DRUSILLA WILSON: A FRIEND OF TEMPERANCE

by

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The meeting in Twin Mound on the eighteenth would end the tour of southern Douglas County. It had been a success, but she would be glad to get back to her warm house in Lawrence. She had held meetings in forty-five school houses and churches--almost one meeting per day. She had organized thirteen temperance unions and received $250.00 in monthly installments for the State Union. Not a bad record. At times, though, the travel seemed hard--the nights too short, the air too cold. After all, she was sixty-four years old. But knowing that she was in her Master's work, gave her "sweet peace."

Drusilla Wilson was a nineteenth century Quaker temperance leader. She came to Kansas with her husband Jonathan in 1871 to be near their grown sons Israel and Joseph C. Wilson, who were farming in Atchison County. In 1873, Drusilla moved to Lawrence, just as the women's crusade was beginning and became involved in the temperance activities of the state. Accompanied by her husband, she traveled more than 3,000 miles by carriage throughout the state between November, 1879, and November, 1880, to promote the passage of the prohibitory amendment to the Kansas Constitution, which would "prohibit forever the manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors except for medical, scientific and mechanical purposes."

One hundred years after her historic campaign, the constitutional question of liquor still causes political turmoil within Kansas. As recently as November, 1978, the Kansas Supreme Court declared that the liquor-by-the-drink legislation passed by the Kansas Legislature and ratified by a popular vote in fifteen counties was unconstitutional because it violated the "open saloon" provision of the Kansas Constitution, a provision that Drusilla Wilson had helped to effect.

Drusilla Wilson was foremost a Quaker. She was born in Belmont County, Ohio, May 3, 1815, one of twelve children of Joseph and Elizabeth Cox, good Quakers. She moved to Wayne County, Indiana, at age fifteen and became a member of Milford Monthly Meeting. Here, she met Jonathan Wilson, a Quaker six years her elder, and they were married in Bethel Meeting House near Dublin, Indiana, in Wayne County, when she was eighteen. She and Jonathan remained in Wayne County for sixteen years on their eighty-acre farm, raising their children, Anna, Elizabeth, Margaret (died at age one), Israel, Martha, and Joseph C.

The Wilsons moved to Hamilton County, Indiana, in 1849, and Drusilla and Jonathan started a Quaker meeting there at Poplar Ridge in 1851. Later they added a Sabbath School, one of the first such schools in the area.
Shortly before the Civil War, Drusilla and Jonathan moved to Indianapolis. They left Indianapolis in 1866 to serve Western Yearly Meeting as superintendents of twenty-one freedmen's schools in Columbus, Mississippi, for which they received payment of $25.00 per month plus expenses. After two years in Mississippi, in 1868, they returned to Indiana, where they headed White's Manual Labor Institute, located on more than 400 acres near Wabash City, under the direction of Indiana Yearly Meeting. As superintendent and matron, Jonathan and Drusilla Wilson helped to train about twenty children in primary education, scriptural instruction, and the several areas of farm and household labor. They were hired for a term of three years for $500.00 per year, "with the agreement that the Board will increase their salary provided the income of the farm nets more than that amount after defraying all expenses." They remained at White's Institute for four years, one year longer than they had originally planned, and made it profitable for the first time. It was after their tenure at White's Institute that the Wilsons moved to Kansas.

In early Kansas Quaker history, the name Drusilla Wilson appears frequently. She was the first clerk of the Kansas Yearly Meeting for Women, selected at the first meeting in 1872, and served in this capacity until 1886 when she returned to Indiana. The minutes of the first Kansas Yearly Meeting report that she also served on the Committee for the Meeting for Sufferings (business meeting) and the first Committee on the Christian Civilization of Indians.

