FARM WOMEN, SOLIDARITY, AND THE SUFFRAGE MESSENGER NEBRASKA SUFFRAGE ACTIVISM ON THE PLAINS, 1915-1917

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In the weeks and months following the November 3, 1914, vote on the Nebraska suffrage amendment, activists picked up the pieces after male voters for the third time defeated the proposition in their state. Thomas Coulter explains that in the days leading up to the vote, "A feeling of impending victory suffused the hearts of pro-suffrage workers," but in the days after, "a sense of shock was widespread."¹ The vote had been close: 90,738 for the Nebraska amendment and 100,842 against it.² In fact, Attorney General Willis Reed later stated that had there been a recount, the amendment would have carried.³

Despite the debilitating setback, suffrage had gained significant support since 1856, when Iowa women's rights activist Amelia Bloomer presented the first suffrage speech in Nebraska. Fifteen years later, in 1871, Nebraska men soundly defeated the first suffrage amendment by a margin of 4 to 1.⁴ By 1879 Elizabeth Cady Stanton helped organize Nebraska's first permanent woman suffrage association, and national leaders such as Susan B. Anthony and Lucy Stone began visiting the state. But after three years of activism and national recognition, Nebraska men in 1882 again defeated the woman suffrage amendment, though by a narrower margin than in 1871.⁵ Suffrage leaders, strategies, and tactics had shifted by the turn of the century, when Carrie Chapman Catt, Anna Howard Shaw, Cady Stanton's daughter Harriet Stanton Blatch, and Alice Paul arose as prominent national figures.⁶ The next wave of Nebraska suffrage activism emerged at this time and included visits from Catt and Shaw, but in 1914 Nebraska men once again voted against the amendment that would have granted full suffrage to Nebraska women.

Key Words: Carrie Chapman Catt, National American Woman Suffrage Association, newspapers, politics, rhetoric

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Following this defeat, activists promptly began to print the *Suffrage Messenger*, one of two newspapers published by Nebraska reformers during the sixty-four-year struggle for the right to vote.7

This article focuses on the three years immediately after the 1914 defeat of the woman suffrage amendment. It explores the remaining seventeen issues of the *Suffrage Messenger* and asks the following question: how did the suffrage newspaper portray and appeal to farm women in the Great Plains?8 Nebraska suffragists at this point recognized that farm women were vital to their cause, even though they had not previously focused their work on this particular demographic. This question is rooted in and shaped by two areas of scholarship: suffrage newspapers and the Nebraska woman suffrage movement.

Suffrage newspapers played a significant role throughout the woman suffrage movement. Scholars have explored the various functions that these periodicals have served, including the ways in which they garnered support and raised consciousness.9 As Lynne Masel-Walters explains, "the publications were significant factors in determining the direction the movement would take on its ragged course toward enfranchisement."10 More specifically, E. Claire Jerry identifies several functions that characterized women's rights newspapers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and notes the ways in which periodicals could "bring together women who were separated by geography" and "bring national groups into contact with members."11 Also noting the importance of suffrage newspapers in building identity and community, Linda Steiner highlights the importance of not only "stimulating an awareness of shared difficulties and past oppression" among women but also simultaneously developing "an alternative image of themselves as agents of change."12 In this way, she explains, "Woman's rights editors and their readers... together constructed the new women they would become."13 As we shall see in this essay, the *Suffrage Messenger* portrayed rural farm women as active, capable, and intelligent.

Farm women typically were neither the editors of nor the primary audience for suffrage newspapers. One exception was the *Farmer's Wife*, published in Kansas from 1891 to 1894, which, Thomas Burkholder argues, "represented a unique blending of woman's rights and Populist issues and a distinctive form of consciousness-raising, which were particularly well adapted to its primary audience, prairie farm women."14 Burkholder explains that these farm women, due to their intellectual and geographic isolation, and because they were "largely ignored by the established women's rights press," did not perceive themselves as active participants in the larger suffrage cause nor as agents capable of enacting change.15 By illustrating their shared struggles and contributions, the periodical functioned to establish a common identity among farm women and thus motivate them to act on their own behalf. Furthermore, as Steiner suggests, the *Farmer's Wife* portrayed farm women as "capable, intelligent, pragmatic, hard-nosed, and politically astute. Family members, as well as livestock and vegetables, depended on their care. They had sophisticated knowledge of and responsibility for nutrition, hygiene, and medicine, education, and their children's total well-being."16 In short, farm women were active participants in their daily lives and potentially offered much to the suffrage cause, yet they were often overlooked by state and national suffrage leaders.17

In the early twentieth century, U.S. involvement in World War I impacted the editorial content of suffrage newspapers, including the *Suffrage Messenger*, and scholars have explored the various strategies that editors used in their presses. Linda Lumsden focuses on the divergent ways in which two prominent suffrage newspapers adapted their approaches during the war. She compares the National American Woman Suffrage Association's (NAWSA) more conservative *Woman Citizen* to the *Suffragist*, published by Alice Paul and the more radical National Woman's Party. The *Suffragist* simply refused to endorse any suffrage activity in support of World War I, but the *Woman Citizen*, according to Lumsden,
“urged and supported women’s war work as part of NAWSA’s strategy to impress upon male politicians women’s worthiness of the vote.”\textsuperscript{18} An unfortunate consequence, she claims, was that the Woman Citizen “reinforced gender restrictions and stereotypes by embracing the dominant war discourse that women should serve their country and not themselves.”\textsuperscript{19} In other words, NAWSA activists hoped that women’s support during the war would result in their enfranchisement, but it came at a price, as this approach potentially reinforced traditional ideas about womanhood.

