

# Amelia Bloomer, A Biography

## Part II The Suffragist of Council Bluffs

LOUISE NOUN

*Editor's note: Part I of "Amelia Bloomer, a Biography," described Bloomer's early life and marriage, her temperance reform activities in New York State's "burned-over district," her editorship of the Lily, her connection with the reform dress which bore her name, her initial meetings and differences with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, and the reasons for her move to Iowa. It appeared in the previous issue of the Annals of Iowa (Winter 1985).*

AMELIA AND DEXTER BLOOMER left Mt. Vernon, Ohio, in late December 1855 and arrived in Council Bluffs, Iowa, the following April. Winter travel was almost impossible in what was then known as the far West because railroads had only extended to the Mississippi River. To reach Council Bluffs one either had to take a stagecoach three hundred miles across Iowa or travel by boat eight hundred miles up the Missouri River from St. Louis. The Bloomers chose the latter route and so had to wait until the Missouri's spring thaw before they could proceed. They used this waiting period as an opportunity to visit relatives and friends in Ohio, Indiana, and New York State. On March 22, after saying farewell to her sisters, brother, and parents, Amelia left for the West with Dexter. They stopped en route to visit in Buffalo and Chicago, and then went on to Alton, Illinois. This latter part of the journey took them through vast stretches of unbroken prairie where Bloomer marveled at the abundance of deer and other wild game which she viewed from the train window. From Alton the Bloomers took a steam-

boat to St. Louis, where they were welcome guests in the home of Bloomer's long-time correspondent, journalist and woman's rights advocate Frances Dana Gage.<sup>1</sup>

In St. Louis the Bloomers learned that the Missouri River was too low for boats to reach Council Bluffs, so they waited, hoping for rains to increase the river's flow. This was a drought year, however, so after a week the Bloomers had to resign themselves to taking the boat only as far as St. Joseph, Missouri, and then completing the trip by stagecoach. Bloomer enjoyed the seven-day boat trip to St. Joseph; she led the dancing one evening and lectured on woman's rights on another. There were about one hundred cabin passengers on board and an even larger number on deck whom Bloomer found to be a rough, uncultured, backwoods lot. She reported to the *Lily* that the coarse, vulgar language, slovenly appearance, and entire absence of modesty among both the men and the women passengers caused her to involuntarily shrink for fear of contamination. While she felt unable to place herself on an even footing with these people or to receive them into her society, she would nevertheless strive to better their condition.<sup>2</sup>

In St. Joseph the Bloomers had to stay cooped up in a crude hotel for two days waiting for the tri-weekly stage to take them to Council Bluffs. They were afraid to venture outdoors because of high winds and dust storms. At seven o'clock on her second night in town a delegation of men visited Bloomer and persuaded her to lecture on woman's rights later that night. Bloomer considered the short dress and pants which she wore for traveling too shabby for the lecture platform, so she hurriedly unstrapped her trunk and unpacked a more elegant reform dress for her appearance. "I, who had 'turned the world upside down' by preaching a new gospel and was sorely criti-

1. For contemporary descriptions of Council Bluffs see "City of Council Bluffs, Iowa," *Frank Leslie's Weekly*, [1856] clipping in slide display on Dexter Bloomer, Iowa State Historical Department (ISHD), Des Moines; "City of Council Bluffs, Iowa," Ballou's *Pictorial Drawing Room Companion*, 26 December 1857, 412-413; Mildred Goosman, "George Simons: Frontier Artist," *Iowan*, December 1962, 1932. This last article carries reproductions of Simon's paintings and drawings of early Council Bluffs. For Bloomer's experiences see *Lily*, 1 February, 15 February, 1 March, 15 May 1855; D[exter] C. Bloomer, ed., *Life and Writings of Amelia Bloomer* (Boston, 1895), 190-196.

2. *Lily*, 15 May 1855; D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 197-198.

cized therefore, must make as good an impression as possible with my clothes at least," she told her *Lily* readers. When she appeared at the courthouse an hour later she found a full house curious to hear and see this famous woman.<sup>3</sup>

The Bloomers began their thirty-six-hour stagecoach journey to Council Bluffs at two o'clock the following morning. Bloomer was suffering from a bad cold, and the trip was anything but pleasant. For most of the journey nine passengers sat in three seats. They were packed together day and night except for brief stops, when they ate poorly cooked meals or walked up hill to temporarily relieve the horses. Traveling in the same coach with Bloomer was the famous frontiersman, Kit Carson, whom Bloomer found unremarkable except for his fringed buckskin clothes. No doubt Carson was equally curious about the petite woman in reform dress who was scrutinizing him so carefully.<sup>4</sup>

The Bloomers arrived in Council Bluffs on April 15, their fifteenth wedding anniversary, with Amelia suffering from another bad headache. They found welcome rest in the Pacific House, the town's leading hotel, where they waited two weeks for the river to rise enough to allow a boat to carry their household furnishings from St. Louis. Dexter had purchased a small house during his visit to Council Bluffs the previous fall but it was nearly July before their furniture finally arrived. So they moved into their home with borrowed furnishings: two old wooden chairs, an old table, and a mattress. They managed to buy an old-fashioned cook stove and dishes enough to set up housekeeping. They set out shrubs and fruit-tree cuttings which they had brought from the East, but without rain the plants all soon died. Since Bloomer was the object of great curiosity in Council Bluffs, many people came to call upon her. The Bloomers had only boxes and trunks for extra seating. Dexter enjoyed this informality but Amelia found it unpleasant and mortifying. She was delighted when her household goods finally arrived and she could lay carpets, hang wallpaper, sleep in a bed, and entertain in a more dignified manner.<sup>5</sup>

3. D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 199-201.

4. D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 202-204.

5. *Lily*, 15 May, 1 August 1855; D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 204-207.

Council Bluffs in 1855 was a decided contrast to the quiet, settled village of Seneca Falls which Bloomer had left so reluctantly. It was a boomtown of about two thousand inhabitants but did the business of a community twice that size as people poured in from all parts of the country en route to the California gold fields. The town had drawn settlers such as the Bloomers with the expectation that it would become the terminus of the first railroad across Iowa. The main part of Council Bluffs, set back about three miles from the river, stood against high bluffs covered with prairie grass and flowers. The Bloomer home was at the foot of one of these bluffs. It had an unobstructed view across the river to the village of Omaha and the vast unpopulated plains of Nebraska beyond. Frame buildings like the Bloomer house were rare in Council Bluffs—most consisted of rough logs. In wet weather the few streets formed a sea of mud. In most areas beaten paths across the fields served as thoroughfares. The Bloomer house, situated on what is now Fourth Street, faced only the open prairie until a road was cut through a year after their arrival.<sup>6</sup>

Indians, about to leave the area by the force of white settlement, were still in Council Bluffs when the Bloomers arrived. One group pitched its tent on the summit of a bluff near Bloomer's home soon after her arrival. "Though I do not fear them, I dislike trying to talk with them, and their begging propensity makes them disagreeable visitors," she reported to the *Lily*. She said the Indians were friendly and harmless, though great thieves and beggars, and she found them filthy and disgusting. The first white settlers in Council Bluffs (which they originally called Kanessville) were Mormons from Nauvoo, Illinois, who set up temporary quarters in the low lands along the river in 1846. Within two years they had built a log city to house several thousand persons. In 1852 they abandoned their town when they moved to Utah on orders from Brigham Young. Other Mormon groups continued to pass through Council Bluffs on their westward treks. Several years after their arrival the Bloomers adopted two Mormon children who were probably part of a contingent of English and Welsh converts who came through in the summer of 1856.<sup>7</sup>

6. *Council Bluffs Chronotype*, 9 May 1855; *Lily*, 15 June 1855; D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 208-209.

7. *Lily*, 1 November 1855; D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 423-424; *History of Pottawat-*

Since 1849 the California gold rush had been bringing thousands of prospectors into the area on their way to and from the gold fields. Among them came gamblers, horse thieves, murderers, and desperados of every kind. A community where saloons, gambling joints, and brothels lined the streets replaced the sobriety of the Mormon settlement. Newspapers regularly reported fines which prostitutes known as "Sore Thumb Julia," "White Eye, Eliza Seymour," and "French Moll" paid. Self-constituted vigilante committees flourished and finding the body of an unsavory character hanging from a tree was not uncommon. The Fourth-of-July celebration which the Bloomers attended their first summer in Council Bluffs occurred in Hangman's Hollow (the site of the present town of Glenwood), an area which drew its name from a hanging which occurred there two years earlier. Citizens hanged a man in 1860 "for all kinds of rascality" and lynched two men as late as 1867. Law-abiding citizens such as the Bloomers tolerated the vigilantes because they seemed necessary for crime control in the community.<sup>8</sup>

The Bloomers caught the land speculation fever which engulfed the area during 1855 and 1856. Dexter purchased property for himself as well as going into business as a land agent and lawyer. Amelia, in a letter to the *Lily*, offered to purchase good property at trivial expense for anyone willing to trust her with funds. She wrote, "Send here your money and your land warrants, and secure a part in these rich prairie lands . . . and you will secure for yourselves and families a patrimony at once ample and abundant for all your and their wants." Bloomer especially urged any woman who had one or two hundred dollars to invest them in Iowa lands because state laws allowed women to own and manage their own property. She was anxious for them to take advantage of this liberality. In

*tamie County, Iowa* (Chicago, 1883), 19-20, 85; D. C. Bloomer, "Notes on the Early History of Pottawattamie County," *Annals of Iowa*, 9-12 (April 1871-October 1874) 10:138; Dexter Bloomer, "My House, My Home," Dexter Bloomer journal, MS, ISHD Des Moines.

8. On the lawless situation in Council Bluffs see D. C. Bloomer, "History of Pottawattamie County," 282, 530-531; *History of Pottawattamie County*, 20-21, 85, 168; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 10 January, 14 July, 10 August 1869; D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 207. The *Woman's Journal*, 14 May 1870, reported that a tax on fallen women paid all the school expenses in Council Bluffs.

response, an Illinois woman sent Bloomer money to buy eighty acres for a poor girl who lived with her. According to the 1860 Iowa census, Bloomer herself owned \$5,000 worth of real estate, yet ten years later no property appears on record in her name.<sup>9</sup>

Dexter speculated heavily in Council Bluffs property and suffered severe losses during the panic of 1857 when the real estate bubble burst. At the same time, the bank in which he had deposited all of his money failed. These losses crippled him financially for years. In 1861 he accepted appointment as the receiver of public lands, a position which he held until the office was abolished twelve years later. In addition to practicing law he also sold insurance and eventually was able to earn a comfortable but modest living. In contrast to Amelia, who as a woman had little outlet for her civic interests other than church work and reform agitation, Dexter served his community in a variety of ways. He was an elected member of the Iowa board of education for several years and for nine years he was president of the Council Bluffs school board. In 1869 and again in 1871 he held the office of mayor, and he was a founder and long-time board member of the city's public library.<sup>10</sup>

Although Bloomer assured her friends in the East that she was not lonely in Iowa, her letters to the *Lily* strike a note of homesickness along with determination to make the best of her new situation. "Far from the place of my nativity, far from the spot where since childhood all the years of my life have been spent, save one, far from dearly loved kindred and highly cherished friends, far from all the noble spirits with whom I have long labored in the cause of humanity . . . I have commenced life anew," she wrote. Here amid flower-decked prairies she intended to do all she could to help the development and prosperity of the infant city of Council Bluffs. Her readers should not imagine her in a wild and uncultivated country deprived of all life's comforts. "We do not consider ourselves

9. *Lily*, 15 June 1855; 1860 Iowa Census, Pottawattamie County, 20.

