
Fallow Yet Fertile: The Field of Indiana Women's History

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If scholars have taught us anything in the last twenty-five years, it is that women's experiences, like men's, have varied widely and that women's history is not a uniform category. Although gender provides same-sex people with shared experiences, it also is affected by other sources of identity such as race, ethnicity, age, marital status, sexual orientation, and class. Writing the history of women in Indiana is therefore an ambitious enterprise. Despite the state's relative ethnic homogeneity, the variety of settlements, occupations, and lifestyles that it encompasses makes generalizations even about white native-born females difficult. And although too-often "invisible" in historical writing and in contemporary society, the state's women of color complicate further any examination of women's history. While there are books and articles on Indiana women's history, generally speaking the subject has received little attention, either from historians whose work focuses on Indiana or from those who have made women's history one of the most significant developments in the discipline in the last quarter century. In contrast to the historiography on women in other states, there exists no body of literature clearly identifiable as the history of women in Indiana.¹ For this and other

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¹Historical studies of women in other states include the following: Suzanne Lebsock, *"A Share of Honour": Virginia Women, 1600-1945* (Richmond, Va., 1984); Genevieve G. McBride, *On Wisconsin Women: Working for Their Rights from Settlement to Suffrage* (Madison, Wis., 1993); Mary R. Murrin, ed., *Women in New Jersey History* (Trenton, N.J., 1985); Joan N. Burstyn, ed., *Past and Promise: Lives of New Jersey Women* (Metuchen, N.J., 1990); Margaret Supplee Smith, *North Carolina Women: Making History* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1999); Fane Downs and Nancy Baker Jones, eds., *Women and Texas History: Selected Essays* (Austin, Tex., 1993); and Mary Martha Thomas, ed., *Stepping Out of the Shadows: Alabama Women, 1819-1990* (Tuscaloosa, Ala., 1995).

reasons, the “field” of Indiana women’s history is both fallow and an area of great promise.

The most comprehensive historical study of Indiana women is *Women of Indiana*, compiled by journalist Blanche Foster Boruff in 1941.² The bulk of the book is a “who’s who” and “who was who” of Hoosier women, as determined by the standards of the day. Introductory essays on Indiana women and women’s organizations precede the biographies of 295 individuals. These essays created the only available outline of Indiana women’s history. Although Boruff and her associates were not, by their own admission, professional historians, their outline has been used frequently since 1941 by writers of both popular and academic histories of Indiana. Beginning about 1800 and focusing on white settlement, Boruff first highlights Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen and then chronicles woman suffrage organizations in Indiana and the organization and development of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the Indiana Federation of Women’s Clubs, the Legislative Council of Indiana Women, Business and Professional Women’s clubs, and the Indiana League of Women Voters. Boruff pays some attention to post-1920 developments, including women’s involvement in the Republican and Democratic parties, and to women’s access to professions such as education, the fine and performing arts, journalism, fiction-writing, the law, nursing, and medicine.

Boruff and her contributors considered themselves amateur historians with a feminist goal. “This resumé of women’s activities in Indiana,” Boruff modestly began, “is not, in any sense, a history.” Aware that historical writing implies critical evaluation, they apologized that their motive in writing the overview essay was “to show the wonderful development women have made during the past fifty years.” With a nod to empiricism, the compilers “endeavored to give accurate facts, but,” they complained, “collecting historical data is difficult. This is especially the case in regard to the work of women, as it has been ignored by historians until recent years.”³ A reference to Mary Ritter Beard—an Indianapolis native and DePauw University graduate—and the small group who pioneered in the research and writing of women’s history, this statement would hold true at least thirty years after it appeared in print.⁴ But with all due respect for

²Blanche Foster Boruff, *Women of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1941).

³*Ibid.*, 8.

⁴The work of this important group includes the following: Elisabeth Anthony Dexter, *Colonial Women of Affairs: Women in Business and the Professions in America before 1776* (Boston, 1931); Julia Cherry Spruill, *Women’s Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1938); Mary Sumner Benson, *Women in Eighteenth-Century America: A Study of Opinion and Social Usage* (New York, 1935); and Mary Ritter Beard, *Woman as Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realities* (New York, 1946; reprint, 1987). See also Bonnie Smith, “The Contribution of Women to Modern Historiography in Great Britain, France, and the United States, 1750–1940,” *American Historical Review*, LXXXIX (June 1984), 709–32; Nancy F. Cott, *A Woman Making History: Mary Ritter Beard Through Her Letters* (New Haven, Conn., 1991).

the challenges that they faced and the work that they accomplished, Boruff and her colleagues evaluated historical significance in ways that narrowed and limited their purportedly general narrative. Women were pioneers who worked "hand in hand with the men, ran the gauntlet of hostile Indians and established homes."⁵ Oblivious to the presence of Native American women, the authors also excluded black women from the list of notable Hoosier women. The compilers were selective in other ways as well. Of the 295 women whose biographies are included (most of whom were alive at the time of writing), a mere handful are Jewish or Catholic and all are decidedly middle-to-upper-class. Moreover, Boruff's interpretive focus on individual biography and the white middle-class experience has not been replaced or eclipsed since its articulation nearly sixty years ago.⁶

Complementing *Women of Indiana* are histories of women's organizations such as the Federation of Women's Clubs, the WCTU, and the League of Women Voters, written by members of their own groups.⁷ Although they collect useful information about the organizations, their goals and purposes, and their leaders and members, these organizational histories are uncritical. They avoid controversy and canonize women leaders. Representatives of the notable woman approach to women's history, they provide little context for their subjects' lives and are more interesting as primary sources than as histories of women in the Hoosier state.⁸

While no comprehensive history of Indiana women has yet appeared, there has been a significant expansion of work in this field, especially since 1970. Whereas Boruff's volume and the histories of Hoosier women's organizations celebrate their subjects, much of this newer research offers a more critical perspective. This essay examines the available scholarship and suggests further opportunities for research and writing. Although works available now offer a broader perspective on and knowledge of the female experience in the state

⁵Boruff, *Women of Indiana*, 11.

⁶The works on black women in Indiana written by Darlene Clark Hine and Emma Lou Thornbrough are exceptions. Hine, *When the Truth is Told: A History of Black Women's Culture and Community in Indiana, 1875-1950* (Indianapolis, 1981); Thornbrough, "The History of Black Women in Indiana," in *Indiana's African-American Heritage: Essays from Black History News & Notes*, ed. Wilma L. Gibbs (Indianapolis, 1993), 67-85.

⁷Grace Gates Courtney, *History, Indiana Federation of Clubs* (Fort Wayne, Ind., 1939); Frances Hendrickson, *Hoosier Heritage 1874-1974: Women's Christian Temperance Union* (n. p., 1974); Katharine Greenough, *A History of the League of Women Voters of Indiana, 1920-1952* (Indianapolis, 1977); Caroline McMath Goodwin, *History of the Indiana League of Women Voters during World War II, 1941-1945* (Indianapolis, 1946).

⁸On the historiography of the field see Gerda Lerner, "Placing Women in History: Definitions and Challenges," *Feminist Studies*, III (Fall 1975), 5-14; Linda Gordon, "U. S. Women's History," in *The New American History*, ed. Eric Foner (Philadelphia, 1990), 185-210; and Mari Jo Buhle, "Feminist Approaches to Social History," in *Encyclopedia of American Social History*, ed. Mary Cayton et al. (New York, 1993), 319-33.

than those of thirty years ago, there is much more we could and should know. What is needed is research that complicates, modernizes, and extends the narrative established sixty years ago.

The history of women in Indiana's frontier period remains a barren landscape. There is no study that focuses specifically on women in Indiana before the early 1800s. Boruff and the other white middle-class women who established the standard historical narrative projected themselves self-centeredly (if unconsciously) backward through time and sought their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century origins not in North America but in the British Isles and western Europe. They overlooked the Indian peoples who were displaced by whites from France and England. If Boruff and her colleagues thought about Native Americans at all, it was as an undifferentiated male mass. Yet, as Andrew Cayton reminds us in his recent survey of frontier Indiana, Indian tribes were "the masters of Indiana in the first half of the eighteenth century."⁹ Moreover, by the mid-eighteenth century the territory contained a multicultural world, populated by the Miami and other Indians, French families in Vincennes, British land speculators and traders, and Anglo-American farmers, all living on land along the banks of the Wabash River and its tributaries.¹⁰

Women's place in this middle ground warrants greater attention. Scholars debate about the extent to which the experience of European colonization undermined native women's power relative to men. European settlement in North America heightened the importance of native men's activities as hunters, traders, warriors, and diplomats, and this prompted a general and pervasive shift to patridominance. The American Midwest, however, may have seen an exception to this historical trend. In her analysis of the Mandan, Omaha, and Fox, semisedentary village tribes in what we now know as North Dakota, Kansas, and Wisconsin, Tanis C. Thorne argues that the experiences of native women in the Midwest differed from that of women in other regions. She emphasizes that midwestern tribespeople had "relatively gender-balanced economies and ideologies." Native American women also actively participated in intertribal as well as European trade from the mid-1600s to the mid-1800s. Thorne also questions the widely held view that marriages between white men and native women were a form of racial bondage and female commodification. She instead highlights the role of native women "as cultural brokers and political intermediaries" and speculates that this "public responsibility . . . was perhaps more highly developed in the Midwest than elsewhere. . . ." Lucy Eldersveld Murphy argues similarly. Examining the Fox and Sauk in Wisconsin and Illinois, Mur-

⁹Andrew Cayton, *Frontier Indiana* (Bloomington, Ind., 1996), 6.

¹⁰For the prestatehood period see John D. Barnhart and Dorothy L. Riker, *Indiana to 1816: The Colonial Period*. Vol. I: *The History of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1971).

phy finds that native women's domination of agriculture and mining offered them independence as well as power and influence.¹¹

Although no one has examined gender roles and relations among the native groups along the Wabash River, evidence suggests that similar dynamics obtained there. Many Indian tribes lived in the area that would become Indiana, but the most important were the Miami. Like other Indian groups, the Miami had a strict gender division of labor; at the same time they offered women a degree of respect and equality that was ordinarily denied European women. Indian women not only bore, cared for, and socialized children, made clothes, and prepared meals, but they were also agriculturists with responsibility for the cultivation and distribution of crops. Women's control of crops and the frequent absences of men to hunt, fish, trade, and fight offered women power and influence that offset or balanced male power and privilege. The Miami divided themselves into clans based on patrilineal kinship ties, but they also had female chiefs who were in charge of feasts, collecting supplies for war parties, and negotiating the end of long-standing feuds.

