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Article Summary: Nebraska was one of the last states west of the Mississippi to approve woman's suffrage. The men of the state opposed giving the vote to women primarily because of ethnic or religious tradition. Fear that women would support prohibition swayed many men. Even some women opposed woman suffrage, dreading the social changes that might result.

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Photographs / Images: horse-drawn suffrage float, Blair, Nebraska, July 1914; Anna Howard Shaw, president of the National Woman Suffrage Association; Mary Nash Crofoot of the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage; flyer: "Lest Catholic Men Be Mised," written by Lodowick F Crofoot and signed by his wife Mary Nash Crofoot; John Mattes, owner and founder of Mattes' Brewery, leader of the German-American coalition in the Nebraska senate; James C Dahlman, Omaha mayor; Lodowick F Crofoot, leading Nebraska anti-suffragist, president of the pro-liquor Nebraska Prosperity League; flyer issued by the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage: "Ten Reasons Why the Great Majority of Women Do Not Want the Ballot"; car decorated as suffrage float, Blair, Nebraska, July 1914

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THOU SHALT NOT VOTE

Anti-Suffrage in Nebraska

1914-1920

One hundred fifty years has passed since the Seneca Falls Convention, the event that marks the opening of the woman's suffrage movement in the United States. Our understanding of that movement, however, remains clouded by missing pieces and unexplored biases. In particular, opposition to woman suffrage has only begun to be explored. Although all of Nebraska's neighbors to the west, north, and south passed full woman suffrage before World War I, the state's electorate rejected proposed suffrage amendments to the constitution three times: following the 1871 constitutional convention, in 1882, and in 1914. In 1917 a limited suffrage act passed the state legislature, but it was nullified by a referendum petition drive until 1919, when the state supreme court declared the petitions fraudulent. Nebraska women did not win full suffrage until 1920, when the national amendment was ratified.¹

Why was Nebraska one of the last states west of the Mississippi to grant the ballot to women? The answer requires an examination both of Nebraska's electorate and its organized anti-suffrage movement. As the possibility of woman suffrage became more real in the 1910s, those individuals who felt most threatened organized against the suffragists and used every force at their disposal to stop the extension of the franchise; ironically, many of them were women.

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By Laura McKee Hickman

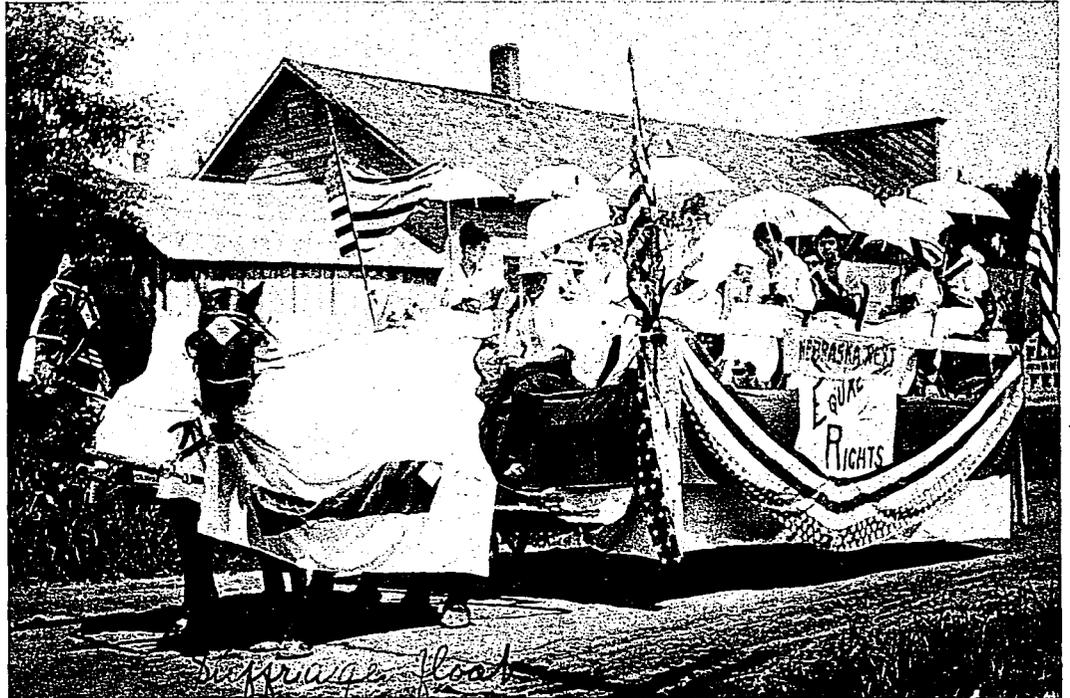
Suffrage failed to pass in Nebraska for many reasons, but most important was that a large segment of the all-male voting population opposed it. Opposition was strongest among certain religious and ethnic groups whose cultural perspective and religious teachings formed shared values. This trend can be seen in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when party affiliation was heavily defined by religious or ethnic factors. The values embraced by the Democratic Party included laissez-faire economics, personal liberty, and social conservatism. The party platform, therefore, consistently rejected prohibition, tariffs, and woman suffrage. In Nebraska, the Democratic coalition combined Catholics, German Lutherans, and other ritualistic religions, Southern migrants, and many of the wealthiest segments of the population.² These groups made up much of Nebraska's anti-suffrage vote.

Nationally, immigrant religious groups also tended to be affiliated with the Democrats, the party of personal liberty. About 55 percent of German Lutherans and members of the German Reformed Church, both ritualistic reli-

gions, joined the Democratic Party. Native religious groups — Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians — tended to be more pietistic and voted overwhelmingly Republican, the party of purification, politically and morally. In turn-of-the-century Nebraska, these native religious groups made up only about 36 percent of the state's population.³ Nebraska's strong immigrant vote, as well as the ritualistic religions that many immigrants practiced, helps explain the failure of woman suffrage in the late nineteenth century.

