Introduction

During the history of the United States women have had limited rights, whether it be in suffrage or in the amount of money that they make for working. During the nineteenth century this was no different; women still did not have the right to vote, but there was a group of women who had more rights than others. These women were in rural parts of the country, like the west and the south\(^1\).

While the rural women still did have less rights than the men of the same time, they did have more rights than other women of the same, these women were part of the Populist Party. The Populist Party sometimes known as the People's Party, was a political party made up of farmers and other labors.

By comparing women in with each other, one can see that they women in the cities had significantly less rights than the women of the rural. Many of the women in the rural parts of the United States were members of the Populist Party and had many right and responsibilities placed upon them because of the work load that had to be completed. As well, as being part of organizations. An example of this, would be Mary Elizabeth Lease, she was part of the Populist Party and gave speeches supporting the Populist platform.

City

Women who lived in urban areas did not typically have any power or authority over anything other than fashion and what people in the household were wearing. This has to do with the fact that in urban areas there was more work for men to do in factories and plants. Women did not do much physical labor at this time\(^2\).

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While these ladies were clearly women, there was other factors that played into what they could and could not do. What social class they belonged in had a significant role on what they could do and how much power they had over anything. Women who were of the lower class typically were allowed to do more in some aspects but had very little influence or power over anything. There was a double standard for these women, women were still not supposed to do these things but they could get away with it because they were so poor, or where they came from. Because many of the lower class women were immigrants, and had a different culture. For example these women could perform manual labor or be involved in prostitution because this was needed to support the family\(^3\). This fact was also alluded to in a speech made by Mary Elizabeth Lease when she talks about girls selling their virtues for bread, because they cannot afford it on the wages that they are making\(^4\).

While the lower class women could get away with things that are typically not allowed because of the culture and situation, women of the upper classes could get away with other things that the lower classes could not. They had control over what their children and spouse would wear. Women were primarily in charge of the family fashion and the household while the man was away at work or on business. She could control the labor or what decisions were made while he was away\(^5\).

Different class women in the cities had different roles and different things that they could get away with however, something that they had in common was the fact they did not get into politics publicly. They may talk about them from time to time with other women or in other situations but they did not open discuss politics at the bar or church, as was common for men\(^6\).

All the similarities and differences between the women of different classes in the urban areas, can also be seen when they are compared to rural women. Knowing that women in rural parts of the United States could do more.

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Rural

Women in the rural parts of America have traditionally had more rights or freedoms than women in the cities and more urban areas. In his book *American Populism A Social History 1877-1898*, Robert McMath Jr looks at the different parts of the United States where populism flourished and gained support and breaks down, what made it so popular. The two parts of the country that he focuses on are the south and the west.

In all parts of rural America women were treated as valuable members of the community and the organizations that they were a part of. This was seen most in the Organization the Patrons of Husbandry or the Grange.

Because of where the women in rural America lived they were expected to help with the work on the farm. This included caring for the animals and tending to the fields. This was not a paying job but women were expected to do the work so that the family could have money come harvest time. At this time much of the work on the farm was still being done by hand, the tractor did not become widely used until around 1924. After the tractor and other mechanical implements became widely used there was less need for labor on the farm, what used to take a lot of people could now be done by just one or two.

Famous woman's rights advocate Susan B. Anthony said she could recognize a woman in the Grange because, “Granger woman as far off as I could see her, because of her air of feeling herself as good as a man.” This was a huge compliment to the Grange because they have always recognized that women were equal and important to the organization. This compliment came thirty seven years after the founding of the Patrons of Husbandry. The founder of the Grange had always wanted women to have included in the Grange. Saying in a letter, “As our wives and daughters are generally attractive

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features in rural life, I have planned the work to have them active laborers with us, in full communion, and propose to make male and female form for each degree.” In the reply to the letter Oliver Kelley received this, “Your idea of female membership is all right, and will give general satisfaction....” Based on these two letters it can be judged that the issue of having women in the organization was not really an issue, it was met with open approval.