The focus on portrayals of and appeals to farm women is also shaped by scholarship on the Nebraska woman suffrage movement. I explore activism in Nebraska from 1879 to 1882, focusing on Thayer County’s Erasmus Correll and a small group of prominent townspeople who led the cause at that time.\textsuperscript{20} In addition, Ann Wilhite provides a general overview of Nebraska suffrage activism from 1856 to 1920, while Coulter and Daniel Fus offer detailed studies of the Nebraska woman suffrage movement from its inception to 1920.\textsuperscript{21} Coulter and Fus both explore the suffrage campaign leading to the 1914 vote, and as Fus notes, Nebraska activists acknowledged that Nebraska men defeated the amendment “largely because [suffragists] had not enlisted sufficient support from the rural segment of Nebraska’s population.”\textsuperscript{22} He also explains that in 1882 and 1914, “record numbers of urban women” worked on the suffrage cause, yet “they still totaled too few to reach their more numerous, widely scattered sisters.”\textsuperscript{23} Accordingly, as Fus explains, Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) President Edna Barkley decided to focus suffrage efforts primarily on this rural group, as she “spearheaded the court­ship of farm women even more intensely than that of club women,” the other target demo­graphic whose support she sought.\textsuperscript{24} Fus and Coulter then shift their attention to the Partial Suffrage Law of 1917, leaving largely unexplored the ways in which the NWSA appealed to rural farm women through the publication of the Suffrage Messenger from 1915 to 1917. During this time, the Suffrage Messenger served as the primary means through which Nebraska activists reached out to their audiences, including women who were already committed to the cause and those they hoped to persuade.

I will demonstrate that the Suffrage Messenger appealed to farm women in three ways: first, through overall attempts at statewide strategizing, which included and centralized rural farm women; second, through articles specifically targeted toward farm women; and third, through the promotion of patriotic war service. Through these efforts, the Suffrage Messenger functioned to create community and build solidarity among women at the local, state, national, and international levels. I also demonstrate how this mix of ideas, reflected in the interplay between state and national reformers in the newspaper’s editorial content, took on a unique meaning for farm women in the Plains.

The first section of this essay focuses on the two remaining Suffrage Messenger issues that were published in 1915 and the initial emphasis on strategies for the anticipated 1918 campaign; the second section explores the 1916 issues, with particular emphasis on letters and articles directed to farm women and the simultaneous ties to Catt and the National American Woman Suffrage Association; and the third section explores the 1917 issues and the impact of Catt’s decision to support World War I. The final section offers my conclusions.

1915: BUILDING SOLIDARITY THROUGH STATEWIDE STRATEGIZING

The debut issue of the Suffrage Messenger reviewed and assessed the 1914 suffrage amendment campaign and then highlighted the December Nebraska Suffrage Convention in Omaha, where activists reflected on and discussed their recent work. NWSA President Henrietta Draper Smith addressed the small convention audience by acknowledging the national support and money suffragists received for the 1914 campaign; she also thanked the various speakers and current supporters, and
urged additional women to join the cause.25 “To one and all who helped,” she exclaimed, “we express our gratitude. A good many women have given all of their time and all of their ability. To those who have done little or nothing, the cause extends a call to service.”26 Reformers issued this call to service because they recognized that they had not effectively reached out to rural men and women prior to the 1914 vote. Suffrage, as Draper Smith stated, “would have been won if we could have had a few more weeks in which to reach the individual voters in the country precincts.”27

Accordingly, Nebraska activists passed the following resolution at the convention: “That it is the purpose of this convention that the Suffrage Organizations of the state immediately enter into an active campaign of education covering the entire state with an eye single to votes for women.”28 Suffrage Messenger editors emphasized that prior to the next anticipated suffrage amendment vote in 1918, the campaign “must find workers fully organized in every precinct of every county ready for a ‘long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together’ that will bring ‘Votes for Women.’”29 The use of terms such as “entire state” and “every precinct” suggests the inclusion of all Nebraska residents, especially those in more isolated and rural regions. In addition, activists made clear their plan to continue working with the National American Woman Suffrage Association in their ongoing pursuit of the suffrage amendment. As Nebraska suffragists Grace Wheeler and Mary Williams explained, “it was decided to organize more thoroughly and to seek the advice of the National Association as to how and when to try again.”30 Their assessments reveal the desire, with the guidance of national leaders, to immediately begin work on reaching out to women across the state.

**Looking Forward and Strategizing: The 1918 Suffrage Campaign**

Nebraska activists enacted their overall strategy of reaching voters in every precinct by introducing their new suffrage newspaper in February 1915, advertising a national suffrage film, and focusing on enrollment. Through these approaches, the Suffrage Messenger demonstrates the creation of inclusive connections throughout the state, with a specific focus on rural Nebraskans.

One strategy that activists immediately implemented was the publication of their newspaper, the Suffrage Messenger. The first issue explained the purpose of the periodical: “Let the Messenger help you to gain ‘The Many’ and set them to work. It has no other mission.”31 In short, the editors hoped that their newspaper would increase the number of active supporters throughout the state. As editor Mrs. F. A. Harrison explained, “We want to send the Messenger to every member of your Club, and to every other man or woman who is interested in winning friends for equal suffrage.”32 More specifically, Harrison highlighted the importance of reaching out to rural Nebraskans: “You can afford to remember the friend on the homestead, and help her to keep up on suffrage news and in time gather her neighbors into a suffrage club.”33 The Suffrage Messenger metaphorically referred to the addition of new supporters as adding “links” to a “chain” and through the discussion of this process, invited a sense of connection throughout the state, especially among rural women and men.34 In addition, their language reveals a notion of womanhood that is active, as the editors highlighted their own efforts behind the publication. Readers were encouraged to submit names to further the cause, and all of those involved were invited to feel a sense of ownership in the work.

The newspaper also demonstrated the creation of inclusive connections through their advertisement of the 1914 suffrage film, *Your Girl and Mine*:

Nebraska suffragists now have an opportunity to co-operate with the National Suffrage Association in a fine two-fold proposition that may result in much benefit. The State Board recognizing the educational value and the drawing power of moving pictures even
in the smallest town, has secured a six-reel suffrage photo-play for the double purpose of presenting the cause to patrons of pictures shows, and of helping suffragists to make money for their own local work. 35

The film, the newspaper said, “is a well staged melodrama portraying in a story that grips the heart, the adverse conditions governing the lives of women and children in many states, and will bring home to those who see it the need of woman’s hand and heart in public affairs.” The film functioned to bring women together in all areas of Nebraska, including the “smallest town,” by exploring the common conditions that women faced regardless of location. In this sense, the film, which played nationally, also symbolically united urban and rural women across the country.