Marriages between native women and European men acquire a different significance when women's power is taken into account. Although native villages remained fairly segregated from the French, British, and Americans, some relationships among them did develop. In the eighteenth century at French posts such as Ouiatenon, Kekionga, and Vincennes, the most important of these were between French males—traders and officials—and Algonquian women. These relationships were often both economic and diplomatic alliances, and formal marriages were performed according to the customs of the Indians. Both groups benefited from these relationships. On the one hand, they gave Frenchmen entry into village society, which required that they have both companions and trading partners; and on the

¹¹Tanis C. Thorne, "For the Good of Her People: Continuity and Change for Native Women of the Midwest, 1650–1850," in *Midwestern Women: Work, Community, and Leadership at the Crossroads*, ed. Lucy Eldersveld Murphy and Wendy Hamand Venet (Bloomington, Ind., 1997), 95–120; Murphy, "To Live Among Us: Accommodation, Gender, and Conflict in the Western Great Lakes Region, 1760–1832," in *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750–1830*, ed. Andrew R. L. Cayton and Fredrika Teute (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998), 270–303; Murphy, "Autonomy and the Economic Roles of Indian Women of the Fox-Wisconsin Riverway Region, 1763–1832," in *Negotiators of Change: Historical Perspectives on Native American Women*, ed. Nancy Shoemaker (New York, 1995), 72–89. For analyses of the impact of colonization on native women and information about Native American women in Indiana before removal see Mona Etienne and Eleanor Leacock, eds., *Women and Colonization: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York, 1980); Sylvia Van Kirk, *Many Tender Ties: Women in the Fur-Trade Society, 1670–1870* (Norman, Okla., 1980); Nancy Shoemaker, "Introduction," in Shoemaker, ed., *Negotiators of Change*, 1–25; Carol Devens, *Countering Colonization: Native American Women and Great Lakes Missions, 1630–1900* (Berkeley, Calif., 1992); and Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, U.K., 1991).

other hand, they offered Indian women greater influence and privileges for themselves and their kin.¹²

British and American traders and officials also married Indian women; indeed, this is how native women most often have found their way into observers' reports and historians' accounts. John Lauritz Larson and David G. Vanderstel tell the story of William Conner, a fur trader turned land agent, who married a Delaware woman named Mekinges in 1802. Describing Conner as an "agent of empire" whose "story reveals . . . the central role of enterprise as the primary constant in a frontier life that offered wrenching changes," Larson and Vanderstel criticize their subject for taking an Indian wife to advance his own career: Conner helped to negotiate the removal of the Delaware from the state and then coldly bade Mekinges farewell as she and her people were driven from Indiana to Missouri. Within four months of the removal of his Indian wife and children from the region, Conner married a white woman and subsequently never mentioned his first wife or their children. While evidence of Conner's intent is scant—he left no written statements about his feelings for his first wife and her removal—Larson's and Vanderstel's sophisticated analysis is compelling. Yet at the same time, we learn little about Mekinges. If Thorne, Murphy, and others are right, there may be another personal narrative here worth reconstructing.¹³

¹²Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 7-8. We also know too little about the French in Indiana. The French who settled Vincennes in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries followed different gender systems than those of the Indians. But French law regarding the protection of family property and the frequent absence of husbands gave Frenchwomen much the same kind of power and influence that Miami women enjoyed. Treatments of Frenchwomen in North America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries include the following: *ibid.*, 49-50; Winstanley Briggs, "The Enhanced Status of Women in French Colonial Illinois," in *The Quiet Heritage: Proceedings from a Conference on the Contributions of the French to the Upper Midwest*, ed. Clarence A. Glasrud (Moorhead, Minn., 1987); Susan C. Boyle, "Did She Generally Decide? Women in Ste. Genevieve, 1750-1805," *William and Mary Quarterly*, XLIV (October 1987), 775-89; and Joseph L. Peyser, "The Fall and Rise of Thérèse Catin: A Portrait from Indiana's French and Canadian History," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XCI (December 1995), 361-77. Bridgett Williams-Searle's dissertation-in-progress will tell us much more about gender, ethnicity, and race in Indiana in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. See Williams-Searle, "Resolving the Revolution: African-American Women and the Restructuring of Civil Society in Indiana, 1778-1825" (paper in author's possession, presented at the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, University of Rochester, Rochester, N. Y., June 5, 1999).

¹³John Lauritz Larson and David G. Vanderstel, "Agent of Empire: William Conner on the Indiana Frontier, 1800-1855," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXX (December 1984), 301-28, quote on p. 303. William Wells is another intermediary worthy of further investigation. Born in 1770, Wells was captured by a party of Miamis in Kentucky in 1784. He became a Miami warrior and married a daughter of Little Turtle. But Wells shifted back-and-forth between Miami and American societies, serving as an army scout and Indian agent for the United States government and as a leader of the Miami; he also abandoned his wife and children for long stretches of time. After his Miami wife died, Wells married a white woman. See Paul A. Hutton, "William Wells: Frontier Scout and Indian Agent," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXIV (September 1978), 183-222.

The story of William Conner and Mekinges, however, also suggests the extent to which this once-multicultural region changed after the 1760s as first the British and then American officials and Hoosier settlers asserted themselves. French policy, based on mutual economic advantage, pursued cooperation and persuasion rather than exploitation or coercion of Indian allies. American policy, by contrast, was to acquire land for colonization and development by Americans and to remove Indians. Americans accomplished their goals in stages, at first offering Indians cash annuities, land allotments, gifts, salt, the elimination of debts claimed by traders, and acculturation of Indians to a new way of life—in return for land. Hence, as Cayton explains, Indian villages became home “to peoples feeling the full effects of spatial, ecological, and cultural dislocation. Virtually everything in Indian society was at issue, from gender roles to the power of shamans to the role of hunting.”¹⁴

Over the years, Native American men’s work became increasingly difficult. Settlers reduced the size of forests, diminishing the population of beavers and deer, while European conflicts curtailed the market for furs and skins. Indian men, nevertheless, would not farm, because to them it was women’s work; the Potawatomi and Miami refused to become, like whites, a society of sedentary farm families. It was, moreover, only a matter of time before they were forced to leave Indiana. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the Miami and the Delaware surrendered their claims to southern Indiana. In the twenty years following the War of 1812, these tribes and the Potawatomi gave up the northern half as well. By 1840, only the Miami were left as an intact tribe wholly within Indiana.

The impact on Native American gender roles and relations of the Indians’ transition from fur traders to land traders and of the increased presence of a white pioneer population in northern Indiana warrants greater attention. In his book on the Miami in Indiana, Stewart Rafert opens several promising lines of inquiry into the history of Native Americans in Indiana in the post-Revolutionary years. Rafert notes that tribal population declined by two-thirds in one generation because of increased disease, violence, and desertion, and that most of the losses were men. This in turn, he argues, had two separate but related consequences for women. First, the unbalanced sex ratio further weakened the tribe by encouraging women’s out-marriage. Secondly, it also tended to raise the status of women, many of whom now preserved tribal culture, remaining in their cabins and fields, going out little, and speaking only the Miami language. The importance of the subject and the availability of primary sources make this a promising project.¹⁵

¹⁴Cayton, *Frontier Indiana*, 200.

¹⁵Stewart Rafert, *The Miami Indians of Indiana: A Persistent People, 1654–1994* (Indianapolis, 1996). See also Rafert, “Ozashshinwah: A Miami Woman’s Life,” *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History* (hereafter, *Traces*), IV (Spring 1992), 4–11.

While white male pioneer experience in Indiana has been studied frequently, the daily lives of the white women who settled here remain beclouded and distorted. As a result, the role of pioneer women has long been highly romanticized and to some extent fictionalized. As Barbara Steinson notes in her review of the historiography of rural Indiana, "the settlement era has generated a substantial corpus of 'hardy pioneer' literature."¹⁶ The characterization of the female settler in *Women of Indiana* as "the pioneer mother [whose] courageous heart and undimmed vision gave life to the founding of our commonwealth" is typical.¹⁷ At its best, this approach can provide useful and suggestive information: Logan Esarey's *The Indiana Home*, for example, is more than just a charming evocation of life in early Indiana. The essays, found after his death in 1942, were written both as lectures and as entertainments and memoirs for his grandchildren; they offer vivid descriptions of women's work—swapping seeds, dropping corn, washing wool, caring for poultry. But many details remain undeveloped, undocumented, and unverified.¹⁸

The prospects for a revision of our knowledge about the female experience in antebellum Indiana improved somewhat in the early 1970s. In a suggestive essay published in 1971, John Modell argued that families, not self-sufficient frontiersmen, "provided the basic element of social structure on the frontier." Analyzing punchcard transcriptions of entries by household in the census enumerators' manuscripts for Indiana in 1820, Modell found that family structure was overwhelmingly nuclear in all areas on the Indiana frontier. "The family," Modell concluded, "passed almost intact to the Old Northwest frontier."¹⁹ Modell's essay was part of a trend in frontier studies challenging Frederick Jackson Turner and his disciples. Studies of communities, such as John Mack Faragher's *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie*, confirmed and reinforced Modell's discovery.²⁰ Like Modell, Faragher emphasized the role of kinship groups in settling Illinois, and his strategy naturally integrated women into the narrative. Unfortunately, no one has used *Sugar Creek* as a model for a detailed local study of rural life in Indiana during the period of settlement. Older studies tended either to overlook women or to speak sentimentally about them. Esarey's evocation of the sturdy pioneer woman's life seems to have been based largely on his imagination. Published in the same period, R. Carlyle Buley's Pulitzer prize-winning *The Old Northwest* reads as though everyone in the territory had

¹⁶Barbara J. Steinson, "Rural Life in Indiana, 1800–1950," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XC (September 1994), 206.

¹⁷Boruff, *Women of Indiana*, 11.

¹⁸Logan Esarey, *The Indiana Home* (Bloomington, Ind., 1953).

¹⁹John Modell, "Family and Fertility on the Indiana Frontier, 1820," *American Quarterly*, XXIII (December 1971), 615–34.

²⁰John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven, Conn., 1986).



"SARAH ELKINS FEEDING CHICKENS, ELKINSVILLE," JULY 16, 1929,
PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANK M. HOHENBERGER

Courtesy, The Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

been male. "The pioneer's world was essentially a man's world," Buley asserted in 1950. But Buley at least occasionally integrated women into his narrative, particularly in his discussion of the settlers' "self-sufficient domestic economy," which, he admitted, "was left largely to the women."²¹ A more recent study pays even less attention to women. In his 1998 survey of Indiana from 1816 to 1850, Donald Carmony devotes a disappointing three of 632 pages to women.²² By narrowing questions about women's lives as pioneers to the problem of "morality and abuses," Carmony ignores the work of scholars who have enriched western and frontier history in the past two decades by examining the diverse experiences of women.²³

²¹R. Carlyle Buley, *The Old Northwest: Pioneer Period, 1815-1840* (2 vols., 1950; reprint, Bloomington, Ind., 1964) I, 202, 222, 315.

²²Donald F. Carmony, *Indiana, 1816-1850: The Pioneer Era*. Vol. II: *The History of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1998), 77-79, 656n.

