

Women Officeholders in Kansas, 1872-1912

by Lorraine A. Gehring



Emeline "Emma" McCormick Hall was appointed Jackson County's register of deeds by Governor Osborn in 1877. The early date of this appointment indicates that Mrs. Hall was the first woman in Kansas to hold that office.

FROM ITS EARLIEST TERRITORIAL DAYS, Kansas has been recognized as one of the more progressive states in the area of women's political rights. Kansas' first legislature, in 1861, gave women the right to vote in school elections,¹ and in 1871 Attorney General A. L. Williams rendered the opinion that women were eligible to appointment as notaries public.²

However, it is in the area of women officeholders that Kansas' progressive spirit is most noticeable. The state not only boasts the first woman mayor elected in the United States, but by the turn of the century more women had held political office in Kansas than anywhere else.³ Many of these women were voted into office by all-male electorates. Moreover, several women had been elected and had served full terms in office before their right to hold elective office had been legally assured.

Such was the case with Kansas' first female officeholders. Although later elections drew a great deal of attention, the first women officeholders were virtually ignored by the press. The *Kansas Daily Commonwealth*, in a news filler buried on the second page, reported on June 18, 1872, that "Mrs. Ellen Webster has taken the oath and qualified as superintendent of public instruction in Harvey County."⁴ Two other women listed in the state superintendent of public instruction's annual report for 1872—Mary Higby of Labette County and Mrs. C. J. Sharon of Marion County—appear to have

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1. Joanna L. Stratton, *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981), 258.

2. "Women in Office," *Historical Collections, 1911-1912* 12 (Topeka: 1912): 396.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Kansas Daily Commonwealth*, Topeka, June 18, 1872. Webster's name does not appear in the Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Twelfth Annual Report, 1872* (Topeka: 1872). Since no name is listed for Harvey County and the date of the announcement is some time after the election, it is possible she was appointed to fill a vacancy.

received even less notice.⁵ Since no female names are evident in the superintendent's 1871 report, these women were probably the first to hold elective office in Kansas. Higby and Sharon were reelected in 1874, and in that year two more women, Emma Johnson of Pawnee County and Una Hebron of Shawnee County,⁶ joined the circle of women serving as county superintendents of public instruction.

Another woman, Mary P. Wright of Coffey County, was also elected that year. However, Julius H. Noell, the runner-up in the county superintendent's race, contested her election on the grounds that at the time of her election she was "not eligible to the office" because she was a woman.⁷ He also claimed that "rejecting the votes cast for said woman . . . the contestor [Noell] received a majority of the votes cast" and by rights he should be the superintendent of public instruction in Coffey County.⁸ The district court agreed that Wright was ineligible for the office; however, the judges held that, as a result, no one had been elected. Both parties disputed the district court's decision.⁹

Wright filed an appeal with the state supreme court which, on October 6, 1876, rendered the opinion that women were "eligible to the office of County Superintendent of public instruction" because "'All political power is inherent in the people' & all powers not delegated by the constitution remain with them."¹⁰ The state constitution's eligibility requirements for county offices were simple and did not even include a clause requiring the officeholder to be an elector—the requirement which, in Justice Brewer's opinion, kept women from being eligible for election to the state legislature. He asked, "is it not a fair inference that where the constitution is silent they [the constitution's framers] intended no restriction," and he cited a similar case in Maine which supported his decision.¹¹

The applicability of the *Wright v. Noell* decision to other county offices became the focal point in the discussion of whether Jessie Patterson was eligible to be register of deeds in Davis (later Geary) County in 1885.¹² Although two women had been elected to a

county office other than that of school superintendent—Anna M. Junken, register of deeds for Dickinson County in 1884, and Emily S. Rice, county clerk for Harper County in 1884¹³—and another, Emeline McCormick Hall, had been appointed register of deeds for Jackson County by Governor Osborn in 1877,¹⁴ Patterson's eligibility to hold office was debated in the press. The *Atchison Weekly Champion* believed her election presented "an opportunity now of having the matter settled, and we hope it will be carried up to the Supreme Court of the United States where a final decision will be given that will settle the matter for all time to come."¹⁵ Instead, on July 13, 1886, after at least three women had held county office and dozens more had been elected county superintendents of public instruction, the attorney general finally rendered the opinion that women could legally hold office in Kansas.¹⁶

Despite their new legitimacy as officeholders, only two more women were elected to a county office besides that of superintendent of public instruction by 1890: Ada E. Clift, register of deeds for Trego County (1886-1900), and Mary P. Coleman, register of deeds for Clay County (1888-1889).¹⁷ In the next ten years, however, fifteen more women were elected to an office besides county school superintendent, with dozens more serving as appointive deputies in various offices. By 1912 at least seventy-five women had been elected to a non-school county office.¹⁸ In all seventy-five cases, the women were elected by all-male voters.