The religious group most cohesive in its rejection of woman suffrage and most overwhelmingly Democratic despite ethnic variables, was the Roman Catholic Church. Whether of Irish, Polish, French, Dutch, Bohemian, or German background, Catholics voted Democratic in huge percentages. In 1906 more than 29 percent of all Nebraskans claimed affiliation with the Catholic Church, by far the largest single denomination in the state.⁴

The German Catholics were the most conservative. In response to progressive era reforms, the German-American *Central-Verein*, a national organization, formed a union to reform society in its conservative mold. The union pledged to work against those Catholics calling for greater Americanization of the church. According to historian Philip Gleason, "German Catholics in particular were convinced that the surest bulwark to the immigrant's religion was the maintenance of his traditional cultural heritage against the forces of Americanization."⁵ The *Central-Verein's* greatest concerns included the secularization of



Suffrage float for a parade in Blair, Nebraska, July 1914. NSHS-RG1073

American society and the separation of church and state, but the maintenance of the traditional culture would lead German Catholics to fight to include their language in public school instruction, to battle against prohibitionists, and to maintain the traditional family structure.

Like many other Germans in the United States, Nebraska Germans saw in reform movements such as prohibition and woman suffrage the tools to destroy their traditional culture. The assumption was that, if women were given the vote, many of them would be inclined to support prohibition. Furthermore, woman suffrage was seen as a threat to German family values, as well as demoralizing to women who would no longer be sheltered in the home. In the 1882 vote for a woman suffrage amendment, precincts with a German population greater than 50 percent rejected the amendment by ten to one. Overall, the amendment failed by only two to one.⁶

Whether Catholic or not, in Nebraska Germans formed the largest non-English ethnic group. Germans made up nearly 54 percent of the state's foreign-born

population, and more than 23 percent of the total population in 1910.⁷ Furthermore, the German community, prior to World War I, was very strong socially and politically. German newspapers had a huge circulation (there were fourteen in Nebraska and forty in the nation), many grade schools taught the language, and the German-American Alliance provided a political organization. This organization was key in preventing the passage of prohibition in Nebraska for many years.⁸ The dual issues of woman suffrage and prohibition further developed the Germans' self-consciousness as a minority group because the group's cohesiveness in votes on these issues, just as later attacks on the German language, united the German community.

The movement to prohibit alcohol had a long history in the state. Advocates of prohibition argued that its passage would create "a social order universally congenial to entrepreneurial capitalism."⁹ During the vote on Nebraska's 1871 constitution, a prohibition amendment received 37 percent approval. By 1874 a Prohibition Party

had formed and offered candidates for governor and other offices. Prohibition sentiments grew steadily toward the turn of the century. But prohibition's growing popularity also caused increased controversy and threatened to split Nebraska's major political parties.¹⁰

Many other immigrants, along with Germans, saw prohibition as an attack on their culture and woman suffrage as the weapon. Women had waged prohibition battles throughout the country and in Nebraska for decades. In 1873 Carrie Nation, the hatchet-wielding crusader of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, rallied the women of Lincoln, who entered the saloons by the hundreds to pray and sing for the end of the evils of alcohol. It required a city ordinance to protect the barkeeps from the ladies. The National Brewers' Association, along with many others, including prohibitionists, believed that giving women the vote would result in prohibition. The brewers quietly spent large amounts of money advertising against the extension of the franchise.¹¹ The association saw "the unreasoning interfer-

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ence of women" as the largest obstacle to "rational temperance reform."¹² Even after the 1917 implementation of statewide prohibition in Nebraska, many continued to see the breweries' involvement in anti-suffrage campaigns as a "last ditch effort to repeal prohibition."¹³

Suffrage thus failed in Nebraska prior to 1914 due to the anti-suffrage sentiments of the state's all-male voting population. While many emigrant groups, brewers, and Catholics could be counted on to oppose prohibition, no organized anti-suffrage movement existed in the state until 1914, when the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association launched an initiative campaign to place the issue on the ballot.

The suffrage movement, unlike any other civil rights movement in history, was not merely a struggle between the powerful and the powerless. It was not a struggle between men and women. Nor was it a class struggle. The leadership of the anti-suffragists and pro-suffragists shared the same social class, and neither group encouraged participation by non-whites or non-Christians. The leadership of both organizations tended to be college educated, white, middle to upper class, and socially active.

The woman suffrage counter-movement has often been distorted by studies relying solely on the perspective of the suffragists. Women opposed to suffrage have been portrayed as mere puppets of the powerful brewery and industrial interests, or as society matrons unaware of the difficulties faced by poor women. More recent studies of the anti-suffragists have revealed that the men's organizations were mere subsidiaries to the women's organizations, and the female leadership, very much aware of the life faced by poor women, simply disagreed that the vote was the means of achieving change.¹⁴

The fallacy that women opposed to woman suffrage were society butterflies, with no real concept of the hardships faced by less fortunate women, has been exposed as suffrage rhetoric, or misconception. In fact, female oppo-

nents of suffrage embraced the twentieth century idea of womanhood—the extension of women into the public realm—almost to the same degree as did their sisters fighting for the ballot. The major difference between the two groups of women was the extent to which they believed women could effectively contribute in the *political* realm. The anti-suffragists believed the ballot would only hamper women's unique contributions to society.¹⁵

The longest-lived anti-suffrage organization, the Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women, listed the many philanthropic, charitable, educational, and civic activities of its female members.¹⁶ While nineteenth century anti-suffrage spokeswomen Catherine Beecher and Sara Josephina Hale had argued that women's sphere was entirely domestic, twentieth century anti-suffragists had moved beyond the Victorian era concepts of home and hearth and accepted the idea of progressive activism for women. Josephine Dodge, founder of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, worked many years with the Legal Aid Society and the National Federation of Day Nurseries. Very much aware of the plight of poor women, she encouraged her membership to continue work in social reform and charity, and discouraged a total focus on home. The General Federation of Women's Clubs, by far the most socially active group of women in the nation, refused to endorse woman suffrage for many years. Like the anti-suffragists in general, many club women feared having the ballot would only hamper their work.¹⁷

The leadership of Nebraska's anti-suffragists shared the civic-mindedness of the national associations. When America entered World War I in 1917, many of the women went to work. Mrs. William A. Smith of Omaha, secretary of the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, became chairman of the National League for Women's Services, "a non-partisan, non-political war organization."¹⁸ The anti-suffragists be-

lieved that once women became politicized, their ability to reform society would be impaired because they would no longer be disinterested parties.

