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The [McMillan Journal Collection](#) is an archive of the journals of Martha McMillan of Cedarville, Ohio, who maintained a daily journal from 1867 until her death in 1913.

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Historical Analysis: WCTU (1899 – Travel Diary – Indiana)

Victoria Krus

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In June of 1899, Martha McMillan traveled to Lyons, Indiana where she visited family. During her stay, she attended a WCTU meeting and gave a lengthy speech about the importance of good, moral mothers in the home. Several times throughout her journals, Martha references different social gatherings, meetings, elections, and conventions held by the WCTU. The organization seems to have played a large role in her life. With this in mind, more knowledge about the WCTU will provide insight into Martha's beliefs and convictions.

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, or the WCTU, was founded in Cleveland, Ohio in November 1874. Annie Wittenmyer became the first president of the organization and established 1,000 local groups as well as a journal titled *Our Union*. When Wittenmyer opposed adding suffrage and abstinence from alcohol to the groups' platform in 1879, Frances Willard replaced her. Willard helped make the WCTU "one of the largest and most influential women's groups of the 19th century by expanding its platform to campaign for labor laws, prison reform and suffrage" ("Woman's Christian Temperance Union"). After Willard's death in 1898, the WCTU shifted their main focus to prohibition.

The organization worked hard to make life better for the lower class (Gusfield 223). Joseph Gusfield writes in his article, which traces a 100-year history of the WCTU, that "the American temperance movement during the nineteenth century was a part of a general effort toward the improvement of the worth of the human being through improved mortality as well as economic conditions" (Gusfield 222-23). The WCTU worked to "secure penal reform, to shorten working hours and raise wages for workers, and to abolish child labor" (Gusfield 223). They also

attempted to create legislation that would protect working girls being exploited by men (Gusfield 223). The Knights of Labor came alongside the WCTU to support the temperance movement after the WCTU gave their support to the labor movement (Gusfield 224). Gusfield notes that all of these efforts in moral reform are hard to separate from Christianity: “Prison reform, for example, was stressed as a way to rehabilitate character, to convert men to Christianity, and to prevent the suffering of prisoners” (Gusfield 224).

Willard encouraged women to use their homemaking skills and their position in the home to make social change. She helped create a campaign of “social housekeeping” which “invoked traditional feminine values of domesticity and yet could be used to justify women’s public involvement in any number of social issues: alcohol temperance, domestic violence, labor justice, and women’s suffrage”(Beard 55). In 1882, they started the Kitchen Gardens Department to train girls “in the arts of cooking and household management” in hopes that young women could receive jobs as housemaids and avoid city life (Gusfield 224). Programs like the Kitchen Gardens Department made the movement seem more “home-like” by using the domestic strengths of the women involved (Beard 55).

Deanna Beard argues in her article that the success of the WCTU is because of how “its leadership effectively articulated the need for female public activism, as unusual as the measure seemed, as a reasonable response to the extraordinary dangers of alcohol intemperance”(Beard 53). The WCTU called on women who had a “duty to protect the family” and who were already using “emotional persuasion” to civilize men (53).

Martha McMillan believed these arguments and expounded upon these principles in the speech she gave at an Indiana WCTU meeting in July of 1899. She begins by encouraging the group by explaining to them that a small group with a clear focus can do more than a large group

without focus and expresses her sadness about Frances Willard's death. Martha begins to teach the women how they can create change within their homes and their towns. She believes that the mother's work holds great importance: "It is generally understood that a mother's work must begin at home. Madam Willard said it was only as a mother did her full duty in her own home that she is capable of doing anything of great value elsewhere."

Martha talks about the spiritual side of a mother's work. She says that the most important thing a mother can teach a child is to fear the Lord. She writes, "Teach a child to pray as soon as it can lisp its mother's name. Teach it to love and reverence the Bible. Teach them little texts. Teach them obedience." She shares stories of John Newton and young men in the country who remembered their mother's words about God at a young age and stresses the importance of teaching children to fear the Lord.

By understanding the beliefs and platforms of the WCTU, Martha's political stance becomes clearer. Readers have the ability to understand what issues were important to her and how she believed in a solution to those issues. Throughout her journals, Martha's faith and love for her family are apparent. It should not surprise readers to know that she was involved in the WCTU because the organization focused on the things that Martha cared for the most. After looking into the values of the WCTU, the theme of faith and family in Martha's life becomes clear. While she travelled in Indiana, she recorded every letter that she received from her children and often notes how anxious she is to get back to them. Throughout her journals, she makes references to Florence, who passed away at the young age of two, mourning the loss of her precious child for many years. These instances are scattered throughout her journals and are easy to miss among the daily farm records at times. But, Martha's involvement in the WCTU

makes it clear that above her farm and above her friends, Martha adored her family and depended on her faith.

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