

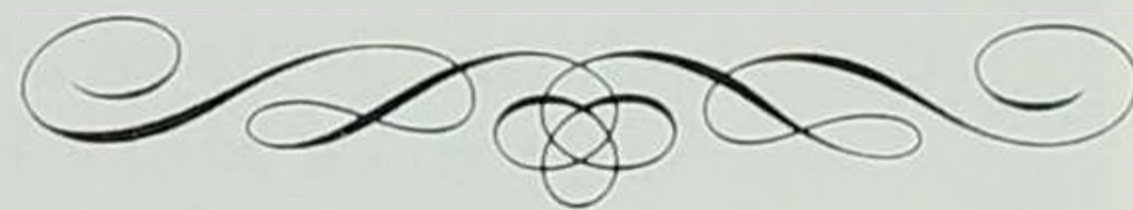
# Suffragists, Free Love, and the Woman Question

by Diana Pounds



*“There is something revolting and unwomanly  
in this uproar and clamor for the ballot.”*

Letter to the editor, *Daily Iowa State Register*, October 26, 1871



**I**N THE PAGES of Iowa's newspapers of the 1870s, they were cheered as society's best class of women. They were jeered as ugly old maids and floozies. And they were feared as emasculating radicals out to destroy the happy American home. They were woman suffragists and they burst into the limelight and the headlines in the winter of 1871/72.

It was indeed news when proper nineteenth-century ladies, quiet homebodies for so long, began noisily to demand the vote along with other rights — such as the right to good jobs and educations. Among the newspapers closely following the activities of the reformers were the Des Moines *Daily Iowa State Register*, the *Dubuque Herald*, and the *Burlington Hawk-Eye*. During the winter of 1871/72, as Iowa suffragists pushed their campaign for the ballot, the three newspapers printed hundreds of articles about suffrage as well as other women's rights issues.

From the suffragists' standpoint, however, the press coverage left something to be desired. While suffragists got some good press, many news stories painted most unflattering pictures of the women who wanted to vote. The

intensity of the anti-suffrage sentiments suggests much more was at stake in nineteenth-century America than the mere depositing of a feminine vote in a ballot box. A likely explanation for the strong negative reaction to the suffragists is that both the press and the public viewed woman suffrage as a threat to a way of life, to the very traditions held dear by nineteenth-century Americans.

Iowa suffragists were certainly bucking tradition when they went after the vote in the 1870s. No state in the Union had yet granted women the right to vote, but things looked promising for would-be female voters in Iowa in the winter of 1871/72. The previous year, the Iowa General Assembly had passed a resolution to amend the state constitution, giving women the right to vote. Two hurdles remained. The same resolution had to be passed by the 1872 General Assembly. Then it needed the approval of voters in a general election.

Iowa suffragists, sensing a good opportunity to lead the way to the ballot box, mounted a

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Right: Illustration from L. P. Brockett's *Woman: Her Rights, Wrongs, Privileges, and Responsibilities* (1870).



THE WIFE AND MOTHER AT A PRIMARY,



THE FATHER STAYS AT HOME, ATTENDING TO THE CHILDREN.



Considered pure and pious, woman was deemed guardian of morals. Her duty: to raise upstanding children.

heavy campaign to persuade both lawmakers and the public that women should have the vote. Nationally known suffragists lent a hand. During the summer of 1871, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, on a cross-country speaking tour, spent three days in Des Moines. Iowa suffragists hoped to further their cause at the first state convention of the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association in Des Moines in October.

Much of the discussion of the suffrage issue was carried on in the newspapers. Readers of the *Des Moines Register*, *Dubuque Herald*, and *Burlington Hawk-Eye* had good exposure to arguments of both suffragists and their opponents as they debated what was often referred to as the "woman question." Although the woman question ostensibly referred to the question of whether women would be allowed to vote, there was considerably more to it than that for many nineteenth-century men and women. In addition to the ballot, some women

were pushing for other rights — better educations, jobs outside the home, wages comparable to men's, and more liberal divorce laws. While some Victorians — both men and women — favored giving women more freedom and opportunities, others worried that such actions would destroy the family. They feared that women with the political clout of the ballot, good educations, and a chance at well-paying jobs no longer would be willing to stay home and be good mothers and wives.