"Women in politics would destroy charity." Many female anti-suffragists believed that their social contributions benefited society as much as, if not more than, men's political work. The ballot, by placing greater responsibilities on women and by changing their role as neutral, non-political beings, would compromise their unique contributions to society.¹⁹

Furthermore, anti-suffragists argued that the suffragists' lack of civic spirit and selfishness made it "easier to believe in the fallacy that the vote will change all the evils of the world, than it is to give hours [of] . . . unheralded work toward the amelioration of the conditions of women, children, and the unfortunate." Anti-suffragists proved their point by comparing philanthropic statistics in eastern states, where there was no female suffrage, and western states with female suffrage. They concluded the suffragists were "anti-female, anti-family, and anti-American."²⁰

It was these sentiments, along with the 1914 suffrage initiative, that led to the creation of formal anti-suffrage organizations in Nebraska. During the campaign, Josephine Dodge, president of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, traveled to Omaha along with other noted personalities to speak against the issue. Mrs. J. W. Crumacker, an anti-suffragist from Kansas, joined Dodge and two veteran campaigners sent by the Massachusetts anti-suffrage association to fight the amendment in a campaign the *Woman's Protest* claimed was funded by the Nebraska Men's League Opposed to Woman Suffrage. Out-of-state anti-suffrage associations, despite sending these few relatively unknown campaigners, were not particularly worried about the outcome of the vote. Nebraska, like other states with large German populations, could be relied on to reject suffrage, which it did. Also working in favor

of the anti-suffragists was the confrontational and controversial personality of the National Woman Suffrage Association president, Anna Howard Shaw. During her visit to Omaha during the 1914 campaign, Shaw verbally attacked a state judge who refused to allow Nebraska women to vote for the office of superintendent, though women could vote for school board members. The anti-suffragists widely publicized the event: "Here is a woman from an eastern state who knows nothing about Nebraska statutes, refuting in positive language the opinion of a man who has spent years in the practice of the law."²¹

With the help of more experienced organizers, a meeting was held at the home of Mrs. E. P. Peck in Omaha and the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage was founded. Peck, after a brief period as chairwoman of the executive committee, became president of the association in September 1914; Mrs. L. F. Crofoot was named chairwoman of the executive committee; the secretary was Mrs. William Archibald Smith, and the treasurer was Mrs. Charles C. George. Other board members included Mrs. N. P. Dodge, Jr., Mrs. R. T. Hamilton, Mrs. C. S. Elgutter, Mrs. T. J. Mackaye, Mrs. C. F. McGrew, Mrs. C. Peters, Mrs. John H. Butler, and Miss Jessie Millard. Like anti-suffrage associations in other states, the Nebraska association was staffed and run by women, and its membership was overwhelmingly female. As in the national and other state associations, the role of men in the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage was marginal.²²

Throughout the state, but especially in the largest cities of Omaha and Lincoln, the anti-suffragists recruited, organized, and raised funds through teas, luncheons, balls at luxurious hotels, and junior auxiliaries at colleges. They set out to educate the public on the evils of suffrage through literature, advertising, public speaking, or even playing dirty on some occasions. The anti-suffragists broke into parades disguised as suffragists to make their opposition look foolish.²³



Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, president of the National Woman Suffrage Association. NSHS-RG1073



Mary Nash (Mrs. L. F.) Crofoot. Photograph courtesy of Mrs. Michael Crofoot

The first organized male opposition to the Nebraska suffragists also came from Omaha in 1914. The Nebraska Men's Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage (NMAOWS) published a manifesto in July and August of the 1914 petition campaign for a suffrage amendment Signed by prominent community leaders, most of whom had wives and daughters leading the Nebraska anti-suffragists, the manifesto carried affidavits by the city's preachers from various denominations. The first publication by the men listed their arguments against the extension of the franchise to women. They began with political arguments: "Franchise is a privilege of government granted only to those to whom the government sees fit to grant it"; it was not a birthright, nor a right connected to taxation. To avoid a complete rejection of the principles of the nation's founders, the authors further claimed woman suffrage was inconsistent with the founding fathers' vision of republican government. Female suffrage was never suggested in the original constitution because the founders feared "an excitable and emotional suffrage" would destroy the republic, a danger the manifesto's authors foresaw in a veiled reference to the fifteenth amendment and the huddled masses fueling the cities' political machines by the overextension of the franchise to "highly questionable" segments of the population. The men's arguments concluded with moral issues. Women did not belong in the political realm because their place was the "realm of sentiment, . . . love, . . . gentler, kinder and holier attributes, that make the name of wife, mother, and sister next to the name of God himself."²⁴

The next month's publication was wholly moral in tone. Adolf Hult, pastor of Immanuel Lutheran, claimed that "Suffragism [is] Gripped by Feminism." Citing radical feminists' views, Reverend Hult claimed that the suffrage movement had been taken over by "lust and immorality." Fearing that the fall of woman meant the fall of the world, Hult asked, "Must men put on the iron

glove?" Other arguments were more logical, such as that of Reverend John Williams of St. Barnabas Episcopal Church, who drew a distinction between the mainstream suffragists and the radical fringe. Nonetheless, he argued that the failure of the mainstream suffragists to suppress or refute the radicals was subversive to Christian morality, marriage, and home life. The damaging effect of woman suffrage on home life was a pervasive theme throughout the manifesto. The ministers claimed the Victorian ideal of domesticity had been preordained by God: "God meant for women to reign over home, and most good women reject politics because woman suffrage will destroy society." A minister from Ponca, Nebraska, quoted scripture implying that God simply forgot to list the commandment, women shall not vote.²⁵

In response to the suffragists' publication of priests' testimonials favoring suffrage, L. F. Crofoot, a prominent Catholic lawyer among the male anti-suffragists, authored a pamphlet, "Lest Catholic Men Be Misled." He argued that a "good Catholic" would never support the movement because Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, "spurns all male authority—even St. Paul who she claimed enslaved women." Nor would a "good Catholic woman" embrace feminism.²⁶

The men's anti-suffrage association became the Men's League Opposed to Woman Suffrage by the time of the November 1914 election. Advertising, especially in the Omaha papers, was their main tactic to defeat the suffrage amendment. Their position focused on two major arguments: the passage of woman suffrage would compel women to serve on juries; and, again quoting radical feminists, suffrage was simply the first step for women who demanded "FREEDOM and POWER" in their attempts to change "HOME and MARRIAGE."²⁷ The Men's League was not the only male group advertising in Omaha's newspapers in 1914. The Massachusetts Men's Association Opposed

Lest Catholic Men Be Misled.

Literature was distributed Sunday at the doors of the Catholic churches in Omaha, quoting a few Catholic priests, who, as citizens, had declared themselves in favor of suffrage.

