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**”Un emploi digne d’une honnête citoyenne” : la  
recherche de la citoyenneté économique au sein de la  
Women’s Educational and Industrial Union de Boston  
(1877-1920)**

Jeanne Boiteux

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Jeanne BOITEUX

**“A Work Worthy of a Dignified Citizen.”**

*The Pursuit of Economic Citizenship in the Women’s  
Educational and Industrial Union of Boston (1877-1920)*

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# Abstract

*“A Work Worthy of a Dignified Citizen”: The Pursuit of Economic Citizenship in the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union of Boston (1877-1920).*

This dissertation examines changing ideas of economic independence amid the white, middle-class reformers who sympathized with the American woman’s suffrage movement. Through a case study of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union (WEIU) of Boston, this study highlights the “practical” efforts that such women undertook to enhance self-supporting women’s access to education and jobs, in a more expansive complement to suffragist activism. From 1877, when this class-bridging organization was founded, to 1920, when the US Congress removed gendered barriers to the right to vote, my project investigates the actors who worked to redefine perceptions of white, middle-class women’s paid work in a belief that this would help bring about their emancipation. The WEIU stood out from other female-led organizations like settlements and social clubs because of its early interest in developing the template for an urban institution with a self-supporting fundraising model. The affluent volunteers who ran the WEIU’s restaurants and shops fashioned a career in philanthropic business, endeavoring to create opportunities both for themselves and for Boston’s women. Treating the organization’s programs as the tangible expressions of ideas about women’s social and political roles, I trace the story of their attempt to redress gender-based economic inequalities and analyze the class-based conception of independence that they embraced. All the chapters in this dissertation highlight how the WEIU constructed solidarity between women and rejected top-down, hierarchical notions of benevolence by championing, instead, what they called “cooperation,” even as this purported inclusivity actually concealed a rather narrow vision of politicized womanhood.

KEYWORDS: women’s rights; women’s associations; philanthropy; economic citizenship; cooperation; entrepreneurship; Progressivism.

## Résumé

*“Un emploi digne d’une honnête citoyenne” : la recherche de la citoyenneté économique au sein de la Women’s Educational and Industrial Union de Boston (1877-1920).*

Cette thèse porte sur la façon dont les réformatrices de la classe moyenne blanche américaine, également sympathisantes du mouvement suffragiste, concevaient l’indépendance économique. Par le biais d’une étude de cas de la *Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (WEIU) de Boston, l’ouvrage met en lumière les efforts “pragmatiques” que ces femmes ont déployés pour améliorer l’accès des femmes à l’éducation et à l’emploi, vus comme complément à la campagne pour le droit de vote. De 1877, date de la fondation de la WEIU, et jusqu’en 1920, quand le Congrès permit l’accès des femmes au droit de vote, nous étudions les agentes d’une redéfinition de la perception de l’activité rémunérée par les femmes de la classe moyenne blanche. La WEIU se distingue d’autres organisations féminines contemporaines comme les clubs ou les settlement houses par ses efforts précoces pour établir le modèle d’une nouvelle institution urbaine dont le financement serait autonome. Les volontaires aisées qui géraient les restaurants et boutiques de la WEIU se sont ainsi créés une carrière commerciale aux accents philanthropiques, avec la volonté d’ouvrir des portes aux autres femmes de Boston. En considérant les programmes de la WEIU comme l’expression tangible d’idées sur la place que devaient occuper les femmes dans la société comme en politique, nous retraçons l’histoire de ses tentatives économiques pour corriger les inégalités de genre. Nous analysons également l’élaboration, socialement située, d’une nouvelle conception de l’indépendance féminine. Tout au long de la thèse, nous décrivons la façon dont la WEIU modelait une solidarité entre femmes qui rejetait les relations hiérarchiques descendantes ayant cours dans les oeuvres caritatives, au profit de liens de “coopération” – quand bien même cette volonté d’ouverture dissimulait une vision relativement étroite de la féminité politisée.

MOTS-CLEF: droits des femmes; associations féminines; philanthropie; citoyenneté économique; coopération; entrepreneuriat; Progressivisme.

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# Abbreviations

**AC** Associated Charities  
**ACA** Association of Collegiate Alumnae  
**AFMRS** American Female Moral Reform Society  
**AWSA** American Woman Suffrage Association  
**BESA** Boston Equal Suffrage Association  
**BFA** Boston Female Asylum  
**DRL** Domestic Reform League  
**GFWC** General Federation of Women's Clubs  
**IAW** International Alliance of Women  
**ICW** International Congress of Women  
**JWC** Junior Workers' Club  
**MWSA** Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association  
**NAWS** National Association of Women Stenographers  
**NAWSA** National American Woman Suffrage Association  
**NCF** National Civic Federation  
**NCL** National Consumers League  
**NEA** National Education Association  
**NEK** New England Kitchen  
**NEWC** New England Woman's Club  
**NHEA** National Household Economic Association  
**PSA** Public School Association  
**UdFG** Union des Femmes de Genève  
**UIP** Union for Industrial Progress  
**WCTU** Woman's Christian Temperance Union  
**WEIU** Women's Educational and Industrial Union  
**WILPF** Women's International League for Peace and Freedom  
**WRTA** Women's Rest Tour Association  
**WTUL** Women's Trade Union League  
**YMCA** Young Men's Christian Association  
**YMCU** Young Men's Christian Union  
**YWCA** Young Women's Christian Association



# Introduction

## Self-Supporting Women, Economic Rights, and the “Woman Question”

On May 6, 1885, Boston’s Horticultural Hall was the scene of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union’s annual meeting, a record of past good deeds which Massachusetts Governor George Robinson<sup>1</sup> sanctioned by his presence. In the pages of the *Boston Daily Advertiser*, this women’s social reform association was praised for fulfilling the “practical mission”<sup>2</sup> it had claimed as its own—“to become to women, however their circumstances, a means of aid, protection, elevation, development, according as each may need.”<sup>3</sup> In the years following its founding in 1877, the WEIU received uniformly positive press attention: it was praised for the “practical manner in which its affairs [were] directed,”<sup>4</sup>. Such a “practical” outlook found an expression in a legal aid scheme, an employment bureau, a campaign against fraudulent job advertisements as well as hygiene lectures and bookkeeping, language, and penmanship classes for women. The “practical” descriptor was meant to distinguish the Women’s Union from militant suffragist organizations, themselves derided in the press for concerns deemed as out of touch with the reality of most women’s lives—the vote, sensible dress, or women’s right to address public meetings.<sup>5</sup> However, much as the Boston press was quick to label the WEIU’s activities “practical charity,”<sup>6</sup> it was also the case that two

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<sup>1</sup>George D. Robinson (1834-1896), an attorney by trade, served as the governor of Massachusetts from 1883 to 1887, when he declined to run again, preferring instead to go back to his law practice. Laura Rundell, “Robinson, George Dexter,” *Dictionary of American National Biography*, February 2000.

<sup>2</sup>“A Practical Mission,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, May 6, 1885, 8.

<sup>3</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1888* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1888), 7, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924064>

<sup>4</sup>“Local Miscellany,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 14, 1878, 4.

<sup>5</sup>Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 138.

<sup>6</sup>“Our Boston Letter,” *Springfield Republican*, May 6, 1881, 2.

prominent suffragists had also been slated to attend the 1885 annual meeting but found themselves otherwise engaged. Lecturer Mary F. Eastman (1833-1908) was ill, and Mary A. Livermore (1820-1905), known for her twin abolitionist and suffragist commitments, had been “detained [...] by a meeting to organize a woman suffrage league.”<sup>7</sup> One of a myriad local urban women’s associations, the WEIU nurtured close ties with Boston’s suffragist sphere even if it was not, itself, devoted to fighting for the right to vote.

The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union of Boston instead became noteworthy for the extent of its commercial activities and the openness with which this women’s association sought to enhance its members’ economic situation, going well beyond the ambitions of other feminine clubs. It was founded in 1877, at a time an efflorescence of literary and self-culture clubs led them to become the new prototypical female middle-class gatherings.<sup>8</sup> The 1870s were also characterized by national and local agitation for married women’s property rights which redoubled that for suffrage and redefined popular understandings of women’s relationship with money and self-support across the class spectrum.<sup>9</sup> In that context, then, it is striking to read lines such as those contained in a poem that a Union volunteer had composed for a social night between members in 1882. “I dare not tell you

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<sup>7</sup>“A Practical Mission,” 8. As young women, Mary Eastman and Mary Livermore shared a strong desire to become independent; both were single, self-supporting women. In the 1870s, schoolteacher Eastman quit her position after being hired as a full-time field agent by the Massachusetts state suffrage organization. She would become one of the stars of the feminist lecture circuit. Livermore, the daughter of a laborer, became a governess to the children of a Virginia plantation owner before working as a teacher, prior to marriage. Even as a married woman, Mary Livermore shared newspaper editing duties with her husband, Daniel Livermore, worked for the US Sanitary Commission during the Civil War, and later became one of the editors of the *Woman’s Journal*, while also touring the lyceum circuit. For a biographical account of Livermore’s life, see Wendy Hamand Venet, *A Strong-Minded Woman: The Life of Mary A. Livermore* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005). On Eastman and the lecture circuit, see Lisa Tetrault, “The Incorporation of American Feminism: Suffragists and the Postbellum Lyceum,” *Journal of American History* 96, no. 4 (March 2010): 1051-1052.

<sup>8</sup>Theodora Penny Martin, *The Sound of Our Own Voices: Women’s Study Clubs, 1860-1910* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 14; 18. Throughout the dissertation, I use the term “middle-class” to refer to what was, at the end of the nineteenth century, a growing segment of the American population which was just starting to be called by that very name. This was a group with comfortable earnings and a particular culture that emphasized sobriety, morality, and restraint. Jean-Christian Vinel, in an exploration of the politics of middle-class labor reformers, used it to mean “that segment of the labor force comprising men who earned a high return for their skill and enjoyed a large amount of autonomy in performing the work they had agreed to do”; increasingly, this tended to be nonmanual or “white-collar” work. Jean-Christian Vinel, *The Employee: A Political History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 14. For a more cultural definition of the “middle class” and how its distinctive moral identity came to be, see Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle-Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

<sup>9</sup>Linda K. Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 39.

how strong we have grown, nor dare I tell the amount, / But it's thousands and thousands and thousands of dollars, I see in our bank account," boasted a Mrs. H. A. Upham in a good-humored paean to her peers, on the occasion of the WEIU's annual meeting.<sup>10</sup> The expression of such naked glee at the prospect of capital accumulation was not compatible with then common discourses about the nature of ladydom,<sup>11</sup> but it can and should be traced back to earlier conceptions of women's economic (in)dependence.

From the 1830s onwards, the increasingly open struggle for women's rights, while it was and has since often been framed around the issue of suffrage and access to electoral politics, also involved a growing sense of women's economic disabilities and their dependence as a class.<sup>12</sup> According to the legal doctrine of "coverture," even white, even free, women were defined as dependents by virtue of the body of the married woman becoming her husband's property.<sup>13</sup> While some propertied individuals used legal ways to circumvent coverture, as Stephanie Jones-Rogers has shown,<sup>14</sup> the legal system was designed so as to both reflect and sanction beliefs about women's inability to accede to the glorified status of provider and protector to the nation.<sup>15</sup> Just as an ideal of domesticity came to dominate white middle-class women's existence, so was economic power made one of the terms of the "woman question," the name given in the late 1830s to a vigorous public debate about women's social roles and rights, which in subsequent decades "took a variety of forms, from a woman's right to control her body to her

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<sup>10</sup>Additional records of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1877-1977 [hereafter "Additional WEIU records"], "Rhymes for the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, written for the Annual Reception, May 2, 1882, by Mrs. H. A. Upham," 1882. 81-M237. Carton 8. "Mrs. H. A. Upham" may have been Lizzie, the 44-year-old wife of Henry A. Upham, who owned a "produce business." United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHXP-TLT>), Entry for Henry A Upham and Lizzie Upham, 1880.

<sup>11</sup>Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 42.

<sup>12</sup>The historiographic tradition of the "feminist-abolitionist coalition" locates the early stirrings of women's rights activism in the 1830s and 1840s, as female abolitionists confronted gender discrimination in mixed groups. For works that belong to this historiographic stream, see Blanche Glassman Hersch, *Slavery of Sex: Feminist-Abolitionists in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois press, 1978); Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horn, eds., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2003), or Susan Ware, ed., *American Women's Suffrage: Voices from the Long Struggle for the Vote 1776-1965* (New York: Library of America, 2020).

<sup>13</sup>Anne-Marie Daune-Richard, "Homme, Femme, Individualité et Citoyenneté," *Recherches Féministes; Québec* 21, no. 1 (2008): 39-50, <https://doi.org/10.7202/018307ar>.

<sup>14</sup>Stephanie Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property: White Women as Slave Owners in the American South* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 25-26; 31-55.

<sup>15</sup>Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 7-8.

right to the vote.”<sup>16</sup> The women’s rights conventions of the late 1840s and 1850s made manifest a variety of demands—from the vote and married women’s property rights to wage equality.<sup>17</sup> The Rochester women’s rights convention, held a mere few days after the famed Seneca Falls convention of July 1848, put a significant emphasis on economic rights.<sup>18</sup> There, author and activist Paulina Wright Davis called for “an epochal movement, the emancipation of a class, the redemption of half the world, and a conforming reorganization of all social, political, and industrial interests and institutions.”<sup>19</sup> The right to vote was one (controversial) demand among many, which was initially considered as part as a broader agenda. It was only gradually in the 1850s and then more definitively in the late 1860s, as the feminist-abolitionist coalition broke down that new, independent suffragist organizations singled out the ballot as one possible guarantee for the obtention of other rights. This shift can be traced back to a nexus of issues that included longstanding cracks between the “feminist” and “abolitionist” components of the coalition as well as bitter disputes over Black men’s suffrage rights.<sup>20</sup>

Historian Ellen Carol DuBois has powerfully argued that the independent suffragist movement which came of age in the post-war period was shaped in large part by the failure of leading activists to broker alliances with working women. Following the hiatus caused by the Civil War, self-proclaimed suffrage leaders Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony had tried and failed to organize New York’s female typesetters. Called up by a small group of skilled women competing with male operatives for wages, Stanton and Anthony sought out to guide them through the establishment of the Working Women’s Association (WWA), a labor organization formed to “bring together wage-earning women to challenge the organized power of men over them.”<sup>21</sup> The WWA was the offspring of suffragists

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<sup>16</sup>Martha S. Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1. Jones herself decided to apply the term to one aspect of the debate, i.e. “the extent to which African American women would exercise autonomy and authority within their community’s public culture.”

<sup>17</sup>Judith Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman’s Rights Convention* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 260-264; DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, 44-46; and Hélène Quanquin, “Abolitionism and the Antebellum US Women’s Rights Movement: The (Missed) Connections of the First National Woman’s Rights Convention (1850),” *Etudes Anglaises* 74, no. 4 (2021): 482-493.

<sup>18</sup>Nancy Hewitt, “Feminist Friends: Agrarian Quakers and the Emergence of Women’s Rights in America,” *Feminist Studies* 12, no. 1 (1986): 27-49.

<sup>19</sup>Quoted by Quanquin in “Abolitionism and the Antebellum US Women’s Rights Movement.”

<sup>20</sup>Faye Dudden, *Fighting Chance: The Struggle Over Woman Suffrage and Black Suffrage in Reconstruction America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 194-197; Hélène Quanquin, *Men in the American Women’s Rights Movement, 1860-1890: Cumbersome Allies* (London: Routledge, 2021), 5.

<sup>21</sup>DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, 127.

and typesetters, a symbol of their shared proto-feminist beliefs. Its demise, in large part due to suffragists' inability to understand the typesetters' class position, signaled the interest of the former in the critical constituency formed by middle-class working women who would constitute the embryo of the National Woman Suffrage Association, created in 1869.<sup>22</sup>

In her later scholarship, which dealt with the activism of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter, Harriot Stanton Blatch (1856-1940), Ellen DuBois has refined the argument that there was a connecting thread linking Stanton's antebellum equal rights and abolitionist agenda to Blatch's socialist commitment to organizing working women for suffrage in the 1900s and 1910s. DuBois contends that antebellum suffragists' holistic understanding of the interconnectedness of women's disabilities underwent a "process of adaptation and modernization"<sup>23</sup> over the course of the following decades. This culminated in Harriot Stanton Blatch's rhetorical shift "from a politics of exclusion toward inclusion"<sup>24</sup> as she tried to expand the base of the middle-class suffragist movement and mobilize factory workers. Ultimately, DuBois, following early women's historian Mary Beard, puts forth the argument that Blatch formed a third polarity in the suffrage movement of the 1900s and 1910s. DuBois argues that Blatch's rejection of the conventions of polite society distinguished her from Carrie Chapman, while her willingness to link up with progressive movements of the day set her apart from radical Alice Paul.<sup>25</sup>

Insofar as suffragist connections with other social justice movements of the day are concerned, less attention has been paid to the period bracketed by Elizabeth Cady Stanton's early work in the women's conventions of the 1850s and Harriot Stanton Blatch's work in the New York-based Equality League of Suffrage Women (1907). This oversight was in part caused by what Nancy Cott characterized as "historians' tendency to lump together the woman movement, the chronology of the suffrage movement, and the vocabulary of feminism."<sup>26</sup> While some authors tend to conflate the "woman question" with the specific issue of suffrage,<sup>27</sup> bub-

<sup>22</sup>DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, 160-161.

<sup>23</sup>Ellen Carol DuBois, *Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Winning of Woman Suffrage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 276.

<sup>24</sup>Belinda A. Stillion Southard, "A Rhetoric of Inclusion and the Expansion of Movement Constituencies: Harriot Stanton Blatch and the Classed Politics of Woman Suffrage," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2014): 130, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2014.888465>.

<sup>25</sup>DuBois, *Harriot Stanton Blatch*, 276.

<sup>26</sup>Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (London: Yale University Press, 1989), 3. Writing in the same years, Steven Bluecher chose, by contrast, to treat "the mobilization for women's rights and woman suffrage [...] as one movement and unit of analysis." Steven M. Buechler, *Women's Movements in the United States: Woman Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 2.

<sup>27</sup>For instances of this, see: Allison L. Sneider, *Suffragists in an Imperial Age: US Expansion*



bling under the surface of the suffrage campaigns of the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s was a clear though diffuse understanding of the interconnections between different forms of oppression—chiefly, those linked to class and sex.<sup>28</sup>

These years are precisely those when the idea of a Women’s Educational and Industrial Union took root in Boston. Not all WEIU officers were suffragists, but those who were, like Boston Suffrage League president Ellen B. Dietrick, considered the “industrial emancipation of women”<sup>29</sup> an essential part of their activism. Dietrick did not believe that the leading suffragist organization, by then the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), should focus solely on the ballot. In 1893, when controversy erupted in suffragist circles, following a decision by the US Congress to close the Chicago World’s Fair<sup>30</sup> on Sundays for religious reasons, some delegates at NAWSA’s annual convention tried to issue an official rebuke, but the organization eventually chose not to take a stand on the issue on grounds that this controversy bore no relation to woman’s suffrage. Criticizing the failure of the resolution, Ellen Dietrick refuted the notion that NAWSA was a single-issue organization. She further argued that taking part in public debate

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*and the Woman Question, 1870-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Amy Easton-Flake, “Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Multifaceted Response to the Nineteenth-Century Woman Question,” *New England Quarterly* 86, no. 1 (March 2013): 29-59, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43284971>.

<sup>28</sup>While nationally prominent Black activists tried to shed light on their complex position, they were shut out from the largest suffrage organizations and left to operate their own groups from within the African American community. For a closer look at the abundant literature on the topic, see Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Evelyn Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women’s Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Martha S. Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Martha S. Jones, *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* (New York: Basic Books, 2022); Alison M. Parker, *Mary Church Terrell: Woman Suffrage and Civil Rights Pioneer* (Alexandria, VA: Alexander Street, 2015); and Cathleen D. Cahill, *Recasting the Vote: How Women of Color Transformed the Suffrage Movement* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2020).

<sup>29</sup>Per the title of a talk she gave to the Thursday Evening Club, a working-girls’ club headquartered at the WEIU, in 1892. Massachusetts Association of Working Girls’ Clubs, *Fourth Annual Report of the Massachusetts Association of Working Girls’ Clubs, 1892* (Boston: Massachusetts Association of Working Girls’ Clubs, 1892), 38, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31175035169153>.

<sup>30</sup>Kristy Maddux, *Practicing Citizenship: Women’s Rhetoric at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019), 1-2. The World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, popularly known as the “Chicago World Fair,” was one of a number of international turn-of-the-century exhibitions of extravagant proportions. For six months, domestic and international visitors crowded the newly-erected buildings of the Fair in order to gawk at the latest technological innovations, prominent displays of the United States’ agricultural and industrial power and productivity. On women’s participation at the Chicago World Fair, see also *Women in International and Universal Exhibitions, 1876-1937*, edited by Myriam Boussahba-Bravard and Rebecca Rogers (London: Routledge, 2018).

was a crucial means by which women asserted their status as citizens: “To a body of women working to secure protection in their right to speak as citizens, it is peculiarly essential to prove their fitness for enjoying such protection by an exhibition of courageous speaking when occasion demands.”<sup>31</sup> Women experienced the consequences of economic policy—why should they not, as citizens, express an opinion about them? Outlining her view of what an ideal suffragist convention should be, she wrote:

The woman’s annual suffrage convention should be a congress of ideas wherein every question of the day, affecting woman’s freedom, should be fairly represented, as furnishing fresh evidence of their fitness to exercise suffrage. Their right to freedom of trade, their right to be preserved from the folly of free coinage, their right to be saved from the burden of taxes imposed by men’s monstrous system of pensions, are as important subjects for discussion as the question of circulating petitions. For, after all, when such discussion has widely prepared women to take part in public life, they will no longer beg Legislatures to give them permission to exercise their right of suffrage, they will simply take it.<sup>32</sup>

To WEIU officer Ellen B. Dietrick, it was by doing the work of legislators, embracing debate, and laying a claim to public life that (white) women would prove their “fitness” for citizenship. In another piece in what would prove a long-drawn dispute in the pages of the *Woman’s Journal*, the leading suffragist publication of the 1890s, Dietrick defended herself against accusations that her endorsement of municipal suffrage meant that she was in fact one of the very women she criticized for “hammering away” at one single issue—the vote—, claiming: “I have from the first steadily advised the Massachusetts Association to broaden its lines of thought and work. I have constantly and publicly urged that the general education of women in regard to the merits of all public questions is really the most effectual method for procuring their legalized enfranchisement.”<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps Dietrick had her commitment to the “Women’s Union” in mind when she made that statement, for, as one of the directors of the WEIU, she was devoting time and energy to improving women’s access to education and paid work and collaborating with the Boston City Council to protect homeworkers from fraudulent job advertisements.<sup>34</sup> Through her own example and that of her peers, she

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<sup>31</sup>Ellen Battelle Dietrick, “The Sunday Resolutions,” *Woman’s Journal* 24, no. 7 (February 18, 1893): 53-54.

<sup>32</sup>Dietrick, “The Sunday Resolutions,” 54.

<sup>33</sup>Ellen Battelle Dietrick, “The True Meaning of the Sunday Resolutions,” *Woman’s Journal* 24, no. 9 (March 4, 1893): 70.

<sup>34</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Women’s Educational and Industrial Union*,

was essentially preparing women to take part in public life. Her voluntarism thus essentially and quite naturally complemented her suffrage work. Kristy Maddux, in her analysis of women's rhetorics at the Chicago World Fair, has identified several novel modes according to which they "practiced" citizenship; one of them was "economic participation," which meant "treat[ing] economics as an arena for civil leadership."<sup>35</sup>

By shedding light on the work of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union in the period preceding the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the US Constitution (1920), this dissertation grapples with the economic component of suffragists' demands and activities from the perspective of the mainstream or most visible part of the women's movement—the northern, white, native-born women whose voices were allowed to be the loudest in the court of public opinion, and whose very publicity ensured that they set the terms of the national debate. Better understanding the contours of this debate is the very reason that I chose to focus on this particular subgroup of women, even as a robust scholarship has already dissected this segment of the women's movement.<sup>36</sup>

In this dissertation, I examine white middle-class women's changing ideas about women's paid work and the terms of their advocacy for economic independence against the backdrop of a mandated domesticity. Economic independence could form a sound basis for the "liberty to grow, mentally, morally, spiritually, as well as physically"<sup>37</sup> that Ellen B. Dietrick claimed was essential to life; in addition, by embedding themselves in local economic networks, women demonstrated both their understanding of local politics and their capacity for community involvement. Through the case study of a class-bridging association with a regional proximity to one of the epicenters of American suffragism, this dissertation expands the scholarly interpretation of the mainstream of the women's rights movement by

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264 *Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1895* (Boston: The Barta Press, 144 High Street, 1895), 4, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923819>.

<sup>35</sup>Maddux, *Practicing Citizenship*, 155-181. For quotation, see p. 156 specifically.

<sup>36</sup>For a non-exhaustive list of representative works, for they comprise the majority of the existing literature on woman suffrage, see Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959); Aileen Kraditor, *Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965); Keith E. Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Woman's Rights Movement, 1800-1850* (New York: Schocken, 1977); Christine Lunardini, *From Equal Suffrage to Equal Rights: Alice Paul and the National Woman's Party, 1910-1928* (New York: New York University Press, 1986), or Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Southern States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). For an example of a work explicitly interrogating the "racial origins of feminism," see Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>37</sup>Dietrick, "The Sunday Resolutions," 54.

showing how the white “middle-class working women”<sup>38</sup> in its orbit sought to harness entrepreneurship, vocational education, and the growth of white-collar work as avenues of opportunity they saw as complementary both to social betterment as a whole and to the obtention of woman suffrage. I try to show that, while it may have been the rather marginal expression of what historian Kimberly Hamblin calls “an alternate women’s rights discourse,”<sup>39</sup> the campaign initiated by the Women’s Educational and Industrial Unions of Boston and other cities underlay and redoubled the suffrage movement to an extent that would complexify the narrative that the postbellum women’s movement sharply narrowed down its focus to the ballot and little else, at least until the founding of Blatch’s Equality League of Suffrage Women.

The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union sought to be an independent organization for independent women, a democratic body for the pursuit of enhanced citizenship through the establishment of evening classes, cooperative stores, affordable restaurants, a legal aid bureau, and various placement and vocational schemes. What did the women of the WEIU think that reaching material independence could achieve for women—and which women?—and how did they campaign for it in the shadow of the suffrage movement? What did the women of the WEIU want women’s work to be—whether paid or unpaid—and how were these views materialized by the programs that they championed and funded? Following the work and interpretation of historians Lara Vapnek and Sarah Deutsch,<sup>40</sup> this dissertation brings attention to the gendered and class-based notion of independence that these early New England feminists constructed to justify their participation in local politics and community life.

Writing to Susan B. Anthony, the first president of the Working Women’s Association, herself a typesetter and the wife of a skilled artisan, expressed the hope that they could reconcile two potentially complementary takes on the suffrage movement: “We can make theory and practice go hand in hand [...] working

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<sup>38</sup>A term coined and defined by historian Ellen Carol DuBois as “women in occupations that involved intellectual rather than manual labor and conditions that gave them considerable control over their work. Frequently, they were self-employed people or entrepreneurs.” DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, 148. Lara Vapnek uses the term “middle-class” to refer to a subset of women labor reformers who chose to work for the cause of reform, whether as volunteers or as professionals. They also self-identified as mediators of class conflict. These common denominators may have trumped income, for the members of an incipient middle class were not immune to economic dislocation and downward mobility. Vapnek, *Breadwinners: Working Women and Economic Independence, 1865-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 6.

<sup>39</sup>Kimberly A. Hamblin, *From Eve to Evolution: Darwin, Science, and Women’s Rights in Gilded Age America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 169.

<sup>40</sup>Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Vapnek, *Breadwinners*, 7-10.

closely up to our convictions.”<sup>41</sup> The “practice” of suffrage work could find echoes in the work of the WWA and other bodies for working women’s emancipation both from the perspective of sexual inequality on job market and dependence on male relatives. The WEIU, as we will see, is also a fruitful terrain to study the “practical” campaign for women’s rights.

## The Case Study: Why the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union?

Nineteenth-century Boston was well-known as a hotbed of feminist and abolitionist activism. Keith E. Melder’s landmark work on the American women’s rights movement highlights “Boston’s radical women”: in the late 1830s, in particular, “[f]or about two years the contention over woman’s activities in abolitionist organizations remained centered in Massachusetts.”<sup>42</sup> After the end of the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, the abolitionist movement dispersed and many activists refocused their energies on other ventures. The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union was an offshoot of the New England Woman’s Club (NEWC), one of the first women’s literary and social clubs in the country, created in 1866. Middle- and upper-class women from the Northeast and Midwest were carrying into associative life the momentum gathered by their participation to the war effort, applying the new standards of business efficiency to benevolence.<sup>43</sup> After several years of taking part in the activities of the NEWC, a group of members led by physician Harriet Clisby decided to create their own organization to focus on issues which they felt would not be emphasized by the NEWC. The WEIU’s founding generation was comprised of an eclectic group of former white abolitionist activists, so-called “Brahmin”<sup>44</sup> ladies belonging to Boston’s upper-crust, and among the

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<sup>41</sup>Quoted in DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, 135.

<sup>42</sup>Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood*, 95.

<sup>43</sup>Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 154-173.

<sup>44</sup>“Boston Brahmin” is a colloquial term referring to Boston’s moneyed elite, a closed group of about forty tightly allied families whose economic, social, and cultural dominance over Boston and its vicinity dates back to the seventeenth century, and was predicated on successful commercial and banking ventures. By the 1820s, it had congealed into a distinctive “enclave”; the term “Brahmin,” originally used to describe the uppermost caste in the Indian caste system, was borrowed to reflect that exclusivity. Despite a relative decline in prominence by the end of the century, the Brahmins remained a formidable presence in Boston’s charities, salons, universities, and halls of power. Frederic Jaher Cople, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 15-158.

first female physicians and lawyers in Massachusetts. By the mid-1920s, the association had become known locally for the quality of the food and goods it sold in its various shops. This commercial network included a bakery, a public kitchen, a restaurant, a “Food Shop,” an “Ice Cream Plant” and a “Cake Kitchen.” Like Woman’s Exchanges in other cities, several WEIU-run shops offered a place for female producers—called “consignors”—to sell home-made food and goods. Compared to the myriad various philanthropic, charitable, and reform organizations which flourished in Boston in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, the WEIU was remarkably successful. Today, it operates under a different name and is no longer a women’s organization, but the fact that it never ceased its philanthropic activities makes it an intriguing outlier.<sup>45</sup>

This study starts in 1877, when the WEIU was founded and launched its activities, and ends in 1920, the year when the white women concentrated in the WEIU gained the ballot. The terms of the WEIU’s political involvement and the meaning ascribed to its activities were necessarily influenced by the material and psychological changes entailed by the success of the suffrage campaign. In addition, in the 1920s, as the National American Woman Suffrage Association morphed into the League of Women Voters (LWV), so was organized women’s lobbying power eroded by the electoral mobilization of women by and through established political parties.<sup>46</sup> By 1920, also the year when Marion Churchill, formerly Dean of Women at Colorado College, became the WEIU’s first college-educated president,<sup>47</sup> the scope and meaning of the association’s activities was transformed by a changed political context. No longer a fully volunteer mutual help organization, the Union was run by a professional paid leadership and had become a trusted collaborator of the city council.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>In 2006, the WEIU merged with Crittenton, Inc., another Boston nonprofit aiming at protecting female migrants to the city, which had been founded in 1824. Ten years later, in 2016, the Crittenton Women’s Union changed its name to “Economic Mobility Pathways, EMPATH.” EMPATH defines its mission statement as “transform[ing] people’s lives by helping them move out of poverty and provid[ing] other institutions with the tools to systematically do the same.” EMPATH website, <https://empathways.org/about>. Accessed October 12, 2023.

<sup>46</sup>Anna L. Harvey, *Votes Without Leverage: Women in American Electoral Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2. This is the central argument laid out in *Votes Without Leverage*.

<sup>47</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Forty-First Annual Report of the Women’s Educational & Industrial Union For the Year 1918-1919* (Boston: 264 Boylston Street), 10, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239561>; “Miss Churchill to Head Industrial Union,” *Boston Herald*, December 4, 1919, 14.

<sup>48</sup>In 1921 for instance, the management of the “Head House” at South Boston marine park, a beach resort of sorts, was turned over by the city council to the Union under condition that they be purveyors of a public service, selling pure food at cost. “To Reopen Head House in South Boston,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, September 4, 1921, 3.

The Union checks several criteria that make it valuable as the topic for a case study. First, it was a fairly large, enduring and influential organization which quickly came to enjoy a dues-paying membership in the thousands (see appendix 1.1). Perhaps as a result, there is a wealth of sources minutely documenting the way the organization was run, over the course of decades. Annual reports—commonly found in the archives of women’s organizations—were preserved alongside the minutes of the Board of Government, those of the Executive Committee, rules for employees, templates for filing cards, letters to members and suppliers, financial statements, and various pamphlets and advertisements issued by the WEIU. A few years’ worth of issues of its internal publication, the *Union Bulletin*, give us an insight into the way its employees came together as a group. It is thus feasible to paint a detailed picture of the Union’s funding channels, of the way it operated its lunch rooms, cake shop, toy shop, and other catering ventures, and of how the managers viewed their own activities. As a reform organization driven by big ideas about what women’s economic opportunities should be, the WEIU offers us an opportunity to look at the way some specific principles could be translated into experimental social programs.

The WEIU may also be considered significant in that the strength of the founders’ convictions led them to encourage the creation of branches in other north-eastern cities and even the rest of the country. As time passed and the women’s club movement emerged and gained strength, the WEIU became influential in other ways, through personal connections with the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, created in 1890 as an umbrella organization for the hundreds of local study and social clubs which met in the parlors of middle-class Americans, initially for self-improvement and, by the turn of the century, to effect social change as part of grand “municipal housekeeping” programs<sup>49</sup>

The *Federation Bulletin*, the organ of the Massachusetts Federation of Women’s Clubs, was edited and published by two WEIU women. When it became the official organ of the General Federation, the monthly features on WEIU programs reached tens of thousands of clubwomen across the country. Such articles struck a discor-

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<sup>49</sup>“Municipal housekeeping,” a phrase first used in the 1890s, was an assertion of women’s right to take part in public affairs on the basis of their being mothers and homemakers. Contending that they could not hope to keep their homes clean, tidy, and safe if the community itself was not, clubwomen, settlement workers, and labor reformers started using the metaphor of the home to justify expanding the bounds of the “domestic sphere.” See Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 5, and Melanie S. Gustafson, ““Good City Government is Good House-Keeping:’ Women and Municipal Reforms,” *Pennsylvania Legacies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 12-17.

dantly progressive note in the still relatively conservative club world. The Union was an outlier, but it may perhaps also be considered a bellwether for trends that would affect the club movement as a whole. In the Boston city center, the Union constituted a physical and intellectual meeting ground for women from different educational backgrounds and generations. The older members were New England ladies of Brahmin stock and women connected to antebellum Bostonian reform circles. They mingled with physicians, nurses, and the occasional lawyer, but they also socialized with the teachers for the Union's industrial evening classes, the younger college graduates who increasingly formed the cadre that run the organization, and the consignors, saleswomen, clerks, dressmakers and milliners, lodgers, bookkeepers, beauticians, and entrepreneurs of various stripes connected to the Union either because it employed them, because they used some of its numerous services, or both.

Points of contact between members of different social groups have been highlighted for their usefulness as starting points to study differences in values and outlooks, especially in such an economically polarized society as that of the Gilded Age. In a recent look at cross-class encounters in Progressive New York, David Huyssen criticized social control theory and urged us to rethink philanthropists' motivations and intentions in a more nuanced way. He argues that sites of cross-class encounters illuminate Progressive men and women's very notion of class, and in that light the WEIU's relational web of officers, sponsors, members, employees and "consignors" may be worth a closer look.<sup>50</sup>

No comprehensive monograph has yet been published on the activities of the WEIU, unlike other large, national women's organizations active over the period, like the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the Young Woman's Christian Association (YWCA), or the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL).<sup>51</sup> A 1985 honors thesis from Oberlin College is the closest to such a work.<sup>52</sup> Two

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<sup>50</sup>David Huyssen, *Progressive Inequality: Rich and Poor in New York, 1890-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 7.

<sup>51</sup>On the WCTU, see Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982) and Ian Tyrrell, *Woman's World/Woman's Empire: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in International Perspective, 1880-1930* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010). On the YWCA, see Nancy Marie Robertson, *Christian Sisterhood, Race Relations, and the YWCA, 1906-46* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007) and Judith Weisenfeld, *African American Women and Christian Activism: New York's Black YWCA, 1905-1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014). Finally, on the WTUL, see Nancy Dye Schrom, *As Equals and As Sisters: Feminism, the Labor Movement, and the Women's Trade Union League of New York* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980).

<sup>52</sup>Charlotte H. Briggs, "From Social Reform to Social Science: The Women's Educational and Industrial Union of Boston, 1877-1912." Honors thesis. Oberlin College, 1985.



works of regional history written in the late 1980s and 1990s feature the Boston and Buffalo WEIUS—they are articles by Erica Harth and Brenda K. Shelton, rather conventionally foregrounding WEIU women’s maternal qualities as “founding mothers of social justice” dispensing “organized mother love.”<sup>53</sup> Both are essentially narratives of progress and propose to celebrate quintessentially Progressive collaborations between organized female philanthropy and the local authorities. Other scholars chose to focus on the programs carried out conjointly by the WEIU and another women’s organization. In 1992, Margaret Dollar authored a dissertation in education on the WEIU’s collaboration with the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA), covering specifically the development of their joint vocational counseling program in the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>54</sup> The same year, Sarah Deutsch published a piece comparing three class-bridging women’s organizations in Boston, the WEIU, the Fragment Society (1812), and Denison House, a women’s college settlement (1892).<sup>55</sup> This would later be revised in *Women and the City* (2000), a deeper dive into how affluent clubwomen, ambitious college-educated “New Women,” industrial workers, and telephone operators navigated a changing Boston between the Civil War and the interwar period, contesting both male authority and each other’s conception of what it meant to be a woman.<sup>56</sup> The WEIU features rather prominently in Deutsch’s work more as a running thread, coming to the forefront only in the author’s analysis of their legal aid scheme.<sup>57</sup> Most recently, Nicholas Williams’s article on Ellen Richards’s New England Kitchen (NEK), which the Union bought and took up in 1907, examines how the reformers were trying to Americanize Boston’s immigrants through cheap but nutritious New England fare.<sup>58</sup>

The program-based approach is in fact the main way in which scholars have engaged with the association, deliberately foregrounding one program or experi-

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<sup>53</sup>Brenda K. Shelton, “Organized Mother Love: The Buffalo Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 1885-1915,” *New York History* 67, no. 2 (1986): 154-176; Erica Harth, “Founding Mothers of Social Justice: The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union of Boston, 1877-1892,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 28, no. 2 (1999): 140-165.

<sup>54</sup>Margaret C. Dollar, *The Beginnings of Vocational Guidance for College Women: The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, and Women’s Colleges*. PhD thesis. Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1992.

<sup>55</sup>Sarah Deutsch, “‘Learning to Talk More Like a Man’: Boston Women’s Class-Bridging Organizations, 1870-1940,” *American Historical Review* 97, no. 2 (1992): 379-404. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2165724>

<sup>56</sup>Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>57</sup>Deutsch, *Women and the City*, 56-57, 126.

<sup>58</sup>Nicholas J. P. Williams, “Becoming What You Eat: The New England Kitchen and the Body as a Site of Social Reform,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 18, no. 4 (2019): 441-460. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781419000288>

ment at the expense of the rest or that of a global vision. My curiosity was piqued by these variegated and sometimes contradictory depictions of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union. Faye Dudden, a specialist of household service, chose to highlight the work of the Protective Committee (1878), whose task was to investigate complaints about "the injustice done to working women in withholding their hardly [sic] earned wages"<sup>59</sup> and provide them with legal aid at a reduced cost. Like Sarah Deutsch, Lara Vapnek focused on the Domestic Reform League (DRL), a committee launched in the 1890s by a group of WEIU women to address the shortage of domestic servants in Boston's middle-class homes. She highlighted the tensions that existed between reformers' commitment to improving the work environment of saleswomen and factory workers, while at the same time refusing to fully address the exploitative labor conditions that servants faced.<sup>60</sup> The WEIU is an elusive presence in other works, like Lorine Swainston Goodwin's portrait of the "pure food, drink, and drug crusaders" of the turn of the century, in which the association is depicted as a "vigorous advocate of pure food, drink, and drugs."<sup>61</sup>

Maureen Flanagan's textbook account of the period offers perhaps one of the plainest but also most accurate takes on the WEIU. "Women's Educational and Industrial Unions appeared in other cities, such as in Boston (1877) and Los Angeles (1888), to connect middle-class and working-class women in efforts to better the conditions of the latter," she writes.<sup>62</sup> Like Flanagan, Nancy Dye Schrom, in her story of the Women's Trade Union League—itsself the brainchild of several WEIU organizers—, stresses the "cross-class" character of the organization and its focus on women's working conditions.<sup>63</sup> Gayle Gullett explored this aspect of the San Francisco WEIU in more depth in her study of the California women's movement, writing that "WEIU organizers wanted to develop a cross-class women's organization in which they could support each other's advancement in public life."<sup>64</sup> She depicts an organization with "links to other components of organized womanhood,"<sup>65</sup> neither a club, a labor group, nor a suffrage organization, but a composite

<sup>59</sup>Faye Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 91-92. The quote appears in Dudden's account.

<sup>60</sup>Vapnek, *Breadwinners*, 101-128.

<sup>61</sup>Lorine Swainston Goodwin, *The Pure Food, Drink, and Drug Crusaders, 1879-1914* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1999), 150.

<sup>62</sup>Maureen A. Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s-1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 43.

<sup>63</sup>Nancy Schrom Dye, *As Equals and As Sisters: Feminism, the Labor Movement, and the Women's Trade Union League of New York* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980), 15.

<sup>64</sup>Gayle Gullett, *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women's Movement, 1880-1911* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 49. See 47-51 for her account of the San Francisco organization.

<sup>65</sup>Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 47.

institution with strong ideological and personal ties to all three kinds of organization. Delving into the specifics of the San Francisco Union's attitude towards laboring women, she notes that they did not join forces with the Ladies' Assembly of the Knights of Labor, formed shortly after the WEIU. Unlike the Knights of Labor, the WEIU sought to improve women's position within an existing, albeit unfair, system of wage labor, not to radically overturn or transform it.<sup>66</sup> The fact that the existing literature provides us with such a kaleidoscopic view of the Educational and Industrial Union owes much to the variety of programs it experimented with; the large degree of autonomy that committees enjoyed, and a very open, adaptable first constitution.

Devoting a monograph to the organization can help us understand the nature of its ideas and the reason for their enduring popularity, thereby giving us an insight into those of the women's rights movement as a whole. The workings of women's associations may more easily be laid bare in a case study such as this—how a new organization emerged in a given environment; how it spawned branches or sister organizations in other cities; how its directors harnessed the press and personal connections for publicity and funding purposes; how they cooperated with the local government and with prominent businessmen in the pursuit of their agenda. The ideas championed by the WEIU may or may not have been widely shared at the outset—what does the existence of multiple WEIUs across the country tell us about that?—but they eventually won out, not in their more radical iterations, but in the eventually mainstream acceptance of white women's pursuit of higher education and participation in the job market. Crucially, the highly “efficient” or “businesslike” form that the organization adopted in the late 1890s and 1900s is worth studying for what it tells us about the workings of women's participation in local politics through the medium of the non-profit organization.

The Union aimed at being a bit of something for everyone. Of course, its founders and subsequent leaders operated within much of the mental parameters of their day, and by “everyone” they unconsciously or not meant white, native or at least English-speaking women. Despite these reservations, we should note that they strove for class-bridging at a time when few women's organizations sought to bring together, on an equal footing, working-class girls and women of larger means. If sisterhood, or “the common ground of womanhood,”<sup>67</sup> was the original rationale, it gradually gave way to the understanding that women, just like men,

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<sup>66</sup>Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 48.

<sup>67</sup>Priscilla Murolo, *The Common Ground of Womanhood: Class, Gender, and Working Girls' Clubs, 1884-1928* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

should enjoy equality of (economic) opportunity, that cardinal American value. WEIU women considered that women's economic participation in the life of the city was an intrinsic part of their membership in the social body.

The Annual Report for 1905 includes a handy sketch of the Union's activities by its own leadership. It illustrates both the potential and the difficulties inherent in a study of the organization. In a nutshell, the Report tells us, the Union was "a non-resident settlement, a woman's exchange and a woman's club all embodied in one organism; all vitalized by the spirit of social service."<sup>68</sup> To what extent was this a true reflection of the organization's exceptional character? Boston was saturated with philanthropic and reform organizations, and WEIU leaders may have been trying to advertise themselves as a unique, and uniquely important, source of contributions to the community; we need to remain attuned to the necessary distance which exists between an organization's rhetoric—as respects its identity, successes, and failures—and its actual work.

## Economic Citizenship: A Useful Analytical Concept

Historian Lori Ginzberg defines citizenship as "encompass[ing] various rights and obligations determined by legal forms," and shows that white nineteenth-century women "did not experience it the same way as their male kin."<sup>69</sup> Over the course of the 1820s and 1830s, as property qualifications were scrapped from most state constitutions and more propertyless white men were able to enjoy the right to vote, attempts to further expand access to electoral politics were met with a staunch opposition at state constitutional conventions.<sup>70</sup> In Ginzberg's analysis, citizenship is not a purely abstract legal status, but a sense of belonging to the nation which may be influenced by factors such as gender, race, religion, and marital status:<sup>71</sup> to that list, we should add economic status.

Alice Kessler-Harris defines economic citizenship as "another, more hidden

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<sup>68</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *A Report of Progress Made in the Year 1905, Being the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston: Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1905), 7, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239272>.

<sup>69</sup>Lori D. Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins: A Story of Woman's Rights in Antebellum New York* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 29.

<sup>70</sup>Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 77-80.

<sup>71</sup>Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins*, 29.

form of citizenship” and uses it “to suggest the achievement of an independent and relatively autonomous status that marks self-respect and provides access to the full play of power and influence that defines participation in a democratic society.”<sup>72</sup> Early twentieth-century American women, although they could not legally vote in a majority of states<sup>73</sup>, also suffered from discrimination in regards to access to vocational and higher education, unequal wages for equal work, and extreme hostility from the mainstream of trade unionism. Scholars like Ruth Milkman and Alice Kessler-Harris have studied the parameters which guided the processes of job segregation and wage definition and showed that the rules of the market economy had surprisingly little to do with both.<sup>74</sup> Rather, beliefs about women’s biology and social roles created an economic environment that was downright hostile to self-supporting women.

Economic citizenship is a conceptual tool used by historians, sociologists, and anthropologists to study the relationship of the individual to the social body from the perspective of the rights conferred to citizens. Ever since sociologist T. H. Marshall’s 1950 landmark work, a widespread scholarly definition of citizenship has comprised civic as well as political and social components. Marshall used the framing of “social citizenship” to describe how, with the advent of the welfare state in several western European countries in the twentieth century, social rights were conferred to the citizen, joining older civic and political rights. His own definition of citizenship is that of “a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community”; he adds that “[a]ll who possess the status are equal with respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed.”<sup>75</sup> At the time Marshall was

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<sup>72</sup>Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest of Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.

<sup>73</sup>The language of New Jersey’s 1776 constitution briefly allowed property-owning women to vote, before a 1807 law defined voters as adult white male citizens. It was not until 1869, when Wyoming Territory adopted woman suffrage, that American women were able to vote in state elections. When Wyoming was admitted to statehood in 1890, it was the first and only state that granted women the ballot in state elections. Prior to those two dates, however, women in some eastern states were granted school and municipal suffrage. In 1879, for instance, the women of Massachusetts were enfranchised in school board elections. Judith Apter Klinghoffer and Lois Elkis, “The Petticoat Electors’: Women’s Suffrage in New Jersey, 1776-1807,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 12, no 2 (1992): 159-193; T. A. Larson, “Petticoats at the Polls: Woman Suffrage in Territorial Wyoming,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (April 1953): 74-79; Kathryn A. Nicholas, “Reexamining Women’s Nineteenth Century Political Agency: School Suffrage and Office-Holding,” *Journal of Policy History* 30, no. 3 (2018): 452-489, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0898030618000179>.

<sup>74</sup>Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 5-8; Alice Kessler-Harris, *A Woman’s Wage: Historical Meanings and Social Consequences* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1990), 117-122.

<sup>75</sup>T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Cambridge

writing, he observed that the status granted the citizen access to certain resources, chief among them welfare payments, state pensions, and unemployment benefits. Later scholars like Kessler-Harris made the case for “economic” citizenship being a distinct subcategory under the social citizenship umbrella, because of its salience in different locales. She has argued that “[u]nlike many other industrialized countries, America chose to distribute [...] the rights of ‘social citizenship’ on the basis of work rather than as a function of residence or citizenship.”<sup>76</sup> As Meg Jacobs has shown, by the early twentieth century, it was not only as producers that Americans could earn social credit: economic independence became politically significant not only in light of what made it possible, but in terms of what it enabled—what it could buy. Being a citizen no longer entailed simply casting a literal ballot, but also voting with one’s wallet, and consumers could start counting on the government to safeguard their interests; the New Deal programs of 1930s, through price control and the representation of consumers on tripartite bodies, brought legitimacy to the demands of the new citizen-consumers as civic entitlements.<sup>77</sup>

As this last example suggests, relying on an economic citizenship framework means interrogating—in any historically-defined context—how central equal access to the job market, wage equality, and spending power may be to the definition of individuals as citizens and their ability to cast a ballot, whether being identified or perceived as producing economic value will lead to more positive civic outcomes, and how workers make use of their productivity to demand new rights.

## Sources: Organizational Archives, Personal Papers, and Digital Databases

This dissertation is primarily and essentially based on the records of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, which are held at Harvard University’s Schlesinger Library, in Cambridge. The first collection was donated in 1955 and bears traces of careful cataloging by the WEIU’s own officers and historians, people like Cornelia James Cannon (1876-1969) and S. Agnes Donham (1871-1959).<sup>78</sup> They, or

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University Press, 1950), 28-29.

<sup>76</sup>Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*, 4.

<sup>77</sup>Meg Jacobs, *Pocketbook Politics: Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 2-6, 97-98, 104.

<sup>78</sup>Additional WEIU records, Cornelia James Cannon, *The History of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union: A Civic Laboratory* (Boston: 264 Boylston Street, 1927). 81-M237. Carton 1; Additional WEIU records, S. Agnes Donham, *History of the Women’s Educational and In-*

other WEIU members, collected samples of the files that were used routinely by the organization's staff in between 1905 and 1915, the various leaflets and pamphlets sent to prospective members as part of outreach efforts, as well as minutiae that bear witness to the daily life of the WEIU's employees—poems that they wrote each other, drawings and collages that they made on special occasions. Scrapbooks of the kind that I found whole (in the WEIU's additional records) or spliced by later archivists (as in the main WEIU collection) were commonplace enough in the lives of turn-of-the-century women. In clubs and women's societies, they constituted important records of organizations' institutional history and achievements.<sup>79</sup> The WEIU women who compiled these tomes carefully inscribed the name of the printing shop to which they sent the documents and the number of copies that they ordered, perhaps an indication that some of the scrapbooks were initially meaningful as printing samples. What these documents first suggested to me as I handled them, was the surprising complexity and professionalism of the internal machinery of the early twentieth century Women's Union. Blank bills of lading, empty forms for the purchase of supplies, samples of stock letters to customers—all of these were more reminiscent of a corporate concern than what I had expected to find. The archives also contained the many studies authored by the WEIU's research fellows, often in collaboration with the State Bureau of Labor Statistics and various local civic organizations.

While these documents helped me carefully trace the content of the WEIU's programs over time, as well as the rationales that supported the allocation of resources for said programs, most of them do not date back to the organization's very early years—the late 1870s and 1880s. For these decades, I mostly relied on the organization's annual reports, composed of the reports of the various committees as they were read to the assembled membership at the annual meeting, itself a record of the year's progress. I also mined the minutes of the Board of Government, joined, after 1904-1905, by those of the newly-formed Business then Executive Committee, in order to track the changes internal to the structure of the association itself.<sup>80</sup>

To these resources, I added the personal papers and documents of some of the people that were connected to the WEIU in one way or another, like educator

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*dustrial Union*, 1955. 81-M237. Carton 1. For biographical information, see "Cannon," Deaths, *Boston Herald*, December 10, 1969; "Donham," Death Notices, *Boston Traveler*, May 25, 1959.

<sup>79</sup>Ellen Gruber Garvey, *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 200-201.

<sup>80</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, May 17, 1904, 103; *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 9, October 3, 1905, 1. 81-M237. Carton 2.

Mary Coes (1861-1913),<sup>81</sup> research fellow Louise Marion Bosworth (1881-1982),<sup>82</sup> librarian Ethel McLean Johnson (1882-undetermined),<sup>83</sup> or collaborator in reform Elizabeth Putnam Lowell (1862-1935).<sup>84</sup> As is shown in chapters 5 and 7, in the late 1890s the Union ramped up its collaboration with other women's societies and the Boston City Council. When possible, I also made use of these institutional collections, as was the case for the Women's Rest Tour Association, a mutual aid group for female travelers who found headquarters and organizational support at the WEIU's 264 Boylston Street building. Because of the WEIU's ties to the city's municipal government and to the State Bureau of Labor Statistics, it made sense to consult legislative records at the State Massachusetts Library, as well as the digitized copies of bulletins and reports published by state government bodies over the course of the period.

Online databases of digitized archival materials proved central to this study. Thanks to digitized census and local newspaper records, I was sometimes able to reconstruct the lives of women whose families never donated any personal documents to archive centers like the Schlesinger Library. Digital libraries like HathiTrust contain a still wider range of documents, from US Congress reports to city directories and New England versions of the *Who's Who*. In addition, their powerful search engines made it possible for me to use them in a secondary stage of research, once I had first identified people or events that warranted further investigation. I credit the level of contextual detail I was able to achieve to these databases.

Finally, as I was keen on studying the ideas of the women who ran, staffed, and contributed to the WEIU in various ways, I tried to get a better sense of their intellectual horizons by turning to the magazines and books that I know that they read, or at least expressed an interest in, because they were added to the WEIU's own library. In magazines as diverse as the *Woman's Journal*, *Lend a Hand* or *Good Housekeeping*, I found pieces that were sometimes referenced directly by WEIU officers or employees, others that they wrote, as well as many more features that, while I have no proof they read, contributed to fashioning the

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<sup>81</sup>Mary Coes Papers, 1880-1958. SC 22. Radcliffe College Archives, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>82</sup>Louise Marion Bosworth Papers, 1890-1946. 85-M71. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>83</sup>Ethel McLean Johnson Papers, 1918-1945 (inclusive), 1919-1932 (bulk). A-27. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.; Ethel McLean Johnson Additional papers, 1840-1978 (inclusive), 1920-1960 (bulk). 79-M209. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>84</sup>Papers of Mrs. William Lowell Putnam, 1887-1935, MC 360. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.



cultural environment of many other women like them.

In many ways, the scope of this study was limited by the absence of data that might have led to a quantitative analysis of the WEIU's membership. The association's membership rolls are not part of the Schlesinger Library's collection; it is likely that they were not preserved at all. There is an exhaustive list of all the women who served on the committees, and a partial record of the WEIU's employees over the period, but they do not tell us anything about the ordinary members—those who paid the lowest tier in membership dues—nor about those, men and women, who availed themselves of some of the association's services, without being members themselves. I have found no records of the female producers who consigned goods to the WEIU's shops. Historian Sarah Deutsch, in her study of turn-of-the-century Boston, has noted that many of the leading women of the Union were white Protestants from the city's elite.<sup>85</sup> Owing to the gaps in the records and their fragmentary nature, I have not computed an exhaustive social composition of the other categories of people connected with the WEIU—indeed, those who made it what it was—dealing instead in qualitative data as I worked out indirect ways of getting at the life stories of the people whose ideas are the focus of this dissertation.

## The History of the Ideas of a Women's Reform Association

Tracking down the way that the leaders of the WEIU took up and discarded designs for social programs for women can give us a notion of their changing ideas, and of the similarly changing collective imagination of gendered roles in which they played out. As such, this work is perhaps more intellectual history than it is social history, which explains why I do not draw on the conceptual and analytical toolbox of social movement theory, which has been developed by sociologists to analyze and predict the forms and processes of activist groups.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>85</sup>Deutsch, "Learning to Talk More Like a Man," 379-404.

<sup>86</sup>Social movement theory refers to a host of competing approaches like resource mobilization theory, political process theory, or identity-oriented theory. Borrowing concepts and tools from political science, sociology, and social psychology, social movement theorists try to explain the emergence of social movements, describe the stages of organizations' lifecycles, and create predictive models and analytical frameworks for generalization. Alberto Melucci classically defined social movements as "action systems" whose "structures are built by aims, beliefs, decisions, and exchanges operating in a systemic field." Alberto Melucci, "The Symbolic Challenge of Contemporary Movements," *Social Research* 52, no. 4 (1985): 793. In an appendix to his comparative

Historians of women and gender, without necessarily claiming the mantle of intellectual history, have naturally been drawn to the field and made a persuasive case for the impact of ideas on political systems and people's daily lives. Because of its theoretical underpinnings, feminist scholarship is especially compatible with the methods of intellectual history.<sup>87</sup> Historian Alice Kessler-Harris writes that “[f]eminist scholarship operates from the assumption that the traditional belief systems out of which knowledge is constructed place constraints on thought that have real consequences for the behavior of individuals who live within them.”<sup>88</sup> In her first foray into the meaning of the “woman’s wage,” she set out to show wage differentials could be related to functional differences in men’s and women’s wages. In Alice Kessler-Harris’s interpretation, the wage exists simultaneously as a reflection and a justification of a world order, dialectics which she determined have far-reaching legislative consequences.<sup>89</sup> The basic premise on which most if not all intellectual historians would agree is that ideas, as the primary medium through which we make sense of the world, have power; they are social forces. Accordingly, the intellectual historian seeks to “restore a lost world, to recover perspectives and ideas from the ruins, to pull back the veil”<sup>90</sup> on ways of thinking that once convinced or shocked, shaped what was understood as natural, and helped determine the way that people would associate.

This theoretical approach also works well at the individual level. Other scholars, by focusing on radical, forward-thinking individuals, have illuminated what

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study of contemporary gay and lesbian movements in the United States and the United Kingdom, Stephen M. Engel has furnished a useful survey and discussion of the different schools that comprise the field of social movement theory. See Stephen M. Engel, *The Unfinished Revolution: Social Movement Theory and the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 167-186. For other useful references, see *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory*, edited by Aldon Morris and Carol McClurg Mueller (New Haven: Yale University, 1992), and *Social Movements and Culture*, edited by Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

<sup>87</sup>In her overview of the emergence of women’s history as a subject, Linda Kerber writes that early women’s historians were by necessity intellectual historians, as their research required them to relentlessly interrogate the meaning of terms and categories. She argues that “feminist scholars cannot ignore theorists of language or historians of ideas.” Linda K. Kerber, *Toward an Intellectual History of Women: Essays* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 14.

<sup>88</sup>Kessler-Harris, *A Woman’s Wage*, 1.

<sup>89</sup>Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity*.

<sup>90</sup>Richard Whatmore, *What Is Intellectual History?* (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 5-6. While the influence of the Cambridge School is still widely felt, resulting in strong associations between the field and modern European political theory, as Whatmore notes, intellectual historians today contend deal in a great diversity of objects. (*What Is Intellectual History?* p. 14). For key theoretical works outlining the fundamental premises of intellectual history, see R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) [first edition 1946], and Quentin Skinner, *Visions of Politics* v. 1, *Regarding Method* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

it could mean to “fly in the face of a popular set of ideas about the proper roles for men and women,”<sup>91</sup> whether in the business world or in the political arena. Lori Ginzberg authored a study in microhistory which centered on a handful of individuals, a group of six women from Jefferson county, New York. Writing of an early, maybe the first, petition for women’s suffrage (1846), Ginzberg spoke of her desire to reestablish the parameters of her subjects’ intellectual framework, in the process “underscor[ing] the histories of ideas as they emerge from the experiences (personal, local, and national) of actual people,” and “show[ing] how those ideas enter wide conversations—all of which contribute to the complex story of people’s political identities and of political and intellectual change.”<sup>92</sup>

This dissertation is chiefly concerned with ideas and their manifestations over time—the interplay between thought and action<sup>93</sup>—and foregrounds both the women’s nonprofit association as a site of intellectual production and the mutual help scheme as its output. Approaching a “big idea” specifically though its particulars may help us steer clear of losing sight of them, a criticism that contextualist historians often direct at proponents of textualism.<sup>94</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I treated the WEIU’s programs as texts in which ideas about and rationales for gender-based activism might be embedded. In Derrick Spires’s words, I used the social program as “a substrate—a widely circulated articulation of a common understanding” of a concept.<sup>95</sup> Even the most pragmatic self-help schemes may be driven by underlying principles and ideas about a desired social organization. The WEIU, like other women’s associations of its time, was explicit in calling for changes to the social order, demands that I tried to characterize and analyze over time.

In that endeavor I was also inspired by historian Leila Rupp’s interpretation and mediation of the sociological concept of “prefigurative politics,” first fashioned by new social movement theorist Wini Breines for her study of the American “New Left.”<sup>96</sup> Rupp writes that when activists engage in prefigurative politics, they “[act]

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<sup>91</sup>Edith Sparks, *Boss Lady: How Three Women Entrepreneurs Built Successful Big Businesses in the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 2.

<sup>92</sup>Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins*, 5.

<sup>93</sup>Felix Gilbert, “Intellectual History: Its Aims and Methods,” *Daedalus* 100, no. 1 (Winter 1971): 81-82.

<sup>94</sup>Martin Jay, *Genesis and Validity: The Theory and Practice of Intellectual History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 94-96.

<sup>95</sup>Derrick Spires, *The Practice of Citizenship: Black Politics and Print Culture in the Early United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 36.

<sup>96</sup>See Wini Breines, *Community and Organization in the New Left, 1962-1968* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 6. In Breines’s words, “[t]he crux of prefigurative politics [in the New Left movement] imposed substantial tasks, the central one being to create and sustain within the live

out the conviction that, through putting into practice desirable ways of living, a group can, in fact, help transform the old order.” While prefigurative politics as a concept was initially applied to the student-led protests of the 1960s, Rupp used it to characterize early-twentieth-century international women’s peace organizations and show that their members saw in them potential “model[s] of what society might be.”<sup>97</sup> In late-nineteenth-century Boston and in other towns and cities across the northeast, women founded “Educational and Industrial Unions” in order to make the urban environment more hospitable to self-supporting women, in the process deliberately challenging a social system grounded in the idea of a male family wage.<sup>98</sup> In a leaflet likely destined to prospective donors and members, the directors of the Union’s “Handwork Shop” described their chief purpose as “help[ing] women to do their chosen work in the best possible manner; to assist them to acquire business habits; to convince them that there is always a demand for skilled labor; and to prove that efficient wage-earners command respect in every community.”<sup>99</sup> In the early 1900s, when that document was drafted, this way of thinking about women, their labor, and the money that they received for it was more than unusual. The Handwork Shop’s managers, by asserting that male as well as female workers should earn an income that was a function of their efficiency, thus directly contradicted basic conceptions of women’s earnings as ancillary to a male breadwinner’s wages—<sup>100</sup>without addressing the fact not all women could comfortably do so on an equal basis.

## Membership, Race, and the Bounds of Womanhood

The Union aimed at being a bit of something for (almost) everyone. From the beginning, the WEIU’s motto was “the union of all for the good of all.” The founders wanted, or so they claimed, “all” women to be included in its activities and provided for through its services. In spite of these inclusive intentions, in practice this was a mostly white group. The Sunday afternoon religious talks, which purported

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practice of the movement, relationships and political forms that ‘prefigures’ and embodied the desired society.”

<sup>97</sup>Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women’s Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 226.

<sup>98</sup>Kessler-Harris, *A Woman’s Wage*, 19.

<sup>99</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Handwork Department” (leaflet), undated, c1900-1905, scrapbook. 81-M237. Carton 8.

<sup>100</sup>Kessler-Harris, *A Woman’s Wage*, 6-23.

to cultivate a nonsectarian atmosphere, only came to feature Catholic and Jewish speakers more than ten years after their inception. Given the contemporaneous overlap of class and religious identities, this would suggest that working-class Irish Bostonians did not constitute a significant part of the membership. Black women were not formally excluded from membership, and Josephine Saint-Pierre Ruffin (1842-1924), a prominent Black socialite, journalist, and activist, joined one of its committees in the early 1900s, but I have found little evidence that the WEIU was anything but a white women's association, which existed separately from the local Black community.

Individuals may have associated with the Union, but no outreach efforts were ever undertaken. Although the occasional Black Bostonian took classes at the WEIU or benefited from the work of its Befriending Committee, there was no deliberate attempt on the part of the WEIU to reach out across the racial divide. A French journalist visiting Boston in the early 1900s, describing the Union, made the matter of fact observation that in this “school where women of all ages [were] taught how to earn a living,” he variously saw (white) forty-year-old women learning how to make hats, a Black woman copying embroidery pattern, and a (white) fourteen-year-old practicing watercolor painting.<sup>101</sup> In 1907, the Union helped a “Miss Alice J. M. Miller (col)” find a convalescent home. She was a 38-year-old music teacher, who had injured her shoulder and arm and needed treatment.<sup>102</sup> In the 1910 census, both Alice and her widowed mother Mary, the head of their household, a dressmaker, were listed as “mulattoes”; both were explicitly stated to be working “on their own account,” from their shared home.<sup>103</sup>

Alice and Mary Miller were likely light-skinned Black women. As a teacher and a proprietor respectively, they would have firmly belonged to Black Boston's middle class. The Millers' education and income levels separated them from the bulk of Boston's Black population and thus informed their relationship to a primarily white institution like the WEIU. By the turn of the century, Boston had developed a Black middle-class of clergymen, artists, and a handful of mechanics, who lived on the periphery of an “amorphous Black bourgeoisie”<sup>104</sup>. This a group of a dozen families whom historian Adelaide Cromwell called Boston's

<sup>101</sup>Jules Huret, “En Amérique,” *Figaro*, March 17, 1903, 1-2, Gallica, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k2861793>.

<sup>102</sup>Additional WEIU records, Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Befriending Record Book, November 1906-1910*, 15. 81-M237. Carton 7.

<sup>103</sup>United States Census, 1910, FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M2K1-D17>), Entry for Mary Miller and Alice Miller, 1910.

<sup>104</sup>George A. Levesque, *Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America* (New York: Garland, 1994), 120.

“other Brahmins.”<sup>105</sup> In the postwar decades, these Black merchants and professionals “set the stage for an exclusive society to which one definitely did or did not belong,” who emulated the lifestyle of the white upper-classes, socialized with their white neighbors, and claimed the leadership of the Black community while distancing themselves from its separate institutions.<sup>106</sup> Black Bostonian women who were not part of the tiny minority represented by lawyer Robert Morris and dentist John W. Rock would have not been reluctant to associate with other Blacks. They had their own self-help and charity organizations, separate from those of white women, and there does not seem to have been many points of contact between them and the Union.<sup>107</sup> The Black population represented about 1.5% to 2% of Boston’s inhabitants; it was a self-contained and tight-knit community, though not without its conflicts or divisions, whether ideological or class-based.<sup>108</sup>

The complexity of the relations that the different components of Boston’s Black community entertained with their white neighbors may have explained the silence surrounding potential Black WEIU members. The association was founded in 1877, a period which was marked by a loosening of the bonds that the abolitionist tradition had woven between the Black leadership and Boston’s white antislavery activists in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s.<sup>109</sup> In the wake of William Lloyd Garrison’s 1865 discontinuing of the abolitionist *Liberator*, which had received the ideological and economic support of Boston’s Black community, formerly cordial—sometimes even intimate—relations slowly eroded, giving way to indifference.<sup>110</sup> Without a common cause, and with the mistaken belief that Boston’s

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<sup>105</sup>Adelaide Cromwell, *The Other Brahmins: Boston’s Black Upper Class, 1750-1950* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994).

<sup>106</sup>Cromwell, *The Other Brahmins*, 55-59. See p. 55 for the quotation. Cromwell notes that, for all the “Brahmin” descriptor implied, Boston’s Black upper stratum, like those in other northern cities, possessed little to no generational wealth and no political power. Its members were thus highly vulnerable to downward mobility. For a contemporary description of Black Boston’s “class division,” see John Daniels, *In Freedom’s Birthplace: A Study of the Boston Negroes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1914).

<sup>107</sup>Black Boston’s mutual aid associations were built on a dual model which emphasized both economic assistance and intellectual self-improvement. While the first one, the male African Society, was founded as early as 1796, it was in the 1830s and 1840s that George Levesque identified a “flowering of self-help groups” and located the first female benevolent bodies: the Afric-American Female Intelligence Society (1832), the Daughters of Zion (1845), and the Female Benevolent Firm (1850). See Levesque, *Black Boston*, 316-327.

<sup>108</sup>In 1875, census returns showed that there were 4,969 Blacks and “mulattoes” (separate categories) out of 341,919 Bostonians, 1.5% of the total population. In 1905, those numbers had risen to 11,932 and 2% respectively. Carroll D. Wright, ed., *The Census of Massachusetts: 1875* v. 1 (Boston: Albert J. Wright, 1876), 53, State Library of Massachusetts, <http://hdl.handle.net/2452/122032>; *Census of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1905*, v. 1, 367, State Library of Massachusetts, <http://hdl.handle.net/2452/122035>.

<sup>109</sup>Levesque, *Black Boston*, 63-64.

<sup>110</sup>Donald M. Jacobs, “William Lloyd Garrison’s *Liberator* and Boston’s Blacks, 1830-1865,”

Black population did not need any more support, the abolitionist set distanced themselves from the Black leadership. While Massachusetts' reputation as a safe haven for Blacks received much publicity—racial intermarriages were legalized in the 1840s, desegregation in common carriers and schools achieved in the 1850s, and discrimination in theaters and inns banned by a 1865 law—the postwar period was characterized by what George Levesque has termed a “judicial-legislative antithesis with regard to Black rights”<sup>[11]</sup>; antidiscrimination laws were passed, but not enforced. The color line was part of the experience of Boston's African American population and discriminatory attitudes and customs remained a significant fact of life, one which I found hard to assess finely, insofar as the WEIU was concerned.

Much like suffragists, the women of the WEIU posited a shared humanity or sisterhood that was predicated on the experiences of a very specific subset of women, and disregarded those who did not share characteristics implicitly established by the association's founders as universal. The WEIU, for all of its focus on women's earning power and ability to lead self-sufficient lives, did not consider the specificity of the Black female experience. The association did not conceptualize the pervasive economic disabilities from which Boston's African American population suffered, conditions worsened by the rising competition with Irish immigrants.<sup>[12]</sup> For Nancy Cott, these tendencies to race blindness can be explained by the fact that “[t]he woman's rights tradition was historically initiated by, and remains prejudiced toward, those who perceive themselves first and foremost as ‘woman,’ who can gloss over their class, racial and other status identifications because those are culturally dominant and therefore relatively invisible.”<sup>[13]</sup>

Despite these significant reservations, we should note that the WEIU strove for class-bridging at a time when few women's organizations sought to bring together, on an equal footing, working-class girls and women of larger means. If sisterhood, or “the common ground of womanhood,”<sup>[14]</sup> was the original rationale, it gradually gave way to the understanding that women, just like men, should enjoy equality of (economic) opportunity, that cardinal American value. WEIU women considered that women's economic participation in the life of the city was an intrinsic part of their membership in the social body. Accordingly, this dissertation investigates

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*New England Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (June 1971): 259-277, <https://doi.org/10.2307/364529>. Garrison ceased publication of his newspaper in December 1865, acting on the belief that since the days of the antislavery crusade were over, so were his weekly's.

<sup>111</sup>Levesque, *Black Boston*, 136.

<sup>112</sup>Levesque, *Black Boston*, 116-117.

<sup>113</sup>Nancy Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 9.

<sup>114</sup>Murolo, *Common Ground of Womanhood*.

the processes by which these beliefs came to be, and how they were deployed, even insofar as they were myopic or exclusionary.

## Chapter Outline

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters, each contending with one type of program or aspect of the running of the WEIU. The topical format entails the risk of repetition, and so they have been arranged in very rough chronological order. This allows for a global apprehension of the organization's ideas and how they unfolded in different directions, over the course of time; of the multifaceted identities that WEIU women took on and discarded, and of what made them successful in their quest to redefine middle-class women's relation to paid work.

Chapter 1 starts with the core of the Union's programs: the classes and lectures that its founders devised to teach skills for self-support, the employment bureau that offered to match employers with female employees, and the "Exchange"—a marketplace for the sale of goods made by those women who, for health, family, or respectability reasons, would not find work outside their homes. The "Woman's Exchange," an institution pioneered in Philadelphia in the 1830s and widely copied in the 1870s, was initially designed as a scheme for impoverished patricians to eke out an income. The WEIU redesigned it to be a springboard for businesswomen. Their first mission was to improve educated and skilled women's access to education and employment. Its founders believed in creating opportunities for women both in the established professions and in new fields of activities like secretarial work. They were convinced that "New Women" needed institutions like the WEIU to open up new paths and further acceptance of women's wage-earning beyond housework, industrial work, and teaching. They believed in the necessity and dignity of remunerated work for women and implemented several programs to reach these goals.

Building on the story of the "Woman's Exchange" and the support it provided to home bakers and craftswomen, chapter 2 offers insights into the lives and careers of four businesswomen with WEIU connections, commercial dairy farmer Charlotte Barrell Ware, tea room owners Louise and Helen Greene, and restaurateur Bertha Stevenson, all of whom were embedded in a "female economy" of reform. In addition to their Union volunteering, they ran successful businesses. Their portraits show how, starting in the late 1890s, college women relied on philanthropic and associational networks to launch their careers, in return furthering such networks.



The admittedly small numbers of college alumnae who followed the path charted for them by the WEIU and discarded teaching for proprietorships tended to share a similar profile. Relying on female-coded activities to carve out commercial niches, they lived out their personal convictions related to social concerns and championed the cause of clean milk, pure food, and better labor standards from their position as business managers. They also shared an interest in education, including that of the “public,” and a strong belief in their social responsibility. Infant mortality, inadequate working-class diets, and workplace injuries were social ills they attempted to remedy through the implementation of the latest business methods.

Several high-profile WEIU officers were, like Mary Morton Kehew, the wives and relatives of wealthy merchants and industrialists. Under her tutelage, from the mid-1890s to the mid-1900s, the organization gradually “adopt[ed] the industrial methods that shall best ‘help women to help themselves.’”<sup>115</sup> The particulars of money management and the latest developments in the field of accounting increasingly occupied the thoughts of the changing leadership of the Union—from volunteers, a majority of them had become, by the 1910s, salaried officers managing several hundreds of employees under contract with the WEIU. Chapter 3 looks at the managerial activities of Union women, the evolution of their fundraising and advertising techniques, and the terms according to which they embraced the Progressive ethos of “efficiency.” Whereas the founders’ generation was not always well-versed in parliamentary procedures and bookkeeping methods, by 1900-1910 the Union had developed into a behemoth of an organization with a complex, ever-changing architecture of committees and sub-committees. This chapter tracks how the Union’s leaders imported industrial and business methods into the world of female voluntary organizing, using their own experience to create templates for others to follow.

As chapter 4 attempts to clarify, the activities of the WEIU in a large part reflected the specifically middle-class views of its directors. This chapter is based on a review of the literature on the “servant problem,” the labor shortage leaving middle- and upper-class homes in disarray. Studying the economics of the “servant problem” was a powerful incentive for the WEIU’s reformers to put to use the tools of the emerging social sciences. Quantitative analysis was used to investigate working women’s wholesale rejection of domestic work, and to buttress policy proposals aiming at redistributing the “supply” of female workers across industries in a way that the WEIU’s Domestic Reform League deemed more harmonious. This chapter

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<sup>115</sup>WEIU, *1905 Report*, 23.

aims at clarifying how college-educated reformers and their wealthier collaborators apprehended domestic work and domestic workers. By the late 1890s, they were firmly convinced, as is evident in their “School of Housekeeping” experiment, that housework was or at least should be a branch of industry like any other—one that they could bring to the level of other occupations.

While many WEIU officers had servants, they also employed women as WEIU personnel. Chapter 5 picks up the thread of the “employing women” who ran the nonprofit and explores the relationships between employers, employees, and producers or “consignors” to the Union’s shops in a philanthropic setting. Greater organizational complexity and higher budgets both demanded and made a paid workforce possible. How did WEIU officers operate as employers of other women within the municipal community? Under what conditions did they try to enact a relational citizenship predicated on their ties to other commercial institutions? By the late 1900s, they had accepted and embraced the fact that they were no ladies bountiful, but savvy purveyors of paying services. A look at their writings about the link between their employer status and their commitment to enhancing women’s economic citizenship shows the powerful contradictions which ran deep in the meetings of the Board of Government. The reformers struggled to throw off criticism that they were replicating exploitative relations in their treatment of consignors, who led a “strike” in 1907-1908; they were torn when their own employees asked them for their stance on the labor movement and faced political retribution when they tried to reform the city’s regulations on employment bureaus as operators of one such institution. On the whole, these educated, comfortably middle-class women understood their social commitment to public health and well-being to be on a par with that of the benevolent businessmen with whom they collaborated. Claiming the mantle of the Progressive employer, a new generation of officers embraced the status to push for legislation.

All the chapters in this dissertation highlight the way that the WEIU constructed solidarity between women and rejected top-down, hierarchical notions of benevolence by championing, instead, what they called “cooperation”—reciprocal, mutually beneficial relations between equals. Chapter 6, however, delves deeper into the Union’s function as a meeting place and the social side of the Union’s activities. The early Union was meant as a providential third place for women set “adrift” by the forces of urbanization and industrialization. Its founders attempted to create a counterpart to the Young Men’s Christian Union (YMCU), a close relative of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). Projecting

an understanding of their own needs as untethered women as a universal feminine experience, the white professionals who joined physician Harriet Clisby in opening and staffing the organization's reading room purported to establish a safe meeting place for strangers to connect and support one another emotionally and psychologically. The WEIU set out to institutionalize what used to fall under the umbrella of personal relationships, contributing to the expansion and formalization of older female social networks. At their rooms, through word-of-mouth carefully recorded in ledgers, it was possible to secure the names and addresses of people who would hire "handicapped women," find safe, respectable lodging houses, or obtain information about educational institutions in the city. Through their organization, the WEIU's founders extended standards of safety and reliability to other women with whom they constructed kinship. It would prove harder to fully realize the dream of a class-blind solidarity. The 1890s signaled simultaneously an enlarged membership—which reached the thousands—and difficulties nurturing a social program based on lectures and musical entertainments. Slowly, the locus of the WEIU's sociabilities shifted from the membership to its personnel. This chapter looks at the social life of Union employees and the occupational culture that they developed, uncovering their perspectives through a study of the internal paper that they wrote and circulated. By the late 1910s, the WEIU resembled the modern professional network of the Business and Professional Women's Clubs rather than the fantasized colonial settlement of old. Its proximity to collegiate and alumnae networks was made most manifest by its collaboration with Simmons Female College, a Boston vocational college for women.

Acting as a coda of sorts for preceding analyses, the final chapter apprehends the WEIU as part of national, regional, and local female associational networks. Only a few years after its incorporation, the Boston Women's Educational and Industrial Union was joined by sister organizations in New England and, by the 1890s, in places as varied as Covington, Ohio, and Geneva, Switzerland. Early WEIU presidents encouraged the development of other "Educational and Industrial Unions." Second president Abby Morton Diaz in particular envisioned the Union not as an isolated club, but as a new type of urban social service institution. The fact that similar undertakings flourished in sometimes distant locales would seem to suggest the extent to which economic concerns resonated with white, native-born women otherwise active in other organized movements. Closest to home, the chapter deals with the working-women's clubs hosted and nurtured by the WEIU at its 264 Boylston Street headquarters. It is through its individual

and organizational connections to the suffrage movement, the club movement, as well as local projects like the Woman's Rest Tour Association (WRTA), a social club for solo female travelers, that it is possible to define what the WEIU stood for. In the words of one scholar, the WRTA was a progressive institution with a "socially conservative side,"<sup>116</sup> a description which, in the final analysis, may aptly be applied to the WEIU.

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<sup>116</sup>Julia Carlson, "Reading the Bibliographies of the Women's Rest Tour Association: Cultural Travel in the Long Nineteenth Century," *Transatlantica* 1 (2019), paragraph 22, <https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.12672>.



# Chapter 1

## The Meanings of Work: Educating, Placing, and Supporting “New Women”

### Introduction

The “Board of Directors” of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union (WEIU) held its first meeting on June 15, 1877, in rooms rented by Dr. Harriet Clisby for her personal use.<sup>1</sup> Of the five women present, Clisby was one of two physicians, women who had chosen to go off the beaten track and pursue medicine as a profession. Like a majority of the first generation of female physicians in the United States, Dr. Harriet Clisby (1830-1931) and Dr. Arvilla B. Haynes (1827-1884) were idealists and reformers. The fervor with which female physicians discharged their medical duties was often also that with which they hoped to alleviate society’s ills, tackling the “woman question” from a variety of vantage points.<sup>2</sup> Of the

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<sup>1</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, Board reports from 1877-1880*, v. 1, June 15, 1877, 1. 81-M237. Carton 1, item 14v. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. <https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/resources/5020#>

<sup>2</sup>From the 1840s to the 1860s, the few female practitioners of medicine in the United States faced considerable barriers to entry, in what historian Mary Roth Walsh has characterized as a “male backlash” grounded in a self-interested attempt at keeping control of the profession. Female medical students were educated at institutions steeped in alternative models of medicine, like homeopathy and hydropathy, which proved more welcoming. Homeopathic hospital and water cure centers were then known for being staffed and sought out by progressive physicians and patients alike. Regina Morantz-Sanchez, *Sympathy and Science: Women Physicians in American Medicine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 101-104; Mary Roth Walsh, *Doctors Wanted, No Women Need Apply: Sexual Barriers in the Medical Profession, 1835–1975* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), xii; Lynn D. Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 4.

larger circle of founding members, Haynes was part of a group of physicians that included Drs. Mary Safford Blake, Caroline E. Hastings, and Mercy B. Jackson, who already knew each other from co-authoring and publishing a treatise on dress reform in 1875.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Angeline Wetherbee, meanwhile, knew Arvilla Haynes from their joint work at the North-End Dispensary for women and children.<sup>4</sup> It was far from incidental that these female physicians' collective effort for women's emancipation played out in Boston. According to Mary Roth Walsh, who centered her study of early female physicians in that city, it "served as the stage for most of the crucial battles that have marked women's efforts to enter medicine."<sup>5</sup> Well-aware of the hardships that women could face when they tried to learn practical skills for self-support, Drs. Clisby, Wetherbee, Haynes, Blake, Hastings, and Jackson founded the WEIU as a vehicle for mutual help.<sup>6</sup> This is what the local press understood the founding principle and main object of the organization to be: in the second year of the WEIU's work, a local paper reported that "[i]ts object is to aid in various ways women who seek to earn their own livelihood."<sup>7</sup>

More than a decade later, the WEIU's Directors reminisced about the Union's founding as Dr. Clisby's "plan of starting an institution which would open up avenues of industry for women [...]."<sup>8</sup> To Clisby, "industry" would not necessarily have meant factory work, much less paid work or a career, as a later WEIU president would note.<sup>9</sup> In the 1870s, to many well-to-do New Englanders looking to support the WEIU, "industry" would have meant the wholesome and occasionally economically productive outlets that women of leisure and the wives of white farmers, well-off artisans, and clerks found for their time and energy. Yet, by the

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<sup>3</sup>"Literary Notices," *Hartford Daily Courant*, January 21, 1875, 2. Following in the widely publicized footsteps of Amelia Bloomer, who gave her name to the eponymous costume of the late 1840s and early 1850s, proponents of the short-lived "dress reform" movement defended a simplification in the norms that governed customary female attire. On grounds that women's long trains and heavy petticoats not only impeded their ability to move and work, but proved downright injurious to their health, they tried to push new designs for what they argued were more sensible garments. On the debates of the 1850s and 1860s about the relation between fashion and women's rights, and the often contradictory attitude of the first suffragists, see Margaret Mary Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 18-22. For a more detailed study of the "construction of fashionable identities" by feminists at a later period, see Einav Rabinovitch Fox, *Dressed for Freedom: The Fashionable Politics of American Feminism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021).

<sup>4</sup>"Annual Meeting," *Daily Evening Traveller*, February 10, 1873, 1.

<sup>5</sup>Walsh, *Doctors Wanted, No Women Need Apply*, xiv.

<sup>6</sup>Morantz-Sanchez, *Sympathy and Science*, 46.

<sup>7</sup>"Local Miscellany," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 14, 1878, 4.

<sup>8</sup>Additional WEIU records, *The Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., 1892-1893*, 1893, 14. 81-M237. Carton 1, item 2v.

<sup>9</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Report Made by the President to Members of The Women's Educational and Industrial Union at the Annual Meeting, January 29, 1957*, 1957. 81-M237. Carton 1.

Figure 1.1: Formal portrait of Dr. Harriet Clisby. Between 1877 and 1881.



Harvard University, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, ss\_21594570

Source: Harvard Digital Collections, [https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital\\_collections/8001528307\\_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356590](https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital_collections/8001528307_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356590).

late 1880s the meaning that Dr. Clisby's successors ascribed to such a term was becoming clearer. Just as the early views of the society's object persisted, so did its directors refine them over time. The women who ran the WEIU wanted its members to be able to earn a living, whatever the reason—which increasingly did not have to be the support of dependents, but could also include personal dignity or even enjoyment.

In her memoirs, Harriet Clisby wrote of wanting to help a variety of women, who she argued were all united not by their economic conditions but by shared feelings of loneliness, aimlessness, and uselessness, feelings about their productive value that she was interested in alleviating to the best of her ability. She described:

[u]nequipped, half-taught workers, available women, knowing well how to work, but finding no opportunities or outlet for their especial talents; silent and timid women who called in their hearts for fellowship, yet found it not. [...] [Women whose] lives held no particular aim; they ate daintily, dressed elegantly, visited their friends, received superbly in their houses, attended churches and followed all that one was called upon to follow in the great world of custom and fashion.<sup>10</sup>

Despite her own personal experiences of self-reliance as an uprooted English-

<sup>10</sup>Additional WEIU records, Extracts from Dr. Harriet Clisby's reminiscences, manuscript, undated, 108-110. 81-M237. Carton 1, item 7.



woman and a self-supporting physician, Clisby depicted the plight of struggling needlewomen and that of the idle wives of lawyers or manufacturers as comparable in their lack of fulfilling, meaningful “employment.” Her analysis of what ailed urban residents struck enough of a chord for her to rally others to her cause. A year in, by its first annual meeting, the WEIU numbered four hundred members.<sup>11</sup> Yet it was later, over the course of the 1880s, that the Union’s membership really took off, just as it settled on a definite platform of equipping women with marketable skills and finding remunerative occupations for them, in the process carefully delineating its distinctive purpose as an urban social reform institution.

I argue that studying the initial shifts in the WEIU’s founding ideals, and their coalescing into a clearly defined middle-class, suffragist ideology of women’s paid work over the 1880s helps shine a light on the evolution of ideas about white women’s labor and its uses and purposes. By looking at the evidence offered by the WEIU’s early employment programs and the changes they sustained over time, I tried to learn more about how white middle-class female reformers perceived women’s paid activities outside and inside of the home, and how they connected economic independence with other political goals and demands.

In this chapter, we will study how the rationale for the Union’s existence was established and how its support of women’s paid work took shape and was expressed in the infancy of its three earliest and, tellingly, longest-lived programs: its classes, its employment agency, and its platform for the sale of women’s home-made goods (or “Women’s Exchange”). The latter two are the programs for which the Union became best known in the twentieth century, while the early classes eventually led to grander experiments—a School of Housekeeping and a School of Salesmanship, as well as a collaboration with Boston’s Simmons College after its founding in 1903. Because the employment agency and the “Exchange” were flagship Union programs, and because they were the expression of the founders’ core ideology regarding women’s work, I will start my investigation of the association’s ideas with them.

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<sup>11</sup>“Local Miscellany,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, November 14, 1878, 4.

*Prescriptive Imperatives: Women's Education and Work in Question*

In the second half of the nineteenth century, benevolent work, unpaid as it was, was the most accepted form of employment for white middle-class women, certainly because it was not remunerative and was instead largely understood as a class signifier or status symbol. Sprouting from the very first Protestant sewing circles that emerged in the aftermath of the Revolutionary period, the sphere of women's benevolence expanded as it bloomed into a wide range of Bible tract and missionary societies in the 1810s and 1820s. The middle-class or bourgeois ideology of domesticity was simultaneously taking shape. It established that it was proper for women to be employed in helping others, whether within or outside the household—but only an acute personal crisis could justify paid employment. “Ladies Bountiful” and moral reformers of the 1830s could help other, less favored sisters find paid employment, but they could not pursue it themselves—which is why, in many ways, they forged their own path through social reform, political reform, and a host of “invisible careers” related to philanthropy.<sup>12</sup>

We still need to elucidate how these antebellum ideas of women's “employment” as status signifier, contribution towards society, or the support of dependents evolved into a greater acceptance of women's self-support not just as temporary crisis management but as a way to attain a form of personal independence and fulfillment—culminating in Progressive-era depictions of “New Women,” who, confidently for some and aggressively for others, took over colleges campuses and the job market. The New Woman of the 1910s favored “short hair, practical dress” and expressed a “demand for higher education, the vote, the right to earn a decent living,” which were all “challenges to accepted views of femininity and female sexuality.”<sup>13</sup> Autonomy was her chief drive, be it political, economic, or sexual—and that last one both concentrated media attention and heightened middle-class anxieties.<sup>14</sup> The founders of the WEIU, most of whom were born in the 1820s and

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<sup>12</sup>Kathleen D. McCarthy defines the “Lady Bountiful” as “a stock figure in the gallery of feminine stereotypes,” one that speaks to women's voluntarism and charitable roles, and has been used to “stigmatize women's philanthropy, often trivializing its presence on the American scene.” Kathleen D. McCarthy, ed., *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy, and Power* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), ix, and McCarthy, “Parallel Power Structures: Women and the Voluntary Sphere,” in *Lady Bountiful Revisited*, 1-23.

<sup>13</sup>Ann Heilmann, Margaret Beetham, eds., *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism, and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930* (London: Routledge, 2004), 1-3. In this volume, see in particular Jill Bergman, “Natural Divisions/National Divisions: Whiteness and the American New Woman in the General Federation of Women's Clubs,” 223-239; Angelika Köhler, “Charged with Ambiguity: The Image of the New Woman in American Cartoons,” 158-178. See also Estelle B. Freedman, “The New Woman: Changing Views of Women in the 1920s,” *Journal of American History* 61 (September 1974): 372-393.

<sup>14</sup>Caroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Ox-

1830s, were socialized in an antebellum world of female domesticity and benevolence. Their view of women's work was initially that of a sustained "busy-ness" rooted in personal virtue and abstract, exacting self-improvement, an ideal of femininity that formed the bedrock of the American middle-class identity as it was fashioned in the crucible of the Second Great Awakening.<sup>15</sup>

During the Civil War, a contemporary estimate is that maybe 300,000 women who might never have sought out paid work entered the job market. They were especially vulnerable, having neither a male "breadwinner" nor any experience of industrial work.<sup>16</sup> The Boston correspondent for the *Worcester Daily Spy*, contextualizing the early work of the WEIU, wrote that the society reported "that from all parts of the country girls come to Boston seeking work; most of them are strangers here, many without friends and without money, and they fall easily into temptation."<sup>17</sup> Like other white middle-class and upper-class women with connections to the broad women's rights movement, the founders of the WEIU had witnessed the rising tide of single native-born women who moved from the New England countryside to the cities on the eastern sea-board in search of a livelihood. This "massive rural-urban migration," which started in the 1850s and 1860s, was interpreted by historian Thomas Dublin as the second step in the process of women's integration into industrial capitalism.<sup>18</sup> Using Lynn's population as an example, he shows that "for the majority of women shoeworkers, migration to Lynn became a permanent entry in a growing urban working class in the Civil War years," not a stopgap measure.<sup>19</sup>

For white middle and upper-middle-class women, this same period was transitional time as far as their access to formal education was concerned. By the 1870s, many of the first women's colleges had been established and most existing institutions, both public and private, had become coeducational. Prospective students had a variety of options at their disposal; these ranged from the private, religious women's college to its public, secular coeducational counterpart.<sup>20</sup> Yet,

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ford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 245-296.

<sup>15</sup>Ryan, Mary P., *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 15.

<sup>16</sup>Alice Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work: A History of Wage-Earning Women in the United States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 76.

<sup>17</sup>"Women's Work in Boston," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, January 11, 1879, 7. This piece, written by the Boston correspondent for the *Worcester Daily Spy*, appeared in the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, *Chicago Daily*, and *Denver Rocky Mountain News*, an early sign that the activities of the Boston Women's Union were sparking an interest across the country.

<sup>18</sup>Thomas Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), xv.

<sup>19</sup>Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work*, 151; 155.

<sup>20</sup>Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women's Higher*

the aftermath of the Civil War was also a time when women's collegiate education still very often did not lead to a career and was not expected to do so; many collegiates were still unclear about the purpose of their education.<sup>21</sup> As we will see in this chapter, at such a turning point, the founders of the WEIU believed in a diffuse and eclectic mix of values: women's right to higher education and paid work for survival and personal fulfillment, but also their moral duty to society to be educated and put that education to use for the benefit of their children.

## 1.1 Delineating the Bounds and Goals of Women's Formal Education

### 1.1.1 Lectures and Classes: Educated Motherhood, Self-Culture, and Self-Sufficiency

#### *Women's All-Powerful Motherly Influence*

As they were born in the 1820s and the 1830s, the women of the WEIU had likely been socialized to view women as especially pious, moral beings whose influence on men and children made them ideal agents of social betterment. Consequently, they argued that it was as mothers that women should be educated. Abby Morton Diaz (1821-1904), the Union's second president, expounded on Harriet Clisby's desire to "elevate" women and explained that helping them, as a class, meant "elevating" their character. Educated women would in turn raise their children to be good citizens and good Christians, because "woman mould[ed] the home and through it the world."<sup>22</sup> Throughout the 1880s, this framework of female influence was central to the work of the Union.<sup>23</sup> To elevate women individually was to elevate womankind collectively. Dialectically, if individuals could be proven to exercise the special, moralizing influence that "true women" were thought to possess on men,

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*Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 47.

<sup>21</sup>Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 82.

<sup>22</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational & Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 3, 1881* (Boston: 157 Tremont Street, 1881), 8, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2mg21svjbjv>; Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 2, 1882* (Boston: No. 157 Tremont Street, 1882), 12-13, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065320874>; Abby Morton Diaz, "Woman's Work for the Millennium," *Woman's Journal* 13, no. 3 (January 21, 1882): 23.

<sup>23</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1886* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1886), 7.

their social status would be enhanced.<sup>24</sup> Because of the way Harriet Clisby and Abby Morton Diaz wrote about moral suasion, we might be tempted to consider that this was a new, revolutionary idea. In fact, it was a defining principle of 1830s evangelical perfectionism that women, being more virtuous than men, had both the possibility and the duty to tap that virtue to effect radical social change.<sup>25</sup> Kathleen McCarthy argues that the associational revolution of the early 1800s, which saw the rise of the female voluntary organization, was predicated on the elaboration of a “feminized version of the republican credo of public service, personal self-sacrifice, and individual virtue.”<sup>26</sup> It was thus in clear continuity with antebellum discourses on women’s social roles that the WEIU first established a rationale for women to seek self-improvement.

By the time the WEIU was founded, the archetype of the “Republican mother” had been mediated through the middle-class domestic turn of the 1830s and 1840s. Demands for women’s full citizenship evolved into assertions that women’s chief responsibility in the home, and their only political role, was mothering. Only as the mothers of citizens, or potential mothers—as teachers—could women claim a political role of their own, tasked as they were with imbuing the next generation with the civic virtues of self-control, rational judgment, and hard work, which Jacksonian politicians construed as the pillars of a representative democracy.<sup>27</sup> At the same time, in the words of early women’s historian Keith Melder, the fact that the education provided by women was increasingly taking place outside the home, as teachers, “contributed something—how much is impossible to say—to the growing uncertainty about sex-role definition in mid-nineteenth century America.”<sup>28</sup> To prepare mothers for public service, as early as 1877 the WEIU offered a variety of day and evening classes and lectures which were to function as opportunities for both instruction and entertainment. They were the responsibility of the women of the Class and Lecture Committee. Behind the founders’ decision

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<sup>24</sup>Lilian Whiting, “The Woman’s Union,” *Woman’s Journal* 13, no. 9 (March 4, 1882): 71. For an in-depth analysis of the concept of the “true” woman, see Barbara Welter’s classic article. Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2 (1966): 151-174. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2711179>.

<sup>25</sup>Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 5.

<sup>26</sup>Kathleen D. McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 31. More broadly, see 30-48.

<sup>27</sup>Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 283-284; Alexander Keyssar, *The Right to Vote: The Contested History of Democracy in the United States* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 69.

<sup>28</sup>Keith E. Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Woman’s Rights Movement, 1800-1850* (New York: Schocken, 1977), 27.

to arrange their first crop of talks, woman's twin duties as mothers and educators loomed large, reflecting such early-nineteenth-century conceptions as that of the "Republic mother."

The influence of Linda Kerber's notion of "Republican mother" on American society was the main argument that the Union's founders wielded to justify considering women from all backgrounds and "classes"<sup>29</sup> as potential members. As second WEIU president Abby Morton Diaz asked WEIU members, "shall the rich woman share with the poor woman the classes and other literary privileges of the Union? Yes. Otherwise we build up the very walls we are striving to break down."<sup>30</sup> At the organization's third annual meeting, in 1881, she went on to explain that for all of society to be bettered, all mothers needed to educate themselves, regardless of class status, so that a positive influence may be exerted on all American children. Ostentatiously opening classes to all and making them free was one of the ways that the WEIU sought to bridge class differences. A chief preoccupation was reducing the cost of the society's vocational classes—classes designed to fit students for a remunerative occupation by teaching them manual skills. Less significant but notable was the impulse to offer at least a few such evening classes for the convenience of those who could not attend afternoon classes. In 1884-1885, seven out of 43 classes took place in the evening.<sup>31</sup>

During the first half of the century, domestic determinism took root and became a widely accepted notion. It posited the power of the middle-class domestic environment, from carpeting to décor, to shape children's manners and morals, and, through a cumulative process, the national character. To better her immediate family, and, ultimately, reform society, the white middle-class urban dweller first had to improve her own habits of consumption and housekeeping.<sup>32</sup> Just as mothers could instill habits of order, neatness and hard work, so could the WEIU's classes and meetings for mothers foster those qualities in the membership. As E. A. R. Gordon wrote for the Class and Lecture Committee in 1885, "[i]ndeed our whole Union, in all its parts, is emphatically educational, character building."<sup>33</sup> Charac-

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<sup>29</sup>WEIU, *1881 Report*, 11-12: "suppose just such another in every town and city, aiming in all ways to protect, assist, and wisely educate women, helping to establish true ideas of comparative values, helping to break down partition walls and to draw all classes and sects together in sympathetic intercourse."

<sup>30</sup>WEIU, *1881 Report*, 9.

<sup>31</sup>WEIU, *1881 Report*, 37; Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1885* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1885), 26, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923629>.

<sup>32</sup>Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 6-7.

<sup>33</sup>Emphasis mine. WEIU, *1885 Report*, 30.

ter,” in its late-nineteenth-century manifestation, was the conflation of the cardinal middle-class virtues of control, moderation, and altruistic fulfilment of one’s duties to society. The women of the WEIU saw themselves as being entrusted with the responsibility of shaping the next generation, and, correspondingly, the future of the nation. The higher degrees of character were implicitly gendered, racialized, and related to a specific social status: good or ”manly” character was one of the markers or attributes of white masculine respectability. Young white boys were taught that to be manly was to exert self-restraint and to check one’s instincts, and well-to-do Yankee parents were especially well-aware of their responsibilities to their offspring in that regard.<sup>34</sup> In mothers’ clubs and at special lectures, women were taught how to properly guide their boys along the path of character development. A typical WEIU Sunday Meeting for Women, a kind of mixed lay and religious meeting which the early WEIU held on Sunday afternoons, featured moralist Kate Gannett Wells on “Elements of Character” or Mary Livermore on “How shall we educate our Sons?”<sup>35</sup> Much like the Republican mother was allowed forays into the male preserve of education, new prescriptions for motherhood made male notions of character relevant to women, and the WEIU leaned into them to open up new political vistas to its members.

Within a few years, the impulse to foreground motherhood would lead to the Union organizing specific “Mothers’ Meetings,” initially described as “a training school for mothers.” Starting in 1886, they were held once a month “to discuss the best methods of training children.”<sup>36</sup> The creation of the “Mothers’ Meetings” in the second half of the 1880s signaled changes in WEIU women’s conception of motherhood, which became more explicitly political.<sup>37</sup> These developments took place in the wake of a successful 1879 state campaign for school suffrage, in which both suffragists and women keen to distance themselves from the cause took part. Kathryn J. Nicholas has identified two different agendas at work in the campaigns to extend school suffrage to women. One contingent of campaigners saw it as a step towards full suffrage, while others were only ever interested in their own ability to effect school reform.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 79-80.

<sup>35</sup>“Sunday Meetings for Women,” *Woman’s Journal* 13, no. 11 (March 18, 1882): 80.

<sup>36</sup>“Women’s Industrial Union,” *Woman’s Journal* 17, no. 19 (May 8, 1886): 152.

<sup>37</sup>These meetings also indicate the ideological proximity between social gospellers like Carolina Bartlett Crane, whose “People’s Church” also organized mothers’ meetings, and the unaffiliated, nonsectarian WEIU. Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and American Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 33.

<sup>38</sup>Kathryn A. Nicholas, “Reexamining Women’s Nineteenth-Century Political Agency: School

Guided by a belief in parental stakes in the school system, and taking notice of local efforts to secure school suffrage, the organizers of the Union's "Mother Meetings" became more firmly convinced that mothers were justified in entering the world of electoral politics.<sup>39</sup> Abby Morton Diaz, then president, "emphasized the importance of selecting good members of the School Committee" because teachers shared responsibility with parents for bringing up children. To Diaz, women's positive influence on school matters would be most keenly felt from the perspective of temperance work. That goal was enough, on its own, to justify giving women a voice in the election of school officers.<sup>40</sup> It was not a coincidence if such a nationally prominent suffragist as Boston-based Lucy Stone<sup>41</sup> hosted the WEIU's meetings; while not all suffragists were proponents of school suffrage, some saw it as the linchpin of an entering wedge strategy.<sup>42</sup> In 1888, a more obscure Mrs. Adelaide A. Claflin gave a talk at the WEIU to affirm "[t]he duty of mothers in regard to school suffrage."<sup>43</sup> Gradually, over the course of the 1880s, the emphasis on "character," character formation, and women's responsibilities toward society as mothers was stripped from its antebellum religious overtones and clothed in the latest scientific garb. Looking both backward, to early and mid-century meanings of respectable masculinity, and forward, to advances in the medical field, the Union's Committee on "Moral and Spiritual Development," its in-house provider of lectures, edifying talks and pamphlets, delved into the newest science to examine habit formation in children from a physiological or neurological perspective, justifying mothers' responsibilities anew.<sup>44</sup>

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Suffrage and Office-Holding," *Journal of Policy History* 30, no. 3 (2018): 452; 458.

<sup>39</sup>Nicholas, "Reexamining Women's Nineteenth-Century Political Agency," 452.

<sup>40</sup>"School Suffrage," *Boston Journal*, February 20, 1884, 3.

<sup>41</sup>Lucy Stone (1818-1893) was a prominent antislavery and suffrage activist who belonged to the first generation of American suffragists. From 1870 until her death, she was the editor of the *Woman's Journal*, which would become the unofficial organ of the suffrage movement. Joelle Million's biography of Stone places her within the context of the early women's rights movement and illuminates the schism that led to the formation of Stone's Boston-based American Woman Suffrage Association and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's rival National Woman Suffrage Association in 1869. Joelle Million, *Woman's Voice, Woman's Place: Lucy Stone and the Birth of the Woman's Rights Movement* (Westport: Praeger, 2003).

<sup>42</sup>Nicholas, "Reexamining Women's Nineteenth-Century Political Agency," 68; Additional WEIU records, *Women's Educational and Industrial Union, Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1887* (Boston: Press of Geo. E. Crosby & Co., 1887), 26. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>43</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1888* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1888), 24, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924064>.

<sup>44</sup>Records of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1894-1955 [hereafter WEIU records], Leaflets published by the Committee on Ethics, number 1. B-8. Box 1, item 3. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. <https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/resources/5020#>, Rima Apple, *Perfect*



The “Mothers’ Meetings,” by creating a distinct forum for mothers, also effectively set them apart from the Union’s other educational offerings. While mothering and child-rearing were repeatedly mentioned by WEIU women as justification for women’s education throughout the 1880s, these references were increasingly made in a more contained context.<sup>45</sup> Very gradually, the overall focus of the Class and Lecture Committee shifted from uplifting women as mothers and wives to uplifting women personally, through self-culture, regardless of their familial ties and responsibilities.

### *Self-Culture in the Women’s Club*

This made the WEIU look more like other urban northeastern sites of popular learning and entertainment, the myriad other institutions that provided Bostonians with edifying talks. It positioned it within a vibrant network of diversified institutions. By the late 1870s, the lecture had become a widespread form of popular entertainment in the United States and contemporaries hailed the format as a vehicle for the formation of a civic identity and the education of the public for citizenship. The American “lecture culture” had its roots in 1830s Massachusetts; by the end of the Civil War the early lyceum, which initially offered a civic space of discussion and debate, had evolved into a lecture circuit dominated by elite northeastern lecturers with an outsized cultural clout.<sup>46</sup> Whether in villages, small towns or larger cities, institutions and organizations ranging from local governments to church-based groups and fraternal lodges hired lecturers to give their neighbours an evening’s rational, sedate entertainment. They explicitly aimed at creating and appealing to an idealized, universal public.<sup>47</sup>

There were different levels to the postwar lecture circuit. At the fully professional end of the spectrum, suffragist lecturers in particular “actively pursued incomes”; to them, the “lyceum” was an alluring source of economic opportunities for single, tenuously “middle class” women.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, at a local level, women’s literary or self-culture clubs were a part of this larger lecture circuit; they both

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*Motherhood: Science and Childrearing in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006), 14-21.

<sup>45</sup>WEIU, *1888 Report*, 9; Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 98 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May 6, 1890* (Boston: No. 98 Boylston Street, 1890), 10, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923967>.

<sup>46</sup>Tom F. Wright, *Lecturing the Atlantic: Speech, Print, and an Anglo-American Commons, 1830-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 9-10; 12-16.

<sup>47</sup>Wright, *Lecturing the Atlantic*, 26-32.

<sup>48</sup>Lisa Tetrault, “The Incorporation of American Feminism: Suffragists and the Postbellum Lyceum,” *Journal of American History* 96, no. 4 (March 2010): 1028-1029.

hired lecturers and fostered their own speakers, some of whom were then sent out into the world, when their papers themselves did not travel from one club to another.<sup>49</sup> The lecture which a Mrs. Kate E. Tuley gave to the Chicago Woman's Club in November 1879 was first a paper that she had read to a meeting of the Illinois Social Science Association, a month earlier.<sup>50</sup>

In the 1870s and 1880s, women's clubs, like the local New England Woman's Club—the first of its kind—or the “Cantabrigia Club” in Cambridge, foregrounded the socialization and instruction of middle- and upper-middle-class women.<sup>53</sup> Such forums gave them the opportunity to learn European languages like French, German or Italian, hone their speaking and research skills, or engage in stimulating debates. The managers of many a club construed their work as that of an educational institution.<sup>54</sup> Working-women's clubs, often founded or nurtured by well-off clubwomen, disseminated the call to self-improvement far and wide, as working-class members modulated these ideas to other women on the job, and to family members in the home.<sup>55</sup>

To this idea of education as mothers' duty of self-improvement, the WEIU superimposed education as an economic safety net for women. Classes providing schooling in the refined manners that were increasingly demanded of the daughters of the middle class<sup>56</sup>—piano lessons, embroidery, stenography, drawing, to name a few in the WEIU's 1881 roster—could be parlayed into a stint as a teacher or a governess. In the 1880s, teaching was one of the most common paying occupations for women, behind domestic service and factory work, and one on which “respectable”

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<sup>49</sup>Anne Ruggles Gere, *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in US Women's Clubs, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>50</sup>“Social Science,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, October 4, 1879, 9; “Social Amenities,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, November 8, 1879, 6. Abby Morton Diaz, who was also well-known as an author of children's books, would often travel to lecture on topics relating to education and child-rearing. Conversely, the WEIU sometimes sent speakers to other benevolent institutions, like the “Women's Industrial Home.”<sup>51</sup> Urban reformers, like other groups of women activists in the antebellum period, were part of thick friendship and kin networks, which their lecture circuit both opened up to urban middle-class institutions and redoubled.<sup>52</sup> Nancy Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 55-57.

<sup>53</sup>Gere, *Intimate Practices*, 10.

<sup>54</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational & Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 8, 1880* (Boston: 157 Tremont Street, 1880), 18-22, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2b1p08h29z>; Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 46: “[l]iterary and cultural leaders likened the activities of their groups to those of women's colleges.”; Martin, *Sound of Our Own Voices*, 107-109. See also Anne Meis Knupfer and Christine Woysner eds., *The Educational Work of Women's Organizations, 1890-1960* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

<sup>55</sup>Priscilla Murolo, *The Common Ground of Womanhood: Class, Gender, and Working Girls' Clubs, 1884-1928* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 26-28.

<sup>56</sup>Frances B. Cogan, *All American Girl: The Ideal of Real Womanhood in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 257.

women could expect to fall back with a carefully controlled loss of status. Before the Civil War, an estimate of as many 25% of all native-born Massachusetts women taught at some point in their lives.<sup>57</sup> Teenagers and young women would teach Sunday school, or work for one or two years at a rural school, without necessarily committing to it as a career.<sup>58</sup> However, just as educational authorities began to subject the profession to professional standards, so was the sort of education received at female academies or in women's clubs becoming less and less relevant or adequate. In the decade immediately preceding the war and that following it, modern pathways into teaching were established in Massachusetts. Boston's first teachers' school dates back to 1852, and six years later prospective schoolteachers were required to pass an examination. By the 1880s, to this was added the requirement of one year's teaching, unless one was a graduate of the Boston Normal School. A college degree was by then a prerequisite to teaching in high school: the window had closed on the possibility of putting women's clubs' literary offerings to marketable use.<sup>59</sup>

### ***Education for Self-Sufficiency: Learning For Their Own Sake***

Even though the female job market was changing fast, WEIU founders like Harriet Clisby and Abby Morton Diaz fully expected it to be possible for educated women to leverage broad-based literacy skills to reach self-sufficiency. While early Union officers made a distinction between different kinds of labor, they shared a belief that any skill women could possess had value, whether in the home or outside of it, to raise one's own children or those of others, for pay or for free. Some skills could interchangeably be relied upon to earn an income should it become necessary, bolster the family's social status, nurture social networks, help support the family financially, or save money, as in the case of classes in dressmaking, first introduced by the Union in 1881.<sup>60</sup>

The dressmaking lessons offered by the Union were initially intended for home use, with latitude for imagining them as an occasional source of income. As was vaguely stated in 1883, “[i]t [was] the earnest desire of the Committee to make this department helpful in teaching women to use their busy fingers and active brains with skill and profit to themselves and others.”<sup>61</sup> In post-war Massachusetts, wives’

<sup>57</sup>Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work*, 205-206.

<sup>58</sup>Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman's Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 30-35.

<sup>59</sup>Cristina Groeger, *The Education Trap: Schools and the Remaking of Inequality in Boston* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021), 42.

<sup>60</sup>WEIU, *1882 Report*, 41.

<sup>61</sup>WEIU, *1883 Report*, 41.

domestic labor was often classified as potentially or partially productive depending on circumstances. The putting-out system that emerged in the years after the Revolution relied on women who could draw on crafts that they had mastered in domestic contexts.<sup>62</sup> Especially on the New England farm, skills like straw-hat making were put to productive use on a part-time basis, as needed, and this had been the case since the early nineteenth century.<sup>63</sup> Considering this, we understand that the intention of the Class and Lecture Committee was not necessarily to train dressmakers who would have claimed the profession as a chief source of income, self-support, and identity—in short, as a career. Rather, they focused on outfitting home-makers with the means to reduce their spending or to earn extra income to accommodate changing circumstances. This was a crucially important skillset for the wives of machinists, artisans or even clerks to have, as it could help stretch a husband's income and avoid cash outlays. Even though working-class women sometimes did not have the time to sew, even at the turn of the century most made some or all of their family's clothing, because it was simply cheaper to do so.<sup>64</sup> Christine Stansell has noted how at midcentury women of the "tenement classes" kept familial economies afloat by scraping and saving money wherever they could, "whether stitching shirts for the clothing shops or bargaining down street peddlers."<sup>65</sup> The dressmaking classes offered at the WEIU starting in 1882 involved cutting the patterns at home, for home use, as a direct application of the lessons. These classes were complemented by crochet lessons, at the close of which "the teacher offered to furnish employment to those pupils who desired it," suggesting the extent to which WEIU teachers conceived of women's "industries" as possessing the potential for remuneration.<sup>66</sup>

In the majority of cases, the classes were taught by Union members. Some of them, despite not being working women themselves, may have had personal reasons for becoming proficient enough to teach others. Mrs. Bella C. Barrows,

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<sup>62</sup>The putting-out system was a proto-industrial system of production involving the rural female population of New England. Farmers' wives and daughters spun yarn or made shoes, baskets, or plaited straw hats out of raw material that was provided to them by the urban merchants who hired their labor, usually during the winter time. Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1986), 15; Thomas Dublin, "Rural Putting-Out Work in Early Nineteenth-Century New England: Women and the Transition to Capitalism in the Countryside," *New England Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (1991): 531-573.

<sup>63</sup>Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work*, 30-32.

<sup>64</sup>Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1990), 115; Sarah Gordon, "Make it Yourself:" *Home Sewing, Gender, and Culture, 1890-1930* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), paragraphs 6-18, <http://www.gutenberg-e.org/gordon/chap1.html>.

<sup>65</sup>Stansell, *City of Women*, 42.

<sup>66</sup>WEIU, *1882 Report*, 41.

Figure 1.2: View of women seated indoors around a table, sewing; likely a dress-making class at the Union. Between 1890 and 1900.



Harvard University, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, ss\_21594575

Source: Harvard Digital Collections, [https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital\\_collections/8001528322\\_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356600](https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital_collections/8001528322_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356600).

who taught “advanced stenography” classes in the early 1880s,<sup>67</sup> was the daughter of Scot immigrants. She was married to a clergyman, and could afford to keep a maid of all work, a 16-year-old “mulatto” servant, indicating a tenuously middle-class lifestyle.<sup>68</sup> As was often the case in the census, in 1880 she was said to be “keeping house” and no mention was made of her teaching activities, even though her sister-in-law and one boarder were listed as music teachers. From her census records only, it is unclear where or how a woman like Bella Barrows would have learned stenography. What we do know is that she put the skill to use as a “reporter” for the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, as the editor of the proceedings of its annual sessions, and as a prominent member of Boston’s Woman’s Unitarian Association.<sup>69</sup> Twenty years later, by her mid-50s and still married she had built on the business skills she developed if not learned in an organizational context, and become an editor—an occupation documented

<sup>67</sup>WEIU, *1882 Report*, 43.

<sup>68</sup>United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MXB-DC7>), Bella C. Barrows in household of Samuel J. Barrows.

<sup>69</sup>*Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections*, edited by Alexander Johnson (Fort Wayne: Press of the Archer Printing Co., 1910): 656, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112124138626>; Editorial, *Unity* 21, no. 5 (March 31, 1888): 1, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433005886167>.

by census-takers.<sup>70</sup> Involvement in women's organizations and clubs, whether of a religious, charitable or philanthropic nature, provided women like Bella Barrows with skills they could use in professional contexts. Susan Benson Porter has already shown how skills acquired at home, like the supervision of servants, transferred easily to the work of benevolence, a factor in white middle-class women's successful embrace of such activities.<sup>71</sup> As Bella Barrows' life story suggests, the reverse was also true.

What Bella Barrows's life story shows is how, at the close of the 1880s, some married women were turning occasional income-generating activities into full-time careers. The home-based, composite vision of women's "employment" that characterized the WEIU's founding generation gave way to a clearer picture of paid work as distinct from others, and the most significant kind of work, because it was the first step towards reaching economic self-sufficiency. In 1887, nearly a decade after the Class Committee was established, its members could articulate much more clearly and cogently the distinction between different types of dressmaking, dressmaking as a career and dressmaking as a money-saving skill: "the dressmaking pupils are taught to cut and make dresses for themselves and others, thereby acquiring a business, or increasing their usefulness in the home, while enjoying the self satisfaction of knowing that, in case of adversity, they have a means of livelihood," one of the association's reports noted in 1891.<sup>72</sup>

### 1.1.2 Building up Paid Work as a Feminist Panacea

When it was founded, in 1877, the early WEIU considered classes and lectures to be similar enough as to be placed in charge of a single committee. The organization also focused on personal culture and self-improvement, firstly as a means of social reform, and only secondarily as a way for white women of the middling classes to build a skillset that they might find useful should a personal crisis arise. By contrast, ten years later, the move from values of self-improvement to self-sufficiency was nearly completed. By the mid- to late-1880s, the proportion of evening classes had increased—more than two-thirds in 1887—as had the pro-

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<sup>70</sup>United States Census, 1900, FamilySearch (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M9Y2-RZJ>), Isabelle C Barrows in entry for Samuel J Barrows, 1900.

<sup>71</sup>Porter, "Business Heads and Sympathizing Hearts," 308-309.

<sup>72</sup>Emphasis mine. Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1891* (Boston: No. 264 Boylston Street, 1891), 35, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923918>.

portion of classes meant to be purely vocational.<sup>73</sup> The WEIU's commitment to enhancing middle-class women's ability to work changed as much as, and in tandem with, its members' conception of "work." Increasingly, in the last third of the nineteenth century, what middle-class women's "work" meant to them underwent a salient transformation. The evolution of their beliefs in women's duties to society, their appropriate sphere, as well as the American work ethic are the background to that transformation.

Frances B. Cogan has explored the white antebellum bourgeois feminine ideal and the recommendations that the daughters of the middle-classes received in domestic fiction and advice literature. She shows that the mid-1860s definition of the word "work," the one most employed by middle-brow advice books, had connotations of service. To build their character, women were advised to keep engaged in productive activities always, whether at home or at church or as part of benevolent organizations. Salaried or waged employment was not out of the question either if it was pursued in times of crisis. Authors of domestic manuals or didactic fiction praised heroines who learned a skill they could parlay into earnings should the need arise. In that crisis framework, women's employment was understood to be noble and praise-worthy if it prevented the woman or her family from falling into abasing dependency.<sup>74</sup>

Cogan stops her study in the 1880s and argues that that cluster of ideas mysteriously and suddenly lost its currency not long after<sup>75</sup> but there is evidence of the persistence of these ideas into that decade. In a 1883 article, "Shirley Dare," a literary columnist and the author of advice books like *Anna Maria's Housekeeping*, laments the plight of "the woman without resources and without work," the respectable native-born who found that she has to provide for herself following a personal crisis.<sup>76</sup> It was perfectly understandable, and even commendable, for the kind of women that Shirley Dare described to work for pay to support themselves—whether the "old maid," who upon the death of her parents was told that their house had been sold and she must move, or the woman whose entrepreneur father or husband had lost his property, or was suddenly paralyzed. Shirley Dare described how few options there really were for those who had no marketable skill

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<sup>73</sup>WEIU, *1887 Report*, 26.

<sup>74</sup>Cogan, *All American Girl*, 199-214.

<sup>75</sup>Cogan, *All American Girl*, 257.

<sup>76</sup>Helen M. Sumner, *Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage-Earners in the United States*, v. 9 "History of Women in Industry in the United States" (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1910), 148, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112062899114>; "The Best Books," *American Garden* 9, no. 2 (February 1888): 76, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/pst.000013567125>.

and feared loss of status more than anything.<sup>77</sup> It is noteworthy that a career journalist and author like Dare, who herself earned an independent income, devoted at least part of her energy to investigating working women in industrial occupations<sup>78</sup> and the means for rural women to earn at least a supplementary income.<sup>79</sup> She was part of the cohort of moderate middle-class women who did not go so far as to fight for wives' right to paid employment, but recommended vocational schooling for the safety net it provided.<sup>80</sup> Angel Kwolek-Folland chronicles the emergence of a new genre, business advice for women, published in books, magazines and press articles, which first appeared in the mid-1880s. In these accounts, small-time entrepreneurship was positioned as “almost a panacea for women.”<sup>81</sup>

It was acknowledged more and more often, and better tolerated, that single white women would work for pay outside the home. More militant journalists and reformers like Shirley Dare's more famous colleague Helen Campbell—another contributor to the *New York Tribune*—tackled the “social question” in widely circulated dailies and weeklies. They took women workers as an object of study, with an especial focus on their earnings and their living conditions.<sup>82</sup> By the mid-1880s, even the Massachusetts Commissioner of Labor directed such a study, *The Working Girls of Boston* (1885), which proved popular enough to warrant reprint editions.<sup>83</sup> The men of the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics of Labor were moved to carrying out the study by the acknowledgment that material conditions in the state were not such that women could labor in their own home for personal gratification—and not outside of it, for cash—as they believed ought to be the case.<sup>84</sup> The isolated findings and pronouncements of the various articles and studies of the 1870s coalesced into a nationwide conversation, the “working-

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<sup>77</sup>Shirley Dare, “What Is to Become of the Women?” *Woman's Journal* 14, no. 15 (April 14, 1883): 114.

<sup>78</sup>Sumner, *Report on Condition of Woman and Child Wage-Earners*, 148. In 1870, when she was a correspondent of the *New York Tribune*, Dare published an investigation of sewing work in New York, interviewing isolated seamstresses about their wages.

<sup>79</sup>“The Best Books,” *American Garden* 76. In 1888, Dare published *Fruit Pastes, Syrups and Preserves*, a 78-page volume that detailed “a new Home Industry for Farmers and Women.”

<sup>80</sup>Vi Van Duzen, “Our Duty to School-Girls,” *Woman's Journal* 17, no. 11 (March 13, 1886): 82.

<sup>81</sup>Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 99.

<sup>82</sup>Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation's Work: The Rise of Women's Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 122.

<sup>83</sup>Carroll D. Wright, *The Working Girls of Boston* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing co., 1889), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112000926771>.

<sup>84</sup>Henry F. Bedford, “Good Men and ‘Working Girls’: The Bureau of Statistics of Labor, 1870-1900,” in *Women of the Commonwealth*, edited by Susan L. Porter (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 88.



girl problem.” Academics and journalists set the stage for an investigation of the virtues and vices of the young, urban industrial workers who constituted the backbone of such industries as rubber, textile, and paper goods. To the members of women’s clubs, the fact that craftsmen’s and farmers’ daughters were leaving the farm, and going out to work, was a deeply disturbing fact.<sup>85</sup>

Contemporaries’ focus on working-girls’ sexuality should not distract us from the connection that existed between these gendered conversations and those that centered on the “living wage,” a term first coined in the 1870s. As male workers leaned into an identity as consumers that they connected to their value as citizens, they articulated a demand for wages that made working people’s physiological and intellectual needs central to the labor struggles of the 1880s and 1890s: “Living wage proponents argue[d] that well-compensated workers are more likely to be active in political life and, conversely, that impoverished workers cannot constitute a vital citizenry,” Lawrence Glickman shows.<sup>86</sup> In that intellectual context, what working girls earned, or did not earn, and what they could, or could not, afford on their wages was scrutinized not only because of the fear they would turn to sex work, but also because it was interpreted by some as an indicator of their value to society. Did women contribute enough to society? To some, the answer to that question directly related to whether women deserved to proclaim themselves citizens and to vote.

That was the case of Charles W. Elliott, the author of a piece entitled “Woman’s Work and Woman’s Wages” (1892), which he published in the *North American Review*, a high-brow current events magazine.<sup>87</sup> Not to be confused with Harvard president Charles Eliot, Elliott was a rather obscure writer, mostly known for his amateur history of New England and character sketches of Biblical patriarchs; given the timeline of his publications, he was likely an old man by the time he wrote his *North American Review* article.<sup>88</sup> The piece is mostly notable for the heated response it received from famous abolitionist and writer, notorious clubwoman, and WEIU member Julia Ward Howe (1819-1910).<sup>89</sup> The

<sup>85</sup>Murolo, *Common Ground of Womanhood*, 9-10.

<sup>86</sup>Lawrence Glickman, *A Living Wage: American Workers and the Making of Consumer Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), xii, 3.

<sup>87</sup>Charles W. Elliott, “Woman’s Work and Woman’s Wages,” *North American Review* 135, no. 309 (August 1882): 141-161, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25118198>.

<sup>88</sup>T. W. H. (likely Thomas Wentworth Higginson), “Elliott’s New England History,” *Liberator*, June 12, 1857, 3; “Life in the Holy Land,” *New Bedford Mercury* (New Bedford, Massachusetts), December 24, 1869, 4.

<sup>89</sup>Julia Ward Howe was among the founders of the New England Woman’s Club (NEWC), one of the oldest women’s clubs in the country. “Mrs Julia Ward Howe—Her Connection with Women’s Clubs,” *Times-Picayune*, June 2, 1889, 14; Papers of the Julia Ward Howe family,

core of Elliott's argument was that white, middle- and upper-class women did not contribute enough to the nation's economy because the advent of machinery had removed many ancestral crafts from the home and thus reduced their productive or income-generating value to nil.

Julia Ward Howe was a member of the "Yankee bourgeoisie" whose ideas about work were influential in shaping the version of the American work ethic as it crystallized in the late nineteenth century. White, bourgeois suffragists like Howe developed a "feminist" version of the work ethic, channelling a diffuse, protean discontent with women's status as second-class citizens into a defense of economic independence as a tool of emancipation. Work was a Protestant moral absolute, and women like Harriet Beecher Stowe, Julia Ward Howe, and Elizabeth Stuart Phelps argued that women should not be exempted from the demands of productive work, but rather be granted access to it, and publicly celebrated for what they did.<sup>90</sup>

Julia Ward Howe's vibrant rebuke of Charles Elliott's arguments is an articulation of this feminist work ethic as it was developing in the suffrage circles of the 1880s. In her piece, Howe mounts a defense of women as a class, refusing to consider that everything, or everyone, had a value that could be measured pecuniarily. She wrote, "Mr. Elliott invites us to form our estimate of the value of women in the present day, by the amount of wages actually paid to them. But, supposing it to be entirely correct; is it not true that much of the greatest work which is done for society is of a sort which cannot be paid for?" In one stroke, Julia Ward Howe defended the social value of domestic work and that of women's voluntary work in charities and reform organizations, questioning an entire value system grounded in economic productivity.<sup>91</sup> She proceeded to offer a prescient analysis of the unpaid domestic and emotional labor carried out by women and of the reasons behind the devaluation of women's work more generally. Her general conclusion, which resonated with the writings of other WEIU members and was most likely shared by them, was that women were powerless to assert their economic rights because they were a disenfranchised class, like enslaved persons before the Civil War, or Chinese laborers in the Western territories and states. To Julia Ward Howe, who was playing on the well-worn and problematic compar-

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1787-1984 (inclusive), 1787-1944 (bulk), Julia Ward Howe, "The Industrial Value of Woman," [1882?]. MC-272. Box 3, item 62. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Cambridge, Mass. <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/ead/c/sch00222c00006/catalog>

<sup>90</sup>Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 182-185.

<sup>91</sup>Howe, "The Industrial Value of Woman," 435.

ison between white women and black bondsmen and women,<sup>92</sup> the “inferiority of political disenfranchisement” was directly responsible for women’s powerlessness in the face of wage standards that they could neither establish nor control. She concluded by equating voting with working, simultaneously de-gendering the two activities and arguing that whoever was able and ready to take on the work that needs to be done should do it, whether it be shovelling or even voting.

She was one of many Bostonian suffragist voices then articulating the argument that the vote was necessary to women as a means of defending their economic interests in the face of gendered standards of pay. By 1887, five years later, one could read confidently asserted in the Boston-based, suffragist *Woman’s Journal* that:

“[n]o disfranchised class of laborers ever yet received fair pay for their work until they were armed with the ballot. The vote is power, and power always commands respect. It compels a hearing. It arouses public opinion, and ensures the eventual redress of every social wrong. It would enable working women to obtain admission to a hundred new occupations where skilled labor secures fair pay. It would encourage them to combine for mutual protection as men combine.”<sup>93</sup>

The WEIU and individuals connected to it were close to the epicenter of northeastern suffragism, and they took part in conversations that linked economic and political citizenship. In the 1880s, just as the WEIU was getting off the ground and garnering local attention, contributors to the *Woman’s Journal*, in which the Union regularly published notices of its activities, and to which its Library subscribed, regularly asserted earning power as one of the constitutive elements of female independence.<sup>94</sup> One recurring thread of arguments in the suffragist literature of the 1880s and 1890s was that suffrage and women’s economic status could not be dissociated, but were part of a powerful dialectic—the construction of a gendered class of citizens whose best hope was association and self-help. In 1887, a “Mrs. E. R. Hazelton”—likely the “Mrs. E. R. Haseltine” mentioned in the minutes of the WEIU’s Board of Directors—presided over a meeting of the Boston Suffrage League, in the organization’s first attempt to appeal to “working-women,” hoping that its

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<sup>92</sup>Analyzed by Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 106-109.

<sup>93</sup>H. B. B., “Have Women a Grievance?” *Woman’s Journal* 18, no. 3 (January 15, 1887): 20.

<sup>94</sup>As soon as the Union started sending out work of its activities to the press, it chose the *Woman’s Journal* to do so. Additional WEIU Records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 1, January 2, 1878, 34. 81-M27. Carton 1; Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1894* (Boston: Press of L. Bart & Co., 148 High Street, 1894), 25, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923868>.

members might provide for the creation of “an organization for working-women, in which industrial and labor matters should be discussed [...] an organization, in short, to do for working-women in this city what the various labor unions have done for working-men.”<sup>95</sup> Organizing for suffrage while organizing for better pay and better labor conditions seemed a most coherent idea to the often wealthy, prominent suffragists behind the Boston Woman Suffrage League. They accordingly supported the Central Labor Union, which sponsored the meeting.

Whatever their status, wage-workers or independent producers, women needed political representation to defend their economic interests. In issues of the *Woman's Journal*, no discussion of “Women's Work” was complete without a mention of their disenfranchisement.<sup>96</sup> Of Californian farm women, one suffragist wrote: “[they] will begin to wish they had a voice in deciding whether duties shall be taken off from oranges, raisins, silks, etc. which they produce.”<sup>97</sup> The reference to Western women should not be taken to mean that they did not articulate these ideas yet. Californian suffragists seem to have been well aware of the economic dimension of suffrage: equal pay for equal work was one of the planks that were routinely brought up in the suffrage conventions held in the state. At such events, teachers and seamstresses were eager to discuss how adequate, or inadequate, their earnings were. Of those, San Francisco teachers in particular mounted a political campaign that included electing officers and appealing to the state legislature when their pay was threatened by a new bill.<sup>98</sup>

In the 1870s and 1880s, women's property rights, taxes and female taxpayers more generally rounded out the arsenal of suffragist arguments. This was a talking point that Abby Morton Diaz had picked up. In a public lecture that came last in a series about “Taxation,” she decried the fact that women were taxed, because they

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<sup>95</sup> *Woman's Journal* 18, no. 33 (August 20, 1887): 265. The Boston Suffrage League was a small suffragist organization active in the 1890s at the city level. One of its presidents, Mrs. Ellen Dietrick, was a WEIU member, in the mid-1890s the chairperson of the Employment Committee. The first mention of the League in the *Woman's Journal* was in “Boston Woman Suffrage League,” *Woman's Journal* 21, no. 1 (January 4, 1890): 420. At that date, Julia Ward Howe was its president, but since the article mentions an annual meeting, the organization was at least several months to a year old. Ellen B. Dietrick became president sometime between 1890 and 1894. “Massachusetts Clubs and Leagues,” *Woman's Journal* 25, no. 9 (March 3, 1894): 72.

<sup>96</sup> See for instance *Woman's Journal* 18, no. 33 (August 20, 1887): 265. The editors made statistics from 1875 front-page news, stating that in 163 cities in the state, women paid “nearly two million dollars”; in places, it was reported that the “women paid nearly three times as much as the men,” and so the question stood: “every man has a vote, and every woman has none. Is this justice or fair play?”

<sup>97</sup> A. E. K., “Women's Work in California,” *Woman's Journal* 19, no. 11 (March 17, 1888): 84.

<sup>98</sup> Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 166.

had “[no] voice at all in the management or spending of the money so produced.”<sup>99</sup> More broadly, the “injustice of taxation without representation”<sup>100</sup> formed the basis of feminist campaigns led by white property-owners like Abby Hadassah Smith and Julia Eveline Smith, who became known for refusing to pay their taxes for nearly a decade, between 1869 and 1876. Their rhetoric was steeped in the language of duties and rights, and in their speeches taxes featured as a proxy for class and responsibility. As Linda Kerber has shown, the feminist tax protests of the 1850s and 1860s, which were initially based on republican rhetoric, later evolved into debates about how women could leverage their financial contribution to new municipal infrastructure like roads, public transportation, and sewers.<sup>101</sup> What is noteworthy about the Boston-based suffragists of the 1880s is the way that they developed a very broad argument about all women needing the vote—not just taxpayers, oppressed factory-workers, or farmwomen. This was also true of some of their male allies—the abolitionist lawyer Samuel Sewall, who volunteered his services and worked with his wife in the Union’s legal aid department, named the Protective Committee, also worked “to construct a husband and wife property law which would be strictly just for all concerned.”<sup>102</sup> WEIU women and their male kin were aware of the economic disabilities faced by women on legislative grounds, and attempted to remedy them.

The crisis framework had led reformers to view all women as potentially concerned by paid work; in the 1880s, this idea was transformed by associational work. Clubwomen argued that even better off women could derive both meaning and tangible improvements in personal character from earning a living. Only when they earned money would they be able to gain a healthy appreciation of its value and stop being parasites.<sup>103</sup> That argument was often emphasized in the more progressive middle-class women’s periodicals, and is echoed in early addresses by the WEIU’s presidents to the organization’s members at publicly-held annual meetings. In 1890 third president Mary Morton Kehew went so far as to argue that wealthy women who labored for money benefitted the common good

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<sup>99</sup> “Injustice of Taxing Women,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, February 2, 1890, 3.

<sup>100</sup> A. E. K., “Women’s Work in California.”

<sup>101</sup> Linda Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies: Women and the Obligations of Citizenship* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998), 81-95. It is worth noting that other women, like suffragist Lucy Stone, also engaged in tax resistance tactics. For an in-depth examination of suffragists’ actions and arguments for tax resistance, see Juliana Tutt, “‘No Taxation Without Representation’ in the American Woman Suffrage Movement,” *Stanford Law Review* 62, no. 5 (May 2010): 1473-1512.

