"Undismayed by Any Mere Man":  
Women Lawmakers and Tax Policy in Nevada,  
1919-1956  
by  
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A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
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ABSTRACT

Women have played a vital role in Nevada's lawmaking process since first lobbying the Territorial Legislature in 1861. In subsequent decades, women increased in numbers as lobbyists, staff, and reporters. By 1914, when Nevada women won the right to vote and be elected to office, male legislators were accustomed to a female presence in the Capitol. With enfranchisement, however, came a more direct role for women in the state's lawmaking process. Featuring the twenty-nine women who served in the Nevada Legislature in the first half of the twentieth century, this dissertation enhances knowledge about public women between what are commonly called the two feminist waves. In addition to a general analysis of their partisan and legislative activities, this dissertation specifically contemplates women's participation in shifting Nevada's tax base from residents to nonresidents.

This dissertation argues that these women legislators were influenced primarily by their experiences in the business sector. Suffrage provided the opportunity to hold public office, but it did not define their politics. More useful for understanding women lawmakers in the first half of the twentieth century is what I call "fiscal maternalism." Women legislators mitigated their social concerns with their understanding of the state's economic limitations. Their votes on controversial issues such as legalized gambling, easy divorce, and regulated prostitution reflected a perspective of these issues as economic first and moral second. Demonstrating a motherly care for the state's economy and the tax burden
on families, women invoked both their maternal authority and financial acumen to construct their legislative authority.

Combining policy history and women's history, this dissertation documents that a legislator's sex did not necessarily predict her vote on legislation and advances the gendered analysis of state lawmaking beyond the dichotomy that emerges with the application of the label "women's issues." In addition, this dissertation demonstrates that the digitization of newspapers provides a fruitful new resource for historians, particularly those interested in women. The ability to search within articles removes the reliance on headlines and reveals that the previously-disregarded society pages are valuable tools for tracing women's business activities and political networks.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the spring of 2006, I slipped out of a conference being held on the Tempe campus of Arizona State University and settled on a bench not far from Hayden Library, lazily wondering what it would be like to be a student again. It had been twenty years since I had finished my masters in what was then the new field of women’s history, and I was comfortably drifting along on a profitable career path. Without warning, a bird dove out of a nearby tree and whacked me in the head. Three months later, I was enrolled in the history PhD program at ASU.

With a nod to that clever bird, I am pleased to acknowledge the many people who made this dissertation process both possible and pleasant. My family, especially my parents Dan and Joan Bennett, didn’t blink an eye when I quit my job, sold my house, and went back to graduate school. Their support never wavered. Good friends in both Nevada and Arizona generously celebrated each passing milestone. My dearest friend Dale Erquiaga kept me moving forward with plenty of fortifying wine. My fiancé Shannon Jackson, an amazing cook, ensured that I didn’t go hungry. He, too, has quit his job, sold his house, and returned to school, and I will happily support him through the remainder of his studies as he has sustained me through mine.

I am fortunate to have been guided through the academic world by incredibly smart and savvy historians. Professor Noel Stowe picked up where the bird left off, convinced me that this goal was attainable, and shepherded me through classes, internships, and exams. I dearly wish he had lived to read this
dissertation. He left me, however, in the extremely capable hands of Professor Susan Gray whose wise counsel and challenging queries shaped this dissertation into a much better document that I had ever imagined. Her sharp and sophisticated analysis exemplifies the pinnacle of history as a profession, and her standards of historical scholarship are an inspiration. Indeed, working with my entire dissertation committee has been rewarding. I have enjoyed many fruitful conversations with Professor Jannelle Warren-Findley with whom I share the singular experience of having been self-employed. Provocative discussions with Professor Donald Critchlow always yield new insights about the complicated relationship between policy history and today’s politics. My committee’s confidence in the quality of my work was validated when I was honored with a dissertation completion fellowship from ASU’s Graduate College and the School of Historical, Philosophical, and Religious Studies.