10. Dexter Bloomer, "Some Events of My Life," Dexter Bloomer journal, MS, ISHD, Des Moines; "Dexter Bloomer," *Biographical History of Pottawattamie County, Iowa* (1891), 241; "Dexter Bloomer," *An Illustrated History of the State of Iowa* (Chicago, 1876), 668-669.

as far out of the world as we are set down by those who realize nothing of the immense emigration to the mighty West," she assured them. Disregarding the lawless character of their new home, Bloomer reported that the people who had settled there were "mostly from the east and nearly all Americans; consequently we have an intelligent, well-ordered community."<sup>11</sup>

Adjustment to her new home was not easy for Bloomer. After two weeks in her own house she wrote to the *Lily* that it had been a long time since she felt confined to the business of housekeeping alone. It seemed strange after her many activities of the previous six or seven years to settle down in this distant place with nothing to do but care for her house and garden. To while away her loneliness Bloomer spent many hours wandering along the bluffs behind her home, enjoying their beauty but dreaming of the day when a bustling city would fill the valley below and elegant residences would cover the bluffs.<sup>12</sup>

The Bloomer home was anything but elegant. It was a two-room, sixteen-by-twenty-four-foot frame structure set on wood blocks. Since it stood on the side of a bluff it was subject to flooding. The Bloomers added a rough structure to the back of their house which served as a kitchen and laundry during their first summer there. A year later they built another addition containing bedrooms. In 1859 a fire destroyed the roof and, in rebuilding, the Bloomers gained a second story with several more bedrooms which made it possible for them to rent out rooms. The house acquired gas lights in 1871 but there was no indoor plumbing during Amelia Bloomer's lifetime. Her roomers were often school teachers, and in 1866 Dexter's law partner, J. D. Edmundson, remembered as the philanthropist who endowed the Des Moines Art Center, stayed with them when he first moved to town.<sup>13</sup>

11. D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 222-223.

12. D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 227.

13. D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 209; Dexter Bloomer, "My House, My Home"; Dexter Bloomer *Diary*, 22 August 1871, ISHD, Des Moines; James B. Weaver, "The Full Tide," *Palimpsest* 14 (January 1933), 12. The 1870 Iowa Census, Pottawattamie County, 209, lists Emma Jenks, age 17 (who was probably a relative since Jenks was Amelia Bloomer's maiden name), and Mary Bristil, age 42, a teacher, as residents in the Bloomer home in addition to Amelia, Dexter, and Eddie.

At the time of the fire the Bloomers had an adopted five-year-old son, Eddie, one of five English-born children whose parents were Mormon converts. Their mother had died in Council Bluffs during the severe winter of 1856-57 and their father, Thomas Lewis, unable to look after them himself, traveled on to settle in Idaho. The year after the fire the Bloomers adopted Eddie's fourteen-year-old sister, Mary. Different Council Bluffs families accepted the other three Lewis children. Assessment of Amelia Bloomer's relationship with these children is difficult as she left little direct indication of her feelings toward them. No doubt they filled a great need in her life at a time when she had few outside activities. Dexter, in his biography of Amelia, wrote that she carefully cared for, instructed, and educated these children and that they remained at home "until they took their welfare into their own hands." According to Dexter, Amelia had the warmest interest in Eddie, both as a boy and as a man, and after he moved away from Council Bluffs she sent him and his family boxes of clothing every year. Eddie Bloomer eventually went to Arizona where he rejoined the Mormons.<sup>14</sup>

Amelia Bloomer cut all ties with Mary, however, after the young woman announced in December 1866 that she was about to marry Joseph Stright, a man generally considered a good-for-nothing in the community. Bloomer's outrage overshadowed any feeling of warmth she may have had for this girl. Dexter noted in his diary that his wife hated both Mary and her fiancé and was very indignant that Stright should come into her home. "She is greatly excited . . . and says many hard things about Mary and her lover," he observed a few days before the wedding. Dexter, on the other hand, decided not to oppose the marriage even though he disapproved of it. He gave the bride in marriage at her wedding on Christmas Day although he could hardly keep from crying during the ceremony. "I have loved her very much," he told his diary, "and it is hard to part with her. My wife," he added, "would not go to the church." Mary left for Ohio immediately after her wedding and eventually settled in Oregon. The Council Bluffs community may have seen both Eddie and Mary as disap-

14. Dexter Bloomer, "My House, My Home"; D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 300.



pointments to the Bloomers. Many years later a woman who had lived next door to them as a child recalled people saying, "Isn't it too bad the way those children turned out, after all the Bloomers did for them?"<sup>15</sup>

AMELIA BLOOMER reported to the *Lily*, after two months in Council Bluffs: "Society here is made up of the good and the bad—the moral and the immoral." She had met some women who were intelligent, well educated, and accustomed to good society, but on the whole she had found less sociability there than in any place she had known. "I judge that the Spirit of Reform does not dwell here; if so, I have not found it out, though I have kept a constant lookout for it," she told her readers. With one or two exceptions, she had found no true reformers and no one had "manifested any interest in subjects affecting the rights and happiness of humanity." She found little enthusiasm for the temperance organizations in which she had been active. A Council Bluffs chapter of the Sons of Temperance formed in the spring of 1855 but since it admitted women only as visiting members, Bloomer refused to associate with it. The following year when a Good Templar's lodge organized, she became a charter member. The two temperance organizations furnished a hall and held regular meetings on different evenings but they both expired after a year or two. Council Bluffs, as Bloomer later recalled, "was always a hard field for temperance work."<sup>16</sup>

Without reform-minded cohorts, Bloomer found both sociability and an outlet for her energies in church work. Soon after her arrival the minister of the Congregational church invited her to attend a meeting of the women's sewing society in his log home. The six women who met there promptly chose Bloomer to head the group. The church consisted of a log building with wood slabs for seats and an up-ended dry-goods box for a pulpit. A new building was under construction and the sewing society helped raise funds for its completion by organizing fairs and other social events. When an Episcopal

15. Dexter Bloomer *Diary*, 15, 19, 24, 25 December 1866; Edith Brock Officer, interview with author, Council Bluffs, Iowa, c. 1962.

16. *Lily*, 1 August 1855; D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 231.

congregation organized in the spring of 1856 Bloomer then became active in the denomination of her choice. She was the first woman to sign the parish register and she remained a devoted member of this church for the rest of her life. New ministers often stayed as guests in her home until they could locate permanent places to live.<sup>17</sup>

Bloomer did not allow her initial lack of kindred spirits to hinder her from expressing her disapproval of the community's morals. Several weeks after her arrival she wrote to the *Council Bluffs Chronotype* complaining that some men who had recently wanted to display a panorama of the Holy Land had to give up their plan because the license fee was too high. Yet no one had required a license of other men who had raced some poor mongrel horses on the bottom lands a couple of weeks earlier. "The town turned out to honor the brutal and inhuman contest between poor goaded animals that were forced to race in the noon-time heat," she wrote. "There were fifteen drunken fights that day. Thirty human beings in the fury of besotment strove to prove their bestial attributes and no one attempted to stop them." Bloomer believed that men had "no right to place such surroundings about the boys of this community and lead them astray from the paths of virtue and rectitude—be it rum-selling, horse-racing, or gambling." Bloomer found little sympathy, however, for her outspoken views, because even those who disapproved of the town's morals resented any unfavorable publicity for their community.<sup>18</sup>

Bloomer's first lecture in her new home, delivered on Thanksgiving Day 1855, was on the subject of temperance. She was appalled that, despite the prohibition law which had gone into effect in Iowa on July first, liquor continued to flow as usual in Council Bluffs. She told her audience she would greatly prefer that someone else take over the task which she was assuming that evening, but as she never shrank from her duty to humanity she would not do so on this occasion. She had looked forward to the first of July when all liquor sales in the community would stop and when drunken men would no longer stagger on the streets, fall from their horses, or be

17. D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 210-211, 302-304.

18. *Council Bluffs Chronotype*, 27 May, 4 July 1855.

carried home senseless. She had hoped prohibition would end the fighting which originated in the dram shops and that decent citizens would no longer suffer exposure to the unmistakable evidence of the sale of liquor.

Bloomer regretted that neither the city's press nor its pulpit had seen fit to comment on the general disregard of a prohibition law so fraught with good. She chided temperance men for folding their arms and doing nothing. Liquor was doing great injury to the good name of the city. Bloomer "heard the tale more than a thousand miles away that Council Bluffs was the worst place in all the west for drinking and gambling. . . . The tale is all too true and this prevents many from choosing Council Bluffs as their future home," she warned. She was equally disappointed with people's disregard of the prohibition law then in effect in Nebraska Territory. At the Fourth-of-July celebration in Omaha she was shocked to see women as well as men drinking. She lamented to her *Lily* readers that she returned home "sorrowful and with a load upon her spirits which she could not shake off." Liquor again became legal in Iowa when the state supreme court declared its prohibition law unconstitutional in 1857.<sup>19</sup>

Of course Bloomer also advocated woman's rights in Iowa, and was the first resident of the state to speak out publicly on the subject. During her first year in Council Bluffs she delivered several lectures to a community that was more curious about her views than sympathetic to them. The city's newspapers, though unfriendly to the cause, were nevertheless willing to publish her frequent letters on various aspects of the woman's movement. In August 1855 Bloomer sent a letter to the *Chronotype* which offered news about women she had garnered from the many publications to which she and Dexter subscribed. She wrote that she was anxious to keep the public posted about the woman's movement and that her sex should "receive credit for whatever talent and intellect they possess." Since the *Chronotype* was "usually directed entirely to chronicling the doings of the 'sterner sex,'" Bloomer took it for

19. Amelia Bloomer, lecture, n.d. [November 1855], MS, Seneca Falls Historical Society (SFHS); *Lily*, 1 December 1855; D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 207-208.

granted that it would not refuse woman a corner occasionally.<sup>20</sup>

The following October the *Chronotype* published a letter from Bloomer which advised parents not to send their daughters to a female academy in St. Joseph, Missouri which was currently advertising in Council Bluffs newspapers. She objected to "female schools" and hoped that one day they would become extinct. Bloomer recommended the new university at Iowa City which was both inexpensive and coeducational. "Women should enjoy the same educational advantages as men. This would do more for their elevation than any other single reform," she wrote.<sup>21</sup>

When the all-male Council Bluffs' literary society debated the question of woman suffrage in November, Bloomer deplored the quality of the discussion. "The question of *right* was lost sight of and that of *expediency* substituted," she reported to the *Lily*. In the discussion after the debate Bloomer expressed as many objections as she could in the ten minutes allotted. The society subsequently invited her to give a lecture on woman suffrage which she delivered to a crowded Methodist church on December 7. In contrast to her woman's rights lectures in the East, Bloomer emphasized the franchise as a natural right rather than as a means of prohibiting the use of alcohol. With a prohibition law already on the books in Iowa a different argument for woman's suffrage was necessary. Bloomer's lecture caused heated discussion in the community. A correspondent to the *Council Bluffs Bugle* commented that the controversy was of greater importance than usual because of the talent involved. This writer asserted that women seemed to think they inherited the right to vote from Adam. Such an argument seemed without foundation: "Political rights are not natural rights. To say so is so much BALDERDASH!"<sup>22</sup>

General William Larimer, a member of the Nebraska territo-

20. For information about other Iowa lecturers on woman's rights see Louise Noun, *Strong-minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Iowa* (Ames, 1969), 91-99; *Council Bluffs Chronotype*, 15 August 1855.