<sup>102</sup> “Money for Wives,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, October 5, 1890, 26.

<sup>103</sup> Mrs. A. M. M. Payne, “Her First Doll,” *Woman’s Journal* 16, no. 49 (December 5, 1885): 390.

by doing their part to remove the stigma from labor.<sup>104</sup> Working for pay was still widely branded as unladylike because it entailed a combination of “manual labor, publicity, interaction with people of lower social standing, personal service, and deference” and exposed women to the “danger of falling into impropriety and sexual irregularity.”<sup>105</sup> Sarah Eisenstein, in her study of the late nineteenth-century prescriptive literature aimed at the women who sought jobs, reports that it was initially intended for downwardly-mobile “ladies.” By foregrounding these women’s abject need—their reason for working—prescriptive literature reconciled the notion of paid work with that of respectable womanhood while excluding other, less legitimate working women. By the early years of the twentieth century, a short period of paid work before marriage had become acceptable to the native-born middle-class. However, there was an important distinction to be made. Eisenstein insists how, while the idea of women working without losing caste became more acceptable, working-class women themselves remained suspicious characters whose very association could contaminate and degrade those who aspired to ladydom. Advice literature to women in paid occupations went from addressing the fallen but still respectable lady to the upwardly mobile woman who acted like one, and was wary of associating with the wrong crowd.<sup>106</sup>

Other groups, notably suffragists, were less rigid about their embrace of paid work for women. Very high-profile reformers connected to the cause of suffrage, like the above-mentioned Julia Ward Howe and her daughters, Isabella Beecher Hooker (1822-1907) or Mary A. Livermore (1820-1905), joined the WEIU and offered public praise for its vocational classes, employment bureau, and Exchange.<sup>107</sup> Livermore in particular publicized her membership, citing the WEIU as an example of an urban reform organization that really based its benevolent work off the shared assumption that “[t]he half-paid labor of women is a social abuse, prolific

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<sup>104</sup>In the WEIU’s 1884 annual report already Dr. Safford stressed the “importance to all classes of having some occupation.” See Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1884* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1884), 40, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065321724>; WEIU, *1890 Report*, 8.

<sup>105</sup>Sarah Eisenstein, *Give Us Bread but Give Us Roses: Working Women’s Consciousness in the United States, 1890 to the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1983), 86.

<sup>106</sup>Eisenstein, *Give Us Bread but Give Us Roses*, 71-111.

<sup>107</sup>“Our Boston Letter,” *Springfield Republican*, May 6, 1881, 2-3; Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, March 10, 1885, 94. 81-M237. Carton 1, item 15v. “Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Boston Journal*, November 25, 1879, 4. Mary Livermore was present at the first annual meeting of the WEIU and was recorded as praising its early efforts. “Easter Massachusetts,” *Springfield Republican*, December 17, 1881, 6: “Julia Ward Howe writes of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union’s Christmas sale at Boston, saying it needs and deserves generous patronage [...]”

of evil”<sup>108</sup>—by which she meant sex work. More obscure though locally prominent women were also active both in the WEIU and in Massachusetts suffrage organizations. The National Woman Suffrage Association of Massachusetts—founded in 1882—at one time in the 1880s counted as its president and vice-president Mrs. Harriette Robinson Shattuck and Dr. Salome Merrit; in the 1890s, another WEIU member, Mrs. Ellen Battelle Dietrick, was the president of the Boston Suffrage League.<sup>109</sup> Well-known advocates of woman suffrage who were affiliated with the WEIU consistently engaged with the issue of the value and worth of women’s work, at least on an embryonic level. At a lecture she gave in 1888, Lucy Stone once “brought down the house” by telling the story of a little boy who, upon describing the wages of his male family members, “explained how his mother did not work for anybody, at least there was no money in what she did.”<sup>110</sup> That wages did not always reward labor adequately, or not at all, was one insight that informed these women’s activism, and may have made the WEIU’s programs seem more appealing to them.

As far as its conception of women’s work went, the early WEIU itself seems to have oscillated between two polarities: idealizing paid work on the one hand—the “Dignity of Labor,” per the title of a 1884 talk<sup>111</sup>—and realistically apprehending it as a means of survival on the other. These contradictions appear very clearly in the 1880s reports issued by the Class and Lecture Committee, which state the Committee members’ desire to “[aid] those women and girls who [were] eager to equip themselves for earning their own support,” while the content of the classes themselves still skewed towards the ornamental arts. The very few individual cases which were discussed in the pages of those early reports were chiefly those of exceptional individuals whose achievements were framed as aspirational. The Committee congratulated itself for the fact that a young deaf girl was ready to find a position after taking unspecified classes at the Union, or that two saleswomen who had learned bookkeeping there could then secure better positions elsewhere.<sup>112</sup> It was not until the late 1880s that the Lecture Committee started inviting speakers to discuss actual social conditions; in 1888-1889, aspiring novelist Hamlin Garland

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<sup>108</sup>Mary A. Livermore, “Women’s Work in Moral Reforms,” *Woman’s Journal* 17, no. 44 (October 30, 1886): 345-346.

<sup>109</sup>Ida Husted Harper and Susan B. Anthony, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage* v. 4 (Rochester: Susan B. Anthony, c1900), 750-751, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924052143595>.

<sup>110</sup>“Legalized Masters,” *Baltimore Sun*, March 30, 1888, supplement, 1.

<sup>111</sup>*Columbus Journal* (Nebraska), June 11, 1884, 3.

<sup>112</sup>WEIU, *1884 Report*, 36.

delivered a talk on “Women’s Work and Wages.”<sup>113</sup> Until then, it was mostly in the WEIU’s Sunday religious meetings that the question of “work” was taken up, through the prism of women’s Christian duties. One such meeting was devoted to Anna F. Dowse’s sermon on “Ideal Work,” a praise of work as self-sacrifice and service, in which she declared: “we must dignify our [benevolent] work by doing it lovingly for its own sake.”<sup>114</sup> Dowse’s conception of “work” as a type of activity was heavily influenced by the culture and practice of benevolence. This is the lens through which white middle-class women viewed remunerative work. Even as the WEIU’s lectures started skewing toward an examination of women’s “work,” it often remained construed in terms of volunteer activism: 1887-1888, which signaled a significant shift in the contents of the Sunday meetings, featured talks on the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, the Salvation Army, and Dorothea Dix’s life’s work, all of which preceded Abby Morton Diaz’s grand encapsulation of these concerns, “The Advancement of Women during the last half Century.”<sup>115</sup>

The members of WEIU branches that sprouted in neighboring states in the early 1880s shared that conception of “Ideal Work.” An article that initially appeared in the *Kermis*, a short-lived journal published by the WEIU of Syracuse, New York, contained the aspirational and probably fictional story of a young woman who identified herself as a “gentlewoman.” Using the device of a letter to a friend, she documented how she found an “occupation that suit[ed] [her] taste and ability [as a middle-class woman], that [might] be followed without overstrain, and that [was] fairly remunerative.” These, then, were the three criteria according to which paid employment was assessed by job-seekers of that social background. Needless to say, the description of the anonymous letter-writer’s occupation sounds like a fever dream. She only needed to advertised herself as “[a] gentlewoman who has a few spare hours [and] would like employment in good families” to find herself with a roster of customers, for whom she performed the kind of domestic duties commonly assigned to women: nursing sick infants, watching over older children, reading to the blind, helping a housewife prepare a large dinner, etc. The author

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<sup>113</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 98 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May 7, 1889* (Boston: No. 98 Boylston Street, 1889), 22, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924015>. Novelist Hamlin Garland was in his late twenties when he lectured before the WEIU. The son of a Wisconsin farmer, Garland tried his hand at farming in North Dakota before moving to Boston in 1884, in hopes of starting a literary career. There, he found a position at the Boston School of Oratory. Federal Writers’ Project of the Works Progress Administration in South Dakota, *Hamlin Garland Memorial* (Mitchell, SD: South Dakota Writers’ League, 1939), 9-16, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3578442>.

<sup>114</sup>WEIU, *1884 Report*, 40.

<sup>115</sup>WEIU, *1888 Report*, 23-24.



herself compared her services to those of a sister or a daughter—not a servant—echoing much older conceptions of quasi-apprenticeships in domestic service as were prevalent in comfortable farming homes at the beginning of the century.<sup>116</sup>

In an intellectual context that accommodated ideas of middle-class women's work that ran the gamut from quaint to provoking, the ideology of work espoused by the Boston WEIU was not just the stuff of domestic fiction or advice literature. While for them the word "work" in its broadest meaning still encompassed charitable or benevolent employment, they increasingly understood paid work as both distinct in kind and highly desirable. The position of the Boston WEIU can be explained both by its proximity to suffrage circles, and by the fact that part of its membership had some sort of paid activity. The lively discussion that followed a 1884 talk on "Employments for Women" was led by such women as Mrs. Bella Barrows, the part-time stenographer, a Miss Newman, "the only woman in the city who has taken up floriculture as an occupation [and] thinks it can be made profitable" as well as a local journalist of some notoriety, "Sally Joy White, well qualified to speak of the profession, [who] said that in no other calling have women been better received than in journalism."<sup>117</sup> Per Mary Livermore's estimation, in 1886 the Boston WEIU's membership comprised about 1,000 women, "mostly from the working classes, but including also a few women of means."<sup>118</sup> Even though the latter made up a significant part of the membership, as the list of officers and committee members reveal, the base of the organization as well as the constituency which the leadership sought to reach may have had an impact on the WEIU's apprehension of the problems of working women. This was all the more important as keeping in touch with the lived experiences of self-supporting women was the only way to provide useful assistance to them.

### 1.1.3 The Vocational Turn of the Late 1880s

As early as 1882, there were plans at the Union for classes on "business forms and methods" as well as "industrial drawing and designing," but it was in the mid-1880s that a genuine vocational turn took place. The number of classes in purely ornamental arts declined, while the proportion of those that purported to teach students marketable skills rose. Just as vocational classes were receiving more

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<sup>116</sup>Faye Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 19-27.

<sup>117</sup>"Notes and News," *Woman's Journal* 15, no. 49 (December 6, 1884): 399.

<sup>118</sup>Livermore, "Women's Work in Moral Reforms," 345-346.

attention at the Union, the Class and Lecture Committee split in two. There was still a drive to provide well-to-do home-makers—and even self-supporting women—with social hours and leisure, but the new Class Committee was moving more decidedly toward vocational education. Consequently, a new “Art and Literature Coterie,” whose fashionable name hinted at its social purpose, was devised and given the task of organizing courses of lectures like those initially provided by the Lecture and Class Committee.<sup>119</sup>

The WEIU clearly introduced a distinction between different types of education, according to their purpose—education for leisure or for intellectual stimulation on the one hand, and education that was primarily meant to lead to earning opportunities on the other hand. As education and character-building were one, and the latter was still foremost in the minds of Union organizers, they consequently drew a line between the type of character-building working girls required, and that which they sought for themselves. From the outset, “numbers of sewing girls, saleswomen and other working women avail[ed] themselves” of the WEIU’s classes in “the common useful branches” like arithmetic for bookkeeping, likely hoping to cross the border between manual and non-manual occupations.<sup>120</sup> Learning a “handicraft” would provide working girls with a wholesome distraction and a “feeling of independence and self-respect,” as Reverend Julius Ward explained to the assembled women of the WEIU.<sup>121</sup> It was implied that better-off women would combine instruction and entertainment in different ways, cultivating their grasp of the social and political situation of the country. The local press offered glowing reports of the WEIU’s educational opportunities for young women in pursuit of “mental growth”: “The classes are well attended, and hundreds of young women avail themselves of the opportunity offered them of advancing in their studies, as they could not if they were compelled to find private instruction,” one article noted in 1885.<sup>122</sup> The late 1890s saw the introduction of several Parliamentary Law classes as well as morning “Topics of the Day” talks given by May Alden Ward, a well-connected author and lecturer; pamphlets issued by the Moral and Spiritual Development Committee dabbled in analyses of democracy throughout the ages, American imperialism and the Spanish-American War.<sup>123</sup> By 1905, the “class in

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<sup>119</sup>WEIU, *1884 Report*, 39.

<sup>120</sup>“Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Boston Journal*, November 25, 1879, 4.

<sup>121</sup>WEIU, *1884 Report*, 40.

<sup>122</sup>“Work Among Women,” *Boston Herald*, January 10, 1885, 2.

<sup>123</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1895* (Boston: The Barta Press, 144 High Street, 1895), 36, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923819>. As early as 1884, the Board of Government had resolved to have the Directors “adhere strictly to

Parliamentary Practice” was going strong: it admitted both men and women, and was given by a Mrs. S. S. Fesseden, who made it her business to lecture “Suffrage Leagues” on equal suffrage and conduct parliamentary drills for them.<sup>124</sup>

It was actually the years 1887-1888 that S. Agnes Donham (1871-1959), an early in-house female historian, identified as a turning point in the history of the WEIU’s classes.<sup>125</sup> In 1887, the Union’s annual report explicitly made the case for opening a course in “business methods,” feeling that “it would accomplish a great good.”<sup>126</sup> Starting in 1888-1889, the range of classes offered by the organization shrank, as part of a recentering on classes that taught marketable skills. The Union’s directors explicitly stated that they endeavored “to encourage women who studi[ed] for self-support as well as self-culture” and to answer the question that pupils were asking more and more frequently: “How can I learn to earn a living?”<sup>127</sup>

The year 1892-1893 is when the move towards dressmaking and millinery was made more visible through the adoption of new classroom methods that resembled those of a training school. Progressive reformers and skilled workmen looked favorably upon the industrial school as the scheme best able to prepare working-class youth for entry into both the factory system and the office of the modern corporation.<sup>128</sup> In 1895, the WEIU hired a graduate of Pratt Institute as their dressmaking teacher, professing a desire to lean toward “the new and more scientific [teaching] method taught at the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, the Drexel Institute, and other progressive industrial schools,” even when this required more money, and longer terms.<sup>129</sup> In the context of growing debates about the role of public education, Pratt Institute had been founded less than ten years prior, in Brooklyn, “to prepare women for home work or to become labourers”<sup>130</sup> such as

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parliamentary rules at the Board Meetings.” Roughly a decade later, the interest in parliamentary procedures had trickled down to the membership as a whole. Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, June 4, 1884, 22. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>124</sup>“Notes and News,” *Woman’s Journal* 36, no. 3 (January 21, 1905): 15.

<sup>125</sup>Additional WEIU records, S. Agnes Donham, *History of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union*, 1955, 13. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>126</sup>WEIU, *1887 Report*, 13.

<sup>127</sup>WEIU, *1888 Report*, 30.

<sup>128</sup>Ileen DeVault, *Sons and Daughters of Labor: Class and Clerical Work in Turn-of-the-Century Pittsburgh* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 125-127.

<sup>129</sup>WEIU, *1895 Report*, 36.

<sup>130</sup>Alison Kowalski, “The Pursuit of Art and Professionalism: Dressmaking, Millinery, and Costume Design at Pratt Institute, 1888-1904,” *Journal of Design History* 31, no. 4 (2018): 305-306, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jdh/epy018>. Oil tycoon Charles Pratt founded the eponymous institute in Brooklyn in 1887. Initially an “unusual combination of an art and design school,” it was an innovative private educational institution devoted to teaching skilled manual work to women, chiefly sewing and dressmaking. For the first fifteen years of its existence, which included

milliners and dressmakers. Operating from a broader platform, the later Philadelphia Drexel Institute (1890) was another renowned industrial school.<sup>131</sup> There, pupils received the manual training that proponents of vocational education advocated as beneficial on both economic and developmental grounds. Education reformers, allying with industrialists, argued that school curricula should be tailored to students' most likely future place on the labor market.<sup>132</sup> The WEIU was taking notice of these developments: keeping abreast of the latest pedagogical experiments in the field of industrial education was paramount to the members of the Class Committee.

The Class Committee justified these changes as a response to WEIU members' needs, offering to tailor the list of courses to better meet community needs. By 1896, the Class Committee wrote that they would not be satisfied "until the course is widely known, and we have a large proportion of pupils who intend to make Dressmaking a profession, and who take the lessons in a serious and earnest way attendant upon such a motive."<sup>133</sup> Ambitiously, they opened its first iteration of "a training school in dressmaking and millinery" with a structured curriculum that would span two years, as opposed to the trimester-based sewing classes.<sup>134</sup> The society's leaders tried to advertise how ready they were to listen to the needs of the women of the city. In one directory of Boston's charitable and benevolent organizations, the entry for the WEIU clearly specified that "[n]ew classes in any subject [could be] formed on request of 6 women."<sup>135</sup>

Tensions sometimes ran high between the leadership of the Class Committee

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the period when the WEIU drew upon its teaching staff, Pratt Institute contributed to spreading the ideas of dress reform and the Arts and Crafts movement.

<sup>131</sup>Pratt proved influential and, following its example, Drexel Institute of Technology was founded three years later in Philadelphia by philanthropists Anthony J. Drexel and George W. Childs. They intended to further the "practical education" of young men and women by providing them with instruction in wood-working, metal-working, sewing, and physical culture. The Drexel Institute did not teach specific "trades" but its curriculum was meant to supplement the general education dispensed in the public schools. Amateur historians connected to Drexel would later write of the school's founding that it was "a renewal in modern educational terms of the old guild spirit." See Edward D. McDonald and Edward M. Hinton, *Drexel Institute of Technology, 1891-1941: A Memorial History* (Philadelphia: Haddon Craftsmen, Inc., 1942), 15-16, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b3813197>.

<sup>132</sup>Jane Bernard Powers, *The Girl Question in Education: Vocational Education for Young Women in the Progressive Era* (London: Falmer Press, 1992), 1.

<sup>133</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston St., Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1896* (Cambridge: Press of the Cambridge Co-operative Society, 1896), 27, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924106>.

<sup>134</sup>WEIU, *1896 Report*, 12.

<sup>135</sup>Associated Charities, *A Directory of the Charitable and Beneficent Organizations of Boston* (Boston: Damrell & Upham, 1899), 172, HathiTrust, [hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951001873444s](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951001873444s).

and the women who took the dressmaking course, and they were likely caused by how different their views of the program were. What members wanted may not have been what the WEIU offered, and conversely the Class Committee's highly vocational ambitions were foisted on women who might have had other things in mind. In 1898, the Committee complained bitterly that most students failed to take the complete course, skipping the last term, which would have given them an experience of "order work."<sup>136</sup> WEIU women speculated that this was because the students were mostly "amateurs" who did not seek true business training. There was a clear disconnect between what members said they wanted—more dressmaking classes—and what members did—fail to sign up for the dressmaking classes the Union had set up, or fail to complete the entire course as it was designed by the WEIU's leadership. The latter did not speculate that this discrepancy may have been the consequence of working-class women not being able to take time off to follow the course, or not being keen on learning how to become a dressmaking teacher. Indeed, what the WEIU first meant by dressmaking as profession, was teaching dressmaking classes in working-girls' clubs. Misconstruing what their membership base sought, the Class Committee of the early 1890s persevered in offering unpopular classes in care of children and invalids for nurses.<sup>137</sup> The Union directors' personal experience led them to perceive a need for such classes; perhaps they, as employers of domestic servants, were looking for nurses with special training.

That last part, combined with the establishment of a "School of Housekeeping" in 1897, is likely what prompted historian Jane Bernard Powers to incorrectly identify the WEIU as part of a vocal minority of female reformers who envisioned trade education for young working-class women primarily as training for housework and domestic service.<sup>138</sup> As she puts it, the WEIU was part of a "concerned and influential network" of middle-class women "who worked to influence the course of trade training in the school"<sup>139</sup> starting in the 1890s. These women, a mix of social science researchers, settlement house leaders and home economists, were active participants in national debates about the place of women on the job market at the turn of the century. They argued that schools were responsible for outfit-

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<sup>136</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston St., Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1898* (Cambridge: Cambridge Co-operative Printing Society, 1898), 15, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923710>.

<sup>137</sup>WEIU, *1894 Report*, 40.

<sup>138</sup>Powers, *Girl Question in Education*, 29-35.

<sup>139</sup>Powers, *Girl Question in Education*, 28.

ting female students with the means of becoming self-supporting. It is telling that this group of women included Laura Drake Gills, of Sewanee College, who was later tasked by the WEIU with overseeing the restructuring and modernization of their employment bureau in the 1910s.<sup>140</sup> According to Powers, the WEIU was a precursor in discussing the benefits of formalizing trade training for young women, influencing the creation of schools like the Boston Trade School for Girls and the Manhattan Trade School for Girls.<sup>141</sup> I argue that this dimension of the WEIU's programs is more representative of their ideas and impact in the female trade education movement. As we will see in chapter 4, domestic service was envisioned quite distinctly from all the forms of work "in the higher branches."

By 1900, the transition from the society's early literary days to advocacy for industrial training seems to have been fully completed. In 1895 already, a reporter for the *Boston Herald* reported that there were "extensive changes"<sup>142</sup> underway on Boylston Street. Another, that the Union's class work would be "more extensive than ever before" and that "[g]reater attention [would] be paid to industrial lines of work."<sup>143</sup> The roster of classes offered by the WEIU was sharply polarized. On the one hand was a smattering of ornamental classes as well as current events talks aimed at society women. On the other was a school for dressmaking and millinery which the WEIU hoped would enable pupils to strike out on their own as independent proprietors. Skills like sewing were only worth mastering if they could lead to a career, WEIU women thought, and the distinction between the vocational and non-vocational uses of these skills was reinforced. Initially, the women of the WEIU considered self-support as the occasionally remunerative use of skills first mastered in a domestic context, which could be used indifferently to save money or to earn it. Through the evolution of the WEIU's dressmaking classes can be traced a clearer, more positive delineation of self-support as a career, and the gradual embrace of the same by the public: the Union abandoned its classes in needle work when an independent educational institution, the Trade School for Girls, was finally taken over by Boston's municipal government.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup>Margaret C. Dollar, *The Beginnings of Vocational Guidance for College Women: The Women's Educational and Industrial Union, the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, and Women's Colleges*, PhD thesis (Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1992), 84-88.

<sup>141</sup>Powers, *Girl Question in Education*, 27-29.

<sup>142</sup>"Among the Women's Clubs," *Boston Sunday Herald*, August 11, 1895, 28.

<sup>143</sup>"Practical Training for Girls," *Boston Sunday Herald*, November 3, 1895, 12.

<sup>144</sup>Additional WEIU records, "Reference Notes on Union," c1926, 3. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 153.

## 1.2 Employment Agencies: Those Who Had Work, and Those Who Wanted It

### 1.2.1 Work as Public Relief

The first attempts by Women’s Educational and Industrial Union to provide work to needy women found their origins in public relief schemes initially developed in the early nineteenth century. An early Union public meeting, which took place at the Union’s 4 Park Street rooms, framed the issue of women’s work as one of “relief among the poor.” Describing the work of women’s associations in other localities, like the Germantown Relief Association from Pennsylvania, association member Mrs. James T. Fields “appealed to her audience for aid and support in this great movement to assist struggling women, who were able and willing to work, but knew not how to secure it.”<sup>145</sup> Fields also expressed her sympathy, and presumably the WEIU’s as well, for “cooperative relief work,” that is to say the work of Boston’s Associated Charities (AC), an organization established in 1879 to centralize and coordinate private relief efforts. The AC sought to end the “indiscriminate charity”<sup>146</sup> mentioned at the Union’s meeting, first by ensuring that recipients worked for it—providing work relief—, and then by tracking down families and individuals who sought to combine aid from different sources.<sup>147</sup> The fact that the WEIU initially conceived of their employment scheme as relief reveals much about how contemporary attitudes towards poverty were evolving, and the kind of applicants that they expected to cater to. The idea of paid work as a better alternative to public relief derived from views of charity as morally debasing, and from work as its polar opposite. The epitome of forced labor as a character-building influence was the institution known variously as the poorhouse, almshouse, or workhouse, a facility managed by the local overseer of the poor, and where the elderly, the disabled, single mothers, children, petty criminals, and unemployed able-bodied men were housed and fed in exchange for manual work. Its proponents saw it as the ultimate instrument to both punish and reform the undeserving poor. The American workhouse found its origins in sixteenth-century Europe and, from there, in the North American colonies. In the United States, it was mostly in the larger cities of the eastern seaboard and their vicinity that they were concentrated.

<sup>145</sup>“Relief Visiting Among the Poor,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, February 21, 1878, 4.

<sup>146</sup>“Relief Visiting Among the Poor,” 4.

<sup>147</sup>Nathan Irving Huggins, *Protestants Against Poverty: Boston’s Charities, 1870-1900* (Westport: Greenwood, 1971), 25.

Following the publication of state reports in New York and Massachusetts, the 1820s saw a drive to build poorhouses, as the institution was by then believed to be more apt at reforming individuals than outdoor relief had been, by turning deviants into productive citizens. While, according to David Wagner, work was by the 1870s more of a “symbolic” demand on the part of reformers, it still loomed large so far as the collective imagination was concerned. Overall, the 1870s and 1880s marked the start of the institution’s slow decline, as potential inmates’ personal interests drew them to low-wage work outside the poorhouse, and this despite a hostile economic climate.<sup>148</sup>

The United States experienced a rather severe and prolonged economic downturn in the mid-to-late 1870s, which led to a corresponding rise in unemployment. The slump did not escape reformers’ notice; in their 1879 report, the WEIU’s workers wondered “how best to meet the alarming fact that the increase of unemployed labor threatens to overpower us.” They thought of devising ways to become “alleviators of this evil,” and they involved “bring[ing] together for mutual benefit those having work to be done, and those willing to work.”<sup>149</sup> Accordingly, in its early months of existence the WEIU set up an “employment bureau.” Its goal was to “relieve [needy women’s] immediate necessities.”<sup>150</sup> In the nineteenth-century city, “intelligence offices,” the most common name for the employment bureau, were a common sight; they sprang up out of a recognized need for connecting houseworkers and their employers. Unlike the WEIU’s, the standard employment office would have targeted domestic servants, and perhaps seamstresses for private families. In addition, they had a reputation for being especially seedy, unreliable businesses; some were run by women out of their own kitchens. As early as 1825, a New York Society for the Encouragement of Faithful Domestic Servants opened a benevolent intelligence office, trying to fight disreputable for-profit ventures.<sup>151</sup> Like the New York association, the Boston Union aimed at carrying out placement work in a fair manner that was also relevant to the needs that they perceived. At the society’s headquarters, applicants for work would submit written references to one of the six members who took turns managing the bureau everyday from 11 to 12 am. The work of receiving applicants involved having a “personal conver-

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<sup>148</sup>David Wagner, *The Poorhouse: America’s Forgotten Institution* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 2-10; 40; 50-56.

<sup>149</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational & Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 7, 1879* (Boston: 4 Park Street, 1879), 23, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2wncj5nkpr>.

<sup>150</sup>WEIU, *1882 Report*, 52.

<sup>151</sup>Dudden, *Serving Women*, 79-85.



sation” with them, and offering them encouragement if needed.<sup>152</sup> Contact was established in a personalized way, so as not to make the clients feel that they were domestics seeking work in a commercial employment bureau.

The mostly middle-class women who ran the Employment Committee put effort into stripping the veneer of class from the personal interactions which took place in their parlors. They hoped that their cross-class organization could mediate between the haves and the have-nots, by helping both fulfill each other’s needs. This via media was illustrated by the work of the Union’s “Protective Committee.”<sup>153</sup> Initially considered part of their “Employment” work, this legal aid department aimed at protecting female employees from bad employers, but without necessarily taking the side of the former.<sup>154</sup>

Between May 1879 and May 1880, the WEIU received 220 applications from employers, 130 of which they filled, while they rejected a much larger 510 applications for employment. Their first and starkest realization was that “many of the women who appl[ied] to the Bureau for employment, [were] those who [had] not been accustomed to work, being persons who [had] lived in comfortable, in some cases, affluent circumstances in their own homes, until overtaken by reverses of fortune which [had] obliged them to seek for means of support.” The second was that there was very little demand for the kind of work that these needy women offered to—or were able to—do, what the WEIU’s S. E. Cotting termed “the higher class of employment.”<sup>155</sup> By this, she would have meant non-manual work which required no vocational training, because it drew on a lady’s education. It is likely that the Union’s first applicants for relief sought work as child nurses, governesses, and seamstresses to private families, or as companions to elderly or disabled women of means. Annie A. Fellows, who briefly served as chair for the Employment Committee, noted that many of the applicants looked for positions as “nurses and seamstresses.” She also wrote that the bureau was “for the benefit of a class of women and girls who [were] unwilling to go to an ordinary intelligence office” and aimed “not only at finding employment for them, but at giving them kindly advice as well.”<sup>156</sup>

Consequently, in 1881 the WEIU introduced a “stricter system of classification

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<sup>152</sup>WEIU, *1879 Report*, 23.

<sup>153</sup>WEIU, *1879 Report*, 19.

<sup>154</sup>Which is what Wendy Gamber concludes from her close reading of the minutes of Protective Committee meetings. Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 85-88.

<sup>155</sup>WEIU, *1880 Report*, 31.

<sup>156</sup>WEIU, *1882 Report*, 52.

of applicants,” which it was hoped would lead to the “rapid development of the original plan of furnishing only the higher grade of employés.”<sup>157</sup> Ever-finer classifications were thought to make it possible for them to sort through workers, keep the best, and use them to entice employers susceptible to hire women. Within a few years, the system evolved into one of “classifying applicants with their best work.”<sup>158</sup>

### 1.2.2 Distinguishing the “Higher Branches”

By the mid-1880s, the WEIU had worked out the kinks of its employment bureau. Most applicants were able to find permanent situations as “assistants in the various higher branches of employment”—two thirds of the 574 women who patronized the service in 1883-1884.<sup>159</sup> The association rapidly moved to offer better terms of service themselves. In 1885, they hired a member, whom they put in charge of the books and of receiving prospective employers and employees. Mrs. Marshall’s labor supplemented the work of the five volunteer “ladies” who were in charge of the committee.<sup>160</sup> The finishing touch on the WEIU’s employment bureau was paying for the professional license that would sanction their enterprise, which the Board of Government planned to do in late 1884 for 1885.<sup>161</sup> The year when the WEIU’s placement bureau received official sanction was also when “Employment” became an independent committee—and it was explicitly for the “higher branches” that it was established.<sup>162</sup>

Faced with the conundrum of finding more respectable openings for women who were neither accustomed to nor willing to turn to domestic service or factory work, WEIU women worked to help speed up the feminization of the lower-ranking clerical employments. This process, which took place roughly between 1880-1930, was one by which, according to Angel Kwolek-Folland, “[t]he all-male office of the early-nineteenth-century United States became, by the twentieth century, a predominantly female space.” Around the turn of the century, clerical work was the one occupational category in which women made the fastest headway. Young, white, native-born women entered the office as cashiers, accountants, typists, book-

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<sup>157</sup>WEIU, *1881 Report*, 44.

<sup>158</sup>WEIU, *1884 Report*, 47.

<sup>159</sup>WEIU, *1884 Report*, 47.

<sup>160</sup>WEIU, *1885 Report*, 39; Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, October 7, 1884, 40. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>161</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, December 16, 1884, 62. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>162</sup>WEIU, *1885 Report*, 39.

keepers, secretaries, and stenographers. Whereas in 1870 women had constituted 2.5% of the total clerical labor force, by 1930 they represented more than half of all clerical workers (52.5%).<sup>163</sup> From an analysis of census returns, Carole Srole has shown that, with Washington D.C, Boston was one of the cities which led the feminization of the clerking workforce. In 1880, under 10% of clerical workers in the fifty largest American cities were women. In Boston, that figure was over 12%, and nearby Cambridge had an even higher 19.3% of female workers in offices. By 1890, Boston was still a trend-setter, at a 25.2% female workforce; only manufacturing cities in the states of New York and Massachusetts had similar figures.<sup>164</sup> Women had started entering offices in the 1860s, and the depression of the 1870s accelerated the process, as hiring more female workers was considered an acceptable way of cutting down on labor costs. According to Srole, the late 1880s witnessed another “employment boom,” and by 1905 the transformation of the office was completed in Boston. “Of all areas in the US, metropolitan Boston was the initiator and continuous leader in the hiring of women clerical workers,” she writes.<sup>165</sup>

The women of the WEIU were likely aware of these developments. It is hard to gauge how instrumental the work of their Business Agency proved in prying open the doors of the corporate office, but what is certain is that they at least tried to do so. They sent business cards to employers, advertising the fact that they could provide reliable white-collar workers.<sup>166</sup> all in hopes of making women’s entry into certain occupations seem more legitimate—even quite socially acceptable. In the 1880s, the association also started recording, classifying, and advertising these new occupations. In the WEIU’s rooms was kept a book in which “short notices of the different employments suitable for women” was kept for perusal by applicants.<sup>167</sup> To this was later added a circular containing “a list of more than thirty-three different kinds of employment for women, that [were] practical and possible in the various conditions of life.”<sup>168</sup> These efforts could not, by themselves, revolutionize Boston’s labor market; over the course of the 1880s and 1890s, the Union’s officers

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<sup>163</sup>Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 4.

<sup>164</sup>Carole Srole, ‘*A Position that God Has Not Particularly Assigned to Men: The Feminization of Clerical Work, Boston, 1860-1915*, PhD thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1984, 4-5; 9-11.

<sup>165</sup>Srole, ‘*A Position*,’ 5.

<sup>166</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, February 3, 1885, 81. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>167</sup>WEIU, *1885 Report*, 39.

<sup>168</sup>WEIU, *1888 Report*, 27.

regularly lamented the fact that prospective employees outnumbered employers.<sup>169</sup>

Perhaps in response to this, in 1889 the WEIU briefly opened a second, quite distinct employment bureau for domestic service. This “Department of Domestic Service” was to be contrasted with the newly branded “General Department.” In its first year, 1,366 out of the 1,541 applicants for domestic service were provided with a situation, compared to 591 out of 1,673 “general” employees.<sup>170</sup> There was evidently a greater demand for, and lower threshold to, positions as domestics. Despite this, housework was resolutely set apart from any and all other categories of employment for women. By keeping two separate placement bureaus, the WEIU implicitly reaffirmed that the women who were supposed, or fit, to be domestic servants were of a different kind than those who sought out the new clerical occupations.

The 1890s constituted a transitional era for the WEIU’s Employment Department. Between late 1889 and 1891, the domestic bureau was briefly dropped for lack of space, on account of the association moving to new quarters. The Board of Government felt that, since similar services were being offered by other private concerns, there was no need to prioritize it. Interestingly, this was not the case for the “general” department.<sup>171</sup> However, as we have noted, some things were slow to change: the WEIU consistently reported that the women seeking non-manual or skilled sewing work possessed inadequate training for these occupations. “We have a large class of applicants who have not been accustomed to general labor, or trained to service of any particular kind; so that they are in a measure unfitted for the regular work generally required, and are often undecided themselves what they are best prepared to undertake,” the Employment Department’s chair would write in 1890 still. Helping them required larger amounts of both time and effort.<sup>172</sup> More often than was the case for 1870s victims of the economic downturn, these were women who had once been able to support themselves, but lost the tenuous grip they had had on respectability—a middle-aged saleswoman, perhaps, who had “taken ill” and found her place filled by a younger woman, and “must resort to sewing to earn a living” but had no skill she could market for it. This could also be a teacher, whose ill-health and unwise investments had cost her position and savings. How could the Union help, in such cases? In at least two instances in the early 1890s, “trust funds” were secured for “women too old and feeble to continue a

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<sup>169</sup>WEIU, *1885 Report*, 39.

<sup>170</sup>WEIU, *1889 Report*, 27.

<sup>171</sup>WEIU, *1891 Report*, 30.

<sup>172</sup>WEIU, *1890 Report*, 33.

wage-earning life,” the reluctant acknowledgment that paid work alone could not always suffice.<sup>173</sup> Angel Kwolek-Folland cogently argues that “the economic and social class meanings of [white-collar] work can vary depending on gender, race, life stage, or the opportunity such work provides for widening social contacts.”<sup>174</sup> She takes the example of a young secretary in 1900, for whom the option of marrying a colleague would have guaranteed a more assured footing into the middle-class than remaining single and becoming a career secretary—which would have involved retaining a measure of respectability, but not the comfortable means and lifestyle associated with the “middle class.” In a still indefinite way, the WEIU was taking notice of these discrepancies, and attempting to improve the economic situation of individuals trapped in ambiguous circumstances.

The 1890s signaled a slow away move from the individual or crisis framework, towards formulating a social or collective approach to the problem of women’s economic dependency. In 1891, shortly before becoming the WEIU’s third president, wealthy Back Bay matron Mary Morton Kehew was the chairperson for the Employment Committee when she wrote of the “unsolved difficulties” that the volunteers she coordinated were facing—such as “the uncertain relation of the employer to the employed, the still more difficult question of the responsibilities of the public towards the unemployed, and the monster perplexity of supply and demand.”<sup>175</sup> In their attempt to alleviate the problems of individuals, in part through the work of the Employment Department, the volunteers active in the Women’s Union came to realize the extent of the barriers to paid employment against which untrained white native-born women struggled.

When the association reopened its domestic bureau on Providence Street, in 1892, it did so with a radically new outlook—a determination to implement “plans for thoroughly business-like, systematic, and careful work [...] and from a careful investigation of the best methods in other institutions [...] to take one step towards a solution” to the shortage of domestics that housewives increasingly faced.<sup>176</sup> In chapter 4, we will pick up the thread of the “domestic” or “servant problem” that the WEIU made it its responsibility to solve, and further investigate WEIU workers’ attitudes toward housework.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>173</sup>Additional WEIU records, Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., 1900-1901* (Cambridge: The Co-operative Press, 1901), 60. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>174</sup>Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Engendering Business*, 12.

<sup>175</sup>WEIU, *1891 Report*, 30.

<sup>176</sup>WEIU, *1891 Report*, 31.

<sup>177</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Year Book, Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 1905-1906* (Boston, January 1907), 5, <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/curiosity/>

In 1895, the WEIU's employment bureau became the "Business Agency," and advertisements for it briefly ran in Boston's main papers. Its managers kept up the outreach work, hoping by their persistence to crack open the doors of business firms. To them, it seemed a plain matter of having employers realize the quality of the work that increasingly trained applicants could perform: "On our books there are registered many reliable workers, and we are earnestly striving to reach the business world by new connections. The problem of how to help the many who must earn their living and who have no regular occupation is a difficult one and yet each year opens up new opportunities for genuinely qualified workers," the Committee's chair wrote for the WEIU's annual report.<sup>178</sup>

Despite this increasingly clear sense of their mission and of the environment in which they were operating, there was still confusion at the WEIU about the exact boundaries according to which they should categorize women's occupations. For a few years, this translated to a push-pull dynamic of organizational fusion and separation. In 1896, the Business Agency and domestic bureau were reunited in a Department of Industries and Employment, following the acknowledgment that both "devis[ed] and adopt[ed] such industrial methods as shall be a true help for women, whereby their individual talents may be unfolded to profitable issues, either in the domain of art, science, literature, trade, manufacture, invention, home avocation, or whatever else offers to insure this end."<sup>179</sup> Nine years later, the running of the two placement bureaus would be neatly dissociated once more.<sup>180</sup>

This hesitation as to what constituted women's work can also be deduced from the organizational standing of the Union's "Industrial Department." For women who would not or could not leave their homes to apply for the "positions" that the first employment bureau offered, the WEIU opened what was then called a "Woman's Exchange." It was instituted in April 1878 as a branch of the Employment Committee, whose attributions were to "receive the work of women at 'the rooms' and sell it" on commission.<sup>181</sup> Despite its origins in the association's

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[women-working-1800-1930/45-990093887760203941](#). "The Union's aims have altered inevitably with its growth and with the radical changes in social economic conditions, and in the collective viewpoint, that have taken place in the last thirty years. More and more the Union is coming to interest itself not merely in the local and immediate application of those industrial and civic conditions that are related to its various activities, but in their broader reaction on the community, with the idea of preventive, rather than remedial, and personal work."

<sup>178</sup>WEIU, *1895 Report*, 33.

<sup>179</sup>WEIU, *1896 Report*, 39, 71.

<sup>180</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 4, November 21, 1905, 1. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>181</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 1, April 2, 1878, 46. 81-M237. Carton 1.

“Employment” division, by 1905 the annual report plainly stated that the “Employment Department as a whole [had] found interpretation through four allied but distinct efforts”<sup>182</sup> which did not include the shop—perhaps a sign that “employment” was first and foremost construed by these middle-class reformers as a position, whether permanent or temporary, that not only entailed an income, but some sort of labor performed outside the four walls of one’s home.

### 1.3 The “Exchange”: An Incubator for Businesswomen

Starting in 1879, with the establishment of an independent Industrial Department,<sup>183</sup> the Union experimented with a wide array of commercial activities designed to benefit producers as much as customers and reformers. In both concept and execution the WEIU borrowed from pioneers in other northeastern cities. In the early 1880s, exchanges were a well-known type of urban institution, which is certainly why, until 1884, the sign posted outside the Union read “Woman’s Exchange,”<sup>184</sup> even though their “Industrial Department” did not bear the name (a fact which actually confused Bostonians<sup>185</sup>).

The women who put on such Exchanges, and perhaps some of their customers and producers, developed an innovative conception of economic gender-based solidarity. At the same time, they also looked backwards, to notions of middle-class respectability that forbade women from working outside of the home, lest they lose caste. Over the course of the first two decades of the WEIU’s Industrial Department, however, such views eventually receded, to the point consignors were dealt with, and considered as economic agents first and foremost—producers/suppliers to be schooled in the rules of the marketplace.

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<sup>182</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *A Report of Progress Made in the Year 1905, Being the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston: Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 1905), 25, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239272>.

<sup>183</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 1, October 7, 1879, 113. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>184</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, June 4, 1884, 18. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>185</sup>“Gossip and Gleanings,” *Woman’s Journal* 15, no. 52 (December 27, 1884): 429.

### 1.3.1 Antebellum Concerns: Preserving Caste

By midcentury, the ability for women to remain home-bound had become a class signifier that limited women’s earning options. Women from the middling classes were supposed to inhabit a homosocial domestic world. Going out for work was tantamount to losing caste, which is the reason why home-based work, when possible, was often preferred, for both practical and ideological reasons. Regardless of the cultural imperative to shield women from the streets, the demands of housework and childcare were powerful drivers for female kin not to venture too far from the family’s lodgings. They alone could make it more likely for women to prefer income-generating work that they could perform at home and incorporate more flexibly into their daily schedule.

According to Edith Sparks, this lived experience is why many female proprietors at the time chose business-ownership. In her study of late nineteenth-century women business-owners in San Francisco, she shows that they “pursued [operating businesses in the domestic industry] as viable opportunities within market niches where their skills and resources could be leveraged to meet an economic need.”<sup>186</sup> Proprietorship, in her analysis, was a solution to the conundrum of contributing to household income, especially for those women who were the heads of their household. Scholars have noted that female proprietors were far from being insignificant exceptions in the nineteenth-century city: many petty dealers of all sorts operated from their houses, with very little capital, selling food, alcohol, or various trinkets.<sup>187</sup> Boarding-house keepers even made their own homes, and their home-making skills, into a source of cash, thereby unwittingly highlighting the tensions that existed when domestic spaces became sites where economic relationships visibly played out.<sup>188</sup> Those who had neither capital nor a home to operate from could peddle fruit, vegetables or baked goods in the street. They occupied the lowest rungs of the urban economy, like the Black women who sold hot corn in early-nineteenth-century New York.<sup>189</sup>

For those who could, operating a bakery, a grocery store, a dressmaking establishment or even a boarding-house from one’s own home was leaps and bounds above street peddling. At a time when live-in service was the norm, it was not as stigmatizing as turning to domestic service either. However, definitions of what

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<sup>186</sup>Edith Sparks, *Capital Intentions: Female Proprietors in San Francisco, 1850-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 8, 9-10.

<sup>187</sup>Deutsch, *Women and the City*, 115-116.

<sup>188</sup>Gamber, *Boardinghouse in Nineteenth-Century America*, 7-8.

<sup>189</sup>Stansell, *City of Women*, 13.



gentility constituted varied, and to some even keeping shop was not deemed “genteel” enough.<sup>190</sup> The poem an anonymous *Good Housekeeping* reader submitted to the magazine in 1889 variously noted, “Genteel it is to have soft hands, / But not genteel to work on lands; / Genteel it is to lie in bed, / But not genteel to earn your bread; [...] Genteel it is to play a fool, / But not genteel to keep a school; [...] Genteel it is to eat rich cake, / But not genteel to cook or bake” or even “*Genteel it is to skip and hop, But not genteel to keep a shop.*”<sup>191</sup> The reader who submitted the poem, which they had supposedly found in a fragmentary form in their attic, dated it back to the 1850s and implied that they disagreed with its message. Still, they framed the issue of what constituted true gentility—idleness or “honest” work—as contentious. As far as women’s work was concerned, domestic labor itself was not the issue; the circumstances in which it was performed were, for they colored popular perceptions of it. Labor that took place within the home, whether paid homework or unpaid care work, was invisibilized by virtue of its very location.<sup>192</sup> Cooking was respectable if it was gratuitous, private labor performed for the family; putting-out was too, only insofar as it was done by married farm women in their spare time. Increasingly, as the kind of homework performed by the wives of immigrant men gained more visibility, so was it branded as the opposite of respectable. In the 1890s, campaigners against the sweated trades loudly proclaimed the women who made artificial flowers or shelled nuts for what amounted to starvation wages to be degraded “white slaves,” objects of mixed contempt and pity.<sup>193</sup>

Publicity appears to have been the biggest threat to genteel women’s propriety, and we see hints of reluctance to publicity of any kind in some of the older

<sup>190</sup>Sparks, *Capital Intentions*, 44. Sparks cites the fictional account of the scion of a wealthy family befriendng the son of a female confectioner, much to his parents’ horror. She uses the example to illustrate how, in the late 1850s, the figure of the female retail dealer functioned as a stock character and a class signifier.

<sup>191</sup>A. M. P., “What is Gentility?” *Good Housekeeping* 9, no. 1 (May 11, 1889): 46, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015024013966>. Emphasis mine.

<sup>192</sup>Eileen Boris, *Home To Work: Motherhood and the Politics of Industrial Homework in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>193</sup>Boris, *Home To Work*, 22-23. The moral panic over “white slavery” found its roots in the large urban centers of the northeast, when concerns arose over stories of white, native-born women being coerced into becoming sex workers. They reached a fever pitch in the 1900s and 1910s, when an organized campaign against “white slavery” unfolded. Brian Donovan has argued that this moral panic was grounded in a process of race formation analogous to the development of the Jim Crow system in southern states. Racial boundaries were drawn and redrawn by “racialized images of sexual depravity and sexual innocence.” Instead of building up the racist stereotype of the black rapist, white native-born reformers from the North posited the existence of a new kind of slavery and used it to stoke fears of a reversal in a supposed natural hierarchy of races. Brian Donovan, *White Slave Crusades: Race, Gender, and Anti-Vice Activism, 1887-1917* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 15.

WEIU members, like the widow of a wealthy Boston merchant, Mary ”Hemmingway” or Hemenway (1820-1894), who in 1884 sent a letter to the WEIU’s Board of Directors to suggest the creation of a bureau for missing articles, because she did not see it proper for a woman to advertise in the newspapers for lost belongings.<sup>194</sup> Such attitudes towards the press may also have caused some of the members of the Industrial Committee to initially oppose putting up weekly advertisements for their activities in the Boston papers as they did in December of the same year.<sup>195</sup> As late as the mid-1880s, then, women from propertied families still struggled with having a public presence, even when it could not be avoided.

In the 1830s, Americans had not yet started questioning these constraints on genteel women’s remunerative use of their time. Middle-class female reformers from Philadelphia tried to simply work around them. In 1832, at a time when economic instability and downward mobility were causes for general anxiety, they decided to help formerly middle- and upper-class ladies like themselves. What they wanted to address was not free Black women’s lack of opportunities beyond laundry work or service, or white working-class women’s double shift. They zeroed in on the issue of respectability, sympathizing first and foremost with white women who had fallen on hard times and were desperate to support themselves without risking their reputation by going out of the home or applying for municipal relief. The founders of the Philadelphian Ladies’ Repository drew on inspiration from early-nineteenth-century Scotland, but they adapted the idea to the social, economic and cultural context in which they found themselves.<sup>196</sup> In the 1830s, a decade that bore the stamp of religious revivalism, “perfectionists” like them looked not only to alleviate but to eradicate the increasingly glaring inequalities wrought by the market revolution.<sup>197</sup>

Who were the consignors and to whom did this female solidarity actually

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<sup>194</sup>Mary Hemenway was the wife of Augustus Hemenway, of the firm Hemenway and Brown, which traded in the Caribbean and in South America. When he died, the famously overworked Hemenway was said to have left her “the largest fortune ever probated in Boston” at the time, 22 million dollars. United States Census, 1860, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MZCC-D8D>), Mary T Heminway in entry for Augustus Heminway, 1860; “The Road to Fortune,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, September 13, 1891, 21. “Domain of Woman,” *Plain Dealer*, March 22, 1894, 4; Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, November 18, 1884, 51. 81-M237. Carton 1, item 15v.

<sup>195</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, December 16, 1884, 62. 81-M237. Carton 1, item 15v. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. <https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/resources/5020#>.

<sup>196</sup>Kathleen Waters Sander, *The Business of Charity: The Woman’s Exchange Movement, 1832-1900* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 11-25.

<sup>197</sup>Hewitt, *Women’s Activism and Social Change*, 40.

extend? Elizabeth Stott's Ladies' Repository aimed at meeting the needs of women that she felt had not been helped sufficiently by existing charities—the “genteel poor,” white and native-born, those who retained a middle-class sense of respectability, and were reluctant to take on work for which they were unprepared, or which they feared would degrade them. The first consignors of the Philadelphia Ladies' Repository would arrange for deliveries of their goods at night, dressed in concealing clothing.<sup>198</sup> As a journalist put it in the late 1880s, at the peak of the Woman's Exchange movement, “[Exchanges] were the first provision for a class needy yet shrinking from any public recognition of such need; a class including thousands who have ‘seen better days;’ that formula which means almost inevitably no training to fall back upon when the evil days came.”<sup>199</sup> Women were even more vulnerable to impoverishment than men; the injury, death or desertion of a male breadwinner could be sudden and plunge their female kin into destitution, even when they had enjoyed a relatively comfortable living beforehand; the death or desertion of a primary breadwinner was often a trigger for young rural women to migrate to the city in search of work.<sup>200</sup> Intense anxieties and fears of downward mobility characterized many of those who self-identified as part of the broad middle range of society in the 1830s.<sup>201</sup> In fact, Anne Boylan has shown that because downward mobility was a common experience in the first half of the century, it was not unusual for benevolent ladies to provide charitable assistance to their former peers.<sup>202</sup> and so the distinguishing feature of the Philadelphian Repository was its emphasis on the economic agency of the women it helped.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, the idea of a group of women helping themselves or other women sell the product of their industry on their own terms would keep resurfacing locally, a testament to the appeal of the idea. In 1844, thirty widows who turned to sewing to make a living formed a Women's Sewing Association and opened a shop in Rochester, to “protect themselves from the rapacity of employers.”<sup>203</sup> At the very same time, in Boston, the female-led Seamen's Aid Society had its members sew naval uniforms towards fulfillment of a contract with the Navy Bureau of Provision and Clothing. Forty years later, in Los Angeles, a dressmaker and three sewing women formed the core of a “little

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<sup>198</sup>Sander, *Business of Charity*, 31.

<sup>199</sup>Helen Campbell, “Women's Exchanges,” *Woman's Work and Wages*, *Good Housekeeping* 10, no. 3 (December 1889): 65.

<sup>200</sup>Stansell, *City of Women*, 12; Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, 14.

<sup>201</sup>Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 60-61.

<sup>202</sup>Boylan, *Origins of Women's Activism*, 204-206.

<sup>203</sup>Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change*, 33.

cooperative sewing establishment” that distributed out-work to women who could not leave their homes to sew on the premises.<sup>204</sup> However short-lived, enterprises such as these were a decisive step away from the charitable proto-manufactures of the 1810s and 1820s. In a private twist on public relief schemes, they gave impoverished women yarn to spin, or cloth to sew and then sold the end product, like the New York Society for the Relief of Poor Widows with Small Children, which by 1804 was selling the clothes made by the society’s charges.<sup>205</sup>

While the women who sold goods through the Woman’s Exchange were not treated as charity recipients, the concept was not as radical in challenging power relationships in the market because the organizers of Exchanges did not necessarily produce goods alongside consignors. It was only implied that they too would be welcome to furnish the shops, if bad times came, or if they wanted the money. Rather like the leaders of the Providence Employment Society (1837), who cast themselves as model employers to the seamstresses to whom they sought to give work,<sup>206</sup> Elizabeth Stott and her peers of the first Philadelphia Exchange offered to harness entrepreneurship and substitute themselves for male proprietors.

Still, the Exchange was only the most popular implementation of a more horizontal, more truly cooperative scheme that found expression in many different forms across the country starting in the late 1830s. Kathleen Waters Sander characterizes the spread of Woman’s Exchanges as a loose “movement” driven by word-of-mouth. With no input from a national or federal body, exchanges numbered perhaps two on the eve of the Civil War, before visitors at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition had a chance to become acquainted with the idea and disseminate it across the northeast. According to Sander, there were seventy-two Exchanges in operation in 1900.<sup>207</sup> Perhaps the concept of the Exchange was so attractive because it successfully struck reformers’ imagination, but it may have met a real need. As a collectively-operated, anonymous selling platform, the Woman’s Exchange was a way for women to emancipate themselves from manufacturers and escape the working-class taint of homework. Exchange consignors were not the same women who engaged in the kind of homework typically associated with immigrants and which would have been performed by entire families crammed in downtown tenements. As Eileen Boris writes of the employment category which

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<sup>204</sup>Boylan, *Origins of Women’s Activism*, 149, 206.

<sup>205</sup>Anne Boylan, “Women in Groups: An Analysis of Women’s Benevolent Organizations in New York and Boston, 1797-1840,” *Journal of American History* 71, no. 3 (December 1984): 501.

<sup>206</sup>Porter, “Business Heads and Sympathizing Hearts,” 303.

<sup>207</sup>Sander, *Business of Charity*, 3, 43-49.

“homework” increasingly constituted, in and of itself, “[h]omeworker turned into a category produced and limited by the discourses through which reformers and trade unionists opposed what they named exploitation: low wages, poor working conditions, and a general lack of a control over the labor process.”<sup>208</sup>

There are very few records of consignors’ experiences or social backgrounds, and their situations and motivations for supplying Exchanges likely varied. Many came from the ranks of the tenuously affluent or the genteel poor, widows out to support themselves or mothers looking after children or sick family members.<sup>209</sup> The appeal of the Exchange was felt widely, as an 1889 *Good Housekeeping* forum revealed. A reader from rural Vermont confided, “I am constantly meeting women who are unhappy in life because they have never been taught business habits, and are as helpless in caring for themselves as young children. Such women are from all grades of society, and most especially do those suffer who have been reduced from prosperous conditions to poverty.”<sup>210</sup> Other letter writers were not so kind to better-off women looking for a purpose in life or a supplementary income of their own. As one wrote, contrasting two different types of consignors, “I know one who makes and sells sponge cake to get her pin-money. I know of another woman who bakes cake and sells it at a Woman’s Exchange that she may buy silk and flounces, while her husband pays for the sugar and butter she uses. Is it not too bad that those who need the help of Exchanges must compete with those who live only to gratify their love of finery?”<sup>211</sup> Most sympathetically perceived were the women whose husbands could not or would not provide for the family. When that was the case, it was up to their wives to develop the “business talent” that they lacked.<sup>212</sup> In the 1890s, as much greater numbers of married women began to work for pay,<sup>213</sup> “pin-money” would spark heated debates in working-girls’ clubs.<sup>214</sup> These clashes attest to the persistence of the idea that paid female labor was to be a stopgap in a family’s finances, as well as to the different ways that universal sisterhood could be deployed—to support wealthy women’s right to work for pay, or to deny it, depending on whether individual or collective—

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<sup>208</sup>Boris, *Home to Work*, 3.

<sup>209</sup>In some locales, this was the case even as late as the early 1910s: “The Woman’s Exchange of Oakland, California,” *Boston Cooking-School Magazine* 17, no. 1 (June-July 1912): 11, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044083801829>.

<sup>210</sup>Helen Campbell, “A New Song,” *Woman’s Work and Wages*, *Good Housekeeping* 10, no. 1 (October 1889), 14-17, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.64458260>. This was the first entry in a new series on “Woman’s Work and Wages.”

<sup>211</sup>Campbell, “A New Song.”

<sup>212</sup>Campbell, “A New Song.”

<sup>213</sup>Kessler-Harris, *Out to Work*, 109.

<sup>214</sup>Murolo, *Common Groud of Womanhood*, 101-103, 120.

class-based—empowerment was considered. Exchange managers faced their own version of this conundrum. Initially, the WEIU, like most other Exchanges, kept its commission rates kept purposefully low as a form of charity.<sup>215</sup>

### 1.3.2 Female Association as Gender-Based Economic Solidarity

The Woman’s Exchange is one of the earlier iterations of the idea that women should help themselves earn a living by purchasing goods from one another. In the last two decades, historians of consumption and consumer behavior have outlined the ways in which Americans have sought to be mindful or ethical consumers—buy with a purpose.<sup>216</sup> More recent studies center not on consumers themselves or consumer movements, but activist businesses and their originators, and how these activist businessmen and women have contributed funding and spaces to social movements like feminism or civil rights, shaping both the geography of the city and that of activist networks.<sup>217</sup> If the feminist libraries and printing presses of the 1960s and 1970s have been hailed as the vanguard of a “feminist economic revolution,” shops that were similar in design and intent existed well before them. Like 1960s and 1970s feminists, Boston’s clubwomen of the Progressive Era asked themselves the question, “[i]f businesses [are] one of men’s greatest source of power, [can] they be restructured to give women power?”<sup>218</sup> Of workingmen’s benefit funds, the Union’s directors wrote in 1889 that “[a]ssociations of this kind have been so successful with men in many instances, there seems no reason why women should not have the same opportunity.”<sup>219</sup> Trade unions and workingmen’s benefit funds struck these reformers as a primarily male type of organization, and they hoped to create what they conceptualized as a female counterpart or alternative to them. What their own relatively comfortable experience of life had not enabled them to see, was that in large cities tenements and working-class neighborhoods

<sup>215</sup>Sander, *Business of Charity*, 24.

<sup>216</sup>Lawrence Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

<sup>217</sup>Joshua Clark Davis, *From Head Shops to Whole Foods: The Rise and Fall of Activist Entrepreneurs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017); Alex D. Ketchum, *Ingredients for Revolution: A History of American Feminist Restaurants, Cafes, and Coffeehouses* (Montreal: Concordia University Press, 2023); Tiffany M. Gill, *Beauty Shop Politics: African American Women’s Activism in the Beauty Industry* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 2010); Daphne Spain, *Constructive Feminism: Women’s Spaces and Women’s Rights in the American City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

<sup>218</sup>Davis, *From Head Shops to Whole Foods*, 131.

<sup>219</sup>WEIU, *1889 Report*, 42.

did already function as “a female form of association and mutual aid, a crucial buffer against the shocks of uprootedness and poverty,” as Christine Stansell has shown.<sup>220</sup>

Disregarding both the gender segregation of the job market and existing forms of working-class mutuality, the women of the WEIU thought that if, like men, they just “combined,” whether as a business corporation or as a benefit fund, they would enable women to live on a more independent footing. Early on in the history of the WEIU, Harriet Clisby, its founder and first president, stated that association and organization could be as transformational for women as they were for men.<sup>221</sup> Naturally, in the case of business association, staying in the black required bona fide business sense, not charitable intents.<sup>222</sup> Although the women of the WEIU did not see themselves as going up against an entire economic and political order, they did seek to create avenues of self-support for women through collective, reciprocal action. In this, they involved the fragile economies of artisans’ households and those of the prosperous New England bourgeoisie, leaving out the truly destitute.

If the women who had money could just buy from the women who needed it, then wealthy women would act as substitutes for both working women’s male kin and employers. We find hints of these motivations in one of the very few sources that can tell us about the consignor’s experience. Catherine Owen’s *Gentle Breadwinners*, published in Boston in 1888, tells the fictionalized story of two sisters who must start working after their father’s sudden death. Owen was an author and a regular contributor to women’s magazines like *Good Housekeeping*, but some of the books she wrote were practical manuals and cook-books that reportedly drew on her own experience selling confectionery, as did *Gentle Breadwinners*.<sup>223</sup> The protagonist of the story is Dorothy, a newly impoverished New Englander, the daughter of a merchant father ruined by “unfortunate speculation.”<sup>224</sup> She turns to baking and confectionery as a source of income, and over the course of the story learns how to be a successful Exchange consignor. The characters in this didactic tale contribute to a portrait of the Woman’s Exchange as simultaneously a business, a charity, and a self-help organization, which was not without its con-

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<sup>220</sup>Stansell, *City of Women*, 55.

<sup>221</sup>WEIU, *1879 Report*, 5.

<sup>222</sup>WEIU, *1890 Report*, 9.

<sup>223</sup>Catherine Owen, *Gentle Breadwinners: The Story of One of Them* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044080919640>. Owen’s bibliography includes works like *Ten Dollars Enough: Keeping House Well on Ten Dollars a Week; How It Has Been Done; How It May Be Done Again* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1900), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112112084717>.

<sup>224</sup>Owen, *Gentle Breadwinners*, 7.

traditions or its downsides. Explained a lady who was disappointed in the quality of the home-made cake she had purchased: “I wish I could say this cake is decent. I sent for it at the Woman’s Exchange instead of to a first-rate confectioner’s, thinking my few cents might help to encourage more deserving women than myself, and this is my reward. [...] How can one help women except as a matter of charity? If ever I buy again at the Exchange, it will be because I want to bestow my money, not because it suits me to buy there.”<sup>225</sup>

The Woman’s Exchange was first designed to be a commercial institution created by women’s clubs as a means to further gender solidarity of an economic kind; it could stand alone or be run by a larger parent organization. A case in point, the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union of Boston was not, initially or primarily, a Woman’s Exchange. WEIU women, with their goal of enhancing female economic independence, were interested in schemes that promised to make both individuals and groups or institutions less dependent on men’s cash. Its Exchange-like “Industrial Department” was the expression of some of the founders’ core values regarding women’s economic independence and cross-class cooperation. Such principles led the founders to conceive of an integrated business model wherein the profits of commercial activity would be reinjected in social outreach programs benefiting self-supporting women. Some of the WEIUs founded in other cities in imitation of the Boston model pursued similar ideas, each in their own way. In 1890, a local newspaper, describing the Exchange operated by a Kentucky sister WEIU, told its readers how “from the profits of such sales the [Women’s Educational and Industrial] union [had] one source of means for carrying on its operations.”<sup>226</sup> Local WEIUs themselves, whether in Massachusetts, in Kentucky or in other states, sought total independence through commercial success, a goal which they would never reach, even though the Boston Exchange was remarkably longer-lived and more profitable than typical Exchanges, so much so that some of its members claimed for it the title of “Mother of Women’s Exchanges.”<sup>227</sup>

The Exchange appeared as an appealing solution to the problems of both women’s economic dependency on men and the economic devaluation of domestic work (defined as “women’s work”). Reaching economic self-sufficiency through the female-led and female-direct commodification of household productions and services was the goal that structured the efforts of what Dolores Hayden has called material feminism. Its advocates identified the root cause of women’s inequality

<sup>225</sup>Owen, *Gentle Breadwinners*, 34-35.

<sup>226</sup>“Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Knoxville Journal*, April 22, 1890, 1.

<sup>227</sup>Cannon, *History of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union*, 9.



to be the exploitation of their labor by men, as well as men's control of newly commodified domestic industries, like the canning industry. If women were to be remunerated fairly for tasks pertaining to social reproduction, and relieved of their personal responsibilities towards their families, so material feminists argued, then domestic work would no longer be exploitative. They encouraged women to reclaim the commercial development of businesses selling wives commodities like bread, preserves, candles or soap which they had formerly made in the home.<sup>228</sup> In the decades following the Civil War, the widespread fervor for "cooperation," and, later for "efficiency,"<sup>229</sup> led material feminists to consider making tasks like cooking a collective responsibility. In some instances, housewives formed cooperatives to share housework. Middle-class women concerned with the price and quality of their purchases created consumers' cooperatives. There are a few examples of housewives and college students banding together to create cooperative laundries, bakeries, and dining clubs in the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>230</sup>

Hayden has noted that from the 1870s onwards the East Coast and the Boston area in particular were places of bold experiments in rethinking the bourgeois domestic environment. The Cambridge Cooperative Housekeeping Society is a case in point. Described as "the first pay-for-housework movement," it was the earliest experiment with cooperative housekeeping in the United States. Harvard faculty wives, under the leadership of Melusina Fay Peirce, organized the cooperative in 1869, to supervise servants collectively, creating a laundry and bakery for the use of the members. They aimed at raising the status of women's work by making it a public business, providing higher wages and better working conditions for women who laundered and baked, while at the time at least partly freeing themselves from the demands of monitoring servants.<sup>231</sup>

Melusina Fay Peirce may have been one of a small group of radical-minded women, but she did originate the concept of the Cambridge Cooperative. Her literal intellectual genealogy included her great-aunt, Caroline Howard Gilman, who had advocated the professionalization of housekeeping services as early as

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<sup>228</sup>Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 3; 295.

<sup>229</sup>For examples of the American passion with efficiency in the Progressive era, see Martin J. Schiesl, *The Politics of Efficiency: Municipal Administration and Reform in America, 1880-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>230</sup>Hayden, *Grand Domestic Revolution*, 120.

<sup>231</sup>Suzanne Spencer-Wood, "A Historic Pay-for-Housework Community Household: The Cambridge Cooperative Housekeeping Society," in *Household Chores and Household Choices: Theorizing the Domestic Sphere in Historical Archaeology*, edited by Kerri S. Barile and Jamie C. Brandon (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 138-146.

1834. The Rochdale Equitable Pioneers, an English group of working-class men who refined the producers’ cooperative in the 1840s, was another notable influence. While the Cooperative failed in 1871, the victim of the all-male supervising board’s reluctance to fund the venture as well as allow their wives to volunteer their time,<sup>232</sup> their ideology of female cooperation resonated in cities across the country, in Woman’s Exchanges, and it left an indelible imprint in Boston and its suburbs. From the way the WEIU developed, it seems likely that it was influenced by a belief in organized women’s ability to harness capitalist forms of production to achieve economic independence from men, through the specialization of labor and the collective raising of capital in incorporated enterprises.

### 1.3.3 Educating Consignors to the Marketplace

Influenced as they were by the tenets of material feminism, WEIU women resolved that it was their duty as business-owners to be educators of their collaborators and suppliers. In later recollections of the Union’s early years, they emphasized the educational value of their business endeavors.<sup>233</sup> The Exchange’s Directors saw themselves as being responsible for educating consignors in the ways of the world, and they intended to create a supportive community predicated on an exchange of both advice and cash.

Through its Exchange-type work and its cooked food delivery services, the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union of Boston was part of the advanced guard of material feminism. Increasingly, female reformers put forward the business venture as a corrective to a domestic order they characterized as oppressive. The commodification of domestic services, they hoped, would help them score a double victory—liberating middle-class women while providing well-paid occupations to the working-class women who would specialize in these kinds of outsourced domestic “crafts.”<sup>234</sup> By the late 1880s, before feminist author Charlotte Perkins

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<sup>232</sup>Spencer-Wood, “A History Pay-for-Housework Community Household,” 148-151.

<sup>233</sup>Additional WEIU records, Cornelia James Cannon, *The History of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union: A Civic Laboratory* (Boston: 264 Boylston Street, 1927), 20. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>234</sup>In colonial society, crafts were artisans’ purview. The word referred to trades that required an apprenticeship, the sole means of acquiring the special skills and knowledge that commanded respect, social recognition, and a comfortable living. In his study of the craft apprentice in the early United States, W. J. Rorabaugh has reported finding no records of female apprentices; indentured girls typically learned housekeeping, but this was not considered a “craft.” See W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Craft Apprentice: From Franklin to the Machine Age in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), viii; 7-8.

Figure 1.3: Interior view of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union store with two women shoppers and six women working behind the counter. Between 1890 and 1900.



Harvard University, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, ss\_21594518

Source: Harvard Digital Collections, [https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital\\_collections/8001501870\\_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356486](https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital_collections/8001501870_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356486).

Gilman would later articulate it in *Women and Economics*.<sup>235</sup> the WEIU identified small-scale food production and retail as an opportunity not only for their organizations, but also for individual women, and for women’s rights in general. These women outlined a vision of the economy in which craftsmanship and entrepreneurship went hand in hand, and in which any task or skill could be monetized.<sup>236</sup> Cooking, in particular, was recategorized as a craft to be perfected, even an art, and not just as domestic drudgery.<sup>237</sup>

WEIU women hoped to find in home work the possibility for women to escape

<sup>235</sup>Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1860-1935) came to prominence in the early 1900s as a feminist theorist and an author of both fiction and non-fiction. In her ambitious *Women and Economics* (1898), whose success catapulted her to fame, she attempted to replace women at the center of discourses about white Western civilization, emphasizing women’s contribution to the economy and society of countries like the United States. Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 122.

<sup>236</sup>May C. Moore, *100 New Money Making Plans for Untrained Women* (Atlanta: National Woman’s Exchange Pub. Co., 1904). Microfilm Reel #674, no. 5379, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/alma/990026327140203941/catalog>. Moore’s examples of niche paid work include taking photographs for tourists as an “expert amateur artist” (p. 15), making and selling fancy lampshades (p. 25) or making over old hats as a “visiting milliner” (p. 27).

<sup>237</sup>Renowned cookbook author of the period Catherine Owen wrote an entire manual, which she refused to call a “cookery book,” to show “that cooking and cultivation are by no means antagonistic.” Catherine Owen, *Culture and Cooking, or, Art in the Kitchen* (New York: Cassell, Petter, Galpin & Co., 1881), iii, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044087429718>.

what they would later call “economic parasitism:” “Some of us saw, or thought we saw, herein the glorious possibility of a return to domestic production, if not the domestic system of production,” so that women could use idle days or hours “or the hours when other domestic processes were under way and not requiring close attention [...] in earning the dollars which her mother and grandmother saved by spinning and weaving and baking and candle making,” wrote Susan Kingsbury, Director of the Research Department, in the preface of *Industrial Home Work in Massachusetts*, published in 1915.<sup>238</sup> This idealized depiction of women’s earning power echoed Boston suffragists’ beliefs in the emancipating power of an independent income.

The 1880s marked a time of expansion for the Exchange movement, “when homework was once again promulgated as an attractive option for women who could earn an income while still performing domestic duties” in the wake of the Civil War and the panic of 1873.<sup>239</sup> As domestic service was still not considered by many as an “economic” phenomenon at least until after the late 1890s—the date when Vassar professor Lucy Maynard Salmon devoted part of a study of the economic dimensions of domestic service to the Woman’s Exchange<sup>240</sup>—such shops were a gateway to viewing the home in an economic light, presenting a view of paid labor as compatible with home-making, both ideologically and practically speaking.<sup>241</sup> For single entrepreneurs, marriage was not out of the question. Catherine Owen’s Dorothy was depicted earning an ambiguous happy ending, one in which her booming business was complemented by a marriage proposal.<sup>242</sup> These views did not go uncontested, but they tended to slowly gain prominence as women’s paid labor outside the home became more and more socially acceptable. There was an increasing understanding that women could be “breadwinners” too, so long as they were “gentle” ones.<sup>243</sup> Press portraits of successful businesswomen offered constant reassurances as to the fact that the market had not corrupted them, and that they had been forced into taking the plunge into the business world.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>238</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Industrial Home Work in Massachusetts* (Boston: Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 1915), viii, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044019077437>.

<sup>239</sup>Sander, *Business of Charity*, 102.

<sup>240</sup>Lucy Maynard Salmon, *Domestic Service* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1897), 5-6, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015030961208>.

<sup>241</sup>WEIU, *1883 Report*, 13: “yet this is but the beginning of what we mean to do in this direction. The sale of home-made food, jellies, canned fruits, etc., opens an avenue to important kinds of women’s work which have as yet had little market value.”

<sup>242</sup>Owen, *Gentle Breadwinners*, 163.

<sup>243</sup>Per the title of Owen’s account.

<sup>244</sup>As late as 1916, a press portrait of Boston’s “highest salaried woman,” Mrs. Florence E. Shaal, the manager of the Woman’s Department of the New York Equitable Life Assurance

Most of the seventy-two Exchanges in operation in the US near the end of the nineteenth century never became more than local charities. Despite often enthusiastic responses from producers, managers struggled to run sustainable institutions.<sup>245</sup> The WEIU's shops offer a counterpoint and an exception to that trend. In a later chapter, we will see how reformers active in the WEIU eventually became successful managers and business-owners through the creation of a reputation or a brand, a process which accelerated in the late 1890s as the organization gradually but decisively settled the question of whether the Exchange was a charity program or a legitimate business endeavor as was commonly understood at the time.<sup>246</sup> For now, we will look at the way that the WEIU's shops were, from the very start, conceived as a means for women to gain agency through the economically productive use of their leisure time or domestic down time. Between 1879 and the early 1890s, as the Exchange slowly took shape, it stood alongside the organization's evening classes and employment agencies, catering to a different type of women with specific needs and constraints.

As a member of the committee that managed the Handiwork Department put it in its 1894 report, the Union volunteers managed the shops “not that the Department may make money, but that it may guide the attempts of women who come to us hoping by their own efforts to open a pathway to independence, narrow at first, but with opportunities and possibilities only to be obtained through our help.”<sup>247</sup> The WEIU's efforts centered on consignors' education as to consumer demand and the workings of the market. In that, the Exchange, first a mere shop-window, was eventually explicitly run as a practical “school” in entrepreneurship. Vassar professor Lucy M. Salmon essentially praised the Exchange as such, deeming it most valuable because “it [had] opened up to women what [was] practically a new occupation”: thanks to the Exchange, domestic house performed by family members could finally find an economic outlet, and housewives learn what an exact recipe for cake was.<sup>248</sup>

Because the women who helmed the WEIU were comfortably middle-class, if not more well-off, they had a good idea of the tastes and preferences of their main customer base. In the early 1910s, for instance, the Union's Handwork Shop

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Company, reported her to have been forced into working by a dire home situation. With an invalid husband to take care of, and a son's college education to pay for, she was thrown against her will “into the rough and unknown paths of the business world.” “Boston's Successful Business Women,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, August 20, 1916, 38.

<sup>245</sup>Salmon, *Domestic Service*, 217.

<sup>246</sup>See chapter 3, p. 221-225.

<sup>247</sup>WEIU, *1894 Report*, 32.

<sup>248</sup>Salmon, *Domestic Service*, 218.

advertised “Shantung Tea-Tables,” ready for “shipment to cottage, camp, or bungalow”<sup>249</sup>; they were presumably meant for upper-middle-class women who had summer homes and could expend time and money to coordinate their furniture and invite guests over for tea. The notice for an “Easter Exhibition” announced the sale of hand-embroidered blouses made according to “exclusive designs.” Smocked blouses ran for \$7 to \$15, alongside “negligees” and silk “boudoir caps.”<sup>250</sup> Expensive materials accounted for these prices as much as craftsmanship did: the children’s winter coats sold by the Union were made of velvet, quilted silk, or ottoman silk.<sup>251</sup> Although the cheapest dolls sold by the WEIU retailed for as low as 60 cents, at the other end of the spectrum, the most refined creations went for \$18 apiece.<sup>252</sup> Both the types of goods that the WEIU’s shops stocked, as well as their price range, delineated the bounds of an elite customer base. To prospective patrons, the Union advertised a luxurious shopping experience. One promotional slip read: “On Boston’s best shopping street, directly opposite the beautiful Public Gardens, is a Handwork Shop conducted by a unique institution for women, the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union. Here in a cool, comfortable room, where one may shop with ease and pleasure, is a permanent exhibition of the best handwork of today.”<sup>253</sup>

One important service that Exchanges could render consignors was supply them with information about local demand—what sold, and what did not. Such exchanges bled into the pages of women’s periodicals like *Good Housekeeping*, where correspondents interested in becoming petty dealers or starting a business could get in touch with one another. They exchanged information about “prosperous” Exchanges, where they might best earn money.<sup>254</sup> What the genteel but impoverished Dorothy learned was what Exchange managers knew well. The sale of food articles, from the outset, outpaced that of “fancy articles.” It was acknowledged by many that fancy goods performed dismally when compared to food articles. Women were advised by journalists, cookbook authors and Exchange managers to learn how to make fine jams, jellies, cakes, dainties, and the like if they intended

<sup>249</sup>WEIU records, “Shantung Tea-Tables,” c1910-1912. B-8. Box 1, folder 7.

<sup>250</sup>WEIU records, “Easter Exhibition,” c1910-1912. B-8. Box 1, folder 7.

<sup>251</sup>WEIU records, “Children’s Winter Coats,” c1910-1912. B-8. Box 1, folder 7.

<sup>252</sup>WEIU records, “Do you know any little girl who wants a doll?” (advertising, card format), c1910-1912. B-8. Box 1, folder 7.

<sup>253</sup>WEIU records, advertisement slip, c1910-1912. B-8. Box 1, folder 7.

<sup>254</sup>For a typical example, see “The Cozy Corner,” *American Kitchen Magazine* 4, no. 1 (November 13, 1896): 18-19, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112048863309>. One letter-writer asked about whether there was an Exchange in Philadelphia, another relayed information about how well fine lace sold in the New York Exchange, and shared contact information for the New York Exchange managers.

to earn money.<sup>255</sup>

Exchanges like the WEIU's worked carefully to shape the output of consignors, sometimes in spite of their resistance.<sup>256</sup> Almost from the beginning, a jury was instituted at the Industrial Department to review the quality of the edible goods proposed to the public for sale. Even non-perishable goods like jams, jellies and pickles, which could be turned out more consistently or evenly than cakes,<sup>257</sup> had to pass a yearly test. The WEIU came up with increasingly detailed instructions over the year. By 1900, the few guidelines of the 1880s had become an entire guide-book.<sup>258</sup> After sampling, prospective producers for the Food Sales Room were sent a report from the "food jury"; if their goods had passed the test, they were sent the general rules for consignors as well as information about the mandatory sanitary inspection conducted by a WEIU agent.<sup>259</sup> In 1905-1906, the Handwork Shop instituted a similar "Handwork Jury" and a seal of approval was affixed to items exhibited for sale. The committee in charge of the shop justified this move as an expression of its "desire to emphasize the dignity of any handwork that is done efficiently, the honest pride in workmanship that the worker should feel in having her name associated with her work, and the force of the Jury's standard and approval."<sup>260</sup> WEIU women, like other Exchange managers, felt that educating consignors as to what business standards constituted was the most important part of the Exchange experience, and of its success. By 1916, a promotional leaflet for the WEIU confidently asserted that professional training was the core mission of the Food Shop: "The shop aims to help the inexperienced home-worker, by advice and practical illustration, to attain a high standard in production, sanitation, and business management."<sup>261</sup>

Success was verified at the WEIU. As early as 1883, the quality of the food produced by its consignors began to be noted locally. When the organization, inspired by the venture, launched a tea room, it became so popular that several branches and related businesses were opened in the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>262</sup> Between

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<sup>255</sup>Susan Power, "A Home Industry for Women," *Woman's Journal* 16, no. 49 (December 5, 1885): 390.

<sup>256</sup>Campbell, "A New Song."

<sup>257</sup>Power, "A Home Industry for Women"; Owen, *Gentle Breadwinners*, 32.

<sup>258</sup>WEIU records, "General rules for consignors," undated, c1894-1897. B-8. Box 2, folder 17.

<sup>259</sup>WEIU records, "Food Jury Report" (sample), October 1909. B-8. Box 3, folder 24.

<sup>260</sup>WEIU, *1906 Report*, 42-43.

<sup>261</sup>Additional WEIU records, "The Women's Educational and Industrial Union," 1916, 13. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>262</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Thirty-Sixth Annual Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year 1913-1914* (Boston: 264 Boylston Street, 1915), 36, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239447>.

1880 and 1900, as the WEIU’s directors grappled with the broader implications of their work, they came to acknowledge, albeit reluctantly, that the Industrial Department was more business than charity—or, at least, that it was a business run in a way that was compatible with creating opportunities for self-help. In 1903 still, the 1,161 consignors who contributed indiscriminately to the Food Department and to the Handiwork Department were “women who would have no other chance to find a market for their wares.”<sup>263</sup> In this transitional phase, the Exchange managers saw themselves as offering a retail space to those who could have never afforded it, along with insider information as to the evolution of middle- and upper-class consumer demand and tastes.

What these customers wanted was, literally, a taste of home. Before the home economics revolution of the 1900s, middle-class domestic ideals made home-made food into the defining feature of a home. The antebellum satirical literature on boarding-houses made this abundantly clear, categorizing landladies’ cooking as subpar because it was but a mimicry of staid bourgeois cooking.<sup>264</sup> The homemade signifier was reactivated in a different guise after the Civil War. In the context of the adulteration scandals of the 1890s, middle-class consumers were yearning more and more ardently for simpler times and purer fare, and they heralded home-cooking as the solution to the problem of supplying the household. Since it was not realistic to expect even the middle-class household to consume exclusively home-made products, manufacturers who could reassure customers that their products were close enough to home-made would capture the market.<sup>265</sup> Advertisers tapped the “sentimentalist” side of many of the women involved in the club movement. As Lauren Shapiro has described, the proponents of the emerging scientific cookery of the 1890s went up against deeply ingrained ideas about the moral value of home cooking.<sup>266</sup>

Despite home economists’ sneering criticism of home cooking as backward, Exchanges were an attractive option for a majority of middle- and upper-class

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<sup>263</sup>Lucia M. Peabody, “An Early Woman’s Movement,” *Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 5 (March 1904), 99.

<sup>264</sup>Gamber, *Boarding House*, 78-81. Gamber’s overarching argument here is that the criticisms incurred by boarding-house fare can be explained by boarders’ perception of landladies’ cooking as a remunerative activity masquerading as familial obligation. Home-cooking, by contrast, was worthy of celebration.

<sup>265</sup>Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 170-174; Harvey A. Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 40-41.

<sup>266</sup>Lauren Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 189-190.



consumers, who would have been raised to revere home cooking and wanted to know that the convenience food they bought had been made inside a home by the loving hands of a wife, mother, or sister. As jellies, preserves, and canned fruit joined the expanding list of goods that people would buy rather than make themselves, wealthy customers looked for places to buy them, while compromising neither the safety and comfort provided by the shopping experience at a typical retail establishment—placing orders on the telephone, having the food delivered by express—nor the assurance that what they bought was made in a quaint private kitchen by a real home-maker. This desire they justified by arguing that food articles which were made by hand and in small batches were necessarily of superior quality than mass-produced goods.<sup>267</sup>

The appeal of the Union's Food Sales Room, then, was likely that women of respectable means could procure home-made food, which they did not have to cook or instruct their servants to cook, and whose quality was ascertained by a jury of experts, WEIU members who met weekly to taste and rate the goods made by prospective consignors, and could turn down whatever was not up to their standards.<sup>268</sup> As the Union's reputation grew, its managers sought to perpetuate and enforce uniformly high standards of quality. Clubwomen were well aware of the mounting scandals besetting the food industry: they were in fact seeking to do something about it, organizing pure food committees and petitioning the legislature in support of star USDA chemist and renowned pure food advocate Dr. Harvey Wiley.<sup>269</sup> Conveniently, the niche thus identified enabled WEIU women to eschew competition with bigger businesses, whether for food products or fancy work. As they put it themselves, in the case of the latter, "although we can not compete as to prices, with the large department stores with their annual sale and bargain days, yet we are willing to compare with any of them as to the nicety, fineness, and delicacy of most of our work."<sup>270</sup> In the same breath, they thus rejoiced that they were helping not only producers find an outlet for their goods, but also customers looking for quality.

Putting a spotlight on women's craftsmanship, they reinforced the budding association between handcrafted goods and social distinction. Increasingly, those

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<sup>267</sup>Helen Campbell, "Woman's Exchanges Again," *Woman's Work and Wages*, *Good Housekeeping* 10, no. 4 (December 21, 1889), 87-90, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.64458260>.

<sup>268</sup>Additional WEIU records, "The Women's Educational and Industrial Union," 1916, 13. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>269</sup>Lorine Swainston Goodwin, *The Pure Food, Drink, and Drug Crusaders, 1879-1914* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1999), 131-151.

<sup>270</sup>WEIU, *1889 Report*, 28.

who could afford to buy genuine handcrafted products—or at least believable imitations—were wealthy Americans who did not have to buy mass-produced, factory-made goods. This led directors and managers to buy materials for producers and to give them advice.<sup>271</sup> Exchange managers and customers who favored handcrafted goods sent a message with their purchases—that artisanal was best. As Steven Gelber writes, “[b]oth the process and the product of handicrafts carry a double message about the meaning of the modern workplace: production is good, but the circumstances in which it occurs are not.”<sup>272</sup>

For Exchange managers, upper-class nostalgia for the handicrafts of the colonial period was a business opportunity which could be mined for profit. Accordingly, they offered consignors advice that was both general—“A Few Suggestions to Consignors”<sup>273</sup>—and personalized, by mail or by appointment.<sup>274</sup> Sending samples and privileging quality materials were examples of the kind of professional advice WEIU leaders hoped would turn home-makers into what we today call micro-entrepreneurs. This strategy is congruent with ideas found in the organization’s vocational advice publications. Aspiring businesswomen were advised to look for specialty niches; they were told that the way to success was through identifying local demand for cut flowers, fresh vegetables, or fancy poultry.<sup>275</sup>

What sold, then, was a matter not only of kind, but of quality—it was not enough to tell producers what goods to make (the kind of baked or knitted goods that were best reminiscent of a New England colonial homestead), but how to make them (artisanal-looking, but not crude). Cookbook authors like Catherine Owen, who claimed to have been a consignor herself, shared pragmatic advice from the point of view of the average consignor. In her novel-cum-advice manual *Molly Bishop’s Family*, she chronicles the story of a young, respectable widow with young children who turns to running a boarding-house and sending pies and cakes to a local Exchange to make ends meet. Molly is the epitome of the successful consignor, and she shares her tips and tricks with the reader, who is thus instructed to “take her wares to the Exchange herself,” so that she may open the packages herself upon arrival and display them to advantage.<sup>276</sup> Owen, through Molly, also

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<sup>271</sup>WEIU, *1894 Report*, 33.

<sup>272</sup>Steven M. Gelber, *Hobbies: Leisure and the Culture of Work in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 155.

<sup>273</sup>WEIU records, “A Few Suggestions to Would-Be Consignors,” undated. B-8. Box 3, folder 25.

<sup>274</sup>WEIU records, “Handwork Shop, Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” c1910-1912. B-8. Box 1, folder 7. “When desired, the Director will arrange for interviews with consignors for personal criticism of rejected work.”

<sup>275</sup>See the bulletins in the “Vocation series,” in WEIU records. B-8. Box 1, folder 4.

<sup>276</sup>Catherine Owen, *Molly Bishop’s Family* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1888),

taught her reader how to estimate how much of a profit she will make, and how to pack goods for the Exchange, using waxed paper for the wrapping and filling the vacant space with “cotton batting covered with waxed paper.”<sup>277</sup> At the WEIU, the concerns with the “business” education of consignors increasingly became the primary focus of the Industrial Department, by the turn of the century the “Food Sales Room” and the “Handiwork Shop.” As early as 1894, the managers could take the example of a woman helped by the Union, perhaps another widow with children whose only means of livelihood was a sewing machine.<sup>278</sup> Only after the Union taught her how to “finish, press, fold and arrange [the articles] in a business-like way” did they become “salable.”<sup>279</sup> No longer was the enterprise a nebulous way to encourage women’s “industry” in a very general way, in moral terms.

By World War I, the WEIU’s business plan all came together in a network of related ventures. Growth was fostered by the integration of their business dealings into a loose commercial network. Green Gables, in Magnolia, Massachusetts, was a “Vacation house” placed “under the management of the WEIU, Boston.”<sup>280</sup> Its Tea room sold “Union cakes received fresh daily” and promotional material suggested that orders could be filled by Boston workers and promptly delivered. In the Gift Shop, guests could buy exclusive toys made for the Union, touted as evidence of “a reputation that [would] be sustained.”<sup>281</sup> Creating a local presence and reputation ensured that well-off Bostonians and suburbanites would not hesitate to sample different types of goods made in Union-managed shops which they had not patronized yet.

Few of the WEIU’s producers were long-term consignors. Only a handful would sell goods through the Union for a decade or longer. In one striking case, whose details were given in the Food Committee’s annual report for 1896, one consignor was able to clear her debts after more than ten years of “painstaking industry.”<sup>282</sup> The turnover rate was rather high and consigning was a short-term practice. Other consignors, who had started out as Union suppliers, eventually stopped either because they started their own businesses or found other, more traditional commercial outlets for their products.<sup>283</sup> This situation seems to have

150, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hn3ipa>.

<sup>277</sup>Owen, *Molly Bishop’s Family*, 152; 158, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hn3ipa>.

<sup>278</sup>WEIU, *1890 Report*, 47.

<sup>279</sup>WEIU, *1894 Report*, 32.

<sup>280</sup>WEIU records, “Green Gables, Magnolia, Mass.” (card format), 1909. B-8. Box 3, folder 24.

<sup>281</sup>WEIU records, “Green Gables, Magnolia, Mass. Conducted by Women’s Educational & Industrial Union” (leaflet), 1909. B-8. Box 3, folder 24.

<sup>282</sup>WEIU, *1896 Report*, 35-36.

<sup>283</sup>As was the case for the women discussed by Helen Campbell in her *Good Housekeeping*

become more common between the early 1880s and 1900, perhaps a sign that the WEIU’s business advice was working as intended, or that only those women with the room and means to eventually expand their activities responded to the call of the Exchange.

When the Union’s Industrial Department was established, “no woman [could] make consignments who [had] a salesroom for the article presented.”<sup>284</sup> By the late 1900s, rules and regulations only specified that if a producer sold her goods elsewhere in Boston, the prices had to be identical to those practiced in the Union’s shops.<sup>285</sup> There are also reports of individual consignors starting their own businesses, a practice which was encouraged and praised by the WEIU leadership. As consignors were increasingly considered as suppliers and skilled professionals who may or may not have had a side business of their own, it did not matter whether they truly needed the selling platform provided by the Union. They were considered by the superintendents of the Union primarily as collaborators, as economic partners. In the process of tutoring homemakers, the women who ran the Exchange became managers harnessing both their social networks and insider knowledge of middle-class tastes to shape the output of female craftswomen.<sup>286</sup> As the managers worked on building a reputation based on quality and exclusivity, they tried to educate homemakers to make them into successful entrepreneurs. Eventually, the organization affirmed a belief in the necessity for women to create opportunities for themselves that followed the rules of the market.

## Conclusion

*100 New Money Making Plans for Untrained Women*, published in 1904 by a Woman’s Exchange, opened with National American Woman Suffrage Association president Carrie Chapman Catt’s assertion that “[w]omen can never know true self-respect until they are finally independent.” Other leading suffragists contributed

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column about women’s exchanges.

<sup>284</sup>WEIU records, “General rules for consignors,” undated, c1894-1897. B-8. Box 2, folder 17.

<sup>285</sup>WEIU records, “Handwork Department” (leaflet), July 1909, n.p. B-8. Box 3, folder 25.

<sup>286</sup>Eisenstein, *Give Us Bread but Give Us Roses*, 85. Of the actual usefulness of the schemes described in this advice literature, Eisenstein writes “[w]hile [they] may seem peripheral or impractical, they play an important part in the advice offered by these books, with as much space devoted to schemes for home production of needlework or food, for opening lunch-rooms, or growing flowers, or keeping bees, as is given to more significant occupations, until well into the early twentieth century. The precise, almost painful detail in which they describe these improbable possibilities is indicative of the desire to find ways in which a woman might use being a lady in earning a living.”

lines to the preface for this work of advice literature, like the suffragist author Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, who added that being remunerated for one's work meant "[a]cquir[ing] value to [oneself], to [one's] family and to the world."<sup>287</sup> The readers they addressed, "untrained women," would have come from the ranks of those unaccustomed to, and unprepared for, industrial employments. As *100 New Money Making Plans* and the literature to which it belonged attest, by 1904 women active in reform organizations like the Women's Educational and Industrial Union no longer considered women's quintessential "work" to be that of unpaid service to their families and communities. They had become more than comfortable with advocating for more room for their peers to labor for pay, even outside of the exceptional circumstances which, at midcentury, had carefully delineated what was acceptable for a "lady."

By exploring the triad which constituted the core of the WEIU's early work, this chapter has canvassed middle-class reformers' attitudes towards women's paid work. In 1883, the society's annual report offered potential donors and members three reasons why the WEIU should be allowed to go on, and the first was because "through its industrial department it help[ed] women to help themselves." For Kathleen Waters Sander, in the 1890s "self-help [...] expanded to include the notion of encouraging all women, rich and poor alike, to become more stable financially by learning marketable vocational skills."<sup>288</sup> Five years into its existence, the WEIU's president judged its most significant contribution to be its classes, its marketplace for the sale of women's handiwork, and its employment bureau.<sup>289</sup>

The WEIU offers a good illustration of the contrasting attitudes of different generations of women and the intellectual shifts which were taking place in the 1870s and 1880s. In the immediate postbellum period, the social responsibilities attributed to women as mothers—whom unspoken assumptions defined as white, native-born, and aspiring to a vaguely defined form of respectability—largely defined the purview of the education that they were urged to pursue. Over the course of the 1880s and the early 1890s, the WEIU's annual reports show, from year to year, how the perception of the ideal woman as an educated mother gave way to a recognition that they were individuals who might benefit from self-culture initiatives for their own sake. The WEIU's classes started out as mostly literary and artistic lectures. Following members' advice as well as their own efforts to

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<sup>287</sup>May C. Moore, *100 New Money Making Plans for Untrained Women* (Atlanta: National Woman's Exchange Pub. Co., 1904), 3. Microfilm Reel # 674, No. 5379. Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Harvard University.

<sup>288</sup>Sander, *Business of Charity*, 43.

<sup>289</sup>WEIU, *1883 Report*, 13.

keep their finger on the pulse of community needs, the organization then gradually introduced classes explicitly teaching skills for self-support, like dressmaking, stenography, and penmanship. These were geared not to genteel individuals who might one day need to use them as teaching credentials, but to women looking for an independence—either a proprietorship, or a white-collar position.

This ideological shift can also be discerned at the organizational level, as the Lecture and Class Committee split into a body dedicated to entertainments and socials, from which formal instruction was sharply separated by the mid-1890s, the time of the Union’s “vocational turn.” Hiring teachers from recognized industrial schools and putting together more elaborate curricula was the way the women of the Union tried to establish themselves as modern, scientific purveyors of vocational training for women.

At the same time, increasingly larger cracks appeared in their discourse on women’s work. Work in all its guises, whether paid or unpaid, domestic or otherwise, was praised by the WEIU as an elevating influence, a source of personal dignity and social recognition altogether. However, when the Union created concurrent training programs and placement services for women—evening classes, “schools,” two different employment bureaus—it also gave birth to a tier-based system. In practice, reformers did not ascribe the same value to all paid activities, and neither did they consider that all women were suited for all kinds of occupations. As historian Laurie Crumpacker writes, “educational reforms during this period worked best for upwardly mobile, native-born, working-class women” who expressed a genuine desire for independence of the kind that reformers praised.<sup>290</sup>

Following Crumpacker’s insight, we contend that similarity of experience was the main predictor of economic success for the women who sought out the Union’s vocational services. At a time when, as contemporary evidence suggests, it was a rather common occurrence for white, middle-class women to sell homemade goods for cash,<sup>291</sup> the popularity of the WEIU’s “Women’s Exchange” was the most visible evidence of middle-class housewives’ interest in income-generating schemes. A lack of sources makes it difficult to reconstruct the extent of this kind of informal economy, but what is certain is that petty dealers were not all immigrant women operating food joints or saloons from their own homes. The rising tide of business

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<sup>290</sup>Laurie Crumpacker, “Beyond Servants and Salesgirls: Working Women’s Education in Boston, 1885-1915,” 227, in Susan Porter, ed., *Women of the Commonwealth: Work, Family, and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996).

<sup>291</sup>Helen Campbell, “Chow Chow,” *Woman’s Work and Wages*, *Good Housekeeping* 10, no. 13 (April 26, 1890), 305-307, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.64458260>.

advice aimed at “untrained” women shows the creative lengths to which at least some of them were going to turn any skill into a possible source of pecuniary profit.<sup>292</sup>

Over time, the WEIU became a vehicle for experimenting with a broader range of ideas pertaining to material feminism, operating lunch rooms and catering services which employed women. The WEIU sought to help other women start their own independent ventures. When the Union gave up its general dressmaking classes, turning instead to a model in which their specialized dressmaking courses were supplemented by wholesale apprenticeships, its officers provided both encouragement and material to their teacher, a Mrs. Cameron, so that she might carry on the classes “as an independent venture.” The Board of Government warmly recommended “[t]hat Mrs. Cameron’s undertaking be endorsed in any way possible, that equipment be loaned her, and that the hospitality of the Union be extended her for the registration and advertisement of her classes.”<sup>293</sup> As we will see in the following chapter, in the 1900s and 1910s the WEIU consolidated its position in a female economy peopled by principled female proprietors and businesswomen.

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<sup>292</sup>Moore, *100 New Money Making Plans*.

<sup>293</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 9, April 18, 1905, 2. 81-M237. Carton 2.

# Chapter 2

## Collaborations with Businesswomen: The WEIU As a Node in a “Female Economy” of Reform

### Introduction

#### *Networking Charities, Networking Businesses*

In 1880, a year after its founding, the Boston-based Associated Charities (AC) published a directory of the city’s philanthropic efforts. In its 1886 edition, the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union (WEIU) appeared for the first time in this comprehensive catalogue of Boston’s homes and charitable institutions. In the economic turmoil of the 1870s, the city experienced such a surge in charitable activity that some urban reformers felt the need to enumerate, centralize, and systematize ongoing relief efforts.<sup>1</sup> This document is a suggestive depiction of the charitable ecosystem of a major northeastern city, precisely the environment in which the WEIU was operating. For instance, in the section on Employment Bureaus, the Union appeared between the Boston Young Men’s Christian Union

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<sup>1</sup>Starting in the 1880s, the Associated Charities (AC), a new type of philanthropic organization, undertook the task of crossreferencing and comparing client information from as many independent Boston charities as possible. The directors of the AC aimed at making almsgiving more efficient and eliminating what they saw as fraud—charity recipients seeking help from several organizations and failing to disclose that fact—, thereby institutionalizing a heretofore inchoate distinction between the “worthy” and the “unworthy” poor. The AC’s 1880 catalogue of Boston’s charities and its subsequent editions should be understood as part of these centralization efforts. Nathan Irving Huggins, *Protestants Against Poverty, Boston’s Charities, 1870-1900* (Westport: Greenwood, 1971), 25, 59-61.



(YMCU), which often sent them donations of tickets for recreational outings, and the Temporary Home for Working-Women, which would call upon the WEIU to provide religious services for its residents a few years after the directory was published.<sup>2</sup>

It is then unsurprising that the WEIU would collaborate with other private agencies for relief and social reform. However, charities were not the only type of private collaborators with which it fostered ties. Owing to the commercial nature of some of its activities, the organization was also a node in a network of professionals and entrepreneurs. They were peers of the women who composed the WEIU, supplied the organization, and in return received financial support and advice from the Union for their commercial ventures. While chapter 7 will describe the organizational links between the Union and other non-profit groups of women at the municipal, state, and national levels, this chapter is concerned with properly commercial ties, in the form of business-supplier relationships and professional networks.

Wendy Gamber, in her study of the American clothing industry in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, has shown that the relationships between female proprietors, workers, and consumers were so meaningful when considered jointly as to constitute “a female economy based on fragile, often tenuous relationships between women.”<sup>3</sup> As Sarah Deutsch writes, “[t]he female economy was not without its conflicts”: often, male creditors were paid before other women, against whom the language of emotional bonds was wielded by debtors.<sup>4</sup> Other scholars of women’s business activities in the English-speaking world have suggested that in the modern period, at least in a few documented instances women made the conscious choice to either extend credit to other women—rather than men—or patronize specifically female entrepreneurs as suppliers. Nicola Jane Phillips has provided a case study of a gentlewoman in eighteenth-century Durham, England, who nurtured a network of female suppliers in that way.<sup>5</sup> In a broader sense,

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<sup>2</sup>A *Directory of the Charitable and Beneficent Organizations of Boston Together with “Legal Suggestions,” Prepared for the Associated Charities* (Boston: Cupples, Upham & Company, 1886), 49; Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1884* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1884), 29, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065321724>; Additional WEIU records, Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1886* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1886), 43. 81-M237. Carton 1. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>3</sup>Wendy Gamber, *The Female Economy: The Millinery and Dressmaking Trades, 1860-1930* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>4</sup>Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 126.

<sup>5</sup>Nicola Jane Phillips, *Women in Business 1700-1850* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2006), 95.

writing about "female alliances" in early modern England, Amanda Herbert explored the "[m]ultifarious alliances [...] between elite women and the lower-status servants, friends, and neighbors with whom they lived and worked,"<sup>6</sup> which were predicated on cooperative domestic labor. However, scholars are not unanimous as to the existence of distinct "female economies."

Edith Sparks argues that between 1870 and 1920 the majority of female business-owners in the United States did not conduct business in a "female economy" but in a "heterosocial world" of male and female employees, suppliers, and creditors. Still, even she has noted the significant commercial ties that bound female proprietors who were working in distinct but adjacent majority-female sectors of the economy, like sex work and dressmaking, and their propensity to turn to other women as creditors, advisers, and business partners.<sup>7</sup> In the context of debates about the existence of "female economies," to properly acknowledge the economic dimensions of women's work in non-profit organizations requires investigating the relationship between their directors or leaders and those from whom they sought the goods, services, and knowledge or know-how that were necessary to run their activities in profit-generating ways. To that end, it may be fruitful to turn our attention to the field of home economics, or domestic science, as it was also known in the early years of the twentieth century. The strong reform connections of most home economists can help us bridge the gap that exists between the worlds of commerce and reform in the existing scholarly literature.

### *Home Economics and the College Graduate*

Historians of the home economics movement agree that it was the province of college graduates. It was they who theorized it in magazines and taught the new subject in high schools and colleges across the nation. From its 1890s infancy as the brainchild of New England chemist Ellen M. Richards, the home economics movement was rooted in the college laboratory. Home economists advocated the use of new scientific methods and instruments to create bodies of detailed, comprehensive knowledge on varied aspects of the domestic experience—cooking, cleaning, but also heating, sanitation, and care for textiles—with the aim of improving

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More specifically, see chapter 5, "'The Friendship of the World': Female Business Networks in Eighteenth-Century Durham."

<sup>6</sup>Amanda E. Herbert, *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity, and Friendship in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 78.

<sup>7</sup>Edith Sparks, *Capital Intentions: Female Proprietors in San Francisco, 1850-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 17, 61: "[P]rostitution, a largely female business opportunity, fueled yet another economic sphere that was also dominated by women—the apparel industry."

Americans' standards of living and citizenship. That part was perhaps what mattered most: in the words of Lauren Shapiro, domestic scientists were, at heart, "reformers, not research scientists."<sup>8</sup>

These reformers were interested in using the new science of nutrition to build stronger bodies and that of sanitation to keep them healthy, all in the service of the body politic. Harried home-makers were to learn how to fulfill their duties in the best, modern, rational way that educators were developing for them through time-and-motion studies and chemistry experiments. In some accounts, these educated men and women discounted strictly political solutions to public health issues, favoring instead home economics training for individuals as a way to prevent disease and intemperance on a larger scale. This led these researchers to agitate for the development of new academic and scientific disciplines and to consolidate a platform for women to rationalize the home from the inside. Glenna Matthews first laid out the classic argument that domestic scientists were frustrated academics creating a "beachhead" for women in academia.<sup>9</sup> From that perspective, graduates of home economics programs were not supposed to go out and become anything else than teachers of home economics, and the current literature seems to support that view.<sup>10</sup> Representatively, Helen Zoe Veit writes that while "home economics training did lead to paying jobs for a small percentage of women who went on to teach it and an even smaller percentage who got related jobs in industry," it did not lead to the professionalization of domestic work.<sup>11</sup>

While it is true that the proportion of college-educated women who became proprietors or managers of food-related businesses was likely small, the goals of the home economics movement as a whole involved creating new economic opportunities for women. Megan Elias describes it as "a movement to professionalize domestic work and domestic space."<sup>12</sup> As such, the variety and context of activities that they engaged in as early as the 1890s and 1900s remains to be investigated. It is only recently and sparingly that scholars have studied women's paid careers in

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<sup>8</sup>Lauren Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 75.

<sup>9</sup>Glenna Matthews, "*Just a Housewife*": *The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 148.

<sup>10</sup>Shapiro, *Perfection Salad*, 9. Throughout *Perfection Salad*, Shapiro defends the thesis that domestic reformers, while they were trying to forge new paths and a more modern kind of authority for women, were neither feminists nor interested in working out collective solutions to social issues.

<sup>11</sup>Helen Zoe Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food: Self-Control, Science, and the Rise of Modern American Eating in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 88.

<sup>12</sup>Megan J. Elias, *Stir It Up: Home Economics in American Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 1-2.

home economics-related positions that were not domestic service, and then mostly with a focus on the corporate positions created for women in the food industry in the 1920s and beyond.<sup>13</sup> As early as the 1890s, however, female proprietors running lunch rooms, cafés, restaurants, and even farms tried to feed customers and earn a living, at the same time as they aimed at reforming the public's character and uplifting American morals. In addition to those goals, I argue that a group of reformers active in the domestic science movement considered using their training and expert knowledge to reach social justice goals. These women sought to reform businesses from the inside in order to improve employees' working conditions as well as market better products at fairer prices.

Using the WEIU's activities and connection as a starting point, it is possible to uncover that the trained home economists of the 1920s, who worked in corporate test kitchens and were "diplomats in the marketplace, negotiating between the consumer and the company,"<sup>14</sup> were not the first women to balance education and profit-making. When we consider white middle-class women's entrepreneurial activities as food and food commodities producers, we refine and complexify our understanding of domestic scientists' philosophy of reform. This we can do by studying the personal and professional ties that bound the WEIU, a women's association committed to the cause of reform through innovative social programs, and college graduates pursuing work on dairy farms and in restaurants or lunch rooms.

### *Identifying Types*

It was possible to reconstruct the careers and lives of several locally prominent businesswomen—Charlotte Barrell Ware, Helen and Louise Greene, and Bertha Stevenson—who were connected with the Women's Educational and Industrial Union. They shared opinionated ideas about the role that Progressive-era businesses had to play in individual women's lives as well as in civic betterment. Their stories reveal how the WEIU, a female reform organization, sought to act as a creator or incubator of opportunities on the marketplace, in its support of their business ventures. They also suggest that there existed a type of educated, white middle- or upper-class woman who embraced a specific conception of commercial life in which business-owners had a social as well as an economic role to play.

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<sup>13</sup>In Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti's recent volume, *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), see Lynn K. Nyhart, "Home Economists in the Hospital, 1900-1930," 125-144; Regina Lee Blaszczyk, "'Where Mrs. Homemaker is Never Forgotten': Lucy Maltby and Home Economics at Cornell Glass Works, 1929-1965," 163-180, and Carolyn M. Goldstein, "Part of the Package: Home Economists in the Consumer Products Industries, 1920-1940," 271-296.

<sup>14</sup>Stage and Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics*, 11.

In at least some cases, Progressive middle- and upper-class women like those of the WEIU went further than rolling out arguments for the need for businesses, the state, and private citizens to “co-operate” in improving urban amenities and urban quality of life—a typical Progressive demand.<sup>15</sup> At a time of great social transformations, not only did women “save the city” through the creation of non-profit “redemptive places”<sup>16</sup> like public baths and settlement houses; some of them attempted to do their part not only as concerned members of the public, but also as entrepreneurs. They believed that business interests had a role to play in social reform, and in their eyes this justified women’s entry into the commercial realm. When these white, middle- and upper-class entrepreneurs eyed new career paths for college alumnae, they often kept track of both individual and collective opportunities: opportunities for personal self-support on the one hand, and opportunities for social betterment on the other. In newspaper accounts of their professional lives—glowing portraits of then exceptional feminine success—and in their own publications, these two kinds of opportunities were never considered singly. As we will see in chapter 3, in the 1890s and 1900s, as the Board of Government of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union itself phased out volunteer labor in favor of paid employees, introduced new book-keeping methods, and paid a closer look at the treasury, so did the organization’s support for and reliance on business-minded individuals increase. This chapter aims at characterizing the business-centered philosophy of reform that progressive female entrepreneurs deployed as a corollary to their associational activities. Historian Lynn Gordon has studied female models of professional achievements as alternatives to the dominant professional culture. She contends that “women physicians, settlement workers, academics, and government officials often had a gender-related perspective on their work and its relationship to larger social concerns.”<sup>17</sup> I argue that we could extend such a perspective to female business-owners as well. Moving in chronological order, we can delineate three different types of female reformist entrepreneurs, each with a specific life cycle and domain of expertise. They are exemplified by dairy

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<sup>15</sup>This is a theme explored by Judith Walzer Leavitt in her case study of Milwaukee, *The Healthiest City: Milwaukee and the Politics of Health Reform* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982). For a typical example, see the successful anti-tuberculosis campaigns coordinated there by the public and the private sectors in 1907 and 1912. Leavitt, *Healthiest City*, 201-208.

<sup>16</sup>Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 14-15.

<sup>17</sup>Lynn Gordon, *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 4. On the existence of a distinct female professional culture, see also Daniel Walkowitz, “The Making of a Feminine Professional Identity,” *American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (1990): 1051-1075. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2163478>.

farmer Charlotte Barrell Ware, tea room proprietors Helen and Louise Greene, and Bertha Stevenson, the innovative restaurateur.

## 2.1 Charlotte Barrell Ware: From Education to Dairying and Back

Charlotte Barrell Ware (1862-1945), as the oldest woman in this corpus, was a transitional type. She received a college education, but one that was not meant to lead to a job, and she first labored in women's organizations as an unpaid volunteer. Her example reveals how a college education could lead to a "career" that mixed reform and business, at a time when it was unusual for college graduates to engage in paid employment, especially if they were married. Ware turned to business activity after marriage, when she purchased and renovated a dairy farm with the idea of producing "clean milk" to solve what was known as the "milk question"—the public health issues caused by the hardships that urban residents faced when they tried to secure supplies of clean, fresh, unadulterated milk, especially for their children's consumption. In the 1890s and 1900s, scandals involving the death of infants periodically rocked the press, and well-meaning physicians and reformers started advocating state regulation of dairy producers and retailers.

The Women's Educational and Industrial Union was a hub and a source of support for enterprising women like Charlotte Barrell Ware. It supported private initiatives, choosing as suppliers people who shared a commitment to social reform and went into business both for personal profit and for community betterment. In its Food Sales Room, the WEIU sold the Warelands milk and cream produced by Ware, one of its directors, who started out as a clubwoman and later became the proprietor and manager of a large dairy farm. The WEIU sold her dairy in its shops and lunch rooms for reasons that have as much to do with a commitment to consumer activism as with its patrons' appetite for higher-quality, artisanal goods.

### 2.1.1 A Family Interest in the Cause of Public Education

As a member of Boston University's class of 1885,<sup>18</sup> Charlotte Barrell Ware was part of the first generation of college-educated women, those who actively had

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<sup>18</sup>"The Departments," *Bostonia* 10, no. 2 (July 1910): 41, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433075982318>.

to choose between a career and marriage, and would have seen themselves as “pioneer[s] enlarging the female sphere” while still “defin[ing] themselves as true [women].”<sup>19</sup> Initially, Ware chose teaching: after graduating, she taught in Cambridge Latin School from 1888 to 1895. She quit after marrying Robert A. Ware, a wholesale paper salesman, that same year.<sup>20</sup> Throughout her teaching and later marriage years, she was active in female-led associations and clubs. Her lifelong interest in education may be imputed in part to her father, James S. Barrell, a highly-respected, locally famous high school teacher and later principal.<sup>21</sup> Ware developed a lasting commitment to the cause of popular or adult education, then referred to as “extension courses.” She championed adult education in the variety of women’s groups that she joined after marrying, some of which collaborated with the Boston city government to investigate matters for which women were thought to be better suited. Such collaborations were slowly becoming a matter of course in Boston. In the late 1890s, following the example of the city of New York, the Boston City Council developed an interest in adult education and provided it in the form of free public lectures. As a member of the Educational Department of the Boston Twentieth Century Club, Charlotte Barrell Ware became the secretary of an “Advisory Committee on Free Municipal Lectures” appointed by mayor Josiah Quincy in 1899.<sup>22</sup> It was eventually under the Twentieth Century Club’s direction that a course of thirty-six free public lectures was given in local public

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<sup>19</sup>Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women’s Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 94; Margaret Dollar, *The Beginnings of Vocational Guidance for College Women: The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, and Women’s Colleges*, PhD. thesis, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1992, 19, 49. Even at the turn of the century, Bryn Mawr president M. Carey Thomas was in the minority when she asserted that a married college graduate should be able to keep her career.

<sup>20</sup>“Funeral Today For Mrs. Ware,” *Boston Herald*, April 16, 1945, 13; United States Census, 1900, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M9TN-DSN>), Charlotte B Ware in entry for Robert A Ware, 1900. In the nineteenth century, it was rare for teachers who married to keep their position. We should understand Charlotte Barrell Ware’s resignation not as a personal choice, but as compliance to custom, and, potentially, to her school’s rules and regulations. Thomas Dublin, *Transforming Women’s Work: New England Lives in the Industrial Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 219.

<sup>21</sup>“Massachusetts,” *Journal of Education* 59, no. 7 (1904): 108, JSTOR, <https://jstor.org/stable/44058494>.

<sup>22</sup>The Twentieth Century Club was a Boston social club founded in 1892 and likely modelled after the Chicago institution of the same name, although unrelated “Twentieth Century Clubs” were also founded in the late 1880s and early 1890s in other cities. Its object was “the promotion of the liberal arts and all earnest, unselfish practices.” As for the WEIU, a point was made of membership being open to all, although it is likely that it was mostly a middle- and upper-middle class organization. For several decades, the Club arranged for public lectures on political and social issues. “Twentieth Century Club,” *Plain Dealer*, December 20, 1889, 3; “Northwestern University,” *New York Tribune*, November 24, 1890, 4; “The Very Latest,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, October 24, 1892, 4.

schools, expenses being paid by private subscription, while the city offered the schools as free venues.<sup>23</sup>

The Club furnished both the impetus and the template for this municipal initiative.<sup>24</sup> Under Ware's leadership, the Educational Department aimed at creating resources for adult education for use by teachers, educators, and civically-minded residents. They received broad support from the presidents of local colleges, clergymen, and school officials.<sup>25</sup> By the mid-1900s, when she began focusing on the "milk question" and on the effects of the public's lack of knowledge about milk production and the health risks posed by spoiled or tainted milk, Ware was already both well-versed in the intricacies of adult education and convinced of the necessity of "enlightening" the public.

Ware found herself in the midst of a second wave of milk reform activism, which followed the movement for the reform of the urban swill milk production system in the 1840s and 1850s. The first generation of clean milk reformers—clergymen and merchants—had been concerned with moving the production of fresh milk from urban districts to the countryside, a move which they thought would provide cities with milk that was safe to drink, but infant mortality did not decline when dairy farmers replaced small urban milk dealers as suppliers of city markets. Indeed, new problems arose, like that of the spread of bovine diseases on the new, more intensive rural farms. Consequently, a new class of reformers—monied philanthropists like New York's Nathan Straus—took it upon themselves to establish clean milk stations for the urban poor.<sup>26</sup>

Over time, as Ware's reform priorities shifted, so did her memberships in multiple benevolent organizations. While it was not unusual for leaders in female organizations to be involved in a mix of leadership and rank-and-file positions in a variety of groups, she was at the "activist" end of the spectrum.<sup>27</sup> We can trace the evolution of her priorities and reform beliefs in her commitment to various organizations. In the late 1890s and early 1900s, she was both a secretary of the Education Department of the Twentieth Century Club and a director for the

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<sup>23</sup> *Documents of the City of Boston* v. 4 (1899), 1-8, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015068218901>.

<sup>24</sup> *Documents of the City of Boston* v. 4 (1899), 2.

<sup>25</sup> "Report on Extension Teaching, 1899," in *Documents of the Senate of the State of New York*, c. 1, session 123, vol. 16, no. 44 (1900), 647-648, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.74660381>.

<sup>26</sup> E. Melanie DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food: How Milk Became America's Drink* (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 72-73.

<sup>27</sup> Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism, New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 95-96.



Women’s Educational and Industrial Union. She later became a vice-president for the Milk and Baby Hygiene Association of Boston when it was founded in 1909 by a socialist politician<sup>28</sup> and joined the American Association of Study for the Prevention of Infant Mortality, created the following year.<sup>29</sup> As “[m]ilk reform was part of a broader food safety and city sanitation movement, which was itself part of the new ‘Progressive’ politics of urban reform,” the diversification of Ware’s activities was a more seamless process than we might have otherwise surmised.<sup>30</sup>

### 2.1.2 Educating the Public about the “Milk Question”

The creation of these organizations reflected growing interest in the “milk question,” that of access to milk that could be fed safely to infants. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was far from easy for urban residents to ascertain that the milk they bought, either directly from large dealers or from neighborhood grocers, would not make them sick or kill their babies. Because of the distance that separated consumers from farms, even the most educated and wariest consumer could be deceived, as frequent scandals revealed. In Massachusetts, this was underscored by the “Hood-Lawrence controversy” of 1909-1913. Over the course of several years, one of the three largest milk dealers that supplied Boston, which was known for selling high-price certified milk to hospitals and middle- and upper-class parents—and played on parental fear in its advertising—was revealed to have sourced filthy milk from out-of-state dairies.<sup>31</sup> Both clubwomen and medical professionals sounded the alarm.<sup>32</sup> Starting in 1910, a slew of local and national organizations agitated for legislation that would empower the State Board of Health and for public awareness of the dangers of tainted milk.<sup>33</sup>

When she joined these efforts for legislative reform, Charlotte Barrell Ware had already charted a new course for herself, “[withdrawing] her energy from city

<sup>28</sup>“Walter Edison Kruesi,” *Who’s Who in New York City and State*, edited by Herman W. Know (New York: Who’s Who Publications, 1917-1918), 637, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433058766415>.

<sup>29</sup>“A Private Dairy School,” *American Produce Review and American Creamery* 30, no. 7 (June 8, 1910): 260, HathiTrust, [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$c209733](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$c209733).

<sup>30</sup>DuPuis, *Nature’s Perfect Food*, 68-69.

<sup>31</sup>Papers of Mrs. William Putnam Lowell, 1887-1935 [hereafter “Papers of Mrs. William Putnam Lowell”], “Hood-Lawrence Controversy, as explained by Chairman Daniels J. Murphy and Milk Inspector Dr. Tobin of the Lawrence Board of Health,” c1913. MC 360. Box 6, folder 117. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>32</sup>Mrs. Walter McNab Miller, “Pure Food Exhibit,” *Federation Bulletin* 3, no. 5 (February 1906): 317, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679734>.

<sup>33</sup>American Academy of Medicine, *Prevention of Infant Mortality* (Easton, c1909), 326, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015068496838>.

committees and enter[ing] upon an interesting experiment in scientific dairying.”<sup>34</sup> Before adding to her outreach work at the Twentieth Century Club and the WEIU with the Milk and Baby Hygiene Association, she had decided to explore different avenues for activism. The idea that she had come up with was to create her own business—to purchase and manage a dairy farm in order to produce the clean milk that she determined was missing on the market. How she came to that business plan is unclear. All that we do know is that as soon as she conceived of the project, she decided to involve the WEIU. In late 1904, she presented her plans for a “scientific dairy” to the Union, which she wanted to make her Boston selling agent. The Union’s Business Committee approved and agreed to sell milk and cream in the Food Salesroom, as well as 1/3 quart sealed bottles of milk in their Boylston Street Lunch Room.<sup>35</sup> In 1905, Ware started operating the Warelands, in Norfolk, Massachusetts, an old farm that had been the property of her husband’s family in colonial times. The Wares had purchased the abandoned farm ten years earlier, with the intention of turning it into a summer home, but the idea of opening her own model dairy farm led Charlotte to a change of plans.<sup>36</sup> Her husband’s financial backing would have been crucial assurance to creditors. As Edith Sparks has noted, “[m]arried women whose husbands enjoyed a secure middling income probably had the greatest access to capital” at a time when access to credit was the greatest obstacle faced by female proprietors.<sup>37</sup> In April 1905, Charlotte Barrell Ware opened the Warelands Dairy.<sup>38</sup> As a contemporary noted, “[m]odel farms [were] generally run by men of wealth, who [paid] college graduates salaries to manage them.”<sup>39</sup> Like the men of her class, Charlotte Barrell Ware set out to hire trained managers and workers in order to run a model farm according to the best available scientific knowledge.

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<sup>34</sup>Mary H. Northend, “The Warelands Dairy, Where Clean Milk is Produced—The Experiment of a Woman,” *Boston Cooking-School Magazine* 16, no. 3 (October 1911): 115-120, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015074941058>.

<sup>35</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 9, December 6, 1904, 19-20. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>36</sup>The estate was originally purchased by Robert Ware as part of a treaty concluded with Metacomet, the chief of the local Wampanoag tribe. By the time Charlotte Barrell Ware and her husband Robert A. Ware bought it, the farm’s main building was the “Elisha Ware House,” which had been built in 1733. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. National Register of Historical Places Inventory – Nominal Form. The Warelands. November 10, 1977.

<sup>37</sup>Sparks, *Capital Intentions*, 92.

<sup>38</sup>“Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Federation Bulletin* 3, no. 3 (December 1905): 152, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679734>.

<sup>39</sup>“How Can I Really Learn a Profession?” *Ladies Home Journal* 36, no. 8 (August 1919): 39-42, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015021073336>.

### 2.1.3 Building a Scientific Farm

Ware made sure to build her farm according to the latest scientific evidence, the kind that federally-funded agricultural colleges and agricultural experiment stations had been churning out since the 1880s.<sup>40</sup> She would later claim to have been inspired by a series of talks given in the late 1890s at Amherst College. The lecturers who urged the audience to “[get] back to the soil,”<sup>41</sup> and she listened closely. Through her WEIU connections, she may also have heard of the venture at Ashland, Massachusetts. In 1892, women connected with the Union leased a farm there and endeavored to produce eggs, poultry, flowers and small fruit.<sup>42</sup> This was in the very early days of what became the Country Life movement: coordinated appeals to the public by politicians and faculty at the new agricultural colleges, who sought to improve rural life in hopes of stemming the rural exodus and protecting agrarian values.<sup>43</sup> Upon the close of the lectures, Ware had made up her mind: to “[supply] at least one pure food product.”<sup>44</sup> She would choose milk and work out how to produce some that was as free from bacteria as materially possible.

For at least a decade scientists had been concerned with bacteriological indicators of the quality of milk and the authorities were taking notice. In 1893, the Dairy Bureau of the Massachusetts Board of Agriculture reported to the Senate about a scholarly article published on that topic by W. T. Sedgwick of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.<sup>45</sup> At the turn of the century, the Boards of Health of several Massachusetts towns and cities adopted legislation that barred the sale of milk containing more than 500,000 bacteria per cubic centimeter.<sup>46</sup> By 1905, this

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<sup>40</sup>James Harvey Young, *Pure Food: Securing the Federal Food and Drugs Act of 1906* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 121-122; Lou Ferleger, “Uplifting American Agriculture: Experiment Station Scientists and the Office of Experiment Stations in the Early Years After the Hatch Act,” *Agricultural History* 64, no. 2 (Spring 1990): 5-23.

<sup>41</sup>Northend, “The Warelands Dairy,” 115.

<sup>42</sup>*Boston Herald*, September 18, 1892, 14. I have found no further reference to what must have been a very short-lived venture.

<sup>43</sup>Contemporaries identified 1908 as the year when previously inchoate feelings morphed into national, organized efforts. In August 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt appointed a “Commission on Country Life.” It is unclear when Ware attended the talks at Amherst College, but they must have taken place before she started the Warelands in 1907, and most likely in the 1890s when she was involved in several Boston civic and benevolent organizations. For more context about contemporaries’ views of the “country life movement,” see L. H. Bailey, *The Country-Life Movement in the United States* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1911), 6.

<sup>44</sup>Northend, “The Warelands Dairy,” 115.

<sup>45</sup>Massachusetts, General Court, Senate, 1893 Senate Bill 0010, Second Annual Report of the Dairy Bureau of the Massachusetts Board of Agriculture, January 16, 1893, 10, State Library of Massachusetts, <https://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/435564>.

<sup>46</sup>Papers of Mrs. William Putnam Lowell, City of Cambridge, Office of the Board of Health, “Regulations for the Sale and Care of Milk,” 1904. MC 360. Box 5, folder 64.

was the case in Boston: milk that either contained more than 500,000 bacteria per c.c. or whose temperature exceeded 50 degrees could not legally be sold.<sup>47</sup> In northeastern localities, legislators solidified bacteria counts as the main criterion according to which milk was assessed, graded, and thus deemed fit or unfit for infant consumption.<sup>48</sup> “Certified milk,” inspected as it was by local medical associations, legally had to contain much smaller amounts of bacteria, to be determined by city governments.<sup>49</sup> One model farm which supplied non-profit milk distribution stations for poor mothers was noted as having a “remarkable average of from 2,000 to 5,000 bacteria per cubic centimeter.”<sup>50</sup> To achieve similar figures, Ware oversaw a complete renovation of the existing buildings at the Warelands as well as the erection of new ones.<sup>51</sup> In that and in planning for feed production, she followed the advice of agronomists and supplemented them with her own European tour of scientific dairy farms, which she conducted “while engaged in educational work in Boston,” likely in the late 1890s.<sup>52</sup> In that, again, she did not differ much from male businessmen, including condensed milk inventor’s Gail Borden (1801-1874), who also dreamed of making milk a cheap, safe convenience for all. To that end, Borden had undertaken a comprehensive investigation of whatever methods already existed in the 1850s and 1860s, before the production of condensed milk existed as an industry.<sup>53</sup>

Charlotte Barrell Ware believed that it was not only up to consumers to solve this public health crisis. The solution to the “milk question” would be neither refraining from buying suspicious milk nor scrimping and saving to buy

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<sup>47</sup>Papers of Mrs. William Putnam Lowell, Bureau of Milk Inspection, warning card. MC 360. Box 5, folder 70.

<sup>48</sup>Papers of Mrs. William Putnam Lowell, Department of Health of the City of New York. *Bulletin* no. 88, January 4, 1912. MC 360. Box 5, folder 70. As an example, the New York City Board of Health listed three different grades of milk: grade A, “for infants and children,” grade B, “for adults,” and grade C, “for cooking and manufacturing purposes only.” See also Deborah Valenze, *Milk: A Local and Global History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 225-226.

<sup>49</sup>Papers of Mrs. William Putnam Lowell, Milk Commission of the Cambridge Medical Improvement Society, “Circular of Information Concerning Certified Milk.” MC 360. Box 5, folder 64. The Commission specifies that certified milk had to have a bacterial count of less than 10,000 per cubic centimeter. The milk could contain neither pus, coloring matter, preservatives, nor any “contaminating substances,” among other requirements.

<sup>50</sup>Papers of Mrs. William Putnam Lowell, *Annual Report of the Inspector of Milk, City of Cambridge*, 1909, 11. MC 360. Box 5, folder 64.

<sup>51</sup>For a detailed description of the alterations she made to the existing building, see the report filled in 1977 when the farm was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service. National Register of Historical Places Inventory—Nominal Form. The Warelands. November 10, 1977.

<sup>52</sup>Northend, “The Warelands Dairy,” 116.

<sup>53</sup>Valenze, *Milk*, 179-180, 184-187.

higher-quality but more expensive milk. Through her involvement in social reform organizations, she had come to realize that consumers could only buy what was both available and affordable. In a context where government responsibility for the supply of clean milk was not yet established, she determined that businesses had a role to play and that there was a need for responsible business-owners putting out safe, quality products, at affordable prices.

Her perspective was unique since she was as much of a farmer as a manager and an expert, like those who increasingly dictated the standards of the industry from the confines of agricultural colleges and agricultural experiment stations.<sup>54</sup> To her, also, it was not only the public who required an education—a view which Ware impressed on the journalists who visited the Warelands. “Farmers and dealers alike must be educated to the fine point of cleanliness and then we shall have sanitary milk,” one enthusiastic reporter wrote after interviewing her.<sup>55</sup> Ware was not alone in considering the average dairy farmer backwards in his crass ignorance of the need for cleanliness, that cardinal womanly virtue. As former Massachusetts governor Goard wrote in 1901, “[a] great many farmers do not possess a civilized idea of cleanliness in the management of cows; they seem to be slovens by instinct [. . .] In the interest of dairy economics, I believe I would like to see the wives of many farmers handle the farms and the cows.”<sup>56</sup> In order to educate milk producers, Charlotte Barrell Ware decided to become one of them. Although she did not generally milk the cows or clean the stables herself, she made a point of being thoroughly acquainted with the work. The inspector who signed her “dairy score card” in June 1911 praised her “almost [. . .] ideal farm” and her “[p]ersonal supervision.”<sup>57</sup>

Despite starting out firmly convinced that “milk produced under sanitary conditions was possible at the price paid per quart by the average householder,”<sup>58</sup> Ware very quickly realized that she could not sell pure milk below a certain price and had to turn around. Whereas the average quart of milk sold for 5 to 5.5 cents,

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<sup>54</sup>Valenze, *Milk*, 236-237.

<sup>55</sup>Peggy Quincy, “Concerted Effort at Cleanliness Price of Pure Milk, Says Peggy,” *Boston Journal*, September 25, 1908, 7.

<sup>56</sup>Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture. Massachusetts Agricultural Experiment Station, *Forty-Ninth Annual Report of the Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1902), 173, State Library of Massachusetts, <https://hdl.handle.net/2452/205479>.

<sup>57</sup>Papers of Mrs. William Putnam Lowell, United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Animal Industry, Dairy Division, Sanitary Inspection of Dairies. Dairy Score Card. “Mrs C. B. Ware.” MC 360. Box 6, folder 121.

<sup>58</sup>Quincy, “Concerted Effort at Cleanliness Price of Pure Milk,” 7.

hers went for 30 cents.<sup>59</sup> By 1910, when she had fully digested the implications of that economic constraint, she came to interpret the public's reluctance to pay for her milk as the ignorance of its benefits and the unwillingness to "pay for the highest class of insurance against disease germs in milk, which can only be given at a high cost."<sup>60</sup> She also directed her ire at experts, in this case physicians, the people she thought should be the ones educating the masses and convincing them that buying pure milk was an utmost priority. If physicians did not set an example to the public by buying pure milk, who would? By early 1910, as revealed in a talk she gave for the Milk and Baby Hygiene Association at the Twentieth Century Club, she had come to realize the extent to which the production of certified milk was "an economic problem"—not simply a public health issue.<sup>61</sup>

One very revealing remark shows how closely still she linked women's reform work and economic opportunities. In 1907, she attended a talk given at the New England Women's Club (NEWC) on the topic of "Clean Food." Two years after she had started her dairy farm, this was the first time that she had expressed disillusionment with her initial goal of producing moderately-priced, high-quality milk. She is reported as saying that "with the present high price of cattle feed and labor, it was almost impossible to supply pure milk at a moderate price, but she thought the milk business would be a good one for women, under other conditions."<sup>62</sup> Read in the context of other statements that she made elsewhere, to her what constituted a "good" business for women was one in which they could produce pure or clean articles of food at the kind of prices that the majority could afford. The adverse conditions of high production costs prevented Ware from pursuing public service at the same time as private entrepreneurship: this is the meaning of that statement.

#### 2.1.4 For Profit and Principle: Saving Babies, Helping Women

Charlotte Barrell Ware used her commercial activities to act out on her principles: her reform commitment was an essential feature of her work, not an ancillary one. Although the high quality milk she initially produced was in high demand in high-class cafés, hotels, and women's clubs—and was indeed eagerly purchased

<sup>59</sup> "Milk at 30 Cents a Quart," *Kansas City Star*.

<sup>60</sup> "Not Willing to Pay for Perfect Milk," *Boston Journal*, March 23, 1910, 14.

<sup>61</sup> "Not Willing to Pay for Perfect Milk," 14.

<sup>62</sup> "Clean Food," *Woman's Journal* 38, no. 49 (December 7, 1907): 194. Emphasis mine.

for retail by the Women's Educational and Industrial Union—she hoped both to fight the middle-men of the “milk trust”<sup>63</sup> and to make lay people understand why pure milk cost more. Her dairy farm turned to producing milk with a medium fat content, specially adapted to infant consumption, alongside the richer milk that sold very well in hotels and cafés.<sup>64</sup> The choice to diversify the Warelands' customer base may have been rooted in pragmatism, which meant balancing high revenues with its founder's ethical and educational agenda. Because of the commercial niche that she had found—a demand for high-quality milk, no matter its price—even experts agreed that she ran no risk of being driven out of business by the milk trust.<sup>65</sup>

When she founded the Warelands, these commercial opportunities were already well established. Whereas a century earlier fresh, fluid milk would only have been consumed marginally, mostly in rural settings, and in cities would have been reserved to infants, by the 1880s Americans had taken to milk drinking even as adults.<sup>66</sup> As the consumption of milk skyrocketed, dairy farmers were called upon by urban reformers to produce milk rather than butter or cheese. Enterprising individuals pictured opportunities for individual profit; Charlotte Barrell Ware saw more.

She hoped to make her farm into a model dairy and an educational institution for the benefits of both career-driven women and the public. She saw openings for women like herself in farming, and encouraged young women to further her “pure food” agenda. After several years of operation, she created a summer “Dairy School” at the Warelands in 1910. In theory, it was to be a place where young women could learn how to become dairy farmers or managers on a dairy farm. In practice, it was a summer school where college alumnae, many of whom were domestic science teachers, could learn the details of the production of clean milk, the better to educate the public about its connection to the prevention of infant mortality. In 1911, the six students attending the annual summer session included the head of a school with a home-making department, a “teacher of foods” in a

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<sup>63</sup>These rival producers were middle-men overseeing large-scale dairying operations, like H.P. Hood and Sons, D. Whiting and Sons and the Boston Dairy Company. Owing to pressure that they could put on small producers, they were well-positioned to secure contracts with local hospitals and large institutions. To contemporary critics, they constituted a sort of local “milk trust.” In a pamphlet issued circa 1909-1910, the socialist “Boston Club,” complained of the grip that these three firms had on the milk contracting business, and on the low prices to which milk producers were forced to sell to them. Papers of Mrs. William Putnam Lowell, The Boston Club, “Read This About Milk and the Milk Strike,” undated, c1909-1910. MC 360. Box 5, folder 83.

<sup>64</sup>Northend, “The Warelands Dairy,” 118.

<sup>65</sup>“Milk at 30 Cents a Quart,” *Kansas City Star*.