Throughout her years in Kansas Yearly Meeting, Wilson was active in the service of the church. She was a member of the Temperance Committee for six years (1875, 1876, 1880, 1882, 1885, and 1886), serving as president or chairman of the executive committee in five of these six years. She was also active in spreading the Quaker influence in Kansas; she was a member of the Committee on General Meetings from 1874 through 1876, a member of the Executive Committee of the Missionary Board for three years, and a member of the Executive Committee of the Committee on Evangelical and Pastoral Work, the successor to the Missionary Board, for five years (1892, 1893, 1894, 1895, and 1866). She was also clerk of the Executive Committee that revised the Discipline for Kansas Yearly Meeting in 1882 and was on the committee that recommended the establishment of the Friends American Board of Foreign Missions in 1885. She also served on the committee that recommended the adoption of the first Five Years Meeting (the first national meeting of Quakers) in 1896 and was selected as a delegate to this meeting from Kansas Yearly Meeting. She returned to Indiana in 1886, when Jonathan died.

Drusilla Wilson remained involved in Quaker activities in Indiana until her death in 1908 at age ninety-three. She frequently preached at meetings in Carmel and Indianapolis and was general superintendent of social purity for Western Yearly Meeting. In this capacity she traveled throughout the state and helped to form the White Shield Aid Societies. Through her fund-raising efforts in the cause of social purity, a home was established in Indianapolis to
Jlla and Jonathan moved to Mississippi in 1868, where they served as superintendent and pedagogues to train about twenty freedmen's schools near Wabash City, under the agreement that the board of the farm nets more than they had originally. They remained at the school longer than they had originally expected.

It was after Wilson moved to Kansas that the name Drusilla Wilson was used for the Kansas Yearly meeting in 1872, and served as a member of the Quaker church. The minutes of the meeting for worship and the business meeting of the Iowa Yearly Meeting, Wilson was a member of the Executive Committee for five years (1862, 1863, 1864, 1865, and 1866) and the executive committee active in spreading the gospel. A member of the Committee on Evangelical and Pastoral Board, for five years (1862, 1863, 1864, 1865, and 1866). She was clerk of the Executive Kansas Yearly Meeting in 1883, and as such was a member of the establishment of the Monthly Meeting in 1883. She also served as the secretary of the first meeting of Quakers in 1886, and as a member of the executive committee active in spreading the gospel.

In Quaker activities in thirty-three. She frequently attended the Indiana Yearly Meeting and helped to form the Evangelical and Pastoral Board, for five years. She was clerk of the Executive Kansas Yearly Meeting in 1883. She also served as the secretary of the first meeting of Quakers in 1886, and as a member of the executive committee active in spreading the gospel.

Drusilla Wilson viewed her temperance activities as a religious cause, a view that was supported by her Quaker upbringing. She describes her involvement in the temperance campaign in religious terms: "It was undertaken with many misgivings on my part, lest I might not do justice to the cause, but this crusade was an inspiration of the Holy Ghost, sent from heaven to arouse action in this great work..." She later wrote in an issue of Our Messenger, the Kansas Woman's Christian Temperance Union paper:

While the Lord is able to put down the saloon by prayer, it is not His way. He works through instruments. He said to us as he did to Joshua, "Get thee up; wherefore
Hest thou upon thy face? We were obedient to the command. We began a crusade among the citizens of the state and we never quit work until prohibition was placed in the state constitution.5

Wilson's opposition to alcohol was supported by her Quaker meetings. Debates on the temperance issue appear in Quaker literature in the nineteenth century, but by the mid-1860s, Quakers generally opposed excessive use of liquor. The Discipline of the Society of Friends of Western Yearly Meeting for 1865 entreated monthly meetings to encourage temperance and help those who used intoxicating liquor. If they could not dissuade such persons, they should disown them. In Kansas the summary report of the queries sent to the monthly meetings given in the first yearly meeting stated that "Moderation and temperance are generally observed,...", and the meeting approved the plan of operation of the Executive Temperance Committee of Kansas Yearly Meeting to establish temperance committees at each monthly meeting, with the goal of securing, "...the enactment of laws prohibiting the manufacture and sale of all alcoholic liquors." In 1873 the Kansas Yearly Meeting sent a memorial to the Kansas Legislature supporting temperance, and in 1877 the Kansas Yearly Meeting's Committee on Temperance recommended that monthly temperance meetings be held and members sign the pledge of the National Christian Temperance Union.