The Kansas legislature, facing increased demands for some form of woman suffrage, passed a bill in 1886 granting women the right to vote in municipal elections.¹⁹ The Municipal Suffrage Law, signed by Governor Martin on February 13, 1887,²⁰ changed the nature of Kansas politics forever. The work of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union over the previous decade had brought many Kansas women into the political arena,²¹ and armed with their new voting privileges, the women of Kansas' small towns were determined to make their hometowns moral, safe, and dry.

5. Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Twelfth Annual Report*, 1872 (Topeka: 1872), XLV. The 1872 report and later 1874 report give two spellings for Higby: 1872 reads Higby while 1874 reads Higbey.

6. Superintendent of Public Instruction, *Fourteenth Annual Report*, 1874 (Topeka: 1875), 178.

7. *Wright v. Noell*, Supreme Court Case Files, case 566, subseries 2, Archives Department, Kansas State Historical Society.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Atchison Weekly Champion*, November 28, 1885, in *Biographical Scrapbook*, 127:200, Library, KSHS.

13. "Women in Office," 397-98.

14. *Holton Recorder*, February 3, 1958, in *Women Clippings*, 1:254, Library, KSHS.

15. *Atchison Weekly Champion*, November 28, 1885.

16. "Women in Office," 396.

17. *Ibid.*, 397-99.

18. *Ibid.*, 396-400.

19. *Ibid.*, 396. The demand for municipal suffrage became an official objective of the newly formed Kansas Equal Suffrage Association in 1884. See *Topeka Daily Capital*, June 27, 1884, in *Woman Suffrage Clippings*, 5:12, Library, KSHS.

20. "Women in Office," 396.

21. Stratton, *Pioneer Women*, 254-55.

The extent of the new law's effect became apparent almost immediately. In Argonia, as in many small Kansas towns, interest in the upcoming municipal election was at its typical low level in April 1887.²² Despite this, the recently enfranchised women of the WCTU called a meeting a few days before the election to select a slate of acceptable candidates.²³ The meeting was held in the Baptist church and drew a fair-sized crowd of both men and women. Since the WCTU had called the meeting, its officers conducted it, with Susanna Madora Salter, the organization's secretary, serving in the absent president's stead.²⁴

The members of the Argonia WCTU took their new political responsibilities seriously, selecting a ticket of good men despite the interruptions of two "wet" hecklers in the crowd.²⁵ The problem was, the candidates were good men, dry men—difficult men to beat. According to one of the wets:

About 9 o'clock on election day all us boys were feeling gay and agreed to meet at a hall and nominate a candidate to knock out [S. P.] Wilson [the WCTU's choice for mayor]. Jack Ducker... nominated Mrs. Susanna Madora Salter for mayor; and the nomination was made unanimous. We rushed into the streets and commenced to work for our candidate. At noon her husband came to us and begged us to quit the racket, sayn' it was an insult to his wife. We wouldn't do it, and then the voters commenced to come our way in clusters. We got full of whiskey and enthusiasm and at 4 o'clock everyone was votin' for our candidate.²⁶

Perhaps his "whiskey and enthusiasm"²⁷ blurred his recollections, for others remembered events in a slightly different way. Susanna Madora Salter wrote: "Dr. Janeway, the Republican chairman, ... sensed that it was a slam on the women. ... Let's beat them at their own game and really elect her to the office they decided. After getting my consent to serve, if elected, they went to work and rolled up a two-thirds majority for the women."²⁸

22. In both the Argonia election and later in the Oskaloosa election, the nominees for municipal office were chosen just a few days before the elections. Moreover, many towns put only one ticket in the field, and municipal elections often drew very few voters. See the Kansas State Historical Society's collection of replies to Secretary F. G. Adams' request in 1888 for information on the April municipal elections.

23. Letter from Susanna Madora Salter to Frank Beals, published in full in *Argonia Argosy*, December 24, 1952, in *Sumner County Clippings*, 3:153, Library, KSHS.

24. Ibid.; Monroe Billington, "Susanna Madora Salter—First Woman Mayor," *Kansas Historical Quarterly*, 21 (Autumn, 1954): 174.