<sup>66</sup>DuPuis, *Nature's Perfect Food*, 6.

school of domestic science, two graduates of a school of domestic science preparing to teach, a trained nurse, and a graduate of the School for Social Workers preparing for a career as a market inspector.<sup>67</sup> In other press accounts of her school, students were reported to be graduates from Harvard, Wellesley, Clark, Cornell, and the Carnegie Technical Schools. The curriculum, which was covered in six weeks, focused on “the production of clean milk, the handling of milk from farm to consumer, [and] the relation of milk to the public health.”<sup>68</sup>

Meanwhile, her own work included initiating the creation of stricter health standards in Massachusetts and relentlessly communicating about the production of pure milk. She reportedly “proposed and put through” the concept of certified milk as adopted by the state government of Massachusetts.<sup>69</sup> As she pursued these activities, it bears repeating that Ware was a prominent member of the Boston WEIU, and that she kept tying these commercial and educational projects to the Union’s work for the development of new career opportunities for women. Over time, her personal experiences helped her mature her beliefs about women’s work.

Ware saw women as innately skilled for farm work. She made no distinction between women’s home life and domestic skills and their labor in other areas. She explicitly compared farming with housekeeping, and not simply in reference to the bucolic tradition of the New England homestead. More implicitly, the main advice she gave to prospective dairy farmers was to ensure they were able and ready to step up to do any part of the work themselves if necessary. This was precisely the kind of advice in the management of servants which the writers and editors of women’s magazines issued to young housekeepers in the 1900s. The term “management” was increasingly being used to characterize the mistress-servant relationship, and employers were advised in popular women’s magazines to learn how to do the work themselves in order to become better “managers”: “America does need trained servants, there can be no doubt of that, but it first needs the trained mistress,” one professional “visiting housekeeper” asserted in March 1911.<sup>70</sup>

Ware’s “Dairy School,” the position she occupied as “chairman” of the WEIU’s Employment Committee<sup>71</sup>, and the article she contributed to the WEIU’s com-

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<sup>67</sup>Charlotte Barrell Ware, “Dairy Farming,” in *Vocations for the Trained Woman* (Boston: Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 1910), 149, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044010292381>.

<sup>68</sup>*Daily Picayune*. Woman’s World and Work. July 16, 1910.

<sup>69</sup>“A Woman Milk Expert,” *Daily Picayune*, October 23, 1910, 36.

<sup>70</sup>“She Answers a ‘Hurry Call’ from a Servantless Home,” *Good Housekeeping* 52, no. 3 (March 1911): 341, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.102781459>.

<sup>71</sup>Additional WEIU records, *The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., 1899-1900* (Cambridge: The Co-operative Press, 1900), 41. Carton 1.



pendium *Vocations for the Trained Woman* (1910)<sup>72</sup> all suggest how closely she connected the expansion of women's job opportunities with the emergence of new types of what we could call "productive-preventive" work, i.e. for-profit work which produced goods or services whose consumption would further reform goals by contributing to public welfare. By producing and selling clean milk, Charlotte Barrell Ware hoped to solve a pressing public health issue. Robyn Muncy has shown how college-educated women carved out a niche for themselves in public service through the establishment of the Children's Bureau in 1912—a federal body for the care of women and children, which was for a brief time chiefly staffed with women.<sup>73</sup> What the example of Charlotte Barrell Ware suggests is that we should not exclude the commercial arena from the purview of our study, but rather underline the interconnections between capital, women's non-profit organizations, educational institutions, and local governments. However marginally, it was also as businesswomen that reformers like Charlotte Barrell Ware sought to achieve the twin goals of improving the standards of living and public health and finding new sources of authority and independent income for women.

To help others follow in her footsteps, she made sure to keep a constant media presence. She communicated about her own success as a dairy farmer, willingly sharing starting advice in both newspapers and vocational guidance publications. Her "Warelands Dairy School" was also classified by such guides as an educational institution.<sup>74</sup> From the beginning, she conceived of her project as an experiment, and thought it would be beneficial to the public whether she succeeded or not—as a positive or negative example, as the case would turn out to be. Ware was one of many college-educated women giving professional advice in both print and in public lectures, often at their alma maters or in other women's colleges, and her commitment to vocational guidance cannot be considered separately from her membership and involvement in the WEIU. As Margaret Dollar has shown, the Union was both a pioneer and an influential player in the development of the

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<sup>72</sup>Agnes F. Perkins, ed., *Vocations for the Trained Woman: Opportunities Other Than Teaching* (Boston: Women's Educational and Industrial Union), 1910, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044010292381>

<sup>73</sup>Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 38-65. See also Alisa Klaus, "Women's Organizations and the Infant Health Movement in France and the United States, 1890-1920," in *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Philanthropy, and Power*, edited by Kathleen D. McCarthy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 162-165.

<sup>74</sup>"Some Advice from a Successful Woman Farmer," *Craftsman* 22, no. 6 (September 1912): 67; Ware, "Dairy Farming," 146-150; *Vocational Training: A Classified List of Institutions Training Educated Women for Occupations other Than Teaching*, Association of Collegiate Alumnae Bulletin 1 (Northampton: Press of Gazette Printing Co., 1913), 16, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo1.ark:/13960/t16m3tb2n>

vocational guidance movement of the 1910s. Along with the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA), it was responsible for driving research into nonteaching occupations for college-educated women, including careers in fields like agriculture and business. Throughout the 1910s, its Appointment Bureau would gather information on professional opportunities for women and send trained workers to colleges and sponsor conferences on women's vocations.<sup>75</sup> Ware must have been aware of these efforts. As a successful business-owner herself she may have been called upon to help others make good with their education, or her own personal struggles may have caused her to feel the pull of educating and guiding others.

One of her tips to female college-graduates reveals the resourcefulness that contemporaries depicted them as possessing. The conclusion of an account that was published in 1904 in several northeastern newspapers was that "on the whole, the important and interesting fact that [came out] in a glimpse of the doing of Radcliffe girls after they [had] taken their diplomas and joined the breadwinners [was] that given a real university education, women [found] for themselves unoccupied fields of activity which they [could] fill better than men, and which [were] cultivated to the advantage not merely of the individual, but of the world at large."<sup>76</sup> Ware shows what that could have looked like or meant in practice when in 1912 she told the story of a "Simmons College girl" who was interested in horticulture but could not convince a farmer to hire her as a manager. According to Ware, she was able to get her foot in the door using her stenography skills and learned everything she needed to know on the job, as a secretary.<sup>77</sup> Ware herself emphasized the extent to which farming had become a business, the more to convince educated young women that this was a professional niche they could enter and fill as community-minded individuals.

Charlotte Barrell Ware was not alone, first because about ten percent of the New Hampshire teachers studied by Thomas Dublin had other occupations "before, during, or after their years of teaching."<sup>78</sup> In addition, although women like her were not many, she exemplifies a type of female college graduate that existed in the 1910s: the scientific commercial farmer. Just as farming was being constituted as an industry, as a commercial field like any other, women versed in bookkeeping and management turned it into a professional opportunity that could reconcile concerns with personal profit and with community improvement. In August 1910,

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<sup>75</sup>Margaret C. Dollar, *The Beginnings of Vocational Guidance for College Women*, 97-99.

<sup>76</sup>"The Radcliffe College Girls. Things That Graduates Do," *Springfield Daily Republican*, September 4, 1904.

<sup>77</sup>"Some Advice from a Successful Woman Farmer," 67.

<sup>78</sup>Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work*, 219.

when her media exposure was reaching a peak, Ware took part in a conference that tried to answer the question of whether agriculture offered a future for women. It was the first of its kind in Massachusetts, but not in the country, as college graduates were becoming farmers and urging other collegiate women to effect an agricultural renaissance by going back to the land. In the early 1910s, Florence Jackson, a WEIU director, visited “the successful farm managed by Miss Helen Holmes, Smith ‘87, at Kingston, Massachusetts.” Holmes had purchased the estate two years earlier and in that time had reportedly turned twenty acres of “fallow” land into a farm capable of producing the “most successful” crop of potatoes in the state.<sup>79</sup> In the words of Laura Drake Gill, another Smith graduate, college women were fit to be “leaders in rural betterment.”<sup>80</sup> Agriculture was also to be reformed, and not necessarily through associational work or through the new science of home economics, towards which young women were being directed in the new co-educational Western colleges. There existed some resistance both to the idea that women belonged solely in nutrition or home economics departments, and that a home economics degree would preclude graduates from starting a business of their own, like a farm. Ware’s summer school contradicted these ideas; she hoped to train students in the particulars of dairy production and milk testing, so that they could take advantage of the “unfilled demand” for clean milk, whether as producers or as bacteriologists and inspectors.<sup>81</sup>

It was of her own accord that Charlotte Barrell Ware decided to stop all operations at the Warelands. In a posthumous profile published in Boston University’s magazine, a student wrote that “[b]y 1913 the campaign from clean milk had spread far, and Mrs. Ware felt that she could cease her management of Warelands dairy and dairy school.”<sup>82</sup>

Her career would make a definite turn towards reform and advocacy work. While still the Warelands’ operating manager, she had advised the Massachusetts

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<sup>79</sup>WEIU records, Department News, “Miss Jackson Visits Model Farm,” *Union News Items*, undated, c1912, 29-30. B-8. Box 1, folder 3. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

<sup>80</sup>*The Daily Picayune*. Woman’s World and Work. July 16, 1910, 7.

<sup>81</sup>Ware, “Dairy Farming,” 149-150.

<sup>82</sup>Eva Phillips Boyd, “Charlotte Barrell Ware, 1862-1945,” *Bostonia* 19, no. 2 (1945): 58, <https://open.bu.edu/ds2/stream/?#/documents/141944/page/1>. Over the course of the twentieth century, the Warelands briefly became a turkey farm, and, after being left vacant, was purchased in 2018 by a couple hoping to restore it and turn it into a farm school. See “The Warelands,” <https://www.thewarelands.org/>; Grace Allen, “A New Chapter for the Warelands—Historic Property to Become Farm-Based Education School,” *Norfolk & Wrentham*, July 31, 2020, <https://www.norfolkwrenthamnews.com/2020/07/31/323798/a-new-chapter-for-the-warelands-historic-property-to-become-farm-based-education-school>.

Figure 2.1: Portrait of Charlotte Barrell Ware in 1936.



Source: Harvard Digital Collections, [https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital\\_collections/w20005734\\_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:343305](https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital_collections/w20005734_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:343305).

Department of Agriculture on legislation likely pertaining to dairy production.<sup>83</sup> In 1913, she was appointed on a national commission by the Governor of Massachusetts and sent to the International Institute of Agriculture in Rome to study rural credit and agricultural co-operation in Europe. She went, again, in 1922.<sup>84</sup> Her successful work was rewarded with an appointment as the secretary of the International Institute of Agriculture, for which she also received a desk at the State House, where “she receive[d] communications from Brazil and from Denmark, from Scotland and the Netherlands, from Budapest and Kankakee, asking about conditions and conditions there”—duties she discharged while also, simultaneously, being the secretary of the Massachusetts Department of Agriculture.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup>Boyd, “Charlotte Barrell Ware,” 57.

<sup>84</sup>Massachusetts, State Board of Agriculture, *Sixty-First Annual Report of the Secretary of the Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture* (1913), 96, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2452/205491>; “Agriculturists Going to Rome,” *Florists’ Exchange* 53, no. 17 (April 29, 1922): 1078, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uma.ark:/13960/t0gt63w7z>.

<sup>85</sup>Boyd, “Charlotte Barrell Ware,” 58.

By the end of her life and career as an advocate for female farmers, in the 1930s and 1940s, Charlotte Barrell Ware had developed a holistic view of farming. She emphasized the links between farming and community-building—through the fulfillment of the female farmer’s responsibility for education—and between farming and domestic work—since farming involved work inside the farmhouse, but also cleaning and the preparation and preservation of food, and even children’s education. To her, farm life ought to be family- and community-centered. At the end of her life, Ware actively supported international efforts by farming women,<sup>86</sup> notably those by the Associated Country Women of the World, to give women advice and support in the running of their farms and elevate “morale” in rural communities.<sup>87</sup> At home, she administered agricultural scholarship funds, which she also helped raise.<sup>88</sup>

Public responses to Ware’s life and career were initially mixed. She was celebrated as an incredibly skillful business-owner, but her success was occasionally met with scorn or disbelief. While she received commendation by women’s organizations like the WEIU for her commercial successes and for what she pioneered for other women, in at least one case even reformers who were active in the same clean milk advocacy groups as her listed her husband as the owner of her farm.<sup>89</sup> In press coverage of the 1900s and early 1910s, she was heralded as a female expert, receiving the same mythologizing treatment as other very successful female entrepreneurs.<sup>90</sup> Shortly before her death in 1945, she was celebrated for being a successful entrepreneur, the first to produce certified milk in New England.<sup>91</sup> Conversely, at the peak of her commercial success, she was also ridiculed for being out of touch with the realities of farm work or for romanticizing life on the land. Male dairy professionals and journalists mockingly described “society girls running about in knee-length skirts, carrying pails of milk from the barns, driving cows, or shoveling coal in the engine room of the plant.” In their eyes, barriers of both gender and class prevented college-educated women from living and working on a

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<sup>86</sup>She supported public education on matters related to agriculture, hosting foreign female lecturers: “The Garden Club of America’s List of Lecturers,” *Bulletin of the Garden Club of America* no. 6 (September 1920): 22, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.b2937484>.

<sup>87</sup>*Third Triennial Meeting of the Associated Country Women of the World. Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Affairs House of Representatives, Seventy-Fourth Congress, Second Session on S. 2664* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1936), 1936, 2-3, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015049898904>.

<sup>88</sup>Boyd, “Charlotte Barrell Ware,” 58.

<sup>89</sup>Papers of Mrs. William Putnam Lowell, Contact list[?], c1910. MC 360. Box 5, folder 64.

<sup>90</sup>“A Woman Milk Expert,” 36; “Busy Women Farmers,” *Sunday Oregonian*, January 1, 1911, 15. Charlotte Barrell Ware was said to be a sample “of the types who have succeeded.”

<sup>91</sup>Elizabeth Rust Mosely, *Boston Herald*. On the Distaff Side, September 17, 1939, 10, 24.

farm.<sup>92</sup> The credibility of prospective female farm managers was also called into question by politicians. In 1924, Congressmen who eventually awarded the Associated Country Women of the World the appropriation that they had requested were initially wary of those they suspected of being not “real” farm women but sentimental reformers. The organization’s representatives only won them out by describing the minutiae of raising livestock and selling their goods at a cooperative market, but like Ware, who openly supported their request, they were reformers nonetheless.<sup>93</sup>

Charlotte Barrell Ware’s work seamlessly blended business and reform, as she used her organizational networks to find customers and have her products retailed, while at the same time furthering the activities of the reform organizations of which she was a member. She both benefited from and contributed to female economic and professional networks, taking an active part in vocational education efforts for college women, because she believed that it was possible for young, energetic, and idealistic women to benefit both themselves and society by pursuing public health goals, business goals, and “an independence” at the same time. Or, as she explained to the readers of *Vocations for Trained Women*, “[the dairy farm of New England] offers an independence,—a breadth of life under more wholesome normal conditions; it offers a service of real value in the contribution of a pure food product, particularly that which will help in the prevention of infant mortality.”<sup>94</sup>

## 2.2 The Greene Sisters: From the Settlement House to the Lunch Room

To Charlotte Barrell Ware’s contemporaries, the dairy farm may have initially appeared as a strikingly unusual workplace for a college-educated, city-dwelling woman. The tea room did not. As early as 1905, it offered a similar promise of economic independence to graduates of home economics programs, and more largely an avenue for women to define their own working conditions.<sup>95</sup> It even

<sup>92</sup>“A Milkmaids’ College: Latest Society Fad,” *Michigan Dairy Farmer* 1, no. 16 (July 7, 1909): 4, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015027644734>.

<sup>93</sup>Department of State Appropriation Bill, 1925. *Hearings before the Subcommittee of U.S. Congress House Committee on Appropriations* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1924), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112118811063>.

<sup>94</sup>Ware, “Dairy Farming,” 150.

<sup>95</sup>Cynthia A. Brandimarte, “‘To Make the Whole World Homelike’: Gender, Space, and America’s Tea Room Movement,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 30, no. 1 (Spring 1995): 4, 9. Other than Brandimarte’s contribution, little has been published on the tea room as a social and com-

proved, in a few cases, to be a locus from which to advocate for better working conditions. Remarkably, even proprietors and managers who did not have reform sensibilities seem to have regarded—and sold—the tea room as more than a competitive, profit-making endeavor.

The Greene sisters were closer to being Ware’s contemporaries than Bertha Stevenson’s, and they were slightly less well-off. Most importantly, they did not marry. As such, to support themselves, they embraced both of the newly professionalized fields that women could occupy in the 1890s—social work, and tea room or lunch room management, one after the other. The Greene sisters help us shine a light on the stories of the WEIU’s managers, dozens of whom were employed from the 1890s onward to run the organization’s restaurants and tea rooms, and about whom little evidence remains.

### 2.2.1 The Lunch Room and the Tea Room as Female Commercial Spaces

Concerned as it was with creating social spaces for women, by 1900 the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union was one of many providers of lunch rooms in downtown Boston, establishments where light meals and afternoon tea could be had.<sup>96</sup> The Union’s lunch and tea rooms were not designed with “Brahmin” or upper-class customers in mind. Indeed, when its first lunch room opened in November 1887, a limited choice of coffee, tea, and milk was served. The place was initially intended to be one “where any one bringing her own luncheon could find a quiet, pleasant room in which to eat it.” After a few months, the organization

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merchial phenomenon. See also E. Alexander, “‘Woman’s Place is in the Tea Room’: White Middle-Class American Women as Entrepreneurs and Customers,” *Journal of American Culture* 32, no. 2 (2009): 130, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-734X.2009.00703.x>; Millie H. Coleman, Christopher M. Sweat, Sharon Y. Nickols, “The Frances Virginia Tea Room: The Home Economics Foundation of an Extraordinary Business, 1915-1962,” *Family & Consumer Sciences* 39, no. 3 (March 2011), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1552-3934.2010.02068.x>. Jan Whitaker has published a non-academic account of what she calls the “tea room craze”: *Tea at the Blue Lantern Inn: A Social History of the Tea Room Craze in America* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002). She links the development of the tea room to feminists’ debates about the kitchen-less home and the possibility of removing food preparation from the home.

<sup>96</sup>In 1890 already, a Kansas newspaper reported that Boston “now ha[d] five eating houses to the block and still they bloom[ed]” as a result of the enforcement of a local statute stipulating that liquor could only be sold where customers had a sit-down meal. “Boston,” *Kansas City Times*, May 23, 1890, 4. By 1900, it was common for both individuals and real estate companies to advertise in local newspapers for financial support, venues, or even business stocks. Typical examples of these advertisements include “\$2,000—Stock and furniture,” *Boston Herald*, April 24, 1900, 11, “For business investments in lunch rooms [. . .]”, *Boston Herald*, May 21, 1900, 9, and “Restaurant, lunch rooms, down town,” *Boston Herald*, June 19, 1900, 11.

decided to sell hot meals, and a single, simple bill of fare was offered.<sup>97</sup> This tells us that the Union's typical customer would have been one of the many women who worked in offices, stores, or factories, in a downtown retail district characterized by its density and its immediate proximity with elite residential neighborhoods, rather than with working- or lower-middle-class ones. Often, women who worked in offices or department stores were actually forbidden from eating on the job.<sup>98</sup> This meant that the growing ranks of young, female workers constituted a customer base to be served. From 1870 to 1910, the percentage of women reported by census takers as having an occupation went from 14.7 to 25.5. This rise was a slow and steady one.<sup>99</sup> In 1891, the Union opened a second eatery, the Boylston Street Lunch Room, in order "[t]o meet a demand by the business and other busy women of the community for quick service and dainty food, and to furnish an income to the Union, to help in the support of other departments that are a constant drain on the Union's treasury." Its success was such that in 1903, a third, special "Members'" lunch room was opened in order to provide less crowded quarters.<sup>100</sup> The WEIU had found the right formula.

In the following years, the Union's lunch rooms became part of a network of similar eateries.<sup>101</sup> By the late 1900s, this kind of restaurant was joined by a close relative, the tea room, where afternoon tea and dainty luncheons were served. Even more so than lunch rooms, it appears, these establishments were owned, managed, staffed, and patronized by women.<sup>102</sup> Although the soaring numbers of tea rooms on American streets did not go unnoticed, it was sometimes hard, even for contemporaries, to distinguish them from other similar establishments. In 1908, on Boylston Street, a reporter for the *Boston Herald* noted at least "three English tea rooms, over the entrance doors of which hang picturesque signs after the fashion of the old country," but he added that there were "also numerous restaurants or

<sup>97</sup>*Boston Herald*. Among the Women, May 4, 1887, 8.

<sup>98</sup>Mona Domosh, "Shaping the Commercial City: Retail Districts in Nineteenth-Century New York and Boston," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 80, no. 2 (June 1990): 268-284, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8306.1990.tb00291.x>; Ida M. Van Etten, "Women Behind the Counter," *Ladies Home Journal* 9, no. 9 (August 1892): 8.

<sup>99</sup>Joseph A. Hill, *Women in Gainful Occupations, 1870 to 1920* (Washington: GPO, 1929), 16, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112057498229>.

<sup>100</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *A Report of Progress Made in the Year 1905* (Boston, 1905), 34, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239272>.

<sup>101</sup>For this section, I have combed through two of the best-selling women's magazines of the time from 1890 to 1920—the *Ladies Home Journal* and *Good Housekeeping*—as well as one home economics publication, the *Boston Cooking-School Magazine*, taking systematic stock of mentions of "tea rooms," "tea houses," and "lunch rooms" using the database's search engine.

<sup>102</sup>E. Alexander, "Woman's Place is in the Tea Room," 130; "Afternoon Tea Fad Now," *Boston Herald*, January 9, 1908, 36; Sherrie A. Inness, *Dinner Roles: American Women and Culinary Culture* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2011), 58.



Figure 2.2: Interior view of the WEIU's lunch room with a server standing against partition doors. Between 1890 and 1900.



Harvard University, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, ss\_21594568

Source: Harvard Digital Collections, [https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital\\_collections/8001526297\\_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356586](https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital_collections/8001526297_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356586).

lunch rooms, frankly American in name and in idea, but where afternoon tea is more or less a specialty.<sup>103</sup> The names “lunch rooms,” “restaurants,” “cafés,” and “tea rooms” could be sometimes used interchangeably. As long as the place was ostensibly run by women, who served home-style cooking and decorated it as they would a private home, it could be recognized as a tea room, whatever its name.<sup>104</sup>

The fact that proprietors strove for originality did not preclude them from advising one another and even encouraging other women to give the business a try. In the pages of women’s magazines, personal accounts, tips and business advice were readily shared. Sometimes, establishments connected with cooking or household economics schools also doubled as “model” eateries.<sup>105</sup> The WEIU, in particular, constituted a training ground for would-be female proprietors of lunch and tea rooms in Boston. 1905 marked the year when the tea room was first introduced in Boston, as Lucy Nichols and Eda M. Chapman opened an “English Tea Room” on Tremont Street. Lucy Nichols had been “connected with” lunch

<sup>103</sup> “Afternoon Tea Fad Now,” 36.

<sup>104</sup> Brandimarte, “To Make the Whole World Homelike,” 4.

<sup>105</sup> “Notes and News,” *Boston Cooking-School Magazine* 5, no. 6 (April and May 1901): 285. As an example, in 1901 the Syracuse Model Home School of Household Economics operated a “Model Home Lunch Room,” “where home-made bread, rolls, hot soups, cold meats, eggs, sandwiches, salads, coffee, tea, etc., [were] served, or delivered to order.”

rooms “in the Exchange building,” while Eda M. Chapman was a graduate of the normal cooking school of Pratt Institute who later became a superintendent for the WEIU and supervised its consignors for two and a half years, the *Federation Bulletin*, a Massachusetts women’s club periodical edited by a WEIU director, hailed the venture as one that would “meet the demand among ladies for a retired and quiet place where home cooking is served at reasonable prices.”<sup>106</sup> Although it was one of the first “English”<sup>107</sup> tea rooms to open in downtown Boston, Nichols and Chapman’s faced stiff competition from lunch rooms. Their time at the WEIU had prepared them well: “through long connection with the Educational and Industrial Union,” they were able to compete with other purveyors of dainty luncheons.<sup>108</sup> Eventually, Nichols and Chapman met such resounding commercial success that they opened a second tea room on Boylston Street.<sup>109</sup> By 1916, their brand, “English Tea Room Co.,” comprised six different restaurants, for a total of eighteen locations.<sup>110</sup>

Throughout the process, Nichols and Chapman kept in close contact with the Union, joining an advisory board that was set up to ensure that its eateries were run according to the best business methods of the day.<sup>111</sup> They were not the only “WEIU alum” to embark on a career as a tea room proprietor: in 1912 Flora Dutton, who had served as assistant director in the Union’s Food Shop, started the “Westminster Tea-room” in Providence with another woman, Agnes Best.<sup>112</sup> Having benefited from the professional environment that the WEIU had come to constitute, Nichols, Chapman, and Dutton then became part of the cadre that

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<sup>106</sup>“Affairs at Pratt Institute,” *New York Tribune*, May 1, 1893, 4; “Women Break From Industrial Union,” *Boston Herald*, January 19, 1908, 3; “The English Tea Room,” *Federation Bulletin* 2, no. 8 (May 1905): 328, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>. We know that Eda Chapman graduated in 1891 and taught at a Long Island high school before working for the WEIU.

<sup>107</sup>The first commercial tea rooms in the US were commonly called “English” tea rooms both because they were popular establishments overseas, and because taking tea was seen as a quintessentially British institution. Correspondingly, the tea room conjured a sentimental, aestheticized view of the country itself through metonymy.

<sup>108</sup>Janet M. Hill, “After Breakfast Chat,” *Boston Cooking-School Magazine* 10, no. 7 (February 1906): 345, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044083801027>.

<sup>109</sup>“The Delft Lunch and Tea Room,” *Boston Herald*, March 3, 1907, 35. I have found no conclusive evidence that this was one of the three tea rooms that drew the eye of the *Herald*’s reporter in 1908.

<sup>110</sup>“The English Tea Room Co.,” *Boston Journal*, December 19, 1916, 5. These eateries were the original English Tea Room, the Acorn, the Unity Luncheon, the Exchange Luncheon (three different locations), the Oliver Building Luncheon, and the Board of Trade Luncheon.

<sup>111</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston, 1908), 12, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433075991970>.

<sup>112</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Tea Room Opened by Former Assistant in Food Shop,” *Union News Items* 2, no. 1 (November 1912), 14. 81-M237. Carton 1.

Figure 2.3: Advertisement for the English Tea Room Co.

**The English Tea Room Co.**  
**ENGLISH TEA ROOM**  
 160 Tremont Street  
**THE ACORN**  
 144 Tremont Street  
**UNITY LUNCHEON**  
 181 Devonshire Street  
**EXCHANGE LUNCHEON**  
 53 State Street  
 204 State Street  
 25 Kilby Street  
**OLIVER BUILDING LUNCHEON**  
 141 Milk Street  
**BOARD OF TRADE LUNCHEON**  
 131 State Street

Source: *Boston Journal*, December 19, 1916, 5.

Figure 2.4: Advertisement for the WEIU's lunch rooms.

**Women's Educational and  
 Industrial Union  
 Lunch Rooms**  
 FOR MEN AND WOMEN  
 Approved by the Consumers' League  
 264 Boylston Street, Boston  
 Luncheon 11 to 3  
 Afternoon Tea, 3.30 to 5.30  
 Supper 5.30 to 7.30  
 Best Quality of Food, Daintily Served

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**New England Kitchen**  
 39 Charles Street  
 Breakfast 7.15 to 11  
 Luncheon 11 to 4.30  
 Supper 4.30 to 7  
 Wholesome Food, Appetizingly Cooked  
 Excellent Coffee

Source: *Boston Journal*, December 19, 1916, 5.

worked for the continued success of the Union’s lunch rooms. Rather than acting purely as competitors, they counseled their competition, a decision that was not as curious as we might imagine it to be today. These women were part of a loose network of female proprietors and managers who shared a specific training—often, a degree in home economics—a business model—the tea room, or its close relative the lunch room or lunch counter—and, often, similar life experiences.

### 2.2.2 Sisters and Business Partners

Among the Union’s special advisors were also the Greene sisters, Helen (1868-1952) and Louise (1862-1934), who ran the Colonial Lunch Room in Boston. Both were the daughters of the Reverend John Morton Greene, a locally famous clergyman who was also a Smith College trustee, and Louise Greene, who had received an extensive education at Mount Holyoke and worked as a teacher before she married.<sup>[113]</sup> While Helen and her sister Louise may have led different lives as young adults, by 1900, then in their thirties, they were recorded by the Census as living together in Geddes, New York, even though Helen occupied the position of head worker at a New York City settlement house, Hartley House, and was noted as being a “resident head.”<sup>[114]</sup> From the house she rented, Louise ran the Solvay Clubhouse, a boarding house, or a lodging house connected to her restaurant: she was listed as being the manager of a “Solvay restaurant” and her household numbered fourteen male “lodgers” between the ages of 20 and 50, along with three servants.<sup>[115]</sup> It is not known whether Louise had attended college like Helen, who graduated from Smith College in 1891 and was also educated at Radcliffe, earning degrees of bachelor and master of arts from Smith,<sup>[116]</sup> but the two sisters did more than share a census address. In 1905, just as Nichols and Chapman were opening their English

<sup>113</sup>Helen French Greene, *Foreshadowings of Smith College* (Portland, Maine: The Southworth Press, 1928), 3-5, HathiTrust, [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b18325](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b18325).

<sup>114</sup>*Fifty-Fourth Annual Report of the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, Progressive Philanthropy* (New York City, 1897): 49, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112108116945>.

<sup>115</sup>United States Census, 1900, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MS2P-6JX>), Louise D Green, 1900.

<sup>116</sup>“Helen F. Greene, 83, of Cambridge, Dies, Retired Educator,” *Boston Herald*, February 5, 1952, 15; “Alumnae Department,” *Smith College Monthly* 12, no. 6 (March 1905): 386, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hxpjv6>. Smith College is one of the “Seven Sisters,” seven historic women’s colleges founded on the East coast in the second half of the nineteenth century. They were funded by monied women who believed in empowerment through education. Joan Marie Johnson, “An Education for Women Equal to That of Men,” in *Funding Feminism: Monied Women, Philanthropy, and the Women’s Movement, 1870-1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 109-110.

Tea Room, Helen Greene was taking a leave of absence from Hartley House to “[help] her sister to start the ‘Colonial Lunch Room,’ 31 Pearl Street, Boston.”<sup>117</sup>

A look at the Boston city directories for these years confirms the existence of sisterly business partnerships. Margaret and Mary Faulkner and the “McDonald sisters” were some such restaurateurs listed in 1900.<sup>118</sup> As these examples suggest, it was common for lunch room and tea room proprietors to work in pairs of friends or relatives, often women with a little capital and/or a college education.<sup>119</sup> Depending on their starting capital, one partner would do the cooking, and the other wait on customers; or both could and hire what workers were needed to run and front the business. Tea rooms were also run collectively by women’s organizations, like the YWCA, as well as Women’s Exchanges, clubs, and charities.<sup>120</sup> At least early on, college-educated women in particular seem to have constituted a significant share of such proprietors, compared to non-college-educated women. They could draw inspiration from the kind of respectable, moderately-priced eateries that catered to female undergraduates in college towns and proved immensely popular as lunching and meeting places.<sup>121</sup> In one case, an enterprising pair of business-owners—likely relatives, given their shared surname—even named their establishment after the locally-renowned “Copper Kettle” “where Smith students [spent] time and money.”<sup>122</sup> College graduates also tended to constitute a pool of workers on which lunch and tea room proprietors would draw. In 1915, the *Simmons College Register of Graduates* reported E. Lillian Harrington as the manager of the Mary Elizabeth Tea and Candy Shop in Boston, which she left for a superintendent position at Nichols’ and Chapman’s English Tea Room the following year.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>117</sup>“Alumnae Department,” 386.

<sup>118</sup>*The Boston Directory* no. 96 (Boston: Sampson, Murdock, & Company, 1900), 1957, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hxe13n>.

<sup>119</sup>As noted by both contemporaries and scholars. See E. B. Cutting, “Road Side Tea Rooms: A New Industry,” *Harper’s Bazaar* 43, no. 5 (May 1909): 494-497, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015010834920>, and Sparks, *Capital Intentions*, 98-104.

<sup>120</sup>Gertrude Clark Hanson, “As to Those Five and Ten-Cent Meals,” *Boston Cooking-School Magazine* 18, no. 6 (January 1914): 439, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044083801878>; “There are in most of our cities restaurants in connection with the Young Women’s Christian Associations; they are in no sense charitable institutions and any girl can patronize them without loss of self-respect, as she pays a fair price for what she gets. The food is almost certain to be clean and wholesome.” See also Una Nixon Hopkins, “How Two Girls Helped Their Pet Charity,” *Ladies Home Journal* 27, no. 6 (May 1910): 35, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015011414193>.

<sup>121</sup>Mary Mullett, “A Swarm of Twelve Hundred Girls,” *Ladies Home Journal* 23, no. 7 (June 1906): 6, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015011447888>.

<sup>122</sup>“College Girls as Caterers,” *Boston Cooking-School Magazine* 13, no. 6 (January 1909): 300, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044083801043>.

<sup>123</sup>Simmons College Register of Graduates (1915), *Simmons Quarterly*, 18, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044083801043>.

Increasingly, as the business of tea rooms became an established one, white, precariously middle-class women in need of money or desirous to go into business turned to the tea room as a sure money-maker. Some operated one from their own home, for self-support or pin-money, personal fulfillment that came with the promise of profits. In particular, the tea room business appealed to those who suffered from the much-lamented “nervous breakdown” that seemed so common a disease of civilization. White middle-class men, who were increasingly confined to white-collar occupations, were afraid that too much brain work and too little exercise would lead them to contract what was termed “neurasthenia.”<sup>124</sup> While contemporaries feared that white masculinity was especially threatened by a depressed physical condition, white upper- and middle-class women could also be diagnosed with similar disorders, from hysteria to what we would today call chronic fatigue.<sup>125</sup> It was not rare for teachers or stenographers to fantasize about life as a road-side tea room proprietor. Sarah Deutsch writes that “[t]o many working girls, struggling New Women, and overworked wives, self-employment was the ultimate desideratum”; they hoped to be able to “turn homes—associated with female economic dependence—into sites of not only social but economic authority.”<sup>126</sup> As one stenographer-turned-proprietor put it for the *Ladies Home Journal*, recounting the thought that one day crossed her mind,

Why not? My sister and I for the last ten years have been pounding machines here all day long; every evening we hang on to a strap all the way home, every night we go to bed on a shelf in a Harlem flat, every morning we get up and come down here to do it all over again. All our wages have to go on our backs, to keep us suitably attired for office work. There is no honest pleasure that we can afford. We are merely parts of a monstrous machine—and most infinitesimal parts at that. If other women can make a tea room go in the country we can.<sup>127</sup>

In fact, by the late 1910s this career change formed the archetypical plot of stories in the pages of women’s magazines. As the tea room became a commonplace

[//hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433074829429](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433074829429); Simmons College Register of Graduates, 1916, *Simmons Quarterly*, 18, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433074829429>; “Among the Alumnae,” *Simmons Quarterly* 6, no. 4 (July 1916): 23, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433074829429>.

<sup>124</sup>Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 14-15.

<sup>125</sup>Edward Shorter, *From Paralysis to Fatigue: A History of Psychosomatic Illness in the Modern Era* (New York: Free Press, 1992), 292. Shorter even writes that “[p]sychogenic pain, like chronic fatigue, seems to have afflicted women more frequently than men in the first half of the twentieth century.”

<sup>126</sup>Deutsch, *Women and the City*, 115-116.

<sup>127</sup>Charlotte Brewster Jordan, “The Tea-Room by the Roadside,” *Ladies Home Journal* 28, no. 5 (May 1911): 15, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015011414334>.

type of business, and a part of the social life of many middle- and upper-class women, so did it become not only the setting for stories,<sup>128</sup> but also their subject-matter. In “Misfits” (1918), a typical example of the genre, two female friends who board together and happen to lose their jobs at the same time—one a failed singer, the other a home economics teacher—decide to open a tea room. The “prospective business women” naturally pin their hopes to the tea room because of their love of parties and flair for hosting, qualities typically associated with the perfect hostess or wife rather than with the businesswoman. One of the two friends even confidently asserts: “Do you know a dream I’ve always had? [...] A little tea-room somewhere. A dainty little place where I could plan and manage everything. I know I could do it.” The fantasy of the home that doubles as a business, or the business that doubles as the home, reaches its crowning height when, by the end of the story, the two friends are being courted by patrons and contemplating the happy ending of a double wedding. Concludes one of the protagonists, “It’s been awfully good training for a permanent job!”<sup>129</sup> In other whimsically-titled stories like “The Palace of Sponge Cake” (1916) or “The Magician’s Daughter” (1920),<sup>130</sup> plucky college graduates live out fantasies of self-sufficiency in which earning a living takes center stage. Business-ownership is depicted as a means to attain a situation, whether that is combining home life and a career, or a career and some other personal aspiration. The successful tea room is praised for its “homey”-ness, its “home-made” food, as well as for its gift shop where various homemade textile goods and “novelties” could be sold.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>128</sup>In the *Ladies Home Journal*, the first fictional reference to a tea room was made in 1908, in Frances Elton Morris’s “The Mouse and the Man,” *Ladies Home Journal* 26, no. 1 (December 1908): 2, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015026094170>; for another example, see “When I Became Engaged to William,” *Ladies Home Journal* 27 no. 3 (February 1910): 58, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015011414193>.

<sup>129</sup>Hazel B. Stevenson, “Misfits,” *American Cookery* 22, no. 4 (November 1918): 252-254, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044083801910>.

<sup>130</sup>Mabel S. Merrill, “The Palace of Sponge Cake,” *American Cookery* 20, no. 10 (May 1916): 753-757, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044083801894>; Elsie Spicer Eels, “The Magician’s Daughter,” *American Cookery* 24, no. 7 (February 1920): 498-501, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044083801936>.

<sup>131</sup>In fiction, “Misfits,” 253; for a real-life example, “How Two Girls Helped Their Pet Charity,” 35. For the prevalence of tea room cum gift shops, see Julia Davis Chandler, “Suggestions for Gift-Shops and Exchanges,” *Boston Cooking-School Magazine* 13, no. 7 (February 1909): 343-344, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044083801043>.

### 2.2.3 Female Business Partnerships in “Part-Home, Part-Business Spaces”<sup>132</sup>

By the 1910s, home economics publications and women’s magazines suggested that many of their readers could be interested in starting a tea room. Common features included not only profiles of tea room owners and establishments as inspiration for home décor and home-cooking, but mostly a celebration of individuals’ achievements, alongside advice for prospective proprietors. The message was that any decent housewife had it in herself to start her own tea room, provided that she had enough commercial commonsense and that she brushed up on accounting and business methods.<sup>133</sup> The occasional success story suggested that not even that was necessary, as the owner of the Studio Tea Room in New York confidently recounted in 1914 that she began work with no capital, no knowledge of cooking, and “very little idea of business methods,” and that this apparently did not stop her from building up “the most successful small tea rooms in New York City.”<sup>134</sup> A flurry of similarly brazenly enthusiastic pieces published in the early 1910s prompted cautionary responses. The next year, in the same magazine, the author of “A Safe and Sane Salary” urged moderation in all things, especially one’s expectations, and reminded her readers that tea rooms did not always pay. Her sobering conclusion was that sometimes domestic service was a safer prospect for women who needed to support themselves, because being a hired woman was less risky than doing the hiring.<sup>135</sup>

Despite these warnings, it seems that by the late 1910s, and even more so after the war, it had become a commonplace assumption that catering was a remunerative occupation for women, maybe the first option to which some turned.<sup>136</sup> A century earlier, white native-born women would have held domestic service in the same regard, that is to say as a remunerative activity that did not require any specific training or qualifications, and that any woman might undertake. By the late 1910s, though, service was considered as degrading rather than uplifting. When in the mid-nineteenth century, Boston servants were recruited among rural

<sup>132</sup>Brandimarte, “To Make the Whole World Homelike,” 1.

<sup>133</sup>“The Tea Room on the Road,” *Ladies Home Journal* 34, no. 5 (May 1917): 39, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015018052467>.

<sup>134</sup>“Home Ideas and Economics,” *Boston Cooking-School Magazine* 18, no. 9 (April 1914): 707, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044083801878>.

<sup>135</sup>Hilda Richmond, “A Safe and Sane Salary,” *Ladies Home Journal* 32, no. 5 (May 1915): 16, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015006960804>.

<sup>136</sup>Ruth Evelyn Dowdell, “Starting a Business in Your Own Home,” *Ladies Home Journal* 37, no. 8 (August 1920): 87, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015014704319>.



migrants to the city, by the early years of the twentieth century they tended to be the native-born daughters of immigrants as well as Black women.<sup>137</sup> For precariously middle-class white women, selling cakes and pots of tea outside of anyone's home—except perhaps their own—was the way to go. After the First World War, some enterprising individuals even developed business models out of helping others succeed in this line of work, like Mrs. Ida C. B. Allen, who advertised her “Special Home Study Courses for housewives, brides and brides-to-be” in the *Ladies Home Journal*, alongside “[p]rofessional courses in tea room management, dietetics, catering, etc. fitting for excellent positions.”<sup>138</sup> Even having one solid home-made specialty was apparently enough to advertise, with one Mrs. Grace Osborn from Michigan boasting that her angel food cakes sold for \$3 with a profit of \$2, and that she was ready to sell her profit-making recipe, a prospect that would have appealed to many a tea room proprietor already looking for recipes in dedicated magazines.<sup>139</sup>

This very explicit commodification of home-cooking is striking for the ways it blends the commercial realm with that of the home kitchen. It is also a cipher, showing us that running a tea room became an acceptable, even expected female commercial endeavor specifically because cooking was defined, understood and construed as women's work.<sup>140</sup> In fact, we could argue that catering was metonymical women's work, because of how difficult it is to document historically, and because of its relationship to the home, both as a concept and as a location. The invisibility of women's domestic work, combined with our inability to envision women as proprietors, has resulted in a crucial lack of literature on the topic of women's paid work as restaurateurs and caterers at the peak of the home economics movement. In the antebellum US city, as Susan Ingalls Lewis has shown, it was common for women to engage in a wide variety of small-scale commercial activities as independent agents.<sup>141</sup> Because of the lack of historical documentation, no attempt has yet been made to trace the evolution of women's diverse food-related business activities into the Progressive Era, even though anecdotal evidence suggests just how an informal catering economy could flourish alongside

<sup>137</sup>Dublin, *Transforming Women's Work*, 202.

<sup>138</sup>“Learn to Cook,” *Ladies Home Journal* 37, no. 8 (August 1920): 162, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015014704319>.

<sup>139</sup>“Angel Food Cake,” *Ladies Home Journal* 37, no. 8 (August 1920): 162, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015014704319>.

<sup>140</sup>Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 3-4.

<sup>141</sup>Susan Ingalls Lewis, *Unexceptional Women: Female Proprietors in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Albany, 1830-1880* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009).

the dainty tea rooms of the home economics graduates.<sup>142</sup> Even individuals with little starting capital had the option of selling home-made food to neighbors.<sup>143</sup> In Boston, the WEIU investigated career opportunities for women in domestic science. While in 1916 one of its Research department fellows noted that “training courses in Home Economics [...] [led] not only to opportunities in dietetics, institutional management, or home-making but also to positions ad divergent as textile expert in the department store, assistant in a clinic for problem children, or even chemist in a flour company,”<sup>144</sup> overall food-centered work offered the most opportunities, whether in the field of social service, institutional management, teaching, or commercial lunchrooms. Even though the work was hard and the beginnings uncertain, it was in “cafeterias, lunch and tea rooms” that the most opportunities were to be found.<sup>145</sup>

In the case of tea room proprietors, what they sold as a product was a home away from home, a place where rest and moral regeneration went for sale alongside dainty cakes and sandwiches. Tea rooms were “part-home, part-business spaces.”<sup>146</sup> Hugely popular green, white and gray color schemes, flowers and potted palms and strategically-placed curtains all worked to create little oases of calm in the bustling cities of the northeast. These were places where female shoppers and even the occasional businessman could have a stop and a rest, before truly coming home for the night.<sup>147</sup> Female students in college towns contributed to the rise of the tea room precisely because they were also away from home, and dangerously close to being “home-less,” meaning distanced from the twin moralizing influence of family and domesticity.

Behind the rhetoric of the homelike tea room lay a complex blend of personal

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<sup>142</sup>In “Roadside Catering,” published in 1909, Alice E. Whitaker paints the portrait of an elderly Black working-class woman who earned a living as a caterer for Black construction workers. The twist in Whitaker’s article is that for once it is not a typical success story featuring a white, college-educated woman. She opened her piece by stating, “[t]he woman caterer whom I have in mind does not supply dainty salads and sandwiches for afternoon teas and ladies’ luncheons; neither does she take charge of state dinners of many courses. She is no graduate of a cooking school, no disciple of domestic science; in fact, she cannot read or write, and never knew a definite recipe in her life.” “Roadside Catering,” *Boston Cooking-School Magazine* 13, no. 7 (February 1909): 341, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044083801043>

<sup>143</sup>Mrs. S. T. Rorer, “When One Takes Summer Boarders,” *Ladies Home Journal* 25, no. 9 (August 1908): 22, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015011414169>

<sup>144</sup>Additional WEIU records, Marie Francke, “Bulletin on Opportunities for Women in Domestic Science,” 1916, 3, in *Appointment Bureau: Printing Samples*, 81-M237. Carton 9.

<sup>145</sup>Francke, “Bulletin on Opportunities for Women in Domestic Science,” 5.

<sup>146</sup>Brandimarte, “To Make the Whole World Homelike,” 1.

<sup>147</sup>For a representative description of the proclaimed “quaintest tea-house in all New England,” see Mary H. Northend, “The Coming of the Tea House,” *American Cookery* 20, no. 1 (June-July 1915): 11-15, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924055082378>

aspirations and motivations. The longing that some women felt for an income stream that would make it possible to accommodate their domestic situation or affinities coexisted with the acknowledgment that catering was a profession. In the 1900s, prospective caterers were reminded by professionals that catering could and should be divorced from feeling. In 1908, one advice-giver offered the sobering perspective that providing people with a roof or cooked food “is not a sufficiently attractive profession to accept for pleasure [...]”<sup>148</sup> Still, it may have been a pleasurable perspective, at the very least to burnt-out teachers and stenographers or any woman who longed to be invested with the sense of dignity and independence that remunerative work conferred. Proprietors dealing in what Edith Sparks has termed “commercial domesticity”<sup>149</sup> more generally may have agreed that even menial work, even domestic work, was dignified if it was remunerative and thus a source of income that eliminated the need for public alms. These views ran counter to nineteenth-century condemnations of domestic service as a demeaning and degrading option to which only lower-class, and especially Black or nonwhite, women would turn.<sup>150</sup>

### 2.2.4 Careers Defined by Reform

Before the Greene sisters opened their tea room, and before the tea room fad as a whole took off, social work was an appealing career opportunity for female college graduates.<sup>151</sup> Unsurprisingly, some of them, like Helen Greene, moved easily from one career to the other. Whether a social worker or a caterer, a woman like her would have been perceived by her contemporaries as drawing on a set of typically

<sup>148</sup>Rorer, “When One Takes Summer Boarders.”

<sup>149</sup>Sparks, *Capital Intentions*, 8. Sparks defines “commercial domesticity” as “jobs historically related to women’s culturally prescribed role as stewards of house and home.”

<sup>150</sup>Faye Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth Century America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 7-8. Dudden charts the transition from “the help” (or the “hired girl”) to the “domestic,” two different modes of service. She argues that live-in domestic service became “more demanding and demeaning” as the nineteenth century wore on, causing native-born whites to reject the profession massively. More recently, Danielle Phillips-Cunningham, in her “gendered history of the social construction of race,” has pried apart the racialized stigma that domestic service incurred. Danielle Phillips-Cunningham, *Putting Their Hands on Race: Irish Immigrant and Southern Black Domestic Workers* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2019), 29-31.

<sup>151</sup>Linda M. Shoemaker, “The Gendered Foundations of Social Work Education in Boston, 1904-1930,” in *Women of the Commonwealth: Work, Family, and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts*, edited by Susan L. Porter (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 102. In 1904, Simmons Female College and Harvard University opened the Boston School for Social Workers, the first full time social work program in the nation to receive accreditation from a university. To contemporaries, social work as a vocation was a work in progress, and a new, exciting prospect at that.

female traits that connected her to the home.<sup>152</sup> Resident settlement workers were tasked with creating a home both for themselves and for underserved neighbors.<sup>153</sup> At Hartley House in New York, where Helen Greene worked, residents were exhorted to help not only materially, but by extending a “kind word”—female solace. The resident staff also specifically included an “instructress in home-making.”<sup>154</sup> This was because the managers of the New York Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor, of which the Hartley House settlement was an offshoot, explicitly expressed an interest in making “the homes of the poor” “more comfortable and attractive,” in hopes of improving these families’ morals and thus the community as a whole.<sup>155</sup>

What were the bounds of Helen Greene’s commitment to social reform? Her career and her interest in reform started in New York City, when she became Hartley House’s first salaried headworker upon its creation in 1897. In addition to this, her main occupation, she was also involved in a myriad local social reform associations. By 1899, she had been elected to the governing board of the New York City chapter of the Consumers League,<sup>156</sup> and she also convened meetings of the Outdoor Recreation League at Hartley House, both her home and workplace.<sup>157</sup> This was intentional. Gradually, as she settled into her life in New York, Greene started bringing together local associations, just as a city-wide push for the concentration and rationalization of philanthropic efforts was taking place. In 1901-1902, Greene, representing Hartley House, was a founding member of the Council for Civic Co-operation, a collective of about thirty “educational, political, social and philanthropic organizations” dedicated to “the improvement of the

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<sup>152</sup>For a study of the meaning of “home” as it was elaborated in the antebellum period, see Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981). As also concerns the postwar period, see Wendy Gamber’s study of boarding-houses, in which she explores the differences that existed between a “home” and a “house.” She uses the boarding-house as a foil, examining how nineteenth-century criticism of lodgers was leveled at their subversion of familial relationships for economic gain. Gamber, *Boarding-House in the Nineteenth-Century*.

<sup>153</sup>Gwendolyn Wright, *Moralism and the Model Home: Domestic Architecture and Cultural Conflict in Chicago, 1873-1913* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press), 114. In her autobiography, Jane Addams also described her childhood home as “[t]he house at the end of the village in which I was born, and which was my home until I moved to Hull-House [...],” *Twenty Years at Hull House* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1912), 10, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89098884265>. Emphasis mine.

<sup>154</sup>*Fifty-Fourth Annual Report of the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor*, 49.

<sup>155</sup>*Fifty-Fourth Annual Report of the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor*, 52.

<sup>156</sup>“Consumers League Meeting,” *New York Tribune*, January 20, 1899, 7.

<sup>157</sup>“Playground for Children,” *New York Tribune*, April 26, 1899, 3; “The Outdoor Recreation League,” *New York Tribune*, May 24, 1899, 4.

conditions of labor and life in [New York City].”<sup>158</sup>

In New York, as a settlement worker, a reformer, and as the social secretary of the Manhattan Trade School for women, Helen Greene developed a keen sense of the needs of urban dwellers and working women.<sup>159</sup> When in 1905 she moved to Boston to start the Colonial Lunch Room with her sister Louise, she brought with her the knowledge base and practices of social work, and indeed stayed active in reform circles. It is hard to know why, exactly, the Greene sisters chose Boston to open their tea room, but their decision may have been linked to their personal acquaintance with Boston’s reform networks. In a direct continuation of her work with the Manhattan Trade School for Girls, Helen Greene managed to get herself appointed on a local advisory committee on trade schools for girls.<sup>160</sup> Simultaneously, she also served on the civics committee of the Women’s City Club and on the executive board of the Intercollegiate Community Service Association (formerly the College Settlements Association).<sup>161</sup> There, she was in the company of women like Susan M. Kingsbury, Mary Simkhovitch and Ida M. Cannon, who were active in the WEIU—which her sister Louise Greene advised on a special “Union lunch rooms and New England Kitchen” committee.<sup>162</sup>

Helen Greene’s collaborative work did not only concern her reform interests; it also included her occupation as restaurateur. She was committed to advising other women like her, educated and self-supporting. As she pursued her work at the Colonial Lunch Room, she gave vocational talks at northeastern colleges like Wellesley, advising exactly the kind of young women whom she and her sister would then hire.<sup>163</sup> Students at her alma mater hoped to attract speakers like her: businesswomen who had succeeded on the strength of their domestic science training. In 1917, Smith College alumnae wrote that “some time later in the year [they] hope[d] to have Miss Helen F. Greene 1891, of the Colonial Lunch Room in Boston, and Miss Clary Thrasher of the Robert B. Brigham Hospital, come [...] to study the equipment in [their] kitchens and to make suggestions in regard to the

<sup>158</sup>The League for Political Education, *Year-Book, 1901-1902* (New York: Rudolph Lenz, 1902), 74-75, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiuo.ark:/13960/s23hv53mw3w>.

<sup>159</sup>“Helen F. Greene, 83, of Cambridge, Dies, Retired Educator,” 15.

<sup>160</sup>“Teachers Must Bear Expense,” *Boston Herald*, November 17, 1914, 4.

<sup>161</sup>“Women’s City Club,” *Boston Herald*, June 25, 1916, 40.

<sup>162</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston, 1912), 14, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239462>.

<sup>163</sup>*Wellesley College News* 23, no. 5 (1915): 29, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hxfy83>. At least once, the Greens hired a graduate from the Boston Young Women’s Christian Association School of Domestic Science as “assistant superintendent”: Boston Young Women’s Christian Association School of Domestic Science, *Report, 1910-1911* (Cambridge, Mass.: Caustic-Claffin Co.), 23, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hxpsal>.

preparation of [their] food.”<sup>164</sup> In this example, it is not quite clear exactly what sort of advice Greene and Clary Thrasher were supposed to provide. Seeing as the kitchens of women’s colleges were sometimes used as laboratories and training grounds for students pursuing domestic science degrees, the Smith alumnae may have wished to have professionals help them improve their training facilities.

Greene advocated for better working conditions for women, whether that work took place inside or outside the home. In the press, she spoke from personal experience, both as a social worker and as a concerned professional, when she defended her positions. In 1917, before the Boston Consumers League,<sup>165</sup> where she had resumed her involvement with consumer activism, Greene expounded on the “unsatisfactory condition coming from the use of gas stoves in preparing meals.”<sup>166</sup> She had all the more authority that she had seen her sister run a large boarding-house and restaurant, had been a settlement headworker herself, and was by then then a lunch room proprietor. Indeed, in this instance she was talking about conditions in the food industry, one with which she was intimately acquainted. This was a fact that the journalist who wrote the story did not fail to highlight: “Her own experience led her to favor an extra vacation of a week in mid-winter,” he specified.<sup>167</sup>

It is not mentioned whether Greene favored legislative action over a voluntary reform of management practices. It seems that what mattered most to her was the end result. She advocated an eight-hour day for working women, and even a seven-hour day if wages were not to be improved, as well as a five-day week during the summer.<sup>168</sup> To make it a binding arrangement would have required legislation, but other provisions she mentioned would not necessarily have constituted the basis for a bill. She spoke of the best equipment that was to be secured by proprietors to ensure the health of workers and of collaborative schemes like that of having only one neighborhood restaurant kept open on Saturdays—“to be decided upon

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<sup>164</sup>“Report of the Alumnae Council,” *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* 8, no. 4 (February 1917): 202, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433074832894>.

<sup>165</sup>The National Consumers League (NCL) was founded in 1899 both to safeguard the interests of consumers and to promote ethical consumption of a kind that was believed to have the power to materially improve producers’ lives. State consumers’ organizations like the Consumers League of New York (dated by some to 1888) preceded the NCL. Their work ran parallel to that of the national organization. For a larger history of the consumers’ movement which contextualizes the emergence of consumers’ leagues, see Lawrence Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). For a biography of the NCL’s founder, Florence Kelley, see Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation’s Work: The Rise of Women’s Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>166</sup>“Says Electric Cooking Will Secure Health,” *Boston Herald*, February 7, 1917, 13.

<sup>167</sup>“Says Electric Cooking Will Secure Health,” 13.

<sup>168</sup>“Proposes Seven Hour Day and Five Day Week,” *Boston Journal*, February 7, 1917, 6.

by a consultation of proprietors.”<sup>169</sup> At that Consumers League meeting, Greene shared an elaborate vision of workplace justice that demanded concerted action on the part of business-owners. Helen Greene’s vision of airier, cooler kitchens, and shorter workdays and workweeks for women sprang from her own lived experience, and the methods she advocated to realize it were also grounded in her position as “head” of the Colonial Lunch Room. On the one hand, technology and better management practices were to be embraced by professionals like herself. On the other, the government had to step in to regulate hours as needed, when better customary standards and arrangements could not be depended on.

Little is known about the Colonial Lunch Room itself, and about the workplace conditions there. What we do know is that its managers involved the business in their activism. In 1921, the Colonial Lunch Room appeared in the business firm section of the “subscribers and members” of the Boston Legal Aid Society, an organization dedicated to helping workers recover their earnings.<sup>170</sup> Symbolically and materially—the Colonial Lunch Room donated \$10—through such gestures, the Greenes’s business communicated an attachment to fairer management practices.

But how successful was it as a business? By 1909, it had a second address on the same street.<sup>171</sup> In 1913, Helen Greene was reported as “making extensive additions”<sup>172</sup> to the lunch room, an indicator of commercial success, and as late as 1921 she was listed as an advisor for the WEIU.<sup>173</sup> Whether the Greenes left the business together or she alone decided to move on,<sup>174</sup> sometime in the 1920s she changed jobs again and became an educator—what would earn her local recognition. From 1929 to 1932, she was associate dean of the extramural school at Antioch College and she later became dean of the New Hampshire State Normal School. Her obituary completely elides the more than fifteen years she spent as a successful restaurateur, as it does her sister Louise. Helen herself is celebrated as

<sup>169</sup>“Proposes Seven Hour Day and Five Day Week,” 6.

<sup>170</sup>Boston Legal Aid Society, *Annual Report of the Boston Legal Aid Society, 1921* (Boston: Court Square Press, 1921), 31, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32437121847772>.

<sup>171</sup>*The Boston Directory* (Boston: Sampson & Murdock Company, 1911), 2299, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044092998160>.

<sup>172</sup>“Class News,” *Smith Alumnae Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (April 1913): 183, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433074832852>.

<sup>173</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Forty-Seventh Annual Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston, 1925), 34, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239603>.

<sup>174</sup>We know that the Colonial Lunch Room operated in the same building until 1941, when it was sold on account of the building itself being torn down. “Sale At Public Auction: Restaurant, Baking & Hotel Equipment,” *Boston Herald*, November 23, 1941, 77.

a “retired educator and former social worker.”<sup>175</sup> Her commitment to education and social reform had entirely overshadowed her business career, an illustration of how her contemporaries viewed women like her. They could not live on as businesswomen, so they would be remembered as educators. Helen Greene’s legacy is a poignant reminder of the roles that women were allowed to be take on, how their contributions were received, and how their labors were categorized.

### 2.3 Bertha Stevenson: The “Educated Cook” Feeding Working Girls

Like Charlotte Barrell Ware and Helen and Louise Greene, Bertha Stevenson (1876-unknown) belonged to the WEIU. She was described by the press as an “educated cook”—a particularly successful representative of the growing cohorts of women putting a college education to good use.<sup>176</sup> She was versed in the new sciences of scientific cooking and management, and in the 1900s opened a chain of successful lunch rooms in Boston. She was a WEIU member and served on several of its commissions, which is why the Union reached out to her as a collaborator when they decided to expand their lunch room business. Both Stevenson and Charlotte Barrell Ware identified a public health crisis—one the lack of access to “clean restaurants,”<sup>177</sup> the other infant mortality caused by low sanitary standards for milk production—and both set about to provide a market solution for it, in the process collaborating with women’s reform organizations and other female proprietors. Despite their generational gap, both Bertha Stevenson and Charlotte Barrell Ware embraced commercial activity as a vehicle for social reform.

Seeing as Louise Greene and Bertha Stevenson were on the same WEIU advisory committee, they were probably at least acquainted with one another. After all, they were in a very similar line of business. Bertha Stevenson was simultaneously a college graduate, a reformer involved in local women’s organizations, and a member of the home economics movement, which blossomed when she herself was still a student. Unlike most of her peers, she did not go into teaching upon graduating. She was rather inspired by changes in Americans’ eating habits to

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<sup>175</sup>“Helen F. Greene, 83, of Cambridge, Dies, Retired Educator,” 15.

<sup>176</sup>By 1920, the expectation that graduates would pursue a career in relation with their studies was high, as educators remarked. Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women*, 117.

<sup>177</sup>Bertha Stevenson, “Remarks on Food Standards in the Public Kitchen and the Home Kitchen,” *Journal of Home Economics* 2, no. 3 (June 1910): 290, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hn4mrm>.



apply her degree to the sale of prepared food.

### 2.3.1 Capitalizing on Changing Eating Patterns

The 1890s saw the establishment of experimental “public kitchens” and lunch rooms, in the wake of new developments in the fields of nutrition science and the establishment of home economics as an academic discipline. Like Women’s Exchanges, they combined educational, reform, and commercial purposes.<sup>178</sup> Ellen Richards’ New England Kitchen (NEK), which was founded in 1890 as a laboratory for the study of nutrition and intended as a place for immigrants to purchase ready-made New England food, did sell chowder, beef broth, and beans, but it was first and foremost a laboratory for the study of the food habits of immigrants, the better to transform them. In the words of one historian, Progressives sought to “reform” working-class bodies through the promotion of American middle-class eating habits.<sup>179</sup> The NEK was later used to produce hot meals for Boston’s high schools, as an interest in school lunches agitated women’s clubs and organizations.<sup>180</sup> In 1907 it was taken up by the WEIU for its own use. The WEIU continued the school lunch program while conducting their own experiments in food production and sale. They effectively turned the kitchen into a training ground for college-educated women studying for managerial positions.

Contemporaries did not consider the NEK and the related “Laboratory Kitchens” of the Boston area from a purely scientific or social reform perspective. In 1905, the *Woman’s Journal* noted that the NEK had done much to promote the necessity for cooks to acquire “the finest training and the best business ability,”<sup>181</sup> and that it was a direct influence on the WEIU. It is no wonder that in the early 1900s the WEIU directors had started considering the experience of working for its lunch rooms or supplying its shops as a first professional experience, and perhaps the first step towards independent success for aspiring cooks. College-educated women working for the Union also acquired or perfected the managerial qualities necessary for running tea rooms, lunch rooms, and restaurants, then a commercial occupation thought particularly appropriate for them. As we have seen, in 1905,

<sup>178</sup>Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 151-152.

<sup>179</sup>Nicholas J. P. Williams, “Becoming What You Eat: The New England Kitchen and the Body as a Site of Social Reform,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 18, no. 4 (2019): 452, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781419000288>

<sup>180</sup>Susan Levine, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America’s Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 33-34.

<sup>181</sup>“Domestic Science and Women,” *Woman’s Journal* 36, no. 11 (March 18, 1905), 42.

Eda Chapman, a former superintendent of the WEIU, left it to open a tea room catering to customers of the same social background as the Union's own members, and which was located on the same street.<sup>182</sup>

By the early 1910s, the WEIU's Exchange had finished assuming a new shape. No longer was its purpose to allow down-on-their-luck housewives to eke out a respectable living. As advertisement materials read, "[t]he aim of the Food Shop [was] to put that branch of 'Home Industries' that [was] concerned with the production of food, on a business basis, yielding to both the producer and the Shop adequate remuneration."<sup>183</sup> Exchange managers offered expert advice to housewives; they made much of the fact that a jury assessed the quality of products received by the Exchange. Only the very best, they claimed, could hope to be sold by the WEIU. This selling point would have appealed to the average customer of the WEIU's Food Sales Room, a white clubwoman who lived comfortably, was keen on buying pure, artisan-made food, and sought exclusivity and originality in all her purchases. She was catered to by a business which was prepared to rely on local express companies for out-of-town deliveries during the summer months, and "[made] a feature of afternoon teas, receptions, suppers, children's parties."<sup>184</sup> In the 1910s also, the Union's Handiwork shop provided training for young women in "business methods."<sup>185</sup> The WEIU deliberately chose not to outsource certain tasks in order to create jobs for young women.

As we saw in chapter 1, Exchange managers and employees sought to teach talented home bakers how to be professional suppliers, with a view to teaching them how to strike out on their own. Some of these women, led by Eda Chapman, took advantage of their experience selling their goods through the WEIU to launch their own business, the "Consignors' Union."<sup>186</sup> The true success stories belonged to those with a college education like Chapman herself: they were uniquely positioned to articulate reform goals and business aspirations.

### 2.3.2 A "Unique Sociological Kitchen"<sup>187</sup>

<sup>182</sup>"The English Tea Room," 328.

<sup>183</sup>WEIU records, Food Shop leaflet, July 1911. B-8. Box 4, folder 31.

<sup>184</sup>WEIU records, Food Sales Department leaflet, April 1911. B-8. Box 4, folder 31; Catering (ad slip), September 1911, folder 31.

<sup>185</sup>Additional WEIU records, Katherine Brooks, "W.E.I.U. Handiwork Shop Trains Young Women in Business Methods," *Boston Evening Record*, September 13, 1915. M-89.

<sup>186</sup>"Women Break From Industrial Union," *Boston Sunday Herald*, January 19, 1908, 3.

<sup>187</sup>"Miss Bertha Stevenson Opens Cafe as an Experiment with Sociology," *Boston Journal*, November 16, 1904, 8.

Bertha Stevenson is a case in point. A successful businesswoman, she was put in touch with the Women's Educational and Industrial Union in 1903 by one of its directors, Henrietta Goodrich, and helped the organization set up its own Laboratory Kitchen on Bedford Street.<sup>188</sup> Stevenson was born in 1876 in Aiken, South Carolina, where her father, an agent for a steamship company, owned land.<sup>189</sup> After earning an A.B. at a local college, she took a year-long graduate course at Radcliffe College. It is hard to know precisely the kind of subjects that she studied—was her graduate course in English or in chemistry? Press portraits of her variously reported her to have studied chemistry, economics and sociology, or “household arts.”<sup>190</sup> The confusion is far from surprising. Ellen Richards herself—the founder of home economics—had studied chemistry, and the home economics movement was divided into several contingents, each emphasizing specific types of knowledge. Those who defended the use of the term “domestic science” saw their subject as applied chemistry first, whereas the graduates of liberal arts women's colleges championed “home economics” as an extension of the new disciplines of economics and sociology.<sup>191</sup> Only a few years after the inaugural Lake Placid Conference (1899),<sup>192</sup> the public would not necessarily have known how to classify the education of a Bertha Stevenson. Journalists may have thought it more logical or more proper to insist on the domestic applications of her degrees. Depending on the writer, Stevenson was variously “the educated cook” or “the college woman in business.”<sup>193</sup> What she was actually doing, it must be emphasized, was overseeing workers, creating and refining business concepts, and managing up to eventually three restaurants simultaneously.

<sup>188</sup> “If Your Cook Leaves Suddenly, Order Meals by Phone—Dinners Delivered at Any Time by this New Food Supply Company,” *Boston Journal*, May 17, 1903, 2.

<sup>189</sup> “Made Fortune out of Malt. Miss Stevenson of Boston Visits Former Home,” *State*, February 10, 1911, 3; United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M695-D9V>), Wellington Stevenson, Aiken, South Carolina, United States.

<sup>190</sup> *San Jose Mercury and Herald*. Women's World News and Gossip of Women's Clubs, January 15, 1905, 18; “Dignity of the Kitchen,” *Kansas City Star*, December 12, 1904, 6.

<sup>191</sup> Stage and Vincenti, *Rethinking Home Economics*, 5-7.

<sup>192</sup> The first Lake Placid conference was called by the National Household Economics Association (NHEA) in 1899. In September of that year, Ellen M. Richards invited prominent leaders in the nascent field of home economics to a private home on the shore of Lake Placid. There, they settled on the very name “home economics” at the opening meeting. In many ways, the conference is considered as having jumpstarted the growth of the movement in the US: central topics like training of women for leadership, the state of the high school curriculum, and simplified housekeeping, were first discussed there. The NHEA itself was an outgrowth of the Woman's Department at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 and brought together women who were keen on promoting new scientific standards of cooking and cleaning. Emma Seifrit Weigley, “It Might Have Been Euthenics: The Lake Placid Conferences and the Home Economics Movement,” *American Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (March 1974): 79-96.

<sup>193</sup> “Dignity of the Kitchen,” 6; “A Quick Lunch Reform,” *Charlotte Daily Observer*, September 16, 1906, 4.

At some point between her undergraduate and graduate degrees, she lived in Toronto. There, she worked in “a unique educational plant known as Agnes Smith House, where she had the household management of the institution for a year or more.”<sup>194</sup> Institutional management was one the main professional avenues for graduates of home economics courses, who were often deeply enmeshed in social reform networks as well. Agnes Smith House, from its description, was likely a settlement house. Stevenson eventually settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and partnered with “a doctor’s daughter from Canada,” fellow Radcliffe alumna Frances Elliott. The latter would later be replaced by Elizabeth McClelland, with whose sister Adelaide Stevenson would also work—and live—for decades.<sup>195</sup> Together, Stevenson and Elliott established an experimental—contemporaries called it “scientific”—bakery on Massachusetts Avenue in Cambridge, in the Young Men’s Christian Association building.<sup>196</sup> There they baked “scientifically wholesome bread,” more specifically the malt bread then praised by nutrition experts for its health properties.<sup>197</sup> This was no coincidence: Stevenson and her associate studied demand, and went about to meet it. Their bread was “not such as mother used to make, but such as mother should have made, but didn’t know how.”<sup>198</sup> More generally, though, the bakery was an expression of Stevenson and Elliott’s shared belief “that a business enterprise based on scrupulous honesty, regard for scientific principles and a high standard of work can not only face competition, but in the long run can win in a race with dishonest competitors.”<sup>199</sup>

Their café and bakery on Bedford Street specialized in malt bread, which initially puzzled locals more interested in white bread made from refined flour. Soon enough, the entrepreneurs found their health-conscious clientele, and the

<sup>194</sup> *Dallas Morning News*. Club Women’s Work, June 15, 1903, 10.

<sup>195</sup> “They Make Good Bread,” *Daily Morning Journal and Courier* (New Haven, CT), November 7, 1903, 7; “Boston’s Successful Business Women,” *Boston Herald*, August 20, 1916, 38. Starting with the 1910 census, Bertha Stevenson was reported as living with the McClelland sisters. In the 1910 census, she was designated as head of household, and reported as the “president” of the Laboratory Kitchen, while Elizabeth was its “treasurer” and Adelaide its “secretary.” By 1920, they had been joined by another McClelland sister, Frances. They would later buy a house in Cambridge, valued at \$12,000, but were noted as renters in the 1940 census, perhaps as a result of the Depression. United States Census, 1910, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M2JQ-Y4M>), Entry for Bertha Stevenson, 1910; United States Census, 1920, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MF9H-C16>), Entry for Bertha Stevenson and Elizabeth McClelland, 1920; United States Census, 1940, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:K4VJ-YH6>), Entry for Francis McClelland and Adelaide McClelland, 1940.

<sup>196</sup> “They Make Good Bread,” 7.

<sup>197</sup> “A Quick Lunch Reform,” 4.

<sup>198</sup> “They Make Good Bread,” 7.

<sup>199</sup> WEIU records, Henrietta I. Goodrich, “A Possible Alleviation of Present Difficulties in Domestic Service,” c1903-1904. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

Laboratory Kitchen, Inc. met with commercial and economic success. The loaves sold at double the usual price for bread, but customers were evidently willing to pay for “home-made,”<sup>200</sup> healthful bread. “Home-cooking” was touted as “the rule of this institution.” Following the success of this first venture, Stevenson opened the Cambridge Laboratory Kitchen at 50 Temple Place, in 1903. A testament either to its novelty, to the advertising acumen of its founders, or to their ability to attract attention, locals awaited its opening. Before it opened in May, it was featured in the *Boston Cooking School Magazine* as a noteworthy new local business.<sup>201</sup>

What set it apart? The Laboratory Kitchen, Inc. was hailed by journalists as a “unique sociological kitchen” combining lunch rooms and a hot dinner delivery service, whose existence was supposed to show “that a lunch room may be run on economic principles and yet make a profit for the owners.”<sup>202</sup> The Laboratory Kitchen and Food Supply Company was incorporated with five directors in April 1903 under Massachusetts laws with a capital stock of \$6,000—half of which was owned by the WEIU—“for the purpose of manufacturing, preparing, selling, serving and delivering cooked food.”<sup>203</sup> The Union was not prepared to contribute more than that sum, and went into the venture cautiously, considering it an experiment. The Board of Government only agreed to it on the condition that if the company was not incorporated for a limited time, the Union ought to be able to withdraw at any time by mutual consent.<sup>204</sup>

The Laboratory Kitchen aimed at serving several distinct groups of Bostonians. There, down-town workers and shoppers could order a simple luncheon; young, single men and women living in apartments could purchase bread and cooked food, or arrange for delivery, as could middle- and upper-class families residing in the suburbs. Stevenson targeted the last two types of customers as she thought it likely that they were eager to do without the services of a cook. In the 1880s and 1890s, it was indeed becoming harder for suburban families to find servants willing to remove themselves from the city center, as the women of the WEIU had witnessed for themselves. At the same time, critics of the consumer society, including the author of a pamphlet published in 1899 by the WEIU’s Committee

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<sup>200</sup> “College Women’s Lunchroom,” *Kansas City Star*, January 7, 1905.

<sup>201</sup> “Notes and Correspondence,” *Boston Cooking School Magazine* 8, no. 1 (June-July 1903): 57, x-xii, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015036669920>.

<sup>202</sup> “Miss Bertha Stevenson Opens Cafe as an Experiment with Sociology,” *Boston Journal*, November 16, 1904, 8.

<sup>203</sup> Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, March 3, 1903, 26. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>204</sup> Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, February 3, 1903, 20. 81-M237. Carton 2.

of Ethics, emphasized the need for the simplification of living arrangements.<sup>205</sup> As early as the 1880s, Abby Morton Diaz, the Union's second president, had identified the burden of domestic work as an obstacle for women's education and self-culture: accordingly, she advocated lowering standards of cooking.<sup>206</sup> Twenty to thirty years later, for the increasing ranks of the single apartment-dwellers, so-called "light-housekeeping" was not a moral aspiration, but a necessity. These young wage-earners, often clerical workers, could not afford live-in servants. In earlier times, they would have boarded, but with the advent of new definitions of privacy boarding was becoming less and less appealing to many.<sup>207</sup>

Stevenson and her partners, then, knew that there were customers waiting to be served. Lunch rooms had already been attempted in the central, advantageous location that they had selected: according to the *Boston Cooking-School Magazine*, to open a lunch room in Temple Place was "a venerable effort, attempted time and time again."<sup>208</sup> These attempts apparently had not satisfied customer demand. Another journalist noted that "there ha[d] been a sad lack of decent and moderate-priced eating-rooms in Boston, and many and constant [had] been the laments." This suggests that Stevenson's venture, while ambitious, was both reasonable and meticulously planned. 50 Temple Place was chosen because it was on one of "Boston's busiest streets," at the heart of the business district. Local newspapers received circulars announcing the opening of the new restaurant.<sup>209</sup> From the start, the premises made it possible to feed more than six hundred people a day and heat retainers were used to deliver dinners that were still hot hours after being prepared. Finally, Stevenson and Goodrich picked female professionals as their employees—women with degrees in home economics. Bertha Stevenson was said to be helped by three other Toronto women, who must have been the McClelland sisters, and whom she had presumably met when she worked at Agnes Smith House. A final addition was a Miss Helen M'Donough, who had "for years [been] head cook at St Luke's Hospital in New York," and was put in charge of the kitchen.<sup>210</sup> Only a year after this venue was opened, Stevenson and the McClelland sisters started

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<sup>205</sup>WEIU records, Mary Brown, *Simplification of Life, Some Words to Women, from an English Leaflet* (Boston: Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1899). B-8. Box 1, folder 2. These views were broadly shared by reformers, as suggested by Wright in *Moralism and the Model Home*, 106.

<sup>206</sup>Abby Morton Diaz, *A Domestic Problem* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1875), 83, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hwxbu2>

<sup>207</sup>Gamber, *Boardinghouse in Nineteenth-Century America*, 166.

<sup>208</sup>"Notes and Correspondence," x.

<sup>209</sup>"How One College Girl Used Her Education," *Kansas City Star*, December 27, 1903, 4.

<sup>210</sup>"If Your Cook Leaves Suddenly, Order Meals by Phone," 2.

another cafeteria at the corner of Bedford and Kingston streets. A 1916 press account of their ventures noted that they “ha[d] been carrying on a successful business ever since.”<sup>211</sup> The Laboratory Kitchen, Inc., was the thriving brainchild of a determined band of coworkers—but it was also more than that. As we will see, the beneficiaries of this Progressive success story were not just Bertha Stevenson, the McClelland sisters, and Helen M’Donough, but all the women with a similar background and, in a sense, the entire community.

### 2.3.3 Individual Success and Collective Progress

As Bertha Stevenson’s success story illustrates, college-educated women often relied on female associational networks to launch their careers, and they themselves furthered such networks. When the WEIU started establishing advisory committees composed of experts for its own standing committees, it reached out to women in business. Bertha Stevenson herself was part of the early advisory committee for the Lunch Rooms, along with an instructor of institutional management from Simmons College and managers or small proprietors of lunch rooms and tea rooms like Lucy Nichols, from the English Tea Room or Ellen A. King, from the Technology Lunch Room.<sup>212</sup> They were assigned such tasks as determining which proportion of the profits of the WEIU’s Lunch Rooms should be set aside for wear and tear, breakage, and emergencies, which was something seasoned professionals would have had experience assessing.<sup>213</sup>

Like Stevenson, some of these women lived out their personal convictions as they attempted to remedy social ills through their business activities. They saw their concerns for the education of the public, for the pure food crusade, and for workplace justice as inseparable from the implementation of better business and scientific methods in the businesses that they managed and ran. Bertha Stevenson was adamant that everything that she served at her restaurants would have to be “a genuine article of pure food,” and that the meals be accessible, because some people depended on lunch rooms for a majority of their meals.<sup>214</sup> This was not only a matter of business strategy, but rather one of the tenets of her activism. Plain home-style food like baked beans was thought by Progressives to possess “civilizing” qualities, on top of its physiologically regenerating prop-

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<sup>211</sup> “Boston’s Successful Business Women,” *Boston Herald*, August 20, 1916, 38.

<sup>212</sup> WEIU, *1908 Report*, 12.

<sup>213</sup> Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, December 6, 1904, 1.

<sup>214</sup> *Vocations for the Trained Woman*, 96.

erties.<sup>215</sup> “Civilization” was associated with maleness and whiteness; it was a concept that legitimized the claims to power that white Americans of European descent formulated. Consuming the right food was one of the ways that bodies could be brought closer to the ideal of a white, native-born lifestyle.<sup>216</sup> Progressive employers were beginning to realize that their immigrant workers needed adequate nutrition to perform on the job—some of them even started lunch rooms offering the same kind of food as Stevenson’s<sup>217</sup>—and their fellow reformers underscored that the right meal would make fine American workers out of these foreigners.<sup>218</sup>

What were these meals to cost? Pure food crusaders did not always consider the issue of affordability. In contrast, Stevenson, perhaps because of her life experience, had come to value accessibility: “Who the girl is, where she works or what pay she gets, doesn’t matter. If one cent a day makes all that difference to her, it must be an important thing to have what she does get of the best quality,” she claimed.<sup>219</sup> This was also the case for the WEIU. As early as 1890, a director for the Union indicated that the organization’s lunch room “served [food] at rates so cheap that a girl working at three dollars per week can well afford, at least, one good ‘square meal’ each day.”<sup>220</sup> In 1915, the Union would open a pure food shop that was straightforwardly for the benefit of the “poor.” There, “hygienic 3-cent tarts and 2-cent muffins,” scientifically prepared, were offered as an alternative to the “fly-specked fruit in carts outside”—likely sold by immigrants. Like the various enterprises mentioned in this chapter, this catering operation was first and foremost an educational one.<sup>221</sup> Middle-class reformers took it upon themselves to teach working-class Bostonians how to eat nutritious food that was also cheap.

In Bertha Stevenson’s case, the social responsibility that she felt was not only directed at consumers. From available accounts, she was motivated by concerns for labor justice. In the same breath, she discussed both the moral necessity of selling affordable fare, and that of ensuring that workers were shown respect for the work they completed, no matter the task. Stevenson’s conception of work emphasized dignity and personal fulfillment, and she rejected hierarchies of work based on the

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<sup>215</sup>Veit, *Modern Food, Moral Food*, 127-129.

<sup>216</sup>Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 23-24.

<sup>217</sup>Ellen H. Richards, “A Factory Lunch Room,” *American Kitchen Magazine* 4, no. 6 (March 1896): 271-272, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112048863309>.

<sup>218</sup>Williams, “Becoming What You Eat,” 441-460.

<sup>219</sup>“A Quick Lunch Reform,” 4.

<sup>220</sup>Caroline Dupree, “The Woman’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Lend a Hand* 5, no. 2 (February 1890): 113, HathiTrust, [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b359087](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b359087).

<sup>221</sup>“Opens Pure Food Shop for Benefit of Poor,” *Boston Morning Journal*, July 13, 1915, 5.



distinction between manual and intellectual labor.<sup>222</sup> Although she believed that college-educated women, by virtue of their training, enjoyed a higher attention to detail and a command of specialized bodies of knowledge like chemistry, she encouraged young graduates intent on starting a business to “do as a man does when he leaves college to begin business, and go in at the very bottom,” because even vocational college instruction could not provide for the knowledge derived from actual business experience.<sup>223</sup> Meanwhile, the duty she felt towards employees led her to try to interest employees in the running of the business and, eventually, to establish a profit-sharing system, then a well-established practice among self-consciously progressive employers.<sup>224</sup>

At least in her case, these convictions were not antithetical to commercial success. In 1904, one year after the launch of her shared venture with the WEIU, Stevenson opened a “unique sociological kitchen” on 69 Bedford Street, the same street where her first restaurant was located. Called the Cafeteria, it was a very large lunch room, at 28,000 square feet, and offered to feed 2,400 people a day. By 1905, there were “three laboratory kitchen and food supply companies in Boston,” “all conducted by women”—and Bertha Stevenson was, apparently, connected to them all. By 1911, she employed four hundred workers and one of her lunch rooms alone was reported as servicing 4,000 to 6,000 businessmen, “working girls,” and shoppers a day. Efficiency was guaranteed through a mix of management techniques and technological innovations, including a system of numbered buttons and correspondingly numbered dishes being carried up to the lunch room from the kitchen on a dumb waiter. Being a self-service restaurant—another recent innovation—the Cafeteria also required fewer waiters and waitresses.<sup>225</sup>

“Efficiency” was not simply about management and speed. For a committed domestic scientist like Bertha Stevenson, who regularly contributed to the *Journal of Home Economics*, adequate sanitation was part and parcel of the modernization of the “public kitchen.” Her professional activity had led her to realize how crucial it was to reform restaurant kitchens as well as private ones. In 1910, she wrote that “[a]n investigation of public kitchen methods would make it clear that all of the good accomplished by the pure food laws is insignificant compared with

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<sup>222</sup>“President Johnson’s Report to the Public,” *State*, June 2, 1904.

<sup>223</sup>*Vocations for the Trained Woman*, 97.

<sup>224</sup>Edward W. Bemis, *Cooperation in New England, Publications of the American Economic Association* 1, no. 5 (November 1886): 127. In 1886, Bemis wrote that “[t]he idea of profit-sharing [was] rapidly gaining ground in New England, and [that] many manufacturers [were] only waiting to see the results of present experiments before adopting similar measures themselves.”

<sup>225</sup>“Science in Serving of Food,” *Emporia Gazette*, February 10, 1912, 2.

what could be accomplished for better health in our cities if the dirty restaurants could be cleaned up.”<sup>226</sup> These concerns arose from personal experience. It is likely that Bertha Stevenson shared them with the women of the WEIU, whether in her capacity as a business adviser or simply as an acquaintance or friend. The following year, when the director of the WEIU’s Research Department and several former WEIU fellows published a compendium of “[l]abor laws and their enforcement,” they singled out the restaurant industry for record numbers of labor law violations that put the employees’ and the customers’ health at risk.<sup>227</sup> Who exactly was to blame? Food could be adulterated at any point of the cooking process, but restaurant workers who were not cooks were also responsible for enforcing higher sanitary standards—and patrons had to be alerted to the question. Without them, it would not be possible to reform the industry. According to Stevenson, then, only joint efforts, both inside and outside the kitchen, would ensure that pure food laws were successfully enforced.<sup>228</sup> The government, the public, restaurant managers, cooks, waiters and waitresses, cashiers—all had to be reached out to, and mobilized, for food standards to be raised across the board. The Boston Health Commission eventually reached the same conclusion. Some years later, in 1921, the Commission convened two hundred representatives “of all types of lunchrooms of restaurants” to a City Hall hearing. Bertha Stevenson was one of them.<sup>229</sup>

Bertha Stevenson was part of a generation of idealistic college graduates, for whom proprietorship was appealing also for the way it enabled them not to compromise on their principles. In 1917, Mrs. Helen E. McLean, a graduate of Simmons College and the manager of the lunch room of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was asked to give vocational advice to young women. To Esther Harney, a reporter for the *Boston Traveller*, she declared that “[t]here must also be the consciousness in a [business] woman that she can carry out her ideas and ideals.”<sup>230</sup> The women who put on fund-raising fairs in the antebellum period were guided by visions of community betterment;<sup>231</sup> still in 1890, a feature on Boston’s “pioneer” businesswomen emphasized that their achievements meant

<sup>226</sup>Bertha Stevenson, “Remarks on Food Standards,” 290.

<sup>227</sup>Susan M. Kingsbury, ed., *Labor Laws and their Enforcement* (Longmans, Green, and Co.: New York, 1911), 154-155, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044024226573>.

<sup>228</sup>Bertha Stevenson, “Remarks on Food Standards in the Public Kitchen and the Home Kitchen,” *Journal of Home Economics* 2, no. 3 (June 1910): 289-290, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924053753566>.

<sup>229</sup>“Will Refuse to Cover Food,” *Boston Herald*, November 2, 1921, 13.

<sup>230</sup>WEIU clippings, Esther Harney, “Running a Lunch Room Bully Vocation for Girl with a Little Gumption,” *Boston Traveller*, March 8, 1917, n.p. M-89.

<sup>231</sup>Beverly Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies: The History of the American Fundraising Fair* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 3-4.

more for the women who would come later, than for these individual proprietors themselves.<sup>232</sup> Managers of Bertha Stevenson and Helen McLean's mettle, their spiritual successors, also envisioned opportunities for themselves in careers defined by caring for others.

### 2.3.4 The Failure of the WEIU's "Hot Dinners" Experiment

Prompted by the state of their finances, the women of the WEIU's Board of Government would eventually sell their shares of the Laboratory Kitchen Co.<sup>233</sup> Meanwhile, the rapid success of the lunch room, which was not matched by the delivery service, led the WEIU to take back exclusive charge of the operations. Delivery was discontinued for a few weeks in the spring of 1904, and the communal kitchen was transferred to 264 Boylston Street, the Union's headquarters. Over the following years, the organization struggled with finding customers. Lunch rooms catering to the same crowd were obviously very successful, so the WEIU directors felt that their only problem was that of advertising—making the initiative known to the public. In early 1905, they reported only 174 patrons over the previous fourteen months. Expenses were only covered for one month out of these fourteen.<sup>234</sup>

In the case of the WEIU's delivery experiment, principles or ideals clashed with the figures in the account book, even though patrons were explicitly assured that the food served at the WEIU's lunch rooms and that which it delivered were identical. The typical dinner delivered by the Union was middle-class fare: four courses, including a soup, meat with two sides, a salad, and a dessert. On the week of November 7, 1904, this formula translated to cream of potato soup, roast beef with browned sweet potato, macaroni and tomato, orange salad, and lemon jelly with whipped cream.<sup>235</sup> Convenience and rising prices eventually led to concessions, especially when the intended customer was not a middle-class matron, or even a young clerk or saleswoman, but a working-class mother. In the early 1910s, processed food commodities and brand names could be found in the pantry of the NEK. Evaporated milk, "Bell's Dressing," pineapple processed four

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<sup>232</sup> "Early Business Women," *Boston Herald*, October 26, 1890, 24.

<sup>233</sup> Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, February 16, 1904, 74. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>234</sup> "The Full Dinner Pail—An Experiment in the Mechanics of Daily Living," *Federation Bulletin* 2, no. 3 (December 1904): 79, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.

<sup>235</sup> "The Full Dinner Pail," 79.

different ways—even two brands of butterine, a much decried processed alternative to butter, which had been at the center of heated debates over pure food in Congress<sup>236</sup>—these convenience foods and others were all part of the arsenal of NEK cooks.<sup>237</sup>

The food served by the NEK was far from being a nutritionist's nightmare, of course, and for the time it probably struck a good balance of quality for cost, but it was far from the gourmet, artisan foodstuffs sold by the WEIU's Exchange. At the very same time as NEK cooks used butterine, unsalted butter "made under hygienic conditions from sweet Guernsey cream," which "arrive[d] at the shop on the days it [was] made,"<sup>238</sup> was advertised as one of the latest products available at the WEIU's Food Shop. The fact that the products were hand-made according to traditional methods was heavily emphasized as a selling point. The WEIU learned where and how to cut corners to cater to different customer bases. Even the middle-class patrons of the Members' Lunch Room, however, had to contend with rising costs caused by mild inflation, when the directors of the business departments decided to discontinue the glamorous table d'hôte luncheon in 1910, blaming the cost of living.<sup>239</sup>

The change in the New England Kitchen's clientele when it came under the WEIU's management in 1907 reveals the shift in emphasis, priorities, and goals of the female reformers who had taken an interest in food production. Meanwhile, the success and organizational growth of the NEK and of the WEIU's associated lunch rooms—as shown above—when contrasted with the failure of its delivery service, suggests a mismatch between supply and demand. Young, single workers and apartment-dwellers formed a ready and ever-expanding clientele for the lunch rooms, while white middle- and upper-class families either could afford a competent cook or, barring that, could still accommodate a preference for meals made at home

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<sup>236</sup>Young, *Pure Food*, 71-94. Oleomargarine, often sold as butterine, was a butter ersatz made from low-grade animal fats. It had been invented in Europe, at the time of a shortage of edible oils, and the patent was eagerly picked up by American businessmen in the late 1870s. As it was cheaper to produce than butter, oleomargarine was perceived by dairymen as a threat to their business. The agricultural depression of the 1880s saw organized dairymen push for state regulation of the production and sale of alternatives to butter. Dairymen argued that oleomargarine was a deceptive and unsanitary product and they testified as such before Congress, painting themselves as the guardians of an ancient yeoman tradition. Their opponents countered this by pitching new industrial processes as technological progress. Young uses the congressional debates surrounding the production and sale of oleomargarine as an illustration of the long, protracted fight that preceded the passage of the 1906 Pure Food and Drugs Act.

<sup>237</sup>WEIU records, New England Kitchen Inventory of Food Supplies, July 1910. B-8. Box 4, folder 28; School Lunch Department Order Slip, c1910. Box 4, folder 28.

<sup>238</sup>WEIU records, "New Wares at the Food Shop," 1911. B-8. Box 4, folder 31.

<sup>239</sup>WEIU records, Members' Lunch Room Menu, 1910. B-8. Box 4, folder 28.

by a female family member. With continued technological innovation and the slow death of live-in domestic service, the trend of housewives dedicating themselves to feeding their families would not abate in the following decades.<sup>240</sup>

The changes in Americans' eating patterns favored Stevenson's "cafeterias" rather than the WEIU's delivery experiment, but after the end of their collaboration on the delivery of hot dinners in 1905,<sup>241</sup> Stevenson kept in touch with the WEIU. After all, she was at one point so involved in the running of the entire organization as to be one of its trustees. In 1925, Stevenson was still on the Union's "Lunch Department and New England Kitchen" board as an advisor and business representative from the Laboratory Kitchen.<sup>242</sup> She also continued working in home economics circles. One year, she took charge of the "laboratory kitchen" in the women's department of the Mechanics' Fair, working for the education of the public.<sup>243</sup> She would occasionally give talks at Simmons College, a local women's college with a strong vocational bent, to share her experience as a college-educated woman in business.<sup>244</sup> She was a part of alumnae networks spreading the word about new opportunities for college women in institutional management and in business more generally.<sup>245</sup>

Bertha Stevenson's business model, which emphasized market research, technological and managerial efficiency, and social justice, cannot be separated from her deep personal convictions about the role of business in social life and about what business could contribute to reform. She deemed it necessary to make her restaurant a model of efficiency in order to put its fare "in convenient reach of the many."<sup>246</sup> As we have seen, she was not alone in this. Like her, some reformers believed that business ought to be akin to a kind of public utility and should be at consumers' and workers' service.<sup>247</sup> Cities, also, were responsible for regulating business, and fostering the right commercial environment. When in 1910 the City Club of Philadelphia organized a conference about "What Philadelphia [was] doing to provide her citizens with pure milk supply," its members clearly conceived

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<sup>240</sup>Inness, *Dinner Roles*, 71-81.

<sup>241</sup>*A Report of Progress Made in the Year 1905*, 39.

<sup>242</sup>"What Women Are Doing for Women—A Tale of Accomplishment in Boston," *Boston Herald*, August 22, 1909, 3; WEIU, *1925 Report*, 15.

<sup>243</sup>*Evening Press*. A Corner for Womankind, January 6, 1903, 7.

<sup>244</sup>*Simmons College Annual Reports* (Boston: Simmons College, 1911), 8, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015076390122>.

<sup>245</sup>Like the successful manager of a famous dairy farm, who also supplied the WEIU's lunch rooms with her products: see "Woman and Agriculture," *Kansas City Star*, May 22, 1912, 10.

<sup>246</sup>Stevenson, "Remarks on Food Standards in the Public Kitchen and the Home Kitchen," 290.

<sup>247</sup>Martha Bensley Bruère and Robert Walter Bruère, *Increasing Home Efficiency* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1913), 106.

of clean milk as a public utility—one that ethical businesswomen like Charlotte Barrell Ware would provide.<sup>248</sup>

Minimizing costs without cutting back either on quality or on her employees' wages was the goal that Stevenson sought to achieve, deploying efficiency in the service of social justice. Despite her lack of involvement in formal politics, her views placed her squarely in the same sphere as urban socialists like J. Stitt Wilson, who served one term as mayor of Berkeley in the 1910s. Wilson forcefully argued that “it is the business of the city administration to secure the necessities of city life for the use and enjoyment of the humblest family [...] at the lowest possible cost for the best possible service.”<sup>249</sup> What a socialist politician like Wilson conceptualized as the government's mission, a businesswoman like Bertha Stevenson also argued was the responsibility of business-owners and the private sector more generally.

In Boston, she had identified a niche that needed filling. There was a dire need for moderately-priced establishments selling pure food where down-town workers could easily purchase it. A business proprietor like Bertha Stevenson believed that such establishments should also provide adequate remuneration and working conditions; she was certainly convinced of the need to improve the “industrial conditions of women and children,” as she sat for a time on a WEIU standing committee tasked with investigating them.<sup>250</sup> Championing at once pure food as home-style fare, the reform of living arrangements, and labor reform, Bertha Stevenson, characterized in turn as a college-woman, a scientist, a businesswoman, and a cook, may have been so successful because the principles upon which she founded her businesses resonated so strongly with each other.

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<sup>248</sup>“Program for the Year 1910-1911,” *City Club Bulletin* 3, no. 2 (September 22, 1910): 9, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015073312384>.

<sup>249</sup>Stephen E. Barton, “This Social Mother in Whose Household We All Live’: Berkeley Mayor J. Stitt Wilson’s Early Twentieth-Century Socialist Feminism,” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 13, no. 4 (2014): 8.

<sup>250</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Thirty-First Annual Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston, 1909), 9, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923702>.

## Conclusion

In June 1910, the National Education Association (NEA) convened in Boston for its annual convention. As often with events of national import organized by middle- and upper-class women, a hospitality committee was put together by the local branch. Attendees had to be provided with lodging and meals. While the Boston Teachers' Club dealt with arranging the reception, rest and writing rooms, a representative from the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) was placed in charge of catering. She received the assistance of Mrs. Mary H. Moran, of the WEIU's New England Kitchen, Miss Helen Greene, of the Colonial Lunch Room, Miss Bertha Stevenson of the Laboratory Kitchen, and Miss Lucy M. Nichols, the director of the English Tea Room. Together, these women planned a lunch and "tea garden" in the courtyard of the fine arts museum.<sup>251</sup>

As we have seen, Greene, Stevenson, and Nichols had many reasons for knowing each other, and they would definitely have known how to work together to put on a reception for a national body like the NEA. As WEIU members, but also peers and competitors on the marketplace, they belonged to overlapping social and professional networks. In the 1930 census, the members of the McClelland-Stevenson household were reported as being Louise Greene's neighbors.<sup>252</sup> These women were competitors; their lunch rooms were located in the same ward and even in the same neighborhood, but they may also have been friends. All of them had connections to the WEIU as business advisors and perhaps as members, at least in Stevenson's case, and they were part of the same professional organizations and networks. Their collective involvement with the NEA suggests that they shared big ideas about how American women should be educated, whether they should be allowed to work for their own account, and how their businesses could contribute to improving Americans' well-being by creating market-based solutions to public health and social issues. Refining Nancy Cott's conclusion that individualism and individual success were the chief motivations of feminist businesswomen and professionals in the 1910s,<sup>253</sup> I show that for at least a class of reformers,

<sup>251</sup> "Teachers' Hosts Are Appointed," *Boston Herald*, June 13, 1910, 16.

<sup>252</sup> United States Census, 1930, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XQGY-B3F>), Entry for Elizabeth McClelland and Frances McClelland, 1930; United States Census, 1930, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:XQGY-B3X>), Entry for Louise D Greene, 1930. The McClelland-Stevenson household occupied a 12,000 square foot home at 9 Kirkland Place, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Their immediate next-door neighbor was Louise Greene, who was the owner of her own 15,000 square foot home.

<sup>253</sup> Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 281.

individual and collective progress were tightly intertwined.

In 1904-1905 already, their ideas resonated with those of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, at a time of important changes in the association's internal organization. Its directors were all the more invested in these women's ventures since they had several reasons for taking an interest in their careers. As a matter of principle, the Union supported women who opened up new avenues of work for others. This is probably the reason why its Board of Government voted to support Charlotte Barrell Ware's project of a dairy farm in 1905. The WEIU was involved in the consumer movement—its leaders supported the 1905 Pure Food and Drugs bill until it was eventually passed in 1906<sup>254</sup>—but it also ran several businesses. The Board of Government felt responsible for the labor conditions that prevailed in other firms with which it dealt, at least enough to commission an investigation of firms for which it could not obtain Consumers League, factory inspection, or trade union reports.<sup>255</sup> Within their own walls, the WEIU's managers felt responsible for their health of their customers, a concern which drove their pure food activism. Lorine Goodwin thus wrote that it "became involved in the pure food crusade to insure the quality of food it served to its patrons."<sup>256</sup>

Business needs were a third, powerful motivation. By the early 1900s the WEIU's directors understood that they needed to rely on expert advisers and skilled professionals as paid consultants—commissioning for instance a Miss Helen Hill, an advertising agent, to draw up an outline for a "publicity campaign."<sup>257</sup> Already in 1904, Bertha Stevenson was called upon to help the Union determine how much to price the meals sold in the Employees' Lunch Room, so as to strike a balance between fairness and providing for tear and breakage.<sup>258</sup> Finally, a few years later, the WEIU began systematically drawing on a pool of successful female professionals and business-owners as both collaborators and advisers. The new "Advisory Trade Committees" were devised in response to a perceived need felt by the Union's business departments "of measuring their experience and methods by similar business enterprises outside." They were made up of "recognized leaders

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<sup>254</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of Board of Government* v. 9, November 15, 1904, 17. 81-M237. Carton 2; Lorine Swainston Goodwin, *The Pure Food, Drink, and Drug Crusaders, 1879-1914* (Jefferson: McFarland, 1999), 145.

<sup>255</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 9, October 4, 1904, 1. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>256</sup>Goodwin, *The Pure Food, Drink, and Drug Crusaders*, 150.

<sup>257</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of Board of Government* v. 9, February 7, 1905, 40. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>258</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of Board of Government* v. 9, October 4, 1904, 2. 81-M237. Carton 2.



of similar business enterprises.”<sup>259</sup>

As we have seen, these progressive female business-owners tended to be white college graduates, independent women who moved from activities or jobs in social work or education to jobs in food production and retail, and often back again. They engaged in income-generating activities which engaged with the home both as a physical location and as an idea. These women portrayed themselves as “home-based,” or at least they were portrayed by others as in tune with home values associated with the cult of domesticity.<sup>260</sup> Through their joint educational and commercial activities, they blurred the distinction between work of the home (home-making), work performed inside the home, and work that took place outside the home. In addition, they drew no distinction between the purview or responsibilities of individuals as consumers and producers, and those of the government. In their eyes, middle-class women could be more than ethical consumers. They could also go into business themselves to further social reform aims, while at the same time advancing their own economic interests. This was easier said than done, as Charlotte Barrell Ware, Bertha Stevenson and the WEIU’s Henrietta Goodrich learned. Sometimes, production costs were simply too high, as in the case of pure milk, or the public was not interested in the service that was for sale, as in that of the delivery service.

Whether they succeeded or failed, these women modeled new ways of earning a living and pushing for reform. In the Progressive city, they inhabited a sphere of work which we may term “productive-preventive work”—work that yielded both an income to those who performed it, as well as fairly-priced commodities or services for customers, with a view to addressing issues not dealt with by the legislation. These women reveal the extent to which reform-minded college graduates were active in the commercial arena and how their gendered identity determined their activities. Our perspective would not be complete without the college graduates who chose business-ownership and whose professional culture also emphasized reform and service. Middle- and upper-class Bostonians involved in the domestic science movement as well as the consumer movement, including the leaders of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union and some of their business partners, came to believe in business solutions to social problems as a complement

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<sup>259</sup>WEIU, *1908 Report*, 40-41.

<sup>260</sup>For an in-depth discussion of how the cult of domesticity operated in the second half of the nineteenth century, especially as regarded the middle-class home, see “Victorian suburbs and the cult of domesticity,” chapter 6 of Gwendolyn Wright’s *Building the Dream: A Social History of Housing in America* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1981). See also Matthews, “*Just A Housewife.*”

to legislative action. The WEIU envisioned trained or educated women as agents whose “leadership [...] would be of service” to society.<sup>261</sup> They embraced a more expansive vision of commercial activity, arguing that its success or impact could be measured according to a wider variety of metrics that included the pursuit of public interest. In 1900, reporting on the life of their own lunch room, one WEIU director stated that in the past year “[t]here [had been] many checks for small amounts each day, and many persons who [had brought] their own luncheons.” To her, “[that] statement [proved] the usefulness of a work not to be estimated by profits alone.”<sup>262</sup>

The Union was a non-profit association that defended women’s rights to education and employment. At the core of its business model was the desire to combine profit-making and public service, for instance through the sale of pure milk or cheap, wholesome lunches. In the following chapter, I will examine the specifics of WEIU women’s activities as “managers” and business leaders, in their quest to balance growth and self-support.

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<sup>261</sup>Additional WEIU records, Business Agency and Intermunicipal Research Committees, “Industrial Opportunities for College Women Other Than Teaching,” October 1, 1907. 81-M237. Carton 6, folder 104.

<sup>262</sup>Additional WEIU records, Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., 1899-1900* (Cambridge: The Co-operative Press, 1900), 36. 81-M237. Carton 1. See also *1899 Report*, 36: “Although the work is of so practical a nature and its ethical side less pronounced, it has its usefulness of purpose beyond a purely business side.”



# Chapter 3

## The Female Managerial Experience: From Volunteer Beginnings to Business Consolidation

### Introduction

Faulty plumbing, creaky stairs, and cramped rooms loomed large over the experience of the WEIU's first Board of Government. As late as June 1884, such a seemingly small matter as the "leakage in the water closet" at 74 Boylston Street engrossed the treasurer, Phebe Willey.<sup>1</sup> A few months later, in early 1885, she was tasked with investigating the possibility of purchasing 72 Boylston Street, the building immediately adjacent to the Union's headquarters, and soon after was temporarily promoted to "business manager," a then unsalaried position, and a radically novel one as far as the association's organizational structure was concerned.<sup>2</sup> It was probably not a coincidence that the same person evinced an interest in—and was tasked with—superintending the building and looking after the business interests of the Union.<sup>3</sup> For the women of the WEIU, as for the members of any other women's nonprofit at the time, having a commodious downtown building and personnel to keep it open to the public was paramount. As they knew, lack of

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<sup>1</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, June 24, 1884, 26-27. 81-M237. Carton 1. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., <https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/resources/5020#>.

<sup>2</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, January 20, 1885, 76; *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, March 24, 1885, 96.

<sup>3</sup>Phebe Willey penned the WEIU's annual treasurer's report for a decade, from 1882 to 1893.

room and of a skilled or willing enough workforce were matter-of-fact issues that only cash could reliably solve.

The reform-minded women who started the WEIU were fully aware of the need for disposable income and how preferable it was for that income to keep flowing steadily into the organization's coffers. In fact, the very first meeting of the group, at which the organization was formed, ended on a pecuniary note: "After discussing ways and means, [the founders] resolved themselves into a Committee to secure a guarantee fund to carry on the work."<sup>4</sup> Earning money, managing it, saving it, investing it or spending it in the most cost-effective way possible—this was what took up a majority of the time and brain power of the Board of Government, not expounding on the women's rights ideology that framed and justified their activities. The more loudly purveyors of charity insisted on their apolitical altruism, the better they were able to shroud the less socially acceptable aspects of their economic activities in the veil of Christian morality and female piety.<sup>5</sup> As Susan Yohn argues, the social stigma and structural constraints that businesswomen faced led them to favor charity as a cover.<sup>6</sup>

Stanley Wenocur and Michael Reisch provided a first and still isolated treatment of the nineteenth-century charity as an enterprise, noting how it evolved into social work, a business dealing in the commodity of human services. However, they fail to explore the gender dynamics at play in the emergence of the profession.<sup>7</sup> A year later, Lori Ginzberg's landmark *Work of Benevolence*, published in 1990, took to the task of exploring the pragmatic underbelly of the female benevolent experience. The existing literature on women's organizations has tended to treat their material conditions of existence as a secondary concern, perhaps because it was self-evident that any attempt at relieving poverty or transforming social mores would have required a place to gather—one that was warm in the winter, cool in the summer, and quiet enough to conduct business.<sup>8</sup> To that were added paper for

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<sup>4</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational & Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 7, 1879* (Boston: 4 Park Street, 1879), 9, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2wncj5nkpr>

<sup>5</sup>An argument central to Lori Ginzberg's *Women and the Work of Benevolence*. Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

<sup>6</sup>Susan M. Yohn, "Crippled Capitalists: The Inscription of Economic Dependence and the Challenge of Female Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth Century America," *Feminist Economics* 12, no. 1/2 (January/April 2006): 93-94, 100-101.

<sup>7</sup>Stanley Wenocur and Michael Reisch, *From Charity to Enterprise: The Development of American Social Work in a Market Economy* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).

<sup>8</sup>As we will see in chapter 6, this is exactly the kind of things that the WEIU's college-educated employees would playfully demand in the mid-1910s, when there was talk of erecting a new building. See chapter 6, figure 6.5, p. 375.

pamphlets and letters, miscellaneous goods to distribute, and, of course, cash to pay for it all. Anne Firor Scott's (1991) and Anne Boylan's (2002) landmark volumes on women's associations in the northeastern cities of the nineteenth-century,<sup>9</sup> tended to foreground women's kin and friendship networks. These authors showed how such networks translated to overlapping associational spheres, debated the chronology according to which different kinds of female societies were created, from church sewing circles to abolitionist groups—was this chronology sequential?—and investigated how the women's association was the locus of an emerging female consciousness, the idea that by virtue of their sex women were “natural allies,” per the title of Anne Firor Scott's volume. In these comprehensive overviews of women's antebellum activism, while these organizations are deemed “significant economic entities” with an impact on the local economy, money matters appear as one facet of their charitable and reform work, one that is not accorded a central treatment.<sup>10</sup>

Scott and Boylan ended their accounts around the time of the Civil War. The postbellum women's association has not received detailed treatment, not least as far as fundraising and investing is concerned. Until the 2010s, existing works on the topic were few and far between. In 1990, Kathryn Kish Sklar published a case study of the funding of a specific organization, Jane Addams's distinguished Hull House,<sup>11</sup> but it was really in the decade that followed the publication of Anne Boylan's *Origins of Women's Activism* that historians of philanthropy explored the economic impact of nonprofit organizations, whether they were led by men, women, or both. In 2003, Kathleen D. McCarthy acknowledged that the economic function of philanthropy has historically been neglected by scholars—it was, so far, “its least studied, least understood role.”<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, she dedicated a chapter of her *American Creed* to the “women citizens” who, as the managers of nonprofits, were also “women entrepreneurs.”<sup>13</sup> Other scholars in the field have also offered less gender-specific looks at the economic impact of philanthropy at two key moments, the “associational revolution” of the early national period, and the emergence of

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<sup>9</sup>Anne Firor Scott, *Natural Allies: Women's Associations in American History* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991); Anne Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism, New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002): see pages 173-193 for her study of the finances of female urban antebellum institutions.

<sup>10</sup>Boylan, *Origins of Women's Activism*, 175.

<sup>11</sup>Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Who Funded Hull House?” in *Lady Bountiful Revisited: Women, Money and Power*, edited by Kathleen D. McCarthy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 94-115. Sklar highlights the significance of women's contributions to settlement houses led by women, suggesting the sense of agency that these gifts might have conferred.

<sup>12</sup>Kathleen McCarthy, *American Creed: Philanthropy and the Rise of Civil Society, 1700-1865* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>13</sup>McCarthy, *American Creed*, 48.

the charity foundation and mass modern philanthropy in the Progressive Era and beyond.<sup>14</sup> In recent years, there has been a burgeoning interest in the financial dimension of women's non-profit associational activities among historians of women and gender, as they are once more probing the perennial and interlinked questions of how suffrage was eventually won for all women and how racial dynamics operated within the movement. Joan Marie Johnson, in her study of white heiresses' economic support of suffrage organizations, powerfully argued that their contribution was critical in both shaping the movement to fit their vision of equity and enabling the suffrage campaign to reach a critical mass in the 1910s. In her view, though ultimately "[women's suffrage] was won only when rich women gave large contributions," white monied women's use of the "coercive power of philanthropy" doomed the hopes of a true cross-class coalition in support of suffrage.<sup>15</sup> Tanisha C. Ford's most recent project complicates that picture, as she foregrounds the critical but forgotten fundraising carried out by Black female socialites in support of the Civil Rights movement and, accordingly, the matter-of-fact extension of suffrage to all women.<sup>16</sup>

So far as women's suffragist-adjacent or para-suffragist activism is concerned, there is a dearth of detailed case studies of organizational finances. A look at the Boston WEIU reveals the complexity that underlay those associations' money management practices, especially when they were bound to ideals of economic independence. We do not analyze a single type of fundraising, as Beverly Gordon did in her study of the ladies' fair,<sup>17</sup> but, in the spirit of Kathryn Kish Sklar's article, a fundraising and management complex developed over time by one association. In this chapter, we propose to delve deeper in the process through which the WEIU's leadership came to constitute themselves as business managers—how they came not only to identify with the label, but to learn, through trial and error (and the occasional mentoring), how to keep a women's organization afloat.

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<sup>14</sup>Johann N. Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners: Democracy and Civil Society in Early National Massachusetts* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Olivier Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

<sup>15</sup>Joan Marie Johnson, *Funding Feminism: Monied Women, Philanthropy, and the Women's Movement, 1870-1967* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 1-2.

<sup>16</sup>Tanisha C. Ford, "Satin Glove Suffrage: Black Socialite Activism and Voting Rights in WWII-Era Harlem." Paper presented at "How Long Must Women Wait for Liberty?": Woman Suffrage and Women's Citizenship in the Long History of the 19th Amendment," Lille, France, January 2020. At the time of writing, Ford was in the process of publishing *Our Secret Society: Mollie Moon and the Glamour, Money, and Power Behind the Civil Rights Movement* (New York City: Harper Collins, 2023).

<sup>17</sup>Beverly Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies: The History of the American Fundraising Fair* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998).

## 3.1 Learning How to Put on a Fair (1877-1895)

For a non-profit organization like the WEIU, fundraising was and would always remain a major concern. It was over the course of the first decade of the organization's existence that its leaders came to learn exactly what it took to successfully raise funds in pursuit of their vision. However, just as the women of the WEIU came to master the fundraising fair, then the gold standard for women's organizations, so did they realize the limits of that well-oiled machine. Exploiting members' connections to Boston's business community with a view to reaching the state of economic independence that was so dear to them as a principle, they eventually constructed a more elaborate fundraising model. By 1895, their income channels included yearly membership dues, the dividends yielded by shareholding, and a "Permanent Fund" established through bequests and donations, the receipts of special sales, and the profits from their own shops.

### 3.1.1 The Lessons of the Dickens Carnival (1885)

#### *History of the Fundraising Fair*

By the 1850s and until the turn of the century, for many a women's association, learning to raise funds was often associated with learning how to put on a bazaar or a fair. What Beverly Gordon decided to term the "fundraising fair" was a family of events planned by women for charitable purposes and made possible only by the gift of volunteer labor. This "highly adaptable, almost chameleon-like"<sup>18</sup> institution often featured the sale of hand-made decorative items and home-made food. Its receipts helped further a wide array of radical and not-so-radical causes, from abolition, to temperance and suffrage, but also Confederate rebellion and memory in the south. In her exhaustive study of the fundraising fair, Gordon acknowledges how difficult it is at times to distinguish it from other similar public expositions. She notes that men's early-nineteenth-century agricultural fairs often included displays of the handcrafts of farmers' wives and daughters, and that there is a case to be made for the interpretation of industrial and commercial exhibits as male counterparts to the ladies' fair.<sup>19</sup>

The fundraising fair was first pioneered in England before crossing over to North America in the 1820s. Up until the 1850s, when Gordon documents an

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<sup>18</sup>Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, xvii.

<sup>19</sup>Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, 8-9.



explosion in the number of such charitable fundraisers, it was considered an innovative, daring, and sometimes downright provocative undertaking. For the daughters of the business and political elite to labor as salespeople and entice customers with a smile or a wink was sometimes decried as highly inappropriate. By the Civil War, the large-scale “sanitary fairs” held in support of the war effort, no longer strictly women’s affairs, evinced an unsentimental professionalism; they were instrumental in sponsoring the Unionist army.<sup>20</sup> The popularity of the fundraising fair reached its apex sometime between 1875 and 1900, when exclusive women’s clubs and charities organized elaborate events, replete with dainty refreshments, dancing, and theatrical performances in which society ladies competed to take part.<sup>21</sup>

In the 1880s, then, fairs were a type of social event, with their own “season,” and to which broad philanthropic purposes were subordinated. This was the case of the 1885 “Dickens Carnival,” part of a multi-pronged effort by the WEIU’s Board of Government to raise a lump sum of \$150,000 in order to build or buy new headquarters. The WEIU’s meteoric growth had left it in an uncomfortable position. Cramped quarters proved a hindrance to many of the social programs that they had in mind. They needed attractive ground floor rooms for a shop window and as many rooms as possible for the library, class work, and committee meetings—and these needed to be kept clean and neat. When this was not the case, committee members did not fail to make their displeasure known to the Board of Government.<sup>22</sup> The very fact that by 1884 permanent committees were created was acknowledged as one factor in the WEIU’s increasing demand for resources. The Committee on Finance dedicated itself to raising that money.<sup>23</sup> Initially, there were disagreements as to the best way to go about it. The idea of organizing a “festival” of some sort was eventually mentioned; the newly-minted, ad hoc “Festival Committee” recommended the Board to wait until the winter to organize it.<sup>24</sup> Between the spring of 1884 and February 1885, the idea was left hanging, while other smaller entertainments were put on: first a “Directors’ Party,” a purely social event planned by many of the women who would later work on the Dickens Carnival like Mrs. Thomas Mack and Mrs. Mira H. Pitman, the

<sup>20</sup>Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence*, 149-153.

<sup>21</sup>Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, 10-16.

<sup>22</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, December 7, 1886, 1. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>23</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Progress of the Union, 1877-1894,” 3. M-89. “1. WEIU directors” (microfilm).

<sup>24</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, April 29, 1884, 9; May 27, 1887, 15-15. 81-237. Carton 1.

wives of two prominent Boston businessmen<sup>25</sup>; then a minstrel show—a clear indication of the WEIU’s likely poor relationship with Boston’s Black community—<sup>26</sup> specifically for the benefit of the Industrial Department.<sup>27</sup> These were more modest events, sometimes only informally connected to the Union, like the “auction given” at a hotel for the benefit of the Union, but which does appear to have been claimed by it.<sup>28</sup>

### *A Social Event for Boston’s Literary Scene*

In January 1885, a members’ meeting, advertised in the local papers, was finally held to discuss the organization of “the proposed Carnival in aid of the Union,” which was to take place a month later.<sup>29</sup> Overall, the minutes of the Union’s Board of Government do not contain much detail about the organization of the Carnival, which was left to a large, co-educational committee that brought together an eclectic mix of Boston’s most prominent literary men and women, affluent merchants and their kin, as well as famous faces from the antebellum abolitionist

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<sup>25</sup>Thomas Mack (1827-1897) was a businessman, a partner in the firm of C. F. Hovey & Co, a large Boston department store founded by abolitionist and women’s rights advocate Charles Fox Hovey. After Mack’s death in 1897, his widow Eleanor’s personal estate was valued to \$67,000; she also owned \$56,000 in real estate. “Thomas Mack,” *Boston Morning Journal*, May 27, 1897, 2; United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHXK-PKV>), Thos. Mack, Boston, Suffolk, Massachusetts, United States; “Boston’s Heavy Taxpayers,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, January 14, 1900, 47. Elmira (Mira) Hollander Pitman (1854-1939) was the daughter of Maria Hollander, of the clothing emporium M. T. Hollander’s, and the wife of Benjamin F. Pitman (1852-1918), an influential Boston businessman who joined her family business and eventually became its managing director. Maria was “active in the cause of woman suffrage and chairman of the ways and means committees [of the state’s suffrage association].” As Susan Ingalls Lewis noted in her case study of Albany’s businesswomen, it was common for mothers to train sons in their business and have them take it over. Susan Ingalls Lewis, *Unexceptional Women: Female Proprietors in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Albany, 1830-1880* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009), 72; “Benj. F. Pitman Dies in Brooklyne,” *Boston Herald and Boston Journal*, July 1, 1918, 9; United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHXW-8NN>), Benj. F. Pitman in household of Jacob Hollander, Somerville, Middlesex, Massachusetts, United States.

<sup>26</sup>Minstrel shows were a kind of hybrid popular entertainment featuring blackface skits and songs, which also showcased “operatic choruses, mock versions of popular and folk songs, and comedic comments on the performance of foreign artists.” William J. Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1999), 9. Mahar contends that minstrelsy was a peculiarly American mixing of white and Black popular cultures, in contrast to scholars like Eric Lott (*Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class*, 1993) who put forth that minstrelsy was purely the product of racially exploitative dynamics. While we do not know much about the “minstrel show” given by the WEIU, it is highly likely that it featured racist elements—one of few indicators of the WEIU’s relationship to Boston’s Black community.

<sup>27</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, January 3, 1885, 69a; January 20, 1885, 76. 81-237. Carton 1.

<sup>28</sup>“Personal and Social Gossip,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, August 31, 1890, 19.

<sup>29</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, January 6, 1885, 74-75. 81-237. Carton 1.

movement.<sup>30</sup> The very public nature of the members' meeting, which took place in a public hall and was open to all, suggests the extent to which WEIU members conceived of the Carnival as a community happening.

Of course, the bounds of that "community" were drawn by a host of unspoken expectations. The committee targeted a specific audience, that most susceptible to attend and enjoy a high-style fundraising fair: their peers. In the run-up to the event itself, Bostonians were reminded in the press not to forget their opera glasses, so that they could enjoy looking for their friends on the stage, as at similar entertainments previously given in the city. While journalists seemingly addressed the entire city, it would have been quite obvious who was expected to attend.<sup>31</sup> They were socialites, artists, literary men and women, as well as politicians; the so-called "Brahmin" set of Boston's oldest families would have been expected. On the night of the Dickens Carnival, not only did the mayor of Boston and the governor of Massachusetts grace the reserved seats in Mechanics' Hall with their presence. Businessmen, lawyers, elected officials—the Dickens Carnival turned out, as expected, to be a brilliant society event: "[t]he hall was crowded by a brilliant assemblage which included not a few of the literary and artistic celebrities of the New England Athens," one inspired journalist wrote.<sup>32</sup> The friends, families and acquaintances of these "celebrities" were among the three hundred costumed dancers who recreated scenes from seven of Dickens's works in elaborate tableaux to the music played by a 25-piece orchestra.<sup>33</sup>

As the audience members partook of the refreshments that were served that night—ice cream, cake, coffee, and lemonade—, so did they also cheer for their favorite fictional characters, an experience with which many would have been familiar. Indeed, the WEIU's success in putting on the Carnival owed much to the ability of its organizing committee to keep abreast of the latest trends. The Dick-

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<sup>30</sup>Additional WEIU records, "A Dickens Carnival," undated, n.p. M-89. "3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events" (microfilm). The general organizing committee was made up of Julia Ward Howe's daughter and son-in-law, the Anagnoses; famed journalist Sally Joy White; moralist Kate Gannett Wells; authors Louisa M. Alcott and Lucretia Hale, as well as men and women from Boston's abolitionist circles, like William Lloyd Garrison, Jr., lawyer Samuel Sewall and his wife Harriet, among many others from their acquaintance. Longer versions of this list, as they appeared in the press, also made mention of high-ranking politicians: Massachusetts Governor Robinson and Lieutenant Governor Ames, Boston Mayor O'Brien, and wealthy men like Rufus S. Frost, J. L. Bremer, and Augustus Hemenway, who would later find their way to who's whos of Boston's business community. Compare the list of "members of the General Committee" for the Dickens Carnival with that in "The Road to Fortune," *Boston Sunday Herald*, September 13, 1891, 21.

<sup>31</sup>Additional WEIU records, "Dickens Carnival."

<sup>32</sup>Additional WEIU records, "The Dickens Carnival in Boston," undated, n.p. M-89. "3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events," 5 (microfilm).

<sup>33</sup>Additional WEIU records, "Dickens Carnival."

ens Carnival was an “author carnival,” a type of theatrical entertainment which briefly emerged and peaked in the 1870s and 1880s before falling out of fashion. These amateur theater pageants were often produced by the white educated middle-classes as charity events. They originated in the northeast; the first such show was put on in Buffalo in 1874 for the benefit of the local YMCA. According to Michael D’Alessandro, at a time when falling book prices and burgeoning reading clubs made reading a more widespread pastime, the author carnival contributed to the establishment of a white, Western literary canon in which authors like Dickens held pride of place, although it ultimately failed to leave a lasting cultural impact as a theatrical and literary mode in itself.<sup>34</sup> In this context as in the social reform work of the Union, the hegemonic quality of whiteness went unquestioned, in a way that was not dissimilar to the assumption that the upper-middle-class audience of the Carnival was representative of Boston’s population.

Making use of members’ social connections, the WEIU managed to plan a public event that garnered widespread recognition and support even before it was actually given. Tickets were sold not only at the WEIU’s rooms but also by local businesses affiliated in one way or another with WEIU members.<sup>35</sup> The latter also provided practical assistance—loaning dishes, gifting foodstuffs. WEIU member Nancy Willard Covell was commended by the Board of Government for successfully soliciting both grocers and individuals.<sup>36</sup> These efforts were part of a strategic, integrated campaign. Taking inspiration from successful fairs, the WEIU employed well-known trade tips and tricks.<sup>37</sup> The Board of Government contacted the local papers, to ensure that there would be adequate press coverage in the run-up to the show and thus drum up excitement. This was a successful ploy as more than 1,000 tickets out of 3,300 seats in Mechanics’ Hall were engaged before they were even put up for sale.<sup>38</sup> Ticket sales were not the only way that women’s organizations raised money through fairs: the sale of Dickens Carnival “souvenirs”—lavishly illustrated booklets—brought in yet more money after the day of the event, not least because they contained advertising for Boston’s leading department stores, like Jordan, Marsh & Co. Because they would have been gifted

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<sup>34</sup>Michael D’Alessandro, “Dickens and Shakespeare and Longfellow, Oh My! Staging the Fan Canon at the Nineteenth-Century Authors’ Carnivals,” *American Literary History* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2023): 715-743, <https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/ajad005>.

<sup>35</sup>This was the case for L.P. Hollander’s & Co. and W. B. Clarke and Carruth, for instance. Additional WEIU records, “Dickens Carnival.”

<sup>36</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Dickens Carnival.”

<sup>37</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Kirmess Points,” *Boston Globe*, April 14 [1886], n.p. M-89. “3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events,” 18b (microfilm).

<sup>38</sup>Additional WEIU records, “The Dickens Carnival.”

by audience members to friends and relatives who had been unable to attend, these booklets were also a way for the WEIU to generate still more publicity about its activities.<sup>39</sup>

### *A Case for Redefining the Fundraiser as a Business Enterprise*

Self-support was part of the WEIU's charitable DNA. That its managers insisted upon the principle was far from unusual. Antebellum charities aimed for economic independence so as to protect their grip on their own programs: independence meant control.<sup>40</sup> However, unlike antebellum charities, whose managers were capitalists who "never soiled their own hands with profits" and did not consider their own activities as being cut of the economic cloth as those of their clients and male family members, the WEIU employed the rhetorical device of economic independence as a goal to be pursued in and of itself.<sup>41</sup> The object of the Union was to help women help themselves, that is to say help them find ways to make their labor a source of income. In a bid for ideological consistency, they rejected charity for themselves as much as they did so far as the women they serviced were concerned. This was remarked upon in the press. As one Boston paper noted, "[t]his carnival has attracted considerable interest, not only from its unique and entertaining character, but also from the fact that the Women's Educational and Industrial Union was the originator of the entertainment. The union has always been opposed to asking charity for its benevolent object."<sup>42</sup> Of the inner workings of the Union, its president would later clarify in a press release: "[i]n the business departments [...] the effort towards self-support as a basis for business is strongly emphasized by the committees, and warmly seconded by the women employed in the departments, and by those whose goods are sold there."<sup>43</sup> From these reports, we may gather that the image and reputation of the WEIU were tied to that central principle, which also functioned as a rallying cry for the women connected to the Union in one way or another.

From the contemporaneous work of other WEIUS, where the carnival was also a preferred means of fundraising in the 1880s and early 1890s, we may learn just

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<sup>39</sup> "Souvenir Dickens Carnival" (Boston: Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1885), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31175035156457>.

<sup>40</sup> Boylan, *Origins of Women's Activism*, 178-179.

<sup>41</sup> Boylan, *Origins of Women's Activism*, 172-173; Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 217.

<sup>42</sup> Additional WEIU records, "The Dickens Carnival," *Boston Journal*, February 18 [1885]. M-89. "3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events" (microfilm).

<sup>43</sup> Mary Morton Kehew, "Boston Women's E. and I. Union," *Woman's Journal* 29, no. 14 (April 2, 1898), 121.

how the ethos of the “Educational and Industrial Union” was deployed. Five years after the Boston WEIU put on the Dickens Carnival, the Providence association organized the “Women’s Educational and Industrial Union Carnival” at Infantry Hall, in Providence. In a commemorative booklet describing the Carnival of 1890 and the work of the Union more generally, the members highlighted that their “Industrial Department” for the sale of women’s crafts was evidence of women’s productive potential: “[t]he character of the work proves the industry of women and their desire for self-support.”<sup>44</sup> It was left unsaid but still made abundantly clear that the carnival itself mirrored this drive, through both the labor expended by the organizers and their connections to the business community, and exaltation of the same. At the carnival’s variegated booths—among them the “gypsy camp,” the “corn palace,” the art booth, and the “Greek Cerealia” where hand-made baskets were sold—a variety of offerings, both home-made and not, were on display. Home-made candies, fancy chocolates, fresh popcorn and popcorn balls, dry goods, groceries, statuary, paintings, “fancy goods;” and perfumes were all part of a cornucopia of goods with whose production both WEIU women and local businessmen were connected. Governor Herbert W. Ladd, who opened the Carnival, saw his family business, the H. W. Ladd Company, represented in the “Drill of the Trades” pageant. So did confectioner Walter Baker, whose chocolate was being advertised at the fair. Tellingly, the WEIU itself was part of this display—in the pageant, it appeared as a business like any other, a paean to women’s productive labor.<sup>45</sup> Since the Carnival did clear \$2,000 for the organization, it may not have been too far off the mark to consider it economically productive, even when the cost of volunteer labor was accounted for.<sup>46</sup>

The female volunteers behind these carnivals, both managers and otherwise, displayed competence. In Mary Ryan’s words, fairs “illustrate[d] women’s acumen for converting their own unpaid labors into cash.”<sup>47</sup> The ablest of them, and those to whom fair organizing appealed, could even become (unpaid) professional

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<sup>44</sup>Additional WEIU records. Providence Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, “Women’s Educational and Industrial Union Carnival,” 1890. 81-237. Carton 8, folder 133.

<sup>45</sup>Providence Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, “Women’s Educational and Industrial Union Carnival.” Herbert Warren Ladd (1843-1913) was a prominent dry goods merchant from Providence, Rhode Island. A Republican, he served as governor of Rhode Island from 1889 to 1890 and from 1891 to 1892. United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M4S6-SY7>), Herbert W. Ladd, Providence, Providence, Rhode Island, United States; “Former Governors—Rhode Island,” Website of the National Governors Association, <https://nga.org/former-governors/rhode-island/>

<sup>46</sup>Pertaining to Women. *Boston Sunday Herald*, February 1890, 21.

<sup>47</sup>Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 215.

fair managers<sup>48</sup> Mrs. Micah Dyer Jr., to whom the idea for the Carnival was later credited, was an experienced organizer of military fairs and a manager for the Massachusetts Home for Intemperate Women, one in nearly two dozen offices she held in local philanthropic organizations.<sup>49</sup> What is remarkable is not the breadth of her commitment, but the extent to which she was representative of the women who worked for the WEIU's organizing committee. As Anne Boylan has noted of antebellum organizations, "[w]omen leaders' money-managing competence derived from both personal experience of paid labor and family ties"<sup>50</sup>; this was certainly true of the Union. Mrs. Maria L. Turner, who for eighteen years managed waitresses at an establishment called Copeland's, was assisted by Mrs. de L. Sheplie, a milliner by trade and the inventor of a machine for binding the edge of bonnet frames. She was known around Boston for being "shrewd and keen in her business management, generous in her treatment of her employees, inflexible in her ideas of right and wrong, and upright in her dealings with mankind."<sup>51</sup> Even those who had no credentialed experience could in fact possess inherited knowledge, as in the case of Mrs. Mira H. Pitman, the wife of a wholesale clothing dealer. Not only did she work as superintendent of the WEIU's Employment Department<sup>52</sup> and was "so well known as the accurate and enterprising business manager of the commercial department of the Union."<sup>53</sup> She was also the daughter of one of Boston's "pioneer" businesswomen, Mrs. M. T. Hollander, who had reportedly single-handedly started "Hollander's," a nationally renowned retailer of ready-made children's clothing. Pitman's mother was also an "ardent suffragist" who donated to the cause, and an "earnest supporter of the Woman's Educational and Industrial Union in its early days," as was mentioned in the *Boston Herald* in 1890.<sup>54</sup> It was no coincidence if the WEIU attracted women of such stature and

<sup>48</sup>Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, 13.

<sup>49</sup>"A Heart for Kindly Deeds," *Boston Sunday Herald*, December 11, 1892, 30. The Massachusetts Home for Intemperate Women, founded in 1879 and incorporated in 1881, aimed "to cure by medical and moral treatment women of any race or creed who [were] intemperate and want[ed] to reform, and those using opium," through a minimum stay of at least twelve weeks. Those who could not afford it outright worked for pay; all "able" women were required to learn a sewing trade. Associated Charities, *A Directory of the Charitable and Beneficent organizations of Boston* (Boston: Damrell & Upham, 1891), 102-103, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044009670795>.

<sup>50</sup>Boylan, *Origins of Women's Activism*, 187.

<sup>51</sup>"Early Business Women," *Boston Sunday Herald*, October 26, 1890, 24.

<sup>52</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, September 16, 1884, 36. 81-237. Carton 1.

<sup>53</sup>Additional WEIU records, "The Dickens Carnival."

<sup>54</sup>"Early Business Women," *Boston Sunday Herald*. Interestingly, this article contains factual mistakes: in the late 1840s, when Maria Hollander launched her business, her husband was alive: she was no single mother raising orphaned children. This description of the rise of what would become L. P. Hollander's (after her son) plays directly into the trope of the middle-class

business acumen. Putting them in charge of their fundraising entertainments was an explicit decision to entrust management to those with business experience.<sup>55</sup> Their reputation alone had some inherent worth: when Mira Pitman had to resign from the organizing committee of the 1887 Kirmess, the Union still requested that she “allow the use of her name as Chairman.”<sup>56</sup> In return, women like her saw their family’s businesses benefit from increased visibility: the 1885 “Souvenir” booklet for the Dickens Carnival prominently featured advertising for “Sheplie’s Bleachery” and for “L. P. Hollander & Co. Outfitters.”<sup>57</sup>

Even for seasoned managers, however, entertaining 3,300 people required a learning curve. In the days following the show, several newspapers reported complaints about bad management, because more people had been admitted than was safe. Nearly 8,000 people thronged Mechanics’ Hall and those who could not find their way in swarmed the doors. The most severe critics contended that “the manner in which the carnival was managed—or, to speak more correctly, mismanaged—was phenomenal.”<sup>58</sup> The problem lay with crowd management. Of the arrangements at the door, another disgruntled audience member complained that “they were wholly inefficient, and that the gains to charity were at a vast sacrifice of personal comfort on the part of the ticket-buyers.”<sup>59</sup> The absence of any officials to regulate entry and police the audience’s behavior compounded the chaos. A fire was even quickly put out on stage.<sup>60</sup>

Despite the reported commotion and the handful of very vocal critics, the Dickens Carnival proved a resounding financial and public relations success for the WEIU. The event brought in \$6,174.01 to their treasury, which amounted to a “clear profit of \$5,000”—the same amount as was raised by the 1890 Kirmess of the Syracuse WEIU.<sup>61</sup> Beside the odd confused remark about what it had all been for—“It is not generally understood for what purpose all this has been executed. It is for funds, at no distant day, for the erection of a large building, for the education,

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housewife reduced to working for pay by circumstance.

<sup>55</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Boston Home Journal*, February 21, 3. M-89. “3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events” (microfilm).

<sup>56</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, March 15, 1887, 11. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>57</sup>“Souvenir Dickens Carnival,” 2, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31175035156457>.

<sup>58</sup>Additional WEIU records, “The Dickens Carnival,” undated. M-89. “3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events,” 7 (microfilm).

