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Article Summary: Three times in the nineteenth century Nebraska considered granting full suffrage to women. When the third attempt ended in a resounding defeat in 1882, the suffrage movement abandoned the goal of achieving legislative change one state at a time. The national campaign waged after that Nebraska defeat culminated in the passage and ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution thirty years later.

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Photographs / Images: Clara Bewick Colby, organizer of the Nebraska suffrage movement; portrait of Susan B Anthony in Nebraska City (1871); Lucy Correll, who wrote for her husband's pro-suffrage newspapers; Erasmus M Correll, founder of the *Hebron Journal* and publisher/editor of the *Western Woman's Journal*; Ada M Bittenbender, attorney, editor of Nebraska's first Farmer's Alliance newspaper; inset article reporting on a Susan B Anthony lecture, *Hebron Journal*, November 1, 1877; the town of Hebron, Nebraska, in the 1870s (one two-page view and one single-page view); upper half of page 1 of the first issue of the *Western Woman's Journal*, April 1881, including a letter from editor Erasmus Correll; Harriet Sophia Brewer Brooks, the most senior Nebraska women's rights activist; Edward Rosewater, anti-suffragist editor of the *Omaha Daily Bee*, who debated Clara Bewick Colby and Susan B Anthony; inset petition form printed in a Woman Suffrage supplement to the *Western Woman's Journal*, 1882, to gather support for the suffrage amendment; inset article about a National Woman Suffrage Association meeting in Omaha, *Omaha Bee*, September 28, 1882; inset headline describing the Anthony/Rosewater debate, *Omaha Daily Bee*, October 16, 1882; inset article announcing Nebraska election results, *Lincoln Daily State Journal*, November 8, 1882; Matthew Brady studio's 1890 photograph of Susan B Anthony, Clara Bewick Colby, and sculptor Bessie Potter



# "STRIVING \*\* \* \* FOR \* \* \* EQUAL RIGHTS FOR ALL"

### Woman Suffrage in Nebraska 1855-1882<sup>1</sup>

For years, suffrage leaders saw Nebraska as the nation's best hope to grant women the right to vote, but an 1882 statewide election caused the movement to rethink its national strategy.

The morning of November 7, 1882, was far from an ordinary morning in Nebraska. It was Election Day, and a special one at that. Nebraska was poised to become the first state in the Union to recognize women's right to full suffrage and equal citizenship with men. It was a moment nearly thirty years in the making and a result both of Nebraska's history of progressivism and of a serendipitous convergence of people and politics. Women's rights advocates hoped to transform national politics by changing their state constitution, but they were to be disappointed.

Three times prior to the twentieth century, Nebraska women stood on the threshold of full citizenship, and three times their efforts were denied. Like any social movement, the nearly century-long struggle for woman's rights was made up of local failures and achievements, both of which helped propel the national movement forward. And while Nebraska's early suffrage initiatives failed, they were key historical moments that shaped the trajectory of the national women's rights movement that ultimately led to a strategy to amend the United States Constitution. In other words, after striking out in Nebraska three times in thirty years, many woman suffrage advocates decided that state legislative change-even in progressive states—was better left behind in favor of national legislative change.

Clara Bewick Colby's efforts to organize a suffrage movement in Nebraska impressed national leaders such as Susan B. Anthony. Colby, however, knew that the local movement had deep roots. "It is remarkable," she wrote in the 1880s, that thirty years earlier "in a country with but scant communication with the older parts of the Republic, this instinctive justice should have crystallized into legislative action." Wisconsin Historical Society, Image ID: 26613



The first push for woman suffrage began in 1856 during Nebraska's territorial days. Writing in the 1880s, Clara Bewick Colby of Beatrice observed, "It is remarkable . . . that, thirty years ago, when the discussion of woman's status was still new in Massachusetts and New York, and only seven years after the first woman-suffrage convention ever held, here—half way across a continent, in a country almost unheard of, and with but scant communication with the older parts of the Republic—this instinctive justice should have crystallized into legislative action."2 That legislative action was spearheaded by Amelia Jenks Bloomer of Council Bluffs, Iowa, in a speech given to the Nebraska territorial legislature at Omaha in 1856, less than a decade after the landmark Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention of 1848. Bloomer, formerly of New York State, founder of the woman's rights journal the Lily and popularizer of the "Bloomer costume," found herself in this remarkable position as a result of an earlier visit to the eight-month-old city of Omaha on July 4, 1855, when she spoke on the subject of woman's rights.3 Her lecture aroused curiosity among Nebraska's political leaders and as a result, twenty-five members of the Nebraska territorial legislature extended a formal invitation for Bloomer to address their assembly. Her persuasive speech influenced lawmakers to consider a woman suffrage bill in both houses; however, by virtue of being placed on the agenda for the last day of the session, the bill died for lack of vote. Had it been approved, Nebraska would have been the first territory or state in the United States to give women the right of equal franchise.4

The spirit of progressivism that marked Nebraska's early consideration of liberal legislation continued in 1867 when it joined the Union as the thirty-seventh state in March, and in June ratified the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>5</sup> Woman suffrage was not part of that state constitution; however, Nebraska's affirmation of universal male suffrage and its earlier consideration of female suffrage attracted the interest of eastern suffrage activists who had decided to abandon the strategy of linking woman suffrage and Negro suffrage after failing to do so in Kansas—after all, they believed, the question of suffrage for black men was now decided in Nebraska.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, woman suffrage advocates could focus solely on arguing for women's enfranchisement under the Fourteenth Amendment. On November 15, 1867, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and George Francis Train arrived in Omaha to speak on the question as they worked their way



Susan B. Anthony sat for this portrait in Nebraska City during an 1871 visit. NSHS RG2669-5

back east following the Kansas defeat.<sup>7</sup> Their efforts bore some fruit, for according to Colby, "The early legislation of Nebraska was favorable to woman, and much ahead of that passed in the same period by most of the older States." For example, Nebraska granted school suffrage for women in 1869, and at almost every legislative session of the next few years, the question of woman suffrage was introduced.<sup>9</sup>

Even though Nebraska's early initiatives for female suffrage failed, eastern women's rights activists visited the state hoping to organize local support for another constitutional challenge. These activists included Hannah Tracy Cutler, a well-known national suffrage speaker and writer who spoke in Lincoln during the winter of 1870 and attempted to organize a state suffrage association, but failed. Similarly, Anthony addressed sympathetic audiences in Lincoln and tried her hand at organizing a state association, but was similarly thwarted. Esther L. Warner of Roca, Nebraska, described the difficulties of creating permanent organizational interest in suffrage:

During the same winter [as Cutler] Miss Susan B. Anthony lectured in Lincoln, and presented a petition to be signed by women, asking to be allowed to vote under the fourteenth amendment. She also called a meeting of ladies in a hotel parlor and aided in organizing a State suffrage society. Her rare executive ability accomplished what other hands would have failed to do, for the difficulties in the way of such a movement at that early day were great. Lydia Butler, wife of Governor Butler, was elected president, and other representative women filled the various offices, but after a short time it was deemed wise to disband. as circumstances made it impossible to keep up an efficient organization. Time and money were not plentiful with western women, but we did what we could, and sent a petition to the legislature that winter asking a resolution recommending the coming State convention to omit the word "male" from the constitution. The petition was signed by about 1,000 women, and received respectful attention from the legislature.10

With support from this petition, resolutions for woman suffrage and women's legal rights were considered by Nebraska's 1871 constitutional convention, including a resolution granting married women's property rights. But the amendment for woman suffrage was defeated when it was sent to Nebraska's male voters, 3,502 for and 12,668 against.<sup>11</sup>

For a variety of reasons, woman suffrage advocates were not able to overcome their opponents and effect an efficient organization. For one, woman suffrage was not taken seriously by some lawmakers who introduced, for example, ridiculous resolutions advocating that the word "male" be stricken from the entirety of the state's constitution and "female" inserted instead. Another suggestion was that men be removed by force of law from all occupations, legally place women therein, and require men to "fill the occupations and employments heretofore usually filled by women, such as nursing and the usual household duties of females together with running sewing societies, tea parties and all other employments of females not herein enumerated so as to properly fit him for both a useful and ornamental person in society."12 Compounding or perhaps causing a lack of funds and sympathetic workers was the fact that Lydia Butler, then president of Nebraska's nascent state suffrage society, had a larger task on her hands as a result of the impeachment of her husband Governor David Butler. 13 But in spite of these setbacks, Nebraska's

"Many self-satisfied women...
were soon awakened to a new
consciousness
of their true status wherein they
discovered their
'rights' were only
'privileges.'"
-Lucy Correll

Lucy Correll of Hebron wrote for her husband's pro-suffrage newspapers and was instrumental in establishing the first permanent woman suffrage association in Nebraska. NSHS RG2411-1106



woman's rights advocates pushed their cause forward, and Nebraska women achieved rights consistent with other states, including married women's property rights.<sup>14</sup>

s a result of Nebraska's quickly chang-Aing demographics, the work done by national activists in the early 1870s was largely forgotten. But in the late 1870s, a grassroots movement for woman suffrage emerged from southeast Nebraska, generally organized by newcomers to the state, who Lucy Correll of Hebron called a "band of progressive, thinking women" residing in Gage, Douglas, Jefferson, Polk, and Thayer counties.<sup>15</sup> These women were broadminded and educated civic activists married to progressive and politically active men; among them were Clara Bewick Colby, whose husband Leonard W. Colby was a well-known Beatrice attorney; Lucy Correll, whose husband Erasmus M. Correll was editor of the Hebron Journal; Harriet S. Brooks, whose husband D. C. Brooks was editor of the Omaha Republican; and Ada M. Bittenbender, who with her husband H. C. Bittenbender, was editor of the Osceola Record.