21. *Council Bluffs Chronotype*, 24 August 1855.

22. *Lily*, 1 December 1855, 1 March 1856; *Council Bluffs Chronotype*, 19 December 1855; *Council Bluffs Bugle*, 15 December 1855.

rial legislature who heard Bloomer's lecture in Council Bluffs, helped secure an invitation for her to speak to the Nebraska legislature which met in Omaha the following January. Bloomer braved a thirty-degrees-below-zero temperature to meet her engagement. The house chamber where she spoke was packed with a standing-room-only crowd of men curious about this famous woman in her reform dress. Even the platform was so crowded that Bloomer scarcely had room to stand. The audience cheered when she stepped to the podium. The *Chronotype* commented that most people agreed with Bloomer on the subject of property rights for women but doubted if woman suffrage was good policy. "Mrs. Bloomer, though a little body, is among the great women of the United States. Her only danger," the *Chronotype* feared, "is in asking too much."<sup>23</sup>

Soon after Bloomer's lecture to the Nebraska legislature General Larimer introduced a woman suffrage bill which the house took up on January 30. This time women were present to hear the debate. Larimer spoke eloquently in favor of the bill and the house approved the measure fourteen to eleven. This action created a sensation in legislative circles and at the next house session two wags presented Larimer with "an unmentionable article of lady's apparel" (presumably a pair of underpants). The senate was scheduled to take up the woman suffrage measure on the last day of the session but the issue did not reach the floor because of a filibuster over another matter. Members of the legislature assured Bloomer that, had they had the opportunity to vote on it, suffrage would have won approval. Since women in Nebraska waited until 1917 to receive even limited suffrage, however, one wonders how serious these legislators were about giving women the vote.<sup>24</sup>

Bloomer's last lecture in Council Bluffs during the winter of 1855-56 was on the subject of women's education, for the benefit of the library association. By this time the townspeople had satisfied their curiosity about Bloomer, and they subsequently lost interest in hearing her lecture again. As Bloomer

23. *Lily*, 1 March 1856; *Council Bluffs Chronotype*, 16 January 1856; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda J. Gage, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* (Rochester, 1887), 3:672.

24. *Lily*, 1 March 1856; *Council Bluffs Bugle*, 29 January 1856; *Council Bluffs Chronotype*, 30 January 1856; D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 212-214.

wrote to the *Lily*, "the field for such labor is not very extensive here." During her early years in Iowa, Bloomer had to reject many opportunities to speak in other communities because of the difficulties of travel. Even crossing the Missouri River to Omaha could be hazardous. Bloomer never forgot one trip in the early spring of 1858 when she went to Omaha to speak on women's education. The ice was breaking up in the river that evening. Although she managed to cross on a flatboat which men propelled with poles, a storm had risen by the time she was ready to return and the only means of crossing was a row boat. After Bloomer promised not to become hysterical, the boatmen permitted her aboard. As it crossed, the row boat tossed precipitously on the high waves amidst the floating ice blocks. Although it finally reached shore safely, Bloomer vowed never to expose herself to such dangers again.<sup>25</sup>

At the time of the boat trip, Bloomer was wearing conventional dress again. She had come to the conclusion that dress reform was a hopeless cause, at least for the time being. In November 1857 she expressed her feelings on the subject in a letter to a dress reform advocate in the East.

The cause *may* now be '*gaining ground*,' as you say, but I see no evidence of it. The mass of women do and will, still follow the lead of French milliners, and deck themselves in what extravagance and folly Fashion may prescribe. It is idle to talk of materially reforming the dress of woman . . . so long as her education and employments are as superficial and trivial as now. Woman must first feel the *need* for such reform and understand the great benefits to her health and personal comfort that will accrue from it, and then have the courage and independence to live up to her convictions and needs, ere any real, permanent reform can be accomplished.

Bloomer's interest in dress reform never waned although her attitudes were at times ambivalent. During the Civil War she advocated the short dress and pants as a sensible costume for army nurses, but a few years later she advised Dr. Mary Walker, notorious for her flamboyant male attire, to conform to present fashions rather than make herself so conspicuous. Women

25. *Lily*, 1 March 1856; D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 214-216.

should sacrifice their own comfort for the sake of the larger cause, she told Walker. In her old age Bloomer told an interviewer that if she had not retired to private life after coming to Council Bluffs she might still have been wearing the reform costume.<sup>26</sup>

Bloomer was delighted in January 1861 to receive a copy of the *Mayflower*, a woman's rights paper which had just begun publication in Indiana. "From my far away home amidst the bluffs of the Missouri, I send you greeting," she wrote to Lizzie Bunnell, the paper's editor. The *Mayflower's* arrival brought back many happy memories of editing the *Lily*, she said, but "those years seem but . . . a dream to me now, so inactive and quietly have passed the six years since I resigned my charge . . . and so far removed from all those who are alive to the importance of the work in which you are engaged." Bloomer saw her *Lily* resurrected in the *Mayflower* and she became its frequent correspondent.<sup>27</sup>

With the outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861 Bloomer felt more isolated than ever in Council Bluffs. "I sometimes wish I were located where I too might take part in ministering to the wants . . . of those brave men who go forth to fight our battles," she wrote in June. The following month the work for which she had wished was at hand. The Seventh Iowa Regiment was stationed nearby, and the women of Council Bluffs turned needle and thread to the benefit of these troops. They organized a Soldiers' Aid Society and elected Bloomer president. The society's first project was to make a flag for Company A, which was composed primarily of local men. Bloomer made the formal presentation of this flag on August 9 before the entire regiment in parade formation. She reminded the troops that they were going forth to defend the Constitution against a monstrous and unjust rebellion of wicked men who wanted to overthrow the best government the world had ever seen. She warned them to stay away from every vice, to avoid profanity, and especially to abstain from the intoxicating cup.

26. Amelia Bloomer, letter to Edwin B. Houghton, Esq., 16 November 1857, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College; *Mayflower*, 1 July 1861; *Agitator* [Chicago], 23 October 1869; "Story of the Bloomer Costume," unidentified clipping, c. 1893, New-York Historical Society (NYHS).

27. *Mayflower*, 1 March 1861.

She urged them to conduct themselves so that regardless of their fates, no stain would darken their fair fame. These sentiments drew tears from even the doughtiest men in her audience.<sup>28</sup>

After the aid society had supplied the Seventh Iowa Regiment with havelocks, towels, and other accessories, the members devoted their efforts to making bed shirts, drawers, and bandages for the sick and wounded. The women met every Wednesday afternoon to cut out garments which they then distributed for sewing at home. To help pay for materials, they organized a mite society which met one evening a week. Anyone willing to contribute ten cents was welcome. This society was similar to church mite societies which met both to socialize and to contribute small amounts to sustain their churches. Bloomer entered into this work with patriotic fervor and devoted to it every moment she could spare from her household responsibilities.<sup>29</sup>

The Council Bluffs Soldiers' Aid Society was typical of many others in towns across Iowa. Annie Wittenmyer of Keokuk, Iowa, had spurred the formation of such societies. She had seen firsthand the needs of the wounded soldiers brought up the Mississippi River, and she wrote to women throughout the state during the spring and summer of 1861 asking help for these men. She soon became the focus for relief work in Iowa and received a large quantity of supplies for distribution to the troops. However, in October 1861, when Governor Kirkwood appointed the Iowa Sanitary Commission (Iowa's Civil War counterpart of the present-day Red Cross) this group of men initiated a concerted drive to persuade all the women's groups to affiliate with the state commission. The commission wanted to serve as the sole distribution agency for all relief materials.<sup>30</sup>

The Council Bluffs society in early December considered

28. *Mayflower*, 15 July, 15 October, 1 August 1861; D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 279-280.

29. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 24 August 1861; *Mayflower*, 15 October 1861.

30. Louise Noun, *Strong-minded Women*, 27-28; Ruth A. Gallaher, "Annie Turner Wittenmyer," *Journal of Iowa History*, 29 (October 1931), 518-569; Earl S. Fullbrook, "Relief Work in Iowa During the Civil War," *Journal of Iowa History*, 16 (April 1918), 155-274; L. P. Brockett, *Woman's Work in the Civil War* (Philadelphia, 1867), 374-379.



organizing as an auxiliary to the state commission but the women decided to remain independent. In the spring of 1862, however, the state commission gained control of soldiers' aid work in Council Bluffs at a meeting called by Judge Caleb Baldwin, a Council Bluffs member of the honorary state sanitary commission. Baldwin, who presided at the meeting, presented bylaws and a slate of officers, both of which were approved without question or discussion by the women present. Voting was by secret ballot. The meeting assigned Bloomer only a minor office. She felt in an awkward position because she was president of the existing Soldiers' Aid Society, so she kept silent during the proceedings. Evidently, neither the state commission nor the local women wanted Bloomer in control of the new organization. At Bloomer's suggestion, the Soldiers' Aid Society subsequently merged with the sanitary commission.<sup>31</sup>

"My feelings were considerably hurt by the course taken, and I have never since taken an active part in labors for the soldiers," Bloomer wrote to Annie Wittenmyer in the spring of 1863. She said she seldom attended meetings of the sanitary commission although she supported it financially. She hesitated to make suggestions or to interfere with the work in any way.

This inactivity is not natural to me. I have always been actively engaged in every good and benevolent work around me. Whatever I set my hand to, I do with a will. I feel intensely, and suffer with the suffering. I have executive ability and a willingness to take responsibility; but I find few women here who feel with me or who have capacity for undertakings outside their own households. When I read of the terrible sufferings of the soldiers I feel a wish to fly to their relief and to stand side by side with you in ministering to their comfort, and it is only poor health which has kept me from offering my services in their behalf.<sup>32</sup>

During the summer of 1863 Annie Wittenmyer was under attack. Forces aligned with the state sanitary commission claimed

31. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 7 December 1861, 22 August 1862; Amelia Bloomer, letter to Annie Wittenmyer, 2 March 1863, ISHD, Des Moines.