<sup>59</sup>Additional WEIU records. M-89. “3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events,” 3 (microfilm).

<sup>60</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Helpful ‘Help,’” February 18 [1885]. M-89. “3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events,” 7 (microfilm).

<sup>61</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Boston Globe*, February 18. M-89. “3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events,” 6 (microfilm); Fair Women’s World, *Omaha World-Herald*, July 20, 1890, 6.



industrial and social interests of a ladies' union"<sup>62</sup>—the coverage of the Carnival generally consisted in praise for the WEIU and a commendation of the “necessary” work it conducted for Boston’s women. Why, then, such biting criticism? Because the organizers were women? While brokerage was a firmly male preserve in the minds of Gilded Age financiers, even the ladies’ fair incurred criticism for its commercialism, as men resented “encroachment” upon the dominion of commercial exchanges.<sup>63</sup> In the case of the WEIU’s Dickens Carnival, the organizers’ response was to hype up their husbands’ credentials and business savvy, hiding behind them in the process—“Over 80 ladies, with their husbands, prominent down-town business men, were on the different committees, and everything was thought of that could be anticipated,” explained a sympathetic journalist.<sup>64</sup>

Whether in Boston or in Providence, the “Educational and Industrial Union” ideologically aligned with the local business community in the celebration of its success and values. Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, in her study of later cultural events like the St Paul, Minnesota carnivals of 1918 and 1919, has shown that in the last years of the nineteenth century, and early years of the twentieth, such large-scale “public” events were usually organized by prominent business men and professionals as a celebration of the values of commerce. Public halls and streets were “spaces marked as belonging to the people who controlled capital, power, and success.”<sup>65</sup> Even as carnivals or other sponsored public entertainments had the potential to bring together the inhabitants of a city, and were sometimes a self-conscious celebration of localism, in effect they cemented the bonds that united the economic elite. This has led Duclos-Orsello to chart a cultural shift from place-based to affinity-based community in the transitional period of the turn of the century.<sup>66</sup>

The Union’s 1887 Kirmess, although it was more open to Bostonians of non-patrician backgrounds, exhibited the same characteristics. This was not surprising, as it was organized by a group of women whose core members had been among the managers of the Dickens’ Carnival. It was planned specifically “to enable [the Union] to secure larger quarters.”<sup>67</sup> In their efforts to gather a “nest egg,”<sup>68</sup> that is

<sup>62</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Helpful ‘Help.’”

<sup>63</sup>Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, 8; see also pages 51-52; Susan M. Yohn, “You Can’t Share Babies with Bonds: How Americans Think about Women Making Money,” *Iris* 40 (April 2000), n.p.

<sup>64</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Helpful ‘Help.’”

<sup>65</sup>Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, *Modern Bonds: Redefining Community in Early Twentieth-Century St. Paul* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2018), 149.

<sup>66</sup>Duclos-Orsello, *Modern Bonds*, 3.

<sup>67</sup>Additional WEIU records, “A Kirmess,” *Boston Herald*, February 22, 1887. M-89. “3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events,” 14 (microfilm).

<sup>68</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Kirmess Points,” *Boston Globe*, April 14 [1886]. M-89. “3. 1885-

to say a building fund, the Union tried to replicate the success of the 1885 carnival and even improve upon it.

### *Savvy Novelty-Seekers*

Another key part of the Union's fund-raising strategy was novelty. The Kirmess was gaining in popularity in other northeastern cities when trail-blazing socialites associated with the WEIU decided to bring it to town, billing it as the "first of its kind in Boston."<sup>69</sup> It was a popular form of entertainment in the late 1880s and 1890s, decades that were also the heyday of the world fair as a cultural form. Much like these cosmopolitan and international events, kirmesses, said to have been inspired by German tradition, were an approximation of European folk dance festivals, which white middle-class women put on as fundraisers. They offered the public an elaborately crafted staging of a romanticized, bucolic, "old world" Europe.<sup>70</sup> The WEIU's own rendition of the Kirmess featured six "national dances," a minuet in Louis XVI costumes, and a flower dance. Among the national dances—Swedish, Spanish, Tyrolean, Russian, "Hungarian gypsy"—the specially created "lawn tennis dance"<sup>71</sup> was supposed to stand in for the "folk" dance of the white American upper class.<sup>72</sup>

From the WEIU's perspective, the Kirmess was bigger and better than the Carnival, first of all for the simple reason that it was a multi-day event. As equally important, as the press noted, was that the organizers had learned from experience: "Many persons who remembered the confusion attending the seating of the audience at the Dickens carnival, two years ago [...] predicted only a partial success for the Kirmess. But they were mistaken."<sup>73</sup> This time, the Union provided raised and numbered seats. There could be actual reservations, and these could be spread over several evenings, which made it possible for more people to attend, and more safely so. The excitement generated by a carefully orchestrated press

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1892 Fundraising events," 18b (microfilm).

<sup>69</sup>"A Kirmess," *Boston Herald*, February 22, 1887, 6.

<sup>70</sup>Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, 132-133.

<sup>71</sup>The "Lawn Tennis Dance" consisted in twenty couples dancing to a polka tune, dressed in tennis outfits decorated with tennis netting and silver bells. The dancers carried rackets decorated with streamers, which they used as props. "After the Kirmess," *Plain Dealer*, April 24, 1887, 11. Lawn tennis gained in popularity first in 1860s England, before making its way to the United States a decade or so later. At first synonymous with garden parties, it was a pastime of the leisure class and the upwardly mobile, which could be played by men and women together and provided opportunities for flirtatious interactions. Elizabeth Semmelhack, "From Lawn Tennis to Eugenics: A History of Women and Sneakers," *Costume* 53, no. 1 (2019): 92-94.

<sup>72</sup>Additional WEIU records, "The Coming Kirmess," *Boston Evening Transcript*, March 14, 1887. M-89. "3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events" (microfilm).

<sup>73</sup>Additional WEIU records. "The Kirmess," *Boston Evening Transcript*, April 15, 1887. M-89. "3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events" (microfilm).

campaign did not dissipate, nor did it cause chaos, but was successfully channeled into the event. During the day, even a working-class and lower-middle-class public could enjoy the “market-place.” Up to 10,000 could be accommodated, for a low price of 25 cents a day per head, and even those who could not afford the “luxury articles” sold in booths as part of the fundraiser would have enjoyed the atmosphere, the elaborate decor, and the 11 am and 3 pm musical entertainments.<sup>74</sup> At night, the better-off patrons who could pay for seats enjoyed the choreographed tableaux created by Carl Marwig, a professional dance master specifically hired by the Union on the strength of his reputation.<sup>75</sup>

In the years following, the Kirmess was later followed by similar “educative and artistic entertainments,” again two- to three-day affairs, where professionals could shine: the “Fasching in Venice” (1888), another “Dickens Carnival and Bazaar” (1890),<sup>76</sup> and the “Pageant of the Year” (1892). Over time, the WEIU created a well-oiled machine. Seasoned, specialized fair workers did parallel work to that of the Board of Government, so that “the regular business of the Union be not interrupted by the business of the entertainment.”<sup>77</sup> Mrs. Pitman was the “chairman” of the entertainment committee that organized the 1888 “Fasching” (or Venetian Carnival) as well as the second Dickens Bazaar and Carnival.<sup>78</sup> Laura C. Hills, who lived off her art as a painter of miniatures, got her start on the costume design of the Pageant of the Year.<sup>79</sup> She played an even more central role in the creation of Fairyland (1900), the last of the WEIU’s great fundraising fairs, for which she was given complete creative control.<sup>80</sup> By 1900, the WEIU—like the public—was tiring of the arms race in which they and other women’s associations were caught, caving under the demand to put on ever more extravagant entertainments with central themes that were obsessively adhered to, with matching décor, costumes, and music.<sup>81</sup>

The fundraising fair was slowly becoming an obsolete income channel. It was certainly no longer paramount for the WEIU to be able to raise large sums

<sup>74</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Boston Globe*, April 14, c1887. M-89. “3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events,” 18b (microfilm).

<sup>75</sup>“A Kirmess,” *Boston Herald*. Carl Marwig was a professional itinerant dance master from New York, who made a living training dancers for such charitable carnivals.

<sup>76</sup>“The Dickens Carnival,” *Boston Herald*, September 26, 1890, 4.

<sup>77</sup>WEIU, *1893 Report*, 21. The event reportedly brought in \$4,127. Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, May 22, 1888, 92.

<sup>78</sup>“The Dickens Carnival,” *Boston Herald*.

<sup>79</sup>“Nature Her Guiding Star,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, November 20, 1892, 6.

<sup>80</sup>Additional WEIU records, “The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston,” scrapbook, c1900. 81-M237. Folio box 10.

<sup>81</sup>Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, 12, 131.

of money at once when the building, bought in 1889, was paid off. The publicity the event would have brought the organization was deemed not to be worth the manpower and the starting capital. At most, large fundraisers were a last resort, as in 1894, when, following increased relief activity generated by the financial depression of 1893, Mira Pitman “arranged a musical and dramatic entertainment” to meet the exceptional expense.<sup>82</sup> By the 1900s, the WEIU’s officers were trying to avoid resorting to fairs, both echoing and anticipated contemporary criticism of the fair. According to Beverly Gordon, the elaborate fundraising “fairyland” of the late nineteenth century drew its final breath in the early 1920s and declined concurrently with the economic downturn of the Great Depression.<sup>83</sup> The WEIU’s own “Fairyland” extravaganza had taken place twenty years earlier.

Still as late as 1920 the WEIU put on a smaller “Bazaar of Seven Shops.”<sup>84</sup> In addition to being more much more modest, it had a more marginal place in the WEIU’s fundraising strategy, in many ways closer to the occasional Easter and Christmas sales of the 1890s, 1900s and 1910s than to the Dickens Carnival. The seasonal sales included both “curios” sales, open to any woman interested in trading “interesting” articles for cash, and special promotional events that mobilized the workers of the Handwork Shop and the Food Sales Room. While they were always a success, they were explicitly intended as a stopgap in the finances of special committees or for the benefit of the “wage-earners” who made the articles on sale.<sup>85</sup> Successfully experimenting with different ways to raise funds had enabled the WEIU to secure a baseline income.

### 3.1.2 Turning Bequests into Trustees: the “Permanent Fund”

For the thousands of dollars that they brought to the Union’s coffers, large fundraising fairs like the Dickens’ Carnival or the Fasching in Venice were only the tip of the iceberg. For a women’s association, the steadiest source of income was certainly members’ dues. The practice of dues-paying was established in the first half of the century as the earliest civic associations underwent a shift from trusteeship

<sup>82</sup>“Concert for the W. E. and I. U.,” *Boston Herald*, April 12, 1894, 10.

<sup>83</sup>Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, 156-183.

<sup>84</sup>“Bazaar of Seven Shops Open Week’s Exhibit,” *Boston Herald*, May 12, 1920, 14. The bazaar featured elaborate tableaux meant to display the variety of goods sold by the Union in its shops, from its children’s toys to needlework.

<sup>85</sup>“Easter Sale Successfully Opened,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, April 4, 1899. M-89. “3. 1885-1892 Fundraising events” (microfilm); Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May 1894* (Boston: Press of L. Bart & Co., 148 High Street, 1894), 13, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923868>.

to membership and from elite patronage to a more democratic conception of membership. Dues-paying signaled participation and underscored one's belonging to an affinity-based community; part of members' identity was shaped by the sense that they were taking part in a work larger than themselves.<sup>86</sup>

In the nineteenth century, as today still, small donations, whether in the form of subscriptions, dues, bequests, or free standing gifts, were the lifeblood of women's non-profits.<sup>87</sup> Oftentimes, they came in the form of goods. What kind depended on the organization's purpose. Most often, the early WEIU solicited and accepted donations of furnishings and books, its chief preoccupation being the rooms where its members gathered.<sup>88</sup> In November 1877, soon after the WEIU's creation, a Miss Draper donated a small sum of money and lace curtains to spruce up the association's headquarters (then Harriet Clisby's rented living quarters).<sup>89</sup> Through the 1880s, the Library Committee received gifts of books and magazines.<sup>90</sup> In keeping with the prevailing norms that governed female propriety, few overt, active solicitation was made for these gifts, at least not the kind that could find its way in official proceedings or in the press. It was mostly through private channels that an organization's needs were discussed, and accordingly thanks went to "friends" of the WEIU, per the well-worn phrase. In the winter of 1879-1880, the Protective Committee sent only one circular appealing for financial aid. As Kate Gannett Wells noted in the annual report, "[m]any gifts, however, had been ours before our appeal was sent forth."<sup>91</sup> These charitable gifts were presented as the natural, free-flowing expression of an individual's goodwill and sympathetic heart.

The early years of the WEIU bore the stamp of these attitudes. In particular,

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<sup>86</sup>Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners*, 101-104.

<sup>87</sup>Boylan, *Origins of Women's Activism*, 177. Of the individual annual "subscription," which would usually go from fifty cents to three dollars, Anne Boylan says that "[b]enevolent society leaders considered [them] a crucial initial mechanism for generating budgets, and every new announcement of a worthy cause was accompanied by a subscription list."

<sup>88</sup>WEIU, *1879 Report*, 10, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2wncj5nkpr>.

<sup>89</sup>See for instance Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 98 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May 6, 1890* (Boston: No. 98 Boylston Street, 1890), 22-23, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923967>. That year, an especial prosperous one for the library, there were gifts of "books in French, Italian and German, scientific treatises, encyclopedias, religious books, books relating to women, and volumes of the *Popular Science Monthly*, *Atlantic*, and *Harper's Magazines*," as well as "a collection of books upon Art."

<sup>90</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 2, 1882* (Boston: No. 157 Tremont Street, 1882), 26, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065320874>.

<sup>91</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational & Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 8, 1880* (Boston: 157 Tremont Street, 1880), 39, HathiTrust, [hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2b1p08h29z](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2b1p08h29z).

the first volume of the minutes of the Board of Government is a testament to WEIU women's simultaneous desire for publicity and reluctance to leave the reassuring confines of anonymity. In the spring of 1878, the Board passed a motion to send a woman canvas the neighborhood and solicit donations, but it was rescinded soon after.<sup>92</sup> At the same time, Thomas Mack, the husband of a WEIU officer, was urged to make his anonymous \$500 donation public.<sup>93</sup> Not only was it tolerated that men show their support, it was deemed beneficial for the organization to be publicly endorsed by the likes of Mack, a dry goods merchant.<sup>94</sup> It was not just a matter of word-of-mouth publicity. Through his female kin, Thomas Mack was urged to "allow the use of his name in connection with his donation," presumably for the Board of Government to craft convincing appeals, whether private or public. Private appeals, in fact, were likely often preferred. Well-connected members of the Union, like Mary Morton Kehew, could be called on to prepare a list of names to solicit, so as to tactically limit the Union's exposure and ensure that there would be returns on volunteers' investment in time.<sup>95</sup>

By the mid-1880s, cash seems to have overtaken donations in kind. This should have pleased the officers of the WEIU, for whom "money-gifts" were of paramount importance, when compared to volunteer labor and donations in kind. At the close of the decade, president Abby Morton Diaz protested against "the common assumption that these last [were] of little account, except as they represent a money value."<sup>96</sup> This was in part a response to the celebrations occasioned by the Union's first large donations and bequests, which can be traced back to the middle of the 1880s. The Union's second president clung fervently to her belief in the spiritual power of sentimental, individualized giving. She imbued the practice with a significance that she denied cash, then in the process of being ascribed new meanings. In the words of sociologist Viviana Zelizer, it was in the last third of the nineteenth-century that money came to be redefined and understood as the "absolutely fungible, qualitatively neutral, infinitely divisible, homogeneous

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<sup>92</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 1, April 2, 1878, 45. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>93</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, May 11, 1886, 200. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>94</sup>United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch, (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHXK-PKV>), Thos. Mack, Boston, Suffolk, Massachusetts, United States.

<sup>95</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 6, November 16, 1888, 233. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>96</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 98 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May 7, 1889* (Boston: No. 98 Boylston Street, 1889), 9, HathiTrust, (<https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924015>).

medium of market exchange,” a shift which had come into currency at the Union, as Diaz’s protest revealed.<sup>97</sup>

The large bequests that so dazzled its members were in part due to a demographical shift. The Union’s earliest and oldest members, many of them born in the 1820s, were dying off. A bequest of \$2,000 made in 1882, augmented by a large donation of \$5,000, formed “the nucleus of a permanent fund” for which seven trustees were appointed at the annual meeting that same year.<sup>98</sup> However, it was not until the Perkins bequest of 1887 that the Permanent Fund was safely established. Richard Perkins, a local captain of industry, bequeathed “nearly a quarter million dollars to various charitable institutions,” of which \$10,000 went to the WEIU.<sup>99</sup> Perhaps on account of his own ill-health, Perkins had been keenly interested in the Massachusetts Homeopathic Hospital.<sup>100</sup> That institution was a stronghold of alternative medicine, an especially hospitable space for female physicians and patients alike; the Homeopathic New York Medical College for Women, established in 1863, turned out about one hundred female graduates in the first ten years of its existence.<sup>101</sup> It is possible that Richard’s wife, Catherine, can be credited for raising his awareness of the needs of female institutions in the state. What we do know is that she was a dedicated member of the WEIU. Whether she convinced her husband to make the WEIU a legatee, or she and her husband shared deep-seated convictions, Catherine Perkins finished the work started by her husband’s will. When she died in 1893, she bequeathed the Union \$100,000, ten times what Richard’s bequest had been, single-handedly enabling the WEIU to comfortably pay off the mortgage on the Boylston Street building.<sup>102</sup>

The early years of the WEIU’s existence were characterized by the support provided by male kin. When the Union sought to invest in real estate, these men were eagerly solicited for advice. That support can be characterized by its auxiliary, supportive nature, and the formal quality with which it was purposely imbued, even as personal acquaintance greased the wheels of mixed-sex cooperation. In 1888, perhaps on account of the momentum created by the Perkins bequest, the question of a building for the Union was once again laid on the table: “it was

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<sup>97</sup>Viviana A. Zelizer, *The Social Meaning of Money: Pin Money, Paychecks, Poor Relief and Other Currencies* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 6-13.

<sup>98</sup>WEIU, *1882 Report*, 20.

<sup>99</sup>Notes and News. *Woman’s Journal* 18, no. 1 (January 1, 1887), 5.

<sup>100</sup>Mortuary Notice. *Boston Journal*, December 7, 1886, 4.

<sup>101</sup>Regina Morantz-Sanchez, *Sympathy and Science: Women Physicians In American Medicine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 49.

<sup>102</sup>WEIU, *1894 Report*, 12-13, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923868>.

decided [by the Board of Government] to ask advice of certain business gentlemen whose names were mentioned about this matter and the President, Treasurer and Secretary were appointed to meet with them as representatives of the Union.”<sup>103</sup> A distinction was clearly being made between personal and official matters. The WEIU’s officers may have moved within the same social waters as the businessmen they proposed to rally to their cause, but they attempted to distinguish their private selves from their associational titles and qualities. Similarly, whom exactly to seek advice from was eventually a matter settled in a meeting of the Board of Government, although the chosen gentlemen were to meet in Mrs. Sewall’s parlors. On March 6, 1888, the Board voted to invite “[Thomas] Mack, [Franklin?] Haven, Wills, [Jacob H.] Hecht, William H. Endicott, William I. Bowditch, George S. Hale, Minot, Moore & [George] Norman.”<sup>104</sup> From these men, Mrs. Sewall and others wished to learn which of the properties they had in mind was a more auspicious choice as well as settle “any other business matter which may rise in connection with it.”<sup>105</sup> Who were these men? Some were lawyers, like William I. Bowditch, the elderly abolitionist.<sup>106</sup> At least one, Moore, was a physician.<sup>107</sup> One thing they had in common was their connection to WEIU members: “Hecht” was likely Jacob H. Hecht, husband to one of the WEIU’s directors.<sup>108</sup>

The men’s contribution came in the form of their knowledge of Boston’s real estate market, essential to avoid the traps laid by the likes of a “gentleman” who bought one of the properties the WEIU had been eyeing and offered to sell it to them for \$5,000 more.<sup>109</sup> What mattered most was the information that these men could supply, since the decision-making and the day-to-day investigating was

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<sup>103</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 6, February 7, 1888, 54. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>104</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 6, March 6, 1888, 59. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>105</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, March 6, 1888, 59. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>106</sup>William Ingersoll Bowditch (1818-1909) was a Boston lawyer best known for his abolitionist convictions and activities on the Boston Vigilance Committee. He was also a noted supporter of the women’s suffrage movement, to which he lent his legal skills, and served as president of the Massachusetts Women Suffrage Association from 1878 to 1883. “William Ingersoll Bowditch,” Website of the National Park Service, <https://nps.gov/people/william-bowditch.htm>, Ida Husted Harper and Susan B. Anthony, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, v. 4 (Rochester, 1902), 702-708, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/inu.32000001360272>.

<sup>107</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, March 20, 1888, 63. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>108</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1888* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1888), 3, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924064>.

<sup>109</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, May 29, 1888, 93. 81-M237. Carton 1.



firmly in the hands of the Union's officers. They decided where to look for a building—from Park Square or Church Street to Beacon Street, and on Tremont Street as far south as Elliott Street,<sup>110</sup> a location they knew was advantageous from its proximity to the homes of Boston's first families, the city's political center, and the shopping district.

The real potential power struggle that the women of the WEIU faced came from the Trustees of the Permanent Fund, who were not men. They could prove contrarian, withholding information about the money that was available for the transaction; ultimately, they decided or “consented” to disburse funds for the building.<sup>111</sup> Upon the creation of the Permanent Fund in 1882, seven women had been appointed as trustees under the chairmanship of Kate Gannett Wells. All had connections to well-off businessmen and professionals, and some, as wealthy widows, even enjoyed financial independence. This was the case of Mrs. John W. James, one of the benefactors whose gifts directly led to the creation of the board of trustees. She was a widow, the daughter of “a well known and respected business man of Boston,”<sup>112</sup> upon whose death in 1866, when she was already widowed, she inherited \$1,100,000. This fortune she would have likely had to learn how to manage, provided that she was not already well-versed in the intricacies of financial management.<sup>113</sup> The rest of the trustees included a physician's wife, Mrs. Dr. J. P. Oliver, the wife of a leather dealer, Mrs. Thomas E. Proctor, another wealthy merchant's wife, Mary Hemenway, and that of a civil engineer, Mrs. George. H. Norman.<sup>114</sup> The latter's husband was among three men who constituted auxiliary counsel as the “Advisory Board of Trustees.”<sup>115</sup> While the fact that they used their husbands' names in official publications of the society would tend to suggest a more conservative view of gender roles, and may even point to antisuffragist persuasions, this was not necessarily incompatible with a dedication to helping improve women's economic status. Manuela Thurner has argued that anti-suffragists were not necessarily in favor of confining women to the home; some urged women to do the work of reform, and argued that this, not suffrage, would make them into citizens—indeed, that they would be better citizens if they remained apoliti-

<sup>110</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, February 28, 1888, 57. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>111</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, April 3, 1888, 66; April 17, 1888, 71. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>112</sup>“Public Bequests,” *Boston Journal*, November 14, 1897, 8.

<sup>113</sup>New England News Summary. Boston and Vicinity. *Massachusetts Spy*, June 22, 1866.

<sup>114</sup>United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch, (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHXK-LLD>), T. E. Proctor, Boston, Suffolk, Massachusetts, United States.

<sup>115</sup>WEIU, *1892 Report*, 3, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065320874>.

cal, apartisan members of the social body, and that they did not need the ballot to become wage-earners.<sup>116</sup>

By 1888, when the building project was gathering steam, there were fewer trustees, and two of them were men—one being George H. Norman, who replaced his wife, and the other an actuary working for an insurance company, Franklin Haven, Jr., likely the “Haven” mentioned as a potential advisor in real estate matters.<sup>117</sup> It was not long before a more permanent structure was established, that of the board of Trustees of the Building Fund. The WEIU’s annual report for the year 1890-1891 bears the first mention of three men whose counsel the WEIU sought. They were given the title of trustees and put on a par with the largely unchanged board of Trustees of the Permanent Fund.<sup>118</sup> 1890, then, constitutes a turning point: the moment when responsibility for managing the Union’s investments was shared between two main boards of trustees, one male and one mixed. Experienced women like Mrs. John W. James gained decades of experience; that they kept their position as trustees for so long, just as the WEIU was slowly expanding, may be construed as a testament to their careful guardianship of the association’s nest egg.

However, the Union could hardly publicize these women’s expertise to raise funds. They needed male clout.<sup>119</sup> Men like lawyers Henry Sprague and Samuel Wells and financier George Wigglesworth<sup>120</sup> were tasked with managing the Build-

<sup>116</sup>See Susan E. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 166; Manuela Thurner, “Better Citizens Without the Ballot’: American Anti-Suffrage Women and Their Rationale During the Progressive Era,” *Journal of Women’s History* 5, no. 1 (1993): 40-47. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2010.0279>.

<sup>117</sup>WEIU, *1888 Report*, 3; United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHXV-RJ3>), Franklin Haven in household of Franklin Haven, Boston, Suffolk, Massachusetts, United States.

<sup>118</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May 1891* (Boston: No. 264 Boylston Street, 1891), 3, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923918>. In 1898 still, the latter body was comprised of Kate Gannett Wells, Mrs. John W. James, George H. Norman, Franklin Haven, and Harriet O. Crufts, who filled Mary Hemenway’s spot on account of her death. Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston St., Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1898* (Cambridge: Cambridge Co-operative Printing Society, 1898), 5, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923710>.

<sup>119</sup>Deutsch, “Learning to Talk More Like a Man,” 391.

<sup>120</sup>Henry H. Sprague (1841-1920) was a local lawyer involved in local philanthropy; he served as a vice-president of the Young Men’s Christian Union, after which Harriet Clisby had at least in part modeled the WEIU. United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHXK-X81>), Henry H. Sprague in household of Jarvis A. Ames, Boston, Suffolk, Massachusetts, United States; “Y.M.C.U. Changes,” *Boston Herald*, June 8, 1909, 1. Samuel Wells (1836-1903), the son of a judge of the Maine Supreme Court and governor of the same state, was descended from prominent New England families. He was

ing Fund, likely on account of their being perceived as knowledgeable, trustworthy supporters who could also lend credibility to the Union when the need arose. The name of lawyer Henry Sprague was first mentioned in 1888 as “the best person to consult and to interest in the matter” of raising money for the building through the sale of bonds at a low rate of interest, a plan first proposed by Franklin Haven, who “[thought] it impossible to get money subscribed outright and [believed] that such bonds would be taken.”<sup>121</sup> Such an opinion of Sprague’s character may have been formed through personal connections: he was intimately acquainted with WEIU member Maud G. Ames’s family, with whom he had boarded in the early 1880s.<sup>122</sup>

From what can be gathered, a large proportion of the capital directly injected into the Permanent Fund came from WEIU officers and their families, for two likely reasons: first of all, that they were more likely to come from wealth, and secondly as a function of the time that they had “invested” in the Union, so to speak. Mrs. Elizabeth Gay exemplified that trend: she was the “Mrs. E. G. Gay” who had sat on the board of Trustees of the Permanent Fund. Upon her death, she left \$8,000 to the Union for her friends and former colleagues to invest.<sup>123</sup> Women who dedicated years of their lives to the work, even when they were employees and did not occupy leadership positions, or when they had little money to give in the first place, were more likely to name the WEIU one of their legatees. In October 1906, the WEIU received a small bequest from a Miss Manning, a former WEIU employee; a decade earlier, Dr. Mary J. Safford, a self-supporting physician, left \$200.<sup>124</sup> The

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also the husband of moralist and noted anti-suffragist Kate Gannett Wells and was “well known in law, real estate, masonic and scientific circles.” He left his law practice to become a partner in a real estate company, and in his later years focused on trust fund management, which expertise he put at the service of local charities, including the YMCU. United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch, (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHX2-WS7>), Sam. Wells, Boston, Suffolk, Massachusetts, United States; “Prominent Bostonian Dead,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, October 4, 1903, 13. George Wigglesworth (1853-1930), another lawyer by trade, was the wealthiest of the three, a “prominent financier and trustee” and the father of a local Congressman. Upon his death, he was hailed as “one of the most widely known business men in New England.” Like his colleagues Sprague and Wells, he supported philanthropic institutions. United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch, (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHX9-98S>), George Wigglesworth in household of Epes S. Dixwell, Cambridge, Middlesex, Massachusetts, United States; “Wigglesworth, Financier, Dead,” *Boston Herald*, November 28, 1930, 1; “George Wigglesworth,” *Boston Herald*, November 29, 1930, 12. All three enjoyed excellent reputations in Boston as gentlemen of Brahmin stock who abided by the old “noblesse oblige” ideal.

<sup>121</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, May 10, 1888, 81. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>122</sup>United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch, (<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHXK-X8X>), Entry for Jarvis A. Ames and Ruby M. Ames, 1880.

<sup>123</sup>WEIU, *1894 Report*, 20, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923868>.

<sup>124</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 7, October 16, 1906, 13. 81-M237. Carton 2; WEIU, *1894 Report*, 20, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu>.

organization officially encouraged its members to make that final gift. From the mid-1880s on, annual reports, which were mailed to members, contained a “form of bequest” that offered the option to donate specifically to the Permanent Fund.<sup>125</sup> While, until the turn of the century, bequest law contained built-in limitations to the use of donations, Olivier Zunz has noted that “[i]n New England, a strong associational life encouraged donations of all sorts” and ensured that most bequests were allowed to stand, no matter how vaguely worded. This was especially the case not only for large donations to prestigious higher education institutions like Harvard University, but also for small gifts to the Sunday schools and various tract and mite societies which formed the Protestant benevolent “empire.”<sup>126</sup> In many ways, then, including members’ loyalty to the organization in death, the WEIU fit well within the rich benevolent ecosystem descended from the women’s associations of the 1810s and 1820s. The investment strategy developed by the organization in the late 1880s and 1890s should thus be seen as one of the further evolutions of incipient trends.

### 3.1.3 A Diversified Fund-Raising Strategy for the Twentieth Century

#### *The Consequences of Having a “Hall of their Own”*<sup>127</sup>

Over the course of a single decade, the 1880s, the Union relocated its headquarters three times. Each move to larger quarters, while welcome, “brought a great increase of expenses in new carpeting, furniture, heating, lighting, and the services of [assistants],” to perform the manual labor that the directors themselves preferred to avoid.<sup>128</sup>

The most significant of these moves was the last one. In the words of WEIU secretary Lucia Peabody, the year 1888-1889 was “in some respects one of the

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<sup>125</sup>WEIU, *1888 Report*, 52, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924064>.

<sup>126</sup>Olivier Zunz, *Philanthropy in America*, 13; Barbara Reeves-Ellington, Kathryn Kish Sklar and Connie A. Shemo, eds., *Competing Kingdoms: Women, Mission, Nation, and the American Protestant Empire, 1812-1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>127</sup>WEIU, *1889 Report*, 11.

<sup>128</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational & Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 3, 1881* (Boston: 157 Tremont Street, 1881), 15, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark\protect\protect\leavevmode@ifvmode\kern+.2222em\relax/13960/s2mg21svjbv>.

<sup>129</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government v. 1*, 1. 81-M237. Carton 1; WEIU, *1880 Report*, 12; WEIU, *1884 Report*, 16; WEIU, *1889 Report*, 11.

Table 3.1: Chronology of the WEIU's relocations.<sup>129</sup>

Year	Location of WEIU headquarters	Reason for the move
1877	4 Park Street, Boston (rent)	N/A
1880	157 Tremont Street, Boston (rent)	Need for more room.
1883	74 Boylston Street (rent)	Previous lease expired.
1889	97-98 Boylston Street, Boston (purchase)	Previous lease expired June 1888. WEIU seized opportunity to move to larger quarters.

most eventful ones in the history of the Union” so far.<sup>130</sup> This was the year when the Union purchased its Boylston Street building, thereby liberating itself in part from the pressing pecuniary demands that resulted from the lack of permanent headquarters. That pressure had been felt most acutely in June 1888, when the WEIU’s lease expired. The summer of 1888 was a time of reckoning, the occasion for the organization to assess their progress and determine what the next steps would be. The idea was floated to purchase two adjoining houses on Boylston Street, numbers 97 and 98, in order to accommodate the growth of the Union’s social programs.<sup>131</sup> As we have seen, three trustees were appointed to run a new Building Fund. Following a meeting on June 19, 1889, the Board of Trustees of the Permanent Fund suggested raising funds by issuing 4% bonds to the value of \$60,000, which would run for 15 years. The buildings were estimated to cost \$116,000 in themselves and an additional \$29,800 was necessary to alter them.<sup>132</sup> The partitions between them would then be taken down to better suit the WEIU’s needs. The plan had been approved by “shrewd business men,” an endorsement undoubtedly mentioned as a badge of honor.<sup>133</sup> In practice, there were a few bumps in the road. While purchasing the houses was easy, it proved harder to sell the entirety of the bonds. In addition, the women of the WEIU realized how limiting and how dispiriting the work of altering the layout of the building could be: “to realize one’s hopes and ideals when restricted in means and hampered by conditions which must be accepted, this is, indeed, a labor,” wrote the Union’s

<sup>130</sup>WEIU, 1889, Report, 11.

<sup>131</sup>WEIU, *1893 Report*, 20.

<sup>132</sup>WEIU, *1893 Report*, 20.

<sup>133</sup>Additional WEIU records, S. Agnes Donham, *History of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union*, 1955, 16, 32. 81-M237. Carton 1.

president shortly after the move was completed.<sup>134</sup> Choices had to be made: the employment bureau for domestic servants was given up for lack of room. Since it was not the only one of its kind in Boston, and it could be argued that the city's population was being adequately serviced already, the management of the Union decided to save room for the work of the Lecture and Class Committee. This is the kind of calculation that limited means forced a women's association to make.<sup>135</sup>

While to observers the growth of the WEIU may have looked constant and rather seamless,<sup>136</sup> to those who ran it every new financial year was a scramble—all the more so because the building was only the beginning of a new adventure, one in manipulating more complex financial products and in relying on a larger salaried workforce. Making good on the bonds and having the necessary repairs and alterations carried out would translate to greater expenses than renting, and the WEIU needed to step up its fundraising in order to “meet the obligations incurred and to maintain its credit and its high standing financially.”<sup>137</sup> While the agreement for the purchase of the houses provided a breakdown of the expected costs and of how they would be met—by a combination of renting, net income from the WEIU's various departments, and the payment of membership fees<sup>138</sup>—financial risks were a known threat. Accordingly, as a precaution, the Union put on a large fundraising entertainment, the “Fasching in Venice,” shortly before the sale proceeded; it brought in a welcome \$4,000.<sup>139</sup> In the years that followed, the Union put on a flurry of various musical and theatrical entertainments to try to match the greater demand for funds.<sup>140</sup>

The purchase of the building set a chain reaction into motion. Upkeep alone required an enlarged workforce. Managing that workforce and handling the sale of the bonds, in turn, led the organization to complexify its own internal structure. In the years following the move to 97 and 98 Boylston Street, the constitution and by-laws of the WEIU were amended. Four more directors and an assistant treasurer were added to the Board of Government and the right of regular members to

<sup>134</sup>WEIU, *1889 Report*, 12-13, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924015>.

<sup>135</sup>WEIU, *1889 Report*, 15, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924015>. The Lecture and Class Committee was in charge of organizing lecture courses on a variety of topics, from literature, history, and travel to current events and politics; it also ran the WEIU's roster of classes, both vocational and recreational.

<sup>136</sup>“A Year of Excellent Work,” *Boston Herald*, May 13, 1891, 5.

<sup>137</sup>WEIU, *1889 Report*, 13.

<sup>138</sup>Additional WEIU records. Kate Gannett Wells, Abby Morton Diaz, “Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 74 Boylston Street, Boston,” c1888, 2. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>139</sup>WEIU, *1889 Report*, 14.

<sup>140</sup>In 1892 alone, the WEIU put on four mid-sized to large entertainments: “Replenished the Coffers,” *Boston Herald*, April 6, 1892; “All Friends of Aunt Abby,” *Boston Herald*, February 11, 1892, 4; “Charity in Comedy,” *Boston Journal*, May 13, 1892.

vote at WEIU meetings was restricted for the first time. Only women who had been members for at least a year previous to any vote could take part in it.<sup>141</sup> The coming of the WEIU into greater resources led its directors to choose both greater organizational complexity and less democracy, as power was ever so slightly concentrated into the hands of the core group that controlled the purse strings. That this process was reflected in businessmen's associations over the same time period may suggest something of the class background of the WEIU women who pushed for these changes.<sup>142</sup>

### *Income Streams and Investments*

In the early years, the Union's main revenue stream was the payment of annual fees and higher grades of membership: this amounted to 45.8% of the "receipts" listed in the treasurer's report for 1879.<sup>143</sup> Until 1882, dues represented at least a third of the WEIU's treasury, if not more. Donations were a close second and on occasion outstripped the payment of membership dues, as in 1880, when they accounted for 40.8% of the previous year's receipts.<sup>144</sup> From 1877 to 1881 inclusive, membership dues and donations were the Union's main income streams. They were supplemented by small fundraising entertainments, the commissions on the sale of women's work through the Industrial Department, the fees employers paid the Union's Employment Bureau, and the creative use of the association's assets. Those could include the loan of chairs, rent of rooms, and, in 1880, the "rent of windows" on September 17, when the city celebrated the "two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the settlement of Boston."<sup>145</sup>

1882 was a turning point in the Union's finances. The two large bequests that the Union received, to the amount of \$2,000 and \$5,000, were respectively constituted into a "Fund" for the benefit of the legal aid department and invested into 3% US bonds. Together, they represented two thirds of the Union's income

<sup>141</sup>WEIU, *1893 Report*, 19.

<sup>142</sup>Robert Wiebe, *Businessmen and Reform: A Study of the Progressive Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 22-23.

<sup>143</sup>WEIU, *1879 Report*, 15, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2wncj5nkpr>.

<sup>144</sup>WEIU, *1880 Report*, 17, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2b1p08h29z>.

<sup>145</sup>WEIU, *1881 Report*, 21, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2mg21svjby>; "The City's Guests," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, September 17, 1880, 1. In 1880, the Boston City Council organized city-wide celebrations of the mythologized founding of the city by English Puritans in 1630. For a detailed account of the celebrations, which included a trades procession, military demonstrations, and elaborate theatrical "tableaux," see *Celebration of the Two Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of the Settlement of Boston, September 17, 1880* (Boston: Printed by order of the City Council, 1880), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89077230092>.

for 1881-1882, which itself had tripled compared to previous years.<sup>146</sup> These bonds were later earmarked for general purposes: some were transferred to the Permanent Fund, to yield interests on the principal as security, while others were “deposited for security of rent,” presumably at a savings bank, the New England Trust Co., where the Union had deposited cash.<sup>147</sup> Interestingly, the first treasurer’s reports to bear mention of the bonds, while they distinguished the capital investment from the interests that they yielded, still incorrectly placed both in the receipt column, one of the early limitations faced by this accounting method.

Bequests were by nature unexpected windfalls; the WEIU could not possibly expect to be gifted such a large amount of money on an annual basis. The realization of the possibilities created by the 1884 bequests may have motivated Mrs. Micah Dyer Jr. and others to suggest putting on large-scale entertainments like the 1885 Dickens Carnival. More importantly, there was a more reliable asset to have in the form of interest and dividends. As Anne Boylan has noted of antebellum groups, “the creation of permanent funds (or in some instances, more targeted building funds) to produce reliable yearly cash flows could be described as the one financial move that marked the most comfortable and long-lived organizations.”<sup>148</sup> This was the case of the WEIU, evidence that they also built on processes and practices that originated in the antebellum context.

Interestingly, far from being restricted to the typical US bonds, the pattern of the investments made by the Union’s trustees matches that of Boston’s Gilded Age financiers instead.<sup>149</sup> The majority of the Permanent Fund’s principal was consistently invested in Western railroad companies, for an annual yield of 4 to 6%. The Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad was initially a favored investment, but by 1895 the investment portfolio of the Permanent Fund was quite diversified. The bonds of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad were listed along those of the Fitchburg Railroad Company, Chicago, the Burlington and Quincy Railroad (both the general company and its Iowa division), the Old Colony Railroad Company, the Eastern Railroad, and the Kentucky and Memphis Railway and Bridge Company. The Perkins bequest, meanwhile, brought the WEIU shares in various textile firms, like those in the Pepperell Manufacturing Company or the Manchester Mills, which

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<sup>146</sup>WEIU, *1882 Report*, 24.

<sup>147</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1884* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1884), 19-20, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065321724>.

<sup>148</sup>Boylan, *Origins of Women’s Activism*, 178.

<sup>149</sup>Noam Maggor, *Brahmin Capitalism: Frontiers of Wealth and Poverty in America’s First Gilded Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 6-7.



were more typical investments for Boston bankers in the antebellum period.<sup>150</sup>

While early treasurers' reports included little else than two columns, one for "receipts" and one for "expenses,"<sup>151</sup> by 1900 they contained a thorough breakdown of all the income and expenses generated by each of the Union's departments, neatly labeled. It had become possible for the Union's directors to know exactly where the money was going. This was all the more important as, overall, the Union barely broke even. Earlier, in 1890, its directors had briefly opened a "mending bureau"—where clients could have articles of clothing mended for a small fee—in hopes that it would contribute both to community welfare and to the Union's finances.<sup>152</sup> While the Food Department, the Handiwork Department, the lunch room and the tea room as well as the classes and lectures all brought in more money than they had required, this was not the case of the rest of the WEIU's services, which included its employment bureaus, legal aid program, "School of Housekeeping," hygiene lectures, and the more marginal ethics and visiting committees.<sup>153</sup> The press often described the WEIU as a thriving organization, but what did that mean? Minimizing both the recourse to appeals for money and the gap between expenses and receipts was a start. Susan Yohn has analyzed what she calls the "gendering of the very idea of profit,"<sup>154</sup> a process at work in the 1870s and 1880s. While financial gains and returns for investment were more readily associated with men, "profit" for women was more closely associated not with building capital, but with spending it to improve the collective well-being. As a result, "[w]omen were more comfortably relegated (and relegated themselves) to the arena of generating social, rather than monetary profit."<sup>155</sup> While managing a nonprofit was entrepreneurship, even successful women's associations were not able to alter these longstanding cultural associations.

Unlike the Protestant missions studied by Susan Yohn,<sup>156</sup> in the 1890s and

<sup>150</sup>WEIU, *1884 Report*, 20; Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1885* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1885), 20, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923629>; Maggor, *Brahmin Capitalism*, 20-21.

<sup>151</sup>WEIU, *1879 Report*, 17, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2b1p08h29z>.

<sup>152</sup>WEIU, *1890 Report*, 33-34.

<sup>153</sup>Additional WEIU records. Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *The Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., 1899-1900* (Cambridge: The Co-operative Press, 1900), 15-20. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>154</sup>Susan M. Yohn, "You Can't Share Babies with Bonds: How Americans Think about Women Making Money," *Iris* 40 (April 2000), ProQuest, <https://proquest.com/magazines/you-cant-share-babies-with-bonds-how-americans/docview/214671495/se-2>, n.p.

<sup>155</sup>Yohn, "You Can't Share Babies with Bonds," n.p.

<sup>156</sup>Susan M. Yohn, "Let Christian Women Set the Example in Their Own Gifts: The 'Business' of Protestant Women's Organizations," in *Women and Twentieth-Century Protestantism*, edited

onward WEIU directors felt comfortable publicizing their successes; in that respect, they are slightly atypical. One way that they escaped social stigma was through the visibility of their foodstuffs business, at the apex of the “commercial domesticity” peddled by small female proprietors—hospitality, restauration, laundry services that replicated the care work usually provided by women to their male kin.<sup>157</sup> In some respect, the WEIU was a little too successful: by World War I the public was convinced that the WEIU was its Food Sales Room and its restaurants, that they were money-making enterprises (which they were), and that the net profits from these activists were enough to meet the organization’s other needs (they were not). Accordingly, the directors had to take to the press to explain why still needed support.<sup>158</sup> As a nonprofit, they ran social programs that did not bring in any money, but rather generated recurring expenses.

Another reason why the WEIU stood apart from other examples of women’s philanthropy was that its representatives held sincere beliefs about the simultaneously individual and collective progress that would result from mastering better management techniques. In 1894, Mary Morton Kehew, the Union’s president, defending the association’s annual figures, wrote to members that “[the] [Finance] committee [was] prepared to assert that the figures which [were] presented to [them] as the result of the year’s work in the various departments [told] of their prosperity, not always through increased receipts, sometimes, indeed, through increased expenditure, but yet they [did] tell of a prosperity that counts efficient work and growth in accurate business methods as a more valuable contribution than dollars and cents toward a permanent basis on which to build the future.”<sup>159</sup> To Mary Morton Kehew, whose punctuality was legendary,<sup>160</sup> system, order, and sound business sense were in themselves a precious capital to possess. To the Union’s membership, she made the case that receipts and good financial returns were secondary to the skill and method necessary to secure them. The former were not the only, or

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by Virginia Brereton and Margaret Brendoth (Urbana: University of Illinois, 2002), 213-235.

<sup>157</sup>According to Edith Sparks, it was in the 1880s that female business ownership reached its apex in large cities like San Francisco, her case study. Edith Sparks, *Capital Intentions: Female Proprietors in San Francisco, 1850-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 13-14.

<sup>158</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Industrial Union Needs Public Help,” *Boston Post*, May 19, 1914. M-89; “Women’s Union Begins Week of Celebration,” May 19, 1914. M-89.

<sup>159</sup>WEIU, *1894 Report*, 21, HathiTrust, [hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923868](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923868). Emphasis mine.

<sup>160</sup>In one of the statements read at her memorial service, one of her collaborators noted that, when he once was one minute late to an appointment he had with her, she sternly motioned at the clock and pointed it out to him. This was the anecdote he chose to illustrate the kind of manager she was. Additional WEIU records, Address by Mr. Charles F. F. Campbell, Superintendent, Ohio State School for the Blind, in “In Memoriam: Mary Morton Kehew.” 1918. 81-M237. Carton 1.

even the best, indicator of the long-term health and success of the organization, insofar as improved accounting systems, to take one example, were investments for the future that might prove expensive to implement in the short-term, but were designed to guarantee long-term success.

Keeping that in mind, it makes more sense, then, to contrast rather than to oppose a reform association like the WEIU and white Protestant missions. In the 1890s, the “Educational and Industrial Union,” by virtue of its founders’ interest in improving women’s ability to generate money for themselves or others, evolved into a training ground for shrewd administrators. Helen Barrett Montgomery (1861-1934) was president of the Rochester WEIU from 1893 to 1911. She would later go on to head the Woman’s American Baptist Foreign Mission Society, where she was an advocate of putting women, and not men, in charge of spending the money that they had raised. To her, this was a crucial part of their education to financial responsibility. As she herself might have been aware, her earlier career as head of a Women’s Union had imparted her with valuable management experience.<sup>161</sup>

### 3.2 Reorganization and “Business Methods”

As early as 1881, second president Abby Morton Diaz declared at a public WEIU meeting that “this [was] a business organization, and should be conducted on business principles.”<sup>162</sup> Mary Morton Kehew succeeded Diaz when the latter resigned in 1892.<sup>163</sup> She brought to the table a formidable work ethic, a willingness to part from the moral framework of her predecessors, and, most of all, a yearning for “progress.” This all-encompassing impulse stemmed from the Progressive view of man as infinitely perfectible. Reformers defined their own mission as perfecting more efficient political and economic systems that could provide Americans with better educational, working, and living standards. Part of the business of politics, from that perspective, was to be the province of administrative experts—which, following a process of state building, it did become.<sup>164</sup> Mary Morton Kehew herself

<sup>161</sup>Kendal Mobley, *Helen Barrett Montgomery, 1861-1910: From Progressivism and Woman’s Emancipation to Global Mission*, PhD thesis, Boston University School of Theology, 2004, 250, 407. See also 291: “Although [Helen Montgomery Barrett’s] later career as a leader of the ecumenical woman’s missionary movement overshadowed her career as a municipal housekeeper in Rochester, the second phase of her career would not have been possible without the early experience of leadership in Rochester.”

<sup>162</sup>“Public Meeting of the Women’s Union,” *Woman’s Journal* 12, no. 10 (March 5, 1881), 80.

<sup>163</sup>“New Presiding Officer,” *Home Hints and Happenings*, *Boston Herald*, February 4, 1892, 5.

<sup>164</sup>On the idea of perfectibility as it was defended by reformers, see James Trent’s biography of Julia Ward Howe’s husband, Samuel G. Howe. James W. Trent, *The Manliest Man: Samuel*

reportedly “frequently maintained” that administration by voluntary committees occasioned “a great loss of time and that it was by no means efficient or expert.”<sup>165</sup> It was under her leadership, into the first year of her presidency, that a regular business meeting could be followed by a discussion of “[w]hat improvement in method [was] possible for the woman’s exchange.”<sup>166</sup> Over the first few decades of the Union’s existence, its leadership had very gradually transposed business methods in associative life, but it was after 1892, under Mary Morton Kehew’s leadership, that rationalization and systematization truly picked up steam, eventually culminating in the reorganization which took place between 1902 and 1905. In this section, I examine how WEIU women increasingly strove to use the resources that they had painstakingly accumulated in a more “businesslike” manner, in a drive that paralleled the transition from antebellum alms-giving to modern scientific philanthropy.<sup>167</sup>

### 3.2.1 Defining “Businesslike”

In the 1880s and 1890s, as press portrayals of wage-earning and entrepreneurial women reflected greater tolerance, even descriptions of the domestic experience were liable to be couched in the language of commercialism. In 1886, to ring in the New Year, a journalist encouraged wives and mothers to be “sensible, practical business women” in a companion to a piece on the home business of making and selling fruit preserves. By that, the reporter meant “hav[ing] some systematized method of work, and know[ing] how to plan and provide for their means”—“nothing [would] serve [mothers] better than to do like the successful business man,

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*G. Howe and the Contours of Nineteenth-Century American Reform* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 6-8. Stephen Skowronek has described the state building of the late nineteenth century as the “turn away from a state organization that presumed the absence of extensive institutional controls at the national level toward a state organized around national administrative capacities.” Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 4.

<sup>165</sup>Additional WEIU records, Address by President Henry Lefavour of Simmons College, in “In Memoriam: Mary Morton Kehew.” 1918. 81-M237. Carton 1. The tension between calls for more direct democracy and reverence for expert authority was a quintessentially Progressive motif.

<sup>166</sup>Advertisement. “The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Boston Herald*, October 24, 1892, 2.

<sup>167</sup>Zunz, *Philanthropy in the United States*, 2. The “robber barons” who poured their millions in philanthropy heralded a new conception of philanthropy as “yet another financial investment” and innovated insofar as they “use[d] the skills they had acquired in business to minimize the risk of their speculations, and to vastly enlarge the scope of their charitable giving.”

take frequent inventories of ‘supplies’ on hand [...]”<sup>168</sup> At the WEIU, systematizing was similarly the order of the day in the 1890s, when the Board of Government started to embrace quantification as a means to better planning. It was to become one of the Union’s distinguishing features in the charitable ecosystem, as in 1909 it was deemed “the best money earner” of all the social betterment organizations in Boston, thanks to its pursuit of self-support.<sup>169</sup>

### *Following in the Footsteps of the New England Kitchen*

It was not until 1907 that the WEIU would take over Ellen H. Richards’s “New England Kitchen,” but the presence of “The Story of the New England Kitchen” in the archives of the association gives a measure of the interest with which Union women observed the rise of the pioneering experimental kitchen.<sup>170</sup> It was in fact reported to them almost in real time: barely six weeks after the beginning of the experiment “[o]ne of the managers of the laudable enterprise, Mrs. Mary Hinman Abel, gave a very interesting lecture before the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union.” It was part of a free course on “hygienic and economic topics” given by the Union’s Committee of Hygiene,<sup>171</sup> and one of several lectures that Abel gave at the WEIU that winter.<sup>172</sup> Consequently, the lessons that Ellen Richards and her close collaborator Mary Hinman Abel drew from the first few months of their operations can be useful to contextualize the WEIU’s changing management and accounting practices, at the same moment in time, in the same city, and in the same reformist circles.

One of the first things we must comment upon, in that respect, is what Ellen Richards herself found most remarkable about the NEK. In her preface to the short volume, a close second to the sheer amount of scientific information that had been gathered was “the short time which [had] sufficed to put the enterprise on a business basis.”<sup>173</sup> The renowned chemist was interested in determining whether the work could be made to pay; plans to open an “eating-room” as an alternative to the saloon depended upon it.<sup>174</sup>

<sup>168</sup> “A New Year’s Letter to Wives and Mothers, Full of Good Advice,” *Woman’s Kingdom, Daily Inter Ocean*, January 2, 1886, 11.

<sup>169</sup> “What Women Are Doing for Women,” *Sunday Herald*, August 22, 1909, 3.

<sup>170</sup> Additional WEIU records, Mary Hinman Abel, *The Story of the New England Kitchen, part I, 1890*, 1890. 81-M237. Carton 8.

<sup>171</sup> “Mrs. Hinman Abel’s Lecture,” *Boston Herald*, February 28, 1890, 4.

<sup>172</sup> “Faults of American Cookery,” *Boston Herald*, March 28, 1890, 3.

<sup>173</sup> Abel, *Story of the New England Kitchen*, 3.

<sup>174</sup> Abel, *Story of the New England Kitchen*, 4-5. Temperance activists, at the time, widely shared the belief that working-class men could be steered towards sobriety if they were fed nutritious foods and, conversely, that it was the lack of suitable dinner options which con-

In the main body of the volume, Mary Hinman Abel delved into the difficulties that the domestic scientists had to face, most of which had to do with “obtain[ing] competent service,” deciding what to sell—taking into account both potential demand and the competition from neighborhood eateries—and most importantly at what cost. They had originally thought of allocating one third of the selling price to the cost of materials, one third to service, and the remaining third “for other expenses.” They quickly learned that this was far from a realistic expectation, because they had not built into the price the fluctuation in the costs of ingredients, nor that of the leftover food that was sure to result from their operations. Service, too, was twice as expensive as had been projected.<sup>175</sup> Throughout the process of refining their methods, Abel and Richards did not allow themselves to interview their patrons, “nor [do] anything inconsistent with a regular place of business,”<sup>176</sup> because the experiment seemed to have also been one in determining true and tested methods for running a business.

In the 1890s, the WEIU would face the same challenges as these domestic scientists: securing a skilled workforce and managing it, anticipating trends in customer demand, accounting, setting prices, and, unlike the women of the NEK—who relied on word-of-mouth<sup>177</sup>—figuring out how to think strategically about advertising.

### *The WEIU’s Needs for and Uses of Advertising*

From the beginning, the women of the WEIU considered advertising carefully as one factor which could make or break the momentum toward greater public support. If Boston’s well-to-do did not know about the Union, they would never contribute any money towards the support of its social programs. Because the women who had founded the Union were female physicians of middling means, older, formerly abolitionist women, and the wives of young professionals, they did not expect to operate exclusively through personal channels, but rather envisioned the city’s inhabitants as a collective body that they needed to reach. Accordingly, one of the earliest donations received by the Union, the comparatively large sum of \$25, was earmarked for “advertising or any other purpose [the Board of Government]

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tributed to intemperance. Harvey Levenstein, *Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 49. Discussions of temperance “coffee houses” can be found in *Lend a Hand* 2, no. 3 (March 1887): 346, HathiTrust, [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b359083](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b359083); “There has sprung up, almost simultaneously, in several large cities, an interest in coffee houses and coffee palaces, as counter-attractions to the liquor saloons.”

<sup>175</sup>Abel, *Story of the New England Kitchen*, 19-21.

<sup>176</sup>Abel, *Story of the New England Kitchen*, 13.

<sup>177</sup>Abel, *Story of the New England Kitchen*, 11.

thought best.”<sup>178</sup> Advertising was a way to spread awareness of certain social issues to which the Union was offering remedial action. This was especially the case of the WEIU’s campaign against fraudulent advertising, which made most visible the importance of being a known quantity, projecting a voice, and being heard over others. Purporting to protect women from fraudulent job offers, the WEIU took on fighting advertising with more advertising. The campaign truly picked up steam when, starting in 1884, it was decided that the Union’s Industrial and Employment Committees would have a regular weekly notice in Boston’s main papers, the *Herald* and *Transcript*.<sup>179</sup>

For the Industrial Committee in particular, advertising was a lifeblood. It was used by the WEIU as any regular trade concern would have: as a means to attract paying customers. In the first months of the shop’s existence, with no means of advertising, “quarters too obscure to attract notice, too small to make any display of goods,” the women who ran it struggled on until December 1878. Forced to reckon with the consequences of obscurity, they resolved to shift gears and to take inspiration from the New York Woman’s Exchange. They would save a small sum for new showcases and for notices to be printed at regular intervals in local papers. That money “had its immediate effect”: in less than two months, customers bought as much bread and cake as homemakers were putting up for sale, and there was a noticeable increase in the number of orders for fancy work, hand-made underwear, and children’s clothing.<sup>180</sup> From then on, the committee in charge of the Exchange would not stop making repeated pleas for larger appropriations. A year later, one woman came to report for the Industrial Committee and successfully argued before the Board of Government that the Committee could not carry on their work without some funds with which to advertise and purchase yet a new showcase.<sup>181</sup> The benefits to the Union were explicitly noted by the chairwoman of the Union’s Printing Committee, which had been created in 1881 to supervise the printing and mailing of circulars to “leading magazines and newspapers” as well as the “most influential ladies of this city.” Speaking from experience, she concluded that advertising “[paid] for [them] as well as for business men,” because it “[had]

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<sup>178</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of Board of Government*, v. 1, November 26, 1877, 21. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>179</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of Board of Government*, v. 3, December 2, 1884. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>180</sup>Additional WEIU records, Report of the Committee of Industries, 1880, 1-2. 81-M237. Carton 8.

<sup>181</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of Board of Government*, v. 1, December 2, 1879, 127. 81-M237. Carton 2.

brought [them] before the public.”<sup>182</sup>

The differentiated uses to which the WEIU put advertising explain the different forms that it took in and around Boston. Newspaper circulars and ads were on a par with public meetings; they aimed first at reaching an idealized, implicitly middle-class “public” that could be tapped for donations in kind, time, and money,<sup>183</sup> and only second at reaching out to rural and urban homemakers whom the Union could steer away from malicious homework schemes, and towards its own shops. General meetings called for the organization of large entertainments were given the most exposure. In 1886, in preparation for its Kirmess, the Board of Government voted to send notices to all of Boston’s newspapers, not simply the *Transcript* and *Herald*.<sup>184</sup> To win the hearts of Boston’s charitably-minded middle class, WEIU emphasized their good financial standing and lack of debt. Most of all, as was appreciatively noted by journalists, they avoided dealing in sentimental language and tropes.<sup>185</sup> By the early 1900s, the association had grown bolder and was considering targeting lawyers specifically, making them aware of the possibility for their clients to make the Union their beneficiaries.<sup>186</sup>

Meanwhile, in order to visibly mark the building that they occupied as female space, the managers put up a sign and placards outside of the building, as well as notices in stations and in commercial establishments with a large female workforce, like department stores.<sup>187</sup> These efforts reveal the varieties of women to whom the Union sought to reach out—the in-bound traveler from outside the city, whether the suburban wife on a shopping trip, or the farmer’s daughter in search of a job; the wage-working commuter, whether in transit or at her workplace; and, overall, any woman in the city at large who might need assistance. That form of advertising may have been more common than we would think. In the early 1880s, Philadelphia’s “Working Women’s Institute,” which earned comparisons with Boston’s WEIU, similarly advertised its evening classes at horse-car stations, the rooms of the “Christian Association” (the YWCA?) and “in the great shops.” This was a strategy calculated to attract certain categories of women, in their case

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<sup>182</sup>WEIU, *1882 Report*, 51.

<sup>183</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of Board of Government*, v. 1, February 17, 1880, 146. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>184</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, February 15, 1887, 9. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>185</sup>“Talk of the Day,” *Boston Journal*, March 14, 1892; *Boston Herald*, March 6, 1892, 14; “A Deserving Appeal,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, March 14, 1892, 4.

<sup>186</sup>Additional WEIU records. *Minutes of Board of Government*, v. 9, December 20, 1904, 4. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>187</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of Board of Government*, v. 9, October 17, 1905, 3. 81-M237. Carton 2.



working-class women—“shop girls, milliners, domestic servants, dressmakers, cigar rollers, workers in artificial flowers, [and] mill hands.”<sup>188</sup> Throughout the 1880s and 1890s, the Union, like similar organizations in other large northeastern cities, used placards in strategically-chosen public locations to build a reputation. There is anecdotal evidence that these markers of their existence worked as intended. In 1892, a “poor woman in distress,” newly widowed and destitute, managed to make her way to the Union’s Boylston Street headquarters thanks to one of its placards. The Union was then able to locate out of state relatives and send her on her way to reach them.<sup>189</sup> The press account of this incident itself was both a testament to the success of the Union’s outreach strategy, and further publicity of a kind.

Over time, the association would find ways to engage more forcefully with its public image. In 1905, the WEIU hired an advertising agent, Helen M. Hill, and tasked her with coming up with an outline for an integrated “publicity campaign.”<sup>190</sup> By the middle of the twentieth century, the reputation of the Union’s shops and restaurants was so well established that managers no longer felt a need for advertising for them specifically, but the association continued to issue pamphlets and circulars to describe its activities, solicit support, and add to its membership rolls.<sup>191</sup> Throughout the 1910s, the WEIU evolved the older practice of having press releases strategically sent to Boston’s papers. It became much more systematic, and national publications came under consideration as well. Topics and titles would be researched, authors for the promotional pieces found, and newspapers and magazines solicited. In 1920, the WEIU put together a list of sympathetic publications, with the kind of articles that they accepted; of the *Ladies Home Journal*, for instance, it was noted that they had a “Women in Business” department.<sup>192</sup> Advertising, in a way, had become one more routine task to fulfill.

### ***Bookkeeping, Accounting, and Price-Setting***

The creation of the WEIU in the late 1870s took place roughly at the same time as

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<sup>188</sup>“Brain Work for Hand Workers,” *Boston Journal*, September 21, 1882. According to the press, the chief difference between the Working Woman Institute and the WEIU was that while the former “[aimed] to benefit women of the poorer class, the WEIU ignore[d] class boundaries and invite[d] all women to join in the entertainments.”

<sup>189</sup>“An Unfortunate Helped.” Home Hints and Happenings, *Boston Herald*, February 9, 1892, 5.

<sup>190</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 9, February 7, 1905, 2-3. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>191</sup>Additional WEIU records, Copy of “A Unique Industrial Enterprise,” Frank Prendergast, INDUSTRY, February 1949. 81-M237. Carton 8. For examples of such pamphlets, see carton 8 in the WEIU’s additional records in particular.

<sup>192</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Potential Markets,” c1920; “Possible Writers—Formerly on The Bostonian.” 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 153.

the modern American office was invented, in the throes of a revolution in business life. Prior to industrialization, the majority of American businesses were small-to medium-sized concerns subject to personal supervision. Proprietors dealt with limited amounts of data and did so directly: they could get away with keeping similarly limited records, often reduced to a simple balance sheet, which a single bookkeeper/accountant could produce.<sup>193</sup> Prior to the 1870s, then, there was arguably but a slight difference between the records of small businesses and those of women’s nonprofits. Women’s charitable associations could expect to run a school, an orphanage, or a “home” for needy women, institutions comparable in size and complexity with most proprietorships, save the largest.

As Alfred Chandler Jr. has shown in his seminal work on what he called the “managerial revolution in American business,” the advent of the modern corporation was synonymous with an explosion in the quantity of data that had to be gathered, analyzed, and reviewed, especially insofar as stockholders had to be catered to. This “revolution” was matched by an explosion in the number of office workers and clerks. The railroad corporations, whose offices were geographically scattered, and which shifted through large amounts of information, pioneered many of the financial practices later embraced by the modern office.<sup>194</sup> Financial statements of the kind first produced by Franklin Haven in 1891 on behalf of the Trustees of the Union’s Permanent Fund became one of the most visible signs of the circulation of information within the corporate office (see figure 3.3).<sup>195</sup>

It was also part of the decade-long process of reconfiguring the WEIU’s finances, following the vague malaise that gripped its leadership. In October 1894, the issue was finally explicitly raised—the “difficulties and complications in the management of the financial affairs of the Union,” caused by the multiplication of the committees and programs, demanded “some plan for simplifying and unifying the book-keeping of the Union.”<sup>196</sup> Until then, the committees had enjoyed great financial independence. They still would, but Mary Morton Kehew endeavored to make them more answerable to the Board of Government, notably through “Conferences of Committees” at which management could more easily get word of the doings of directors.<sup>197</sup> The authority of the Board of Govern-

<sup>193</sup>Charles W. Wootton and Barbara E. Kemmerer, “The Changing Genderization of Book-keeping in the United States, 1870-1930,” *Business History Review* 70, no. 4 (Winter 1996), 547-548.

<sup>194</sup>Alfred D. Chandler Jr., *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977).

<sup>195</sup>WEIU, *1891 Report*, 15.

<sup>196</sup>WEIU, *1894 Report*, 23.

<sup>197</sup>At one such conference, it was for instance possible for the Union’s legal counsel and outside

Figure 3.1: Treasurer's report for 1878-1879.

<i>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, in account with MRS. S. E. EATON, Treasurer.</i>	
By CASH RECEIVED:—	
For Annual Fees . . . . .	\$443.00
“ Life Memberships . . . . .	125.00
“ Honorary “ . . . . .	5.00
“ Donations . . . . .	310.80
“ Entertainments . . . . .	198.35
“ Lectures and Classes . . . . .	51.05
“ Loan of Chairs . . . . .	24.15
“ Rent of Room . . . . .	20.00
From Employment Department . . . . .	14.00
“ Industrial “ . . . . .	21.56
“ Annual Supper . . . . .	12.60
“ Sale of Papers . . . . .	3.00
For Advertising in Desk in Reading Room . . . . .	15.90
Cash in Treasury May 1st, 1878 . . . . .	86.93
Total . . . . .	<u>\$1340.34</u>
By CASH PAID:—	
For Rent . . . . .	\$612.00
“ Services . . . . .	155.42
“ Fuel . . . . .	35.95
“ Gas . . . . .	22.52
“ Printing and Advertising . . . . .	72.82
“ Stamps and Postals . . . . .	33.18
“ Annual Supper . . . . .	19.86
“ Stationery . . . . .	3.45
“ 50 copies Woman's Journal . . . . .	3.00
“ Insurance on Furniture and Books . . . . .	4.50
“ Rent of Piano . . . . .	32.00
“ Sundries . . . . .	20.84
“ Wesleyan Hall, for Entertainment . . . . .	13.75
“ Ventilator for Window . . . . .	5.00
To Paper Carrier . . . . .	3.66
Total . . . . .	<u>\$1037.95</u>
Balance . . . . .	302.39

Source: WEIU, 1879 Report, 15.

Figure 3.2: First page of treasurer's report for 1898-1899.

**REPORT OF HELEN HARRINGTON, TREASURER,**

FOR ELEVEN MONTHS ENDING MARCH 31, 1899.

**Food Department.**

Sales for eleven months ending March 31, 1899 . . . . .	\$31,487.05
Stock on hand of Jelly at close of the year, taken at cost . . . . .	181.10
	<u>\$31,668.15</u>
Cost.	
Amount paid to Consignors of Food, etc. . . . .	\$24,392.11
Amount paid for Jelly, etc., purchased . . . . .	1,478.11
	<u>\$25,870.22</u>
Stock of Jelly on hand at the beginning of year . . . . .	118.30
	<u>\$25,988.52</u>
Unpaid bills:	
Amount due consignors at close of the present period, March 31, '99 . . . . .	\$1087.81
Amount due consignors May 1, '98 . . . . .	586.53
Add excess of unpaid bills this year . . . . .	501.28
Total cost . . . . .	<u>26,489.80</u>
Gross profit . . . . .	<u>\$5,178.35</u>
Add interest on Deposits in Bank . . . . .	35.54
	<u>\$5,213.89</u>
Deduct allowance for goods delivered on false order . . . . .	2.56
	<u>\$5,210.93</u>

**EXPENSES OF CARRYING ON THIS DEPARTMENT.**

Salaries . . . . .	\$3,484.22
Supplies and postage . . . . .	537.07
Teaming . . . . .	698.00
	<u>4,719.29</u>
Net gain for eleven months . . . . .	<u>\$491.64</u>

Source: WEIU, 1899 Report, 15.

Figure 3.3: Financial statement of the Trustees of the Permanent Fund, 1891.

**FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF THE TRUSTEES OF  
THE PERMANENT FUND.**

FOR THE YEAR ENDING MAY 1, 1891.

Received from income, . . . . .	\$843 50
Paid to Hon. H. H. Sprague, Treasurer of Building Trustees, . . . . .	\$843 50

The Permanent Funds are invested in the following securities :

4 bonds C., B. & Q. 4 per cent., due 1919, . . . . .	\$4,000 00
6 “ C., B. & N. 5 per cent. 1st mortgage. due 1926, . . . . .	6,000 00
2 “ C., B. & Q. 4 per cent., due 1922, . . . . .	2,000 00
1 “ Eastern R. R. 6 per cent., due 1906, . . . . .	1,000 00
\$4,321.87 Atch., Top. & Santa Fé 4 per cent. gold bonds and scrip, <i>a</i> 84, . . . . .	3,630 00
\$2,600 Atch., Top. & Santa Fé income bonds and scrip, <i>a</i> 58, . . . . .	1,508 00
Deposit in Savings Bank, . . . . .	193 55

KATE GANNETT WELLS,  
*Chairman of Trustees.*

FRANKLIN HAVEN, JR., *Treasurer.*

Source: WEIU, *1891 Report*, 15.

ment grew more complete as a new, formal, internal communication hierarchy was enacted. With surprisingly little delay, the women of the WEIU adopted the tenets of the new “systematic management,” which entailed the greater ability to coordinate flows of written information “up, down, and across the hierarchy,” thanks to which a central decision-making body could strengthen its authority and legitimacy. As JoAnne Yates has shown, in the manufacturing firms where these methods and their underlying philosophy were pioneered in the 1880s, better control—and thereby increased profitability—was what their originators sought to achieve.<sup>198</sup> At the WEIU, at another level, beyond increased coordination and simplification of the organization’s internal communication systems, each committee also evolved standardizing procedures specific to their activities. In 1902, for instance, consignors were attributed individual numbers in order to simplify the shops’ record-keeping, and a card catalogue system was introduced in place of a more arcane method of keeping the accounts. That same year, the Employment Bureau boasted that “[t]he machinery of [its] office [was] now of the most modern

speakers from other organizations to address the Union’s directors as a group. WEIU records, “Conference of Committees,” *Union News Items*, no. 1 (April 1911): 1. Box 4, folder 31.

<sup>198</sup>JoAnne Yates, *Control Through Communication: The Rise of System in American Management* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1989), xvii; 10.

sort,” in part thanks to its “complete system of card-cataloguing.”<sup>199</sup> In that part of the WEIU’s work, the realignment of charity and business also meant abolishing the employer’s fee, in order to follow the industry practice.<sup>200</sup>

To a degree, the growth of the WEIU as an organization mirrored many of the developments taking place in offices, like the process of separating duties as well as distinguishing management from ownership. Between 1820 and 1860, bookkeeping methods became more precise and elaborate; they were geared specifically toward determining and maximizing the profitability of the business. Simultaneously, following a “realignment” of the relationship between work and proprietorship, proprietors increasingly tended to eschew manual work. The artisan-proprietor of the eighteenth-century city evolved into the white collar entrepreneur.<sup>201</sup> For the WEIU, the shift toward specialization was heralded by the creation of a “Business Committee” in 1905, later renamed “Executive Committee.” It was to deal with “the details of the business departments”; that way, the Board of Government and even the Financial Committee were relieved from the day-to-day management of the shops and restaurants.<sup>202</sup> The responsibilities of the Board of Government became much more general and centered on charting a course for the development of the Union’s social programs in response to a scientific analysis of municipal needs. As the annual report for 1908 explained, “[t]he Board of Government ha[d] an administrative function and determine[d] policies, but all executive detail [was] delegated to the Executive Committee.”<sup>203</sup>

Between 1905 and 1918, the pace at which ideas about order, system, and efficiency penetrated even women’s organizations accelerated. More broadly, systematic management entered the public discourse, albeit in a diluted form. Business system was offered up as a solution to any individual or group looking to achieve the much lauded “efficiency.”<sup>204</sup> At Simmons College, a vocational college for women founded in Boston in 1903 and a close institutional collaborator of the WEIU, all students were encouraged to peruse Parke Schoch and Murray Gross’s

<sup>199</sup>WEIU records, “History of the Domestic Reform League,” undated, c1902?, 2. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>200</sup>WEIU, *1902 Report*, 41-43.

<sup>201</sup>Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 70-83.

<sup>202</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *A Report of Progress Made in the Year 1905, Being the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston: Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 1905), 17, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239272>.

<sup>203</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston, 1908), 7, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433075991970>.

<sup>204</sup>Yates, *Control Through Communication*, 14-15.

1918 *Elements of Business*, a treatise on “business methods for laymen,” addressed as much to the housewife as to the prospective business owner—irrespective of gender.<sup>205</sup> This was not incidental: the authors argued that personal orderliness was the necessary precondition for efficiency “in the administration of public affairs, of commercial enterprises, [and] of professional interests.”<sup>206</sup> In their minds, the gulf that separated these areas from personal record-keeping had been greatly reduced, so that the value of system could be preached to the public at large.

By then, the Union’s special “Administrative Department,” comprised of a financial, secretarial and “house” divisions, centralized information and steered the course of the organization’s work, while the shops themselves were administered by a complex, densely-woven hierarchy of directors and assistant directors. In 1913 the New England Kitchen alone, for instance, had its own director, Mary H. Moran, as well as two assistant directors, Margaret Gifford and Agnes V. O’Leary, and a bakery superintendent, Anne Jenness.<sup>207</sup> Unlike the women who would have attended Mary Hinman Abel’s conference about the very same NEK when it was then in its infancy, they had clearly delineated duties and fixed hours of work, as well as more explicit titles modeled after those in for-profit establishments: in 1908, Lena S. Lincoln, heretofore superintendent of the Union’s building, was given the title of “purchasing agent.”<sup>208</sup> Most significant, however, was the fact that they were employees of the Union rather than volunteers. With the Union’s growth as an administrative entity came a salaried workforce, hierarchically related to, but separate from, the upper echelons of decision-making.

### 3.2.2 From a Volunteer to a Hired Workforce

The early WEIU was a typical volunteer endeavor, whose members put in hours of free labor in the service of the leaders’ vision. Starting in November 1877, the members of the reception committee arranged to take shifts during the week, half a day at a time, in order to keep the rooms open and welcome visitors.<sup>209</sup> They

<sup>205</sup>In Our Library. “Business Methods for Laymen,” *Simmons College Review* 2, no. 1 (November 1919), 18, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433074829395>; Parker Schoch and Murray Gross, *Elements of Business* (Boston: American Book Company, 1918), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044102785995>.

<sup>206</sup>Schoch and Gross, *Elements of Business*, 3.

<sup>207</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union for the Year 1912-1913* (Boston, 1914), 9, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239462>.

<sup>208</sup>WEIU, *1908 Report*, 8.

<sup>209</sup>WEIU, *1879 Report*, 16.

had considered hiring someone to do so, but could not afford it.<sup>210</sup> Similarly, from the organization's foundation and into the late 1880s volunteers covered shifts in the Union's shops and later restaurants, as waitresses and cashiers.<sup>211</sup> Time and labor voluntarily given enabled the association to get off the ground but eventually proved a limiting factor in the development of its activities. As soon as the WEIU started expanding, the idea of delegating at least part of the work to hired workers was entertained. This went against prevailing attitudes towards women's charitable work, as reflected in the Union's own reports. Keeping the rooms open and clean were "services, which [they] fe[lt], too, ought to be voluntary and spring from genuine interest in the objects proposed."<sup>212</sup>

This conflicted back-and-forth mirrored the conversation which was happening in suffragist organizations. As Joan Marie Johnson has noted in discussing later donations to the National American Woman Suffrage Association, "[o]ne of the most important items the new large donations [of the 1910s] paid for was salaries, which Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony had identified as the major expense (along with publicity) of the movement as early as the 1860s."<sup>213</sup> Paying for a cadre of traveling organizers conflicted with the volunteer ideal—women were expected never to think of their own gain, even when self-support was at stake—but Stanton and Anthony had deemed salaried workers to be a necessity. It was in 1882, three years into the operation of the Industrial Department, that its first paid employee, a superintendent, was added to the Union's payrolls—but, as in the case of other departments, all the sales and most of the clerical work were conducted by volunteer WEIU members.

Becoming its own landlord meant, for the Union, an acceleration of the transition towards a hired workforce.<sup>214</sup> Many changes took the form of incremental tweaks. Such was the case for the rules that governed the hiring process and the management of the association's employees. In the late 1870s and through the 1880s, raises were suggested in a piecemeal fashion; individual cases were discussed in meetings of the Board of Government, but there was no systematic attempt to determine neither overarching rules nor a pay scale. When concern was raised over the overtime of "the man" hired by the Industrial Committee, the matter was not

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<sup>210</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 1, November 6, 1877, 15-16. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>211</sup>Mary Morton Kehew herself reportedly volunteered as a waitress in the early days of the Union's first lunch room. Additional WEIU records, Address by President Henry Lefavour of Simmons College, in "In Memoriam: Mary Morton Kehew," 1918, n.p. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>212</sup>WEIU, *1891 Report*, 10.

<sup>213</sup>Johnson, *Funding Feminism*, 53-55.

<sup>214</sup>WEIU, *1893 Report*, 21.

considered from any other perspective than that of the individual.<sup>215</sup>

Very early on, the leaders of the WEIU faced several problems insofar as hiring workers was concerned. The first, of course, was money; hiring a janitor was mentioned in one of the Union’s very first meetings, but the suggestion was brushed off for lack of money. When one was finally hired, it was at the lowest possible cost.<sup>216</sup> There was great confusion as to what constituted work that should be paid, and how to estimate its cost. In the winter of 1878, when several WEIU members asked to “take care” of the rooms for \$3 a week, one woman’s offer to do it for free was accepted.<sup>217</sup> When she had to stop on account of ill health, several months later, she pleaded to be reinstated—if she could be paid. Another, healthier woman was eventually engaged, but with no mention of whether she received a salary, nor how much it was.<sup>218</sup> As in the case of the putative janitor, what mattered most to the WEIU’s first managers was saving as much as they could on labor costs, without consideration for the fact that volunteer labor drove down the wages that could have been paid a salaried worker.

The issue of how much to pay the Union’s workers was an especially puzzling one to the members of the Board of Government. Rather logically, they managed workers the way they knew, that is to say the way many housekeepers dealt with their domestic help: unsystematically, if not downright chaotically. The professional relationship between “mistress” and “maid” was a highly personalized and thus a very fluid one.<sup>219</sup> Initially, at the WEIU, as in a private home, there was no fixed wage scale nor standard pay; raises were sometimes given, sometimes withheld. Some Union members from middle-class backgrounds who were assumed to need the money were paid arguably very high salaries to keep the rooms open—as much as \$6 or \$8 a week for what was unskilled work. Meanwhile, working-class janitors and waitresses—after 1886 when the Union opened its first lunch room—were paid \$2 or \$3 a week for similar tasks. The decision of whom to pay, how much, tended to be guided more by emotional impulses, which were not fully articulated, rather than by objective criteria. It was slowly, incrementally, that the

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<sup>215</sup>Additional WEIU Records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, November 17, 1885, 151. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>216</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 1, November 6, 1877, 15. 81-M237. Carton 1; *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, April 15, 1884, 3. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>217</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 1, November 5, 1878, 66. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>218</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 1, March 4, 1879, 83; April 1, 1879, 89-90. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>219</sup>David M. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 150.



management of the WEIU evolved a conception of job categories and of salaries to match them. In 1887, business manager Phebe Willey was given authorization to raise the wages of Mary Campbell, an employee, on one condition—“if on examination it prove[d] that other girls in similar positions receive[d] more than she [did].”<sup>220</sup> It was later, in 1904, in the thick of a complete reorganization of the WEIU’s operating structure towards “business” lines, that management finally articulated the question: “Shall the Union stand primarily upon a philanthropic or a business basis as regards its attitude in engaging workers?” The answer was clear: the Board of Government decided to enshrine the principle that “the person best fitted for the place be chosen, and that the Superintendent should not be responsible for investigating the conditions of applicants in order that her choice may be influenced by the need of the worker.”<sup>221</sup>

The shift from volunteer to paid workers was also reflected at the higher level of management, where the reorganization of the WEIU’s work was driven by a recognition of both the growing demands placed on officers, and the competition that the business departments were facing from industry.<sup>222</sup> In 1899, the long illness of Corra Osborne, the Union’s dependable house superintendent, highlighted how reliant the smooth running of the association was on a few key workers; meanwhile, when president Mary Morton Kehew decided to resign the same year, she was unable to find anyone willing to assume the position, even were it to become a paid one.<sup>223</sup> When the duties of the secretary were reassessed and formally determined, volunteer Mrs. Young tendered her resignation, deeming the strain too great on her.<sup>224</sup> The pragmatic needs of the organization and those of its workers ultimately guided the WEIU’s transformation into a more “businesslike” institution, which largely meant relying on paid experts to carry out a majority of the work.<sup>225</sup> As a compromise, volunteers would remain at the higher echelons, for older members argued that they were essential to maintaining the “Union spirit” that distinguished the nonprofit from a purely commercial endeavor. Afterward, the first recommendations “Special Committee on the Reorganization of the Busi-

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<sup>220</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, November 5, 1887, n.p. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>221</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 8, December 20, 1904, 5. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>222</sup>WEIU, *1905 Report*, 14.

<sup>223</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 7, December 19, 1899, 30-33. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>224</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 7, February 16, 1904, 74.

<sup>225</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 7, January 19, 1904, 72; WEIU, *1905 Report*, 14-15.

ness Departments of the Union” stated that the ideal “paid expert” would be someone who had “a knowledge of the Union’s traditions and ideals, as well as business ability and experience.”<sup>226</sup>

Over time, as volunteers were replaced by a permanent pool of paid employees and errand man “George” was joined by other workers, agreements and even formal contracts delineated the terms of their relationship to the organization.<sup>227</sup> Management moved to control employees’ work more tightly. Maximum and minimum wage scales were introduced in 1904.<sup>228</sup> While even in the late 1910s individual cases were still considered by the Executive Committee whenever raises were at stake, loose job categories had been created, and wages and raises within those tended toward homogeneity. It was no longer the individual employee whose wages and hours were up for debate. In a typical business meeting of the Executive Committee, as in October 1917, raises were awarded in a more systematic fashion to a group of employees working the same fixed hours. Waitresses and servers hitherto compensated with \$7 a week were all bumped up to \$8, while male janitors and store room workers, whose wages hovered between \$10 and \$13, similarly received a \$2-raise. When the Executive Committee considered creating a new clerical position, that of “office manager,” it was added to a stabilized, coherent organizational structure. The members of the Committee knew instinctively how to categorize it—as an “assistant’s position”—and, correspondingly, which standard wages to pay for it—no more than \$1,000.<sup>229</sup>

Meanwhile, the growth of the Union’s catering business, slow and steady as it was, reflected the tendency towards embedding home producers into a more traditional business model than that offered by the template set by the first Woman’s Exchange in Philadelphia. While they had signed no contract and were not WEIU employees, per 1894 rules and regulations, consignors had to stand at the ready to fill orders.<sup>230</sup> A housewife could no longer simply stroll into the Boylston Street headquarters with a basket of gloves or tea cakes and offer them for consignment to the middle-class “ladies” volunteering there. She had to send them by mail to a cadre of paid employees, in boxes corresponding to the specified description; she

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<sup>226</sup> Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v 7, January 19, 1904, 72. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>227</sup> WEIU records, Order slip, c1910-1912. B-8, folder 7. “General Rules for Employees,” January 1906. B-8. Box 2, folder 15.

<sup>228</sup> *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 9, December 20, 1904, 7.

<sup>229</sup> Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Executive Committee*, v. 28, no. 1, October 2, 1917, 8-10. 81-M237. Carton 4.

<sup>230</sup> Additional WEIU records, “1893-1894—Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” c1894, 12, in WEIU scrapbook, item 150v, [77]. 81-M237. Carton 9.

would be told which kinds of goods sold most readily, and had to take in orders, agreeing to forgo vacations at the most inopportune times in the business year.<sup>231</sup>

From the leadership's perspective, dealing with this new workforce meant wading the muddy waters of personnel management, which the "business man," their kindred, knew well: "The business man constantly faces the problem of securing efficient employees. Unskilled workers exist in numbers. There is no difficulty in obtaining the untrained and inexperienced. It is however, exceedingly difficult to find the thoroughly competent man or woman who is capable of filling a position of responsibility," noted WEIU librarian Ethel McLean Johnson in 1913.<sup>232</sup> For their part, the WEIU would propose to solve the problem through more thorough in-house training, a collaboration with Simmons College, and a revamped vocational counseling service (1910), as we will see in chapter 6.

By the late 1910s, the Union's managers had gotten to fixing the details of employees' overtime and lateness and restricted what might once have been subject to informal arrangements between employees. To keep track of situations in which employees were substituting for one another, a complex filing and index system was introduced, the sort that would become commonplace in larger American workplaces by the First World War. Union departments used a number of forms, each with its own identifier; many were for strictly internal use. These were the forms used to justify and track down expenses. Attempts at quantification not only concerned stock but also consignors' production costs and work time.<sup>233</sup>

Occupationally, the workforce of the WEIU was a diverse one. By the 1900s, some of its high-ranking officers were paid workers; clerks and research fellows were their colleagues, but so were technically the "pantry girls," "elevator girls," dishwashers, cashiers, cooks, and "errand men" who kept its businesses running.<sup>234</sup> Demographically, a cursory glance at the surnames of many of the WEIU's employees seems to indicate that they were of English, Scottish and Irish stock; there is also evidence that the Union hired black women as cooks and laundresses. Such were Mrs. Simms, a graduate of the Boston Normal School, who worked in the kitchen of the WEIU's main lunch room between at least April 1908 and Febru-

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<sup>231</sup>WEIU records, "To Producers of the Food Sales Department," undated, c1910. B-8. Box 4, folder 27.

<sup>232</sup>Additional WEIU records, Ethel M. Johnson, "The Business Man and the Skilled Employee," 1913, [26]. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 151.

<sup>233</sup>WEIU records, *General Rules and Information for Employees*, September 1910. B-8. Box 4, folder 28. For forms recording the stocks of the restaurants or shops, see for instance WEIU records, B-8. Box 3, folder 20; for records of absences, see "Union Benefit—Absences for the Week Ending," March 1911. B-8. Box 4, folder 31.

<sup>234</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Union Employees: 1877-1903*. 81-M237. Carton 8.

ary 1909, and Mrs. Conway, a laundress at the New England Kitchen around the same dates.<sup>235</sup>

By then, volunteer work in WEIU shops and restaurants was a thing of the past. Professional saleswomen and clerks were in charge of the day-to-day work of the operations, and even the Executive Committee, which was separated from the Board of Government, was staffed by mostly salaried workers. Only the departmental committees remained as advisory bodies which reported to the Board of Government and the Executive Committee. Volunteers no longer had much say neither in the most important decisions made by the Union’s leadership, nor in the day-to-day management of its financial affairs. By the late 1910s, even advisory roles became paid positions, as evidenced by the Union’s appointment of Mrs. Ethel D. Thoré (a “decorator”), Mrs. Mariam H. Hilliard (a “consultant”) and Miss Alice Morse (another “consultant”) in 1917 for sums ranging from \$75 to \$300 per year.<sup>236</sup> The compensation may have fallen far short from actual wages, but it represented a complete departure from the cultural context of the Union’s fully volunteer beginnings.

The idea that women’s time had a definite monetary value had gained definite ground. As early as 1912, the Union’s first professional president, Mary Woolman, had thus castigated “[t]he ordinary dressmaking establishment” as “a relic of medievalism so far as business methods [went],” pointing to the way dressmakers rushed their workers, shirked their wages, and charged what they thought they could get away with charging. Even in an associational setting, women’s labor was slowly beginning to be quantified and assigned a monetary value. No longer was it conceivable to “[stay] up late to finish a shirtwaist.”<sup>237</sup> This shift in the way women’s nonprofits were run was taking place in the context of the emergence of a new professional category, that of “social work,” and Boston was the epicenter of the movement towards professionalization. While it was only in 1930 that social work appeared as such in the Census, the Boston School for Social Workers was founded as early as 1904. It was the offspring of both Harvard University and Simmons College, a women’s college closely aligned with the WEIU.<sup>238</sup> The

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<sup>235</sup> Additional WEIU records, *Befriending Record Book, November 1906-1910*, 121, 142. 81-M237. Carton 7.

<sup>236</sup> Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Executive Committee* v. 28, no. 5., October 19, 1917, 17. 81-M237. Carton 4.

<sup>237</sup> Additional WEIU records, “Coming to Experiment with Women Workers,” *Boston Herald*, December 31, 1912. M-89. “1. WEIU directors,” 17 (microfilm).

<sup>238</sup> Frances Rollins Morse, one of the members of the School’s Administrative Board, was also a board member of the WEIU. For information about the Boston School for Social Workers, see Linda M. Shoemaker, “The Gendered Foundations of Social Work Education in Boston,

School offered a full-time vocational training program, the first in the country to do so. While in its early years female students were encouraged to become volunteer social workers in Boston's charities—the most visible manifestation of a “commitment to the preservation of and enhancement of nineteenth-century-style voluntarism within professional work,”<sup>239</sup>—after the First World War, greater emphasis was placed on technique and skill in the curriculum, thus paving the way for the emergence of the salaried case worker.<sup>240</sup>

### 3.3 “Labor of Love”?<sup>241</sup> The Business-Charity Conundrum

In 1891, the Knoxville WEIU was heralded by the local press as “the ladies who so modestly and unostentatiously have begun and carried on this labor of love.” The unnamed journalist insisted that their toil was pure, “untainted from the suspicion of interest.”<sup>242</sup> Behind the conventional formulas lay a contradiction that gripped women's nonprofits, including the “Educational and Unions” cast after the Boston mold. In Boston in fact, from 1892 to 1905, at the same time as the WEIU was effectively reorganizing its bookkeeping and accounting departments, the members of the organization engaged in passionate ideological debates about the principles that underlay these pragmatic arrangements. The latter should not be analyzed separately from the former, because the WEIU's turn towards “business-like” methods was not solely a response to economic imperatives. On the contrary, in many ways it represented the victory of those who tried to accept the commercial aspect of their activities, and even to reconcile it with their conception of the work as philanthropic in nature.

#### 3.3.1 Profit or Principle?

The early 1890s saw more frequent inquiries from the public into the principles according to which work was given to the Industrial Department's consignors.

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1904-1930,” in *Women of the Commonwealth: Work, Family, and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts*, edited by Susan L. Porter (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 99-104.

<sup>239</sup>Shoemaker, “The Gendered Foundations of Social Work Education,” 110.

<sup>240</sup>Shoemaker, “The Gendered Foundations of Social Work Education,” 112.

<sup>241</sup>“The Women's Educational and Industrial Union,” *Knoxville Journal*, March 26, 1891, 2.

<sup>242</sup>“The Women's Educational and Industrial Union,” *Knoxville Journal*, March 26, 1891, 2.

Did the Union "receive articles from the poor only"? Thus went the question. One of the most prominent official public records of the association's ideas and activities was the secretary's annual report, and that for 1890 answered in the negative, defending the idea that the Union was "not a charity." Implicit in her pronouncement, then, was the idea that women, like men, were liable to possess special skills or talents that they could nurture for both their own and society's profit. Those who did should not be discouraged by circumstances (or social status) from engaging in remunerative activities: paid work should not be the province of charity recipients. At the same time, the women in charge of the Industrial Committee argued that the shops of the Industrial Department were different from regular proprietorships, because they provided a business education to home producers. Money was a consideration to them, but it was not "the only" one.<sup>243</sup>

By the 1890s this idea that the WEIU's shops were a unique kind of businesses assumed a new significance as well as new proportions, in the context of broader debates about large mergers and capitalist corporate consolidation. In pamphlets edited by the Ethics Committee, which bore the stamp of the Social Gospel and Christian socialism,<sup>244</sup> authors like Lucia T. Ames Mead (1856-1936) picked apart justifications for the rising wealth gap between the new millionaires and the urban underclass.<sup>245</sup> Ames Mead was a pacifist and suffragist activist from New Hampshire, with family ties to the core group of families involved in antebellum

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<sup>243</sup>WEIU, *1890 Report*, 8-9.

<sup>244</sup>The "Social Gospel" is the name given to a late-nineteenth-century strand of American Protestantism. Popularized by the writings and speeches of ministers like Washington Gladden, Josiah Strong, and Francis Greenwood Peabody, authors like Lucia True Ames Mead, and settlement workers, it posited that the individual's Christian duty lay not only in his or her own moral regeneration but in that of society. Social gospelers developed an agenda of social justice that centered on the need for harmonious, cooperative relations, and called on Protestants to focus on improving their neighbors' worldly experience rather than on achieving salvation in the afterlife. Historian Susan Curtis, analyzing the Social Gospel from a cultural perspective, has called it "the religious expression of progressivism in the early twentieth century." Socialism, defined either very loosely as a celebration of mutualism and brotherhood, or more narrowly as a Marxist theory of labor power relations, appealed to many of the leading social gospelers for its proximity to their own ideas, leading to the emergence of an ideological undercurrent named "Christian socialism." See Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and American Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 2; 2-13; 22-26; Jacob H. Dorn, "The Social Gospel and Socialism: A Comparison of the Thought of Francis Greenwood Peabody, Washington Gladden, and Walter Rauschenbusch," *Church History* 62, no. 1 (1993): 82-100.

<sup>245</sup>WEIU records, Joseph Lee, "Expensive Living the Blight on America," Leaflet no. 12 (Cambridge: The Co-Operative Press, 1900); "Luxury and Responsibility," Leaflet no. 4 (Cambridge: The Co-Operative Press, 1897); Richard T. Ely, "What Is Our Social Ideal," Leaflet no. 6 (Cambridge: The Co-Operative Press, 1898); Lucia T. Ames, "A Popular Fallacy," Leaflet no. 2 (Cambridge: Co-Operative Printing Society, 1897). B-8. Box 1, folder 2.

abolitionism.<sup>246</sup> In her writings for the WEIU, she rejected the Smithian notion that “the self-indulgence of the few is of genuine benefit to the whole community”;<sup>247</sup> she indicted millionaires for the impact of their extravagant consumption patterns on the American economy, in the language of antimonopolism identified by Daniel Rodgers as one of three strands of a loose progressive rhetoric.<sup>248</sup> This progressive criticism found a surprising echo in the debates of the Board of Government about the way the shops should be run. As early as 1885, responding to reports about the amounts that were paid to different food producers of the Industrial Department, the Board resolved that it was “contrary to the principles of the Union to allow any monopolies” and voted to have a practical plan be devised to “break up this tendency to monopolies.”<sup>249</sup> In context, however, this amounted to finding a way not to let customers patronize the most successful bakers and cooks. Consignors’ cakes, pies, and jellies were not identified by numbers, nor by name, and there was no differentiated advertising. If any one producer sold vastly more goods than another, the explanation was likely to be that she was simply a better baker, or that her recipes were more closely aligned with customers’ tastes and preferences.

Fifteen years later, WEIU managers held a very different view of their own responsibilities as far as producers’ financial returns were concerned. No longer did they find it to be their role to influence individuals’ commercial outcomes. The Union’s own secretary explained that “the Union occupie[d] the place of ‘the middle man’ in commerce”—“without any of ‘the middle man’s advantages,” however. By this, she meant that too great a proportion of the money made on the sale of consigned goods went to producers, not to the Union as middle (wo)man. She estimated that the commission rate that consignors paid the Union was not enough to support the business. Up until 1899, commissions did not pay even for the running expenses of the salesrooms, which meant that the Union found itself torn: “still doing in part a beneficent work while keeping constantly in view the Mecca of scientific philanthropy.”<sup>250</sup> “Scientific philanthropy,” a much less

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<sup>246</sup>For the only scholarly biography of Ames Mead, see John Craig, *Lucia Ames Mead (1856-1936) and the American Peace Movement* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1990). For a contextualized analysis of her political beliefs, see Dorothy Rogers, “Before ‘Care’: Marietta Kies, Lucia Ames Mead, and Female Political Theory,” *Hypatia* 19, no. 2 (Spring 2004): 105-117, <https://doi:10.1111/j.1527-2001.2004.tb01291.x>.

<sup>247</sup>Lucia T. Ames, “A Popular Fallacy,” 5.

<sup>248</sup>Lucia T. Ames, “A Popular Fallacy”; Daniel T. Rodgers, “In Search of Progressivism,” *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (December 1982): 123-124.

<sup>249</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, November 3, 1885, 148. 81-M237. Carton 2; Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, November 17, 1885, 151. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>250</sup>Additional WEIU records, Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., 1899-1900* (Cambridge: The

common term than “scientific charity” or the “charity organization movement” which pioneered it, emerged in the 1870s and 1880s as a major innovation in private relief, the attempt to correct structural poverty through the improvement of character and the coordination of charitable efforts. It was in more impersonal, dispassionate data-driven intercourse with the poor that individual moral flaws could be redressed and poverty ultimately alleviated. By the late 1890s, when third president Mary Morton Kehew was writing, the charity organization movement had become synonymous with modernity and was embraced by many a social reformer for its self-proclaimed rationality.<sup>251</sup> Despite the occasional admission that there was more to the Union’s commercial dealings than charity, it was still hard to label them anything other than “philanthropy.” The women of the Union contrasted older and newer forms of relief rather than nonprofit and for-profit activities, charity and business. This was likely linked to their propensity to think of themselves as forward-thinking reformers, and of their organization as one node in a reforming complex that included government as well as industry.

In 1885, a distinction between the food producers who were Union members and those who were not was first introduced: the former paid a reduced commission rate—10%— compared to the latter’s 15%.<sup>252</sup> Around the same time, consignors who took orders in the fancy work department paid 10%, regardless of their status.<sup>253</sup> 10 to 15% was to remain the standard commission rate for a decade, when the Board of Government started looking into the Exchange’s bookkeeping, in an effort to have the “industrial” departments become reliable providers of income for the Union at large. The proposed changes involved transitioning from “a purely commission business to a regular purchasing business,” which meant buying stock outright from the consignors and taking on the risk of not selling in full. In 1896, the Union’s line of preserves, pickles, and similar canned articles was selected as “safest” to begin with, probably because they were non-perishables.<sup>254</sup>

The question still remained as to the Union’s profit margin—or commission—for the rest of the food and clothing sold in the Union’s shops. How should it be

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Co-operative Press, 1900), 10. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>251</sup>Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 143-146.

<sup>252</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, November 3, 1885, 148. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>253</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, May 25, 1886, 207. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>254</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston St., Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1896* (Cambridge: Press of the Cambridge Co-operative Society, 1896), 12, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924106>.



determined? The annual report for 1897 captured the tensions that subsisted between the (unnamed, unidentified) proponents of different answers to that question: “It [was] the earnestly expressed opinion of some that this branch of the Union work should be made entirely self-supporting and put on a strictly business basis,” wrote the secretary, but “[o]thers contend[ed] with equal earnestness, that as one of the great objects of the Union is to aid women to help themselves, and to raise the standard of excellence in production, for the good quality of the producers and of the community, there is no reason why this department [...] should be considered in a strictly commercial light, more than any other.”<sup>255</sup> The opponents of higher commission rates considered their shops as training wheels of sorts for women first learning how to market their home-produced goods for sale. To them, the Union was supposed to offer a training ground, as the Exchange was first conceived.<sup>256</sup> Those who disagreed with them did not seem to offer any philosophical or ideological argument. They wanted to make the shops self-supporting for the good financial health of the Union as a whole, and, indirectly, consignors’ own good. More “economic” buying and more systematic bookkeeping methods were desirable in so far as they would keep the business afloat: consignors had a part to play in paying for the running expenses of the Industrial Department, “support[ing] in fact their own market.”<sup>257</sup> This was the reason ultimately invoked to justify raising the commission rate from 15% to 20%, gradually so. In 1897, it was decided that first time consignors would pay a 10% commission on all their sales during a 6-month probationary period, and that if accepted as regular consignors, the amount would go up to 15% on all sales amounting to \$500, 20% over that sum. The decision was justified both not only by the need to match the commission rate “charged in stores doing a similar business,” but also by a fairness rationale: “It is but just that the consignor who has benefited largely through her connection with the Food Department should hold the same business relation to it as other business houses [...]” “Self-help” was predicated on the supposed mutuality and equality of the relationship that bound producer and consumer through the “medium” constituted by the shop.<sup>258</sup>

In 1911, even a 20% commission was deemed insufficient: the chair of the Handwork Shop Committee argued that such a rate was “not sufficient for the

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<sup>255</sup>WEIU, *1897 Report*, 14.

<sup>256</sup>See chapter 1, p. 86-107.

<sup>257</sup>WEIU, *1898 Report*, 13; WEIU, *1899 Report*, 38-39.

<sup>258</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Food Department,” c1897, in WEIU scrapbook, item 150v, [77]. 81-M237. Carton 9.

maintenance of a gift shop in a proper locality in Boston.”<sup>259</sup> The transition that we have charted thus far was complete. In the 1910s, the entity with which the Union felt it most relevant to compare its own commercial outgrowths were gift shops—those of the kind that sold hand-crafted items and trinkets and were often managed by middle-class women in touristy areas, in connection with tea rooms.<sup>260</sup> These small proprietors were the class of people with which Union directors and managers compared themselves. The WEIU followed the rules of the market; the brief push to limit who could enter a business relationship with the Union, or how much they could sell—the call to tame monopolies—was a thing of the past. In 1907, one-third of the business of the Food Shop went to only three consignors without raising any alarm.<sup>261</sup>

Thanks to increased sales and a yet higher commission rate of 25%, by 1913 the Union’s Handwork Shop was reported to be entirely self-supporting for the first time. After paying for its own running expenses, including overhead, it turned over a profit \$1,340 to the Union.<sup>262</sup> The commercialism of the Union’s activities could only be fully embraced when accounting rationales, bolstered by a definition of “self-help” that stressed producers’ obligations to the Union, overpowered older conceptions of benevolent volunteerism.

### 3.3.2 Towards Social Efficiency

Lucia T. Ames’s definition of “efficiency” is the closest we have to the one to which the WEIU’s Board of Government must have adhered. In the late 1890s, at a time when the progressive language of “social efficiency” was taking hold of entire segments of the public sphere, she singled it out as the value that ought to guide not only the country’s economic leaders and elected officials, but anyone who had anything to spend. She wrote that “[o]ne’s moral right to spend his own money for his own exclusive use, is measured by the power of that money to promote his efficiency, that is, to make him a healthier, wiser, better, and truly happier man. Beyond that, his expenditure of money on himself is for ostentation

<sup>259</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, Boston, Massachusetts, January, Nineteen Hundred Eleven* (Boston, 1911), 51, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923652>.

<sup>260</sup>As we have seen in chapter 2, tea rooms were often connected—or incorporated parts of—a gift shop. See p. 42.

<sup>261</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston, 1907), 28, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433075991970>.

<sup>262</sup>WEIU, *1913 Report*, 40.

Figure 3.4: Interior view of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union store with six women shoppers, three women working behind the counter, and two women receptionists seated at a desk. Between 1920 and 1930.



Harvard University, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, 81.M237.203.2

Source: Harvard Digital Collections, [https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital\\_collections/8001528331\\_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356612](https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital_collections/8001528331_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356612).

and display and indulgence of the appetites, for that which enervates and does not elevate him.” Books, pictures, music, leisure, and travel could be used towards self-improvement, and thus fit the definition.<sup>263</sup> While the women who ran the Women’s Union at the time had, by then, relinquished the founders’ Emersonian language of universal sisterhood,<sup>264</sup> they still tended to define “efficiency” as the use of economic resources towards the goal of becoming an improved version of oneself, from the multiple perspectives of health, morality, and intellect.<sup>265</sup> As WEIU founder Harriet Clisby had envisioned it, in Ames’s view the compounding effect of individuals’ search for moral uplift was bound to lead to wholesale social progress.

The Board of Government couched its hopes for the future in the language of the Platonic ideal, a rhetoric that positioned the WEIU as a capitalist microcosm. The WEIU’s shops were explicitly defined as a sheltered replica of the market, a worldly ideal to be achieved for the elevation of other businesses. In 1897, the

<sup>263</sup>Lucia T. Ames, “A Popular Fallacy,” 7-8.

<sup>264</sup>Deutsch, “Learning to Talk More Like a Man,” 392.

<sup>265</sup>Contrast this with the following statement, made in 1878: “[The Union] was organized with a view to increasing fellowship among women, and unfolding, developing and strengthening their spiritual, intellectual and physical natures.” “Letter from Boston,” *St Albans Daily Messenger*, March 9, 1878, 2.

same year that Lucia Ames published "A Popular Fallacy," the director of the Food Committee confidently asserted that "each year's experience [helped] the committee to approach a step nearer its *ideal*"—by which she meant "not solely the opportunity afforded women to dispose of their food products, nor yet the effort to make each article received the best of its kind in the market, but to accomplish these results upon such an economic basis that the consignors may receive an adequate return for their work, and by their commissions pay the running of the department without aid."<sup>266</sup> According to her, the financial health of the Food Shop was an indicator of consignors' own business success. The ultimate sign of producers' improved methods and clearer understanding of the niche they occupied on the market was to be the shop's ability to make a clear profit in excess of overhead and running expenses. Through open, unhindered competition with other producers, the women who sold their wares on the WEIU's marketplace would be incentivized to up their standards.<sup>267</sup> Better cooks and seamstresses did not necessarily make for more successful sellers. One of the consignors' meetings for 1902 was consequently devoted "to help[ing] the consignors to a more thorough knowledge, not only of cooking as an art, but of the business principles which underlie all successful practical achievement."<sup>268</sup> As the producers and thus the shop itself matured, they would learn to leave behind the training wheels of preferential conditions and shed their benevolent past, once and for all. They would become able to fully compete in the free market, to their benefit as well as to that of competitors, whom they would expose to a stabilized fusion of social justice principles and free market mechanisms.

Embracing business methods was the only way to reach the commercial success that was the more dependable basis upon which the Union could rest its financial strategy—a necessary complement to membership dues on the one hand, and to the capital generated by the Permanent Fund on the other. The WEIU was finally in a position to put the founder's nebulous self-help ideal into sharper focus. A 1910 report fully detailed that idea:

The four industrial departments of the Union, the Lunch Rooms, New England Kitchen, Food Shop and Handwork Shop, are organized on a business basis. They must be successful, profit-making ventures, in order to furnish to the Union the opportunities it desires for the training of women in the management of business affairs. And their profits, resulting from the efficiency shown in their management,

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<sup>266</sup>WEIU, *1897 Report*, 36. Emphasis mine.

<sup>267</sup>WEIU, *1897 Report*, 38-40.

<sup>268</sup>WEIU, *1902 Report*, 40.

enable the Union to carry on a large share of its purely educational and social work.<sup>269</sup>

In the 1880s, the idea of creating self-sufficient reform organizations was being more broadly entertained by temperance reformers and others who felt the influence of the Social Gospel. Principled entrepreneurs could be drivers for reform, but only on the condition that their businesses be able to successfully withstand competition. Abolitionist proponents of “free produce stores,” grocers which did not carry any goods made by slave labor, found out the hard way that if customers complained about the quality and cost of their products, they would not be wooed into consuming better for the sake of the enslaved.<sup>270</sup> It was also vital to steer clear of the stigma that charity carried. As one temperance activist wrote in the pages of social reform magazine *Lend a Hand* in 1887 temperance restaurants and cafés could compete with saloons, but only if the public was made aware that they were legitimate businesses, and not charities. The “cheap lunches” they sold could not give off even a whiff of condescension, or customers would not buy them.<sup>271</sup> It was ultimately on the terrain of the market that activist businesses would prove both their mettle and the strength of their principles.

In order to create a self-sustaining, self-propelling movement, WEIU’s reformers pursued “an efficiency which [was] removing [their endeavors] from a philanthropic to a self-supporting basis.”<sup>272</sup> While volunteering and fundraising would remain irreducible factors within the association’s business plan, the WEIU gradually imported bookkeeping, accounting, advertising, and personnel management techniques from the corporate office, at the same time as those were developed. At least as far as management was concerned, reformers came to see business and charity as two unreconcilable poles, and by the 1900s it had become clear to them that “efficiency,” the catchphrase of the business world, ought to distinguish the two in activist shops. Nevertheless, while they eventually acknowledged how similar their activities were to those of their male kin, the women of the WEIU would never admit clearly just how important money-making in itself was to them. In-

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<sup>269</sup>WEIU, *1910 Report*, 49.

<sup>270</sup>On the business hardships of abolitionist “free produce” stores, see Lawrence Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Urbana: University of Chicago Press), 61-90. See also Carol Faulkner, “The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 27, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 395. The free produce strategy was one that emphasized individual purity and abstinence at the expense of comfort, one of the reasons why, as Carol Faulkner argued, it failed to catch on.

<sup>271</sup>*Lend a Hand* 2, no. 3 (March 1887), 346, HathiTrust, [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b359083](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b359083).

<sup>272</sup>Additional WEIU records, “One of Magnolia’s Interesting Shops,” c1915-1916. M-89. “19. 1913-1916,” 3 (microfilm).

deed, commercial success would always seem a little suspect and warrant profuse justifications. Communicating to the press in response to the staggering mention that the association handled \$300,000 annually, in 1909 one representative from the Union tried to dispel the notion that profit was the main driver of the WEIU's activities. "Inevitably such a busy institution as [the WEIU] induces many visitors to think that a commercial profit is the dominating motive of the activity," she wrote, but it was not actually the case. She was quick to make sure that the Union's social schemes would not be overshadowed by the commercial activities that had been meant to pay for them all along.<sup>273</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter was properly concerned with the significance of the material conditions of reform work in the postbellum era. To understand where the WEIU's money came from and— as much as possible—how the people who manipulated those sums reflected on what they were doing, we have probed the experience of the Union's officers as managers. They ran a unique non-profit association, one whose organizational complexity and self-support ethos set it apart from similar undertakings. What did we learn about the financial demands the Union faced in its quest to fund social programs for self-supporting women? First and foremost, that the 1870s and 1880s were marked by continuity with the fundraising techniques and trends that Anne Boylan has identified in the antebellum nonprofit. By the 1860s, the longest-lived and more prosperous women's associations in New York and Boston tended to rely on annual subscriptions less and less; they favored diversified assets. Most of all, the WEIU relied on almost all of the different kinds of typical income streams typically exploited by women's nonprofits: they "sold annual and life memberships; solicited donations of goods and money; collected savings account interest and stock dividends; [...] sold client-made goods or services; rented out organizational space; held fund-raising fairs, sermons, or concerts; [and] accepted legacies and bequests."<sup>274</sup> The largest incentive for fundraising was the need and desire for proper headquarters in downtown Boston. This led managers to put on extravagant entertainments for fundraising purposes; in the 1880s and early 1890s, along with placards and press advertising, this was how the WEIU left its mark on the city.

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<sup>273</sup>"What Women Are Doing for Women," *Boston Sunday Herald*, August 22, 1909, 3.

<sup>274</sup>Boylan, *Origins of Women's Activism*, 175-176.

After that date, the declining significance of the fundraising fair can be attributed or tied not only to the resources that buying real estate necessitated, but to the status of the Union's own workforce. The fair was fundamentally "a fundraising vehicle used primarily by those who did not earn their own money."<sup>275</sup> Correspondingly, as the WEIU purchased its own building, phased out volunteer labor, and increasingly relied on the profits from shops kept and managed by salaried employees, they no longer needed to pour their sweat and money into lavish entertainments. The very first sign that associational work was becoming a quasi-professional path for the white, middle-class women of the WEIU, was in fact the specialization of the workers who had put on fairs for the Union. Before Mary Morton Kehew, there was Mira F. Pitman, the seasoned fair manager, Mrs. de L. Sheplie, the genius inventor, and Mrs. John W. James, the wealthy widow with a knack for trust fund managing. Many of them had in fact previous experience with money matters, whether through family connections or through personal experience as business-owners themselves. The women's association was more than a quasi-professional path for individuals with limited options, it drew the attention and volunteer talent of women who were already proprietors.

Despite the misgivings about women who engaged in business generally, the local press was generally generous with the WEIU. In press profiles, its directors received lavish praise for their business acumen, to which the overall success of the WEIU was attributed. Of Abby Morton Diaz, it was thus said that "the energy and sound business management of her and associates has raised that institution to its present powerful and prosperous condition."<sup>276</sup> Of the Union more generally, that it demonstrated "that a well-organized society of women [was] capable of prosecuting an intelligent business enterprise, whether it be for the good of their own sex, or any less needy object."<sup>277</sup> Through their impeccable commercial dealings and attachment to a self-supporting ethos, the WEIU managed to earn the grudging respect of Boston's opinion-makers. As a likely apocryphal or at least unsubstantiated anecdote went, a "distinguished Professor of Economics" specializing in business administration once said that he "[would get] his education at the Women's Educational and Industrial Union."<sup>278</sup> What we do know is that in the 1890s and early 1900s, the WEIU adopted the codes and bookkeeping tech-

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<sup>275</sup>Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies*, 16.

<sup>276</sup>"Women Nationalists," *Boston Sunday Herald*, June 15, 1890, 26.

<sup>277</sup>"A Year of Excellent Work," *Boston Herald*, May 13, 1891, 5.

<sup>278</sup>Additional WEIU records, Address by Dr. Susan M. Kingsbury, Director of the Carola Woerishoffer Department of Social Economy of Bryn Mawr College, in "In Memoriam: Mary Morton Kehew." 1918. 81-237. Carton 1.

niques that were becoming commonplace in American offices, following Chandler's "managerial revolution."

What happened when female Progressives with personal ties to Boston's business community tried to improve the women's non-profit? They gave birth to a hybrid institution, part-business, part-charity, which they categorized as such. As we will see in chapter 5, it was more accurately understood as a sort of public institution by the women who ran it. It was also an outlet for their personal aspirations. Beginning in the 1890s, taking inspiration from the work of pioneering domestic scientist Mary Hinman Abel of the New England Kitchen—which the Union would later take over—Mary Morton Kehew, the Union's third president (1892-1911), slowly led her colleagues and workers towards an "efficiency" turn that can be dated to 1902-1905, the key years during which the Union was reorganized and a college-educated, salaried workforce was brought in.<sup>279</sup> Throughout the period, the tension occasioned by the implicit acknowledgment of the Union's commercial and financial activities created a push-pull dynamic. The WEIU's leadership was keenly aware of the benefits wrought by publicity, but also of the strategic quality of anonymity; of the more reliable output of a salaried labor force, as well as of the praise that volunteering received, and the special "spirit" it fostered. Over time, it was towards the latter poles that the association would gravitate, but the rhetoric of altruistic anonymity and sentimental volunteering had staying power, because these were deep beliefs harbored by the antebellum generation. Those tensions would be resolved only when it became much more acceptable for the layman and laywoman alike to strive for business efficiency—perhaps in the guise of "social" efficiency insofar as women were concerned.

As we will see in the following chapter, it was also in the domestic sphere, and more precisely in their own homes, that the association's managers deployed the rhetoric of the corporation, as the WEIU's business reorganization was accompanied—perhaps even underscored—by efforts to analyze and solve the "servant problem" using the tools of the new social sciences.

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<sup>279</sup>As Simmons College president Henry Lefavour noted at her memorial service, "It is enough to say that from the time Mrs. Kehew became president, certain constructive policies were put into operation, which made the Union not merely the benevolent organization which it had been before, but an important educational institution, the objects of which were no less benevolent but were on such a basis that women in industry have benefited in a remarkable degree." Additional WEIU records, Address by President Henry Lefavour of Simmons College, in "In Memoriam: Mary Morton Kehew," 1918, n.p. 81-237. Carton 1.





## Chapter 4

# The Economics of the “Servant Question”: Reformers, Women Workers, and Labor

### Introduction

In 1899 the Domestic Reform League (DRL), one of the committees of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union had created two years earlier, drafted the text of an employment contract for use between housekeepers and domestic servants.<sup>1</sup> It preceded by four years the labor contract which the Union introduced for its own employees—clerks, cashiers, and waitresses—in 1903.<sup>2</sup> I initially found it striking that the more exotic document—that which tried to regulate a labor relationship that was still not widely acknowledged as such—was drawn up first. In a way, as we will see, it is not so surprising that it was as employers of houseworkers that the middle-class leaders of the WEIU learned the ropes of personnel management. While concerns with commercial success and greater “efficiency” drove their re-organization of the Union’s administration along business lines between 1895 and 1905, this transitional period took place in a larger context: that of shifting ideas about the nature of domestic work, women’s work, and their economics.

Scholarly interest in housework and houseworkers in the United States rose in the early 1980s, when David Katzman defined the late nineteenth-century “servant problem,” a leading topic in the women’s and general press of the 1880s-1910s, as

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<sup>1</sup>WEIU records, *Domestic Reform League, Report—1898-1899*, c1899, n.p. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>2</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, October 20, 1903, 53. 81-M237. Carton 2.

“the housewives’ problem of an insufficient supply of workers; even as wages and working and living conditions improved, the status of the job remained too low to attract or retain adequate number of workers.”<sup>3</sup> This was in fact preeminently a “problem” faced by a newly defined segment of the population, the middle-class.<sup>4</sup> The white-collar middle class had expanded much more rapidly than the pool of domestics on which they would have liked to draw—and which had, in fact, contracted. As white native-born working-class women found new opportunities in the nation’s factories, stores, and offices, so did they turn away from service as an occupation. Arguably, the “servant problem” was not entirely a postbellum phenomenon. The employing class had, of long, complained about the quality of service, and it is in eighteenth-century England that Kristina Straub found what appeared to be the first early stirrings of discontent toward servants. As the concept of family was redefined and narrowed down to its nuclear incarnation, servants increasingly tended to occupy an uncomfortable position as both child-like subalterns to be morally guided by the master or mistress, and dangerous “others” likely to partake in the rowdy urban culture which flourished then.<sup>5</sup> Straub writes that “[w]hat became the ‘servant problem’ of the nineteenth century was, in the eighteenth, a collection of hopes and fears that clustered around a member of the household whose mixed contractual and affective status framed the basis for many of the contradictions embodied in the family under early capitalism.”<sup>6</sup>

In the analysis of the “servant problem,” the relationship between masters and servants—or, later, employer and employee, the terms which the WEIU embraced—is central. Faye Dudden’s work, although it preceded Straub’s by several decades, chronologically picks up her story in the early nineteenth-century. Along with Katzman, Dudden produced one of the early great accounts of service in the antebellum period. She argues that middle-class Americans’ increasing difficulty

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<sup>3</sup>David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 223-224. See p. 223-265 more generally for Katzman’s exploration of the problem.

<sup>4</sup>For a description of the process by which Americans came to define a “middle class,” see Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989). For a study of domesticity as an important factor in the emergence and shaping of a middle-class culture, see Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Jean-Christian Vinel has described how Progressives embraced the “regulation of the employment relationship” and its corollary, the ideology of social harmony, as the building blocs of a reformed, “classless” society. Jean-Christian Vinel, *The Employee: A Political History* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 27-28; 34.

<sup>5</sup>Kristina Straub, *Domestic Affairs: Intimacy, Eroticism, and Violence Between Servants and Masters in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 19-46.

<sup>6</sup>Straub, *Domestic Affairs*, 6.

in finding servants coincided with an ideological and economic shift from native-born “help” to immigrant “domestics.”<sup>7</sup> To many late Gilded Age commentators, in fact, the Irish “Bridget” or “Biddy”<sup>8</sup> was an embodiment of the vexing disorder which reigned over so many well-to-do homes. Her shortcomings were a convenient smokescreen; focusing on them, a way to avoid dealing with the “free-market economics” by which many commentators were utterly confused.<sup>9</sup> There was considerable change at the turn of the century in the conditions of service, ideas about maids, how maids should interact with their employers, and how they chose or left the occupation. From a quasi- or actual relative, who often labored alongside the housekeeper who employed her—the “help”—, the general maid had become a subaltern other, a status symbol, and a labor-saving device all at once.<sup>10</sup>

For the material feminists of the time, Dolores Hayden writes, “[d]omestic servants were part of the problem, not the solution.”<sup>11</sup> Distancing themselves from the “ladies” who bemoaned the disintegrating morals of the servant class, these self-styled progressive domestic reformers started envisioning other modes of domestic organization which minimized or even negated the need for a servant: the housekeeper’s cooperative, the dining club, and the labor-saving appliances and commodities which were coming out of the nation’s factories. Even they, however, often failed to appreciate the factors which undergirded servants’ exploitation, the intertwined racism and sexism whose workings Danielle Phillips-Cunningham has recently analyzed in her comparison of Irish and Black southern domestics in the North.<sup>12</sup> It is similarly from the perspective of the “independent” women who refused to bend to middle-class demands that Lara Vapnek first delved into the

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<sup>7</sup>Dudden excluded the South from her study. She contends that the changes in the forms of women’s domestic work in the nineteenth-century “varied with the pace and pattern of regional development but everywhere revealed similar direction and substance,” except in the South, where the influence of slavery on domestic service could be felt long after the end of the Civil War. Faye Dudden, *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 5-6.

<sup>8</sup>Dudden, *Serving Women*, 60, 65. “Biddy” was the derogatory name that white native-born housewives used to refer to what they saw as the average, stereotypical Irish maid.

<sup>9</sup>Dudden, *Serving Women*, 60.

<sup>10</sup>Dudden, *Serving Women*, 240.

<sup>11</sup>Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 134.

<sup>12</sup>In her study of the “gendered history of the social construction of race,” Danielle Phillips-Cunningham explores how racialized depictions of Irish immigrant and southern Black women in domestic service were used by native-born whites to reactivate racial hierarchies well after emancipation. Drawing on the whiteness studies of the 1990s, her work focuses on the different outcomes experienced by these two constituencies of women, as the Irish, like their male kin, were gradually made “white.” Danielle Phillips-Cunningham, *Putting Their Hands on Race: Irish Immigrant and Southern Black Domestic Workers* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019).

WEIU’s failure to reform domestic service, to which she devoted a chapter of *Breadwinners* in 2009.<sup>13</sup> The present chapter is an attempt to continue the conversation and see how domestic work as labor fit within the worldview of the reformers who staffed and led the WEIU.

From the vantage view of the association’s main object, which was to provide women with opportunities for self-support, I argue that the “servant problem,” being an issue that many female reformers would have experienced in the privacy of their homes, furnished them with a powerful impetus to start using the tools of the new social sciences to investigate labor issues. The “servant problem” constituted their point of entry into the labor question of the 1890s, the personalized prism through which these women would approach industrial legislation, and, in the ultimate analysis, a starting point from which they would rapidly move past and abandon. It was by trying to clarify the “mistress-servant”<sup>14</sup> relationship and making a case for the urgency of their concerns that middle-class reformers active in the WEIU started working out the problems that women faced on the job market. In the process, they reconstituted domestic service as an industry, domestic servants as “employees,” housework as a trade, and its management as a science. As DRL chair Ada M. Child put it to members, “[t]he Domestic Reform League [stood] for a recognition of the domestic problem, as a part of the great industrial problem of to-day; and for an organized effort to meet the question scientifically and effectively.”<sup>15</sup> In 1896 WEIU secretary Lucy Peabody gravely told the assembled membership that “[i]n the Employment Department [of which the DRL was a part] the problems calling for solution [were] perhaps the most difficult of any [they] had to study.”<sup>16</sup> The “servant problem” rapidly proved the thorniest faced by the Union—why did young native-born women crowd the shoe, cordage, twine, and rubber factories of Massachusetts? Why did they prefer the dressmaking establishment, the candy plant, and the department store to the home—while housekeepers were paying ever higher wages even to domestics they deemed incompetent? The “servant problem” constituted a way for middle-class reformers to grapple with economic concepts like supply and demand, interrogate the pro-

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<sup>13</sup>Lara Vapnek, “Solving the Servant Problem,” in *Breadwinners: Working Women and Economic Independence, 1865-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 102-128.

<sup>14</sup>A term used by Katzman in *Seven Days a Week*, 175.

<sup>15</sup>WEIU records, Letter from Ada M. Child to members of the Domestic Reform League, August 25, c1900-1905. B-8. Box 2, folder 5. Emphasis mine.

<sup>16</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston St., Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1896* (Cambridge: Press of the Cambridge Co-operative Society, 1896), 13, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924106>.

cesses of wage determination, and refine the categories in which they would class different forms of paid labor.

As we will see, college-educated (and even grammar-school educated) white women’s pursuit of white-collar and professional careers was predicated on their ability to outsource their housework. As a result, they had a keen interest in the “servant problem.” Their concerns for the future of domestic work led them to imagine a future in which white middle-class housewives would be relieved of their domestic obligations through a combination of “socializing”<sup>17</sup> domestic tasks—making them the province of new types of businesses—, simplifying the standards for home life, but first and foremost bringing the “industry” of home upkeep into the twentieth century. Domestic reformers set their sights on labor contracts and vocational training as the means through which women’s work would find its place in the male world of commerce.

## 4.1 Coming Face to Face With the “Servant Problem”

As Anne Boylan has shown, a white nineteenth-century woman’s lifecycle was one important determinant of her associational activities. She was more likely to stop contributing to local charities and social reform societies shortly after marriage and throughout the period when she raised children. Single women and older women whose children were grown were most likely to be active participants and assume responsibilities for which a mother of young children could not find time.<sup>18</sup> For the leadership core of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, the issue of freeing time for reform first meant finding and retaining the hired help that would create an orderly background to their community commitments.

### 4.1.1 Domestic Labor and Reform

To second WEIU president Abby Morton Diaz, the “domestic problem,” as she called it herself, was couched in terms which laid bare the complicated relationship that connected domestic workers and women’s rights advocates. First delivered as

<sup>17</sup>Hayden, *Grand Domestic Revolution*, 5.

<sup>18</sup>Anne Boylan, “Timid Girls, Venerable Widows, and Dignified Matrons: Life Cycle Patterns Among Organized Women in New York and Boston, 1797-1840,” *American Quarterly* 38, no. 5 (1986): 779-797.

a series of lectures to the members of an unspecified women’s club, her *Domestic Problem* (1875) was not the conventional rant on the unreliable and incompetent Irish “Biddy.” Drawing on her own experience as a female household head, Diaz tried to explain in what ways, precisely, employing servants mattered to middle- and upper-class women. In the process, the question that she tried to answer was the following: “How may woman enjoy the delights of culture, and at the same time fulfill her duties to family and household?”<sup>19</sup> In her study of domestic workers’ place in the English suffrage movement of the early 1900s, Laura Schwartz has noted how the exacerbation of the “servant problem” found its genesis not only in the decreasing numbers of potential servants, but also in the rising number of professional women and activists who needed their labor to emancipate themselves from their domestic duties—a conclusion which echoes Vanessa May’s findings for the United States: middle-class reformers needed domestics “so that they could concentrate their energies elsewhere.”<sup>20</sup>

In the antebellum period, keeping a middle-class home was back-breaking, time-consuming work. Hiring help was often not enough to offer a respite to the wives of the emerging middle class, who often found it necessary to labor next to their servants.<sup>21</sup> With gradual improvements in domestic technology in the second half of the century—like the transition from the open hearth to the stove, or that from homemade soap, fabric, jellies to commercially-produced goods—, wealthy housewives could afford to rely more completely on exploited domestic laborers, but a reminder of the scope of the work always lurked. As late as 1907, a mother of five who wrote to an advice column after losing her houseworker of seven years laid out how hard she had realized the upkeep of her home truly was, and how she regretted having subjected her former employee to a life of thankless drudgery. Confronted with the difficulty of finding a new help, she determined to reorganize her work and take on part of the housekeeping.<sup>22</sup> Just as more modern heating and plumbing systems promised to lessen the burden of keeping a family clean and fed, so did changing standards keep the goal out of women’s reach. The goalposts were

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<sup>19</sup>Abby Morton Diaz, *A Domestic Problem* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1875), 7, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hwxhu2>

<sup>20</sup>Laura Schwartz, *Feminism and the Servant Problem: Class and Domestic Labour in the Women’s Suffrage Movement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 15; Vanessa H. May, *Unprotected Labor: Household Workers, Politics, and Middle-Class Reform in New York, 1870-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 33.

<sup>21</sup>Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 76-79.

<sup>22</sup>Frances A. Kellor, “The Housewife and Her Helper,” *Ladies Home Journal* 24, no. 10 (October 1907): 62.

being constantly pushed back.<sup>23</sup> In the 1880s and 1890s, with the spread of germ theory, housewives were held to higher standards of cleanliness, upon which the health of their family members was thought to depend. Warned about the danger of “house diseases,” rigorous cleaning routines were imposed on women so that they may properly sanitize dangerous environments.<sup>24</sup> The higher standards of homemaking concerned cooking as well as cleaning: in the late 1870s and 1880s, just as Abby Morton Diaz was writing her *Domestic Problem*, the homes of the middle-class were also undergoing a culinary revolution of sorts. The most fashionable housekeepers introduced French cooking to their table in an effort to emulate the lifestyle of the new millionaire elite. More elaborate menus and stylish tables were the highlights of the dinner party, an equally fashionable social occasion to which the middle-class duly converted. Only, technological improvements did not entirely compensate for the smaller and less specialized workforce that middle-class housekeepers could command, compared to those they tried to copy.<sup>25</sup>

In an implicit reaction to this new culinary struggle for status, Diaz blamed housewives for not understanding where their priorities should lie, or how best they should fulfill their duties. She argued that while being physically present at the stove was often praised as being “domestic,” true mothers spent quality time with their families, time they could use to meet both the spiritual and physical needs of their children.<sup>26</sup> The advice literature similarly faulted the women who tired themselves out sewing ruffled dresses for their daughters instead of using their time more wisely. Catherine Owen, a celebrated author of domestic advice manuals from the 1870s and 1880s, had her Molly Bishop character use the savings that resulted from cooking more intelligently to send out her sewing to a seamstress; this was a lesson that her overworked neighbor had yet to learn.<sup>27</sup> Like the new experts in home economics, Diaz and Owen subtly denigrated the housewife and her unlearned ways. In the process they asserted the intellectual authority that their mastery of a burgeoning science conferred on them.<sup>28</sup> As Laura Shapiro

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<sup>23</sup>Ruth Cowan Schwartz, *More Work for Mother: The Ironies of Household Technology from the Open Hearth to the Microwave* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 89; 99-100.

<sup>24</sup>Nancy Tomes, “Spreading the Germ Theory: Sanitary Science and Home Economics, 1880-1930,” 38-43, in *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of a Profession*, edited by Sarah Stage and Virginia Vincenti (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>25</sup>Harvey Levenstein, “The ‘Servant Problem’ and American Cookery,” *Revue Française d’Études Américaines* 27-28, no. 1 (1986): 127-130.

<sup>26</sup>Diaz, *A Domestic Problem*, 19-20.

<sup>27</sup>Catherine Owen, *Ten Dollars Enough: Keeping House Well on Ten Dollars A Week* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1887), 53.

<sup>28</sup>Glenna Matthews, *“Just a Housewife”: The Rise and Fall of Domesticity in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 146.



writes, “[t]o domestic scientists, the inchoate nature of traditional cookery was a sorry reminder of humankind’s barbaric past.”<sup>29</sup> To solve the issue, Diaz proposed either “lessening the work” or “hiring workers” so that mothers could devote themselves to acquiring culture for the benefit of their children and “tak[ing] interest in such kinds of public affairs as [had] a bearing on [this] special duty.”<sup>30</sup>

Despite Abby Morton Diaz’s emphasis on motherhood, women did not need to be mothers to pursue culture and the exhilaration of a career outside the home. Many activists and reformers pursuing a quasi-career in reform relied on the domestic labor of other women. Mary Livermore’s housekeeper and governess enabled her to work for the US Sanitary Commission during the Civil War; Elizabeth Cady Stanton openly paid tribute to her servant Amelia Willard, acknowledging that her suffrage work would have been “quite impossible” without her.<sup>31</sup> Even at the WEIU, where regional rather than national reform work was taking place, the directors who were boarders—and thus had their housekeeping done for pay by the person from whom they rented a room—tended to be of the class that could and did afford servants. Sarah Deutsch reaffirmed that what enabled third WEIU president Mary Morton Kehew to dedicate her life to reform was “in part the reimagining and ordering of domestic space by elite matrons [. . .]: the domestic-based claims of moral authority and the domestic servants who freed the time of elite and upper middle-class matrons.”<sup>32</sup> Charlotte Barrell Ware (studied in chapter 2) hired a general maid even before becoming a commercial farmer. In 1900, when the census showed that she had one servant, Maria L. Starks, a 19-year-old African American woman from Virginia, she was active in the Union’s Domestic Reform League and in the Twentieth Century Club, but not yet a career woman.<sup>33</sup> Among the WEIU’s founders, Caroline E. Streeter, a widow who lived with her adolescent daughter and adult son—a journalist—had two boarders and a domestic servant in 1880.<sup>34</sup> The same year, Caroline A. Kennard, whose husband was US assistant treasurer Marten P. Kennard, was reported as having no children but two

<sup>29</sup>Shapiro, *Perfection Salad*, 79.

<sup>30</sup>Diaz, *A Domestic Problem*, 99. In a supplementary chapter, she argued that fathers should “be educated for their vocation” too (p. 115).

<sup>31</sup>Dudden, *Serving Women*, 241.

<sup>32</sup>Deutsch, *Women and the City*, 137.

<sup>33</sup>United States Census, 1900, FamilySearch ([familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M9TN-DSF](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M9TN-DSF)), Entry for Robert A Ware and Charlotte B Ware, 1900; United States Census, 1910, FamilySearch ([familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M2KR-91P](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M2KR-91P)), Entry for Robert A Ware and Charlotte B Ware, 1910. In 1910, she and her husband had eight lodgers, mostly teachers and social workers, and one “general servant,” 26-year-old William McPheters from Maine.

<sup>34</sup>United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch ([familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHXT-7Y5](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHXT-7Y5)), Entry for Caroline E. Streeter and Benjn L. Beal, 1880.

servants, Scot Jane McCartney and the younger, native-born Sarah Beatty, also of Scot descent.<sup>35</sup> Dr. Helen B. O’Leary was likely able to have her own practice thanks to the two Irish maids she and her physician husband kept.<sup>36</sup>

Some of the women involved in the WEIU, the most socially prominent of them all, lived busy lives that combined paid work and volunteering. Mary D. H. Prang (1836-1927) was an art educator, a scion of the illustrious New England Dana family,<sup>37</sup> whose parents put their wealth to the service of local benevolent enterprises. In the 1890s and early 1900s she supplemented her teaching career with an involvement in the WEIU and twenty-six other various societies ranging from exclusive social clubs to teachers’ professional associations, suffragist groups, and charitable societies. After school hours, she educated teachers, put on exhibitions of schoolchildren’s drawings, and presided the Social Art Club of Syracuse and the Massachusetts Floral Emblem Society. Owing to her almost overwhelming amount of social engagements, she would probably have viewed her two domestics as a bare necessity.<sup>38</sup> More likely than not, WEIU women were to be found among the employing class. It was their servants’ hired labor which enabled these career reformers to puzzle over how to advance women’s economic interests—and, starting in the 1890s, what to do about the rising number of women who spurned domestic service in favor of factory work.