Research for this dissertation provided a terrific excuse to drive around Nevada, one of my favorite things to do. I relished the time spent with Joel Guldner and his colleagues at Special Collections at the University of Nevada, Reno, and with Su Kim Chung and her colleagues at Special Collections at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau is a hidden treasure, thanks to Nan Bowers, Jan Wolfley, and Teresa Wilt. It was always fun to chat with Jeff Kintop and Chris Driggs at the Nevada State Archives in Carson City and Eric Moody at the Nevada Historical Society in Reno. I thoroughly enjoyed my visits to the Nevada Historical Society.

I presented a portion of this dissertation at the annual meeting of the Social Science History Association in 2009 and profited from the constructive critiques of Professor Benita Roth of Binghamton University, my alma mater, and Professor Kendra Schiffman of the University of Minnesota. My research also led to articles published in the *Nevada Historical Society Quarterly* and *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*. I welcomed the anonymous reviewers’ comments, which were both useful and encouraging, and the expert guidance of the journals’ editors, Michael Green and Gayle Gullett.

I simply cannot overstate my appreciation to the relatives of the women upon whom this dissertation is focused. I gained priceless insights through personal chats with Helen Williams’s grand-nephew, Mary Sharp’s granddaughter, Alice Towle’s grandson, and Hazel Denton’s son and daughter-in-law and telephone and email conversations with Frances Friedhoff’s daughter-in-law, Rita Millar’s grandsons and granddaughter, and Lois Washburn’s daughter. I extend my most heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Gilbert and Swainia Cochran, Jeanne Sharp Howerton, Gene Wines Segerblom, Bill Young, Ralph and Sara Denton, Helen Strosnider Friedhoff, Thomas Burns, Robert Burns, Mary Burns-Tavish, and Lois Deimel Whealey. These delightful encounters enriched my research beyond measure, and I will always be grateful for their many kindnesses.
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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Laughter and applause filled Nevada’s Capitol Building on a wintry Saturday afternoon in 1923 as lawmakers, lobbyists, and spectators set aside weighty policy debates, such as the row over a gasoline tax, and crowded into the Assembly Chambers to enjoy the staff’s witty scrutiny of the thirty-seven Assembly members. “Throwing bouquets” of gentle humor, Assembly attachés continued a long tradition of merrily joshing the legislators and the work they had – and had not – done during the recent legislative session. “Likes to talk on prohibition,” was directed toward one Assemblyman; toward another, “at making beer you can’t beat ‘em.” “Arguing is his favorite past-time,” they sang about the minority floor leader, “Think sometime he’ll split a lung.” The audience chuckled and clapped as each four-line stanza featured an Assemblyman or Assemblywoman. The attachés winked, “Though the men hate to admit it, Mrs. Hays has got the pep”; complimented Marguerite Gosse, “plump and bright and pretty”; and sniffed, “isn’t it terribly provoking?” that Alice Towle would choose marriage instead of Congress to which the impressive young lawmaker would “go in ‘on high.”” Concluding their epic poem, they cheered Mineral County’s legislator:

Mineral sent us Mrs. Millar.
She’s an equal suffrage fan,
And as clever as they make ‘em,
Undismayed by any mere man.1

Known as “Third House,” this tradition of spoofing a legislative session began in 1861 with Samuel L. Clemens, a young reporter who covered Nevada’s Territorial Legislature and later became famous as author Mark Twain. During the first half of the twentieth century, the Assembly and Senate each enjoyed its own Third House, which was typically performed near the end of each biennial session. Legislative attachés and newspaper reporters impersonated various lawmakers in what Assemblywoman Hazel Denton proclaimed “[h]ilarious caricatures” that hearkened to key policy issues and significant legislation and sometimes alluded to hallway gossip from the session. Legislators occasionally participated; the Governor usually attended; and local newspapers reported the merriment. As staff, women played the roles of male legislators in Third House, and once elected to the Legislature, women became lawmakers to be mimicked, an indication of their active participation in the regular legislative process.