Nineteenth-century women lived in the straitlaced era of England's influential Queen Victoria and were expected to abide by a restrictive set of Victorian traditions that tended to subjugate women to men. Such traditions reflected Victorian society's attitudes about the sexes. Preachers pointed to passages in the Bible, instructing women to obey their husbands. Scientists maintained females were both physically and intellectually inferior to males. And doctors claimed women were crea-

tures of passion rather than reason because they had smaller brains and more finely developed nervous systems. Women were neither expected nor encouraged to get as much education as men. Some believed too much education could damage a woman's reproductive organs.

While Victorians doubted that woman could compete with man physically or mentally, most agreed she bested the male species in spirituality. Woman was believed to be naturally pure, pious, and sexually prim. It supposedly was easy for her to be good, because she was simply built that way. Because of her innate righteousness, woman was put in charge of her family's morality. Just as it was her duty to keep a nice home, it was her duty to raise upstanding children and set a good example for the rest of the family.

Woman's place was so well defined in nineteenth-century America that there was a special phrase for it — the "woman's sphere." A proper nineteenth-century American woman operating within the confines of this sphere conducted herself purely and demurely at all times, got just enough schooling to become a good wife and mother, and worked within the home. Her primary task was to turn her home into a quiet haven where man could recuperate from the stresses and chaos of the outside working world.

The image of the ideal Victorian lady was a powerful one for nineteenth-century Americans. Magazines, books, and newspapers reinforced the tender picture of the genteel lady, happy in her proper sphere, making a warm home for her husband and children. "A neat, clean, fresh-aired, sweet, cheerful, well-arranged house exerts a moral influence over its inmates," the *Dubuque Herald* enthused in one news story.

**M**ANY WHO OPPOSED woman suffrage feared the vote would destroy this Victorian ideal, dragging her down into the dirty world of politics and somehow causing her to lose interest in taking care of her home and her

children. Suffragists attempted to refute such arguments, maintaining their allegiance to home, family, and traditional nineteenth-century morality. But it was difficult business. While the Victorian lady was portrayed as pure, feminine, and submissive, the suffragist was sometimes tagged as masculine, ugly, and domineering — or at least likely to become so if she got the vote.

Articles in the three Iowa newspapers reveal a recurring debate about whether women would be soiled by contact with the dirty world of politics. "Throw women into the political arena and some of the fairest features of their moral superiority will be exposed to a rude and

PARLOR IN CLARION, IOWA (SHS/DES MOINES)



"A neat, clean, fresh-aired, sweet, cheerful, well-arranged house exerts a moral influence over its inmates" (*Dubuque Herald*). Anti-suffragists feared that the vote would lead women out of this "woman's sphere" and into the "sordid" world of work and politics.



James Clarkson, *Des Moines Register* editor, praised Iowa suffragists in October 1871. By the new year, he had changed positions and opposed woman suffrage.

perilous test," a *Register* article quoted author Carl Benson.

Another oft-expressed fear was that politics would make women more masculine. Typical is this *Des Moines Register* item: "A writer in the *Woman's Journal* hopes we may never get over the feeling that a woman is made to be gentler than man." In another *Register* story, the *St. Louis Christian* complained about "feminine men, husbandly wives, paternal mothers, matronly lawyers, delicate doctors, dowager divines, statesladies, city mothers, alderwomen, bearesses and bullesses in Wall street" who were "determined to see the universal petticoat wave triumphantly over a subjugated world."

It was but a short step, in some minds, from the macho female voter to the macho female voter bossing her henpecked husband. Such imagery is evident in a *Register* account of a woman who pressured a poll clerk into taking her vote during a New York election: "Mrs. Muller, being no joke in physique, the clerk didn't care about telling her that he could not take her vote. The policemen around giggled. . . . She went home and informed her weaker half, who, in turn, went to the polling place and

deposited his vote, no doubt on the same ticket."