Because the Catholic church has not declared herself on this point, politics being outside of her sphere this great effort has been made to influence the Catholic voter. Although I am strenuously opposed to mixing politics and religion, as a Catholic woman I must protest against our Catholic men voting for the enfranchisement of women in Nebraska. **I do not believe that any Catholic men or women would favor "Votes for Women" if they realized certain facts.**

First, There are a million socialists in this country, and all are unanimous for woman suffrage. because they hope by the women's vote to help themselves politically. All socialists are opposed to anything Christian, but they bitterly hate and attack Catholics. Why should Catholics join themselves with such a body?

Second, The great cry of the suffrage body is for individual liberty. They demand the vote because they object to their husbands, fathers and brothers voting for them. I heard Dr. Shaw say the other evening, when she spoke at the Brandeis, "No one these days respects authority on any question." She said, "Who believes the pulpit knows more than the pew?" She spoke of St. Paul as though he were a school boy friend, but did not mention how a certain suffrage leader scored him for enslaving women by his famous text in regard to marriage. It strikes me that a catholic should hesitate to support a movement whose leader expresses such sentiments against authority, when the fundamental point of our belief is the divine authority which Christ gave to His church.

Third. The feminist doctrine, I grant, has not made itself felt here in Nebraska as it has in the east, but nevertheless its followers are an arm of the suffrage body. Does the Catholic woman wish to be in the class which has feminists within its body. We, with the Virgin Mary for our standard of ideal womanhood, must have a care that our ideal is not shattered.

Fourth. I fear that women in politics, judging from the present campaign, will injure the Catholic virtue of charity.

I call attention to Dr. Shaw's interview in yesterday's Bee when she called respectable women, such as Mrs. George, "liars," and spoke of driving the antis back to their "kennels." I contrasted the dignified address and clear argument of Mrs. George with Dr. Shaw's clever political speech when she flippantly dodged the real issue, and confined herself principally to abusing the antis.

I hope that Catholic men in this community will vote "No" to woman suffrage.

Omaha, Nov. 2, 1914.

MARY NASH CROFOOT.

to Woman Suffrage argued that women's inability to enforce the laws they would help make was objectionable. Nor was it in the interest of the state to more than double the electorate with a segment of the population having so little experience in business.

The men's anti-suffrage associations were much smaller, less well organized, and frequently subordinate to the women's anti-suffrage organizations. Their contributions to the anti-suffrage movement were important, however, because while many female anti-suffragists were unwilling to take a public stand, the men's organizations could do so. Furthermore, the men's associations provided funding for the campaigns. Nebraska's female anti-suffragists reported that the Men's League "helped with the responsibility" of the 1914 counter-campaign, and provided financial help in later fights.²⁸

The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage had organized only three years earlier, in 1911. Its leadership was entirely female, and its membership was more than 90 percent female. The state anti-suffrage organizations, like the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, paid an annual fee to the national body which, in turn, helped support the state level. Local organizations were also formed. For example, Fremont, Lincoln, and Grand Island had very strong local chapters of the anti-suffrage association. The state association in 1914 had a membership of between 1,200 and 1,300, only about 100 of whom were active, dues-paying members. Many of the associate members belonged to groups affiliated with the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, such as the Men's League and the Wage Earner's League. The Wage Earner's League represented female wage earners such as clerks, secretaries, and teachers. Founded by May McNamara and Alice Gilchrist in 1911, its five hundred members worked with Nebraska anti-suffragists.²⁹

Why were so many women opposed to having the franchise? The only rea-

sonable answer must be that they feared the loss of something valuable in return for gaining the ballot. While a few noble souls may have organized to preserve the charity anti-suffragists claimed would be lost if women entered politics, it is much more likely that many were drawn by concern over a loss more personal, a loss in status. Many women clung to the Victorian ideal because



State Senator John Mattes of Nebraska City, Otoe County. NSHS-RG2141-1445(1)

they feared the social change that suffrage would bring would also bring a loss of the privileges and protections they had been accorded as the so-called weaker sex. Suffrage, they argued, would cause men to deny dependent women support and would cause a dramatic increase in divorce rates, forcing many women into the labor force. Political responsibilities would overburden already busy women, and the image of the new woman would destroy the respect and status they enjoyed as wives and mothers.

Nationally, the rhetoric of the power struggle waged by the anti-suffragists also portrayed a concern with status. Anti-suffragists tended to support the

laissez-faire philosophy of wages, arguing that women were paid less because their labor was worth less. Most believed in the preferential hiring of male breadwinners and the removal of women from industrial work. Female anti-suffragists fought to maintain the status and wealth of the men who protected them by preserving the industrial system. Similarly they opposed unions, reformers, socialists, communists, and anarchists, arguing that suffrage would empower these groups by giving a larger political voice to industrial workers and the foreign-born, and eventually bring an end to democracy and capitalism in the United States. Other arguments foresaw the growing power of the lower classes because "respectable" women's fertility would suffer due to the added burden of suffrage. Eugenics and birth control for race improvement also found a place in the rhetoric of the anti-suffragists.³⁰

One compromise was offered to the status-conscious anti-suffragists in 1911. A limited suffrage movement founded in Philadelphia would pass suffrage, but only for educated, or middle to upper class women. Ironically, both camps resoundingly rejected the limited suffrage compromise as narrow-minded, parochial, and undemocratic. Half measures were clearly unacceptable to either side. However, Nebraska legislators may have considered a similar compromise: the exclusion of farm women.³¹

Following the initiative defeat in 1914, Nebraska suffragists resigned themselves to a four-year wait before a new initiative could be proposed. But in 1917 the state legislature surprised both suffragists and anti-suffragists by passing a limited suffrage act allowing women to vote in municipal elections and for presidential electors, the most that could be done without an amendment to the state constitution. The bill had nearly been foiled by the German-American coalition in the senate led by Senator John Mattes of Nebraska City, owner and founder of Mattes' Brewery. In the spring of 1917 two limited suf-

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frage bills were simultaneously proposed in the upper and lower houses of the legislature. The senate version was quickly killed by Mattes as president pro tempore of the senate and chairman of the sifting committee. Poised to repeat the process with the version passed by the house, Mattes's plans were disrupted in April with the U.S. declaration of war on the country of his birth. With his patriotism and culture under attack, not to mention his livelihood with the recent adoption of prohibition, Mattes and the other Germans in the legislature were forced to make a deal. A German language law threatened by repeal became the vehicle to passage of the limited suffrage act. Legislators favoring woman suffrage voted to continue to allow German to be taught in the public schools, and Mattes supported limited suffrage for Nebraska women.³²

