Henrietta Briggs-Wall’s American Woman and Her Political Peers, 1893.
Ask any assembled group of people, native Kansans or not, what images they associate with Kansas and almost assuredly the list will include tornadoes, sunflowers, and, probably first and foremost, Dorothy, along with Toto and her other companions from the *Wizard of Oz*. These icons are indelibly engrained in the culture of and lore about the state of Kansas and we are richer for them. Tornadoes and sunflowers, of course, come with the territory, but the *Wizard of Oz* associations are not of our own making; they are manufactured images, which, like it or not, now help to define us. Yet none of these icons gets to the “essence” of the state. If our list also included John Brown, we would at least be headed in the right direction. But what if the images most popularly associated with Kansas—instead of twisters, and flowers, and classic movies—reflected something truly significant about the state’s historical, cultural, and social development?

There are three images of Kansas from the late nineteenth century, none commonly known today, that uniquely speak to exactly these issues. The first, *Drouthy Kansas* by Henry Worrall, was a widely circulated illustration used to encourage immigration to Kansas in the 1870s. The second, a painting by Mary Bartlett Pillsbury Weston titled *The Spirit of Kansas*, promoted a peaceful future for the state after the turbulent days of Bleeding Kansas. And the third, *American Woman and Her Political Peers*, a painting conceptualized by Henrietta Briggs-Wall, demonstrates how women’s lack of voting rights at the end of the nineteenth century affected women’s stature in the state and beyond. The creators of these three works sought a brighter future for Kansas, using art to convey their aspirations for the state. Their work shows that nineteenth-century artists engaged historical and political questions of the day using imagery that was understood by the public. Coincidentally, these artists or their works appeared at the Chicago Columbian Exposition in 1893, contributing to the presentation of Kansas to national and international fairgoers. Collectively, these images of Kansas by Kansans uniquely embody the “spirit” of the state in the late nineteenth century and are important icons because the noble ideals they express demonstrate how art was used as an effective social force.

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For the state of Kansas, as well as the country as a whole, the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893 was an opportunity to show its technological progress, impress humanity with its inventions, and attempt to prove its cultural prowess. The exhibition was held in honor of the four hundredth anniversary of Christopher Columbus’s discovery of America. Among other highlights, a glass urn containing the explorer’s ashes was on display at the fair. The scale of the event was remarkable: it covered six hundred acres, upon which nearly two hundred new buildings were constructed through the collective efforts of forty-six participating countries. Over twenty-six million people attended. It was a massive stage upon which Kansas presented itself to the world.1

The state set aside $100,000 to cover the cost of its state building on the fairgrounds, as well as other exhibition and material expenses. The goal of the state’s various exhibitions was to display “natural, agricultural, livestock, horticultural and industrial products” in order to illustrate the state’s “history, progress, moral and material welfare and future development.”2 The call went out across the state for all citizens to contribute; counties to organize; schoolchildren to send in their best work; farmers to select the finest and biggest samples of produce and natural materials; and women to submit handiwork, paintings, and crafts. Even a “World’s Fair Chorus,” comprised of Lawrence-area singers, banded together for a chance to perform before an international audience in Chicago. All across the state World’s Fair Associations, which coordinated and disseminated information about the fair, and Ladies Columbian Clubs, formed for the purpose of planning and organizing acquisitions for the event, set to work.3 Presumably these groups contacted and recruited women whose work would be displayed in the Woman’s Department of the Kansas Building.

From the beginning of the fair in May until it closed at the end of October officials in Topeka sent daily cars of fresh fruits, vegetables, and other products to Chicago to continually replenish the state’s exhibits. During “Kansas Days” at the fair, held September 15 and 16, Governor Lorenzo Lewelling, former Governor Charles Robinson, various judges, and members of Congress addressed the crowd; Marshall’s Military Band of Topeka performed; and the DeMoss family sang “Kansas, Bright Sunflower State.” The Missouri Pacific Railway furnished over one thousand copies of a small book, Kansas, which were passed out over the summer along its route into Chicago. The fair and preparations for it gave Kansas an unprecedented opportunity to show itself to the world.4

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1. Benjamin Cummings Truman, History of the World’s Fair, Being a Complete and Authentic Description of the Columbian Exposition from its Inception (Philadelphia, Pa.: Kelly, 1893; reprint New York: Arno Press, 1976); and Lawrence (Kans.) Daily Journal, May 1, 1893. The ashes, which were held by the Cathedral Santa Domingo in Italy, were borrowed for the exposition and displayed in a specially constructed convent on the world’s fair grounds.

2. Kansas Board of State Fair Managers, Kansas at the World’s Fair, 1893 (Topeka: State Printer, 1894) 1, 9, available online at kansasmemory.org/item/221144; Lawrence Daily Journal, April 29, May 1, 1893.


4. Kansas at the World’s Fair, 16, 17, 18. The De Moss family was described as the “Lyric Bards of America” (p. 17).
The Spirit of Kansas and American Woman and Her Political Peers, two of the three nineteenth-century icons under consideration here, were displayed in the Woman’s Department on the first floor of the Kansas Building. A photograph of the department shows Henrietta Briggs-Wall’s work hung on its north wall; no photographic evidence has been found to confirm how Mary Weston’s painting was displayed. Alongside these two women’s works were florals, still-life paintings, and handicrafts, made mostly by amateur members of art clubs. Mrs. W. W. Reed’s still-life “masterpiece” of a quail on a panel was especially admired. Reed deemed another work on display, Products of Kansas by Mrs. James J. Ogden, “an admirable study of still life . . . an arrangement of cucumbers, corn and onions resting against a cabbage head.” The display of Briggs-Wall’s and Weston’s more politically minded works, which each in their own way spoke to the cultural and social challenges of the 1890s, reminds us that Kansas women were at the forefront in defining the state and the nation at the turn of the century. Moreover their artwork was not the only nod to the larger cultural questions of the day hanging in the Women’s Department. A portrait of Clarina Nichols, an early champion of women’s suffrage in Kansas who attended the 1859 Wyandotte Constitutional Convention, was also displayed.