The Suffrage Messenger article that most captures the spirit of inclusive connectedness among all Nebraskans is titled “What Next?” and appeared in the premiere February 1915 issue. It included future campaign suggestions submitted by women and at least one man from a range of regions in the state: Fairbury and Hebron in the southeast, Norfolk in the northeast, Ainsworth and Kola in north-central Nebraska, Schuyler and Blair in the east, Fairfield in central Nebraska, and North Platte in west-central Nebraska. The listing of these rural towns geographically united people from different parts of the state as they focused on one cause. Furthermore, those who offered recommendations focused their ideas for future strategies on physical settings that included local towns, counties, precincts, and the state of Nebraska as a whole, bringing together all residents, including farm men and women in remote locations.

Naming the individuals who submitted recommendations also reflects inclusive connections. Mrs. L. K. Adler, J. W. Linkhart, Mrs. Alma Ewing, Mrs. Mary Axtell, Mrs. Minnie Davis, Mrs. Cressa Morris, Mr. Jerry Janecek, Mrs. W. M. Haller, Mrs. C. C. Burton, Mrs. Ingram Armstrong, and Mrs. S. H. McCaw comprised nine women, one man, and one individual who was not identified as male or female. The inclusion of at least one man reveals a degree of gender inclusiveness, as men were welcome to work on the suffrage cause. The Suffrage Messenger portrayed these contributors as intelligent, active individuals who had something important to offer to the cause; throughout the article they “declare,” “advocate,” and “express their opinions.” The significance of these supporters is also demonstrated by the editors’ decision to devote nearly one full page out of four to their concerns and recommendations.

Another way in which the “What Next?” article illustrates inclusive state connections is through the identification of specific approaches to change, along with target audiences comprised of diverse ethnic and gender groups. Reformers referred to “foreigners” as one group that they hoped to educate about the suffrage cause. Mrs. Adler urged additional work “among foreigners” and Jerry Janecek also noted the “lack of understanding” among “Bohemian, German, and Irish” voters. Mrs. C. C. Burton also encouraged more education “of not only our German men and women but the indifferent Americans.” In addition to identifying the different ethnic groups, contributors showed gender inclusiveness by specifically referring to “women,” “men,” “Americans,” and “voters” (i.e., men) in their discussions. To clear up the lack of understanding among these groups, Adler concluded that the various ethnicities “have confidence in friends of their own tongue,” and similarly, Janecek suggested that “each nationality [should] present [suffrage] in the right light to their own people.” Moreover, by reaching out to diverse audiences, these strategies suggest that activists themselves were also of varied ethnicities, as they were the ones who would do the educating.

Finally, the article highlights the importance of reaching out to rural residents and the role that country women could play in this process. Minnie Davis urged activists to spark interest among farm women who, she reasoned, would convince neighborhood
men only after they understood their own "need of the ballot." Another contributor focused on mothers who lived in rural areas. Mrs. Haller emphasized that "the place that needs strengthening is the home, through the interest of the mother in it." She offered statistics that illustrated how the amendment would have carried "if 10 women in 25 different voting precincts had converted each one man." As she concluded, "what better proof of need of getting into the country;" In sum, the recommendations that comprised the Suffrage Messenger’s "What Next?" article reveal the desire to reach out to men and women of various ethnicities and the active role that rural women could play in educating local men. Moreover, the identification of different regions across the state promoted a sense of unity among all activists.

In October 1915, activists held the Thirty-Fifth Annual Nebraska Suffrage Convention in Columbus, where they again passed resolutions that underscored their approaches to winning the vote. They hoped to begin another campaign the following year, and they resolved to "make the coming year one of preparation for that campaign by constant work in lines of education and organization, carrying into every township and precinct in the state." They also resolved that enrollment was "the best method to educate and to stimulate organization." Nebraska suffragist Grace Wheeler "formulated" the enrollment plan, which would focus on the entire state, bringing together city, town, and country women. She stated that sixty counties were already represented and that work was being conducted in another thirty counties. The Suffrage Messenger reported that Wheeler received additional enrollment slips throughout the convention, which would "be used as a nucleus for a broad organization for the 1918 Nebraska campaign." To unite women from ninety Nebraska counties reflects the inclusive connections that activists hoped to build around the suffrage cause. As the paper emphasized, again using the links in a chain metaphor, "to enlarge and strengthen the chain of suffragists in Nebraska is the most important work to be accomplished for the cause in the state this year." These links included all Nebraska women, especially those who lived on remote homesteads.

In addition, the Suffrage Messenger included updates on the activities of state and national leaders. At the fall convention, Nebraska suffragists elected a new Nebraska Woman Suffrage Association president, Edna Barkley (See Fig. 1), who, "after a hurried trip to her home in Lincoln, left at once for New York, where she was called by the president of the International Equal Suffrage Association, Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt, to help in the wind-up for the big New York campaign." The Suffrage Messenger also noted that Mrs. Barkley would "take this opportunity to study eastern campaign methods." Barkley's trip to New York is noteworthy, as it reflects the alliance between state and national groups. Catt’s reluctant acceptance of the NAWSA presidency in
late 1915 and the subsequent unveiling of her “Winning Plan” became key components in the final push for the federal suffrage amendment. Catt identified Nebraska as one of the states in which suffrage should be won by 1920, the year that the “next national party platforms will be adopted.” Accordingly, Nebraska activists tried to perfect their organizational outreach efforts to secure national support, and as indicated previously, connecting with rural men and women comprised a central part of this plan.

The 1915 issues of the *Suffrage Messenger* appealed to farm women through statewide strategizing efforts, which included their new newspaper, the suffrage film, and enrollment work. The newspaper’s discussion of these methods generated a sense of inclusive community among supporters from all regions in the state, including and especially farm women. Moreover, it revealed activists’ ties with national leaders. This strategic work of 1915, as we shall see in the next section, provided the foundation for their continued outreach to rural residents.

