

## "THE BEST TEMPERANCE ORGANIZATION IN THE LAND": SOUTHERN METHODISTS AND THE W.C.T.U. IN GEORGIA

NANCY A. HARDESTY

The strong bond between Methodists and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union is well known. Emory College President Warren Akin Candler once declared that the Methodist Church was "the best temperance organization in the land."<sup>1</sup> Mother Eliza Stewart, a leader in the Women's Crusade of 1873-74; Annie Wittenmyer, founding president of the W.C.T.U.; and, of course, Frances E. Willard, longtime president of the W.C.T.U. and the most beloved woman of the nineteenth century, were all well known as Methodists.<sup>2</sup> One survey of W.C.T.U. leadership over the last three decades of the nineteenth century found that about one-third of the leadership was Methodist.<sup>3</sup>

In the south the W.C.T.U. initially had very strong ties with both the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The Atlanta chapter of the W.C.T.U. was formed in April, 1880 when the Georgia Good Templars invited Mother Stewart to speak at Trinity Methodist Church. The *Daily Constitution* reported that 200 women joined at once; 100 more joined when she spoke at a Baptist church. Mrs. Alfred Colquitt, a Methodist and wife of the governor, became honorary presi-

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<sup>1</sup>"'For God and Home and Native Land.'" *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*, April 12, 1893, 4.

<sup>2</sup>Frances Willard has been studied by a variety of authors. She herself documented her life and work in *Glimpses of Fifty Years* (Chicago: Woman's Temperance Publication Association, 1889) and *Woman and Temperance* (Harford, Conn.: Park Publishing Co., 1883). Other biographical works include Ray Strachey [Rachel Costelloe], *Frances Willard: Her Life and Work* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1913); Lydia Jones Trowbridge, *Frances Willard of Evanston* (Chicago: Willette, Clark & Company, 1938); and Mary Earhart, *Frances Willard: From Prayers to Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944). More recent works include Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1981); Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981) and *Frances Willard: A Biography* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986). The first chapter of my own *Women Called to Witness: Evangelical Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), is devoted to Willard.

<sup>3</sup>Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 169. Of a group of 110 visible national leaders, Bordin was able to identify 40 (36%) as Methodists (she was unable to identify the denominational preference of 22 or 20%). Of the 1874 officers (40 women), 11 were Methodists (27%; she was unable to identify denominations for 50%). In 1884 16 (29%) leaders were Methodists (with 22 or 39% unidentified), and among the 58 officers in 1894 16 or 28% were Methodists (with 20 or 34% unidentified).

dent.<sup>4</sup> Mother Stewart also founded the first black W.C.T.U. at the Storrs' Institute, as well as Unions in Griffin and Macon, Georgia, and Chattanooga, Tennessee.

One of the Atlanta chapter's first activities was to sponsor a series of Gospel Temperance Meetings in early 1881. The first speaker was Clement A. Evans, ex-Confederate general and current pastor of First Methodist Church. Of the nine meetings led by various ministers, seven were conducted by Methodists.

Willard, having been elected national president of the W.C.T.U. in 1879, paid her first visit to the south in the spring of 1881. Her traveling companions were Georgia Hulse McLeod of Baltimore, whose husband was a minister and editor with the Wesleyan Methodists, and Sallie Chapin of Charleston, South Carolina, daughter of a Methodist minister. Willard bore letters of introduction from "Good Bishop Wightman," William M. Wightman of South Carolina, who, according to Willard, "when not able to sit up, wrote me letters of introduction as hearty as our own Northern bishops would have penned, and they proved the 'open sesame' to many an influential home in the Gulf states; brought many a pastor out of the quiet of his study to 'work me up a meeting'; conciliated the immense influences of church journalism and paved the way for the recognition of the white ribbon movement throughout the Southern states."<sup>5</sup> She applauded the "cordial co-operation" she received "from the most liberal-minded of the clergy."<sup>6</sup>

In Atlanta for three days, she gave eight speeches at the Marietta Street Methodist Church, Trinity Methodist, and DeGive's Opera House. Governor and Mrs. Colquitt welcomed her to the governor's mansion. In her fourteen-week tour of the south, Willard spoke in fifty cities and founded numerous local chapters.

That fall Willard invited Jane Elizabeth Sibley, a Presbyterian and newly elected president of the Augusta chapter, and Missouri Stokes, a Methodist and corresponding secretary of the Atlanta Union, to the national convention in Washington, D.C. They, along with Chapin, were the first southern delegates. Chapin was appointed superintendent of the Southern Work and served until 1889. At the 1882 convention in Louisville, Sibley was named provisional president of Georgia and empowered to call a state convention.

