leavitt was supplied with money for her voyage to Australia by the temperance friends at the Sandwich Islands and left for New Zealand in January, 1884.”³³ Leavitt apparently found the Australians receptive to her message and enjoyed much success, which she reported to Willard: ““These people are thorough; when they take the white ribbon, they take it to *keep* and to *wear*.””³⁴ Leavitt also visited Japan, China, Ceylon, Madagascar, and Africa. Her successes helped propel the WCTU into a worldwide association that soon sent its second world traveler, Miss Jessie A. Ackermann, on an extensive mission trip.

³³ Frances E. Willard, *Glimpses of Fifty Years: The Autobiography of an American Woman* (Chicago: H. J. Smith and Co., 1889), 430-431.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 431.

CHAPTER 4

“OUR JESSIE”

JESSIE ACKERMANN

Jessie Ackermann left California in the fall of 1888 as the second world missionary for the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. She was about 28 years old. Following in the footsteps of Mrs. Mary Leavitt as world missionary, she soon surpassed Leavitt in the numbers of miles and places she visited. In her lifetime, she carried her message to countries in the Far East, Europe, South America, and Africa. She traveled to Siam, Japan, China, India, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, England, and Iceland, among others. She even went to the bottom of the ocean once. Fortunately, she recorded many of her observations in letters to her sponsors, which included the WCTU and various newspapers and magazines. Her commentary and opinions, largely taken from short articles and letters, were compiled into two books, *Australia from a Woman’s Point of View* and *The World through a Woman’s Eyes*.

Ackermann was born probably on July 4, 1860, in Boston.¹ She was raised in the Chicago area, educated in the public schools there, and taken to her first temperance meeting at age twelve. In her adulthood, she was about six feet tall, and, “by her own admission ‘good-looking,’” as reported by Tyrrell.² She was a member of the Independent Order of Good Templars, the International Order of Rechabites, and the WCTU. According to a 1918 *New York Herald* article, Ackermann was “brought up in a conventional atmosphere, but something happened when she was quite young that turned the direction of her life, and finding the routine

¹ Ackermann reported late in her life that she was born July 4, 1860. However, some sources indicate that she was born in 1857 or 1861 in Frankfurt, Illinois.

² Ian Tyrrell, “Jessie A. Ackermann,” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/AS10003b.htm> (accessed January 25, 2009).

irksome, she broke away never to return to it.”³ She apparently traveled to the mountains of the South as a girl,⁴ and eventually made her way to California, where she attended Berkeley and began making her name as a leader in the WCTU. Some of her first speaking engagements were in the American West in mining towns where conditions were so bad that she, as the *Herald* reported, “all but forgot her carefully prepared speech.”⁵

Ackermann’s mentor within the WCTU was Frances Willard, president of the Union from 1879 until her death in 1898. Willard wrote personal letters to Ackermann with detailed instructions on where she should go and how she should conduct herself. She likely considered Ackermann one of her dear friends and found her a valuable asset to the movement. Ackermann was essentially handpicked by Willard as the second round the world missionary for the WCTU. Willard sent her to the Oregon and Washington Territories “under the auspices of Mrs. Churchill . . . so that you can be able to say on your longer trip that you know our work by experience,” according to an 1888 letter Willard wrote to Ackermann.⁶ Willard continued to encourage Ackermann to go to the Sandwich Islands: “I have had an excellent record of you from Mrs. Churchill.”⁷ Willard wrote again in July, “You have indeed done us good service and I am confident it will be promptly recognized by all our army. Please study carefully Mrs. Buell’s handbook and my ‘Woman and Temperance.’”⁸ Two months later, Willard wrote, “I am very

³ “Miss Jessie Ackerman, Champion Woman Traveller and Explorer, Tells of Circling Globe Eight Times,” *New York Herald*, 1918, Jessie A. Ackermann Papers, Archives of Appalachia, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN. [Hereafter cited as Ackermann Papers]

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Willard to Ackermann, February 15, 1888, Ackermann Papers.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Willard to Ackermann, July 17, 1888, Ackermann Papers.

pleased with all I hear about your trip to Alaska.”⁹ In yet another letter, Willard invited Ackermann to attend the WCTU convention that was to be held in New York City, October 19-23, 1888, at the Metropolitan Opera House. Ackermann later handwrote across this letter, “I was appointed to world work at this convention.”¹⁰

Willard met Ackermann soon after the expansion of the WCTU as a worldwide organization. She wrote, “My first acquaintance with Miss Ackermann dates from the year 1887 when the idea of the World’s W.C.T.U. was but four years old.” Willard reported that as she was searching for Mrs. Leavitt’s successor, “From California the word came from our President Mrs. Churchill of San Jose, ‘I know the young woman, it is Miss Jessie Ackermann of the Golden State. She has good health, unbound courage and she is devoted to the temperance work.’”¹¹ Willard accepted Churchill’s recommendation and arranged for Ackermann to follow Mary Leavitt’s footsteps as the round the world missionary and suggested that she consider South America, as well. Leavitt had earned her financing for her trips, and Ackermann was expected to do the same. Willard wrote, “I learn that Mrs. Leavitt has been almost entirely self-supporting and I think you can be.”¹² She found Ackermann to be an excellent speaker and writer and capitalized on those skills for the advancement of the Union¹³ saying, “you have a sort of off-hand way that makes your letters seem more home-like than any I receive.”¹⁴

⁹ Willard to Ackermann, September 3, 1888, Ackermann Papers.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Willard article for *The Union Signal*, December 14, 1896, Ackermann Papers.

¹² Willard to Ackermann, February 15, 1888, Ackermann Papers.

¹³ Willard to Ackermann, December 14, 1896, Ackermann Papers.

¹⁴ Willard to Ackermann, April 19, 1894, Ackermann Papers.

Ackermann used her interviews, books, and articles to spotlight the conditions of peoples throughout the world. Although her language and attitudes are those of a person living in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she reported on lifestyles, legal and social rights, and living conditions of the inhabitants of the various countries she toured. She met women from all walks of life, but in all her travels, she said she could “count on her fingers the number of truly contented women she had met.”¹⁵ Her books and articles were also made very readable and entertaining through her use of conversational narrative techniques and self-deprecating humor.

She traveled under the banner of the WCTU or as a writer for various publications but widened her view beyond those causes. In her volume, *The World through a Woman’s Eyes*, she makes it plain that she was unafraid of new experiences and was willing to endure seasickness, uncomfortable modes of transportation, and unknown accommodations from locals who may or may not have wanted her in their midst. She did not falter in her determination to visit the lands to which she was assigned or wished to see. She found women who were very happy with their circumstances and those who were not, regardless of their economic status. Her commentary is colored by the prejudices of the day to an extent; however, she is perceptive and accepting of other cultures in a time when that was not the norm. Many of the same themes run throughout her narratives on each country. Women have few rights, if any at all. They are essentially subject to the whims of the men in their lives. They are treated as slaves, laborers, and forced into marriages and work environments with no say in the matter. Ackermann saw that “No nation can move on and leave its women behind; it can only progress as women keep abreast with the age.”¹⁶ She became convinced that, “The position of men in all countries is practically

¹⁵ “Miss Ackermann’s Lecture, ‘The Women of Asia,’” *West Australian* [Perth], August 4, 1892, in *Historic Australian Newspapers, 1803 to 1954*, <http://ndpbeta.nla.gov.au/> (accessed January 24, 2009).