32. Amelia Bloomer, letter to Annie Wittenmyer, 2 March 1863.

that she was inefficient and unable to properly distribute the goods sent to her. Ann E. Harlan of Mt. Pleasant traveled throughout the state denouncing Wittenmyer. The anti-Wittenmyer faction also called a Ladies State Sanitary Convention (chaired by Ann Harlan's husband, Senator James Harlan) which met in Des Moines in November. Bloomer, anxious to support Wittenmyer, planned to go to Des Moines as a delegate from the Council Bluffs chapter but when it came time to start on the two-day stagecoach journey to Des Moines she felt too ill to make the trip. She could not find a substitute.<sup>33</sup>

Although the Des Moines convention vindicated Wittenmyer of mismanaging distribution of relief supplies, opposition to her was so persistent that she soon left the state to work for the Christian Sanitary Commission based in the East. In December 1864 a branch of the Christian commission organized in Council Bluffs. Bloomer, whose wounded pride had kept her aloof from soldiers' aid work, thus found a congenial group with which to associate and she enthusiastically joined in its work. According to Dexter Bloomer in his *History of Pottawattamie County*, there was spirited competition between the Council Bluffs' branches of the Christian Sanitary Commission and the Iowa Sanitary Commission. By May 1865 the Christian commission had collected over \$500. Part of these funds went for the work of the Christian commission and the rest to hold a sanitary fair in Chicago in late May and early June. Dexter did not record how much the Iowa commission collected.<sup>34</sup>

In early 1865 Bloomer was appointed (probably by the organizers of the Chicago fair) to membership on its Iowa committee. Her job was to help secure donations of items to sell at the fair for the benefit of the troops. She also received an expense-paid trip to the fair, where for three weeks she helped oversee the Iowa section. Since the war had ended in April, this event marked the end of soldiers' aid efforts in the Midwest. Bloomer also took advantage of her Chicago visit to

33. Amelia Bloomer, letter to Annie Wittenmyer, 16 November 1863, ISHD, Des Moines.

34. *Des Moines Register*, 20 November 1863; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 3 December 1864, 21 January, 11 March, 19 May 1865; D. C. Bloomer, "History of Pottawattamie County," 348.

seek relief for what seemed to be her almost chronic illness. Dexter noted in his diary on the day she left home, "Her health is very poor. She goes partly to attend the fair but mainly for medical treatment." Either the doctors or the change of scenery was helpful because several weeks later Dexter could note that he had received a letter from his wife in which she reported that she was feeling "quite well" and "enjoying herself."<sup>35</sup>

AMELIA BLOOMER, like the majority of Northerners, supported the Civil War to preserve the Union. Although she deplored slavery she was not an abolitionist. She supported President Lincoln wholeheartedly in his cautious stand on the slavery issue. This was not the case with all woman's rights advocates, however. Bloomer's former co-workers Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, always more radical in their views than Bloomer, saw slavery as the primary issue facing the country and were indignant with Lincoln for not doing away with this evil more speedily. They denounced his Emancipation Proclamation of September 1862 because it applied only to the rebel states where no one would enforce it. In the spring of 1863, Stanton and Anthony launched a campaign to mobilize women of the North to pressure Congress and the president for immediate abolition in all the states. In April, Bloomer received a letter from Anthony which enclosed a call for a meeting of loyal women of the North in New York on May 14. "We have resolved . . . to demand that only *freedom* to all shall be the terms of peace," Anthony wrote. She hoped Bloomer might be able to attend, but if she could not, Anthony asked her to send a message they could read to the meeting.<sup>36</sup>

Bloomer did not attend this meeting but she did send a fervent message. Her letter, printed in the *Nonpareil*, deplored the notion of many women that men should have brought the war to a close long before by compromise. These women were

35. A. Wiltse, letter to Amelia Bloomer, 16 May 1865, Council Bluffs Free Public Library (CBFPL); D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 287; Dexter Bloomer *Diary*, 21 May, 15 June 1865.

36. D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 287; Ida Husted Harper, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony* (Indianapolis, 1899), 1:225-227; Susan B. Anthony, letter to Amelia Bloomer, 10 April 1863, ISHD, Des Moines; Stanton et al, *History*, 2:50-78.

willing to settle for peace at almost any price. Bloomer wanted peace only when the Union Army finally triumphed and destroyed the institution of slavery. She then went on to qualify her statement on slavery by adding, "I do not mean that every slave must be free before peace can be established, but that the political power of the institution [of slavery] shall be overthrown and the way open for its early and complete disappearance from every part of the country." In 1877, when Stanton and Anthony published Bloomer's letter in their *History of Woman Suffrage*, they deleted this sentence. We can assume that they did not include it when they read the letter at the 1863 New York meeting.<sup>37</sup>

The New York convention organized a Loyal Women's League and launched a major petition campaign to ask Congress for emancipation legislation. The league obtained six thousand petition signatures in Iowa but considering Bloomer's conservative stand on the slavery issue, it seems unlikely that she took part in this campaign. Stanton and Anthony, in promoting the antislavery petitions, realized that, while soldiers' relief would end with the war, a woman's organization based on the principles of universal emancipation and enfranchisement could continue the campaign for equality when the war was over. Within a year after the Union victory, they were once again calling out their cohorts across the country in behalf of woman's cause.<sup>38</sup>

In April 1866 Bloomer received a letter from Stanton which announced a woman's rights convention scheduled for May 9 in New York. Stanton and Anthony had organized this meeting—the first woman's rights convention since 1860—because of their alarm over the wording of the proposed Fourteenth Amendment to the federal constitution. This amendment, which Republicans designed to force the South to give black men the vote without disturbing racist voting laws in the North, proposed to reduce representation in Congress in proportion to the number of *male* citizens denied the right to vote in each state. Before this, suffrage had been a matter for state regula-

37. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 6 June 1863; Stanton et al, *History of Woman Suffrage*, 2:886.

38. Stanton et al, *History*, 2:79; Harper, *Life and Work*, 229-230.

tion and women could at least console themselves that there was nothing in the federal constitution to prevent their enfranchisement. Now they faced losing even this dubious distinction. "If possible we should be glad to see you at our coming convention," Stanton wrote to Bloomer. "If not, send a letter. With so many joint resolutions before Congress to introduce the word 'male' into the federal constitution we cannot be silent in justice to ourselves." Although Bloomer was unable to attend this meeting, those who did named her vice president for Iowa of the national association.<sup>39</sup>

Much to the feminists' distress, Congress submitted the Fourteenth Amendment to the states in June 1866 and it became law two years later. The amendment apportioned membership in Congress according to the number of male citizens who had the right to vote in each state. It also declared that all persons born or naturalized in the United States were citizens entitled to equal protection of the law. Before long women began to wonder if they were not entitled to vote under the equal protection clause of this amendment. Meanwhile, Republican politicians told them that this was the "Negro's hour" and that their hour would come once the black man was fully enfranchised.<sup>40</sup>

When Congress approved the Fifteenth Amendment in 1869, which prohibited voting discrimination by race, color, or previous condition of servitude, Stanton and Anthony also opposed ratification of this legislation because it did not outlaw voting discrimination by sex. This stand outraged many of their Republican friends and embarrassed many feminists. Democrats, adamantly opposed to granting the ballot to blacks, looked with amusement on feminists' struggle for inclusion in any proposals to extend voting rights. They took great pleasure in taunting Republicans for enfranchising ignorant former slaves while denying suffrage to their own educated and refined white wives and daughters. Thus by one of the ironies of politics, feminists, almost all of the Republican persuasion, found their most vocal champions in the opposition party.

39. Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, 1959), 142-145; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, letter to Amelia Bloomer, 5 April 1866, ISHD, Des Moines.

40. Stanton et al, *History*, 2:407-411.

Stanton and Anthony welcomed any help the Democrats could give them while Lucy Stone and more conservative feminists deplored such association. With ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870 the way was clear for women to join in a concerted drive for their own enfranchisement. Differences within the woman suffrage ranks, however, soon led to a dissipation of much of the energy which feminists could have used against their enemies.<sup>41</sup>

Iowa was also in the process of granting black men the ballot. The 1866 General Assembly approved an amendment to the state constitution which deleted the word "white" from the qualifications for voting. Two years later the legislature gave the necessary second approval to this measure and voters ratified it in a popular referendum that fall. Friends of woman suffrage in the General Assembly had promised feminists that once they had enfranchised the black man, they would work for a state constitutional amendment to delete the word "male" from the qualifications for voting. When the black suffrage amendment became law in 1868 feminists looked to the next session of the legislature for serious consideration of women's demands for the ballot.<sup>42</sup>

Meanwhile, Bloomer was doing what she could to further the suffrage cause in the unfriendly atmosphere of her own community. Both of Council Bluffs' newspapers, the Republican *Nonpareil* and the Democrat *Bugle*, opposed woman suffrage and refused to treat the subject seriously. When Bloomer delivered a lecture on woman's rights in February 1867 (probably her first on the subject since her early years in the city) the *Nonpareil* gave it such a caustic review that a correspondent chastised the editor for "unmercifully satirizing" Bloomer's address. "To cloak your dislike under the barb of approbation is hardly gallantry to say the least," this writer remarked. During the next few years the *Nonpareil* changed its tactics but not its opposition to woman suffrage. In February 1869 the paper announced that, in principle, it had to concede the justice of woman suffrage though it doubted its expediency. Since the question was essentially a new theme of political consider-

41. Harper, *Life and Work*, 255-270; Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 147-149.

42. Louise Noun, *Strong-minded Women*, 35-46, 84-87.

ation and "error in any decision would be freighted with terrible consequences," the paper hoped that "the final solution would be long and protracted."<sup>43</sup>

Bloomer responded to this editorial that she hoped the *Nonpareil* was finally coming to see the light. Woman suffrage "has able champions in both parties and prominent Republicans and Democrats are vying with each other for the leadership," she wrote. The *Bugle*, noting that Bloomer's letter had caused considerable comment in the community, advised her to join the Democrats who were for white woman's suffrage. Suffrage for the "African" would probably give him the balance of power, the paper feared. The Democrats disliked disturbing the educated, home-loving, fair, Anglo-Saxon women of this country, yet in view of the impending danger, they favored placing power in their hands. In this same sarcastic vein, the *Bugle* told Bloomer that friends of the cause were gratified to know that she had again buckled on her armor. They prayed that for the sake of the great question involved she would conduct a sensible and dignified campaign such as her "commanding ability, towering as it does above that of any other woman on this continent" would enable her to do, provided she did not get into bad company.<sup>44</sup>

"You claim to be a champion of woman suffrage, while some are uncharitable enough to say that you have all along been seriously opposed to the movement," Bloomer responded to the *Bugle*. She conceded that the *Bugle's* position on the woman suffrage question "in one particular is very like that of its most able and earnest champions. We are opposed to manhood suffrage alone," Bloomer wrote. "Woman has, by our laws and constitutions, always been kept on a level with the negro. Now it is proposed to elevate the negro above her. To this she will not willingly submit. . . . We are willing to accord to our colored population all the rights of citizenship but we claim them also, at the same time, for ourselves."<sup>45</sup>

Bloomer was anxious to be in touch once again with feminists in the East, so she decided to attend the annual woman's

43. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 22 February 1867, 13 February 1869.

44. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 14 February 1869; *Council Bluffs Bugle*, 17 February 1869.

45. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 27 February 1869.

rights convention in New York in June 1869, while en route for a visit to Seneca Falls. "I have been retired from the world so long that it would give me pleasure to see and hear something once more," she wrote to Stanton and Anthony. While in New York, Bloomer stayed at the Woman's Bureau, a facility recently established in a mansion on East 23rd Street. This bureau, the first of its kind in the country, served as a center for women's activities; it provided offices for various women's groups, elegant parlors for entertaining, and rooms for out-of-town visitors. A formal reception held at the bureau on the evening before the convention allowed Bloomer to mingle with leaders of the movement as well as prominent intellectuals of the city. "Say to our good people at home that though this party did not break up till midnight . . . there were no refreshments of any kind save pure, cold water," she reported to the *Nonpareil*. "What will the lovers of good eating who think it so dull and dreadful to have even a church Mite Society without a supper think of the *elite* and fashion and intelligence gathered together on that occasion for so many hours, never once flagging in conversation, or showing by their manner that they were expecting refreshments?" she asked.<sup>46</sup>

At the convention Bloomer, as the vice president from Iowa, held a seat of honor on the platform with other officers of the association. The lively discussion "of the great questions now agitating the public mind" thrilled her. Foremost among these was the question of suffrage for the black man. A resolution to endorse the Fifteenth Amendment caused acrimonious debate. Stanton and Anthony unsuccessfully opposed such action while Lucy Stone and other New Englanders strongly supported it. The latter accused Stanton and Anthony of repudiating the principle of equal rights and some suggested that it was time for them to resign as officers of the society.<sup>47</sup>

The subject of free love also caused a lively debate. Mary Livermore of Chicago, a recent convert to the woman suffrage cause, introduced a resolution which repudiated "free loveism" as "horrible and mischievous to society." She said the West

46. *Revolution*, 22 April 1869; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 20 May 1869.

47. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 20 May 1869; Harper, *Life and Work*, 1:322-324; Stanton et al, *History*, 2:379-398; *Revolution*, 20 May 1869.



wanted such a resolution because of the "innuendos that had come to their ears with regard to their striving for the ballot." Long-time workers for woman suffrage opposed this resolution because it seemed degrading to women to plead innocent to false accusations. The convention finally resolved the issue with a statement that the woman suffrage movement was not seeking to undermine marriage but rather to ennoble it by removing the legal disabilities which oppressed married women. Opposition to Anthony and Stanton was implicit in Livermore's anti-free love resolution. For a year and a half Anthony and Stanton had been publishing a woman's rights paper, appropriately titled the *Revolution*, in which Stanton expressed her radical views on marriage, divorce, and prostitution. Conservative feminists, led by Lucy Stone, believed that Anthony and Stanton were doing the movement more harm than good and were anxious to have an organization independent of these two women. This difference caused a split in the woman suffrage forces after the 1869 convention. Two rival groups emerged: Anthony's and Stanton's National Woman Suffrage Association and Stone's and Livermore's American Woman Suffrage Association.<sup>48</sup>

Stanton and Anthony formed the National Woman Suffrage Association in an impromptu meeting at the Woman's Bureau shortly after the May convention. The American Woman Suffrage Association organized at a convention held in Cleveland late in November. Bloomer, along with ten other Iowans, signed the call for this meeting but none of the signers attended the convention, despite the organizers' concerted effort to have as many states as possible represented. Livermore pleaded with Bloomer to make the trip to Cleveland. "*It is of the greatest importance that you should be there, for if you are not, Iowa will have no representation,*" she wrote shortly before the meeting. "*One delegate from Iowa will be sufficient . . . bundle up and come right along no matter how cold it may be. . . . If you will only come now, we can excuse you from attending any half dozen conventions,*" she pleaded. This appeal did not sway Bloomer, however. At the last minute Jud-

48. Harper, *Life and Work*, 1:324-329; Stanton et al, *History*, 2:389; Flexner, *Century of Struggle*, 149-152.

son Cross, a lawyer from eastern Iowa, showed up at the convention; so the state had representation after all. The group elected the popular Brooklyn minister Henry Ward Beecher as president to give the association prestige. Lucy Stone chaired the executive committee and assumed responsibility for the organization's work. The conferees named lawyer Cross a vice-president for Iowa, but Bloomer succeeded him the following year.<sup>49</sup>

As the woman's rights cause gained momentum in Iowa, criticism of the movement intensified. Bloomer increasingly used her pen to defend the cause against attacks from ministers, legislators, editors, and anonymous correspondents whose letters the newspapers frequently published. Bloomer seemed to relish this activity and her pungent style made her an effective spokesperson. Her communications to the newspapers cover a wide variety of topics including women's employment, women on juries, women's ability to govern, prostitution, and the "Bible argument" that women were subordinate to men by scriptural application. Bloomer also quickly came to the defense of any women whom the press unfairly attacked.<sup>50</sup>

For example, when Susan B. Anthony made her first Iowa lecture tour in 1871 the *Des Moines Register*, in an article which the *Nonpareil* reprinted, ridiculed her as a physically unattractive, avaricious woman who was grasping for money at fifty cents a head. "Men were willing to pay well to hear beautiful women," the *Register* said, "but when they possess none of these divine pulchritudes which man loves to see and adore, the show ceases to be interesting and the money is spent for little use. . . . In Miss Anthony's case there is no particular beauty of form or face to divert the attention from the great truths she illustrates." "The spite against Miss Anthony," Bloomer retorted, "is not the cause she advocates . . . but that she is neither young nor handsome. Let old, ugly women take warning, and foot all the bills out of their own pockets. I know not

49. Mary Livermore, letter to Amelia Bloomer, 15 November 1869, CBFPL; Noun, *Strong-minded Women*, 104-111.

50. *Council Bluffs Bugle*, 23 February 1869; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 14 March, 22 April, 12 May 1871; *Burlington Hawkeye*, 25 August 1870 (reprint from *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*); *Des Moines Register*, 23 February, 5 April, 29 June 1870; D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 237-239, 245-277, 355-375.

why women or the woman suffrage movement should be expected to labor without assistance any more than men and their enterprises can be sustained without help. Give us justice; we ask no more."<sup>51</sup>

While Bloomer waged her lonely battle in Council Bluffs on behalf of women, woman suffrage was also becoming a lively issue in other parts of the state. A group of Dubuque women formed the first woman suffrage association in the state in April 1869, after they heard Stanton and Anthony speak in nearby Galena, Illinois, during their first western trip. Two other suffrage societies also began in smaller Iowa communities during the year. Meanwhile lecturers, including several Iowa women as well as prominent easterners, were bringing woman's rights arguments before Iowa audiences. In December 1869 Henry O'Connor, the attorney general of Iowa, delighted feminists by ruling that a woman could hold the elective position of county superintendent of schools. In his ruling O'Connor declared that the word "man" was a generic term which also included women. Bloomer reported to friends in the East that O'Connor, who was an eloquent speaker, was ready to join with other influential men in Iowa to stump the state for woman suffrage whenever the question came up for a vote.<sup>52</sup>

With the increasing interest in woman suffrage and the hope that, now that the black man could vote, the 1870 General Assembly would approve a woman suffrage amendment, Bloomer saw the urgency of organizing suffragists on a state-wide basis. Shortly before she went east in June 1869 she wrote to Annie Savery of Des Moines hoping that Savery would help her organize a woman suffrage convention in the capital city. Although the railroad from Council Bluffs to Des Moines was completed two years previously, Bloomer had not been in Des Moines herself. Yet she was familiar with Savery's reputation as a woman's rights advocate. Savery, thirty-eight years old,

51. *Des Moines Register*, 14 February 1871; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 17 February 1871.

52. Noun, *Strong-minded Women*, 89-99; Ruth A. Gallaher, *The Legal and Political Status of Women in Iowa* (Iowa City, 1918), 84, 228-230; "Remarks of Mrs. Bloomer at Buffalo, N.Y. at the Woman Suffrage Convention," *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 18 July 1869.

was the only woman in her community who had had the courage to speak publicly in support of woman suffrage. Although largely self-educated, she had a keen and inquiring mind, spoke French fluently, and approached her causes with great enthusiasm and dedication. Her husband, James Savery, was a wealthy real estate speculator and hotel owner, as well as an agent for the American Emigrant Company, which sold Iowa land to Scandinavian immigrants. Annie traveled extensively in Europe when her husband went there on business trips, and she was out of the country when Bloomer's letter arrived. She did not reply until the following December. She and Bloomer began a correspondence which developed into a close friendship.<sup>53</sup>

ANNIE SAVERY'S letters to Bloomer written between December 1869 and April 1870 reveal Bloomer's interest in organizing a Des Moines woman's suffrage convention as well as her fears and reservations about such a project. Savery and Bloomer were both concerned about how little anyone had done in Iowa to further woman suffrage and they agreed to rally their forces and hold a Des Moines convention during the coming session of the General Assembly. Savery repeatedly invited Bloomer to Des Moines so that they could discuss the project. "As I should wish to do everything creditably . . . I should not dare, without the advice and instruction of a competent leader to undertake such a work. . . . You may not have the health," Savery wrote, "but you certainly have the experience and the ability to organize this or any other association. Hence, if you cannot do it because of your health, if you will come to me and teach me, I'll agree to be a willing pupil."<sup>54</sup>

Although Bloomer indicated that she would like to visit Savery she kept offering excuses to avoid coming to see her.

53. Annie Savery, letter to Amelia Bloomer, 11 December 1869, CBFPL; Louise Noun, "Annie Savery, a Voice for Woman's Rights," *Annals of Iowa* 44 (Summer 1977), 3-30; Florence E. Janson, *Background of Swedish Immigration, 1840-1930* (Chicago, 1931), 232; William S. Peterson, "The Scandinavians," *Palimpsest*, 43 (April 1962), 166; *Des Moines Register*, 30 April 1863; *Dubuque Herald*, 31 January 1869.

54. Annie Savery, letters to Amelia Bloomer, 19 December 1869, 25 January 1870, CBFPL.

Either she was too ill or she could not afford the trip. Behind her hesitation was her fear that she would feel out of place in Savery's elegant home. Amelia Bloomer had experienced this sense of social or economic inferiority since her days in Seneca Falls when Elizabeth Cady Stanton's social set intimidated her. Finally Savery offered to visit Bloomer in Council Bluffs. "How would it be for me to go and see you next week and you return with me? It is shameful for the women of our state to . . . fold their hands when there is so much of God's work to be done. Dear Mrs. Bloomer, you must set us in motion," Savery exclaimed. Bloomer, also sensitive about the modesty of her home, feared Savery as a visitor and again used her health as an excuse to postpone a meeting.<sup>55</sup>

Meanwhile, Bloomer and Savery had decided that since good lecturers were an important part of any convention, they should try to secure one or more of the eastern woman suffrage leaders to speak. Bloomer contacted both Lucy Stone and Elizabeth Cady Stanton but neither was free to lecture in Des Moines during the legislative session. Lucy Stone advised Bloomer to wait until fall when speakers would be available after the American Woman Suffrage Association convention in Cleveland. Stone also urged Bloomer to have any Iowa organization affiliate with this association rather than its rival, Stanton's and Anthony's National Woman Suffrage Association.<sup>56</sup>

By February 10, Bloomer and Savery had decided to postpone calling a convention until fall. It was too late in the legislative session for a convention to do much good and they had been unable to secure any prominent speakers. Instead, Savery encouraged Bloomer to come to Des Moines and address the General Assembly herself. "*Do not say no!* but come if your health will admit of it," she urged on February 14. Savery noted that as soon as the legislators returned to the city after the midterm recess, there would be several large

55. Annie Savery, letters to Amelia Bloomer, 25 January, 6 February 1870, CBFPL.

56. Annie Savery, letters to Amelia Bloomer, 19 December 1869, 25 January 1870, CBFPL; Henry Blackwell, letter to Amelia Bloomer, 5 February 1870, CBFPL; Lucy Stone, letter to Amelia Bloomer, 13 February 1870, CBFPL; C. S. Carter [Agent for Elizabeth Cady Stanton], letter to Amelia Bloomer, 15 February 1870, CBFPL.