#### 4.1.2 Founding the Domestic Reform League: Solving A Peculiarly Female Problem

In the nineteenth century, New England purveyors of charity were accustomed to considering domestic service an avenue for self-support for women who would have otherwise been objects of public relief. In orphanages like the Boston Female Asylum (BFA), an institution for destitute native-born children founded in 1800 and run by well-meaning middle-class matrons, girls were expected to perform

<sup>35</sup>United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch ([familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MXXH-6JW](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MXXH-6JW)), Entry for Marten P. Kennard and Caroline A. Kennard, 1880.

<sup>36</sup>United States Census, 1880, FamilySearch ([familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MXH5-RNM](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MXH5-RNM)), Entry for Arthur O’Leary and Helen B. O’Leary, 1880.

<sup>37</sup>The Danas were part of the elite Brahmin set. Frederic Jaher Cople, *The Urban Establishment: Upper Strata in Boston, New York, Charleston, Chicago, and Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 26.

<sup>38</sup>“Mary D. H. Prang,” *Representative Women of New England* (Boston: New England Historical Publishing Company, 1904), edited by Julia Ward Howe, 40-43, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.rslfex>; United States Census, 1900, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M9TR-B3R>), Entry for Louis Prang and Mary D H Prang, 1900.

essential housework tasks. Their labor doubled as a basic training of sorts, with the expectation that upon reaching adulthood they would become self-supporting as domestics. Even though by the 1840s more orphans chose to marry, and at earlier ages than previously, self-reliance was still stressed by the benevolent managers of the BFA.<sup>39</sup> Service was an occupation for women that was thought to require little or no training; an option of last resort that could always be depended upon.

While this view was gradually fading by the 1880s, it still retained a strong hold on the collective imagination, as the story of the WEIU’s involvement in Boston’s Citizens’ Relief Committee will show. Following the Panic of 1893, the WEIU was called upon by Boston’s municipal government to help find work for unemployed women by sending them to “good country homes” for service positions. Over the span of three weeks, forty women who applied for work to the sewing workshops run by the Citizens’ Relief Committee were instead placed by the Union in private homes.<sup>40</sup> These were women who for the most part were not accustomed to working for pay outside the home; “untrained” women whom the economic slump had precipitated into the ranks of the wage-earners, and who could lay little claim to white-collar or teaching positions. Some of them “had always done housework” but were unable to find places in the city.<sup>41</sup> To be a woman meant that one would be presumed to know how to do for pay what many were already doing in their homes for free. A municipal agent working for the citizen’s relief committee summarized his observations thus:

A similar crowd came daily for several weeks, young and old, Germans, Russians, Portuguese, Italians, as well as Irish and Americans. Many could hardly speak a word of English. Some looked very poor, some were comfortably and even well dressed. Many manifestly belonged to the class accustomed to pick up an irregular subsistence as chances turned up; many looked like trade-workers, and a very few seemed as if they had never before looked for work out of their homes.<sup>42</sup>

While the Boston housekeepers who volunteered their names to the WEIU in 1893 would have accepted untrained domestic help into their homes, by the early 1890s a growing number of their middle-class peers were bemoaning the disorder-

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<sup>39</sup>Susan L. Porter, “Victorian Values in the Marketplace: Single Women and Work in Boston, 1800-1850,” in *Women of the Commonwealth: Work, Family, and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts*, edited by Susan L. Porter (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 17-41.

<sup>40</sup>“More Money and More Work,” *Boston Herald*, January 21, 1894, 12; “The E. and I. Union.” Among the Women’s Clubs, *Boston Sunday Herald*, March 4, 1894, 29.

<sup>41</sup>*Documents of the City of Boston*, 1894, v. 4 (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1895), 24, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015068187411>

<sup>42</sup>*Documents of the City of Boston*, 1894, v. 4, 21.

liness engendered by “green,” i.e. inexperienced, servants. Some of them began advocating systematic training for what was, under the aegis of the domestic science movement, being recast as a paid occupation like any other. Discriminating white middle-class housewives had long complained about the shortcomings of their help; now, they felt entitled to demand more bang for their buck. Mrs. C. H. Stone, a St Louis clubwoman and author, published her *Problem of Domestic Service* in 1892, only five years after Abby Morton Diaz’s *Domestic Problem*. Stone’s treatise, of which the WEIU kept a copy, made the case for the stringent training of houseworkers.<sup>43</sup> Mrs C. H. Stone went further in detailing the moral implications of the middle-class guidance that domestics received. Since the home was woman’s “special kingdom,” the “servant problem” was hers to investigate and solve. In Stone’s view, servants should be apprehended first as women, the wives and mothers of working-class men. She argued that housekeepers had a special responsibility for making domestics into upstanding workers because of the moral consequences of housework—when carried out to unsatisfactory standards, it would turn out inadequate homes and citizens. Middle-class men had their hands full, and, she contended, did not know what housewives really needed anyway. It was up to the latter to find how to secure pools of willing, competent enough workers.<sup>44</sup> Improved working conditions would not cut it: only greater competition between workers would tame their laziness, by forcing them to perform to a higher standard or risk losing their job.<sup>45</sup> In Stone’s account, we see the beginnings of a more economic way of thinking about the “servant problem”—as one largely caused not by individual moral failings considered in the aggregate, but by an entire class or category of workers who should be made to compete against one another, and whose work could and should be ruthlessly graded and compared.

This way of conceptualizing the “servant problem” would be pursued to greater lengths by the WEIU’s Domestic Reform League (DRL). The DRL was the brainchild of WEIU directors’ dissatisfaction with their own servants. As they stated, upon organizing the DRL as an ad-hoc committee, “[t]he objects of the League [were] the scientific and careful consideration of present conditions; the

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<sup>43</sup>Additional WEIU records, Mrs. C. H. Stone, *The Problem of Domestic Service* (St Louis: Nelson Printing Company, 1892). 81-M237. Carton 8. In some ways, this attempt on the part of the Boston municipal government to find care work for women otherwise unfit for the labor market prefigured the New Deal housekeeper program, which the US Children’s Bureau would implement in 1935. Eileen Boris and Jennifer Klein, *Caring for America: Home Health Workers in the Shadow of the Welfare State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 19.

<sup>44</sup>Stone, *Problem of Domestic Service*, 5-7.

<sup>45</sup>Stone, *Problem of Domestic Service*, 7.

awakening of the interest of women in the largest aspect of the problem; the recognition by the employer that fair conditions should be given for faithful service; and by the employee, that interested and efficient service must be given in exchange for fair wages and just conditions; and the further recognition by both employer and employee that efficiency should be a standard of wages.”<sup>46</sup> In their writings, the terms “employer” and “employee” replaced the older, more feudal “mistress” and “servant,” as the former embraced a new identity as managers of staff, counterparts to their husbands. Faye Dudden contends that it was housewives’ ability to recast themselves as female business managers which made domesticity palatable to them.<sup>47</sup> This experience even prepared them for bona fide professional management: once they were accustomed to receiving respect and recognition for managing the help, white native-born women could start envisioning themselves as professional managers outside of the house as well. A 1912 compendium of women’s vocations defined “going into business” simply as “employing and managing others,” and asserted that “women [were] competent for such management,” presumably because they had experience managing servants.<sup>48</sup> Confident in her ability to preside over female workers, the newfangled mistress had become, in the eyes of reformers, a factor in the labor question.

## 4.2 Home-Based “Industries”

The late 1890s was the period when the WEIU refined the principles by which its Food Sales Department was run. The Union’s producers were watched more closely and provided with gentle but firm advice as to what home-made goods would sell in a store. This position as managers of a woman’s exchange colored their view of the domestic space as one where valuable commodities could be produced, if only bulk buying, adequate bookkeeping, and commercial standards of work could be adhered to. The women of the WEIU, like other domestic reformers, “emphasiz[ed] the need for systematic management principles” and gradually moved toward “treat[ing] the servant question as part of the general question of capital and labor.”<sup>49</sup> Unlike producers, however, domestics were not independent,

<sup>46</sup>WEIU records, Heloise E. Hersey, “History of the Domestic Reform League,” November 1903, n.p. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>47</sup>Dudden, *Serving Women*, 244.

<sup>48</sup>*The Women’s Athenaeum*, v. 9 (Boston: 1912), 21, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.rsm6qb>.

<sup>49</sup>Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 251-252.

self-directed agents—and the consequence of making them into employees would lead reformers to face uncomfortable consequences.

### 4.2.1 A “Belated Industry”<sup>50</sup>: Constructing Domestic Service as a Branch of Industry

To early WEIU members like social reformer and author Ednah Dow Cheney (1824–1904),<sup>51</sup> domestic work was the prototype of work as service to humanity. In 1886, at one of the WEIU’s religious Sunday meetings, Cheney approached the labor question from a moral perspective—that of the moral imperative. She articulated a conception of work as the “active principle of nature.” Man and beast were made to engage in “earnest, productive labor.” In self-denying New England fashion, she exhorted the audience of “ladies” to ask themselves, “What work is needed to be done? What does the human race lack that I can do?” To raise the standard of work, she believed that the profit motive must be discarded and an ethos of service embraced. And what the world lacked that women could provide, was “a great deal of what is called housework.”<sup>52</sup>

In those years, while the Union provided a placement service for domestic workers, its Employment Bureau was rather dedicated to the “higher branches,” white-collar positions more fitting of those who aspired to middle-class status, and which could be more easily conceived of as career prospects. The “work that underl[ay] all the happiness of the home” was not a career, but “the most sacred of all the employments.”<sup>53</sup> In the words of historian Vanessa May, “the privacy and protection of a self-sufficient home was central to the maintenance of virtuous middle-class domesticity, and domestics seemed central to the maintenance of the private, middle-class home,” which was collectively understood to form the bedrock of society.<sup>54</sup> WEIU members made a show of their own domestic prowess in the cookbook that they edited and sold as a souvenir for the fundraising fair they organized in 1887.<sup>55</sup> The recipes were presented as coming directly from

<sup>50</sup>WEIU records, “Domestic Service: A Belated Industry,” invitation card, c1907. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>51</sup>Snyder, Lawrence W., “Cheney, Ednah Dow Littlehale,” *American National Biography*, February 2000.

<sup>52</sup>“Labor Was Her Theme,” *Boston Herald*, December 27, 1886, 6.

<sup>53</sup>“At Cross Purposes,” *Boston Herald*, February 21, 1887, 6.

<sup>54</sup>May, *Unprotected Labor*, 35.

<sup>55</sup>Additional WEIU records, Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *The Kirmess Cook-Book*, Boston (Boston: Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 1887). 81-M237. Carton 8, folder 136.

the editors’ personal repertoires; this was a conventional way for them to reaffirm their womanliness and their standing in the community.<sup>56</sup> From the 1880s through the turn of the century, the women of the WEIU considered housework as a private matter—the housewife’s special duties, and for some working-class women the most straightforward way they could support themselves. In 1902, the WEIU managed the Woman’s Department of the twenty-first exhibition of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics’ Association.<sup>57</sup> A Boston institution, starting in 1887 the triennial fair had included a “woman’s department” to showcase the industries that employed working-class women.<sup>58</sup> In the same vein, the 1902 exhibit was intended to showcase “what ha[d] been done by women, and for women.” The organizers noted that “while the imperative importance of the home cannot be disregarded, the growing opportunities of women for self-support in the industrial world must also claim attention.” Still, they chose to emphasize the exhibit on maintenance of the home as a peculiarly female responsibility.<sup>59</sup> This restricted perspective was motivated on the ground that, since women had made inroads in most of the previously male industries, it would have been impossible to cover everything; if choices had to be made anyway, then the WEIU might as well point to the rise of domestic science as a that of new opportunities for self-support.<sup>60</sup> The women’s part of the exhibit was thus divided into three rooms, and as many themes: “Household Management,” where the work of the WEIU’s Domestic Reform League was showcased, “Industries,” by which the WEIU mostly meant the “arts and crafts” inspired revival of handcrafts like hand-weaving and rug-making, and “Social Service.”<sup>61</sup> Even the accompanying lectures, like Bertha Stevenson’s “Breadmaking and its Industrial Significance,” depicted women’s “industrial work” as largely connected to the domestic space.<sup>62</sup> Contemporaries took “industry” to mean “any department or branch of art, occupation; especially, one which employs

<sup>56</sup>Suffragists used cooking and embroidery as symbols of their femininity. Beverly Gordon, *Bazaars and Fair Ladies: The History of the American Fundraising Fair* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 122.

<sup>57</sup>The object of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics Association was “the encouragement of ingenuity and excellence of workmanship among the mechanics and manufacturers” of the state through the organization of exhibitions and fairs. The first such exhibition was held in 1818. *Guide to Boston and Vicinity* (Boston: 1867), 69, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hn63c8>.

<sup>58</sup>“Women’s Work in the Mechanics’ Fair,” *Boston Journal*, May 3, 1890, 1.

<sup>59</sup>Papers of Ethel Fifield Brooks, “Catalogue of the Women’s Department of the Twenty-First Exhibition of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association,” 1902, 3. Box 1. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Libraries, Department of Distinctive Collections, <https://hdl.handle.net/1721.3/200502>.

<sup>60</sup>“Catalogue of the Women’s Department,” 3-4; 6.

<sup>61</sup>“Catalogue of the Women’s Department,” 9-10.

<sup>62</sup>“Catalogue of the Women’s Department,” 12-14.

much labor and capital and is a distinct branch of trade”; to political economists, it was tied to capital and explicitly entailed the “creation of value.”<sup>63</sup> The focus on women’s domestic work, while it revealed the preferences and inclinations of middle-class reformers, also involved connecting the domestic space and economic production.

Five years later, in a measure of how quickly the reformers at the Union moved to apprehend domestic work as an “industry,” the same organization proudly showed visitors of the Boston Exhibit of Industrial Conditions around their “domestic work” booth.<sup>64</sup> The Exhibit, a free public event held in Horticultural Hall in 1907, was organized by the WEIU, the Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL), other local trade unions, industrial schools and middle-class reform organizations like the National Consumers League (NCL) and the Boston Association for the Relief and Control of Tuberculosis.<sup>65</sup> The “first of its kind held in New England,” the event was motivated by the Progressive logic that showing the public laborers’ true working conditions would spur voters to demand protective legislation from their government. Juxtaposed data-bearing panels, photographic evidence of reformed workplaces and hazardous, unregulated factories, and even “actual workings scenes” were combined to give attendees the gut punch that would lead them to take action.<sup>66</sup> For a week, loom operators, printers, and laundry workers demon-

<sup>63</sup>These definitions are those from the 1913 edition of Webster’s New International Dictionary of the English Language, <https://www.websters1913.com/words/Industry>.

<sup>64</sup>WEIU records, *Bulletin of the Domestic Reform League* 3, no. 1 (October 1908): 2. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>65</sup>The Association for the Relief and Control of Tuberculosis, the local expression of a regional and even national interest in public health, was established in 1903 by Boston physicians and reformers intent on spreading accurate information on the best ways to prevent the spread of tuberculosis. In the first year of its work, the Association pursued a “vigorous campaign of education,” which involved giving lectures to an estimated 10,500 people, distributing some 80,000 leaflets, and putting together a traveling exhibit of photographs, statistical diagrams, and sanitary appliances. The Association also petitioned Boston’s Mayor and City Council for the creation of a hospital that would accept tuberculous patients. See *Annual Report of the Boston Association for the Relief and Control of Tuberculosis, 1903-1904* (Boston: 1904), 5-9, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112112343238>; “Massachusetts,” *Federation Bulletin* 6, no. 3 (December 1908): 89-90, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679742>; and Liliastrom, “Health Department,” *Federation Bulletin* 7, no. 1 (September 1909): 30, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679742>. The Women’s Trade Union League, founded the same year, was a women’s trade union started by an alliance of middle-class reformers and leading labor women. The Boston branch of the national organization owed its vibrant activity to the Boston origins of the WTUL, which third WEIU president Mary Morton Kehew was instrumental in organizing. For reference about the national history of the WTUL, see Robin M. Jacoby, “The Women’s Trade Union League and American Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 3, 1/2 (1975): 126-140, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3518960>, as well as Nancy Dye Schrom, *As Equals and As Sisters: Feminism, the Labor Movement, and the Women’s Trade Union League of New York* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980). For a note on the history of the National Consumers League, see chapter 2, page 149

<sup>66</sup>“Boston To Have Novel Exhibit,” *Boston Herald*, February 25, 1907, 4.



strated actual work processes for the edification of the public; conferences were held, and various ventilation appliances and safety devices examined.<sup>67</sup> Renowned settlement worker Jane Addams penned the foreword to the exhibit’s booklet. In it, she explained that the exhibit was designed to lift the veil of familiarity. As the artist shows reality under a new light, so did the people who organized the exhibit try to make industrial conditions come alive to visitors.<sup>68</sup> The invisibility on which Jane Addams remarked was later analyzed by Jeanne Boydston as a historical process unto itself, the “pastoralization” of housework. Boydston analyzes how the economic dimension of housework was purposely invisibilized over the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup> Through the careful weaving of a romantic narrative, women’s domestic labor was made into “work’s opposite: a new form of leisure.” Elevated to the exalted rank of gentle counselor, woman was discounted from the ranks of the laborers, and her work’s economic value completely negated.<sup>70</sup>

While Addams’s remarks concerned the entirety of the exhibit, they rang even truer of domestic work and its paid subcategory, domestic service. Through their work at Horticultural Hall, the women of the WEIU aimed at making men and women realize the extent to which domestic service was an industry like any other—one that must adapt to changing times. Years earlier, Addams had made the thinly veiled case that the more conservative elements among the club movement, the self-identified ladies who harped on the sanctity of the home and the need to protect it, were doing themselves and other women a disservice. Comparing them to English Luddites in their selfish opposition to technological progress, Addams deplored that even when they had received a college education, they were reluctant to embrace innovations like prepared foods and turned a blind eye to houseworkers’ demands. Jane Addams’s own understanding was that “that small body of women who attempt[ed] to bring the household into harmony with the industrial conditions and the social ideals that prevail[ed] [then] in the larger world outside the home [were] the women who [were] really saving the home and [were] exhibiting faith in the future.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup>“Industrial Conditions Exhibit,” *Springfield Republican*, April 5, 1907, 9; “Boston To Have Novel Exhibit,” *Boston Herald*, February 25, 1907, 4; “Industrial Conditions Exhibit,” *Springfield Republican*, April 5, 1907, 9; “To Show Problems of Working Class,” *Boston Herald*, April 7, 1907, 18; “Philanthropy That Pays,” *Plain Dealer*, October 27, 1907, 59.

<sup>68</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Exhibit of Industrial Conditions in Relation to Public Health, Safety and Welfare,” 1907. 81-M237. Carton 8.

<sup>69</sup>Boydston, *Home and Work*, 142-163.

<sup>70</sup>Boydston, *Home and Work*, 145.

<sup>71</sup>Jane Addams, “The Servant Problem,” *Good Housekeeping* 37 (September 1903): 234, HathiTrust, [hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.102781344](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.102781344). As defined and summarized by Ken Binfield, the term “Luddite” may be applied to the workers who led protests against the introduc-

At the industrial fair in 1907, the WEIU’s representatives pushed that reasoning to its logical conclusion, arguing that domestic workers were fully concerned by the labor question. They were “women in industry”<sup>72</sup>; the fact might have escaped their contemporaries, they argued, because women’s work only alarmed cultural luminaries and trade unions when it took place outside the home. In addition, the peculiarities of domestic labor—that it was carried on in the private home, usually by a lone employee, who had to take on a bewildering array of tasks—obscured its relation to the labor question. In a pioneering 1898 study on the “social conditions in domestic service,” already the DRL had noted that the maid occupied a “peculiar” position in the industrial world: while she was a purveyor of essential services, her status was lower than that of factory women; “[s]he [was] in the family, but not of it”; finally, the “old relation of mistress of servant,” defined by mutual responsibility, had not yet given way to the better-defined employer-employee relationship.<sup>73</sup> A relic from a time when cottage industries were still widespread, housework was “one of the old home industries,” but it was an “industry” nonetheless, the WEIU argued—and it was in the process of catching up with the rest of the economy.<sup>74</sup> To impress the necessity of reform on visitors, DRL attendants gestured at one telling figure: out of the 5,319,397 women wage-earners in the United States in 1900, 26.88% were employed in domestic service.<sup>75</sup> They would likely have steered interested attendees toward the conferences held on the third day of the event, when president of the Massachusetts Civic League Edward Cummings disserted on “The Place of Domestic Service in Industry” and Ellen Richards presented her insights as to “The Hope for the Future of Domestic Service.”<sup>76</sup>

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tion of new machinery in the early stages of the English industrial revolution. Between 1811 and 1817, starting in the Midlands and the North of England, workers engaged in the breaking of machinery, which they justified in writings they signed Edward “Ned” Ludd. These anonymous authors wrote letters, proclamations, and verses, threatening violence against manufacturers if they would not put an end to the use of machinery which, they argued, was driving down wages and destroying their living. While some historians have argued that there was no coherent Luddite movement or campaign, Binfield edited a collection of Luddite texts. Kevin Binfield, ed., *Writings of the Luddites* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), 1-4.

<sup>72</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Exhibit of Industrial Conditions in Relation to Public Health, Safety and Welfare,” 1907, 5. 81-M237. Carton 8, folder 133.

<sup>73</sup>WEIU records, Mary Dewson, *Social Conditions in Domestic Service* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1900), 3-4. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>74</sup>*Bulletin of the Domestic Reform League* (October 1908): 2.

<sup>75</sup>*Bulletin of the Domestic Reform League* (October 1908): 3.

<sup>76</sup>WEIU records, “Domestic Service: A Belated Industry,” invitation card, c1907. B-8. Box 2, folder 5. Ellen Richards was the MIT chemist and leading home economist discussed in chapter 2 <sup>77</sup>, while Harvard-graduate Edward Cummings (1861-unknown) was a minister at Boston’s South Congregational Church. In 1900, he had resigned his position at Harvard’s sociology department to embrace a religious calling. In addition to being the President of the Massachusetts Civic

This industrial fair should be related to the Union’s own exhibits of women’s work, whose tenor was close to the celebratory tones of mechanics’ fairs. In 1903 and 1909 WEIU members were invited “to preview an exhibition of exquisite and original articles hand-fashioned by home producers for The Seven Delightful Shops of the Union.” On the day of the event, “demonstrations of techniques and skills” awaited the prospective shopper.<sup>78</sup> Buoyed by the ascending winds of an arts and crafts revival,<sup>79</sup> the WEIU’s female reformers romanticized hand work and posited skill as central to the productive activities of cooking, knitting, sewing, carpet-making—but, it appeared, this was most clearly the case when producers worked from their own homes and sold their goods to customers through a third-party like the Woman’s Exchange. Removed from domestic service, from its social stigma and unappealing working conditions, producers’ labor could most easily be dignified, especially when it was contrasted with those of ordinary housewives. According to Glenna Matthews, by then the latter were inhabiting an “industrialized home,” in which cooking itself was in the process of being de-skilled.<sup>80</sup> No longer a refuge from the disruptive forces of industrialization, the home could no longer function as “an arena for the display of female prowess.”<sup>81</sup> Whether self-employed producers or hired domestic help, the women who labored within its walls were increasingly being acknowledged as economic agents.

#### 4.2.2 Houseworkers: Personnel or Commodities?

What were the consequences on houseworkers of this conceptual reorientation of housework as an industry? The market logic of supply and demand was the primary interpretive framework that the women of the DRL, like many middle-class

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League, a civic reform association, he was also involved in local and state societies like the Associated Charities and several social settlements. At his 1907 lecture, he advocated a “half-holiday” for servants, arguing that the working conditions of factory operatives were better than those of domestics. *Who’s Who in New England* (Chicago: A. N. Marquis, 1909), 267, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015031909834>; “A Minister Now,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, October 8, 1900, 8; “Half-Holiday for the Servant Girl,” *Boston Journal*, April 12, 1907, 12.

<sup>78</sup>Additional WEIU records, “You are cordially invited...,” invitation card, c1903-1909. 81-M237. Carton 8.

<sup>79</sup>Gillian Naylor, *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A Study of Its Sources, Ideals, and Influence on Design Theory* (London: Studio Vista, 1971), 7-12. The “Arts and Crafts” movement was a British aesthetic movement with moral undertones and a social message: that traditional crafts ought to be preserved in the face of industrialization, and that their practice might bring a sense of personal and collective fulfillment. The British “Arts and Crafts” movement reached a peak in the 1860s, before its ideals were embraced by middle-class American reformers.

<sup>80</sup>Matthews, “Just A Housewife,” 92, 111.

<sup>81</sup>Matthews, “Just A Housewife,” 114-115.

proponents of domestic reform, applied to the “servant problem.” Domestic service was “preeminently the trade where demand exceed[ed] supply,”<sup>82</sup> and this motivated the Bureau’s decision to issue its monthly *Bulletin* (1906-1909), which was meant for publication of the statistics of supply and demand collected by the WEIU’s employment agency and the DRL’s fellows. The January 1909 issue of the *Bulletin*, for instance, focused on the effects that the financial depression of 1908-1909 had had on domestic service as a sector of industry. The WEIU noted that a fifteen-month business slump had resulted in a temporary increase in the number of job seekers and a lessened demand for houseworkers. Reformers concluded that this would probably affect the wages that were paid domestics.<sup>83</sup> Conversely, the DRL correctly analyzed that higher wages resulted from a lack of available workers. Under improved economic conditions, “individual employers vie[d] with each other in their eagerness to avail themselves of their portion of an inadequate supply,” offering higher wages than they would have wished.<sup>84</sup> In 1906, the DRL’s investigator wrote that the wages offered to inexperienced workers had increased 33.5% in the previous five years.<sup>85</sup> As Lara Vapnek has noted, “[w]hile DRL investigators [...] appreciated and publicized problems with hours and conditions from employees’ point of view, they remained firmly allied with the employing classes on the issue of wages,” considering the sums demanded (and obtained) by maids too high.<sup>86</sup>

Concerned middle-class housewives and labor reformers shared this supply-side approach to the problem. Readers of the *Bulletin of the Domestic Reform League* were referred to the column published by sociologist Frances Kellor (1873-1952) in the pages of the *Ladies Home Journal*.<sup>87</sup> Throughout 1906 and 1907, Kellor, a New-York based labor reformer with a degree in sociology from the University of Chicago, answered questions from the affluent readers of the *Ladies Home Journal*. In confidential though often frustrated tones, she tried to convey to them the need for a “clearing house,”<sup>88</sup> a collective approach to the “servant problem,” but her queries—what did housewives think of the contract between

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<sup>82</sup>WEIU records, Mary Moseley, “Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” February 1907, n.p. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>83</sup>WEIU records, *Bulletin of the Domestic Reform League* 3, no. 2 (January 1909): 1. B-8. Box 3, folder 23.

<sup>84</sup>WEIU records, *Bulletin of the Domestic Reform League* 1, no. 2 (February 1907), n.p. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>85</sup>*Trained and Supplementary Workers*, 2.

<sup>86</sup>Vapnek, *Breadwinners*, 113.

<sup>87</sup>WEIU records, *Bulletin of the Domestic Reform League* 1, no. 2 (February 1907), n.p. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>88</sup>Frances A. Kellor, “A New Phase of Welfare Work,” *Woman’s Welfare* 2, no. 3 (November 1905): 85.

mistress and servant? “What kind of legislation, if any, would better the conditions of household work and the relations between housewives and their helpers?”<sup>89</sup>—often went unheeded. The contract question garnered so few answers that in her October 1907 column she resorted to recycling a letter she had already discussed in a previous issue.<sup>90</sup> Soldiering on, Kellor asserted that “[t]he great law of supply and demand exist[ed] for the housewife as much as for the manufacturer.”<sup>91</sup> She could count on a few of the occasional letter writers to ask questions which enabled her to make her point. When “Dubuque” asked, “Will you not take some stand about the high wages that girls demand?” Kellor placed part of the blame on employment agents—whose fees were proportionate to the wages of the employees they placed—, but reserved the largest share of her criticism for the employers. If only they would come together, through “a concerted action,” would they be able to bring domestics’ wages down.<sup>92</sup>

It is little wonder that Kellor would think of applying the technique of the boycott to employers’ “servant problem.” In the New York Association for Household Research,<sup>93</sup> of which Kellor was a founder, she collaborated closely with NCL president Maud Nathan and WTUL leader Leonora O’Reilly.<sup>94</sup> Consumers Leagues, the NCL chief among them, made an extensive and expansion use of tactics like blacklisting, whitelisting, and boycotting, the latter being a practice which found its North American roots in Revolutionary America, a time and place when it was called “nonimportation” or “nonconsumption.” The boycott, as it was practiced in the 1880s and evolved into the consumer movement of the 1890s and 1900s, considerably enlarged the boundaries of any given protest because it involved an “imagined community of all supporters of the cause.” This is what domestic reformers hoped to do—to appeal to a self-conscious community of housewives, employers of domestic workers.<sup>95</sup> A “servant boycott” was all the more likely to appeal to the or-

<sup>89</sup>Frances A. Kellor, “The Housewife and Her Helper,” *Ladies Home Journal* 23, no. 2 (January 1906): 36, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015011447888>.

<sup>90</sup>Frances A. Kellor, “The Housewife and Her Helper,” *Ladies Home Journal* 24, no. 10 (October 1907), 62, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015013140838>. The recycled letter was first published in April 1907. Frances A. Kellor, “The Housewife and Her Helper,” *Ladies’ Home Journal* 24, no. 5 (April 1907): 42, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015013140838>.

<sup>91</sup>Kellor, “The Housewife and Her Helper” (October 1907).

<sup>92</sup>Frances A. Kellor, “The Housewife and Her Helper,” *Ladies Home Journal* 23, no. 3 (February 1906): 32, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015011447888>.

<sup>93</sup>The New York Association for Household Research (1904-1906) was an organization of reformers and philanthropists who, like the Bostonian founders of the DRL, investigated the conditions of domestic service and authored data-driven studies in hopes of effecting domestic reform. See May, *Unprotected Labor*, 117.

<sup>94</sup>May, *Unprotected Labor*, 117.

<sup>95</sup>Lawrence Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Urbana:

dinary mistress that the inflation of the late 1900s was met by a surge in consumer activism at all levels, including that of otherwise unpoliticized housewives.<sup>96</sup>

Kellor also had a WEIU connection: like the Domestic Reform League, the New York Association for Household Research was one of the founding members of the Inter-Municipal Research Committee for Household Research, a think tank dedicated to “the study of the industrial conditions of domestic workers, and of the conditions of all unemployed women,” of which Kellor herself was the general director in 1907.<sup>97</sup> As we will see later in this chapter, in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston, the sociologists active in the Inter-Municipal Committee’s member organizations did initially conduct coordinated investigations into the living and working conditions of domestic servants.

Their shared supply-side approach to the problem dictated the solutions that the DRL considered. First, they attempted to convince factory workers and saleswomen to choose a job that was, to reformers, more healthful and better paid. Young, white native-born women found opportunities for wage work outside of the middle-class home. They were enticed by the clearly-defined hours, well-bounded duties, and the possibility to socialize with peers on the job.<sup>98</sup> These workers were considered most desirable, especially when compared to Irish immigrants and Black southern women, whose migrations to New England struck fear into the heart of the white middle-class matron.<sup>99</sup> Too many women competed for

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University of Chicago Press, 2009), 115; 134; 155-188; Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation’s Work: The Rise of Women’s Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 221.

<sup>96</sup>For a case study of housewives’ role in a slightly ulterior boycott campaign, that of the 1910 meat boycott, see Alice Béja, “The Political Uses of Food Protests: Analyzing the 1910 Meat Boycott,” *Journal of American Studies* 57, no. 2 (2023): 178-196.

<sup>97</sup>WEIU records, “Domestic Service: A Belated Industry,” invitation card, c1907, n.p. B-8. Box 2, folder 5; Kellor, “A New Phrase of Welfare Work,” 84.

<sup>98</sup>Vapnek, *Breadwinners*, 113-114.

<sup>99</sup>Phillips-Cunningham, *Putting Their Hands on Race*, 90-91; Elizabeth Hafkin Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty in Boston, 1865-1900* (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 45-66; Blake Gumprecht, *North to Boston: Life Histories from the Black Great Migration in New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 1-26. Boston did not follow the migration patterns identified by historians as the “Great Migration” of Black Americans out of the South and into the North and the Midwest. It was roughly between 1860 and 1900 that the city experienced its first wave of significant Black southern immigration: between 1860 and 1880, the number of Boston’s Black inhabitants doubled, and would do so again between 1880 and 1900. Most of Boston’s Black immigrants were Virginians; in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, they represented about one third of Boston’s total Black population. Historian Elizabeth Pleck has determined that these migrants tended to be more literate, lighter-skinned, and more accustomed to urban modes of living than the average Black southerner—characteristics they shared with the southern free Blacks. Most of the southern immigrants who arrived after emancipation settled in Boston’s South End, then spread into adjacent lower Roxbury, where they created a thriving network of “southern-Black” businesses and a church which complemented existing Black community institutions dating back to the early nineteenth century. Most Black Bostonians,

factory jobs, which depressed their wages, when at the same time servant quarters remained desperately empty in Boston’s leafy suburbs. To reformers, the fix was simple. Attempting to divert the “supply” of white, native-born Americans from the factory and the department store was the most logical way to correct the flaws of an otherwise unregulated labor market. When that failed, even men were considered as a potential source of general workers, so that the “balance of supply and demand” may be “restore[d]” at last.<sup>100</sup>

The economic language of supply and demand was both responsive to and formative of housewives’ dehumanizing view of domestic workers. In 1901-1902 the DRL conducted a survey of Massachusetts clubwomen and collegiate women from the eastern seaboard and Midwest. Female investigators asked them how domestic workers could be induced to pursue training, among other questions pertaining to the “servant problem” and how it could be solved. One respondent openly wondered if China could not constitute a new source of “supply.”<sup>101</sup> While in the DRL’s sociological analysis domestic service was fully considered as an economic sector—an “industry”—, houseworkers were not personnel, but “supply”—a kind of commodity to be procured, enjoyed, and in some cases even used up by housewives. In appalled tones, one of Frances Kellor’s letter-writers, an employment agent, shared insights into the behavior of his clients: “there is a class—yes, I say class—of employers who hire a girl for about four or six weeks every year. They come to the office and ask for a strong girl; then she is required to clean the whole house and do a month’s washing, including the bedclothes, and then she is discharged. At the end of a month or two these employers come back and want another girl for the same thing,” he wrote.<sup>102</sup> What mattered most to a

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whether Massachusetts-born or southern immigrants, were concentrated in menial and service occupations.

<sup>100</sup>WEIU records, Heloise E. Hersey, “History of the Domestic Reform League,” November 1903, 2. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>101</sup>WEIU records, WEIU, *Trained and Supplementary Workers in Domestic Service* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1906), 8. B-8. Box 2, folder 5. This remark may seem surprising in the context of provisions which barred Chinese immigration in the wake of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882). However, this survey return may have come from a Western employer, more likely to be acquainted with Asian servants—per the author of the study, “[t]he Association of Collegiate Alumnae [whose members were surveyed] had a membership [...] located throughout the United States, representing, therefore, diversified household conditions ranging from the San Francisco home, with its inevitable Chinese man servant, to the ‘eight in help’ in the home of the ‘effet East.’” *Trained and Supplementary Workers*, 3. On the impact of the Chinese Exclusion Act on American culture and its introduction of what Erika Lee argues was a “gatekeeping” ideology, see Erika Lee, “The Chinese Exclusion Example: Race, Immigration, and American Gatekeeping, 1882-1924,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 21, no. 3 (Spring 2002): 36-62.

<sup>102</sup>Frances A. Kellor, “The Housewife and Her Helper,” *Ladies Home Journal* 24, no. 4 (April 1907), 42.

majority of mistresses seems to have been wringing out as many working hours from their servants as they could. After all, employers frequently expressed the view that they did not hire a worker’s time, but her person.<sup>103</sup> Live-in domestic service was preferred for the very reason that housewives desired a worker to be available round the clock in case of emergency. This behavior led domestic scientists and reformers to complain about housewives’ backwardly feudal tendencies. Even as the imbalance of supply and demand led many to raise the wages that they offered, or to tout better servant quarters as enticements, only 4.82% of the DRL’s respondents were prepared to give more free time to their servants.<sup>104</sup>

Houseworkers’ ambiguous status as both labor force and commodity helps explain that reformers did not successfully carry out their economic analysis of the situation. The DRL acknowledged that there were not enough employees to go around, but its directors and fellows, like the housewives they surveyed, found it fundamentally unreasonable and almost absurd that incompetent helpers could command high wages. Mrs. C. H. Stone thought it worthy of censure “when prices [went] up from fictitious reasons only, instead of legitimate ones”—“legitimate” reasons being an increase in the quality of work.<sup>105</sup> In a sense, she, like the founders of the DRL, could not part from the idea that efficiency was or at least should be the main factor of wage definition. Consequently, they were indignant about what they perceived as extortion on the part of domestics. Of employers, the DRL noted that they “complain[ed] of the scarcity of employees for domestic service and of the high wages demanded, in consequence of such scarcity, by the incompetent,” as if there existed a situation in which the former would not entail the latter.<sup>106</sup> Sometimes, housewives blamed each other for wage inflation. One told the DRL that the problem was that “employers in this country [were] willing, in great numbers, to pay high wages for unskilled and disrespectful service.”<sup>107</sup> To them, only good service, measured with “efficiency” as a yardstick, deserved to be rewarded with higher wages; no other factor ought to figure in the equation. This idea was so central to these women’s worldview that the DRL tried, equally as unsuccessfully, to apply the efficiency rule to the management of the employment office. In an appeal for funds, Henrietta Goodrich, a former instructor in the School of Housekeeping, stated in 1907 “[t]he Union [felt] that if the work of the League

<sup>103</sup>Dudden, *Serving Women*, 178-183.

<sup>104</sup>*Trained and Supplementary Workers*, 5.

<sup>105</sup>Stone, *Domestic Problem*, 40; Helen M. Winslow, “Literary Club Women,” *Critic* 44, no. 4 (April 1904): 333, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hnxxb8>

<sup>106</sup>*Trained and Supplementary Workers*, 2.

<sup>107</sup>*Trained and Supplementary Workers*, 8.



Figure 4.1: Photograph of School of Housekeeping instructional exhibit by Ethel Frances Fifield, circa 1900.



Source: Papers of Ethel Fifield Brooks, MIT Library, <https://dome.mit.edu/handle/1721.3/200520>.

[was] understood to be of real value, the community [would] cheerfully co-operate in bearing this additional expense.”<sup>108</sup>

In the early 1900s, domestic reformers like School of Housekeeping instructor Ethel Fifield enthusiastically wrote about their new vision for the home. The twentieth-century home would no longer be run by an angel, but by a factory manager. Fifield wrote that the most important role the family’s dwelling could play was that of “a factory where certain habitual work is done,” while the housewife should, correspondingly, “regard herself as the manager of this factory, the superintendent of its work [...]”<sup>109</sup> Simplicity was her motto: why bother dusting knick-knacks, when they did not materially improve either the family’s mood or their health? At the Mary Lowell Stone Home Economics Exhibit, for which Fifield wrote the *House Efficient* in 1903, the eight-page booklet was meant to accompany the display of a crowded living-room, the symptom of a fussy, time-wasting, and thus antiquated style of housekeeping (see figure 4.1).

The first and most important duty of the housekeeper was to ensure that

<sup>108</sup>WEIU records, Letter from Henrietta I. Goodrich to members of the Domestic Reform League, August 15, 1907. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>109</sup>Papers of Ethel Fifield, Ethel F. Fifield, *The House Efficient* (prepared for the Mary Lowell Stone Home Economics Exhibit, 1903), 3. Box 1. <https://dome.mit.edu/handle/1721.3/200511>.

family members be provided with shelter; the second, that their living quarters protect their health, so that they might be efficient workers. In Fifield’s words, “[t]he manager of a large factory care[d] for the health of the men and women in his charge, largely for business reasons [...] [b]ut more vital by far [was] the obligation which rest[ed] upon the wife and mother for the well-being of those for whom she [was] morally responsible.”<sup>110</sup> The housewife’s (and, presumably, her servants’) labor was that of social reproduction: keeping the family safe, well-fed, and healthy, both physiologically and psychologically. Doing so meant sending out into the world citizens and workers who would, in turn, discharge their duty in a most “efficient” manner.

Domestic reformers Martha Bensley Bruère and Robert Walter Bruère expanded upon Fifield’s early work, describing “home efficiency” as the home’s ability to “produce something socially valuable.”<sup>111</sup> In their writings, home was no longer the factory of the cottage system, nor the shelter of the bourgeois family, but a core unit of society, one which produced loyal and alert citizens. They singled out a kind of “social efficiency”<sup>112</sup> as the main criterion according to which a home should be assessed. A well-oiled domestic machinery was not the end, but the means to a socially beneficial outcome.<sup>113</sup> To achieve an efficient home meant to produce family members who would not “engag[e] in work disadvantageous to the community,” but rather produce able workers, and the best tool that the housewife could wield to that end was the budget. The Bruères insisted that a good budget was as necessary to the home as it was to “a city or great industrial corporation.”<sup>114</sup> In Boston, the municipal budget, with its fixed, predictable expenditure of money and predetermined allocation of resources, was one of the “fiscal instruments of efficiency” that municipal reformers adopted in the late 1890s.<sup>115</sup> While male family members would adopt the methods of the new scientific management to save money, their female kin would labor to apply those methods to the running of the home and save time, brain, and brawn.

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<sup>110</sup>Fifield, *House Efficient*, 8.

<sup>111</sup>Martha Bensley Bruère and Robert Walter Bruère, *Increasing Home Efficiency* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1913), 12, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015073312384>.

<sup>112</sup>Samuel Haber analyzed Progressives’ use of “social efficiency” as distinct from “commercial efficiency,” meaning the “output-input ratio of dollars.” Social efficiency was the pursuit of social harmony. Samuel Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift: Scientific Management in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1964), x-xi; 58-60.

<sup>113</sup>Bruère and Bruère, *Increasing Home Efficiency*, 9, 27.

<sup>114</sup>Bruère and Bruère, *Increasing Home Efficiency*, 44-74.

<sup>115</sup>Martin Schiesl, *The Politics of Efficiency: Municipal Administration and Reform in America, 1800-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 89-90.

But if servants were not to be secured, how was domestic efficiency ever to be reached? Various solutions to the “servant problem” were considered. Aligning with women labor reformers, the WEIU decided in favor of bridging the gap between what service was in their eyes—an antidemocratic, inefficient realm—and what it should be: a thoroughly “businesslike” sector. This would be achieved by adopting two major innovations from the industrial world: vocational training and the contractual relationship. In presenting the WEIU’s take on domestic service to the public, a representative from the organization wrote that “[d]omestic work taught as a skilled vocation, [would] tend to give the housewife her just independent economic status.”<sup>116</sup> It was through the kind of state-sponsored industrial education then in the process of being generalized for boys that realizing the “latent efficiency of the people” was thought possible.<sup>117</sup> Why not give schoolgirls opportunities for vocational training in housekeeping? Or, as the *Boston Globe* put it in 1900, “Why not colleges for housekeepers for women as well as colleges for men in various practical lines?”<sup>118</sup>

Freedom of contract was central to the ethos of class harmony as it was deployed by Progressives, so much so that “the free labor legal apparatus [...] construed the employee’s economic citizenship as the right to contract freely.”<sup>119</sup> Fashioning themselves into mediators of class conflict, the women of the DRL introduced the contract to their domestic employment bureau in 1899. From the first, as they wrote, the League “[stood] for an exchange of opportunity, by which employees of good character may negotiate with employers who [were] known by the League to offer equitable conditions and fair wages in return for faithful service.”<sup>120</sup> In fact, as Lara Vapnek has argued, the contract, the Trojan horse of free labor, was used to stabilize the workforce. Its terms prevented domestics from leaving at a moment’s notice.<sup>121</sup> While the labor contract was hailed by the DRL as one of the main conduits of modernization for the “belated industry” of domestic service, the conditions it forced domestics to accept were suggestive of the persisting inequities that were central to the mistress-servant relationship. As we will see in the following section, the WEIU’s efforts, like those of other domestic

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<sup>116</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Exhibit of Industrial Conditions in Relation to Public Health, Safety and Welfare*, 1907, 25. 81-M237. Carton 8, folder 133.

<sup>117</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Exhibit of Industrial Conditions in Relation to Public Health, Safety and Welfare*, 1907, 26. 81-M237. Carton 8, folder 133.

<sup>118</sup>WEIU records, “Three Months’ Course for Employers, January 1st and April 1st, 1900,” 1900. B-8. Box 2, folder 9.

<sup>119</sup>Vinel, *The Employee*, 49.

<sup>120</sup>WEIU records, “Domestic Reform League,” c1909. B-8. Box 3, folder 23.

<sup>121</sup>Vapnek, *Breadwinners*, 115.

reformers more broadly, were hampered by contradictory visions of houseworkers as subordinates on the one hand, and as individuals pursuing economic strategies of their own on the other.

### 4.3 Contradictory Domestic Reform Efforts

The WEIU's two most involved domestic reform projects possessed practical as well as theoretical underpinnings. On the practical end of the spectrum, one was a trade school for "managers" (housekeepers) and their employees (houseworkers): the School of Housekeeping, created in 1897. The other, the Inter-Municipal Committee for Household Research (1904), was a sociological research group whose coordinated members launched quintessentially Progressive investigations into the state of live-in domestic service and formulated policy proposals to curb its perceived decline. To readers of the clubwomen's readership of the *Federation Bulletin*, the women of the Union themselves described them as "practical experiments in Industrial Sociology."<sup>122</sup> While the School spoke to a vision of domestic work as a branch of industry and of the home as a site where labor relations played out, the fellows of the Inter-Municipal Committee eventually scrapped the studies which would have provided a rationale for protecting houseworkers to the same degree as factory workers, thereby halting the realignment of domestic service on the standards of mercantile and industrial employment. This was a reorientation to which the failure of the School may have contributed at least in part.<sup>123</sup>

#### 4.3.1 The School of Housekeeping (1897-1902)

In 1897, the WEIU rented two adjoining houses on St. Botolph Street and invested between \$3,000 and \$4,000 in furnishing them.<sup>124</sup> The DRL opened the School of Housekeeping in recognition that the "economic functions of housekeeping" warranted special training for houseworkers and housekeepers alike: "Housekeeping [was] a Profession demanding scientific training."<sup>125</sup> The WEIU's managers also told

<sup>122</sup>"The Union Stock Account," *Federation Bulletin* 3, no. 1 (October 1905): 27, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679734>.

<sup>123</sup>A contradiction which Vanessa May picked up but ultimately dismissed in *Unprotected Labor*, 96-97.

<sup>124</sup>In addition, the annual running costs of the school amounted to \$11,000-12,000. Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 7, April 3, 1900, 72. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>125</sup>WEIU records, *School of Housekeeping, 45 and 47 St. Botolph Street*, 1899, 3. B-8. Box 2, folder 9.

the press of their hopes for the school, namely that it would “stan[d] as a protest against the disorganization which [then] controll[ed] the domestic situation.”<sup>126</sup> Lucy Salmon, a Vassar professor of home economics with a keen interest in the “servant problem,” openly supported the venture. She provided a foreword to the School’s advertising leaflet, writing that “[t]here must be a truer conception on the part of both men and women of the important place that household employments occupy in the economy of the world.”<sup>127</sup> The School’s existence as a provider of specialized training, alone, signified that caring for a home was a profession. Its founders set out to earn respect for the housewife and her helper.

From the first year of its existence, the School offered two courses of training: one for “employers,” the other for “employees,” the latter being the heart of the work.<sup>128</sup> “Employers” were expected to be college-educated women eager to apply their scientific knowledge to house sanitation, marketing, cookery, and household management—the subjects that they would study, either as “resident-pupils” or as day students, through lectures, recitations, and laboratory work. Special lectures promised to show the connections which existed between the housewife’s “profession” and the public welfare.<sup>129</sup> Unlike employers, employees were expected to work in exchange for their tuition. Upon successful completion of the course, they would be handed certificates, then placed with an employer to serve three months’ probation—and only then would they receive their diplomas.<sup>130</sup> The employers’ course in “principles of cooking,” which required a foundational knowledge of chemistry, found its practical counterpart in a long list which included “care of fire, care of sink and traps, care of kitchen, pantry, cellar and ice-chest, preparation of cereals, making bread, biscuit, and muffins, making plain soups, roasting, boiling, braising, and boiling meats, cooking eggs, fish, and oysters, cooking vegetables, fresh and canned, making tea, coffee, chocolate, and cocoa, making plain desserts.”<sup>131</sup> Upon graduation, employees were guaranteed a position at the house of a DRL member, at a wage determined by the grades they received. An “A” was worth \$4 a week; a “D,” 75 cents less, in a clear application of the principle

<sup>126</sup>WEIU records, “Three Months’ Course for Employers, January 1st and April 1st, 1900,” 1900, n.p. B-8. Box 2, folder 9.

<sup>127</sup>WEIU records, *School of Housekeeping, 45 and 47 St. Botolph Street*, 1899, n.p. B-8. Box 2, folder 9.

<sup>128</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government v. 7*, November 20, 1900, 105. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>129</sup>WEIU records, *School of Housekeeping, 45 and 47 St. Botolph Street*, 1899, n.p. B-8. Box 2, folder 9.

<sup>130</sup>WEIU records, *Course for House-Workers, 1900-1901*, 1900, 1-2. B-8. Box 2, folder 9.

<sup>131</sup>WEIU records, *Course for House-Workers, 1900-1901*, 1900, 2-3. B-8. Box 2, folder 9.

that “efficiency” should be the standard wage determinant.<sup>132</sup> These wages did not differ materially from what even inexperienced servants could earn, which is why there was little financial incentive for them to enroll in the School.<sup>133</sup>

The School of Housekeeping was built on a central contradiction. While the WEIU sought to dignify the domestic work performed by employees, by importing the “hand and brain” division of tasks from industry into the home, it construed housework as unskilled work requiring management.<sup>134</sup> As DRL chair Ada M. Child put it to members of the DRL, the School of Housekeeping stood for a recognition that “housekeeping [was] a science, to be acquired by the employer through study and investigation,—while the employee must, as in all other trades, serve an apprenticeship before efficiency and an adequate appreciation of the scope and advantages of domestic service [could] be attained.”<sup>135</sup> The School was supposed to dignify domestic service and raise the status of its students, but they were given stringent instructions as to appropriate attire, down to their underwear.<sup>136</sup> In addition, as an investigator for the Union herself noted in 1906, “[t]he ‘dignity of housework’ is inconsistent with a social system which makes the ‘doing of one’s own housework’ the line of demarcation between those who are ‘in society’ and those who are not.”<sup>137</sup> In 1900, after three years of this experiment, WEIU president Mary Morton Kehew summarized the School’s track record thus: “The first year, the employees were brought in by great effort; the second, less effort was made; the third, only advertising was resorted to, and as a result eight girls applied instead of the ten that were desired.” Out of these ten, soon enough only five remained, the others leaving for a variety of personal and health reasons.<sup>138</sup> Faced with a despairing lack of students in the employee’s course, the Union conducted a survey of housekeepers, asking them for their help in determining what could make

<sup>132</sup>WEIU records, *School of Housekeeping: Course for Employees, 1899-1900*, c1899, 2. B-8. Box 2, folder 9.

<sup>133</sup>In 1897, a servant’s average weekly wage amounted to \$3.60 in Chicago, deemed by David Katzman to be representative of other northern cities like Boston, where wages tended to be higher than those in rural areas. Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 311-312.

<sup>134</sup>Matthews, “Just A Housewife,” 146.

<sup>135</sup>WEIU records, Letter from Ada M. Child to members of the Domestic Reform League, August 25, c1900-1905. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>136</sup>WEIU records, *School of Housekeeping: Course for Employees, 1899-1900*, c1899, 3. B-8. Box 2, folder 9. Such instructions are redolent of the “social control” that has been interpreted as a prime mover of social reformers in late-nineteenth-century America. For an overview of social control theory, see Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).

<sup>137</sup>WEIU records, *Trained and Supplementary Workers in Domestic Service* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1906), 34-35. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>138</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government v. 7*, November 20, 1900, 105. 81-M237. Carton 2.

the houseworker “desire training for herself.” Faced with a slew of unexploitable suggestions, the investigator tersely concluded: “Many inducements [for training] were suggested with apparently little study of the economic principles involved.”<sup>139</sup> The truth was that domestics had very little incentive for attending the School of Housekeeping. As we have seen, the demand for workers being so much greater than the supply, they needed no passing grade nor certificate to find jobs in the homes of the middle class.

After the failure of the School of Housekeeping and its sale to Simmons Female College in 1902,<sup>140</sup> the WEIU reverted back to considering housework primarily as a wage-earning opportunity of last resort for untrained, uncredentialed women, or those who, for various reasons, had few other options. In 1906-1907, the Union’s social worker visited women like Winifred Byrne of south Boston, a white twenty-five-year-old woman who, while still living with her parents, wanted to find day work to supplement the family’s income.<sup>141</sup> Like Winifred Byrne, a Miss E. C. Ferguson was sent to the Domestic Reform League, by the late 1900s functionally the Union’s employment bureau for houseworkers. Ferguson, from Brookline, was a laundress with three children and a missing husband, who was willing to go out by the day.<sup>142</sup> Black women, even those who worked as domestics, were especially disadvantaged on Boston’s labor market; as in most northern cities, they were barred from clerical employment and the higher-paying factory jobs and had to compete with Irish immigrants for domestic service positions, often unfavorably.<sup>143</sup> To the WEIU’s Agent, Emma Grove insisted that “it [was] because of her color that she [could] not find employment.” Owing to her difficulties in finding work as a laundress, she was referred several times to the DRL and to the Union’s special agent. It is unclear whether she eventually found a job, seeing as she did not appear further in the Committee’s records.<sup>144</sup>

At the same time, however, there was no going back to the days when housework was a purely private, domestic matter. It was solidifying into a low status job

<sup>139</sup>WEIU records, *Trained and Supplementary Workers in Domestic Service* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1906), 6. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.

<sup>140</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 7, February 26, 1902, 123. 81-M237. Carton 2. Once incorporated into Simmons College, the School of Housekeeping became a regular home economics department preparing young women to teach or go into institutional management.

<sup>141</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Befriending Record Book*, November 2, 1906, 1. 81-M237. Carton 7.

<sup>142</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Befriending Record Book*, January 25, 1907, 21.

<sup>143</sup>Phillips-Cunningham, *Putting Their Hands on Race*, 82-83; Levesque, *Black Boston*, 121-122. Levesque notes how Blacks’ restricted upward mobility and depressed economic situation was recognized even by contemporaries as an obstacle to their achieving social equality with whites.

<sup>144</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Befriending Record Book*, April 30, 1907, 38.

for women considered as undesirable as workers in other fields, but an occupation nonetheless. As the Union's internal newspaper noted in 1911, that year—one year after the demise of the WEIU's domestic employment bureau—there were “390,675 women in Massachusetts [...] engaged in gainful occupations as compared with 951,692 men”—but, if the calculations were done a little differently, so did the comparison come out: “Including housewives and women doing housework without pay there [were] 1,031,349 women employed.”<sup>145</sup> This figure was an attempt to give visibility to the labor performed by women, based entirely on the recognition that housework was “work,” even when it involved no remuneration. The work of the DRL, for all its opportunistic mobilizing of working-class women's labor power in the pursuit of middle-class career aspirations, entailed a bold conceptual re-configuring of the demands of domesticity.

The end of the Domestic Reform League was precipitated by the WEIU's decision to close their employment agency for domestic servants, on the ground that there was no need for a Union-run service, when there were several satisfactory options across Boston. Starting January 1, 1900, the Union would forward employers' requests to “co-operating offices” against a small fee.<sup>146</sup> Meanwhile, President Mary Morton Kehew communicated simultaneously the WEIU's incapacity to reform the industry and, paradoxically, their acceptance that the occupation, as it stood, had already been recognized as an economic sector. The same letter informed members that the WEIU's “Day Work Department” was to be enlarged and improved. This was a response to the rising numbers of employers opting for day workers rather than the elusive live-in servant.<sup>147</sup> Part of this compromise involved implementing an “efficiency test” for the day workers who came in contact with the Union.<sup>148</sup> Despite the failure of the School of Housekeeping and the demise of the DRL, efficient work remained the golden standard, and the test was the yardstick with which middle-class housekeepers would keep measuring domestics' abilities. The future of domestic training lay in providing training for women engaged for pay outside the home in what we would today call service jobs. In 1912, the Union reported the creation of a “Training Course of Waitresses.” By that date, there were 8,000 waitresses in Massachusetts, half the number of women teachers.<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>145</sup>WEIU records, *Union News Items* (May 10, 1911): 7. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>146</sup>WEIU records, Letter from Mary Morton Kehew to members of the Domestic Reform League, c1909. B-8. Box 3, folder 23.

<sup>147</sup>Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 177.

<sup>148</sup>WEIU records, Letter from Mary Morton Kehew to members of the Domestic Reform League, c1909. B-8. Box 3, folder 23.

<sup>149</sup>WEIU records, “Training Course for Waitresses,” *Union News Items*, undated, c1912, 27. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.



The WEIU felt that there was a real need for training, one that remained to be addressed. Their waitressing program was a much less publicized counterpart to their School of Salesmanship, launched in 1905 in cooperation with leading Boston department stores to provide saleswomen with opportunities for vocational training.<sup>150</sup> Much like department store managers, “[r]estaurant managers [had] long recognized the need of such a course but [had] felt unwilling to devote the time and expense necessary to introduce the work.”<sup>151</sup> The WEIU was part of a class of organizations whose nonprofit work supplied the wants of employers, in an effort to improve working women’s standing on a professionalizing labor market. Their own employees furnished the test subjects for the program. When the first class opened in the early 1910s, “all of the waitresses from the Union Lunch Room and the New England Kitchen” were among the pupils. They followed a course of general and technical lectures, including talks by Miss Helen Greene, the manager of the Colonial Lunch Room, who spoke “from the management side,”<sup>152</sup> and from a Union director who represented the “customer” side. There were lectures on “Service to the Public” as well as “The Care of the Dining Room,” because, blurring the line between restaurant work and domestic service, the WEIU’s catering service offered to supply waitresses for dinner parties and other social events held in private homes.<sup>153</sup> In her study of the Union’s Schools of Housework and Salesmanship, historian Laurie Crumpacker argued that “educational reforms during this period worked best for upwardly mobile, native-born, working-class women,” whose aspirations for self-support were met with understanding and validation by the WEIU.<sup>154</sup>

### 4.3.2 Frances Kellor and the Inter-Municipal Research Committee

In the wake of the transfer of the School of Housekeeping to Simmons Female College and its re-configuration into a collegiate domestic science department, the WEIU became involved in domestic reform efforts of another kind. In February 1904, the WEIU’s Board of Government met to discuss a proposition made

<sup>150</sup>For an in-depth treatment of the WEIU’s School of Salesmanship and its comparison with the School of Housekeeping, see Laurie Crumpacker, “Beyond Servants and Salesgirls: Working Women’s Education in Boston, 1885-1915,” in *Women of the Commonwealth*, edited by Susan L. Porter, 207-228.

<sup>151</sup>“Training Course for Waitresses,” 28.

<sup>152</sup>For a detailed profile of Helen Greene, see chapter two, p. 138-149.

<sup>153</sup>“Training Course of Waitresses,” 29.

<sup>154</sup>Crumpacker, “Beyond Servants and Salesgirls,” 227.

by labor reformer Frances Kellor. The Union was invited to join a new venture, the Inter-Municipal Committee on Household Research. Kellor had plans to coordinate the domestic service studies of the New York Association for Household Research with those of the Civic Club of Philadelphia, formed in 1894 “to promote by education and active co-operation a higher public spirit and a better social order,” and the Housekeepers’ Alliance of Philadelphia, a society initially established in 1898 to run a “School of Housekeeping.”<sup>155</sup> Kellor wanted these reform organization to form a joint committee “to collect data regarding the work and the conditions of women in homes, shops, and factories.”<sup>156</sup> The WEIU promptly accepted the offer, and soon after appointed an “agent” for the Inter-Municipal Committee, to whom they assigned a desk in the office of the Domestic Reform League. Along with regular office hours, she was also given instructions to investigate both “sources of supply” for domestic service and information as to the health of household workers.<sup>157</sup>

Sociological research was the central activity of the Inter-Municipal Committee on Household Research, whose cooperation with the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA) guaranteed that fellowships would be paid for. The goal of the allied domestic reformers from Boston, Philadelphia, and New York was “to study impartially and thoroughly the conditions which attend household work, to place this information before employers, employees, and students, and to encourage helpful movements for adjustment.”<sup>158</sup> They stressed their “neutrality” and the fact that they were but a bureau of information, not an employment agency. They kept a whitelist of approved agencies on hand, as well as lists of suitable boarding houses for single working women, and “full information about domestic training schools and movements.”<sup>159</sup> Of the sixty subjects they considered analyzing from a research standpoint, they first chose to focus on “[t]he sources of the supply of employees, with especial attention to immigrants, their characteristics, training, and the quality of their work, and to negroes and their adaptability; the conditions of household work, with especial emphasis upon the hygienic and social phases;

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<sup>155</sup> “Announcement,” *Bulletin of the Inter-Municipal Committee on Household Research* 1, no. 1 (November 1904): 1, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951t002544289>.

<sup>156</sup> Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, Special meeting, February 23, 1904, 89. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>157</sup> Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, October 18, 1904, 5. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>158</sup> “Announcement,” *Bulletin of the Inter-Municipal Committee on Household Research* 1, no. 1 (November 1904): 1, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951t002544289>.

<sup>159</sup> “Announcement,” *Bulletin of the Inter-Municipal Committee on Household Research*.

the conditions of housing unemployed women in cities [...].”<sup>160</sup> Faye Dudden has noted that the Inter-Municipal Committee signaled the “highest point” of the conversation surrounding the “servant problem.” Among the myriad local associations opening training schools and employment agencies for domestics, and homes for immigrant and Black southern women (from which they would be funneled into service), the Committee had the one of the highest profiles.<sup>161</sup>

Vanessa May argues that middle-class labor reformers with an interest in domestic reform sidelined domestic workers because they did not want attention drawn to the paid work that was happening inside the home—they did not want this sacred American institution to be re-categorized as a workplace, because it would have undermined the chief argument of the Brandeis brief: that “work” (understood as meaning factory work) endangered women’s health and, with it, the public welfare.<sup>162</sup> In 1907, Louis Brandeis was not yet a star lawyer in the Progressive ecosystem. He was a Boston legal practitioner with professional acclaim but little clout, who staked his career on defending the public interest. He was also the brother-in-law of NCL leader Josephine Goldmark. Given his track record and his connections, he was called upon to provide legal counsel in the Supreme Court case of *Muller v. Oregon*. Manufacturers in Oregon had tried to test—and overturn—the state’s ten-hour law of 1903. Curtis Muller, the owner of a large laundry, was the test case; the state brought charges against him for having a female employee work longer days than was allowed by the law. It was only when the case reached the highest judicial echelon that the Consumers League decided to step in. Having secured Brandeis’s help, ten researchers, included famed factory inspector and labor reformer Florence Kelley, scoured British factory commission reports and the medical literature to document the impact of factory work on women’s reproductive functions. The Brandeis team had made the tactical decision not to produce a brief based on legal precedent, which would not have been straightforwardly favorable to them. Instead, they produced a hefty 113-page brief which built an argument based on facts and the testimony of scientific authorities. Linking public health and the conditions of factory employment, they crafted a “difference argument” that could form the basis for differentiated labor regimes. Essentially, the Brandeis brief asserted that long working hours were at odds with women workers’ greater frailty compared to men. In the context of anxieties sur-

<sup>160</sup>“Announcement,” *Bulletin of the Inter-Municipal Committee on Household Research*.

<sup>161</sup>Dudden, *Serving Women*, 238-240.

<sup>162</sup>May, *Unprotected Labor*, 23.

rounding white women's birth rates and panicked diagnoses of "race suicide,"<sup>163</sup> both the courts and the public were primed to respond positively to the NCL's case.

I would argue that while the legacy of the domestic reform movement was indeed the exclusion of domestic workers from the protective labor legislation of the 1910s and the New Deal programs of the 1930s, it was at least in part because the reformers who evinced an interest in employees' welfare received no support from the influential women's club movement at large—something upon which reformers had very much counted.<sup>164</sup> There never was a concerted campaign either to boycott incompetent domestics nor to legislate for servants' welfare. Some reforming organizations, like the WEIU, started with more inclusive intentions, before backing down from the fight altogether. In the years immediately preceding the *Muller v. Oregon* ruling, they launched simultaneous investigations into the labor conditions of factory workers, saleswomen, and domestic workers. One of the initial objects of study chosen by the Inter-Municipal Committee had been "the conditions of household work, with especial emphasis upon the hygienic and social phases."<sup>165</sup> Already in 1901, the Union had used information collected by the School of Housekeeping to compare the working conditions and living environment of the houseworker "with those of employés [sic] in other occupations," in an effort to determine "how much of actual 'living,' not mere animal existence, the worker in a given employment now ha[d]."<sup>166</sup> In 1905, the WEIU's Industrial Committee set Caroline Manning, the recipient of a master's degree in economics from Radcliffe, on to a two-year study of provisions for factory inspection in Massachusetts. The DRL's directors wanted to know how efficiently work in "factories, restaurants, shops, and workshops" was being monitored and regulated by the state. The findings of this investigation led the Union's legislative experts to draw a bill that would correct the flaws of the existing factory ventilation law, which until then

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<sup>163</sup>Nancy Woloch, *A Class by Herself: Protective Laws for Women Workers, 1890s-1990s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 64-69; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 196-206. "Race suicide" was the name given by eugenicists to a theory according to which white native-born women, college alumnae chief among them, by bearing fewer children than both their forebears and immigrant women of color, would slowly drive the "white race" to extinction.

<sup>164</sup>"The Employers' Co-operation," *Bulletin of the Inter-Municipal Committee on Household Research* 1, no. 1 (November 1904): 3, HathiTrust, [hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951t002544289](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951t002544289)

<sup>165</sup>"Announcement," *Bulletin of the Inter-Municipal Committee* (November 1904): 2.

<sup>166</sup>WEIU records, *Social Statistics of Working Women* (reprinted from *Massachusetts Labor Bulletin* 18, May 1901) (Boston: 1910), 3-4. B-8. Box 2, folder 9.

did not cover mercantile establishments.<sup>167</sup> At the same time, through the Inter-Municipal Committee, the WEIU launched an investigation of houseworkers’ living quarters in apartment houses. They wanted to “find out what kind of rooms [were] being furnished domestic workers in apartment houses” with a view to the effect on health, morals and the ‘trade.’” To that end, the WEIU inspected 100 apartment houses and interviewed employers, employees, and janitors. They hoped to put together a highly digestible presentation of facts for public consumption, in the manner of the 1907 exhibit on industrial conditions. This, they knew, was a reliable way to pique clubwomen’s interests and, hopefully, initiate a conversation at the state or even national level.<sup>168</sup> The quality of workers’ living environments was the focus of much of the literature on the “servant problem,” which meant that these concerns would have resonated with the club movement.<sup>169</sup> For reasons that I could not ascertain, neither the investigation on “Domestic Service in Apartment Houses” nor the legislative efforts to regulate the construction of tenements were carried on in the other cities where the Inter-Municipal Committee had implanted, New York and Philadelphia, as was initially planned. Only in Boston did the reformers’ efforts reach the legislative stage. The WEIU was able to “insert a clause in the housing bill enacted after completion of the investigation that [would] prevent the future erection of apartment houses with quite such unsanitary sleeping-rooms as were found by the investigator” in Boston’s West End. The bill also restricted the use of basement rooms as servants’ rooms in existing buildings.<sup>170</sup>

Mabel Parton, the WEIU’s agent, was at one point the director of both the Committee on Industrial Conditions of Women and Children and the Boston branch of the Inter-Municipal Research Committee.<sup>171</sup> She was first hired by the WEIU to conduct an investigation on the conditions in rubber, rope, and twine factories in Massachusetts, and the health consequences for the women who worked there.<sup>172</sup> She was the scion of a literary family from Newburyport: her uncle,

<sup>167</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Industrial Committee Report 1907-1908,” c1908, 7. 81-M237. Carton 6, folder 104.

<sup>168</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Investigation of Employees’ Rooms in Apartment Houses,” undated, c1904-1909, 1. 81-M237. Carton 6, folder 104.

<sup>169</sup>Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 233.

<sup>170</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Inter-Municipal Committee,” undated, c1904-1909, 1. 81-M237. Carton 6, folder 104. The bill is not mentioned by name, but a survey of legislative documents in those years reveals that it was likely the much later House Bill no. 2314, passed in 1913 as “An Act Relative To Tenement Houses in Cities.” Massachusetts House of Representatives. 1913 House Bill 2314. “An Act Relative To The Construction of Tenement Houses In Towns.” Massachusetts State Library, <http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/465501>.

<sup>171</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government v. 8*, December 3, 1907, 100. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>172</sup>Mabel Parton, *The Work of Women and Children in Cordage and Twine Factories: Its Effect*

James Parton, was a biographer; her grandmother, a poet and journalist, had been the famous “Fanny Fern,”<sup>173</sup> and her sister Ethel worked on the editorial staff of the *Youth’s Companion*, a Christian children’s magazine. Even as a child, Mabel Parton was described as an idealist who would always come to the rescue of younger, weaker children when play went wrong. As an adult, she devoted her time to the personal observation of factory conditions. A proponent of protective labor legislation for women, she authored chapters on “unregulated conditions in women’s work” in the WEIU’s 1911 *Labor Laws and their Enforcement*, edited by Susan Kingsbury, Parton’s successor as the head of the Department of Research.<sup>174</sup> Interestingly, Manning’s findings on domestics’ living quarters did not appear in *Labor Laws and their Enforcement*. The chapter she co-authored with Mabel Parton dealt exclusively with issues of ventilation in cordage, rubber, and twine factories, dressmaking establishments, and restaurants—the last two being the topic of another investigation conducted from 1905 to 1907. Manning would later move to Philadelphia, where she became chief tenement house inspector and as such focused on tenement conditions only insofar as they affected the family.<sup>175</sup>

Even though live-in cooks and restaurant cooks dealt with many of the same issues, and faced worse conditions “than in any other class [of establishments] investigated,”<sup>176</sup> only the latter were considered at length in “Violations of Health Laws in Women-Employing Industries.” The year Manning embarked on her study, Frances Kellor wrote that it had already been demonstrated that “in no industry are the hours longer, the work harder, especially in general housework, and in many hotels and boarding houses, and in some homes.”<sup>177</sup> Manning worked in fifteen restaurants, where she noted “a marked lack of cleanliness” and “long and irregular hours.” Often, there was no time schedule and forced overtime was a common industry practice, in violation of the existing 58-hour law. As a waitress,

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*on Health* (Boston: Joint Committee on Sanitary and Industrial Conditions of the Massachusetts State Federation of Women’s Clubs and the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 1905).

<sup>173</sup>“Fanny Fern” was author Sara Payson Willis’s pen name. Willis was famous in her time for being one of a handful of women who forged a journalistic career in the 1850s. She was the highest-paid female journalist of her time. Like “Grace Greenwood” or “Minnie Myrtle,” “Fanny Fern” wrote columns for the female readers of Christian and local newspapers, at times touching upon social issues that concerned women. Jacquelyn Masur McElhaney, *Pauline Periwinkle and Progressive Reform in Dallas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 7-8.

<sup>174</sup>Jessie Douglas Wilford, “Over The Library Desk,” *Quincy Patriot Ledger*, May 2, 1931, 4.

<sup>175</sup>Susan M. Kingsbury, ed., *Labor Laws and their Enforcement* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), vii, 131-155, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924091726350>.

<sup>176</sup>Caroline Manning, “Violations of Health Laws in Women-Employing Industries,” in *Labor Laws and their Enforcement*, 154.

<sup>177</sup>Kellor, “A New Phase of Welfare Work,” 84.

Manning worked for an average of sixty-six hours per week, or 11 hours per day, but she noted that cooks and servers had even longer days.<sup>178</sup> These were conditions which closely replicated, albeit in a commercial environment, the experience of houseworkers in apartments. In another WEIU study, domestics were reported as working—being either “busy” or “on call”—for an average of 11.55 hours a day for general houseworkers, 12.40 hours for parlor maids, and 11.62 hours for waitresses.<sup>179</sup>

Despite the Inter-Municipal Committee’s earlier interests and Caroline Manning’s first study, women’s paid domestic work was scrutinized when it took place in an institutional setting or when it connected with workplaces that were not the private home. The only mention of domestic servants in *Labor Laws and their Enforcement* is in Mabelle Moses’s report on private employment agencies.<sup>180</sup> Such agencies were servants’ main point of contact with the business world; although the agency was not their worksite, it was the institution that connected them with employers. By the time the report went to print, Moses had left her position as assistant director of the WEIU’s Research Department for one as an instructor of history at Simmons College and Wellesley.<sup>181</sup> Her research centered on the problem of the “distribution of labor,”<sup>182</sup> an issue which engrossed Progressive labor reformers. By the 1910s, the private employment agency had become the chief means through which working men and women found jobs, and it was soundly criticized for the shady business maneuvers of most agents. To many settlement workers and charitable leaders, placement services were a new kind of public utility and ought to be secured for the public by the government. Mabelle Moses’s study, by foregrounding the employment bureau as an institution, also briefly discussed the experience of the houseworker in connection with those of other workers. She observed that “training and the guarantee of workers” were needed “not only in domestic employment but in all grades of work.”<sup>183</sup> The reference system governed domestic service: outgoing domestics were often required to provide character references to the agencies where they registered.<sup>184</sup> Moses favored not specifically

<sup>178</sup>Manning, “Violation of Health Laws,” 154-155.

<sup>179</sup>“The Hours of Labor in Domestic Service,” reprinted from *Massachusetts Labor Bulletin* 8 (October 1898) (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1898), 6, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015068283145>.

<sup>180</sup>Mabelle Moses, “Violations of Health Laws in Women-Employing Industries,” in *Labor Laws and their Enforcement*, 154.

<sup>181</sup>*Labor Laws and their Enforcement*, vii.

<sup>182</sup>Moses, “Violations of Health Laws,” 337.

<sup>183</sup>Moses, “Violations of Health Laws,” 344.

<sup>184</sup>Katzman, *Seven Days a Week*, 150.

character references, but, more generally, records of an employee's previous experience. Conversely, like Frances Kellor and the WEIU's Domestic Reform League, she saw in the labor contract a legal instrument houseworkers and their employers ought to appropriate for themselves, and which would help improve the conditions of domestic service: "Attention is especially called to the most progressive requirements as to the card given the employee in the New York law. An attempt is evidently being made here to approach the question of definite hours of service, *even in domestic labor*, by requiring that the parties to the contract shall make some definite stipulation as to hours, or if that is not possible shall understand that it is an indefinite rather than a definite contract," she thus wrote.<sup>185</sup> There is little evidence that the contract was much used, however; it rather functioned as a novelty, another way that the WEIU's domestic employment agency could distinguish itself from competitors.

The private employment agency was also Frances Kellor's target and the topic of the more famous *Out of Work* (1904), the very first publication of the Inter-Municipal Committee.<sup>186</sup> This study only confirmed Kellor's belief that the peculiarities of domestic service warranted different ways of effective "welfare" reform in this industry and in others. Domestic service was different from hotel and restaurant work; because conditions varied immensely from one home to the next and houseworkers were paid for personalized service, welfare must be "individual." This meant working on the education of individual employers, whose "consciousness" had to be awakened so that they may develop "a genuine human sympathy."<sup>187</sup> This sat uneasily with the belief that the relation of employer and domestic employee ought to be, first and foremost, a contractual one.<sup>188</sup>

## Conclusion

In her foreword to the booklet for the WEIU's 1907 exhibition on "industrial conditions," Jane Addams thus summed up the stance that domestic scientists had initially assumed: "[a]t a conference held at Lake Placid by employers of household labor, it was contended that future historical review may show that the girls who

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<sup>185</sup>Moses, "Violations of Health Laws," 355. Emphasis mine.

<sup>186</sup>Frances A. Kellor, *Out of Work: A Study of Employment Agencies, Their Treatment of the Unemployed, and Their Influence upon Homes and Business* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1904).

<sup>187</sup>Kellor, "A New Phase of Welfare Work," 85.

<sup>188</sup>WEIU records, Domestic Reform League, *The Law of Employer and Domestic Employee*, undated, 1. B-8. Box 2, folder 5.



are today in domestic service are the really progressive women of the age,” she wrote.<sup>189</sup> This statement, which may sound surprisingly modern in its sensibilities, in fact alluded to the erstwhile hope that the “belated industry” of domestic service could be made to match the standards of reliability and quality of mass industrial production. The first domestic scientists and reformers shared the conviction that it was in the home that the last frontier of industrialization was to be found.

These efforts would never come to fruition. Factory workers and saleswomen finally made the DRL understand that they would never exchange an independence for social stigma and constant surveillance; domestic servants-turned-“employees” voted with their feet by keeping away from the School of Housekeeping; and, eventually, it was to day service and improved home technology that the WEIU and their allies in the Inter-Municipal surrendered their grand ambitions to make domestics into an “efficient” workforce, one whose labor must be savantly converted into the creation and maintenance of an enlightened citizenry. By the late 1900s, as Vanessa May contends, it was to other working women that they pinned their hopes of female advancement. Still, their stint working on solving the “servant problem” had been a prime occasion for them to deploy the scientific apparatus of Progressive reform, and they were ready to redirect their energy toward other, more promising targets.

With respect to the idea of opening a model domestic employment agency, one which could play a role in solving the “servant problem,” the story of the San Francisco WEIU offers a mirror image of that of its Boston inspiration. The original San Francisco organization destroyed itself a year and a half after its founding in 1888, and a “new” WEIU was rebuilt by a drastically reduced part of the original membership. The new leadership moved the focus of the society away from the broad program of mutual help and self-improvement which characterized the early Boston WEIU, and instead poured their energy into the local equivalent of the DRL—abandoning, in Gayle Gullett’s words, a “vision of interclass mutuality.”<sup>190</sup> for a shot at providing affluent women with domestic help.

In Boston, meanwhile, the ideal of “interclass mutuality” underwent mutations. By the turn of the century, just as the members of the Union’s new Legislative Committee moved to turn clout into political influence, so did the organization as a whole make it clear that the duty that they felt most was not to servants, but

<sup>189</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Exhibit of Industrial Conditions in Relation to Public Health, Safety and Welfare,” 1907, 41. 81-M237. Carton 8.

<sup>190</sup>Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 50.

to their own employees, and those in similar establishments across the city. As the Union's Industrial Committee noted sometime between 1905 and 1907, "[t]he need for more efficient factory inspection had been apparent to the Union for years through its association with a large number of working women."<sup>191</sup> Between 1877 and 1907, the women of the WEIU gained a greater awareness of the issues faced by working women in the home, as employers themselves; through their connections with the housekeepers who patronized their employment bureau; and, starting in the late 1890s, through the WEIU's own employees. As we will see in chapter 5, their dual status as reformers and employers interacted in manifold, and sometimes contradictory ways, in the legislative and customary reforms that the WEIU sought to effect on American workplaces and cities in the 1900s and 1910s.

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<sup>191</sup>Additional WEIU records, "Factory Inspection Investigation—Industrial Committee '05-'07," October 1, 1907. 81-M237. Carton 6, folder 104.



# Chapter 5

## Employing Women: Their Responsibilities as Citizens

### Introduction

We have seen that one of the distinguishing features of the Union as a reform association was the breadth of its commercial activities. Manufacturing things, or overseeing the process, is what the young, college-educated New Women who staffed and ran the WEIU at its peak saw themselves as doing, as they themselves marveled that “[u]nder a single roof [were] manufactured delectable luncheons, economic theses on the status of woman, and sales-girls warranted not to chew gum.”<sup>1</sup> In the funny papers that they edited for their own enjoyment, they lamented the tyranny of the clock and expounded on the need to be ever more “efficient,” even as their managers offered prizes “for suggestions as to improving the business efficiency of the [Food Sales Department].”<sup>2</sup> As much as they were reformers, they were also engaged in productive, remunerated work outside of the home—which Carroll D. Wright, then US Commissioner of Labor, called “industrial,” as the common usage of the time went.<sup>3</sup> By the early 1900s, the Union’s leadership indiscernibly ran shops and restaurants, sent college-educated women gather data on labor management practices in other mercantile establishments in Boston, and advocated in the halls of the Massachusetts Congress for working women’s welfare. As the association’s annual report for 1905 noted, it was its commercial activities

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<sup>1</sup>“The Union Done in the Vest-Pocket Style,” *Union News Items* 2, no. 7 (May 1913), 12.

<sup>2</sup>WEIU records, “Prizes in Food Sales Department,” *Union News Items* 1, no. 5 (May 24, 1911), n.p. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>3</sup>Carroll D. Wright, “The Industrial Emancipation of Women,” *Federation Bulletin* 2, no. 7 (April 1905): 219, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.

which made it eminently possible for it to be a “Social Experiment Station”—that is to say, “[t]he industrial aspect of the Union’s work constitute[d] its peculiar distinction and opportunity. Through its business departments, supplemented by committees that represent[ed] various phases of social service, it [was] equipped to an exceptional degree for investigations and experiments in social industry.”<sup>4</sup> Correspondingly, I argue that these activities should be understood as a system and that from a case study of the WEIU we may learn much about the ties that bound the spheres of municipal politics, reform, and business between 1900 and the First World War.

In this chapter, I will look at what happened when Progressive reformers were also corporate managers—and not the other way around, as has been the focus of a literature on welfare capitalism in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era.<sup>5</sup> How did employing women influence the WEIU’s political activities as an advocate for working women’s rights? Did the organization’s officers and the members of its Executive Committee leverage their commercial activities as political currency or social credit? In her study of several women’s “class-bridging” organizations in Boston between the years 1880 and 1920, Sarah Deutsch links changes in the WEIU’s structure and management to its officers’ “desire to change the city and not just individual women,”<sup>6</sup> which required more funds and more political and cultural capital and thus warranted a closer working relationship with male elected officials. These women’s efforts to reshape the city led them to adopt a new language that emphasized business efficiency, in a bid for the help of male allies in the City Council and the state legislature.<sup>7</sup> This chapter further explores the internal dynamics of the shift identified by Deutsch and relates them to the Union’s status as an employer of women.

### *Community-Based Citizenship in the Business World*

Like many of their contemporaries, the managers of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union considered that women’s economic dependency on men was antithetical to the status of independent citizens. This is why Ethel McLean

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<sup>4</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *A Report of Progress Made in the Year 1905, Being the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston: Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 1905), 56, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239272>.

<sup>5</sup>For examples see Stuart D. Brandes, *American Welfare Capitalism, 1880-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) and Andrea Tone, *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>6</sup>Sarah Deutsch, “Learning to Talk American More Like a Man: Boston Women’s Class-Bridging Organizations, 1870-1940,” *American Historical Review* 97, no. 2 (1992): 397.

<sup>7</sup>Deutsch, “Leaning to Talk More Like a Man,” 397.

Johnson, who worked as a librarian for the WEIU in the 1910s, could ascribe an extreme preoccupation with men's provider status to her caricature of an anti-suffragist: "To give women the ballot, then, would be to kill the goose that lays the golden egg. Perhaps, to be more correct, I should say, to kill the gender that lays the golden egg, or if not to kill him, at least to irritate him so he wouldn't lay any more."<sup>8</sup> In Johnson's pro-suffrage play, which was likely performed at a social function of the Employees' Association, the cartoonishly uptight Christabel Thinkhurst rattles off a pot-pourri of all the most common anti-suffrage arguments of the time. That women's precarious status on the job market was featured in this satire as an argument not to campaign for suffrage should not surprise us. This may also be a nod to the fact that many antisuffragists were upper-class women fighting to defend their own ability to influence powerful men.<sup>9</sup>

In the early twentieth century, citizenship was not just a matter of legal status, but a quality that the authorities, the press, and more generally the public could bestow or deny to individuals depending on whether they adhered to a range of behaviors that were commonly associated with the practice of participatory democracy. Linda Kerber has shown how vagrancy laws inherited from an English common law stock defined the offense on the basis of a person's appearance, and this well into the twentieth century. The duty of the citizen was to "appear to be self-supporting," and thus confirm that he or she adhered to community standards of productive labor. However, as Kerber has demonstrated, vagrancy laws were not enforced systematically because the appearance of self-support could vary according to factors like race and gender; married Black women in particular, unlike their white counterparts, were most vulnerable to being labeled "idle"—or else risk being denied their very identity as women.<sup>10</sup>

As Derrick Spires contends in his study of African American theories and practices of citizenship in the antebellum period, when citizenship is predicated at least in part on the broadcasting of behavior associated with civic values, marginalized communities may seize the opportunity to prove themselves capable of embodying these values. Echoing Martha Jones, Spires defines citizenship as a "relation created by and practiced between members of a community," a definition which encompasses others more explicitly focused on the individual rights and obligations towards the state that result from the citizen's act of consent to the social

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<sup>8</sup>Ethel McLean Johnson, "Miss Christabel Thinkhurst in WHY VOTE? An Anti-Suffrage Monologue," *Union News Items* 1 (June 8, 1911), 19.

<sup>9</sup>Susan E. Marshall, *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 5.

<sup>10</sup>Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies*, 51-70. See p. 54 for the quotation.

contract.<sup>11</sup> The relational vision of citizenship foregrounds the ties that bind individuals on a horizontal plane of mutual obligation and interdependence, and how acting on these obligations can reinforce social cohesion. This framework is relevant here because even well-off white middle-class women had visibility and power to gain from membership in voluntary organizations. Throughout the nineteenth century, they were perceived as part of a larger class whose claim to citizenship was disputed, and whose socialization, to a large extent, took place in and was shaped by alternate spaces.<sup>12</sup> They were aware of it; indeed, as we will emphasize in chapter 6, the early Union made much of the universal sisterhood it tried to foster.<sup>13</sup>

Two aspects of citizenship that Spires traced in black public debates may possess relevance insofar as white women were concerned. “Neighborly citizenship” is concerned with “what the good citizen does and, as important, how the good citizen views and engages others, stranger and friend alike.”<sup>14</sup> In Spires’s definition, meanwhile, “economic citizenship” involves earning social credit and political power in exchange for being a visible contributor to the local economy.<sup>15</sup> In antebellum discourses on citizenship, the neighborhood and the market were claimed as spaces for the everyday enactment of citizenship through concrete actions. By the close of the century, women’s nonprofits like the WEIU, when they engaged in commercial activities, tended to fuse or confuse these two dimensions of citizenship, even as corporations—especially when they were run by welfare capitalists—tried to stake a claim to neighborliness to justify their rising power.<sup>16</sup> In the light of Spires’s approach to the citizenship of the disenfranchised, if to be a good citizen was to take business concerns seriously because they were then construed as community concerns, then it could be expected of at least some women to latch onto business ownership as a basis for the formulation of legitimate claims on citizen-

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<sup>11</sup>Derrick Spires, *The Practice of Citizenship: Black Politics and Print Culture in the United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 3-4; Martha Jones, *Birthright Citizens: A History of Race and Rights in Antebellum America* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 9-10.

<sup>12</sup>Nancy Isenberg, *Sex and Citizenship in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies*, 97; Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 98-99, 114-115, 168.

<sup>13</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational & Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 7, 1879* (Boston: 4 Park Street, 1879), 8, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2wncj5nkpr>.

<sup>14</sup>Spires, *Practice of Citizenship*, 34.

<sup>15</sup>Spires, *Practice of Citizenship*, 121.

<sup>16</sup>Roland Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul: The Rise of Public Relations and Corporate Imagery in American Big Business* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 2.

ship. What follows is an exploration of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union's use of business activities to change the parameters of its directors' participation in local politics. I propose to delve deeper into the shift in rhetoric and organization that Sarah Deutsch identified in the WEIU—to try to see how business methods and business success were actively leveraged. Progressive “New Women,” far from being interested in the labor question merely as observers, construed both earning power and managerial authority all at once as independence, as political credentials or capital, and as a means of staking a claim in their community. These are the meanings of business activity as enactments of relational citizenship that I will be analyzing, showing how the directors of the WEIU attempted to use their commercial activities to portray themselves as organized constituents, model employers with a good grasp of workplace democracy, as well as competent adjuncts to the city government.

## 5.1 Organized Constituents

### 5.1.1 The Post-War Redefinition of Municipal Interests as Business Interests

From the 1850s to the 1880s, Boston's postbellum municipal government was the site of a constantly renewed contest for power. As local elites turned away from textile manufacturing and towards bankrolling the development of the new western territories, they defended a vision of Boston as a forward-looking financial hub. The business and kin ties of families like the Lowells, the Cabots, or the Appletons overlapped to such an extent that, over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they coalesced into an old and especially resilient upper stratum. These Boston Brahmins controlled the region's manufacturing base and its cultural, educational, and associative life but they did not have a firm grasp over political governance. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the democratically elected city government of Boston had become the province of “neighborhood businessmen, skilled workers, mechanics, and tradesmen.”<sup>17</sup> From the 1850s to the 1880s, the Brahmin financiers had to work around them and plot and persuade in order to make the city a more amenable place to conduct their business.<sup>18</sup> Eventually, despite this brief

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<sup>17</sup>Noam Maggor, *Brahmin Capitalism: Frontiers of Wealth and Poverty in America's First Gilded Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 179.

<sup>18</sup>Maggor, *Brahmin Capitalism*, 179.



struggle, per historian Frederic Jaher Cople, “the Boston political and economic elites merged, and government service advanced class power as well as class or individual honor.”<sup>19</sup> The Brahmins won the political contest with mechanics and artisans; Gilded Age Boston was theirs.

In those same decades, the defense of business interests was similarly taken up by their counterparts in other cities of the East and Midwest. In Chicago, for instance, the merchants and industrialists who formed the bulk of the City Club membership shared a relatively similar view of the city as a space that rightfully belonged to them and existed for them to fashion in a way that would maximize their profits.<sup>20</sup> A crucial difference between them and Boston’s upper class was that the members of the Chicago City Club had a greater involvement in political life than the Brahmins did at the same time. In civic reform associations like the City Club, Chicago’s men of business defended private subcontracting over the government ownership of municipal services and public utilities, arguing that local entrepreneurs would spend tax money more efficiently and thus more sparingly. They also contended that business owners would be more apt than civil servants or elected officials at maximizing profits, which would ultimately benefit the entire community.<sup>21</sup>

After the Civil War, such a conception of municipal management was increasingly popular. As cities grew, sometimes exponentially, they faced ever more acute issues of improving sanitation, reducing crime, and redefining municipal boundaries and the structure of the local government. Local entrepreneurs sensed that the provision of municipal services was a boon waiting for appropriation and felt entitled to these opportunities. In her study of the Chicago City Club, Maureen Flanagan argues that “despite businessmen and manufacturers replacing the older merchant oligarchy, [...] economic status still conferred municipal political power and kept the municipal government’s focus on economic growth through private enterprise.”<sup>22</sup> Businessmen did not abandon the old merchant dynasties’ penchant

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<sup>19</sup>Cople, *The Urban Establishment*, 26.

<sup>20</sup>The Chicago City Club (1903) was a civic reform organization enmeshed in close collaborative relationships with the city’s businessmen’s clubs. The latter have been identified as one of the sites in which the socialization of municipal business elites took place, and where they coalesced into self-conscious groups defined by common interests. Elisabeth C. Clemens, “From City Club to Nation State: Business Networks in American Political Development,” *Theory and Society* 39, no. 3/4 (May 2010): 379-380, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40587541>; Maureen A. Flanagan, “Gender and Urban Political Reform: The City Club and the Woman’s City Club of Chicago in the Progressive Era,” *American Historical Review*, no. 95 (1990): 1032, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2163477>.

<sup>21</sup>Flanagan, “Gender and Urban Political Reform,” 1038, 1044.

<sup>22</sup>Maureen A. Flanagan, *Constructing the Patriarchal City: Gender and the Built Environ-*

for growth as they wrenched power from them. The growth mindset merely assumed a new face in a changed political context.

While we more readily associate patronage relations—and corruption—with political machines, in large cities like New York, where Democratic bosses had the tightest grip on taxpayers' money and public jobs, Republican proponents of civil service reform adopted an exclusionary model of their own. Their meetings were private: in New York, anti-Tweed reformers eschewed the Jacksonian tradition of the public meeting. Invitations went to taxpayers and property-owners, who were also white professionals and merchants. The eventual political success of Republican financiers and professionals was also that of business interests, so much so that in New York the board meeting became the template for the new way of doing politics that followed their “municipal coup” in 1872.<sup>23</sup> So transparent was the redefinition of community interests as business interests to contemporaries—or, to phrase it differently, the growing identification of business interests and municipal interests—that the female kin of urban financiers and professionals were well acquainted with the changing stakes of municipal politics.<sup>24</sup>

In the 1890s, the WEIU was not the only women's organization whose members hoped to operate as political power players and form special interest groups of their own. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), established in 1873, eventually developed a strategy of backing dry candidates in local races.<sup>25</sup>

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*ments of London, Dublin, Toronto, and Chicago, 1870s into the 1940s* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2018), 15.

<sup>23</sup>Mary Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of Carolina Press, 1997), 275-276, 279. By “municipal coup,” Ryan meant the use of secret tactics, privately organized groups, and collusion with the press in order to effect changes to the structure of local government, essentially forcing elected officials to relinquish their seats. It was not at the ballot box that the famously corrupt allies of Mayor Tweed were defeated, but rather in the press, and through the replacement of elective functions with appointive offices.

<sup>24</sup>Lee M. A. Simpson, *Selling the City: Gender, Class, and the California Growth Machine, 1880-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 171-175. Of boosterism in West coast towns, Simpson writes that “[p]roperty ownership provided women with the status of stockholders in the city corporation.” *Selling the City*, 9.

<sup>25</sup>The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, a national female organization initially created in 1873 amid a resurgence of temperance activism, was the largest American women's association in the 1880s and 1890s. As it based its activities on an assertion of women's right to intervene in politics in the pursuit of moral reform, it managed to rally Protestant women who were often wary of the organized women's rights movement. Under the leadership of its influential president Frances Willard (1879-1898), the WCTU broke away from moral suasion as a strategy, in order to embrace what Willard would call the “home protection ballot,” a view of suffrage as a means for mothers to defend themselves and their children against drunkard husbands and fathers. This conservative strain of argument was key to politicizing a new constituency of women. Contrary to suffragists, the women of the WCTU came to embrace a broad program of social action and philanthropy in the 1890s, which was entitled “Do Everything.” See Ruth Bordin, *Women and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982),

Around the turn of the century, the National Consumers League (NCL) and other groups belonging to the growing consumer movement tried to apply pressure on legislators through a variety of means—drafting petitions, urging prominent citizens to write to their representatives, and sending lobbyists to public hearings.<sup>26</sup> The General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) itself, which cooperated with, and championed the efforts of the NCL, endorsed private initiatives.

There were often two paths for women’s non-profit organizations to follow. In a 1912 *Good Housekeeping* feature on the “agencies through which woman [was] reducing the cost of life,” two similar organizations illustrate the choice facing reformers: embracing business-based solutions or cooperating with local authorities. Whereas members of the Housewives’ League in New York cooperated with the city government to establish open markets—to bypass middlemen and purchase staples like butter at better prices—the Marketing Club of Brooklyn chose to become a wholesaler of its own.<sup>27</sup> Following that strategy led the women of the Pittsburgh Marketing Club to strike the same deal as that concluded by the railroad company which had built a market house in East Pittsburgh: “[a] new ordinance drafted for Pittsburgh will give the Marketing Club the right to open a market house also, and a track to the trolley system will open the way to farmers.”<sup>28</sup> That municipal ordinance offered the same treatment to a voluntary organization as it did grocery wholesalers, showing that women’s organizations were able to play the business card to secure resources for the demographics they served.

The women running clubs and municipal reform associations had a good grasp of what was at stake in the contest for the allocation of municipal resources and

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46-47; 57-63; 96-104.

<sup>26</sup>Kathryn Kish Sklar, *Florence Kelley and the Nation’s Work: The Rise of Women’s Political Culture, 1830-1900* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>27</sup>Izola Forrester, “Woman’s Capture of the Food Market,” *Good Housekeeping* 54, no. 5 (May 1912): 670-671, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.102781475>. The National Housewives’ League, founded in 1911, was an organization dedicated to “organiz[ing] the housewives of American for educational, constructive, and defensive work for the home.” Members active in this consumer advocacy group sought to fight against the high cost of living and secure pure food for their families at a fair cost both to themselves and to the producers. In essence, the Housewives’ League was a protest against price gouging as it was thought to be practiced by middlemen. The Marketing Clubs of Brooklyn and Pittsburgh, which unlike the Housewives League were unaffiliated to any national body, were part of a wave of food cooperatives formed in the early 1910s, as housewives banded together to boycott products to whose quality or price (or both) they objected, seeking to wield collective economic power as “organized housewi[ves].” “The Aims of this Magazine,” *Housewives League Magazine* 1, no. 1 (January 1913): 3; Mrs. Julian Heath, “Work of the Housewives League,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 48 (July 1913): 121-126; Anne Meis Knupfer, *Food Co-ops in America: Communities, Consumption, and Economic Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 19-22.

<sup>28</sup>Forrester, “Woman’s Capture of the Food Market,” 675.

government support more generally. Their insightful perception that local interests were reformulated as business interests led them to redefine themselves as pressure groups; that was the case of the mothers' pure food lobby. In the 1900s, the white women who championed the cause of pure food in clubs and Consumers Leagues embraced what they considered both the efficacy and even inevitability of lobbying in the face of industrial interest groups sitting in Congress. What they could do to fight organized "money power" was to constitute themselves as an interest group of their own. Later in the decade, club women would build upon municipal housekeeping arguments and equate housekeeping with business in hopes of imbuing their concerns with as much political weight as those of industrialists and manufacturers.<sup>29</sup> In 1905 two hundred Philadelphia club women forcefully deployed these arguments in their plea for the mayor to act on the issue of corruption in municipal politics:

The word I have to say is in behalf of an industry more important than the most powerful corporation or the greatest industrial establishment: it is the business of housekeeping. We are obliged to come in touch with politics in our work. [...] We are tax-payers: we contribute one-fifth of the revenue required to run the affairs of the municipality. Therefore, we are interested and concerned in the present revolt against dishonesty and corruption in our city. As women citizens, we comprise one-half of the population. We have no direct voice in saying what kind of politics shall affect our business: our only redress is through complaint.<sup>30</sup>

The middle- and upper-class clubwomen who addressed the mayor of Philadelphia in 1905 most likely hailed from the same milieu as the industrialists and businessmen who had the mayor's ear. Consequently, they had a keen understanding

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<sup>29</sup>For a more detailed analysis of the comparison between housekeeping and business, see chapter 4, 245-250. For a definition of "municipal housekeeping," see Melanie S. Gustafson, "Good City Government Is Good House-Keeping": Women and Municipal Reform," *Pennsylvania Legacies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 14, 16, <https://doi.org/10.5215/pennlega.11.2.0012>. In the 1880s and 1890s, club women affiliated with the GFWC developed the concept of "municipal housekeeping"—the rationale that municipal affairs concerned women as housewives, both because their homes occupied a certain location within the city and because what happened in the streets or nearby factories had a vital impact upon family life, that backbone of American politics. For more literature on "municipal housekeeping," see Paula Baker's classic article, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1790-1920," *American Historical Review* 89, no. 3 (1984): 620-647, <https://doi.org/10.1086/ahr/89.3.620>; Philip J. Ethington, "Recasting Urban Political History: Gender, the Public, the Household, and Political Participation in Boston and San Francisco during the Progressive Era," *Social Science History* 16, no. 2 (1992): 301-333, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1171291>, and Juliann Sivulka, "From Domestic to Municipal Housekeeper: The Influence of the Sanitary Reform Movement on Changing Women's Roles in America, 1860-1920," *Journal of American Culture* 22, no. 4 (1999): 1-7, [https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-734X.1999.2204\\_1.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1542-734X.1999.2204_1.x).

<sup>30</sup>"Philadelphia Club Women in Civic Affairs," *Federation Bulletin* 3, no. 3 (December 1905): 156, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679734>.

of the balance of power: they grasped that the order of the day was for tax-payers to have a say in municipal affairs, and that they needed to paint themselves as such if they were to be heard. They had to successfully demonstrate what they contributed—resources that were as many stakes in community life—and show that when they benefited, the whole city did as well. The women of the GFWC came to favor this rhetoric precisely because of how effective they perceived it to be in the context of the redefinition of community interests as business interests.

### 5.1.2 Learning How to Lobby for Protection

Between 1905 and the First World War, the women of the WEIU did not need to stop at using metaphors. As we have seen, they were conducting several businesses themselves, a commercial activity they pursued parallel to, and in tandem with, their efforts to influence local legislation through their Legislation Committee.

It was an early goal: as early as two years into the organization's existence, its founders were considering the legislative changes that they could enact by applying the right kind of pressure. Taking stock of one piece of protective labor legislation passed by the New York legislature, in 1879, they confidently asserted: "We hope in due time to get such a law passed in Massachusetts."<sup>31</sup> Through the 1880s, their efforts to obtain that women be hired as police matrons by Massachusetts cities converged with those of similar organizations, including the Buffalo WEIU.<sup>32</sup> There is apparently no surviving evidence of how these women's associations successfully lobbied for police matrons, but it is likely that they worked through private channels, relying on male family members and friends.<sup>33</sup> More broadly or structurally, in her study of women's activism in antebellum Rochester, Nancy Hewitt has shown that male kin's social status and connections were a key factor in determining the success of women's lobbying. As early as the late 1820s, the men of Rochester supported benevolent schemes by providing the women in their family with crucial resources for public activism: legitimacy, money, and political favors. Rochester "ladies" with indirect access to the pulpit, to the press, and to political offices could be assured that their benevolent endeavors would be blessed with success. Abolitionist "ultraists," whose families came to Rochester later than

<sup>31</sup>WEIU, *1879 Report*, 21.

<sup>32</sup>"Buffalo," *New York Tribune*, October 11, 1884, 7.

<sup>33</sup>Lori D. Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins: A Story of Woman's Rights in Antebellum New York* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 129. When she traced back the origins of a petition for female suffrage presented at the New York constitutional convention of 1846, Lori Ginzberg found that the women who wrote it had asked a family friend to read it for them.

the more affluent women engaged in conservative benevolence, were not part of fashionable society and, as a result, could not draw on the same economic and political resources for their anti-slavery activism.<sup>34</sup> That the women of even the early WEIU were able to successfully carry a campaign for the hiring of police matrons in the towns of Massachusetts is an indicator of the strength of their connections—and their reliance on personalized tactics similar to those of the 1840s suggests enduring continuity in the activist practices of women’s voluntary associations.

Through the 1880s, the women of the Boston WEIU engaged in sporadic efforts to impress on politicians how necessary protective labor legislation was to working women’s health and well-being. In 1885 hearings of the state legislative committee, WEIU founder Salome Merritt, MD, powerfully argued that even adult women could not endure ten-hour days without injury to their health and that the “good of the girls” should not be sacrificed “for the gain of the employers.” As a physician, Merritt was well aware of the diminished constitution of many a worker. At the legislative hearings, she was backed by fellow WEIU member Nancy Willard Covell, who added that the law should guarantee women time for outdoor exercise.<sup>35</sup>

Later, in the early 1900s, the WEIU engaged in active, more sustained and thus more easily traceable lobbying at the state level. The organization introduced some bills and supported or sponsored others, sometimes in conjunction with other reform societies. In 1904, the Union joined with other societies in creating an organ to lobby “for improvement of factory inspection.” The Union’s Legislative Committee had delegates sit on an “Industrial Committee” that also represented the Massachusetts Federation of Women’s Clubs, the Massachusetts branch of the American Federation of Labor, the Massachusetts Civic League, the Massachusetts Consumers League, the Women’s Trade Union League, and the Massachusetts Medical Society. In the fall of 1906, they collectively entered a bill in the Massachusetts legislature, calling for a transfer of the responsibility for enforcing health and sanitation laws in the workplace from the state police to a body of experts. Either thanks to the joint weight and resources of these organizations, or because the bill was redoubled by one introduced by the governor, or both, it was enacted. The women of the WEIU were quite lucid as to the limitations of legislation, and following that success they carefully noted that “the efficient sanitation of factories was not accomplished at stroke of the gubernatorial pen on House Bill No. 797” and that “the time had arrived for private organizations

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<sup>34</sup>Nancy Hewitt, *Women’s Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 50-54.

<sup>35</sup>“Amending the 10-Hour Law,” *Springfield Daily Republican*, February 25, 1885, 8.

to pause and watch the outcome of this radical change in administration of the Labor Laws over a period of years, without disturbing the conditions of the experiment.”<sup>36</sup> There was nothing more to be done: as they themselves noted, they had played their parts as citizens.

The Union itself, one of its members remarked, was a “responsible citizen,” and in order to coordinate its increasing legislative activity, the organization created a Standing Legislative Committee in 1908. WEIU directors attributed their mounting opportunities to take part in the legislative process to several factors. While their research work unearthed cause for reform, they also felt that some “problems [were] forced on the Union by its responsibilities as a business manager and employer of labor in the various trades it represent[ed]”: by the 1910s, all roads were leading them “to the State House, City Hall, or Police Headquarters,” and they resolved to discharge their self-imposed duties responsibly.<sup>37</sup> Through the Legislative Committee, the WEIU also helped Massachusetts legislators collate documents for mass consumption by the public. Out of these collaborations came out several “simplified statements” of Massachusetts law on topics relevant to the working-class and middle-class women whom the Union wished to reach, or at least to the people who employed them—the society reported that the “small but steady” demand for these leaflets chiefly concerned social workers and employers.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike the NCL or the GFWC, the WEIU leadership constructed a political identity not just as a group representing citizens but also as employers and business owners. They exploited the fact that they were in charge of a substantial workforce—100 paid employees in 1910<sup>39</sup>—and that, as employers, they were justified in appearing at state hearings whenever labor legislation was under review. Overall, still, they introduced and supported bills relating to a wide range of concerns, including labor relations and female employees’ well-being, earning power, and ability to practice responsible financial management. How they interacted

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<sup>36</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Report of the Industrial Committee for 1907-1908*, October 1, 1907, 1-2. 81-M237. Carton 6, folder 104.

<sup>37</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Twenty-Ninth Annual Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston, 1908), 28-29, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433075991970>.

<sup>38</sup>Report of the Industrial Committee for 1907-1908, 6; Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Simplified Statement of Laws Affecting the Employment of Women and Children in Massachusetts* (Boston, 1908), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.hl496y>; Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, “Evidence in Support of House Bill no. 1118,” *Assignment of Wages* (Boston: Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 1906), n.p., HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044053637062>.

<sup>39</sup>“World’s Fair Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Federation Bulletin* 2, no. 1 (October 1904), 8, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.

with government officials reflected their belief that they were reformers with a unique insight into the commercial realm. They worked closely with leaders in the business community, considering them to be especially civically minded and uniquely positioned to effect radical change. Indeed, they may have identified with them outright throughout their joint commercial and legislative efforts.

### ***Failed Attempts at Reforming Employment Offices (1905-1910)***

Unlike male businessmen and politicians, however, they first had to adjust to and deal with negative gendered assumptions. In the early years of their legislative activity, the leadership of the WEIU learned the hard way that they were perceived primarily not as legitimate business owners but as nosy citizens by the business interests that occupied the orbit of the State Legislature. In 1910 the failure of the WEIU's "Employment Bill" showed them how political inexperience could thwart even the most reasonable, democratic intentions. The bill had provided for a government investigation of employment offices in Massachusetts. The Union was aware of the absence of licensing regulation and the subsequent potential for abuse, because it ran employment offices to help domestic workers and college-educated women find jobs.<sup>40</sup> No provisions existed for regular inspections of employment bureaus and intelligence offices, and licensing was a matter of paying a small fee. In addition, the resources of the Boston Licensing Board were already stretched thin: it was in charge of licensing not only employment offices but also picnic groves, bowling alleys, and other related places of business where customers could buy alcohol. In 1909, when the WEIU proposed to partner with the Board to investigate the matter, the latter turned the offer down, even though such operations were far from unusual. Undaunted, the reformers completed a small-scale investigation themselves, sending an agent to all the employment offices in the City of Boston to poll agents on their business methods and the fees they charged. The ensuing report was written from a scholarly rather than a professional perspective and did not emphasize the WEIU's credentials in the field.<sup>41</sup>

Despite initially favorable responses from Massachusetts politicians charged with reviewing the Union bill, the vote was delayed—"unanimous" approbation inexplicably turned to opposition. That, the reformers learned months later, was the result of the Licensing Board moving against them. In February 1910, one week after the Union presented the Legal Affairs Committee with evidence, the

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<sup>40</sup>WEIU records, "Regulations and Terms," c1909, n.p. B-8. Box 3, folder 23.

<sup>41</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *The Employment Agency Situation in Massachusetts 1909-1910* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911). Mentioned by the Social Research Council of Boston in their 1912 list of social investigations in Boston and its suburbs.



Committee gave a hearing to the WEIU's opponents in what was supposed to be a regular business meeting, "without notification to the petitioners," i.e. the Union.<sup>42</sup> This move completely blindsided them. They probably did not know, or at least expect, that official channels could be bypassed in such a way. It later came to light that the politicians who changed their minds about the Employment Bill did so because the Licensing Board representative wrongly told them that the Union agent investigating employment offices had usurped the authority of the Board.<sup>43</sup>

That was not the only action that the Board took to oppose the reformers' quest for transparency. In a move made more scandalous still by the Union's status as a manager of employment offices, the Board contacted all the other employment offices in the city to tell them not to cooperate with private investigators. After the Ways and Means Committee of the Massachusetts House of Representatives reported on the bill unfavorably, there was little that the WEIU could do to save it. Its President Mary Morton Kehew had an understanding of strength in numbers—she sent Union members a letter to remind them to attend the hearings en masse—but it was too late. Likely as retribution for publishing an impassioned circular detailing the above, the Licensing Board refused to renew the Union's licenses for its Appointment Bureau and its Domestic Reform League. The Union had to close them temporarily: to be in business meant to have skin in the game, and the risks from political fallout were real.<sup>44</sup>

Why did the Licensing Board go to such lengths to counteract a government investigation into employment offices? Reformers suggested that it was the result of "the pressure of its other interests (saloons, picnic groves, skating rinks, billiard and pool tables, and bowling alleys)."<sup>45</sup> It is not inconceivable that liquor interests were so afraid of potential regulations that they fought to kill the measure. Indeed, what these establishments had in common was that they all served alcohol, and it was true that groups identified with suffragists defined liquor as a "vested interest" to combat.<sup>46</sup> Despite the WEIU's letter-writing campaign, in which the organization's president tried to harness the collective power of Massachusetts women's

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<sup>42</sup>Records of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1894-1955, Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *House Bill 781: Why Support It*, 1910, n.p. B-8. Box 4, folder 28. Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., <https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/repositories/8/resources/5020#>

<sup>43</sup>WEIU, *House Bill 781*.

<sup>44</sup>WEIU, *House Bill 781*.

<sup>45</sup>WEIU, *House Bill 781*.

<sup>46</sup>Aileen Kraditor, *Ideas of the Woman's Rights Movement* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 60.

clubs,<sup>47</sup> reformers failed to prevail.

“Public-spirited [women],” even with their long business experience in the relevant field, found it hard to go against entrenched interests. In any case, the organization used the incident to reaffirm its definition of the democratic process and the role of government. To WEIU women, the “right of citizens to ‘study and investigate’ a matter in which they are vitally concerned” had to be defended.<sup>48</sup> As experts, potential clients of employment offices, and “constituents,”<sup>49</sup> they claimed the right to play a part in the shaping of legislation on the matter, even as they were disenfranchised themselves. From their perspective, their status in the community marked them as citizens, and the issue at hand was a public one. They explicitly characterized the distribution of jobs as a matter of public interest but saw no contradiction in private firms carrying it out. What they wanted was enhanced cooperation between all involved parties as well as increased government oversight. That was their political ideal, which they were slowly refining in the publications of mixed-sex good government reform associations.<sup>50</sup> They concluded their appeal to the public with a reminder that “[u]nder the American ideal of democratic government, public officials are ‘the servants of the people,’ and a knowledge of their method of fulfilling their trust is the right of every citizen.”<sup>51</sup>

### *The Small Loan Campaign (1906-1911)*

In subsequent attempts at introducing and championing legislation, WEIU women were more effective in using their status as employers to gather and convincingly present conclusive supportive evidence. Just as these reformers were pushing for the regulation of employment agencies, they were also taking an interest in the practices of short-term loan companies. They had been tipped off by the women who sought the help of the Union’s legal aid program.<sup>52</sup> In 1906, the Union had been concerned with the limits of existing regulations and attempted to impress on lawmakers the need for better, smarter legislation, to no avail.<sup>53</sup> The members

<sup>47</sup>WEIU records, Mary Morton Kehew, Letter to the Presidents of Federated Clubs, April 2, 1909. B-8. Box 3, folder 23.

<sup>48</sup>WEIU, *House Bill 781*.

<sup>49</sup>WEIU records, Letter from Mary Morton Kehew to the Presidents of the Federation Clubs, April 2, 1909. B-8. Box 3, folder 23. “A copy of the enclosed letter has been sent to each member of the Legislature, but he should hear from his constituents.”

<sup>50</sup>*Bulletin of the Social Research Council of Boston* 1 (1912), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433082279641>. *New Boston: A Chronicle of Progress in Developing a Greater and Finer City—Under the Auspices of the Boston 1915 Movement* 2 (1911), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.101956530>.

<sup>51</sup>WEIU, *House Bill 781*.

<sup>52</sup>Mabel Parton, “Urge Assignment of Wages Bill,” *Boston Herald*, March 2, 1906, 7.

<sup>53</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *The Need of Legislation to Regulate Assign-*

of its Legislative Committee had used all the resources at their disposal. They managed to create momentum for the movement for a state investigation of loan companies, successfully courting endorsements from public charities and several local benevolent organizations. They also issued a pamphlet of forty pages summarizing the evidence-based testimony they gave before the legislature.<sup>54</sup> Even stressing that “many employers throughout the state” supported the measure, as WEIU agent Mabel Parton did in a letter to the *Boston Herald*, was not enough to get more than initially favorable reviews for the bill.<sup>55</sup> In another blow to the WEIU’s reform plan, a year later, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that the lien established by the assignment process could not be severed even by bankruptcy.<sup>56</sup>

A few years later, the president of the Union reiterated her concerns in an appeal to legislators.<sup>57</sup> This time, the WEIU succeeded. In 1911, stricter legislation concerning small loans was considered and eventually passed, with the support of the Union.<sup>58</sup> On the heels of its failures in 1906 and later 1910, the leadership of the WEIU had decided to emphasize their expert knowledge as employers and managers whose employees could fall prey to “loan sharks.” Assignment of wages was a practice by which money lenders could call on employers to turn over a worker’s wages directly to the loan company if they failed to make the necessary payments on time. Predatory loan agencies often resorted to byzantine arrangements that bordered on the illegal. The very investigation that the WEIU led to gather evidence for the legislature was made possible by the fact that it could instruct one of their employees to assign their wages. In the process, the WEIU was able to collect documents that companies were not willing to turn over to mere investigators. The WEIU showed that in many assignment cases, no binding agreement actually existed. When the loan companies contacted employers and demanded that they turn over an employee’s wages, employers just assumed that an assignment had been contracted and complied with the request.<sup>59</sup>

Showing the ease with which WEIU agent Mabel Parton could sign away her wages, the WEIU argued that protecting workers’ financial standing was also in

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*ment of Wages* (Boston: January 25, 1906), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89099412512>.

<sup>54</sup>“After the Shylocks,” *Boston Herald*, March 30, 1906, 6.

<sup>55</sup>Parton, “Urge Assignment of Wages Bill.”

<sup>56</sup>“Assignment Holds After Bankruptcy,” *Boston Journal*, November 30, 1907, 5.

<sup>57</sup>WEIU records, Mary Morton Kehew, “Letter to Legislators,” March 30, 1909. B-8, folder 23.

<sup>58</sup>“Small Loans,” *Union News Items* 1, no. 9 (July 17, 1911), 2.

<sup>59</sup>WEIU, “Evidence in Support of House Bill no. 1118,” 24.

employers' interests.<sup>60</sup> A member of the small loans committee of the Chamber of Commerce, at a meeting with Union directors, explained that working-class Americans needed “help from above”—like that provided by eighteen retail dealers in New York who had “combined” to fight “loan sharks.” Their twin argument was that anxious employees performed badly and that the money they paid in sky-high interests did not go towards buying consumer goods or services, thus hurting employers' own business.<sup>61</sup> The Union placed itself on the side of progressive employers. Like the department stores upon which it reported—and with which it worked to establish a School of Salesmanship—it started conducting a credit union to provide employees with safe access to loans.<sup>62</sup> A test case could boost the conclusions of the WEIU's investigation.<sup>63</sup>

The WEIU hoped to secure backing for higher legal and customary standards. Unlike welfare capitalists, their ultimate goal was to protect all workers, not just their milliners, clerks, saleswomen, and cooks. They thought that required a delicate balance of employers' goodwill, state control, and personal responsibility on the part of employees. All of these elements were part of an intricate whole. For instance, employees could only practice sound financial management, which the WEIU encouraged by selling WEIU-branded account books.<sup>64</sup> if the state stepped in to keep “loan sharks” in check.

Accordingly, in parallel with the small loan campaigns, the women of the WEIU tried out various schemes to instill thrift and sound money-management in the people with whom they came into contact. At the WEIU's “Woman Department” exhibit at the 1902 Massachusetts Charitable Mechanics' Association,<sup>65</sup> the organization ran a small lunch room “with the object of giving a practical illustration of attractive and healthful combinations of food that can be served for a small amount of money.”<sup>66</sup> The daily menus bore mention of this, also because managers offered to give patrons the actual cost per person of the raw material used in each dish, as an educational measure. In way of explanation, the menu

<sup>60</sup>WEIU, “Evidence in Support of House Bill no. 1118,” 8.

<sup>61</sup>WEIU records, “Small Loans,” *Union News*, undated, c1911, 1-2. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>62</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Thirty-Seventh Annual Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year 1914-1915* (Boston, 1915), 22, HathiTrust, <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/curiosity/women-working-1800-1930/45-990020152060203941>.

<sup>63</sup>“Conference of Committees,” *Union News Items* 1, no. 1 (April 1911), 2.

<sup>64</sup>“Books of Interest to College Women,” *Radcliffe Fortnightly* 1, no. 4 (March 11, 1914): 5, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.rsm9up>.

<sup>65</sup>See chapter 4, p. 246, for a mention of this event.

<sup>66</sup>Papers of Ethel Fifield Brooks, “Catalogue of the Women's Department of the Twenty-First Exhibition of the Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association,” 1902, 8. Box 1. Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Libraries, Department of Distinctive Collections, <https://hdl.handle.net/1721.3/200502>.

stated that “[t]he purpose of this lunch room [was] to suggest inexpensive, well-balanced and attractive combinations of food for luncheons and dinners that would be suitable to serve in a small family where the income is limited and only one maid is employed.”<sup>67</sup> More straightforwardly, the Union also pitted savings bank insurance against industrial insurance, arguing that only a savings bank could encourage thrift.<sup>68</sup> In the midst of their wrangling with the Massachusetts legislature over assignment of wages, the WEIU sent out a concerted appeal to “the women of Massachusetts” over the matter of “savings bank life insurance for women.” First established in Massachusetts in 1907, the state system of savings bank insurance was explicitly meant as a state-sponsored alternative to industrial life insurance.<sup>69</sup> The WEIU argued that women workers, who were less likely to contract old age insurance than men, would benefit from the scheme. They urged them to take advantage of it.

An alliance of corporate responsibility, individual responsibility, and state oversight was thought by the WEIU to be an essential component of their vision of a fairer society. WEIU women materialized these beliefs by allying closely with different segments of Boston’s population. Throughout their small loan campaign, they brokered alliances with representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, mutual help societies like the Workingman’s Loan Association, and good faith money-lenders themselves—like William Cobb, the president of the Collateral Loan Company, who claimed that borrowing was essential but “should be carried on with propriety.”<sup>70</sup> In sponsoring savings bank insurance, they joined more than a dozen Boston business firm—like the well-known progressive workplaces of the Gillette Safety Razor Co. and department store Filene’s—and at least as many civic groups and women’s associations, including the Massachusetts Association of Women Workers, the General Federation of Women’s Club, and the Equal Suffrage Association, but also the Boston Merchants’ Association.<sup>71</sup> At the same time as it was pursuing legislation that would protect small wage-earners, the WEIU was reforming its own workplace. In reformers’ hands, the trappings and the tools of welfare capitalism were not wielded in covert battles against the passage of labor legislation.<sup>72</sup> We will see how the WEIU conceived of voluntary workplace reform

<sup>67</sup> Additional WEIU records, Lunch Room menu, October 6, 1902. 81-M237. Folio box 10.

<sup>68</sup> WEIU records, “Why was the Chattel Loan Company so called?” c1909. B-8. Box 3, folder 23.

<sup>69</sup> WEIU records, “Savings Bank Life Insurance for Women,” 1909, 3. B-8. Box 3, folder 23.

<sup>70</sup> WEIU records, “Small Loans,” *Union News*, undated, c1911, 2. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>71</sup> WEIU records, “Savings Bank Life Insurance for Women,” 1909, 2. B-8. Box 3, folder 23.

<sup>72</sup> As has been argued by Andrea Tone in *The Business of Benevolence: Industrial Paternalism in Progressive America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

as a necessary component of a multi-pronged campaign for social and labor reform.

## 5.2 Model Employers Enhancing Women's Economic Citizenship

### 5.2.1 Modeling Responsible Business Practices

The Women's Educational and Industrial Union backed its direct lobbying efforts with more indirect methods. The WEIU believed in the complementarity of the statist and the voluntarist approaches to welfare. Consequently, the association worked on portraying itself as a creditable business. If, as WEIU women thought, influential business owners played a part in establishing customary standards, then they could nudge other Boston mercantile establishments towards workplace reform. Over time, the WEIU's workplace reforms made it possible for the organization to make the case that, as a model employer, it could spearhead efforts to reshape local practices and labor legislation through sheer example. The managers of the WEIU were benevolent employers concerned not only with improving their employees' working conditions through welfare capitalism but also with raising standards across the industry. By setting an example for other businesses to follow, like instituting an eight-hour day, appointing a health inspector, or barring tipping,<sup>73</sup> they hoped to change customary standards. In that, they apprehended themselves as part of a community of business owners that they could affect through their own management choices. "During the past year we have joined with other business houses in giving shorter hours to our employees, and must report that already their increased interest and faithfulness show the wisdom of the plan," the 1896 annual report noted.<sup>74</sup> These words, and the stance to which they referred, seem to have left a sufficient imprint for member Cornelia James Cannon to state years later that in the lunch rooms "[e]very effort [was then being]

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<sup>73</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Year Book, Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1905-1906* (Boston, January 1907), 38, <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/curiosity/women-working-1800-1930/45-990093887760203941>; *Women's Educational and Industrial Union, Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston St., Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1896* (Cambridge: Press of the Cambridge Co-operative Society, 1896), 18, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924106>; Additional WEIU records, "Reference Notes on Union," c1926, 5. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 153: "No tipping allowed. This regulation costs the Union, in additional salaries to the waitresses, many thousands of dollars a year."

<sup>74</sup>WEIU, *1896 Report*, 37.

made, only to keep abreast of the best business practices, but to serve as a model of fair and honorable treatment of employees and patrons.”<sup>75</sup>

When the Union officially championed an eight-hour day and a minimum wage for women and children, it did so as a progressive employer. By implementing such measures, the Union painted itself as a model employer. It was especially noteworthy as several of its activities rested on consignment by home workers at a time when their exploitation was deemed a social and public health crisis. The Union hoped to lead by example and show what bosses could do to improve workers’ lives while maintaining an acceptable degree of business efficiency. Starting in 1896, Union directors described their efforts to close the WEIU’s salesrooms at 5 pm.<sup>76</sup> By 1903, following other progressive employers, they had moved to establishing rest-rooms for employees not only in the main Boylston Street building, but on every site they operated, including the Members’ Lunch Room building, where two rooms were allocated to kitchen employees, one for changing their clothes, and one for eating at a designated lunch counter.<sup>77</sup> The WEIU also hired a health inspector and formalized an employment contract providing employees with at least a week of paid leave a year after six months—two weeks after a year—in order to protect workers and consumers from poor hygiene and infectious diseases, overwork, and poor service caused by overwork.<sup>78</sup>

The work of the WEIU’s “sanitary inspector” meant more than a commitment to middle-class standards of hygiene. As she explained in 1905 for the readership of the *Federation Bulletin*, the WEIU initially hired an inspector to provide management with insight into consignors’ business methods, collecting statistics as to the cost of consignments “with an attempt to estimate, as closely as possible, the percent of profit and earnings per hour” and “to encourage some simple system of book-keeping as well as business-like habits and methods of work wherever these do not already prevail.”<sup>79</sup> When the WEIU’s inspector reported on unsatisfactory kitchens, “disorder” was condemned.<sup>80</sup> health inspections were not only concerned with physiological health. They were a Progressive version of the charitable home

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<sup>75</sup>Additional WEIU records, Cornelia James Cannon, *The History of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union: A Civic Laboratory* (Boston: 264 Boylston Street, 1927), 13. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>76</sup>WEIU, *1896 Report*, 18.

<sup>77</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, June 2, 1903, 45. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>78</sup>WEIU records, *Contract of Employment*, undated. B-8. Box 3, folder 24.

<sup>79</sup>Mabel Potter, “Developments of a Food Salesroom,” *Federation Bulletin* 2, no. 7 (April 1905): 225, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>

<sup>80</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, November 3, 1903, 2. 81-M237. Carton 2.

visit of the 1890s, whereby the Union sought to reach the women it employed both to improve their working conditions and inculcate them with business habits conducive to self-support. Unlike the “friendly visitors” of the Charitable Organization Society (COS), the Union’s health inspector was instructed to provide advice of a strictly commercial nature.<sup>81</sup> Sanitation was not a private concern, that is to say, a simple matter of individual well-being or cleanliness. For the WEIU’s Board of Government, it was an issue of social organization—of how market forces operated and dictated the conditions under which women worked. That is why the responsibilities of the health inspector included investigating the “economic and ethical conditions under which consignments are made.”<sup>82</sup> This is also why they advocated for a more robust system for enforcing violations of labor legislation.

As employers, the Union aimed to demonstrate it was possible to work with employees to implement workplace reforms voluntarily, as a complement to regulation, without sacrificing profits—in their words, “to demonstrate what may be done by public spirited employers.”<sup>83</sup> These workplace practices preceded and may have inspired the 1914 report on industrial homework drafted by the Research Department in support of an overhaul of homework legislation in Massachusetts. The impetus for that report lay in the WEIU’s concern for women’s working conditions both in the shop and in home—domestic service proper being a special case, as seen in chapter 4. The WEIU’s effort to develop its exchange and shops paralleled its increasing support for placement work. After the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics issued the report as the first entry in a series of Labor Bulletins, a conference of reform organizations met to discuss its findings and sent a committee to confer with the State Board of Labor and Industries. As the Board was too disorganized to analyze its records of licensed home workers, it arranged for the WEIU to do so. The findings of this second report enabled the WEIU, the Massachusetts Consumers League, and the Massachusetts Child Labor Committee, along with other local players like the Massachusetts Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL) and the Associated Charities, acting together as the “Industrial Committee,” to draft and endorse a bill for the regulation of industrial homework “for the protection of public health.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>For a description of the work of the COS and their “friendly visitors,” see Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 150-155.

<sup>82</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 9, October 4, 1901, 1. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>83</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Exhibit of Industrial Conditions in Relation to Public Health, Safety and Welfare, Horticultural Hall, Boston, April 7-14, 1907*, 1907, foreword. 81-M237. Carton 8.

<sup>84</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Industrial Home Work in Massachusetts*



Out of all the people involved in this campaign, the WEIU directors were the best acquainted with home manufactures, since the organization sold the products of such activities in its shops. This would have lent weight to the conclusions of their investigation of industrial homework, which were that the revival of women's handicrafts and domestic industries was not a viable path to economic independence in the twentieth century.<sup>85</sup> These findings would likely have strengthened their resolve to do what they could to offer good jobs to some of Boston's women. In 1915, Ethel McLean Johnson, who was in charge of the Union's reference library on labor matters, thus concluded her survey of the economic opportunities directly created by the WEIU as an employer: "Clean, attractive work rooms, with pay for over time, paid holidays and vacations, sick benefit, and steady employment throughout the year irrespective of slack seasons—these are the standards set by the Union for all of its industrial departments."<sup>86</sup>

To better situate the WEIU's particular position and understand how they deployed arguments about employer responsibility, it is worth considering what other women were doing to achieve similar goals, like the members of the Woman's Department of the National Civic Federation (NCF). The NCF found its roots in the Chicago Civic Federation (1894), a meliorative organization with class-bridging aims and a tripartite board of conciliation, founded in response to the depression of the early 1890s. In 1900, Republican Ralph M. Easley organized the National Civic Federation, bringing together employers, employees, and top union leaders under the purportedly classless banner of economic expansion.<sup>87</sup> Despite its tripartite origins, in the 1910s the NCF's base was mostly comprised of socially-conscious industrialists and politicians with ties to industry. Some of their wives and daughters, while women of leisure, shared their interest in philanthropy and the implementation of paternalist policies. Like the women of the WEIU, the ladies of the female auxiliary of the NCF believed in the power of "the practical demonstration to employers of what has been accomplished in the same directions by other employers controlling kindred industries."<sup>88</sup> As such, they aimed their early 1910s lobbying at convincing the US Congress of the need to improve the working

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(Boston: Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1915), ix-xii, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo1.ark:/13960/t7np2mm18>.

<sup>85</sup>WEIU, *Industrial Home Work*, vii.

<sup>86</sup>Ethel M. Johnson, "Opportunity for Women," *American Cookery* 20, no. 3 (October 1915): 192, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044083801894>.

<sup>87</sup>James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-1918* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1981), 6-10.

<sup>88</sup>Mrs. John Hays Hammond, "Woman's Share in Civic Life," *Good Housekeeping* 54, no. 5 (May 1912): 596, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.102781475>.

conditions of civil service employees, following the rationale that the federal government would stand as a model to private employers.<sup>89</sup> While they shared some assumptions about the efficacy of lobbying and the benefits of reforms led by individuals, the WEIU and the Woman's Department of the NCF operated from different standpoints. The latter were true modern incarnations of the "Lady Bountiful"; they sought to influence their male kin so that they in turn may influence their peers, whereas the former were employers themselves, with more direct ways to effect the change for which they called.

The Boston press acknowledged the business success of the WEIU, equating the organization's prosperity with "proof of the capacity of women to successfully engage in the practical undertakings of the world."<sup>90</sup> In surveys of the association's economic activity, as in 1895, the press made manifest the Union's desire to help women both materially and by sheer "force of example."<sup>91</sup> The women of the WEIU knew that they were not only working for their own gain, or even for the economic interests of the people they employed. Their visibility and status as a local institution made them stand-ins for all white middle-class female entrepreneurs, and their success held symbolic weight. A promotional leaflet for the WEIU put forward the fact that it "[set] industrial standards by maintaining the eight-hour day, paid vacations, paid overtime, employees' rest and lunch rooms, and a benefit association for payment in case of absence."<sup>92</sup> In that way, the association set an example not only for the business community as it existed in that moment in time, for the Simmons College students interning in its shops, some of whom would be part of the next generation of female proprietors and social secretaries. That view would be quite clearly articulated by the mid-1920s, when one Union member wrote in an internal document that the industrial departments were "safeguarded from temptation to put profitable production first, not only by the spirit in which the work is conceived, but by the need of keeping constantly before the eyes of Simmons' and other students, who come for laboratory training, the ideals lying back of the buying and selling, administrating and advising, teaching and placing,

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<sup>89</sup>Hammond, "Woman's Share in Civic Life," 597.

<sup>90</sup>WEIU clippings, unnamed, "4. 1897-97," [3]. M-89.

<sup>91</sup>WEIU records, "Woman's Work," undated newspaper clipping. M-89, section 4, 2-3. This clipping is undated but was likely published circa 1895, since the lecture program mentioned in the article is identical to that described in "Among the Women's Club," *Boston Sunday Herald*, February 3, 1895, 28.

<sup>92</sup>Additional WEIU records, "The Women's Educational and Industrial Union," c1912-1913, 4, in *Appointment Bureau: Printing Samples*, 81-M237. Carton 9.

which are the surface evidence of the Union activities.”<sup>93</sup> The WEIU’s business ideals were always quite close to the surface, to those who were willing to look—as WEIU member and early historian Cornelia James Cannon wrote in her 1928 history of the society’s record, “Doing jobs [was] not the function of the Union, but making the jobs that [were] done serve in educating the community to juster dealings, better methods, higher standards, and a happier and richer life for all [was] the purpose for which they exist[ed].”<sup>94</sup>

## 5.2.2 Modeling a More Expansive Version of Citizenship for Women

By “making jobs” for them—and “making” those jobs serve higher ends—, that is to say providing educated women with economic opportunities, the women of the Union worked to enhance not only their own political standing but also that of the organization’s members or potential members. In their interactions with the municipal and state governments and local businessmen, the WEIU’s directors attempted to claim a stake in the civic community by demonstrating the qualities that were expected of successful entrepreneurs. In the multi-faceted work of investigating social issues, devising and running social programs, and conducting political advocacy, reputation was essential; signaling savvy and responsibility was an integral part of the making of a reputation as a trusted partner. As James Connolly has shown, in the 1890s and 1900s Boston’s ethnic politicians devised a powerful brand of “ethnic Progressivism” which emphasized precisely such signaling. As he puts it, these Irish American politicians “adopted the language of efficiency for their own purpose. Even small shop owners running for city council in Boston proclaimed themselves as business experts.”<sup>95</sup> This may explain why, in an appeal to Boston businessmen “for co-operation in carrying on and developing [Union] work,” third president Mary Morton Kehew established the business skills of the WEIU’s management to bolster its credibility:

The gain from business departments, where receipts are greater than expenses, was approximately \$12,600 for the year ending April 1, 1906. The loss from those phases of educational, philanthropic and administrative work where expenses are

<sup>93</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Reference Notes on Union,” c1926, 6. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 153.

<sup>94</sup>Cannon, *History of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union*, 18.

<sup>95</sup>James J. Connolly, *The Triumph of Ethnic Progressivism: Urban Political Culture in Boston 1900-1925* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 84.

necessarily greater than receipts, was about \$27,000. The difference between net receipts and expenses represents the community's indebtedness to the Union for the social-industrial work that was accomplished.<sup>96</sup>

The city's economic elite extended credit to those it deemed able to pursue profits in a capitalist system. To show the worth of her organization, Mary Morton Kehew added detail to her appeal. The figures include a daily average of 1,000 customers in the Union's Lunch Rooms. The letter ended with the offer to forward prospective investors and collaborators "reports of the work, or any specific information in regard to its cope and expenditure." By showing themselves able to raise funds through commercial activity as well as oversee the provision of social services, the Union hoped to impress on the business community that it could be trusted to use the money "efficiently."<sup>97</sup>

Having secured the goodwill and approval of influential men, the WEIU could go on to convince still more affluent Bostonians to fund its activities. A typical promotional leaflet published in the 1910s could comfortably consist of little more than words of praise from Boston's finest citizens. One specimen quoted academics like Henry Lefavour, the President of Simmons College, David Snedden, the Massachusetts State Commissioner of Education, Edwin F. Gay, an economist and Harvard professor, and Richard C. Cabot, a fellow Harvard affiliate and prominent physician with an interest in social issues.<sup>98</sup> These academics were actively and very publicly involved in reshaping both public and private education in Massachusetts. Any sympathizer of reform would have been familiar with their names

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<sup>96</sup>WEIU records, Mary Morton Kehew, "He Gives Twice Who Gives Quickly," 1906. B-8. Box 2, folder 15.