Although Henry Worrall’s illustration Drouthy Kansas was not on display at the world’s fair in Chicago, the artist was very much involved in the event. Worrall was a major influence...
Although Henry Worrall’s illustration Drouthy Kansas was not on display at the world’s fair in Chicago, the artist himself was very much involved in the event. Worrall was a major influence in the nineteenth century as a promoter for Kansas, and accordingly was hired by the state to design exhibits and decorations at several previous and subsequent fairs. Worrall is pictured on a day pass issued for the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition.

in the nineteenth century as a promoter for Kansas, and accordingly was hired by the state to design exhibits and decorations at several previous and subsequent fairs. During his visit to the Crystal Palace Exhibition in London in 1851, Worrall first learned that regional displays at fairs were important promotional tools. Twenty-five years later, at the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876, he was in charge of Kansas’s crop-art exhibits, for which he carved a replica of the state seal out of wood and fashioned a model of the Liberty Bell out of the state’s agricultural products. His painting of a portion of the interior of the Kansas-Colorado Building from the 1876 exposition showed a model of the national capitol surrounded by Kansas fruits and vegetables.

The commemorative book Kansas at the World’s Fair, 1893 noted Worrall’s contributions to the Chicago fair: “Prof. Henry Worrall was retained in charge of exhibits collected, and appointed as agent to visit fairs and make additional collections.” In the vestibule of the Kansas Building, cornstalks as tall as sixteen feet formed the centerpiece of wall decorations with ears of corn, sheaves of wheat, and grasses added to complete the design. The Kansas Building was the third largest state building at the fair, and its exhibitions were among the most popular. It was estimated that ten to twelve thousand visitors viewed the Kansas exhibits daily. During the last two months of the fair that total reached eighteen to twenty thousand, and during “Kansas Days” the Kansas Building was “crowded to suffocation.” The general consensus, at the conclusion of the Columbus Centennial Exposition, was that Kansas had presented a self-assured, progressive, and successful image to fairgoers.

As far as can be ascertained none of Henry Worrall’s art works were on display at the Chicago World’s Fair. Drouthy Kansas, his most widely acclaimed work, was originally drawn to amuse friends visiting from Cincinnati in 1869, a time when the national reputation of Kansas was still adversely affected by the drought of 1859 and 1860. With sheets of rain falling, rivers bursting at the seams, and colossal produce of all types displayed, Worrall’s imagery conveyed to viewers that a new set of circumstances existed in the state. Drouthy Kansas next appeared commercially on the cover of the Kansas Farmer magazine in November 1869; on a land advertisement distributed by L. R. Elliot of Manhattan in 1875; and in a book called Resources of Kansas, written in 1877 by C. C. Hutchinson to promote immigration to Kansas. Worrall created several versions of his concept including the original charcoal drawing, a painting in 1878, and Drouthy Kansas even appeared on the drop curtain for the theatrical stage at Liberty Hall in Lawrence. The image was cited repeatedly in the press.

7. Ibid., 18–22.
8. Robert Taft, “The Pictorial Record of the Old West, III. Henry Worrall,” Kansas Historical Quarterly 14 (August 1946): 250. See also Joseph G. Gambone, “Economic Relief in Kansas, 1860–1861,” Kansas Historical Quarterly 36 (Summer 1970): 149–74. Gambone noted that “Kansans” were reluctant to acknowledge the severity of the drought and resulting famine because they worried about damaging their reputation and thus adversely affecting immigration to the soon-to-be-state. Nonetheless, relief efforts were mounted nationwide to address the dire situation.
9. L. R. Elliott, “The Way our Crops ‘Pan Out’ in 1875 in Drouthy Kansas,” advertisement, Manhattan, Kansas, 1875, State Archives Division, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, available online at kansasmemory.org/item/208665; and C. C. [Clinton Carter] Hutchinson, Resources of Kansas (Topeka, Kans.: C. C. Hutchinson, 1871). The latter enumerated the state’s natural resources, geography, and
Worrall was put in charge of Kansas’s exhibits at the 1893 fair, including those on display in the Kansas Building, the interior of which is pictured in this photo from Kansas at the World’s Fair, 1893. An arched entryway flanked by columns covered in cornstalks as tall as sixteen feet can be seen at bottom left of center. Decorations of ears of corn, sheaves of wheat, and grasses adorn the walls on both floors and the tops of two huge displays—the Pyramid of Grain and the Pyramid of Grain and Grasses, which stood on the first floor just inside the entrance—can be seen right of center at bottom.

as “the best advertisement for Kansas ever published.”

In fact the illustration was deemed so seductive it was an important reason many easterners moved to the state in the early 1870s. Worrall was subsequently blamed when those emigrants suffered “ruination” from grasshoppers and drought as climate conditions in Kansas worsened again in the mid-1870s. One angry emigrant in 1875 stated, “had it not been for the diabolical seductiveness of that picture they would never have come to Kansas to be ruined and undone by the grasshoppers.”

Worrall was an early immigrant to Kansas. Born in Liverpool, England, in 1825, he immigrated to America in 1835 and moved to Kansas from Cincinnati in 1868. Prior to settling in Kansas, Worrall was a glass cutter and musician. He taught, composed, and arranged popular music for the guitar in the late nineteenth century, and was especially well known for his compositions “The Siege of Sevastopol (Sebastopol)” and “Spanish Fandango.” Worrall’s pieces were part of the standard guitar repertoire into the 1920s.

