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# Queen of the Platform: Inventions on the Life of Matilda Fletcher

Laura Madeline Wiseman  
*University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

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QUEEN OF THE PLATFORM:  
INVENTIONS ON THE LIFE OF MATILDA FLETCHER

by

Laura Madeline Wiseman

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: English

Under the Supervision of Professor Grace Bauer

Lincoln, Nebraska

May, 2011

QUEEN OF THE PLATFORM:  
INVENTIONS ON THE LIFE OF MATILDA FLETCHER

Laura Madeline Wiseman, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska, 2011

Adviser: Grace Bauer

This dissertation explores the 19<sup>th</sup> century lecturer, poet, and suffragist, Matilda Fletcher (1842-1909). The fifth of fourteen children from abolitionist parents, Matilda was born in Illinois. Like her brother, who served in the Civil War, Matilda imagined herself in the public sphere. After the death of her one and only child, Matilda joined the lecture circuit. She spoke to support herself and her first husband, until his death. He died of tuberculosis, a disease he contracted during his service to the Union. Her lectures were a series of talks so powerful a man named a silver mine after her. Another man claimed she had a forked tongue. Upon the death of her first husband, newspapers speculated who might be the lucky man to call Matilda his own. On the stage she spoke among other lecturers of her time, such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Even though she couldn't legally vote, she stumped for political candidates such as President Ulysses S. Grant. During her forty year career, she spoke on woman's suffrage, temperance, and education and published several books. Given the nature of oration and the time period during which she spoke, much of her work has been lost. However, some of her poems and lectures have survived in newspapers, often as excerpts only. Eleven years after the death of her first husband, she remarried a Methodist minister, William Albert Wiseman, and became the stepmother to his three children, all under the age of ten. She continued to speak on the issues that mattered to her until the day she died.