Drusilla Wilson was foremost a Quaker. Her energies were expended on Quaker activities, and even her great efforts for the cause of temperance stemmed at least in part from her Quaker beliefs. As a Quaker, she had avenues for leadership open to her, and she followed these avenues, serving both the Society of Friends and the Kansas Woman's Christian Temperance Union as a leader during their formative years in Kansas.

Drusilla Wilson described herself as a born prohibitionist. Her father's father had died when he was quite young, and his mother had remarried a man who owned a distillery in North Carolina. Wilson's father did not like the activities of the distillery and set out on his own to find a new life—at the age of twelve. Drusilla's family convictions against alcohol were supported by the Quaker environment in which the family lived.

She became active in the temperance movement when she moved to Lawrence just as the women's crusade was beginning. She was an active participant in the crusade, heading a Lawrence praying band. She led a band of about twenty women, who would enter a saloon and begin praying with the barkeepers and patrons. But, as Wilson later wrote, "We worked faithfully on that line until we saw we must change tactics. We then turned our face toward the citizens and success crowned the efforts put forth, as faith and works went together."6 She further explained this change in tactics;
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Indelibly stamped upon some of our minds during the
Crusade was the need of prohibition, for then some
of us learned that the traffic was a child of the law.
Women saw it was inconsistent for our fathers and
brothers and husbands to make laws protecting, and
the women follow in the wake pleading with the men
thus licensed to quit the business. A change must
be brought about. We must have prohibition instead
of license. 7

She was present at the 1879 meeting at Bismarck Grove when
a small group of women created the Kansas Woman's Christian
Temperance Union. She served as its second president from 1879
to 1882. During her presidency, the WCTU led the fight for the
passage of the prohibitory amendment to the Kansas Constitution.
The WCTU was only one year old when the legislature began to con-
sider a prohibitory amendment. As Wilson noted, the first task of
the WCTU was to obtain signatures for petitions to get the legislators
to pass a prohibitory amendment, and then once it was passed in the
legislature, the organization had to work for its passage in a general
election. Drusilla's efforts in this last step are among her most
heroic.

She and her husband traveled more than 3,000 miles by car-
riage throughout the state in support of the passage of the prohibitory
amendment. Their travels were made under the auspices of the State
Temperance Committee and without financial compensation. In the
1882 presidential address to the WCTU, Wilson describes their ven-
ture:

"It seemed needful for your President to devote the most of
one entire year to the work, and during the year we--
myself and husband--traveled in our own carriage over
three thousand miles, over roads good, bad or indifferent,
gave more than three hundred public lectures, besides
giving many addresses to Sabbath Schools." 8

Some of the strain of the tour creeps into her views when she later
wrote to the Kansas State Historical Society, "The work was arduous,
as we travelled largely in carriage that we might reach many locali-
ties which could not be otherwise." 9

I have not been able to trace her exact route, although I do
know some of the places she visited from her accounts In the Lawrence
Daily Journal. Her first account shows that she toured southern
Douglas County in December, 1879. She again left Lawrence on
January 8, 1880, and arrived in Hesper on January 9. From there she
gone to Bellevue School, three miles west of Hesper, and then to
Hopewell on January 13, Roscoe on January 14, Union on January 15,
Pleasant Valley in Johnson County on January 16, and Dodd School
on January 17. In early February she spoke in Marion, and on February
she spoke to "a crowded house" five miles north of Marion. On February 15 she spoke at a meeting three miles northwest of Marion, and she was entertained by J. J. Darlich and wife on February 15, five miles southwest of Marion. She then headed to Barry School in the southwest corner of the county. The meeting in Twin Mound on February 18 ended the tour of southern Douglas County. She had held meetings in forty-five school houses and churches, organized thirteen unions, and received $250.00 in monthly installments to be paid to the State Union. She had held twenty meetings in twenty days plus twelve in another thirteen days. She then headed for Shawnee County. Later accounts in the Lawrence Daily Journal show that she spoke in Shawnee County in May, but they do not detail the places. Her efforts were rewarded with the successful passage of the amendment on November 2, 1880, the day after she completed her tour.