¹⁶ Ackermann, *World*, 119.

the same, while that of women changes with the spirit of the times.”¹⁷ She did not consider that the study of women diminished the stature of men: “Men have always, throughout human history, held a recognised place. It has been said: ‘A country will never rise above the status of its women.’”¹⁸

Her books and articles read, on the surface, like travelogues thanks to Ackermann’s vivid descriptions of flora, fauna, cities, and homes. Her keen sense of observation and curiosity makes them more than descriptive narratives; moreover, she did not mince words in her criticism of the men and governments who created the hardships others had to endure. Her concern for women extended to a concern for the welfare of children and men, especially the poor. She found that, “Words fail to express what the native women of almost every country suffer at the hands of white men who go to their shores in search of wealth, or to follow business pursuits. Wherever the white man has planted his foot, his tracks may be traced in the greater degradation of the native women.”¹⁹

Ackermann’s awareness of social conditions became evident through her essays from her round the world trips. The WCTU first sent her to Alaska, where she found the beauty of the landscape in sharp contrast to the ugliness she perceived surrounding the general treatment of women. She related stories of women in the Yukon who killed their daughters rather than let them grow up to live the wretched lives they surely faced. She saw young girls sold to their future husbands and reported that as the man’s labor needs increased, he merely bought more wives. She called the ritual lip-piercing and tattooing barbarous and fretted for the girls’ well-

¹⁷ Ackermann, *Australia from a Woman’s Point of View* (London: Cassell and Company, 1913), 76.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁹ Ackermann, *World*, 34.

being.²⁰ She wrote, “The estimation in which they are held by men has been voiced by one of the chiefs, who said, ‘Women are made to labor; one of them can haul as much as two men can. They pitch our tents and mend our clothing.’”²¹ Ackermann lamented the lack of “home” life for women and told the story of a woman who lived in such squalor that she challenged Ackermann to “Live here for five years, and you will be a drunkard, too.” Ackermann was certain that the institutions such as the school at Sitka, established by Dr. Sheldon Jackson, were the best method for bringing up the standards of living for the Alaskan natives. In these settlements, natives had homes and children attended the mission school. Separate settlements were available for young people who had finished school; they were encouraged to marry and settle down away from the villages in efforts to keep them from returning to their old ways. Ackermann was certain that, “If we are ever to lead these people to a higher civilization, the work must begin in improving the home. Home life would soon elevate the women above a slavery so degrading that they themselves feel it.”²²

Ackermann also reported on the landscapes and structures she saw in a journalistic style. She described the grandeur of the scenery and the totem pole and was adept at using humor to add to the vividness of her narrative. At one point, she traveled around Juneau to visit a mining town that was only accessible by a mountain trail that was difficult for horses to traverse. She said, “As the only mule at hand was said to have been thirty-eight years old at the time of the purchase of the territory from Russia (the sale including his venerable quadruped), I decided that

²⁰ Ibid., 23-25.

²¹ Ibid., 26.

²² Ibid., 27.

my reverence for antiquity was so great that rather than call the long-suffering animal into requisition I would make the pilgrimage on foot, which I did.”²³

Ackermann’s next assignment was to the Sandwich Islands, which Leavitt previously had visited and where there was an established WCTU. Her journey there was made very unpleasant by a bout of seasickness and having to endure a shipmate sing at length about the joys of life on the ocean. She said,

As I languished in my berth, through the open window came a voice singing, ‘Oh, for a life on the ocean wave, a home on the rolling deep.’ I could endure the seasickness, but the very thought of those words filled my whole being with an intense desire to imbrue my hands in the gore of the man who wrote them to delude an unsuspecting public. If it were only the deep that rolled, no one would care; but the steamer rolled – everything rolled – I rolled.²⁴

Apparently, the ship’s steward added to the distress of seasickness by describing her own episodes of rolling out of bed and being put in a safe place. Ackermann exclaimed, “I spake not another word, for that woman was a better roller than I.”²⁵

She recounted the approach to the Hawaiian Islands as entering a new world and described in detail the beauty of bay, the land, the volcanoes – Mauna Loa and Kilauea – as well as the palms and other vegetation. Ackermann’s narrative concerning her visit to Hawaii contained a great deal of vivid material, perhaps because this was one of her first journeys abroad. She describes Koko head, the banana and coconut crops and goes into great detail about the royal palace and King Kalakaua: “In appearance he was a perfect type of physical manhood. He was very dark, with black, curly hair, a feature that at once betrayed the negro blood.”²⁶

²³ Ibid., 28.

²⁴ Ibid., 44.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ackermann, *World*, 56.

She found much intermingling of the races in Hawaii: “Intermarrying exists here to a greater extent than in almost any other place of which I know. The negroes [sic], Portuguese, Japanese, and Chinese marry white women if they can; if not, they take half-castes, and I doubt very much if any of the present generation have a clear idea of the race to which they belong.”²⁷ She reported visiting a Portuguese night school with a half-white teacher, a Japanese singing school with an American white teacher, and an English temperance meeting attended by natives but led by an Englishman.²⁸

Ackermann was especially moved by her trip to Molokai’s leper colony and commented on Father Damien who cared for the lepers. She said, “No class of people so calculated to draw upon our sympathy as are lepers.” Families were broken up if one member contracted the illness and ordered to Molokai. She continues, “no matter what their station may have been, there they must mingle with every and all specimens of humanity, for among the diseased are Japanese, Chinese, half-castes, Hawaiians, and, in fact, members of all the tribes found in the islands.”²⁹ Ackermann had planned on visiting other islands in the Pacific but heard of squalls and swells. “I had had ‘swell’ enough in getting to Honolulu, so I resolved to continue my journey to New Zealand and later on return to the islands.”³⁰

Upon her arrival at Auckland, she reported seeing “many swarthy-skinned natives,” whom she found intelligent and resembling American Indians. However, she found their numbers decreasing, “a fact attributed to the introduction of strong drink, which has a fatal effect

²⁷ Ackermann, *World*, 50.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 65.

upon them.”³¹ She had not forgotten her temperance mission. She once commented that if she were to leave America and make a home elsewhere, she would choose New Zealand. She found that, “there is less apparent poverty. The people are much better fed, clad, and housed than the masses of any other country in the world, and it seems less a crime to be comfortable in New Zealand than where you are in the midst of appalling poverty.”³²

She left Auckland by boat, continued across the island’s 150 miles by train, and eventually visited Tasmania on her way to Australia. Her experiences in mining camps in America were echoed in her early experiences in Western Australia. Friends said she might have a rough time, but she countered, “I have been all through the mining towns of the other colonies, and have had a great deal of roughing it in the back blocks.”³³

Young women did not speak in public at that time; women speakers were a shock to some and Ackermann was met with some hostility that she did not take personally – any woman speaker would have been treated the same way. She expected hostility from drinkers and saloon keepers but was surprised to report that, “Ministers often refused to open their churches to a woman, and as for the pulpit!” While she stood the chance of being turned back, she visited Western Australia even though one letter writer indicated that the “community was not prepared for so wide a departure from usages as that of a woman appearing upon the public platform.”

³¹ Ibid., 78-79.

³² “Views of Miss Jessie Ackermann,” *Evening Post* [Wellington], May 15, 1908, in PapersPast, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/> (accessed January 24, 2009).

³³ “Miss Jessie Ackermann, an Interview,” *West Australian* [Perth], July 28, 1892, in Historic Australian Newspapers, 1803 to 1954, <http://ndpbeta.nla.gov.au/> (accessed January 24, 2009).