Prohibition had passed in Nebraska almost simultaneously with limited woman suffrage, and with the full support of the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association. Their 1917 convention adopted a resolution favoring nationwide prohibition: "Whereas the conserving of all grains . . . is needed by our allies and vitally necessary to the winning of the war . . . BE IT RESOLVED, that the Nebraska Womans (*sic*) Suffrage Association in state convention assembled urges upon the United States Congress . . . the passage of . . . prohibition."³³

The political power of the German-Americans and the Brewers' Association was seriously curtailed when the United States entered World War I. As xenophobia gripped the nation, anything associated with Germany became anathema. Both suffragists and anti-suffragists smeared their opposition with connection to German imports: anti-suffragists were portrayed as mere fronts for the brewery gangs; suffragists were in league with socialists.³⁴ German-American political power decreased dramatically as their loyalty came under question, and the issues they had fought against for so long gained in popularity. The Democratic Party endorsed both

national prohibition and full woman suffrage in the 1918 platform, causing a mass exodus by German-American voters until the 1920s.³⁵ But there was nowhere else to turn.

Nebraska had fifteen breweries and one distillery in 1917, most of which were in Omaha. That city's mayor, James Dahlman, became the spokesman for the anti-suffragists.³⁶ Mayor Dahlman was



Omaha Mayor James C. Dahlman.
NSHS-RG2990-2

the frontman for the city's political machine run by Tom Dennison and Frank Johnson. Johnson's predecessor, Edward Rosewater, published the *Omaha Bee*, a paper that tended to oppose women's participation in politics until Rosewater's death in 1906. The nineteenth century machine had depended on alcohol, gambling, and prostitution; female suffrage posed a clear threat to the machine's power. Dahlman, by now termed the "perpetual mayor," considered women as qualified as men to vote, but feared that woman suffrage would usher in prohibition, the only reason, he claimed, that he would vote against the extension of the franchise.³⁷

Once the limited woman suffrage law

passed Nebraska's legislature, the state's anti-suffrage association organized in full force to block its implementation. The Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage voiced the arguments of their national coalition. They appealed to those resistant to social change by evoking established social myths: political competition with men would lead to a loss of modesty and gentleness while forcing women to become more aggressive; suffrage would double divorce rates by causing discord within the home, and would destroy good wives and mothers who would neglect the home; women would merely duplicate their husband's vote because they have no knowledge of government; and because of their physical inferiority, they would be unable to enforce the laws they would help create. Anti-suffragists also appealed to the nativist, racist, and class-based attitudes of early twentieth century society, but so did suffragists.³⁸

Nebraska anti-suffragists also appealed to the voters whose mandate against woman suffrage in 1914 had been cast aside by the 1917 legislative act. In a letter to the editor of the *Omaha World-Herald* following the passage of the limited suffrage law, the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage claimed that the suffragists had harassed and intimidated the state legislature into passing the bill "over the veto of the people. This is the worst blow to representative government that our country has received. . . . Legislators forget that they represent the people, not the suffragists." Antis further warned "that when a handful of women seek to set aside the verdict of the voters at the polls they make more enemies for their cause than they suspect."³⁹

Nebraskans opposed to woman suffrage set out to prove that claim with the referendum petition of 1917. For legal advice the anti-suffragists turned to Senator John F. Moriarty, a leading member of the Democratic Party, and a Catholic. Moriarty drafted the referendum petition circulated by the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage and se-

cured the services of an experienced referendum organizer.⁴⁰ In just three months the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage collected more than 30,000 names, blocking the law until it could be voted upon by the male electorate at the next election.

German-Americans were repeatedly blamed for organizing the petition drive.⁴¹ At the height of war hysteria, the use of anti-German rhetoric would play nicely for the suffragists to push the patriotic into the suffrage camp. The *Woman Citizen*, the national organ of the National Woman Suffrage Association, reported that the German-American Alliance had publicly stated its involvement in Nebraska's referendum to nullify woman suffrage.⁴²

But German-Americans were not the only group opposed to woman suffrage. L. F. Crofoot, a leading anti-suffragist along with his wife, was also president of the Nebraska Prosperity League, a pro-liquor campaign organization. Senator John F. Moriarty, the legislator who helped the anti-suffragists organize their referendum drive, may have been motivated equally by Catholic conservatism and self-interest. He was the attorney for Omaha's saloonkeepers.

Due to wartime hysteria against the Kaiser and beer, Germans and saloonkeepers could not openly work against woman suffrage, but the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage could. Like the national organization, Nebraska's female anti-suffragists were active in the public domain, but they shied away from political work, even to stop the passage of suffrage. Mrs. William Archibald Smith reported her attitudes about working for the Nebraska anti-suffrage association: "I was elected the first secretary of the organization and I took the work I must say at first rather unwillingly because I did not want to become involved in any political work, . . . [But] there was a demand among a large majority of women . . . that we did not want to enter political life, that there should be an organization which would publicly express

our opposition. . . . [There] was a principle involved."⁴³ Such attitudes are key to an examination of the failed signature collection process because most of the women refused to carry the petitions themselves. Instead the association paid others to collect signatures, opening the process to fraud.



Lodowick F. Crofoot. *Nebraskans, 1854-1904*. NSHS-978.2/B39m

During the suffragists' 1914 initiative campaign, nearly all petitioners had been female members of the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association. One anti-suffragist claimed the suffragists did not have to hire help because "they have a great deal more time to spare than we have." The Nebraska anti-suffragists in 1917, however, relied almost completely on hired circulators outside Omaha, where there were nearly no women circulators. One exception was Maud May, who personally took charge of the campaign in Fremont and almost single-handedly secured the quota of signatures for Dodge County. In Omaha, a few women did circulate petitions. Mrs. Charles C. George, treasurer of the Ne-

braska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, claimed she "circulate[d] petitions, not privately at all, but taking them down—for instance in the packing houses" and to several banks and mercantile stores. Most of the circulators, however, were not loyal anti-suffragists, but men who needed to make money.⁴⁴