As reported in many sources, Drusilla Wilson was a popular speaker on the issue of temperance. She spoke in early February, 1879, at the national meeting of the WCTU held in Topeka where Costa's Opera House was filled to capacity. In August, 1879, she spoke at a national temperance meeting at Bismarck Grove, near Lawrence. One reporter described her appearance at that meeting: "Mrs. Drusilla Wilson spoke at some length on the great temperance problem. She speaks plainly and carries conviction of truth with every word. Her facts were true and her arguments unanswerable." Another listener described her speech: "Mrs. Drusilla Wilson, a venerable lady who reminds us of the venerable and eloquent Quakeress, Lucretia Mott, made an eloquent and convincing argument, which was most highly appreciated by all who heard it." In January, 1880, Drusilla Wilson headed a meeting during a special day of prayer sponsored by the Christian temperance people of Lawrence, and the following month she spoke to a full audience in Marion on the importance of voting for the prohibitory amendment. Later in May, at a large temperance rally in Lawrence, Drusilla spoke, along with Frances Willard and Amanda Way.

Although most of the newspaper accounts do not supply the texts of her talks, one account in the Lawrence Daily Journal does report the content of one of her speeches. According to the reporter, Wilson discussed the rationale for prohibition at a state meeting held in the Baptist church in Lawrence. She stated that liquor selling was among the crimes recognized by law, and that the licensing of the sale of liquor by law was a violation of the law itself. The question of license was clearly a question of right and wrong. The law deemed the sale of liquor illegal, and therefore the licensing of the sale was illegal also. The article further reported Drusilla's query that when a crime was committed because of drink, who was to blame? The man who sold the liquor—who knew its character—or the drinker—who did not know its character. She contended that the rum seller always knows the character of liquor, but the drunkard does not.
Wilson continued to serve the Kansas WCTU even after the prohibitory amendment was passed. She served as state organizer in 1883 for a salary of $600.00 and was president of District II, the Lawrence area, for five years, in 1880-81 and from 1882 to 1886. She chaired the organization’s Committee on Prisons, Committee on Historical and Memorial Building, Committee on Temperance Literature, and Committee on Home Mission Sabbath School Work in 1882 and served on the committee that petitioned the state legislature for an amendment to the school law that would add scientific temperance instruction to the required studies in school. In 1883 she was also on the Committee of Plan of Work, which outlined the future plans of the organization. She was superintendent of the work among colored people in 1884.

Her work with the Kansas WCTU ended with her return to Indiana in 1886. Her role in Indiana seems to be more one of support rather than one of leadership. In Kansas, however, she was a leader—a “temperance tornado.” Through her efforts Kansas became a bulwark against the open saloon. Drusilla Wilson believed in women and the equality of women. She wrote, “Woman should be as a cornerstone—the strength and support of a building... she should be polished... cultivated mentally, morally and physically.” She added, “Woman’s influence and power are felt where those of man cannot reach. The first to bear the tidings of a risen Lord was woman, and He has ever commissioned her messages of love and salvation to a fallen world.” She likewise felt that “Woman... is called to lead forward in almost every reform... and woman’s success in reform is captured in her report to the Kansas WCTU, “... that without woman’s earnest work for the amendment prohibition would not be incorporated in the constitution of our State.” Woman has yet another purpose, according to Wilson:

That for which she was made was to help man... God said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make him a helpmeet.”[sic] Not a toy, not a slave, but one with whom he could consult, hold counsel, compare views; a trustworthy companion.”

Drusilla Wilson’s writings and speeches, as well as her actions, reflect her concern with woman and how she fit into society. As early as 1867 Drusilla was concerned with woman’s place in the world. She was serving as matron of twenty-one freedmen’s schools in Mississippi at that time and developed special sessions to instruct the newly freed women in their role in society. She reported to Western Yearly Meeting of Friends, the sponsor of the schools, that to instruct the adults and parents in their duties as responsible members of society and heads of family, “... she was in the practice of holding meetings once in two weeks for females only; at which time an essay was read by one of the female teachers, on some suitable and instructive subject.” After pursuing this course for some time, she felt it appropriate to invite both sexes. She concluded:
These meetings were thought to have a very marked influence in increasing their estimate of female character, showing her influence and the place she should occupy in the domestic and social circles, as well as the power she may exert as a public teacher.