She was a bit headstrong and saw this objection as “a Divine call to visit the colony.” She eventually spoke twenty-one consecutive nights to packed houses.³⁴

Ackermann had anticipated a cool reception in Western Australia, but she was so well accepted that, while in Perth, she was invited to lay the cornerstone of the Rechabite Coffee Palace. On the day of the ceremony, many dignitaries addressed the crowd, and as she later wrote, “I was then and there made an Honorary Life Member of everything possessing a name by which to call itself.” She laid the stone with a specially designed trowel, and “Without any protest from the Labour Union or causing a strike as a non-unionist, I accomplished my first work in the building line in Australia.” She had won them over, and on her return to Perth eighteen years later, she spoke on six nights to sell-out crowds.³⁵

Ackermann enjoyed a sort of celebrity status as she became better known in Australia. From about 1889 until at least 1911, several Australian and New Zealand newspapers carried dozens of articles on “Miss Ackermann.” Newspapers recorded her lectures and told her stories and the condition of her health and whereabouts reported when she was not even in the country. She was so well known, many headlines merely stated, “Lecture by Miss Ackermann.” For example, the *Otago Witness* of Dunedin, New Zealand, reported in 1889, “Among the passengers by the mail steamer Alameda was Miss Jessie A. Ackermann, of Boston, the world’s missionary to the Women’s Christian Temperance Union, and also lecturess in connection with the Independent Order of Good Templars.”³⁶ Of all the places she visited, Australia apparently held a special appeal for her, and the Australians made her more than welcome.

³⁴ Ackermann, *Australia*, 303-304.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 304-306.

³⁶ “Local and General,” *Otago Witness*, March 7, 1889, in PapersPast, <http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/> (accessed January 24, 2009).

Ackermann visited Japan not long after the First Sino-Japanese War in 1894-95. She indicated fairly early in her career that she leaned toward pacifism and commented on the recent Japanese victory over China: “Victory in war, however, is no criterion upon which to base our opinions of the people of these nations.” She indicated that Japan had made progress and became more open, but “it is by no means true that it is in every respect superior to China. Japan excels in warfare; but that, after all, is only a relic of barbarism, and modern methods of carrying on wholesale murder and butchery surpass in barbarity anything known in the darkest ages.”³⁷

She provided the reader a short history of the restoration of the emperor to the Japanese throne and the subjugation of Shoguns. She evidently was empathetic with the emperor as a person, describing the manner in which he was to choose a wife, “In marriage the emperor is no more allowed to make a love match than is his meanest subject. Imagine this youth, less than twenty years of age, standing before a line of blushing maidens, of whom he has little knowledge, and looking them over much as he might a stock of merchandise.”³⁸

Ackermann commented on the polite manners of the Japanese, calling them the “French of the East.” As she departed the ship at Yokohama, a man who had heard about her trouble with seasickness assisted her to shore: “I towered nearly two feet above him, and as I stooped down to take his arm my only thought – which amounted to a fear – was, if I should fall upon this man he never would know what killed him.”³⁹

One reason Ackermann had gone to Japan was to encourage the women to take on western dress, but she found a society wherein the traditional women’s wear was much more comfortable than western dress. Foreign dress had been adopted at court, and she says,

³⁷ Ackermann, *World*, 106.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

“Accustomed as they are to ease and comfort in clothing, it was truly a sorry day when they tried to ape western customs and entered upon a struggle with our barbarous manner of dress.”⁴⁰

Ackermann described very candidly her views of the “civilized” westerner carrying the message to the “heathen” who listens politely but are astonished at the missionary’s appearance: “Why it is like rigging a ship, to get a woman into her clothes in these days! ... I am often amazed at our lack of intelligence in matters of dress. We weigh down our poor, tired bodies with as many pounds of cloth as we can carry, and load our heads with cockades and feathers until we look top-heavy and lop-sided; then we go to the mirror, and the reflection so charms us that we exclaim ‘How lovely!’”⁴¹ Ackermann attended the Tokyo dress reform society in order to express an opinion on introducing a new mode of attire: “I was in doubt for a few moments what to say. I looked at them in their long, loose gowns with roomy sleeves, saw that they could trip about with a degree of grace, and certainly with great comfort, and then I thought of my own manner of dress – of all the stringing, strapping, binding, lacing and hooking!”⁴² At that time, women wore bustles which she described as a hump on the back. If women were born with this hump, “I believe we would lie on our backs all the days of our lives, trying to flatten it out.”⁴³

There seems to have been a mutual sense of curiosity between Ackermann and the Japanese women she met. Ackermann was intrigued by the amounts of time Japanese women spent on their hair styles. She described the detailed process, saying, “I was greatly interested, one day, watching a Japanese lady undergoing this form of martyrdom.”⁴⁴ The women of Japan

⁴⁰ Ibid., 104.

⁴¹ Ibid., 105.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 104-105.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 109.

apparently found Ackermann an interesting person to observe. She was invited to dinner at the Maple Leaf club-house in Tokyo: “On reaching the door, I was requested by a servant to remove my shoes, and he at once proceeded to assist me in complying with his request.” She soon found that here was no furniture in the dining room; she said:

There was nothing to sit on but the floor. These little creatures drop down on their knees and throw themselves back on their heels. No extra provision had been made for me, and I, too, must sit like a tailor, or squat like a Turk. Being nearly two yards long, I found it no easy task to shut myself up like a jack-knife; so, camel-like, I got down by degrees and tried to assume as nearly as possible an attitude like that of my companions, but even this kept me so far from the floor, that I was forced to sit tailor-fashion, in order to reach the food.⁴⁵

She found that few women in Asia were educated but believed that, “This is not so true of the women of Japan. Boys and girls alike are sent to primary schools, and since the advent of missionaries special attention has been given to the education of girls, and the higher education of woman is an oft-discussed subject.”⁴⁶ Women in Japan were beginning to enter professions, and Ackermann met women reporters and a female editor of a temperance magazine. She reported that the Japanese government felt that, ““Our women are all backward in intelligence for want of sound education, and the education of the children goes hand in hand with that of the mothers, and is an object of highest importance.””⁴⁷ Ackermann was fond of the Japanese women and apparently enjoyed their company. She found them eager to accept the Christian missionaries, and “she believed that she would yet see Japan come out and take her place among the Christian nations of the world.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid., 114-115.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 119.

⁴⁸ *West Australian* [Perth], August 4, 1892.

She traveled to China on a steamer, which she called a tea boat, and bunked with livestock on the trip during which she endured a three-day typhoon before landing at Hong Kong. She did not want to go to China, which had no appeal to her as a tourist. She pointed out that Americans formed bad opinions about the Chinese because the lower classes were frequently the ones who emigrated to other countries, carrying vice and disease, “to such an extent that the very name of China has become a dread to many communities.”⁴⁹ She was appreciative of the antiquity of the Chinese culture but was still not anxious to go there. When she arrived in Hong Kong, she was met by people who lived in boat houses in the harbor and formed the opinion that the women were greatly overworked there. This reception added to her unfavorable view of the country: “The degraded condition of the women is most apparent, and the heavy labor that falls to their portion must make life a burden scarcely to be borne.”⁵⁰ Her impressions were reinforced as she traveled to a town where, she reports, “We passed a stone quarry where women, old and young – some of them very old – were pounding away at the rocks with great sledge-hammers” to make rock for roads. She considered that the service attitude of the Chinese women “brought the thought, continually, that the women of China were all slaves.”⁵¹ Through her Western lens, she found that “The greatest drawback to China is the lack of home life, as we understand the term.”⁵²

The most dramatic part of her visit to China, and that which impressed and disturbed her the most, was visiting a hospital where women with bound feet resided. There she met a woman whose feet had been bound for forty years. The binding began with girls at age ten and was

⁴⁹ Ackermann, *World*, 129

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵¹ *West Australian* [Perth], August 4, 1892.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 141.

practiced only by the upper classes; lower class women had to remain mobile so they could work. Ackermann reported, “I have seen a full-grown Chinawoman, bedecked in silk and richest satin, unable to walk across the room without the aid of a servant or a staff. Her feet were but three inches long!”⁵³