²³For this literature see Joan Jensen and Darlis Miller, "Gentle Tamers Revisited: New Approaches to the History of Women in the American West," *Pacific Historical Review*, XLIX (May 1980), 173-214; Glenda Riley, *The Female Frontier: A Comparative View of Women on the Prairie and the Plains* (Lawrence, Kans., 1988); Elizabeth Jameson, "Towards a Multicultural History of Women in the Western United States," *Signs*, XIII (Summer 1988), 761-91; Elizabeth Jameson and Susan Armitage, eds., *The Women's West* (Norman, Okla., 1987); and Jameson and Armitage, eds., *Writing the Range: Race, Class, and Culture in the Women's West* (Norman, Okla., 1997).

Despite the absence of a social history of rural life in early Indiana, historians have begun to study white Indiana women during the frontier and early statehood eras, and Turner has influenced these historians of women on the frontier just as forcefully as he influenced historians of men. These works raise questions about the significance of the frontier for women: did the frontier liberate women from their dependent and inferior status, or did it reinforce gender inequality? Did the demands of settlement and new community-building encourage greater gender equality? Did settlement conditions mitigate, modify, or undermine the trend toward the separation of men's and women's spheres evident in the East in the nineteenth century? Published work on Indiana women in this period tends to address these questions indirectly. Like frontier studies that look primarily at men, they focus on Turnerian notions of democracy, individualism, and the ordering of society through the development of political, social, and economic institutions, while they also highlight women's role in community- and institution-building. Although voteless, women engaged in politics, founded charities, and operated boardinghouses. While it is interesting and promising, this work is still in early stages.

The life of Eliza Julia Flower offers an example of the frontier experience that challenges more conventional views. In their biography of her, Janet Walker and Richard Burkhardt deem Flower "no ordinary woman," but it is the ways in which she reflected "ordinary" life that make her so compelling. Eliza's story offers evidence of the gap between the ideology of female dependence and passivity and the practice of female activism, particularly, perhaps, on the Indiana and midwestern frontier.²⁴

Eliza Andrews Flower was an English emigrant who married George Flower in 1817 in Vincennes, while en route to southern Illinois. With Morris Birkbeck, the Flowers founded the English Settlement in Edwards County. An antislavery activist, George Flower was a close associate of Frances Wright and overseer (1825–1826) at Nashoba, her experimental community near Memphis, Tennessee. Daughter of a minister, Eliza challenged gender conventions in her teens by disguising herself as a man to gain admittance to the House of Commons. She married Flower nearly twenty years before he was formally divorced from his first wife and had fourteen children with him. Both the Flowers also were well acquainted with Robert Owen, his son Robert Dale Owen, and the reform community at New Harmony, and they were central figures in the establishment and failure of Wright's colony. When the Flowers lost their money and property

²⁴Janet R. Walker and Richard W. Burkhardt, *Eliza Julia Flower: Letters of an English Gentlewoman—Life on the Illinois-Indiana Frontier, 1817–1861* (Muncie, Ind., 1991). For the life of a less privileged woman settler in central Indiana see David L. Kimbrough, "Malinda Clark Slawson Pugh," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XCIV (March 1998), 29–38.

after 1837, Eliza became the principal breadwinner of the family, running inns in Graysville, Illinois, New Harmony, Indiana, and Mt. Vernon, Indiana, while George gardened and wrote.

The challenge in writing Eliza Julia Flower's biography, as it so often is with other women, is in part a lack of sources. Flower's surviving manuscripts are few, although high in quality. The twelve letters she wrote to a nephew between 1833 and 1837 reveal her as intelligent, shrewd, and hard-working, and they richly detail life on the Illinois prairie. Flower's correspondence expresses her love for her husband and children and offers insight into child-rearing practices. It also illuminates the character of economic life in Illinois and Indiana in the 1830s–1850s. Actively involved in the family's financial and business affairs, Eliza served as “deputy husband” during George's extended absences; “I am Master, Mistress, Servant—in short *Factotum*,” she explained during one of his trips. Two letters in 1844 to a creditor and two to her sons in 1858 and 1859 reflect her growing preoccupation with financial matters after the couple fell on hard times, and they underscore the economic instability of the middle period. Taken together they offer a view of women's experience in early Indiana that challenges the conventional narrative.

Until recently, the role of women in the antebellum Indiana economy has received little attention. For example, while Esarey and Buley describe the way in which preparing wool for market, a woman's task, provided either cash or barter, they do not examine women's place in the economy of the frontier and settlement period. But in her 1997 dissertation Anita Ashendel demonstrates that from the beginning of frontier settlement, women like Eliza Flower were part of the merchant community. They developed economic ties with western travelers and eastern merchants, dealt with currency and barter and unpaid bills, and routinely transacted business with men. Although women's economic history was “largely submerged in the history of family business and pioneer struggles to settle the Ohio Valley,” Ashendel explains, women's business activities shed important light on the history of Indiana. Ashendel is interested not only in how women merchants supported themselves and their families, but also in how they came to view the market, “which was then defined as male, but controlled by no one,” as an arena for self-definition and self-determination. To be sure, Ashendel focuses on businesswomen. Had she looked at wage-earning women, she would have been less likely to argue that the market revolution fostered personal independence even for women. But her study is a significant advance over the work of the past.²⁵

²⁵Anita Ashendel, “She is the Man of the Concern: Entrepreneurial Women in the Ohio Valley, 1790–1860” (Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, 1997). Ashendel uses census data, newspapers, probate records, court orderbooks, account books, credit reports, and county commissioner records as well as manuscript collections and

Another approach to integrating women into the history of early Indiana is to examine the many utopian communities in the state before 1850. Challenging conventions (including gender) and emphasizing equality among individuals regardless of rank or sex, utopians in theory offered women freedom from established norms. Robert Owen's colony at New Harmony is the most prominent example. Having experimented with reform at his New Lanark mills in Great Britain, Owen purchased the Rappite community's buildings at Harmony in Indiana in 1824 to establish a "Community of Equality" according to the principles of communitarian socialism. Focusing on gender ideology and gender relations, Carol Kolmerten reexamines the utopian communities established by Owen and his followers in the East and Midwest.²⁶ Kolmerten finds in the backgrounds, ideas, and actions of the residents some potentially promising material for creating gender equality. All women were guaranteed the right to vote in public meetings; women were encouraged to wear practical, unrestrictive clothing; boys and girls were supposed to be taught the same subjects; and marriage was to be a partnership of equals.

Yet by 1828, all the Owenite communities disbanded. Kolmerten indicates many reasons for this: economic problems, the lack of cohesion among strangers, the splintering of the settlers, conflict among reformers living at New Harmony, and Owen's inability or refusal to provide leadership. More damaging, Kolmerten argues, were conflicts among the residents over the promise of equality and its limited application. Because the settlers were not required to renounce all their property before joining the communities, some owned more than others; and the evidence of economic inequality clashed with the principle of communal equality. Of even greater consequence, Kolmerten contends, was the persistence of gender inequality: girls and boys did not receive the same education; the political rights of women were limited; and women were regarded as not only different from but inferior to men by nature. Moreover, married women—like men—were expected to perform work for the community; but—unlike men—they were also to continue to assume all responsibility for the care of their own families. The "Community of Equality" actually

contemporary literature in her analysis. For women wage earners see Ashendel, "Fabricating Independence: Industrial Labor in Antebellum Indiana," *Michigan Historical Review*, XXIII (Fall 1997), 1-24; David Schob, *Hired Hands and Plowboys: Farm Labor in the Midwest, 1815-60* (Urbana, Ill., 1975), 191-208; and Robert V. Robinson and Ann-Marie Wahl, "Industrial Employment and Wages of Women, Men, and Children in a Nineteenth Century City: Indianapolis, 1850-1880," *American Sociological Review*, LV (December 1990), 912-28. On women as school teachers in the antebellum period see Kathleen A. Murphey, "Schooling, Teaching, and Change in Nineteenth-Century Fort Wayne, Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XCIV (March 1998), 1-28; Polly Welts Kaufman, *Women Teachers on the Frontier* (New Haven, Conn., 1984).

²⁶Carol Kolmerten, *Women in Utopia: The Ideology of Gender in the American Owenite Communities* (Bloomington, Ind., 1990).

increased women's burden to produce for others. Female discontent, Kolmerten contends, was a significant factor in the decision of settlers to leave the communities and thus in the ultimate demise of New Harmony and the other sites.

Making effective use of women's private writings as well as men's accounts, Kolmerten demonstrates the centrality of gender in the history of the communities and, by extension, of all communal reform movements. The material she has gathered about communities in the 1820s and in succeeding decades as a second generation experimented with utopias suggests how widely discussed and contested nineteenth-century gender ideology—the view that the sexes were inherently different and unequal and women's place was in the domestic sphere—was in America. Kolmerten emphasizes the uniqueness of the Owenite communities' pledge of gender equality in a period when the power of patriarchy was seemingly immutable (as the sad story of Frances Wright, told in a separate chapter, is meant to demonstrate); but between 1820 and 1850 gender ideology was in flux outside as well as inside the Owenite communities. Greater consideration of the tone and content of cultural engagement with gender ideology in those years throughout Indiana—in and out of reform-minded communities—would not only widen our perspective on women in the state but also situate the region in broader context.

Women's involvement in politics and other more conventional reform organizations in the antebellum period offers additional opportunities for assessing the effect of the frontier on gender and women. In view of the attention the topic has received elsewhere, it is surprising that no historian of Indiana has looked closely at women's role in the temperance movement in the state.²⁷ Nor have scholars examined women's role in party politics in this era, although there is a growing literature on women in the political history of the antebellum period.²⁸ Women's involvement in antislavery activity in the state

²⁷For women and temperance before 1860 in Indiana see Emma Lou Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era, 1850–1880*. Vol. III: *The History of Indiana* (Indianapolis, 1992), 31n; and Charles E. Canup, "Temperance Movements and Legislation in Indiana," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XVI (March 1920), 3–37. For women and temperance in other states in this period see Ruth M. Alexander, "We Are Engaged as a Band of Sisters': Class and Domesticity in the Washingtonian Temperance Movement, 1840–1850," *Journal of American History*, LXXV (December 1988), 763–85; Barbara Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America* (Middletown, Conn., 1980); and Jack S. Blocker, Jr., *American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform* (Boston, 1989).

²⁸For recent analyses of other states see Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, "Whig Women, Politics, and Culture in the Campaign of 1840: Three Perspectives from Massachusetts," *Journal of the Early Republic*, XVII (Summer 1997), 277–315; Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to be Counted: White Women & Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998); Nicole Etcheson, "Labouring for the Freedom of This Territory': Free-State Kansas Women in the 1850s," *Kansas History*, XXI (Summer 1998), 68–87; Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825–1880* (Baltimore, Md., 1990); and Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York, 1995).

has received some consideration.²⁹ But by far the greatest attention has been paid to the state's women's rights movement. To some extent, the treatment of Indiana's female reformers hews closely to the narrative established in *Women of Indiana* in 1941, which was dominated by Robert Dale Owen.³⁰ Yet some recent scholarship has begun to move beyond this approach to provide more information on the movement's rank and file and local leaders.