According to Wilson, woman's duty was to raise her children: "Immortal beings are entrusted to mothers to train for usefulness in this world, and for happiness in the world to come. The trust is an important one." She repeated the importance of woman as child-raiser in her 1885 State of Society report to the Kansas Yearly Meeting for Women.

Sweetly comforting and encouraging to weary mothers is the fact that while faithfully and trustingly training the little ones God has committed to you, for life's duties and for Heaven, your work is just as acceptable to Him as that of those He has called to more public service.

However, childrearing was only one of many duties for women. She felt that as woman discharges first duties throughout her life, "she will go forward as other duties open." She wrote, "Women are encouraged to occupy faithfully the gifts and talents bestowed upon them." As would be expected, the good Quaker Drusilla Wilson believed that "Aside from our family duties we should be ever ready to work for our Master in many ways, as opportunity offers." Her concern for lack of women participating in work for the Master—a concern also expressed by modern-day Quakers—is reflected in many of her State of Society reports to the Kansas Yearly Meeting for Women. In 1879 she wrote:

The subject of women's ministry being on the decrease was brought before us, and a belief was exercised that it was not because the Lord did not call for women to labor, but because we had let too many guests take the place in our hearts.

She expresses this same view a bit more dramatically in 1881:

Very impressive was the exhortation by a brother, that women were not coming up to their duty in exercising their gift in the ministry. That it was a device of the devil to make women believe that it was enough for them to do to take care of their children—a device of his to keep them silent. The Lord has beautifully divided the gift to both sexes. When He gives the gift of ministry of the Word to either sex, He does not recall the gift, but gives this injunction, "Occupy till I come."
Drusilla Wilson’s life reflects her concept of first duty to family and then service to her Master. She did not take an active role in church or civic affairs until she moved to Indianapolis in 1860, when her youngest child was sixteen years old. Her leadership positions in Western Yearly Meeting and Kansas Yearly Meeting all came after her children were raised. Likewise, her active temperance campaign was waged when she was sixty-four years old. She had discharged her first duty of children and had gone forward in other duties.

Her belief in women is manifested in many of her actions. Compared to most nineteenth century women, she led a non-traditional life. As a Quaker, she was able to participate outside the home in church work and reform movements. Her local meeting endorsed her as a minister and supported her in her travels throughout the state for the cause of temperance. Contemporaries noted her unusual approach to life:

When called upon to do temperance work, some would have said that it would have appeared bold and out of place for a woman, that a woman’s sphere is at home. Yet she did her home duties well, and found time to do a vast lot of field work. 23

As an exchange in the Lawrence Daily Journal shows, however, not everyone shared the positive, Quaker view of women. At the close of one of her temperance lectures in Shawnee County a gentleman attacked the prohibition doctrine and challenged her to a debate. The date was set for May 25, 1880, but her opponent did not show up at the appointed time because he objected to debating with a woman. Wilson wrote to the Lawrence Daily Journal, “I told him that it was a woman who was challenged, and a woman would debate the question. . . .” 24 No new date was set.

In her letters to the Lawrence Daily Journal during her temperance campaign, Drusilla Wilson would sometimes taunt the men. In March, 1880, she reported that lectures were needed in the rural districts, and:

... as spring is now close at hand, we are cheered with the prospect, that as the wintry storms will soon be over the gentlemen will feel safe to venture the exposure, and that a number may for a time leave the railroads and betake themselves to this much-needed though unobtrusive field of labor.” 25

Drusilla Wilson was a woman who believed in women.