Ackermann toured China using a wide variety of transport and witnessed scenes that she found both engaging and revolting: “The choice of conveyance was between a jenrikishaw and a sedan-chair; of these two evils I chose the greater, that is to say, the larger. With a mingled feeling of fear, pity and compassion I passed through the streets amid scenes that no tongue could tell or pen describe.”⁵⁴ She continued northward in order to learn more about real Chinese life where she found that “The appearance of a foreigner in one of these inland towns is truly an event. So small a per cent of the people read or know anything of the outside world that the advent of a white face among them creates wide-spread interest, and not a little confusion.” The people in the villages were wondering what sort of person Ackermann was and if some “foreign devil” had come. Her companion, a Bible woman, thought she should show herself: “I knew my unusual height (nearly six feet) would lead them to suppose some giant race had invaded their borders. What was I to do? No manner of dress could decrease the two yards of humanity that would confront them.” She eventually exited to let people see her and explained the purpose of her trip. The villagers commented on how white Ackermann was and the last words the translator (the Bible woman) heard were ““That big one must be a man.””⁵⁵

Ackermann observed that western habits were bad for the Chinese and reported that there were two thousand opium dens in Shanghai alone: “It is a fact that western civilization without

⁵³ Ibid., 152.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 134.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 143-144.

the subduing effects of Christianity is the worst-known civilization. It is another fact that the people of the East have fallen into the way of our vices while our virtues have made no impression on them . . . the people have become demoralized by opium introduced by a western and so-called Christian country. One of the ‘sights’ of Shanghai is the great opium palace where the Chinese are debauched by thousands.”⁵⁶

Ackermann continued her narrative by describing a Confucian temple and her crossing to visit a Baptist Mission. The junk overturned and threw them into the water; she learned that the Chinese were superstitious about rescuing people from water, but a Turkish man-of-war picked them up. She wrote, “The next morning we sent messages of thanks to the captain, and a copy of the Bible to each of the sailors. In over one hundred and fifty thousand miles of travel this was the only accident that ever befell me at sea.”⁵⁷ Many people had traveled for months in order to visit the mission and attend the missionary conference. Although this was a serious conference, Ackermann made it a point to interject humorous events into her narrative. The group evidently took time from the convention to sit for a photograph that was to be set up on wooden bleachers; however, the bleachers collapsed under their weight. As people were tugged out, their clothing became torn and participants ended up in awkward entanglements. Ackermann laughed it off commenting, “This concluded my ‘down-sittings’ and my ‘up-risings’ with that conference.”⁵⁸

Ackermann moved on to Siam, which at that time was a place not frequented by many tourists and was very difficult to reach. Her trip meant another bout of seasickness (the captain gave up his quarters to Ackermann) on a voyage where she was the only white passenger on a

⁵⁶ Ibid., 164.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 153.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 160.

steamer loaded with Chinese workers who smoked opium and gambled (both were evils she was battling) aboard ship. She commented, “The class of Chinese who leave their own country are usually the very lowest, and this cargo of human freight was no exception.”⁵⁹ During one episode on this voyage, she was locked into the cabin as the captain put down a disagreement over gambling. She was forced to stay in the cabin for two hours because the captain thought she might faint. She was not pleased with this presumption that she had a delicate disposition, and reported “My indignation knew no bounds,” calling this thirteen-day trip “the most wretched and uncomfortable in my life.”⁶⁰

She sailed upriver to Bangkok, where she found people living on boat houses which she considered more acceptable than the house boats the Chinese used. Aside from her descriptions of the land and general impressions about the country, Ackermann considered the Siamese women to be in “the most enslaved condition of any women in the world. They have neither legal nor social status, and not one of them could own a paper of pins in her own right.”⁶¹

While in Siam, she brought up the treatment of women and opportunities for education with the king. He, like many men throughout the world, was not receptive to the idea that girls and women needed any formal education. The king was of the opinion that education would make the women unfit for their station in life and apparently stated that, ““with education there always comes culture and refinement. The people of this country are very poor. If they become cultured and refined, they will naturally want things about them more beautiful than those they have been accustomed to, and this education will bring with it a spirit of discontent.””⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid., 171.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 172-173.

⁶¹ Ibid., 181.

⁶² Ibid., 193.

She described in detail a trip to visit a wat and climbing to the top where there was a striking view of the city and the commerce on the river, saying, “It is a wonderful sight, though somewhat confusing.” On the King’s Road in the mainland, “I was told that no less than fifteen nationalities passed us.” However, she was not knowledgeable regarding the numbers of Buddhist priests she encountered. She was complimentary of their yellow clothing saying, “The garment hangs in graceful folds about the body.” She reported that all men are to enter the priesthood for three years and be supported by alms and “in Bangkok alone, thirty thousand able-bodied men are thus maintained in indolence.”⁶³ Comments such as this one present a contradiction in Ackermann’s attitudes towards others. She appears more tolerant of people and religions that have much more in common with her Western and Baptist traditions than with, for example, Eastern traditions.

While in Siam, Ackermann procured a copy of a Buddhist sacred book. She says, “I asked my guide to try to buy one, but the devout priest told him he dared not sell it, though if I would put the silver down he would go away while I took the volume. His conscience being thus easily satisfied, I became the possessor of one of these books, which is a great curiosity.”⁶⁴

While in Southeast Asia, Ackermann also visited Java, which was under Dutch rule. She was very critical of “Hollanders,” calling them sleepy and chastising them for not making the interior of Java more accessible. She was very critical of their taking advantage of the native peoples and setting up a few Dutch individuals in positions of power: “But when Holland, after the manner of other countries, took unto herself this land, pensioned the rulers, set aside all native rights, and appropriated the labor of the natives to cultivate and make rich the soil, she lost

⁶³ Ibid., 178.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

sight of all things save the enrichment of her treasury, and the bestowal of ‘fat offices’ upon a few favored individuals.”⁶⁵

She found the landscape and animal life beautiful, and made it a point to visit the grand temple in the interior of Java. “At the Batavia postoffice I read in English, ‘The grand temple in the interior of Java, that for architectural design, decorations, carvings and finish is worthy of Greece itself, testifies to a cultivation of the natives that has long since died out.’ It did not take me long to make up my mind to make the trip to the interior, not only that I might gaze upon this triumph of architectural skill, but that I might also see the ruins to be passed on the way.” The journey to temple was two hundred miles by slow rail. She began the journey by stage: “The six little horses were changed every few miles, and even then I felt that a humane society should have had charge of the whole party.” On arriving at the temple, she mused in apparent appreciation of the native craftsmen, “One massive stone after another was dug from the quarry, and under the skillful hand of the sculptor was converted into a thing of beauty. The temple stands to-day almost as complete as when left by the workmen, and will probably remain only to crumble when time itself shall fade.”⁶⁶

She found Singapore an interesting location where, she said, “thirty different languages are spoken.” Singapore is almost on the equator and Ackermann found that the “climate is very trying. A garment the weight of a mosquito-net becomes a burden.”⁶⁷ She found it difficult to find transport on the eastern coast and reported that, “It was my unhappy fate to take passage on a Dutch steamer. As usual the discomfort of seasickness was upon me, and I was unable to go on deck for a few days.” The ship was ordered to Sumatra to take sick troops to the mainland.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 195-196.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 200.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 204.

“The prospect of sailing for a few days with a fever-stricken crew was anything but pleasant, but as the open sea afforded no desirable means of escape I settled down and decided, as one must often do in tramping the earth, to make the best of it.” Some of the troops had died and were buried at sea at night. “I put my hands to my ears and closed my eyes, thinking to shut out every sight and sound; but soon I heard a great splash, then another and another, until almost a score had been consigned to a watery grave. There can be nothing more distressing than a burial at sea.”⁶⁸

Ackermann wrapped up her analysis of Asia with the comment, “The rich of these lands spend great sums of money erecting places of shelter for their ugly gods, and leave their own fellow-creatures to the most abject poverty, a prey to the greatest hardships and suffering.”⁶⁹ Ackermann had an appreciation for the beauty of the lands she visited and was truly interested in the lives of the people of each particular country. Her attention to the condition of women in various places, as well as to social conditions she saw, helped her bring social concerns into sharper focus for her readers. Her writing and the very graphic descriptions and analysis of the conditions of poor people provide readers a view of the lives of the dispossessed. The travel guide sections she includes give the reader a sense of immediacy and help to create empathy.