In addition to masculine females and overbearing wives, suffragists were sometimes portrayed by their detractors as "old maids." An example of such sniping is this *Register* account of a Connecticut suffrage meeting: "At the late woman suffrage meeting at Trumbull, Connecticut, all ladies in favor of the movement were requested to rise, whereupon one old maid responded — the last rose of summer."

Suffrage supporters sought to counter arguments that woman suffragists would change women for the worse or damage traditional family life. A *Burlington Hawk-Eye* article quoted Philadelphia suffragists who maintained that woman suffrage would bring "greater purity, constancy and permanence in marriage."

Suffragists also appealed to democratic ideals. Women have a right "to a direct voice in the enactment of those laws by which they are taxed and the formation of that government by which they are governed," the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association declared in an article submitted to the *Des Moines Register*, *Dubuque Herald*, and *Burlington Hawk-Eye*. Denying women the vote "is unjust, unconstitutional and a direct insult and wrong to more than one-half the entire population of the United States."

All three Iowa newspapers gave considerable space to those on both sides of suffrage and women's rights during the fall and winter of 1871/72. Both editorialists and letter writers had the chance to have their say:

"The only logical reason that sustains the right of man to vote is equally applicable to woman," a *Hawk-Eye* editorialist wrote.

"Let us . . . speed the day when America shall become the first Republic, i.e., a government of the people, for the people, by the people," wrote well-known suffragist Lizzie Boynton Harbert in a *Register* letter urging Iowans to attend the state suffrage convention.

Those of the religious persuasion often attempted to interpret God's position on women's rights, and several *Des Moines Register* letter writers brought the Almighty into the woman question.

"God made man, and woman also, to be

active and useful, and it was never meant that there should be any line drawn as to their privileges and rights — the woman is equal to the man and should have the same rights — social and legal,” letter writer James Ellis wrote.

“You may look at this matter in whatever light you will,” wrote one anti-suffragist, “but simmer it down, and it is but a quarrel with the Almighty that we are not all men.”

**D**ES MOINES *Register* editor James Clarkson seemingly could not quite decide where he stood on the issue of woman suffrage. On October 18, 1871, the first day of Iowa’s first statewide suffrage convention, Clarkson asked Iowans to “give serious consideration to the importance” of the convention and praised Iowa suffragists as some of “our best educated and better class of people” who “seek to give to women, as to men, the right to vote, securing for all citizens alike that equality of rights which all citizens should have.” A few days later, Clarkson again praised the women at the convention for their good sense, dignity, and intelligence. “We have never seen a Convention conducted with more decorum or a greater degree of intelligent accord,” he pointed out in an editorial. “All who attended it were impressed with the conviction that its members were earnest and honest, and could see that they were intelligent and well armed.”

For suffragists, the October editorials were perhaps the high point of *Register* coverage of their winter campaign for the vote. Shortly after this initial show of support for the suffragists, Clarkson apparently began to have second thoughts. In a January 21, 1872, editorial, Clarkson offered several arguments against woman suffrage. It provoked a response from a leading Des Moines suffragist, Annie Savery, and the editor and the suffragist were soon engaged in an editorial-page battle. The two crossed swords — or pens, in this case — in what came to be known as the “woman warrior question.” Clarkson editorially maintained women should not be allowed to vote because they could not be soldiers. “Women, while



Des Moines suffragist Annie Savery tackled questions, such as women serving as soldiers and holding office, with *Des Moines Register* editor James Clarkson.

they could and perhaps would use the ballot, in bringing war on, could not and would not use the sword after war had come,” he pointed out.

Taking a swipe at Civil War draft dodgers, Savery replied: “If the laws compelled all who vote, to perform what is voted for, voting, I imagine, would soon be at a discount, and all those who now claim that special privilege, would doubtless avoid the polls, as they did the draft office during the war!” Savery added that, if necessary, “there could doubtless be found” women “willing to carry the musket.”