The author also gave brief accounts of the state’s towns and cities and talked about the cost of living and freight rates. He wrote at length about raising livestock as well as growing fruits and other types of produce. In the preface to the book, Hutchinson stated his goal was to be impartial to different regions of the state and asked readers to keep in mind that he was not a professional writer, but spoke from personal experiences. Worrall also devoted his talents to the fine art of oil portraiture, capturing the likenesses of famous Kansans such as Judge John Guthrie and Governors James Madison Harvey, Thomas Andrew Osborn, and Andrew H. Reeder. These portraits are now in the collection of the Kansas Historical Society.


After settling in Kansas, his artistic fame soon eclipsed his musical reputation as his illustrations were featured in advertisements for fairs and in historical publications. Worrall’s illustrations were highlighted in two popular books, Joseph McCoy’s *Historic Sketches of the Cattle Trade* and W. E. Webb’s *Buffalo Land*, and in magazines such as *Harper’s Weekly* and *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*. In his drawings for these publications, Worrall recorded life in frontier Kansas for a national audience. For example, “The Colored Exodus—Scenes at Topeka, Kansas,” which appeared in *Harper’s Weekly*, July 5, 1879, depicts scenes in Floral Hall at the Topeka Fairgrounds. The unexpected rush of African Americans into the “promised land of Kansas,” with some seven thousand Exodusters congregating in the Topeka area alone, created enormous problems for public officials. Since there was so little housing available, the Shawnee County Commission authorized taking the majority of these black emigrants to the fairgrounds for temporary shelter and religious services, as shown in Worrall’s illustrations, until more permanent quarters became available.

The idea of Kansas as the “promised land,” amply depicted in Worrall’s *Drouthy Kansas*, was much different from images commonly associated with the dry plains and the western frontier. It was the mission of land and railroad companies, in particular the Atchison, Topeka, and Santa Fe and the Kansas Pacific railroads, to sell a different image of the state in order to populate the areas through which they laid tracks. For example, in the first


14. Robert G. Athearn, *In Search of Canaan: Black Migration to Kansas, 1879–80* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), 55, 67. See also Nell Irvin Painter, *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas after Reconstruction* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986), 256–57. The figures are hard to pin down but Painter estimated about one-quarter of the new migrants had enough funds to buy land and put in crops immediately after arrival. Others found work as laborers, on farms, on the railroads, and in towns as washerswomen or domestic workers. Painter noted that while conditions in the state discouraged some Exodusters from settling in Kansas, by early 1880 fifteen thousand black migrants still remained.
ten months of 1886, 950 miles of track were laid in Kansas, more than any other state, bringing the total number of miles covered in the state to 4,517.15 Railroads portrayed themselves as conveyors of civilization to the frontier, clearing paths through the wilderness so America could continue to advance. In their attempts to lure settlers westward, railroads championed farmers as heroic and virtuous tamers of the land. Employing the same theme, Worrall’s work contained frequent references to the noble farmer toiling in a tame, peaceful, and civilized world to benefit himself, his family, his community, and his country. In a drawing titled *Prairie versus Woodland* Worrall contrasted a homestead begun on the prairie with one started in the woods, where acres of trees had to be removed before the land could be worked. The same view is shown in the bottom panels of the drawing, albeit some years later, with the prairie land much further along toward sustainability than the woodland. Thus Worrall illustrated one aspect of the allure of the plains—that grasses could be easily plowed under, crops and trees planted, and farmsteads established without years of preparation.

The depiction of the state as the peaceful home to the noble farmer stood in contrast to an image that at times plagued Kansas and its boosters. From roughly 1825 to 1860 Kansas was often seen as part of the “Great American Desert,” although, as John L. Allen has pointed out, to contend there was a homogeneous view of the region even in the nineteenth century is too simplistic.16 Not only was it a time when more and more information about the diversity of geographies and climates in the Great Plains was becoming available to the American public, but beginning in about 1825 attitudes about the region were mostly dependent on class and location. While the view of the plains as a vast desert did predominate among northeasterners, a large segment of the American population—rural people particularly in the South and West who were stronger advocates for westward expansion in the first place—generally believed in a “garden” concept.

15. Jennie Small Owen and Kirke Mechem, *Annals of Kansas, 1886–1925*, Vol. 1, 1886–1910 (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1954), 20, 134. By 1891 that number had almost doubled for a total of 8,852.8 miles of track across Kansas. Craig Miner, *West of Wichita: Settling the High Plains of Kansas, 1865–1890* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986), 190–91. Miner cited data from the Board of Railway Commissioners from 1887, which agrees with the general point about the frenzied rail building activity in Kansas in 1886 but differs slightly in the statistics, although it is a little difficult to pull the numbers apart. From June 1886 to June 1887, 1,998.31 miles were added to the system in Kansas. According to the commission, by the end of June 1886 the total mileage covered in Kansas was 4,821 miles.