25. Billington, "Susanna Madora Salter," 174.

26. *Gove County Gazette*, Gove City, February 10, 1888.

27. Ibid.

28. *Argonia Argosy*, December 24, 1952.



Susanna Madora Salter was the first woman to be elected mayor in the United States.

Regardless of who actually gets credit for electing the nation's first woman mayor,²⁹ by nightfall April 4, 1887, Argonia's place in the history books had been secured. Reactions to Salter's election were mixed. Some, like the wet city marshal, who related his version of election day in the *Gove County Gazette*, moved from Argonia. Others heralded it as a great victory for temperance and suffrage alike. Frances E. Willard sent congratulations to Salter and asked her to "write me (on your official heading) a note that I can read to audiences, showing the good of woman's ballot as a *temperance weapon* and the advantages of *women in office*."³⁰ Salter had no official heading, and her one dollar a year salary as mayor was hardly sufficient to pay her

29. Although Salter was the first woman mayor, she was not the only woman to hold a municipal office that year. The city of Syracuse had several female council members that year, while the city of Wetmore had an appointed woman city clerk. See "Women in Office," 400-401.

30. *Gove County Gazette*, February 10, 1888; Billington, "Susanna Madora Salter," 181.

postage answering all the mail she received.³¹ Laura M. Johns of the Kansas Equal Suffrage Association asked Salter for pictures of herself, as many as she could send, to be sold at the Boston Bazaar to raise money for KESA. "Why, my dear, you don't know what a prominent figure you are in history," she wrote the twenty-seven-year-old mother of four.³²

"Dora" Salter kept her perspective during the sensation she caused, never believing she had been elected in her own right, but as a symbol of the collective strength of the WCTU. Statements like "a two-thirds majority for the women [emphasis added]" illustrate this. But she also understood the importance of her role. She opened her first city council meeting with the words "This is a new venture, and the eyes of Kansas and the U. S. are watching and waiting to see how I will run things. I want you to know that is your responsibility, not mine, but I will help you to the best of my ability." Relieved that they were not under "petticoat rule," her councilmen "were very kind and courteous" to her, and she boasted that "there was no discord during the entire year."³³

Several things about Dora Salter should be mentioned to understand her acceptance by the voters of Argonia. She had attended Kansas Agricultural College before marrying Lewis A. Salter, son of former lieutenant governor Melville J. Salter. Her father, Oliver Kinsey, was Argonia's first mayor, and her husband had served as city clerk, writing all the town's ordinances while he read for the bar.³⁴ It was perhaps a stroke of luck that the only WCTU officer the wets could choose for their mayoral candidate was a woman so singularly qualified.³⁵ She was educated, intelligent, and had been involved in Argonia politics through her husband's and father's participation. The dry voters of Argonia doubtless preferred a good dry female candidate to a wet male one, and with Salter's qualifications there was no reason not to vote for her. Although her husband at first balked at the idea of his wife as mayor, he came to accept the situation and made good-natured jokes about being "the husband of the mayor." Her parents supported her candidacy, voting with her late on election day, and Salter herself obviously did not feel she was unqualified, despite the strain of caring for four children and being pregnant at the time.³⁶

Even those in Argonia who disagreed with the idea of woman suffrage supported Salter:

We are far from being an advocate of the woman suffrage cause, but, in justification of the lady's marked ability to take care of the interests of our city, will say that the city is now entirely out of debt, which was not the case when she was elected to office.³⁷

And how was this remarkable feat achieved at a time when the economy of Kansas was at its worst since the Civil War? As one writer pointed out, "There is possibly no cities [sic], of the size of Argonia, in the known world that has enjoyed so much free advertising the past year."³⁸ And it was good advertising, wholesome advertising, the kind of advertising a small town seeking hard working, dry, Christian emigrants needed.

This point was not lost on Dr. J. W. Balsley, one of the leading citizens of Oskaloosa. As Carl Becker pointed out in his essay "Kansas," Kansans like to make history—they like to do things first: "In fact, this disregard of precedent is almost an article of faith; that a thing has been done before is an indication that it is time to improve upon it."³⁹ Dr. Balsley must have agreed, for three days before Oskaloosa's 1888 municipal election he "got to thinking the matter over and felt so discouraged at the outlook that it suddenly occurred to him that a lot of women would take more interest in improving the town than the men who had been selected, and the more he thought upon the subject the better he liked it."⁴⁰ No mention of Argonia or Mayor Salter was made in this newspaper account although Dr. Balsley surely knew of her election and probably just as surely neglected to mention it to the reporters. However, Dr. Balsley had hit upon the perfect improvement to a woman mayor—an all-woman council to accompany her.