In her survey of Indiana history between 1850 and 1880, Emma Lou Thornbrough offered what has become the standard treatment of the Indiana women's rights movement. Thornbrough described the state constitutional convention of 1850–1851, in which Owen proposed a revised married women's property rights law, prompting attacks by traditionalist opponents and attracting support from women who publicly dissociated themselves from woman suffrage advocates. Consequently, "a more militant group of women" organized the first woman's rights association in the state and one of the earliest in the nation. At a Quaker antislavery meeting in Greensboro, Henry County, in January 1851, Amanda Way proposed "that we call a Woman's Rights Convention, and that a committee be now appointed to make the necessary arrangements." Calling upon "all the friends of self government and human equality," organizers Way, Mary Thomas, Agnes Cook, and Owen met in Richmond on October 14, 1851, and established a Women's Rights Association (WRA). Thornbrough's survey of the WRA's goals and purposes, founders, leaders, and activities in the 1850s drew upon—and drew attention to—the association's records at the Indiana Historical Society, the popular press, and legislative reports.³¹

²⁹Peggy Brase Seigel, "Moral Champions and Public Pathfinders: Antebellum Quaker Women in Eastcentral Indiana," *Quaker History*, LXXXI (Fall 1992), 87–106; Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1998).

³⁰Most of those who have examined the movement date its public appearance to Robert Dale Owen and the 1850–1851 state constitutional convention. Owen submitted a resolution giving married women the right to acquire and possess property for their sole use and disposal and to secure for married women all property that they owned before or acquired after marriage. This resolution was defeated by one vote. Owen's modified resolution, which guaranteed to women their real and personal property, passed by a margin of seven votes on the first ballot but failed on the second ballot. Owen tried and failed twice more, although the votes were close. Owen's effort to reform the state's married women's property rights law was, of course, not unique. The trend toward such reform was well established in other states by 1850. But none of the scholars who accord Owen the role of women's movement founder have sought to place the Indiana effort in a national context. On married women's property rights see Michael Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1985); Norma Basch, *In the Eyes of the Law: Women, Marriage, and Property in Nineteenth Century New York* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982); and Carole Shammas, "Re-assessing the Married Women's Property Acts," *Journal of Women's History*, VI (Spring 1994), 9–30.

³¹Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era*, 34–37.

Her claim that the women's rights movement "had relatively little popular support" and that, in contrast to the antislavery and temperance movements, "the woman's rights movement had little impact upon Indiana politics" has not been challenged.³² While Peggy Brase Seigel goes further than Thornbrough in examining the principal leaders and members of the WRA, she, too, minimizes their impact and significance. Seigel argues that the progression of women from antislavery organizations into women's rights activism, so well established for the East, is harder to document for Indiana. Seigel acknowledges that leaders such as Way participated in both antislavery work and woman's rights meetings. But she also notes that the names of most of the leaders of the Henry County Female Antislavery Society do not appear in records of the WRA. Seigel suggests that Indiana was different from eastern states, citing "Indiana's isolation from Eastern reformers . . . [and] Eastcentral Indiana's strong Quaker agrarian subculture." WRA's ineffectiveness, Seigel therefore implies, was due in part to its lack of integration into the antislavery reform network in Indiana.³³

Similarly, Pat Creech Scholten finds precedents in the 1840s for the WRA actions after 1850. Nonetheless, in her detailed discussion of the association's promotion of a women's property rights reform bill and a woman suffrage resolution during the 1859 Indiana state assembly, she emphasizes the strongly negative response to the bill and petition. Relying principally on newspaper coverage of the petition in the Indianapolis *Indiana Weekly State Journal*, Cincinnati *Daily Gazette*, Indianapolis *Indiana Daily State Sentinel*, and Indiana *House Journal* and *Senate Journal*, Scholten points out that the speeches made by Mary Birdsall, Agnes Cook, and Mary Thomas were consistent with other women's rights texts of the 1850s, thus establishing national context for the state story. But the negative response to the bill and petition prompts Scholten to conclude, as Thornbrough did earlier, that there was scant support for gender equality in Indiana in the 1850s.³⁴ However, it could be argued that the public political rejection of legal equality did not necessarily mean there was no social support for gender equality in Indiana in the 1850s. Nor does the failure of the petition drive in 1859 prove that women did not engage in politics before the Civil War or that gender was not an engaging political idea. Studies in other states reveal the fruitfulness of examining how gender and equality were understood in cultural as well as political terms in Indiana before the Civil War.

The questions of how Indiana's gender politics were typical or unique warrant further reflection and research. There is evidence

³²*Ibid.*

³³Seigel, "Moral Champions and Public Pathfinders," quotation on p. 87.

³⁴Pat Creech Scholten, "A Public 'Jollification': The 1859 Women's Rights Petition before the Indiana Legislature," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXII (December 1976), 347-59.

that Indiana not only resembled other states but that the WRA's leaders were well connected to activists in the East. Like the delegates at the first women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848, who refused to endorse woman suffrage, the members of the WRA did not do so until an 1853 meeting attended by Frances Gage. The group, which met annually during the 1850s in Richmond and Indianapolis, used a Cincinnati journal (*Genius of Liberty*) published by Elizabeth Aldrich as its organ, further suggesting an eastern orientation and network connections with Ohio. Notable, too, was the decision of Birdsall and Thomas to bring *The Lily*, a New York woman suffrage newspaper, to Richmond (Birdsall bought it from the well-known Amelia Bloomer).

But there is also evidence of the WRA's independence and uniqueness. Unlike eastern groups, the WRA emphasized women's economic independence in its 1850s resolutions and platforms, calling, for example, for laws to eliminate the "political, religious, legal, and pecuniary [disabilities] to which women as a class are subjected and from which results so much misery, degradation and crime." Echoing others who participated in the movement in the 1850s, the Indiana group endorsed "the idea of the equality of the sexes" and sought to banish "the idea of inferiority and superiority of the sexes." The WRA, however, not only called for the abolition of discriminatory state laws, but also urged women "everywhere . . . to fit [themselves] in early life for some useful and lucrative employment" and called for equal pay for equal work.

The Indiana women's rights group's concern with female independence is not unique among women's rights activists before the Civil War, but it is unlike the agendas of other states' meetings and conventions in the decade. Drawing together newspapers, including the feminist *The Lily* and WRA's and other reform platforms from the 1850s, Ashendel speculates that this unusual emphasis on wage earning reflects the volatility of economic development in the Ohio Valley compared to that in more developed areas in the East. Ashendel also links WRA's emphasis on independence and equality to the experiences of leaders like Thomas (a physician) and Way (a schoolteacher turned minister) as "entrepreneurs." "This emphasis on women's employment in commercial enterprises," Ashendel concludes, "is fitting not only given the individual backgrounds of local woman's rights advocates but also [given] the circumstances that stimulated the growth of the Ohio Valley."³⁵ Work along these lines extends our knowledge, moves beyond the conventional narrative of hardy but quite Victorian heroines of the prairie, and facilitates integration of the Indiana story into a national political, social, and economic context.

³⁵Ashendel, "Entrepreneurial Women," 144.

The terrain of women's history for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is more varied than that of the earlier period. Yet, to mix the metaphor, there are still gaping holes in our knowledge. We know most about the organizational and political activity of middle-class white and black women. Indiana women, like those throughout the United States, moved purposefully into the public sphere during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era in numbers so great that they were called collectively "the woman movement," a term that embraced apolitical women as well as suffragists. In Indiana, the all-female WCTU claimed more than 5,000 members in 1900. When the Indiana State Federation of Clubs formed in 1906, it brought together 185 clubs with a membership of 7,000 women. African American women, who were excluded from white women's organizations, also were active. Between 1880 and 1920, more than 3,000 black women participated in nearly 500 women's church and secular clubs in Indianapolis alone. With some exceptions, much of this information about Hoosier women's public engagement comes from biographical studies of a few leaders rather than from examination of women's collective actions. Because of this "notable woman" approach, scholars have neither placed women's involvement in the public sphere into a broader context nor evaluated the extent to which it changes what is known about politics or society in Indiana.

Several biographical studies of prominent Indiana women help establish the outline if not the substance of a history of women in the state after the Civil War. Robert Kriebel's biography of Helen Gougar, for example, offers insight into women's relationship to politics at the end of the nineteenth century. Born in Hillsdale, Michigan, in 1843, Gougar followed her brother and three uncles to Lafayette in 1860. There she began teaching. She was named principal of the public school in 1863, the same year in which she married Lafayette attorney John Gougar. They had no children, but she gave up teaching after the spring of 1864. Helen Gougar became involved in the temperance movement in the 1870s, serving as a speaker for the cause. In November 1878, she began a weekly column in the Lafayette *Courier*; between 1881 and 1885 she owned and operated the weekly *Our Herald*. Gougar claimed that she was converted to woman suffrage upon learning about the death of a mother of four in 1878 from domestic violence. "I had been a member of a small temperance society. . .," she confessed in an 1882 account. "I believed in praying away the evil. But I became convinced that the best way was to vote it away!" Gougar became, as she put it, "a fanatic on both subjects."³⁶

While Kriebel recapitulates Lafayette newspaper reports of Gougar's comings and goings and her articles and lectures, he offers

³⁶Robert C. Kriebel, *Where the Saints Have Trod: The Life of Helen Gougar* (West Lafayette, Ind., 1985), 53.

no analysis of Helen Gougar's place in history—her work for woman suffrage and temperance, her impact on Gilded Age politics regionally and nationally, and her significance for women's history. What is apparent from his biography of her, however, is Gougar's commitment to gender equality, her prickly relationships with woman suffrage leaders, and her independence. Gougar's importance in state politics and her national and financial success as an orator are also evident—though only implicitly—in Kriebel's biography.