Drusilla Wilson had the gift for recognizing what actions would bring her desired results. She likewise had the energy and
dedication to take those actions and bring about those results. Wilson was proud of her accomplishments, and well she should have been. In many regards, her comments about the success of her ventures seem to be part of her testimony for her salvation on Judgment Day. She wrote, "To God one day we must give an account. Each must answer for herself; no excuse will be taken." And many of her reports seem as if she was detailing her activities for that final judgment, a judgment that should be made in her favor, when the numbers—which she bountifully supplied—were added up. Although the records of most of her speeches and other writings are gone, Wilson has made sure that later generations know that she traveled 3,000 miles, giving 300 speeches, without pay, for the cause of temperance. She includes this information in her printed presidential address to the Kansas WCTU (three years after the trip was made), again in an article for the twentieth anniversary of the Kansas WCTU for Our Messenger, and again in a letter to the Kansas State Historical Society.

Her pride comes out in other ways, as well. In commenting about the Kansas WCTU in her 1882 presidential address, Wilson wrote:

Still the effective work done by the women of the State is not a whit behind the chiepest. "Prohibition" has been our watchword; "Eternal vigilance" our banner. These we hoisted in the face of the enemy more than seven years ago.

She continued:

When we remember that this was in addition to steering the frail bark in which one year previous we had set sail as a Woman's Christian Temperance Union, it is not to be wondered that the sails were not always set to catch each breeze that might have given us a swifter passage to the union of distinction and placed us second to none as a part of the national household. Can you point out any State where the women have worked less selfishly and more effectively than the women of Kansas? . . . Prohibition, instead of license, graces our constitution.

Her report as state organizer of the WCTU similarly reflects her own pride. She began the document with an apology for her absence at their convention because she was attending the Friends Yearly Meeting:

No one in this state or nation feels a deeper interest in the convention than I do. . . No one has been longer in the work of this state than I have. . . .
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address, Wilson wrote:
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Drusilla Wilson was loved by many. E. H. Collins, a
Quaker, wrote in a county newspaper after her death:

The spirit of reform, of social improvement and of true personal liberty filled each word and motive until she was loved by both congenial people and those who walked in a different plane... In this work (temperance) she was respected and loved, instead of insulted and despised.

Drusilla Wilson was foremost a Quaker. She was a leader--of temperance and of women--an activist and a pragmatist. E. H. Collins summarized her accomplishments by writing:

The life of Drusilla Wilson is a good object lesson to us all in its usefulness in many fields of activity. Her activity came firmly in touch with the life of society. Most people are led; Mrs. Wilson was a leader.

Allen Jay concluded, "The world is better because they [Drusilla and Jonathan Wilson] have passed through it. The church is richer because they lived." And I must add, the women of Kansas are stronger because Drusilla Wilson showed them what they could achieve.
NOTES


7 Minutes of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Kansas, at the Fourth Annual Meeting, held at Burlingame, Kansas, September 22, 23, and 24, 1882 (Burlingame, Kan.: The Osage County Chronicle News and Job Rooms, 1882), p. 11.

8 WCTU Minutes, 1882, p. 11.

9 Drusilla Wilson to Kansas Historical Society, October 29, 1903, Kansas State Historical Society Manuscript Department, p. 3.


13 Cecil Howe's, "Kansas's First Temperance Tornado was Sparked by a Lawrence Woman," Kansas City Times, August 24, 1948,
14 "Woman's First Duty," as quoted in A Brief Sketch of the Lives of Jonathan and Drusilla Wilson, p. 68.

15 Minutes of Kansas Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1885, p. 87.

16 "Woman's First Duty," as quoted in A Brief Sketch of the Lives of Jonathan and Drusilla Wilson, p. 69.

17 WCTU Minutes, 1882, p. 11.


19 The American Friend, First Series, Vol. 1, No. 6 (June, 1867), p. 122.

20 Minutes of Kansas Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1882, p. 66.

21 Minutes of Kansas Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1882, p. 66.

22 Minutes of Kansas Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1886, p. 68.


26 Minutes of Kansas Yearly Meeting of Friends, 1882, p. 66.

27 WCTU Minutes, 1882, p. 11.

28 WCTU Minutes, 1884, p. 49.

29 Drusilla Wilson to Kansas Historical Society, p. 2.

30 "Obituary," Hamilton County Ledger, June 19, 1908.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.