Undaunted by seasickness, bad weather, poor transportation, and the usual concerns of the traveler, Ackermann traveled the globe for a number of years. She was an adventurer and maintained a sense of humor and grace. On the way to India, she had the fortune to visit the bottom of the sea while in the pearling grounds. She admittedly was not a good sailor, but on board she sat near an officer who asked if she would like to go. This sounded like a challenge or

⁶⁸ Ibid., 212-213.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 219-220.

a dare to her and she did not think that he would have a suit that would fit her. She agreed to go and to her surprise, the captain produced a suit for her. It consisted of heavy knit covered by an outer garment with a metal hoop around the neck for attaching a helmet. An air supply was attached along with forty pounds of lead weights to the thirty-two pound suit. Ten men carried her to the side of the ship and threw her overboard. She reported, “I found the bottom hard and sandy. All around me were shells of many colors, seaweed and sponge. After a few moments below I pulled the signal-rope and was taken up to the deck of the steamer, none the worse for my trip to the bottom of the sea.”⁷⁰

On the approach to India, Ackermann recalled stories she had heard about mothers throwing children to the crocodiles and widows on the funeral pile. She made the time to visit Thackeray’s birthplace, Macaulay’s rooms, Carey’s church, and Judson’s baptistery. She observed penitents and holy men in the Ganges and reported, “Almost every act in a Hindu’s life is one of devotion.” She learned of the wish of Hindus to die near the Ganges, and as a Christian missionary commented, “This sight of poor, wretched, ignorant humanity, as looked upon that spot, filled me with a sense of gratitude for the blessing of birth in a Christian land.” She was distressed at seeing the funeral pyres and frightened by images of Hindu deities, “At one end is a shrine for the only image the Brahmins have. It represents three gods in one, and is the most hideous thing that could possibly be imagined.”⁷¹

Ackermann began her trek through India with a side trip through the Khyber Pass to Afghanistan and entered the country, as she describes, “. . . whose ruler is fearful the whole world will invade his possessions. I determined to at least go through the pass, and the natural

⁷⁰ Ibid., 226.

⁷¹ Ibid., 227-231.

perversity of woman's nature filled me with desire to commit the forbidden act – enter his domain.”⁷² She left India for Afghanistan via the city of Peshawar where she indicated that there were only four white people inside this city's walls: “The city is chiefly Mohammedan, and early in the morning, before daylight, can be heard the call to prayer.”⁷³ She had applied to the government for troops who joined her through the natural pass. At a halfway point, Ackermann stopped at a fort where she could see a caravan with camels, cattle, and other livestock; she apparently did not go any further. She met women wearing the burqa and traveled with them, describing their attire, “their garments were so fashioned that they covered the entire body. Two small holes were cut out of the dress for the eyes, but aside from this no feature of the women could be seen.”⁷⁴ Strangely enough, she did not comment on the burqa nor why the women were compelled to wear them.

Ackermann returned to India and toured the Taj Mahal, recommending that the best time to see the structure is at night. She also visited a home for widows run by Pundita Ramabai, who was Christian, and who Ackermann called “the most remarkable woman that India has ever produced. Her father, contrary to custom, believed in the education of women, whether wives or daughters.”⁷⁵ Both Pundita and her mother were educated; she married a lawyer, was widowed early, and traveled to Europe and America raising funding for the widow's home. Widows in India were (and still are) shunned and seen as a financial drain on the family. When their husbands died, they were expelled from their homes, forbidden to wear jewelry, and forced to

⁷² Ibid., 238.

⁷³ Ibid., 237.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 244.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 251.

beg for food; many just waited to die. Ackermann visited forty-seven rescued women in Ramabai's shelter.⁷⁶

Ackermann traveled to South Africa on a month-long sea voyage which must have been torturous to her because of her propensity toward seasickness. However, she enjoyed the company of her shipmates and wrote that on the day after the ship's departure the passengers began forming "ourselves into little groups – to talk about the others."⁷⁷ Many travelers had lost resources in an Australian financial recession and were headed to Africa to make a new start. Other passengers included two future brides and a wealthy English woman traveler. She interjected a rare glimpse into her personal life with a report of a trip out to deck at night where she heard a couple professing their mutual affection, "One may imagine the feeling of utter loneliness that would creep upon an old maid, away off in the middle of the sea on a dark night, in hearing such tender heart appeals and knowing that they were meant for another. I silently withdrew to meditate upon the strangeness of fate – perchance to slumber."⁷⁸

On this same voyage, the captain suggested she go to the mast head. Being the adventurer she was, she agreed. There was much speculation among the other passengers about who the lady might be who might climb. Ackermann donned her divided skirt and climbed up the mast with the captain on one side and another man on the other. She reported that the people on deck looked like little children from so far up and commented on the beauty of the moon. She returned to deck, she said, "amid the cheers of the passengers, and the 'Well done; you are the first woman I have ever heard of who would venture to the mast-head,' from the captain."⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Ibid., 251-252.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 258.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 261.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 262.

She was disappointed at her first sight of Africa and Cape Town but enjoyed Johannesburg and Pretoria. She arranged to experience the usual tourist excursions and, determined that, “Like all other visitors, I, too, must go to the top of Table Mountain.” The mayor arranged to help her reach the summit, “and at the same time save my strength and shoe leather.” A construction site was on the mountain top and cable lines had been installed with baskets attached to carry materials. She reported that “in one of these we were to ascend three thousand five hundred feet. The manager of the works and another gentleman were to accompany me.” She was apparently more fearful of the trip down, but it was uneventful. She could, however, say, “I have been to the top of Table Mountain.”⁸⁰

Her narrative includes descriptions of desolate landscapes and commentary on reports about the difficulties of traveling in Africa. She visited Johannesburg which she found to be a wonderful big city where the gold discoveries had made many millionaires. She also visited Pretoria and reported, “Between these cities [Johannesburg and Pretoria] a deadly hatred seems to exist, doubtless because of the numbers of English who have come to Johannesburg and made great fortunes. In their enterprises they have greatly outdone the Boer, who seems quite satisfied to follow in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, and the very presence of the English is regarded as an infringement on Dutch rights.”⁸¹ From there she went on to Queenstown and visited a native village. She reported that the people “received us with great hospitality, showing us through their houses, and giving us any desired information.” She commented on the native women’s clothing – two blankets which were wound around the waist and across the shoulders –

⁸⁰ Ibid., 265.

⁸¹ Ibid., 267.

but was concerned about their welfare and commented that they “occupy the same place that woman has always held in the heathen countries of the world.”⁸²

Ackermann did much of her traveling not only as a missionary for the WCTU but also as a member of the Baptist church. At the beginning of her mission work, she belonged to the First Baptist Church in Sacramento and was, according to J. A. Hopper, “in good and regular standing and is held by us in high esteem as a Christian lady.”⁸³ For a while she took her “crusade for reform” to Chicago, where she began working with the Fourth Street Baptist Church. She served as an assistant pastor at the Fourth Street Church and believed that women should hold a worthwhile place in the church. She asserted that, “Women’s mental powers qualify her to become a leader of religious thought” and is brave and will use the pulpit to “defend the oppressed.” She challenged the church to apply “the principles of Christianity to the life of the individual” but saw that it failed in this goal too frequently.⁸⁴ She encouraged parishioners to visit the places where the fallen frequent. She gave sermons wherein she described her visits to the slums in both Chicago and New York.⁸⁵ *The Chicago Post* described her as a “modern-day Joan of Arc” who came to the “Fourth Baptist Church as special rescue worker.”⁸⁶

In addition to her temperance and literary work, concern about educational opportunities for girls and women was one of Ackermann’s passions. For example, despite her love for Australia and its citizens, she was critical of the educational philosophy held by many

⁸² Ibid., 272.