Temperance and woman suffrage were strongly linked issues in Indiana in the 1880s and 1890s, which helps explain the influence that Gougar—and by implication, other women—had in Indiana politics. Gougar at first stumped for temperance and woman suffrage as a Republican; but when the state and national GOP rejected her effort to include woman suffrage and temperance in the party platform in 1888, Gougar switched her allegiance to the Prohibition party, which endorsed woman suffrage. In the 1890s, Gougar persisted in supporting the Prohibition party, though other suffragists preferred nonpartisanship. Gougar's "drift into third-party politics" ended her friendship with the eminent Indiana feminist May Wright Sewall and strained her relations with friends and allies like Susan B. Anthony. Representing the Indiana Suffrage Association, Gougar also sued the Lafayette election board, which denied her the right to vote in the November 1894 election. She was unsuccessful, but her suit raised the issue and importance of woman suffrage in the state.³⁷

Gougar was only one of many Hoosier women active in politics in the Gilded Age. Zerelda Wallace, Sewall, Ida Husted Harper, and Grace Julian Clarke were all well known, not just in Indiana political circles but in national politics as well. While there have been several biographical articles written on these women, they are limited in scope.³⁸ How did these women and the institutions they led affect

³⁷On the woman suffrage movement in Indiana after 1860 see Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era*, 258-61, 284; Clifton J. Phillips, *Indiana in Transition: The Emergence of an Industrial Commonwealth, 1880-1920* (Indianapolis, 1968), 498-502; Barbara A. Springer, "Ladylike Reformers: Indiana Women and Progressive Reform, 1900-1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1985); Janice Marie La Flamme, "The Strategy of Feminine Protest: A Rhetorical Study of the Campaign for Woman's Rights in Indiana, 1881" (M.A. thesis, Indiana University, 1968); L. Alene Sloan, "Some Aspects of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Indiana" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ball State University, 1982); and Tatjana Bürgener, "Angels May Be Devils: The Women's Suffrage Movement in Indiana, 1851-1920" (M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1991).

³⁸Susan Vogelgesang, "Zerelda Wallace: Indiana's Conservative Radical," *Traces*, IV (Summer 1992); Clifton Phillips, "Zerelda Wallace," in Edward T. James, ed., *Notable American Women 1607-1950*, (3 vols., Cambridge, Mass., 1971), III, 535-36; Jane Stephens, "May Wright Sewall: An Indiana Reformer," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXVIII (December 1982), 273-95; Phillips, "May Wright Sewall" in *Notable American Women*, III, 269-71; Nancy Baker Jones, "A Forgotten Feminist: The Early Writings of Ida Husted Harper, 1878-1894," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXIII (June 1977), 79-101; Phillips, "Ida Husted Harper," in *Notable American Women*, II, 139-40; Phillips, "Grace Julian Clarke," *ibid.*, I, 341-42.

Indiana politics, broadly defined? What was the meaning of gender in Indiana politics in this period? Only with answers to questions like these will historians be able to integrate our state studies into the broader context of Gilded Age and Progressive Era women's and political history. One useful approach to some of these issues appears in Wendy Gamber's provocative analysis of newspaper coverage of and public reaction to a murder at Cold Spring, a resort northwest of Indianapolis in 1868. She links the diverse opinions both to differences between the major political parties on the subject of women's economic place and to social tensions about changes in gender roles and relations in the Gilded Age. A speculative foray into micro-history, Gamber's effort to interrogate the primary sources on a sensational episode in Indiana history from the perspective of gender and cultural studies warrants emulation.³⁹

The decades following the Civil War were significant not only for women's involvement in formal politics but also for their extensive institution-building. Women throughout the state formed groups with purposes ranging from cultural enrichment to religious reform to social welfare. Most groups blended goals. For example, the Indianapolis Woman's Club, founded in 1875 and the oldest of its type in Indiana, was designed "to form an organized center for the mental and social culture of its members and for the improvement of domestic life," and at the same time it challenged prevalent assumptions about the inferior intelligence of women. The same was true for African American women's literary clubs. These organizations, formed ostensibly for individual self-improvement, also protested against the denial of education to blacks of both sexes and expressed a collective concern with racial survival and uplift.

Other women's groups combined self-improvement and sociability with benevolence, fulfilling a middle-class commitment to social efficacy as well as acting on the widely held belief that female nature served a social purpose. Literary clubs often went beyond their stated purposes by engaging in a variety of private charitable activities such as collecting and distributing food and clothing to the poor. In Indianapolis, the African American women's Bethel Literary Society and the Allen Chapel Literary Society not only sponsored lectures and debates but also aided black migrants to the city from the South and

³⁹Wendy Gamber, "The Cold Spring Tragedy: Murder and the Politics of Gender in Gilded Age Indianapolis" (paper presented at Indiana Association of Historians meeting, Bloomington, Indiana, March 1996, copy in author's possession). An important recent treatment of women and politics in the late nineteenth century is Rebecca Edwards, *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era* (New York, 1997). See, too, Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review*, LXXXIX (June 1984), 620-47; Michael McGerr, "Political Style and Women's Power, 1830-1930," *Journal of American History*, LXXVII (December 1990), 864-85; and Suzanne Lebsock, "Women and American Politics, 1880-1920," in *Women, Politics, and Change*, ed. Louise A. Tilly and Patricia Gurin (New York, 1990), 35-62.

provided other forms of community service. Similarly, other groups operated under the aegis of churches and synagogues. The Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society, part of the Jewish Welfare Federation of Indianapolis (established in 1905), provided social services to poor Jewish immigrants, including financial support, employment opportunities, health care, and assistance in adjusting to American life. Secular women's organizations also offered social welfare and social services in a period when tax-supported poor relief was limited at best.⁴⁰

Efforts by women's groups to expand and institutionalize private charity, raise public health and safety standards, extend and improve the public school systems, and increase access to medical care created durable institutions that transformed the quality of life for their fellow citizens. At the same time, this work established networks of experienced women activists, enhancing their power and influence.

One example of women's political and social power in this period was the work of the Women's Improvement Club of Indianapolis (WIC). Organized as a literary circle in 1903, WIC became the group most responsible for attacking tuberculosis among the Indianapolis black population, which was excluded from the health care provided to white Indianapolis. Independent of public funding or assistance, the WIC set up an outdoor tuberculosis camp and offered a class in nursing to black women, who were excluded from the training programs associated with hospitals. WIC also raised money for supplies, groceries, and nursing care. When the WIC closed the camp in 1916 in response to both a lack of funds and a trend toward home care for tubercular patients, its members sought other strategies to prevent and treat tuberculosis. The most acute need was for long-term care for blacks in advanced stages of the disease, and WIC eventually supplied such a facility. In the wake of these successes WIC turned its attention to poor children, providing funds for summer vacations outside the city, and to blacks about to be evicted.⁴¹

The organizational and institutional efforts of women in Gilded Age and Progressive Era Indiana were extensive, diverse, and of profound consequence. In addition to the activities of the WIC, other institutions organized and operated by women included orphanages, homes for aged women, boardinghouses for single working women, and settlement houses. So well developed and institutionalized was

⁴⁰For African American women's organizations see Earline Rae Ferguson, "A Community Affair: African-American Club Women's Work in Indianapolis, 1895-1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1996); Hine, *When the Truth is Told*. For Jewish women see Judith E. Endelman, *The Jewish Community of Indianapolis: 1849 to the Present* (Bloomington, Ind., 1984).

⁴¹Earline Rae Ferguson, "The Woman's Improvement Club of Indianapolis: Black Women Pioneers in Tuberculosis Work, 1903-1938," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXIV (September 1988), 237-61.



ROSE HUMMONS, ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF THE WOMEN'S IMPROVEMENT CLUB OF INDIANAPOLIS IN 1903, WAS A LEADER IN INDIANAPOLIS'S AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN THE EARLY DECADES OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Courtesy, Indiana Historical Society

the “woman movement” in Indianapolis that its white members established their own building and organized a formal federation in the 1890s. Begun in 1892 with 49 groups, including literary societies, charities, and missionary and church associations, the Indianapolis Council of Women met monthly to address issues related to women and children, such as women’s suffrage and school matters; investigated conditions for women prisoners in jails and the presence of children in taverns; lobbied for municipal legislation regarding public health and housing; and campaigned for the appointment of women to local commissions and government offices.

Ruth Crocker’s *Social Work and Social Order* studies settlement houses in Indianapolis and Gary from 1889 until 1930, with separate chapters on each of seven Hoosier settlements (Christamore, Foreign House, and Flanner House in Indianapolis and Campbell Friendship House, Neighborhood House, Gary-Aldering Settlement

House and Stewart House in Gary). Her organization allows Crocker to highlight issues of race and ethnicity, since the settlements were segregated. Crocker argues that the seven Indiana settlement houses were typical of "second-tier" settlements, in contrast to more prominent ones like Hull House in Chicago and Henry Street Settlement in New York. Religion was more important in the Indiana settlements, which were often sponsored by churches, than in the more secular Hull House; "they were less interested in social science," explains Crocker, "than in saving souls."⁴²

The Indiana settlements were also different from Hull House in their relations with immigrants; Indiana settlement workers were Americanizers rather than cultural pluralists. Crocker contends that Indiana settlements may have begun as communities of women—like Hull House—but that they did not have long-term women residents and soon came under male control. Too, settlement workers advanced conventional middle-class ideas about gender for working-class adoption while they focused on issues of health and welfare for working-class women and children. Crocker notes conflict, both among residents and between them and their constituents, over married women's paid employment, with some residents endorsing jobs over handouts for married women. The Indiana settlements, Crocker concludes, "were at once more conservative and more practical than the more famous settlements." Unlike other studies of settlements, Crocker's finds no link between organized labor and Hoosier settlements. Instead she finds increasing involvement by businesses in funding and controlling the houses. As opposed to those who argue that settlement houses narrowed their larger, grander, more radical original intents and purposes as time went on, Crocker shows that at least in Indiana the settlements were rather conservative from the outset. In this respect, Crocker's analysis dovetails with the view of Indiana and Hoosiers as nonradical, cautious, and less than progressive.

American women enjoyed a new measure of individuality and autonomy between 1870 and 1920, thanks in large part to greater educational and occupational opportunities. But these changes also heightened the tension between women's self-fulfillment and their duty to family. Mina Carson's study of Agnes Hamilton is unusual in its effort to situate one Indiana woman within this larger context of middle-class female experience at the turn of the century. Relying almost exclusively on Hamilton's diaries, Carson is particularly interested in the emotional and psychological dimensions of that experience. Agnes grew up with her cousins, the more prominent Alice (expert in industrial toxicology) and Edith (popularizer of ancient culture), in Fort Wayne. An adherent of Charles Kingsley's Christian socialism, Agnes Hamilton believed in social salvation through individu-

⁴²Ruth Hutchinson Crocker, *Social Work and Social Order: The Settlement Movement in Two Industrial Cities, 1889–1930* (Urbana, Ill., 1992).

al regeneration, rather than working-class organization and collective action. Earnestly she put her faith into practice, first at Nebraska Mission, a nondenominational social center in a poor section of Fort Wayne where she taught Sunday school and managed a tea-and-lunch service for working women. In 1894, Hamilton led the founding of the Fort Wayne YWCA and served as its first president. In the late 1890s, she moved to Philadelphia, where she served as director of a Presbyterian settlement; she never returned to Fort Wayne. Carson concludes that for Agnes Hamilton the Christian ideals of duty and service "constituted a confused and confusing mandate of propitiatory selflessness achieved by scrupulous attention to self. For one who could not allow herself the unleashed ambition of single-minded professional or creative endeavor, the settlement substituted a real-world battleground for the rigged and treacherous battlefield of her own soul."