Although some of Oskaloosa's businessmen "laughed at first they soon took it up seriously," and by the night before the election Dr. Balsley had "prepared a ticket, induced six women to run for office, and had secured pledges from half of the town that they would vote for them." Oskaloosa was, then, the first town in Kansas to purposely nominate and elect a woman mayor and an all-female council. The all-woman government of Oskaloosa was warmly welcomed, with "every man

31. Billington, "Susanna Madora Salter," 181.

32. Ibid., 178, 181.

33. *Argonia Argosy*, December 24, 1952.

34. Ibid.; Lewis Spencer Salter, "First Woman Mayor—1887," *Kansas Government Journal* 23 (October 1937): 21.

35. Salter was the only WCTU officer who lived within the town limits, a requirement for office. See Salter, "First Woman Mayor," 21; Billington, "Susanna Madora Salter," 174.

36. Billington, "Susanna Madora Salter," 175, 178.

37. *Wellington Morning Quid-Nunc*, January 1, 1888, in *Sumner County Clippings*, 1:309, Library, KSHS.

38. Ibid.

39. Carl Becker, "Kansas," *The Heritage of Kansas: Selected Commentaries on Past Times*, ed., Everett Rich (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1960), 359.

40. *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1889.



Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper was one of many national publications to carry stories and illustrations of the Oskaloosa mayor and city council. Pictured from left to right are Mayor Mary D. Lowman and councilwomen, Carrie Johnson, Sadie Balsley, Hannah P. Morse, Emma K. Hamilton, and Mittie Golden.

and woman in the town turned out to vote." The women won by a three-to-one margin.⁴¹

Dr. Balsley shrewdly chose his candidates. The wives of the town's most prominent men were selected, and Balsley's ticket was a masterpiece of political compromise, boasting two declared Republicans, two Democrats, and representation from all of the town's diverse factions.⁴²

The mayor, Mary D. Lowman, was deputy chief register of deeds; her husband was the register. She had been a teacher for several years, and was active in the WCTU.⁴³ She was also probably the most qualified woman in the town. Dr. Balsley's own wife, Sadie, was one of the five council members, as were Hannah P. Morse, wife of one of the town's attorneys; Mittie Golden, the blacksmith's wife, representing the laboring class; Emma Kirkpatrick Hamilton, the "highly educated" wife of a leading real estate dealer; and Carrie L. Johnson, wife of state senator Charles F. Johnson and daughter of M. L. Critchfield, who apparently vigorously opposed most of the town leaders.⁴⁴

41. Ibid.

42. Author's conclusions are drawn from newspaper accounts. See *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1889; *Topeka Capital-Commonwealth*, April 3, 1889, reprinted from the *Lincoln (Nebr.) Journal*, see *Jefferson County Clippings*, 1:300, Library, KSHS.

43. *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1889; Frances E. Willard and Mary A. Livermore, eds., *American Women* (New York: Mast, Crowell and Kirkpatrick, 1897), 476.

Dr. Balsley's plan worked. The *Chicago Tribune* reported that "never in its history has the town known such a flood-tide of prosperity."⁴⁵ The newspaper also pointed out that, although the election had been the "signal for a volley of ridicule," the townsfolk against whom "the shafts of satire were turned rather enjoyed the notoriety that was . . . thrust upon them," for "they realized that their poky little village was being lifted out of the mire of obscurity and advertised far and wide."⁴⁶

That the people of Oskaloosa considered their experiment a success was evidenced by Mayor Lowman's reelection the following year, again with an all-woman city council, though two of the original councilmembers were replaced.⁴⁷ The townsfolk of Oskaloosa after one year of "petticoat rule" pointed "with pride to the prosperous condition of trade, the increased population, and striking public improvements, all of which has come to them under the administration of these city 'mothers.'"⁴⁸

The newspaper accounts of the elections in Argonia and Oskaloosa played the events for everything they

44. *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1889; "Women in Office," 400. Both sources give the spelling of Balsley, but the name is spelled Baisley in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, April 21, 1888.

45. *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1889.

46. Ibid.

47. Mrs. Johnson was replaced by Mrs. D. H. Kline, and Mrs. Hamilton was replaced by Mrs. W. H. Huddleson. See "Women in Office," 400.