With the open embrace of women in the organization did not mean that there was no problems or disagreements over the importance of women. This can best be seen in the early elections of officers, in the Wisconsin State Grange, there were over 250 votes cast as to who would get the state master position, while voting on the four offices that women hold barely reached 200 for all four together.

This low turnout of voting does not mean that women are unimportant to the organization, women bring attention to detail, Reverend Aaron Grosh and early member of the Grange stated it was follows, “Woman needs our Order for more than does the sterner, hardier sex; and the Order needs her for man's improvement. Her gentle influence, her innate tact in all matters of good taste and propriety, her instinctive perceptions of righteousness and purity- all these are needed in the Grange and also in society at large, from which she has been so much excluded, but into which our Order is rapidly introducing her.” By including women they were benefiting the woman as well as the organization, and in the long run society as a whole. By letting women have full membership and hold offices many leaders were allowed to bloom and flourish.

Not only were women permitted to have full membership of the social organizations like the Grange, they had offices that were only allowed to held by women. Some of the offices that were designated for the women included Ceres, Flora, and Pomona. By having offices that only women

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could hold they were given a special role in the organizations and they were made to be important.
Without women not all Grange offices will be filled. While these are officer roles in the organization,
they are not the most important roles. Master and overseer, are two of the most important roles, and
women can hold these roles it was not common practice until much later that they filled these offices.
The first female master of a subordinate Grange was elected in 1877, and one of the first women to be
elected to the state master was Sarah Baird and she held that post for seventeen year, in Minnesota.
Some of the things that Ceres is in charge of minor things such as flowers when a member passes away.
The three graces (Pomona, Ceres, and Flora) as they are referred to be mostly just ceremonial roles.

These offices that they hold are important but even more important than that is the role that they
played in the raising and guiding of young Granger's. This is much like how women gained prominence
in the church, let them be in charge of the youth and they will be bringing up good Grangers. The ideal
of Republican Motherhood, goes right along with this. The first juvenile Grange was in Ohio,
organized by Harriet Mason, who was a graduate of Oberlin College, and a founding member of the
Wellington Grange. By raising the next generation of the Grange a large role was placed on the
women, they had to raise and teach them right so that they could successfully lead the Grange in the
coming years. “These units, later called junior Granges, kept many Grange women occupied in a
function with far-reaching, positive results.”

By letting women have offices in the Grange be it the local, state, or national level, they were
kept in the organization and doing that lead to bigger membership for the Grange. Not only were
women permitted full membership and allowed to hold offices but they were also give roles that lead

them to have a major impact on the way that the Grange will be run for the generations to come.

Women were also allowed to be members of the Farmers Alliance, the Alliance was open to people of good character who were of the producing class. Meaning that both men and women could join as long as they were a, “farmer, farm labor, a country mechanic, a country merchant, a country school teacher, a country physician, or a minister of the gospel.”17 This opened up membership to a lot of people.

Because of the impact that Grange had on the women, other organizations also allowed women to take part in them and some with women taking the leading role, for example Women Involved in Farm Economics18.

One of the most popular Populist women was Mary Elizabeth Lease. She is famous for giving multiple speeches for the Populist Party. Mrs. Lease led an impressive life. She was one of the few women that passed the bar exam in the state of Kansas. She was the mother of four children. She traveled around Kansas giving speeches in support of the Populist Party making ten dollars a speech19. “They used to tell us that we should stay at home and darn the children's stockings. Well, my children never ran around with holes in their knees, yet I managed to find time to take my place in [the] world.”20 This quote my Lease shows that she was not taking her role as a woman, a mother, and an activist lightly, because she was still passionate about all that she did.

Mary Elizabeth Lease could be described as a volatile person. This can be seen in many of the speeches that she delivers. In many cases she has notes on what she wants to talk about but she does not use them she just goes with the spur of the moment21. It is said that she could go from topic to topic

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and the just come back to previous topics. One of her famous quotes, “raise less corn and more hell” shows how volatile she could be. She would often be yelling in her speeches.