Carson's approach is intensely personal; only by implication can her analysis of Agnes Hamilton's individual psychology apply more generally to other women involved in charity and welfare work in Indiana. But Carson's attention to the religious faith and activism of middle-class women bears notice. Katherine Tinsley's 1995 doctoral dissertation takes a wider sample. Mining a rich vein of correspondence, journals, and diaries from some thirty midwestern families (including many in Indiana), Tinsley renders a sensitive portrait of middle-class women's options, choices, and experiences between 1870 and 1920. Tinsley finds evidence of marked changes during this period; correspondence between engaged couples, for example, reveals the growing importance of emotional relationships and the development of true companionship. Parents also paid increasing attention to preparing daughters for economic self-sufficiency. Yet marriage and career remained mutually exclusive concepts for most women. And strong emotional ties among family members could as easily immobilize women as buffer the trauma of altered material relationships and expectations.⁴³

The legal status of women in Indiana remains another important and understudied subject. Just as politics entailed more than voting or running for office, the law affected women in more ways than by denying them the vote; women's legal status also is found, for example, in the provision of property rights and the settlement of divorce cases. Indiana acquired a reputation for quick and easy divorces in the nineteenth century, instanced by William Dean Howells' novel, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*.⁴⁴ Although the loosening of

⁴³Mina J. Carson, "Agnes Hamilton of Fort Wayne: The Education of a Christian Settlement Worker," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXX (March 1984), 1-34; Katherine Ann Tinsley, "Continuing Ties: Relations between Middle Class Parents and Their Children in Midwestern Families, 1870-1920" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1995).

⁴⁴William Dean Howells, *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1889; reprint New York, 1983).

restrictions on divorce in some ways accompanied a loosening of restrictions on women, a liberal divorce code did not necessarily mean female independence or autonomy. In her study of the shift in the United States from a virtually divorceless society to one that provided divorces in the civil courts for a variety of grounds, Norma Basch examines how divorce was implemented in the county courts and what role was played by women in the divorce process. Situating Indiana at the liberal end of the divorce spectrum, Basch explains that the state provided broad statutory grounds for divorce from the beginning of statehood, including the most liberal of provisions, the so-called omnibus clause that gave judges discretion in granting decrees in situations that did not fit the statute. Basch argues that divorce was not so much an appealing recourse for most women in this period as a response to higher rates of male desertion. "As men created *de facto* divorces," Basch explains, "women sought out legal ones." There were only three economic remedies available to female plaintiffs: provisions for alimony; the wife's right to recoup her property and earnings from her husband; and a simple decree dissolving marriage. In 1852, Indiana limited alimony to a one-time, lump-sum settlement to be paid out at most over a few years. While the concept of separate marital property was well entrenched in Anglo-American legal tradition, it was not the same as joint-ownership of a couple's assets; a woman could expect to receive what she brought to the marriage as well as her own earnings but not half of all the couple owned. So, in practice, the principal form of relief that divorce afforded Indiana women in the nineteenth century was to provide them with single status and the right to remarry. "Although these were not inconsequential gains," admits Basch, "they do not fully support the view that the presence of women in court as plaintiffs was a symptom of their autonomy, particularly since they were often contending with abandonment."⁴⁵ The status and experience of women at law, Basch's work demonstrates, offer rich subjects for closer examination of gender roles and relations, marriage and the family, conflict and consensus in community standards, and change and continuity over time.

More attention has been paid to dispensers than to recipients of charity and social welfare, though by emphasizing the voluntary character of working people's use of the settlements, Crocker challenges the view that settlement houses were simply institutions of social control. Several other Indiana historians have effectively pursued the same approach. Joan E. Marshall has studied the history of social welfare in Lafayette in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, draw-

⁴⁵Norma Basch, "Relief in the Premises: Divorce as a Woman's Remedy in New York and Indiana, 1815-1870," *Law and History Review*, VIII (Spring 1990), 1-24; Basch, *Framing American Divorce: From the Revolutionary Generation to the Victorians* (Berkeley, Calif., 1999).

ing on evidence from city records, newspapers, and organizational materials. Sensitive to the gap between intent and effect, between goals and outcomes, Marshall illuminates not just the important role of middle-class women in the institutionalization of social welfare but the experience of working-class and poor women as objects of reform and as clients of the system. Similarly, Ferguson's work on African American women's organizations in Indianapolis in the same period enriches and complicates our knowledge of Indiana women's history. Building on Crocker's analysis of Flanner House, Ferguson highlights the diversity among middle-class and working-class African American women. Ferguson emphasizes "the interconnectedness of race and class and an overarching sisterhood" and suggests that black clubwomen tended to discriminate less than their white counterparts between the "worthy" and the "undeserving" poor. Ferguson attributes the acceptance of all members of the African American community as "worthy" to the emphasis in black churches on individual sanctity. It may also reflect the shared consequences of racism and its economic hardships.⁴⁶

Like their antebellum counterparts, Hoosier working women in the period between the Civil War and World War I are rarely studied. Following the middle-class focus of *Women of Indiana*, historians have given some attention to educated women and their prospects as nurses, teachers, writers, and artists.⁴⁷ Fewer, however, have studied women in service and manufacturing jobs. These women do not go completely unnoticed, but there is a tendency to slight them.⁴⁸ For their part, labor historians have emphasized working-class men and

⁴⁶Joan E. Marshall, "The Charity Organization Society and Poor Relief for the Able-Bodied Unemployed: Lafayette, Indiana, 1905-1910," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XCIII (September 1997), 217-43; Marshall, "Parents and Foster Parents, Shapers of Progressive Era Child Saving Practices: A Case Study, Tippecanoe County, Indiana, 1887-1916," *ibid.*, XC (June 1994), 147-73; Ferguson, "A Community Affair"; Earline Rae Ferguson, "Sisterhood and Community: The Sisters of Charity and African American Women's Health Care in Indianapolis, 1876-1920," in Murphy and Venet, *Midwestern Women*, 172. See also Thomas W. Cowger, "Custodians of Social Justice: The Indianapolis Asylum for Friendless Colored Children, 1870-1922," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXVIII (June 1992), 93-110; Alida Joyce Moonen, "The Missing Half: The Experience of Women in the Indianapolis Athenaeum Turnverein Women's Auxiliary" (Ph.D. dissertation, Ohio State University, 1993).

⁴⁷See for example, Peggy Brase Seigel, "She Went to War: Indiana Women Nurses in the Civil War," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXVI (March 1990), 1-27; Murphey, "Schooling, Teaching, and Change"; M. Georgia Costin, *Priceless Spirit: A History of the Sisters of the Holy Cross, 1841-1893* (South Bend, Ind., 1994); H. Tracy Schier, "History of Higher Education for Women at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, 1840-1980" (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston College, 1987); Earline Rae Ferguson, "Lillian Thomas Fox: Indianapolis Journalist and Community Leader," in *Indiana's African-American Heritage*, 139-50; Ray Boomhower, *The Country Contributor: The Life and Times of Juliet V. Strauss* (Indianapolis, 1998); Betty Clayton Harris, *The Role of Women on Indiana Newspapers, and in Other Media, 1876-1976* (Muncie, Ind., 1977); and Judith Reick Long, *Gene Stratton-Porter: Novelist and Naturalist* (Indianapolis, 1990).

⁴⁸For information on working women in the period 1870-1920 see Thornbrough, *Indiana in the Civil War Era*, 440; and Phillips, *Indiana in Transition*, 327-331.

overlooked working-class women, and women's involvement in the labor movement similarly has gone unexamined. With the exception of studies of African American women in Indianapolis and Evansville and a few analyses of the working-class family economy in Indianapolis, there is no historical writing that focuses on Indiana's working-class women in a critical period that witnessed the expansion not just of industry but also of service-sector jobs, a traditional mainstay of women.⁴⁹

A recent study of labor and politics in Evansville and New Albany in the nineteenth century offers significant new information about how the two major parties mobilized working-class voters and neatly illustrates this problematic area of Indiana women's history. Lawrence Lipin recognizes the importance of women's wage earning in these two industrial towns. In his discussion of an 1877 strike by cotton mill workers, most of whom were female, Lipin emphasizes the extent to which Evansville Democrats used the strike to curry favor with working-class voters. But Lipin ignores women's inability to vote in this period. Although he emphasizes a broad realm for politics, arguing that it concerns not just the ballot box but also meetings, conventions, rallies, and informal discussions within and without the workplace—places where women clearly could have and must have participated and played important roles, Lipin relies on a notion of “worker” that excludes women. “It was this heavy involvement of ordinary men—of workers—as much as the corruption of the urban ‘machine’ with which elites were so concerned in the Gilded Age,” he contends in one typical statement that makes all workers male.⁵⁰ Lipin thus subverts his own intentions by erasing women from his study of working-class life and politics in southern Indiana before the twentieth century.

While the politics of gender after 1900 has received some attention, the subject demands more. A truism that emerges from studies of Indiana state politics in this period is that progressivism arrived in Indiana late (and, some would say, left too soon). In accounting for the limited impact of the Progressive movement in the state, scholars point to factors such as Hoosiers' resistance to change; the

⁴⁹On African American women see Hine, *When the Truth is Told*; Emma Lou Thornbrough, *The Negro in Indiana before 1900: A Study of a Minority* (1957; reprint, Bloomington, Ind., 1993), 348-49, 359, 361, 393-94; Ferguson, “A Community Affair”; and Darrel Bigham, *We Ask Only a Fair Trial: A History of the Black Community of Evansville, Indiana* (Bloomington, Ind., 1987). For working-class families in Indianapolis see Robert V. Robinson, “Making Ends Meet: Wives and Children in the Family Economy of Indianapolis, 1860-1920,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, XCII (September 1996), 197-234. See also Richard Lindstrom, “It would break my heart to see you behind a counter!” Business and Reform at L. S. Ayres & Company in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Indiana Magazine of History*, XCIII (December 1997), 345-76.

⁵⁰Lawrence M. Lipin, *Producers, Proletarians, and Politicians: Workers and Party Politics in Evansville and New Albany, Indiana, 1850-1887* (Urbana, Ill., 1994), 252.