Willard and Chapin along with delegates from Savannah, Augusta, Rome, and Atlanta met in the basement of the First Methodist Church,

<sup>4</sup>Mother Stewart, *Memories of the Crusade* (Chicago: H. J. Smith & Co., 1890), 510-32.

<sup>5</sup>Willard, *Glimpses*, 372.

<sup>6</sup>H. A. Scamp, *King Alcohol in the Realm of King Cotton* (n.p.: The Blakely Printing Co., 1888), 686.

Atlanta, to found the Georgia W.C.T.U. on January 11, 1883.<sup>7</sup> Sibley was elected president and Stokes, corresponding secretary. From Atlanta, Willard went to Oxford at the invitation of Bishop Atticus Haygood, president of Emory College. There she organized a Union with Mrs. Henry A. Scomp, whose husband was professor of ancient languages, as president. From there Willard went to Macon and to Columbus, where Mrs. A. T. Mann, wife of a leading Methodist minister in the South Georgia Conference, was elected president.<sup>8</sup> And so it went throughout the south.

While the south had witnessed few female public speakers, Willard was well received. Even though southern women had not previously participated in reform organizations, they joined the W.C.T.U. Though they had little experience even in leading church organizations, they soon became adept at parliamentary procedure.

The most decisive triumph for the Georgia temperance advocates came in 1885 when Fulton County, the jurisdiction in which Atlanta, the state capital, lies, voted to go dry. The victory was credited in part to the efforts of the Atlanta W.C.T.U., which had worked for local option since its inception.<sup>9</sup> When the measure was reversed in 1887, some began to consider the idea of at least limited woman's suffrage.<sup>10</sup>

For its first decade in the south, relations between the W.C.T.U. and Methodists were cordial. Both local meetings and state conventions were frequently held in Methodist churches.<sup>11</sup> Yet trouble was brewing because Frances Willard was also an outspoken advocate of woman's rights. She had been converted in 1876 to the cause of woman's suffrage. When she spoke of it at the W.C.T.U. convention in October in Newark, New Jersey, opposition within the organization was strong, but she was elected president in 1879 with the knowledge that she would push the issue. In 1880 the Union accepted her call for a "Home Protection Ballot"; in 1882 they authorized a "Franchise Department"; and in 1883 they endorsed equal suffrage for women. Willard was not a narrow advocate of temperance or prohibition, though she favored both. Nor was she simply a propo-

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<sup>7</sup>Mrs. J. J. [Lula] Ansley, *History of the Georgia Woman's Christian Temperance Union from Its Organization, 1883-1907* (Columbus, Ga.: Gilbert Printing Co., 1914), 56. See also Glenda Alice Rabby, "The Woman's Christian Temperance Union in Georgia," in Scomp, *Kind Alcohol*, 677-710.

<sup>8</sup>Ansley, *History of the Georgia W.C.T.U.*, 58, 59.

<sup>9</sup>See Scomp, *Kind Alcohol*, 695.

<sup>10</sup>See Miles H. Dillard to Warren A. Candler, September 13, 1893, Warren Akin Candler Collection (hereinafter referred to as the WAC Collection), Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia: "The results of the Prohibition fight in Atlanta in 1887 led me into this error. I believed that suffrage, qualified by education and limited to school and municipal affairs would bless this country. I saw no hope in trusting such affairs entirely to men."

<sup>11</sup>The Georgia W.C.T.U. annual state conventions were often held in Methodist Churches:  
1883 Organized in First Methodist Church, Atlanta  
1884 First Presbyterian Church, Augusta (Mrs. Sibley's church)

ment of woman's suffrage. Her goal was to do all in her power to elevate the status of women. She called it her "Do-Everything Policy."

Southern men and most southern women were rather conservative in regard to women's roles, and most were totally opposed to woman's suffrage for several reasons. First, they considered it contrary to woman's subordinate role in family and society as taught in Scripture. Second, they saw it as extending to black women the same rights they were already striving to curtail for black men. Most southern Unions took great care not even to mention woman's suffrage and to distance themselves wherever possible from the national position. But this stance became increasingly difficult to sustain. For more than a decade the women petitioned local governments and state legislatures for various temperance measures. Their political powerlessness became ever more evident.