By looking at and evaluating two different speeches that she made one can see the volatility that she embodies. The first speech given at a Women’s Christian Temperance Union meeting in 1890 shows her talking about her passion at the time of populism. She makes reference to how she does not know who women could not want to join the alliance.

“Do you wonder the women are joining the Alliance? I wonder if there is a woman in all this broad land who can afford to stay out of the Alliance. Our loyal, white-ribbon women should be heart and hand in this Farmers' Alliance movement, for the men whom we have sent to represent us are the only men in the councils of this nation who have not been elected on a liquor platform; and I want to say here, with exultant pride, that the five farmer Congressmen and the United States Senator we have sent up from Kansas-the liquor traffic, Wall Street, "nor the gates of hell shall not prevail against them."24

The quote above exemplifies, what she was about. She was talking temperance while also advocating the Farmer’s Alliance. This also exemplifies her volatility. In the last line of the quote talking about how not even the gates of hell will be able to stop the man that have been sent by the state of Kansas. She is most likely yelling by this time.

She goes on in this same speech to talk about how the people of Kansas have gotten many of the right candidates elected to offices ranging from the local government to that of the national government. Getting to the end of this speech she talks about how there will be no more kings, whether it be the gold, silver, or oil kings, there will also be no more paupers. She wants everyone to be equal and on a level playing field. Her final line is one that she tends to echo in many of her speeches one about how the people need to take back the government and not be a government by the capitalist or for

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wall street but by and for the people. In this speech she calls them capitalist but in many other refers to them as Wall Street.

The next speech that will be analyzed is In Defense of Home and Hearth, this is one of the speeches where she refers to the capitalist as Wall Street. “Wall Street owns the country. It is no longer a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, but a government of Wall Street, by Wall Street, and for Wall Street.” This is one of her more famous quotes, she feels that the people of the United States have lost control of their country to the people on Wall Street.

To start this speech she is taking about how the Puritans had left to get away from the “oppression” they were facing only to become the “oppressors” having fought for their freedom of England only to enslave millions of black people. She talks about how this is a nation of inconsistencies. She talks about how the east is pushing the west and the south around, because all of the money is in the east, and the workers are in the south and west.

She goes on to finish this speech calling for a revolution. She wants the people to stand by ideally and not pay their debts to the government, until the government starts working for them again. To support her call for revolution, she references how children are starving to death and women in the city are forced to “sell their virtue” to pay for things that they need and cannot afford because they make terrible wages.

Mrs. Lease being able to give these speeches and make a living off doing this speaks to what rural women were allowed to do while, one does not see anyone similar in the cities doing similar things.

Another example of rural women doing things that were not typical of women of the time is Dora H. Stockman. She went on to run a successful business along with her husband. After doing that

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for some time she went back to school and obtained her bachelor’s and master's degree. Then she settled down for a few years and became a housewife and mother. She did get accepted to Michigan State College for doctoral program in sociology in 1930, but never finished the program. She served twenty four years on the Board of Agriculture. To finish off her illustrious life she was elected to the Michigan House of Representatives, she held this office from 1938 to 1946, with her tenure in the House of Representatives she was successful in passing legislation in many areas including education and agriculture\(^\text{32}\).

Because of social organizations like the Grange that Mrs. Stockman was a member of women were able to reach for a more public role then they have had in the past. The Grange being such a large institution in the state of Michigan, and the Grange being progressive with the roles of women and how they were treated, it can be seen how women were so successful in other ventures that they took. The life of Dora Stockman proves this.

**Conclusion**

Women have had many hard times since the founding of the Unites States, many of these have since been resolved or made better. The different places that women live have a part in what kind of struggles that the woman will face. As well as, what she will be able to do. This can be seen clearly in the split of urban women and rural women during the Populist era in the United States.

With the aid of social organizations like the Grange and the Farmer's Alliance women in the rural parts of America were able to have fuller lives and experience more than their counterparts in the cities. Some were able to become successful lawyers and speakers, and others went on to be in politics and get an education.

Bibliography