WOMEN CLEANING AND PREPARING CHICKENS FOR THE COLUMBIA CONSERVE COMPANY, 1930S

Courtesy, The Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

even balance between the two major parties, which made them cautious and unwilling to advocate innovation and change; the slow and unwieldy state constitution amendment process; and the persistent opposition of business to regulation and reform. It is not clear whether these circumstances posed obstacles to women's political activism and the achievement of reforms that were advanced by women in other states—such as regulation of child and female labor, temperance, and woman suffrage—or whether women themselves helped create the conditions that stymied reform. Barbara Springer's work on the woman movement in the state criticizes middle-class reformers as too meek. "Except for the most aggressive leaders," Springer argues, "most Hoosier women remained timid and reverted to 'ladylike' methods of political persuasion—petitions and memorials. They blanched at the idea of speaking in public, and worse yet, of becoming 'career women.'"⁵¹ Hoosier women may have been more conservative than women in other states, but to some extent the contention that women in Indiana failed to achieve as much as their counterparts elsewhere is valid only because scholars have made legislators their principal focus.⁵² This approach overlooks the efforts and achievements of interest groups that emerged as a dominant force in American politics during the Progressive Era. In this realm women shone, 'even' in Indiana, a recognition that has been the basis for studies of important Indiana progressives like Albion Fellows Bacon, who held no elective office but was responsible for Indiana's public housing law, among other accomplishments.⁵³ Too great a reliance on electoral politics not only obscures various other figures in the state's woman movement but it also minimizes the Progressive-style efforts of those, like African Americans and labor unionists, who were not central players in state government. As the work of Springer, Robert Barrows, Ferguson, and Darlene Clark Hine indicates, women's activism in the Progressive Era ought to be made a point of departure for, rather than a footnote to, the political history of Indiana from the turn of the twentieth century through World War I.

The eighty years following passage of the Nineteenth Amendment are both among the least studied and the most promising in

⁵¹Springer, "Ladylike Reformers," 30.

⁵²See, for example, Philip R. VanderMeer, *The Hoosier Politician: Officeholding and Political Culture in Indiana, 1896–1920* (Urbana, Ill., 1985).

⁵³Robert Barrows, "'The Homes of Indiana': Albion Fellows Bacon and Housing Reform Legislation, 1907–1917," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXI (December 1985), 309–50; Mary Boewe, "Annie & Albion: Reformers of Riverville," *Traces*, VII (Winter 1995), 4–11. See, too, Robert Barrows, "Building Up the State: Women Reformers and Child Welfare Work in Indiana during World War I," *Mid-America*, LXXVII (Fall 1995), 267–83. Barrows's biography of Bacon is forthcoming from Indiana University Press. For another view of women and Progressivism in Indiana see Dwight W. Hoover, "Daisy Douglas Barr: From Quaker to Klan 'Kluckeress,'" *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXVII (June 1991), 171–95.

Indiana women's history. James H. Madison's *The Indiana Way* and his volume on Indiana between 1920 and 1945 highlight themes worthy of further examination.⁵⁴ Overall, however, scholarship on the history of women since 1920 (and especially since mid-century) is thin, despite the considerable changes that have occurred in women's lives and the writing of women's history in this period. With the recent acquisition of several large collections of primary sources by the Indiana Historical Society, prospects for new and informative works are brighter.⁵⁵ The larger national narrative of women in the United States in this century is still being written, and the integration of Indiana women into it is overdue.

The Nineteenth Amendment had at least the potential to change the way that women behaved politically. As Boruff put it in 1941, "For years women . . . worked side by side for the suffrage amendment with no thought of party affiliation; then suddenly the number of voters was doubled . . . and women were no longer suffragists but Republicans or Democrats."⁵⁶ The two major parties recognized this potential and sought, with varying degrees of energy and effectiveness, to recruit women as voters and as politicians. Both parties in the 1920s created seats for women on their national committees and integrated women into the state apparatus by requiring that vice chairmen be the opposite sex of chairmen in precinct, county, district, and state organizations. Women began running for—and winning—local and state office almost immediately after 1920. The first woman elected to Congress from Indiana was Virginia Jenckes, who served from 1932 to 1938.⁵⁷

Yet researchers need not limit themselves to an examination of women's relationship to the two major parties. Women were mobilized not just by parties but also by a variety of voluntary organizations, one of the most notable being the League of Women Voters, which after 1920 sought to educate the enlarged electorate and to promote public interest legislation.⁵⁸ Another fruitful approach would

⁵⁴James H. Madison, *The Indiana Way: A State History* (Bloomington, Ind., 1986); Madison, *Indiana through Tradition and Change: A History of the Hoosier State and Its People, 1920–1945* (Indianapolis, 1982).

⁵⁵Organizations whose collections have been recently accessioned by the Indiana Historical Society include the following: National Council of Negro Women—Indianapolis Section; Indiana National Organization of Women (NOW); Indiana Women's Political Caucus; Indianapolis Woman's Club; Indianapolis Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women; Grand Body of the Sisters of Charity; Indiana Association of Intercollegiate Athletics for Women; Governor's Commission on the Status of Women in Indiana; League of Women Voters of Indiana; and League of Women Voters of Indianapolis.

⁵⁶Boruff, *Women of Indiana*, 36.

⁵⁷Edward K. Spann, "Indiana's First Woman in Congress: Virginia E. Jenckes and the New Deal, 1932–1938," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XCII (September 1996), 235–53. On women and politics in the 1920s see Kristi Andersen, *After Suffrage: Women in Partisan and Electoral Politics before the New Deal* (Chicago, 1996).

⁵⁸The National American Woman Suffrage Association transformed itself into the National League of Women Voters in 1920. The records of the state and

be to examine women's participation as reformers and activists in the post-World War I decades. The persistence of interest group politics and the increasingly democratic definition of citizenship helped to create, maintain, and enlarge a space for women in the public sphere. All the twentieth-century reform movements in Indiana (as elsewhere) included women, but this history has yet to be written. We need state-level studies of women in the anticommunist movement after World War II, the urban reform movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the antibusing movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the environmental movement, the feminist and the antifeminist movements, and the farmers' protest movement of the 1980s. Many Hoosier women also played prominent roles in national politics, national reformism, and national social movements since 1920; but their work has not yet been analyzed.⁵⁹

One monograph on women in Indiana since 1920 illustrates some of the possibilities for innovative research. Kathleen Blee's *Women of the Klan* integrates gender into an analysis of the Ku Klux Klan, extends our understanding of the Klan in the twenties, and tells much about Indiana women after 1920. Blee argues that by looking only at highly visible actions of Klansmen, like electoral corruption, night-riding, and gang terrorism, "we might conclude that in many places the Klan's attack on Catholics, Jews, blacks, and other minorities was relatively ineffectual. When we include the less public actions of Klanswomen—the 'poison squads' that spread rumor and slander or organized consumer boycotts—the picture changes." "Klanswomen," Blee explains, "acted in different ways that complemented those of Klansmen, making the Klan's influence both more extensive and more deadly than the actions of Klansmen alone would

Indianapolis organizations at the Indiana Historical Society are extensive—there are 91 manuscript boxes in the League of Women Voters of Indiana collection and 28 manuscript boxes in the Indianapolis collection. See Louise M. Young, *In the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters, 1920–1970* (New York, 1989); Greenough, *League of Women Voters of Indiana*; and Susan Ware, "American Women in the 1950s: Nonpartisan Politics and Women's Politicization," in Tilly and Gurin, *Women, Politics, and Change*, 281–99.

⁵⁹On women's social and political activism in Indiana after 1930 see James H. Madison, "Flossie Bailey: 'What a Woman!'" *Traces*, XII (Winter 2000), 23–27; Evelyn Baldwin, "Civic Housekeeping 50s Style: Women's Citizen's Committee, Gary, Indiana" (M.A. thesis, American Studies, Purdue University, 1992); Hine, *When the Truth is Told*, 69–78; Ray Boomhower, "Mattie Coney," *Traces*, VIII (Fall 1996), 57–61; Marian Kleinsasser Towne, *That All May Be One: Centennial History of Church Women United in Indianapolis, 1898–1998* (Indianapolis, 1998); James B. Lane, "Women and the Work Place: The Calumet District Women's Caucus" (October 1991, paper in author's possession); Nancy Gabin, "Gender and Power in Rural America: Women Factory Workers and Labor Activism in Indiana since 1880" (paper delivered at Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Vassar College, Poughkeepsie, New York, June 12, 1993); Gabin, "Overview: Women," in *The Encyclopedia of Indianapolis*, ed. David J. Bodenhamer and Robert G. Barrows (Bloomington, Ind., 1994), 218–28; and Linda Gail Seward, "The Equal Rights Amendment in Indiana: A Study of Ideas and Arguments" (Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, 1991).



“QUILTING PARTY AT GOSPORT,” FEBRUARY 3, 1928, PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANK M. HOHENBERGER

Courtesy, The Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

suggest.”⁶⁰ Though women do not always act or participate in ways different from those of men, Blee’s emphasis on the extent to which attention to women requires a revision of political and social history should be a constant reminder to those writing the history of women in Indiana.

Some recent work on rural women suggests another means both to uncover the history of Hoosier women in this century and to incorporate Indiana into a broader national and intellectual context. In the past most women’s historians have either focused on cities or overlooked midwestern states, while rural sociologists for their part have been blind to the significance of women’s role in maintaining farms and sustaining communities. But several scholars within the last ten years have compared the state’s rural and urban women over time. Much of this work finds that, in contrast to the better-studied lives of urban middle-class women, the rural female experience in this century challenges the notion of separate spheres for women and men. So blurry and permeable have the boundaries been between home and work in rural Indiana, between the so-called private and

⁶⁰Kathleen Blee, *Women of the Klan: Racism and Gender in the 1920s* (Berkeley, Calif., 1991), 2-3.

public spheres, that they nearly disappear, both for scholars and their subjects.⁶¹

Steinson has analyzed transcripts of interviews with nearly 300 Indiana Extension Homemaker club members. She looks at the impact of World War II on two groups of women: the agents of Indiana's agricultural extension programs and the members of the homemakers' extension clubs. She challenges scholars who claim that extension agents sought to mold farmwomen into efficient, scientifically knowledgeable homemakers and consumers by showing that home extension agents in Indiana had to respond and adapt to local women's interests if they wanted an audience for their programs. Steinson argues that World War II in many ways empowered rural women by requiring them to take on new responsibilities—to act like family doctors or to do appliance repair or to run tractors—and by encouraging them to demand home extension education for these new responsibilities.

While Steinson concludes that extension programs in Indiana accommodated the interests of rural women in a society at war, she also notes that the war challenged the basic premise of the land grant university home demonstration programs, i.e., that the preferred role for rural women was as efficient, scientifically informed full-time homemakers. Indiana agents, like their counterparts in other states, thus lagged behind their constituents in appreciating the already blurry boundaries between men's and women's work in the rural family economy. The war, she demonstrates, also offered rural women a newly enhanced civic role. While Steinson does not portray rural women as the vanguard of a modern trend toward gender equality, she argues convincingly that urban women were not necessarily the first to push against the barriers of separate spheres' gender ideology. She also serves notice that attention to the politicization of women after 1920 must consider rural women, whose opportunities for political participation and whose identity as citizens differed from those of urban women.⁶²

⁶¹See, for example, Kathy Miller, "Rural Women's Work and Community Building in Indiana from 1900 to 1980" (Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, 1997); Nancy Gabin, "Labor and Gender Relations in the Indiana Food Processing Industries: Women in Tomato Canning Factories, 1920–1950" (paper delivered at North American Labor History Conference, Wayne State University, Detroit, Michigan, October 17, 1992); and Julia Wilder, "Female Farmer Talk Show: Farm Wives in Central Indiana Who Dare to Call Themselves Farmers" (unpublished manuscript in author's possession based on interviews with twenty-four women).