At the national W.C.T.U. convention in Atlanta in 1890, Mrs. Zerelda Wallace of Indiana, a noted suffrage lecturer and superintendent of the W.C.T.U.'s Franchise Department from 1883 to 1888,<sup>12</sup> gave a stirring speech on "Woman Suffrage" and got a standing ovation.<sup>13</sup> At the Georgia state convention members passed a resolution reiterating that they were obligated to "adopt only those principles espoused and plans devised by the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union as are best suited to the needs of Southern work," but the damage was done.

The suffrage movement in the south was still in its infancy,<sup>14</sup> though as early as 1867 southern women had begun conducting campaigns for

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- 1885 St. Luke's Methodist Church, Columbus
  - 1886 Mulberry Street Methodist Church, Macon
  - 1887 Masonic Temple, Savannah
  - 1888 First Baptist Church, Atlanta
  - 1889 St. John's Methodist Church, Augusta
  - 1890 First Methodist Church, Rome
  - 1891 Methodist Church, Thomasville
  - 1892 Methodist Church, Milledgeville
  - 1893 First Baptist Church, Macon
  - 1894 First Baptist Church, Rome
  - 1895 Trinity Methodist Church, Savannah
  - 1896 First Baptist Church, Brunswick
  - 1897 Sandersville
  - 1898 Moody's Tabernacle, Atlanta
  - 1899 No convention because so many Unions had disbanded
  - 1900 St. John's Methodist Church, Augusta

<sup>12</sup>Edward T. James, ed., et al., *Notable American Women* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 3:535.

<sup>13</sup>From a typescript history of the W.C.T.U., unsigned but appears to be manuscript of the book by Mrs. J. J. Ansley, "Georgia W.C.T.U. Histories," Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

<sup>14</sup>Sidney R. Bland, "Fighting the Odds: Militant Suffragists in South Carolina," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 82 (January, 1981): 32-43: "the first significant organizing efforts in the South did not occur until the 1890s," 32.

state constitutional amendments to give women at least some form of suffrage.<sup>15</sup> In a private letter to a Rev. S. W. Rogers in 1888, Missouri Stokes replied "Yes and No" to his question as to whether she believed "in Woman's Suffrage in connection with the temperance cause." She expressed support for women's right to vote on local matters regarding the liquor traffic, but she opposed suffrage on the basis that foreign women in the north and black women in the south would probably vote to support liquor interests.<sup>16</sup>

The Georgia Woman Suffrage Association was founded about 1889 in Columbus by H. Augusta Howard, her mother, and her four sisters.<sup>17</sup> One of its leading members became Mary Latimer McLendon of Atlanta, temperance woman herself and sister of prominent W.C.T.U. leader Rebecca Latimer Felton.<sup>18</sup> One of the Georgia association's most effective pieces of literature was *Prominent Georgia Men in Favor of Woman Suffrage*, published in 1894. Included was a statement by William C. Sibley of Augusta, prominent businessman and husband of Jane Elizabeth Sibley.<sup>19</sup> In 1894 the National American Woman Suffrage Association voted to break precedent and hold its next national convention outside Washington, D.C. In successfully urging that Atlanta be the site in 1895, Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, prominent temperance worker, suffragist, and ordained Methodist Protestant minister, declared that she had recently delivered a woman suffrage speech in Atlanta while attending a W.C.T.U. convention there and that her address was favorably received.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Kenneth R. Johnson, "Kate Gordon and the Woman-Suffrage Movement in the South," *The Journal of Southern History*, 38 (August, 1972), 365.

<sup>16</sup>Missouri H. Stokes to the Rev. S. W. Rogers, 26 September 1888, WAC Collection. This fear seems somewhat contrary to evidence. The W.C.T.U. itself had formed a number of black Unions, and many black women seem to have favored the temperance cause. Indeed, black women seem more independent of black men than white women were of their own male kin.

<sup>17</sup>A. Elizabeth Taylor, "The Origins of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Georgia," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 28 (June 1944), 63-79. See also H. Augusta Howard, "Progress of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Georgia," *Woman's Progress*, 2 (1893-1896).

<sup>18</sup>Taylor, *Ibid.*, 66, 79. Mrs. Felton eventually became the first woman member of the United States Senate, by appointment of the governor on the death of Tom Watson. See Barbara B. Reitt, editor, *Georgia Women: A Celebration* (Atlanta: Atlanta Branch, American Association of University Women, 1976), 17-18. Felton, already deeply involved in politics, had several major battles with Emory President Warren Candler during the 1890s.