Nebraska's anti-suffrage movement shared other similarities with the national anti-suffragists. The Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage had connections to moneyed interests. Among the membership of the women's and men's leagues were names associated with big business, particularly in Omaha: president of the electric company, grocers, seven bank presidents, numerous lawyers, the president of the Omaha Gas Company, and railroad and other mass transit company executives. Capitalists and industrialists, along with their wives and daughters, made up the leadership of the Nebraska anti-suffragists.⁴⁵ However, the Nebraska Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage categorically denied that the referendum was carried on under the direction or control of any outside organization: "The Nebraska association was wholly responsible for this themselves."⁴⁶

Nor would anti-suffragists admit any connections to the liquor interests. The secretary of the anti-suffrage association claimed, "It is just as unfair to accuse the association of being supported by the saloons and the vice interests as it is to make the suffrage association responsible for such women as Rose Pastor Stokes and Vardaman, and LaFollette's actions."⁴⁷ No analysis of the Nebraska petitions for connections to liquor interests was ever attempted, but in Ohio's 1914 campaign suffragists investigated and found that a liquor organization had paid for an anti-suffrage pamphlet that was distributed door-to-door. In North Dakota, a dry state, the referendum attempt failed miserably. In every state suffrage campaign, some link to the liquor interests was charged against the anti-suffrage organizations.⁴⁸ Nebraska had been dry only a few months

Anti-Suffrage in Nebraska

Ten Reasons Why The Great Majority of Women Do Not Want the Ballot.

BECAUSE they have not lost faith in their fathers, husbands, sons and brothers, who afford full protection to the community, there being no call for women to relieve them of the task.

BECAUSE women realize that when they become voters they will in consequence have to serve as jurors, and be compelled to hear all the repugnant details incident to murder trials and trials for other crimes disclosing unspeakable wickedness. Jury service is abhorrent to every normal woman.

BECAUSE in political activities there is constant strife, turmoil, contention and bitterness, producing conditions from which every normal woman naturally shrinks.

BECAUSE the primary object of government is to protect persons and property. This duty is imposed by nature upon man, the women being by nature absolved from assuming a task to them impossible.

BECAUSE when women noisily contest and scramble for public office—woman pitted against woman—they write an indictment of womankind against which all right-minded women strenuously protest.

BECAUSE women can accomplish more through counselling than they ever can attain through commanding.

BECAUSE woman suffrage will not enhance peace and harmony in the home, but, on the contrary, in the heat of a campaign, it is sure to bring about dissension and discord.

BECAUSE Nebraska women are already enjoying a greater measure of protection and privilege under the law than do women of any state where women vote.

BECAUSE the woman worker wants rest and quietude—not political excitement.

BECAUSE every reason supporting the claim of women to vote supports also the right of women to be consulted as to whether they shall or shall not be given the ballot.

Issued by the Nebraska Association Opposed to Women Suffrage, Omaha, Nebraska.

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when the referendum was initiated, so "liquor organizations [were still able to] muster considerable strength."⁴⁹ Many ex-saloonkeepers and Germans were among the circulators or allied with the anti-suffragists for prohibition reasons according to some Nebraska newspapers.⁵⁰ The Nebraska anti-suffragists probably did not seek an alliance with the anti-prohibitionists, but the shared goals would have naturally brought

those seeking to legalize alcohol into the anti-suffragist's camp. The same is true of industrialists. Men and women who expected their status and income to decline because of the growing power of women would be more likely to join with the anti-suffragists.

The Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association demanded to review the referendum petition signatures, first as a threat to publish the names of the signers.

They soon found such tactics unnecessary. Many of the signatures were in alphabetical order and appeared to be forgeries. Preliminary investigation found evidence of extensive fraud, including improper collection of signatures, the names of minor and deceased signers, and addresses that did not exist.⁵¹ The state supreme court nullified the referendum petition effort in 1919, restoring limited suffrage for women until the national amendment passed the next year. Due to widespread charges of fraud in the referendum campaign, Nebraska's anti-suffragists failed to prove that Nebraskans opposed the expansion of the electorate.

It remains unclear whether the voters would have overturned the legislature's limited suffrage bill. Anti-suffragists, if not a majority, were certainly a very strong minority. They were not, however, a monolith. Anti-suffragists were divided on many issues: some opposed woman suffrage because it would strengthen prohibitionists, others rejected the massive social change they perceived to be part of the suffrage agenda, and many women feared the ballot because they would lose social deference without gaining political equality. Taken as a whole, those opposed to woman suffrage made a powerful force in Nebraska, but their efforts became moot with the ratification of the nineteenth amendment in 1920.

Notes

¹ The federal amendment was ratified with the support of Nebraska's legislature and full suffrage was added to the state constitution in the same year. For a history of woman suffrage in Nebraska see Ann L. Wiegman Wilhite, "Sixty-five Years Till Victory: A History of Woman Suffrage in Nebraska," *Nebraska History* 49 (Summer, 1969): 149-163, and James E. Potter, "*Barkley v. Pool*: Woman Suffrage and the Nebraska Referendum Law," *Nebraska History* 69 (Spring, 1988): 11-18.

² Paul Kleppner, *The Cross of Culture: A Social Analysis of Midwestern Politics 1850-1900* (New York: Free Press, 1970), 7-34; Frederick C. Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics: The Germans of Nebraska 1880-1900* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 66, 79, 87, 115; Robert Wallace Chery, *Populist and Progressive in Ne-*

braska: *A Study of Nebraska Politics 1885-1912* (Ph. D. diss. Columbia University, 1972), 385; Luebke, *Nebraska: An Illustrated History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 187.

³ Kleppner, *Cross of Culture*, 70; Cherny, *Populist and Progressive*, 353-57; *The Nebraska Blue Book and Historical Register*, ed. Addison E. Sheldon (Lincoln: State Journal Company, 1915), 759. Pietists and ritualists held differing views on how to attain salvation. Pietists believed it depended upon right behavior, while ritualists relied on faith. German sectarians, or splinter evangelical groups, tended to be pietistic and therefore identified with the Republican ideology, while the Reformed churches were more ritualistic.

⁴ Kleppner, *Cross of Culture*, 70; *Nebraska Blue Book* (1915), 759.

⁵ Philip Gleason, "An Immigrant Group's Interest in Progressive Era Reform: The Case of the German-American Catholics," *American Historical Review* 73 (December 1967): 372-73.

⁶ Luebke, *Immigrants and Politics*, 124, 128-30, 140, 182-83; Luebke, *Nebraska*, 178-80; Cherny, *Populist and Progressive*, 1; Thomas J. Jablonsky, *The Home, Heaven and Mother Party: Female Anti-Suffragists in the United States, 1868-1920* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishers Inc., 1994), 65-67.