This activism was in large part due to the personal experiences and networks brought by the core group of Ada M. Bittenbender, Harriet Brooks, Erasmus M. Correll, and Clara Bewick Colby. Their shared values regarding political philosophy and education, as well as their professional experience, united them—as did their understanding of the West as a place of social transformation and

political opportunity that could be used to build a better America. Brooks (b. 1828), the most senior of Nebraska's woman's rights activists, was college-educated and raised in Michigan, and had experience in Chicago's Cook County Woman's Franchise Association and the Illinois Woman's Suffrage Association, as well as the National Woman Suffrage Association.<sup>16</sup> She arrived in Nebraska in 1876 when her husband accepted the editorship of the Omaha Republican. Bittenbender (b. 1848) was also college-educated, and gained distinction as Nebraska's first "lady lawyer." With her husband, she emigrated from Pennsylvania to Osceola, Nebraska, in 1878, where Henry Bittenbender began practicing law and in 1879 purchased and Ada began editing the Osceola Record. Ada Bittenbender, with her husband, later established the Polk County Agricultural Association, and became editor of the first Farmers' Alliance newspaper in Nebraska. A temperance advocate, she was an influential member of the Nebraska Woman's Christian Temperance Union, who in 1888 was admitted to argue cases before the United States Supreme Court and served as the attorney for the National WCTU.17

Erasmus M. Correll, Lucy's husband, founded the Hebron Journal in 1871. It soon gained a reputation as a newspaper favorable to women's rights. In 1881-1882, he published and edited the Western Woman's Journal, Nebraska's first suffrage paper. NSHS RG2141-512



But among this group, Clara Colby and Erasmus Correll could be counted as particularly influential during this crucial time. Correll (b. 1846) was a college-educated newspaperman who moved to Nebraska from Illinois in 1869. In 1871 Correll established the Hebron Journal, which immediately gained a reputation as a newspaper favorable to woman's rights. During 1881 and 1882, he edited and published the Western Woman's Journal, which served as the organ of the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association and was the first woman suffrage paper in the state. He was elected from Thayer County to the Nebraska House of Representatives in 1880, and as a result of that position, introduced the bill for woman suffrage that was the focus of the Nebraska campaign in 1881 and 1882.18 Lucy Correll worked on both of her husband's newspapers, and was instrumental in establishing the first permanent woman suffrage association in Nebraska.

Like the others in this group, Colby (b. 1846) was college educated. Raised on the Wisconsin frontier, she moved to Beatrice, Nebraska, in 1872 with her husband, Leonard Wright Colby, who set up a thriving legal practice. In 1876 Leonard purchased the Beatrice Express, the town's Republican newspaper, and became its editor and proprietor; Clara later contributed columns. 19 In 1877 Leonard Colby was elected a Nebraska state senator. With the other Nebraska suffrage leaders, Clara Colby shared a passion for civic improvement, society building, and newspapering. In Nebraska she threw herself into public life, where she worked to establish the Beatrice Public Library, engaged speakers of national reputation for the Ladies' Literary Association, served as the principal of the Beatrice Public School District, assisted with Correll's Western Woman's Journal, and later edited and published the Woman's Tribune (1883-1909), which was the second woman suffrage paper in Nebraska and the second-longest-running woman suffrage paper in the United States.20

A number of common characteristics unified these Nebraska suffrage leaders, and may account for the revitalized effort for woman suffrage. Three of the four came of age on America's emerging western frontier: Correll in Illinois, Brooks in Michigan, and Colby in Wisconsin. All earned college degrees, and shared a similar European Protestant heritage. Correll, Colby, and Bittenbender were of the same generation, and as adults all worked in the educated professional class and lived in town. None were wealthy; their economic position is best classified as middle class. In addition, the



Ada M. Bittenbender became editor of Nebraska's first Farmer's Alliance newspaper. She served as an attorney for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and in 1888 was admitted to argue cases before the United States Supreme Court. The New Republic (Lincoln), Aug. 23, 1888.

three women each had ties to national progressive women's networks. For example, Bittenbender was active in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Colby was active in the Association for the Advancement of Women, and Brooks had ties to the National Woman Suffrage Association. But importantly, this group held passionate views about frontier America; their interest was driven by a Turnerian sense of American progress, social idealism, and sense of responsibility in helping to create a better society as it was being constructed in the West.<sup>21</sup> With other progressives who settled Nebraska, they held the distinct view that they were there to help build up a good society, not take profit from it. Thus, their personal experiences, political beliefs, and extended networks helped prime the pump for a revitalized focus on woman suffrage in Nebraska.

As the local movement gained momentum, Nebraska suffrage activists rediscovered Susan B. Anthony, who accepted Erasmus Correll's invitation to lecture in Hebron on the topic "Bread versus the Ballot" on October 30, 1877. 22 Significantly, now it was Nebraska advocates seeking the assistance of national workers, not the other way around, and the early work done by the Corrells, Colby, and others had shaped a constituency ready to hear Anthony's message. Her talk electrified the cause because, Lucy Correll explained, "Previous to this time many self-satisfied women believed they had all the 'rights' they wanted, but they were soon

Erasmus M. Correll was adept at using the Hebron Journal to unite a far-flung frontier constituency sympathetic to the cause of women's rights. In doing so, he began to develop a more comprehensive state suffrage movement.

The November 1, 1877, issue of the *Hebron Journal* reported Susan B. Anthony's lecture there a few days earlier.

Below: Hebron, Nebraska, in the 1870s, during the time that Erasmus and Lucy Correll were involved with the Hebron Journal. NSHS RG2719-8-3

## Hebran Johnal. THE FLEBRON JOURNAL. Published Every. Thursday. Published Every. Thursday.

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··· ) ESTABLISHED MARCH, 1871. (\* · ·

VOL. VII, NO. 19. HEBRON, NEB., THURSDAY, NOV. 1, 1877.

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#### SUSAN B ANTHONY.

ERASMUS M. CUBBELL.

The lecture by Susan B. Anthony, Tuesday night, on the subject, "Woman wants Bread, not the Ballot," was a clear, logical, and masterly exposition of the theory known as "woman's rights."

The firm, massive under jaw of the lady is indicative of the stern will that has actuated her in her long battle in behalf of her sex, given her the title of "the invincible," and inscribed her name in imperishable characters on the summit of the rugged mount of fame.

awakened to a new consciousness of their true status wherein they discovered their 'rights' were only 'privileges.'"<sup>23</sup> As the *Western Woman's Journal* reported, Anthony "aroused the community, and a majority of the leading citizens became converts to the doctrine of equal rights."<sup>24</sup>

Colby scheduled Anthony to speak in Beatrice the day following her lecture in Hebron. Anthony declared the stop in Beatrice a resounding success, and was impressed with Colby's feminist activism which she acknowledged in a letter written from Lincoln while waiting for the next leg of her journey:

Such women as you . . . have <u>individual</u> work to do —to lift the world into better conditions— & I hope you will not allow anything to estop [sic] you from doing what seems to be your duty— I long to see women be themselves -- not the mere echoes of men -- . . . Mrs. Colby—do, please, write a brief letter of your library work—& lecture Course for the December number of the Ballot Box. . . For you— & every woman to tell what you are doing-helps to rouse other women to do likewise-Women want to be helped into the feeling that they can help on the good works they like to see done—We have been told we couldn't do anything but help the individual man or men of our families—So long & so constantly—that very few women can of themselves get into any work above that—25

By praising Colby's public reform efforts in Beatrice, and by asking her to submit pieces to the radical journal the *National Citizen and Ballot Box* (1878-1881), Anthony's request illustrates the importance assigned to journals and newspapers advocating the suffrage cause. In this way, Nebraskans framed their work as part of a larger social effort, thus uniting what might be seen as disparate local activities into those that furthered a structured, national plan.