1916: BUILDING SOLIDARITY THROUGH RURAL OUTREACH

The 1916 issues of the *Suffrage Messenger* reveal that activists continued to build inclusive connections through an increased emphasis on appeals to Nebraska farm women and a more pronounced alignment with Catt and the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Iowa suffragist Janet Craighead contributed an article to the *Suffrage Messenger* concerning the need to reach women and men in small, rural towns. “It is absolutely essential,” she wrote, “to have the vote of the smaller towns and rural communities.” Craighead hoped that rural residents would counter antisuffrage efforts in the larger cities, and she emphasized that “the county organization must do the work, reaching through schools and churches and farmer’s organizations every nook and corner of the state.” Nebraskan activists demonstrated their commitment to rural outreach in the 1916 issues of the *Suffrage Messenger* in two central ways: the “suffrage pig movement” and suffrage articles written by and directed specifically to farm women.

The suffrage pig movement comprised a unique approach that suffragists used to raise money; in addition, this fundraising effort offered the added advantage of appealing to farm women and functioning to build inclusive community within the state of Nebraska. The pig movement also reflected activists’ connections to the larger national movement. The *Suffrage Messenger* identified the “Dollar March for Iowa” and the “Pig Movement” as the “real ‘thrillers’ of the November 1915 suffrage convention.” The suffrage pig movement began in Louisiana, where a banker denied a suffragist money but instead offered her a pig. She accepted and subsequently found many activists in rural communities who could not afford to give money but were able to donate a pig. Nebraska suffragist and “pig chairwoman” Harriet King recalled the origins of the suffrage pig story at the convention and revealed that “so many pigs were given that the campaign expenses were practically cared for by the pigs.” Following King’s story, the *Suffrage Messenger* reported that “there were so many pig offers flying about that it was with difficulty they could be definitely scheduled, but twelve pigs are already on the Nebraska suffrage pig roll of honor.” King encouraged Nebraska suffragists to “Bring on your pigs!” and a new slogan emerged: “A Pig in Every Precinct.”

Throughout 1916, the *Suffrage Messenger* included a variety of suffrage pig updates. The April issue included a report that the sale of “Posey,” the first suffrage pig, had raised $16.60 for the suffrage cause. The November issue also reported “Important ‘Pig’ News” as Mrs. Hull, along with other women in Gosper County, “led [the pig] through the streets with a rope tied to it until a sale was found for it. Everyone in town knew the suffragists had a pig for sale. Eighteen dollars was secured for it.” The newspaper noted that the “pig plan” had raised $204.10 for the suffrage cause and listed by county and individual the money
brought in by the sale of pigs. The periodical also highlighted Mary Baird Bryan’s work on the pig plan; at the recent suffrage convention in Hastings, she topped the list of contributors from fourteen Nebraska counties through her donation of three pigs (See Fig. 2). The identification of these counties, including Douglas, Lancaster, and rural counties in various parts of the state, demonstrates the integration of city and country women, and the creation of community among women. At the same time, the pig movement also positioned farmers as offering a particularly important contribution to the cause. The newspaper encouraged women to “organize a corn wagon” and “decorate [their] wagon, buggy, or automobile with equal suffrage banners, and drive through the country asking farmers for donations of corn, wheat, or other grain, or pigs, sheep, or chickens.” The suffrage pig movement involved farm men and women in a unique way, as they had the capacity to contribute their crops and livestock.

Two lengthy *Suffrage Messenger* articles encapsulate the effort to appeal specifically to farm women and simultaneously build broader connections among women at the state level. Nebraska suffragists reached out to farm women in the June issue by reprinting excerpts from “The Ballot for the Women of the Farm,” a pamphlet by Chicago activist Ella Stewart, along with their own local commentary. The inclusion of the pamphlet reflects Nebraska suffragists’ relationship with regional and national activists and the application and adaptation of broader promotional materials to rural women in the Nebraska plains. At its core, the article demonstrates the shared interests among rural farm and urban town women, and rhetorically positions the ballot as the means through which country women would experience new opportunities for growth, development, and social service.

The article began by quoting Stewart, who claimed, “Equal suffrage will open a new world of experience and development to country women. No class will share more richly in the revaluation of women which enfranchisement will bring. No class will feel so new a stimulus to social service.” In addition to the impact of the ballot on farm women, *Suffrage Messenger* editors added that “the ballot will bridge over the chasms which have separated the rural women from their urban sisters and all will unite in working out important problems of citizenship.” The focus on unity among rural and city women was also highlighted in the work of Emma Reed Davison, director of the University of Nebraska Extension Department Woman’s Club, who wrote, “through the medium of women’s clubs . . . organized bodies of farm and town women have already accomplished many interesting things to the advantage of both.” Nebraska activists portrayed women’s clubs and the ballot as the means through which city and country women would continue to pursue their goals; in other words, the ballot would allow them to collectively
do things. Suffragists also noted that these achievements would benefit both groups of women, again reinforcing shared interests and promoting a sense of community. In addition, the *Suffrage Messenger* portrayed women in this article as active: they pursued opportunities for growth, worked out problems, and accomplished objectives.

The article also appealed to farm women by emphasizing a range of issues on which they had no voice, including road conditions, the administration of various institutions, and the “local option law,” through which men could vote to license saloons. It stressed that “if country women were organized, and had political power equal to men, what valuable and equal work they could do toward making conditions in county institutions—jails, poor farms, hospitals, etc. reflect modern thought as to sanitation, correction, and humanity.”

The piece focused on a range of social issues and highlighted the ways in which farm women had no voice in public affairs even though they were active contributors to society. The editors emphasized that the vote would provide women with a voice on a wide range of issues related to farming, the community, and their children’s education. Finally, “The Ballot for the Women of the Farm” interchangeably used the language of “women,” “farm women,” and “mothers,” which broadened the scope of appeal beyond farm women. Editors fashioned the notion of farm women in relation to more general concepts of womanhood and motherhood, thus inviting country and city women to identify with each other and with issues related to the suffrage cause.