<sup>97</sup>Kehew, "He Gives Twice Who Gives Quickly."

<sup>98</sup>Educator Henry Lefavour (1863-1946) served as the first president of Boston's Simmons Female College; he would later become the chairman of the Massachusetts state emergency public works commission. *Simmons College Catalogue 1902-1903* (Boston: Published by the college, 1903), 4, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015075920051>; *Boston Traveler*. Death and Funerals, June 17, 1946, 12. At the time of his death, physician Richard C. Cabot (1868-1939) was hailed for his pioneering inroad into "socialized medicine." A descendant from the illustrious New England Cabot family, he was known for being a vocal critic of the American Medical Association and of the cost of medical treatment. "Dr. Richard Cabot, Medical Pioneer, Dies in Cambridge," *Springfield Republican*, May 11, 1939, 12. David Snedden (1868-1951) was another educator, who served as Massachusetts commissioner of education from 1909 to 1916. "David Snedden, Educator, Dead," *Boston Herald*, December 3, 1951, 21. Finally, in the early 1900s, Edwin F. Gay (1867-1946) was a young lecturer in economy when he was appointed as first the dean of the Harvard Business School. He was brought in at Harvard to give scientific grounding to businessmen's training, notably through the Bureau of Business Research, established in 1911. During his tenure, from 1908 to 1919, he also helped develop statistical tools that could be used to track economic performances over time. Évelyne Payen-Variéras, "Sciences économiques et cultures de gestion dans la période progressiste : l'administration des affaires à la Harvard Business School, 1908-1917," *Revue Française d'Études Américaines*, no. 122 (2009): 27-43.

and achievements. In the 1910s, it was an asset for the WEIU to boast that such respected public figures considered the organization “one of the most active leaders of civic progress in Boston,” an “institution [...] of the highest value [to] the community.”<sup>99</sup> These arguments were echoed in appeals to members and local businessmen for funding. In the “quasi-public city,”<sup>100</sup> where the interests of propertied male elites dictated the terms of the provision of public services, private philanthropic organizations could contribute their share only if they were able to convince officials that they were doing the right kind of work, in precisely the right way.

### *Efficient Women*

In Progressive circles, efficiency was a cardinal value that tied politics to business life. Martin Schiesl shows that by 1900, middle-class reformers’ dissatisfaction with local politics had “led to an emphasis on governmental efficiency, which tended to be defined as the promotion of economic growth and development.”<sup>101</sup> In other contexts as well, the term referred to a mix of skill, speed, and optimal use of human, material, and financial resources, so as to minimize expenditure and waste while maximizing (often financial) results. Along with the new tools of scientific management like time and motion studies, the Union eagerly adopted efficiency as a motto, following the lead of home economists and social workers. WEIU members could attend lectures by Frederick Taylor and others on such topics as “The Significance of Industrial Efficiency.” As early as the mid-1890s, when Taylor was first formulating the tenets of scientific management, the women of the Union were paying attention to his ideas and lending credence to them, some fifteen years before he acquired enough notoriety for industrialists to hail him as a “Progressive hero.”<sup>102</sup> In the Union library, books like *Where Have My Profits Gone?* offered directors and committee members advice on how to run a business.<sup>103</sup> Taylor’s public exposure and popularity arguably peaked in April 1914, at the “efficiency exposition” held at New York’s Grand Central Palace. 69,000 people attended the event, for which Taylor acted as the main speaker, a visible sign that scientific management, in all its guises, was appealing to a wider audience than the

<sup>99</sup>WEIU records, “Significance and Quality of Work Done by the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union.” c1911. B-8. Box 5, folder 33.

<sup>100</sup>Flanagan, *Constructing the Patriarchal City*, 15.

<sup>101</sup>Martin Schiesl, *The Politics of Efficiency: Municipal Administration and Reform in America, 1800-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 2-3.

<sup>102</sup>Tone, *Business of Benevolence*, 74.

<sup>103</sup>WEIU records, Admission ticket to a series of lectures on “scientific management,” January 1910. B-8. Box 4, folder 27; “New Material in the Library,” *Union News Items* (July 31, 1912), 13.

Progressive reformers who had first publicized it.<sup>104</sup>

Like Taylor, the leadership of the WEIU was bent on familiarizing the working class with the creed of efficiency, a duty they likened to education. As we saw in chapter 1, the WEIU justified the existence of the Woman's Exchange as an "educational" program because it provided skilled women simultaneously with a shop window, a market for their wares, and professional advice. The Union emphasized this point in its promotional material and correspondence with consignors.<sup>105</sup> They wanted to show that women, too, could be the Taylorist makers of new industrial processes and essentially modern, efficient workers.

From its inception to the 1900s, the organization's annual reports grouped the Exchange with other programs in categories like "Education and Industrial Arts."<sup>106</sup> Only later, in the 1910s, was a clear distinction made between the "industrial" and "social-educational" departments, with mentions of the former supporting the latter financially.<sup>107</sup> What did the reformers mean by "social-educational"? Under that heading were the employment bureau and the shops. The goal of social-educational programs was not only to improve the economic prospects of individual women but to give them more choices and enable them to become less dependent on the incomes of relatives. At the same time as the WEIU was consolidating its existing restaurants and shops, it was revamping its employment bureau for college-educated women and stepping up its lobbying activities. The WEIU's experimental impulse was strong but we should not see these various programs as a disparate collage of experiments. They, too, could learn how to help turn the gears of the American economy and earn public acclaim in the process. After the turn of the century, the WEIU's social programs were all geared towards enhancing women's citizenship, in many cases by focusing on their economic citizenship.

Explorations of the concept of economic citizenship by Alice Kessler-Harris have drawn attention to the tangible impact that women's degraded status in the marketplace had on labor and social rights legislation. Succinctly put, economic citizenship can be defined as the ways in which an individual's economic contribution to society—and sometimes the perception of it—can either hinder or grant access to the rights and privileges of citizenship, like suffrage and various social

<sup>104</sup>Samuel Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift: Scientific Management in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 60-61.

<sup>105</sup>Lucie M. Peabody, "An Early Woman's Movement," *Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 5 (March 1904): 99, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.

<sup>106</sup>WEIU, *Year Book*, 3.

<sup>107</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year 1912-1913* (Boston, 1914), 53, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239462>.

benefits. When a “gendered imagination” shapes the terms of policy debates, it is in turn nourished by the decidedly gendered outcomes of policy.<sup>108</sup> Theodore Roosevelt’s Commission on Country Life is a contemporaneous example of the impact that gendered assumptions could have on the legislative process, and through it, on the particulars of women’s citizenship. The President appointed this legislative commission in 1908 and tasked its members with finding ways to stem the tide of rural-to-urban migrations. Most of these enthusiastic “country-lifers” were college-educated middle-class Protestants with a passion for agricultural reform and a firm belief in technological solutions to political issues. While their report to the President was supposed to give him a comprehensive picture of the situation of American farmers at the turn of the century, assumptions about who the farmer was and what he would do led them to portray farm women as adjuncts to male kin, implicitly their proprietor husbands. In so doing, they were disregarding not only the economic contributions of farm women in such fields as dairying, poultry-raising, and horticulture, but also Roosevelt’s own instruction that “farmers” include both men and women.<sup>109</sup> When the Smith-Lever Act was passed in 1914, it was essentially the commission’s brainchild. By sending agricultural agents to teach scientific farming and home economics to farm-dwellers, the Act institutionalized a gendered division of labor on the farm. This would push women who owned or co-owned and ran farms to the margins of the political agenda. Farm-dwelling women were not to have access to lectures, reading courses, correspondence courses, and demonstrations in the science of agriculture, but in that of urban home-making.<sup>110</sup> The programs created by the Smith-Lever Act, borne out of historically specific gendered assumptions, further erased women’s identity as producers or co-producers, reinforcing these very same assumptions.

It was in such circular, self-reinforcing fashion that women’s alleged non-economic nature and their intended exclusion from the sphere of profit-making functioned as rhetorical tools of disenfranchisement while also helping shape legislation that hindered women’s access to education and jobs. Faced with the reality of most women’s economically dependent status, legislators could find it easy to keep excluding them from the franchise. This is why taxpayer and breadwinner statuses were deployed by individuals and groups fighting for women’s suffrage. Fe-

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<sup>108</sup>Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in 20th-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 10-14.

<sup>109</sup>E. M. Ziegler, “The Burdens and the Narrow Life of Farm Women’: Women, Gender, and Theodore Roosevelt’s Commission On Country Life,” *Agricultural History* 86, no. 3 (2012): 80-86, <https://doi.org/10.3098/ah.2012.86.3.77>

<sup>110</sup>Ziegler, “The Burdens and the Narrow Life of Farm Women,” 93.

male factory workers fighting for recognition knew that at stake were not only better wages, but a political identity, a voice, authority, and legitimacy—all of which, when secured, would turn them into a much more powerful interest group.<sup>111</sup>

In the nineteenth-century United States, the control of one's own body and property was seen as the prerequisite to making free choices. In the foundational language of natural rights, choice directly translated to the ability to consent to obligations towards the state as were created by the social contract.<sup>112</sup> The case can be made that by the close of the century, that political construct had expanded to include the ability to choose to engage in remunerated employment and enjoy its consequent benefits, whether in the form of wages, salaries, or any income that one earned. Elite men rhapsodized about the way the implicitly masculine value of "free labor" shored up a "civic manhood" that "glorified participation in the marketplace."<sup>113</sup> In that context, women's restricted choices in the marketplace would have been read as a further sign that their citizenship was of a different, more limited, kind than men's.

In the 1900s and 1910s, the WEIU consolidated a defense of women's citizen status based on a recognition of their paid labor. By doing so, they unknowingly inscribed themselves in an intellectual lineage of sorts. Historians have shown how, starting in the 1820s and 1830s, different groups of self-supporting women have at different times harnessed a rhetoric of remunerated labor to claim an identity as citizens. This process was as class-based as it was historically situated. Mary Blewett studied shoebinders in Essex County, Massachusetts. She traced the formation of group consciousness, as some of the shoe workers evolved an identity as working women and sought to appropriate some of the ideals of the "mechanic ideology," in an effort to shore up the legitimacy of their protest. When the Society of Shoebinders (formed in 1812) publicly denounced the low wages paid women in the industry, they based their claims to better remuneration both on the labor theory of value and on revolutionary republican ideas that formed the backbone of the male artisan intellectual tradition. In 1833, women who organized in the shoe-making hub of Lynn, Massachusetts, took up similar themes and, by doing so, managed to attract a measure of male artisan support.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>Vapnek, *Breadwinners*, 1, 7.

<sup>112</sup>Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies*, 8.

<sup>113</sup>Emma Z. Rothberg, "Full-Grown, Large, and Shapely': Parades, Free Labor, and Civic Manhood after the Civil War," Master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2018.

<sup>114</sup>Mary H. Blewett, *Men, Women, and Work: Class, Gender, and Protest in the New England Shoe Industry, 1780-1910* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 34-37.



Unlike Blewett's shoebinders, the leadership of the WEIU was by and large strictly middle-, upper-middle-, and upper-class. As a result, they did not draw on a male working-class ideology of labor, but on the glorification of the capitalist entrepreneur and of his helping hand, the corporate manager. How working women, or women who perceived themselves as such, sought to convince the men of their class—and often public opinion as well—depended on their socioeconomic identity. Higher up in the WEIU's employee hierarchy were white, college-educated middle-class women who could envision careers in the new female "semi-professions" and hope to become clerks, social secretaries, or home economics or salesmanship teachers in large corporations. They cultivated a reputation for efficiency as a means of generating money and opportunities, both directly and indirectly, for other women and for themselves as benevolent and later paid workers. As a complement to the analyses of Mary Blewett, which concerns an earlier time period, this case study illustrates the specific ways in which white-collar women of the 1910s sought the recognition and social capital that came with an economically productive identity—in their case, that of the proprietor or business leader.

### *Coming into their Own as Business-Owners*

More saliently than other women's reform organizations, the WEIU constructed an identity as the operator of successful businesses. A good business reputation facilitated fundraising but could also be a sales argument in and of itself, while legitimizing the idea that college-educated women could legitimately fill roles as entrepreneurs and buyers or managers in large corporations. Business owners like the managers of the WEIU were far from unique as female proprietors, but they were unusual in that by the First World War their businesses were large by the female standards of the time.<sup>115</sup> They were also very aware of the implications of their commercial activities for their status in their communities. In club circles, the WEIU built visibility and a reputation revolving around its money-making ventures. In the 1900s, it was one of several groups influential enough to have a monthly calendar of its activities reprinted in the pages of the *Federation Bulletin*. In a typical month, half of the page was devoted to descriptions of, or advertisements for, the organization's commercial activities. In April 1905, alongside the announcement for a talk by a prominent trade unionist were advertisements for the fresh cream sold in the Union's Food Sales Room and for its Easter sale, its Uji Tea Room, and its Millinery Shop.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>115</sup>Susan Ingalls Lewis, *Unexceptional Women: Female Proprietors in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Albany, 1830-1880* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2009), 58-59.

<sup>116</sup>"Women's Educational and Industrial Union Calendar," *Federation Bulletin* 2, no. 7

Between 1890 and 1905, as new blood reinvigorated the organization, WEIU women gained greater acceptance for being businesswomen out to generate a profit, if only because it was becoming increasingly necessary for their shops to be self-supporting. As early as 1891, the WEIU's Lunch Committee could congratulate themselves that "the[ir] work rest[ed] fundamentally on the old question of supply and demand. [...] [T]he demand has been constant, the 'supply' never-failing, and the results most satisfactory financially."<sup>117</sup> Over time, the Union put department after department on what they referred to as a "business basis."<sup>118</sup> As the Industrial Department split in two, becoming the Handiwork (later Handwork) Shop and Food Sales Rooms, the WEIU's operations expanded. As early as 1905, the organization provided Bostonians with "the unique spectacle of a business that employ[ed] one hundred and twenty paid workers and yield[ed] yearly receipts of more than \$168,000.00, conducted by one hundred and ten different women, distributed among a Board of Government and sixteen standing committees."<sup>119</sup> Increasingly, the Industrial Department's managers underlined their identity as business owners in their advertising materials. In order to impress prospective consumers, they stressed their efficiency and promptness in filling orders, and invited the public to inspect their "plants," turning what had been a necessary change in organizational methods into a sales argument.<sup>120</sup> Consignors, while they were not under contract and as such remained independent economic agents, entertained a relationship with management that was not unlike that of employees of the WEIU, but they saw themselves as independent enough that they would bristle at the Union's increased oversight.

### 5.3 Proponents of Workplace Democracy?

The WEIU's annual report for 1900 bore mention of the association working with 510 consignors, men and women, a number that tended to vary slightly from year to year; the total number of the Union's paid employees was not stated. By 1910,

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(April 1905): 248, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.

<sup>117</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1891* (Boston: No. 264 Boylston Street, 1891), 32, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923918>.

<sup>118</sup>Deutsch, "Learning to Talk More Like a Man," 393.

<sup>119</sup>WEIU, *Year Book*, 14.

<sup>120</sup>WEIU records, Boylston Street Lunch Room Menu, 1909. B-8. Box 3, folder 24.

those numbers were openly mentioned to be 671 and 245 respectively.<sup>121</sup> Between 1900 and 1910, as the president of the Union and its Board of Government steered the non-profit toward the operation of multiple business schemes, they realized that they could no longer ignore the tensions and even contradictions raised by their dual status as social reformers and employers of women. If the Union wished to be known as a model employer and to pioneer progressive management practices, they had to walk the walk and talk the talk. This meant taking stock of evolving workplace relationships at their 264 Boylston Street building and in their Providence Street restaurant.

### 5.3.1 The 1908 Consignors' "Strike"

As early as 1892, WEIU women received public criticism as employers. Some complaints dealt with their being too lenient with their Food Shop employees<sup>122</sup>—others, of being too secretive about their management practices. One private teacher, seeing in the Union an unfair competitor, wrote to the editors of the *Boston Transcript* to castigate their business practices more generally. She wrote that the Union fostered subservience among its workers and patrons, and that its own reports suspiciously disclosed neither “the rate of wages paid its employees, nor [...] the length of its labor day.”<sup>123</sup> In the late 1900s, other voices would decry the Union’s claims of being a progressive employer.

As we have seen in previous chapters, the women who consigned or sold textile goods and food to the Union’s shops were not quite employees and not quite charity cases to the Union leadership. In fact, they were rather more like imagined peers that the middle-class housewives and college girls of the Union’s management hoped to help succeed financially in the business environment of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth century city. Through the 1900s and 1910s, the directors of the Handwork and Food Departments took a personal interest in at least some of the consignors, dispensing advice and occasionally helping them with supplies as they never would have ordinary suppliers. In 1917, as war-induced shortages hit the producers of the Food Shop, the Union resolved to supply two

<sup>121</sup>Additional WEIU records, Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., 1899-1900* (Cambridge: The Co-operative Press, 1900), 38, 40. 81-M237. Carton 1; Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, Boston, Massachusetts, January, Nineteen Hundred Eleven* (Boston, 1911), 3, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923652>.

<sup>122</sup>“Personal and Social Gossip,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, January 10, 1892, 23.

<sup>123</sup>WEIU clippings, “One Woman,” *Boston Transcript*, c1893, “4. 1887-97,” [4]. M-89.

women with sugar if they found themselves unable to buy any elsewhere.<sup>124</sup>

As we have previously seen, throughout the 1890s and the early 1900s, commission rates were the focus of considerable, constantly renewed debates. The Finance Committee made it clear that the 10% commission rate of the early days was a charitable rate, and not one a legitimate business could offer if keeping it afloat was a concern, which the Union had decided was the case. Discussions about commission rates were underscored by debates about consignors' status—should consignors be made to be Union members? Initially, any woman, whether she held Union membership or not, was able to sell goods through the WEIU's shops. When the commission rate was first raised to 15%, the Board of Government decided that members would still enjoy the original 10% rate, which they hoped would be incentive enough for consignors to join. Eventually, the rule was changed so that only WEIU members could become consignors. This mechanically resulted in a massive influx of new members. The Union could not resist changing the rule to add several hundreds of names to its membership rolls, because each of them brought in \$1 to their treasury in membership dues.<sup>125</sup> Consignors were as displeased at being forced to join or stop selling to the Union as they were at bearing the burden of rising commission rates.

In 1908, those simmering tensions came to a head: the Boston papers reported a "strike" by WEIU consignors, who protested that the organization exploited them and made it impossible for them to profit off their own labor. On January 1, the Union increased its commission rate on all foodstuffs from 20 to 30 percent. That unpopular measure was compounded by an increase in delivery fees, by inflation, and by changes in the Union's rules and regulations for consignors. Starting in 1908, consignors were to work to order only and have baked goods ready for delivery to the Union by 9 o'clock each morning for distribution to the organization's various lunch and sales-rooms.

On January 18, less than three weeks after these changes came into effect, a group of consignors met in Boston's Social Hall and voted to "start in business

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<sup>124</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Executive Committee* v. 28, no. 6 (October 23, 1917), 2. 81-M237. Carton 4.

<sup>125</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1886* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1886), 27; Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 98 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May 7, 1889* (Boston: No. 98 Boylston Street, 1889), 27, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924015>; that year, it was ruled that only consignors who were members would receive payment for their consignments.

for themselves.”<sup>126</sup> To the head of the new organization they were forming to defend their interests, they elected Eda Chapman. She was briefly discussed in chapter 2 as one of the businesswomen who struck out on their own after working for the WEIU.<sup>127</sup> In early 1908, Chapman was both a regular consignor and the proprietor of the Peacock Lunch Room, located on 355 Boylston Street. For two years and a half, she had worked as a superintendent for the WEIU, bearing special responsibility for dealings with its consignors, but she was also close enough to the higher ranks of management to fill in for the Director of the Food Department at the organization’s 1905 annual meeting.<sup>128</sup> Charlotte Smith, a woman reported as an “organizer of the Women’s Board of Trade,” assisted her in leading the proceedings at Social Hall.<sup>129</sup> Spearheading the consignors’ revolt against the Union, then, were both a proprietor and an organizer intent on defending the cause of Boston’s working women.

Perhaps emboldened by her own commercial success, Eda Chapman led the “seceding consignors.” They sought not a complete break from the Union—some intended to keep retailing their products through the Union’s shops—but proprietorship in their own right. Available evidence suggests that the Union’s regular consignors formed a tight-knit community of self-supporting women. It was simultaneously as employers, prospective middle-class consumers, and peers (female entrepreneurs) that the directors of the WEIU had sought to deal with consignors. Starting in the 1890s, they invited consignors to teas for them to meet, socialize, and talk about their experiences as producers, recognizing a shared condition or status as women trying to assert an identity as economic agents.<sup>130</sup> By 1904, these

<sup>126</sup>“Women Break From Industrial Union,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, January 19, 1908, 3.

<sup>127</sup>See chapter 2, p. 136-137.

<sup>128</sup>“Woman’s Gain in Business Way,” *Boston Herald*, April 26, 1905, 7.

<sup>129</sup>The Women’s Board of Trade was a short-lived Bostonian institution founded in the summer of 1907 to “promote commercial relations between women” and function as a counterpart to the male Board of Trade. “Business Women of State Form an Organization,” *Boston Journal*, August 15, 1907, 7. Charlotte Smith was not the Women’s Board of Trade’s first president, and from reports of the organization’s foundering in late 1907 she seems to have been a divisive figure. The press ridiculed her as a “far-famed reformer of all abuses” who was more interested in calling for a ban on the teddy bear than on actually reforming anything. Overall, the *Journal’s* coverage of the activities of the Women’s Board of Trade is illustrative of how women’s inroads into traditionally male preserves could lead to charges of unprofessional emotionalism and irrationality. “Women’s Board of Trade on Rock, Disbanded,” *Boston Journal*, September 17, 1907, 2; “Women’s Board of Trade Taboos Teddy Bear,” *Boston Journal*, September 16, 1907, 7.

<sup>130</sup>There were a few meetings a year, as in 1900-1901, when two meetings were organized for the consignors of the Food Department, and one for those of the Handiwork Department. Additional WEIU records, Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., 1900-1901* (Cambridge: The Co-operative Press, 1901), 16. 81-M237. Carton 1. See also WEIU records, *Union News Items* (June 1911), 6. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

consignors' meetings were conducted on a monthly basis. From the perspective of Union officers, such social events were successful in creating an atmosphere of trust. One officer noted in 1904 that there was a "a very genuine spirit of friendliness and cooperation among the persons associated with us in business."<sup>131</sup> The yearly food exhibits that the Union started organizing the same year rounded off their efforts to nurture their consignors' social and professional networks, as each was encouraged to sample her colleagues' consignments for educational purposes.<sup>132</sup>

What went wrong in 1908? The crisis may be attributed to consignors not feeling sufficiently acknowledged as peers and professionals. One aggrieved consignor said that she had "consulted with a number of men in different lines of business," who all told her that a 20% commission rate was a standard that could be relied upon. "We want business and want to be treated in a business way," said another consignor, summarizing her peers' grievances.<sup>133</sup> The confidence that the WEIU's consignors felt in their own abilities as producers and businesswomen led them to reevaluate their professional relationship to the Union as a social reform organization, and to object to what they construed as exploitation. To Eda Chapman, there was "no reason why the consignors, if they [went] into business for themselves, should not make an excellent profit."<sup>134</sup> That was reason enough to stop putting up with the Union's rules and regulations. At stake were the profits that could be made from the sale of artisan jams, jellies and cakes, and who would reap these profits. Accusing the management of the Union of having repudiated their social mission and running the WEIU as "an institution for the personal gain of a few wealthy women,"<sup>135</sup> the group of "seceding consignors" planned to open a more truly cooperative store in Boston. They eventually opened a shop on Winter Street, which they advertised in the Boston papers as the "Consignors' Union," in a fashion reminiscent of other Woman's Exchanges.<sup>136</sup> Given the way they framed the issue, as that of the conflict between a wealthy leadership and the more numerous workers whose labored they exploited for financial gain, it is clear that the protesting consignors did not understand themselves to be on an equal footing with the new professionals who occupied the top rungs of the WEIU's management structure. Down to its very name, the "Consignors' Union" was a

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<sup>131</sup>WEIU, *1904 Report*, 29, 39.

<sup>132</sup>WEIU, *1904 Report*, 39.

<sup>133</sup>"Women Break From Industrial Union," *Boston Herald*, January 19, 1908, 3.

<sup>134</sup>"Women Break From Industrial Union," *Boston Herald*, January 19, 1908, 3.

<sup>135</sup>"Women Consignees Revolt Against Industrial Union," *Sunday American*, January 19, 1908, 9.

<sup>136</sup>"Home-Made Christmas Dainties," *Boston Journal*, December 14, 1910, 13.

response to the purported classlessness of the “Educational and Industrial Union” project. When labor and surpluses were involved, Chapman and Smith seemed to be saying, there could be no identity of purpose.

Their movement appears to have been limited, for the management of the Union was not outwardly worried that their own business would collapse.<sup>137</sup> Even internally, there is no evidence of reactions to the consignors’ public criticism of the Union. In January and February 1908, the Board of Government did not acknowledge the situation of the Food Shop except to recommend that more time be given to analyze the financial impact of the general shift from consignment to order work, evidence that more attention was paid to larger trends rather than what may have been considered a fleeting moment of crisis.<sup>138</sup> In regard to the former, financial motivations seem to have been simultaneously at the root of the WEIU’s policy change—their move away from consignment, and toward buying outright—at the center of their public relations strategy.

Internal WEIU records indicate that a special meeting on financial conditions was held on January 17. The *Boston Herald*, which on January 19 was one of several local papers giving a platform to disgruntled consignors, published a piece that was more favorable to the WEIU.<sup>139</sup> Their January 21 article provided a still deeper dive into the WEIU’s receipts and expenses, highlighting both its yearly operating deficit of “nearly \$10,000” and the organization’s contribution to community life. The piece, a regurgitation of figures provided by the Union’s secretary, was an overt response to the consignors’ outspoken criticism. “The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union has no protest but only congratulations to offer to any group of consignors who feel themselves able as a result of their experiences in the salesroom to enter into business for themselves,” WEIU secretary Henrietta Goodrich declared to the *Herald*, reasserting that consignors starting independent businesses had been the goal of the Woman’s Exchange all along. Crucially, it was on the terrain of business savvy that she countered the consignors’ claims, conjuring her own connections to businessmen to justify raising the commission rates. While the WEIU did not profess overt hostility towards the consignors, management still moved to protect the association’s image and shield it from criticism. They were likely aware of what they risked for being branded hypocrites by the very women they had pledged to help.

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<sup>137</sup>“Women Consignees Revolt Against Industrial Union,” 9.

<sup>138</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government v. 8*, January 21, 1908, 109. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>139</sup>“Women’s Work Cost \$226,828 For Year,” *Boston Herald*, January 21, 1908, 4.

Ultimately, the WEIU's clout and well-established reputation protected its leaders from the public criticism that was leveled by aggrieved consignors—even when, in 1909, one “Gertrude E. Pease” addressed a petition to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in hopes that they might pass a bill capping the commission rate in women's exchanges at 25%.<sup>140</sup> Without naming the Boston association, Pease's bill targeted “charitable institutions and industrial unions,”<sup>141</sup> but in the press the latter term was usually used exclusively to refer to the “Women's Educational and Industrial Union.”<sup>142</sup> While the bill was never passed by the Massachusetts Congress, its very existence suggests the dedication with which some consignors pursued the state's protection from Exchange managers.

### 5.3.2 Workplace Democracy in the Employees' Association

The Union first considered organizing a committee of employees in 1903, when the Board of Government authorized Mary Morton Kehew, the Union's third president, to “call the employees of the Union together and to talk with them about organizing among themselves with a view to having authorized representatives [...].”<sup>143</sup> This initial meeting resulted in the creation of the Employees' Association in 1906, later to be assisted by the “Union Benefit Association,” sometimes referred to as the “Employees' Benefit Association.” These two bodies were the embodiment of the WEIU's ideological commitment to the principles of workplace democracy. The creation of the Employees' Association formalized the relationship between the management and the workers. These bodies were official channels through which to make suggestions and convey grievances. Per the constitution of the Employees' Association, the WEIU's president had the power to approve or veto the recommendations formulated by the employees' representatives.<sup>144</sup> However, this ultimate check on employees' ability to determine their own working conditions was also accompanied by public gestures of gratefulness. Starting in 1905, the Union's management made a show of extending votes of thanks to employees and

<sup>140</sup>Massachusetts House of Representatives. 1909 House Bill 1021. An Act Relative To The Amount of Profit To Be Made By Charitable Institutions and Industrial Unions By the Sale Of Products Of The Home, Massachusetts State Library, <http://archives.lib.state.ma.us/handle/2452/635349>.

<sup>141</sup>1909 House Bill 1021.

<sup>142</sup>As revealed by a survey of such mentions in the *Boston Herald* and *Boston Journal* between 1905 and 1915.

<sup>143</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, October 6, 1903, 51. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>144</sup>Additional WEIU records, Women's Educational and Industrial Union, “The Women's Educational and Industrial Union,” undated, c1915, 21. 81-M237. Carton 1.



volunteers, both in private reports and at public meetings.<sup>145</sup>

These do not seem to have been empty words. In fact, the WEIU's employees appear to have been active in steering the course of the Union's research and reform work and in ensuring that they, as business leaders, practiced what they preached. One salient example of this is the WEIU's investigation on women's living wage, published in 1911.<sup>146</sup> The investigation resulted from a motion of one of the Union's own employees within the course of a debate in the General Committee of Employees. The concept of a "living wage" had been brought up by the Food Sales delegate, who represented the cash-girls, waitresses, cooks, and clerks who worked in the Union's restaurants and in the Food Sales room. When their representative moved that the Board of Government be asked to change the Union wage scale so that no employee in the sales room would be paid less than \$1 a day, "because less than that [was] not a living wage," debates turned to defining what a living wage was in early-twentieth-century Boston. It was an internal dispute, about a specific workplace issue, which led to the appointment by the Board of Government of a special "living wage investigation" committee, and then to the investigation itself, eventually conducted by college students working for the WEIU's Research Department. In the process, the goal became not only to determine what a fair wage would be for the Union's employees, but what it would be for all women, in the abstract. The committee's stated purpose was to "help toward the establishment of a minimum wage for women which shall be a living wage" through the collection of reliable data.<sup>147</sup>

Similarly, when a special commission of the Employees' Association formulated recommendations to the leadership of the Union, asking that the Research Department undertake an investigation of "benefit schemes," they did so "[i]n the hope that from such an investigation may be evolved some practical plan for a fair and impersonal adjustment between employers and employees [...] that could be applied by other firms, as well as by the Union."<sup>148</sup> The Union's employees argued for the need for uniform standards of insurance, and they were committed to helping develop them. They were wage-earning, self-supporting women, and they considered that their particular insight into labor relations was worth taking

<sup>145</sup> Additional WEIU records, *Report of the Annual Meeting, 1905*, 17. 81-M237. Carton 6, folder 102.

<sup>146</sup> Louise Marion Bosworth, *The Living Wage of Women Workers: A Study of Incomes and Expenditures of 450 Women in the City of Boston* (Boston: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1911), HathiTrust, [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b95948](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b95948).

<sup>147</sup> Additional WEIU records, "Living Wage Investigation – Special Committee," October 1, 1907. 81-M237. Carton 6, folder 104.

<sup>148</sup> "Living Wage Investigation – Special Committee," 1.

into account. Certainly, the management's responsiveness to the motions and resolutions of the Employees' Association may have validated this belief. The Union both greenlit their suggestions of investigation and ensured that the investigators themselves brought relevant personal experience to the table. Frida E. Ungar, who held a Tufts College fellowship and undertook the Union's investigation on corporate welfare schemes, had experience as a telegrapher; she had paid her way through college thanks to night work.<sup>149</sup>

The WEIU used the results of that particular investigation on "benefit schemes" to argue that other firms should follow the Union's lead, stating clearly that the seven hundred women Frida Ungar investigated would have been better off had they been WEIU employees: their expenses for loss of absence would have been reduced from \$12 to \$3 a year.<sup>150</sup> Here we see that the representatives of the Union's employees, no less than the Board of Management or the college-educated investigators themselves, considered the Union's shops as a testing ground which could help reformers develop more widely applicable corporate welfare schemes. Here, then, we see another illustration of the fact that women's reform organizations were not only experiment stations for the elaboration of public services within the Progressive-era city. In some fringe cases like that of the WEIU, non-profit organizations could also investigate ways to effect workplace reform from the inside.

Their being employers had a bearing on the organization's stance and on the kind of reform that they would advocate. Despite being a reform organization, the WEIU was constrained by its position within the business world. The Board of Government wanted to model harmonious relationships with their employees, but they argued that they could not head any and all of the requests of the Employees' Association. In 1905, when the employees requested that management write down the principles that governed the regulation of work hours in the various Union departments, presumably with a view to standardizing these hours, they were told that it would be "unwise" for the WEIU to depart from the standards of industry. The employees' desire for standardization, management argued, "rest[ed] upon an 'artificial sense of democracy' that [was] not true to facts nor to the conditions which exist in the world outside."<sup>151</sup> The experimental bubble constituted by the Union needed to be permeable to the business world at large, if anything the

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<sup>149</sup>"Living Wage Investigation – Special Committee," 2.

<sup>150</sup>"Living Wage Investigation – Special Committee," 2.

<sup>151</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 9, October 17, 1905, 1. 81-M237. Carton 2.

WEIU did was to have any impact on their competitors. Evidently, the women of the WEIU were aware that running a business as a feminist organization required walking a tight-rope between reaching for utopia or perfectionism, and settling for pragmatism. It was all the more arduous to strike an effective balance between the two as the organization's leadership conceived their activities as a way to theorize and refine labor management techniques and improve labor relations within society at large. In that regard, unionism would prove to be a real stumbling block for the managers of the Union.

### 5.3.3 Taking a Stance on the Labor Movement as Employers

Mary Morton Kehew was one of the originators of the Women's Trade Union League; she consequently drew inspiration from the principles of that class-bridging female trade union when she pushed the WEIU to organize an in-house union for Union employees. As WEIU president, she also oversaw the increasing formalization and institutionalization of the employer-employee relationship as symbolized by the labor contract. She was moved by the belief that increased transparency enhanced employees' rights both symbolically and materially. Still, because it was itself a purveyor of jobs to a large pool of workers—the WEIU could not have the same relationship to unionism as organizations like the NCL. In December 1904, the General Committee of Employees' Committee on Conditions of Labor voiced a series of questions that explicitly and directly tackled issues that the Board of Government had intermittently discussed throughout the previous decade. Did the Union's officers identify more as benevolent women, or as employers? Most saliently, the Union's employees wanted to know whether their employer would take its commitment to workplace reform and industrial democracy to its logical conclusion—"What is the Union's actual attitude towards organized labor? Does it care to take any stand in the matter?"<sup>152</sup>

It wasn't until January 1907 that the Board of Government would make their position clear, largely because their endorsement of unionism was very carefully delineated. Acknowledging that the work of the WEIU was "vitally related to industrial conditions," and that the organization embraced the ideals of fellowship and group-action, its leaders would not endorse the principles of the closed shop.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>152</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 9, December 6, 1904, 6. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>153</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 10, January 1, 1907, 53.

When they crafted this statement, the women who sat on the Board of Government of the WEIU did so specifically as employers, because they were considering how a commitment to the closed shop would affect their relationship to their suppliers. They did not want to limit the pool of their economic partners; they asserted quality of work as the main criterion for picking a contractor, as they did in the case of printing. In April 1885, the Committee on Industries was authorized by the Board of Government to hire a man “at the lowest possible figure”; a few months later, however, the same women decided to raise the wages of the bookkeeper of the Food Sales Room to \$10 a week in order to entice her to stay—high wages for a woman engaging in that kind of work then.<sup>154</sup> Perhaps it was for women who looked and behaved the most like them that the managers of the WEIU were most comfortable going against existing industrial conditions, and for whom they would make financial sacrifices.

In any case, what appears clearly from the record of the Board of Government’s meetings is that, as employers, they unconsciously othered the women who worked for them. They sometimes ascribed their behavior to irrationality, or laziness, and this attitude bled through some of the studies that the WEIU’s Research Department carried out as tools for the leadership to solve management problems. Between 1906 and 1908, the WEIU conducted several studies on the absence rate of Union employees, and their conclusion was clear. Neither a benefit scheme, like that to which the WEIU contributed financially, nor offering paid leave to workers, increased the amount of absences. While the reports’ findings were benign and went toward supporting the expansion of employer-sponsored benefit schemes, the obsession with scrutinizing workers’ attendance record and use of employer resources may have sat uneasily with the members of the Employees’ Association.<sup>155</sup>

## 5.4 Sub-Contractors: Adjuncts to the Local Government

The WEIU cast itself in the role of adjunct to the city government by attempting to provide necessary social services. In this section, we will look both at the Union’s

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81-M237. Carton 6.

<sup>154</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, April 15, 1884, 2. 81-M237. Carton 1; Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 3, September 3, 1885, 133. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>155</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Report on Union Absences, 1906-1908,” c1908. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 143.

School Lunch program and its related domestic science apprenticeships. While the program eventually received official recognition from the city government, the Union never became a sanctioned educational provider, but its ties to Simmons College enhanced its standing within the community. Through both initiatives, the WEIU played the part of a public utility provider.

### 5.4.1 First Collaborations with Boston's Municipal Government

The WEIU cultivated a relationship with Boston's authorities: like other women's voluntary associations, the organization had, from its early days, sought the approval and help of the municipal government. Securing a charter from the state government was only the first, most basic step in seeking institutional recognition. Their early annual meetings and genteel fundraising entertainments, like their 1887 kirmess or the Venetian carnival they put on the following year, were held in churches or in public halls like Mechanics' Hall. On these occasions, the local press would report on the presence of the Mayor of Boston or the Governor of Massachusetts, both of whom opened the program for the Union's 1887 fundraising kirmess. This granted WEIU fundraisers the same status as citywide industrial exhibitions like the Mechanics' Fair, which in 1887 was opened by the very same pair of prominent politicians. This was a sign that women's organizations, when their members or activities were significant enough, could get symbolic backing from the corporate elite that governed the city.<sup>156</sup>

The members of the Union saw themselves as providing necessary social services in response to the "call for public service."<sup>157</sup> At the state level, the WEIU, like other voluntary associations in New England, worked closely with the new Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics, which was established in 1869-1870 but only started to collect data in 1883.<sup>158</sup> which is when the members of the WEIU turned to its statisticians for assistance. In the organization's early days, in the

<sup>156</sup>"The Coming Kirmess," *New York Herald*, April 10, 1887, 19; "New England: Venetian Dancers," *Worcester Daily Spy*, December 8, 1888, 3; "The Mechanics' Fair. Opening of the Triennial Exhibition," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, September 27, 1887, 8.

<sup>157</sup>WEIU records, Mary H. Moran and Julia Pulsifer, "Boston's Public School Lunches." B-8. Box 3, folder 22. Mary H. Moran would spend a total of twelve years as manager of the NEK, a position she left for a year's graduate study at Cornell. "The Training School for Public Service," *Boston Herald*, June 19, 1923, 14.

<sup>158</sup>Ellen Terrell, "Founding of the Bureau of Labor Statistics," *This Month in Business History*, Library of Congress, <https://guides.loc.gov/this-month-in-business-history/june/founding-bureau-labor-statistics>. Accessed October 20, 2023.

1880s, its members had little experience with tabulating data. The deal they struck with the Bureau was simple. Volunteers would do the investigating and gather raw data before turning them over to the Bureau. Both women's voluntary organizations and the Bureau could then put the findings to use in designing social programs.<sup>159</sup> Such cooperation ramped up in the years before the First World War. In the 1900s and early 1910s, the WEIU explicitly embraced the ideas and methods of the new social sciences and put its research-producing capacities to the service of the State government<sup>160</sup> and even that of the federal government, as one report suggested.<sup>161</sup>

Because of the way female reformers conceptualized citizenship, these offers for help and cooperation were not disinterested, despite the occasional claim to the contrary. As the nineteenth century drew to a close, organizations similar to the WEIU increasingly offered their "assistance" to the authorities in reporting food safety issues or fraud.<sup>162</sup> By the 1900s, club women taking up social reform work aimed to become the investigating arm of the state, each housekeeper a potential health and safety inspector. While the nation required men to provide "assistance to run its gear" by casting a ballot, women, even disenfranchised as they were, could be called upon to help, albeit in a peculiarly feminine way.<sup>163</sup>

White club women conceived of their civic role as different from men's, because the citizenship to which they had access was arguably a truncated female version of their male kin's. By the 1890s, when the organized women's club movement was coming into its own at a national level, both gender and race were firmly entrenched as salient factors in the delineation of a different tier of citizenship. Still, the slow erosion of the legal tradition of coverture created an atmosphere of legal and judicial uncertainty that women's rights activists were quick to seize.<sup>164</sup>

<sup>159</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston St., Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1898* (Cambridge: Cambridge Co-operative Printing Society, 1898), 50, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923710>.

<sup>160</sup>WEIU, *Industrial Home Work in Massachusetts*; Lucile Eaves, *The Food of Working Women in Boston* (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1917), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044004566253>.

<sup>161</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year 1916-1917* (Boston, 1918), xiii, HathiTrust, <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/curiosity/women-working-1800-1930/45-990020152060203941>.

<sup>162</sup>One example of this would be the activities of the Massachusetts Milk Consumers' Association, whose members conducted investigations of ice cream shops in the city of Boston and vicinity in the late 1900s and early 1910s, with a view to enforcing the existing legislation. Papers of Elizabeth Lowell Putnam, "Milk and Ice Cream Committee," undated. MC-360, box 6, file 119.

<sup>163</sup>Forrester, "Woman's Capture of the Food Market," 673.

<sup>164</sup>Kerber, *No Constitutional Right to Be Ladies*, 38-39.

Derrick Spires has analyzed how free black men took advantage of similar circumstances in the antebellum era to argue that they, too, could claim the full array of rights enjoyed by white male citizens, if they only found ways to take on civic responsibilities.<sup>165</sup> This is one reading that we can give our overview of one of the WEIU's widest-reaching programs, the provision of hot lunches to Boston's schoolchildren.

### 5.4.2 School Lunches, a Public Service Women Could Provide

In 1907, the Board of Government of the WEIU received a letter from a committee of schoolmasters. Their request was simple: they wanted to know if this women's voluntary organization was willing to consider working with them to provide hot school lunches to Boston's students. The Union responded with enthusiasm and a reminder that they would consider the "lunch problem" only if it was "a necessary and worthy form of social service."<sup>166</sup> The Union's School Lunch program is a concrete example of the type of public-private partnerships which abounded in the Progressive Era city. In a perfect illustration of the process identified by historian Karen Blair, WEIU president Mary Morton Kehew described the Union "as an experiment station where promising social opportunities may be tried out, to be handed over when proved successful or worth while, to the State or to some organized body particularly able to do them justice."<sup>167</sup> In the 1900s and 1910s, it was common for public amenities as various as public playgrounds, kindergartens, public baths, and school lunch programs to find their origins in the efforts of local women's clubs and settlement houses. Volunteers built them and operated them, with or without the help of public subsidies; when their viability and usefulness were safely established, the local authorities would take them over.<sup>168</sup> This is the fate that awaited the Union's school lunch program: at first an uncertain private experiment, it had to be proven to be worth the expenditure of public monies.

Until the last decades of the nineteenth century, schoolchildren depended on their families for their meals. As a wave of state laws gradually made schooling

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<sup>165</sup>Spires, *Practice of Citizenship*.

<sup>166</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 10, February 5, 1907, 52. 81-M237. Carton 6.

<sup>167</sup>WEIU clippings, Mary Carolina Crawford, "New Fortunes of the Women's Industrial Union," *Boston Evening Transcript*, July 6, 1912. M-89.

<sup>168</sup>Blair, *Clubwoman as Feminist*; Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).

compulsory, questions arose about the state's responsibility for children's meals, and other aspects of their overall health and lives. In the process, the classroom was reconfigured not just as a learning space, but as a community center to which settlement workers, urban reformers, and clubwomen directed their attention.<sup>169</sup> In the 1870s and 1880s urban charities started taking note of the plight of tenement children, who were either fed improperly or not at all; women's organizations like the Home and School League and mothers' clubs provided the first free school meals to disadvantaged pupils. Often, especially in high schools, janitors or their wives sold baked goods and candy to students for a small profit. With the emergence of nutrition science and the realization that children's health and school performance could be improved through diet, home economists and reformers active in women's clubs took up the cause of the school lunch and investigated the possibility of implementing government-sponsored school lunches. It was increasingly believed that strong, healthy citizens could be made not only in the classroom, but also in the school cafeteria. If they were fed nutritionally-balanced meals, children could be taught how to eat healthfully for cheap, a lesson home economists hoped would improve working-class standards of living.<sup>170</sup> Mary H. Moran and Julia Pulsifer, the Union workers in charge of its School Lunch Program, summed up the opinion of many an urban reformer when they stated that school lunch programs originated in "modern urban conditions of living, as well as modern conceptions of the State's responsibilities to its citizens."<sup>171</sup>

Because school lunch programs were local affairs, various models existed. As a home economist reported in 1912, "[i]n several cities such as Chicago, Buffalo, Rochester, New York, St. Louis and Denver, the school boards actively support[ed] the work. In others such as Philadelphia, New York and Boston, there [was] passive cooperation and tolerance."<sup>172</sup> The municipal government, when involved, could pay part or all of the expenses incurred in providing schoolchildren with meals. Sometimes, labor, including that of cooking the meals and supervising their distribution, was paid for by public appropriations; more often than not, it was not. Equipment was also often donated by local charities or paid for through fundraisers. Similarly, profits could either be reinjected into the program or di-

<sup>169</sup>A. R. Ruis, *Eating to Learn, Learning to Eat: The Origins of School Lunch in the United States* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017), 14-17.

<sup>170</sup>Susan Levine, *School Lunch Politics: The Surprising History of America's Favorite Welfare Program* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 30-34; Ruis, *Eating to Learn*, 19-20, 25.

<sup>171</sup>Moran and Pulsifer, "Boston's Public School Lunches."

<sup>172</sup>Louise Stevens Bryant, "General Development and Present Status of the School Feeding Movement," *Journal of Home Economics* 4, no. 5 (November 1912), 476; HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924053753582>.



rectly transferred to the city coffers for more general uses. Overall, the recurring pattern, as in Buffalo, New York, was that of a woman's club testing out the waters and showing the program's popularity and efficacy, before the city government moved towards at least partial supervision or administration.<sup>173</sup> This is a theme explored by Judith Leavitt in her classic case study of early-twentieth-century Milwaukee. Entangling the processes by which the city came to claim a reputation as America's "healthiest city" in the 1920s, she shows that this was the result of close collaborative ties between the local women's clubs and the municipality. A typical example is that of the successful anti-tuberculosis campaigns coordinated there by the public and private sectors in 1907 and 1912.<sup>174</sup>

In 1894, home economics pioneer Ellen Swallow Richards convinced the Boston School Committee to entrust her with a lunch program conducted on a scientific basis. Richards had the approval of the Committee of Hygiene of the School Board, which installed counters and food-serving equipment in nine schools, but she had to raise the rest of the necessary funds. As a result, the scheme was conducted "as a private enterprise."<sup>175</sup> Thirteen years later, the WEIU took over the management of the New England Kitchen and the school lunch program it conducted at cost in cooperation with the Head Masters' Association of Boston High and Latin Schools. Per an agreement with the School Board, an Advisory Committee on School Lunches was constituted, made up in equal parts of representatives of the Union, including its president, and headmasters elected annually by the Head Masters' Association. Any profit was to be turned back to the students "in the shape of better food, lower prices, more efficient service, etc."<sup>176</sup> Part of the facilities in which the lunches were prepared, before being packed and sent for sale in the high schools, were also used by the Union's catering service.

There were growing pains. Business and cooking methods were largely the same, with the largest difference lying in distribution and the coordination of as many as 30 paid workers and 45 "student assistants," that is to say domestic science students. The Union's report of their first day of conducting the school lunch program is an amusing tale of unexpected problems and last-minute solutions. A railroad wreck tied up Boston's milk supply, a baker fell ill, and the delay in bread-baking left cake makers with cold ovens; the electric ice cream freezer

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<sup>173</sup>WEIU records, *School Luncheons: What Is Now Being Done* (Boston, December 3, 1910). B-8. Box 4, folder 28.

<sup>174</sup>Judith Waltzer Leavitt, *The Healthiest City: Milwaukee and the Politics of Health Reform* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), 201-208.

<sup>175</sup>Moran and Pulsifer, "Boston's Public School Lunches."

<sup>176</sup>Moran and Pulsifer, "Boston's Public School Lunches."

broke down, and an intoxicated “expressman” showed up with too small a wagon. Still, despite these setbacks, by the end of the day lunch had been served to 1,500 pupils in 8 schools. One year later, 13 high schools were served, for a total of 2,500 to 3,000 students out of 8,000 in attendance. By 1925, the School Lunch Department served 12,000 to 13,000 pupils daily. Between 4 and 11 elementary schools were also served, in a significant extension of the work. To put these figures in perspective, it should be noted that the average daily attendance in the Boylston Street Restaurant and Members’ Lunch Rooms numbered 800 to 900, and in the New England Kitchen 700.<sup>177</sup> As the Union figured out the logistics of providing meals for schoolchildren, it also established a framework for the management of the program. Eventually, the WEIU set up a joint committee with the headmasters of the schools it serviced, an initiative that was seconded by an official agreement with the Boston school board. The terms of their cooperation required that “the school board provide the room and the equipment and a certain amount of the care, while the union prepare and serve the food.”<sup>178</sup>

As the women of the Union successfully demonstrated their ability to run a school lunch program for the municipal government, local elected officials became used to relying on them. The WEIU was asked to maintain lunch rooms for other government uses: during the First World War, the management of their New England Kitchen set up a lunch room for the benefit of the employees of the Boston Navy Yard.<sup>179</sup> By 1917, the Union’s lunch rooms were squarely on the radar of even the state government. Just as the WEIU established a lunch room at the Boston Navy Yard, an agent for the Board of Education asked to Union if he could examine the equipment in the lunch rooms of three of the high schools that they serviced, with a view to examining the possibility of replicating the set-up across the state.<sup>180</sup> Evidently, the school lunch program was the genesis of a formal business relationship between the Union and the Boston city government. By the late 1910s, Union women had built a reputation as skilled restaurant managers in the nonprofit sector, so much so that in 1921 Boston Mayor Peters asked for

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<sup>177</sup>Moran and Pulsifer, “Boston’s Public School Lunches”; Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Forty-Seventh Annual Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union for the Year 1924-1925* (Boston, 1925), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239603>.

<sup>178</sup>Caroline L. Hunt, *The Daily Meals of School Children* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1909), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015062372308>.

<sup>179</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Executive Committee*, v. 28, October 2, 1917, 7. 81-M237. Carton 4.

<sup>180</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Executive Committee* v. 28, October 5, 1917, 5-6. 81-M237. Carton 4.

Figure 5.1: Women preparing school lunches at the Union. Part of a lantern slide show about the school lunch program. Circa 1907-1910.



Harvard University, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, MC610-PD102-9

Source: Harvard Digital Collections, [https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital\\_collections/8000891735\\_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:13908719](https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital_collections/8000891735_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:13908719).

the WEIU to take over the running of the city-managed Franklin Park Refectory.<sup>181</sup> The city publicly recognized the management skills acquired by the directors of the Union's various restaurants and consequently sought them out as trusted partners in the provision of social services.

Just as the Union came to the school lunch business with experience in running their Food Sales Room and several lunch rooms, so did the work deepen managers' insight into institutional management. In 1913, the New England Kitchen took over the management of a lunch room at South End House for the Business Men's Club. The managers in the New England Kitchen were not just benevolent lunch ladies. Some left the WEIU to open their own businesses or to take a manager position in other organizations;<sup>182</sup> all welcomed visitors eager to learn the ropes, often recent college graduates seeking a practice field.

The Union did not stop at becoming a subcontractor for the city government. It also sought to establish itself as a provider of educational opportunities. In 1910-1911, 18 students in the institutional management courses in Simmons College came to the lunch rooms for 8 weeks, using at least a day a week for hands-on

<sup>181</sup>WEIU clippings, "Waitresses at Franklin Park, 1921. M-89.

<sup>182</sup>WEIU, *1915 Report*, 22.

Figure 5.2: Sample menu. Part of a lantern slide show about the school lunch program. Circa 1907-1910.

SAMPLE SCHOOL LUNCH MENU			
Beef and barley soup			4¢
Sandwiches			
Sliced Ham	5¢	Lettuce	3¢
White Bread			2¢
Clopped Ham	3¢	Jam	2¢
Graham Bread			2¢
Marmalade	2¢	Crust	1¢
Graham rolls	2¢	Coffee rolls	2¢
Baked beans	5¢	Escalloped ham & eggs	5¢
Baked Indian pudding	5¢	Coffee ice cream	5¢
Baked Custard	3¢	Sponge cake	2¢
Banana	2¢	Frosted cake	2¢
Milk	3¢	Cocoa	3¢
Chocolates	5¢	Popcorn	5¢
		Peanuts	5¢

Harvard University, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, MC610-PD10z-5

Source: Harvard Digital Collections, [https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital\\_collections/8000891735\\_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:13908715](https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital_collections/8000891735_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:13908715).

practice—accounting, making menus, marketing, cooking, and supervising service. One of them, who specialized in school lunch room management, became an assistant in the Union’s dedicated department. If lunch room management seems to have been one of the chief positions eyed by college graduates interested in pursuing business careers, at least two studied methods of food shop management, catering, and cooperative buying, and another spent a month at the Handwork Shop, training in gift shop management, which included a full study of “buying, advertising, salesmanship, clerical records, and distribution.”<sup>183</sup> Union directors considered their businesses a “unique educational opportunity to would-be shop managers,” owing to the variety of the work that they conducted.<sup>184</sup> By 1915, yet a new business, the “food laboratory and cake kitchen,” promised to provide an even more deliberate training environment for young women interested in institutional management.<sup>185</sup>

The WEIU perceived its work as that of a local institution, on a par with other businesses, educational institutions, and the city government. Its leaders

<sup>183</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Thirty-Fourth Annual Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union for the Year 1911-1912* (Boston, 1913), 48, HathiTrust, <https://id.lib.harvard.edu/curiosity/women-working-1800-1930/45-990020152060203941>.

<sup>184</sup>WEIU, *1911 Report*, 46.

<sup>185</sup>WEIU, *1915 Report*, 21; Crawford, “New Fortunes of the Women’s Industrial Union.”

and members thought of themselves as citizens, public-spirited members of their community. The administration of social programs, carried out with the city government's approval, endowed them with an institutional legitimacy which they were quick to acknowledge. Interestingly, they made little distinction between the authority and public responsibilities of the business community and those of the government. In the words of New England Kitchen employees contributing to the annual "department vaudeville" of the Union's Employees Association: "Efficiency and then some more / we haul our lunches by the score / to schools in many a hopeless flight / to many a child that was never fed right / till we took the crank / And we're here as ready and always steady / as any great big national bank."<sup>186</sup> The press often referred to the WEIU as a Boston "institution," and its activities recorded in local newspapers as worthy of community attention. In 1912, one female journalist wrote: "It is almost as difficult to fancy what Boston of the twentieth century would be like if the Common or the Athenaeum were to be swept away in a single night as to imagine this city bereft of its 'We and I You' as it is familiarly called."<sup>187</sup> Heralded by some as the like of the emblematic Boston Common, the place par excellence where all citizens could assemble and public matters be conducted, or the Athenaeum, its oldest library, the Union had, by the 1910s, at least partly succeeded in embedding itself in Bostonians' collective imagination.

In that way, the Boston Women's Union proved a particularly successful type of the "woman's association," which was already well-established as a town or city institutions in many communities across the country. Per Ann Firor Scott, as early as midcentury women's associations sprang up "anywhere there were women"; in frontier settlements, "charitable societies appeared almost as swiftly as town government,"<sup>188</sup> an elite female counterpart to the police power wielded by a town's male establishment. As Amelia Ritzenberg Crary adds, clubwomen of the 1900s and 1910s, once the women's club had transitioned from self-culture to municipal reform, "transformed themselves into an institution—an accepted and influential factor in civic life."<sup>189</sup> One of the logos used by the association in the 1910s mimicked both official government seals and those of colleges like Harvard—showing scales over a book, and the outline of a capitol-like building, it positioned the WEIU

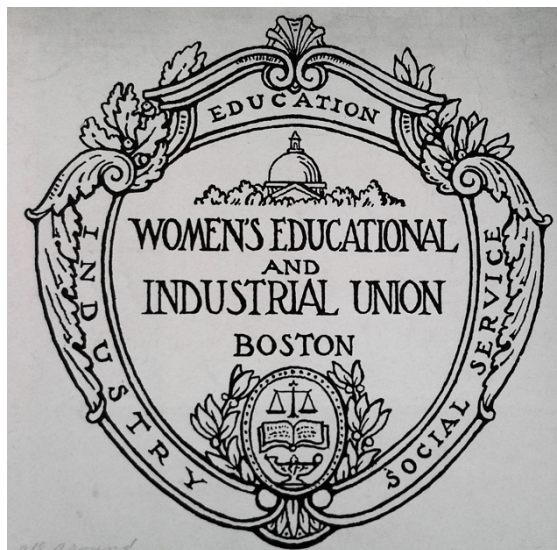
<sup>186</sup>WEIU records, "School Song," *Union News Items* 1 (May 7, 1912), 16. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>187</sup>WEIU clippings, Mary Carolina Crawford, "New Fortunes of the Women's Industrial Union," *Boston Evening Transcript*, July 6, 1912. M-89, p. 8.

<sup>188</sup>Scott, *Natural Allies*, 15-21.

<sup>189</sup>Amelia Ritzenberg Crary, "Women's Clubs in California: Architecture and Organization, 1880-1940," PhD. Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 2016, 8.

Figure 5.3: Printing sample of the WEIU's seal.



Source: Additional WEIU records, printing samples. 81-M237. Carton 11, folder 237.

as one of many public institutions.

In a domestic spin on the logos of large insurance companies, the WEIU also showcased the building which would have made it a visible part of Boston's downtown landscape. Unlike insurers, they did not need to convince the public that the services they sold were not risky—but, like them, the women of the Union endeavored to “signify service” and convey a sense of their responsibility toward Boston's citizens.<sup>190</sup> By showcasing the distinctive silhouette of their 264 Boylston Street building, they attempted to make a mark not only on the urban landscape, but in the very minds of their members and customers.

The reformers and managers active in the Union were part of several networks, both educational and decidedly commercial and political. Nowhere is it clearer than in the active part they played in the movement for vocational education, as they tried to maximize the “efficiency” of young girls and college graduates alike and fit them for business.<sup>191</sup> Their dual status as both reformers and employers meant that it was easier for them to build bridges and effect the quintessentially Progressive ideal of cooperation between civil society, business, and government. In a 1912 review of the Union's history, its president “showed how the desire to help women [...] has led to the development of new departments, and new lines

<sup>190</sup>Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 37-38.

<sup>191</sup>Margaret C. Dollar, “The Beginnings of Vocational Guidance for College Women: The Women's Educational and Industrial Union, the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, and Women's Colleges.” PhD dissertation, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1992.

Figure 5.4: Printing sample of one of the WEIU's logos, showing the Boylston Street building.



Source: Additional WEIU records, printing samples. 81-M237. Carton 11, folder 237.

of effort, until the Union has come to be an educational and legislative force in the community.”<sup>192</sup> This was the same year that the Union’s president and the director of its Research Department worked with the Social Research Council of Boston, a group of socially-minded scholars who sought to “assist in promoting useful investigations into the community life of Greater Boston” and saw research as a panacea for social ills.<sup>193</sup> Pointing out that the State Bureau of Statistics alone could not do the work, they suggested it was necessary that research be conducted “by associations that represent the wider civic interests and seek to secure the enactment of legislation.”<sup>194</sup> They made no distinction between men’s and women’s organizations or efforts, or between public and private initiatives—because, in their view, what mattered was the municipal vision for which they strove as citizens. And, along with other women like them, they wanted to be taken as seriously as the “businessmen” who were hailed as “the most persistent and practical of idealists, bringing their large powers of constructive imagination to the service of the community to make the community’s best dreams come true.”<sup>195</sup>

<sup>192</sup> “Mrs. Kehew Talks to Assistants’ Club,” *Union News Items* 2, no. 2 (December 1912), 3.

<sup>193</sup> *Bulletin of the Social Research Council of Boston* 1, 7.

<sup>194</sup> *Bulletin of the Social Research Council of Boston* 1, 10.

<sup>195</sup> James Nolen, “Civic Planning and Civic Consciousness,” *New Boston* 2, no. 1 (May 1911),

## Conclusion

The uses to which a women's organization like the WEIU put entrepreneurship are indicative of the depth of the connection between business life and civic involvement in the Progressive city. Even prior to the Nineteenth Amendment, white women's organized groups in particular possessed an arsenal of strategies that they successfully deployed in their quest for visibility, legitimacy, and the ability to play a part in local and national politics. In addition to petitioning the state and federal legislatures, organizing tax protests and defiantly marching to the ballot box, it has been shown that suffragists sold and flaunted suffrage-themed trinkets and memorabilia. To Margaret Finnegan, these "suffrage commodities" became "signifiers of cultural legitimacy in a consumer-capitalist society," suggesting that suffragists, too, could partake in the national culture of abundance and celebrate rising standards of living.<sup>196</sup>

Business ownership made it much easier for the WEIU to be heard as constituents, which is the reason why its leaders played up, leaned into, and constructed a dual political identity as reformers/managers. In a political climate which favored business interests, it was accepted that employers could and should defend them; this likely influenced the reception of the WEIU's efforts by leading politicians, at least once its directors had learned to properly wield their business expertise in the legislative arena. By about 1910, they had found out that good management brought more than its own rewards: it could be parlayed into social authority. As one anonymous member wrote for the Union's 1908 report, "[e]very step that carrie[d] the Union forward toward the ranks of the major business enterprises [put] it in possession of just so much more power to study business conditions and influence to command a hearing when it [spoke]."<sup>197</sup> When women's organizations successfully painted themselves as competent adjuncts to the city government, they were rewarded with the means to carry out their vision as sanctioned providers of public services or public utilities, as the WEIU were, as far as their school lunch program was concerned. More, they could more successfully push a labor reform agenda and advocate for employers' responsibility toward their employees.

The WEIU's Food Sales Room, Ice Cream Plant, various clothing shops and

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7, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.101956530>.

<sup>196</sup>Margaret Mary Finnegan, *Selling Suffrage: Consumer Culture and Votes for Women* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 113.

<sup>197</sup>WEIU, *1908 Report*, 36. Emphasis mine.



lunch rooms, as well as its School Lunch Program were instrumental in furthering the organization's vision, also in part for the way that they enabled the leadership to establish 264 Boylston Street as a local urban institution that was on a par with male businesses and halls of power. In this chapter, I concur with Lee Simpson that contested visions for the future of the city were not always gendered, but could instead be class-based. Across the country, in the "booster towns" of California, the participation of middle- and upper-class women to growth machines bolstered their class identity as much as it protected their property interests.<sup>198</sup> While these boosters shared a growth mentality with the men of their class, and profit-making does not appear to have been the WEIU's chief motivation, Boston's reformers envisioned a corporate future for the city, one in which they could partner with employers and the state to protect community interests.

The role of the state and municipal governments in protecting both workers and consumers, residents' relation to one another, including what they did or did not owe one another—these were points of especial interest for the "New Women" running the Women's Union in downtown Boston. If politics can be defined as collective decision-making, then citizenship is the ability to participate in that process, however directly. Derrick Spires emphasizes the relational, or community-based, quality of nineteenth-century American citizenship. Business relations certainly fell under the umbrella of saliently political community relations, for Union women as well as more largely in the American society of the early 1900s. As wave of consumer activism surged in the 1890s and early 1900s, to be an American citizen would slowly come to mean buying the right food, the right clothing, and the right consumer goods, in order to achieve the higher "standard of living" championed by reformers, in itself the marker of a higher standard of civilization.<sup>199</sup> The rise of consumers' interest groups paralleled that of corporate power, at a time when welfare capitalists sought to enshrine their businesses as local institutions with special responsibilities towards the community. Large corporations, by displaying a "Main Street" imagery, were in those years actively trying to dispel negative public criticism and associate themselves with the reliable, human, eminently neighborly small business-owner in order to claim both "social and moral legitimacy" —something the Union was also working toward.<sup>200</sup> Through its various food and clothing shops, the WEIU embraced an ethos of social

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<sup>198</sup>Lee M. A. Simpson, *Selling the City: Gender, Class, and the California Growth Machine, 1880-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 171-175.

<sup>199</sup>Rosanne Currarino, *The Labor Question in America: Economic Democracy in the Gilded Age* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 55-58; 99-103.

<sup>200</sup>Marchand, *Creating the Corporate Soul*, 354; 358 for quotation.

responsibility that bound it to Boston's citizens and local government.

For women concerned with issues of autonomy, being able to spend was not enough—earning came to matter as well, precisely at the time when the quest for suffrage was becoming an accepted goal. As a reform organization, the WEIU looked both for symbolic recognition and effective means of action to shape women's life choices and outcomes. Entrepreneurial activities were not just a means of raising money to that end, creating opportunities for training, or giving housewives better access to the market—these very goals were part of a cohesive view of employer or manufacturer status as politically validating.

Having explained in what ways and to what extent the women of the WEIU cast their association as an urban institution in its own right, advertising it through its logo as a “home” of a sorts for Boston's women, we now turn to examining the nature of the female bonds that the organization sought to foster and, later, institutionalize.



# Chapter 6

## “A Company of Women Banded Together for Mutual Friendliness and Helpfulness”<sup>1</sup>: Female Sociabilities at 264 Boylston Street

### Introduction

Prophets have visions. Mine is of long, well-spread Thanksgiving tables in our entertainment hall. Around these are seated women, far from their own homes, who have come to partake of our good cheer. There is music and greeting and mirth and sociability, and some of the best beloved women of the city extend a warm welcome and make the occasion blessed by their presence—and I venture to prophesy that all of you now before me will help in some way to make this vision a reality [...]<sup>2</sup>

At first glance, the scene that second WEIU president Abby Morton Diaz depicted in her address at the association’s 1889 annual meeting may bring to mind the lavish holiday dinners given in those years for the benefit of the poor by the Salvation

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<sup>1</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston St., Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1896* (Cambridge: Press of the Cambridge Co-operative Society, 1896), 35, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924106>.

<sup>2</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 98 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May 7, 1889* (Boston: No. 98 Boylston Street, 1889), 10, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924015>. Emphasis mine.

Army, various “Christmas Societies,” and wealthy individuals. The popularity of these spectacular displays of philanthropy peaked in the 1890s, even as they drew criticism for the way they underscored the widening gulf between millionaire industrialists and their destitute objects of relief.<sup>3</sup> While Diaz’s address also dealt with an idealized depiction of a national holiday meal—one especially that was construed as a “domestic occasion,” a homecoming for families that had been dislocated by economic change<sup>4</sup>—, she did not insist on the drama of class contact. The “best beloved women of the city,” in her vision, would not have attended the festive occasion to bestow charity on the crowd, but to extend the emotional benefits of a home to uprooted women, whether transients, visitors, or lodgers. All the participants would have shared in the “sociability” that the WEIU was created to foster. Abby Morton Diaz saw potential for the Union to become what would eventually be apprehended as a “connecting link” between different bodies, groups, and constituencies of women.<sup>5</sup>

In the late 1870s and 1880s, the women of the WEIU were trying to recreate what many middle-class Americans feared was disappearing—the “genuine community which held itself together by mutual obligation.”<sup>6</sup> The mounting anxieties occasioned by the perceived degradation of human connection in the urban environment<sup>7</sup>—exacerbated in Boston not only by the long-standing economic depression of the 1870s, but also by local disasters like the devastating fire on Summer Street—were addressed by Christian reformers keen on restoring order within their community.<sup>8</sup> However, other responses were to be found in the parlors of

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<sup>3</sup>David Huyssen, *Progressive Inequality: Rich and Poor in New York, 1890-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 84-86.

<sup>4</sup>Elizabeth Pleck, “The Making of the Domestic Occasion: The History of Thanksgiving in the United States,” *Journal of Social History* 32, no. 4 (Summer 1999), 775-776.

<sup>5</sup>Additional WEIU records, “The Future of Women in Industry,” *Simmons College Review*, c1918. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

<sup>6</sup>Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Protestants Against Poverty: Boston’s Charities, 1870-1900* (Westport: Greenwood, 1971), 5. See also Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press). Boyer interprets the growth of the urban moral-reform effort of the 1830s and 1840s as a reaction to “the erosion of an organic sense of community in a period of urban growth,” 56.

<sup>7</sup>The idea that the growth of cities degraded the social environment held fast among sociologists until at least the 1970s and 1980s: it was a legacy from the early days of the Chicago School. For a classic example of that perspective, see Louis Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” *American Journal of Sociology* 44 (1938): 1-24.

<sup>8</sup>Huggins, *Protestants Against Poverty*, 57-58. According to Huggins, while there had been debates among reformers as to the nature and purpose of charity prior to the 1870s, that decade constituted a turning point in the organization of religious charitable efforts in Boston. In 1872, a large fire destroyed much of Summer Street, in the downtown area, dealing a severe blow to Boston’s garment industry. Huggins argues that the charitable responses to the fire formed both a precedent and a prototype for action later taken to mitigate the deepening national economic depression of the late 1870s. Rendigs Fels’ classic work described 1865-1879 as “the longest

the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, whose members sought to expand rather than constrict the bounds of their hospitality. In 1884 already, Abby Morton Diaz had asked to the crowd assembled at the annual meeting:

Were any woman of you to find yourself in a strange city, what would you like? You would like, would you not, persons of your own sex to whom you might safely apply for information concerning, say, boarding and lodging-houses, concerning any of the facilities and opportunities of the city. You might like companionship, help, advice, protection from wrong, chances for study, or for getting recognition of any special talent or acquirement, or for turning the same to practical account. You might like to know of pleasant rooms where you would find friends and a welcome. In case of sickness, you might like, might need, the presence of a friendly visitor.<sup>9</sup>

In defining what the Union stood for, and the kind of needs that it sought to meet, its members seemingly placed all women on a plane of equality and cooperation. In the same hypothetical situation, stripped from the protective buffer of personal acquaintance and kin, Diaz surmised, women would feel the same wants. Out of that sameness, she tried to elicit constructive compassion from her listeners, regardless of their own social background.

### ***WEIU, YMCA, and YMCU***

The WEIU was far from the only organization attempting to do so; comparisons with the Young Men's Christian Union (YMCU), a close relative and competitor of the earlier and much better studied Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), were telling: "While many lament the temptations which beset young men who leave home to seek employment in large cities, few think of the greater trials endured by young women, many of whom, educated in the false theory of protection, are wholly unfit to meet the trials and temptations of city life which they must encounter in their efforts to support themselves," wrote one journalist in an approving feature on the WEIU.<sup>10</sup> The first YMCA had been started in England in 1841, before a divinity student and a young merchant brought it back to the United States to protect young men's morals by fighting the isolation of their urban lives. The institution met great success in the 1850s, when it became a common sight in many large cities on the eastern seaboard, including Boston. With its comfortable rooms, its library for self-education, its socials and Thanksgiving dinners, the YMCA of-

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cyclical contraction in American history," a downturn economic cycle caused by international pressures. Rendigs Fels, *American Business Cycles: 1865-1897* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1959), 82.

<sup>9</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1884* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1884), 11, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065321724>.

<sup>10</sup>"The Boston Idea of a Woman's Educational and Industrial Union," *Woman's Work for Woman*, *Daily Inter Ocean*, January 17, 1886, 11.

ferred to recreate the structuring influence of the household and the country church and provide companionship to clerks, students, and skilled craftsmen.<sup>11</sup> This is what Mary Livermore had in mind when “she said that the work of [the WEIU] as far as it followed in the beaten track of any other was to do for young women, who [came] from the country to Boston, what the Young Men’s Christian Union [did] for the young men under similar circumstances,” protecting young women from “temptations” and “provid[ing] them with means to earn an honest living.”<sup>12</sup> The Young Men’s Christian Union, founded in Boston in 1851, was a strictly local organization formed by dry goods merchant William Henry Baldwin in imitation of the YMCA concept.<sup>13</sup> Following the Civil War, during which its activities were suspended, the association was reorganized. Unsurprisingly, the YMCU’s Reading Room, Library, large hall for meetings and entertainments, Sunday religious services, classes in subjects ranging from French and German to penmanship and bookkeeping, yearly fee of one dollar and emphatic invitation to “all young men” would have been in Bostonians’ minds when Harriet Clisby launched the WEIU in 1877, reprising many of these features.<sup>14</sup> Other elements indicate close proximity between the YMCU and the WEIU: many of the men who served on the YMCU’s Board of Government in the early 1870s would later support the WEIU, and by the time the WEIU was founded the YMCU was occupying a building “at the corner of Boylston and Tremont Streets,” not far from the former’s headquarters.<sup>15</sup>

This chapter also looks at the social life of Union employees, uncovering their perspectives through a study of the paper that they wrote and circulated internally—the *Union News Items*. In fact, between 1877 and 1920, the Union’s leadership redirected early efforts to push socialization within the membership to focus on the cadre of volunteers that ran the association and, later, the body of salaried workers, many of them college-educated, that replaced them. If, in the late 1870s, the membership of the WEIU greatly overlapped with committee mem-

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<sup>11</sup>Although, as Paul Boyer notes, in theory the movement was not exclusionary. Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order*, 108-120.

<sup>12</sup>“Varied Benevolence,” *Boston Journal*, May 2, 1888, 5.

<sup>13</sup>Anderson, Eric. “Baldwin, William Henry, Jr. (1863-1905), railroad executive and philanthropist,” *American National Biography*, February 1, 2000.

<sup>14</sup>Boston Young Men’s Christian Union, *Report of the Boston Young Men’s Christian Union For the Year Ending April 1, 1878* (Boston: No. 18 Boylston Street, 1878, 12-17, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044018740621>).

<sup>15</sup>BYMCU, *1878 Report*, 12, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044018740621>. The report for 1878 also names Henry H. Sprague as a former president. His wife was a WEIU director, and he himself would later serve on the WEIU’s Board of Trustees. There, he would work with Samuel Wells, a trustee of the Permanent Fund of the Men’s Union. BYMCU, *1878 Report*, 18; for Sprague’s and Well’s biographical notices, see chapter 3, p. 193-194.

bers, by the 1890s this was no longer true. The WEIU contributed to the expansion and formalization of older female social networks. At the Union, more effectively than through word-of-mouth, it was possible to secure the names and addresses of people who could hire “handicapped women,” provide references for reputable boarding-houses, help recruit new members, etc. The Union set out to outsource and institutionalize what used to fall under the umbrella of personal relationships at a time when the household, the buttress of public order, was being destabilized by major economic and social change.<sup>16</sup> Through their organization, these women wished to extend standards of safety and reliability to other women with whom they felt or sought to establish kinship. This would become the embryo for a professional network of the kind that sprung up in the 1910s and 1920s to ease college alumnae’s entry into the workforce. A study of women’s sociabilities can, in this way, shed light on the changing circumstances of self-supporting women in the Progressive Era.

### ***Women’s Sociabilities: Female Friendships and “Alliances”***

Sociability is a multifarious concept which has been defined and used by philosophers, sociologists, as well as specialists of women’s and gender history. Since the earliest attempts by the Chicago school at distinguishing the urban environment from the village community,<sup>17</sup> urban sociologists like C. S. Fisher have studied social relationships through the prism of the social network, examining how relationships are formed, structured, and nurtured, following the postulate that they contribute to integrating the individual into what is colloquially called “society.”<sup>18</sup> To philosophers influenced by Georg Simmel, sociability is “the play-form of association,” “the abstraction of association”<sup>19</sup>—both the fundamental human impulse toward social connection and its manifestation in polite conversation. More relevant to our study, the term “sociability” takes on a much looser and broader meaning in the work of historians like Amanda E. Herbert.<sup>20</sup> In her exploration of “female alliances” and “women’s homosociability” in early modern Britain, she

<sup>16</sup>Margot Canaday, Nancy F. Cott, and Robert O. Self, eds., *Intimate States: Gender, Sexuality, and Governance in Modern US History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 5-6.

<sup>17</sup>For a classic argument for the deleterious effects of urban organization on personal connections, see Louis Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life,” *American Journal of Sociology* 44 (1938): 1-24.

<sup>18</sup>C. S. Fischer, *To Dwell Among Friends: Personal Networks in Town and City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3.

<sup>19</sup>Georg Simmel, “The Sociology of Sociability,” translated by Everett C. Hughes, *American Journal of Sociology* 55, no. 3 (November 1949): 257.

<sup>20</sup>Amanda E. Herbert, *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity, and Friendship in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).



studies sociability as the practice of socializing, the kind of informal conversation and play which could take between kin, friends, and acquaintances both in private and public settings. Her case study of the spa typifies that list. There, early eighteenth-century Englishwomen engaged in same-sex activities like “bathing, shopping, discussing health regimes, and providing medical advice and encouragement [to one another].”<sup>21</sup>

Like their European counterparts, American historians of women of the 1960s and 1970s looked for evidence of female worlds, both a “woman’s sphere” and a unified national woman’s movement, in the context of a surge of feminist activism.<sup>22</sup> In this historiographic stream, the metaphor of family dominates descriptions of female friendships. Nancy Cott, in the *influential Bonds of Womanhood* (1977), mined the diaries of white New Englanders to recreate their lived experiences in what she deemed was a largely homosocial environment. She contended that the seeds of the woman’s movement were to be found in the separate, domestic sphere inhabited by women, a site where affectional ties slowly wove the fabric of associational life.<sup>23</sup> Buoyed by Aileen Kraditor’s since much revised and complexified foray into what she called the “expediency” argument—white suffragists’ embrace of a racist, xenophobic campaign strategy—, subsequent analyses of women’s social movements have tended to emphasize less an idealized unity than the cracks, the rivalries, and outright hostility which divided diverse constituencies of women, and especially activists.<sup>24</sup> Even among white, native-born women could a “sisterly rivalry” be found; in these cases, its parameters were often defined by factors like class and religious affiliation.<sup>25</sup> Rebuking the notion of an uncomplicated white

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<sup>21</sup>Herbert, *Female Alliances*, 130.

<sup>22</sup>For the most representative examples of this school of scholarship, see Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1959); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975): 1-29; Keith E. Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Woman’s Rights Movement, 1800-1850* (New York: Schocken Books, 1977).

<sup>23</sup>Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: “Woman’s Sphere” in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 160-196.

<sup>24</sup>Aileen Kraditor, *Ideas of the Woman’s Rights Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965). See also Debra Gold Hansen’s evocatively titled *Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993).

<sup>25</sup>Nancy Hewitt laid out a typology of Rochester’s female reformers, uncovering patterns of activism that could be related to their socio-economic background, proximity to the town’s elite men, and timeline of migration to the “burned over” district. *Women’s Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987). See also Judith Wellman, “The Seneca Falls Women’s Rights Convention: A Study of Social Networks,” *Journal of Women’s History* 3 (Spring 1991): 9-37. Finally, class divides are also central to Priscilla Murolo’s account of the complicated friendships between wealthy matrons and the

sisterhood, the title of Dorothy Sterling's collection of primary sources authored by black women, *We Are Your Sisters*, is emblematic of the late 1980s and 1990s attempt at recapturing and showcasing the experiences of women of color and their demands for equal rights.<sup>26</sup> Later scholarship has complicated the narrative about the roles that women's same-sex intimacy could play in the building and sustaining of women's social movements.<sup>27</sup> In 1997, Leila Rupp, writing of the international peace movements of the twentieth century, argued for a reappraisal of the notion of "sisterhood" as product of struggle for women's rights, rather than as a polar opposite of conflict and dissension.<sup>28</sup> This is the perspective I adopted in this chapter in my exploration of the efforts of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union to function as a "social centre" and provide same-sex companionship to urban-dwellers. Trying to steer clear of the "feminist-whig"<sup>29</sup> history that overemphasized sisterhood to the expense of conflicts, I tried to characterize the discourse on community elaborated by the WEIU. What did this largely white, native-born, middle-class women's association construe women's emotional and social needs to be, as a class of individuals, and how did the programs they created attempt to meet them?

This chapter focuses on the evolution of middle- and upper-class white women's social networks outside the boundaries of the domestic space but in conversation with it, as I take a look at the social side of the Union's activities. The early Union was meant as a meeting place not only for rural migrants who came to Boston for

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working-girls they sought to elevate in dedicated social clubs: Priscilla Murolo, *The Common Ground of Womanhood: Class, Gender, and Working Girls' Clubs, 1884-1928* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997). That larger historiographic stream also encompasses studies of antisuffragist women, who were actively working against the goals of other women. In *Splintered Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Campaign Against Woman Suffrage* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), Susan Marshall showed that anti-suffragism was a women-led movement driven by a class-based analysis of what the female kin of politicians would have to lose in influence if working-class women were given the ballot.

<sup>26</sup>Dorothy Sterling, *We Are Your Sisters: Black Women in the Nineteenth-Century* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1984). Much more recently, scholars have provided evidence for the far-reaching consequences of black women's activism for women's rights as a whole. See Martha S. Jones, *Vanguard: How Black Women Broke Barriers, Won the Vote, and Insisted on Equality for All* (New York: Basic Books 2020) and Tamika Y. Nunley, *At the Threshold of Liberty: Women, Slavery, and Shifting Identities in Washington, D.C.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

<sup>27</sup>See for instance Wendy Rouse, *Public Faces, Secret Lives: A Queer History of the Suffrage Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), for a narrative of how "queer" relationships collided with the public relations work of the suffragist movement.

<sup>28</sup>Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 6.

<sup>29</sup>Manuela Thurner, "'Better Citizens Without the Ballot': American Anti-Suffrage Women and their Rationale During the Progressive Era," *Journal of American History* 5, no. 1 (1993): 33.

work, young women alone in a “strange” city, but also for isolated urban workers, whether single or widowed, and for women ensconced in the nuclear family.

## 6.1 Recreating Social Networks in the Metropolis

Through what devices did the women of the WEIU self-consciously endeavor—as they saw it—to revitalize the social fabric of the city? A look at the evolution of the programs they fashioned to fulfill this need yields insight into their conception of the female social network. The middle-class parlor formed the first model for the WEIU’s reading room, a place that was to function as a common meeting ground for unrelated women. The “Befriending Committee” embodied this early vision of the WEIU as a band of friends and sisters, and its demise in the late 1900s signaled a change in the way that young middle-class women sought out human connections in the urban center.

### 6.1.1 A Home Away From Home

On May 7, 1884, the annual meeting of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union was opened at Chickering Hall with addresses by Mary Livermore and Reverend Dr. Joseph T. Duryea,<sup>30</sup> among other well-known speakers from Boston’s intelligentsia. Both of them framed and praised the association’s work primarily as an enterprise in bringing cheer to Boston’s lonely young working women. Rev. Duryea asserted his “conviction that there [was] in the city much need of the work [the WEIU was doing, because of] the peril in which many young women [were] in while living alone in the city.” “A home is simply what many of the young women need to turn the whole course of their lives,” concurred Mary Livermore, voicing her contemporaries’ central preoccupation with the protective power of the family home.<sup>31</sup> In the 1870s, such concern about “home-less women,” or “women

<sup>30</sup>This Princeton-educated preacher was the pastor of Boston’s Central Congregational Church in the fashionable Back Bay district, where he had been installed five years prior, in 1879, and taught the senior class in philosophy at Wellesley College. “The Central Congregational Church,” *Boston Journal*, April 18, 1879, 1; “Obituary,” *New York Tribune*, May 18, 1898, 10.

<sup>31</sup>“Working for Women,” *Boston Herald*, May 7, 1884, 8. Per Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, these concerns with the dangers faced by young women when they left the protection of the home were so great that they were instrumental to the design and built environment of the Mount Holyoke Seminary (1837) and the first women’s colleges of the 1860s and 1870s. See *Alma Mater: Design and Experience in the Women’s Colleges From Their Nineteenth-century Beginnings to the 1930s* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984).

adrift,” was great among the reforming class.<sup>32</sup> From the 1840s onwards, it had become progressively more and more common for young working-class women to be living out on their own or in boarding-houses—although, as Lisa Fine asserted, “[l]iving physically apart from kin [...] did not (and does not) necessarily mean that a woman worker was completely detached from some sort of family or domestic economy.”<sup>33</sup> In 1900, 28% of adult working women in Boston were living as boarders or lodgers.<sup>34</sup> Because at least some of the WEIU’s founders and earliest members lived as boarders, in the homes of unrelated women, they may have had the personal experience of meeting and conversing with uprooted youth—or, more generally, with independent, gainfully employed women. The one female proprietor that WEIU founder Arvilla Haynes (unknown-1884) knew best may have been her own widowed sister, Martha, who had also moved from their native Hampshire to Boston and by 1870 was working as a “tailor” (per the census) and living alone.<sup>35</sup> In the 1870 census also, then 36-year-old Harriet Clisby was reported as living at the home of a rather well-off widow. She was one of several female boarders, who also included a dressmaker and a woman working at an employment office, both never married and in their forties. A decade later, Clisby was living with fellow WEIU founder Melissa Chamberlin.<sup>36</sup> Other early WEIU members shared living quarters: this was the case for Anna F. Walker, a stockbroker’s wife, who, with Sarah E. Cotting and Sarah F. Zahm, other members of the WEIU’s Board of Government, boarded at the home of a retired customs officer and his wife.<sup>37</sup> They were likely less than family to each other, but more than mere collaborators.

Boarding was not understood only as a transactional or economic relationship. Landladies were understood to deal in the comforts of home; to their contempo-

<sup>32</sup>Joanne J. Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift: Independent Wage Earners in Chicago, 1880-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

<sup>33</sup>Lisa M. Fine, *The Souls of the Skyscraper: Female Clerical Workers in Chicago, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 41.

<sup>34</sup>Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 91.

<sup>35</sup>United States Census, 1870, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MD3G-NLX>), Martha A Haynes, 1870.

<sup>36</sup>United States Census, 1870, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MD3T-J4C>), Harriet Clisby in entry for Laura A Cutter, 1870.

<sup>37</sup>United States Census, 1880, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHX5-961>), Sarah F Zahm in entry for Enoch Paine, 1880; United States Census, 1880, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHX5-9X3>), Anna F Walker in entry for Enoch Paine, 1880; United States Census, 1880, *FamilySearch*, Sarah E Colting in entry for Enoch Paine, 1880, [familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHX5-9XQ](https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MHX5-9XQ). Sarah Zahm and Anna Walker were married and lived with their husbands at the Paines’s boarding-house, while Sarah Cotting was a widow.

raries, they sold an idea of substitute family.<sup>38</sup> The women who availed themselves of these surrogate families found in them surrogate homes. Those who pooled their resources to share furnished rooms or even entire houses, meanwhile, developed “informal bonds of mutual dependence”: they enabled each other to pay lower rents, shared meals, and divided housekeeping duties. In the 1900s and 1910s, the practice of “cooperative housekeeping” gradually gained recognition and even acceptance. While some resented the lack of privacy, others truly did enjoy the companionship that the arrangement provided.<sup>39</sup> By the turn of the century, in large cities purpose-built residences were operated for constituencies of young, white self-supporting women, like those of Chicago’s Eleanor Association (1898), where clerks forged tight-knit communities—sharing theatrical performances, birthday parties, and holiday meals.<sup>40</sup>

We do not know what conversations could have taken place between fellow boarders such as Sarah Zahm and Mrs. Walker at an earlier time, in the 1880s. Did they discuss daily concerns about affording food or clothing, about their earnings, or did they have deeper conversations about their futures, their place in the economy of the city? Only anecdotal, indirect evidence remains. There are the encouraging words of WEIU founder Harriet Clisby to a close friend, Emma Pieczynska, the Swiss-born wife of a Polish nobleman, whom she convinced to pursue a medical degree.<sup>41</sup> Pieczynska’s letters and diary, as compiled by a biographer, also refer to Harriet Clisby’s live-in companion, Lizzy, and the domestic haven they created together in a roomy suburban house with a garden. In the summer of 1890, Emma Pieczynska was visiting her friend, whom she affectionately referred to as “Mother,” a name that reflected the quasi-familial turn that their relation had taken. By 1890, Clisby had become Pieczynska’s mentor, a surrogate mother of sorts. Pieczynska wrote:

I am in the orchard, in the shade of the house, sitting in a folding chair that Mother brought me. She is sitting by the open window, in a constant state of business, working for someone’s sake, and we chat from time to time. In such moments of rest, it is good to stop. These hours when we stay quiet and listen to the silent

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<sup>38</sup>Gamber, *Boardinghouse in Nineteenth-Century America*, 74.

<sup>39</sup>Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, 93-95.

<sup>40</sup>Fine, *Souls of the Skyscraper*, 151-165. Reformer Ina Law Robertson founded the Eleanor Association as a residential club in 1898 in Chicago. It operated low-cost residences for single middle-class women who occupied clerking positions downtown. The residences were advertised as convenient, home-like spaces, with a focus on respectability. In its heyday, the Eleanor Association also offered other services, like a lunch room and social center and a residence at a summering destination.

<sup>41</sup>Elie Gounelle, “Nos Pionniers,” *Le Christianisme Social*, January 1, 1930, 240-242.

rhythms of life, tasting a calm, simple joy that knows no bound.<sup>42</sup>

How many other like-minded women did Clisby befriend? What was Harriet Clisby's relationship to her friends and companions—was she in a “Boston marriage”—with Lizzie?<sup>43</sup> How many women did she convince to pursue an education? In *Untidy Origins*, Lori Ginzberg tackled reconstructing the attitudes and ingrained cultural outlook of ordinary people with otherwise radical ideas. She highlighted how complex the historian's task could be in trying to contextualize these ideas.<sup>44</sup> This would seem to be especially hard when these laypeople are as foreign to a society as Harriet Clisby was: born an Englishwoman, she was raised in Australia and only moved to the United States to pursue a medical degree.

Clisby, recognized by her friends and colleagues as the Union's founder, had a significant imprint on the “Educational and Industrial Union” as it existed in its early years. Her own life experience may have factored in her decision to emphasize the organization's social aspects. The WEIU's first independent headquarters, 4 Park Street, were primarily used as a reading room, in addition to their function as designated meeting place for the Board of Government. It was a space designed to foster acquaintances between strangers in a home-like environment that closely replicated the middle-class home. Whenever they had to give a sketch of their own activities to the public, the women of the WEIU never failed to locate and describe their base of operations. In such instances, they took pains to stress the similarity of the space that they rented with the middle-class home: “We have pleasant, homelike (sic) rooms, including a reading room with many of the popular magazines and papers,” which were open from 9 am to 8 pm. They were expressly “created with a view to increasing fellowship among women.”<sup>45</sup> Much later, at their 264 Boylston Street quarters, the same language would be used to describe the “homelike prettiness of the rooms,” to which members had contributed bas-relief, pictures, gas fixtures, fire-irons, and table fittings, among other furnishings.<sup>46</sup> In the optimistic words of second president Abby Morton Diaz, the WEIU's rooms appeared as a metonymy for the entire association—they

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<sup>42</sup>Noémi Regard, *Madame E. Pieczynska: Sa Vie* (Neuchâtel, 1933), 108 for the mention of Lizzie, and 117 for the quote (translation mine).

<sup>43</sup>The term was coined in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to refer to a close partnership between two women, which extended to shared living arrangements and often featured demonstrations of physical affection. Wendy Rouse has shown how “ubiquitous” this type of queer relationship was among suffragists. Rouse, *Public Faces, Secret Lives*, 38.

<sup>44</sup>Lori D. Ginzberg, *Untidy Origins: A Story of Woman's Rights in Antebellum New York* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 11-12.

<sup>45</sup>“Letter from Boston,” *St. Albans Daily Messenger*, March 9, 1878, 2.

<sup>46</sup>WEIU, 1903 Report, 12.

were described as “a social centre—a place of welcome.”<sup>47</sup> She would sometimes feel moved to elaborate and stress that any woman, whether a Boston resident or a stranger, would be welcomed at the Union’s free reading room.<sup>48</sup> The WEIU’s rooms were meant to replicate and even epitomize the middle-class dwelling of mid-century. Indeed, in its initial incarnation, the home was often reduced to the parlor in prescriptive literature. The parlor was the one room by then set aside for social intercourse and more specifically for entertaining guests. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall consider its invention as “the most important late eighteenth century innovation” in the layout of the smaller English family house. As standards of living rose even for artisan households, more plentiful furniture and comfortable carpeting were to be found in such rooms.<sup>49</sup> Over the first half of the nineteenth century, the parlor was naturalized in the United States; there, too, it was an integral part of the careful “facade” of gentility curated by those who aspired to middle-class status.<sup>50</sup> Like that outward-facing but private space, which was destined to welcome outsiders into the household, from the early days, the WEIU’s rooms were characterized by both domesticity and cosmopolitanism, decked out in plush chairs, carpets, and even the lace curtains gifted by a member, all gathered or purchased over the first few months of the organization’s life in its 4 Park Street rooms.<sup>51</sup>

In the Union’s early years, its rooms were kept open by the “Social Affairs Committee,” initially a behemoth made up of six smaller “subcommittees,” which included “Reception,” “Reading Room,” “Entertainment,” “Lecture and Class,” “Agency of Direction,” and “Prospective Work.” The sheer size of that body can easily be illuminated by the vagueness of its attributions. It had the care of “all that pertain[ed] to the social life of the Union.”<sup>52</sup> The reading room alone was in charge of seventeen women designated as official hostesses of sorts for the Union. Within the boundaries of the parlor-like reading room, a sheltered space that was yet fully open to the city streets, they were to welcome strangers, act as

<sup>47</sup>“Legalized Masters,” *Baltimore Sun*, March 30, 1888, supplement p. 1.

<sup>48</sup>Local Varieties. *Boston Herald*, April 9, 1882, 10; “Among the Women,” *Boston Herald*, May 4, 1887, 8.

<sup>49</sup>Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850, 3rd edition* (London: Routledge, 2019), 377-378.

<sup>50</sup>Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle-Class Identity, 1850-1930* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).

<sup>51</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Board of Government Minutes* v. 1, November 6, 1877, 15-16 ; November 26, 1877, 23; December 4, 1877, 25. Carton 1.

<sup>52</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 2, 1882* (Boston: No. 157 Tremont Street, 1882), 25, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065320874>.

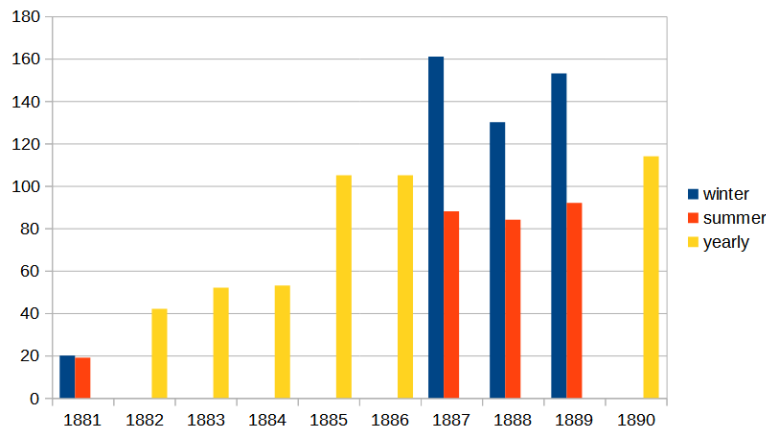


Figure 6.1: Average daily attendance at the Union's rooms (1881-1890).

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spokespeople for the association, and register members.<sup>53</sup> One of their duties was to keep track of attendance and analyze the figures they had collected, a testament to the self-conscious calculation involved in this enterprise of acting as hostesses for the women of the city. Annual reports provide insight into the average figures of daily attendance; they show a steady rise in the number of women who availed themselves of the services of the reading room (see figure 6.1). Interestingly, while there were fewer visits to the Union during the summer, there was still a significant demand for the rooms, which indirectly demonstrates how diverse a body of women could be interested in socializing there. Indeed, while elite women routinely left the city between May and October, fleeing the sweltering heat and foul smells of Boston's streets, those who were not leisured or whose families did not own holiday homes would have stayed. They could have been the summer visitors recorded by the WEIU's Reception Committee.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational & Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 7, 1879* (Boston: 4 Park Street, 1879), 16, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2wncj5nkpr>.

<sup>54</sup>Wealthy families like the Hemenways possessed summer homes on the coast. The Hemenways' estate, for instance, was located on the North Shore. Mary Elizabeth Dewey, "Visit of the Zuni Indians to the Summer House of Mrs. Mary Hemenway in 1886," *Journal of the Southwest* 37, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 554, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40169944>.

<sup>55</sup>Winter (October to May); summer (May to October). Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational & Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 3, 1881* (Boston: 157 Tremont Street, 1881), 22, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2mg21svjby>; WEIU, *1882 Report*, 25; Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1885* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1885), 19, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923629>; Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1886* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1886), 18; Additional WEIU records, *Women's Educational and Industrial Union, Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1887* (Boston: Press of Geo. E. Crosby & Co., 1887), 19. 81-M237. Carton 1; Women's Ed-



The visitors' book, which guests would sign upon entering, yielded more than information about their numbers. They were also records of geographical diversity. On the visitors' books of the mid-1880s were to be found the names of women "from twenty different states of the Union, also from England, Scotland, Switzerland, Canada, Nova Scotia, the Bahama (sic), the Barbadoes, Honolulu."<sup>56</sup> As we will see in chapter 7, the WEIU was part of national and even international female networks and it was in its rooms that many of these contacts took place and that acquaintances and friendships were first struck and rekindled.

The strategic intent evinced by the WEIU's record-keeping also found its expression in the free social events purposely established in 1878, which, like the rooms, were open to non-members. These mixed Wednesday socials took place weekly during the winter and showcased "readings, recitations, and music, vocal and instrumental," as well as the occasional travel talk and novelty demonstration, such as that of a phonograph.<sup>57</sup> They evolved into gatherings termed "coteries" that followed the aforementioned agenda of genteel society and seem to have played a role in bridging the generational divide between older and younger reformers. Women were invited to bring male friends and kin. At the WEIU's coteries, the younger members in attendance could hope to find William Lloyd Garrison, Jr. (1838-1909) share anecdotes about his famous abolitionist father and his friends, and even older members "of the old abolition party" reminisce about their antebellum days of activism.<sup>58</sup> Throughout the 1880s, the Union would gradually put forward more diversified offerings. Starting in 1886, it organized "basket suppers"

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educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1888* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1888), 18, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924064>; WEIU, *1889 Report*, 19; Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 98 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May 6, 1890* (Boston: No. 98 Boylston Street, 1890), 20, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923967>.

<sup>56</sup>WEIU, *1886 Report*, 18.

<sup>57</sup>"Letter from Boston," *St. Albans Daily Messenger*, March 9, 1878, 2; WEIU, *1884 Report*, 23.

<sup>58</sup>WEIU, *1882 Report*, 29; "Down East. 'Hubites' Preparing for the Summer Season," *New York Herald* May 23, 1886, 8. The unnamed *Herald* journalist characterized WEIU women as "hubites," a term used to describe an "ultra fashionable set of Bostonians." William Lloyd Garrison, Jr., himself a reformer, was the son of abolitionist leader William Lloyd Garrison, the editor of *The Liberator* (1830) and one of the founders of the New England Anti-Slavery Society (1832). The Garrison household was the epicenter of New England abolitionism in its heyday, and Garrison senior's "abolitionist marriage" laid the foundation for the son's progressive upbringing. Steward, James Brewer, "Garrison, William Lloyd," *American National Biography*, February 1, 2000, [doi-org.ezproxy.univ-paris3.fr/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.1500256](https://doi-org.ezproxy.univ-paris3.fr/10.1093/anb/9780198606697.article.1500256). Hélène Quanquin, *Men in the American Women's Rights Movement, 1830-1890: Cumbersome Allies* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 24-27; 150. On William Lloyd Garrison Jr.'s childhood and the Garrison family as a whole see also Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Growing Up Abolitionist: The Story of the Garrison Children* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).

every first Wednesday of each month, at which a shared meal was followed by a lecture and discussions.<sup>59</sup>

These socials seem to have met a real need. Many of the women who left notes in the guest books expressed themselves in enthusiastic terms, recording their pleasure in “finding such a centre for women, where all can meet on a friendly basis, and feel at home, although in a strange, and to many, a foreign city.”<sup>60</sup> To the traveler or the woman without connections, the WEIU provided the elusive “home” feeling which they would have associated with the nuclear family and been socialized to yearn for. The female domestic environment in which genteel native-born women were expected and intimated to spend most of their time could be successfully recreated by the women’s association. However, “home” could mean different things to different constituencies of women, and the more affluent travelers looking for companionship mingled with women coming to the WEIU’s rooms “not knowing where they [might] find a home for the night.”<sup>61</sup>

This was a kind of query which would not have surprised the Union’s founders, who underlined that, unlike the typical middle-class hostess, they opened their doors to strangers regardless of social class. While the repeated assurances that any was truly welcome may signal that few working-class individuals numbered as visitors relative to more affluent women, there is also recorded evidence of attempts to attract the former. There are mentions of Monday afternoon “informal reception[s]” where “women of diverse degrees and situations in society, means, brains, acquirement and ambition [met] on a basis of ideal good will—not in the common, vulgar spirit of patronage and dependence.”<sup>62</sup> This 1886 description fails to convey how different those “degrees” were, and whether that range actually included women who might have been the recipients of charity, but the emphasis that was laid on more egalitarian relations at the expense of hierarchical ones suggests that an attempt was made at bucking the conventions of polite social intercourse. It is hard to recapture what diversity would have meant to women as different as self-supporting physicians Clisby and Arvilla B. Haynes on the one hand and socialites from Brahmin stock on the other. Only one thing was clear: there was no obligation to produce either written or spoken words of introduction in order to gain access to the Union’s rooms.

To better grasp how fully the WEIU seized the elastic concept of “home,” we

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<sup>59</sup>WEIU, *1886 Report*, 20.

<sup>60</sup>WEIU, *1886 Report*, 18.

<sup>61</sup>WEIU, *1886 Report*, 18.

<sup>62</sup>“Down East. ‘Hubites’ Preparing for the Summer Season,” 8.

can turn to the example of a like organization established in Oregon by a Bostonian transplant, Emma J. Welty, in 1887. She was familiar with the work of the original Bostonian institution, which is why she spearheaded the creation of a “Woman’s Educational and Industrial Union” that would primarily function as a “safe and respectable boarding house, with the comforts of a home” to women moving west in search of jobs.<sup>63</sup> What the WEIU as a gathering place stood for was simultaneously the opportunity for social intercourse, recreation, and even shelter. There, women could look for, and receive, moral support. When prompted to share anecdotes about the visitors she had met in Boston, librarian M. B. Goodrich recounted one story, which she offered as an illuminating example. Harking back to the very beginnings of the original Union, she wrote:

“A short time ago, a lady whom I know as a successful business woman told me that this Union had been ‘the making’ of her, for when she came to Boston, three years ago, she was discouraged in mind and broken in health; but, finding friendly encouragement here, she soon gained in strength and health, and went forward in business.”<sup>64</sup>

According to that description, the “Union” offered a nurturing environment in which friendship ties could be cemented, an alternative both to the constraints of the private home and to the anomie of the urban environment. The women of the Reception Committee longed for the day “when every woman [should] be delivered from the bondage of the private, isolated life.”<sup>65</sup> It was the organizational growth of the Second Great Awakening<sup>66</sup> for which they seemed to long, not for the much more limiting domesticity of the 1850s which Mary Ryan contends was the true heir of the associational boom of the 1830s and 1840s.<sup>67</sup> After all, the first generation of WEIU women were born in the 1820s, and as girls and young women would have experienced both the fires of religious revival and the rise of the association as a medium for the expression of a collective identity.<sup>68</sup> It was

<sup>63</sup>“In Aid of Working Girls,” *Oregonian*, April 3, 1887, 5.

<sup>64</sup>WEIU, *1881 Report*, 22-23.

<sup>65</sup>WEIU, *1886 Report*, 21.

<sup>66</sup>Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 170-175. The term “Second Great Awakening” was first used by revivalist preachers of the 1820s and 1830s to describe their own conversion work, which they compared to “the Great Awakening” of the 1740s. Led by Charles Grandison Finney, itinerant evangelist preachers from the northeast embarked on an interdenominational and ecumenical quest to revitalize Americans’ Christian faith.

<sup>67</sup>Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 237-238.

<sup>68</sup>Mary P. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City during the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 74-88. Ryan gives particular treatment to the “explosion of societies founded and operated by women” (88) between 1825

also perhaps to the even older, colonial sociabilities of the New England village that they harked back, a life that their own mothers had known—a time when tasks such as cooking, cleaning and sewing were shared by women in larger inter-generational households.<sup>69</sup> Early on, they would set up a committee to devise ways to find “homes” for “young girls who [came] to the city as strangers,” safe places where they would find “friends.”<sup>70</sup> While they looked back to older models of domesticity, the WEIU refashioned them for more mobile and autonomous women operating as independent agents outside the bounds of their own family homes, whether self-supporting women or travelers temporarily away from their kin and friends.

### 6.1.2 Making Sense of the City

Women volunteers, by creating “redemptive places” like charitable homes, boarding-houses, public baths, settlement houses, and neighborhood associations, did much of the work of refashioning the American metropolis of the 1880s and 1890s, enabling it to absorb the masses of strangers—immigrants, “women adrift,” and African American migrants from the South. As agents of order, they labored to “convert the disorder of so many newcomers into a recognizable pattern by giving them actual places to make the transition into a different life.”<sup>71</sup> In the heart of historic downtown Boston, the WEIU’s headquarters were one such place. There, visitors were offered not simply moral support, but also practical help, most often in the guise of trustworthy advice and “local information.”<sup>72</sup> This was especially important for resourceless newcomers to the city, for whom the urban environment could prove a hostile one. The typical young migrant would not necessarily have known where to find shelter, nor a job, and she quickly “learned to mistrust

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and 1850. On the influence of the religious revivals of the 1830s on women’s activism, see also Keith Melder’s mention of a “sisterhood in faith,” *Beginnings of Sisterhood*, 39; Hewitt, *Women’s Activism and Social Change*, 29; and Boylan, *Origins of Women’s Activism*, 6. Hewitt more finely suggests that, even in the “burned over” district, revivalism was a short-lived experience after which the citizens of Rochester were left with unchanged needs for institutionalizing economic assistance and social control. The rising number of voluntary associations in the period resulted from this acknowledgment.

<sup>69</sup>Jeanne Boydston, *Home and Work: Housework, Wages, and the Ideology of Labor in the Early Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 80; see also Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: ‘Woman’s Sphere’ in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977). Cott studied the early nineteenth-century diaries of young New England women from farming and middling stock.

<sup>70</sup>WEIU, *1881 Report*, 19.

<sup>71</sup>Daphne Spain, *How Women Saved the City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>72</sup>“Last Evening’s News,” *Boston Herald*, March 1, 1881, 4.

strangers who might see her as an especially easy mark for exploitation.”<sup>73</sup> Early on, then, the WEIU established an “Agency of Directions” to answer the queries of visitors as to where they could find reputable lodgings and schooling and contact other charitable bodies of various kinds, which could provide temporary or permanent housing as well as assistance in kind or in cash.<sup>74</sup> Over time, the Agency of Directions amassed a considerable sum of information about Boston, so much so that the women who ran it boasted that “[t]he community seem[ed] to be fully assured that whatever it wish[ed] to know, [could] be answered at the Union rooms.”<sup>75</sup>

More than a decade after its creation, the Union’s Agency of Directions dedicated itself to providing information about benevolent and reform endeavors well outside the bounds of the city, a revealing sign of the greater scope of the work that the organization was intending. Through inquiries and personal correspondence, the Union collected the reports of 68 “societies for women” in 42 cities and 22 states, 14 of which were “founded upon the same principles as the Union,” while others were described as doing “similar work.” They were also interested in offering information about hospitals and various “homes” for women and children.<sup>76</sup> As we will see in chapter 7, the growth in the WEIU’s Agency of Directions mirrored the creation of similar organizations across the country which similarly functioned as social centers and clearing-houses for women. In Boston, their female guests could share their “doubts,” their “questionings,” and their “pleasures” with the woman in charge, finding a measure of human contact in city by then well past the dimensions of the “walking city” of even the 1850s, whose growth had been curbed by Boston’s location on a marshy, hilly peninsula.<sup>77</sup> In 1885, the state census reported a population of 390,406 in the city of Boston, compared with 138,788 some thirty years earlier.<sup>78</sup> Confused newcomers were thus quick to direct questions that, WEIU attendants reported, ranged from the “very important” to the “extremely amusing”—but all were deemed worthy of at least an attempt at

<sup>73</sup>Meyerowitz, *Women Adrift*, 21. For a description of the hardships faced by these young women “adrift” in the city, see 21-41.

<sup>74</sup>“A Pioneer Institution,” *Boston Herald*, November 12, 1883, 4.

<sup>75</sup>WEIU, *1888 Report*, 18.

<sup>76</sup>WEIU, *1890 Report*, 21.

<sup>77</sup>WEIU, *1888 Report*, 18 + Sam Bass Warner Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), 15-17.

<sup>78</sup>Carroll D. Wright, *An Analysis of the Population of the City of Boston* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1885), 5, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044024415333>; City Document no. 42, *Report and Tabular Statement of the Censors Appointed by the Board of Mayor and Aldermen, To Obtain the State Census of Boston, May 1, 1850* (Boston: John H. Eastburn, 1850), 10, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nnc1.cu56767072>.

an answer.<sup>79</sup> One Montana woman, upon visiting the WEIU's rooms in 1895, observed the hustle and bustle of the day at the desk: one woman, a newcomer to the city, was looking for information about lodgings; another came for legal aid, while one housewife came for instructions for making soft soap. On Sundays, visitors inquired after "who [would] preach the next day in this or that church."<sup>80</sup>

Housing was one of the topics that drew the WEIU's attention most fully. Initially, owing to the means and interests of many of the middle- and upper-middle-class women who ran it, the Union focused on providing information about boarding-houses in summering destinations. To that end, they kept issues of the weekly *Railroad Advertiser*. The women at the counter were prepared to interpret the lists the paper provided for the sake of callers.<sup>81</sup> These were places where a self-supporting physician could hope to take humble but nonetheless significant time away from the heat and bustle of the city during the summer months. Over the course of the 1880s, the Union started keeping its own list of boarding and lodging houses, both in Boston and in the neighboring countryside.<sup>82</sup> Between 1883 and 1884, a total of 133 such establishments were registered—98 in Boston and 35 in the country. For each of them, reliable references were provided.<sup>83</sup>

Noting how the registry ballooned over the years, a separate body was later established: the WEIU's Boarding House Agency, founded in March 1888. In advertising circulars, the Agency was said to target both those looking for rooms, and those seeking boarders or lodgers.<sup>84</sup> Despite its initial financial success, it was discontinued in November of that same year for reasons that are unclear. The Board of Government favored resuming the original method of keeping a limited list of city and country boarding-places.<sup>85</sup> Apparently, from that point on, the boarding-list tended to remain small, which the leadership interpreted not as an indication that it was not needed, but as a failure of advertising that was later remedied.<sup>86</sup> The registry would leave on to be advertised by other parties, such as the *Souvenir Guide to Boston and Environs*, which directed "ladies" to call at the rooms of the WEIU to "learn of places whose respectability is guaranteed."<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>WEIU, *1890 Report*, 21.

<sup>80</sup>Additional WEIU records, "For the Benefit of Woman," *Boston Herald*, c1895, n.p. M-89. "4. 1887-97," 8 (microfilm).

<sup>81</sup>WEIU, *1881 Report*, 24.

<sup>82</sup>WEIU, *1884 Report*, 22.

<sup>83</sup>"Working for Women," *Boston Herald*, May 7, 1884, 8.

<sup>84</sup>WEIU, *1888 Report*, 19.

<sup>85</sup>WEIU, *1889 Report*, 21.

<sup>86</sup>WEIU, 1891 Report, 19.

<sup>87</sup>*Souvenir Guide to Boston and Environs* (Boston: G W. Armstrong, 1895), 23, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t9r21k59s>.

The act of gathering and sharing reliable information was a collective endeavor, one which theoretically put all potential visitors to the Union as well as its members and directors on a relatively equal footing. The members of the Social Committee encouraged “friends” of the WEIU to actively participate in the act of fleshing out the various registries that they kept.<sup>88</sup> This was yet another way that women could contribute to the association, gifting in this instance neither money, nor much time, but factual knowledge. They could mine their own social connections and clout in order to provide strangers with advice. Issues of trustworthiness loomed large in the psyche of rural antebellum Americans when they confronted the ever-shifting population of urban centers. Between 1830 and 1857, Boston’s residential mobility rate was so high as to signify a total turnover of the population over one or two years.<sup>89</sup> In her study of advice manuals aimed at young men seeking their fortunes in the city, historian Karen Halttunen has described the almost obsessive warnings that moralists issued against deceptively well-dressed and well-mannered scoundrels. Pre-industrial modes of meeting strangers and appraising them could no longer be relied upon.<sup>90</sup> In such a context, an institution like the WEIU offered to act as a dependable third party. While its members could and did vet the boarding-houses that made their way to their special registry, the mere fact that they consisted in personal recommendations did much to shape the impression that the Union was helping reconstitute personal word-of-mouth channels and making them available to any person, on the basis of sex.

Over three decades, what had by 1920 become the Union’s “Main Office,” was a thoroughly professional though free bureau of information, whose workers were ready to supply details about Boston’s “charitable and welfare organizations; clubs, churches and religious societies; educational and vocational schools and courses; health, housing, labor, industry and transportation,” whether in person or over the phone.<sup>91</sup> The secretary in charge of the main desk was also tasked with directing visitors to any of the Union’s departments or stores, depending on their inquiries. Helping women find homes in a potentially hostile city was no longer a priority. Rather, the Union projected itself as a clearing-house, a node in Boston’s social services hub. Making sense of the built environment and the growing ser-

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<sup>88</sup>WEIU, *1881 Report*, 24.

<sup>89</sup>Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 35.

<sup>90</sup>Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 50-51.

<sup>91</sup>Additional WEIU records, “News Notes from the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” Faculty Notes and News, *Simmons College Review*, January 1920, 67-68. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

vices available to Bostonians was still central to the work of the WEIU's former "Agency of Directions," but this was achieved through a much less personalized approach, and from a different perspective. Callers trying to obtain information about Boston's charitable organizations were much more likely to do so because they sought to work there, rather than to find assistance for themselves. With the rise of professional vocational guidance services in the 1910s, which the WEIU itself helped pioneer in collaboration with the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA), the focus was placed on helping college graduates find their way around the web of educational and professional opportunities which were now at their disposal.<sup>92</sup> The resurrected Room Registry, meanwhile, evolved as a complementary service, one that supplied "business women" with shared but modern and comfortable apartment houses, thus "meet[ing] a recognized need among business and professional women."<sup>93</sup> While the WEIU itself never owned nor operated residences for young women who held clerking positions—like the aforementioned Eleanor Association of Chicago—over time the organization cemented a local reputation as a mediating and coordinating agent for women's services.

### 6.1.3 The Fortunes of the Befriending Committee: To Whom Was the Hand of Friendship Extended?

For those who could not leave their homes or make their own inquiries at the Agency of Directions, the multi-pronged strategy of WEIU founder Harriet Clisby involved, of old, a "Befriending Committee." Its members were tasked with visiting poor or sick women at their homes, and offer them spiritual and material comfort in the form of bundles of magazines, Christmas presents, or gifts of home-made preserves.<sup>94</sup> Even in 1877, it might have seemed slightly conservative or out-of-place compared to the Union's bold experiment with consigning the handmade goods of home producers; it was more reminiscent of the visiting work which well-to-do native-born women had been undertaking for close to four decades by then

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<sup>92</sup>Dollar, *The Beginnings of Vocational Guidance for College Women*.

<sup>93</sup>Additional WEIU records, "Apartment House for Business Women," *Union News Items* 2, no. 5 (March 1913), 7. 81-M237. Carton 1, folder 6.

<sup>94</sup>The Befriending Committee was initially a subcommittee ("Visiting the Sick") of the Social Affairs Committee. Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women's Educational & Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 8, 1880* (Boston: 157 Tremont Street, 1880), 18, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2b1p08h29z>; WEIU, *1882 Report*, 27.



as “Ladies Bountiful.”<sup>95</sup> In Boston proper, the Fragment Society, an upper-class circle known for bestowing charitable help on the city’s paupers, worked exclusively along these lines.<sup>96</sup> The rationale for the Union’s group of home visitors was not the Fragment Society’s noblesse oblige, nor yet the dispassionate case work of the social worker, but a more democratic impulse to go and proffer their friendship specifically to isolated women—some of whom might have welcomed the offering, and others rejected it on the grounds that it felt uncomfortably close to charity.

For Harriet Clisby and the WEIU’s cadre of founders, the Befriending Committee was to function as the active arm of the association’s network-building strategy. Through its agents, the Union’s spiritual and emotional assistance could be extended, on an individual basis, all the way into the dwellings of the city’s elderly widows, young saleswomen, or sick single mothers. Through an analysis of the one surviving record book of the Befriending Committee, which covers the period 1906-1910,<sup>97</sup> it is possible to learn how this program of home visits evolved, and, with it, the impulse that sent early Union members out on a mission to spread sisterly love. By the late 1900s, the Befriending Committee was still working much as it had done in the previous decades, reporting on a mix of home visits and inquiries at their office at 264 Boylston Street, but by then many resources were expended not to strange women, but to the Union’s own employees. Many of the visits were to these paid workers; they were more likely to be to employees of the lunch rooms or of the New England Kitchen (NEK), whose contingent was the largest. Whenever a Union employee was visited, it was by her superior: the director of the shop or program which employed her. Sometimes, the director herself would be the one calling on the Befriending Committee to take on the case. In November 1906, Mrs. Moran, who oversaw the Union’s Lunch Room, visited Nellie Shea at her home in Fitchburg; a month later, she was at the bedside of

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<sup>95</sup>Nancy F. Hewitt, *Women’s Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 55.

<sup>96</sup>Sarah Deutsch, “Learning to Talk More Like a Man: Boston Women’s Class-Bridging Organizations, 1870-1940,” *American Historical Review* 97 (2): 384-388. [doi:10.2307/2165724](https://doi.org/10.2307/2165724) The Fragment Society was founded in 1812 by Beacon Hill and Back Bay matrons and gradually evolved into a fashionable Bostonian charity whose new recruits were co-opted from among the daughters and other female kin of current members. In fact, according to Sarah Deutsch, this focus on kinship ties is precisely what “allowed them to ignore the realities of class increasingly visible among them” from the 1870s onward. Into the 20th century, insulated from current trends toward the professionalization of social work, the Fragment Society clung to a personalized view of poor relief, distributing baby clothes, coal and food to a carefully curated roster of the “worthy” poor.

<sup>97</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Befriending Record Book, November 1906-1910*. 81-M237. Carton 7.

Rose Henderson.<sup>98</sup> The Committee also visited women in the hospital; in the most severe cases, a number of follow-up visits would be made, until recovery or death. These follow-up visits were sometimes months apart, a sign that sustained attention was directed to the recipients of the Union's care work. In March 1909, a note was made that Olga Hill, a fifteen-year-old worker in the Handwork Department, likely did not have enough to eat—not a surprising observation to make, when she was left with six siblings, only one of whom was employed. Three months later, she received a visit from Lucinda Prince, her manager, who brought her clothes.<sup>99</sup>

The Befriending Committee could find vacation homes, housing or boarding situations, and convalescent homes for those who needed them but were physically or psychologically unable to do so themselves, some the Union's own employees.<sup>100</sup> As in Olivia Hill's case, individuals received gifts of glasses and clothing—shirtwaists, shoes, or suits—as well as coal; the Committee also sparingly provided loans. The women whom the Union helped in that way found themselves in a variety of situations: some were high school girls asking the Committee how to make money before and after school, or where to apply for additional schooling or a job; others were elderly women looking for work or a boarding situation; others still, sick women, some with mental health problems, recent immigrants, the daughters of respected families, and even middle-class mothers seeking referral to stores where they could retail their products or take in work. To a woman who wore a brace and could only work at home, but who, from the records, does not appear to have been destitute, they gave the address “of two small ware shops, and the Empire Coffee Co.”<sup>101</sup> The Union's visitors met women in a broad range of positions, from those who looked as though they could not afford sustenance and the precariously middle-class going through hard times, to ambitious, upwardly mobile young women.

Most often, in fact, the help that the Union extended through its Befriending Committee came in the guise of practical advice: how to earn enough to sustain oneself or one's dependents. To a widow with two young children, the committee advised “to keep a little home, let a room, which would pay her rent, see if she could not work up a business in home working,” and gave her the address of Marston's

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<sup>98</sup> *Befriending Record Book*, 4, 11.

<sup>99</sup> *Befriending Record Book*, 154-155, 175.

<sup>100</sup> *Befriending Record Book*, 180-181. Miss Ruth McKenney, one of the waitresses working at the Members' Lunch Rooms, was in that category: she asked the Befriending Committee for help in finding a reputable boarding-house.

<sup>101</sup> *Befriending Record Book*, 147.

Lunch Rooms, for a few hours' work a day.<sup>102</sup> It was through a combination of different money-making strategies that the Union sought to make applicants self-sufficient, taking it as a matter of course that women were economic agents and that they should look for an independence in ways best adapted to their limitations—giving music lessons, selling hand-painted china, letting a room or working part-time at a restaurant or in someone's home.

In many ways, the Befriending Committee was a holdover from the early days of the Union; well into the 1890s, its chairwoman was still Melissa Chamberlin, one of the founders of the WEIU, and a close friend of Harriet Clisby's. Still, by the 1910s the program increasingly tended to act as a source of moral support for Union employees, a negligible, rather conservative counterpart to the Union's by then robust mutual benefit fund for Union employees. This was one more sign that the universalist impulses of the 1870s and early 1880s had been transformed by the growth of the WEIU's own commercial activities. The founders of the WEIU had posited the existence of a female version of a universal human experience and aimed at providing solace to all women, regardless of their affiliations. From that perspective, the volunteers active in the Befriending Committee made it their duty to seek out isolated individuals and impart on them the warmth of human connection. While this program would remain roughly unchanged, between 1877 and 1910 there was a visible recentering of the Befriending Committee's expenditure of resources and energy towards the Union's own workers. It was not motivated by changing ideas of who should be helped, but by a change in the composition of the groups most likely to appeal to the Union for help. In 1895, the chairwoman of the Befriending Committee noted that they made no distinction "of class, or religion, or Union membership"—race and immigration status, however, were not explicitly mentioned, perhaps because they were not salient distinctions to Union women, although the mention "col" for "colored" was appended to the names of black recipients of the Committee's help. The WEIU's ambiguous attitude towards women of color—never mentioning them explicitly, but giving them visibility in the written record—may point either to a recognition by the Befriending Committee of the hardships that these women faced as African Americans, or, much more likely, as another unquestioned manifestation of the color line.<sup>103</sup>

Eventually, in the 1910s, "befriending" efforts was absorbed into the depart-

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<sup>102</sup> *Befriending Record Book*, 153.

<sup>103</sup> Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1895* (Boston: The Barta Press, 144 High Street, 1895), 47, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923819>.

ment of “Social Work” and evolved into a more straightforwardly modern social work agency. The work increasingly embraced the principle of preventive rather than curative care and was placed in charge of a paid agent explicitly charged with cooperating with Boston’s relief agencies.<sup>104</sup> These trends line up with what could be observed throughout the organization. Paradoxically, the confirmed success that the reading room met throughout the 1880s, once again remarked upon in 1890, was matched by a tendency to establish secondary social occasions that were more exclusive and brought together cultured friends who appropriated the name “coterie” for themselves, a reference to the purported intimacy and exclusiveness of these gatherings.<sup>105</sup> In 1881, one typical Wednesday evening entertainment could have numbered some twenty to seventy guests, at a time when committee work involved 91 women, and the total membership of the association was 704.<sup>106</sup> To some extent, attendance to the Union’s entertainments matched the rising number of members. Ten years later, regular attendance to the Wednesday evening socials was reported as being between seventy-five to two hundred.<sup>107</sup> However, as early as the 1880s, the turn-over rate was high; in any given year, only half of the members were likely to sign off on another year’s membership. As WEIU historian Agnes Donham wrote, “[e]ach year the total number increased, but there was a large actual loss as less than half of each year’s total renewed at the end of the year.”<sup>108</sup> With membership reaching the thousands by the turn of the century, it was becoming clear that keeping a cohesive whole was fast becoming an even more utopian effort.

In 1891, in the last year of her presidency, Abby Morton Diaz called on members to revive the congenial spirit of the early days: “let our parlors be enlivened by your frequent presence,” she exhorted those present at the association’s annual meeting. Perhaps the “old custom” of having Tuesday afternoons set aside for receptions in the summer could still be revived?<sup>109</sup> In the 1890s, various departments, responding to the call, set out to organize more frequent social hours, which Diaz noted approvingly, because it was clear to her that “[s]ociability [had

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<sup>104</sup>WEIU, *1911 Report*, 38.

<sup>105</sup>WEIU, *1890 Report*, 20; “Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Boston Journal*, October 13, 1888, 4.

<sup>106</sup>WEIU, *1881 Report*, 19.

<sup>107</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1891* (Boston: No. 264 Boylston Street, 1891), 20, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923918>.

<sup>108</sup>Additional WEIU records, S. Agnes Donham, *History of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 1955*, 13. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>109</sup>WEIU, *1891 Report*, 8. (president’s address).

been] one of the original aims, and to further this the Union [had] its Thursday evenings for whist, chess and other games, and also its public receptions,” which members of the Board of Government took turn hosting to all who might come.<sup>110</sup> When using the term “sociability,” Diaz was likely referring either to the practice of conversation itself, or the personal quality of sociableness, one’s disposition to seek out conversation and connection with others.<sup>111</sup> Leaflets and advertising material emphasized the “social advantages” that the WEIU offered, the possibility for “all women” to meet “for mutual acquaintance, exchange of thought, and social intercourse, which ignores class boundaries, whether of wealth, culture, or position.”<sup>112</sup>

In a sense, these exhortations bore fruit, but not of the kind Abby Morton Diaz was expecting. The late 1890s and the first decades of the twentieth century saw the emergence of a genuine company culture at the WEIU, characterized by language that emphasized friendship and even quasi-familial ties.

## 6.2 The Social Life of Union Volunteers and Employees

Upon the passing of Arvilla B. Haynes in 1884, Melissa Chamberlin, one of the Union’s founders and its first secretary, wrote a short tribute to her. Its language departed from that of the paeans that women’s associations conventionally dedicated to the virtues of deceased members.<sup>113</sup> Chamberlin took up her pen “with the feeling that in the spiritual sense [the other Union volunteers] too [were] of her family and that she herself would [have held] [them] in that relation.”<sup>114</sup> The attempts of the 1890s at revitalizing the bonds that united the Union’s volunteers and growing number of employees can best be appreciated through the lens of the almost sisterly bonds that united the founding generation. It was because the

<sup>110</sup>Additional WEIU records, Abby Morton Diaz, statement, undated, c1890-1895, in WEIU scrapbook, item 150v. 81-M237. Carton 9.

<sup>111</sup>Webster’s Dictionary, 1828, s.v. “Sociability, n.,” <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/sociability>. Compare with the 1884 edition of *Webster’s International Dictionary of the English Language*: “Sociability, n.,” which reads “The quality of being sociable; sociableness.” *Webster’s International Dictionary of the English Language; Being the Authentic Edition of Webster’s Unabridged Dictionary, Comprising the Issues of 1864, 1879, and 1884* (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam Company, 1898), 1365, <https://archive.org/details/webstersinternat00port/>.

<sup>112</sup>Additional WEIU records, “1893-1894—Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” c1894, 9-10, in WEIU scrapbook, item 150v, [77]. 81-M237. Carton 9.

<sup>113</sup>Boylan, *Origins of Women’s Activism*, 77.

<sup>114</sup>“In Memoriam”, *Boston Journal*, January 10, 1884, 4.

WEIU of the late 1870s and early 1880s was characterized by such a quasi-familial atmosphere that deep regrets were expressed over the Union's decreasing ability to assimilate new members into this associational culture. The language of family was often used in antebellum women's organizations, blurring the line with the actual family ties which often bound benevolent women. Indeed, as Anne Boylan has shown, female kin tended to join the same organizations.<sup>115</sup> As the membership grew and most of the Union's active workers became salaried ones, it was to the professional environment that the association's socializing function was transferred. Employees' special dinners and parties, outings, and shared jokes in the Union's internal newspaper would eventually form the basis of a thriving occupational culture, whose nurturing was deemed important for what it did to "bring the active workers together from time to time, to consult together and recognize themselves as parts of a great whole, acting in a common cause."<sup>116</sup>

### 6.2.1 Intertwining the Personal and the Professional: The Fiction of the Union as Family

The Union's first social functions initially concerned its leadership specifically; they were a way for them to let off steam without sacrificing the order which ruled the meetings of the committees and the Board of Government. It was in 1883 that the first "social supper" was thrown for the committees. For an evening, the "parliamentary rules were suspended by the festive and gay"; they could enjoy the opportunity of spending time together, without having to attend to their designated duties. In a rapturous account of this event to the press, an anonymous WEIU member wrote that it felt to her "like an oasis in the desert to the weary, thirsty traveller." For the volunteers, this was finally a time marked off for socializing and relaxation. It was capped by "[w]it and humor from various members, diversified by [the] songs and recitations [which] concluded the festivities." In a play on parliamentary procedure, the proposition to turn this one-off affair into a repeat occasion was "unanimously adopted by singing."<sup>117</sup> While it is unclear whether such socials were eventually replicated on a monthly basis, occasional gatherings of a similar sort did take place. Nearly fifteen years later, in January 1897, the Union's heads of departments were invited to a "Social Gath-

<sup>115</sup>Boylan, *Origins of Women's Activism*, 78.

<sup>116</sup>WEIU, *1896 Report*, 16.

<sup>117</sup>Ino, "Mirth and the Muse," *Boston Herald*, February 12, 1883, 2.

ering of the Committees,” to take place on a Thursday afternoon.<sup>118</sup> Neither the members of committees nor the Union’s by then numerous clerks, cashiers, and saleswomen were invited to join them.

In the mid- and late 1890s, rather, the WEIU’s lower-ranking volunteer members and salaried workers started organizing socials of their own, which were spaced out around the calendar year. These events helped integrate and assimilate a growing workforce exhibiting “a marked discrepancy in wages, hours, and work of differing character and trade conditions”; as a whole, the Union’s employees ranged from 14 to 70 years old and allegedly “represented many nationalities.”<sup>119</sup> The annual meeting of the Employees’ Association (founded in 1903) was the highlight of the year, and a prime opportunity for them to mingle. After the business procedures were concluded—annual reports were read, officers were elected—it was time for socializing of a lighter kind. Remarkably, as one undated invitation indicated, pleasure was not sidelined by business. Of the systematic absence of certain letters in an invitation for the 1906 meeting, the woman who penned it observed, tongue-in-cheek, that “W’s, E’s, I’s and U’s being a matter of course, [were] not found herein.” Reading not through the lines but through the missing letters, we learn that employees were convened to a 6 pm supper at the Members’ Lunch Room and an “inter-department masquerade,” two social hours which sandwiched the 8.15 pm business meeting and a planned vote on the constitution of the Employees’ Association.<sup>120</sup>

Other times in the year were marked by fully festive occasions. By the mid-1900s, the employees’ New Year’s party was becoming such an institution that in 1906, when it could not take place on its planned January date, it was pushed back to February and transformed into a costumed Valentine’s Day party.<sup>121</sup> Many of

<sup>118</sup>Additional WEIU records, Invitation, 1897? in WEIU scrapbook, item 150v, [163]. 81-M237. Carton 9.

<sup>119</sup>Additional WEIU records, S. Agnes Donham, *History of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union*, 1955, 50. 81-M237. Carton 1. Donham makes no further mention of employees’ nationalities. A look at a fragmentary list of employees hired before 1903 reveals mostly English surnames, with a sizable smattering of Irish and Scottish ones. In the 1890s, the Union hired women like Miss Nellie J. Curley, a cashier at the Food Department, or Miss Mamie Fitzpatrick, who held an unspecified position at the “Lunch room/tea room.” Perhaps Donham was basing her assessment of the diversity of the Union’s workforce off later employee rolls. Additional WEIU records, *Union employees, 1877-1903*, c1903, n.p. 81-M237. Carton 8.

<sup>120</sup>Additional WEIU records, Invitation to Annual meeting of employees, undated, c1906? in WEIU scrapbook, [29]; “Masquerade Party,” undated, in WEIU scrapbook, [7]. 81-M237. Carton 11.

<sup>121</sup>Additional WEIU records, “The Board of Government Had Planned,” 1906, in WEIU scrapbook, [3]. 81-M237. Carton 11. By the turn of the century, St. Valentine’s Day had already been entrenched as a “not-to-be-missed” social occasion for close to six decades. It was a national holiday for which themed stationery and merchandise existed, the “valentines” that friends and

the poems that coworkers wrote one another for this occasion were full of teasing remarks, couched in affectionate language that relied heavily on the tropes of the female “romantic friendship.”<sup>122</sup> In midcentury middle-class culture, this mode of relationship was more than tolerated; it was celebrated. Close female friends could freely express their love for one another in romantic though not physical terms, in ways that were seen as preparing them for heterosexual, and thus to contemporaries “adult,” relationships. This began to change in the 1900s and 1910s, as new developments in the fields of psychology threw suspicion of sexual impropriety on women who lived together, and, consequently, leading figures in the women’s suffrage movement downplayed their own relationships with female companions and pushed to the margins activists whose personal lives and gender expression they felt made them liabilities for the cause.<sup>123</sup> Despite these developments, it was still quite common for female friendship to occasion overtly passionate declarations, as in many of the WEIU’s Valentine’s Day poems—though some did evince a playful self-awareness. One of the poems is dedicated to Abbie Brown’s desperate, self-deprecating pursuit of her colleague Julia, the object of her affections. It ends in the unsuccessful suitor witnessing a man, her explicit competitor, proposition Julia: “A gentle youth we see / Who wishes that he and Julia / A Mutual Benefit may be / And gentle Abbie Brown / Can never put them down.”<sup>124</sup> “Mutual Benefit,” in this instance, most likely refers to the state of marriage, but it was first and foremost a mutual benefit fund that the WEIU had just set up for its employees under the name “Union Benefit.”<sup>125</sup> The pun is there both as a nod to shared references and as a way of tying the personal and professional lives of

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lovers alike reciprocally exchanged as tokens of affection. In fact, it has been argued that the birth of Valentine’s Day as an American holiday owed much to printers and stationers. Leigh Eric Schmidt, “The Fashioning of a Modern Holiday: St. Valentine’s Day, 1840-1870,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 28, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 209-245.