Erasmus Correll was particularly adept at using the vehicle of the newspaper to unite a far-flung frontier constituency sympathetic to the cause of women's rights. In doing so, he began to develop



a more comprehensive state suffrage movement which had been lacking in previous attempts to pass woman suffrage legislation—by building on the political momentum gained by Anthony's visit. In early 1879, Correll established a woman's column in his newspaper, the Hebron Journal, and was thus able to further the discussion of woman's rights by publishing-often on the front page-articles written for a readership of women, on topics of interest to women, and usually signed by women writers. A range of topics from the column's first ten weeks were illustrative of those covered during its multi-year run, and included articles on women and education, labor, and temperance; woman suffrage; a discussion of reading material appropriate for young women and girls; and a-discussion of women's roles in the family.26 Keen to encourage debate, Correll also printed the article, "From an Anti-Suffragist."27 Thus, through the pages of the Hebron Journal, Correll began to build up a broad constituency supportive of woman's rights.28

Correll followed a pattern of igniting debate and continuing discussion in the pages of the Journal when in the spring of 1879 he extended an invitation to another national speaker—this time Elizabeth Cady Stanton.<sup>29</sup> Stanton's lecture topic was "Our Girls," which the Hebron Journal reported, had she lived in the Middle Ages, she "would have been burned at the stake as a martyr to advanced principles."30 Nebraskans were ready to hear Stanton's radical woman's rights message; as a result, her presence in southeast Nebraska left a lasting mark on the Nebraska woman's rights movement. Following her address to the citizens of Hebron, Stanton led a private program for women which resulted in the organization of the Thayer County Woman's Suffrage Association—the first permanent woman suffrage association in the state of Nebraska, counting a total of fifteen members.31

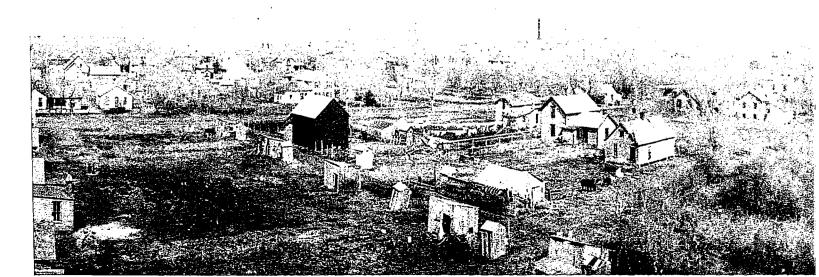


Hebron, Nebraska, ca. 1870s. Thanks to the leadership of the Corrells, national suffrage leaders such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton lectured there, helping create momentum for the movement. NSHS RG2719-8-1

The mission of that first association was "to secure State and National protection for women citizens in the exercises of their right to vote," and fewer than two months after its founding, its membership counted thirty-five women.<sup>32</sup> The Association immediately began its work, and made its first project the circulation of a suffrage petition to be sent to the United States Congress.<sup>33</sup> In celebration of their organization, the women of Hebron declared Stanton their champion, which was noted in the *Hebron Journal*'s "Women's Column" on May 15, 1879:

We congratulate the women that they have organized the Women's S[uffrage] A[ssociation] under such favorable circum-

"A host of women suddenly found themselves gifted with the power to speak and write, which they consecrated to the cause of their civil liberties." -Clara Bewick Colby



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"EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW!"—Motto of Neblaska. AN ARISTOCRACY OF SEX IS REPUGNANT TO A REPUBLIC.

Vol. I

#### LINCOLN, NEB., APRIL, 1881

No.1

#### WESTERN

#### WOMAN'S JOURNAL.

voted to Woman and her Home, Industrial, Educational, and Legal Interests—espec-ially advocating Woman Suffrage

ERASMUS M. CORRELL, Editor & Prop'r.

(Also Editor and Proprietor of the Hebron Journal.)

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#### OUR GREETING.

Without apology, with no plea for special consideration, we present to a critical public the first number of the Western Woman's Journal. We sincerely believe its mission a noble one. Its aims, objects-and tone, if not eloquently, are, at least, clearly and sharply defined on its pages. ever faults it has we hope to lessenwhatever merits it may possess we shallearnestly-endeavor to-increase. Such as it is, with a strong determination to make it better with each succeeding number, we send it forth. If it be unworthy of success, we shall receive without murmuring the adverse judgment—if it merit a favorable reception from a discriminating public, we shall gratefully appreciate the decision, andstrive to attain a higher state of excellence and a corresponding degree of ERASMUS M. CORRELL. success.

#### RIGHTS.

No subjects are of greater importance than questions affecting the political condition of the people. The mental, moral, and physical welfare of the citizens of a state or nation depend more upon the degree of liberty of thought and action enjoyed by the individual citizen than upon anything else.

By reason of the mere fact of existence, every human being possesses certain inherent personal rights. Among these are the right to live, the right to think and act, and the right of en-In addition to these, certain other rights belong to every human being not incapacitated by infancy, insanity, idiocy, or crime. Among these rights are the right to acquire and control property, the right to have and express opinions, and the right of a voice in the organization and management of such societies, associations or governments as may be organized to limit, restrict or control his or her personal rights or privileges.

These rights are not determined by the sex of the individual, nor are they dependent upon any other physical qualification or accident, but pertain equally to all persons. They are birthrights founded upon the broad magna charta of humanity, and are as inherent and indefeasible as the eternal and immutable principles of truth and justice are indestructible.

interests, to change or amend the constitution by which they are gettined.

Governments which do not give just and equal protection and privileges to all citizens, fail to carry out the principles of true government.

The constitution of the state of Nebraska and the constitutions of the other states composing the Union do not provide for equal political rights for women, but authorize an aristocracy of sex, repugnant alike to natural right, justice and the principles of republican government. The educational, social, legal, industrial, and property rights of women depend, as do those of men, upon their political rights.

The ballot secures and protects these rights, and is the means by which the people declare their will

Those who advocate woman suffrage do not ask as a favor of privilege for the removal of the unjust restrictions that now prevent women from receiving the just and e benefits of full citizenship. They sk for the ballot as a right, and maintain that by whatevertenures of right men hold the ballot, women-claim it upon the same grounds Upon every basis of equity, of justice, and of a wise and enlightened public policy, the amendment to the constitution providing for equal political rights for women, should receive the sanction and support of all citizens who believe in progress as opposed to prejudice and injustice, and who have the best interests of the state at heart.

stances. Whoever had the privilege of listening to Mrs. Stanton, enjoyed a "feast of reason and a flow of soul" . . . . Let us consider this matter carefully, not thinking of it lightly, as we would the organization of a newly formed social or [wife] society, but as something to mould and move the nation—a thing not of to-day, but for coming time. . . . Truly, as Mrs. Stanton said, we may be thankful to the editor of the JOURNAL for giving us the control of a column in his paper, a column devoted to the interests of women—a liberality not shown by many papers. This pioneer paper is opening the way. No doubt many will be ready to follow.<sup>34</sup>

Many did follow. Emulating the *Hebron Journal*'s "Woman's Column," the following year saw other newspapers dedicate space to their own woman's columns edited and written by Nebraska's female woman suffrage leaders whose political passion and strength of personality took them through the door opened by the *Hebron Journal*. These included columns in the *Beatrice Express*, edited by Clara Bewick Colby; in the *Omaha Republican*, edited by Harriet S. Brooks; in the *Osceola Record*, edited by



The most senior of Nebraska women's rights activists, Harriet Sophia Brewer Brooks had experience in suffrage organizations before arriving in Nebraska in 1876. Her ties to the National Woman Suffrage Association and the Chicago associations would prove important to the Nebraska movement.

NSHS RG2411-620

Ada M. Bittenbender; and in the *Johnson County Journal*, edited by Lucinda Russell. The crown jewel of the Nebraska woman's rights campaign, however, was later set in the form of the *Western Woman's Journal*, established by Erasmus Correll in

April 1881 as the first woman suffrage paper in Nebraska. Although its tenure was little more than a year and a half, the women's rights news contained within its pages solidified the suffrage movement in Nebraska and, Colby observed, "a host of women suddenly found themselves gifted with the power to speak and write, which they consecrated to the cause of their civil liberties." <sup>35</sup>

As Nebraska women formally organized in support of woman suffrage and woman's rights, Harriet Brooks took action to create a state suffrage association in order to unite the variety of local associations springing up around the state. In her Omaha home on May 30, 1880, Brooks and a half-dozen other women including Clara Colby of Beatrice and Lucy Correll of Hebron met for the purpose of organizing an association to be known as the Nebraska State Suffrage Association. The organization itself was tentative, designed to begin a process that would be expanded later.<sup>36</sup> The main impetus of the meeting, however, was to appoint Brooks and one other as delegates to the mass meeting of the National Woman Suffrage Association in Chicago to be held in June 1880. Brooks's ties to both the NWSA and the Chicago associations would prove to be important connections now that Nebraska was ready to move forward with another challenge to the state's constitution.

n the fall of 1880, two members of the I Thayer County Woman's Suffrage Association were elected to the Nebraska legislature: Erasmus Correll to the House of Representatives and his colleague Charles B. Coon to the Senate.<sup>37</sup> From these positions and backed by a growing grassroots support, Correll and Coon were in place to offer a constitutional question at Nebraska's sixteenth regular session of the legislature in 1881. Accordingly, Correll introduced Nebraska House Roll No. 162, a "Joint resolution providing for the submission to the electors of this state of an amendment to section 1, article 7, of the constitution,"38 which aimed to strike the word "male" from the suffrage article of the Nebraska constitution of 1875 and replace it with the word "person."