16. John L. Allen, “The Garden-Desert Continuum: Competing Views of the Great Plains in the Nineteenth Century,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 5 (Fall 1985): 208, 214. This view had been established rather firmly by about 1825, the result of Major Stephen Long’s explorations. In *West of Wichita*, Miner noted that agricultural experts realized in the 1860s how different the soil and climate of Kansas were from other states and that specific techniques and suitable crops would need to be developed to adjust to these conditions. Miner, *West of Wichita*, 40; see also Andrew Menard, “Striking a Line Through the Great American Desert,” *Journal of American Studies* 45 (May 2011): 267–80.
But there was a reason for this: the desert concept was strongest in the urban cities on the East Coast such as Boston, New York, and Hartford, where newspaper descriptions of the Midwest as desert prevailed by a ratio of three to two. In accordance with this general view, geography textbooks published in the Northeast around 1825 referred to the region as desert almost half of the time. On the other hand, the belief in the garden concept stemmed in part from the glowing reports issued by the leader of migration to Oregon in the 1840s and 1850s, Charles Frémont. His reports about the climate, geography, and possibilities of lands on the west coast also raised the reputation of the lands in between. “The valley of the Platte looked like a garden,” wrote Frémont, “so rich was the verdure of the grasses, and so luxuriant the bloom of abundant flowers.” While textbooks and publications in the Northeast continued to refer to the middle section of the country as a desert into the 1840s, Allen’s survey of small-town, rural papers and travel journals in the South and West finds that almost none refer to the “Great American Desert,” and very few describe desert-like conditions in the middle section of the country. Thus, in the years preceding the Civil War there was a range of beliefs about the Great Plains, not just one image, but a continuum between the extreme opposites of desert versus garden.

After Kansas statehood was attained in 1861, however, promoters strongly advanced the virtues of the Kansas climate as a fertile garden state. It was advertised as a wide open region with limitless ground to farm that was now, thanks to the railroads, part of the civilized world. “Boomer literature” proclaimed the advantages of Kansas:

One of the strongest inducements which Kansas holds out to intending settlers is the general salubrity of its climate. . . . The winter season is dry, with clear skies and pure, bracing air. Dr. Griswalk, of Ohio, says, “There is a peculiar atmosphere in Kansas, whether purer, drier, or containing more oxygen I cannot say, but it has an exhilarating effect on the system. It might be called champaign [sic] air.”

The garden image propaganda that flooded the country, distilled through illustrations such as Drouthy Kansas, guide books, the press, and even state agencies, was highly successful and resulted in a kind of “Kansas fever” in the 1870s. The Kansas population increased from 364,000 at the beginning of the decade to more than 990,000 at its end, an increase of about 526,000 residents. The railroads were staunchly behind the garden image. It influenced immigrant farmers and also made an impact on the federal government, which invested monies in making the garden image a reality by promoting irrigation programs and a massive tree planting campaign in areas across the plains.

In the midst of this public relations campaign, Worrall was employed by the state and railway companies to help combat Kansas’s image problem. Worrall adopted a mission that he believed and endorsed wholeheartedly, to promote Kansas as an idyllic place. It was for this cause that he principally used his art, employing a keen sense of humor in caricature studies and illustrations about western life. While today we can see that Drouthy Kansas fostered a myth about the fertility of Kansas as a “Garden of Eden,” this illustration nonetheless demonstrates the tremendous power images could have in the late nineteenth century. Following his death in 1902, the Topeka Daily Herald printed the following tribute to Henry Worrall: “All his life has been devoted to art. His ability, taste and judgment have often been of great service to the people of Topeka and Kansas and he did much for the advancement of art in the middle West.”

Today several versions of Drouthy Kansas are held by the Kansas Historical Society and a painted version from 1878 is on display at the Kansas Museum of History in Topeka.

Mary Bartlett Pillsbury Weston painted The Spirit of Kansas in the back parlor of her large red-brick home at 1733 Massachusetts Street in Lawrence when she was seventy-five years old. According to family records, the painting


18. Quotation from National Land Company literature found in Michael Lewis Goldberg, An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas (Baltimore, Md.: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997), 193–38. As Painter demonstrated, the Kansas fever idea spread to impoverished African Americans and helped to spark the remarkable Exoduster movement in 1879. Painter, Exodusters, especially 184–201. Miner also dealt with the influx of various nationalities into Kansas, which included Volga Germans, Mennonite Russians, and a sizable Swedish population, among others. Miner, West of Wichita, 80–92.

19. The first federal census taken in Kansas was in 1860 when the population was listed at 107,206; thus the increase in the decade from 1860 to 1870 was 289 percent. U.S. Census, 1870, Kansas, available online at recordsproject.com/census/kansas.asp; and Allen, “The Garden-Desert Continuum,” 214.

20. Topeka Daily Herald, June 21, 1902, as quoted in Taft, “The Pictorial Record of the Old West,” 263. Taft concluded that Worrall’s skills were weak in draftsmanship and that his strengths lay not in traditional fine arts but in contexts where humor and wit were not only expected but greatly appreciated. Taft, “The Pictorial Record of the Old West,” 250.
Three Nineteenth-Century Icons of Kansas

Weston was born in Hebron, New Hampshire, in 1817, the oldest of nine children of a Baptist minister and his wife. As recounted by Elizabeth Fries Ellet in her 1859 book *Women Artists in All Ages and Countries*, Mary’s interest in art developed at an early age; her lifelong ambition was to become a professional artist. At age fourteen she set out on her own, living with families who furnished her with room, board, and a small stipend while she painted their portraits. She was mostly self-taught, but occasionally took classes or simply watched other, more experienced painters.

An early portrait currently held by the Watkins Community Museum in Lawrence, titled *A Distinguished Benevolent Lady of Boston* and sometimes referred to as Mrs. Colby by Weston’s family, is of a woman who was an early friend and patron. Another one of Weston’s early paintings, dating from 1852, is of the William Coventry Henry Waddell Family. This family portrait features William and his second wife Charlotte, along with their three children and an adult daughter from William’s first marriage. This successful New York City financier’s family is shown in front of their palatial estate, the Waddell villa, which formerly encompassed an entire city block in Manhattan between Fifth and Sixth Avenues and Thirty-Seventh and Thirty-Eighth Streets. Charlotte Waddell, a society hostess in New York City and early benefactor of Mary Weston, warranted almost an entire chapter in Ellet’s book *The Queens of American Society*, which discussed her status as one of the twelve most admired women in the country.