Clarkson countered by pointing out that “the peculiar organization of woman makes it impossible for her to be a soldier” and “the world’s several thousand years of history proves it.”

From the woman warrior question, Clarkson and Savery moved on to the issue of women officeholders. Clarkson maintained that once they got the vote, women would want to hold

office. The editor worried that women could not hold office and properly care for their families. Few women could satisfactorily meet "the duties of office and the duties of maternity," Clarkson wrote.

Few women would seek office under such circumstances, Savery replied in a letter to the editor. However, should a woman find herself in such circumstances, Savery asked Clarkson if he would "make a new rule for her not now applied to men, for is it not quite common for incompetent men to hold office?"

Because Clarkson's editorial battle with Savery came just three months after he had kicked off the statewide suffrage convention with glowing reports, Iowa suffragists now found themselves on the defensive, fighting with Clarkson and others they had counted as friends. What happened in those ninety days to so turn things around? Some blamed a public relations disaster that hit the suffrage movement hard in the early 1870s. This disaster came in the form of an attractive, eloquent woman reformer with a flair for bad publicity — Victoria Woodhull.

**W**HEN WOODHULL joined the national suffrage movement in the early part of 1871, she brought publicity, fire, and money to the cause. She also brought an unsavory reputation that would haunt the movement for years. For Iowa suffragists, the haunting began in the winter of 1871/72, when news of Woodhull's "wild" lifestyle began to appear in Iowa newspapers. In light of her upbringing, it is little surprise that Woodhull had some problems fitting into the mold of the modest and demure Victorian lady.

Born Victoria Claflin in 1838 in Homer, Ohio, she spent her youth wandering the Midwest with her family, a shiftless group that told fortunes, held seances, sold alcohol-laced "cure-all" potions, and, it was rumored, ran an itinerant house of prostitution.

By the early 1870s, Woodhull and her sister Tennessee Claflin were living in New York City. With the help of wealthy financier Cornelius Vanderbilt, they had become Wall Street's



THE SCHLESINGER LIBRARY, RADCLIFFE COLLEGE

Victoria Woodhull, suffragist and reformer, advocated "social freedom" involving free love, marriage, divorce, and prostitution. "Freedom does not mean anarchy in the social relations any more than it does in religion and politics," explained an 1871 broadside about a Woodhull speech, "also that the advocacy of its principles requires neither abandoned action nor immodest speech." Right: Sampling from 1871 *Woodhull & Claflin's Weekly*, published by Woodhull and her sister.

first female stockbrokers and launched a daring weekly journal — *Woodhull and Claflin's Weekly*. The journal advocated numerous reforms, such as socialism, licensing of prostitutes, and sexual freedom.

A strong suffragist, Woodhull also supported the "free love" movement, which advocated open sexual encounters between willing partners. Although national suffrage leaders had misgivings about Woodhull's free-lover reputation, her energy and eloquence won them over and they welcomed her into the movement. Rumors about Woodhull's wild lifestyle, however, gained credence in May of 1871 when her own mother testified in a police court hearing that Woodhull was sharing her New York mansion with "the worst gang of free lovers" that "ever lived."

The subsequent scandal created headlines and shock waves throughout the eastern press,

# WOODHULL & CLAFLIN'S WEEKLY.

PROGRESS! FREE THOUGHT! UNTRAMMELED LIVES!

*BREAKING THE WAY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.*

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VICTORIA C. WOODHULL & TENNIE C. CLAFLIN  
EDITORS AND PROPRIETORS.

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## THE Cosmo - Political Party.

NOMINATION FOR PRESIDENT OF THE U. S.,  
In 1872.

# VICTORIA C. WOODHULL

SUBJECT TO  
RATIFICATION BY THE NATIONAL CONVENTION.

THE NEW REBELLION.

The Great Secession Speech

VICTORIA C. WOODHULL,

BEFORE THE  
National Woman's Suffrage Convention,

AT  
Apollo Hall, May 11, 1871.