⁸³ J.A. Hopper, letter of introduction, October 9, 1888, Ackermann Papers.

⁸⁴ Ackermann, “The Twentieth Century Woman: II Her Place in the Church,” undated, Ackermann Papers.

⁸⁵ “Sermons in City Pulpits,” *Chicago Chronicle*, January 4, 1897, Ackermann Papers.

⁸⁶ “War on the Saloons,” *Chicago Post*, January 2, 1897, Ackermann Papers.

Australians. Australian children were required to attend school until age fourteen. The schools were free, but many working class people did not want their children to go for so many years; they thought that going until age ten was long enough. That was all they had completed and they turned out fine was the parents' argument. Some were so insistent on having their children in the work force (either for their own farm or as hired hands elsewhere), and a group of planters went so far as to request that the Christmas holiday be moved so that children could work the fruit-packing season. Ackermann said her "interviews with a number of parents convinced me that they were quite as willing to agree to the criminal sweating of their children as the growers were to avail themselves of the advantages of child-labour."⁸⁷

The education of Australian girls was dependent on the parents' willingness to have their daughter educated and the father's ability or inclination to pay. She learned that the working classes were not very interested in sending their girls to school and some thought that school was "bad for a girl's brain or that the nervous system will break down." Some Australian men, like those in other countries, felt that too much education would make girls restless and unwilling to enter domestic service or be happy in the home. She continued, "Men affirm that too much education will, in some mysterious, indescribable manner, unfit and for ever disqualify them for these important relations of life."⁸⁸ Even when presented with the idea that education can help the household, she reported that, "Men wave the matter to one side with a conclusive sweep of the hand and merely say, 'it's a bad thing for a girl to have too much schooling!'"⁸⁹

Ackermann reported on an incident that occurred while she was on a train ride with a member of the Australian Parliament, who at one point said, "'it's a pity to over-educate girls.'"

⁸⁷ Ackermann, *Australia*, 90-92.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 275-276.

She fired questions at him on the trip until he announced that “Men hate women who think,” and she reported that “he continued to discharge a cargo of the microbe of words, for he was touched with the germs of eloquence, by remarking, ‘A woman with brains is an abomination to mankind. Men,’ said he, ‘can do the thinking for their women.’”⁹⁰ Education does make women restless, but Ackermann claimed, “There is nothing in life that can compare with the delights of thinking.” She asked, “Is it better for girls to stagnate amid present low standards or grow restless in their reaching out for higher ideals?”⁹¹

As a part of her self-education and desire to learn about people firsthand, she spent six weeks in the East End of London where she lived and worked as the poor did there. She was determined to learn first-hand how the poorer classes lived. While she worked selling flowers and newspapers and as an organ grinder carrying a rented baby, she became more convinced that the social evils of the world could not be eliminated without women having the vote. She told the story of her experiences in the East End slums repeatedly, and emphasized that she did “not believe that White Chapel could exist if the women of England had the franchise. After living in the East End of England, I was more than ever convinced that woman suffrage is the soundest principle in political economy.”⁹² Ackermann became acquainted with the people in the area where she was living in London and told the tale of a woman who was 75 years old, had worked for 62 years and had not been able to “save a single pound.”⁹³

⁹⁰ Ibid., 276.

⁹¹ Ibid., 278.

⁹² Unknown newspaper, not dated, Ackermann Papers.

⁹³ “Miss Jessie Ackermann. Traveller, Lecturer, and Journalist.” unknown newspaper, Ackermann Papers.

As time progressed, she became more and more critical of the wealthy. Following her experiences working in London's East End, Ackermann produced vivid descriptions of the conditions in which the poorest women and children earned their living. She accused the public of being appalled at the treatment of Japanese or Chinese immigrant workers but ignoring this same evil she claimed, "here in Christian England women and children by the thousands, dwarfing the mind, stunting the body of childhood and degrading a large per cent of the great army which constitutes the motherhood of England." She described the women who did piece work for pennies, producing goods that went for much more.⁹⁴ She gave her "slum" talk as frequently as possible in England, and the U.S., as well as at Centenary Hall in Sydney.

She was also an early proponent of the idea of equal pay for equal work. She argued, "In the matter of wages numerous arguments are brought forward for and against a scale of pay in each occupation which should apply, regardless of who did the work, so long as equal efficiency is sustained." Regardless of arguments on each side, "A fact remains; the difference between the pay of men and women in the same employment is out of all keeping with the comparative value of service rendered."⁹⁵ She found especially appalling the differences in pay for men and women teachers. She wrote extensively about a woman teacher who had been in the bush for ten years with sixteen students. The female teacher was paid eighty pounds annual plus a room. About ten miles away, a male teacher had eighteen students and received 110 pounds annually; a sewing teacher was also brought to this school at an additional twelve pounds per year because the male teacher was not required to teach sewing.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Ackermann, "The 'Sweating System' of England," unknown newspaper, Ackermann Papers.

⁹⁵ Ackermann, *Australia*, 249.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 251-252.

Men of the period argued that women needed only to work during the time between leaving school and marriage. They believed that women did not expect to rise in a profession and that they would have to take time to keep training new teachers as the experienced ones married and left. Ackermann mocked them, “Thus spoke the male oracle,” finding no relevance in their arguments. The low salaries of shop and factory girls could be blamed for some of their troubles, also. “A girl who must wholly depend upon it for a livelihood cannot live a decent life. Much of the evil into which young girls fall is due to the cruelly low price paid for their services. Australia may be, and probably is, the working man’s paradise, but it is far from a celestial condition for working and business girls.”⁹⁷ However, she saw the Australian girl as ready to take her place in the world. “The real Australian Girl has not yet arrived. Free, independent, and unconventional, the younger generation of girls stands ‘next of kin’ to their neighbour maidens across the Atlantic – American girls.”⁹⁸

She was very concerned that women and men become more informed about the political world. She was certain that of the bills before Congress at that time (ca. 1920) not a handful of people would have any sort of knowledge as to their content or the potential effect on the country. Ackermann conducted an experiment by questioning audiences on each of five successive nights on the contents of the treaty with Germany [ending World War I]; she found she says, “not one who had read the treaty.”⁹⁹

Jessie Ackermann began her long career as a young woman carrying the white ribbon of temperance. Through the years, she matured in a significant way and used her talents as a writer

⁹⁷ Ibid., 253.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 262.

⁹⁹ “‘Modern’ Girl Defended by Miss Ackermann Who Speaks Tuesday to Business Women,” unknown newspaper, nd, Ackermann Papers.

to explain her changing opinions about the world to a wide audience. Most significantly, Ackermann used her modest fame and access to the press as a vehicle for bringing to the public eye an awareness of some of the significant social ills of her day. Ackermann was sent as a missionary for the WCTU and as a correspondent for various publications; however, she did not limit her activities merely to mission work or to “getting a story.” She used her keen eye and interest in the morality and humanity of all people to comment on the conditions of people throughout the world.

She remained successful as a temperance worker and retained Frances Willard’s friendship and professional support. In 1896, Willard wrote an updated account and letter of praise about Ackermann’s life and work for the *Union Signal*. Willard wrote,

Miss Ackermann did not travel from New Zealand to Iceland and from Alaska to Brazil as a mere sight seer, but she went to introduce ideas that she believed would make better and happier every person she met and every community in which she tarried. [During her years in Australia,] she developed the W.C.T.U. until it is the strongest moral force in the country and is federated into a National Organization of which Miss Ackermann was the first president.¹⁰⁰

Ackermann did not hesitate to bring out of the shadows and into public view the lives of millions of women and children. Her barometer was, of course, her own experience and upbringing as a Westerner. She called for better treatment, equal rights, and equal pay for women, while developing a respect for non-western culture and religions that was not common in her day. Ackermann remained true to her mission as a temperance worker but let her purpose expand to include attention toward a wide variety of social issues. She was not afraid of new experiences – and, in fact, sought them out. She commented, “I wish I could live a thousand years; the world is a wonderful place. Everyday is a wonderful experience.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Frances E. Willard, “Miss Jessie A. Ackermann,” December 14, 1896, Ackermann Papers.