With growing public attention to the suffrage issue as a result of the planned introduction of House Roll 162, interest developed in creating a formal statewide woman suffrage association beyond the scope of the tentative one formed in Omaha in May 1880. Noting the urgency of gathering organized support, Lucinda Russell of Tecumseh issued this call in Harriet Brooks's column in the *Omaha Republican*:

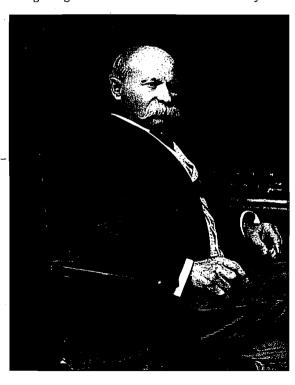
"This town contains scarcely a woman who is opposed to woman suffrage. We know we are a power here..." –Lucinda Russell

"As long as
woman is unjustly
withheld from exercising her right
of suffrage, she
should not be
held answerable
to the laws nor
subject to taxation." – Resolution
adopted by Nebraska Woman
Suffrage Association, 1881

We think it best to call a meeting, even now at this somewhat late day, and send women to Lincoln who will attend personally to this matter. We have left these things neglected too long. Will you call on all women of the State who can do so to assemble at Lincoln during the session of the legislature, appointing the day, etc.? I think we would be surprised at the result. This town contains scarcely a woman who is opposed to woman suffrage. We know we are a power here; and we do not know but the same hearty support which Tecumseh would afford may exist in many towns through the State. All we need for good earnest work and mighty results is organization.<sup>39</sup>

As the legislature began to meet in January, Nebraska women convened in Lincoln, and on January 27, 1881, the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association was formally organized with Harriet Brooks at the helm, and representation from each judicial district in the state. 40 The Nebraska WSA immediately turned its attention to supporting Correll's bill and, Colby explained, "Headquarters were established in Lincoln. Mrs. Brooks remained during the session, and Mesdames Holmes, Russell, Dinsmoor and Colby all, or most of the time, until the act was passed, interviewing the members and securing the promise of their votes for the measure."

Critical to securing passage of the amendment was getting voices of its beneficiaries heard by the



Edward Rosewater, the anti-suffragist editor of the Omaha Daily Bee, debated Clara Bewick Colby in 1881 and Susan B. Anthony in 1882. NSHS RG2411

legislature—this had not been done in a meaningful way during the prior two attempts for woman suffrage. To this end, testimony before the legislature was given by Harriet Brooks, Orpha Dinsmoor, Clara Colby and others who detailed support from all corners of the state. As Colby explained, "Though we who are present are few in numbers, we know that the desire in the section from which we come is very great that this measure be submitted to the people. I may [say] that the ladies in my own town are nearly unanimous in favor of the suffrage for women." Brooks noted the support of "many prominent men and women throughout the state," and singled out "reports from every section of 'a constant pressure' for this measure." She explained, "The question had passed beyond trifling and ridicule many years ago; and it has now almost passed beyond the necessity of argument." Dinsmoor seconded Brooks, noting, "Many ladies of Omaha said to me before coming: 'Tell the members of the legislature that we want a voice.' . . . . while woman has been knocking at the door, the black man has received the suffrageand justly and rightfully, too, for his own protection as a free citizen. It has now come to the question of absolute right—whether one class of people shall say to another: 'You can come only thus far in the direction of liberty."42

But for women like Colby, woman suffrage reflected the best tenets of western life that placed the building of state and society on the shoulders of equally hard-working and patriotic women and men:

The sentiment in many parts of the east, among the learned and society classes is strongly in favor of this, but in the west we have the heart of the people. . . . In the east—as in Massachusetts, where there are 100,000 more women than men—the men seem more tenacious of their rights. Here there is no such sentiment, for there is no occasion for it. Indeed, we women consider ourselves pioneers, equally with our brothers and husbands, and we know that we are helping build up the state in equal measure with you. We, like you, are proud of this state, of *our* state, and we wish perfect liberty to help you build it up in all that is befitting a great and good commonwealth.<sup>43</sup>

For Colby, then, the question of woman suffrage had already been answered by the people of Nebraska who viewed themselves as pioneers—both on the prairies and in politics. Suffrage, then, was a right earned by those who would use it to further the best interests of their chosen state, bestowed

equally upon women who worked shoulder to shoulder with men and had gained their respect.

The bill passed and was signed by the governor on February 26, 1881.44 With legislative approval secured, the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association swung into action with the monumental goal of passing the state suffrage amendment when it came before the electorate in November 1882, giving them less than two years to campaign. From February to July 1881, efforts focused on building an educated popular voter base. As Colby explains, "Lectures were given, and societies and working committees formed as rapidly as possible."45 By the time the Thayer County Woman's Suffrage Association celebrated its second anniversary in the spring of 1881, thirty-nine Nebraska woman's rights associations had been created across the state, including the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association, nine county associations, and twenty-nine local associations.46 And by the time the governor's proclamation announcing the vote on the amendment was published in the Western Woman's Journal in September 1882, more than 175 woman suffrage associations were active in Nebraska.47

While Wyoming Territory had granted women full suffrage in 1869 and Utah Territory in 1870,<sup>48</sup> no state had yet done so, and Nebraska was now poised to become the first. Next on the suffragists' agenda was the organization of the first general convention of the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association held in Omaha in July 1881, which attracted many of the leading women and men citizens of Omaha who listened to speeches such as Ada M. Bittenbender's "Legal Disabilities of the Women of Nebraska," and a lively debate between Clara Colby and Edward Rosewater, the prominent anti-suffragist editor of the *Omaha Bee*.<sup>49</sup> But the main business

of the convention was the adoption of convention resolutions—worthy daughters of the 1848 Seneca Falls convention:

<u>Resolved</u>, That an aristocracy of sex is inconsistent with republican principles.

<u>Resolved</u>, That the fundamental principles of our American republic are:

First—"Government derives its just powers from the consent of the governed";

Second—That "Taxation and representation are inseparable"; as woman is governed and as woman is taxed, woman is clearly entitled to a voice in the government and representation in the halls of the legislature; and that the constitution in prohibiting woman suffrage, not only violates natural rights, but is equally antagonistic to itself.

Resolved, That the act of men in continuing the disfranchisement of one-half of the citizens of this commonwealth, is an unwarranted use of power no longer to be patiently tolerated. The suffrage forces gathered petitions to urge the "qualified electors of the state" (men) to support the suffrage amendment. From the Woman Suffrage supplement to The Western Woman's Journal (1882), NSHS Filmstrip Roll 36

#### PETITION! PETITION!! PETITION!!!

Cut out, paste on a sheet of letter paper, get all the signers possible, and mall september 15th to MRS. CERTRUDE McDOWELL, Fairbury, Neb. This gives you but one week for work. Read "An Appeal" elsewhere.

WHEREAS, We, the Women of Nebraska, are disfranchised by the Constitution solely on account of sex; and WHEREAS, We do respectfully demand the right of suffrage—a right which involves all other rights of citizenship—which cannot justly be withheld as the following admitted principles of government show:

FIRST-"All men are created equal."

SECOND—"Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed."

THIRD—"Taxation and representation are inseparable."

Therefore, We, the undersigned Women of Nebraska, earnestly petition the qualified electors of the State, a the general election to be held in November, 1882, to vote in favor of the proposed amendment to the Constitution, striking out the word "male."

NAM

POST OFFICE

COUNTY

# Woman Suffrage.

SUPPLEMENT

MAKE IN FACT AS IN NAME, NEBRASKA'S MOTTO: "EQUALITY BEFORE THE LAW."



FREEMEN! HO!

BEAD! READ!! BEAD!!!

Liberty and Justice ask a Fair Hearing.

and you value your state just so far as it is an excrept so of persons possessing these qualities, and just so far as it is the means to promote and increase them: It is woman on whom we depend to educate and ferfer the moral qualities of childran, and who possesses the faculty of festering and educating childran on largely that it is admitted that it is rarely that a child who less its mother in early life, grows up possessing them. Vill an older the property of the state will result in the indexed and father in determining what measures and what policy in the state will result in the indexed and property of the p

The capacity to judge of character is peculiar to woman. Senator Hoar says "How often does it hannen that the but

chamber we should throw the windows wide open, and the sweet summer air would sweep all impority away and fill on lungs with fresher life. If we would purge poilities let us turn upon them the great stream of the purest human influence we know."

Women's presence at the polls and political meetings will greatly tend to preserve order and decorum and to insure a "free ballot and a fair count." Neither bayone's nor deputy sheriffs will be needed where wives and mothers are.

The licentiousness of our cities is MEMP, the to the startation pay of women desendent upon their own work for bread, it, the death or misfortune of father, the problem of buttend, are thrown suddenly upon the world without the training needult to earn bread. The failur means better WOMANBUFFRAGE A POLITI CAL REFORM.

Extract from an Address by Hon. H. B.

All admit that some change in our politted system is needed. The crowing corruption of public life is admitted and deplored by gith parties. Low as is the average stanted of private morals; the standard of pilitical ethics is confessedly far lower, yeary year matters seem to grow worst. Our law and our law-mak-

ad;
Now what shall we do about it? How shall we cope with these stern facts? How shall we redeem the future of the great republic?
Only by enlisting all the virtue, all the

e Influence of Suffrage Upo

Men complain of the ignorance, frivally, and apathy in the great questions of the day unone, women, and use, the very fact, as in objection against giving them suffrage. True, but their position has made them so. What incentice his any woman to interest bestell in political subject, in social concern, or in the great questions of the day, when the profoundest thought, the most locked reasoning, or the most able to when the profounder thought, the most locked reasoning, or the most able to the sum of the considered to better than the raving of a manke, or any more to be considered than the criminal's multiered orditing the sum of the consideration of the consideration of the sum of the consideration of the sum of the criminal's multiered orditing the sum of the criminal's multiered orditing the sum of th

BISHOP SIMPROY: "I believe that the vices in our large cities will never be con quered until the ballot is put into the

REV. James PRESEAUCLARES: "I'do not think our politics will be what they out to be till women are legislators and voters."