The July issue also devoted the majority of its final page to farm women, under the heading “Farm Women Want Suffrage.” This article situated farm women as active contributors to society who had experiences that were similar to and different from their city sisters. The author wished to remain anonymous but identified herself as a farm woman and suffragist; she wrote actively about herself and demonstrated intelligence about the suffrage cause by stating that she had read the June article on farm women “with great interest,” had given the issue “much thought,” and now hoped to express her views. Even though she identified herself as a farm woman who lived a very different life from her city sisters, she revealed that she understood the common bonds that all women shared and thus established identification with city women: “The preservation of the home and the betterment and care of her children is as important to the woman in the country as to the woman in the town.” She further emphasized that “the needs of the city and country [are] the same, for both suffer alike from the same evils, and share the same benefits. Therefore to care properly for her family she must help toward the common good.” In short, these shared interests bridged together all women.

The anonymous author also highlighted, in the same article, the unique experiences of farm women:

No one knows better than the farmer how his wife helps him to earn and carry on the farm. When he dies, he leaves it without fear in her hands. But he leaves it unprotected by a citizen’s vote. The woman farm owner is considered a citizen only when the taxes fall due, but on election day she may not say how these taxes are spent.

The author established farm women as active and competent; they managed the farm along with their husbands and made contributions to society, but they had no say in its laws and policies. She portrayed farm women as a group whose daily experiences may have differed from those of city women, but all women suffered without the vote because it rendered them voiceless in public affairs. The need for the ballot comprised the central commonality that bound all women together in a cohesive community.

These two *Suffrage Messenger* articles were designed to appeal directly to farm women. They portrayed farm women as smart, competent, and capable; the only limitation farm women faced was the lack of voice in public affairs.
affairs, a shortcoming shared by city women. They depicted the ballot as the means through which all women's lives would be improved, and this was the major point of connection that the *Suffrage Messenger's* contributors established among its readers. In other words, the specific focus on farm women entailed broader appeals that could resonate with a much wider audience.

Throughout 1916, the *Suffrage Messenger* also increasingly highlighted the work of NAWSA President Carrie Chapman Catt, whose photograph appeared on the front page of the April, September, and October issues (See Fig. 3). According to Nebraska activist Grace Wheeler, Catt emphasized the "vital" importance of organization, and following the lead of Catt, she stressed that activists must "give heed at once to the organization of the reserves; and then to the work they shall do. Organize in every assembly district and every voting precinct. It is the only way to make our appeal invincible." Nebraska suffragists' efforts to reach farm women reflected Catt's organizational plan, and to that end, the newspaper reported, "If there is a woman in Swan precinct who has not signed the yellow suffrage enrollment slip, Mrs. V. E. Crabbs of that precinct, farmer and energetic suffrage worker, would like to know of her." It described Crabbs as "one of the real women farmers of the state, and a woman of pluck and nerve," thus portraying her as an outspoken, active campaign contributor who recognized the importance of her own work in Catt's overall plan. In this sense Catt, as the national leader and overall organizer and strategist of suffrage activism, also functioned to unite women at the state and national levels as one community, and this effort included the focus on rural farm women.

Nebraska suffragists were well aware that Catt could bring together diverse groups of men and women. According to the *Suffrage Messenger*, they hoped Catt would visit their state in April, but at a minimum, they would meet her at the upcoming Mississippi Valley Conference in May. Wheeler then wrote to Catt in August and urged her to attend the Nebraska convention in early October. Catt accepted the invitation, and the September issue headlined that Catt would be the keynote speaker. It described Catt as "the most distinguished woman in the United States today," who was "making the trip west especially to honor the Nebraska women." At the convention, Catt presented "The Crisis," one of her most well-known speeches, and she also assessed suffrage work in the state to determine whether the National Board would approve and support Nebraska for the 1918 suffrage campaign.

**1917: BUILDING SOLIDARITY THROUGH WAR SERVICE**

The 1917 issues of the *Suffrage Messenger* demonstrate a significant shift in how Nebraska activists appealed to rural residents and created
community. Initial issues continued to unite supporters through enrollment, the pig movement, and a new approach: suffrage schools, which brought women together from across the state. By May, however, the newspaper’s focus shifted to World War I, and the subsequent issues propelled Nebraska activists onto an international stage where they comprised a larger community of women who worked on behalf of the war effort. Through the emphasis on war efforts, the Suffrage Messenger functioned to create inclusive community on a much broader scale that positioned farm women at the forefront of war service.

The newspaper’s reports on enrollment efforts continued to target farm women and generate inclusive community across the state. As the April issue explained,

Eight different states are planning to submit a referendum in 1918 and if Nebraska is to get any help from the national for her campaign, it will be necessary to show through preliminary organization. The national will select only the best organized states when offering assistance.79

Accordingly, activists emphasized the call to organize and raise money: “The State Board wants the autograph of any woman in Nebraska who is a suffragist. It wants the names by precincts. It wants 100,000 names by next fall.”80 The newspaper encouraged reformers to schedule speakers at their suffrage club meetings and noted the different locations where Nebraska leaders were scheduled to talk. NWSA President Barkley, according to the Suffrage Messenger, “has speaking engagements in Dawes, Chadron, and Harrison during January.”81 By highlighting these speaking commitments in rural areas, and in this case the far northwestern corner of Nebraska, activists continued to create and maintain inclusive connections between city and country women.

The pig movement also continued to generate community and invite farmers into the suffrage cause. The January 1917 issue featured a photograph of the “Bryan Pig” on the front page, which, it said, provided a “unique means of advertising and revenue by its clever hostesses”82 (See Fig. 4). The pig that Mary Baird Bryan donated to the suffrage cause in 1916 had been transported to McCook, where “it is famous and always in the public eye.”83 The county clerk offered to care for the pig after its initial stay at the home of McCook suffragist Ella Lee, where “it attracts many visitors.”84 The local community supported the pig and became directly involved in its welfare: the Farmer’s Equity Union furnished the feed for free, local veterinarians immunized the “precious porker against hog cholera,” and a “feminine photographer of the town” took images that were then copied and sold for the purchase of additional small pigs. The Suffrage Messenger reported that “the local papers have kept the public informed of the various modes of entertainment which the suffragists have provided for the pig and it has already been worth a great deal in advertising the cause.”85 The pig generated positive attention and communal support for the cause, especially among the farmers and rural residents involved in its care.