48. *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1889.



were worth. Some papers, especially those from outside the state, embellished the accounts to prove that the women would make the men behave. For example, Mayor Salter was given credit for closing down ten-cent-a-chip poker games, forcing the druggist to stop stocking bitters and extract of malt, and closing down two billiard rooms in town.⁴⁹ This type of overt enforcement of the law by the retiring Dora Salter seems out of character and, more than likely, was untrue. She claimed to "saddle all responsibility on my councilmen and let them carry through." Furthermore, she said the "records will show that there were only two arrests made in the city that year and they were tests on an ordinance" written by her husband a few years earlier.⁵⁰ If such a town "clean-up" occurred, it more than likely took place voluntarily.

The cleaning up of Oskaloosa was reported with even more relish. The *Chicago Tribune* claimed that the women had taken action to keep a stallion out of the livery stable in the center of town because the young boys were peeking through the cracks and corrupting their minds.⁵¹ A letter to the *New York Herald* reported that the women had refused complimentary railroad passes issued to them; they had insisted instead that the railroads run their trains through town more slowly.⁵²

Reprinting the letter on February 19, 1889, the *Topeka Capital-Commonwealth* commented:

We know nothing about the free pass matter, but the statement that the railroads have been compelled to run their trains through the city limits 'more carefully' needs an explanation. The Santa Fe depot is one mile southeast of town, while the Kansas City, Wyandotte & Northwestern depot is one and one half miles east and neither road runs through the city limits.⁵³

The *Capital-Commonwealth* concluded: "we are inclined to believe that the letter [to the *Herald* editor] was prepared in the *Herald* office."⁵⁴

Despite their efforts to keep events in perspective, the women of Oskaloosa were seen as heroes of decency, and it was not long before other small Kansas towns followed suit. In 1889 the towns of Baldwin, Cottonwood Falls, Elk Falls, and Rossville elected women mayors along with all-woman councils.⁵⁵ The elections of these women were heralded in the local press but they failed to gain the national notoriety that the Argonia and Oskaloosa elections had generated. The *Rossville Times* confidently predicted that "this new departure will again bring our city into prominence in the eastern states,"⁵⁶ but national publicity for Rossville or any of

49. Billington, "Susanna Madora Salter," 179; *Gove County Gazette*, February 10, 1888; *State Journal*, Topeka, January 23, 1888, reprinted from an article appearing in *Kansas City Star* in *Biographical Scrapbook*, 151:207.

50. *Argonia Argosy*, December 24, 1952; Billington, "Susanna Madora Salter," 175.

51. *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1889.

52. *Topeka Capital-Commonwealth*, February 19, 1889, in *Jefferson County Clippings*, 1:300.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

55. "Women in Office," 399-401.

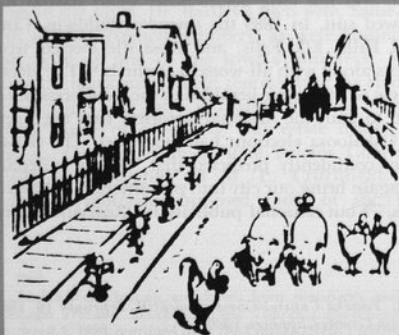
56. *Rossville Times*, April 5, 1889.



THE MUNICIPAL COUNCIL IN SESSION.



BEFORE THE LADIES RULED.



UNDER THE GENTLE ADMINISTRATION.

the other towns which had followed in Oskaloosa's footsteps appears not to have materialized. Despite the lack of publicity, three more towns elected all-female municipal governments in 1890, and by the turn of the century at least sixteen towns had elected women mayors, most accompanied by all-woman councils.⁵⁷

The earliest elections were very peaceful, and the positive aspects of "petticoat rule" were played up for the benefit of the press. However, as the publicity surrounding such elections died down, the situation at times became competitive. In Spring Hill, for example, the all-woman municipal government elected in 1894 ran for reelection in 1895 and lost by a two-to-one margin. Undaunted, they ran again in 1896, only to lose by a three-to-one margin. According to a newspaper article with the subhead "Spring Hill, Kan., Snows Under the Petticoat Ticket": "The women are somewhat discouraged over this second defeat and probably will not again make a fight for supremacy...."⁵⁸

By 1911 the state attorney general's office had been called in to break up the infighting in Hunnewell, a small town not far from Argonia in Sumner County. The mayor, city clerk, and police judge, all women, were at bitter odds with the all-male city council, and the attorney general's office eventually filed a lawsuit to settle the issue. Once again a Kansas mayoress, in this case Hunnewell's Ella Wilson, was featured in the national press, but the positive press generated by earlier elections was sadly missing in her case.⁵⁹

By the time the equal suffrage amendment was passed in 1912, the election of women to municipal office represented a serious political power struggle, unlike earlier elections. There were several similarities in the elections of women mayors prior to 1900 that

The Chicago Tribune in a front page story which described Oskaloosa's "Petticoat Rule" provided readers with sketches of a council meeting and a view of the town before and after the women came to office. In the "before" picture the streets are trashy and the trees are leafless, while in the "after" picture even the pigs look freshly scrubbed.