⁶²Barbara Steinson, "Home Extension on the Home Front: Rural Indiana Women During World War II" (paper delivered at Organization of American Historians meeting, Indianapolis, Indiana, April 4, 1998). The Indiana homemakers interviews are also available in six volumes edited by Eleanor Arnold and originally published by the Indiana Extension Homemakers Association between 1983 and 1990; they are *Feeding Our Families* (1983), *Party Lines, Pumps, and Privies* (1984), *Buggies and Bad Times* (1985), *Girlhood Days* (1987), *Going to Club* (1988), and *Living Rich Lives* (1990). See also Barbara J. Steinson, "Memories of Hoosier Homemakers: A Review

One of the most important economic trends since 1945 is the growing significance of female labor force participation. For a variety of reasons, paid employment has become increasingly a permanent part of women's lives. Female employment in Indiana mirrors patterns throughout the United States. But a few distinctive features especially warrant consideration in the history of Hoosier women in this century. In contrast to Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois, the majority of industrial workers in Indiana in the last one hundred years (except for those in the northwest corner of the state) were native-born Americans recruited from the farm populations of Indiana and nearby states and from the developing towns and cities. Women played an important part in this industrial workforce. Although personal and domestic service employed the largest group of women in the state until the mid-twentieth century, manufacturing was the second most important occupational category for them. In 1900 women employed in manufacturing in Indiana represented 25 percent of the female labor force and 15.5 percent of all workers engaged in manufacturing. By 1940, they represented 18 percent of those employed in manufacturing in the state. At the peak of World War II, in the fall of 1943, more than one-third of all factory workers in the state were women. Although women lost defense jobs after the war, they soon regained their importance in the state's manufacturing sector when electrical goods manufacturing and the related electronics industry, both of which employed women, expanded in Indiana in the postwar period. The prominence of agriculture, the steel industry in the northwestern part of the state, and limestone quarrying and coal mining in the southern section have long given the Indiana economy a distinctly masculine image, so that the less visible women factory workers have attracted little attention from historians interested in the labor and economic history of Indiana.

What makes Indiana unusual—and therefore intriguing—among midwestern states is that women factory workers failed to capture the attention of contemporary reformers and labor activists. In con-

Essay," *Indiana Magazine of History*, LXXXVI (June 1990), 197-222. For extension homemakers' clubs in other states see Kathleen Babbitt, "The Productive Farm Woman and the Extension Home Economist in New York State, 1920-1940," *Agricultural History*, LXVII (Spring 1993), 83-101; Joan Jensen, "Canning Comes to New Mexico: Women and the Agricultural Extension Service, 1914-1919," *New Mexico Historical Review*, LVII (October 1982), 361-86; Jensen, "Crossing Ethnic Barriers in the Southwest: Women's Agricultural Extension Education, 1914-1940," *Agricultural History*, LX (Spring 1986), 169-81; and Dorothy Schwieder, "Changing Times: Iowa Farm Women and Home Economics Cooperative Extension in the 1920s and 1950s," in Murphy and Venet, *Midwestern Women*, 204-22. On rural farm women in the twentieth century see Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1993); Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore, Md., 1995); Deborah Fink, *Open Country, Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition, and Change* (Albany, N.Y., 1986); and Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1992).

trast to their peers in neighboring Ohio, Michigan, and Illinois, Indiana legislators paid little attention to the problems of women in industry. While laws were passed in the 1890s requiring seats for women employed in retail stores and factories and prohibiting their employment in manufacturing between the hours of 10 p.m. and 6 a.m., the laws were never augmented to include minimum wages, maximum hours, or weight-lifting limits. Unlike women in other states, moreover, activist Indiana women's organizations in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era generally did not press for protective legislation for working women. The principal historian of Indiana's woman movement notes bluntly that "the issue of protective legislation for working women remained secondary to other causes for most females, and never found a personal champion among Hoosier reformers."⁶³ Although some women lobbied for a ten- or an eight-hour day for wage-earning women in the state before and after 1920, the loudest female voices on this issue, those of members of the Indiana Business and Professional Women's federation, successfully opposed such legislation.⁶⁴ This apparent anomaly in the history of the politics of gender merits attention.

The limited legislation regulating female working conditions did not mean either that occupational segregation by sex did not exist in Indiana or that gender equality was somehow taken for granted. What it meant was the labor market was not laden with the well-established rhetoric of gender difference and gender hierarchy that characterized similar discussions in other states. It also meant that women in Indiana had little historical experience of either cross-class cooperation or conflict around issues of employment. Working women were neither passive nor quiescent. Although they remained invisible to contemporaries as well as historians, women factory workers sometimes upset Hoosier labor relations, the industrial economy, and politics.⁶⁵ These circumstances had implications for the resur-

⁶³Springer, "Ladylike Reformers," 51.

⁶⁴The self-proclaimed spokespersons for all working women in the state, the Indiana Business and Professional Women's federation (BPW) self-consciously advocated employers' interest in no regulation. The BPW openly referred to itself as the Women's Chamber of Commerce, the men's version of which also led the campaigns against female labor laws. For more information on this subject see Lisa Phillips, "Indiana's 'Female Breadwinners': The Politics of Protective Labor Legislation, 1913-1929" (M.A. thesis, Purdue University, 1993); Nancy Gabin, "The Politics of Gender: A Framework for a History of Women in Indiana" (Emma Lou Thornbrough Lecture, paper presented at Indiana Association of Historians meeting, Butler University, Indianapolis, November 8, 1996).

⁶⁵See Nancy Gabin, "Gender and Power in Rural America: Women Factory Workers and Labor Activism in Indiana since 1880"; Gabin, "The Campaign for Right-to-Work Legislation and the Political Economy of Gender in Indiana, 1935-1965" (paper delivered at Indiana Association of Historians meeting, Terre Haute, February 25, 1995); and David Anderson, "Are You Sure You Want to Call Them Ladies?": Restoring Women's Participation in the Perfect Circle Strike of 1955" (paper delivered at North American Labor History Conference, Wayne State University, Detroit, Mich., October 17, 1998).



“LIBRARIANS AT SPEARSVILLE,” MAY 12, 1926, PHOTOGRAPH BY FRANK M. HOHENBERGER

Courtesy, The Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

gence of the women’s rights movement beginning in the 1960s and the campaign for the equal rights amendment in the 1970s. They also have influenced the dynamics of labor and party politics in the state. Historians of Indiana need both to explain the invisibility of wage-earning women in Indiana and to make them visible.

The wage earning of Indiana women is just one of a host of subjects worthy of attention by historians of the modern era. Lana Ruegamer highlights the achievements of Dorothy Riker, the historian and editor for the Indiana Historical Bureau and Indiana Historical Society, who, with her fellow editors Nellie Armstrong Robinson and Gayle Thornbrough, “exercised considerable influence over what was published in Indiana history” between 1929 and 1979. Little, however, is known about the integration of Indiana women into other male-dominated professions, such as law, medicine, and the ministry. Moreover, as women’s labor historians have long argued, “work” must be broadly defined, to include not only remunerated labor but unpaid efforts within the home as well. At this point the daily lives and domestic experience of females in rural areas are better understood than those of their counterparts in towns and cities. Social historians have paid too little heed to Indiana. The impact of modern developments in technology, medicine, and popular culture on Hoosier

girls and women, for example, is yet unknown. The work of sociologists Helen Merrell Lynd and Robert Lynd on Muncie in the 1920s and 1930s, combined with the follow-up work of the Middletown III project and the Center for Middletown Studies at Ball State University, offer suggestions for essential and rewarding research. The Lynds examined a range of themes that are still important some sixty years after they declared Muncie the middletown of America. Getting a living, making a home, training the young, using leisure, engaging in religious practices, and engaging in community activities continue to define the lives of Hoosiers. By exploring these aspects of life in historical context, in the distant as well as the recent past, scholars will enrich and advance our understanding of women and gender and their place in the history of the state, the Midwest, and the nation.⁶⁶

A new framework for Indiana women's history to replace the one constructed by Boruff and her contemporaries sixty years ago is long overdue. Most studies of the history of women in Indiana have not transcended the narrow paradigm established by *Women of Indiana*. The strengths of these studies—their inward looking, painstaking attention to detail and biographical focus—also constitute the great weakness of Indiana women's history. Although there is an important place for biographical studies of women, the tendency of this approach to degenerate into uncritical examination of famous women, without regard for context, is evident since *Women of Indiana* was published.

The historiography on women in Indiana implicitly demonstrates that Indiana history is not merely local in significance. Despite the hesitance of some historians of the state to broach the larger significance of their research, taken as a whole their work engages various important debates about historical change and continuity in

⁶⁶Lana Ruegamer, "Dorothy Lois Riker, 1904–1994: Reflections on Indiana History, Historical Editing, and Women in the Historical Profession," *Indiana Magazine of History*, XCI (September 1995), 246–66. For Muncie see Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd, *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (1929; reprint, New York, 1956); Lynd and Lynd, *Middletown in Transition: A Study in Cultural Conflicts* (New York, 1937); Theodore Caplow, et al., *Middletown Families: Fifty Years of Change and Continuity* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1982); and Audrey Gale Boltz, "The Changing Roles of Women of Middletown: A Three-Generational Study" (Ed.D. dissertation, Ball State University, 1991). The work of sociologists, anthropologists, and folklorists offers insight into the recent experiences of women in Indiana. See, for example, Susanne P. Bair, "The History and Development of Girls' High School Sport in the State of Indiana" (P.E.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1991); Jennifer Livesay, "Women at the Church Doors: Gender, Protest, and Belief in a Midwestern Women-Church Group" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1998), an examination of a small group of Catholic women in Bloomington; and Elaine J. Lawless, *God's Peculiar People: Women's Voices & Folk Tradition in a Pentecostal Church* (Lexington, Ky., 1988), an ethnographic analysis of women's participation in several small Holiness churches in southern Indiana.

politics, economics, and society. The history of Indiana women, for example, casts new light on the notion that men and women occupied separate spheres. Indiana women's history reveals the extent to which rural as well as urban women were active performers in both private and public arenas simultaneously, and it also indicates the importance of the Indiana experience for understanding the political and economic history of the region and the nation.

Boruff's design need not be abandoned. But it needs remodeling and expansion to include the experience of women who were not white, urban, and middle class. It also should move from individual to collective biography. And we need to know not only what women have done but also how attention to gender as an analytical category alters Indiana history. Thus women's history—a field often criticized as too narrow and particular—can show us the extent to which state history is neither parochial nor provincial.