One new way through which Nebraska activists appealed to rural residents and generated community was the implementation of “suffrage schools,” a part of Catt’s organizational plan.86 The January issue advertised the upcoming suffrage schools, which would be held in Omaha and Lincoln in March, and
noted that the National American Woman Suffrage Association conducted the suffrage schools by sending out three “expert instructors” to cover four areas: organization, public speaking, suffrage history and argument, and publicity and press. The April issue reported that 200 students from across the state had attended the school and these women became part of a national community of supporters. The Suffrage Messenger published a partial list of attendees from outside Lincoln and Omaha, including women from a range of Nebraska towns covering all regions of the state, revealing once again that rural women were part of this national, state, and local community.

In addition, the suffrage school also supplied Nebraska activists with pamphlets, including “How to Reach the Rural Voter,” which highlighted the importance that activists at the state and national levels placed on bringing farmers and country women into the cause.

The United States entered World War I on April 6, 1917, and the Suffrage Messenger reflected this event. The May issue continued to generate community but now did so through the framework of women’s war service. The paper reprinted a letter Catt wrote to the NAWSA members and introduced it by highlighting “the threatened food shortage” and Catt’s request for “all women to get to work at once in every town.” In the letter, Catt, a pacifist, urged women to support the war effort:

The expected has happened and our country is at war . . . whether we approve or disapprove, war is here. . . . It is not the appeal of war, but the call of civilization, which is summoning women to new duties and responsibilities. I for one shall be deeply disappointed if any suffragist, pacifist or militarist fails to answer the call.

The introduction generated community by inviting all women in every town to begin work on the war effort, a common cause that would unite women not just in the state but across the country.

Furthermore, by “answering the call” and “getting to work,” the Suffrage Messenger and Catt portrayed women as active participants in war service, but they made clear that the suffrage cause was always at the core of their work. As the June issue reported, “While suffrage members should stand ready patriotically to help in every good work they should not forget that national woman suffrage is the fundamental principle underlying all that they do.” The goal, as activists made clear, was that women’s “patriotism, thrift, and industry” would ultimately, they hoped, convince men that women deserved full suffrage.

Following U.S. entry into World War I, the newspaper’s direct emphasis on reaching out to farm women shifted to agriculture-related articles that implored women to produce and conserve food. In anticipation of U.S. involvement in the war, the National American Woman Suffrage Association implemented a “national council” of all “national women’s organizations” in the United States. As the Suffrage Messenger reported, this “central committee” would, in the event of war, “act as a clearing house between the government and the women’s national organizations to insure that national service of a constructive sort may be rendered in the most expedient manner possible.” The April issue identified two central divisions of the NAWSA plan for “constructive service”: the Department of Suffrage Agriculture and the Suffrage Thrift Division, both of which were endorsed by the U.S. government secretaries of war and agriculture. The new slogan for the two divisions would be “A garden for every home.” In other words, even though farm women were not directly targeted, the work of these two divisions tapped precisely into their skills, capabilities, and interests, inviting them into the suffrage cause on an international scale, and implicitly positioning them at the forefront of war service.

The lead article in the May issue again created inclusive community among city and country women and prioritized the work of Nebraska’s rural residents. But this time, unlike in 1916, the article was framed by the war effort. The headline, “Mrs. Catt Urges Big
Drive for More Food,” was followed by a letter Catt had written to NAWSA members, which the Suffrage Messenger editors reprinted. In it she distinguished between “small towns” and “cities” by highlighting the contributions that each could make on behalf of the war. Catt emphasized that for “small interior towns, the great opportunity is to increase the food supply. There, nearly every woman can have a garden, thus liberating for outside shipment more of the produce of farmers and public gardeners.”97 Since agriculture, she said, was “obviously limited” in cities, she urged suffragists to persuade city women to “take up the work of farm lab[or], train them to the task and persuade the farmer to accept them.”98 In this way, through Catt’s directive, war service brought city and country women together and placed high value on farm work. “The world,” Catt wrote, “is likely to suffer terribly over the food problem a few months hence . . . . The cities are fed by the rural communities and these sections of our country must produce more.”99 Again, Catt placed farm communities at the forefront of women’s service in the war effort, thus establishing an international community of women through gardening and agricultural work. As the July issue emphasized, “The world’s food supply is short and many must suffer. We have the major burden of feeding the whole world.”100 The issue went on to underscore the importance of agricultural work: “Since food will decide the war, each American woman can do a real national service by protecting the food supply of the nation.”101 In short, the newspaper’s focus on World War I, under Catt’s guidance, positioned farmers as significant players in the war effort, thus propelling them onto the international stage.

The Suffrage Messenger also established community and specific connections to farm women through its emphasis on the integration of suffrage and thrift work. The June issue explained this approach: “The message from the state president to the suffrage clubs is that the thrift work should be pushed in every possible way, and through any societies which may already exist in the towns.”102 In this way, activists established connections with women’s organizations in potentially all cities and towns in Nebraska, including rural areas. Moreover, the front-page headline revealed Nebraska activists’ new slogan: “Suffrage and Thrift.” The ensuing article then explained that the new slogan and integration of suffrage and thrift stemmed from “the first call for men by the president and the announcement of the great drive for food.”103 The NWSA, according to the Suffrage Messenger, requested that “every one of its clubs . . . become a suffrage thrift club with every member pledged to double, or more, her usual out-put of foods preserved for winter use.”104 Collectively, women were all a part of this effort, and the newspaper included articles that brought women together to learn how to complete these tasks. The May issue also reported that “A short article on what to plant and what to can, timely for each month, will be provided by the home economics department of the state university for each issue of The Messenger.”105 The June issue then included articles on how to can spinach, rhubarb, and cherries, and the July issue focused in part on drying and cooking fruits and vegetables, all of which were tasks with which farm women were undoubtedly familiar.106 The newspaper also listed new suffrage thrift clubs in various locations in the state, including Beatrice, Wymore, and Geneva, and highlighted the work of one specific organization:

The York Woman’s Club, in co-operating with the Thrift clubs, cleverly combined demonstrations of canning with patriotic addresses in a meeting attended by 150 women. Forty ladies of the club went out with enrollment slips to enroll the women of that city in the suffrage plans for thrift.107

This event reflected the integration of suffrage enrollment and the patriotic service of canning food, and the newspaper’s reference to the “clever” planning reveals a level of political savviness on the part of activists.