¹⁰¹ Unnamed Lincoln, Nebraska, newspaper, nd, Ackermann papers.

CHAPTER 5

“DO EVERYTHING”

TEMPERANCE AND TRAVEL

Jessie Ackermann traveled the world primarily as a missionary for the WCTU and as a writer for various publications. However, she used the opportunities these positions afforded her to visit places that Westerners had not explored extensively and to provide her readers with vivid commentary on foreign landscapes, peoples, and cultures. During the same time period that the women of the WCTU and other temperance organizations were engaged in their work, a separate group of women also had left their homes and began traveling the world. Many of these women had distinctive reasons or missions for their excursions – some more altruistic than others – and numbers of women were traveling for the same reasons as men: the joy and adventure of the journey.

Dorothy Middleton gave an overview regarding various Victorian women travelers in an address given to the Royal Geographical Society in 1973. She provided brief studies of individual women travelers such as Mary Kingsley who visited Africa in order to complete a book begun by her father, Lady Jane Franklin who organized numerous Arctic expeditions in search of her husband who had gone missing, Isabella Bird who traveled for health reasons, Kate Marsden who attended to Siberian lepers, and May French Sheldon who visited Africa as an adventuress. Middleton noted that between 1860 and 1905 there were more women “taking to travel abroad and returning to write books and give lectures” partly due to improved methods of travel such as railroads and steamers.¹

¹ Dorothy Middleton, “Some Victorian Lady Travellers,” *The Geographical Journal* 139, no. 1 (February 1973): 66, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1795796> (accessed April 6, 2009).

Middleton reported on Liliias Campbell Davidson, whose hints to lady travelers included the following: keep a maid with you on the train where she can be of help in an emergency, do not eat railway ham sandwiches, pack food instead of jewelry, and hang on in case of runaway carriages. She discusses Isabella Bird, who suffered from ill health but became bored with a routine life. Bird visited Canada at age 23, and Middleton says, “As a middle-aged woman she ranged over the dangerous hinterlands of Persia. She was over sixty when she explored Korea and penetrated up the Yangtze.”² Apparently, the traveling helped Bird’s health; she rode a horse in Morocco, spent six months in the Sandwich Islands, took to riding astride and began wearing Hawaiian dress. She ventured on to Japan, Canton, Cambodia, and Malaya. Bird was baptized and began travelling again as a Christian missionary. She continued to travel, visiting Western Tibet via Kashmir, then from Baghdad to Tehran, and from Isfahan through Bakhtiari; she rode through Kirdistan to Trebizond and to the Black Sea. Bird visited Korea three times, then traveled up the Yangtze with the intent of visiting missions. She died in 1904 in the midst of preparing for another trip to China. Bird left several volumes about her trips to America, China, Japan, and Hawaii.³

Middleton tells of Kate Marsden, who traveled as a nurse and who recounted her experiences in a book, *On Sledge and Horseback to Outcast Siberian Lepers*. Marsden had worked in England and New Zealand and, following some undefined illness, devoted herself to finding a course in life to which she was suited. She settled on working with lepers and her book provides details of her journey to a Siberian leper colony. She wrote of her arrival in Moscow in 1891, where she found a Russian-speaking friend. She embarked by train to Zlatoust and then

² Ibid., 70.

³ Ibid., 69-70.

had to transfer to the sledge; Middleton says that Marsden took “no liquid cheer, however – it was Miss Marsden’s conviction that she owed her survival on her travels to total abstinence from alcoholic stimulants and to Dr. Jaeger’s porous woollen clothing.”⁴ She eventually had to transfer to horseback to continue from Yakutsk to Viluisk and the nearby leper colonies. Not long after her arrival, she became ill and had to leave. However, her efforts aided in the establishment of a hospital that was financed by contributions she collected from around the world and profits from lectures and writing.⁵

Middleton, T.J. Boisseau, and Louise Michelle Newman devote considerable attention to Mrs. May French Sheldon, a wealthy American who lived in London. According to Middleton, French-Sheldon had been round the world three times, hunted big game in the Rockies, was fluent in French and Italian, studied geology and medicine, and was friends with Sir Henry Morton Stanley. In 1891, she revealed a plan to visit the Masai and Mount Kilimanjaro in eastern Africa; she initially indicated that she would study the native customs and bring back souvenirs.⁶ However, she produced a book, *Sultan to Sultan*, (written in an ornate style) wherein she describes her journey, “discoveries,” and mastery over the natives.

Boisseau states that French-Sheldon presented herself as a modern and liberated women and a symbol of cultural superiority. She had told friends that she was going to Africa to do research for a novel, to do ethnological research, or according to Boisseau, “to study the lives of the native women.’ What she was less willing to reveal was that she was also determined to gain

⁴ Ibid., 71.

⁵ Ibid., 71-72.

⁶ Ibid., 73.

some of the public attention and political influence that nineteenth-century male explorers of Africa, such as Henry Stanley, who was a close personal friend of hers, had garnered.”⁷

French-Sheldon was not in the same category as other women travelers. She was not a missionary for any social cause, nor did she travel for health reasons. She also did not write the novel she indicated she was researching but instead used the material she had gathered and her recent notoriety and embarked on a lecture tour. Wanting to be known as the “white queen,” French-Sheldon called herself the “first woman explorer of Africa” and made up a term, “Bebe Bwana” to mean “white” and “master.” Boisseau says this term is not grammatical and “carries no connotation of whiteness nor necessarily of mastery.” Boisseau contends that French-Sheldon intended to use this invented title as “an indication of the great esteem Africans ‘spontaneously and universally bestowed upon’ her.”⁸

French-Sheldon also promoted the notion that she had been alone in Africa, yet she traveled to and within Africa with a Swiss maid and an entourage of more than one-hundred porters and aides, carried weapons, and kept a palanquin at her disposal for sleeping. Boisseau points out,

Despite the maid and the porters, she unfailingly described herself for the next forty years as a ‘Lone White Woman in Savage Africa. French-Sheldon purposefully nurtured the image by adopting possibly the most theatrical costume ever donned by a traveler on a thousand-mile trek. Garbed in a long, white, sequined gown, bedecked with jewels and tiara, and sporting a long blond wig that hung well below her waist, French-Sheldon dressed up as Britannia herself to meet various African leaders.⁹

She also wanted to become accepted by the Royal Geographical Society and intended to claim to be the discoverer of Lake Chala even though many others had been there prior to her

⁷ T.J. Boisseau, “‘They Called Me Bebe Bwana’: A Critical Cultural Study of an Imperial Feminist,” *Signs* 21, no. 1 (Autumn 1995): 118, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3175124> (accessed April 6, 2009).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 121-122.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

visit. She considered the African men “deficient in intellect” and literally stood on the backs of Africans when giving orders and made them provide her an elevated position. According to Boisseau, “Figuratively, the backs of Africans became a podium for her own self-promotion and by extension for her advocacy of a white female subject position back home. The purpose of her 1891 expedition, as she explained it, was to demonstrate the proper methods of civilizing a ‘half-savage’ race.”¹⁰

French-Sheldon did overcome many of the objections and restrictions placed on women travelers of her day – she created a new persona and manufactured a lecture and entertainment career for herself. She made it a point of calling herself a “lady,” but also insisted on showing how physically strong she was. Boisseau says that French-Sheldon told journalists that she made this trip to “prove what a woman alone could do,” and at one point she described putting down a “revolt,” saying ““Then or never I realized I must demonstrate to these mutinous half-savage men that I would be obeyed.””¹¹

Yet Newman considers her an imperialist, saying that French-Sheldon was still considered an “exemplar of liberated womanhood” and reports that she had “blazed the way for other women. French-Sheldon’s singular accomplishment was that she had survived an excursion that had defeated many a white man before her, all without sacrificing her womanliness or needing white men’s protection or supervision.” and that she “was understood as demonstrating the superiority of white civilization to primitive peoples.”¹²

¹⁰ Ibid., 129.