George, William Criwins. "Women are quite as much interest in good goysoment; as mon; and I have never heard or read of iny antifactory reason for excluding them from the hallot-box; I have not done to their ameliorating infumes upon politics than I have of the infutance upon politics than I have of the infu-

HERRENT SPERCER: "However, much the groung of political power to women may disagree with our motions of propriets we conclude that he for roughly the Resolved, That as long as woman is unjustly withheld from exercising her right of suffrage, she should not be held answerable to the laws nor subject to taxation.

Resolved, That the abridging of woman's right to hold office and have trial by a jury of her peers, is a tyrannical exercise of power.

Resolved, That the most unjust distinction is made in the statutes of Nebraska in favor of man; Therefore, we urgently request the legislature, at its next session, to reconstruct the laws, doing away with all discrimination between the sexes.

Resolved, That it is clearly the duty of the women of Nebraska to become intelligently acquainted with the laws by which they are governed; that the apathy of woman in regard to the wrongs of her sex, instead of being a plea for remaining in her present condition, is the strongest argument against it. . . .

<u>Resolved</u>, That we pledge ourselves not to relinquish our untiring efforts to wipe out forever the stigma of aristocracy of sex.<sup>50</sup>

Following the adoption of these resolutions, the convention continued its program of speeches and addresses that included "a masterly constitutional argument" from Clara Colby, and two speeches by Amelia Bloomer, who "gave reminiscences of her work in the Nebraska Legislature twenty years ago," and another "reviewing the position of the Bible on the subjugation of women." <sup>51</sup>

In the same way Nebraskans used newspapers, conventions were an important way to excite and inform the electorate, and this first state convention paved the way for a third general convention and first delegate convention held later that year at Kearney in October, where the faithful were sustained with speeches and a reaffirmation of the resolutions adopted at July's convention in Omaha. The most important work of this convention however, was adopting the woman suffrage platform:

We, the representatives of the Nebraska State Woman Suffrage Association, in convention assembled at Kearney, Nebraska, October 19th, '81, hereby declare our fealty to the great principles on which our government is founded, and reiterate the principles of the National Woman Suffrage Association...whose object is to secure to woman political equality with man.

Contemplating these facts and mindful of the blessings we enjoy, we here earnestly resolve to continue the struggle for the supremacy of the right and the abolition of all wrong;

trusting, hoping and striving for equal rights for all, and the lifting of the yoke of bondage from the oppressed of every class, sex and condition in life, and to this end we pledge our solemn determination to prosecute this effort until a satisfactory result is reached; and that our declared purpose shall continue to be the removal of all social, moral and political distinctions that to-day discriminate unjustly between the sexes and consecrate our lives and united energies to the ultimate adoption of the proposed constitutional amendment securing to the women of Nebraska the right of franchise.<sup>52</sup>

The Kearney convention also made clear that interest in the amendment was rising. As the *Western Woman's Journal* reported: "As illustrative of how much in earnest some of the Nebraska women are, we note that one lady, in order to attend the convention, rode thirty-five miles in a lumber wagon and another rode forty miles on a load of wheat." <sup>53</sup>

Nebraska suffragists understood the importance of their bill to national politics; they also understood that valuable political capital could be gained by connecting their work to both the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) and the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), the two national organizations focused on achieving woman suffrage. <sup>54</sup> Drawing support from both the AWSA and the NWSA would bring not only resources, but also national attention to their cause. And while the two associations enjoyed a strong rivalry, Nebraskans believed all might profit by setting aside differences to work together for the common goal of seeing the state become the first to recognize woman suffrage.

Only days after the Kearney convention, Erasmus Correll, Clara Colby, and Lucinda Russell boarded a train to attend the eleventh annual meeting of the AWSA in Louisville, Kentucky, October 26 and 27, hoping to strengthen ties to the national movement. To their great surprise, Correll was unanimously elected president of the American Woman Suffrage Association, while Colby was elected a vice president serving Nebraska. Russell, by virtue of her delegate status, was appointed the Nebraska member to the AWSA Executive Committee. The three returned to Nebraska to great acclaim, having had their efforts marked by a national body, thus adding greater emphasis to their work.

But unlike the early support offered by the AWSA, the NWSA remained cautious. Anthony, who had been observing these developments from the sidelines, cautioned Correll:

"The difficulty is that the men who will vote no neither go out to lectures nor read tracts or newspapers. They... are amenable only to bribes and bitters."

-Lucy Correll

Allow me to congratulate Nebraska generally, and yourself particularly on the honor of the Presidency of the American Woman Suffrage Association, conferred upon you at the recent Louisville Convention. I hope with the office and honor will go to Nebraska lots of money to help you carry forward . . . . I am hoping to see the end of [my current work] by May, so that I can give personal thought and work to Nebraska, for I feel the importance of making the vote there as large as possible, though, after my experience in Kansas, Michigan, and Colorado, in each of which (of the two first at least) our hopes were as bright, seemingly, as are yours to-day. The difficulty is that the men who will vote no neither go out to lectures nor read tracts or newspapers. They cannot be reached by our educational instrumentalities—they are amenable only to bribes and bitters, neither, nor both of which can we stoop to.... such men are not earnest on our side, but intensely against us-every one-because they know their own mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters would vote down the three great pet institutions of such men-grog shops, brothels, and gambling houses. Still I cannot but hope for Nebraska.56

While she remained cautiously optimistic, Anthony's concern about the influence of the powerful liquor lobby, which vehemently opposed woman suffrage on the grounds that women would use the vote to prohibit the sale of liquor, was well founded in light of Nebraska's large population of working men and immigrants.

Fiercely competitive and each eager to claim the victory, the AWSA and the NWSA both converged on Nebraska. In the spring of 1882, the AWSA announced its annual meeting—to be presided over by Erasmus M. Correll-was to be held in Omaha in the fall. Not be outdone, the NWSA announced in early summer that its annual convention would also be held in Omaha at nearly the same time. By August, speakers from Nebraska and around the nation engaged breakneck schedules around the state to raise interest in the respective conventions, which were themselves designed to raise interest in the forthcoming amendment.<sup>57</sup> There was much work to be done. As the Western Woman's Journal explained, "Let the watchword from now until the last vote is cast at six o'clock in the afternoon of November 7th, be with every man and woman, every impartial suffragist, 'work' . . . . Upon every friend of the cause rests a heavy responsibility, that of doing his or her share of the work...Before this responsibility and this duty, every frivolous

#### THE SUFFRAGISTS.

Omaha Daily Bee, Sept. 28, 1882.

# Lively Proceedings at the Morning Session of the Convention.

Obstreperous Males Can be Talked to Death

#### If They Cannot Be Convinced

After the bettle in the opera house last night, and a gentle repose in the arms of Morpheus, the ladies of the National Suffrage association met at Boyd's opera house at 9:30 a. m., looking much refreshed. The rain had ceased early this morning, and by 8 o'clock the clouds began to disappear and few broken gleams of aunlight soon dried up the aidawalka. The suffragists lost none of their seal by the skirmish with the young limb of the law last night, but on the contrary they had determination vividiy portrayed upon their countenances and a relentless warfare

demand of society, fashion or amusement ought to fall. Now is the time for work."58

Under the presidency of Erasmus Correll, the AWSA met in Omaha September 12, 13, and 14. Correll's presidential address noted the gravity of the movement in Nebraska, "a State, we most earnestly hope, that will be first to adopt an amendment removing the political discrimination against sex, and thereby carry into perfect realization the principles of the Declaration of American Independence, establishing upon a basis of eternal equity a *true* republic." His presidential address was followed by an inspirational speech from Boston suffragist Lucy Stone, who praised the work

## SHALL WOMAN YOTE?

## Joint Debate Between Miss Susan B. Anthony and Edward Rosewater.

An Exhaustive Review of the Woman's Suffrage Issue-

Omaha Daily Bee, Oct. 16, 1882. of Nebraska by saying, "When our feet touched Nebraska soil we felt as though we should take off our shoes, for the place on which we stand was holy ground. Not because of her grand prairies, her magnificent harvests or her giant, limitless boundaries, which we do not have in Massachusetts, but because her men are so noble and progressive that they have offered their wives and mothers and sisters equal rights with themselves."60 Stone's address was followed by speeches by Henry Blackwell; Nebraskan Orpha Dinsmoor; and the outgoing Governor of Wyoming Territory, John W. Hoyt, who spoke on the success of women's use of the franchise there. Later speeches were given by luminaries of the AWSA, including Amelia Bloomer, who spoke both at length about the history of suffrage initiatives in Nebraska, and paid tribute to the work of Correll, Brooks, Bittenbender, and Colby.