parties in their honor which she thought Bloomer would enjoy. She also wanted Bloomer to meet her Des Moines friends. "In a former letter you spoke of not entertaining in style," Savery added thoughtfully. "I should be sorry to hear you disappointed in this respect in my house. We live in a cottage that was built twelve years ago, hence you can readily imagine that it cannot be extra fine. . . . Therefore expect to find a plain house and a plain woman, but a warm welcome." Despite this reassurance, Bloomer remained in Council Bluffs. Finally, on March 24, Savery and her husband, who had business in Council Bluffs, went to see Bloomer. The visit was most successful and a few days later Bloomer visited Des Moines as a guest in the Savery home. She timed her visit to coincide with the legislature's debate on a woman suffrage amendment to the state constitution.<sup>57</sup>

John Irish, a Democrat who adamantly opposed black suffrage and posed as an ardent friend of the vote for women, had introduced a woman suffrage measure in the 1870 session. His fellow Democrats chided the Republican majority for being reluctant to support white women in their claim to the ballot after having enfranchised black men. Republican party leaders eventually concluded that they should approve a constitutional amendment to grant woman suffrage in order to both call the Democrats' bluff and placate the genuine supporters of suffrage in their own party. They were willing to support this measure with the knowledge that two successive sessions of the General Assembly would have to approve the bill before its submission to a popular referendum. Republican leaders were confident that they could kill the proposed woman suffrage amendment in the 1872 session. On March 29, when the house took up the woman suffrage measure, Bloomer was prominent among the spectators who jammed the chamber. After only a short debate, the amendment won approval by a vote of 52 to 33. The predominately female audience cheered and applauded. The next day Bloomer was delighted to watch the senate, in its crowded chamber, approve the suffrage amendment by an overwhelming majority and without debate.<sup>58</sup>

57. Annie Savery, letters to Amelia Bloomer, 10, 14 February 1870, CBFPL; Annie Savery, letter to Amelia Bloomer, 26 March 1870, CBFPL.

58. Gallaher, *Legal and Political Status*, 179, 267; Noun, *Strong-minded Women*, 125-132, 208-210.

Bloomer was euphoric over the legislature's action. She had no doubt that the 1872 General Assembly would also approve the amendment but she saw a pressing need to educate the public so that the measure would survive a popular referendum. "All our friends in the legislature are sanguine of the final success of the measure but they say we have got to work for it, meantime," Bloomer reported to the *Woman's Journal*, a paper which the American Woman Suffrage Association published. Bloomer said that many people were looking to her for help and advice. She greatly regretted that poor health confined her efforts to writing and other quiet activities. She hoped that experienced woman's rights advocates from other states would come to help with the Iowa campaign.<sup>59</sup>

Joseph Dugdale of Mt. Pleasant forestalled the Bloomer-Savery plan for a fall woman suffrage meeting in Des Moines by calling a convention to meet in his southeastern Iowa community on June 18 and 19. A Pennsylvania Quaker who had long been active in the movement, Dugdale sent out letters seeking support from friends of the cause soon after the legislature adjourned. Bloomer urged Dugdale to delay any action until she and Savery could arrange a convention in Des Moines, which was more centrally located. The distance and expense of a trip to Mt. Pleasant would prevent her own attendance, she wrote to Dugdale on May 7. In addition she had "hardly strength for much speaking or active participation in the work. . . ." She imagined that, had she called a convention in Council Bluffs, people from Mt. Pleasant would have been unwilling to come such a long distance. Despite her objections to Dugdale's plan, however, Bloomer signed the call for the convention and also went to Mt. Pleasant, chaired the business committee, and delivered an address in the evening.<sup>60</sup>

"All have come together without arrangement, without preparation, without a programme, without experience," Bloomer reported to the *Nonpareil*, "and so poor me, tired with travel, and an aching head, have been forced to take a more prominent part than was anticipated." She enthusiastically reported

59. *Woman's Journal*, 23 April 1870.

60. Amelia Bloomer, letter to Joseph Dugdale, 7 May 1870, ISHD, Des Moines; *Mt. Pleasant Journal*, 13 May 1870.

that at Mt. Pleasant they had formed a state association with Henry O'Connor, Iowa's attorney general, as president. O'Connor, she said, had promised his support to the woman's cause "now and forever" and she believed that he would add as much prestige to the Iowa association as Beecher had to the American association. The convention elected Bloomer first vice-president and Annie Savery corresponding secretary. The participants respected the wishes of Savery and Bloomer by adjourning to meet again in Des Moines in the fall. Both of the national suffrage societies had representatives in the Mt. Pleasant meeting and created an undercurrent of conflict over whether the new Iowa association should officially affiliate with either one. Most delegates, however, wanted to avoid entangling alliances on the national level and decided that the Iowa association should be an independent organization.<sup>61</sup>

After the convention Bloomer traveled to Des Moines with Hannah Tracy Cutler, a worker for the American Woman Suffrage Association, and stopped en route to hold meetings in Ottumwa and Oskaloosa. Bloomer found this experience exhilarating but exhausting. A cryptic note in Dexter Bloomer's diary on June 21 reads, "Letter from Mrs. Bloomer. She is on the war path again and nearly sick." In Des Moines, where Bloomer and Cutler were Annie Savery's guests, they lectured on temperance to an audience of almost two thousand at a Sunday meeting on the grounds of the state capitol. Bloomer, as usual, incorporated arguments for woman suffrage into her temperance address. The following evening she and Cutler lectured on woman suffrage at a meeting in the Baptist church over which Savery presided. Cutler gave the political and moral arguments for woman suffrage while Bloomer analyzed and refuted the so-called Bible arguments against the vote for women. This was the first woman suffrage meeting ever held in Des Moines and it drew a large audience. A second and smaller meeting the following evening took the first steps toward organizing a Polk County woman suffrage society but Bloomer, exhausted by the torrid heat of the Iowa summer,

61. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 21 June 1870; *Revolution*, July 1870 (reprinted in Noun, *Strong-minded Women*, 283-287); Hannah Tracy Cutler, letter, *Woman's Journal*, 2 July 1870.



had already returned to Council Bluffs. In September, Cutler visited Bloomer for several days and during her stay helped organize a Council Bluffs suffrage society with Bloomer as president.<sup>62</sup>

The plans for a fall Iowa Woman Suffrage Association meeting in Des Moines did not materialize in 1870 and it was not until October of the following year that the Iowa association met for the first time since its organization. Meanwhile Iowa suffragists busily defended themselves from accusations that their movement not only tolerated but advocated free love. These attacks followed the rise of Victoria Woodhull, an avowed advocate of sexual freedom, to prominence in the National Woman Suffrage Association. Woodhull was a handsome, charismatic, colorful, and sometimes outrageous character. In youth she had traveled with her parents who sold health nostrums and psychic cures. She married at fifteen and divorced at twenty-six, then traveled in the Midwest with Colonel James Harvey Blood, a clairvoyant physician. Four years later Woodhull, then a spiritualist, went to New York pursuant to a message from her favorite spirit, Demosthenes. She and her sister, Tennessee Claflin, soon became friendly with Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt who set them up in a Wall Street brokerage office. As the first women stockbrokers in the country they caused a national sensation. Two years later, in April 1870, Woodhull announced herself a candidate for president of the United States. At about this same time she and her sister launched *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* which, in addition to backing Woodhull for president, advocated a variety of reforms including woman suffrage, licensing prostitutes, and sexual freedom.<sup>63</sup>

Suffragists avoided Woodhull until January 1871 when she became the first woman to secure a hearing before the House Judiciary Committee. She made such an impressive argument for woman's right to vote under the Fourteenth Amendment that Susan B. Anthony and others attending a National Woman Suffrage Association convention in Washington welcomed her

62. Cutler, letters, *Woman's Journal*, 2, 9 July 1870; *Des Moines Register*, 25, 29 June, 1 July 1870; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 9 September, 11 October 1870.

63. For the most complete account of Woodhull's life see Emanie Sachs, *The Terrible Siren* (New York, 1920) 47-56, 112-138.

as a heroine. Woodhull expressed her gratitude with a \$10,000 gift to the association, a sum equal to more than five times the total association income during the previous year. But opponents of woman's rights, who had always claimed that the movement would lead to a breakdown of the family, relished the opportunity to use Woodhull as proof of their argument. They found grist for their mills in mid-May 1871 when a police court hearing in New York revealed details of Woodhull's personal life. At this widely publicized hearing, Woodhull readily admitted that she was sharing her New York mansion with her former husband Canning Woodhull, her lover Colonel Blood, and her mentor, Stephen Pearl Andrews. Woodhull's mother testified that she did not know whether or not Blood was married to her daughter and she called Andrews an old free-lover.<sup>64</sup>

While Anthony and Stanton embraced Woodhull as a sincere person and an asset to the suffrage movement, Lucy Stone and others in the American Woman Suffrage Association kept strictly aloof from her. Anthony defended her association with Woodhull by arguing that society had sacrificed too many women to hypocritical prating about purity. She deplored the double standard which made women outcasts for the slightest deviations from accepted morality while it gave men the greatest sexual latitude. "The present howl is an old trick to divert public thought from the main question," she warned. Anthony urged women not to waver in the face of the free-love storm. Bloomer had her opportunity to get firsthand information about the Woodhull affair from Stanton, who spent several days with her in Council Bluffs while on a cross-country lecture tour in June 1871. Stanton stoutly defended Woodhull's morality and maintained that she was a much maligned and unjustly persecuted woman. Stanton also confided to Bloomer a scandalous example of the double standard of morals by telling her the current gossip about the esteemed minister, Henry Ward Beecher, former president of the American Woman Suffrage Association. Beecher was said to have seduced his parishioner, Elizabeth Tilton, the wife of a well-known journalist. Stanton

64. Harper, *Life and Work*, 1:375-378; Sachs, *Terrible Siren*, 88-92; Noun, *Strong-minded Women*, 169-171, 179.

said Woodhull knew all about the affair and had threatened to reveal it after her police court hearing. Bloomer, sworn to secrecy, did not reveal her knowledge of the scandal until Woodhull publicized it the following year.<sup>65</sup>

Newspapers in Iowa repeatedly published extracts from *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly* to prove Woodhull's moral degeneracy. By midsummer many Iowans were convinced that all suffragists were free-love advocates. This criticism immobilized the suffragists, who delayed calling a state meeting. Finally they issued a call in late September for a convention to meet in Des Moines on October 19. This call carried Henry O'Connor's signature, but the suffrage movement had become such a political embarrassment to him that he was association president in name only until the October meeting chose his successor. In the interim, Annie Savery became spokesperson for the Iowa association. At the executive committee's request she issued a message to the women of Iowa along with the convention call. "The noble men of Iowa who have stood by us complain of our faltering and inactivity while our enemies vanquished in argument have descended to personal scandal for the purpose of poisoning the public judgment against us," Savery charged, "and are seeking to make the suffrage party responsible for the opinions of fanatical adventurers who always attach themselves to a great reform." She declared that the woman-suffrage party of Iowa was neither responsible for the free-love opinions of those in other states nor connected with those who wished to incorporate that principle into the woman-suffrage party platform. By stating their position on free love in advance, Savery, Bloomer, and other officers of the state association hoped to avoid time-consuming wrangling over this question at the convention. By using only Iowa speakers they intended to demonstrate their independence of any out-of-state influences. These precautions, however, proved to be in vain.<sup>66</sup>

65. *Revolution*, 27 May 1871; Harper, *Life and Work*, 1:379; Dexter Bloomer *Diary* 13, 14, 15 June 1871; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 23 November 1872; Lois W. Banner, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: A Radical for Woman's Rights* (Boston, 1980), 125-131.