¹¹ Ibid., 126.

¹² Newman, 103-105.

French-Sheldon did not take as many risks on her trip to Africa as many of her contemporaries were taking. Jessie Ackermann and others mentioned in this document were also traveling at approximately the same time. French-Sheldon carried an armed entourage, slept in a guarded palanquin, and ate from linen with silver. She did not endure the hardships Ackermann or Marsden did, and her primary goal was apparently that of turning herself into a celebrity. She did not exhibit respect for the peoples and cultures she visited and continued to stress her whiteness and domination over a group of black men. French-Sheldon also did not attempt to establish a rapport with the native women she surely encountered.

Ackermann seemed to have a different view of women's rights and social issues than many of her contemporaries. She commented that women of all races suffered when white men came to their shores.¹³ She crusaded for educational and legal rights for women around the world. She did not enter foreign lands with the sole mission of changing all the customs of the inhabitants; she fostered a kinship with the native women and worked to make their lives better. Ackermann did not pretend to travel alone; she had very limited access to companions or defenders, and did not try to exhibit her superiority over men of other races and nationalities. Ackermann was more than a temperance worker and curious traveler. She was an investigator into the conditions of people around the world, albeit it colored through the lens of her century and upbringing.

Ackermann was sent on her mission, in part, to carry the ways of the West to the "heathen" peoples of foreign lands. As she learned about others, Ackermann apparently became more tolerant of other religions, but during her first trip to Siam, her tolerance was not evident in her assessment of Buddhism. She did not understand the concept of karma but saw it as purely

¹³ Ackermann, *World*, 34.

self-centered and encouraging to individuals do good things only for personal gain. She critically commented that, “The Siamese seem to be a very intelligent people, but their form of worship is anything but in keeping with even an ordinary degree of intellect.”¹⁴ She visited the Siamese “kings idol” and “could not understand how this intelligent man could prostrate himself before that image of stone.”¹⁵ Some years later, the *New York Herald* reported on her tolerant views for what were considered “heathen” religions, “recognizing and respecting those kinds of worship that were apparently so at variance with her own.” Her answer to a comment about a religion worshipping gods of stone, ““oh, well, maybe they see God through the stone.”¹⁶ Her later writings reveal a change of opinion and maturity regarding the tolerance of other religious beliefs. “I believe the future religion of the world will be an individual religion in which every person will worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience.”¹⁷

Ackermann’s writings were informative, humorous, and descriptive. She was critical of perceived wrongs but was not self-serving. She was often very humble and made fun at herself – especially her own attire and size. Ackermann used her prowess at writing and observation to create a second “career” for herself in addition to the work she did as a missionary for the WCTU. Her sharp eye and informative and easy-to-read writing style combined to create vivid descriptions of the people and ways of life she found in the many lands she visited over so many years.

Ackermann showed the world how many women in far-off places lived and how they were treated by the men in their lives, especially native women’s treatment at the hands of white

¹⁴ Ackermann, *World*, 186.

¹⁵ *West Australian* [Perth], August 4, 1892.

¹⁶ *New York Herald*, 1918, Ackermann Papers.

¹⁷ Unnamed Lincoln, Nebraska, newspaper, nd, Ackermann Papers.

men. Ackermann became more vocal throughout her life regarding the conditions in which many of the people of the world lived, including some of those in the West. Her earlier writings read somewhat like a clinical study by an outside observer, interspersed with the occasional exclamation of outrage. However, she became more and more critical about policy, men, and the need for woman suffrage. Willard's philosophy became Jessie Ackermann's who used the "Do Everything" idea as the foundation of a part of her own philosophy. Her life became, in many ways, the epitome of Willard's slogan, "Do Everything." Her "Do Everything" attitude enabled her to focus her energies on the mission at hand but also to provide beautiful, frightening, and engaging narratives about the people and places she visited. Ackermann believed that women's best duty was to study women and to do everything in one's power to make the living conditions of all women better. She, of course, worked for temperance, but she became a voice for girls, widows, wives, laborers, and the uneducated.

Just as the suffrage movement had done, the temperance movement helped move women from the sphere of the home into public life. The WCTU taught women how to present themselves, conduct meetings, give lectures, campaign for political issues, and take action to effect real change. The WCTU took on the slogan that Frances Willard gave it, "Do Everything," and proceeded to create departments and committees that were charged with promoting social purity, rescue work, scientific instruction regarding alcohol, and suffrage. These women of the nineteenth or the twentieth century in many ways tried to "Do Everything" as Willard had mandated. In *Do Everything* Willard told her readers to, "agitate, educate,

organize, these are the deathless watchwords of success.”¹⁸ “The WCTU commanded an army in the nineteenth century, while woman suffrage remained a guerrilla force.”¹⁹

A number of newspaper interviews are very illustrative of Ackermann’s views. A newspaper reporter asked her directly if she was a suffragist; her response, “Am I a suffragist? Yes, I have become convinced through my studies that it must and will come. It is the only way to which certain reforms can be brought about.”²⁰ Ackermann was a tireless worker for temperance, labor, education, and peace. She continued to encourage temperance workers to fight drink but to know that they “should never lose sight of the fact that it was only one of the evils that needed to be combated. At any rate, suffrage is not the only question of importance today; it is only one of many linked together for the bettering of the conditions of women and of the world.”²¹

Ackermann took herself out of the home and made a career for herself. Contrary to the norms of the day, she did not marry, she preached in the church, and she traveled alone into places that were not only inhospitable but dangerous. She did not fear criticizing the powerful and she felt equally at home in a peasant’s hut as in a castle. Ackermann was willing to endure a great deal of physical distress and uncomfortable modes of transportation during her travels. However, her mission and curiosity kept her going. She wrote,

I have just completed a second tour of the world. It covered a period of six years, and during this time I traveled the great distance of one hundred and fifty thousand miles. I was a guest in nearly two thousand homes; all kinds of homes,

¹⁸ Willard, *Do Everything*, 35.

¹⁹ Ellen DuBois, “The Radicalism of the Woman Suffrage Movement: Notes toward the Reconstruction of Nineteenth-Century Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 3 no. 1/2 (Autumn 1975): 68-69, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3518956> (accessed March 26, 2009).

²⁰ “Miss Ackerman Talks about Women’s Progress,” unknown newspaper, nd., Ackermann Papers.

²¹ *New York Herald*, 1918, Ackermann Papers.

rich and poor, high and low – from the palace, government house and castle to the thatched cot of the sturdy farmer, the canvas or tin tent of the miner, and the bark hut of the lumber camp.²²

Ackermann was a student of the world and its people; she was a civilizer, a feminist, a humanist, a temperance worker, a traveler, and a writer. She wrote, “The most cosmopolitan gathering in which I ever found myself was in a crowded steamer starting on a long voyage; better opportunity for studying character is rarely afforded. Is there anything in the world more interesting than the study of our fellow creatures, each cast in a different mold, with such varied characteristics?”²³

²² Ackermann, *World*, 18-19.

²³ *Ibid.*, 257

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VITA

MARGARET SHIPLEY CARR

- Education:** B.S., English, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, 1981
- M.A.L.S., East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN, 2009
- Awards:** Reece Research Award, regarding early education of B. Carroll Reece
- Business Experience:** College of Education, East Tennessee State University, November 2008-
- Alumni Records, University Advancement, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, July 2003 - October 2008
- Carroll Reece Museum, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee, March 1982 - June 2003