While working as an artist Mary met and married Valentine Weston, a New York City widower at least twenty years her senior and the owner of a picture frame business. Valentine assisted Mary in promoting and advertising her work. He constructed a transportable gallery carried by train which he set up in several different cities to display and sell Weston’s work. Interestingly, while Mary Weston was included in the 1879 book *Art and Artists in Connecticut* by Harry Willard French, the author erroneously stated that Mary “virtually gave up the art of painting for the art of making a beautiful home” for Valentine and their two daughters. As is evident through her personal correspondence and the long span of her career, in addition to the fact that Valentine assisted his wife in multiple ways, French’s assessment was false.

After Valentine’s death in 1863, Mary lived and worked in several places on the East Coast before deciding in 1874 to follow her brothers who had migrated to Kansas Territory in the mid-1850s. Her brother Josiah Hobart Pillsbury initially settled in Zeandale and farmed; served as a political delegate, postmaster, and justice of the peace; and made something of a name for himself in the troubled territory. Pillsbury Crossing, a limestone formation over which horses and wagons could easily cross Deep Creek as it ran across Pillsbury’s farm (and now a wildlife wife of Gardner Colby, a prominent Boston philanthropist and founder of Colby College, although her identity has not been established definitively.

23. Elizabeth Fries Ellet, *Women Artists in all Ages and Countries* (London: R. Bentley, 1859), 307, 312–13. Mrs. Colby may have been the


area near Manhattan), was named in his honor. Initially Mary lived in Manhattan to be close to family and so that her two daughters could attend Kansas Agricultural College, but she eventually settled permanently in Lawrence.

Weston’s *The Spirit of Kansas* is an exuberantly colored work that features a Great Plains landscape in its background. Clearly there are some similarities between *The Spirit of Kansas* and John Gast’s *American Progress* from 1872, the imagery of which would have been familiar to many Americans of the time because of its wide distribution as a chromolithograph. Besides the fact that both female figures in these paintings are elevated and carrying symbolic objects, the mature goddess figure of Columbia, leader of democracy, in Gast’s painting contrasts with Weston’s adolescent girl, whose mission is not quite as crucial to the nation but whose youth reflects the bountiful energy of the new state of Kansas.

Painting courtesy of the Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.

Clearly there are some similarities between Weston’s *The Spirit of Kansas* and John Gast’s 1872 *American Progress*, above. The mature goddess figure of Columbia, leader of democracy, in Gast’s painting, however, contrasts with Weston’s adolescent girl, whose mission is not quite as crucial to the nation but whose youth reflects the bountiful energy of the new state of Kansas.

27. Forrest R. Bailey, “Report of Examination,” Bailey Art Conservation, Inc., Kansas City, Missouri, 1990, 1 (dimensions of the painting as recorded in the examination are 63 ¾ by 70 ½ inches); and Martha A. Sandweiss, “John Gast, *American Progress*,” Picturing U.S. History, American Social History Project, The Graduate Center, City University of New York, picturinghistory.gc.cuny.edu/item.php?item_id=180. There was another work titled *Spirit of Kansas*, painted by Kansas-native George M. Stone around 1900 and now hanging in the Kansas State Capitol. This allegorical work features an adult woman holding the scales of justice in one hand and a scythe in the other, with various objects symbolic of Kansas’s history scattered around her, including broken shackles, an empty beer bottle, and a whiskey demijohn. While Stone alludes to the role agriculture, slavery, and Prohibition played in the state’s history, the work contains none of the exuberance or dynamism of Weston’s painting. For further analysis see William M. Tsutsui and Marjorie Swann, “Kansans and the Visual Arts,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 25 (Winter 2002–2003): 277–78; Susan Craig, comp., *Biographical Dictionary of Kansas Artists (active before 1945)*, rev. ed. (Lawrence: Kansas University Scholarworks, 2009), 359, available online at kuscholarworks.ku.edu/dspace/bitstream/1808/1028/4/BDKAversion2.pdf; and “George M. Stone,” Kansapedia, Kansas Historical Society, kshs.org/kansapedia/george-m-stone/15549.
To date there have been few reviews of Weston’s work by art historians and no new biographical studies have been undertaken to add to the information published about her in the nineteenth century. It is not known whether Mary Weston’s status as a professional artist on the East Coast was common knowledge in Lawrence, whether she belonged to a local art club, or had any other involvement in the arts community.28 In nineteenth-century Kansas, however, it was primarily women who carried the visual arts forward. Art clubs attracted women who wanted to replace the cultured ambience they had left behind when they moved west and who created artwork to display and use in their homes. More broadly such participation was viewed as a way to promote classical western artistic traditions and to establish new cultural customs that could raise the reputation of the prairie lands in the estimation of the rest of the country. Making art was thus seen as a way to counter the provincial or rural image many Americans had of an agricultural state like Kansas. Such noted Kansans as William Allen White strongly advocated for the growth of fine arts in a civilized state: “Kansas is producing fighters who astonish the world by their achievements, the state should remember that art, too, has a place in the best civilized state; and that the people who neglect art for arms, will revert to barbarism.”29 Art clubs fostered art appreciation by organizing traveling art galleries, promoting American art, and encouraging all types of artistic creation. A traveling gallery of reproduction European old-master paintings began circulating to members of the traveling library association in 1903. The overseer of the exhibition, Kate Aplington, explained its importance to the Kansas Federation of Women’s Clubs:

The study of art is one of the higher educational influences. It is a means of bringing happier, better thoughts into the lives of our people; it helps to widen our ideas and sympathies. This Art Gallery which travels through every section of our state . . . should prove an inspiration to many who have a dim and indefinite longing after art expression. . . . Art appreciation is the first step toward true art growth in a community.30

Henrietta Briggs-Wall designed and commissioned American Woman and Her Political Peers in an effort to promote women’s suffrage at the end of the nineteenth century. She and her husband established the first dry goods store in Hutchinson in 1886, under the firm name Wall and Wall. They appear to have been equal partners in the venture. Her interests went beyond business, however, and both in her home state of Ohio and later in Kansas she became an ardent advocate for both the temperance and women’s suffrage movements.