Great attention, however, was paid to the speech given by guest lecturer Susan B. Anthony, who remarked, "This is the third campaign in which my friend Lucy Stone and myself have shared. In three different states—Michigan, Kansas, and Colorado—has the question of woman suffrage been placed before the voters. Though it failed in each state, yet the time is fast approaching when

the question will meet success in all these states. . . . Nebraska must not throw away her chance to be the *first* State to adopt woman suffrage. . . . Why should not Nebraska be first in suffrage, as she is ahead on nearly every other national issue?"<sup>61</sup>

Two weeks later, the NWSA held its annual convention in Omaha on September 26, 27, and 28. Because president Elizabeth Cady Stanton was not able to be present, the convention was overseen by acting president Susan B. Anthony. Similar to the AWSA, the NWSA featured speeches by national luminaries and delegates from state associations such as Marietta Bones of Dakota Territory, "who was able to wring tears from the audience by recounting her own unfortunate experiences with a cruel husband whose brutalities drove her to flee with her two children—children whom the courts then ordered her to hand over to her husband."62

The tone of the NWSA convention carried more sentimental and sensational appeals than that of the AWSA, and openly engaged the issue of opposition from African-Americans, immigrants, and religiously conservative voters. Anthony spoke at length about the viability of Nebraska's white, middle-class, temperance-focused voters, who unlike Colorado's voters, were seen as more likely to vote for the amendment. She explained Colorado's suffrage defeat, arguing, "native born white men, temperance men, liberal-minded decent men voted for it. Against it were the rank and file of Mexicans in southern Colorado, miners, foreigners, German, Irish. The Negro also voted against it. Another class was that imbued with the bigotry and superstition of the past, who believed if the right were given her, that St. Paul would have greatly erred."63 These remarks were followed by others similar in tone, including those by Missourian Virginia Minor who urged the men of Nebraska "to stand before the world and prove that they had been educated up to the point where they were willing to give women an equal political status with themselves and not assign to her a position inferior to that enjoyed by the Chinese coolie."64 Certainly, racist and nativist arguments are well known among historians of woman suffrage who have examined their use in urging supporters to vote for suffrage based on expediency.65 It is interesting, however, to note the example and how these claims were constructed by national suffrage activists in Nebraska.

As Election Day drew near, Harriet R. Shattuck, who had been canvassing the state on behalf of the amendment for the NWSA, worried that "while the advocates are earnestly at work, the opponents are not idle." Shattuck explained, "The German

4

"There are those who
conscientiously fear that women
will be changed beings, and that
homes will be no longer homes
when their wives and daughters are
free." -Harriet Shattuck

Catholic priest at St. Helena commanded his congregation not to go to the hall to hear the lecture" in support of the amendment. Liquor dealers and patrons opposed the amendment, wrote Shattuck, because "they know too well that their worthless candidates and their bad measures will be less sure of success when women vote." And, she explained further, "There are the men who have made up their minds that women belong at home, and who cannot realize that the women themselves have a right to choose their 'sphere,' whether it be the home or the profession or the trades. Where they obtained the right to prescribe our sphere they cannot tell, though they claim they have obtained it somehow." Finally, she observed, "There are those who conscientiously fear that women will be changed beings, and that homes will be no longer homes when their wives and daughters are free."66

Colby also noted the determination of liquor interests to defeat the amendment, and described how "The organ of the Brewers' Association sent out its orders to every saloon, bills posted in conspicuous places by friends of the amendment mysteriously disappeared, or were covered by others of an opposite character, and the greatest pains was [sic] taken to excite the antagonism of foreigners by representing to them that woman suffrage meant prohibition." It was beginning to seem that a campaign that had begun in all earnestness had failed to account for the depth of feeling—and funding—of the opposition.

Was success slipping from their grasp? Writing to *The Woman's Journal* on November 5, Erasmus Correll noted: "Just on the eve of the battle I feel intensely anxious. Day after to-morrow, all over the state, will be, I think, the most important contest for the progress of humanity ever bloodlessly fought. One great element of solicitude is the uncertainty. In ordinary political campaigns, we can form tolerably close approximations in foretelling the results.... In this we are entirely at sea. Just in the

#### NEBRASKA ELECTION.

The Republican State Ticket Elected by a Handsome Majority.

Laird and Weaver Elected to Congress by 6,000 Each.

Valentine in the Third District in Doubt.

Very Meager Returns from that District.

Female Suffrage Buried Under an Avalanche.

Probably 25,000 Majority Against it.

Scratching on Legislative Tickets was the Rule.

Csunting Slow and Many Leading Counties not Heard from.

last moment, the liquor (German) interests are flooding the state with circular letters and tracts against it. . . . I doubt our getting a majority of all the votes cast, although we may."68

When the morning of November 7, 1882—election day—arrived, Colby described it as ripe with promise:

The morning dawned bright and clear. . . . Everything wore a holiday appearance. Polling places were gaily decorated; banners floated to the breeze, bearing suggestive mottoes: "Are Women Citizens?" "Taxation Without Representation is Tyranny!" "Governments Derive their Just Powers from the Consent of the Governed," "Equality before the Law," etc., etc. Under pavilions, or in adjoining rooms, or in the very shadow of the ballot-box, women presided at well-filled tables, serving refreshments to the voters, and handing to those who would take them, tickets bearing the words: "For Constitutional Amendment Relating to Right

On Nov. 8, 1882, the Lincoln Daily State Journal announced state election results, including the resounding defeat of the woman suffrage amendment.

Susan B. Anthony (seated) and Clara Bewick Colby of Beatrice (right) continued working together long after the Nebraska suffrage initiative failed. In 1890 they and sculptor Bessie Potter sat for a portrait at Mathew Brady's studio in Washington, D.C.
Sophia Smith Collection,

**Smith College Archives** 



of Suffrage," while the national colors floated alike over governing and governed; alike over women working and pleading for their rights as citizens, and men who were selling woman's birth-right for a glass of beer or a vote. It looked like a holiday picnic—the well-dressed people, the flowers, the badges, and the flags.<sup>59</sup>

However, she wrote, "The tragic events of that day would fill a volume," for "the conservative joined hands with the vicious, the egotist with the ignorant, the demagogue with the venial, and when the sun set, Nebraska's opportunity to do the act of simple justice was gone."

The amendment was defeated 50,693 to 25,756.71 Yet even after its conclusion, emotions continued to run high. Following the election, students at the University of Nebraska enacted a mock funeral complete with an effigy of Susan B. Anthony carried by pallbearers in a coffin, led by a torchlight funeral procession. The students were ultimately thwarted by "another crowd of students who, to preserve the honor of the university, overpowered them and took the effigy away."<sup>72</sup>

Why the resounding defeat? On the one hand, both the Republican and the Democratic parties refused to take a stand on suffrage, and a similar lack of endorsement was found among many candidates. As Colby explained, it had been hoped that the Republicans, at least. would endorse suffrage as a plank in their party platform during their fall convention; however, they did not, and "while individually friendly, they almost to a man avoided the subject."73 As a result, suffragists were left virtually alone on the political landscape, leaving them vulnerable to a wellorganized and well-funded opposition that fostered rampant election fraud, including illegally printed ballots, misread and misfiled ballots, ballot stuffing, and illegal interference. Shattuck observed, "The liquor interest has been universally represented at the polls by workers against suffrage, and much money has been used by them and by others in the effort to carry the election against us."74 Addison Sheldon, historian of Nebraska, concurs: "The liquor element felt that giving women the ballot would make it more difficult for it to control elections."75 Colby lamented, "It will always remain an open question whether the amendment did not, after all, receive an actual majority of all votes cast upon that question."76

While all who had worked so hard for the amendment were sorely disappointed, some were also in debt. Correll had taken out a large mortgage to fund his work,77 and the NWSA reported it "had invested over \$5,000 in the Nebraska campaign and was now \$500 in debt."78 Anthony, who had earlier expressed skepticism to Correll about striking out in Nebraska, was angered by this most recent failure and announced at a post-election meeting on November 8 in Omaha that "she had enough of soliciting votes for the cause," and that she would focus her efforts solely on attaining a sixteenth amendment to the federal constitution.<sup>79</sup> Anthony further believed that "while a vast amount of work had been done in Nebraska by her co-laborers, the work was so vast that the hem of the garment of the vast state had yet scarcely been touched. It was totally impossible to canvass every town and neighborhood, and they never would again attempt it." In closing, Anthony "pled with the voters of Nebraska never to submit the question of woman suffrage to the popular vote again."80

The early suffrage initiatives mounted in Nebraska reveal the state's important role in establishing some of the first serious state legislative efforts for woman suffrage, and the 1881-82 campaign reveals Nebraska's vitally important role in positioning the later work of national suffrage activists. Notably, it marked the point where Susan B. Anthony rejected work at the state level to focus instead on working for a federal constitutional amendment, thus marking a dramatic turning point in Anthony's philosophical approach to woman suffrage popular voters, in her opinion, were no longer to be trusted with such an important decision. And while she would again be seduced by state campaigns in South Dakota and elsewhere, she would devote most of her energy to passing an amendment to the United States Constitution. But as a key moment in the genealogy of national suffrage history, Nebraska's suffrage story should be less about its failure to achieve voting rights for women and more about the opportunities and conflicts it exposed as suffragists strategized the best way to enfranchise women. It exposed the power of the liquor industry's ability to mount a well-organized campaign that uncovered a clash of values that pitted progressives and labor against each other. However, it also exposed the importance of organizing from the grassroots upward, and demonstrated the gains that were to be had by engaging a sophisticated strategy of local organization supported by newspapers, lectures, and conventions that allowed a diverse group of citizens to follow and engage the debate.