<sup>19</sup>Taylor, "Origin of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Georgia," 67-68.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 69-70. Taylor reports Shaw as stating that the speech was given "during the preceding year" 1893. She cites as source *Proceedings of the Twenty-sixth Annual Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1894* (Washington, 1894), 104. I found no references in my reading on the Georgia W.C.T.U. to a speech by Shaw, but I would sooner think it was given during the national W.C.T.U. convention in Atlanta in 1890. If the timing could be pinpointed, Shaw's speech might be seen as a crucial factor in the discussion below.

All of this talk of woman's suffrage began to alienate southern male leaders. A prime example was the controversy that erupted in 1892, led by Warren Akin Candler, then president of Emory College at Oxford and eventually an M. E., South bishop as well. His wife Nettie had long been a member of the Oxford W.C.T.U. chapter, and he had vocally supported temperance, but both of them had "become alarmed on the 'suffrage and political party question.'" <sup>21</sup>

Apparently Mrs. Sibley had expressed herself in favor of suffrage at the national W.C.T.U. convention in Boston and word was getting around to that effect. <sup>22</sup> Sibley urged Dr. and Mrs. Candler to attend the upcoming W.C.T.U. state convention and to express their opinions. She acknowledged that there were "many converts" in the south to the cause of woman's suffrage, but declared that she had "been holding off all these years from the pressure through the National — as have all Southern States but Tennessee." However, she said that Georgia members were wearying of "waiting and appeal" while "legislators continue to show such silent contempt." <sup>23</sup> In reply Candler declared that while his commitment to temperance was unabated, he would "not cooperate with the W.C.T.U. until the suffrage business is stopped." He declared himself unwilling "to furnish churches for meeting places, give pulpit advertising and moral support" to an organization that promoted suffrage ideas he considered "unscriptural tenets." He suggested that the Georgia Union "should cut loose from the National W.C.T.U. and let them go on their way" because "they have ruined the temperance cause [in the] North and they are beginning to injure it in the South." <sup>24</sup>

The controversy became public at the North Georgia Annual Conference when the chair of the Temperance Committee offered a motion that the conference "heartily endorse and . . . co-operate with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union . . . looking to the legal suppression of the liquor traffic." <sup>25</sup> Candler led a successful fight to strike all reference to the W.C.T.U. and then defended the action in the columns of the *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*, suggesting that the doors of all Methodist churches be closed against the group. Quoting various suffrage sentiments from the national W.C.T.U.'s *Union Signal*, he charged that it was meaningless to say that the Georgia W.C.T.U. was not committed to woman suffrage when it sent money to the national organization and when state officers "privately work in favor of the doctrine." <sup>26</sup>

<sup>21</sup>J. E. Sibley to Warren Asa Candler (hereafter WAC), April 29, 1892, WAC Collection. Candler, a Democrat, opposed efforts to focus all temperance efforts in the Prohibition Party, in which Willard was a prime mover.

<sup>22</sup>Missouri H. Stokes to a Mrs. Moore, March 12, 1892, WAC Collection.

<sup>23</sup>Sibley to WAC, April 29, 1892, WAC Collection.

<sup>24</sup>WAC to J. E. Sibley, May 2, 1892, WAC Collection.

<sup>25</sup>Alfred M. Pierce, *Giant Against the Sky: The Life of Bishop Warren Akin Candler* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury press, 1948), 184.

Underneath the rhetoric Candler seems to have been most alarmed by Willard's views on and activities within the Methodist Church. A storm had first risen in 1880 when Willard simply tried to bring greetings from the W.C.T.U. to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Opponents declared it improper for a woman to address a group of men. (That, of course, was the same Conference that denied Anna Oliver and Anna Howard Shaw ordination). In 1888 Willard wrote *Woman in the Pulpit*, defending women as ministers, and was elected one of the first women lay delegates to General Conference, which refused to seat them.<sup>27</sup> Candler charged in 1892 that "the woman's Suffragists have already made a fissure in the Northern Methodist Church, and they will make a similar fissure in the Southern Methodist Church if not resisted at once."<sup>28</sup>

We should learn something from the recent bitter experiences of the Northern Methodists. Largely through the acts of Miss Willard and her following the Methodist Episcopal Church, North, is now confronted by a question involving its very organic structure, and it is evident that however that question may be finally settled the settlement will lead to division. God forbid that our Southern Methodism should admit within its walls a Trojan horse from which forces destructive of its peace, unity and power would issue. . . . I am unwilling to imperil the harmony of our church . . . by following the leadership of revolutionary woman suffragists and 'reformers.'<sup>29</sup>