One of Weston’s relatives recalled that half the community in Lawrence followed the artist’s progress on The Spirit of Kansas. The Lawrence Daily Journal printed an entry in its April 22, 1893, issue marking the day on which the “remarkable” painting by Mary Weston was shipped to the Chicago fair.31 The Spirit of Kansas still bears the scar from an incident at the fair when a gentleman using his umbrella to point to something in the painting was shoved from behind and the tip of his parasol cut through the linen. It was never repaired; the scar serves as a reminder of the painting’s inclusion in the exposition. A letter to Weston making arrangements for shipping the painting back to Lawrence after the fair explained the mishap and added, “Am very sorry but it could not be helped.”32

28. A survey of the Lawrence Daily Journal from 1890 to 1893 suggests that Weston was mentioned only once, in a citation from April 22, 1893. While there were articles about “Art Exhibits” around Lawrence, Weston was never one of the exhibitors listed, nor was she mentioned in the Ladies Columbian Club news and notes. A brief notice on The Spirit of Kansas did appear in “City News,” Lawrence (Kans.) Daily World, April 23, 1893.
31. Lawrence Daily Journal, April 22, 1893. See also “City News,” Lawrence Daily World, April 23, 1893; and Horton, “A Biographical Sketch of Mary Bartlett Pillsbury Weston.”
Mary Weston died at age seventy-eight on April 25, 1895, almost two years after the Columbian Exposition opened its gates, and is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Lawrence. The Spirit of Kansas remained in the family until 1954 when it was donated to the Kansas Historical Society, where it is currently in the collections of the Kansas Museum of History in Topeka.

Henrietta Briggs-Wall, a businesswoman from Hutchinson, Kansas, commissioned American Woman and Her Political Peers in an effort to promote women’s suffrage at the end of the nineteenth century. She designed the painting, which features a woman in the company of other social “outcasts” who were also denied the vote, to highlight the absurdity of the limits placed on women at many of the state’s ballot boxes. This imagery and its meaning would have been immediately obvious, at least to politically astute citizens of the day. Briggs-Wall chose the subjects and designed the concept for the painting, but commissioned Hutchinson artist William A. Ford to create her vision. An imbecile, an Indian, an insane man, and a convict, representatives of women’s political peers, each anchor one corner of the painting. The center of this large pastel work, though, was reserved for a rather severe-looking, bespectacled woman named Frances E. Willard, who represents the “American woman.” Willard was the leader of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the most important national women’s organization in the late nineteenth century. Willard was fully supportive of Briggs-Wall’s painting and offered words of encouragement: “I make no charge therefor [for using her image] let it be my small tribute to the bright enterprise you are setting on foot.” Briggs-Wall’s stated goal for the work was to shock the public. “They do not realize that we are classed with idiots, criminals and the insane as they do when they see that picture. Shocking? Well, it takes a shock to arouse some people to a sense of injustice and degradation.”

The WCTU was founded in 1874 and Willard led the organization from 1879 until her death in 1898. She was a beloved, charismatic figure, who urged her followers to adopt a “Do Everything” approach to restrict and reduce the use of alcohol but moreover encouraged women to put their middle-class values to work making the world at large “homelike.” In addition to Prohibition, the WCTU supported women’s suffrage, charitable work, church organizations, progressive reform of working conditions for women and children, improvement of public education, relief for prostitutes, and better enforcement of laws. The “Woman’s Crusade” came to Kansas in 1874, although the first WCTU club in the state, organized in Bismarck Grove, was not established until 1878, with nearby chapters forming soon after in Osage City, Burlingame, Lawrence, Leavenworth, and Topeka. The Kansas branch of the WCTU showed a strong dedication not only to advancing the political interests of women but in advocating the “cult of domesticity,” which called for women to be both spiritual and self-sacrificing. In fact, the very ideology of the Kansas WCTU was developed around an evangelical and feminine approach to politics because its organizers believed God had called them specifically to do the work men had neglected or failed to accomplish.

33. Craig, “Ford, William A.,” Biographical Dictionary of Kansas Artists, 126, which notes that in 1891 Ford had a residence at the northeast corner of Main and Second Avenue in Hutchinson. Bridges Brothers, The Bridges Brothers City Directory of Hutchinson, Kansas (Hutchinson, Kans.: News Publishing Company, 1893), shows that by 1893 his residence had changed to 227 Sixth Avenue East, lists his occupation as an artist, and notes that he had a studio in Room D of the Higley Block.