As a result of Nebraska's failure to pass a state constitutional amendment supporting woman suffrage, Correll's Western Woman's Journal folded in the fall of 1882. Harriet Brooks, perhaps out of frustration, retired from suffrage work, and turned to "the congenial study of sociology."81 She died in 1888 after a long illness.82 Erasmus Correll also left suffrage work and in 1890 became editor of the Ogden Daily Commercial in Utah. He returned to Nebraska in 1892 and continued his work as an influential newspaperman and politician, and died in 1895 at age 49.83 Clara Bewick Colby continued her suffrage activism in Nebraska and nationally through her work on the woman's rights newspaper the Woman's Tribune, which she published from 1883 to 1909. But in 1916, Colby died without the suffrage for which she had fought so long.84 Ada M. Bittenbender turned her attention to her work in the law; she later became a prominent attorney for the WCTU, and argued cases for that organization before the Supreme Court of the United States. She died in 1925, the only member of the group of early Nebraska activists to see woman suffrage achieved.85

The agitation that led to the suffrage campaign of 1881-82 never again regained its focused momentum and national support, and although various bills in support of woman suffrage were introduced into the Nebraska legislature nearly every session, none were successful. However, when the United

States Congress passed the Nineteenth Amendment, Nebraska suffragists saw their long-sought cause justified when on August 2, 1919, Nebraska became the fourteenth state to ratify the "Anthony Amendment." After the amendment's final ratification by Tennessee on August 18, 1920, all women of the United States shared the privilege of voting in presidential elections.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank Kathi Kern, David Bristow, Jim Potter, and the anonymous reviewer for *Nebraska History* for their helpful comments as this article was revised.
- <sup>2</sup> Clara Bewick Colby, "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX." *History of Woman Suffrage.* Vol. III, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds. (Rochester, New York: Susan B. Anthony, 1886), 672.
- <sup>3</sup> Bloomer edited the *Lily* in Seneca Falls from 1849 to 1854; Mary B. Birdsall from 1855 to 1856. Bloomer participated in the dress reform movement, which advocated healthful styles of women's clothing. The costume she adopted—long pantaloons gathered at the ankles worn under a skirt that had a hemline below the knee—became known as the "Bloomer costume" as a result of her passionate advocacy.
- <sup>4</sup> "First Female Suffragist Movement in Nebraska." *Transactions and Reports of the Nebraska State Historical Society.* Vol. I, Series I (Fremont, Neb: Hammond Brothers, 1885), 59. Bloomer spoke to the legislature on Jan. 8, 1856. The Territory of Wyoming in 1869 was the first in the United States to grant women full suffrage. In Great Britain, the Isle of Man granted land-owning women this privilege in 1881.
- <sup>5</sup> The Fourteenth Amendment was proposed in 1866 and ratified in 1868. It granted the rights of citizenship to "all persons born or naturalized in the United States," most importantly to former slaves. Colby claimed Nebraska's ratification made it effectively "the first state to recognize in its constitution the sovereignty of all male persons," including Blacks. See "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX," *History of Woman Suffrage*, 674. Also James C. Olson and Ronald C. Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 141-142; and "Amendments to the Constitution of the United States," Government Printing Office, www.gpoaccess.gov/constitution/pdf/con001.pdf.
- <sup>6</sup> See, for example, Ellen Carol DuBois's analysis of the Kansas campaign of 1867 in *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).
- <sup>7</sup> See Addison E. Sheldon, ed., *Nebraska Blue Book, 1918* (Lincoln, Neb.: Nebraska Legislative Reference Bureau, 1918), 431; and Susan B. Anthony to Olympia Brown, Nov. 7, 1867, especially note 3, *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton & Susan B. Anthony* Vol. II, Ann D. Gordon, ed. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 100-1.
- <sup>8</sup> Colby, "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX," *History of Woman Suffrage*, 675.
- <sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, this was repealed by the legislature of 1875 and replaced with granting this right only on "every male citizen and unmarried woman" instead of "every inhabitant." It was not until 1881 that the right of school suffrage was again extended to both men and women who have children of school age or have paid taxes on property. See Ann L. Wiegman Wilhite, "Sixty-Five Years Till Victory: A History of Woman Suffrage in Nebraska," Nebraska History 49, (1968): 151; Colby, History of Woman Suffrage, 675.

Kristin Mapel
Bloomberg is
Professor of Women's
Studies, Director
of the Hamline
University Women's
Studies Program, and
Hamline University
Endowed Chair in the
Humanities in St. Paul,
Minnesota. She is
currently completing
a biography of
Nebraska suffragist
Clara Bewick Colby.

- <sup>10</sup> Qtd in. Colby, "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX," History of Woman Suffrage, 676.
  - <sup>11</sup> Sheldon, Nebraska Blue Book, 432.
- <sup>12</sup> Addison E. Sheldon, ed., Official Report of the Debates and Proceedings in the Nebraska Constitutional Convention Assembled in Lincoln, June Thirteenth, 1871, Vol. VI, Series II (Nebraska State Historical Society, 1905), 121.
- <sup>13</sup> Governor David Butler, the first governor of Nebraska, was removed from office in June, 1871; his record was later expunged and he was elected to the state senate in 1882. See Olson and Naugle, *History of Nebraska*, 154.
- 14 Erasmus Correll explained, "By a law passed in 1871 and amended in 1875, a married woman's property, personal, real and mixed, owned by her at the time of the marriage, or acquired after marriage by purchase or otherwise, or the property that comes to her by descent, devise or the gift of any person except her husband remains her sole property and may be disposed of by her to the same extent, and with like effect as a married man may with his. She can also sue and be sued the same as if unmarried, and may carry on trade or business and perform any labor or service on her own account, and the proceeds of her labor, businesses or services, are her sole and separate property, and may be used and invested by her in her own name. She can also devise or bequeath her property as fully as a married man can dispose of his by will." "Nebraska Legislation for Women," unpublished MSS, n.d., 9-10 (Correll's page numbers). Erasmus M. Correll papers, Nebraska State Historical Society (hereafter NSHS), MS 572, S1F5.
- <sup>15</sup> Lucy L. Correll, "Suffrage in Nebraska," Collection of Nebraska Pioneer Reminiscences, Nebraska Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1916), 277.
- <sup>16</sup> For biographical information on Harriet Sophia Brewer Brooks, see the biographical note for her papers RG4054.AM, NSHS.
- <sup>17</sup> "Mrs. Ada M. Bittenbender," A Woman of the Century: Fourteen Hundred-Seventy Biographical Sketches Accompanied by Portraits of Leading American Women in All Walks of Life, Frances E. Willard and Mary A. Livermore., eds., Vol. I (1893) (Facsimile Edition New York: Gordon Press, 1975), 87-88.
- <sup>18</sup> For biographical information on Erasmus Michael Correll, see the manuscript record overview of the Erasmus M. Correll Papers MS572, NSHS; also his biographical sketch in A.T. Andreas's *History of the State of Nebraska* (Chicago: Western Historical Co., 1882).
  - 19 Beatrice Express, Dec. 11, p. 1, Dec. 21, p.1, 1876.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., Dec. 5 1872, p. 3, Apr. 16, 1874, p. 3. See also records of the Ladies' Library Association, Beatrice Public Library, Beatrice, \_Nebraska. The Woman's Journal ran from 1870 to 1920 and was published by Lucy Stone and her husband Henry B. Blackwell.
- <sup>21</sup> In his essay "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), Frederick Jackson Turner identified the American frontier as the place where freedom would bring out the best in the American character. As a result, old social customs and institutions would be broken down and new, more progressive and egalitarian roles would be created.
- 22 Correll, "Suffrage in Nebraska," 277.
- 23 Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> A. Martha Vermillion, "Woman Suffrage in Thayer County," Western Woman's Journal May 1881, p. 25. The Journal reported on Anthony's talk four years later in order to document the history of suffrage work in Nebraska while simultaneously providing propaganda in support of the 1880 suffrage campaign.
- <sup>25</sup> Nov. 2, 1877. Clara Bewick Colby papers, MSS M92-172. Wisconsin Historical Society (hereafter WHS), Madison, Wisconsin.