57. "Women in Office," 399-401.

58. *Ellis Review-Headlight*, April 10, 1896. Spring Hill's all-woman municipal government is not listed in "Women in Office." However, that list was compiled from information submitted by the towns, and it is quite possible that the male government at the time did not supply the information. The article cited above is supported by a news filler in the *Olathe Mirror* which claimed "Miss Edith Barnett was electioneering in this city [Spring Hill] Saturday." See *Olathe Mirror*, April 2, 1886.

59. Henry Smith, "The Kansas Woman Mayor and Her Conflict with 'Pure Cussedness,'" *Metropolitan* 35 (January 1912): 35-36; *Monitor-Press*, Wellington, September 13, 1911. This article explains that Hunnewell had a commission form of government, although the articles refer to the men as councilmen.

merit noting. For instance, the women generally won by a fair majority, served one term, and then retired.⁶⁰ The only women reelected were the mayors of Gaylord (who was followed by an all-female council) and of Oskaloosa (who was reelected with three of the original five councilmembers).⁶¹

Clearly many of these early officeholders were not serious politicians. The women elected to city government were generally married, educated, and members of the upper class. They were women like Lucy M. Sullivan, mayor of Baldwin in 1889 and wife of an "honored trustee" of Baker University,⁶² or Antoinette L. Haskell, the two-time mayor of Gaylord and wife of "a prosperous banker and extensive land owner."⁶³ Most were active in the WCTU and attended church regularly. However, they were divided on the issue of suffrage,

60. Two-to-one and three-to-one appear in many accounts, although complacency in municipal elections was so widespread that often few townsfolk voted. For example, Rossville's all-woman government received only 44 or 45 votes each, while in the following year, their male replacements received over 100 votes each. See Roy D. Bird and Douglass W. Wallace, *Witness of the Times, A History of Shawnee County* (Topeka: H. M. Ives and Sons, 1976), 128-29; Secretary F. G. Adams' request in 1888 for information on the April elections; "Women in Office," 399-401.

61. "Women in Office," 400; *Gaylord Herald*, April 23, 1896; *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1889.

62. "Lucy M. Sweet Sullivan" [obituary] *Methodist Episcopal Church Kansas Annual Conference Minutes, 1908* 5 (Topeka: F. M. Steves and Sons, 1908): 51.

63. *Gaylord Herald*, April 23, 1896.



By the turn of the century, numerous women had been elected to city and county offices, without the attention of the national press. Pictured here is Mary Burbank Wade, mayor, Ellis, Kansas, in 1896.

although some who had previously been against it found themselves in favor of it by the end of their terms.⁶⁴

They were also divided on the issue of party politics. Most stated no party affiliation, and of those who claimed a party, some, like Haskell of Gaylord, were Democrats.⁶⁵ This was not the case in county elections where it would appear that most of the women were steadfast Republicans.⁶⁶ In fact, the issue of party politics, so often absent in municipal elections, seems to have been a prime factor behind the election of women to such county offices as register of deeds, county clerk, county treasurer, and clerk of the district court.

An example which helps illustrate the role formal party politics often played in these women's elections can be found in the political career of Mrs. D. P. Leslie of Brown County. During the latter part of the nineteenth century the Republican party was such a strong force in Brown County that the party's records were included in the county's official *Annals*.⁶⁷ Leslie and her husband were quite active in Brown County politics; Mr. Leslie often served as a delegate to party conventions and once ran for the state legislature. However, Mrs. Leslie's bid for election as county clerk in 1889 apparently was not supported by the local political powers for she lost in the general election, coming in fifth out of six candidates. Despite this, she was given the appointive position of deputy county clerk that year, a position she held until 1896 when she rose to the full position after her election as county clerk.⁶⁸

In the *Annals of Brown County* several pages are devoted to the rounds of voting within the party prior to each election. Once the party decided on its nominee for an office, it was merely a formality to hold a general election, the results of which usually took only one page.⁶⁹ In 1895 Mrs. Leslie finally won the party's approval, beating two opponents for the nomination. It is interesting to note that one of her opponents (and

64. Surprisingly, some of the women claimed that they were not in support of woman's suffrage, while others who may have been for it, did little to support it. Mayor Salter made but one appearance at a suffrage gathering, and Oskaloosa's Mayor Lowman at the end of one term said she now favored woman suffrage and thought women, with proper training, would even make fine senators. See Billington, "Susanna Madora Salter," 181-82; Salter, "First Woman Mayor," 21; *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1889.