36. “Woman’s Christian Temperance Union,” Kansapedia, Kansas Historical Society, kshs.org/kansapedia/woman-s-christian-temperance-union/16679; Underwood, “Civilizing Kansas,” 295; Nancy G. Garner, “For God and Home and Native Land: The Kansas Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, 1878–1938” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 1994), 92, 152; see also Nancy G. Garner, “A Prayerful Public Protest: The Significance of Gender in the Kansas Woman’s Crusade of 1874,” Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains 20 (Winter 1997–1998): 214–29. The WCTU organized around already established political districts and by its third year there were sixteen clubs scattered across most of the state, including in Sabetha, Parsons, Sterling, Wetmore, Enterprise, and Emporia. Northwestern Kansas was not as easily incorporated, with several far western cities holding out until the late 1880s before forming WCTU chapters. Garner demonstrated that the women of the Kansas WCTU used the organization as an arm of the evangelical church, which gave them chances for leadership ordinarily denied by their Protestant churches in the nineteenth century. Not only did these women believe God was on their side, but that women were morally and spiritually superior to men, which is why they argued women were uniquely qualified to defend the home and clean up society.
After Kansas women won the right to vote in municipal elections in 1887, Willard reminded them that they would set an example to the rest of the nation, which would watch and judge womanhood by their turning out (or not turning out) to vote in the next municipal elections. The Kansas WCTU relied on members who had long fought for women’s suffrage in the state, such as Annie Diggs and Laura Johns, to strongly encourage all women to vote by placing articles in newspapers and even gaining support from the pulpit of sympathetic Protestant pastors.37

As suffrage advocates continued their push, Briggs-Wall’s plan for *American Woman and Her Political Peers* was stalled for several years. According to the *Atchison Daily Globe* she was unable to obtain photographs of two of the painting’s subjects—convicts and the insane—due to strict rules against photographing inmates in both England and America. However, Briggs-Wall was not deterred and eventually the wife of a noted phrenologist helped her acquire photographs of all her male subjects, except the insane man. The latter subject was then improvised by the artist from “memory,” probably meaning a composite was drawn based on common conceptions about an insane person’s appearance. One source notes that Briggs-Wall and her artist were aided by the chief of police in Chicago, Mr. Mc Claughry, at the behest of Helen M. Gougar, a temperance and suffrage leader from Indiana. The chief sent Briggs-Wall a collection of photographs of criminals from which she chose a man to serve as a model for the insane figure in her painting.39

In the bottom right of the piece, the insane figure wears a tattered jacket, long, disheveled hair, and an unkempt beard. His wide-eyed, demented stare confirms his status. He is the one figure in the piece whose hand is shown in his vignette; only the heads and shoulders of the others are depicted in traditional portrait format. The insane man holds in his hand a stick, on one branch of which is

Briggs-Wall heavily promoted her painting, in person at the 1893 fair and through several methods of advertising. She offered reproductions in various sizes, including as a cabinet card, both sides of which are pictured here and opposite, that she sold for a quarter each. The details on the cabinet card differ somewhat from those on the full-sized painting, most notably in the figure of the insane man, who on the card has no beard and a more intense gaze.

37. Wilda M. Smith, “A Half Century of Struggle: Gaining Woman Suffrage in Kansas,” *Kansas History: A Journal of the Central Plains* 4 (Summer 1981): 86–89, 92, 93. Smith showed that linking suffrage to the temperance movement, among other causes, proved both beneficial and problematic. While the WCTU trained women to do reform work, the main disadvantage to associating suffrage with temperance came at the hands of powerful, well-funded liquor interests who spent money against woman suffrage. To combat these efforts, the WCTU worked to educate the electorate. A 1887 flyer, titled “What Voters Can Do!” and addressed to the women of Kansas, explained the basic functions of local government as well as how to register to vote for municipal elections, when and where elections were held, and how voters could have an impact on the issues. Three names are appended to the bottom of the flyer: Fanny H. Rastall, president of the Kansas WCTU; Sarah A. Brown, Democratic Party candidate for superintendent of public instruction in 1880; and W. H. Carruth, history professor at the University of Kansas.


propped a floppy, battered hat. An old Indian chief sits opposite the insane man, dressed in full regalia wearing a ceremonial headdress, bear claw necklace, and bear skin. He is the only one of the five who looks directly at the viewer, eyes pinched together and mouth settled into what might be read as an expression of displeasure or annoyance. At top left is the image of a cleanly shaven man, shown almost in full profile, with his mouth gaping open and representing, in Briggs-Wall’s words, the “idiot.”40 Wearing what look to be institutional clothes, his hair is cropped short. His facial features are oversized, although his cranium is markedly small. Opposite the imbecile sits “the convict” in his pin-stripe garb, who looks off to the left with a somewhat pensive stare.

The ideas expressed in American Woman and Her Political Peers were a culmination of many of Briggs-Wall’s interests and concerns. She and her husband established the first dry goods store in Hutchinson in 1886, under the firm name Wall and Wall. They appear to have been equal partners in the venture, as Briggs-Wall was credited with a plan that saved the company from bankruptcy by expanding the business into out-of-town carpet sales. Her interests went beyond business, however, and both in her home state of Ohio and later in Kansas she became an ardent advocate for both the temperance and suffrage movements. She served as the first superintendent of the Ohio Christian Temperance Union and, after her move to the Sunflower State, as the leader of the Kansas WCTU.41 Briggs-Wall wrote a booklet of ten songs called A True Republic, which she dedicated to men. She pleaded for woman’s enfranchisement in such tunes as a “Woman’s Battle Song”:

We are not killing people, but Old Prejudice must go!
The good wireless leads in battle for the coming victory;
Never shots and shells, but principles, will pave the new highway;
As we go bravely on.

Freedom’s banner we’re unfurling,
See the brighter stars now glowing!
We’ll no longer be delaying,
We’ll battle for the right.