He said he had "personal knowledge [of] more than a dozen women suffragists in the unions within the territory occupied by the North Georgia Conference." and that "nearly every woman in the unions in Atlanta is a suffragist at heart, perhaps not for full suffrage but for municipal suffrage with an educational qualification, or at least for the liberty to vote against saloons and on school questions." He also declared, "We have suffered enough from negro suffrage already without bringing in the negro women."<sup>30</sup>

Although Jane Sibley, Mary McLendon, and Lella A. Dillard, president of the Conyers, Georgia, Union, defended the W.C.T.U. and

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<sup>26</sup>WAC, "For God and Home and Native Land," *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*, April 12, 1893, 4.

<sup>27</sup>Whether Willard's views on women and the ministry upset Candler or not, they certainly bothered Southern Baptists. In 1893 the "Rev. Dr. McDonald, editor of the *Christian Index*, the official organ of the Baptist Church of Georgia, and Dr. J. B. Hawthorne, pastor of the First Baptist Church of Atlanta, published articles attacking Willard's teachings on the subject of woman's relation to the ministry and marriage. They claimed that Miss Willard was 'pressing women into the gospel ministry, as preachers and leaders, contrary to the teachings of the Scriptures'; and that she was attempting to revolutionize the social system and contemplating the most thorough and radical change in ancient or modern times.' " They called principles set forth in her 1892 presidential address "a subversion of the relations of woman and marriage." See Ansley, *History of the Georgia W.C.T.U.*, 140.

<sup>28</sup>WAC to J. E. Sibley, May 2, 1892, WAC Collection.

<sup>29</sup>WAC, "For God and Home and Native Land," *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*, April 12, 1893, 4.

<sup>30</sup>WAC, "Endangering the Church and the Temperance Cause," *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*, May 10, 1893, 2.

suffrage,<sup>31</sup> Methodist churches were closed to the W.C.T.U. In an 1894 letter to the editor Mrs. Sibley charged that "Candler's hostility knew no bounds," that he had since denounced members of the W.C.T.U. as "Woman Suffragists," "short-haired female agitators," "platform screamers," and "Jezebels." She declared that he even went so far as to wish that Willard "might be taken from the scene of agitation and action with the grip."<sup>32</sup> Membership dropped so sharply that the Union was unable to hold a state convention in 1899. It had to struggle to regain its strength. Though eventually a new generation of leadership arose, the organization never recovered.

Candler continued to support temperance, but he never encouraged expanded roles for women. His opposition to women's suffrage never abated. Twenty years later he ordered and distributed a large number of copies of fellow conservative Bishop James M. Buckley's *The Wrong and Peril of Woman Suffrage*. In 1914 he wrote another episcopal colleague: "Woman's suffrage would hurt the South more than did reconstruction, it would be our utter ruin." He feared the militancy of woman's suffrage advocates: "Howling mobs of women in a struggle to secure the ballot go through the streets of the metropolis of the greatest nation of the earth, smashing windows and Ten Commandments with equal recklessness." When the Nineteenth Amendment passed and women finally won the ballot, Candler refused to allow his wife to vote. Good Methodist woman that she was, however, Nettie simply sneaked out of the house and went to vote with another of her newly enfranchised friends.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Mrs. W. C. Sibley, "The Georgia W.C.T.U. and Woman's Suffrage," and Mrs. M. L. M., "Why Many Women Want Equal Rights," *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*, April 26, 1893, 2, and Mrs. Lella A. Dillard, "For God and Home and Native Land," *Wesleyan Christian Advocate*, May 10, 1893, 3. This Mrs. Dillard may be the wife of Miles Dillard, who subsequently corresponded with WAC, expressing regret about his own and his wife's previously prosuffrage views.

<sup>32</sup>Clipping in the WAC Collection signed by Mrs. W. C. Sibley and dated August 15, 1894. The letter was written after Candler refused to renew Henry Scomp's contract at Emory in June, 1894. Candler was allegedly infuriated that Scomp had encouraged women to speak out on temperance, that Scomp had run for state office on the Prohibition Party ticket, and that Scomp supported his wife's work in the W.C.T.U. Sibley, Latimore, and Felton all jumped into the fray, supporting Scomp and using the opportunity to renew their charges against Candler.

<sup>33</sup>Mark K. Bauman, *Warren Akin Candler: The Conservative as Idealist* (Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1981), 145.