Review of *Frontier Feminist: Clarina Howard Nichols and the Politics of Motherhood* by Marilyn S. Blackwell and Kristen T. Oertel

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After a difficult first marriage that ended in divorce, Clarina Irene Howard Nichols became an avid supporter of married women's property rights, mothers' custody rights, and, eventually, female suffrage. She was a journalist, a newspaper editor, and in 1852 she became the first woman to speak to the Vermont state legislature, in an address in favor of women's school suffrage. By 1853, she was traveling through the Northeast and Midwest as a public lecturer on temperance and women's rights. She emigrated to Kansas in 1854 as a strong advocate of the free soil cause, but also because she had high hopes that people on the frontier would be more open-minded about women's rights than she had found them to be in "old conservative Vermont." She campaigned extensively for women's rights in Kansas and spoke in favor of women's suffrage at the state constitutional convention in 1859. While full suffrage for women did not make it into the Kansas constitution at that time, school suffrage, married women's property rights, and mothers' custody rights did. Her suffrage work was interrupted by the Civil War, but she later resumed it and continued it in California, where she moved in 1871 for health reasons.

Nichols was a nationally known suffrage advocate and perhaps the most influential voice in the campaign for women's rights in Kansas in the 1850s and 1860s. Thus it seems odd, as Marilyn Blackwell and Kristen Oertel point out in Frontier Feminist, that she has been overlooked by scholars of the women's suffrage movement. In addition to reconstructing the narrative of Nichols's life, the two authors address this issue, arguing that Nichols's contributions have been neglected because her maternalist philosophy and image have not meshed with historians' understandings of nineteenth-century feminists.

Blackwell and Oertel have performed an important service by placing Nichols into the context of nineteenth-century women's political participation in the press and in a variety of reform movements, including temperance, abolition, and women's rights. They also make an important contribution to current scholarship by highlighting the importance of maternalism in the women's rights movement. Although they do not address it in detail, the evidence they uncover in Nichols's story could also be used to complicate cultural understandings of the frontier as a place of liberation. Overall, this book is a valuable addition to nineteenth-century U.S. women's history, the history of the West, the history of reform, and political history.

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