⁷ Cherny, *Populist and Progressive*, 401, 403, 390; Frederick C. Luebke, "The German-American Alliance in Nebraska, 1910-1917," *Nebraska History* 49 (Summer 1968): 165. The term "German" is used somewhat loosely in these studies as it does not necessarily refer to an immigrant's point of origin, particularly prior to 1871, but to his language and culture.

⁸ Luebke, "The German-American Alliance," provides the best overview. See also James Clifton Child, *The German-American in Politics 1914-1917* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1939), 7, 18-19; Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska: The Land and the People*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1931), 918.

⁹ John J. Rumbarger, *Profits, Power, and Prohibition: Alcohol Reform and the Industrializing of America, 1800-1930* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 7.

¹⁰ James C. Olson and Ronald C. Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 215, 228-29, 274-75, 277. Prohibition most adversely affected the Democrats in 1916 when the state party split because party progressives, led by William Jennings Bryan, formed a prohibition faction against the traditional anti-prohibition party.

¹¹ Sheldon, *Land and People*, 911; *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, 5553, Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association Papers, Nebraska State Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska (hereafter, Nebraska Suffrage Papers); Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, *Nebraska Women Through the Years, 1867-1967* (Lincoln: Johnson Publishing

Co., 1967), 22-23; Eleanor Flexnor, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 307.

¹² "New Woman and the Temperance Problem," *Yearbook of the United States Brewers' Association* (New York: United States Brewers' Association, 1912), 178-79.

¹³ "Brewery Gang Postpone Suffrage," *St. Edward* (Nebraska) *Advance*, Aug. 3, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

¹⁴ Manuela Thurner, "Better Citizens Without the Ballot: American Anti-Suffrage Women and Their Rationale During the Progressive Era," *Journal of Women's History* (Spring 1993): 33-34.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37, 33-34, 38, 44-45; Susan E. Marshall, "In Defense of Separate Spheres: Class and Status Politics in the Anti-Suffrage Movement," *Social Forces* 65 (December 1980): 311, 328, 337-38.

¹⁶ The MAOFESW was founded in May 1895 in response to suffrage victories in the 1890s. A petition with twelve signatures effectively killed a municipal suffrage bill in the state legislature that year, spurring anti-suffragists in neighboring eastern states to organize. See Marshall, "Separate Spheres," 330, and Anne M. Benjamin, *A History of the Anti-Suffrage Movement in the United States from 1895 to 1920: Women Against Equality* (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellon Press, 1991), 1-7.

¹⁷ Thurner, "Better Citizens," 49, 38-40; Benjamin, *Anti-Suffrage Movement*, 104.

¹⁸ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, 5530, Nebraska Suffrage Papers. Nebraska's suffrage leaders also went to work for the war effort, see Sheldon, *Land and People*, 922.

¹⁹ L. F. Crofoot, "Lest Catholic Men Be Misled," Nov. 2, 1914, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; Thurner, "Better Citizens," 40-42, 48, 51.

²⁰ Mary Ellen Swift, "Suffrage for Women a Handicap in Civic Work," *Woman's Protest* 3 (August 1913): 3; Thurner, "Better Citizens," 42-43; Marshall, "Separate Spheres," 336.

²¹ Benjamin, *Anti-Suffrage Movement*, 110-18, 112, 169-70. Theodore Roosevelt and William Jennings Bryan also traveled to Omaha during the campaign to speak in favor of woman suffrage.

²² *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, 1244, 5530-59; "Mrs. E. P. Peck Elected Anti-Suffrage Chairman," *Omaha Bee*, Sept. 20, 1914, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers; Thurner, "Better Citizens," 35-36; Marshall, "Separate Spheres," 329, 331.

²³ Wilhite, "Sixty-five Years Till Victory," 160; Marshall, "Separate Spheres," 331; *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, 5535, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²⁴ NMAOWS, "Nebraska Clergymen Condemn Woman Suffrage," Omaha, 1914 (New Haven: Research Publications Inc., 1977, no. 9329), 2-5, 10.

²⁵ NMAOWS, "Manifesto," Omaha, 1914 (New

Haven: Research Publications Inc., 1977, no. 9330), 6-7.

²⁶ Crofoot, "Lest Catholic Men Be Misled."

²⁷ "Facts Which Nebraska Women Must Face," *Omaha World-Herald*, Nov. 2, 1914, 8, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers. The Nebraska suffrage amendment did not automatically change the jury duty law, which specifically said "male."

²⁸ *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, 5551, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

²⁹ The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage peaked in 1916 with a membership of 350,000 members and twenty-five state organizations. Thurner, "Better Citizens," 30-35; Marshall, "Separate Spheres," 329-30; *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, 5530-59, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³⁰ Marshall, "Separate Spheres," 336, 339-41, 342-45; Anastasia Sjms, "Beyond the Ballot: The Radical Vision of the Anti-Suffragists," *Votes for Women! The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee, the South, and the Nation* ed. M. S. Wheeler (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), 105-28. Many leading members of the suffrage organizations were also involved in the "science" of race improvement. In Nebraska, NWSA president Dr. Inez Philbrick was an outspoken proponent of birth control among less desirable elements of society.

³¹ Benjamin, *Anti-Suffrage*, 147-51; "The Farm Woman," n. d., *Omaha World-Herald*, and "Nebraska Women Still Hopeful," unknown source, Apr. 7, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers. There is no proof of the rumor in the Senate Record.

³² "Senate Suffrage Bill Smothered," *Omaha Daily News*, Mar. 29, 1917; "Still Chance for Woman Suffrage," *ibid.*; "Germans Dupe Woman," *Hamilton [Ohio?] News*, July 28, 1917, "clippings" file; *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, 5538, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³³ Minutes of Annual Convention of Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association, Nov. 4, 1917, "writings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

³⁴ Benjamin, *Anti-Suffrage Movement*, 180-90. See, for example, Crofoot's "Lest Catholic Men Be Misled."

³⁵ Cherny, *Populist and Progressive*, 336.

³⁶ Sheldon, *Land and People*, 907, 916.

³⁷ Potter, "*Barkley v. Pool*," 12. Rosewater publicly debated Susan B. Anthony during Nebraska's 1882 campaign for a woman suffrage amendment. Orville D. Menard, *Political Bossism in Mid-America: Tom Dennison's Omaha 1900-1933* (New York: University Press of America, 1989), 72-75, 123-24.