TO ALL WOMEN WHO WOULD BE VOTERS

AND TO

ALL MEN WHO RESPECT THEIR RIGHTS AS CITIZENS.

THE CONSTITUTION, THE LAW AND WOMAN'S  
RIGHTS, AND REDRESS UNDER  
THEM.

THE TIME FOR ACTION COME.

OFFICERS OF ELECTIONS, BEWARE!

VICTORIA C. WOODHULL  
WILL DELIVER HER ARGUMENT FOR  
CONSTITUTIONAL EQUALITY,  
"THE GREAT POLITICAL ISSUE."  
AT THE  
MUSIC HALL, BOSTON,  
MONDAY EVENING, MARCH 27.

News comes from Iowa that there is not one woman convict in the penitentiary. This speaks well for the morality of the woman citizens, or for the equity of the men judges and jurymen who will not condemn "persons" that have no votes, they are so clearly irresponsible. Good for Iowa, either way.





FRANK LESLIE'S ILLUSTRATED NEWSPAPER (NOVEMBER 25, 1871)

Contending a constitutional right to vote, Woodhull was ejected from New York City polls in late 1871.

and then headed west. For Iowa suffragists, it hit home at the worst possible time — just as they were gearing up for their October 1871 state convention. To the Iowa suffragists trying to focus attention on their convention and the ballot during the winter of 1871/72, it must have seemed at times that the Des Moines press was interested in nothing but “the notorious Mrs. Woodhull.” From October 1871 through January 1872, the three Iowa newspapers printed nearly seventy articles about Woodhull or the free-love movement she espoused. A lively combination of sex, scandal, and suffrage, Woodhull would have been hard for any editor to resist. The dull, gray columns of the Des Moines *Register* now fairly sizzled with Woodhull’s fire in a November account of a boisterous speech she gave in New York. In one notable passage, the *Register* printed Woodhull’s defiant reply when a heckler at one of her lectures shouted the question: “Are you a free lover?”

“Yes, I am a free lover,” Woodhull responded to loud hisses. “I have an inevitable, constitutional and natural right to love whom I may, to love as long or as short a period as I can, to change that love every day, if I prefer, [renewed hisses] and with that right neither

you nor any law . . . have any right to interfere.”

The free-love issue unleashed a storm of controversy about the wisdom of giving women the vote, and Iowa suffragists suddenly found themselves guilty by association with a free lover who lived hundreds of miles away. One of the first shots in the press was fired by anonymous letter writer “R.W.T.” of Four Mile Township. In a lengthy letter to the editor of the *Register*, R.W.T. pointed out Woodhull’s “poisonous sentiments” were fast “being imbibed by suffragists,” then added, “there is something revolting and unwomanly in this uproar and clamor for the ballot, and demanding all of men’s so called privileges — free love not excepted.” “Are we to infer,” sniped the *Dubuque Herald*, “that the women’s suffrage convention of Iowa is to be run as a kind of branch of Mrs. Woodhull’s?”

**F**REE LOVE — not suffrage — had suddenly become the issue in the Iowa press. Iowa suffragists found themselves again on the defensive, trying to allay fears that the ballot would turn women into promiscuous, marriage-spurning free

lovers. Some local woman-suffrage organizations scrambled to pass resolutions disavowing free love. The Polk County suffrage association, via the *Des Moines Register*, felt it necessary to publicly condemn free love and divorce and point out that the ballot would only make marriage "more pure and more sacred." The Marshall County suffrage association, in the same newspaper, called for the resignation of current state officers who favor "free love and free lust and easy divorce laws." In letters in the *Register*, the *Herald*, and the *Hawk-Eye*, state suffrage leaders publicly denounced "lewdness and licentiousness and every form of impurity, whether practiced by man or woman" and affirmed their conviction that "the ballot in the hands of woman will lead to greater happiness in the married state, greater purity of life and more elevated morality."