65. *Gaylord Herald*, April 23, 1896.

66. At least one woman was a Populist, but it is assumed that since those counties with a strong tradition of women in office were also heavily Republican, the women candidates were also Republican. See *State Journal*, Topeka, December 11, 1901, in *Biographical Scrapbook*, 91:1-2.

67. Grant W. Harrington, *Annals of Brown County, Kansas* (Hiawatha: Grant W. Harrington, 1903).

68. *Ibid.*, 235, 316, 321, 400-401.

69. *Ibid.*, 235, 321, 345, 365.

possibly both) were male. Not surprisingly, Leslie won the November 5 general election by a plurality of almost nine hundred votes, beating a male Populist and a female Prohibition candidate. She won again in 1897, despite stiffer competition that year from a "Silver" Republican. She apparently chose not to run again in 1899.⁷⁰

Rising in her wake was Jessie Campbell, a young woman who followed Leslie as deputy county clerk in 1897. Campbell, after securing her position with the local political powers, was elected county clerk for at least four consecutive terms, beginning in 1904.⁷¹

Not all of the women elected to county government were Republicans. The occasional Populist or Prohibition candidate can be found, and the Democrats were represented in some locales.⁷² However, considering the powerful role the Republican party played at the county level throughout most of the period in question, the majority of the women competing for political office were probably on good terms with "the party."

It is important to remember at this point that these women were elected by all-male voters. Not only was Brown County's all-powerful Republican party largely (if not entirely) male, all its voters were male. Municipal suffrage did not extend to county elections. Yet what amounts to a female dynasty in the county clerk's office was not that unusual. Many county offices were held by "career" women who moved from the appointive position to the more powerful, higher paying elective office, only to have other, younger women follow in their footsteps. For instance, in 1887 Ellen Keleher Howland was appointed deputy register of deeds for Graham County.⁷³ She held the appointive position for ten years, and then was elected register of deeds in 1897. She won her reelection bid in 1899, but lost in 1901 to Olive M. Kackley. Kackley held the elective office for six years, after which time Howland was again elected register of deeds, a position she held until 1911. At that time yet another woman, Alice McGill, was elected register of deeds for Graham County.⁷⁴

Other counties which had women following women into elective offices include Chase, Geary, Greeley, Meade, Morton, Nemaha, and Trego. In all, forty-five



Among the women holding a county office was Ellen Keleher Howland, pictured here with her husband F. A. Howland. Appointed deputy register of deeds for Graham County, she was elected register of deeds in 1897.

counties had elected at least one woman to office by 1911, and that figure does not include the counties which had elected female superintendents of public instruction, the most widely held elective position. In 1911 alone, that office was held by a woman in fifty of Kansas' 105 counties.⁷⁵

Yet, despite the larger number of people affected by these women's elections, despite the fact that these elective positions carried more clout than municipal offices, and despite the overwhelming difference in their salaries (compare Salter's \$1 a year with Leslie's \$1,200 a year),⁷⁶ the election of women to county offices made barely a ripple in the press. No great publicity (and thus, popularity) was bestowed upon these Kansas locales. No increase in trade or in the county's tax base could be attributed to the election of a woman treasurer or county clerk. No benefit of any kind came to these areas when their voters put women in office. If anyone benefited, it was the women themselves who, in a reasonably populous county, made more money in county office

70. *Ibid.*, 316, 321, 345, 365.

71. "Women in Office," 396-97.

72. In some of the smaller counties, where the pay was not grand, women ran against women for county office. Therefore, it is assumed that the Democrats also ran women for office. See Harrington, *Annals*, 321; *State Journal*, Topeka, December 11, 1901.

73. "Women in Office," 397.

74. *Ibid.*; *State Journal*, Topeka, December 11, 1901. "Women in Office" lists Howland as register of deeds until 1903. However, it is more likely that the year in "Women in Office" is in error than it is that the newspaper, printed in 1901, is incorrect.