³⁸ Marshall, "Separate Spheres," 335-6; Benjamin, *Anti-Suffrage*, 54; Sims, "Beyond the Ballot," 105-28; Lois R. Noun, *Strong Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman Suffrage Movement in*

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Iowa (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1969), 50–53.

³⁹ NAOWS, letter to the editor, *Omaha World-Herald*, Mar. 23, 1917; NAOWS, letter to the editor, *Omaha Daily Bee*, Feb. 1, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴⁰ Obituary of John F. Moriarty, n. d., "clippings" file, *Omaha World Herald*, Omaha Public Library; *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, 5541, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴¹ See for example, "The Teutonic Touch in Nebraska," *Woman's Journal*, Aug. 25, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴² "Germans Fighting Suffrage in Nebraska," *Woman Citizen*, June 30, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴³ *Barkley v. Pool* testimony, 5534–35, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 5547–49, 1249–50.

⁴⁵ Thomas Chalder Coulter, "A History of Woman Suffrage in Nebraska, 1856–1920," (Ph.D. diss. Ohio State University, 1967), 127–34; Jane Jerome Camhi, *Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880–1920* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1994), 108. See NMAOWS, "Nebraska Clergymen Condemn Woman Suffrage," 11, for a member list of the men's league.

⁴⁶ *Barkley V. Pool* testimony, 5547, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

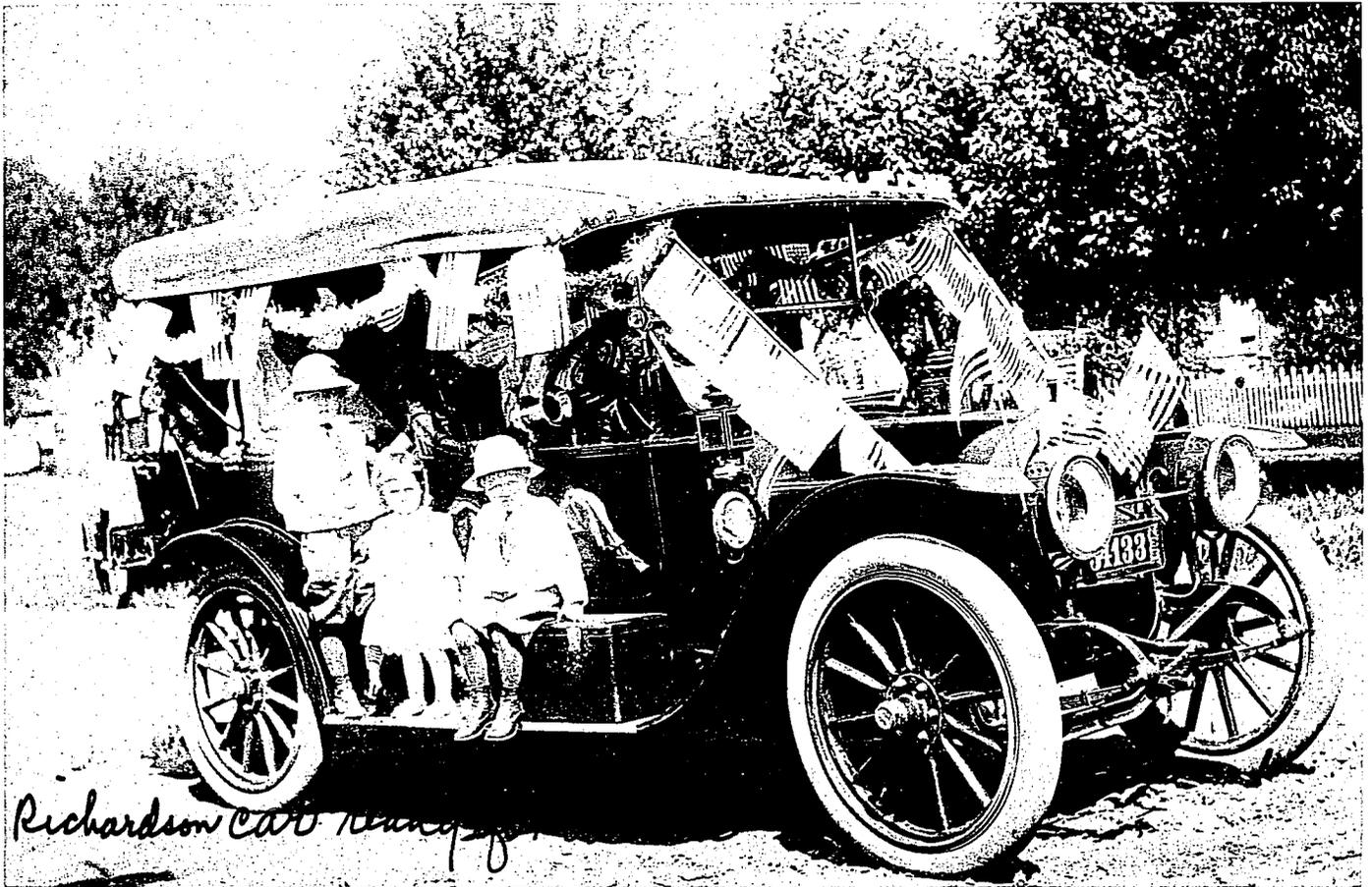
⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5552. Stokes and Vardaman were radical feminists.

⁴⁸ Benjamin, *Anti-Suffrage*, 170–90.

⁴⁹ "Suffrage Referendum," *Lincoln Nebraska State Journal*, June 23, 1917.

⁵⁰ "Anti-Suffragists Gather signatures for Referendum Petition," *Omaha Daily Bee*, July 11, 1917; "263 Circulators of Anti-Petitions," *Omaha Daily News*, Feb. 15, 1918; "Antis to Renew Suffrage Fight," *ibid.*, Apr. 22, 1917, "clippings" file, Nebraska Suffrage Papers.

⁵¹ When questioned about the extraordinary number of names in alphabetical order on the petitions, one referendum worker explained that he collected signatures up one side of the street and down the other. *Barkley v. Pool*, testimony, 4189–91, 4159–64, 4456. For a discussion of the fraud and its effects on the state's petition process see Potter's *Barkley v. Pool*, 11–18.



Suffrage float for a parade in Blair, Nebraska, July 1914. NSHS-RG1073