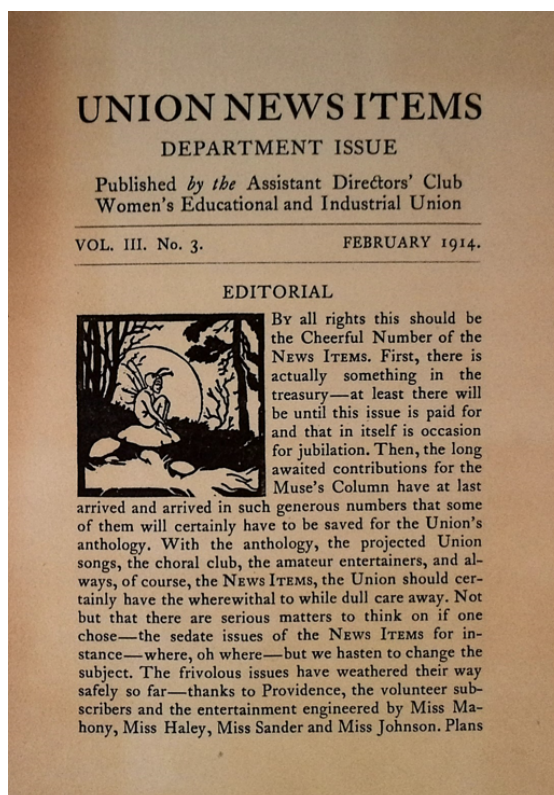
<sup>122</sup>Much like the love poems that smitten college girls wrote one another in the 1880s and 1890s. Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 166-167; Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 18-21. For a more detailed look at female friendship in the late nineteenth-century, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg’s seminal essay “The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 53-76.

<sup>123</sup>Lillian Faderman, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*. See 11-31 for the transformation of the romantic friendship at the turn of the century; for the internal politics of gender expression in the suffrage movement, see Rouse, *Public Faces, Secret Lives*, 28-29.

<sup>124</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Where Is My Mutual Benefit?” 1906, in WEIU scrapbook. 81-M237. Carton 11.

<sup>125</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *A Report of Progress Made in the Year 1905, Being the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the Incorporation of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston: Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 1905), 22, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239272>.



Figure 6.2: First page of the February 1914 issue of the *Union News Items*.

Source: Additional WEIU records, *Union News Items* 3, no. 3 (February 1914). 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 142.

“Julia” and “Abby Brown” together.

As Louise Lamphere has suggested in her contemporary study of 1980s factory workers, when workers “bring the family to work,” shared pictures, stories, and anecdotes about their personal lives generate and power worker solidarity.<sup>126</sup> At least some of the women who worked for the Union developed close relationships which sustained them during the workday; they exchanged news about who was getting married, moving on to another job or simply relocating to another part of country, having children, or benefiting from professional opportunities.<sup>127</sup> They were not shy about declaring their fondness for one another.<sup>128</sup>

In the pages of the *Union News Items*,<sup>129</sup> the “Department News” juxtaposed

<sup>126</sup>Louise Lamphere, “Bringing the Family to Work: Women’s Culture on the Shop Floor,” *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 3 (Autumn, 1985): 519-540.

<sup>127</sup>See for instance WEIU records, Food Shop Items, *Union News Items*, 29-30 (undated, c1912). B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>128</sup>“We love you all devotedly, / We hope you love us, too. / We think that parties such as this, / Are really far too few,” sang the Lunch Rooms workers to the assembled members of the Employees’ Association. WEIU records, “Tune: What’s the Matter with Father?” *Union News Items*, c1911, 25. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>129</sup>The *Union News Items* first appeared in 1911 in the form of typewritten pages circulated

these different categories of information. For readers of the Items, it was possible to stay in touch with even the Union workers who had left the nest, whether temporarily or permanently. In one such column, news were given that Miss Paine, who pursued continuing education, had “completed a series of laboratory lessons in textiles at the Garland School of Home Making,” or that her colleague, Miss Norton, was giving a course at the same school; that Miss Ivy, a normal student, had just taken a position at Halle Brothers Co. in Cleveland; that Miss Edith James was engaged, and that Mrs. Adelaide Warden, a Food Shop employee, had left the Union to relocate to her sister’s residence in New Hampshire.<sup>130</sup> The column, and by extension the Union News Items as a whole, further strengthened the ties that defined and bound the community that served the Union, even as the number of employees rose and it was becoming downright impossible for them to know everyone, not least the workers in other departments.

Most importantly, these writings were a welcome means of expression for the Union’s employees. They joked, teased, and never hesitated to poke fun either at their higher-ups or at themselves. Sometimes the jibe was at the expense of a stereotype, as in the recurring feature “Mrs. Dooley Speaks,” the fictional ramblings—rendered in mock dialect—of an Irish cook for the lunch department.<sup>131</sup> They also complained, together, of the “dear time clock,” to which one poet prescribed “molasses mixed with pitch,” and occasionally gave it mock-praise for the round-the-clock work it was doing.<sup>132</sup> These texts and drawings were an outlet for the creativity that employees would not always have been able to display over the course of their workday. At least one of the Valentine’s Day party-goer took pains to ornament the sheet where she had hand-written her verses, bringing pomp to an otherwise absurdly light-hearted jumble of rhymes (figure 6.3). Others weaved in clever references to their shared work environment; younger and older women celebrated their friendship for one another at the same time as they praised their skills in their chosen lines of work. In another poem, Julia D. Swasey (or “Swasy”), a forty-year-old worker for the Union’s Domestic Reform League (DRL), its employ-

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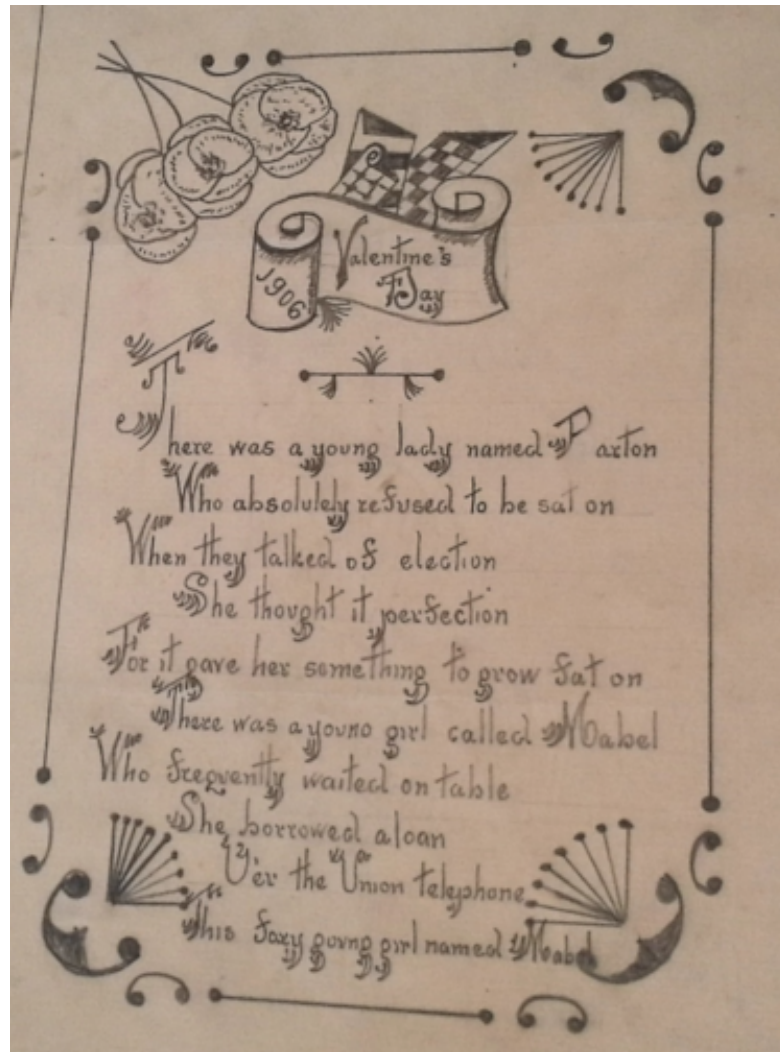
among department directors. In November 1912, it first appeared in print, and its circulation was extended to include all WEIU employees, to whom one copy each was sent. Additional WEIU records, *Union News Items* 2, no. 1 (November 1912), 1. 81-M237. Carton 1, folder 6.

<sup>130</sup>Additional WEIU records, Department News, *Union News Items* 2, no. 6 (April 1913), 5-7. 81-M237. Carton 1, folder 6.

<sup>131</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Mrs Dooley Speaks,” *Union News Items* 2, no. 6 (April 1913), 16. 81-M237. Carton 1, folder 6.

<sup>132</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Ode to the Spring,” *Union News Items* 2, no. 5 (March 1913), 16; “Long Hours for NEK Time Clock,” *Union News Items* 2, no. 2 (December 1912), 16. 81-M237. Carton 1, folder 6.

Figure 6.3: Valentine's Day poem, 1906.



Source: Additional WEIU records, WEIU scrapbook

. 81-M237. Carton 11.

ment bureau for domestic servants, was hailed by an anonymous coworker both as “the queen of the DRL [...] who place[d] cooks so well” and as “a daisy” who drew the author “crazy” (sic).<sup>133</sup> Julia was single at the time and maybe likely to remain so; she lived with an aunt and other relatives, and we may guess would have found in the WEIU companionship as well as paid or unpaid work.<sup>134</sup> There were other “queens” at the party, such as Mrs. Leary, likely a cook at one of the Union’s restaurants, for she was the “[q]ueen of croquette.”<sup>135</sup> The Valentine’s Day Party was a special time for the Union’s workers to give expressions of the pride that they felt in what they were doing, simultaneously bestowing affection and praise. Like the saleswomen studied by Susan Porter Benson, they brought to their workplace a layered consciousness of themselves as individuals, at the same time women and workers, which played out in a self-contained female environment—as the fictional Mrs. Dooley herself had put it, “This [was] a ladies’ institootion.”<sup>136</sup>

In her work on women’s culture in the department store at the turn of the twentieth century, Susan Porter Benson defines “women’s culture” as a matrix of shared experiences of domestic life and similar outlooks toward the lifecycle, bound with the assumption that some spaces, whether emotional or physical, were off limits to men, and belonged strictly to women.<sup>137</sup> She argues that the decline of nineteenth-century domesticity was not the end of women’s culture, but its transformation from the domestic sphere into the “heterosocial and peer cultures”<sup>138</sup> which characterized the way that many young women interacted with one another in the early years of the twentieth century, whether saleswomen, college graduates, or factory workers active in working-girls’ clubs. In the case of the latter group, the emergence of peer culture is especially visible in the evolutions of the “working-girls’ club.” At first vehicles through which middle-class women hoped to provide wholesome entertainment to factory workers and saleswomen, in the 1880s these clubs emphasized the importance of good manners and taught sewing, cooking, and the principles of homemaking; their sponsors endeavored to assimilate young working-class women into middle-class domesticity. Over the

<sup>133</sup>Additional WEIU records, “O Little Julia Swasey,” 1906, in WEIU scrapbook. 81-M237. Carton 11.

<sup>134</sup>United States Census, 1900, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M9YP-43H>) entry for Mrs. Annie Lowe and James H Lowe, 1900.

<sup>135</sup>Additional WEIU records, “To Mrs. Leary” 1906, in WEIU scrapbook. 81-M237. Carton 11.

<sup>136</sup>Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 229; Additional WEIU records, Mrs. Dooley Speaks, *Union News Items* 2, no. 6 (April 1913), 16. 81-M237. Carton 1, folder 6.

<sup>137</sup>Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 3-4.

<sup>138</sup>Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 3.

course of the 1890s and onwards, as club members assumed greater, and eventually total control of the decision-making process, they increasingly steered it toward mixed-sex recreation—boating parties, picnics, dancing—and rebelled more and more overtly against the standards of decorum that were imposed on them, in the process affirming their pride and identity as working women.<sup>139</sup>

At the same time, the WEIU was more distinctly being affirmed as a first professional opportunity for college-educated women; as it started hiring entire cohorts of graduates, they set out to prolong collegiate social networks to their new occupational environment.

### 6.2.2 A Training Ground for College Graduates

At the turn of the century, a paid position at the WEIU increasingly constituted a first professional experience for local college graduates. It was however only in 1909 that the ACA (Association of Collegiate Alumnae) formed its “Committee on Vocational Opportunities Other Than Teaching,” out of a belief that the popularity of teaching as an occupation caused overcrowding, which in turn depressed wages. Clerking was entering the ranks of the feminized occupations and volunteer charitable work was giving way to “social work,” but there was no clear pathway from a college education to occupations other than teaching.<sup>140</sup> In addition, where university provided the theory, college graduates lacked opportunities for on the job training as secretaries, bookkeepers, accountants, business managers, and research assistants. These two trends dovetailed in the WEIU’s new, unofficial recruiting policy, which favored graduates able to provide the “expert guidance” that president Mary Morton Kehew deemed essential to building the organization into an “efficient business.” Unable to find the trained help that they needed, the

<sup>139</sup>Murolo, *Common Ground of Womanhood*.

<sup>140</sup>Margaret C. Dollar, *The Beginnings of Vocational Guidance for College Women: The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, and Women’s Colleges*, PhD thesis, Harvard Graduate School of Education, 1992, 1. On the feminization of clerking and women’s entry into the business office, see Margery W. Davies, *Woman’s Place Is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers, 1870-1930* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 51-78, and Fine, *Souls of the Skyscraper*, 29-50. Angel Kwolek-Folland analyses the changing gender dynamics of the business office following women’s increased penetration of that job market: *Engendering Business: Men and Women in the Corporate Office, 1870-1930* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). Jane Marcellus further examined the media depictions of female clerks and the rise of associated stereotypes in *Business Girls and Two-Job Wives: Emerging Media Stereotypes of Employed Women* (Cresskill: Hampton Press, 2011). On the birth of the department store and native white women’s work as saleswomen, see Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

women of the WEIU set about molding young women into the workers that would administer its shops and turn out the data that would buttress their efforts to influence local legislation.<sup>141</sup> In the 1900s and 1910s, the Union's Research Department was an especially welcoming environment to graduates, many of them with advanced degrees like Elizabeth Porter. She was the recipient of a graduate degree from the Chicago School of Physics and Philanthropy, had studied at the University of Minnesota, and eventually earned a M.S. from Simmons College in 1919. As a "student worker" at the WEIU's Research Department she would have typically been placed in charge of a study of the working and living conditions of Boston's women wage-earners. After completing this internship of sorts, she would obtain a position as agent of the State Charities Aid Society of New York, for a salary of \$2,000 a year.<sup>142</sup> The Union's leadership was satisfied with the quality of the work that "trained" women completed; they noted that "Simmons graduates, as a rule, show[ed] that they [had] had excellent training; when assigned a given task, they [began] in a systematic way and [saw] it through; they show[ed] good professional spirit and rarely allow[ed] personal interests or feelings to interfere with their work."<sup>143</sup>

In the 1910s, many of the women who held administrative positions at the Union were "college people." Three out the four officers of the Employees' Association appeared on the "List of college people connected with the Union" compiled in May 1912; this was also the case for the Union's executive secretary, its financial secretary, and 16 out of 44 of the directors, associate and assistant directors, and assistants. Eleven held degrees from local Simmons College—which, as we will see, collaborated closely with the Union—, and as many from Wellesley. The rest came from a variety of in-state and out-of-state institutions: Radcliffe, Ohio Wesleyan, Tufts, the University of Illinois, Smith College, Columbia University, Boston University, Cornell, Mount Holyoke, the University of Pennsylvania, Barnard College, Pacific University, Leland Stanford, Vassar, the University of Minnesota, and Brown.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Additional WEIU records, "Reference Notes on Union," c1926, 3. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 153.

<sup>142</sup> Additional WEIU records, "News Notes from the Women's Educational and Industrial Union," *Simmons College Review*, c1920. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

<sup>143</sup> Additional WEIU records, "News Notes from the Women's Educational and Industrial Union," *Simmons College Review*, c1920. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

<sup>144</sup> WEIU records, "List of college people connected with the Union, May 7, 1912," *Union News Items* (undated, c1912), 13-14. Box 1, folder 3; Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Thirty-Third Annual Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston, 1912), 7-9, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239462>. Interestingly, these universities belonged to different categories. Mount Holyoke (1837), Vassar (1861), Smith College

As they joined the Union, these institutions' alumnae brought with them good-natured school pride. In the process of becoming Union workers, their allegiance towards their alma maters was gradually transmuted into loyalty towards the WEIU and its president. Nowhere was this made clearer than in the school songs and toasts sung at one of the Union's social functions in June 1911. On the occasion of Mary Morton Kehew's retirement from the leadership of the association, directors, managers, and assistants came together to thank her, express their pride at being part of the work, and celebrate the bonds that they had forged with their colleagues. One Mount Holyoke alumna declared that "tho' college ties we'll ne'er forget, / We hold as dear the friends we've met / Within the Union's busy sphere." She celebrated the organization as "the band / Which gives to all a welcoming hand."<sup>145</sup>

In these toasts, the WEIU appears as a spiritual successor to the "alma mater," "a little spot / Where aims are all the same / Where women have their high ideals / In deed as well as name. / No Alma Mater, you're not lost / Now once again I see you," wrote alumnae from the University of Dublin.<sup>146</sup> Interestingly, the women who had been educated the furthest from Boston did stress their difference. While westerners connected their experience of social work in Boston with its counterpart in Minnesota—farmers' education and uplift—they also claimed that, by striving to "advance, also, the males," they occupied the vanguard of progressive reform.<sup>147</sup> Ultimately, still, all alumnae, regardless of their alma maters, pledged their allegiance to the Union that had brought them together, in the name of all college women.<sup>148</sup> "We used to cheer right lustily / For just the Wellesley

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(1875), Radcliffe (1879), and Barnard College (1889) were early women's colleges and would later be part of the Seven Sisters conference (1922). For more information about them, see Horowitz, *Alma Mater*. The University of Minnesota (1851), initially a private preparatory school, was later enlarged into a public land-grant university, with a coeducational student body. It started enrolling women in 1869. The University of Pennsylvania (1740), Columbia University (1754), Brown University (1764), and Cornell (1865) were prestigious male institutions belonging to the "Ivy League," which only became fully coeducational in the 1970s and 1980s—except in the case of Cornell, which accepted women from its founding, like Leland Stanford (1891). Finally, Ohio Wesleyan College (1842), Pacific University (1849), and Tufts College (1852) enrolled women in 1877, 1854, and 1892 respectively. They were initially small, private universities, one a Boston college (Tufts), another a midwestern one (Ohio Wesleyan), and Pacific University, like Stanford, a west coast institution. For a history of co-education in higher education, see Nancy Weiss Malkiel, *"Keep the Damned Women Out": The Struggle for Coeducation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

<sup>145</sup>WEIU records, "Mt. Holyoke Toast," *Union News Items*, June 8, 1911, 2. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>146</sup>WEIU records, "University of Dublin Toast," *Union News Items*, June 8, 1911, 10. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>147</sup>WEIU records, "University of Minnesota Toast," *Union News Items*, June 8, 1911, 11. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>148</sup>WEIU records, "Mt. Holyoke Toast," *Union News Items*, June 8, 1911, 2. B-8. Box 1,

blue, / But now we add the Union's work, / And, Mrs. ehew, you," sang Wellesley alumnae.<sup>149</sup> while those from Leland Stanford assured the outgoing president that "Stanford wave[d] its crimson in loyalty to [her]."<sup>150</sup> Gratitude for Mary Morton Kehew—"Woman yet leader of women"—was couched in terms of personal loyalty.<sup>151</sup> With this, the narrative that these tributes create was complete: a young woman, full of both hope and fear, leaves her college days behind; she does not know whether she will ever find again a community of like-minded peers, with whom she could work toward creating a fairer world—but, thanks to the WEIU and its president, she does, and she eventually "graduates" to a next step in her education and life. "WE&IU, WE&IU, / Union! Union! Union!" marked the high point and the conclusion of the "Wellesley Cheer."<sup>152</sup>

What their first paid job at the WEIU brought them was an opportunity to put theory into practice: "At college it's a theory or two, / But tho we theorize of the divine, / It's here we drink the living wine, / And win the truth we there were taught to woo," rhapsodized Brown alumnae, while those from Wellesley spun a geographical metaphor in which the college, "an ancient towered town" turned toward "pageants of centuries gone by," was connected to the present by the Union, "the keeper of the great city gate."<sup>153</sup> In the 1860s and 1870s, early women's colleges developed their liberal arts curriculum in order to attain the perceived excellence of the traditionally male classics-based degree. From the 1890s onwards, however, as the experimental and social sciences gained ground in male colleges—to the point of becoming a sales argument—tensions erupted between proponents and critics of the liberal arts degree. These debates did not affect male and female students equally; many women's colleges were reluctant to part from the traditional course of study, and only gradually did elite women's colleges start aligning with men's in that regard. Despite a wave of anti-professionalist sentiment, by the turn of the century, vocational courses were being introduced in women's programs, the most prominent being home economics.<sup>154</sup> To the young

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folder 3.

<sup>149</sup>WEIU records, "Wellesley Toast," *Union News Items*, June 8, 1911, 9. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>150</sup>WEIU records, "Leland Stanford Toast," *Union News Items*, June 8, 1911, 12. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>151</sup>WEIU records, "Smith College toast to M.M.K. (1893-1911)," *Union News Items*, June 8, 1911, 6. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>152</sup>WEIU records, "Wellesley Cheer," *Union News Items*, June 8, 1911, 8. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>153</sup>WEIU records, "Brown Toast," *Union News Items*, June 8, 1911, 1; "Simmons Toast," *Union News Items*, June 8, 1911, 4. B-8. Box 1, folder 3; "Wellesley Toast," *Union News Items*, June 8, 1911, 7.

<sup>154</sup>Barbara Miller Solomon, *In the Company of Educated Women: A History of Women's Higher Education in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 78-87.



college graduates hired by the WEIU in the early 1910s, the Union, a creator of new professional opportunities for college women, was the perfect place for them to put to the test their social science, secretarial, and home economics training. Like college itself, it “opened up to women / Fields of work before undreamed of.”<sup>155</sup>

One example of this can also be read as an indicator of college graduates’ influence on the choice of programs developed by the WEIU in the 1910s: commercial entertainment for children. Building on the rich tradition of college dramatics, which emerged in eastern women’s colleges in the 1900s,<sup>156</sup> a group of WEIU workers founded a dramatic company that they named the “Children Players.” In 1909, several WEIU workers put on their first show, conceived as a fundraiser for unspecified Union purposes. Acting as their “own playwrights, state managers, and property builders,” they gave sincere but “very amateurish performances” according to Union director Melita Knowles.<sup>157</sup> This did not deter the audience, and the initial one-off show morphed into a local tour. In the wake of this early success, the amateur playwrights determined that there was a community need for wholesome children’s entertainment—a market. In 1911, the Children’s Players were formed. The group numbered local actors, members of the mutual help “Lend A Hand Club” and of the Harvard Dramatic Club.<sup>158</sup> Their plan was to move on to giving weekly performances in a local theater at affordable prices. They also investigated the possibilities of opening their own “Children’s Theater” in Boston.<sup>159</sup> While this project would never come to fruition, with the official endorsement of the WEIU the Children’s Players did give widely acclaimed performances in the early 1910s, such as “The Naughty Little Princess,” which they adapted from a German children’s book in 1912, and “The Yellow Bird” two years later.<sup>160</sup>

Their interest in children’s education and entertainment was echoed largely

<sup>155</sup>WEIU records, “Radcliffe Toast,” *Union News Items*, June 8, 1911, 3. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>156</sup>Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 162-163.

<sup>157</sup>Additional WEIU records, [5-6], 1912, 1-2. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 151; Additional WEIU records, Melita Knowles, “To Herald and Transcript re ‘Plays for Children Company,’” [25], June 2, 1913. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 151.

<sup>158</sup>Additional WEIU records, [5-6], 1912, 1-2. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 151; Additional WEIU records, Melita Knowles, “To Herald and Transcript re ‘Plays for Children Company,’” [25], June 2, 1913. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 151.

<sup>159</sup>“Settlement Children See ‘The Forest Ring’ Rehearsed In Full Costume for Their Entertainment in Copley,” *Boston Herald*, January 19, 1912, 12.

<sup>160</sup>Additional WEIU records, [5-6], 1912, 1-2. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 151; Additional WEIU records, Melita Knowles, “To Herald and Transcript re ‘Plays for Children Company,’” [25], June 2, 1913. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 151; “Children’s Players at the Shubert,” *Boston Journal*, November 30, 1912, 7; “‘The Yellow Bird’ Delights Children,” *Boston Journal*, November 28, 1914, 5.

throughout the Union. In 1916, the WEIU would open the “Bookshop for Boys and Girls.” This was yet another commercial venture from the Union, this time aiming at providing parents and local libraries, like the suburban Newton Library, with material that was thought suitable for children.<sup>161</sup> That same year, the director of the Handwork Shop expressed the opinion that “it was on the children’s goods that the future success of the shop would lie rather than on the gift shop goods.”<sup>162</sup>

### 6.2.3 Women’s Work Culture in the WEIU

As a workplace, the WEIU was the site at which the contours of a unique work culture could be clearly traced by the 1910s. Susan Porter Benson, who studied the interactions of saleswomen, managers, and customers at the large department stores of the late nineteenth century, describes “work culture” as “the ideology and practice with which workers stake out a relatively autonomous sphere of action on the job [...] [a] realm of informal, customary values and rules [which] mediates the formal authority structure of the workplace and distances workers from its impact.”<sup>163</sup> Put slightly differently by Patricia Cooper, far more than amusing traditions, in the early twentieth century work culture formed “a coherent system of ideas and practices, forged in the context of the work process itself, through which workers modified, mediated, and resisted the limits of their jobs.”<sup>164</sup> Building on the now classic work of historians Herbert Gutman and E. P. Thompson on working-class culture, the labor historians of the 1970s and 1980s started investigating the rituals and unwritten rules which workers themselves evolved to socialize green workers into shopfloor culture and regulate and distribute labor among themselves, in a deeply personal and often oppositional interpretation of management policies. In that latter decade in particular, historians of women and gender studying female wage-earners zoomed in on women’s work cultures in both sex-segregated and mixed-sex workforces, characterizing their valence—whether mostly compliant or resistant—and the values upon which they were based.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>161</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Executive Committee* v. 28, no. 9, November 2, 1917, 2. 81-M237. Carton 4.

<sup>162</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Executive Committee* v. 27, no. 26, January 7, 1916, 4-5. 81-M237. Carton 3.

<sup>163</sup>Benson, *Counter Cultures*, 228; 240-253.

<sup>164</sup>Patricia A. Cooper, *Once A Cigar Maker: Men, Women, and Work Culture in American Cigar Factories, 1900-1919* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 2.

<sup>165</sup>Such studies of women’s work cultures include: Barbara Melosh, *The Physician’s Hand: Work, Culture and Conflict in American Nursing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982); Benson’s *Counter Cultures* (1986); Cooper’s *Once A Cigar Maker* (1987); Dorothy Sue Cobble, *Dishing It Out: Waitresses and Their Unions in the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University

Over the course of three decades, both the WEIU's waged and unwaged workers grew into a greater consciousness of themselves, not as members of the organization, but as participants in the work of the Union. Owing to its splintering into a dozen different departments, each with discretionary power over the day-to-day work of the programs that they operated, the Union's work culture was a chiefly department-based one. Employees socialized first and foremost as workers in the same department, and they expressed their loyalty first to their department director. Mary H. Moran, who at various times in the 1910s supervised the Union's Food Sales Department, the New England Kitchen, and the lunch rooms, was a towering figure who held pride of place in the lore of the Union's cooks, cashiers, and restaurant clerks. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, like the other department heads, she frequently called on employees on sick leave, visiting them in a way that blended personal and professional concern. In the pages of the Union News Items, they spoke of her as a mother to them, describing how she invited her "numerous children," the "official family" of the New England Kitchen, to a high tea at her own home in February 1913.<sup>166</sup> As this example suggests, there were instances of directors socializing with their subordinates outside of the walls of 264 Boylston Street, in ways which replicated, by domesticating them, the hierarchical relations which united them at the WEIU. At her home, the director became the mother doling out proverbial "cakes and ale" to her offspring, another avatar of the reverently beloved figure she already was in the professional kitchen.<sup>167</sup>

In the writings that they circulated in the early 1910s, the WEIU's employees played at sorting themselves according to the department in which they worked, evincing a self-deprecatingly exaggerated pride. An anonymous writer thus produced a typology of the Union's departments in the mid-1910s. Echoing a poem that likened the organization to a great ship charting new courses for women's future,<sup>168</sup> she compared the different departments with parts of a transatlantic liner. Each shorthand reference—the departments were identified solely by the name of their director—poked fun at the distinctive atmosphere and duties of

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of Illinois Press, 1991). The Autumn 1985 issue of *Feminist Studies* contains several articles on contemporary examples of women's social networks and consciousness on the job. They interrogate the characteristics of specifically female work cultures and shed light on the links between women's domestic lives and the workplace. *Feminist Studies* 11, no. 3 (Autumn, 1985).

<sup>166</sup>Additional WEIU records, Department News, *Union News Items* 2, no. 4 (February 1913), 11. 81-M237. Carton 1, folder 6.

<sup>167</sup>Additional WEIU records, Department News, *Union News Items* 2, no. 4 (February 1913), 11. 81-M237. Carton 1, folder 6.

<sup>168</sup>Additional WEIU records, "Name This," *Union News Items* 2, no. 2 (December 1912), 17. 81-M237. Carton 1, folder 6.

each of the Union's "compartments." That year, there were 316 "Union staff" reading the *Union News Items*.<sup>169</sup> They would have been able to find out where they belonged on the great ship, whether on the upper berth with "Miss Knowles" (the executive secretary), in the ladies' cabin with "Miss Teal" (the director of Social Work), or in the inside stateroom with "Miss Weymouth" (the director of the Handwork Shop), among others. While these three descriptors served to illustrate an unofficial hierarchy within the Union, some simply contributed a clever metaphor. Aptly, "steerage" was Florence Jackson's Vocational Advice and Appointment department, which supervised the work of the Appointment Bureau, where college graduates could expect to find vocational counseling. Finally, some of the categories the author devised aimed at illustrating the working conditions in the different departments. Research was characterized as a bustling hub of activity—the "hurricane deck"—, in opposition to the "promenade deck" of Law and Thrift.<sup>170</sup> Were the conditions experienced by employees in these departments a function of their attributions, the outcome of a leadership style, or both? Whatever the case, this short paragraph in the "Department News" shed light on the layered identities that Union employees may have developed. They identified not with their occupation, but with the place that they occupied within the organization's structure, and their departmental pride was layered with the consciousness that they were all part of a bold experiment in public service.

After all, Union employees would eat lunch at the same Employees' Lunch Room, which was established in 1903. There, they were able to socialize with colleagues from different departments. As a skit for a "department vaudeville" dramatized it, newcomers' initiation into the workplace culture of the Union would probably have taken place at lunchtime, in the cafeteria. Following the business meeting of the Employees' Association in April 1911, representatives from each department took their turn entertaining the company: some with songs, other with "playettes" and short theatrical skits.<sup>171</sup> Women from the Research Department chose to depict a new research fellow's introduction to Union customs and people. In "The New Fellow or Ten Minutes in the Lunch Room," putting on her "company voice," "Miss A."—her full name is never given, but the audience would likely have been able to identify her—gives "Miss Smythe" short descriptions of the

<sup>169</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Thirty-Fifth Annual Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union for the Year 1912-1913* (Boston, 1914), 13, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239462>.

<sup>170</sup>Additional WEIU records, Department News, *Union News Items* 2, no. 6 (April 1913), 6-7. 81-M237. Carton 1, folder 6; WEIU, *1913 Report*, 9-10.

<sup>171</sup>WEIU records, "Department Vaudeville," *Union News Items*, c1911, 13. Box 1, folder 3.

Figure 6.4: WEIU research fellows in 1916-1917—Caroline Legg[?], Edith West[?], H. Dora Stecker, Christine M. Ayars, and Miss Lane—with Dr. Lucile Eaves on far left.



Harvard University, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, ss\_21594571

Source: Harvard Digital Collections, [https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital\\_collections/8001528311\\_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356592](https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital_collections/8001528311_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356592).

Union’s directors as they all come down for lunch. The setting is perfect for the authors to make fun of themselves. Miss A.’s pronouncement that “[t]he Research Department as you probably know is one of the most, in fact, it is the most intellectual hard-working department of the whole Union” is undercut by her audience’s reaction at the ensuing logorrhea: “During the talk Miss Paige is first smiling and attentive; she gradually becomes serious, then yawns, and finally her head drops on the table.”<sup>172</sup>

The delegates from other departments were sometimes more straightforward or sincere in playfully asserting their superiority over other departments. Unlike the perhaps more prestigious, because academically-inclined Research department, whose fellows were all college-educated, the workers of the New England Kitchen may have felt the need to reaffirm the importance of their cooking, cleaning, and feeding schoolchildren. In their “School Song,” set to the tune of a song about an Irish-American youth, these kitchen workers reminded their Union colleagues: “We’re young, we’re strong, we’re power, we’re health / We’re the Union’s hope and the Union’s wealth / We’re the greatest thing that they can get / But if they don’t

<sup>172</sup>WEIU records, “The New Fellow or Ten Minutes in the Lunch Room,” *Union News Items*, c1911, 19-22. Box 1, folder 3.

watch out—we'll get them yet.”<sup>173</sup> There is a hint of defiance and even menace in the lyrics that they wrote for the occasion, a suggestion that they identified “the Union” not with themselves but strictly with its leadership, whom they warn not to take the New England Kitchen for granted. This is the only example that I found of NEK workers' self-expression, but it is far cry from the strictly celebratory tone adopted by the Wellesley alumnae: “The underlings—we're not a few, / You see us all around,—/ Unite to form with their great chiefs a durable background.”<sup>174</sup> Contrasted with the more reverent attitude that college women adopted towards the leadership, the NEK's “School Song” is a suggestion of the fault lines that may have existed within the organization. That these affirmations of in-group solidarity and identity were sung is significant when we consider the role that songs played in the affirmation of a suffragist identity in the early twentieth century. Meant more for those who sang them at parades or rallies than for passers-by, in the 1910s suffragist songs set to popular tunes helped cement a commitment to the cause.<sup>175</sup> The prevalence of the type of singing that WEIU employees enjoyed may be related to a common suffragist stock: Mary H. Moran was noted as attending one of Boston's early suffrage parades; perhaps this was also the case for other NEK workers.<sup>176</sup>

On the whole, perhaps owing to these shared beliefs, whether among themselves or in documents meant for the Board of Government, Union employees demonstrated an attachment to their higher-ups that stemmed from their understanding as workers united by the common cause of women's rights. A few years after the “department vaudeville,” representatives of each of the Union's many departments would produce one document that encapsulated the tenets of their

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<sup>173</sup>WEIU records, “School Song,” *Union News Items*, c1911, 15-16. Box 1, folder 3. The “School Song” was sung to the tune of “Michael Roy,” which appeared in Lockwood Honoré's *Popular College Songs* (New York: The John Church Company, 1891), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044040540312>, and *Northwestern Songs*, edited by Albert Green and Carl M. Beecher (Dixon, IL: Rogers & Owen, 1909), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89100328509>. Both are anthologies of songs popular with male college students. However, given the song's themes and the Irish surnames of the named NEK workers—that year, a Mrs O'Leary was the director of the NEK—, we may surmise that it was not simply chosen for its familiarity.

<sup>174</sup>WEIU records, “Wellesley Toast,” *Union News Items*, June 8, 1911, 7. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>175</sup>Sheryl Hurner, “Discursive Identity Formation of Suffrage Women: Reframing the ‘Cult of True Womanhood’ Through Song,” *Western Journal of Communication* 70, no. 3 (2006): 234-260, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570310600843512>. For collections of suffrage songs, see Francie Wolff's songbook project, *Give the Ballot to the Mothers: Songs of the Suffragists* (Springfield, MO.: Denlinger's Publishers, 1998), and Danny O. Crew's *Suffragist Sheet Music* (Jefferson, NC.: McFarland, 2001). On the uses of songs in social movements, see Ron Eyer-man and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>176</sup>“Prominent in Suffrage Parade,” *Boston Journal*, May 2, 1914, 7.

distinctive occupational culture as paid employees of a women's rights nonprofit. This was the 1916 "Plans and Specifications for the New Building," a fascinating look at WEIU workers' conception of the ideal workplace as well as a testament to their relationship with the leadership of the organization. The "Plans and Specifications" were not conceived at an architect's office. They are a scrapbook that WEIU personnel presented to the president at the employees' 1916 Christmas party.<sup>177</sup>

Representatives from each department produced a unique document to add to the scrapbook, containing their hopes and desires for the new, larger, improved building that the Board of Government was then considering. The employees of the Law and Thrift Department poured them into a fake contract; the Lunch Rooms' personnel produced elaborate plans for a new and improved kitchen and even a "banquet hall," while the Appointment Bureau represented a typical workday in the style of a play—"At 8:51 promptly the curtain rises disclosing a spacious, light, and airy office."<sup>178</sup> Throughout the scrapbook, shared beliefs about the nature of paid work surface. To the workforce of the late 1910s, special training appeared essential to secure the higher wages that were central to their aspirations.<sup>179</sup> Contrary to many of the white-collar women of the turn of the century, they were open in desiring to work for status and money.<sup>180</sup> The WEIU's employees felt close enough to the management to issue mock demands and air complaints, albeit in the guise of jokes. Along with their Christmas greetings to the Union's president, the Salesmanship Department sent a poem titled "The Wail of Whatwewants."<sup>181</sup> In between clearly extravagant requests—for a roof garden, a "Victrola," "comfy" chairs or a private elevator—most WEIU women seemed to ask for a larger budget,

<sup>177</sup>Additional WEIU records, "The Wail of Whatwewants," *Plans and Specifications for the New Building*, 1916, n.p. 81-M237. Carton 11. Ellen Gruber Garvey has studied women's scrapbooks as a unique kind of documentary evidence. Part of her work focused on the scrapbooks made by middle-class reformers in a strategic effort to reinterpret press coverage of women's rights and other social movements. The scrapbook as an object spoke of domesticity, of the home parlor, which its contents connected to the public world of politics. Ellen Gruber Garvey, *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 172-206.

<sup>178</sup>Additional WEIU records, "Know All Men by These Presents"; "Building plan—Lunchrooms"; "Appointment Bureau," *Plans and Specifications for the New Building*, 1916, n.p. 81-M237. Carton 11.

<sup>179</sup>Additional WEIU records, "The Wail of Whatwewants," *Plans and Specifications for the New Building*, 1916, n.p. 81-M237. Carton 11.

<sup>180</sup>Fine, *Souls of the Skyscraper*, 155-156. The "young, independent and trained" women that Fine studied "clearly desired to advance beyond the gains they had recently made," and many were trying to better themselves by pursuing continuing education.

<sup>181</sup>Additional WEIU records, "The Wail of Whatwewants," *Plans and Specifications for the New Building*, 1916, n.p. 81-M237. Carton 11.

Figure 6.5: “Before” view of the Union, by the Library Committee. 1916).



Source: Additional WEIU records, “Before,” *Plans and Specifications for the New Building*, 1916, n.p. 81-M237. Carton 11.

more room, better heating and cooling systems, lockers and lavatories, as well as the supplies and equipment that they needed to perform their work. The Secretarial division put it most plainly: “We care not much for pomp and show / But real efficiency, you know / Ceiling that will deaden sound / No matter how hard typists pound, / New cabinets to hold our files, / Between the desks, tremendous aisles.”<sup>182</sup> To dramatize the difference between their present conditions and their hopes for the future, the librarians drew a before and after comparison which touched on much of the same themes (figures 6.5 and 6.6).

Their gripes about the lack of typewriters echoed those of other departments: a year earlier, both the Vocational Training and Social Work Departments had forwarded complaints about that very issue to the Executive Committee.<sup>183</sup> Class tensions bubble under the smoothly comic surface of the librarians’ drawings: the

<sup>182</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Secretarial,” *Plans and Specifications for the New Building*, 1916, n.p. 81-M237. Carton 11.

<sup>183</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Executive Committee* v. 27, no. 39, September 21, 1915.





Kitchen of the future” entreats the onlooker to “note [...] the Feminist Statue in the distance,” and the librarians’ ideal reading-room features prominent “Votes for women” and “Ballot for both” banners (figure 6.6).<sup>186</sup> The employees’ scrapbook, like other types of women’s scrapbooks, was a “documen[t] of self-construction,”<sup>187</sup> a testimony to their consciousness of themselves, their principles, and their hopes for the future as working women.

Overall, there is much continuity between the social occasions which shaped employees’ consciousness of themselves in the late 1900s and 1910s. After the First World War, the most elaborate events were still those that marked holidays. The annual meeting of the Employees’ Association was the most festive occasion of all, one at which costumes could be worn and games had, in contrast with the always formal though celebratory annual meeting of the WEIU itself. In 1920, the employees’ gathering took the form of a “Halowe’en Party” in the Union’s great hall, Perkins Hall, which was decked out in corn stalks and pumpkins for the occasion. Party-goers enjoyed seasonal treats of apples, cider, and doughnuts.<sup>188</sup> The Wednesday evening socials, by then, had been renamed, but still endured. They were called “At Home” nights and they brought together both WEIU members and workers. On a typical evening in February 1918, Old English children’s songs and Dutch folk songs were sung. There was a costumed dance, and light refreshments were had. At another, the same winter, the members of a local “Musical Club” supplied the entertainment.<sup>189</sup> The “home” that members and workers made together was the institution itself, the beloved “W, E, I and U” that had by then become a Bostonian institution.

### 6.3 Towards Professional Social Networks

In the 1900s and 1910s, the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union moved beyond offering a place for spirited conversation, comforting words, and insight into

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ists in Rush to Finish Parade Plans,” *Boston Journal*, May 1, 1914; “Fair Weather for Suffrage Parade,” *Boston Journal*, October 16, 1915.

<sup>186</sup>Additional WEIU records, “New England Kitchen of the Future,” *Plans and Specifications for the New Building*, n.p. 1916. 81-M237. Carton 11. This was an early adoption of the term “feminist”, as it first entered the language in the early 1910s. Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 13.

<sup>187</sup>Garvey, *Writing with Scissors*, 174.

<sup>188</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Notes and News of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Simmons College Review*, December 1920, 78. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

<sup>189</sup>Additional WEIU records, Eleanor Blackmur, Release February 9-10, February 9, 1918; “At Home” for members, newspaper clipping, 1918. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 145.

supporting oneself in the city. While it did supply its employees with opportunities for socializing on the job, the Union joined the ranks of a new kind of organization devoted not merely to connecting job-seekers to suitable positions, but to fostering career opportunities.

### 6.3.1 A Special Relationship: The weiu, Simmons & the Appointment Bureau

In the pages of the *Simmons College Review*, Simmons College students kept a close watch over the activities of the WEIU. The recurring feature “Notes and News of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union” for December 1920 reminded the student body at large that “[t]he Union extended to all Simmons College students a most cordial invitation to visit its departments, and to become acquainted with its many points of contact with the college.” The special relationship that united this women’s vocational college with the WEIU was perhaps the most salient expression of the latter’s commitment to nurturing college women’s professional networks.<sup>190</sup> Simmons College, like several well-known women’s colleges before it, was established by the will of one man, John Simmons. The college was incorporated in 1899 as “Simmons Female College,” an institution “in which instruction in such branches of art, science, and industry might be given as would best enable women to earn an independent livelihood.”<sup>191</sup> Simmons was a pioneering actor in the field of women’s education. Indeed, it did not follow the trend set by Bryn Mawr for other female institutions of higher education, which involved the move toward male standards of academic excellence, whose hallmarks were by the late 1890s the introduction of experimental science and the budding social sciences.<sup>192</sup> Rather, John Simmons’s will gave birth to a vocational school. Early programs included household economics, secretarial courses, library courses, and nursing;

<sup>190</sup>Additional WEIU records, “News Notes from the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Simmons College Review*, c1920. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

<sup>191</sup>Simmons College, *Catalogue 1902-1903* (Boston: Published by the college, 1903), 9, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015075920051>. John Simmons (1796-1870). He was of old New England ancestry, being descended from “Pilgrim father” Moses Simmons. From humble beginnings as a tailor, Simmons rose to commercial success, so much so that by the mid-1840s he was reportedly conducting “the largest wholesale clothing business in New England.” His biographer surmises that his experience putting out sewing work to farmers’ wives led him to establish the trust fund that would form the basis for Simmons College. Henry S. Rowe, *The Ancestry of John Simmons, Founder of Simmons College* (Cambridge: Privately printed at the Riverside Press, 1933), 61-62, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89066305152>.

<sup>192</sup>Horowitz, *Alma Mater*, 155.

both four-year courses and shorter technical tracks were offered to students in recognition of the variety of their needs, and for every subject teachers' courses coexisted with professional training.<sup>193</sup>

From the creation of Simmons College onwards, it shared both personnel and ideas with the WEIU, incorporating the Union's "School of Housekeeping" into its domestic science program in 1902. Simmons relied on the Union to provide the students with what we, today, would call internships: real-life situations in which they could test the theory that they had learned. Students in the "industrial needle arts" program had to spend time in the Union's Gown Shop, "learning to make outsizes in gowns, and gaining practice in order work," as a condition for graduation.<sup>194</sup> New courses were developed with this very idea in mind. Around 1919, when Simmons's Department of Household Economics added a new course in "institutional management"—the management of hotels, restaurants, hospitals and similar large public and commercial institutions—it was given "in conjunction with the Women's Educational and Industrial Union." The course, designed for graduates of a four-year program, included lectures on general lunch administration, systems of accounting "as applied to lunch room organization," problems of marketing and food preparation on a large scale, and practice work, which was to take place at the Union's lunch rooms and its central NEK plant.<sup>195</sup>

In the 1900s and 1910s, the WEIU and Simmons gradually formalized the terms of their cooperation, by which the college would provide theoretical instruction and the Union a first professional experience for "student workers." This was also a boon for the association, which did not have to pay long-term employees for some of its work, although many Simmons students were eventually hired on a permanent basis. Throughout that process, the professional experience they claimed enabled them to be credible fits for management positions. "Miss Marion French" (Simmons 1919) was hired as head of the salesroom in the Union's NEK after spending part of her last year of formal schooling engaged in "student work" there. Other Simmons graduates, moved on to other positions, such as teaching, like Miss Caroline Kneil, who obtained a position at the Packer Institute in Brooklyn, New York, after a year of student work at the WEIU.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>193</sup>Simmons College, *Catalogue 1902-1903*, 11-12, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015075920051>.

<sup>194</sup>Additional WEIU records, "Notes and News from the Women's Educational and Industrial Union," Faculty Notes and News, *Simmons College Review*, c1919-1920, 277. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

<sup>195</sup>Additional WEIU records, "Lunch Room Management," Faculty Notes and News, *Simmons College Review*, c1919-1920, 276. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

<sup>196</sup>Additional WEIU records, "News Notes from the Women's Educational and Industrial Union,"

Figure 6.7: Advertisement for the Business Agency. 1895.

**TO EMPLOYERS.**  
 Office assistants, stenographers, typewriters,  
 clerks or private secretaries supplied by the  
**BUSINESS AGENCY** of the Women's Educa-  
 tional and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston st.,  
 appointments made by letter or telephone, 75¢  
 Tremont, with experienced woman whose ref-  
 erences have been thoroughly examined before  
 registration.

Source: *Boston Sunday Herald*, June 2, 1895, 16.

The Union's employment bureau was reorganized a mere few years after Simmons's incorporation in 1905, a new "business office"—the Business Agency—was separated from the Domestic Reform League, which dealt in domestic servants, because there was now demand enough for a placement agency for "skilled and efficient" women keen on securing work "outside the ranks of shop, factory, or household labor."<sup>197</sup> The Business Agency took on a more definite form as the Appointment Bureau, the WEIU's special vocational services for college graduates, in 1910. Through the Appointment Bureau, the WEIU, the Association of Collegiate Alumnae and Simmons College closely worked together to develop vocational counseling for college students and investigate new fields into which women could move: "It is the aim of the Appointment Bureau not only to fill all positions for which applicants are sought, but to create new positions for women. This it does by keeping closely in touch with new fields of activity requiring women's services," an early promotional leaflet clarified.<sup>198</sup> To that end, the Bureau launched investigations into various fields open to trained women. In 1920, field agent Miss Alice O'Meara visited paper, silk, cotton and woolen mills and industrial laboratories in the Connecticut Valley in order to find openings for women chemists specializing in industrial chemistry.<sup>199</sup>

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*Simmons College Review*, 22-23, c1920. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146. Packer Collegiate Institute was a women's institution of higher education founded in 1953 after the Brooklyn Female Academy burned down. It was founded by Mrs. William S. Packer and named after her husband, one of the first Board of Trustees of that latter institution. Margaret E. Winslow, ed., *Sketch of the Life, Character and Work of Alonzo Crittenden, A.M., Ph. D., Late President of the Packer Collegiate Institute* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1885), 73-74, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t7mp5ns27>.

<sup>197</sup>Additional WEIU records, Chronology of WEIU work, in *Appointment Bureau: Printing Samples*, undated. 81-M237. Carton 9.

<sup>198</sup>Additional WEIU records, "The Appointment Bureau," January 1913, in *Appointment Bureau: Printing Samples*, 81-M237. Carton 9.

<sup>199</sup>Additional WEIU records, "News Notes from the Women's Educational and Industrial Union,"

Initially, the conference format was the preferred mode of disseminating information about women's vocations. At these lectures, speakers shared their professional experiences with the audience. One such series of afternoon "talks on vocations for women" opened on November 7, 1913. For the organizers, the special value of their take on the vocational conference lay precisely in the speakers' personal acquaintance with their subject matters: "From the standpoint of a woman's actual experience, the speaker [would] explain the special difficulties and special opportunities of the profession or business which [was] hers." The lectures that made up the 1913 course variously dealt with journalism and publishing house work, agriculture, architecture, secretarial work, "business," medicine and nursing, and applied science. That list was curated to touch up subjects "on which general knowledge [was] somewhat indistinct or ones on which enthusiastic applicants for work [had] asked to be more pertinently informed."<sup>200</sup> Vocational conference "such as these" were being held at large state universities like "those of California and Wisconsin," but the Union prided itself on offering multiple, specialized lectures, as compared to their one-day medleys.<sup>201</sup> In addition, for those who were not able to attend the lectures, the WEIU edited both a large compendium of paid occupations and a series of short vocational bulletins detailing the educational requirements, expected pay ranges, and working conditions of a dozen "vocations for women."<sup>202</sup> Three years later, in 1916, the term "vocation" was dropped in favor of the phrase "professional opportunities," and institutional management dominated that year's round of conferences. Hospital dietitian E. Grace McCullough from Peter Bent Brigham Hospital, Nancy Flagg of the Barnacle tea room, and interior decorator Mabel Harlow of the eponymous firm responded to the Union's invitation to lecture and share informal discussion time with the audience.<sup>203</sup> Over the course of the 1910s, the WEIU refined the methods and aim of the Appointment Bureau. In 1918, the Union's executive secretary stated, in a press release sent to the editor of the Boston Herald, that "[m]uch work [was] done with college girls, the recent

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*Simmons College Review*, 22-23, c1920-1921. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

<sup>200</sup> Additional WEIU records, [14]. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 151.

<sup>201</sup> Additional WEIU records, [16]. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 151.

<sup>202</sup> Agnes Perkins, ed., *Vocations for the Trained Woman: Opportunities Other Than Teaching* (Boston: Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1910), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044010292381>. *Vocations for the Trained Woman* was the first volume in the WEIU's "Studies in Economic Relations of Women" series. For copies of bulletins from the "Vocation series," see Additional WEIU records, *Appointment Bureau: Printing Samples*. 81-M237. Carton 9. They include "Probation Work" (Bulletin no. 1, March 1911), "Advertising" (Bulletin no. 2, March, 1911), "Home School and Visiting" (Bulletin no. 3, March 1911) and "Settlement Work" (Bulletin no. 14, April 1912).

<sup>203</sup> Additional WEIU records, "Professional Opportunities for Women," 1916, in *Appointment Bureau: Printing Samples*, 81-M237. Carton 9.

graduates or those about to graduate. Efforts [were] being made to induce them to take apprentice jobs in banks and industrial concerns leading later to executive positions.” The Bureau also encouraged young women to apply to civil service positions by forwarding them notices of upcoming examinations.<sup>204</sup>

Many of the Union’s workers were professionals themselves, like Dr. Angela Bassett, the Union Benefit physician, or Sybil H. Holmes, the director of the Law and Thrift Department, a lawyer and the president of the Massachusetts Women Lawyers’ Association. They dedicated time and effort to keeping a finger on the pulse of their professional networks. Mary H. Moran was the president of the local Business Women’s Club.<sup>205</sup> Lucile Eaves, the director of the WEIU’s Research Department, regularly attended the meetings of the American Economic Association (1885), the American Sociological Society (1906), the American Statistical Association (1839), the American Association for Labor Legislation (1906), and the newly formed American Association of University Professors (1915), all organizations founded by male businessmen and academics.<sup>206</sup> She was also “a member of important committees in two of these associations” and the sociological studies designed by her department were expected to line up with the work of these societies.<sup>207</sup> In the 1910s, the Research Department authored several book-length studies about women’s work in Massachusetts and the impact of publicly funded vocational and technical education, to determine whether the new system turned out women who were “efficient producer[s].” The author of *Industrial Experience*

<sup>204</sup>Additional WEIU records, Enclosure to letter to F. L. Bullard, January 15, 1918, 1. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 145.

<sup>205</sup>“Prominent in Suffrage Parade,” *Boston Journal*, May 2, 1914. The Business Women’s Club had been founded two years earlier, in 1912; its objects were both to advance women’s interests in the business world and to help reform and improve their working conditions. “An Auspicious Debut,” *Boston Journal*, January 20, 1912.

<sup>206</sup>Apart from the American Statistical Association, which its founding date of 1839 made the second oldest professional organization in the United States, these were a recent outgrowth of the still developing modern disciplines of sociology and economics. The active role that Lucile Eaves played in these groups is all the more remarkable that early women economists and sociologists faced barriers to entry and to participation. Ann Mari May and Robert W. Dimand, “Women in the Early Years of the American Economic Association: A Membership beyond the Professoriate Per Se,” *History of Political Economy* 51, no. 4 (2019): 671-702. <https://doi.org/10.1215/00182702-7685185>; Mary Jo Deegan, “Early Women Sociologists and the American Sociological Society: The Patterns of Exclusion and Participation,” *American Sociologist* 6, no. 1 (1981): 14-24; Robert L. Mason and John D. McKenzie Jr., “A Brief History of the American Statistical Association, 1900-2014,” *American Statistician* 69, no. 2 (May 2015): 68-78; John Dennis Chasse, “The American Association for Labor Legislation: An Episode in Institutional Policy Analysis,” *Journal of Economic Issues* 25, no. 3 (1991): 799-828, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00213624.1991.11505202>; Hans-Joerg Tiede, *University Reform: The Founding of the American Association of University Professors* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015).

<sup>207</sup>Additional WEIU records, Faculty Notes and News. *Simmons College Review*, c1920 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

of Trade School Girls in Massachusetts (1918) concluded that only one third of the young workers she surveyed put their training to commercial use. Further, she conclusively showed that the branches that had traditionally offered the most promising opportunities to women—dressmaking and millinery—were no longer the best avenues to economic independence. Rather, the Union’s policy of claiming new fields of activity for women was right on the money: “The future of trade training is here shown to be bound up with a wider selection of trades,” she wrote.<sup>208</sup> These trades, however, more often concerned women with at least a grammar school and often a college education. 1920 saw the publication of *Professional Women Workers*, an authoritative volume written by Elizabeth Kemper Adams, a Vassar alumna with graduate training from the University of Chicago and nine years teaching experience at Smith College.<sup>209</sup>

Conferences and studies were the most conventional arms of an active strategy to make more occupations open to women. To graduates, the Union sent out targeted membership drives, asking them if they knew “[w]hat the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union [was] doing for college women.” Part of the answer to that question was putting on vocational conferences in women’s colleges: between October and March 1914, more than 1,200 undergraduates attended such events at Mount Holyoke, Smith College, Simmons College, and Wellesley, while 300 attended talks held at the WEIU’s headquarters.<sup>210</sup> To local employers, the Union sent both a field secretary—tasked with “bring[ing] the work of the Bureau into close touch with the needs of employers”<sup>211</sup>—as well as promotional leaflets and circulars, which relentlessly asked the question—did they need trained women? “Do you need a secretary, stenographer, bookkeeper, or a filing clerk, office assistant, office manager—we have the right person for you,” they proclaimed to some in 1917.<sup>212</sup> They would also ask them: “Do you know of openings where women trained in the following lines are needed: accounting, advertising, agriculture, arts and crafts, bacteriology, chemistry, dietetics, employment management, journalism, law, library work, literary work, lunchroom management, medicine, nursing,

<sup>208</sup> Additional WEIU records, Emilie J. Hutchinson, “Industrial Experience of Trade School Girls in Massachusetts,” *Political Science Quarterly*, c1918? 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 145.

<sup>209</sup> Additional WEIU records, “News Notes from the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” Faculty Notes and News, *Simmons College Review*, January 1920, 67-68. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

<sup>210</sup> Additional WEIU records, “What the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union Is Doing for College Women,” c1914-1915. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 142.

<sup>211</sup> Additional WEIU records, Ethel M. Johnson, “The Business Man and the Skilled Employee,” 2, c1913. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 151.

<sup>212</sup> Additional WEIU records, “Do You Know...,” undated, c1917, in *Appointment Bureau: Printing Samples*, undated. 81-M237. Carton 9.



personnel work, proof-reading, publicity, psychology, research work, science, social work, special teaching, translation?”<sup>213</sup> If that was the case, employers were urged to phone their tips directly to the Union’s Back Bay line. In the pages of the *Boston Herald*, the WEIU published “employment advertisements” like those of August 1904. Those of the Business Agency referred to “attendants [...] to train in a large hospital near Boston,” an “experienced trimmer [...] to work with an established milliner,” or a “financial secretary for a position of responsibility and trust in Boston,” while the ads for the Domestic Reform League were for more straightforward service positions as houseworker, “general girl” or laundress. There was an interesting overlap when employers sought women able to complete tasks of a domestic nature, but in a supervisory position: the same day, the Business Agency advertised a position for a “practical housekeeper [...] to take charge of a lunch room in connection with a school in the city,” while someone else offered a place as a “managing cook” for the employees’ lunch room of an “out-of-town manufacturing firm.”<sup>214</sup> As home economics reformers reconstructed care work into a curriculum, so was the old distinction between domestic work and the “higher branches” of employment ever so slightly blurred. Training could confer managerial authority, which itself tenuously promised to remove the stigma of service from cooking.

Starting in 1910, with the reorganization of the Business Agency into the Appointment Bureau, the association perfected a system according to which applicants could be sorted according both to their life circumstances and to their training, which by then had been enshrined as the chief criteria determining their employability on different job markets. Historian Cristina Groeger linked the Progressive impulse to reform and expand schooling with the advent of the interpretative framework of “human capital,” according to which individual earnings are determined by the skill level attained through formal schooling and work experience.<sup>215</sup> WEIU librarian Ethel M. Johnson voiced this idea when she wrote that the

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<sup>213</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Do You Know...,” undated, c1917, in *Appointment Bureau: Printing Samples*, undated. 81-M237. Carton 9.

<sup>214</sup>“Employment Advertisements—Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Boston Herald*, August 27, 1904, 12.

<sup>215</sup>Cristina Groeger, *The Education Trap: Schools and the Remaking of Inequality in Boston* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2021). The rationales that lay behind the differentiation of the Union’s employment bureaus were very much in line with prevalent attitudes at the time. Between 1880 and 1930, an unstable coalition of education reformers managed to remake the Boston school system around the idea that education was a panacea for various social ills ranging from unemployment to crime—which were to be solved through individualized policy solutions, namely sorting the youth through specialized educational pathways.

chief problem facing the “business man” was that of finding skilled employees.<sup>216</sup> In the early 1920s, the WEIU ran three “specialized placement bureaus.” One offered placement to “trained or professional women” and was the only to charge fees, because it was assumed that professionals could afford to pay for these services. The “Bureau for Handicapped Women” registered “physically handicapped women” referred by local hospitals and social agencies as well as older women whose only “handicap” was their age or lack of skill. Finally, the Emergency Employment Bureau was aimed at women whose dependents precluded their being placed as live-in domestic help or in full-time positions.<sup>217</sup> On a national scale, the WEIU spearheaded efforts to institutionalize vocational counseling and placement. It was a founding member of the National Committee of the Bureaus of Occupations for Trained Women, a national body with local branches and a journal. War needs compelled the federal government to absorb several of them, but there were enough for a national conference to be called in December 1917.<sup>218</sup> The event was called specifically to support “a movement for a national-wide endowed professional employment bureau for women,” a measure which received support from the president of Radcliffe College.<sup>219</sup>

Both the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union and Simmons College shared ideas about women’s paid work. To celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Appointment Bureau, the WEIU gave a glamorous conference dinner in 1921. Looking back on a decade of growth, they also expectantly considered the future. Appropriately, the night’s theme was “The Future of Women in Industry.” In attendance were representatives from the Union, Simmons College, local employment bureaus, and the Employment Managers’ Association. Speakers stressed the “continuous tradition of mutual contribution and intimate cooperation that [had] grown up naturally out of the efforts of the Union and of the College in the pursuit of their kindred ideals.”<sup>220</sup> What were they? They essentially boiled down to one conception of society as “an aggregation of individual plus their respective employments.” From the point of the view of the Appointment Bureau’s workers,

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<sup>216</sup>Additional WEIU records, Ethel M. Johnson, “The Business Man and the Skilled Employee,” 1, c1913. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 151.

<sup>217</sup>Additional WEIU records, “Three Placement Bureaus,” undated, c1929-1930. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 155.

<sup>218</sup>Additional WEIU records, “The National Committee of the Bureaus of Occupations for Trained Women,” in *Appointment Bureau: Printing Samples*, 81-M237. Carton 9.

<sup>219</sup>Additional WEIU records, “The Future of Women in Industry,” *Simmons College Review*, c1920 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

<sup>220</sup>Additional WEIU records, “The Future of Women in Industry,” *Simmons College Review*, c1920 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

Figure 6.8: At the Appointment Bureau. Between 1920 and 1930.



Harvard University, Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, ss\_21594580

Source: Harvard Digital Collections, [https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital\\_collections/8001528330\\_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356610](https://id.lib.harvard.edu/digital_collections/8001528330_URN-3:RAD.SCHL:34356610).

individuals—whether they were men or women—could not be apprehended separately from what they contributed to modern society. The organizers of employment bureaus saw themselves as possessing the weighty responsibility of matching people and the employment opportunities that suited them the most—they were the “skillful chemist[s]” ensuring that the “economic atoms” that made up the “economic molecule” formed the correct formation. A sound economic system rested on an aggregate of such “economic molecules.” Miss Laura Drake Gill, who had overseen the transition from the Business Agency to the Appointment Bureau, concluded that its aim was “to make self-expression and self-support coincide, and to secure for all something to do that should express themselves beautifully.” Long gone were the days when women’s work was only discussed in terms of a dreaded but necessary expediency. The goal was now for them to take their place as economically productive members of society, whose right to choose the occupation that was best for them guaranteed—for the representative of the Employment Managers’ Association—the necessary harmony of relations between employer and employee.<sup>221</sup>

<sup>221</sup>Additional WEIU records, “The Future of Women in Industry,” *Simmons College Review*, c1920 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

### 6.3.2 Just the Start: Ethel M. Johnson's Female Professional Networks

The career of WEIU librarian Ethel McLean Johnson exemplifies the way some women were able to benefit from the connections forged at the Union. In the 1910s, the Union proved a first professional experience to many college graduates with an appetite for secretarial and social work as well as institutional management. Ethel McLean Johnson was born in 1882 to precariously middle-class parents with an interest in literature and an attachment to social justice. Her father, James Warren Johnson (1840-1922?), had been a Maine farmer when he enlisted in the Union army in 1862, but was eventually discharged with a certificate of disability.<sup>222</sup> At various times, he worked as a teacher and as a jeweler, and was a member of the local Odd Fellows chapter.<sup>223</sup> On her mother's side, Ethel M. Johnson's grandfather was a skilled craftsman, and his wife the poor relative of an affluent family; her mother approved of her daughter's literary ambitions.<sup>224</sup> Johnson grew up in Brownfield, Maine and attended nearby Parsons Seminary, a college preparatory course for young women. Like many young women with an education, she went on to a teachers' school, the Western State Normal School in Kansas, which she left after two semesters in order to start teaching. Whether she disliked teaching, had never cared for it, or envisioned other, better career prospects is unknown, but after six years of teaching in various schools in Maine and New Hampshire, she went back for an education at Emerson College of Oratory, where she supported herself by working as a college librarian, tutoring other students, writing articles, and doing some typewriting. This first experience as a librarian may have inspired her to move to Boston, where she graduated with a degree in library science in 1910.<sup>225</sup> Straight out of college, she was hired by the Women's Educational and Industrial Union to organize a reference library on women's social and economic relations. She would later recall with dismay that, as the reference library was first housed in the former quarters of the DRL—which she derisively termed “a glorified employment bureau for domestic service”—, she had to continuously ex-

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<sup>222</sup>Additional papers of Ethel McLean Johnson, “Army of the United States,” discharge certificate. Carton 1, folder 8.

<sup>223</sup>Additional papers of Ethel McLean Johnson, newspaper clipping, “Maine Girl A Voice Specialist,” May 10, 1913. Carton 1, folder 10. Additional papers of Ethel McLean Johnson, “J.W. Johnson, Jeweler”; certification from the “Independent Order of Odd Fellows.” Carton 1, folder 8.

<sup>224</sup>Additional papers of Ethel McLean Johnson, Letter from “Flora” to “Mary,” May 23 [undated]. Carton 1, folder 8. Additional papers of Ethel McLean Johnson, Letter from Marion C. Johnson to Ethel McLean Johnson, November 12 [1919?]. Carton 1, folder 12.

<sup>225</sup>Additional papers of Ethel McLean Johnson, “Outline of Training and Experience,” September 1943. Carton 1, folder 3.

plain to “ladies from the ‘Back Bay’” and “maids from the provinces” that she was a librarian, not a placement officer. Friends mentioned vague circumstances which would have made it difficult for her to remain at the WEIU,<sup>226</sup> but, nonetheless, looking back on her early career, she assured a vocational counselor from her alma mater that “[t]he experience at the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union was a valuable one in many ways.”<sup>227</sup> There, she received personal encouragement to pursue further studies, and her colleagues at the WEIU were able to grease the wheels of professional opportunity. Johnson, while employed full time as a librarian, completed a literature degree from Boston University. At the same time, she was teaching part-time in Boston University’s “Special course in library administration.”<sup>228</sup> The Union position also placed her in the orbit of Mary Morton Kehew, whose society and political contacts benefited any and all women who came to her notice. In Johnson’s words, “Mrs. Kehew, because of [Johnson’s] interest in labor matters, let [her] have charge of the Union’s legislative work, which included representing the Union at hearings on measures of interest at the State House.” This work would introduce her to officials of the State Board of Labor and the Minimum Wage Commission, which resulted in her appointment as executive secretary of the Massachusetts Minimum Wage Commission in 1918. Following internal restructuring, the work of the commission was transferred to the newly created Department of Labor and Industries in 1919, and she was appointed one of five commissioners, “the woman member of the Board.” This came as a surprise to her, for she had never campaigned for it—her candidacy had been pushed by the “Employers’ Association,”<sup>229</sup> under the severely mistaken belief that she would prove “harmless” to the interests of manufacturers.<sup>230</sup>

Ethel McLean Johnson was in fact a proponent of protective labor legislation, as her record at the Massachusetts Department of Labor and Industries would

<sup>226</sup>Additional papers of Ethel McLean Johnson, Letter to Miss Edythe Davenport, May 4, 1946. Carton 1, folder 3.

<sup>227</sup>Additional papers of Ethel McLean Johnson, Letter to Miss Edythe Davenport, May 4, 1946. Carton 1, folder 3.

<sup>228</sup>Boston University, *Special Course in Library Administration*, September 1917 (Boston, c1917), 3, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uiug.30112077499876>.

<sup>229</sup>It is unclear to which group Johnson was referring in her letter. Clarence Bonnett’s early volume on what he calls the “association movement” bears no mention of a Massachusetts “Employers’ Association.” Johnson may have been referring to the Associated Industries of Massachusetts or to national bodies like the National Association of Manufacturers, the National Civic Federation, or the National Industrial Council. In any case, we may safely infer that she was talking about an organized pressure group of manufacturers and industrialists, of the kind which flourished between 1885 and 1920. Clarence E. Bonnett, *Employers’ Associations in the United States: A Study of Typical Associations* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1922), 13-20.

<sup>230</sup>Additional papers of Ethel McLean Johnson, Letter to Miss Edythe Davenport, May 4, 1946, 1-3. Carton 1, folder 3.

prove.<sup>231</sup> She was also an avowed suffragist, who briefly occupied the position of secretary of the Congressional Committee of the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association, for which she provided legislative references.<sup>232</sup> She marched in suffrage parades and published articles deriding anti-suffrage arguments.<sup>233</sup> Importantly, Johnson made no clear distinction between her commitments to broadening women's economic and political opportunities. In "Mrs. Dooley on Anti-Suffragism"—it is likely that Johnson was the creator of the "Dooley" character that appeared in the *Union News Items*—, she mocked the men who declared women too physically delicate to vote, but not to wash and cook for a family of ten while milking a few cows on the side. She heaped scorn on those who expected women to give up "votes an' laws an' wages" for a few courtesies.<sup>234</sup> On a very basic level, her own personal experience had taught her that being a woman in the world of publishing could cost her professional opportunities. Starting in 1907, she started submitting articles and stories to magazines in order to supplement her income. Eventually, because she needed the money, she would get into the habit of introducing herself under a male name, "Mr. E. M. Johnson, esquire," especially when she wrote to more prestigious publications or when her essays dealt with

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<sup>231</sup> Additional papers of Ethel McLean Johnson, Publications (partial list), May 1926. Carton 1, folder 3.

<sup>232</sup> Additional papers of Ethel McLean Johnson, "Outline of Training and Experience," September 1943. Carton 1, folder 3. The Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association was established by Lucy Stone, Julia Ward Howe and other prominent Massachusetts suffragists in January 1870, a year after the formation of the American Woman Suffrage Association by many of the same. Its goals, aims, and methods were identical to those of the national organization. "Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Convention," *Woman's Journal* 1, no. 5 (February 5, 1870), 33; Sharon Hartman Strom, "Leadership and Tactics in the American Woman Suffrage Movement: A New Perspective from Massachusetts," *Journal of American History* 62, no. 2 (September 1975): 296-315. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1903256>

<sup>233</sup> Addition WEIU records, *Minutes of the Executive Committee* v. 27, no. 39, September 21, 1915, 21. 81-M237. Carton 3. Ethel McLean Johnson, "Mrs. Dooley on Anti-Suffragism," *Woman's Journal* 44, no. 37 (September 13, 1913), 290. The *Woman's Journal* (1870-1917) was one of the main periodicals of the suffragist movement. Based in Boston and founded by the leaders of the American Woman Suffrage Association, it published news about the progress of the suffrage campaign around the country and, more generally, women's efforts to secure expanded property rights for wives, access to the professions, and equal pay. Some histories of the *Woman's Journal*, highlighting its role in the ecology of the American suffragist press, include Susan Schultz Huxman, "The Woman's Journal, 1870-1890: The Torchbearer for Suffrage," in *A Voice of Their Own: The Woman Suffrage Press, 1840-1910*, ed. Martha M. Solomon (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991), 87-109; E. Claire Jerry, "The Role of Newspapers in the Nineteenth-Century Woman's Movement," in *A Voice of Their Own*, 17-29, and Katharine Rodier, "Lucy Stone and The Woman's Journal," in *Blue Pencils and Hidden Hands: Women Editing Periodicals, 1830-1910*, ed. Sharon M. Harris and Ellen Gruber Garvey (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2004), 99-122.

<sup>234</sup> Johnson, "Mrs. Dooley on Anti-Suffragism."

comic or satirical material.<sup>235</sup>

Throughout her political career, which included appointed positions at the California State Unemployment Commission, at the New Hampshire State Government and eventually at the United States Branch of the International Labor Office, of which she became director in 1941, she received the support of her older sister. Marion C. Johnson was also a single woman pursuing an unusual occupation for the time, that of speech therapist.<sup>236</sup> The sisters were close: Marion encouraged Ethel to “send more [pieces] to the same editor and get [her] name known.”<sup>237</sup> From her childhood to the eight years she spent as a librarian for the WEIU, Ethel M. Johnson moved within supportive female environments. While in the mid-1910s, when she first began to consider pursuing a political career, women were scarce on Massachusetts bodies and little resources existed for them,<sup>238</sup> in the 1930s and 1940s, Johnson would be able to female collegiate and professional associations, bodies which institutionalized the kind of mentoring she received from Mary Morton Kehew. In at least 1934-1935, she was a registered member of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs (NFBPWC, organized in 1919).<sup>239</sup> That year, the organization numbered 55,000 members registered in 1,350 clubs across the United States.<sup>240</sup> While many of the networks that bound career women in the first decades of the twentieth century were informal webs of personal acquaintances, often those of a shared college education—like those described by Robyn Muncy in her investigation of the genesis of the Children’s Bureau<sup>241</sup>—over time explicitly named and designed professional journals and organizations sought to institutionalize them for the benefit of career women, moving away from justifying women’s place in the workforce and towards

<sup>235</sup>See for example: Additional papers of Ethel McLean Johnson, Letter from the Atlantic Monthly to E. McLean Johnson, esquire,” April 11, 1918. Carton 4, folder 80.

<sup>236</sup>Additional records of Ethel McLean Johnson, “Maine Girl a Voice Specialist,” May 10, 1913, n.p. Carton 1, folder 10.

<sup>237</sup>Additional records of Ethel McLean Johnson, Letter from Marion C. Johnson to Ethel McLean Johnson, November 12, 1919. Carton 1, folder 12.

<sup>238</sup>In 1914, for instance, Mabel Gillespie was reported to be “the only woman on the Minimum Wage Board.” “Would Increase Scope of Wage Commission,” *Boston Journal*, May 21, 1914, 7.

<sup>239</sup>The National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs was formed in 1919. This national body connected local clubs of working women as teachers, typists, personnel managers, entrepreneurs, and other white-collar occupations. Their representatives banded together in order to lobby national politicians, develop career development programs, and prepare women for public office. Angel Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women: A History of Women and Business in the United States* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1998), 91.

<sup>240</sup>Additional papers of Ethel McLean Johnson, Membership card for the “National Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs,” c1934. Carton 1, folder 3.

<sup>241</sup>Robyn Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform, 1890-1935* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

improving women's vocational opportunities and bringing about greater solidarity between business women.<sup>242</sup> These groups were also deeply intertwined with women's movements in the largest sense of the word: the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs was part of "the loose coalitions of labor and feminist leaders" who advocated for more protective labor legislation.<sup>243</sup>

Sorosis, the first women's professional network, was also one of the first women's clubs—it vied for the title with Boston's NEWC, both coming into existence in 1868. At the time, both were considered literary clubs, but where the NEWC was reserved for spirited academic discussion and essay-reading, Sorosis attracted a brilliant pageant of journalists, writers, and artists—self-supporting women who were pursuing careers in the publishing and news industries. However, it was not strictly a professional society: female physicians and lawyers also joined.<sup>244</sup> Sorosis, whose very name contained the idea of "sorority," was founded by journalist Jane Cunningham Croly (1829-1901), better known then as "Jennie June," after she was refused admission to a social event organized by the men's Press Club of New York.<sup>245</sup> Because writing, especially for women's magazines like *Godey's Lady's Book* (1830), the *Woman's Home Companion* (1873) and the *Ladies Home Journal* (1883), became one of the few intellectual occupations deemed acceptable for women, women's earliest professional networks were those of female journalists.<sup>246</sup> Seventeen years after the creation of Sorosis, editor Marion A. McBride, known for her work for the *Boston Post*, came up with the idea of the National Woman's Press Association (NWPA). She was inspired to do so

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<sup>242</sup>Candace A. Kane, *American Business Women, 1890-1930: Creating an Identity*, PhD thesis, University of New Hampshire, 1997, 142.

<sup>243</sup>Kwolek-Folland, *Incorporating Women*, 140-141. The lines of fracture were, however, far from clear: on the issue of wage equality, the NFBPWC aligned with Alice Paul's National Woman's Party, which opposed protective labor legislation for women.

<sup>244</sup>Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meiers Publishers, 1980), 22.

<sup>245</sup>Blair, *Clubwoman as Feminist*, 15-31.

<sup>246</sup>For a description of women's entry into the world of journalism and commercial fiction-writing, see Susan Coultrap-McQuin, *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth-Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990). Sarah Josepha Hale's *Godey's Lady's Book* was the earliest popular magazine aimed at women. From 1830 to its decline in the 1860s, it commanded the attention of a mass readership of middle-class housewives, to whom it offered sentimental fiction, fashion plates, and recipes. Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 229. The 1870s and 1880s saw an expansion of the market for women's popular magazines and the creation of successors to *Godey's*, including *The Woman's Home Companion* and the *Ladies' Home Journal*. The latter proved the more influential. The creation of editor Edward A. Bok, it exerted a significant influence on the newspaper world, providing an inspiration for Joseph Pulitzer's "woman's department" feature in the 1890s. Jacquelyn Masur McElhaney, *Pauline Periwinkle and Progressive Reform in Dallas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1998), 16.



by the rising number of women who joined the staff of regional and even national newspapers, initially for “women’s” or club columns, and the continuing hostility that they would face in the newspaper business into the 1890s.<sup>247</sup> In 1885, then, six leading Boston journalists formed the New England Woman’s Press Association (NEWPA). It was in the office of WEIU member Sallie Joy White, “pioneer newspaper woman of New England,” that the meeting was held.<sup>248</sup> To the association’s first historian, herself a member, to the NEWPA belonged “the honor of being the first in the Bay State organized and carried on by a distinctive class of women workers.”<sup>249</sup> In 1895, the New England Woman’s Press Association was deemed by one Harper’s Bazaar contributor “one of the most active and promising clubs in and around Boston,” boasting a membership of 160 women “actively engaged in newspaper work.”<sup>250</sup> In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, then, journalists did much to further an acceptance of the idea that it was socially acceptable for a woman to want to become economically self-sufficient, even in the conservative south. Exceptional individuals moving in both informal and formal female support networks, like the pen-named “Jennie June,” “Pauline Periwinkle,” or Sallie Joy White worked to remove the stigma attached to pursuing a career in journalism.<sup>251</sup>

Candace Kane would dispute the primacy of the NWPA, for she identifies the National Association of Women Stenographers (NEWPA) as the “the first nationwide business women’s association.” Founded in Chicago in 1882, the NEWPA attempted to build itself into an alternative to trade unions by fostering more harmonious relationships with employers. Improving women’s career options, notably by improving the public perception of women stenographers, was one of their chief goals. After heated debates at the NEWPA’s national convention in 1899, it was decided to change the organization’s name into that of the National Association of Business Women, later also known as the Business Woman’s Club.<sup>252</sup> Subsequent decades and especially the 1910s and the early 1920s saw a boom in the quantity and variety of resources that college-educated professionals could tap into the pursuit of their life’s work, from the *Woman Lawyers’ Journal* (1911) and the *Business*

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<sup>247</sup>Karen Roggenkamp, *Sympathy, Madness, and Crime: How Four Nineteenth-Century Women Made the Newspaper Women’s Business* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2016), 14-15.

<sup>248</sup>Myra B. Lord, *History of the New England Woman’s Press Association, 1885-1931* (Newton, MA.: The Graphic Press, 1932), 8-10, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89098887490>.

<sup>249</sup>Lord, *History of the New England Woman’s Press Association*, 22.

<sup>250</sup>“Personal,” *Harper’s Bazaar* 28, no. 7 (February 16, 1895), 131.

<sup>251</sup>McElhaney, *Pauline Periwinkle*, 9-11.

<sup>252</sup>Kane, *American Business Women*, 85-88.

*Woman's Journal* (1914) to the National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs (1919).<sup>253</sup> The work of the WEIU, through its Appointment Bureau and vocational services, connected it with those of these organizations. Though the Union's commitment to women's economic independence did not waver, the forms that it took followed larger trends, responding to developments in women's economic prospects, just as it actively contributed to shaping them. Explicitly socializing as career-oriented women, the Union's employees created open spaces for the discussion of women's place on the job market.

As we will see in the next chapter, it was not only in Boston but also in other states and even in other countries that the "Women's Union" offered socialization and mutual help in the transitional period between the emergence of the first occupation-based professional network and the heyday of the Business Women's Association.

## Conclusion

In 1894, only five years after Abby Morton Diaz's comments about her hopes for the future of the organization, the WEIU did come around to organizing the Thanksgiving dinner that, to her, symbolized the warmth of newly-established connections. Two days before Thanksgiving Day, the Union's lunch room invited "friends and patrons" to partake in the holiday meal for twenty-five cents. More than five hundred came.<sup>254</sup> This was not exactly what the Union's founders had in mind—while the lunch room was an addition to the life of the neighborhood, the WEIU of the mid-1890s treated the quintessential New England homecoming more like a commercial opportunity, in a way that both mirrored and foreshadowed developments in the forms that socializing would take for WEIU members and workers. The "Union" in the early "Women's Educational and Industrial Union" was more than a placeholder. It was the heartfelt expression of its founders' attempt to create a surrogate household for young women "adrift" in the city, a social center for isolated women and an entry point for them into the networks of

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<sup>253</sup> *Woman Lawyers' Journal* 1, 1911, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.c3438570>; Kenneth B. Hoyt, *The National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs and Career Education* (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 1978), 1-2, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31210024949263>. For an analysis of the work of that last organization, see Kane, *Amerian Business Women*, 129-148.

<sup>254</sup> WEIU, 1894 Report, 14.

Boston's progressive femininity.<sup>255</sup> Following a logic that was similar to that of Jane Croly, the founder of Sorosis, the first generation of WEIU women reasoned that they could bring together their fellow Bostonians only if they took pains to represent to them that women shared the same very basic needs and wants when they were separated from their families and friends.<sup>256</sup> Appealing to a purported commonality of experience—though a hypothetical one—the women of the WEIU initially tried to create a female counterpart to the YMCA—to replicate kin-based sociability. In the early years, a small group of volunteers was involved in many of the Union's committees; over time, as the membership rose into the hundreds and even thousands, the association became a much more fragmented body. Pockets of sociability, like the mothers' clubs mentioned in chapter 1, tended to emerge as women sought out peers to socialize with. As we will see in chapter 7, the 1890s saw an explosion in the number of very specialized groups that found a home in the WEIU's 264 Boylston Street building. Exclusive "coteries," whist parties, the Junior Workers' Club, and others were first and foremost affinity-based gatherings. While the WEIU's Wednesday evening entertainments were open to all and were at least moderately successful throughout the decades, there is no evidence that they attracted regulars. Reports and indirect testimonies from the 1880s indicate that the WEIU did provide spaces for young women to meet peers, eat, read, and be entertained, and that they were grateful for it—but it is hard to assess to what extent the women present at the Wednesday evening socials and Sunday religious services came to form a true community of members. On the contrary, laments from the leadership would suggest that, by the 1890s, there was a sense that more members did not necessarily translate to more or tighter bonds.

During that decade, there was a displacement in the locus of the Union's sociability in the context of the growth of the Union's paid workforce. From its beginnings, the association had provided emotional support for two different groups, the leadership and the larger group of volunteers working on making founder Harriet Clisby's vision into a reality. The WEIU's paid workforce expanded in the 1890s as it drew both on working-class women for menial work and on alumnae from nearby women's colleges to perform the typewriting, cataloging, financial planning and social research investigations that the "business turn" of 1900-1905 required. As the links between the leadership and the base distended, so did the

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<sup>255</sup>The WEIU's first headquarters, 4 Park Street, shared an address with the office of the *Woman's Journal* and the rooms of the New England Women's Club (NEWC). "Women's Work in Boston," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, January 11, 1879, 7.

<sup>256</sup>Blair, *Clubwoman as Feminist*, 21-22.

Board of Government try to foster the sense of the Union firm as a “family” of employees. It was through the peer and occupational cultures forged by its employees that the Union most effectively exerted an influence as a socializing agent. Through their jobs at the WEIU, self-sufficient women could enjoy companionship and professional training at the same time.

By the 1910s many of the Union’s white-collar workers and managers were college-educated—increasingly so as a result of a close collaboration with nearby vocational Simmons College. By 1920, the Union’s new president, Marion Churchill, was both a Radcliffe alumna and an educator herself. She left her position as Dean of Women at Colorado College to take the WEIU job and was soon elected as a trustee of Simmons College.<sup>257</sup> To a college woman, a WEIU position often represented the first step up the professional ladder; there, in that majority female institution, they tended to prolong the collegiate experience. This time was also beneficial for them because it plugged college graduates into new professional networks which added to their collegiate contacts. In many ways, the WEIU, as a nonprofit advocate for the development of women’s paid work outside the home, belongs to a transitional period. Its efforts to open up new career pathways to graduates paralleled the rise of the professional women’s organizations which institutionalized the mutual help community of old, through which job openings were shared and situations secured.

Bringing a broader geographical perspective to the ways in which WEIU women formed homosocial alliances, the following chapter considers the national, regional, and local networks of which the organization was a part, and the personal and ideological bonds which took root in the Educational and Industrial Union.

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<sup>257</sup>Additional WEIU records, “News Notes from the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” Faculty Notes and News, *Simmons College Review*, January 1920, 67-68; “News Notes from the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Simmons College Review*, 22-23, c1920-1921. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.



# Chapter 7

## The Tendency towards “Cooperation”: Apprehending the WEIU as Part of Larger Female Networks

### Introduction

In 1903, when the *Federation Bulletin*, a women’s club periodical, detailed the “aims, purposes, and needs” of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union of Boston, the piece was not meant for the benefit of the magazine’s general readership. Its author reached out to a very specific audience, “the members of other organizations, so many of which are now federation with the Union, and the members of which are, presumably, therefore, interested in it.”<sup>1</sup> WEIU member Helen Rich Norton, who penned the history of a connected organization, would later explain in 1955 how “[m]any pioneer movements in the field of social betterment started at the Union which sponsored them until, their value proved, they became independent units.”<sup>2</sup> These two examples—the contemporaneous observation and the retrospective look—both seem to locate the WEIU at the center of a network of female voluntary associations, some of which collaborated with the Boston organization on a roughly equal footing while others were nurtured and tutored by their host. Both Norton and the unnamed *Bulletin* reporter seem to suggest that

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<sup>1</sup>“The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (December 1903), 28, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.

<sup>2</sup>Records of the Women’s Rest Tour Association. Helen Rich Norton, “The Story of the Women’s Rest Tour Association,” 7, folder 1.1.

to make sense of the WEIU’s program and its influence on Boston’s social body, we need to take a look at the connections it forged with others. The WEIU’s connection with its mentor, the New England Woman’s Club (NEWC), is a good illustration of the day-to-day interactions that bound women’s associations in reciprocal relationships which formed the warp and weft of the organizational fabric at the local level. While contemporaries considered the Union to be intellectually and ideologically indebted to the NEWC—it “[carried] out many of the ideas first entertained by its parent club”—, materially, the “parent” would eventually come to rely on some of the services provided by the “child.” By the late 1880s, the directors of the NEWC regularly ordered refreshments for their informal teas from the Union’s own catering service.<sup>3</sup>

Expanding on the WEIU’s connections with other bodies, this chapter is an exploration of their collaborations with white female non-profit organizations at different, concentric geographical levels. Adopting by turn local, regional, and national perspectives makes sense: ever since its inception the women of the WEIU had been in close contact with friends and peers in other voluntary groups. Even though this dissertation is a case study of a single organization, due to the nature of reform activity and the ecology of female voluntary associations in Gilded Age and Progressive New England, it would make little sense to try and isolate the WEIU from the associational networks of which it was a part. In previous chapters, we have alluded to its place in Boston’s philanthropic and charitable sector. Here, as we grapple with the intricacies of reformers’ personal and group networks, we deal with the association as a collaborating and nurturing agent.

What can we learn from a study of the specifically female networks to which the WEIU belonged? Of the groups with which it associated? The voluntary associations with which the leaders of the Boston WEIU sought both proximity and collaboration, including the other WEIUs that sprouted in the 1880s and 1890s, can tell us much about the organization’s ideas, membership demographics, and the potential formation of a collective consciousness or identity. These trusted partners can reveal where the management of the Boston WEIU found inspiration for its social programs, as well as how well and how far their own ideas about women’s social and economic roles could spread. Additionally, the WEIU’s choice of collaborators may also be an indication of what its leaders expected or desired the membership of the organization to be. From that perspective, both the help that they extended to other women’s groups and their joint efforts take on a

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<sup>3</sup>“Mrs Julia Ward Howe—Her Connection with Women’s Clubs,” *Times-Picayune*, June 2, 1889, 14.

programmatic quality. In the absence of reliable, comprehensive archival records, the membership of the groups with which the WEIU was most closely aligned may be interpreted as an indication of the composition of the WEIU itself in its heyday—when nearly 5,000 Massachusetts women (and a few men) paid yearly membership dues. Finally, and more generally, a study of the WEIU’s organizational ties gives us subtle clues about the reform niche that WEIU women wished to occupy. One important caveat was that, as was suggested in the introduction, archival research turned up no connections to Black Boston’s organizations. As such, this chapter is one that deals with white organized womanhood. This may not have been by exclusionary design, but the fact remains, nonetheless, that the WEIU did not seek out collaboration with Black women’s self-help organizations.

Working in concentric circles while also moving somewhat chronologically, we will first look at the place that the Boston WEIU came to occupy as the founding organization in a growing national network of what, for want of a better word, we will call sister organizations. The WEIUs that could be found from Saco, Maine, to Knoxville, Tennessee, were completely independent organizations that did not come under the authority or even guidance of any national coordinating body. What can the existence of thriving sister organizations tell us about the WEIU project? Moving downwards, we will then turn to analyzing the collaboration between the Boston WEIU and regional and national organizations like suffragist groups and the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, with a view to determining their ideological proximity to the Union. Finally, as we move down to an even more local degree and also to organizations composed of wage-earning women specifically, which the WEIU helped headquarter, we can better delve into the day-to-day workings of its cross-class philosophy.

## **7.1 A National and International Network? A Look at the Formation of Sister WEIUs (1880s-1890s)**

A few years after it was founded in Boston, the WEIU was joined by other sister organizations in other towns and cities in the northeast: its early successes had caught the attention of women from outside of the state. As early as 1880, a mere three years after the establishment of the Boston WEIU, women from Portland, Maine, noted that what they needed was “a Women’s Educational and Industrial



Union after the manner of the one in Boston [. . .].”<sup>4</sup> Similar comments were made in Cincinnati, where prominent women’s rights advocate Mary Livermore, at the close of a conference she gave there, was reported as predicting that the work of the WEIU “[would] extend sooner or later all over the country, all over the world.”<sup>5</sup> The first sister organizations to be established came soon after. They were those of Buffalo, New York, and Providence, Rhode Island, both founded in 1884; as such, they vied for the title of second-oldest WEIU. The founders of the Buffalo and Providence WEIUS were unknowingly responding to the call that Mary Livermore issued about Boston’s WEIU in May 1884: “Every city needs for its own sake an institution like this.”<sup>6</sup>

By the late 1880s, there was a sizable smattering of WEIUS in the New England states and in the state of New York. An article published in 1899 in the *New York Tribune* mentioned such “clubs” in “Buffalo, Rochester, Oswego, Dunkirk, Utica, Rome, Ilion, Binghamton, Oneida, Auburn, and other cities throughout the center of [New York] State.”<sup>7</sup> While the journalist did not actually clarify whether the aforementioned clubs were “women’s educational and industrial unions” in name or merely similar undertakings, available evidence points to Buffalo, Rochester, Dunkirk, and Auburn having active WEIUS by that date. Considering this, it is highly possible that the other clubs in the *New York Tribune*’s list were also Women’s Unions and not just nondescript literary clubs. In any case, in addition to the WEIUS located in New York state, in the 1890s and 1900s others could be found as far away as San Francisco, California. One was even thriving overseas, in Geneva, as we will see in this section.

How were these organizations formed—under which influences? How were they connected to the first WEIU in Boston, and how similar were they? These are some of the questions that we will try to address here. Studying the WEIU’s sister organizations in other cities can help us better understand what made the specificity of the Boston pioneer, how far and how well its ideas traveled, and how they took root—or did not—in other local ideological climates. Unlike most local women’s associations, the Boston WEIU was not a one-off affair, an isolated phenomenon; the ideas it championed and the programs it ran appealed to women in other cities and even other countries. What can that tell us about white middle-class women’s conception of their duty to the community and their role as citizens?

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<sup>4</sup>“Seed That Fell into Good Ground,” *Portland Daily Press*, May 1, 1880, 3.

<sup>5</sup>“A Talk With Mrs Livermore,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, January 12, 1880, 3.

<sup>6</sup>“Working for Women,” *Boston Herald*, May 7, 1884, 8.

<sup>7</sup>Gossip at the Clubs. *New York Tribune*, March 24, 1899, 5.

### 7.1.1 Harriet Clisby and Abby Morton Diaz: The Prophet and the Missionary

To account for the spread of the WEIU as an institution, we must first discuss the dedicated work of its first two presidents and acknowledge how central their personalities, beliefs, and life stories were to the dissemination of the Union “gospel,” in the words of one founder.<sup>8</sup> The religious beliefs of the WEIU’s main originator, Harriet Clisby, and those of its second president, Abby Morton Diaz, informed their project: neither Clisby nor Diaz saw their efforts as a temporal—as opposed to spiritual—remedy to female poverty. To them, the WEIU made sense not as a local relief agency but as a whole new kind of urban institution undergirded by a spiritual rationale that prefigured Progressive attempts to prevent rather than cure social ills.

This conception of the voluntary association as an urban institution found its roots in the forms of women’s antebellum activism. Antebellum reform organizations tended to operate as networks of similarly-named, locally-based groups. This was the case for the American Female Moral Reform Society (AFMRS), which in 1839 boasted 445 local auxiliaries, mostly in New York state and in New England. According to historian Kathryn Kish Sklar, one such society existed in almost every small settlement in the region.<sup>9</sup> Auxiliaries sometimes functioned as fund-raising agents for a national body, a new and very effective kind of “technology” that, starting in the 1810s and 1820s, allowed reformers to raise large sums of money in the form of small contributions.<sup>10</sup> Abolitionist societies, meanwhile, replicated and spread through informal channels which eventually extended into a mass grass-roots movement. Women liable to be “converted” to the cause picked up ideas and instructions for organization-building through word-of-mouth and correspondence. Upon request, successful societies would send their fledgling sisters copies of their constitution as well as comforting words of advice.<sup>11</sup> In fact, printing 500 copies each of constitutions and circulars was one of the very first decisions of the newly-established WEIU in July 1877. This amounted to an ex-

<sup>8</sup>“Women’s Interests,” *Providence Evening Bulletin*, October 24, 1885, 3.

<sup>9</sup>Kathryn Kish Sklar, “The Historical Foundations of Women’s Power in the Creation of the American Welfare State, 1830-1930,” in *Mothers of a New World: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States*, edited by Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (New York City: Routledge, 1993), 52.

<sup>10</sup>Johann N. Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners: Democracy and Civil Society in Early National Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 93-96.

<sup>11</sup>Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 59-61; Neem, *Creating a Nation of Joiners*, 86-89.

penditure of \$15, a consequential investment, but one that the WEIU’s first board of government deemed an absolute necessity—a subtle but telling sign of their familiarity with the most sophisticated forms of the voluntary association as it had evolved over the previous decades.<sup>12</sup>

Clisby and Diaz knew how important it was to promote their work, even when nothing concrete had yet been achieved. Publicity was all the more important as they sought to promote not an idea, but the forms of a society that would defend a broader set of principles, a coherent, self-sustaining philosophy. Harriet Clisby believed that it was both possible and desirable for them to create a social movement. She had reason to think so. As Anne Boylan has noted, the charitable women’s association as it emerged in the antebellum period was a well-established institution by the time the WEIU was founded: “[o]nce a first generation had outlined the pattern, organizations founded and run by women became legitimate, recognizable, and permanent elements of urban life.”<sup>13</sup> Starting with one Boston-based organization, Clisby dreamed of transforming American cities first, and the whole of American society second. When she would later reminisce about her life before the founding of the WEIU, she detailed her vision of a society radically reorganized by the transformative power of female cooperation. In her memoirs, she waxed lyrical about “the idea [she] saw,” which “was to be nothing more nor less, than the birth of a new order of society that should represent, by its spirit of goodness, its great desire of bringing into it all classes, and conditions of women, with the view of opening to each, new paths of thought, new methods of meeting needs, methods that should have for their object the single aim of increasing the welfare and happiness, and power that lie in mutual service.”<sup>14</sup> Clisby called for the advent of a universal sisterhood premised on what she saw as a fundamentally classless need for spiritual growth. To her, thwarted aspirations for a fuller spiritual life bridged the gap between women who were otherwise separated by their material conditions.<sup>15</sup>

By all contemporary accounts, including hers, Harriet Clisby was a deeply spiritual person, an avowed disciple of Swedish mystic Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Trained as a scientist, the latter would, later in life, write Biblical exegesis under the influence of a revelation he claimed to have received from spirits. Af-

<sup>12</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, July 14, 1877, 7. Carton 1.

<sup>13</sup>Anne Boylan, *Origins of Women’s Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 212.

<sup>14</sup>Additional WEIU records, Harriet Clisby, “The Origins of the WEIU,” extracted from “Some Reminiscences of Australia and America,” 114-115. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>15</sup>Clisby, “The Origins of the WEIU,” 107-110.

ter his death in England, self-proclaimed Swedenborgians seized on his “doctrine of correspondences,” which described interactions between different spiritual and material realms, between mind and matter, experience and feeling, and laid the foundation for various scientific Christian churches.<sup>16</sup> Like many of the esoteric and semisecret societies which flourished in the late colonial and revolutionary periods, Swedenborgianism found fertile soil in America, where the values of universalist tolerance and free-thinking resonated with the younger generations. By the 1830s, these ideas had left the confines of the secret society and American derivations of European esotericism—including spiritualism, mesmerism and folk healing, as well as experimental forms of Christianity—were discussed in the open. Like Clisby, many of their followers identified as Christians.<sup>17</sup> The influence of Swedenborg was being felt still: the New England-based Transcendentalist school of thought was indebted to his “organicist theosophy.” Under the banner of author Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), the Transcendentalists embraced nature as a benevolent force to be protected from industrialism.<sup>18</sup> Other WEIU members expressed an interest in Swedenborg’s doctrines; in 1880, one of the WEIU’s “Women’s Sunday Meetings” was dedicated to that very topic.<sup>19</sup>

Clisby’s successor as president of the WEIU, Abby Morton Diaz, had received a Transcendentalist education at the utopian community of Brook Farm as a young woman.<sup>20</sup> As an adult, she was primed to become a proponent of the then newly fashionable concept of “mind cure.” In the mid-1880s, like many other women in Boston’s intellectual and literary circles, Diaz embraced alternative medical treatments which demanded “faith in one’s self, as well as faith in higher powers.”<sup>21</sup> In the words of historian Gail Parker Thaine, “mind cure” refers to “a faith (and the practices growing out of it) in the power of mind over body, and, more specifically, in the power to heal oneself through right thinking.”<sup>22</sup> In the Boston of the 1870s, the proponents of mind cure turned to the writings of Swedenborg and Emerson

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<sup>16</sup>Arthur Versluis, *The Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 17-20.

<sup>17</sup>Versluis, *Esoteric Origins of the American Renaissance*, 48-55.

<sup>18</sup>Devin P. Zuber, *A Language of Things: Emanuel Swedenborg and the American Environmental Imagination* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2019).

<sup>19</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational & Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 8, 1880* (Boston: 157 Tremont Street, 1880), 25, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2b1p08h29z>.

<sup>20</sup>Harriet A. Townsend, *Reminiscences of Famous Women* (Buffalo: Evans-Penfold, 1916), 49, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433075957971>.

<sup>21</sup>Gertrude Garrison, “About the Mind Cure,” *Republican Journal*, July 2, 1885, 2.

<sup>22</sup>Gail Parker Thaine, *Mind Cure in New England: From the Civil War to World War I* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1973), ix; 4-6.

to sanction the belief system invented by a charismatic New England hypnotist.<sup>23</sup> It was thus in a diffuse, expansive and highly syncretic personal belief system that Clisby and Diaz grounded their efforts to guide the creation of new “Women’s Unions” across New England, and, more largely, across the country. Theirs was a universal project with mysticist underpinnings, one that was predicated on the existence of meaningful correspondences between different aspects of human life in general, and on the deep significance of one’s spiritual outlook in particular.

It is appropriate, then, to refer to Harriet Clisby’s organization-building as proselytizing. As the story of the foundation of the only overseas WEIU shows, she attached a great deal of importance to nurturing the “feminist consciousness”<sup>24</sup> of the friends and acquaintances that she met socially, exerting much of her influence through direct personal connection in a manner for which other early women’s rights activists were praised.<sup>25</sup> In a way, Clisby as portrayed by her contemporaries was another incarnation of the idea of the female reformer as “prophetess” or heroine.<sup>26</sup> In 1881, when she resigned from her position as president of the Boston WEIU on account of ill health, she traveled to a Swiss resort for a water cure. There, she met Emma Pieczynska, the Swiss-born wife of a Polish nobleman. Emma’s diary and letters, as compiled by biographer Noémi Regard, recount her meeting with Clisby. To the younger woman—she was 35 at the time—, the brief time that they spent together amounted to a personal awakening, a revelation of life’s higher purposes.<sup>27</sup> After parting ways, the two women stayed in touch and Clisby eventually convinced Pieczynska to both enter medical school in Geneva and divorce her husband—an episode reminiscent of the life of Dr. Clementine Lozier, Clisby’s medical mentor, who divorced her own husband after attending a lecture

<sup>23</sup>Garrison, “About the Mind Cure.”

<sup>24</sup>Gerda Lerner defines the attainment of “feminist consciousness” as a historical moment “marked by the appearance of organized movements for women’s rights, roughly in the third quarter of the nineteenth century,” when women developed a “consciousness of their own situation.” Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness From the Middle Ages to Eighteen-seventy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13.

<sup>25</sup>See for instance educator Alice Freeman Palmer’s eulogy in a club publication. The erstwhile president of Wellesley College was praised for the “influence” she exercised on the women she met, not for her writings. Her charisma and friendliness were deemed the only mediums through which she worked for the cause of women’s education, in terms reminiscent of Clisby’s own life: “by personal poer rather than by favoring circumstance this woman sent out an influence from the Atlantic to the Pacific, an influence unique in kind and puzzling those on whom it felt.” “One Woman’s Influence,” *Federation Bulletin* 6, no. 3 (December 1908), 72-73, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679742>.

<sup>26</sup>Jill Conway, “Women Reformers and American Culture, 1870-1930,” *Journal of Social History* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1971-1972): 164-177.

<sup>27</sup>Noémie Regard, *Madame E. Pieczynska: Sa Vie* (Neuchâtel), 1933, Gallica, 84-86. Pieczynska spoke of filial “love at first sight” to describe her newfound friendship with Clisby.

by suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton and started studying medicine at the age of thirty-seven.<sup>28</sup> Emma Pieczynska would travel to Boston several times, and on her 1889 visit she was given a tour of the WEIU's headquarters. The foreign visitor marveled at the WEIU's "sunny rooms"<sup>29</sup> and the diligent work that was carried out there for the improvement of women's social and material conditions. The brainchild of her dear friend Harriet Clisby left such an impression on Pieczynska that in 1891 she founded the Union des Femmes de Genève—or Geneva Women's Union (UdFG)—, explicitly modeling it after the WEIU. Clisby actively encouraged and praised Pieczynska's initiative: on the occasion of the UdFG's installation into its new rooms, she traveled to Geneva to give an inaugural address before the young association.<sup>30</sup>

The two organizations shared more than their names. Like the WEIU, the UdFG was organized in specialized Bureaux or departments; like the WEIU's its leaders were driven by an analysis of women's economic dependence as a root cause of their social and political inferiority. They accorded prime of place to remunerative work as a potentially emancipatory force, which led them both to open a shop and hire seamstresses and to gather data, embracing the emerging social sciences as a tool for the investigation of social issues.<sup>31</sup> In 1896, "Mathilde-J." Albert, one of the founding members of the UdFG and its first treasurer, was instructed by the organization to conduct a study of 50,000 women in the Canton of Geneva with a view to learning more about the paid and unpaid work that they engaged into. Like Clisby and the Boston WEIU's cadre of founders, Albert made sense of her work through the prism of broad social reform. In her first report as treasurer, she wrote of the money spent by the Union that "it is not the privilege of all currency in circulation to stand for an idea, a will, and to substantiate the emergence of a social movement in such a way."<sup>32</sup>

A testament to her taste for legal matters, Albert was a member of the Geneva

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<sup>28</sup>Regard, *Madame E. Pieczynska*, 94. For the biographical information about Dr. Clementine Lozier, see Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 148-149, and Karen Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes Meier, 1980), 75.

<sup>29</sup>Regard, *Madame E. Pieczynska*, 112-113.

<sup>30</sup>Additional WEIU records, Harriet Clisby, "What Is this Women's Union?" (Geneva: Printing Office of W. Kündig & Son, 1893). 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 155. The speech bears mention of 18 "Unions" being active at the time.

<sup>31</sup>Thomas David, Alix Heiniger, *Faire Société: La Philanthropie à Genève et Ses Réseaux Transnationaux Autour de 1900* (Paris: Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2019), 59-80.

<sup>32</sup>E. GD. "In Memoriam: Mlle Mathilde-J. Albert," *Le Mouvement Féministe* no. 143 (June 10, 1922), 83, <https://e-periodica.ch/digbib/view?pid=emi-001:1922:10::220#302>.

Union’s Legal Aid Bureau.<sup>33</sup> A few years before she issued her report on women’s work, she, along with other members of a committee for the “reform of women’s legal condition,” had authored a bill for the reform of marital law in the Canton of Geneva, such that married women could have full control over their own earnings.<sup>34</sup> Legislation was one arm of a multi-pronged strategy that also included the conception and administration of relief programs like Les Pénates, a home for single working women which the Women’s Union opened in Geneva in 1909.<sup>35</sup> Finally, like Clisby’s successors in Boston, Emma Pieczynska and her collaborators were also obsessed with the “servant question,” which they hoped to solve by creating a mutual rapport between servants and “mistresses.”<sup>36</sup> As we have seen, this is an issue that gripped the members of the Boston WEIU in the late 1890s as they poured some of their resources into the short-lived Domestic Reform League (DRL).<sup>37</sup> The UDFG’s membership was mixed; it brought together women from Geneva’s oldest families as well as middle-class women, some of whom had worked as schoolteachers, school principals, or deaconesses prior to marriage.<sup>38</sup> Available evidence suggests that the Geneva Women’s Union was still active in the 1920s and that some of its presidents included well-known Swiss feminists like Camille Vidart. This would have positioned the organization close to the epicenter of Swiss feminism.<sup>39</sup>

The establishment of the Geneva Women’s Union should also be understood in the context of a revival of women’s international networks at the 1888 International Congress of Women (ICW), which took place in Washington, DC, and gave birth to the eponymous transnational organization. Bonnie Anderson has determined that the first international women’s movement found its expression in the epistolary connections of a core group of about fifty female activists based in the United States, Great Britain, France, the German states and Scandinavia,

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<sup>33</sup>E. GD. “In Memoriam.”

<sup>34</sup>Louis Bridel, *Le Droit de la Femme Mariée sur le Produit de son Travail* (Genève: Librairie Stapelmohr, 1893), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015028083338>. It is interesting to note that Bridel was a noted Swiss abolitionist, as were many of the members of the UDFG. Anne-Marie Käppeli, *Sublime Croisade. Éthique et Politique du Féminisme Protestant 1875-1928* (Genève: Zoé, 1990), 126-127.

<sup>35</sup>Pour les Jeunes Filles Isolées. “Restaurants, Hôtels et Pensions de Famille,” *La Réforme Sociale*, January 1, 1912, 391.

<sup>36</sup>“Chronique Etrangère,” *Le Travail de la Femme et de la Jeune Fille* no. 49 (January 1905), 1462, Gallica, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k5141508p>.

<sup>37</sup>Lara Vapnek, *Breadwinners: Working Women and Economic Independence, 1865-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 102-128.

<sup>38</sup>David, Heiniger, *Faire Société*.

<sup>39</sup>Gaston Choisy, “Le Féminisme en Europe,” *Revue Politique et Littéraire*, January 6, 1900, 297.

who rallied around the issue of women's rights and abolitionism. After peaking in the wake of the 1848 revolutions, it became dormant; only in the late 1880s would those "preexisting communications networks" of female travelers, missionaries, and writers revive the internationalist impulse, leading to what Leila Rupp has called the "international women's movement."<sup>40</sup> This mostly homogeneous group, dominated by white, Euro-American women of leisure, constructed an identity based on female difference which foregrounded motherhood as a source of moral and social authority to be wielded in the defense of causes like abolitionism. Harriet Clisby, by virtue of her British birth, Australian upbringing, and international wanderings as an adult, was likely enmeshed in these networks; at the very least, she must have been aware of their existence. The case of the Geneva Women's Union is noteworthy because the European importation of American modes of action and ideas has received less attention than the reverence in which American suffragists held their British counterparts, unanimously deemed by contemporaries to be pioneers in the modern fight for suffrage.<sup>41</sup>

Like Harriet Clisby, Abby Morton Diaz believed in the twin powers of cooperation and "influence." Adherence to that latter concept especially marks them as women who grew up in the 1830s and 1840s, the period when women's benevolence received sanction from a distinctly gendered system of meaning. White middle-class women were free to join benevolent societies, provided that their work was couched in the language of influence, "the private regenerative quality of womanhood that mobilized both conservative and radical defenses of women's activism and defined benevolent work as essentially feminine."<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in the

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<sup>40</sup>Bonnie S. Anderson, *Joyous Greetings: The First International Women's Movement, 1830-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 15-27; Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Stewart, eds., *Women's Rights and Abolition in the Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>41</sup>Only recently have the American experiences of British suffragists been studied. See Katherine Connelly, *A Suffragette in America: Reflections on Prisoners, Pickets, and Political Change* (London: Pluto Press, 2019).

<sup>42</sup>Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 2. See also Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 15-17; Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 129-130, and Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1987): 700-701. The belief in women's special influence was first given shape in prescriptive literature in the early revolutionary period, when women were commended for exerting their patriotic "influence" on their male kin in the revolutionary struggle, and condemned when they failed to act. Shortly thereafter, they would be tasked with exerting a gentle, reforming influence of a religious nature on their husbands and children alike in the context of more companionate marriages.



1870s and 1880s, Abby Morton Diaz saw the body politic as a highly malleable substance that, in the right—womanly—hands, could be molded into the perfect shape. Unlike her predecessor Clisby, she undertook a much more active campaign to stimulate the foundation of new WEIUs, or, as she put it, “preach the Union gospel.”<sup>43</sup> While Harriet Clisby was content with providing individual psychological counseling in hopes of awakening more women to a feminist consciousness, Abby Morton Diaz planned tours and advertising campaigns for the WEIU. In 1890, Caroline Dupree, who sat on the WEIU’s Board of Government, wrote for the middle-brow philanthropic *Lend a Hand* magazine that Diaz “ha[d] thrown her whole soul into the work of extending the influence of this institution—an influence which ha[d] ‘put a girdle [almost] round about the earth.’” Even though Dupree was discussing Diaz’s own outreach efforts, this last part may have been a reference to the Geneva Women’s Union then incubating overseas.<sup>44</sup>

Diaz’s more systematic campaign to advertise the Union system benefited from her speaking skills and reputation as a well-known author of children’s literature.<sup>45</sup> After she became president of the WEIU in 1881, she immediately set out to deliver lectures all over the New England states—and beyond. In 1889, she lectured in Kansas City, Missouri, and tried to establish a WEIU there.<sup>46</sup> The effect of those ardent speeches was heightened by the press coverage that they received. In November 1884, Abby Morton Diaz traveled to Springfield, New York, to lecture about “the development of women” before the local women’s club. To illustrate her theoretical points, she used the work of the Boston WEIU as an example—another sign, as previously discussed, of the WEIU being an earthly vessel for Clisby’s Swedenborgian creed. The press account of Diaz’s visit to Springfield touches upon all of the core ideas expounded in her 1875 manifesto, *A Domestic Problem*, as well as later writings and speeches as WEIU president: that wealth did not equate character, that consequently philanthropy was not just for the poor, and that “[g]irls should always be educated to be self-helpful”—bringing it all back to the Women’s Union as an effective way to pursue these goals.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> “Women’s Interests,” *Providence Evening Bulletin*, October 24, 1885, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Caroline Dupree, “The Woman’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Lend a Hand* 5, no. 2 (February 1890), 114, HathiTrust, [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b359087](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b359087).

<sup>45</sup> Her reputation was already so well-established in the 1870s that an ambitious impostor impersonated her in New York to live off her good name, at which point she started going by “Abby Morton Diaz” rather than “Mrs. Diaz.” Our Letter Box. “What’s in a Name?” *Our Young Folks* 9, no. 3 (March 1873), 188, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044092811066>.

<sup>46</sup> “Mrs. Diaz Will Lecture,” *Kansas City Times*, October 16, 1889, 8.

<sup>47</sup> “Mrs Diaz Talks to Women,” *Springfield Republican*, November 20, 1884, 6; Abby Morton Diaz, *A Domestic Problem* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1875), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044092811066>.

This was a few months after the establishment of a WEIU in Providence, Rhode Island, thanks to Diaz's lecturing.<sup>48</sup> When she found a receptive audience of women, as proved the case in Providence in May 1884, she would encourage them to assemble into a founding committee—coming back to check with them, nurturing the fledgling new association. Sometimes, this second visit took place as late as a year later: along with fellow Boston WEIU member Mary F. Eastman, Abby Morton Diaz was a distinguished guest at the first public meeting of the Providence WEIU, which was held in Blackstone Hall on October 23, 1885.<sup>49</sup> By that time, the organization was firmly established, with lines of work that closely paralleled those of the model Boston organization. A year after it had started its operations, the Providence WEIU boasted 250 members, a thriving Industrial Department (Women's Exchange), an Employment Bureau that like the Boston WEIU's exclusively dealt with "the so-called higher employments," a Protective Committee, and a lecture department. Its leaders were considering opening classes in dressmaking "and other industries."<sup>50</sup>

Providence was not an isolated case. Abby Morton Diaz consistently followed up with the work of developing the WEIU's daughter organizations, as in Worcester, Massachusetts, where in 1894 she gave a lecture before the rapidly growing local Union.<sup>51</sup> The same year, she accepted the invitation of the Saco, Maine, WEIU to give a talk on "Human Beings," the first of a series of lectures given for the benefit of another women's association.<sup>52</sup> The larger Unions could warrant grander affairs, like an official reception. At the close of the first year of the Buffalo WEIU, its representatives were invited to Boston for high tea served by "young ladies in pretty aprons and caps," which was followed by short addresses and music.<sup>53</sup> Letters could also substitute a trip or a reception. Momentous occasions, like a WEIU's acquisition of new headquarters, warranted official greetings: in 1886, Diaz congratulated the Buffalo WEIU for their new building on behalf of their Boston sisters.<sup>54</sup> Correspondence similarly helped the WEIU nurture its relationship "with

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<sup>48</sup>*Providence Evening Bulletin*, May 14, 1884, 2.

<sup>49</sup>"Women's Interests," *Providence Evening Bulletin*, October 24, 1885, 3.

<sup>50</sup>M. M. Brewster, "Educational and Industrial Union," *Providence Evening Bulletin*, February 3, 1885, 2.

<sup>51</sup>Neighborhood News—Central Massachusetts. *Worcester Daily Spy*, March 16, 1894, 5.

<sup>52</sup>"Human Beings," *Portland Daily Press*, March 5, 1894, 3.

<sup>53</sup>E.M.H., "Women's Educational and Industrial Union Reception," *Woman's Journal* 16, no. 25 (June 20, 1885), 200.

<sup>54</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, November 16, 1886, 232. Carton 1.

Table 7.1: A list of WEIU sister organizations with founding dates.<sup>58</sup>

City	Date established	Earliest reference
<i>Boston</i>	<i>1877</i>	<i>1877</i>
Providence (Rhode Island)	1884	1884
Buffalo (New York)	1884	1884
“East Boston” (Massachusetts)	N/D	1885
Cleveland (Ohio)	1886	1886
Somerville (Massachusetts)	N/D	1886
Auburn (New York)	1887 or 1888	1888
Covington (Ohio)	1887 or 1888	1888
Syracuse (New York)	1887 or 1888	1888
Los Angeles (California)	1888	N/D
Washington (DC)	1888	1888
Saco (Maine)	1888	1889
San Francisco (California)	1888	1889
Dunkirk (New York)	N/D	1890
Knoxville (Tennessee)	1889	1891
Chelsea (Massachusetts)	1891	1891
Geneva (Switzerland)	1891	1891
Rochester (New York)	1893	1894
Fitchburg (Massachusetts?)	1884	1894
Worcester (Massachusetts)	1894	1894

kindred societies at home and abroad.”<sup>55</sup>

Evidence thus suggests that Abby Morton Diaz, by nurturing her contacts throughout New England, contributed to the emergence of a very loose network of related institutions, which, once firmly established, could enter into official relations with one another. As one local journalist wrote of Diaz in 1887, summarizing what we have demonstrated: “[s]he, more than any other one, has brought [the Union] to where it is today. She has written for it, spoken for it, worked for it, without cessation, and *it has been chiefly through her endeavors, too, that other similar unions have been established in other cities.*”<sup>56</sup> Once she had set the ball rolling, the movement would sustain itself on its own.<sup>57</sup>

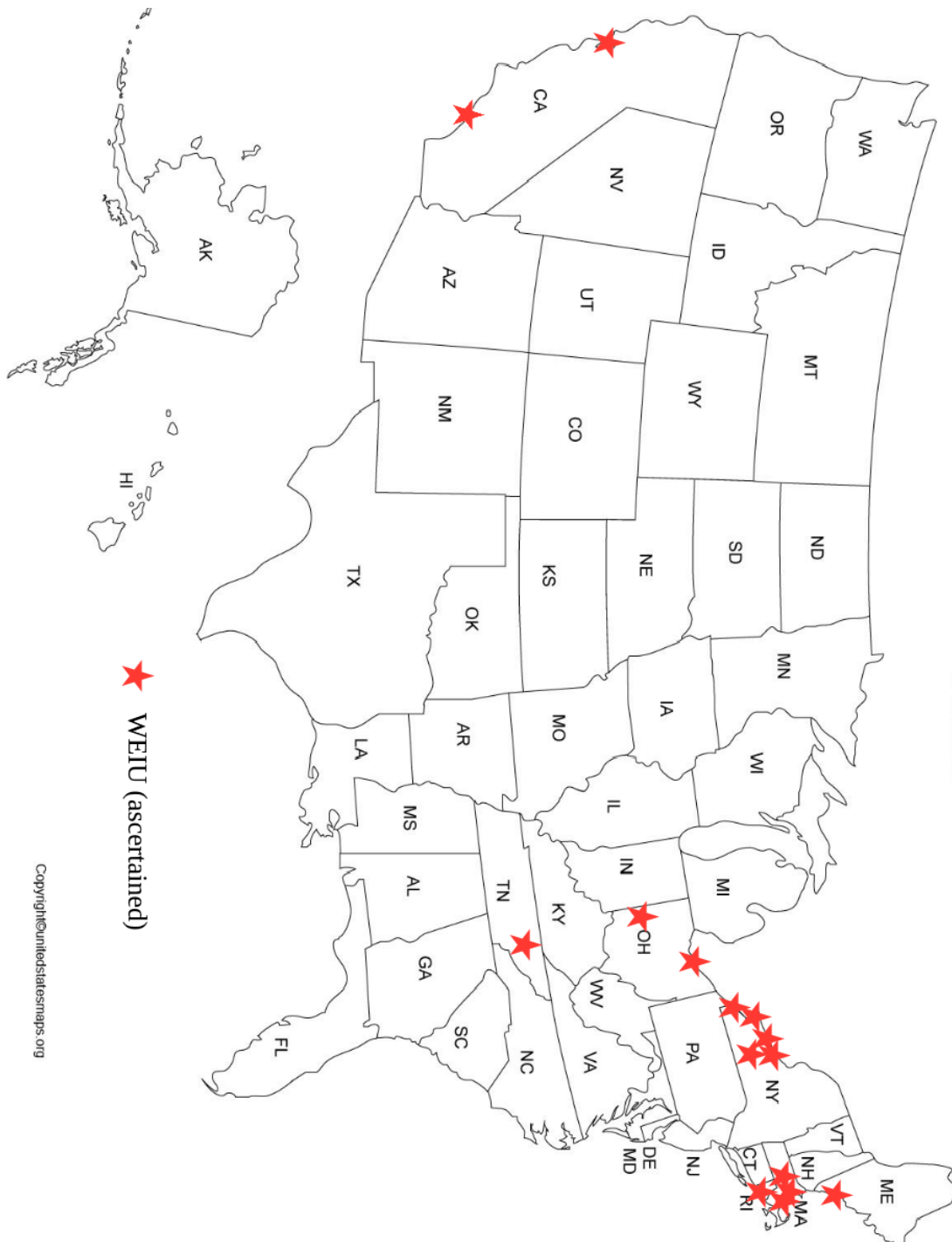
<sup>55</sup>“Working for Women,” *Boston Herald*.

<sup>56</sup>Among the Women. *Boston Herald*, May 4, 1887, 8. Emphasis mine.

<sup>57</sup>For instance, Gayle Gullett reports that one of the founders of the San Francisco had been a very active member in the Buffalo WEIU. Gayle Gullett, *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women’s Movement 1880-1911* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 47.

<sup>58</sup>Compare this table with the WEIU’s own 1890 annual report: “Fourteen of these [societies] are founded upon the same principles as this Union, and the others are taking up in different ways some of its branches; but all of them would extend a helping hand to any woman who came to them a stranger.” Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, 98 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May 6,*

Figure 7.1: American WEIUS founded by 1900.<sup>59</sup>



Source: Table 7.1.

### 7.1.2 A WEIU for Everyone?

Outside observers usually classified Women’s Educational and Industrial Unions as a particular type of social service institution. As early as 1886, when there were about four WEIUs in existence (including the Boston WEIU), the *Woman’s Journal* wrote that “Women’s Educational and Industrial Unions have sprung up in many cities during the past few years. They are most useful institutions, not only aiding poor women, but educating in many ways the richer women who give their services to the work.”<sup>60</sup> To familiarize the public with the concept of the WEIU, both members and journalists put it on a par with such mainstays of mid-sized cities as Young Men and Young Women’s Christian Associations (YMCA and YWCA), local branches of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the Associated Charities (AC), and various benevolent homes and charitable organizations. These references were those a contemporaneous audience was most likely to make sense of, and they were congruent with the communication strategy of the Union’s own leadership. From the inception of the original Boston WEIU, its founders compared it to a female counterpart to the YMCA.<sup>61</sup> By 1899, a reporter for the *New York Evening Post* made sure to contextualize the work of the Rochester WEIU by comparing it to “the lines commonly followed by women’s educational and industrial unions,” without elaborating, as though this would have been common knowledge enough.<sup>62</sup> Evidently, by then, the “women’s educational and industrial union” was

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1890 (Boston: No. 98 Boylston Street, 1890), 21, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923967>.

<sup>59</sup>For Providence, see *Providence Evening Bulletin*, May 14, 1884, 2; for Buffalo, “News from State Centres. *New York Tribune*, March 1, 1884, 2; for “East Boston,” E.M.H., “Women’s Educational and Industrial Union Reception,” *Woman’s Journal* 16, no. 25 (June 20, 1885), 200; for Cleveland, “For Young Women,” *Cleveland Leader and Morning Herald*, September 13, 1886, 8; for Somerville, “Donations, Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association,” *Woman’s Journal* 17, no. 3, January 16, 1886, 21; for Auburn, M. P. N., “Boston Letter,” *Northern Christian Advocate* (Syracuse, NY), February 3, 1887, 2; for Covington, “Covington Cookery,” *Evening Post*, December 8, 1885, 3; for Columbus, “The Methodist Preachers,” *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, November 22, 1886, 4; for Los Angeles, Maureen A. Flanagan, *America Reformed: Progressives and Progressivisms, 1890s-1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 43.; for Washington, DC, “Woman’s E. and I. Union,” *Washington Critic*, April 13, 1888, 5; for Saco, “Lawn Party at Old Orchard,” *Portland Daily Press*, August 12, 1889, 5; for San Francisco, “Women’s Union,” *Sunday Chronicle* (San Francisco), October 14, 1888, 14; for Dunkirk, “A Strong Pull in a Feminine Way,” *New York Herald*, April 20, 1890, 29; for Knoxville, “Praise for the Ladies” August 30, 1891, *Knoxville Journal*, 6; for Chelsea, “About Town,” *Boston Daily Advertiser*, October 17, 1891, 2; for Rochester, “General News Items,” *Buffalo Evening News*, January 20, 1894, 3; for Fitchburg, “Help for their Sex,” *Boston Herald*, February 27, 1894, 8; for Worcester, “Neighborhood News—Central Massachusetts,” March 16, 1894, *Worcester Daily Spy*, 5.

<sup>60</sup>“Buffalo Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Woman’s Journal* 17, no. 1 (January 2, 1886), 1.

<sup>61</sup>“A Pioneer Institution,” *Boston Herald*, November 12, 1883, 4.

<sup>62</sup>In the Women’s Clubs. *New York Evening Post*, December 16, 1899, 18.

Figure 7.2: List of organizations which met at the WEIU for the year 1910-1911. In purple, Union committee or direct affiliate.

Labor organizations, mutual help, cooperatives	Professional organizations; college alumnae clubs	Suffragist and political organizations	Social reform	Social clubs
Auxiliary No. 13, Boston Typographical Club	Business Women's Club	Boston Equal Suffrage Association	Conference Case Committee of Day Nurseries	Folk Dancing
Industrial Credit Union	Board of Management of Business Women's Club	Intercollegiate Society	Milk and Baby Hygiene Association	Educational Dance
Stenographers' Co-operative Registry	Executive Committee of Business Women's Club	Massachusetts Association for Labor Legislation		Fathers' and Mothers' Club
Women's Trade Union League	Executive Committee of the New England Historical Teachers' Association	Massachusetts Association of Woman [sic] Workers		Princeton Vacation House
Woman Clerks' Benefit Association	Simmons Club of Boston	School Voters' League		Salesmanship Dinner
	Teachers' Club			Thursday Evening Club

Source: Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Thirty-Second Annual Report of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union, Boston, Massachusetts, January, Nineteen Hundred Eleven* (Boston, 1911), 41, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239470>.

a well-known type of social service organization in the northeast of the country.

### *A "Third Space" for Women to Gather*

Like the Boston WEIU, very often, as bustling centers of urban sociability and civic work, sister organizations operated from a building that they owned, preferably downtown or in an especially central or fashionable location. WEIU workers hoped to leave a lasting imprint on the geography and social fabric of the city. Lizzie Crozier French, a founding member of the Knoxville WEIU, wrote about how she was "working to establish [. . .] permanent institutions" like the Women's Union.<sup>63</sup> The Syracuse WEIU owned its own "Woman's Union Hall."<sup>64</sup> The building of the Buffalo WEIU, which we have already mentioned, must have stood out in particular. An enthusiastic journalist rhapsodized that the Union "occupie[d] and own[ed], free of debt, one of the handsomest structures of stone and brick in the city, located on grounds bordering the future Champ Elysee [sic] of the Queen City."<sup>65</sup> However, even much smaller cities could take pride in grand WEIU edifices. In Auburn, the building of the local Women's Union was valued at \$200,000 in 1911.<sup>66</sup> Where a WEIU did not possess headquarters of its own, its members contributed to the erection of buildings to be used collectively by local women's associations, as in Cleveland, Ohio. There, in 1892, the WEIU was one of sixteen parties that included Sorosis, not one but two local WCTUs, and various professional women's and temperance organizations, then all working jointly towards the establishment of a central building open to all women regardless of their economic or religious background.<sup>67</sup>

Across the country, women active in clubs and social service organizations were articulating the need for a third space that was not the police station, where female strangers could be safely referred and assisted.<sup>68</sup> In fact, the foundation of the Rochester WEIU can be directly traced back to a particular incident involving a stranger in need of help. In 1893, a Rochester physician, Dr. Sarah R. Adamson, invited prominent club women to a meeting. Knowingly or unknowingly echoing

<sup>63</sup>Lizzie Crozier French Scrapbook, 1, "Mrs L. Crozier French, Woman's Candidate for Councilman from the City-at-Large," 1923. Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, Knoxville County Public Library.

<sup>64</sup>Gossip at the Clubs. *New York Tribune*, March 24, 1899, 5.

<sup>65</sup>Esther C. Davenport, "The Women's Educational and Industrial Union," *Buffalo Sunday News*, December 17, 1899, 14.

<sup>66</sup>"Mrs Eliza Wright Osborne Leaves Much to Charities," *Evening Leader and Corning Daily Democrat* (Corning, New York), July 25, 1911, 1.

<sup>67</sup>"Welfare of Women," *Plain Dealer*, December 17, 1892, 6.

<sup>68</sup>"Welfare of Women," *Plain Dealer*: "The desired end could not be reached until a central building is secured, which would be so well known that young women could be sent there by the police or others."

concerns aired by the women of Cleveland a year earlier, she was thinking of establishing a “Woman’s Alliance” in the city. When the meeting finally took place, the president of the Buffalo WEIU, Harriet A. Townsend, invited by the famous suffrage activist Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906), swayed the audience and convinced them to establish a “Woman’s Educational and Industrial Union” instead of the projected Alliance. Why did Anthony bring in Townsend? She and her friend, activist Mary Lewis Gannett,<sup>69</sup> had been moved by press reports of an indigent woman who, when she fainted in the streets, was brought to the police station. As she was a stranger to the city, no one knew who she was, and in the absence of a central or representative women’s building to send her to, she was locked up for the night.<sup>70</sup> Under the direct influence of the Buffalo WEIU, itself modeled after the Bostonian organization, the Rochester WEIU purported to act as a cross-class, non-sectarian institution that would welcome the women who needed it.<sup>71</sup>

### *Common Management Practices*

To coordinate their committees, run their classes and care for their buildings, local WEIUS tended to resort to the same strategy as the Boston organization: transitioning away from a volunteer workforce and hiring their own employees. Wherever they were, WEIUS tended to draw from the same workforce and hire college educated women who had experience working either in a corporate environment or in organized philanthropy, or both. In 1909, the Auburn WEIU hired a Miss M. L. McLaster as its assistant superintendent. To assume the position, she left Perry Knitting Co., where she was employed in an unspecified capacity.<sup>72</sup> The pool of employees on which the WEIUS drew was one that included regional companies as well as the paid workforce of other women’s non-profits. Conversely, a WEIU employee could expect to pursue her career in another similarly situated institution, like Mary E. Floyd, who was elected physical director of the Tampa YWCA on the strength of the work she had pursued for three years as director of the Auburn WEIU.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup>Mary Lewis Gannett (1854-1952), a Rochester-based suffragist and close associate of Susan B. Anthony’s, was eulogized upon her death in 1952 as a “well-known leader in racial and religious tolerance and pioneer in the fight for equal rights for women.” She was the wife of Unitarian pastor William Channing Gannett. “Equal Rights Pioneer Dies,” *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, October 27, 1952, 5.

<sup>70</sup>Kendal P. Mobley, *Helen Barrett Montgomery, 1861-1910: From Progressivism and Woman’s Emancipation to Global Mission*, PhD. thesis, Boston University School of Theology, 2004, 208-209.

<sup>71</sup>“General News Items,” *Buffalo Evening News*, January 20, 1894, 3.

<sup>72</sup>Latest Vicinity News. *Buffalo News*, December 20, 1909, 7.

<sup>73</sup>“New Physical Director for Tampa Y.W.C.A” *Tampa Sunday Tribune*, September 24, 1916, 28.



The Boston WEIU’s sister organizations were operated according to a similar framework, following a similar timeline. In some cases, it is clearly established that they adopted the same constitution, as did the Worcester WEIU.<sup>74</sup> That constitution was a short and remarkably flexible document that provided for the establishment of as many new ad hoc committees as needed, in an effort to work towards the expansive goals of “increas[ing] fellowship among women in order to promote the best practical methods for securing their educational, industrial and social advancement.”<sup>75</sup> That flexibility could prove attractive; some women praised the WEIU model for being more open than that of the conventional club. Lizzie French wrote that it was her disappointment with the Ossoli Circle and its members’ refusal to add civic work to their activities that led her to organize a WEIU.<sup>76</sup>

### *A Capacious Constitution*

The WEIU’s broadly formulated goals were likely a major factor in the spread of the institution. Leila Rupp underlines that what presided the emergence of a collective feminist consciousness in the second international women’s movement (1880s-1940s) was precisely the broadness of their conception of “feminism.” Women in the International Council of Women (ICW), International Alliance of Women (IAW), and Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) fought bitterly over the best practical way to achieve greater equality for women and even whether “feminist” or “humanist” was the better descriptor for their activities, but all of them shared a sense of working towards advancing “woman’s rights” internationally.<sup>77</sup> For Harriet Clisby’s followers, that meant challenging women’s subordinate status in educational institutions as well as the marketplace, and this entailed a recognition that domestic workers as well as clerks or journalists had something to gain from Union work. Unlike internationalist organizations like the ICW, which gestured at inclusiveness but were in fact a “gathering of the elite” because of how high their true participation cost was, lower annual dues and local roots made it possible for the many to join a generic “women’s educational and in-

<sup>74</sup>Neighborhood News—Central Massachusetts. *Worcester Daily Spy*, March 16, 1894, 5.

<sup>75</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Constitution and by-laws of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (Boston: Press of Faulkner Bros, 1878). Carton 1.

<sup>76</sup>Lizzie Crozier French Scrapbook, 1. “Mrs. L. Crozier French, Woman’s Candidate For Councilman From The City-At-Large,” 1923. Calvin M. McClung Historical Collection, Knoxville County Public Library. The Ossoli Circle was established essentially as a women’s social club with literary aspirations. In a sense, it was a precursor to the Knoxville WEIU: Lizzie Crozier intended it as a place for women to meet on equal terms.