75. "Women in Office," 396-99.

76. The population of Brown County was 20,319 in 1890 and 22,369 in 1900. Since the salary for county offices was set by the legislature, according to county size, the county clerk for Brown County in 1898 should have made \$1,200. See *General Statutes of the State of Kansas, 1897* (Topeka: W. C. Webb, 1897), Ch. 31, 325-32; Floyd R. Souders, "The Small Town and Its Future," *Kansas Historical Quarterly* 35 (Spring 1969): 14.

than they would have earned in other occupations "suitable" for women, like teaching.

The nearly total lack of press coverage about these women and their elections makes discovering their motives—and the motives of the men who elected them—a difficult pursuit. However, looking at some of the differences between the women elected to county office and those elected to municipal office helps to illuminate the different motivations of the two groups of women.

For instance, while most "city mothers" held office for one year and then retired, many of the women in county government ran for reelection term after term. Some, like Kate E. Johnson of Norton County and Ellen Howland of Graham County, served terms in another position (often a deputy position) between elections to the full office. This leads one to conclude that they lost the elections or the nominations during those interim periods.⁷⁷ Such dedication to the political arena, even after losing a reelection bid, shows that these women were serious about their careers.

Furthermore, the women in county office were probably dependent on the salaries of those offices for their support. While most of the women mayors were married to prosperous businessmen and professionals, the women in county government were often unmarried or widowed or helping disabled husbands support the family.⁷⁸ These women were recognized as independent and self-supporting by their communities, and were generally respected for their resourcefulness. In an article about the hardships Olive Kackley had faced early in life, the *Topeka State Journal* praised the twenty-two-year-old register of deeds for being a young woman who "has always made her own way, [and] depends entirely on her own resources. . . ."⁷⁹

Finally, the women in county government actually did something in their offices. While the state's more famous women mayors and their councils held formal council meetings once a month, in much the same way they held their WCTU and women's clubs meetings, their less-well-known sisters in county offices were at work every day, registering the deeds and balancing the county's receipts. The women in county government were, if not politicians, at least working women. The

women in municipal government were, by and large, neither.

While politics played a much larger role in the election of women to county office, the different economic motivations of the two groups of women divided them more than anything else. The women in municipal government more than likely looked at their role as a civic activity, one by which they could help their town in a practical manner; while the women in county government must have seen their role differently, with employment their main objective, not good works.

One can only guess what motivated the men who voted for these women. In the case of municipal elections, the benefit to the community from the publicity a woman's election would generate surely played a large part in their decision. However, county elections drew little publicity. And while the offices women won at the county level were hardly glamorous or powerful, they were not so tainted that no man would take them. They were, even in small counties, fairly well-paying jobs for which men also competed. The fact that women beat men both in the nomination process and in the general election suggests that the male voters considered those women qualified. Party politics obviously played a role in many women's elections, but so did the fact that the male voters knew the women running for office. The female candidates must have been judged capable by their male constituents to have been elected time after time, as so many of them were.

By the first decade of the twentieth century the attitudes of Kansans to female officeholders had changed. The increased acceptance of women in other careers and the growing support for woman suffrage helped create a climate in which women seeking office were seen as legitimate candidates. The election of a woman was no longer treated like a bid for recognition in the *Guinness Book of World Records*—evidenced by the fact that only one town in Kansas elected a woman mayor after 1900, and that election in Hunnewell of Ella Wilson was certainly not typical of the previous municipal elections.⁸⁰ However, that decade saw nearly three times more women than had previously held those positions elected to county offices.

Thus, any real progress made by Kansas women in the area of holding elective office was made at the county level. While the colorful municipal elections created headlines, they did not permanently open any political doors for women. The slow but steady increase in the number of women holding county office had a far more lasting effect on the state and its people. [KH]

77. "Women in Office," 396-99; *State Journal*, Topeka, December 11, 1901.

78. Mayor Lowman of Oskaloosa was also deputy register of deeds; her husband, a Civil War veteran who had lost an arm in battle was the register. Marie Antoinette Shumaker, although a city, not a county, clerk, was forced to take over her husband's insurance business when he went blind. See *Chicago Tribune*, March 25, 1889; "Kansas Women," *Topeka Argus*, May 18, 1888, in *Woman Suffrage Clippings*, 5:18-22.

79. *State Journal*, Topeka, December 11, 1901.

80. Smith, "Kansas Woman Mayor," 35-36; *Monitor-Press*, September 13, 1911.