66. *Woman's Journal*, 7 October 1871; Noun, *Strong-minded Women*, 185-188; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 26 October 1871.

By the time the state convention opened in October, O'Connor had abandoned ship and Bloomer, the first vice-president, chaired the meeting. The association then elected her president for the coming year. The morning session went well, but in the afternoon a stormy debate ensued on the wording of a resolution about the free-love issue. Nettie Sanford, a tart-tongued journalist from Marshalltown, Iowa, had given the committee on resolutions a proposed denunciation of the "Woodhull-Claflin clique" which declared that the woman suffragists of Iowa were neither "immoral or licentious." The committee refused to present this resolution to the convention because it was "too bitter and outrageously personal" for consideration. The committee offered a substitute statement that "the object for which the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association is organized is to secure the ballot for woman and it expressly disavows any responsibility for the opinions or utterances of any party upon questions foreign to this, believing as we do that the ballot is a power to be used only in the interest of virtue and morality." Dissatisfied with this substitute, Sanford unsuccessfully demanded that the meeting consider her proposal. After an acrimonious debate, the participants adopted the resolution as offered by the committee with the strong support of Savery and Bloomer.<sup>67</sup>

Annie Savery planned to lecture on the Woodhull situation at the evening session, so a large crowd gathered. Nettie Sanford disrupted the proceedings, however, when she rose to present yet another anti-free-love resolution as soon as Bloomer called the meeting to order. Sanford's resolution proposed "That the Association denounce the doctrine of free-love, believing that marriage is sacred and binding on all good men and women of Iowa and that the Bible is the Palladium of our liberties." Bloomer feared that they might waste the evening haggling over an issue which she felt they had settled in the afternoon session, so she expressed the hope that the convention would not entertain the resolution. She said she considered free love a side issue which had nothing to do with the purpose of the woman suffrage association. To charge Iowa

67. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 25 October 1871; *Des Moines Register*, 21 October 1871.

women with wrong-doing was an insult, and if the association was going to give itself up to issues such as "free love and free lust, marriage and divorce, theological questions, etc." she for one "would withdraw from it and organize a society that would confine itself to the great question of woman suffrage." At her suggestion, the convention tabled the motion and the speakers proceeded as scheduled.<sup>68</sup>

The day after the convention Bloomer held a meeting of the association's executive committee, which planned to raise \$2,500 during the coming year primarily through a statewide hand-craft fair in Des Moines. Fund-raising plans, however, were of little interest to a critical press. The *Nonpareil*, like other papers in the state, used assorted means to put the convention in a bad light: incomplete reporting, publishing anonymous critical letters, and insisting that rejection of Sanford's "palladium" resolution proved the women suffragists' sympathy for Woodhull's social theories. "By voting down the resolution condemning 'free love,' the inference is legitimately drawn that the Woman Suffragists desire the ballot that they may by legal enactment carry out the views advocated by . . . Woodhull & Co.," the *Nonpareil* charged.<sup>69</sup>

Bloomer replied that she had not thought a woman suffrage convention the appropriate place to discuss free love, divorce, or the Bible, any more than a Republican or Democratic convention would be. It would have been as appropriate for men at their conventions to resolve that they were not free-lovers or to assert that they were neither immoral nor licentious as for women to have done the same. Bloomer thought it insulting to even intimate that the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association was anything but moral and virtuous. If men were free-lovers it was not because they had the ballot; the ballot would not make free-lovers of women either. Bloomer urged timid women not to be alarmed by the furor. She was confident that woman's cause would triumph over all opposition and prove superior to its foes.<sup>70</sup>

"If there were not advocates of 'free love' in the Woman

68. *Des Moines Register*, 21 October 1871; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 25 October 1871.

69. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 1 November 1871.

70. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 25 October 1871.

Suffrage convention, how long would it have taken that body to pass a resolution condemning that abominable heresy?" the *Nonpareil* asked in response to Bloomer's letters of explanation. "It would be opening up a wide field of discussion for the Woman Suffrage Society in mass meeting to entertain a resolution that 'marriage is binding' and the Bible the palladium of their liberties," Bloomer replied. "Woman suffrage cannot stop to inquire into the religious or social beliefs of those who claim the ballot for women, or prescribe a rule of faith for them, any more than men can do the same thing," she argued. She wondered "why the attempt is made to saddle upon the Woman Suffrage party bad intentions and all manner of side issues, except that the opposition hope by that means to overthrow a cause which they cannot meet by any fair argument upon open ground." In answer, the *Nonpareil* simply repeated its charge. "The members of the convention may quarrel with this statement, may waste columns upon columns of words in pronouncing it a flagitious misrepresentation, but they can no more convince the people that it is devoid of solid foundation than they can prove that the moon is made of green cheese," the paper declared.<sup>71</sup>

While Bloomer defended the suffrage convention in her letters to the *Nonpareil*, Annie Savery responded to attacks on the convention in the *Des Moines Register*. Bloomer contributed one letter to this exchange as well. She answered a correspondent who claimed that because the convention had asserted woman's right to vote under the Fourteenth Amendment, the suffragists obviously sympathized with Woodhull, the first person to have presented this argument to Congress. Bloomer explained that Virginia Minor of St. Louis had claimed woman's right to vote under the Fourteenth Amendment several years before Woodhull's appearance.<sup>72</sup>

Nettie Sanford, meanwhile, was not taking her defeat quietly. The *Marshalltown Times*, in an article reprinted in the *Nonpareil*, reported that Sanford was "as determined as ever to fight against the Woodhull—spiritualistic—free-love business and declared it her intention to make it warm for the social

71. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 25 October, 1 November 1871.

72. *Des Moines Register*, 8 November 1871.

disorganizers. She claims that, after all, the best ladies of the convention were heartily in favor of her resolution, but they were browbeaten out of their nerve by the Savery and the Bloomer." In a letter to the *Nonpareil*, Sanford complained that Bloomer had not been impartial when chairing the convention. Instead of keeping her place as a presiding officer, Bloomer had declared a resolution too obnoxious for introduction and never put the motion at all. "That Mrs. Bloomer should be so tender of Mrs. Woodhull as to turn pale with passion, and then lift her hysterical cry to strike down an Iowa woman is simply absurd in a so-called 'leader,'" Sanford declared. Bloomer replied to Sanford that she was "ready to stand by her action now and forever."<sup>73</sup>

FREE LOVE soon caused a split in Iowa's woman suffrage movement. Local societies, critical of the state society's refusal to denounce Woodhull and her theories, adopted their own resolutions to disavow free love and assure the public that the ballot in the hands of woman would not affect the marriage relation. The Marshalltown society went even further. It declared that the officers of the state society were advocates of free love and free lust and demanded their immediate resignation. It also asked for a new state convention to reconsider the October meeting's actions. Bloomer responded indignantly to her critics in Marshalltown. "I brand all, whether open foes or pretended friends as *base liars* and *slanderers* who dare charge that the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association or its leaders are in favor of 'free love and free lust'! From the enemies of the cause we may expect such things, but in this case it comes not so much from enemies as from those who claim to be with us," she lamented. "In view of this fact, we are led to exclaim, 'Good Lord deliver us' from our friends." In late October a discouraged Bloomer continued this lament in the *Nonpareil*. "The most painful feature of the whole thing is that the woman's cause is being stabbed by its pretended friends—that we have to turn our weapons from our foes to defend ourselves from those in our own ranks. Perhaps the convention did not act wisely," she said. "If the action was unwise, it was an error of the head, not of the heart."<sup>74</sup>

73. *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 2, 12, 15 November 1871.

74. *Marshalltown Times*, 16, 23 November 1871; *Council Bluffs Nonpareil*, 28 October 1871.

The Polk County Woman Suffrage Association, composed primarily of Des Moines women, emerged from the free-love debacle as the most enduring and strongest suffrage society in the state. Soon after the convention it denounced Woodhull and her theories and stated that it would not tolerate error in any form. It considered Bloomer and Savery pariahs unfit to speak for the suffrage cause. That Amelia Bloomer should find herself abandoned as a radical over a moral issue is ironic in view of her generally conservative position within the woman's rights movement and her attachment to moralistic reform since the 1850s.<sup>75</sup>

In mid-January 1872, Bloomer went to Des Moines to attend a meeting of the state association's executive committee. After lengthy discussions, the committee issued a statement which reaffirmed the morality of the woman suffrage movement and promised not to denounce any suffragist because of social theories or religious affiliation. While in Des Moines Bloomer conferred with legislative leaders concerning the woman suffrage amendment, which needed approval from the current session of the General Assembly before submission to a popular referendum. John Kasson, the house majority leader, subsequently wrote Bloomer that, should the women decide to press for a vote on the suffrage issue during the current session, he would help arrange for her to address the legislators. He suggested that she ask for a hearing on February 16 at which time the house would be willing to resolve itself into a committee of the whole to hear her. Members of the senate could also attend this session.<sup>76</sup>

Although Bloomer prepared an address for the Iowa General Assembly she never delivered it. The Polk County society's determination that no officer of the state association should represent the suffrage cause before the public probably intimidated her. Annie Savery, on the other hand, was undaunted, and arranged with members of the senate to address that body on March 22. As she stood in the senate chamber ready to speak on the appointed day, the senators defeated a motion

75. *Iowa Review* (Des Moines), 4 November 1871; *Des Moines Register*, 7 February 1872.

76. *Des Moines Register*, 23 January 1892; Stanton et al, *History*, 3:619.



to hear her. Lobbying against her appearance by members of the Polk County association probably led to this humiliation. All during the session, members of the General Assembly put on a charade. They pretended to seriously consider the suffrage amendment while they had no intention of approving it. The house approved the amendment on February 21 but two weeks later voted to send it back to committee. The senate took up the bill on March 29 and defeated it by two votes. Most Iowa suffragists blamed this defeat on Bloomer, Savery, and other officers of the state society.<sup>77</sup>

Bloomer's leadership of the Iowa suffrage movement ended in the wake of the free-love fury. The Council Bluffs society, at its annual meeting in November 1871 elected new officers. Although Bloomer was no longer president she remained a member of the executive committee. She continued as president of the nearly moribund state society until it convened in Des Moines in March 1873. This meeting rehashed the old free-love quarrel and widened the divisions among state suffragists even further. Lizzie Bunnell Read of Algona, former editor of the *Mayflower* in Indiana, won election to succeed Bloomer as president. Bloomer was not active in organizational work for suffrage after 1872, but she never lost her zeal for the cause. She continued responding to recalcitrant editors who attacked woman's rights and she welcomed feminist lecturers who came to Council Bluffs as guests in her home. When a Council Bluffs' chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) formed in the 1870s, Bloomer found a welcome outlet for her temperance interests.<sup>78</sup>

In October 1880 Bloomer received a letter which Susan B. Anthony wrote from Elizabeth Cady Stanton's home in Tenaflly, New Jersey. Anthony requested Bloomer's assistance with an ambitious history of the woman suffrage movement in the United States which she and Stanton were compiling. An-

77. Amelia Bloomer, lecture, MS, SFHS; Noun, "Annie Savery," 25-26; Gallaher, *Legal and Political Status*, 180, 267; Noun, *Strong-minded Women*, 208-220; Mary Livermore, letter to Elizabeth Boynton Harbert, n.d., Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College.