<sup>77</sup>Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women’s Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 130-154.

dustrial union.”<sup>78</sup> San Francisco as well as Boston and Buffalo offered membership for \$1 a year, as compared to the \$10 required of would-be NEWC members.<sup>79</sup> The result was that wealthy ladies mingled with self-supporting women in the volunteer and paid staff of the WEIU’s sister organizations. In the mid-1890s, the president of the Dunkirk WEIU was Mrs. Emma Colman Hamilton, a well-off widow who “took charge of her husband’s large coal and lumber business at his death” and was subsequently able to maintain it.<sup>80</sup> The demographics of WEIU membership may account for the interest that Harriet Clisby’s project generated in the first place. The lived experience of the leaders and members of the WEIUs caused them to have sympathy for “the women who [were] obliged to earn their living” and even to prioritize bettering their working conditions.<sup>81</sup> In Knoxville, Lizzie French had invited her “fellow working women” to help her organize “some sort of a society or club which should have in view the betterment of the working women of the city, a club where they could meet for social pleasure and for their good generally, their advance in a worldly way not to be forgotten, in fact to be made rather prominent.”<sup>82</sup> Among the campaigns led by the San Francisco WEIU (1888) in its first year of existence was a successful push for a law that required shops to provide saleswomen with seats.<sup>83</sup> Overall, the programs that centered paid work and the other interests of the employed were the most popular: the Woman’s Exchange, the Employment Department, the “Industrial School” and other vocational classes seem to have constituted the core of the WEIU project, not only in Boston, as we suggested in chapter 1,<sup>84</sup> but in all other localities where such Women’s Unions were established. As a writer for the *Woman’s Journal* put it 1886, “[t]he features just enumerated [were] common to most Unions.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 51-55. The women of the San Francisco WEIU explicitly articulated making the annual dues \$1 instead of 3, so that working women could join: “Women’s Union,” 14.

<sup>79</sup>“Women’s Industrial Union,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, July 23, 1889, 3; “Mrs Julia Ward Howe—Her Connection with Women’s Clubs,” *Times-Picayune*.

<sup>80</sup>Woman’s Kingdom. *Daily Inter Ocean*, April 8, 1893, 11.

<sup>81</sup>“Aid to Women,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, November 7, 1889, 3.

<sup>82</sup>“Woman’s Educational and Industrial Union Organized,” *Knoxville Journal*, January 2, 1890, 1.

<sup>83</sup>Work for Women. “Annual meeting of the Educational and Industrial Union,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, May 15, 1889, 4.

<sup>84</sup>See chapter 1, p. 48.

<sup>85</sup>“Buffalo Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Woman’s Journal* 17, no. 1 (January 2, 1886), 1.

*The “Women’s Union,” an Institution for Working Women*

What a working woman was or ought to be, what she was likely to need and how best to help her were questions that were settled slightly differently across the country. The aforementioned San Francisco WEIU also boasted a kindergarten nurse course and a cooking school which fell under the purview of their Domestic Training Committee, and whose purpose was to train poor women to become servants. To at least some middle- and upper-middle class WEIU officers the working woman was thus primarily a domestic worker. In Covington, Ohio, two hundred “charitable” ladies established a Women’s Educational and Industrial Union for the express purpose of obtaining adequately trained servants. The dean of the School of Domestic Economy at Iowa Agricultural College helped these “mistresses” establish kitchen garden schools and classes that would fit needy women for domestic positions.<sup>86</sup> This would have stood in sharp contrast with the more expansive—and thus more nuanced—definition that the Boston leaders favored and which held sway in other sister organizations. Around the same time, in the same state, the Cleveland WEIU looked more like a working-girls’ club, with members being instructed to “come directly from [their] place[s] of employment in [their] working dress” for either tea and entertainments or classes meant to teach them remunerative skills like dress-fitting, stenography, or commercial arithmetic.<sup>87</sup> In San Francisco still, in contrast to Covington, there were both day and night cooking classes, a sign that they were not meant exclusively as professional training for servants; the lunches and social meetings offered “working girls” would likely have been meant for saleswomen, clerks, or industrial workers, not live-in help.<sup>88</sup> As Anna E. Hull of the Cleveland WEIU put it, the priority of most WEIU leaders was to fit young women for positions that would make them self-supporting: “The great thing today is to make women capable. They have no right to ask for positions unless capable of filling them,” a journalist wrote in 1892.<sup>89</sup>

The slow work of “opening new doors for new women”<sup>90</sup> was best undertaken at a local level, which made it possible for WEIU officers to tailor classes

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<sup>86</sup>“Covington Cookery,” *Evening Post*, December 9, 1885, 3. As was common with the cooking schools established in the late 1870s and 1880s, initially meant for servants. See Lauren Shapiro, *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 48-68, for an account of the pioneering Boston Cooking School, whose early pupils were expected to be cooks in private families.

<sup>87</sup>“For Young Women,” *Cleveland Leader and Morning Herald*, September 13, 1886, 8; “Culture Classes for Self-Supporting Women,” *Plain Dealer*, September 13, 1886, 8.

<sup>88</sup>“Aid to Women. The Work of the WEIU,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, November 7, 1889, 3.

<sup>89</sup>“Welfare of Women,” *Plain Dealer*, December 17, 1892, 6.

<sup>90</sup>Per the title of chapter 1.

to prepare working women for job openings in regional industries and to remedy gaps in the state education system. Unlike the WCTU, the NAWSA or the GFWC, sister WEIUS did not come under the leadership of a national organization that would issue directives or centralize funds to be channeled into federal lobbying. There were no conditions to start a new Women's Union; local WEIUS were neither properly branches, chapters, nor auxiliaries. The WEIU in itself was rather a concept that could be replicated and adapted anywhere. In contemporary accounts of individuals connected to these Women's Unions, there was sometimes a vague acknowledgment of what was done by sister organizations, and the knowledge that they would be welcome anywhere there was a "Women's Educational and Industrial Union." This could prove handy in case of emergencies, as Boston-based journalist Marion McBride discovered. In 1885, she unexpectedly had to stop in Buffalo on her way to Cleveland; having heard word of the Buffalo WEIU, she could confidently call on the local association for a night's stay.<sup>91</sup> In a more systematic fashion, the San Francisco Union considered establishing a conservative "chaperone" system to welcome eastern "ladies" as they confronted an unfamiliar and potentially hostile environment upon arrival.<sup>92</sup>

These more conservative overtones were sometimes echoed by practices, like giving out clothes to poor families, that were redolent of more traditional—because personalized and curative—forms of charity.<sup>93</sup> That some WEIUS maintained a miscellany of programs reflected the fact that locally, especially in smaller cities, "WEIU" could quickly come to mean a potpourri of white Protestant women's philanthropy. Ultimately, however, I contend that it was a rising awareness of the specific social and economic needs of wage-earning women which undergirded the establishment of even the more conservative WEIUS. In Cleveland, upon the occasion of the emancipation of the WEIU from the Woman's Christian Association, its members stated to the press that three motives guided their work:

First, the fact that hundreds of girls and women are being constantly thrown upon their own unassisted efforts for support, who yet are destitute of the skill in any [?] necessary to the earning of a comfortable livelihood. Second, that this great body of unskilled workers necessarily drift into the employment most easily mastered, so

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<sup>91</sup>Gossip and Gleanings. *Woman's Journal* 16, no. 52 (December 26, 1885), 411.

<sup>92</sup>"Woman and Home," *Jackson Citizen Patriot*, November 7, 1890, 1.

<sup>93</sup>Anne Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism, New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 24. Boylan argues that the second surge of female organizing, which she locates in the 1820s, was analogous to the charitable activities of the 1790s in that it targeted indigent women—most often widows—and children, to whom clothing and typically provided.

crowding the labor market as to reduce wages to the lowest possible [?]. Third, that these girl workers, in the majority of cases, take up their life drudgery at a very early age, when they have acquired only the rudiments of an education, and the narrowest outlook, so that, should they be released from the necessity of self-support and established as mistresses of homes, they have but a meager preparation for a work that needs the highest culture and the greatest breadth of view of which woman is capable.<sup>94</sup> In Boston as in Buffalo, meanwhile, the “Noon Rest” program got off to an explosive start: the WEIU’s lunch rooms, which catered to working women, were successful in large part because they fulfilled a real need.<sup>95</sup>

The very flexibility and openness which characterized the WEIU and explained its success could prove “unwieldy” in smaller cities. “[A]dmit the ‘union’ is unwieldy from aiming at too many ends, or premature because the education of our community is not advanced enough to keep step with its suggested march,” wrote one critic of the Knoxville WEIU in its early days.<sup>96</sup> Eventually, though, most local Unions tended to develop specialties beyond the core WEIU program, depending on factors that included both the existing charitable environment as well as the tastes and preferences of influential individuals. This specialization process gave each WEIU a decidedly local character, as in Auburn, New York. Edith Foster Dulles (1863-1941), the mother of US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, was president of the WEIU for twenty-two years. Her childhood as the daughter of a US ambassador was spent traveling internationally and, as an adult, she developed an interest in foreign affairs and the welfare of the immigrant population. This colored the activities of the Auburn Union, which included luncheons and talks “to some twenty different nationalities.”<sup>97</sup> In Rochester, meanwhile, the Union tended to make educational affairs and the support of local schools its purview. Not only was president Helen Barrett Montgomery, who sat on the School Board, keenly interested in education; at the time it was established, commentators noted that there already existed in Rochester voluntary organizations that were carrying out the social work typically discharged by a Women’s Union.<sup>98</sup>

The motto of the Boston WEIU, “the union of all for the good of all,” was expansive enough as to be copied, adopted, adapted, as in San Francisco.<sup>99</sup> So was its

<sup>94</sup> “Will Be Independent,” *Cleveland Leader and Morning Herald*, February 7, 1888, 5.

<sup>95</sup> Davenport, “The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union.”

<sup>96</sup> “Praise for the Ladies,” *Knoxville Journal*, August 30, 1891, 6.

<sup>97</sup> *Sunday Denver Post*, September 29, 1957, 81.

<sup>98</sup> “In the Women’s Clubs,” *New York Evening Post*, December 16, 1899, 18.

<sup>99</sup> Mrs. M. E. Rise, *Fernwood Leaves 49’-94’: Midwinter Tribute to Our Pioneer Matrons* (San Francisco: Upton Bros., 1894), n.p., HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t9184379k>.

statement of purpose; the Providence WEIU, like the Boston WEIU, first put forward its object as being “mutual cooperation and sympathy” among women.<sup>100</sup> In contrast, and interestingly, a report on women’s clubs collated by the Massachusetts Commissioner of Labor at the turn of the century gave five different objects for the five WEIUS it listed outside of Boston—Buffalo, Knoxville, Rochester, and Saco. Buffalo’s was close to the original Boston formulation—“educational, industrial, and social advancement”; Saco’s was a tamer “[f]riendship among women; welfare of the community,” while Rochester’s and Knoxville’s pointed to very local concerns (education for the former, the “establishment of a day nursery” for the latter).<sup>101</sup> This reflects both the lack of a national, umbrella organization, and the tendency of most of the smaller WEIUS to gain local publicity for hyper-specific undertakings—not for the high-minded ideals which might have undergirded them. This is likely the reason for the distorted view of the 1899 report, and, we might surmise, the contradictory accounts of the WEIU in the literature—as a typical woman’s club, a woman’s exchange, a conservative instrument of benevolence, or a radically progressive class-bridging organization.<sup>102</sup>

## 7.2 Collaborations with State and National Organizations

By the early 1890s, a number of sister WEIUS were established throughout New England and New York State. Both the women’s club movement and the suffragist movement were slowly gaining traction as well: 1890 saw the creation of two influential national organizations, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC) and the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), which, in the wake of the fortieth anniversary of the Seneca Falls Convention (1848), promised to unite the efforts of women across different constituencies and demographics.

At the 1888 International Council of Women in Washington D.C., “only those bodies which [had] [a] National organization, with few exceptions, were invited to send delegates”; these exceptions were “the only bodies of their kind in the

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<sup>100</sup>“Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Christian Register*, December 14, 1878, 3; *Third Annual Report of the Commissioner of Industrial Statistics* (Providence: E.L. Freeman & Son, 1890), 178, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/chi.098255681>.

<sup>101</sup>Carroll D. Wright, *Bulletin of the Department of Labor*, no. 20 (January 1899), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924054535681>, 529; 537; 539; 543.

<sup>102</sup>See the introduction to the dissertation, p. 24-26.

country.”<sup>103</sup> The Boston WEIU fit neither of these categories and thus occupied a unique position at this national gathering, which had planned for women to discuss “woman’s equality” in education, industry, and politics.<sup>104</sup> It was a prime opportunity for president Abby Morton Diaz to give an account of the work of the WEIU and advertise for it, at the same time as she advocated “organization” as a general principle.<sup>105</sup> Other WEIU members were also present as delegates of other bodies, like Julia Ward Howe and suffragist Mary F. Eastman, who noted that “nothing [was] more a feature of the times than the tendency towards organization,” and that in it, unlike in marriage, “perfect equality” could be found.<sup>106</sup> In this section, we will consider the place that the WEIU occupied as an intermediary—an organization with both regional and global foci, whose broad statement of purpose and emphasis on notions like progress, organization, and cooperation led it to function as a local booster for other social movements with which it built complex, mutually beneficial relationships.

### 7.2.1 “Women’s Unions” in a Suffragist Perspective

Owing to its Boston location, the first WEIU flourished in one of the centers of the antebellum “feminist-abolitionist coalition.” Boston-based suffragists, men and women, many with personal connections to abolitionism, were part of the social and intellectual circles in which the women of the WEIU found themselves. Even after the splintering of the suffragist movement in the late 1860s, nationally prominent male supporters of the cause like Thomas Wentworth Higginson (1823-1911) and William Lloyd Garrison, Jr. (1838-1909) attended the lectures given by the WEIU, when they themselves did not volunteer their services as speakers; they donated their time and money; their wives were members of the organization. As we have seen, activists Lucy Stone, Mary Livermore, and Julia Ward Howe, as they took part in its activities, praised the Union program in the press and supported

<sup>103</sup> “Council of Women,” *Daily Inter Ocean*, March 18, 4.

<sup>104</sup> Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 15. In 1888, the National Woman Suffrage Association called an “International Council of Women” in Washington, DC. Leila Rupp identifies the beginnings of the ICW in a European trip undertaken in 1882-1883 by suffrage leaders Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, which resulted in the formation of a committee of correspondence tasked with setting up an international suffrage organization. Interestingly, despite the suffragist roots of the project, the call was sent to “all women of light and learning, as well as to those advocating political rights.” Temperance, labor, and literary organizations as well as professional women’s groups were invited to the founding conference.

<sup>105</sup> “Legalized Masters. Husbands Pronounced Such by Women Suffragists in Council,” *Baltimore Sun*, March 30, 1888, supplement, 1.

<sup>106</sup> “Freedom for the Fair Sex,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 30, 1888, 1.

the principles that undergirded it.<sup>107</sup> While there were not any institutional ties between the Boston-based American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA)<sup>108</sup> and the WEIU, in 1885 the *Woman's Journal* noted that there was a noticeable suffragist presence in the ranks of the Union: “The names of friends of woman suffrage are prominent in the report of the annual meeting of the Woman’s Educational and Industrial Union [sic].” In addition to Abby Morton Diaz, its president, and Lucia Peabody, its secretary, many of the committees numbered at least one suffragist officer. Mira H. Pitman, of the Industrial Department, Dr. Salome Merritt, Harriet W. Sewall, of the Protective Committee, and Caroline Kennard, of the Beneficiary Committee, were all “suffrage women, as [were] a number of the best workers for the Union.”<sup>109</sup> While noted anti-suffragists like moralist and author Kate Gannett Wells (1838-1911) were also deeply involved in the workings of the Union, available evidence tends to suggest that they were not as numerous, or at least that press accounts glossed over their opposition to suffrage.

A look at sister WEIUS enables us to better understand these patterns of involvement. While neither the Boston organization nor many of the New England and New York WEIUS self-identified as political or suffragist bodies, the connections with local suffragist individuals and organizations were strong. One of the founders of the Auburn WEIU, Eliza Wright Osborne, belonged to the same generation as the Boston-based luminaries of abolitionist stock. She exemplifies the family ties that bound the feminist-abolitionist coalition and the WEIU; in that respect, I argue that she was part of a transitional generation that bridges the gap between the ante- and post-bellum suffrage movements, and whose commitment to women’s economic citizenship illuminates continuities that the literature on suffrage has failed to acknowledge.<sup>110</sup> Eliza Wright Osborne was a second-generation suffragist:

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<sup>107</sup>See chapter 1, p. 69.

<sup>108</sup>The American Woman Suffrage Association was established in Cleveland shortly after the National Woman Suffrage Association, in November 1869, in the context of “schismatic” tensions within the broader women’s rights movement. Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 155.

<sup>109</sup>*Woman’s Journal* 16, no. 19 (May 9, 1885), 151.

<sup>110</sup>Classic works like Ellen Carol DuBois’s *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women’s Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978) validate the narrative according to which the post-war suffrage movement was a narrowed down version of the more expansive women’s rights movement of the 1850s. DuBois recounts how Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton tried and failed to convince New York’s typographers to create a cross-class suffragist organization in the late 1860s, and how that failure also signaled the abandonment of economic demands, to the expense of the vote. She writes: “The revival of congressional debate on the suffrage provisions of the Constitution in the winter of 1869 coincided with the collapse of the Working Women’s Association and reinforced the impact of that collapse on suffragists. It helped to draw their attention away from the kind of economic



she was the daughter of Martha Coffin Wright and the niece of Lucretia Mott, and grew up in a staunchly suffragist family.<sup>111</sup> Her daughter, Mrs. Helen O. Storrow, is the “Mrs. J.J. Storrow” mentioned in the Union’s early annual reports.<sup>112</sup> In addition to the duties she herself took on as the vice-president of the New York State Woman Suffrage Association, Eliza Wright Osborne committed herself to bettering the working and living conditions of working women, to which end she made liberal donations towards the establishment of a WEIU and a home for self-supporting women in Auburn.<sup>113</sup>

Evidence of continuity is also surprisingly clear in the activism of Susan B. Anthony, the self-proclaimed figurehead of the suffrage movement and de facto leader of a competing suffrage organization. She was acquainted with New York state reformers and activists like Harriet A. Townsend, the president of the Buffalo Union, with whom she shared an interest in the development of vocational education, and whom she brought to Rochester to make the case for the creation of a local WEIU in 1893.<sup>114</sup> The younger Townsend and Anthony had met at a suffrage meeting when the former was a “school-girl” whose lawyer father wanted “[his] daughters to be educated on all important questions of the day and to learn to think for themselves.” The two women would meet again when Townsend was an adult and become “devoted friends.”<sup>115</sup> Far from a passing interest or an anecdotal gesture, Anthony inviting Townsend to Rochester was only the beginning of her own involvement with the Rochester Union—which itself was one thread in a rich tapestry of feminist voluntary work. Her superlative diary entry for December 2, 1898, indicated that on that day she assisted Mrs. Sewall to form a local Council of Women in Rochester, became a charter member of the George Washington Memorial Association, was guest of honor at the reception of the Educational and Industrial Union, talked to girls of the public schools, signed 1,000 letters asking subscriptions to the work of the National Suffrage Association, entertained the Political Equality Club [etc.].<sup>116</sup> This list is suggestive of Anthony’s interest in the

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demands that were at the center of working women’s concerns, and to give suffragists renewed confidence that political equality was the key to women’s emancipation.” DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage*, 162. Writing later, in 2014, Lisa Tetrault summarized this shift thus: “an antebellum women’s rights movement shaded into a postwar women’s movement,” whose organizers focused on the vote as the chief tool of emancipation. Tetrault, *Myth of Seneca Falls*, 20-21.

<sup>111</sup>“Death of Mrs. D. M. Osborne,” *Springfield Republican*, July 19, 1911, 6.

<sup>112</sup>“Death of Eliza Wright Osborne,” *Boston Herald*, July 19, 1911, 1.

<sup>113</sup>“Death of Mrs. D. M. Osborne,” *Springfield Republican*.

<sup>114</sup>Ida Husted Harper, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony*, v. 2 (Indianapolis: Hollenbeck Press [c1898-1908]), 741, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435056194111>.

<sup>115</sup>Harriet A. Townsend, *Reminiscences of Famous Women* (Buffalo: Evans-Penfold Company Publishers, 1916), 25-26, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433075957971>.

<sup>116</sup>Ida Husted Harper, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony* v. 3 (Indianapolis: Hollenbeck

twin causes of women's education and co-education. Biographical material that contributed to building her into the only leading light of the suffrage movement, per a calculated communication strategy described by Lisa Tetrault,<sup>117</sup> painted her as instrumental to the goals of the Rochester WEIU's educational projects. In particular, friend and colleague Ida Husted Harper's biography cast her as a savior without whom the University of Rochester would not have been made co-educational as early as it was. As the story went, in the summer of 1898 the Board of Trustees of the University of Rochester, responding to several years of sustained lobbying, offered local women's organizations a deal: to admit women, on the condition that \$100,000 would be raised within a year. At a joint meeting of the WEIU, the Ethical Club, and a handful of other women's clubs, the president of the WEIU was appointed chairman of a committee for raising the necessary funds, of which Anthony herself was a member. Notwithstanding intense hostility from alumni and general trouble gathering the sum, the committee managed to raise the \$42,000 out of the \$50,000 that the Trustees had agreed on, as a compromise. In Ida Husted Harper's account of events, on the very last day that the total could be raised, Anthony ran from nearby stores to offices, factories, and made a round of all of her acquaintances in and near Rochester, with the sole purpose of raising the remaining \$8,000. When one of the guarantors she had secured was not deemed trustworthy enough, she lied that she had pledged her own money, declaring with a flourish "Well, gentlemen, I may as well confess—I am the guarantor, but I asked Mr. Wilder to lend me his name so that this question of co-education might not be hurt by any connection with woman suffrage. I now pledge my life insurance for the \$2,000."<sup>118</sup> And, just like that, or so the account goes, the Trustees agreed to turn the University of Rochester into a co-educational institution.

While this story is an illustration of the myth-building that Susan B. Anthony herself engaged in over the last decades of her life, it also exemplifies the kind of inter-organizational alliances that WEIUs entered into and how they were cemented on the ground. In addition, on that particular day in 1899, Anthony's lie contained a kernel of truth: that co-education and woman suffrage were two different though interrelated causes, which could elicit wildly different public responses. She was aware of her own controversial reputation, which her defense of the franchise contributed to fashioning perhaps as much as that of women's right to initiate a

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Press, 1908), 1122, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101008719781>. Emphasis mine.

<sup>117</sup>Lisa Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 183.

<sup>118</sup>Harper, *The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony* v. 3, 1221-1224.

divorce.<sup>119</sup> This sometimes led her to downplay her involvement with Rochester’s reform institutions. When once asked to sit upon the platform and address the Rochester Women’s Union, soon after its creation, she relented, for fear that the work of the WEIU might suffer from an open association with suffragism—even though, as we shall see, there were publicized ties between suffragists and WEIU workers.<sup>120</sup>

Analyses of Anthony’s suffragism have underscored that she and other leaders of the post-bellum women’s suffrage movement prioritized the cause at the expense of every other social or civil demand formulated in the women’s rights conventions of the 1850s. Nancy Schrom Dye, writing of later suffrage leader, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s daughter, Harriot Stanton Blatch, noted that despite being part of the cross-class Women’s Trade Union League, she viewed alliances with working women as purely instrumental. Blatch believed that the vote was “a prerequisite for any other improvement in women’s status.”<sup>121</sup> This was the view endorsed by the unified National American Woman Suffrage Association as early as 1894, when its convention passed a resolution stating “[t]hat disfranchisement is largely responsible for her industrial inequality and therefore for the degradation of many women, and we advocate the just principle of ‘Equal Pay for Equal Work.’”<sup>122</sup> Such priority-setting should not distract us from what contemporaries also noticed—that, especially in her later years, other suffragists like Susan B. Anthony actively contributed to furthering a variety of related or supporting causes, sometimes to the point of diverting money from suffrage, as in the case of co-education in Rochester.

At Anthony’s funeral, the president of the Rochester WEIU, Helen Barrett Montgomery, one of her close friends, was one of the speakers. She declared boldly, though perhaps with some exaggeration, that “[the organization of the WEIU] was due to [Anthony]; all its efforts met her most cordial support; she was the warm personal friend of its active workers, who were ever sure of her tender, womanly sympathy.” Asserting that she was speaking on behalf of all the women in Rochester, Montgomery further stated that “[e]very young woman in her university owe[d] her opportunities to Miss Anthony; every young woman seeking

<sup>119</sup>Lisa Tetrault, *Myth of Seneca Falls*, 26.

<sup>120</sup>Harriet A. Townsend, *Reminiscences of Famous Women* (Buffalo: Evans-Penfold Company Publishers, 1916), 28.

<sup>121</sup>Nancy Schrom Dye, “Creating a Feminist Alliance: Sisterhood and Class Conflict in the New York Women’s Trade Union League, 1903-1914,” *Feminist Studies* 2, no. 2/3 (1975): 34.

<sup>122</sup>Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 62.

wider industrial opportunities owe[d] much of their possibility to Miss Anthony; every mother in [the] State owe[d] her legal right to her own property, her own earnings and even to her own children, to Miss Anthony.”<sup>123</sup> In this speech, we can read an inchoate articulation of economic citizenship—a grasping at the concept. Women’s property rights, their educational opportunities, and their openings on the job market, all were part of a same whole, to which suffrage was not foreign. Nationally, Susan B. Anthony did help popularize a truncated definition of women’s rights as suffrage;<sup>124</sup> locally, she also worked with club women to bolster women’s access to higher education, an indication that she believed this work was worth her time and energy. Both can be true at the same time. Even though she did not see eye to eye with audacious free love advocate Victoria Woodhull, she still publicly defended her right and ability to open a brokerage firm on Wall Street, however short-lived the endeavor proved.<sup>125</sup>

From that perspective, both suffragism and the advocacy work of the “educational and industrial union” furthered the varied, superimposed identities of women as students, workers, and voters, albeit through different means—and conversely. Women’s business experience would bolster their work as voting citizens. Volumes acquired by the Boston WEIU’s extensive library on women’s work illuminate that perspective. In 1912, Ethel McLean Johnson, the WEIU’s librarian, made the purchase of William H. Allen’s *Woman’s Part in Government Whether She Votes or Not*. The volume was likely meant to complement the author’s *Efficient Democracy*, which already sat on the WEIU’s shelves.<sup>126</sup> In the former volume, Allen, the general agent for the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, a progressive philanthropic organization, posited three ways that women could have a hand in politics. First, woman would “do her part” by

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<sup>123</sup>Harper, *Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony* v. 3, 1457. For details about how Helen Barrett Montgomery (who initially “regarded the suffrage label with ambivalence,” 204) and Susan B. Anthony “worked side by side as leaders of the women’s movement in Rochester,” see chapter 6 of Helen Barrett Montgomery, *1861-1910: From Progressivism and Woman’s Emancipation to Global Mission*, Kendal P. Mobley, PhD. thesis, Boston University School of Theology, 2004.

<sup>124</sup>Aileen Kraditor, in her classic volume on Ideas of the *Woman Suffrage Movement*, wrote that “Miss Anthony to the end of her life contended that the vote was the key to women’s emancipation.” Kraditor, *Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement*, 11.

<sup>125</sup>Susan M. Yohn, “Crippled Capitalists: The Inscription of Economic Dependence and the Challenge of Female Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth Century America,” *Feminist Economics* 12 (January/April 2006): 86-87.

<sup>126</sup>WEIU records, “New Material in Library,” *Union News Items* (March 5, 1912), 11. B-8. Box 1, folder 3. See William H. Allen, *Efficient Democracy* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1907), HathiTrust, [https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.\\$b172442](https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.$b172442). William Allen was a fervent partisan of “efficiency” in “the administration of business, health, school, church, juvenile court, hospital, charity, bequest, and government,” placing these varied institutions on a single footing (*Efficient Democracy*, ix).

“do[ing] efficiently what her position require[d] of her as individual member of society: mother, sister, wage-earner, wage-payer, purchaser;” then, by enrolling in a voluntary organization; and thirdly, by laboring as an “influencer of public opinion and official action.”<sup>127</sup> Allen predicted that the day would soon come when voting would be added to that list, and would “prove to be no more a matter of sex than running a college or church or business office.”<sup>128</sup> The experience that women accrued in the discharge of these offices, and the demands that the latter placed on female workers and managers, would make suffrage seem easy and uncomplicated in comparison: “Any woman who can run a charity organization, a suburban home, a typewriter, a boarding house, a sales counter, a loom with one hundred spindles or a class room with sixty children, will find voting so easy and so simple, and so transient in its satisfaction, that she will wonder at woman’s anxiety to do it,” Allen prophesized.<sup>129</sup>

Women’s Unions collaborated with suffragist organizations on a regular basis, whether they were related to the NWSA or the AWSA (prior to their merging), exchanging knowledge, know-how, and money. The Boston WEIU even played an indirect role in the formation of the National Woman Suffrage Association of Massachusetts (1882). One WEIU member, who was also a NWSA member, invited others to a meeting in a back room of the WEIU, which resulted in the formation of a state auxiliary.<sup>130</sup> Meanwhile, individual members took part in suffragist activities in smaller settings, as did Boston president Abby Morton Diaz when she became the president of the Belmont Woman Suffrage League (1886). At the League’s fortnightly gatherings of upwards of 30 some members, she would also read papers on various topics “leading up to woman suffrage.”<sup>131</sup> Smaller northern WEIUs like that of Somerville could show their sympathy for the cause through donations. In 1886, the Somerville society gave \$10 to the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association (MWSA).<sup>132</sup> Even southern WEIU like that of Knoxville, Tennessee, could exist in the orbit of suffragist groups. Writing in 1940 of the first women’s political organizations in the city, a journalist indiscriminately lumped the WEIU

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<sup>127</sup>William H. Allen, *Woman’s Part In Government, Whether She Votes or Not* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1915), v, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/ien.35556020589610>.

<sup>128</sup>Allen, *Woman’s Part in Government*, vi.

<sup>129</sup>Allen, *Woman’s Part in Government*, vi-vii.

<sup>130</sup>“Notes and News,” *Woman’s Journal* 13, no. 6 (February 11, 1882), 45.

<sup>131</sup>Mrs. M. F. Swords, “The Belmont League,” *Woman’s Journal* 17, no. 11 (March 13, 1886), 82.

<sup>132</sup>“Donations, Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Organization,” *Woman’s Journal* 17, no. 3 (January 6, 1886), 21.

with the Knoxville Equal Suffrage League, the Margaret French Suffrage Group, and the National Woman's Party (NWP).<sup>133</sup>

While the Boston WEIU issued no public endorsement of suffrage, by 1900-1905 most in its college-trained staff were suffragists. The Union's Appointment Bureau in particular supported the work of the Education for Citizenship Committee of the Boston Equal Suffrage Association (BESA). Both the leadership and membership of the WEIU had a chance to become acquainted with the work of the BESA, as the two organizations put together a series of joint lectures in 1908.<sup>134</sup> The Union supported suffrage-related measures: in 1913, it backed Senate Bill 207, the "so-called Anti-Gag Rule," which proposed to prohibit the school committee from infringing upon teachers' right to vote in school board elections, petition or appear before the legislature.<sup>135</sup> Conversely, the Massachusetts Woman Suffrage Association called upon Union members to discuss topics that were the province of the Union, like protective labor legislation for women. In 1906, the MSWA held a conference on the "industrial conditions affecting women and children," whose speakers were Caroline J. Cook, the WEIU's legal counsel, and Mabel Parton, its agent in the investigation of rubber and twine and cordage factories.<sup>136</sup> Both the WEIU and the MSWA displayed an interest in issues that the other organization championed. There appeared to have been a capacious meeting ground for their ideas and activists. For the acquaintances, friends and colleagues navigating the sphere of women's rights in the late nineteenth century, improving women's economic and legal standing were interrelated causes, which individuals then ranked idiosyncratically, according to personal hierarchies.

The interconnectedness of demands pertaining to women's work and suffrage were clearest in the writings of Western women, for some of whom the ballot was already a reality.<sup>137</sup> In "The Suffragist, the Club Woman and the Business Woman," a piece published in the *Business Woman's Journal*, the evocatively named organ of the Colorado State Federation of Women's Clubs—also billed as "the only business woman's magazine in the world"—, the president of the State Federation explained how the suffragist movement was responsible for women's new opportunities on the job market. Mary C. C. Bradford saw a causal relationship

<sup>133</sup>Lizzie Crozier French Scrapbook. Newspaper clipping, Margaret Lipscombe, "Knoxville Has Witnessed Long Fight by Women for 'Rights' in Politics," *Knoxville Journal*, July 28, 1940.

<sup>134</sup>Additional WEIU records, "A Bureau of Occupations for Trained Women." Carton 1; Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government v. 10*, October 1, 1907, 91. Carton 2.

<sup>135</sup>*Union News Items* 2, no. 7 (May 1913), 6-7.

<sup>136</sup>"Boston Owes Teachers," *Springfield Daily Republican*, March 14, 1906, 7.

<sup>137</sup>Gayle Gullett, *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women's Movement, 1880-1911* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000).

in the correlation between a higher percentage of “successful business women” and the fact that Colorado women had been able to vote for a decade by then. Chiding club women for ignoring the full extent of the debt they owed suffragists, she painted the advancement of women in a singular brush stroke and argued that “the forward movement of the time [was] one [...]” Club women, business women, and suffragists were working hand in hand towards “the self-development and practical success of women.”<sup>138</sup>

If Abby Morton Diaz had initially talked of the WEIU agenda as “applied Christianity,”<sup>139</sup> by the turn of the century it could aptly be termed “applied suffragism”—unless it was suffragists who consciously distilled various “educational” and “industrial” demands into a single theoretical essence, the vote.

## 7.2.2 A Club after All? Ties to the General Federation of Women’s Clubs

While the Boston WEIU never affiliated to any of the national suffrage organizations, it would eventually join the General Federation of Women’s Clubs (GFWC), despite a long-standing ambivalence towards the white, middle-class Protestant part of the club movement. Starting in the 1860s and 1870s with the creation of the New England Women’s Club (1868) and Sorosis (1868), women’s clubs joined the large, diversified number of women’s voluntary associations. Ranging from groups of a dozen members to large hierarchical organizations articulated around thematic committees or departments, clubs first existed as sites of socialization and self-improvement through the study of literature and history.<sup>140</sup> The WEIU emerged from the NEWC, and evidence suggests that the founding generation acknowledged that heritage and paid tribute to the pioneers in the club movement. In 1889, Caroline Kennard, who sat on the early Boards of Government of the

<sup>138</sup>Marcy C. C. Bradford, “The Suffragist, the Club Woman and the Business Woman,” *Business Woman’s Magazine* 2, no. 1 (January 1904), 7-9, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679791>.

<sup>139</sup>Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 2, 1882* (Boston: No. 157 Tremont Street, 1882), 14, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065320874>. This phrase was a clear reference to the Social Gospel, this also being the title of a 1886 book by Washington Gladden. Susan Curtis, *A Consuming Faith: The Social Gospel and American Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 35.

<sup>140</sup>Per Theodora Penny Martin’s definition. Theodora Penny Martin, *The Sound of Our Own Voices: Women’s Study Clubs, 1860-1910* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 1-3.

WEIU, was its delegate at an event celebrating the anniversary of Sorosis.<sup>141</sup>

Still, the leaders of the WEIU did not refer to themselves as club women, nor to the Union as a club, although the press at times did treat it as one. The ethos of civic improvement demonstrated by the founders of the WEIU as early as the late 1870s placed it in the vanguard of the transformation of the literary club into an organ of social reform.<sup>142</sup> Although to some extent the New York WEIUs presented themselves as clubs and were reported as such when the local press covered their activities—the Syracuse WEIU even had a “club color”<sup>143</sup>—their activities and interests would have set them apart from the mainstream of women’s clubs in the 1880s and even early 1890s. In 1894, it was in cooperation with the New York State Federation that the Syracuse WEIU established a trade school for girls, but this should be understood or read more as an indication of the influence of the “educational and industrial union” on the club movement than the opposite.<sup>144</sup>

The story of the *Federation Bulletin* as an organ of the GFWC will typify the ties that bound it with the WEIU. The *Bulletin*, initially the organ of the Massachusetts Federation of Women’s Clubs, was from its birth edited and published by two prominent officers of the WEIU, May Alden Ward (in 1903, president of the Massachusetts Federation) and Helen A. Whittier (who succeeded Ward in 1904).<sup>145</sup> In September 1903, the Massachusetts Federation and club women Ward and Whittier offered the WEIU to “unite with that organization in the publication of a monthly bulletin or magazine.” The plan was seen by the members of the Board of Government as “an opportunity for getting a wider publication of the work of the Union, and for giving assistance to the club movement along the lines in which both the Federation and the Union have common interests.”<sup>146</sup> Evidently, the women of the Union conceptualized their relationship to organizations like the state and national federations of clubs as a mutually beneficial one. As part of the bargain, the WEIU was entitled to one or two pages for monthly announcements and editorial notices. While other clubs also had that privilege, an

<sup>141</sup>Mildred White Wells, *Unity in Diversity: The History of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs* (Washington: General Federation of Women’s Clubs, 1953), 466, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015012098292>.

<sup>142</sup>Blair, *Clubwoman as Feminist*, 73-91.

<sup>143</sup>“Gossip At The Clubs,” *New York Tribune*, March 24, 1899, 5. This article is also a very good example of the way that the activities of women’s groups were often lumped together in dedicated “club” columns.

<sup>144</sup>Wells, *Unity in Diversity*, 429.

<sup>145</sup>*Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 1 (January 1903), 1, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>; *Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 8 (June 1904), 199, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.

<sup>146</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government v. 8*, September 18, 1903, 48. 81-M237. Carton 2.



offer was made to put the WEIU’s announcements on an easily detachable sheet of paper, for ease of use and circulation.<sup>147</sup> When it became the official organ of the GFWC in 1905, the monthly features on WEIU programs could reach not only tens of thousands of white club women across the country, but upwards of two million people, as historian Anne Ruggles Gere estimated. This was the readership of the forty-seven newspapers to which GFWC leaders sent the *Federation Bulletin* in 1906, so that they may reprint articles in their “ladies” or “club departments.”<sup>148</sup> The white middle-class ladies of the Massachusetts and General Federation and the women of the WEIU belonged—and understood themselves as belonging—to overlapping circles of influence and interest. Thanks to the *Federation Bulletin*, word of the Boston WEIU’s experiments could reach far-flung southern and western communities.

The WEIU also took on an active leadership role as far as local clubs were concerned. In 1904, a special meeting of the Board of Government resulted in a resolution to invite the clubs “in and about Boston” to the Union’s annual meeting and to hold the whole Union building open for inspection on that occasion. The WEIU women positioned themselves not only as fellow philanthropists, but as an example to follow.<sup>149</sup> Only later did Union officers express explicit admiration for the work accomplished by the GFWC. After an annual event held by the Federation in June 1907 the secretary of the WEIU found that it “had opened her eyes to the possibilities of this club movement,” following which the Board of Government recommended that the Union send delegates to all quarterly and annual meetings of the GFWC.<sup>150</sup> Only in the late mid-1900s did the activities of the WEIU and the GFWC converge to such a degree that contemporaries noted the proximity or even identity of their commitment to social service.

Their working relationship had actually originated earlier, in the establishment of a joint “Committee on Industrial Conditions of Women and Children” in 1903. Its members were tasked with investigating “the dangerous and injurious trades in which women and children are engaged.”<sup>151</sup> It was the first committee specifically and solely dedicated to issues of social justice, joining departments on forestry, city beautification, or literary culture. In an acknowledgment of the ex-

<sup>147</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, September 18, 1903, 48-49. Carton 2.

<sup>148</sup>Gere, *Intimate Practices*, 9.

<sup>149</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, February 23, 1904, 83. Carton 2.

<sup>150</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 10 November 5, 1907, 95-96. Carton 2.

<sup>151</sup>Additional WEIU records, Reports made to the annual meeting, 1905. Carton 6.

expertise and authority of WEIU women, the Massachusetts State Federation sought out their “cooperation” and requested that Mary Morton Kehew, president of the Boston Union, serve as chairman of this committee.<sup>152</sup> This joint committee would go on to spearhead the Federation’s efforts to rally the benevolent women of Massachusetts to the cause of the consolidation of the Board of Education. The Federation’s ultimate goal was the appointment of a woman to this Board, and this it felt required the coordinated efforts of the many.<sup>153</sup> Throughout this campaign, the WEIU, although an affiliated club, retained special standing as an explicitly named cooperating member of the Joint Committee.

This brief example encapsulates the way that the Union worked and existed both apart from and in connection with the GFWC. While first the Massachusetts and later the General Federations learned to rely on the WEIU as a body of capable investigators and influential lobbyists, through its personal and institutional connections with the GFWC the Union was also able to harness the power of club networks for its own ends. In 1910 for instance, Union president Mary Morton Kehew appealed to the secretaries of clubs affiliated with the Massachusetts Federation, asking them for help “as ‘man to man.’” She was asking them to join a lobbying campaign led by the Union for passage of a bill policing employment bureaus in the state.<sup>154</sup>

More and more, collaboration with club women entailed reaching out to other groups. In 1917, the Rochester WEIU was only one of at least a dozen “agencies” sitting on the committee in charge of the “Live a Little Longer!” public health education campaign, which also involved federated women’s clubs. Local churches, hospital boards, as well the Board of Education and the Health Bureau brought further authority and additional resources to efforts to “[protect] public health.”<sup>155</sup> By the late 1910s, as public health and educational matters were no longer conceptualized as individual but as community issues and responsibilities, the women of the WEIU had grown accustomed to reaching out to club women as well as public authorities in the pursuit of complex projects that required manpower, time, and ample financial resources. This brought them into working relationships with male politicians as well as mixed-sex civic associations, to the extent that in the

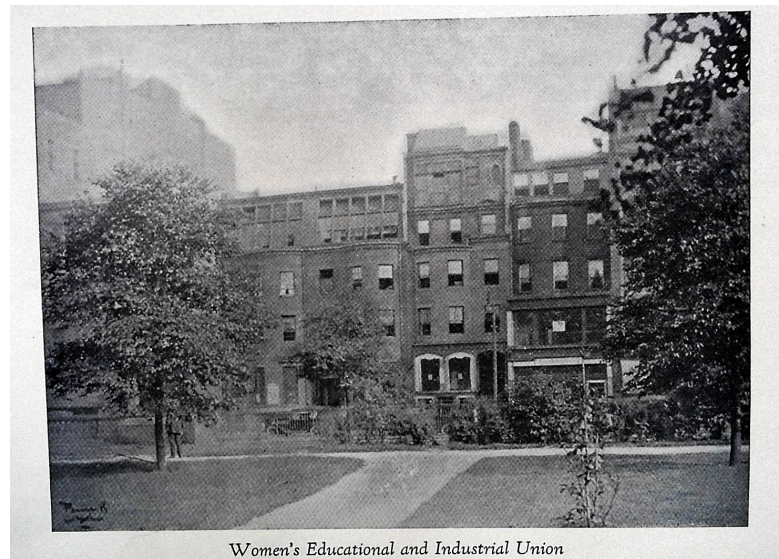
<sup>152</sup>Addition WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 8, May 5, 1903, 42. Carton 2.

<sup>153</sup>WEIU records, B-8. Box 3, folder 23. Georgie A. Bacon and Mary Morton Kehew for the Joint Industrial Committee, letter to Presidents of Clubs of the Massachusetts State Federation, March 8, 1909.

<sup>154</sup>WEIU records. B-8. Box 4, folder 28. Mary Morton Kehew, Letter to the secretaries of the Massachusetts State Federation. March 9, 1910.

<sup>155</sup>“Live a Little Longer!” *General Federation of Women’s Clubs Magazine* 16, no. 3 (March 1917), 28-29, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679924>.

Figure 7.3: A view of 264 Boylston Street in the early 1920s.



Source: Cornelia James Cannon, *The History of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union: A Civic Laboratory* (Boston: 264 Boylston Street, 1927), n.p. 81-M237. Carton 1.

1900s and 1910s we can truly consider them active participants in the Progressive coalition.

### 7.3 A Home for Local Women's Organizations

Not only was the WEIU a bustling community center where hundreds, if not thousands of visitors—men and women—convened daily to complete all kinds of errands “for business, for pleasure, for rest, to meet friends, to read or consult books, to obtain information [...], to ask advice, to tell sad tales of bitter experience and seek sympathy”<sup>156</sup>—it also offered institutional and practical support to many of Boston's smaller women's organizations.

<sup>156</sup>Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston St., Boston, Mass., for the Year Ending May, 1896* (Cambridge: Press of the Cambridge Co-operative Society, 1896), 16, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061924106>.

### 7.3.1 A Factor in the Growth of Boston's Female Voluntary Association

The WEIU supported other women's associations at the local level, first and foremost by providing them with physical headquarters. "Hospitality" was extended to a variety of bodies seeking room for either occasional or regular meetings. Rent would have been a major expense for them; relying on larger organizations like the WEIU enabled them to free resources for other projects. The founding WEIU generation knew the value of having a room of their own; when they had first met, it had been in Harriet Clisby's own lodgings. During the first year of the WEIU's existence, finding suitable rooms for a reasonable price proved trying. The members of the first Board of Government unsuccessfully haggled for a room, first offering \$600 a year, then \$700, before the owner decided to rent it out to someone else.<sup>157</sup> The founders of the Buffalo WEIU were slightly more fortunate. The local branch of the Charity Organization Society offered them rooms free of charge in the Fitch Institute building; even the furniture was donated.<sup>158</sup> Over the 1880s, the Boston WEIU rented rooms in different locations, before the Board of Government bought 97 and 98 Boylston Street. More room to grow meant larger expenses. In part by renting out rooms to outside organizations, the WEIU was able to recoup the cost. There was a mention, in the agreement for the purchase of the buildings, of the fact that renting rooms "[would] meet the greater portion of the interest upon its cost." Renting was worked out to represent a yearly revenue of \$3,500 out of the \$8,540 needed thereafter to maintain the building.<sup>159</sup> In 1885, then, the WEIU granted requests for rooms to other women's associations as different as the City Municipal Suffrage Association and a nondescript Conversation Club. Unlike the City Municipal Suffrage Association, however, the Conversation Club was required to pay \$2 for each Saturday morning that they needed the room—perhaps on account of sympathies for the objects of the Suffrage Association.<sup>160</sup>

In dreaming of a building, a club house, the founders of the WEIU were not alone. Over 1,000 clubhouses were built by women's associations between 1880-1940, and this figure does not even account for the properties that they pur-

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<sup>157</sup>Addition WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 1, July 14, 1877, October 2, 1877, 7-11. Carton 1.

<sup>158</sup>"The Women's Union," *Buffalo Express Evening Bulletin*, May 10, 1884, 2.

<sup>159</sup>Addition WEIU records, Kate Gannett Wells, Abby Morton Diaz, "Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 74 Boylston Street," undated, c1885? Carton 1.

<sup>160</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 3, May 12, 1885, 116. Carton 1.

chased.<sup>161</sup> In the words of a GFWC manager, the 1910s were the dawn of "the age of home-building" for women's clubs.<sup>162</sup> The clubs that conducted these transactions purposely engaged in financial ventures. In order to build or buy, they founded stock companies, as did the Kansas City Athenaeum, a club of 625 members, which started the Athenaeum Club Company, Inc., with a capital of \$10,000 sold in shares of \$5 each.<sup>163</sup> Owning a building was not the province of the larger organizations like the WEIU. Depending on members' family resources and their ability to fund-raise, even small clubs could own a "home," because the appeal was so strong to have a room of one's own.<sup>164</sup> The club building functioned as a public and symbolic embodiment of sisterhood. After WWI especially, building a club house was considered by the women who ran associations as "the ultimate form of female institution building."<sup>165</sup>

As we have seen, for the Union, this legitimization of their activity came early on, in 1891 when 264 Boylston Street was refurbished and claimed as the WEIU's home.<sup>166</sup> Becoming owners fully empowered the Board of Government to let local and even national organizations use the committee rooms and the auditorium, Perkins Hall, free of charge. The WEIU wasted no time in offering its hospitality to bodies with which it was sympathetic. In late 1891, the Union used the local papers to "cordially [invite]" the women who were in town for the temperance convention to make use of its parlors and reading room.<sup>167</sup> In 1907, the annual report noted that during the year the WEIU had "offered its building without charge, as a regular meeting place, to sixteen organizations for social betterment, and sheltered thirty-two others for single or occasional meeting."<sup>168</sup> Despite the occasional decrease in the number of such organizations, by 1911 the annual report highlighted that, overall, there was a trend towards more frequent requests for rooms.<sup>169</sup>

What motivated the Union's leadership to extend such hospitality, if not

<sup>161</sup>Amelia Ritzenberg Crary, *Women's Clubs in California: Architecture and Organization, 1880-1940*, PhD. thesis. University of California, Berkeley, 2016, 11.

<sup>162</sup>Mary I. Wood, "Home-Building Among Clubs," *Ladies' Home Journal* 32, no. 11 (November 1915), 31, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015006960804>.

<sup>163</sup>Wood, "Home-Building Among Clubs."

<sup>164</sup>Carroll D. Wright, ed., *Bulletin of the Department of Labor*, no. 20 (January 1899), 518, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924054535681>.

<sup>165</sup>Karen Blair, "The Limits of Sisterhood: The Woman's Building in Seattle, 1908-1921," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 8, no. 1 (1984), 46-51; Crary, "Women's Clubs in California," 2-5; 8-11. As Crary writes, "[l]ooking at clubs through the lens of architectural history tells us about the needs and aspirations of the women who occupied them, and how the buildings participated in the construction of those needs and aspirations."

<sup>166</sup>See chapter 3, p. 196.

<sup>167</sup>"The W.C.T.U. Wednesday Afternoon's Session," *Boston Journal*, November 12, 1891, 2.

<sup>168</sup>WEIU, 1906-1907 Report, 43.

<sup>169</sup>WEIU, 1910-1911 Report, 40.

merely rent money? The Board of Government conceived that gesture as the provision of a public service: “By recognizing in various small groups of individuals meeting with a common purpose the beginning of important movements, and by drawing these groups to itself, the Union has fostered and made possible the successful development of many organizations [...],” the secretary wrote in the 1911 report.<sup>170</sup> This was not wishful thinking: at least some of the organizations initially hosted by the Union managed to graduate to homes of their own, like the Business Women’s Club, which in 1912 was able to rent prime real estate opposite the State House.<sup>171</sup> To an even greater degree, through the work of its president, the WEIU was credited for the transformation of the Union for Industrial Progress, initially a conference of WEIU staff, members and affiliates hosted at the Union, into the Women’s Trade Union League (WTUL), the only successful cross-class women’s labor organization of the period.<sup>172</sup> Over and over again, the women who led the WEIU reaffirmed their conception of themselves as purveyors of a multifaceted public service—not mere amenities, but the nurturing of potential. As the president of the Consumers’ League of Massachusetts noted, it was not only “as individuals” but also “as representatives of a cause whose importance the Union has always recognized” that they were beneficiaries of the WEIU’s hospitality.<sup>173</sup>

Over time, the Union’s leadership would carry out this work in an increasingly systematic fashion. In the late 1880s, this still inchoate impulse was exemplified by the Union’s serendipitous collaboration with the Helping Hand Society, the owners of a home for working women located at No. 12, Carver Street. The society proposed to “furnish board and lodging, at moderate and reasonable cost, to young girls obliged to work for a living, especially those employed in stores, shops, and manufacturing establishments,” a work which drew comparison with textile worker and organizer Jennie Collins’ then famous Boffin Bower. Because 12 Carver Street stood in very close proximity to the Union’s building at 264 Boylston Street, it was possible to work out an arrangement by which the girls housed by the Helping Hand Society could use the Union’s reading-room, library, and “all its accommodations,”

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<sup>170</sup>WEIU, 1910-1911 Report, 40.

<sup>171</sup>WEIU records, *Union News Items* (July 31, 1912), 10. B-8. Box 1, folder 3.

<sup>172</sup>Addition WEIU records, “In Memoriam: Mary Morton Kehew,” Address by Miss Emily G. Balch of Wellesley College. Carton 1. Mary Morton Kehew, Mary Kenney O’Sullivan, and Emily Balch founded the Boston WTUL in April 1904, a few months after the establishment of the national body, for which Kehew also served as president Nancy Dye Schrom, *As Equals and As Sisters: Feminism, the Labor Movement, and the Women’s Trade Union League of New York* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980), 4; 16-17.

<sup>173</sup>National Consumers League, *Fourth Annual Report* (New York City, 1903), 40, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951d001506393>.

as if it were their own club-room—saving the need for the working-girls’ home to offer any of these features.<sup>174</sup> Ten years later, it was to all the applicants of the Employment Bureau that the women of the WEIU made the decision to open the Bureau every Thursday evening for an informal social gathering, terming it an “experiment in social service.”<sup>175</sup> By the 1910s, the WEIU’s reference library on women’s work and protective labor legislation was advertised as a community institution: college students, social workers and labor organizations were invited to use the collections for browsing and research.<sup>176</sup>

When the Union exercised what its officers termed their “gracious right in offering room, shelter, or assistance to various other organizations,”<sup>177</sup> it built itself up as a provider, a nurturing force in the community—a status which conferred a form of authority and legitimacy upon the women who controlled its resources. There were other ways, beyond opening its doors to groups and individuals, that they made manifest the Union’s “support.” The WEIU occasionally opened its membership records and its mailing lists, presumably to organizations with similar membership demographics. In 1903, it sent out 1,000 postal cards to members of the Union on behalf of the Public School Association (PSA), a “Brahmin reform” organization with ties to the local Republican party.<sup>178</sup> The PSA also benefited from the Union tapping its connections to working women’s organizations, to which 500 special cards and 1,000 circulars were distributed; they were invitations to a PSA meeting.<sup>179</sup> I do not know where that meeting took place, but it may very well have been held at Perkins Hall, because the Women’s Union could also serve as a “convention center.” In Buffalo, the WEIU building hosted the festivities of the New York State Federation of Women’s Clubs. The 600 odd delegates and

<sup>174</sup>“Home for Working Girls,” *Lend a Hand* 3, no. 3 (March 1888), 127-129; Norman B. Leventhal Map Center, *Map of the City of Boston, for 1890* (Boston Sampson, Murdock & Co., 1890), Boston Public Library, <https://collections.leventhalmap.org/search/commonwealth:1257b8817>; Vapnek, *Breadwinners*.

<sup>175</sup>WEIU, *1899 Report*, 43.

<sup>176</sup>Local Varieties. *Boston Herald*, April 9, 1882, 8.

<sup>177</sup>Additional WEIU records, Women’s Educational and Industrial Union, *Report of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union for the Year Ending May 1, 1886* (Boston: No. 74 Boylston Street, 1886), 16. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>178</sup>Deutsch, *Women and the City*, 229. The PSA’s offices were located on nearby Tremont Street; it numbered 9,000 members in 1907. Its members, “elite Republican woman suffragists,” per Deutsch (228), lobbied for what they considered “[g]ood elections to [the local] School Committee” as well as school extension programs. Dora Keen, *Directory of 156 Education Associations and Committees in the United States* (Philadelphia: Public Education Association of Philadelphia, 1907), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nnc1.cu56376294>.

<sup>179</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government v. 8*, November 17, 1903, 59. Carton 2.

guests could all be sat comfortably in the Union's auditorium.<sup>180</sup> Conventions and large events of organized womanhood were the occasion for the WEIU to reaffirm its commitment to sororal hospitality; in 1891, a press release reminded women attending the temperance convention in Boston "to make free use of the parlors and reading room of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union."<sup>181</sup> The WEIU brought together women who were interested in the same causes, sometimes incidentally, as in the case of the WCTU convention, and sometimes deliberately so. The social education convention held in Boston in 1906 was convened by the women of the WEIU. A long list of local and state bodies met at the WEIU's headquarters, some of which already regularly used its committee rooms throughout the year, like the Fathers' and Mothers' Club and the Boston Teachers' Association.<sup>182</sup> At the memorial for Mary Morton Kehew (1859-1918), the WEIU's third president, the latter organization was prominently represented. In her address, Mary Adams paid homage to Kehew for the help the Union extended Boston's educators and expressed the gratitude and even affection of those she helped "realize [their] dream of a club house which should be a social centre to promote loyalty and co-operation among all ranks of teachers, and create new professional life through union and participation."<sup>183</sup>

The fullest expression of the WEIU's associational solidarity was the process by which it gradually took over the projects first initiated by other, smaller groups, so that they might be endowed with enough funding to leave the experimental stage—a process which paralleled the way that municipal governments, in the Progressive Era, dealt with successful women-led programs.<sup>184</sup> For years, a "School Gardens Committee," mainly staffed by normal school teachers and members of the Twentieth Century Club, had agitated to demonstrate the benefits of teaching gardening to schoolchildren, before the WEIU incorporated it in 1905.<sup>185</sup> Similarly,

<sup>180</sup>Woman's Worlds in Paragraphs. *Columbus Daily Enquirer*, February 25, 1894, 12.

<sup>181</sup>"The WCTU Wednesday Afternoon's Session," *Boston Journal*, November 12, 1891, 2.

<sup>182</sup>"News of School and College," *Springfield Republican*, November 19, 1906, 5. The full list included: the Association of Collegiate Alumnae (ACA), the Boston School Principals' Association, the Boston Teachers' Association, the Brookline Education Association, the Catholic Union of Boston, the Harvard Teachers' Association, the Massachusetts Association of Women Workers, the Massachusetts State Teachers' Association, the Massachusetts Federation of Women's Clubs, the Fathers' and Mothers' Club, the New England Woman's Press Association, the Newton Education Association, the Boston Private School Teachers' Association, the Rhode Island Institute of Instruction, the Twentieth Century Club, the Vermont State Teachers' Association, and the Worcester Public Education Association.

<sup>183</sup>Addition WEIU records, "In Memoriam: Mary Morton Kehew," Address by Miss Mary I. Adams of the Boston Teachers' Club. Carton 1.

<sup>184</sup>See chapter 5 for an example of how the Union's own School Lunch program was taken over by the Boston city government, p. 318-326.

<sup>185</sup>WEIU, 1905-1906 Report, 55.



it was after witnessing “well known ladies in Brookline” successfully manage a hand laundry for profit that the WEIU took it over.<sup>186</sup> In so doing, the WEIU cast itself in the role of an intermediary or substitute for the provider role usually performed by the city government.

Enterprising schoolteachers and dilettante businesswomen, these examples seem to suggest, would have been closely aligned with the WEIU’s expansive social reform program in the 1890s and 1900s. For lack of information about the managers of the Langwood laundry or the teachers active in the School Gardens Committee, we cannot ascertain whether they had ever signed up for a WEIU membership card, but it would not have been surprising if they had. The associations regularly mentioned in annual reports in the 1900s “include[d] in their membership members of the Union who [were] actively interested in their work and objects.”<sup>187</sup> They can be classed into five categories (table 2, p. 38): labor and mutual help organizations; professional and alumnae networks; political organizations; social reform groups, and social clubs. Several of them were straight up Union committees that functioned independently enough from the WEIU’s leadership structure that they were mentioned in the lists of associations supported by the WEIU, like the “Princeton Vacation House” group, which managed the country house where working women were sent every summer by the Union for a vacation. Others were sympathetic associations, sometimes managed by WEIU members or their friends and associates, in a pattern of overlapping circles of support and friendship. Especially well-connected or influential women formed nodes in these networks, for it was common for women to join more than one voluntary organization, and women of leisure in particular could balance packed schedules. One of the early presidents of the Syracuse WEIU, a Mrs. Van Lorn Lynch, was locally renowned for her leadership in many local associations. Remembered as a “great hostess” and “a woman of broad culture and great ability,” she was a member of “Kanatenah,” a Social Art club, an Employment Society, a Morning Musicals association, as well as many other clubs.<sup>188</sup> In Boston, similarly, no member of the WEIU was seemingly better-connected than third president Mary Morton Kehew, the wife of businessman William B. Kehew. In the words of club historian and WEIU member Cornelia James Cannon, “[t]here were few boards of directors of important organizations in the city on which she did not serve, and new ventures at social improvement were seldom started before an effort was made to enlist her interest

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<sup>186</sup> “Banishing Washday,” *Grand Rapids Press*, March 14, 1893, 4.

<sup>187</sup> WEIU, *1896 Report*, 17.

<sup>188</sup> “Mrs. Lynch Replies,” *New York Tribune*, November 23, 1897, 5.

and cooperation.”<sup>189</sup> This was hardly a hyperbole, for records show that Mary Morton Kehew was, among other things, an officer, member, or active worker in the Denison House settlement, the Boston Women's Trade Union League, the Milk and Baby Hygiene Association, the New England Historical Teachers' Association, and the Woman's Auxiliary of the Massachusetts Civil Service Reform Association.<sup>190</sup> The depth and breadth of her interest in Boston's civic, educational, and social reform organizations led contemporary Emily Balch to call her “essentially a statesman.” Kehew took on so many different projects because, to her, all the issues she tackled were essentially interrelated, which meant that the work of any one organization made that of the others easier—and conversely.<sup>191</sup> It is in regard to her expansive view of the city's potential for growth, one that took into account the needs and welfare of its various constituencies, that we can understand her as a true politician, as Balch and others evidently did.<sup>192</sup>

One crucial task carried out by the Women's Union under Mary Morton Kehew's leadership was that of connecting the organizations which met under its roof. In the early 1900s, the members of the UIP could join the efforts of the Consumers' League, of which the UIP had become an affiliate; they attended educational talks given by protégées of the Union, like the Association for the Relief and Control of Tuberculosis and sang in the “Union chorus” with employees of the Union and the saleswomen of the former Junior Workers' Club.<sup>193</sup>

By then, the women of the WEIU were consciously articulating a paradigm for systematic, sustained cooperation with Boston's other female voluntary associations, that of mutual institutional help, which materialized the founders' idealized sisterhood: “the Union [found] that by giving help it also [received] help.”<sup>194</sup> In

<sup>189</sup>Additional WEIU records, Cornelia James Cannon, *The History of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union: A Civic Laboratory* (Boston: 264 Boylston Street, 1927), 20. Carton 1.

<sup>190</sup>“The Women's Auxiliary of the Massachusetts Civil Service Reform Association,” *Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 6 (April 1904), 128, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.

<sup>191</sup>Additional WEIU records, “In Memoriam: Mary Morton Kehew,” Address by Miss Emily G. Balch of Wellesley College. Carton 1. Kehew led the committee that selected a location and house for the Denison House settlement, before both serving as treasurer and becoming the director of the Tyler Street Day Nursery. She was also the first president of the Women's Trade Union League, which she helped organize, “bringing on” union leader Mary Kenney O'Sullivan from Chicago for that purpose.

<sup>192</sup>Linda M. Shoemaker, “The Gendered Foundations of Social Work Education in Boston, 1904-1930,” in *Women of the Commonwealth: Work, Family, and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Massachusetts*, ed. Susan L. Porter (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), 110-111.

<sup>193</sup>“Union for Industrial Progress,” *Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 5 (March 1904), 129, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.

<sup>194</sup>Additional WEIU records, Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *The Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., 1899-1900* (Cambridge: The

the 1890s and 1900s, at the same time as the principles of scientific philanthropy were reconfiguring the urban charitable landscape, the Union was formally associating with other bodies that could help it pursue its goals and with which it was more systematically and efficiently swapping skills and techniques that sociologist Elisabeth S. Clemens has called “organizational repertoires.”<sup>195</sup> With its guest organizations, like the Women’s Rest Tour Association (WRTA, 1891), the WEIU exchanged ideas about things like the best way to help members bond and form a self-conscious body of like-minded individuals. Did the adoption of the Union’s badge in 1896 influence the WRTA to adopt the silver shell pin, first mentioned in 1910, as a visible sign of membership, or did the idea originate with the WRTA in the first place?<sup>196</sup> We will now turn to a brief study of that organization, and what its links to the Union can tell us about the kind of women who occupied the center of this nexus.

### 7.3.2 Overlapping Memberships: The Women’s Rest Tour Association

A study of the WRTA’s membership in the context of its institutional ties to the WEIU can tell us much about the kind of organization that were likely to both seek help from the Union and to receive it. As we chart the history of the Women’s Rest Tour Association, we get to better trace the contours of the Union’s own base.

One of the many teachers in the WEIU’s orbit was Anna Cleveland Murdock (1860-1950), whose twin passions in life were teaching in the Boston public schools and traveling. She spent her summer breaks on trips overseas, either alone or with a traveling companion. When she was in her 60s still, a relative would describe her as a seasoned traveler who had just got back from China and whose home was filled with souvenirs.<sup>197</sup> While by the 1920s it had become more common both for unaccompanied women and for people of more limited means to go on international tours, Anna Murdock’s earliest trips singled her out, as we will

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Co-operative Press, 1900), 10. 81-M237. Carton 1.

<sup>195</sup>Elisabeth S. Clemens, “Organizational Repertoires and Institutional Change: Women’s Groups and the Transformation of U.S. Politics, 1890-1920,” *American Journal of Sociology* 98, no. 4 (January 1993), 755-798.

<sup>196</sup>Records of the Women’s Rest Tour Association. WRTA, “Women’s Rest Tour Association” (1910). File 1.19; WEIU, *1896 Report*, 18.

<sup>197</sup>Records of the Women’s Rest Tour Association. M.E. Murdock, “Souvenir of a Founder” (1954). Folder 1.23; Helen Norton Rich, “The Story of the Women’s Rest Tour Association” (1955), 16. Folder 1.1.

see.

In the 1890s, she was part of a small group of women determined to make unaccompanied travel easier for educated women with literary aspirations but little pocket money. The other founders of the Women's Rest Tour Association (1891-1949) were Maria Gilman Reed (1855-1930), the daughter of a "prosperous" New England lawyer, and writers Alice Brown (1857-1948) and Louise Imogen Guiney (1861-1920). The much-recounted story behind the creation of the WRTA goes that in the summer of 1889, Alice Brown and her close friend Maria Reed spent a long, restorative summer in England for a much smaller sum of money than they had expected. The following summer, Anna Murdock and Louise Guiney took a similar trip: they stayed at plain but comfortable bed and breakfast places instead of more expensive hotels, took long walks through the countryside, camped in the woods, and returned to their jobs refreshed and invigorated.<sup>198</sup>

Some time in 1890 or 1891, the two pairs of friends met and bonded over their shared Anglophilia and love of travel. Encouraged by an acquaintance, Dr. Clarence J. Blake, they decided to write a book to share their experience and help other women go on then-fashionable tours of England and the continent.<sup>199</sup> The WRTA was a by-product of the publication of *A Summer in England* (1891), one of the only travel books of the period aimed specifically at women, and even more specifically at working women, then more likely to be single and thus to travel alone.<sup>200</sup>

It was for copyright purposes that Brown, Guiney, Reed and Murdock founded the WRTA, but the organization would go on to become an incredibly successful private club. After a year, the original 36 members had become 350, and in any given year in the 1900s several thousand women from all over the country were WRTA members. They were all friends of friends since the joining process required prospective members to know sponsors who were already part of the organization. While the annual edition of *A Summer in England* was sold to the public, initially for 20 and then for 50 cents, the "Lodgings List" compiled from the personal

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<sup>198</sup>Libby Bischof, "A Summer in England: The Women's Rest Tour Association of Boston and the Encouragement of Independent Transatlantic Travel for American Women," in *Transatlantic Women: Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and Great Britain*, eds. Beth L. Lueck, Brigitte Bailey, and Lucinda L. Damon-Bach (Durham: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012), 157-158.

<sup>199</sup>Rich, "The Story of the Women's Rest Tour Association," 2; William W. Stowe, *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3.

<sup>200</sup>Bischof, "A Summer in England," 156. The author of a 1904 travel book would later commend the association as "one of the indispensables, especially for ladies traveling alone," Hood, *Europe on \$4 a Day*, 9-10.

recommendations of members functioned as a “ticket of membership” that was not to be shared with outsiders, as numerous circulars and letters constantly reminded members.<sup>201</sup> This would have ensured that the base of the organization remained relatively homogeneous as it grew, mostly from positive word of mouth.

In fact, the founders only advertised their activities once, in May 1891, when they sent out circulars stating the objects of the association to teachers, clergymen, physicians, as well as several daily papers.<sup>202</sup> As we have stated, Anna Murdock was a teacher; Alice Brown lived off her writing, while Louise Guiney did not, and worked various white-collar jobs to support herself and her mother. At unspecified times, she worked as a postmistress in Auburndale, Massachusetts and as a cataloguer at the Boston Public Library.<sup>203</sup> It was probably women of similar status and means who responded to their circular. They did so eagerly, buying all 500 copies of the first edition of *A Summer in England* within five weeks. They “needed the help the Association could give”<sup>204</sup>; traveling unchaperoned still went against the social mores of the time and many women simply judged it too daunting to attempt.<sup>205</sup>

To address that reluctance on the part of those who wanted to travel, but thought they could not, the WRTA offered a collection of crowd-sourced addresses and tips. Their guide book promised that travel could be made easier, more convenient, cheaper—but not necessarily more comfortable. In 1922, a member wrote to complain that all the pensions mentioned in Lucerne, Switzerland, were up the hill, away from the lakefront. She was reminded by the WRTA that the object of the association was to help women who wanted to travel for mental relaxation or study “to do so independently, intelligently and economically,” and that to that end they “offered addresses of houses with moderate rates, and ha[d] specialized in pensions and lodgings rather than hotels.” They noted that with the increase in membership and the admittance of wealthier women, some of the recommendations were for more expensive lodgings, but issued a reminder that the officers of the WRTA had “never lost sight of the primary object: to furnish economical stopping-places. And precisely one economy many members are ready

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<sup>201</sup>Records of the Women’s Rest Tour Association. “A note to the members regarding the Lodging List” (c1906). Folder 1.19.

<sup>202</sup>Records of the Women’s Rest Tour Association. Anna C. Murdock, *Tenth Annual Report of the Women’s Rest Tour Association* (March 15, 1902), 1-2. Folder 1.11.

<sup>203</sup>Bischof, “A Summer in England,” 167.

<sup>204</sup>Records of the Women’s Rest Tour Association. Anna C. Murdock, *Tenth Annual Report of the Women’s Rest Tour Association* (March 15, 1902), 2. Folder 1.11.

<sup>205</sup>Jodie Noel Vinson, “The Unprotected Females of the Women’s Rest Tour Association,” *Massachusetts Review* 58, no. 1 (2017): 138.

to adopt is a less desirable situation at a lower price: a house up a hill, or away from the chief attraction."<sup>206</sup> Where and how one traveled mattered. William Stowe has shown how wealthy American men used European travel to assert their own manliness and Americanness and how guide books in particular contributed to the process of both individual and group identity formation at the turn of the century.<sup>207</sup>

The WRTA would have appealed to a very small segment of Boston's female population. While it was a "bureau of information"<sup>208</sup> for cheap travel, even "avoiding useless spending of money on unnecessarily luxurious traveling or living" could cost \$4 a day on a summer trip to England, as much or higher than the weekly wages of many women at the time.<sup>209</sup> While in 1892, the membership committee of the WRTA optimistically put forth that \$250 was enough to enable a woman "of simple tastes" to enjoy a European vacation, in a state like Kansas where female wages tended to be higher, bookkeepers could expect to earn \$327 a year, clerks \$330, and domestics \$119.<sup>210</sup> From the advice in the WRTA's guidebook, then, we can narrow down those it sought to help as women liable to go to the theatre, but not monied enough to possess (or carry) an evening dress. For them, pairing a silk waist with a traveling skirt was deemed a good alternative.<sup>211</sup> They were not Henry James's hotel-going socialites, typical upper-class travelers; evidently neither were they domestic servants. Further evidence suggests the WRTA's affinity with the teaching profession: early on, its officers entered into a correspondence with the Teachers' Guild of Great Britain and Ireland and the two organizations fruitfully exchanged their lodging lists.<sup>212</sup> These, then, were women with an education but neither the husbands nor the generational wealth that would enable them to travel overseas easily, who wrote humorous pieces for one another with such titles

<sup>206</sup>Records of the Women's Rest Tour Association. "Lodging List Notes." Likely taken from *Pilgrim Scrip* 20, March 1922, 25, given the reference. Folder 1.24.

<sup>207</sup>William W. Stowe in Going Abroad and James Buzard in *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature, and the Ways to Culture, 1800-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), xi, 54.

<sup>208</sup>Records of the Women's Rest Tour Association. Membership Committee, "Women's Rest Tour Association" (February 1, 1894). Folder 1.19.

<sup>209</sup>Charles Newton Hood, *Europe on \$4 a Day* (New York: The Rolling Stone Club, c1906), 6. HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t59c7mh8f>.

<sup>210</sup>For figures, see David Katzman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981), 309; Records of the Women's Rest Tour Association, Membership Committee of the WRTA, "Women's Rest Tour Association" (January 30, 1892). Folder 1.19.

<sup>211</sup>Women's Rest Tour Association, *A Summer in England* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1896), 7, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t5r78vf4j>.

<sup>212</sup>Records of the Women's Rest Tour Association. Anna Murdock, *Report of the Women's Rest Tour Association* (January 1893), 1. Folder 1.11.

as “Travels of One in Whose Purse Fate Hath Cruelly Omitted to Put Money” and “From London to New York in a Cattle Ship.”<sup>213</sup> That literary bent is one of the indicators that, as historian Libby Bischof has argued, the WRTA functioned as “a public extension of the intergenerational network of women authors extant in Boston at the turn of the century.”<sup>214</sup>

To help some of these “[w]omen of cultivated tastes and small means” (and most specifically teachers) go on the European trips of their dreams, the WRTA put together a “Travelling Fund.” In June 1892, \$750 were granted to three members so that they may spend the summer in England. In the early 1910s, a much larger and influential WRTA struck a deal with the American Express Company: it would give the association a commission on all its Travelers Cheques bought by members at their own offices. This money would go to recipients who wanted or needed a vacation but could not afford it. In the first three years of the fund’s existence, it went to four teachers and one “business woman,” perhaps a saleswoman or a clerk.<sup>215</sup>

While they sought to help low-salaried teachers, the officers of the WRTA themselves received substantial help on the part of the WEIU. In their words, the Union was the “godmother” that offered them their first headquarters free of charge.<sup>216</sup> In the first annual report of the WRTA, Anna Murdock specifically referred to their “indebtedness” to the Union, for “giv[ing] [them] the support of their name, the shelter of their roof,” selling *A Summer in England*, and answering their questions, presumably questions about the running of a women’s organization.<sup>217</sup> From its creation in 1891 to 1900, the WRTA enjoyed a free office space—which likely included space for their library of travel guides—and a post office address at 264 Boylston Street, the WEIU’s own building. This made it possible for them to save on rent, which would likely have been their biggest expense as a fledgling

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<sup>213</sup>Records of the Women’s Rest Tour Association. Alice Brown, “Travels of one in whose purse fate hath cruelly omitted to put money,” *Pilgrim Scrip* 1, no. 2 (January 1893); C. Caryl “From London to New York in a Cattle Ship.” Folder 1.23; Mary Suzanne Schriber, *Writing Home: American Women Abroad, 1830-1920* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), 23: some prominent, financially successful men funded European trips for the women in their families for the social and cultural capital that they afforded; others hoped that sending daughters of marriageable age to England might result in advantageous connections. See 15-22 for a discussion of the motives of Victorian women who traveled.

<sup>214</sup>Bischof, “A Summer in England,” 169.

<sup>215</sup>Records of the Women’s Rest Tour Association. Women’s Rest Tour Association, “Our Traveling Fund” (c1912). Folder 1.19; WRTA, “To the Members of the Women’s Rest Tour Association” (1915), 3. Folder 1.18.

<sup>216</sup>Records of the Women’s Rest Tour Association, “Miscellaneous” (undated). Folder 1.11.

<sup>217</sup>Records of the Women’s Rest Tour Association. Anna Murdock, *Report of the Women’s Rest Tour Association* (January 1893), 1. Folder 1.11.

club. It was at Perkins Hall, the WEIU's auditorium, that the WRTA held many of its early annual meetings, and that in February 1894 it put on an exhibition of souvenirs and photographs.<sup>218</sup>

The WEIU also helped the smaller organization in other, more indirect ways, giving the WRTA permission to use it as a reference.<sup>219</sup> The press noted the intangible but quite significant value of the endorsement the WEIU provided.<sup>220</sup> WEIU secretary Lucia Peabody, who served as the WRTA's first treasurer, also gave financial advice that directly drew on her experience with the WEIU. She recommended that the Association start a "permanent fund, the income of which [would] be used for necessary expenses," exactly what the Union had done in the mid-1880s upon receiving the Perkins bequest.<sup>221</sup> Peabody had a long experience as a WEIU officer, one that could prove invaluable. From the start, she was able to adopt a long-term perspective; she knew exactly what to do to maximize the chances that the WRTA survived and thrived. In that way, support from the WEIU and its personnel made it possible for the founders of the WRTA to dream bigger. In their first annual report, Murdock that "sometime in the future, when [they] [had become] very prosperous and very purse-proud, [they aimed], with [the] kind permission [of the Union], at having a desk within their walls, and there, twice or three times a week, shall an Intelligent Tourist sit to answer the questions of her interrogatory sisters."<sup>222</sup>

In fact, in the 1890s, many members of the WRTA were also affiliated with the WEIU in one way or another. This is not surprising, given that the officers and employees of the WEIU were all the more likely to learn about the Association that it occupied a room at their headquarters. The 1892 edition of the WRTA's by-laws also contains a member list. Among the thirty-seven members we find treasurer Lucia M. Peabody, as well as WEIU members Lucia T. Ames, E. E. Blodgett, and Mrs. Corra Osborne, the building superintendent of the WEIU, who gave the address of her company accommodation. Upon request from Alice Brown and Louise Guiney, Julia Ward Howe had accepted to become the WRTA's president, which she remained until her death in 1910.<sup>223</sup> The 1897 member list, much

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<sup>218</sup>Murdock, *Tenth Annual Report*, 4-5; Vinson, "The Unprotected Females of the Women's Rest Tour Association," 143.

<sup>219</sup>Murdock, *Tenth Annual Report of the WRTA*, 1.

<sup>220</sup>"How a Lone Woman May Have a Trip to Europe." *Woman's World in Paragraph*. *Idaho Statesman*, July 12, 1891, 6.

<sup>221</sup>Murdock, *Report of the Women's Rest Tour Association* (January 1893), 3. See chapter 3 for a history of the WEIU's Permanent Fund, p. 187-195.

<sup>222</sup>Murdock, *Report of the Women's Rest Tour Association* (January 1893), 2.

<sup>223</sup>Records of the Women's Rest Tour Association. By-laws (1892). Folder 1.33.



larger, also includes the Union’s then-president, Mary Morton Kehew, as well as Mary Thacher Higginson, the second wife of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, a long-time associate of the association.<sup>224</sup> By the early 1900s, the WEIU’s Board of Government had “realiz[ed] the desirability of drawing in teachers,” so far as increasing its own membership was concerned.<sup>225</sup>

This overlapping membership also corresponded to shared principles, a shared ethos. First, very explicitly so, there was the focus on teaching, both as an occupation and as a calling. As a young woman, Abby Morton Diaz herself had taught “infant school” at Brook Farm; she and successor Mary Morton Kehew were deeply interested in school matters, and the latter received commendation for it from local teachers’ organizations.<sup>226</sup> Other high-profile WEIU members were experienced educators. Mabel G. Curtis, the assistant director for the Union’s Appointment Bureau from 1912 to 1915, and later its director in her own right, had earlier taught for more than twenty years in Massachusetts high schools. Wellesley alumna and WEIU affiliate Caroline Davies, meanwhile, taught Greek and English literature after graduating in 1887; she would later work as a “teacher and drawing room lecturer” in Chicago, and become the dean of Jackson College at Tufts in 1910.<sup>227</sup> Then, more broadly, the words of one scholar, much like the WEIU, the WRTA valued “community, reciprocity [and] cross-class interaction.”<sup>228</sup> Their publications reaffirmed that the organization was “one of mutual help and good-will,” “in no sense a charitable institution.”<sup>229</sup> For instance, the money with which the WRTA sent a few select teachers abroad was not a gift from the association, but a kind of loan. The WRTA and the WEIU alike presented themselves as associations of peers drawn together for mutual benefit. What made these women peers was their

<sup>224</sup>Records of the Women’s Rest Tour Association. List of members (1897). Folder 1.33.

<sup>225</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government*, v. 9, December 20, 1904, 3.

<sup>226</sup>John Van Der Zee Sears, *My Friends at Brook Farm* (New York: D. Fitzgerald, c1912), 108, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/hvd.32044010603629>; “Sunday School Reforms,” *Boston Sunday Herald*, March 18, 1890, 4. At Kehew’s memorial service, Mary I. Adams of the Boston Teachers’ Club eulogized her as “a teacher of the noblest type,” a proponent of “professional training,” and a steadfast support of Boston’s teachers. Addition WEIU records, “In Memoriam: Mary Morton Kehew,” Address by Miss Mary I. Adams of the Boston Teachers’ Club. Carton 1.

<sup>227</sup>“Curtis, Mabel Gair,” *Who’s Who in New England* (Chicago: A.N. Marquis & Company, 1916), 300, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc2.ark:/13960/t3xs5tw3v>; “Davies, Caroline Stodder,” *Who’s Who in New England*, 313.

<sup>228</sup>Jill Ann Poulsen, “‘Changing One’s Hemisphere’: The Rise of the Independent American Woman Traveler and the Women’s Rest Tour Association,” Master of Arts in History, College of Social Sciences, California State University, Fresno (2018), 24. Poulsen’s dissertation expands upon Libby Bischof’s article: her conclusions are the product of the more systematic analysis of extant primary sources.

<sup>229</sup>WRTA, *A Summer in England* (1896), 5.

upbringing and their education, or at the very least their expectations of life—and not necessarily their disposable income. In that sense, they were cut out of the same cloth as the less affluent participants in antebellum moral reform, for whom middle-class status was “less a matter of measurable attainment than of hope and psychological orientation,” according to Paul Boyer.<sup>230</sup> When members’ financial means differed, it was expected that the better-off would help their less-privileged but like-minded sisters. Anna Murdock’s assertion that “[t]his Association [was] calculated to bring together two classes—those who give and those who should be willing to receive” was reminiscent of the WEIU’s motto, “the union of all for the good of all,” itself a nod to the Union’s professed commitment to cross-class activism. In that vein, Jill Ann Poulsen has argued that “[t]he cross-class interaction evident in the WRTA was genuine, despite its exclusivity.”<sup>231</sup> We can see instances of this commitment when members directly shared their resources with one another, as when a wealthier woman from a Western state lent her sea-side Massachusetts cottage to another WRTA member and family for a month in the summer of 1898.<sup>232</sup>

According to historian Julia Carson, a close examination of the bibliographies of the various editions of *A Summer in England* uncovers a paradox—that the WRTA was a progressive organization with “a socially conservative side.”<sup>233</sup> She contends that Brown and Guiney, the authors of *A Summer in England*, were fervent Anglophiles who exhibited a clear fascination with British social mores, as evidence by the bibliographies they put together. Class and ethnic prejudice lurked beneath the surface of these reading lists: to their readers, they promoted a UK tour as a return to their roots and recommended books that romanticized the life of the European peasantry, works marked by a “calculated avoidance” of economic realities.<sup>234</sup> As we have seen so far, we could apply the same label—progressive with a jarring dash of social conservatism—to the women of the WEIU.

All of this suggests that one of the reasons for the WEIU’s sympathy for the WRTA was that travel advice was typically one of the services which they could have offered their membership themselves<sup>235</sup>—and this they would eventually do.

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<sup>230</sup>Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 60.

<sup>231</sup>Poulsen, ““Changing One’s Hemisphere,”” 41.

<sup>232</sup>Murdock, *Tenth Annual Report of the WRTA*, 4.

<sup>233</sup>Julia Carson, “Reading the Bibliographies of the Women’s Rest Tour Association: Cultural Travel in the Long Nineteenth Century,” *Transatlantica* 1 (2019), paragraph 22, <https://doi.org/10.4000/transatlantica.12672>

<sup>234</sup>Carson, “Reading the Bibliographies of the Women’s Rest Tour Association,” paragraph 22.

<sup>235</sup>Helen Norton Rich, a WRTA member who wrote an early history of the organization, wrote that the WRTA “appealed to the Union as an eminently worthy undertaking.” Records of the Women’s Rest Tour Association. Helen Norton Rich, “The Story of the Women’s Rest Tour

The impact of the Second World War on the WRTA was such that the members suggested terminating it, but in 1949 the WRTA “return[ed] to the WEIU, its first home, in January with free rent and support of the WEIU Board and Trustees.” It was incorporated the following April and would live on as the Union’s “Travel Advisory Service.”<sup>236</sup>

### 7.3.3 The Fate of Wage-Earning Women’s Associations

Like the WRTA, in the mid-1890s, several wage-earning women’s associations were founded and headquartered at the WEIU: the Union for Industrial Progress (1895), the Thursday Evening Club (1896), and the Junior Workers’ Club (1896). Owing to the objects of the WEIU, they possessed special privileges made manifest in their constitutions.

Union women were deeply interested in providing guidance to wage-earning women through the medium of working-girls’ clubs, social and literary clubs often started and headed by wealthy patrons and “sponsors,” looking over the interests of the working-class members. The movement was initiated by heiress Grace Hoadley Dodge and a group of New York silk weavers, who, together, started the first such organization in the early 1880s. By 1890, through similar undertakings in Philadelphia and Boston, the working-girls’ club had branched out across the northeast and a first national convention was called in New York City.<sup>237</sup> In Boston, the state body responsible for these societies was the Massachusetts Association of Working-Girls’ Clubs, founded in 1888, an endeavor in which WEIU women soon developed a keen interest. By 1892, the president, vice-president, and treasurer of the Association were all WEIU women, and the Union rented club rooms to at least one of the dues-paying club, the Friendly Workers’ Club (1889). The Club had started out using the parlor of a local church and moved to 264 Boylston Street in order to “start the club on a more independent basis.” Not only did the Union provide them with a meeting space that bore no relation to organized religion, these rooms were obtained through renting—a clear token of their ability to afford their own space—and club members could sub-let their rooms during the day in order to bring in additional income to their treasury. At the WEIU, the Friendly Workers’ Club held classes in rhetoric, singing, and embroidery, kept a

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Association” (1955), 7. Folder 1.1.

<sup>236</sup>Records of the Women’s Rest Tour Association, “Highlights of T.I.E. History” (undated). Folder 1.1.; “Come and Shop at the ‘Union’” (April 28, 1964). Folder 1.17.

<sup>237</sup>Priscilla Murolo, *The Common Ground of Womanhood: Class, Gender, and Working Girls’ Clubs, 1884-1928* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 1-2.

library of four hundred books, put on entertainments and fundraising “teas,” and generally “[strove] to make [their quarters] cosy and homelike.”<sup>238</sup>

A few years later, the WEIU would move to establish its own “Friendly Workers’ Club.” WEIU officer Henrietta Goodrich oversaw the creation of the Junior Workers’ Club (JWC). The members of the JWC were for the most part young cash girls, bundle girls and saleswomen who worked in downtown Boston’s department stores, as the initial name, “Cash Girls’ Club,” indicated.<sup>239</sup> Cash girls and bungle girls were at the very bottom of the department store’s hierarchy: they were tasked with manning the cash registers and wrapping parcels respectively.<sup>240</sup> Very soon after the club was established in 1896, its members petitioned to change the name, about which they had not been consulted, to “Junior Workers’ Club.” They affirmed their pride in their status as paid workers, at the same time as they rejected the diminutive “girls,” which assigned them to a subordinate class position. They may have been younger than 20, and in many cases 15, which would earn them the qualifier “junior,” but they were workers nonetheless.<sup>241</sup> Like Rose Lanhegan (or Lanagin), of 1 Plymouth Court, Roxbury, who contacted the Union specifically to join the club in 1906, many likely came from the ranks of the white, native-born working-class.<sup>242</sup>

Their origins and life experience would have set her far apart from the club’s sponsors. Like the most progressive sponsors of working-girls’ clubs, WEIU members in charge of the club’s activities seem to have sought out friendly relations with their charges; they tried to listen to their demands and let them retain a significant measure of agency over the time of meeting and the activities of the club—at least once they had realized that what they offered was not working. The “Cash Girls’ Club” was unsuccessful when it met on Sunday afternoons; its remodeled version, the Junior Workers’ Club attracted an active membership of thirty on Saturday evenings, after 6pm. The changes in both name and meeting

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<sup>238</sup> *Fourth Annual Report of the Massachusetts Association of Working Girls’ Clubs* (Boston?: Everett Printers, 1892), 18-19, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/uc1.31175035169153>.

<sup>239</sup> WEIU, *1896 Report*, 49.

<sup>240</sup> Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 164, 190-193.

<sup>241</sup> In the early 20th century, “girl” did not only connote age, but social status. Working-class women in their twenties and early thirties were also called “girls,” as opposed to “women.”

<sup>242</sup> Additional WEIU records, *Befriending Record Book*, 6 (entry for November 21, 1906). Carton 7; United States Census, 1910, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:M2K1-NHP>), Mary Lanagin in household of Michael F. Hanafin, Boston Ward 17, Suffolk, Massachusetts, United States. Since there was another Mary in the family, it is likely that the young girl who introduced herself at 264 Boylston Street was actually nicknamed “Rose.” In any case, the address and the last name are congruent with information found in the WEIU’s records.

time seemed to have been enough. At 6, young workers came directly from the shops to the Union's parlors, when they shared a meal and a social hour. During that time, they would dance to the beat set by teachers from the Boston Normal School of Gymnastics, sing glees with Miss Gertrude Howes, listen to music played by surburbanite housewives, or attend educational talks arranged by the WEIU on such elevating topics as art, botany, or the "true ways of living," likely moral or domestic in nature. In a little over a year, the membership reached its limit of fifty members. Many young women between the ages of 14 and 18, likely friends or coworkers of Junior Workers, were on the waiting list.<sup>243</sup>

The WEIU workers in charge of the club, which was considered a responsibility of the Befriending Committee—the committee charged with "visiting" sick or unemployed women—tried to interest themselves in the personal and professional lives of the working women: they arranged summer vacations for them, tried to secure positions for those who were out of work, arranged for a dentist to take care of them when it was discovered that many needed it, visited their homes in case of illness, and invited them to their own in return.<sup>244</sup> Throughout the year, the WEIU ladies arranged larger social occasions designed to bring together the WEIU's protégées and its members, a "merry party" the night before New York, and a musical in late May, at the close of the Union's administrative year.<sup>245</sup> As was sometimes the case within the Women's Rest Tour Association, the WEIU's president offered up her vacation house, Ashland, to the working girls in the summer.

The success of the JWC can be measured by the proportion of members who remained over the years. By 1902, some seven years after the club was started, more than half of the original members remained, which prompted the Befriending Committee to raise the age limit to accommodate them.<sup>246</sup> Things came to a head in 1907-1908, when the Committee members noted with dismay that their idea of a "Junior Workers' Club" was growing more remote by the year as the original members stayed, and the age gap between them and the newer arrivals deepened, creating "a disconcerting admixture of ages and experience."<sup>247</sup> Union employees and members from miscellaneous origins—like the vaguely named "Union Club" of

<sup>243</sup>WEIU, *1896 Report*, 49-50; WEIU, *1897 Report*, 65.

<sup>244</sup>WEIU, *1897 Report*, 65; WEIU, *1899 Report*, 34, 56; WEIU, *1900 Report*, 34.

<sup>245</sup>WEIU, *1899 Report*, 56-57.

<sup>246</sup>Additional WEIU records, Women's Educational and Industrial Union, *The Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 264 Boylston Street, Boston, Mass., 1900-1901* (Cambridge: The Co-operative Press, 1901), 62. 81-M237. Carton 1; WEIU, *1902 Report*, 64.

<sup>247</sup>WEIU, 1907-1908 Report, 32.

WEIU employees<sup>248</sup>—also contributed to the erosion of the WEIU's original vision for the club. Over time, the JWC would go from meeting once a week to twice monthly, and perhaps as a consequence of members' preferences, most of the social hour revolved around the club's chorus, so much so that in 1908 a decision was made to transform the JWC into a "Union chorus" to which Junior Workers as well as Union employees were eligible.<sup>249</sup> Whether the JWC truly was on an inevitable decline, or the Junior Workers did not welcome these changes, by 1908-1909 the club was on its last legs. Union manager Lucinda Price had to send desperate reminders to the members to attend the rehearsals for the traditional end-of-year concert. The decision to close the Junior Workers' Club eventually emanated from the WEIU's leadership. Lucinda Price was not happy with the fact that older girls—women—were staying in a social club that had been designed with young girls in mind. Because the membership would not bend to the WEIU's will, the Board of Government voted to shut it down, and to "organize a Choral Society" open "to Junior Workers and to Union employees."<sup>250</sup> Later, the "Union chorus" itself was disbanded and its singers were invited to sing with the Women's Trade Union League chorus, which met at the Union weekly.<sup>251</sup> Its proximity to the Union, for good or ill, had transformed the typical "working-girls' club," which followed the formula studied by Priscilla Murolo, into a corporate social club.<sup>252</sup>

In that way, the fortunes of the Junior Workers' Club tell us as much about the efforts of the WEIU's members to establish personal relationships with the wage-earning women they purported to help, as about the growing significance of the Union's business entanglements. No longer was their class position the only factor that could distance the officers and managers of the WEIU's various committees from the cash girls, bundle girls and saleswomen who met as the Junior Workers' Club. The growth in the Union's business activities, and its attendant rise in the number of employees it hired, put them in an uncomfortable position. It was becoming harder for women like Henrietta Goodrich and Lucinda Price to cast themselves as sisters or mediating agents between the Junior Workers and their male bosses.

Perhaps not so paradoxically, the WEIU was most successful at nurturing wage-

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<sup>248</sup>WEIU, *1896 Report*, 16.

<sup>249</sup>WEIU, 1907-1908 Report, 32.

<sup>250</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 11 (October 10, 1908), 5. 81-M237. Carton 2.

<sup>251</sup>WEIU records. B-8. Box 3, folder 24. Lucinda Price, Message to the Junior Workers, April 21, 1908; Lucinda Price, Message to the Junior Workers, March 1, 1909.

<sup>252</sup>See Murolo, *Common Ground of Womanhood*.

earning women’s mutual benefit associations and social clubs when it did not try to put them under its wing—working women knew what they liked best and would have been better able to respond to members’ changing desires and circumstances. The Thursday Evening Club, “composed chiefly of sewing women,” met two to four times a month in one of the rooms of 264 Boylston Street, for more than ten years, and was prosperous enough to be listed among the annual donors to the Union in 1907-1908 and 1908-1909.<sup>253</sup> It seemed to have been essentially a social club, unlike the Woman’s Clerks Benefit Association, formed in 1896, which was also headquartered at the Union. That last club was a typical mutual benefit association, meaning that it provided sick, disability and unemployment pay to its contributing members, who were required to exhibit “good moral character” and at least one year’s experience “as a saleswoman, superintendent, clerk, or seamstress in any dry goods or department store in Boston.” In 1903, the Massachusetts Department of Labor classed it among similar organizations for men, and praised it for reaching “a prosperous condition and [...] a firm financial basis.”<sup>254</sup> Rather atypically, the Woman’s Clerks Benefit Association was also an affiliate of the national body of working women’s clubs, inside of which it engaged in lobbying for shorter hours.<sup>255</sup> Neither a trade union nor purely a mutual help organization, it drew together women with a keen consciousness of larger social and economic issues.

The Union for Industrial Progress (UIP), yet a fourth type of wage-earning women’s organization, eventually blossomed into the most overtly political form it could take, the women’s trade union. In the late 1890s, it functioned as a meeting space for wage-earning women who advocated trade unionism and endorsed the American Federation of Labor’s stance towards women workers,<sup>256</sup> urging “all

<sup>253</sup>WEIU, *1896 Report*, 16; WEIU, 1907-1908 Report, 63; WEIU, 1908-1909 Report, 49.

<sup>254</sup>Charles F. Pidgin, *Labor and Industrial Chronology of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1903), 73, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433010933517>. See also *Constitution and By-Laws of the Women Clerks’ Benefit Association of Boston* (Boston: A.T. Bliss & Co., 1896), in Additional WEIU records, WEIU scrapbook, item 150v. 81-M237. Carton 9.

<sup>255</sup>Mary E. Richmond, “Working Women’s Clubs,” *Charities Review* 6, no. 4 (1897): 352, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/njp.32101068339462>.

<sup>256</sup>The leaders of the American Federation of Labor, a national federation of labor organization founded in 1886, pledged their support to the organization of women workers into trade unions. However, as Priscilla Murolo notes, the help they provided remained mostly nominal, as female labor organizers fought against barriers to entry. Murolo, *Common Ground of Womanhood*, 85. The AFL’s stance toward women would remain tinged with ambiguity and sexism. Writing in the context of the increasing participation of working women in the suffrage movement of the early 1910s, historian Annelise Orleck writes that “[t]hrough the Socialist Party, the AFL, the New York State Federation of Labor, and the [International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union] all officially supported woman suffrage, individual leaders denounced working-class organizers

women who work for wages, of whatever occupation, to at once join or form trade unions of their respective trades." For 50 cents a year, members could hear educational talks on political economy and civics; in February 1904, for instance, they planned "Sunday Talks and Teas" on the referendum and vocational education.<sup>257</sup> By then, the UIP was 160 strong. The eclectic composition of its board of government may have been indicative of the demographics of its membership: elite women like Mary Morton Kehew and her sister Hannah P. Kimball rubbed elbows with well-known labor leader Mary Kenney O'Sullivan as well as obscure Irish-Americans Nellie A. McNiff and Nellie J. Curley.<sup>258</sup> "A number" of the UIP's members were WEIU employees, but their social origins could vary as much as their income: Henrietta Goodrich earned \$1,800 a year as the secretary of a large women's association, while WEIU superintendents like Anna G. Judson were paid only half that sum, and waitresses, cooks, and cashiers presumably still less.<sup>259</sup>

All could meet for both business and pleasure within the framework set by the UIP, whether at its Vacation House in Squantum, Massachusetts, a 10-cent car ride away from Boston, or at the social meetings held at the WEIU at 8 pm on Sundays, where there was dancing and games. The "interest in economics" and "sympathy with labor organizations" that set the UIP apart from a social club like the seamstresses' Thursday Evening Club is also what could draw together self-identified wage-earners regardless of class status. According to Henrietta Goodrich, this was because they shared an appreciation of the value of money and of the realities of life which only paid work could bestow.<sup>260</sup> Here was the ideological foundation on which the Women's Trade Union League, formed in 1903, would rest. I argue that it also owed its existence to the rich associational collaboration

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for wasting time that should be devoted to the class struggle." Annelise Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire: Women and Working-Class Politics in the United States, 1900-1965* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 99. The four labor organizers studied by Orleck struggled for recognition throughout their life for acceptance within male-dominated union spaces.

<sup>257</sup>"Trades Unions," Labor and Industrial Chronology of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Labor Bureau, 1899 (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1901), 140, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433010933483>; Associated Charities, *A Directory of the Charitable and Beneficent Organizations of Boston* (Boston: Damrell & Upham, 1899), 208, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/umn.31951001873444s>; "Union for Industrial Progress" *Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 5 (February 1904), 106, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.

<sup>258</sup>"Club Admitted to Federation," *Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 4 (February 1904), 104, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.

<sup>259</sup>Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 9, June 19, 1906, 144-147. Carton 2; *Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 4 (February 1904), 127, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.

<sup>260</sup>Henrietta I. Goodrich, "The Union for Industrial Progress," *Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 6 (April 1904), 127, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.



and social intercourse shared by WEIU women who self-identified as businesswomen and the clerks and laborers they hired. It was through closer contact with less financially secure women, on the common(ish) ground of paid work, that wealthy allies were able to grasp a truer measure of what separated them from someone like Rose Langehan or Anna Judson, and of how they should help them fight for fairer pay and working conditions through unionism.

## Conclusion

In late October 1897, Mrs. George W. Townsend, president of the Buffalo WEIU, tasted triumph. The Union's grand building on Niagara Square, erected at a cost of more than \$68,000, was finally fully paid back. To celebrate the occasion, representatives from sister WEIUs from all over the country were invited to take part in the pomp of the formal dedication exercises. It was one of the rare occasions for the leaders of what founder Harriet Clisby had hoped would become a women's educational and industrial union "movement" to come together and discuss global issues. The day after the festivities, when the celebrations of financial independence were over, it was time for business: Boston Union president Mary Morton Kehew presided over a meeting of all the delegates, and together they debated forming a National Federation of Women's Unions. Someone suggested opening that national body to non-Union department clubs, in what would have been a competitive move against the GFWC. Ultimately, however, the conclusion that the delegates reached was that there were enough Women's Unions in the US to warrant limiting the membership of a national body to those bands of women explicitly claiming allegiance to the principles laid out by Harriet Clisby and Abby Morton Diaz. In typical WEIU fashion, an ad hoc committee was appointed to study the feasibility of forming a National Federation, to report at the Boston Union.<sup>261</sup>

Nothing would come of that committee; no National Federation of Women's Unions ever came to be. This was likely because their representatives did not give weight to the differences between Union in name and Union in fact. As one member of the Boston Union put it, "[f]ourteen of these were founded upon the same principles as this Union, and the others are taking up in different ways some of its branches; but all of them would extend a helping hand to any woman

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<sup>261</sup> "The Day's Gossip," *New York Tribune*, November 1, 1897, 5.

who came to them a stranger.”<sup>262</sup> Perhaps this was the true cornerstone of the “Women’s Union.” That no Federation was ever formally instituted also did not mean that the Boston Union, the first of its kind, did not preside over physical and symbolic gatherings of women, whether in the city or outside its bounds. Over the course of a typical month in the 1900s, the bustling Union headquarters were the site of the monthly social for the consignors of the Union’s Food Department, two social meetings of the Massachusetts Association of Women Workers, social and business meetings of the Union for Industrial Progress, two meetings of the Association for the Relief and Control of Tuberculosis, two each of the Women Clerks’ Benefit Association, the Book Binders’ Union, the Junior Workers’ Club and the Thursday Evening Club, and one of the Consumers’ League. Throughout the week, during the day and in the evening for wage-earners, small women’s clubs availed themselves of the facilities provided by the WEIU.<sup>263</sup> Their members would have passed each other in the stairs, perhaps attended the same Union lectures, or sent speakers to lecture one another. They may have been WEIU members—but it was also likely that they were not. Still, all existed in the orbit of that Bostonian institution.

Whether in Buffalo or in downtown Boston, the white middle- and upper-class women who expressed support for the ideology and programs of the Union were doing so, after the turn of the century, out of a shared belief in the social benefits of “cooperation.” In the 1900s and 1910s, the term was as fashionable as the ubiquitous “efficiency” so beloved of Progressive reformers, politicians, philanthropists, and urban planners. A study of the WEIU, a women’s voluntary association whose members early claimed cooperation as a sacred principle, can help us better understand first the meaning that white female reformers ascribed to it, and second the potentialities unleashed by togetherness. The initial cross-class impulse of the Union’s founders had been premised on an idea of universal spiritual sisterhood. By the 1910s, it was firmly rooted in purely economic concerns and in the nebulous identity of wage-earner. The Union for Industrial Progress is a case in point: initially a tentative gathering of Union managers and employees, who met to discuss the economic issues of the day as they affected women, it eventually blossomed into the Women’s Trade Union League, a cross-class organization of women, upper-class

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<sup>262</sup> “The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union—Announcements for January 1904,” *Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 3 (January 1904), 64, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>.

<sup>263</sup> “The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (December 1903), 28, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>. Emphasis mine.

allies and workers both, dedicated to unionizing female wage-earners.

True cooperation, the civic ideal that undergirded the municipal reform movement and Progressive politics, was construed by these women as the polar opposite of charity. In the process of “cooperating,” they constructed a subtle theoretical arsenal to claim citizenship for women. The “help” provided by the Union was ungendered self-help, mutual help: “The Union, formed to help women, still exists to help women, but the help is not of the kind too often inferred from this generalization.” It was not charitable help, “the kind to demoralize,” but “the kind that any self-respecting person can accept.”<sup>264</sup> The WRTA stood for the same: “The present organization is one of mutual help and good-will. It is in no sense a charitable institution, but one which desires chiefly to encourage independent effort,” wrote Louise Guiney and Alice Brown.<sup>265</sup> This mutualist approach cast women as independent agents on the same terms as men, peers who might need each other’s support and need not share a perfect equality but who all could lay claim to financial independence, the necessary condition for offering reciprocal help.

“Cooperation” was the last of the three official tenets of the working-girls’ club movement. Priscilla Murolo argues that to upper-class club sponsors, “cooperation” was a moral force meant to result in the improvement of working-class members’ character through cross-class contact, while the latter used it to describe the mutual help relation that united them in the pursuit of respect and dignity.<sup>266</sup> The upper-class leadership of the WEIU struggled to dictate the terms on which saleswomen would meet as part of the Junior Workers’ Club, but had more success when they embraced the *via media* that characterized the organization. It was an ideal of mutualism and reciprocity among women that was rooted in their status as potential or actual wage-earners. Working with or for the WEIU meant embracing a conception of women as independent agents who could and should provide for themselves and pool their resources to make their mark on the city. Implicitly, this was a rejection of the assumption that women were by nature second-class citizens because of their dependent status. Across the country and as far away as Geneva, Switzerland, middle- and upper-class women mentored by the aging members of the feminist-abolitionist coalition, socialized in the international women’s movement, and well-acquainted with suffragism, defined themselves

<sup>264</sup>“The Women’s Educational and Industrial Union,” *Federation Bulletin* 1, no. 2 (December 1903), 28, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/nyp.33433081679726>. Emphasis mine.

<sup>265</sup>A *Summer in England* (1896), 5, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/loc.ark:/13960/t5r78vf4j>.

<sup>266</sup>Murolo, *Common Ground of Womanhood*, 33.

as working women. This political statement enabled them to breathe new life into Harriet Clisby's spiritual sisterhood and connect economic with political rights.

If "cooperation" meant mutual help in the service of civic improvement and women could pledge the necessary resources towards it, then they, like male reformers and politicians, could claim an active role in the municipal reform and city beautification campaigns of the late 1900s and early 1910s— which they did. The Boston WEIU was a participant in the "Boston-1915" movement (1909), a mixed-sex organization led by the city's philanthropists, which was designed to coordinate the "hundreds of unrelated bodies" working toward raising awareness of the need for citizen action toward city improvement. If the "master motive" of Boston-1915 was "reciprocity between men and money," then surely that of the WEIU would have included women as well.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>267</sup>James P. Munroe, "What Boston-1915 Is Doing," *National Municipal Review* 1, no. 1 (January 1912), 73-76. Wiley periodicals. doi:10.1002/ncr.4110010111.



# Conclusion

A *Good Housekeeping* feature may sound like an unexpected place to find insight into how middle-class women defined “success” at the close of the Progressive era, but it is a fitting end note to the story of the Boston WEIU. In the eponymous piece published in 1915, author Elizabeth King Maurer tells the story of a tailor’s widow who, in her fifties, opened a specialty laundry in order to support herself. To the curious visitor, perhaps Maurer herself, she would proudly show her first half-dollar, in the manner of an Horatio Alger protagonist, and declare: “The first money I earned [...] To think that I, after my reverses, and such an old woman as I am, could earn money again, I could scarcely believe it. I would starve rather than part with that fifty-cent piece”—described by the reporter as “the embodiment of her regained hopes, her new life.”<sup>268</sup> By the time she was interviewed, sixteen months after the beginning of her venture, the female entrepreneur had one permanent employee and supplemented her labor power with that of two or three other women whom she hired by the day. She was praised both for the money she cleared and the “ideals” for which she worked: her love of hard work and her conception of her trade as an art form to be perfected. In short, she was the ideal businesswoman—an identity which made it possible for her to claim a specific kind of productive membership into her community. Despite her age and her gender, she was carrying out “a work worthy of a dignified citizen.”<sup>269</sup>

While this anonymous laundress had reportedly started her business without capital nor connections, the very people who bestowed praise on her and dreamed upon the account of her life had been working for several decades in hopes of giving other women the means to live out such success stories. Moving in the orbit of the large female social movements of the Progressive era, the officers of Women’s Educational and Industrial Union grounded their activities in a relational view of citizenship which rested on the primacy of material concerns. They de-

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<sup>268</sup>Elizabeth King Maurer, “Success,” *Good Housekeeping* 20, no. 2 (August-September 1915): 138. (full 138-140).

<sup>269</sup>Maurer, “Success,” 140.

veloped strategies to improve other women's access to self-support and economic independence but did so according to well-defined middle-class parameters. These determined the most desirable jobs as well as the conditions that linked paid work with independence. To these ambitious organizers, many of whom were active in Boston's philanthropies and social clubs, the ideal career was one involving either intellectual or highly skilled manual work, itself necessarily acquired by training; the fruit of that labor, in turn, was expected to have the most elevating influence when it led to an "independence"—a living situation which involved a home-like setting, but not necessarily a family over which to turn one's wages. In a 1920 document listing potential titles for "feature stories" to send to magazines, an anonymous Union employee put words to this perspective. By that date, the ways that the Boston WEIU advertised itself were as "Proof of the Possibility of Ideals in Business," as well as "proof that it is possible for women to have both marriage and a career." Presumably also in connection with the work of the Union, the unnamed author pitched pieces about "women's business success that men might well envy" and "women set[ting] high standards in business as well as in education."<sup>270</sup> While the early WEIU had been as much about lonely women finding solace in one another as a place on the labor market, by the early 1920s the economic nature of its mission was firmly placed to the fore in retellings of its beginnings. One such amateur historian wrote:

Forty-one years ago in the year eighteen seventy-seven, a few far-sighted women realized how really unfit the women were to meet the economic problems which were continually rising at that time and which showed signs of becoming greater as time went on. Three facts were very evident at that time. In the first place the women lacked the education which was very essential in helping them to obtain skilled positions. Secondly, there was no place where women could take their work such as jellies, cakes, and fancy sewing and secure a market for it. Thirdly, the labor conditions in the factories and shops were very bad. [...] To improve and help the women under these conditions, the WEIU was organized and the work was divided into three heads, namely, Educational, Industrial and Social Service.<sup>271</sup>

In tandem with but distinctly from the suffrage movement, WEIUs across the northeast and in booster cities on the West coast did the grunt work of helping independent-minded white women find places to live as well as remunerative

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<sup>270</sup>Additional WEIU records, "Possible Feature Stories," c1920, [1-3]. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 153.

<sup>271</sup>Additional WEIU records, Alice L. Thorpe, "Women's Educational and Industrial Union," *Simmons College Review*, 1922, 268-270. 81-M237. Carton 9, folder 146.

occupations. Officers and members, whether volunteers or paid staff, labored actively for white middle-class women's acceptance on the labor market. Over the course of the 1880s and 1890s, as the first generations of college graduates came of age, college-women came to constitute the organization's clear focus, because they had the most in common with the professional volunteers who dedicated their time and resources to the running of the Union. Preparing the public opinion for the idea that at least some women deemed respectable because of their race, social background, and educational levels, craved the possibility to self-actualize in occupations of their choosing, the WEIU occupied a well-defined niche in the charitable ecology of Boston and other cities.

Why was there never a national WEIU organization? The "cross-class mutual-ity"<sup>272</sup> the Union stood for and its condemnation of women's economic disabilities appear to have been widespread though diffuse ideas, which were best expressed locally by associations which as often as not claimed the name of "Women's Educational and Industrial Union" or "Women's Union." In her brief study of the Buffalo WEIU, Brenda Shelton concluded that the very success of the association is what led to its concerted dissolution. Having established working relationships between the municipality and other nonprofits, and having impressed upon them the necessity for the social services it started out provided, the Buffalo WEIU no longer had a reason to exist as a self-standing body.<sup>273</sup> Its ideas, as they were powerfully expressed in the programs it championed, had dissolved into the mainstream.

A study of the Boston WEIU and its many sister organizations would suggest that their ideas about women and work existed inchoately in other groups. The difference was that the WEIU made it its mission to act upon them. The relationship between its objects and its leaders' lofty beliefs about the equalizing powers of paid labor is the reason why it was possible to use the WEIU's social programs as texts for an intellectual history in the first place. A study of their employment bureaus, legal aid scheme, "Befriending Committee," and many others, reveals increasingly clearer linkages between different kinds of independence—economic, social, and political—and an understanding that women's doubly dependent status could be challenged on the marketplace.

Beliefs in "co-operation" undergirded the very enterprise of the Women's Union, whose officers derived it from two main sources—men's electoral politics

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<sup>272</sup>Gayle Gullett, *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women's Movement, 1880-1911* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 50.

<sup>273</sup>Brenda K. Shelton, "Organized Mother Love: The Buffalo Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1885-1915," *New York History* 67, no. 2 (1986): 154-176.



and business success on the one hand, and female labor organizations on the other. “Co-operation” guided founder Harriet Clisby’s decision to open up membership to any woman willing to pay the annual \$1 membership fee, placing a putative sisterhood above everything else. It was later that this “co-operation” would take an economic meaning and become the much longed for harmonious relationship of employing women and their employees. Still, throughout the period, from the 1880s to the late 1910s, one aspect of this thinking endured—that the “union of all for the good of all” was radically different from the charitable model because it reconfigured the relationship between those who gave help, and those who received it, positing a clear identity between them.

Lori Ginzberg has described the lengths to which antebellum benevolent middle-class women went to hide the commercialism of their activities.<sup>274</sup> A study of the WEIU clarifies how these tensions could play out and ultimately resolve postbellum, as the Boston association’s officers eventually came to terms with identifying their income-generating schemes as the key to achieving their associational and individual principle of self-support. By the height of the Progressive wave, they openly advocated for businesswomen to help the authorities reform the workplace from the inside. Some of these women did not stop at building a theoretical apparatus; they, themselves, tried to become producers for reform. There were nonetheless cracks between theory and practice and the organization, as an employer, was sometimes torn between the imperatives of its own financial health and those of its producers. It was in the 1910s that the likes of Charlotte Barrell Ware and Bertha Stevenson most fully realized the view that women could harness entrepreneurship to their benefit as well as that of the community. By the mid-1920s, however, that socially conscious view of money-making was giving way to a much more self-oriented focus, that of pioneering individuals opening up paths for other women, as one bank manager reported of her own occupation to the WEIU: “Several women have demonstrated their capabilities, and have been made officers in their banks, which gives the lesser lights something to shoot at and broadens the field considerably,” it was noted in 1930.<sup>275</sup>

The WEIU’s paean to paid work was not just a conveniently amorphous cipher onto which feminists could latch to air their grievances about women’s truncated citizenship, per Daniel Rodgers’s analysis.<sup>276</sup> In the final analysis, this dissertation

<sup>274</sup>Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 42.

<sup>275</sup>Records of the WEIU, *Current Notes on Women at Work*, October 1930, 13. B-8. Box 11, folder 162.

<sup>276</sup>Daniel T. Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920*, (Chicago: University

contends that it was a fruitful, underlying philosophy that complemented the work of the white, middle-class suffragists who labored so hard to keep the limelight focused upon them. Widespread but diffuse, complementary to the quest for the vote, these beliefs in women's need for, and right to become self-supporting was presented as a "practical," pragmatic version of women's rights, one that highlighted the consequences of economic systems on individual human lives. The "equality" and "difference" arguments first identified by Aileen Kraditor in her study of pro-suffrage arguments find their counterparts in justifications for the WEIU's programs for working women.<sup>277</sup> Harriet Clisby and her collaborators argued that displaced young women needed equally as moral and occupational guidance as young male clerks. Demonstrating the necessary intertwining of the different issues they faced in an expanding metropolis, the women of the WEIU tried to offer solutions that were as tightly linked. In the process, they gradually adopted the difference argument, which in its economic version ran something like the rhetorical question found in a carefully preserved clipping—"For many years women have been cooking jellies in their own homes; why shouldn't they cook varnish in a factory?"<sup>278</sup>—or the testimony from one hotel "social and recreational director" that "in a hotel, as well as in a home, one's efforts to re-create the spirit of the guest are most important in successfully keeping him under one's roof [...]"<sup>279</sup>

In 1925, WEIU researcher Lucile Eaves co-authored a report on the "gainfully employed" women of Brattleboro, Vermont, which formed volume XII of the association's "Studies in Economic Relations of Women."<sup>280</sup> The report's authors delved into the finances of these female workers, paying the greatest attention to their spending and savings, in order to compute their earning power; scrutinized their investment and educational strategies, and issued recommendations as to the minimum wages they ought to be receiving. The study was undergirded by the

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of Chicago Press, 1978), 193.

<sup>277</sup>The "equality" argument was that, like men, women were human beings possessed of inalienable natural rights; its "difference" counterpart was that women, being naturally more pious and moral than men, would purge politics from corruption, and that it was on this basis that they should be granted the ballot. Aileen Kraditor's thesis that calls to equality gave way to appeals to difference has been severely amended. The scholarly consensus is now that these two families of arguments largely coexisted and were often wielded in tandem by contemporaries. Louise M. Newman, "Reflections on Aileen Kraditor's Legacy: Fifty Years of Woman Suffrage Historiography, 1965-2014," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 14, no. 3 (2015): 296.

<sup>278</sup>Records of the WEIU, Marjorie Shuler, "Women's Skill in Home Arts Adapted to Factory and Store," November 24, 1931. B-8. Box 11, folder 162.

<sup>279</sup>WEIU records, M. Day, "My responsibility as Social and Recreational Director in Hotels..." 1. B-8. Box 11, folder 127.

<sup>280</sup>Lucile Eaves and associates, *A Legacy to Wage-Earning Women* (Boston: Women's Educational and Industrial Union, 1925), HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/wu.89013486337>.

postulate that women must be productive workers: like men, they must contribute to building the wealth of a community—but, unlike them, they could not do so if their relationship to the social body remained a parasitic one. Stressing the economic and social value of these women’s independence, down to their ability to support dependents, Lucile Eaves concluded that

Organizations of women may co-operate [with businessmen] in the development of a public opinion which will demand intelligent efforts to formulate and enforce just standards of compensation and wholesome conditions of work. The business women of Brattleboro will gain a new energy and self-respect when there is evidence of such appreciation of their important contributions to the economic life of the community, and of their indispensable services in caring for those who are incapable of self support because of immaturity, old age, sickness, or defective endowment.<sup>281</sup>

From 1877 to 1925, the WEIU helped normalize the idea that women might not only need but want a career—a single, clearly-defined income-generating activity around which they might build part of their social identity and group membership—and that it was to the benefit of the public that they might do so. Charting a course from the “self-supporting woman” to the “gainfully-employed woman,” from access to paid work as a feminist demand to an expected part of being a citizen under capitalism, the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union stood as the most shining example of middle-class reformers’ commitment to putting women like themselves on the road to economic independence. Feeling the contradictory push to both join and transform the market economy and the job market, its directors would eventually embrace paid activities over volunteering, just as they relinquished the crisis framework which had colored understandings of nineteenth-century white women’s work. What these reformers were essentially attempting to do, was attempting to prove that women’s work was useful to society—and, therefore, that they too ought to be recognized as citizens, with or without the ballot.

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<sup>281</sup>Eaves, *Legacy to Wage-Earning Women*, 122.

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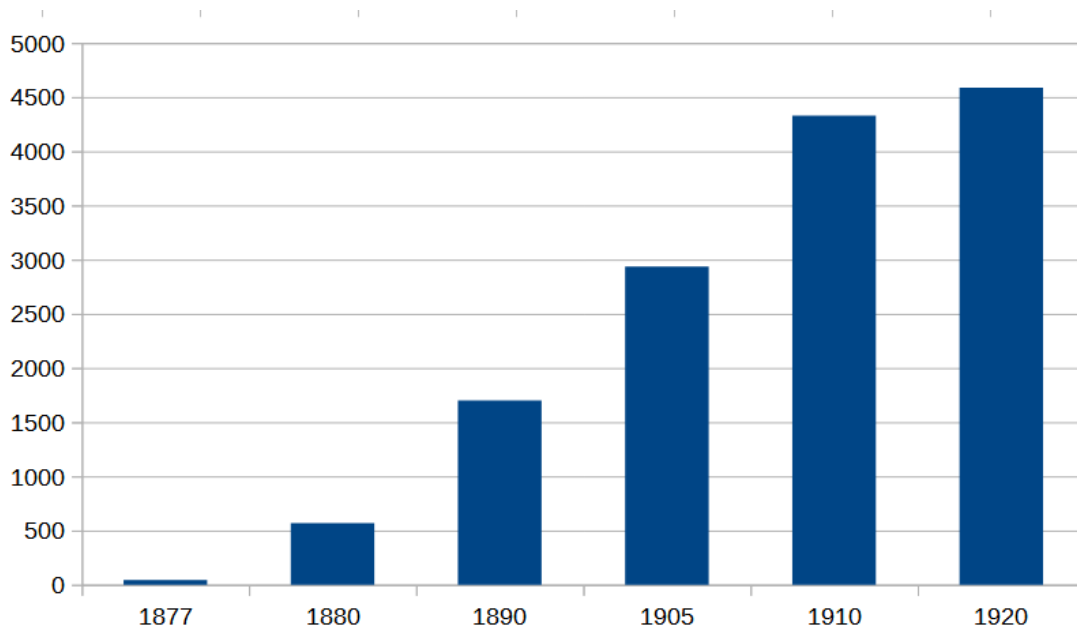
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# Appendice

## Appendix 1: Evolution of the WEIU's membership and leadership (1877-1920)

### Appendix 1.1: WEIU members over time.



Source: WEIU, *1879 Report*, 9-11, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2wncj5nkpr>; WEIU, *1880 Report*, 13, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2b1p08h29z>; WEIU, *1890 Report*, 11, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923967>; WEIU, *1905 Report*, 43, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239272>; WEIU, *1910 Report*, 1, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923652>; WEIU, *1920 Report*, 4, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239496>.

**Appendix 1.2: WEIU presidents over time.**

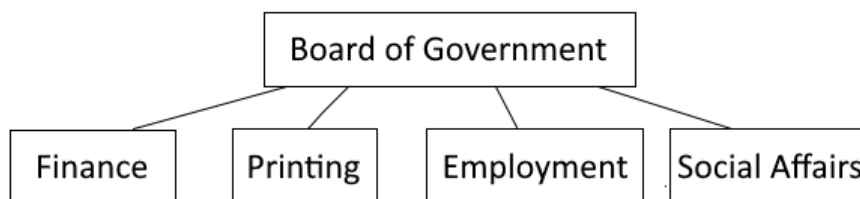
Term	President
1877-1881	Harriet Clisby
1881-1892	Abby Morton Diaz
1892-1913	Mary Morton Kehew
1913-1914	Mary Schenck Woolman
1914-1918	Mary Morton Kehew (acting president)
1918-1919	Caroline L. Humphrey (acting president)

Source: WEIU, *1920 Report*, 2, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239496>.

## Appendix 2: Evolution of the WEIU's organizational structure (1877-1920)

**Note:** The terms used to refer to the various committees and departments in the figures below were directly lifted from primary sources authored by the directors of the WEIU. These are the organizational divisions that they used. Over the course of forty-three years, the Union grew into a complex organism, whose tripartite division—between “educational,” “industrial,” and “social” departments—came into shape in the late 1900s. In the figures below, it is possible to decipher the choices that were made by the WEIU's directors: which programs to place under the responsibility of a committee rather than a subcommittee; under which heading to group programs of which they thought as being related.

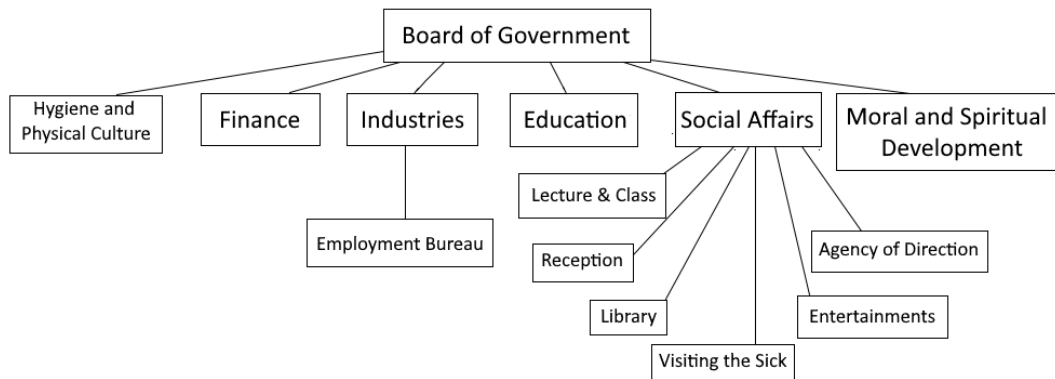
### Appendix 2.1: Organizational structure in 1877.



Source: Additional WEIU records, *Minutes of the Board of Government* v. 1, June 15, 1877, 1. 81-M237. Carton 1.

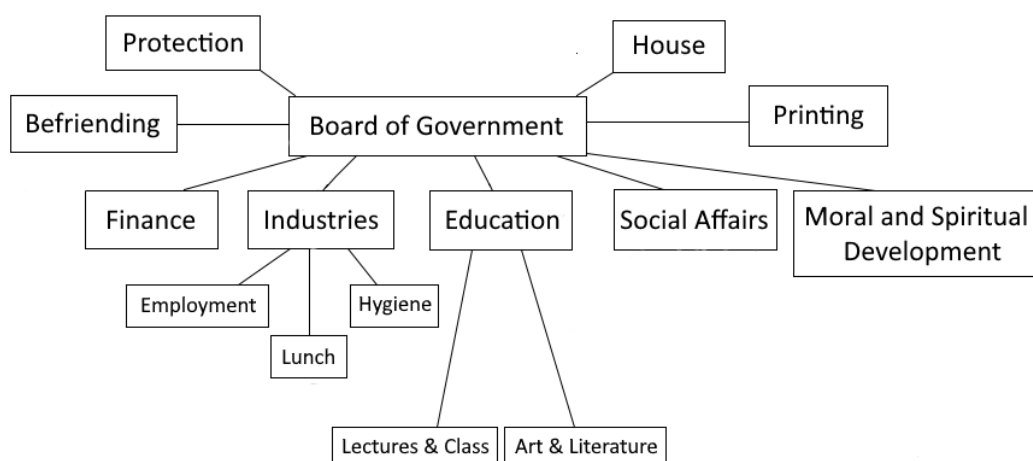


## Appendix 2.2: Organizational structure in 1880.



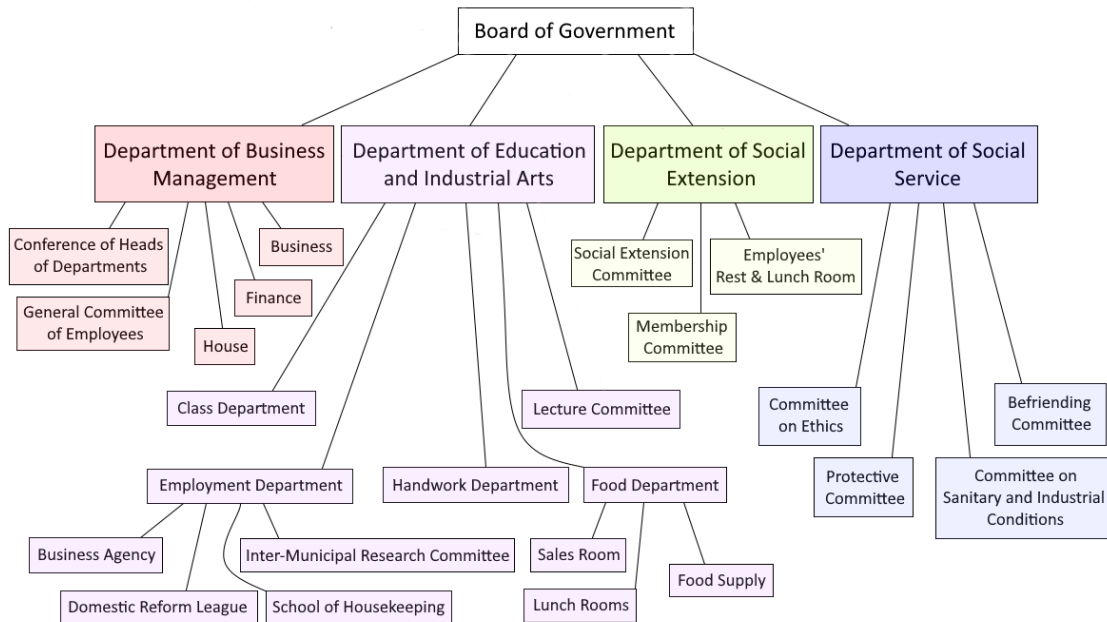
Source: WEIU, *1880 Report*, 3-6, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/bc.ark:/13960/s2b1p08h29z>.

## Appendix 2.3: Organizational structure in 1890.



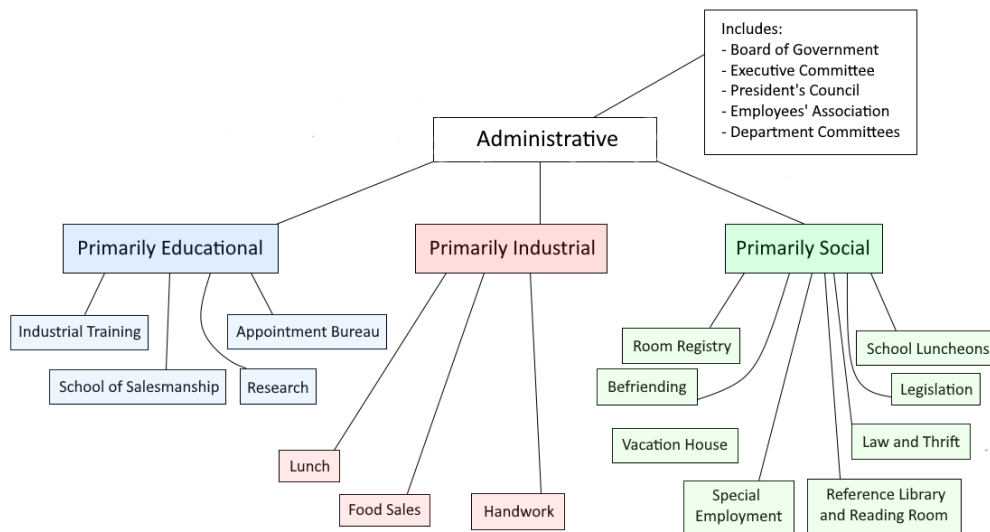
Source: WEIU, *1890 Report*, 3-6, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923967>.

**Appendix 2.4: Organizational structure in 1905.**



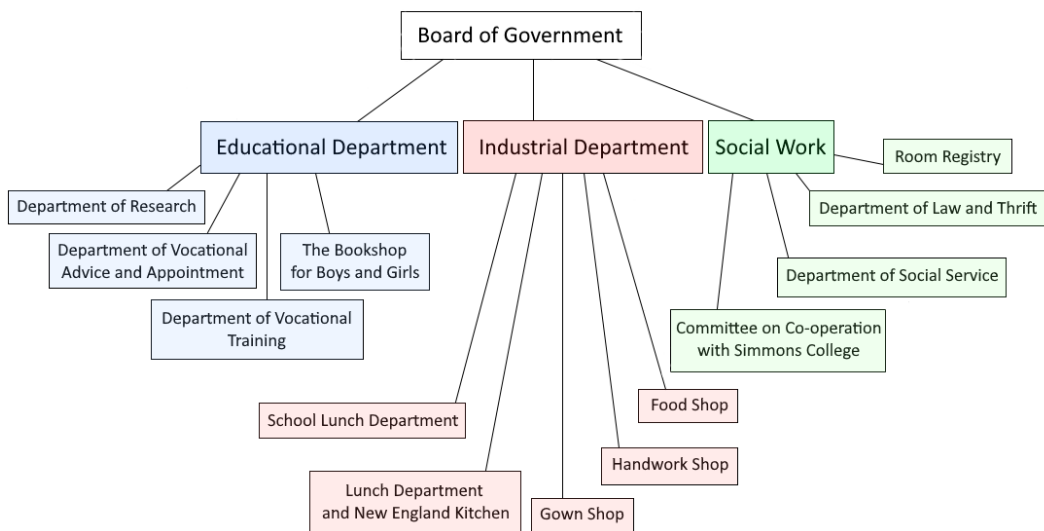
Source: WEIU, *1905 Report*, 17-52, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239272>.

## Appendix 2.5: Organizational structure in 1910.



Source: WEIU, *1910 Report*, 2, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/osu.32435061923652>.

## Appendix 2.6: Organizational structure in 1920.



Source: WEIU, *1920 Report*, 5-8, HathiTrust, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015065239496>.



## **“Un emploi digne d’une honnête citoyenne” : la recherche de la citoyenneté économique au sein de la *Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* de Boston (1877-1920).**

Cette thèse porte sur la façon dont les réformatrices de la classe moyenne blanche américaine, également sympathisantes du mouvement suffragiste, concevaient l’indépendance économique. Par le biais d’une étude de cas de la *Women’s Educational and Industrial Union* (WEIU) de Boston, l’ouvrage met en lumière les efforts “pragmatiques” que ces femmes ont déployés pour améliorer l’accès des femmes à l’éducation et à l’emploi, vus comme complément à la campagne pour le droit de vote. De 1877, date de la fondation de la WEIU, et jusqu’en 1920, quand le Congrès permit l’accès des femmes au droit de vote, nous étudions les agentes d’une redéfinition de la perception de l’activité rémunérée par les femmes de la classe moyenne blanche. La WEIU se distingue d’autres organisations féminines contemporaines comme les clubs ou les settlement houses par ses efforts précoces pour établir le modèle d’une nouvelle institution urbaine dont le financement serait autonome. Les volontaires aisées qui géraient les restaurants et boutiques de la WEIU se sont ainsi créés une carrière commerciale aux accents philanthropiques, avec la volonté d’ouvrir des portes aux autres femmes de Boston. En considérant les programmes de la WEIU comme l’expression tangible d’idées sur la place que devaient occuper les femmes dans la société comme en politique, nous retraçons l’histoire de ses tentatives économiques pour corriger les inégalités de genre. Nous analysons également l’élaboration, socialement située, d’une nouvelle conception de l’indépendance féminine. Tout au long de la thèse, nous décrivons la façon dont la WEIU modelait une solidarité entre femmes qui rejetait les relations hiérarchiques descendantes ayant cours dans les œuvres caritatives, au profit de liens de “coopération” – quand bien même cette volonté d’ouverture dissimulait une vision relativement étroite de la féminité politisée.

MOTS-CLEF : droits des femmes; associations féminines; philanthropie; citoyenneté économique; coopération; entrepreneuriat; Progressivisme.

## **“A Work Worthy of a Dignified Citizen” : The Pursuit of Economic Citizenship in the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union of Boston (1877-1920).**

This dissertation examines changing ideas of economic independence amid the white, middle-class reformers who sympathized with the American woman’s suffrage movement. Through a case study of the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union (WEIU) of Boston, this study highlights the “practical” efforts that such women undertook to enhance self-supporting women’s access to education and jobs, in a more expansive complement to suffragist activism. From 1877, when this class-bridging organization was founded, to 1920, when the US Congress removed gendered barriers to the right to vote, my project investigates the actors who worked to redefine perceptions of white, middle-class women’s paid work in a belief that this would help bring about their emancipation. The WEIU stood out from other female-led organizations like settlements and social clubs because of its early interest in developing the template for an urban institution with a self-supporting fundraising model. The affluent volunteers who ran the WEIU’s restaurants and shops fashioned a career in philanthropic business, endeavoring to create opportunities both for themselves and for Boston’s women. Treating the organization’s programs as the tangible expressions of ideas about women’s social and political roles, I trace the story of their attempt to redress gender-based economic inequalities and analyze the class-based conception of independence that they embraced. All the chapters in this dissertation highlight how the WEIU constructed solidarity between women and rejected top-down, hierarchical notions of benevolence by championing, instead, what they called “cooperation,” even as this purported inclusivity actually concealed a rather narrow vision of politicized womanhood.

KEYWORDS: women’s rights; women’s associations; philanthropy; economic citizenship; cooperation; entrepreneurship; Progressivism.

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