Another song, “The Mothers are Coming,” reminded men that women would always stand by their families and fulfill their maternal roles, even after winning the vote. The last page of the small booklet referred to American Woman and Her Political Peers, including promotional quotes from regional and national newspapers about the work as well as information about ordering copies of the painting from the Campaign Company in Hutchinson.42 Briggs-Wall sold cabinet reproductions of American Woman and Her Political Peers for a quarter each or six for seventy-five cents. Larger reproductions of the work were also available and copies reportedly went to “many countries of the world.” Political memorabilia goes back to the eighteenth century in England, while souvenirs

40. Ploughe, History of Reno County, 695. The “idiot” was identified in the History of Reno County as John Rouse. His identity is known because a New York City sketch artist made a portrait of Rouse from the institution’s medical records and gave it to Briggs-Wall.
41. Ibid., 691–95.
from American elections appeared as early as the 1800s and included such items as clothing, badges, plates, and pins. But by the end of the nineteenth century, all sorts of objects were available to mark campaigns including soaps, jewelry, paperweights, and cigar holders. Early in its history the WCTU chose a white ribbon as its emblem to symbolize purity and patriotism. The women of the Kansas WCTU chose the sunflower as their “distinctive sign” in 1887 because just as “the sunflower follows civilization, follows the wheel-tract and the plow, so woman suffrage inevitably follows civilized government.”43 Their analogy caught on with suffragists across the country and before long the color yellow and the sunflower became an emblem of the suffrage campaign. Various items to raise money and support the cause were sold in the same way political memorabilia was used for campaigns. Pins and pincushions, kitchen wares, foodstuffs, cuff links, badges, clothing, hats, lockets, pennants, coffee spoons, playing cards, handkerchiefs, cups, and matchbooks, were among some of the objects sold in bazaars. Compared to many of these ordinary items, Briggs-Wall’s postcard of American Woman and Her Political Peers was a unique piece of memorabilia for the suffrage movement, in addition to being a forceful visual message for change.

Unlike the other two works under consideration, American Woman and Her Political Peers contains no imagery that connects it specifically to Kansas. Still, its subject matter tied it closely to the state, as for an extended period in the nineteenth century Kansas was at the forefront of the suffrage movement. For instance, in 1861 the Kansas legislature, following a directive in the constitution, allowed women to vote in school elections, a first for American women. In 1867 Kansas was the first state in the Union to put equal suffrage on the ballot. While that initiative did not pass, Kansas was first to allow women municipal voting rights in 1887. That same year Susannah Madora Salter was the first woman elected as the mayor of a town in the United States, in Argonia, a little south and west of Wichita. The federal women’s suffrage amendment was first introduced in Congress in 1868 by Kansas Senator Samuel Pomeroy. While Kansas was the eighth state to grant equal suffrage in 1912, it was still one of the battleground states in the movement, a place where nationally known advocates of the cause, such as Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone, Henry Blackwell, and Olympia Brown, spent time.44

During some portions of the Columbian Exposition in 1893, Briggs-Wall stood outside the Woman’s Department in the Kansas Building engaging passersby in conversation about suffrage. Because of her painting’s political message, Briggs-Wall bore all the expenses of shipping American Woman and Her Political Peers to the fair, unlike Mary Weston, whose painting was shipped to Chicago along with other exhibits from Lawrence. The state was criticized by some for displaying Briggs-Wall’s “notoriety-provoking scheme,” as an article titled “Crankism in Art” called it.

The exhibition of the picture in the Kansas building at the world’s fair is certainly out of place, to speak of it no more harshly. It is purely political, and in a measure commits the state, in the estimation of strangers, to the policy of universal woman suffrage, making the state to appear as the especial champion of that idiom in advance of any formal action on the question.45

Yet the display of Briggs-Wall’s painting at the fair before a national and international audience just months in advance of the crucial Kansas election of 1894, when the suffrage amendment would be considered for the second time in the nineteenth century, brought more attention to the hotly contested issue in the state. Although suffrage was defeated yet again, Briggs-Wall continued to show her painting, at events such as the Greater America Exposition in Omaha in 1899 and at state and local fairs across Kansas. The painting is now held by the Kansas Historical Society and is on display at the Kansas Museum of History in Topeka.46

44. Faye E. Dudden, Fighting Chance: The Struggle over Woman Suffrage and Black Suffrage in Reconstruction America (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 108–32, which specifically addresses the 1867 campaign in Kansas and the conflicts between the push for suffrage for both women and black men and discusses several missteps and misjudgments by the American Equal Rights Association (Stanton and Anthony’s organization) and their supporters that resulted in the woman suffrage movement veering seriously off course. The two referenda went down to resounding defeats in 1867.
45. “Crankism in Art,” Wichita Daily Eagle, June 1, 1893.
46. Plough, History of Reno County, 694. See also Smith, “A Half Century of Struggle,” 83–86. As Smith wrote, there were many reasons for the defeat in 1894 but among them were political party problems, tactical disagreements and rivalries among the leadership, in-fighting, finance and transportation issues, and difficulties that arose from combining suffrage with other causes.
All three works considered here were variously used as tools of social force; Drouthy as a dramatic visual means to encourage people to move to Kansas, Spirit as a way to put the violent past to rest and focus on a peaceful future, and American Woman as a way to correct an egregious wrong by raising women’s political status. Each work engaged the historical, political, or social issues of the day. Together the works or, in the case of Worrall, their creators contributed to the impression attendees of the Columbian Exposition formed about the state of Kansas. There is a forward-looking quality in all three pieces, reflective of the late nineteenth century in America, a period associated with progressive social movements, economic growth, and a spirit of dynamism. These three works are important icons of nineteenth-century Kansas. They visually represented the state’s image at a time when Kansas was recruiting settlers west, rebuilding after the Civil War, and pushing forward equal suffrage. As a trio these icons form a more complex picture of a place that has been identified merely with its agricultural achievements and climactic conditions. This more nuanced picture highlights the diversity of the state and its citizens in the late nineteenth century. Collectively these images captured the hopes and dreams of the residents of the young state. They remind us of a time when Kansas impressed America as, in the words of the New York Times, “the great experimental ground of the nation,” with its can-do attitude, its dynamic energy, and its spirit of optimism.47