78. *Council Bluffs Republican*, 13 February 1873; *Des Moines Register*, 4 March 1873; D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 229, 325; Mary Livermore, letter to Amelia Bloomer, 15 February 1874, ISHD, Des Moines.

thony asked Bloomer for two pieces: a brief reminiscence of her work in New York State, and a chapter covering the history of suffrage work in Iowa. Anthony assured Bloomer that they would print her material exactly as written. Anthony and Stanton never used Bloomer's New York reminiscences, largely because her material, based on accounts in her Seneca Falls paper, the *Lily*, covered much of the same information that they already used in their chapter about early work in New York State.<sup>79</sup>

In recompense for deleting Bloomer's reminiscences, Anthony promised to give the *Lily* full credit in the New York chapter. When Anthony and Stanton published volume one of the history in 1881, however, Bloomer was unhappy to find that they had relegated acknowledgement of the *Lily* to a footnote. She wrote Anthony a sharp letter of complaint. Anthony was apologetic about the situation, but Stanton told Bloomer that she was unfair to charge that she had not received her full share of praise. Stanton listed eight pages on which they had mentioned Bloomer's name and reminded her that her engraved portrait cost \$100. Other women had met this expense themselves. If Stanton and Anthony did neglect Bloomer they probably did so less from design than from the confusion they experienced when they collected an overwhelming mass of material without the time and energy to put much of it in a more coherent order. Bloomer also seemed to have an exaggerated idea about the amount of praise she deserved.<sup>80</sup>

Publication of the Iowa chapter of the *History of Woman Suffrage* awaited completion of volume three in 1887. Bloomer's Iowa history underwent several revisions as Anthony and Stanton felt increasingly reluctant to recall the havoc which their own connection with Victoria Woodhull had caused among suffragists across the country. In January 1881 Anthony as-

79. Susan B. Anthony, letter to Amelia Bloomer, 25 October 1880, SFHS.

80. Stanton et al, *History*, 1:452-753 (*Lily* footnote, 486); Susan B. Anthony, letters to Amelia Bloomer, 9 February, 4 August 1881, SFHS; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, letter to Amelia Bloomer, 10 November —, SFHS. A note in the Seneca Falls Historical Society which Amelia Bloomer wrote reads: "Mrs. Stanton says 'I shall try to see that you have full honor for *The Lily* in the *History*,' and the way she honors my six year's labor and effort in woman's cause in *The Lily* and elsewhere is to mention in a brief note at the bottom of the page that I published *The Lily*."

sured Bloomer, "Now don't try to write your chapter the way you think Mrs. Stanton would want you to—just write it out in your own way and state the things you feel justice and truth and good sense dictate. Of course you must take note of that little neat streak of comraderie that split the Iowa suffrage society as it did all others. I do not see how it can be avoided. . . . There is no escape unless we falsify the facts and that won't do." Four years later, however, Anthony wrote that Bloomer might best strike out any mention of Woodhull since the free-love advocate had received all the publicity she deserved in volume two of the history, in which they had published her memorial to Congress on the Fourteenth Amendment. To Anthony, it seemed unwise for the state chapters to give Woodhull any further notice.<sup>81</sup>

Elizabeth Cady Stanton also advised Bloomer to delete any reference to Woodhull. "I would make a pleasant chapter of the progressive steps in the state, but give nothing of the petty warfare," she wrote. "Our little dissensions are of little count in the grand onward march. Give a fair list of the names of the women who have helped to roll the ball. Considering the slavery of women they have all behaved as well as could be expected." Bloomer was most unhappy with the way Stanton was bowdlerizing her Iowa history. She complained to a friend in Des Moines that when she received the proofs of the Iowa chapter she found her manuscript pruned down and altered. She found some of her statements misrepresented; Stanton seemed to make it read as she would have liked it to be and not as the facts made it. "They will leave in and take out whatever they please, and one don't know how it will come out," Bloomer lamented.<sup>82</sup>

When the Iowa chapter saw publication in 1887, the scars from the free-love controversy were far from healed. In Iowa, Bloomer's critics were incensed over the omissions and distor-

81. For a discussion of Anthony's and Stanton's post-1871 relationship with Woodhull, see Banner, *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*, 132-138; Susan B. Anthony, letter to Amelia Bloomer, 7 January 1881, 23 January 1885, SFHS; Stanton et al, *History*, 3:443-448.

82. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, postcard to Amelia Bloomer, 11 December [probably 1884], SFHS; Amelia Bloomer, letter to Mary Jane Coggeshall, 29 June 1885, SFHS.

tions in this piece and their anger was not without justification. For example, the piece describes the fractious 1871 Iowa convention innocuously: "Speakers had been engaged . . . a good representation secured, and every arrangement made for a successful meeting. And such it was, barring a difference of opinion among the friends of the movement as to what questions should properly come before a society for women." In addition to this kind of sanitized account, Stanton's editing deliberately distorted certain facts. Savery appears to have successfully persuaded the General Assembly to approve a woman suffrage amendment in 1872 when the legislature actually denied her the right to speak and defeated the suffrage measure. Editing together reports of two different events at the state capitol which occurred two years apart accomplished this deception. Critics placed all of the blame for this history's inaccuracies on Bloomer although many of them resulted from Stanton's and Anthony's desire to bury the Woodhull fracas. As late as 1940 Mary Ankeny Hunter, an Iowa suffrage historian, commented, "I know the best friends of the suffrage association were furious about some of Mrs. Bloomer's material and grieved that she omitted other important facts." Bloomer privately criticized Stanton, but she never publicly blamed her for any of the Iowa chapter's defects.<sup>83</sup>

Amelia Bloomer traveled a good deal in her later years, both to her old home in the East and to Colorado. In 1887 she was an honored guest at the centennial celebration of the founding of Seneca Falls. On April 15, 1890 she and Dexter celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary with a large reception at their home. Among the many messages of congratulations they received was a letter from Susan B. Anthony in which she commented, "Your celebration . . . is one of the strongest proofs of the falseness of the charge that the condition of equality of political rights for the wife will cause inharmony and disruption of the marriage bond. . . . Hence I rejoice with you on having reached the golden day of your marriage union, not

83. Stanton et al, *History*, 3:618-619; see *Des Moines Register*, 4 March 1874, for an account of a suffrage rally at the state house in which Annie Savery spoke; Mary Ankeny Hunter, letter to Olive Cole Smith, 15 August 1940, ISHD, Des Moines; *Woman's Standard*, August 1888, letter from Amelia Bloomer answering criticism about Stanton et al, *History of Woman Suffrage*.

only for your own sakes, but for our cause's sake as well." A year later Bloomer suffered a stroke which temporarily affected her vocal chords. During this illness she began writing her memoirs but continued ill health prevented their completion. She died on Sunday, December 30, 1894 at the age of 76, in the home where she and Dexter had lived since coming to Council Bluffs thirty-nine years earlier. After her death Dexter published the *Life and Writings of Amelia Bloomer*. At Anthony's suggestion, Bloomer left her cherished and unique file of the *Lily* to the New York State Library in Albany, but years later a fire partially destroyed it.<sup>84</sup>

Bloomer expressed her steadfastness to the suffrage cause in a letter she wrote in 1889. She was answering a correspondent who wanted to know if she would still go to the polls and vote if she gained the right of suffrage. "That seems a strange question for you to ask," she responded. "Is it supposed that after a forty year's advocacy of woman's right to the ballot . . . we who have grown old and grey in the service would shirk our duty when what we so earnestly labored for was accomplished? Is it supposed that we have been working all these long years only for the fun of it? That we subjected ourselves in the early days to ridicule and odium, to the censures of the press and the maledictions of the pulpit only to get up a sensation and gain notoriety?" The improved laws relating to woman and her expanded field of employment proved for Bloomer that women had already gained much. She was sure women would not shirk their civic duty should they also gain the ballot. Certainly she would vote if she were physically able to get to the polls. "But alas!" Bloomer lamented, "we pioneers in the cause of woman's enfranchisement who have given the best years of our lives to its service, are drawing near, or have reached and passed our allotted [*sic*] three score and ten years, and unless men hasten to do us justice, like Joshua of old, we can only view from a distance the promised glory which our sisters of the future will surely enter upon and enjoy, after we have rested from our labors and gone to our reward."<sup>85</sup>

84. D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 312-313, 319, 322; Amelia Bloomer, letter to Lillian G. Browne, 24 March 1893, NYHS.

85. *Woman's Standard*, October 1889.

A few weeks before she died Bloomer learned that women had won the right to vote in Colorado, although the "promised glory" did not arrive in Iowa until long after her death. The Iowa legislature generally followed its pattern of approving a suffrage amendment in one session and then defeating it by one or two votes in the next. Not until 1916 did a woman suffrage amendment finally win approval by two successive sessions of the General Assembly and gain submission to a popular referendum. Yet even this measure went down to defeat in a conspicuously dishonest election. The federal government finally enfranchised Iowa women by virtue of the Nineteenth Amendment to the Federal Constitution in 1920—seventy years after Amelia Bloomer entered the fray on behalf of woman's right to vote.<sup>86</sup>

Amelia Bloomer was an earnest, socially concerned, but conservative person whose marriage in 1840 took her to Seneca Falls, the home of the radical Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Without Stanton's influence Bloomer would probably have receded into obscurity. Fate planted Bloomer in the right place at the right time. Her ability to wear and defend the reform dress made her name a household word and her writing spread the word about woman's rights throughout the country.

When she moved west with her husband in 1855 Bloomer brought the ideals of the woman's rights movement to Iowa, and struggled to implant them in the rough frontier community of Council Bluffs. Without a newspaper of her own, she expressed her views in letters to the Council Bluffs press and other publications. Her greatest contribution to the woman's cause was as a publicist. She lacked the self-confidence and tact which would have made her a successful organization leader, but the upsurge of antifeminist hysteria in the 1870s, rather than any personal shortcomings, ended her suffrage

86. The referendum on woman suffrage occurred at the time of the Iowa primary elections, June 5, 1916. The Women's Christian Temperance Union investigated and found that 29,341 more votes were cast on the suffrage amendment than the total cast for all the candidates for governor. In fifteen counties alone there were 8,067 more ballots cast on the amendment than voters checked as having voted. Suffragists were advised that even if they could prove fraud, there was no possibility of having the election declared invalid. See Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics* (New York, 1923), 219-223.

career. Many of her contemporaries in the woman's movement ostracized her and age and poor health slowed her. She was almost a forgotten figure to the generation of Iowa feminists which emerged in the 1880s under Carrie Chapman Catt's leadership. A century later still another generation of feminists has come to the fore. With them has come an increasing interest in Amelia Bloomer and an appreciation for the battles she waged in our behalf.<sup>87</sup>

87. Dexter Bloomer said of his wife: "Mrs. Bloomer was a great critic, and for that reason may not have been so popular with her associates as she otherwise might have been. Her criticisms, possibly, were sometimes too unsparing and too forcibly expressed. . . . No one ever attacked her, in print or otherwise, without receiving a sharp reply either from tongue or pen. . . . But no person ever had a kinder heart, or more earnestly desired the happiness of others, or more readily forgot or forgave their failings. Perhaps, she was deficient in the quality of humor and took life too seriously." D. C. Bloomer, *Life*, 305-306. See also Noun, *Strong-minded Women*, 225.

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