The University of Nebraska also played a role in suffragists’ thrift work. The University of
Nebraska Extension Service taught classes, and by October the Suffrage Messenger included a report from Mrs. A. E. Davisson, food administration chair, who stated that thirty-three towns had held forty-five canning schools, which were “attended by women from 227 towns in the state” including rural areas. They included a report from Mrs. A. E. Davisson, food administration chair, who stated that thirty-three towns had held forty-five canning schools, which were “attended by women from 227 towns in the state” including rural areas. Davison added, “These women in turn pledged themselves to teach what they learned at these schools to the women of their communities.” The suffrage newspaper also reported that 50,000 Nebraska women signed Hoover food pledge cards under Davisson’s direction. These canning schools generated inclusive community within Nebraska through the gathering of participants, the 50,000 who signed pledge cards, and the women who returned to their own towns to continue the work. Moreover, these schools, through their national structure, connected suffragists across the country as all were part of this service.

The Suffrage Messenger also demonstrated inclusive community through articles that highlighted the integration of women’s organizations and the Red Cross in particular. It urged suffragists to expand their work and “co-operate with the Red Cross or other organizations for national or world aid.” The focus on world aid and involvement with the Red Cross added an international layer to the notion of inclusive community, and it underscored local activists’ alignment with the association. Within a week of relocating their headquarters in Lincoln, suffragists extended an invitation to the Red Cross to “share the premises,” which the Red Cross accepted. In addition, the June issue noted that many suffragists “are now devoting much time to the Red Cross.”

In Fairmont, Dr. Nelle Deffenbaugh is president of the Red Cross, president of the Suffrage Thrift club, and president of the Woman’s club. This is as it should be, insasmuch as the general committee at Washington is representative of all women’s organizations. Deffenbaugh personified the notion of inclusive community; she embodied the integration of the three clubs, and her involvement in the three organizations also illustrates inclusive connectivity within her local town, the state of Nebraska, and the country. And again, since Red Cross work focused on the war in Europe, suffragists’ involvement with the organization broadened the scope of their activism to an international level.

The 1917 issues of the Suffrage Messenger continued to appeal to farm women and to build community at the local, state, and national levels. Following U.S. involvement in the war, the newspaper created cohesion through the alignment of women’s organizations, and activists’ particular alliance with the Red Cross expanded their work into the global arena. The simultaneous focus on agriculture, gardening, and food preservation also propelled rural Nebraska farmers onto the same international stage.

Activists published the final issue of the Suffrage Messenger in October 1917. In April of that same year, Governor Keith Neville signed a bill granting partial suffrage to Nebraska women, but legal action delayed its implementation for two years. As historian James E. Potter explains, “By the time the case was decided, the adoption of full suffrage amendments to the Nebraska and U.S. constitutions was imminent.” Nebraska women were granted full suffrage on August 28, 1920, with the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

CONCLUSION

In this article I have demonstrated that the Suffrage Messenger appealed to farm women in three ways: first, through overall efforts at statewide strategizing, which focused on and included rural residents; second, through printed articles directed toward farm women; and third, through the promotion of patriotic war service. Through these efforts, the Suffrage Messenger functioned to create a sense of inclusive community among women at the local,
state, national, and international levels. In addition, I have shown that because the newspaper's editorial content reflected the interplay between state and national reformers, the integration of ideas took on a unique meaning for farm women on the plains.

This study offers contributions in the areas of the Nebraska woman suffrage movement and suffrage newspapers. First, it contributes to our understanding of Nebraska suffrage activism by revealing that farm women offered much to the suffrage movement at the local, state, national, and international levels. Farm women comprised a central audience for the *Suffrage Messenger*, and the newspaper's outreach to rural residents portrayed them as smart, active, and competent. Second, this study shows that farm women also comprised an active group of supporters who already participated in the cause; these women identified themselves as outspoken, hardworking, and intelligent. The constructions of Nebraska farm women are consistent with Burkholder's discussion of Kansas farm women. This demographic may not have comprised the typical middle-class suffrage activist from a more urban area, but the *Suffrage Messenger* makes clear that farm women were involved in Nebraska suffrage activism and it portrayed them as agents who were capable of acting on their own behalf.

The study also contributes to our understanding of the interplay between state and national organizations. Nebraska activists were clearly aligned with Catt and the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and the *Suffrage Messenger* highlights the contributions that Nebraska leaders made to the national movement, as well as the ways in which national leaders were involved at the state level. First, the newspaper reveals that the general integration of state and national leadership seemed to work well in Nebraska, especially in relation to reaching farmers. Catt's directive to organize and recruit women in all cities and towns was well suited to Nebraska activists' simultaneous realization that they needed to reach out to their more isolated sisters in rural areas of the state. The suffrage film, pig movement, enrollment efforts, and suffrage schools all functioned to spread the word about suffrage and appeal to rural women. Second, Catt has been critiqued for her support of World War I and the ways in which her position reinforced traditional gender roles, especially for middle-class urban women. For farm women in the Plains, however, her controversial decision created an opening for their genuine abilities and skills. Farm women, through their expertise in the areas of agriculture, gardening, and food preservation, were implicitly positioned as experts in war service activities, and the *Suffrage Messenger*, through its emphasis on war service in the name of suffrage, symbolically brought rural women into the cause. In fact, farm women were indirectly placed at the forefront of women's war service and potentially offered the most significant contribution. In this way, Catt's plan took on a unique meaning in rural areas in the Plains.

Examining cases like these also adds to our understanding of the nature and function of suffrage presses in the Plains. Scholars have explored how various newspaper publications raised consciousness and garnered support, and I have shown that the *Suffrage Messenger* functioned in ways that were similar to other suffrage presses. Through the creation of an integrated and inclusive community, the *Suffrage Messenger* fulfilled several functions outlined by Steiner and Jerry. The newspaper united women isolated by geography, and it brought together city and country women by underscoring their common interests, their universal lack of voice, and the collective need for the ballot. Additionally, it brought national groups into contact with members through its emphasis on Catt and the National American Woman Suffrage Association. With the advent of World War I, it displayed an additional function by generating community on a global level. While Burkholder explored how the *Farmer's Wife* created community among farm women in Kansas, I have illustrated the *Suffrage Messenger'*s formation of community on a much larger scale through the integration of local, state, national, and international leaders.
issues and concerns. Finally, this essay demonstrates that the Suffrage Messenger, by focusing on farmers in rural Nebraska, created a sense of solidarity among women that extended far beyond the boundaries of the Great Plains.