Marriage and morality were of considerable concern to free-love critics. In a *Dubuque Herald* article, one writer sarcastically suggested that Woodhull's favored method of selecting the father of her children was to choose from a

"dozen suspicious characters" long after the child had been born. Free love, according to the disapproving *Des Moines Register*, was "such a love as the flies have that cross in the air, love that is no more a love than is the sexual passion of the beasts." The *Register* also proposed that "Woodhullism" be the name given to a new kind of marriage that lasts "only while fancy shall bind or lust incline."

Woodhull was criticized or ridiculed in the bulk of the news stories about her. She was, to the news writers of the day, the "notorious and miscellaneously married," the destroyer of the "foundation of society," and the proponent of "monstrous doctrines."

Not everyone, however, was so quick to judge Woodhull. In a letter to the *Register*, one writer suggested that those who were "smoking out" free lovers ought to include such Biblical characters as Solomon, David, Moses, and Abraham as well as some current "patrons of the thousands of assignation houses in our Bible loving land."

Another female letter writer waggishly



THE HARRY T. PETERS COLLECTION, MUSEUM OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

"THE AGE OF BRASS, or the triumphs of Woman's rights." A man with baby is only a bystander as women line up to vote for Susan Sharp-Tongue, the "Celebrated Man Tamer" in this Currier and Ives lithograph from 1869.



“GET THEE BEHIND ME, (MRS.) SATAN!”  
WIFE (with heavy burden): “I’D RATHER TRAVEL THE HARDEST PATH OF MATRIMONY THAN FOLLOW YOUR FOOTSTEPS.”

Victoria Woodhull is caricatured as “(Mrs.) Satan” tempting a wife burdened by an alcoholic husband. *Harper’s Weekly* noted that the February 17, 1872 cartoon by Thomas Nast should “convey a great moral lesson to those who may be tempted to accept the pernicious doctrines of the free-love school of our day.”

Opposite page: Woodhull presents her arguments on suffrage to the U.S. House Judiciary Committee.