- $^{26}$  See, for example, the *Hebron Journal* for Feb. 20 and 27, 1879, as well as Mar. 6, 13, and 20, 1879.
  - <sup>27</sup> Hebron Journal, Apr. 3, 1879, p. 1.
- <sup>28</sup> For analyses of the rhetorical strategies deployed by Correll and other Nebraska suffragists, see Carmen Elizabeth Heider, "Equality and Individualism: Woman Suffrage Rhetoric in Thayer County, Nebraska, 1879-1882," Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 2000; Gaylynn Jeanne Welch, "Natural Rights Versus Motherhood: A History of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Nebraska, 1871-1917," M.A. Thesis, University of Nebraska at Kearney, 1998; and Eleanor Claire Jerry, "Clara Bewick Colby and the Woman's Tribune: Strategies of a Free Lance Movement Leader," Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1986.
  - <sup>29</sup> Hebron Journal, Apr. 10, 1879, p. 4.
- 30 Ibid., Apr. 17, 1879, p. 4.
- 31 Western Woman's Journal, May 1881, p. 25.
- <sup>32</sup> "Women's Column," "Constitution of the Thayer County, Neb. Woman Suffrage Association, Organized on April 15, 1879." *Hebron Journal*, June 12, 1879, pp. 1, 4.
  - 33 Hebron Journal, May 22, 1879, p. 1.
- 34 Ibid., May 15, 1879, p. 1.
- <sup>35</sup> Colby, "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX." History of Woman Suffrage, 686.
- <sup>36</sup> The group noted, "It was decided that those being present being only a partial representation of the sentiment in our city that the officers elected should be considered as temporary, and actions of the first meeting rescinded at the second or thereafter, should it be considered desirable." Report of the First State Sufrage Association held in Omaha Nebraska, May 30th, 1880. Cook County Woman's Franchise Association Records Book. Papers of Harriet S. B. Brooks, RG 4054 AM, NSHS (hereafter Brooks Papers).
  - 37 Sheldon, Nebraska Blue Book, 432.
- <sup>38</sup> House Journal of the Legislature of the State of Nebraska, Sixteenth Regular Session, Begun and Held at Lincoln, January 4th, 1881 (Omaha: Henry Gibson, State Printer, 1881), 636.
- <sup>39</sup> Colby, "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX," History & Woman Suffrage, 682. The letter was dated December 4, 1880, and signed "L. R.," likely Mrs. Lucinda Russell, later active in the Nebraska WSA.
- <sup>40</sup> For a complete list of officers, see Vermillion, "Woman Suffrage in Thayer County." *Western Woman's Journal*, May 1881, p. 25.
- <sup>41</sup> Colby, "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX." History of Woman Suffrage, 684.
- <sup>42</sup> "Woman's Department," [Feb. 5, 1881], newspaper clipping from scrapbook, p. 13, Brooks Papers.
- 43 Ibid. Emphasis in original.
- 44 Sheldon, Nebraska Blue Book, 433.
- 45 Colby, "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX," History of Woman Suffrage, 686.
- <sup>46</sup> For a comprehensive list see Thomas Chalmer Coulter, *A History of Woman Suffrage in Nebraska*, Ph.D. diss. (Ohio State University, 1967), 23-24.
  - 47 Western Woman's Journal, Sept. 1882, p. 274.
- <sup>48</sup> In spite of its early gains, Utah women were disfranchised by anti-Mormon provisions of the Edmunds-Tucker Act enacted by Congress in 1887; however, women recouped their loss when Utah was admitted as a state in 1896. As a result of pressure from the liquor lobby, Washington Territory, which gave women suffrage in 1883, disfranchised them in 1889. Wyoming was the first state to enact female suffrage when it entered the United States in 1890.

- <sup>49</sup> See Minutes, First Nebraska Woman Suffrage Convention, Erasmus M. Correll papers, MS 572, S1F3, NSHS; as well as coverage of the convention in the *Omaha Republican*, qtd. In Colby, History of Woman Suffrage, 688.
- $^{50}$  Minutes, First Nebraska Woman Suffrage Convention, Erasmus M. Correll papers, MS 572, S1F3, NSHS.
- 51 Republican, qtd. in Colby, "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX," History of Woman Suffrage, 688; minutes, First Nebraska Woman Suffrage Convention, Erasmus M. Correll papers, MS 572, S1F3, NSHS.
- <sup>52</sup> "Nebraska Woman Suffrage Convention," Western Woman's Journal, Oct. and Nov. 1881, p. 123.
- 53 Ibid
- 54 The political fallout resulting from the Kansas campaign of 1867 and disagreements over the role of woman suffrage in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments had divided eastern woman's rights activists into two rival organizations. In 1869 Anthony and Stanton founded the National Woman Suffrage Association in New York, while in Boston, Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell founded the American Woman Suffrage Association. See Catherine Clinton and Christine Lunardini, *The Columbia Guide to American Women in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 123-25; Nancy Woloch, *Women and the American Experience* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1984) 327-37.
- <sup>55</sup> Western Woman's Journal, Oct. and Nov. 1881, p. 124. See also the letter from Lucy Stone to Erasmus Correll and Correll's response regarding his appointment as president of the AWSA published in the Western Woman's Journal, Oct. and Nov. 1881, p. 100.
- <sup>56</sup> Anthony's letter was published in the *Western Woman's Journal*, Dec. 1881, p. 141. Emphasis in original.
- 57 Speakers in support of the amendment represented the AWSA, the NWSA, and the Nebraska WSA, and included Henry B. Blackwell, Helen M. Gougar, Susan B. Anthony, Margaret W. Campbell, Phoebe Couzins, Hannah Tracy Cutler, Rachel G. Foster, Elizabeth Boynton Harbert, Matilda Hindman, May Wright Sewall, and Harriette R. Shattuck, as well as a cadre of Nebraska woman suffrage supporters. See the fall 1882 issues of the Western Woman's Journal for details about their schedules.
  - 58 Western Woman's Journal, Sept. 1882, p. 279.
- <sup>59</sup> "The American Woman Suffrage Association," Western Woman's Journal, Sept. 1882, p. 284.
- 60 Western Woman's Journal, Sept. 1882, pp. 282-83.
- 61 Ibid., pp. 285-86.
- 62 Coulter, 89.
- 63 Omaha Herald, Sept. 29, 1882, p. 8; qtd. in Coulter, 93.
- <sup>64</sup> Omaha Republican, Sept. 29, 1882, p. 8; qtd. in Coulter, 93.
- <sup>65</sup> See, for example, Aileen S. Kaditor's *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement: 1890-1920* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981); Rebecca J. Mead's *How The Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1868-1914* (New York: New York University Press, 2004); Suzanne M. Marilley's *Woman Suffrage and Origins of Liberal Feminism in the United States, 1820-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); and Louise Michele Newman's *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 66 "The Nebraska Suffrage Campaign," p. 69 of Harriet Robinson Shattuck Scrapbook, Sept. Nov. 1882 Re: Nebraska Woman Suffrage Campaign. Papers of Harriet Jane Hanson Robinson and Harriette Lucy Robinson Shattuck. Women's Studies Manuscript Collections from the Schlesinger library, Radcliffe College, Series 1, Part D, Reel 65, Series IX, Vol. 106 (hereafter Robinson/Shattuck papers).

- <sup>67</sup> Colby, "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX," *History of Woman Suffrage*, 691.
- <sup>68</sup> "The Nebraska Campaign," *The Woman's Journal*, Nov. 11, 1882, p. 360.
- <sup>69</sup> Colby, "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX," History of Woman Suffrage, 691.
  - 70 Ibid
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid., 692; Official Report of the Nebraska State Canvassing Board, Election Held November 7, 1882 (Lincoln, Nebraska, n.d.), 2.
- <sup>72</sup> Ida Husted Harper, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony*, Vol. II (Indianapolis: The Bowen-Merrill Co, 1898), 545, footnote 2.
- $^{\rm 73}$  Colby, "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX," History of Woman Suffrage, 690.
- <sup>74</sup> "The Women's Defeat in Nebraska," Nov. 10, 1882. Harriet Robinson Shattuck Scrapbook for Sept. Nov. 1882, Robinson/Shattuck papers, 70-71.
- <sup>75</sup> Addison E. Sheldon, *Nebraska: The Land and the People*, Vol. I (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1931), 594.
- <sup>76</sup> Colby, "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX," History of Woman Suffrage, 692.
- <sup>77</sup> See Mrs. D.Y. King to Elizabeth Boynton Harbert, Nov. 17, 1882, Papers of Elizabeth Boynton Harbert, 5:70, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
- <sup>78</sup> Coulter, 107; see also the NWSA's Report of the Sixteenth Annual Washington Convention which listed receipts and disbursements for the 1882 Nebraska campaign, pp. 146, 150.
- <sup>79</sup> "Lost Her Temper," *Omaha Republican*, Nov. 9, 1882. *Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, Patricia G. Holland and Ann D. Gordon, eds. (Wilmington DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1991), series 3, reel 22, frame 715 (hereafter Stanton/Anthony papers).
- 80 "Sorry Sisters," Nov. 9, 1882, Omaha Daily Herald. Stanton/ Anthony papers, series 3, reel 22, frame 716.
- 81 Colby, "Nebraska, Chapter XLIX," History of Woman Suffrage, 692.
- <sup>82</sup> "Mrs. D. C. Brooks, An Educated and Refined Lady Departs This Life After a Long Illness," June 23, 1888, obituary from the Omaha Herald, Brooks Papers.
- <sup>83</sup> For information on Correll's death, see the scope and content notes for RG4430.AM: Erasmus Michael Correll Papers, NSHS; as well as his obituary published in the *Omaha World-Herald* on Sept. 6, 1895.
- <sup>84</sup> See Olympia Brown's *Democratic Ideals: A Memorial Sketch of Clara B. Colby* (n.p.: Federal Suffrage Association, 1917).
- 85 See the entry for Ada M. Bittenbender in Willard and Livermore's A Woman of the Century. See also biographical information on Ada M.C. Bittenbender at NSHS.
- <sup>86</sup> See Sheldon, *Nebraska: The Land and the People*, 431-35; and Wilhite, 149-64.