NOTES


2. Ibid., 139.


4. See James C. Olson and Ronald C. Naugle, History of Nebraska, 3rd ed. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 216. Woman suffrage, they state, “received only 22 percent of the vote.” The April 1916 Suffrage Messenger reported that the vote was 3,502 (for) to 12,668 (against).

5. According to the April 1916 Suffrage Messenger, voters defeated the 1882 amendment by a 2 to 1 margin: 25,756 (for) to 50,693 (against).


7. The first suffrage newspaper was the Western Woman’s Journal, published by Erasmus Correll from 1879 to 1882.

8. All remaining issues of the Suffrage Messenger are located in the Nebraska Woman Suffrage Manuscript Collection at the Nebraska State Historical Society in Lincoln.


13. Ibid.


15. Ibid., 157–58.


17. See Masel-Walters, “To Hustle with the Rowdies,” 175. She suggests that suffrage periodicals focused on women characterized by the “more genteel, higher status occupations of greater acceptability to the middle-class, such as medicine, teaching, the fine arts and business administration.”


19. Ibid.


22. Fus, Persuasion on the Plains, 164.

23. Ibid., 218.

24. Ibid., 163.


26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.


29. Ibid.


32. Ibid.

33. Ibid.

34. Suffrage Messenger, November 1915, 3.

35. Suffrage Messenger, February 1915, 2.

36. Ibid.


38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid.
Movement supporter and populist politician William Jennings for a compact to be approval. efforts to amend their constitutions to national am­endment, and submission of state to national Flexner, for Suffrage Winning visions of which were “concentration on the federal specific concept of leadership; an intense states.” efficient publicity machine designed to sway public opinion; a determined pragmatism; and a steady optimism that woman suffrage would win and would provide the means to constructing a better society.” See Fowler and Jones, “Carrie Chapman Catt and the Last Years of the Struggle for Woman Suffrage: “The Winning Plan,”” in Votes for Women: The Struggle for Suffrage Revisited, ed. Jean H. Baker (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 135, 136.

51. Carrie Chapman Catt, qtd. in Eleanor Flexner, Centuries of Struggle: The Women’s Rights Movement in the United States (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1959), 274. Flexner explains that Catt asked for a compact to be “signed by the officers of more than thirty-six state suffrage associations,” the provisions of which were “concentration on the federal amendment, and submission of state to national leadership and direction.” Furthermore, Catt hoped to halt “hopeless campaigns” by subjecting state efforts to amend their constitutions to national approval. See Flexner, Century of Struggle, 274.

52. Suffrage Messenger, August 1916, 4.
53. Ibid.
54. Suffrage Messenger, November 1915, 1.
55. Suffrage Messenger, November 1915, 2.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Suffrage Messenger, April 1916, 4.
60. Mary Baird Bryan was married to suffrage supporter and populist politician William Jennings Bryan.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.
69. Ibid.
70. Ibid.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Suffrage Messenger, November 1916, 3.
75. Ibid.
76. See Correspondence from Grace Wheeler to Carrie Chapman Catt, August 18, 1916. MS 1073, Box 1, Folder 1.
77. Wheeler also hoped that Catt could persuade club women to join the suffrage cause. In her request to Catt, she wrote, “But [Mrs. Barkley] feels as we all do that if you could come to our State Convention held at the same time as the Club Federation and covering both meetings with the distinction of your presence and that of the national Federation’s President, the club women would be convinced of the unity of their work with Suffrage.” See Correspondence from Grace Wheeler to Carrie Chapman Catt, August 18, 1916.
78. Suffrage Messenger, October 1916, 1, 3.
79. Suffrage Messenger, April 1917, 3.
80. Suffrage Messenger, January 1917, 1.
81. Suffrage Messenger, January 1917, 2.
82. Suffrage Messenger, January 1917, 1.
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Ibid.
86. Robert Fowler and Spencer Jones identify suffrage schools as a “crucial feature” of Catt’s Winning Plan. They state, “Recognizing the vital need for well-trained and effective women to occupy leadership positions within the NAWSA at all levels, from the affiliated state organizations to the education committee, Catt started the suffrage schools in order to teach women the history of suffrage, the terms of the current debate, and the procedures of successful participation in the movement. Schools addressed how to work with ordinary citizens and professional politicians, how to deal with (and, if possible, use) the press, and the fundamental techniques of skillful public speaking. Above all, Catt’s schools taught women how to organize down to the last practical detail of circulating petitions.” See Fowler and Jones, “Carrie Chapman Catt,” 137.
87. Suffrage Messenger, April, 1. As Fowler and Jones explain, “Catt’s professional organizers, a network of trained women, eventually penetrated every level of society: state, district, town, city, and village, and often even many precincts. In time, organizers helped NAWSA recruit a membership of two million.” See Fowler and Jones, “Carrie Chapman Catt,” 137.
88. Towns included Hastings, Falls City, McCook, Blair, Union, Crawford, Valentine, Fullerton, Ainsworth, Broken Bow, Sioux City, Hastings, Normal, and Niobrara.
89. Suffrage Messenger, April 1917, 2.
90. Suffrage Messenger, May 1917, 1.
91. Ibid.
92. Suffrage Messenger, June 1917, 2.
93. Ibid.
94. Suffrage Messenger, April 1917, 4.
95. Suffrage Messenger, April 1917, 3.
96. Ibid.
98. Ibid.
99. Ibid.
100. Suffrage Messenger, July 1917, 1.
103. Suffrage Messenger, June 1917, 1.

104. Suffrage Messenger, May 1917, 2.
105. Ibid.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid.
111. Suffrage Messenger June 1917, 2.
112. Ibid.
113. Ibid.
114. Suffrage Messenger, June 1917, 3.