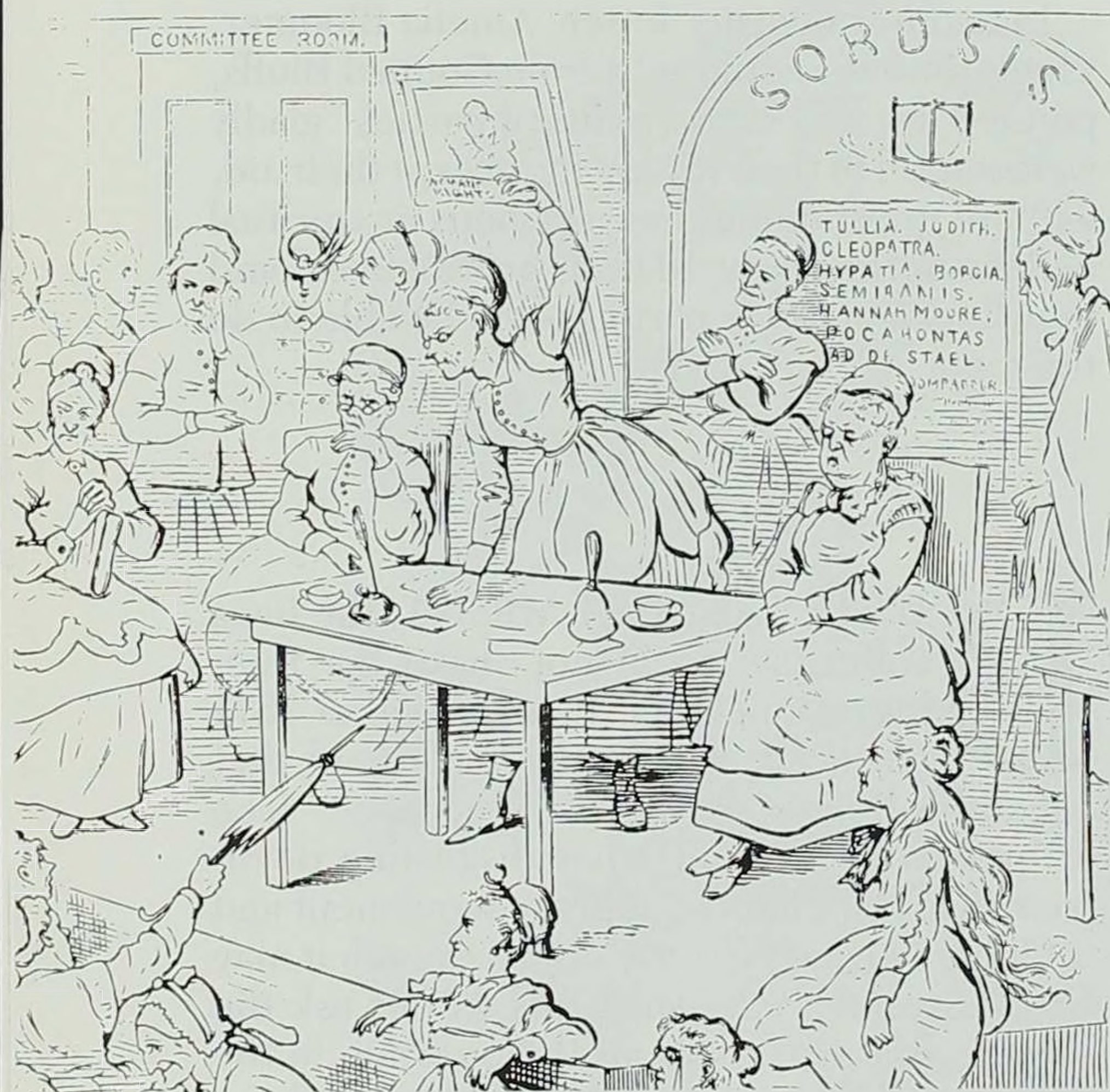
asked the *Register* to enlighten her on the free-love issue: "I notice the gentlemen continuously insinuate that the ladies need nothing more than the ballot to make them all violently opposed to all marriage restrictions. Don't think, dear *Register*, that I am an advocate of woman's rights — far be it from me, I am one of the "Woman's Sphere" people, but I can't help wondering why the gentlemen should think the effects of the ballot would be so vicious; they have it and I don't suppose they ever stray from the path of rectitude, do they?"

As the controversy over free love and suffrage raged on, Iowa suffrage leaders struggled, through the newspapers, to put the issue to rest. In a letter to the editor of the *Register*, Annie Savery wrote: "The Woman Suffrage party is made up of the mothers, wives, and daughters, who believe that the marriage bond is to the social what the Constitution is to the political union. . . . The woman suffrage cause because of its inherent justice can well afford the company of Victoria Woodhull. But from carping friends, who in the name of Christianity offer us a menace with their friendship, we shall ask to be delivered."

In another *Register* letter, Amelia Bloomer, a long-time Iowa suffragist from Council Bluffs, pointed out that men's political parties "gladly welcome all to their ranks, and accept their aid, without questioning their religious or spiritual beliefs, or the doings of their private lives" and the woman-suffrage party should be able to do the same.

**B**UT TRY AS THEY MIGHT, the Iowa suffragists could not shake the free-love connection. In a December 1871 editorial, the *Register* claimed that "Woodhullism," with its "free love, free divorce, free lust and other disgusting deviltries" had crippled the suffrage movement and set it back years: "Utterly unjust though it may be, the women who shall this winter ask the Iowa legislature to submit the question to the people, will be held as responsible for, and as a party to, all the wild, unwomanly and indecent actions of this female and her free-love gang." The *Register* declared that submitting suffrage





Sorosis, an early women's club in America, was established in 1868 in New York. The group and its suffrage work did not escape the satirical pen of a *Harper's Weekly* cartoonist on May 15, 1869.

to a vote of Iowans would result in its "utter and overwhelming defeat."

Iowans would not get an opportunity to prove or disprove the *Register's* prediction on their voting behavior. In March 1872, the Iowa Senate, on a 22-24 vote, turned down the proposed suffrage amendment, thus denying Iowa voters the chance to vote on woman suffrage.

Press coverage of Victoria Woodhull and the free-love issue undoubtedly hurt the suffrage cause in Iowa. But the *Register's* claim that Woodhull killed the movement seems an exaggeration. There simply was too much uncertainty about woman suffrage during the winter of 1871/72, and most of it involved, in one way or another, the woman's sphere.

The notion of a woman's sphere was surely a comforting one to many nineteenth-century Americans, both male and female. There was a reassuring orderliness to a world in which man had his sphere — making a living, politicking, intellectualizing — and woman had hers — running the home, raising the children, tending to the family morals. Woman suffrage appeared to threaten all that.

News articles, editorials, and letters to editors reveal considerable fear that the ballot would inevitably lead to the demise of the woman's sphere — that voting women would develop a taste for political office and a distaste for housework, that they would become more masculine and less virtuous, that they would embrace a promiscuous lifestyle and abandon their families. Those who saw the ballot as the beginning of the end for the woman's sphere, worried about what lurked beyond that sphere.

**T**HE IDEA OF WOMEN out of their sphere and on the loose must have been a frightening one to many, and those who feared the worst, found the worst — in the notorious, free-wheeling, free-loving Victoria Woodhull. For many, Woodhull must have seemed the evolutionary end-product of the future woman, emboldened by the ballot and freed from her sphere. Woodhull was seen as aggressive, intelligent, promiscuous, mouthy, and outrageous. The bitter attacks on Woodhull reveal the depth of concern among media and others about the threat she presented to marriage, to family, to life as nineteenth-century Americans knew it. Many of those who feared Woodhull also feared the suffragists, with whom she had so closely aligned herself.

But Woodhull or no Woodhull, it appears that nineteenth-century Iowans simply were not ready for voting women and, particularly, any changes in the social order that might result. Despite suffrage activities throughout America during the 1870s, women did not have the ballot in any of the nation's thirty-seven states, and as it turned out, they weren't close to getting it. In 1890, when the Territory of Wyoming achieved statehood, it became the first state in which women had equal suffrage.

Iowa suffragists had a particularly long wait. It would be fifty years before they would cast the ballot, which had seemed so near at hand in 1872. The Nineteenth Amendment, giving women the right to vote, took effect August 26, 1920. One day later, Mrs. Jens G. Thuesen, voting in a Cedar Falls school election, became the first woman in Iowa and probably the first

in the nation to vote under the amendment.

At the time, Victoria Woodhull, the wealthy widow of an Englishman, was living on her estate in the English countryside. Many of her fellow suffragists — Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Iowa's Annie Savery — had not lived to see women armed with "that little piece of paper . . . that sacred gift of liberty," as Savery once called it.

The reformers of the seventies called themselves suffragists. Their granddaughters would call themselves "voters." And their granddaughters' granddaughters would call them-

selves "feminists." Whatever their labels or their causes, the women of the twentieth century and beyond owe something to those rather "unladylike" females, many of them Iowans, who dared to break out of their traditional sphere in the early 1870s. They may not have been immediately successful. Those who left their home chores to lobby lawmakers or make speeches one month most likely were back home the next. But, with the help of the Iowa press, they made some headlines. And if they didn't exactly break the woman's sphere wide open, they at least made a crack or two in it. □



"THE AGE OF IRON: MAN AS HE EXPECTS TO BE." A Currier and Ives lithograph from 1869 spells out a common fear that women — given the vote — would abandon the "woman's sphere" and its domestic duties of home and children.

#### NOTE ON SOURCES

Major secondary sources used for this manuscript include Louise R. Noun, *Strong-Minded Women* (1969); Barbara J. Berg, *The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism* (1978); Mabel Collins Donnelly, *The American Victorian Woman* (1986); Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance* (1981); Catherine Clinton, *The Other Civil War* (1984); and Barbara McDowell and Hana Umlauf, eds., *The Good Housekeeping Woman's Almanac* (1977). Important sources on Victoria Woodhull are James

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