Politically successful businesswomen like Rita Millar, a widow engaged in a variety of employment throughout most of her adult life to support herself and her children, do not appear in much of U.S. history about twentieth century women or policymaking. Historians understandably focus on women’s battle for enfranchisement—its achievement on a nationwide scale in 1920 was a hallmark of the Progressive era and a milestone in U.S. political history—but most of the

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post-suffrage histories of political women, like the Nineteenth Amendment itself, are silent about office-holders, especially on a state level. Attention has focused on women as activists, appointees, and other agitators outside or on the margins of the political mainstream after suffrage, yet many women dove right into the middle of established political institutions like the state legislatures. Our historical knowledge about these women—who they were and what they did—is far from complete.

The four Nevada women teased by the attachés—Louise Hays, Marguerite Gosse, Alice Towle, and Rita Millar—comprised more than 10 percent of the Assembly in 1923 and were among the first women elected to represent their counties in the state’s biennial lawmaking session. Four years earlier, Sadie Hurst had become the first woman elected to the Nevada Legislature, and by the 1956 sales tax referendum, which was a women-centered political movement in Nevada, twenty-nine women had served in the state’s Legislature. The appendix provides details about each of them. Most of these women won contested races; many defeated male candidates and incumbents, and some received the highest number of votes among their legislative delegation. They chaired legislative committees, successfully moved legislation, and debated amendments. Some presided over the Assembly. Rarely “dismayed by any mere man,” these female lawmakers—all pragmatic businesswomen—actively joined in with their male colleagues to create and then entrench Nevada’s twentieth-century tax policy of
relying on nonresidents—specifically, tourists and the Federal Government—to provide the revenue necessary to support state government and its services.

The most common characteristic of the women (other than their sex) who served in Nevada’s Legislature between 1919 and 1956 was their active participation in the state’s economy. Almost without exception, these women had been engaged in an astonishing range of money-making ventures to help support—and in many cases, be the sole support of—their families. As entrepreneurs, managers, and employees, their business experiences shaped them as fiscal pragmatists who typically supported revenue-generating legislation, even when women’s groups were opposed. Revenue generation and management were important tasks for a state legislature in the twentieth century, especially as federal programs demanded state fiscal participation, and the small size of the Nevada Legislature ensured that most members participated in the decisions about laws that, together, shaped a fiscal policy for the state. Women’s business acumen made them attractive to voters and facilitated relationships with their male colleagues once they arrived at a legislative session, especially during a time of rapid population growth and economic change for Nevada. Party and regional differences ensured that these women did not all agree on the best economic course for Nevada, but they were certainly not excluded from the conversation because of their sex. During the first half of the twentieth century, the Nevada Legislature approved legislation that shifted the state’s revenue
sources from residents to non-residents, and women lawmakers participated in that process.

Their sex cannot be ignored, however. These legislators were emphatically women who had matured during a time of rapid changes in American women’s lives and, as a result, exhibit many of the markers of modernity and of being New Women—educated, mobile, and free from patriarchal authority.³ Imbued also with the turn-of-the-twentieth-century notion of women’s moral authority, they typically did not challenge the values of the white, middle-class culture in which they had been raised. Like Peggy Pascoe’s San Francisco missionaries who used “the female values” of white, middle-class culture “to strengthen the social authority of women,” these Nevada legislators used those same values to strengthen women’s political authority.⁴

Women lawmakers’ public remarks implied their acceptance of a woman’s role as a motherly caregiver, and their legislative actions extended that role to motherly care of the entire state of Nevada. Attention to the state’s economy and the taxation of its residents was part and parcel of that maternal

³ Martha Patterson notes that these and many other attributes of New Women indicated “multiple and contradictory positions on the most pressing issues of the day” and argues that the term represented a complex, and often regionally- and class-based, understanding of modern women. Martha H. Patterson, ed., The American New Woman Revisited: A Reader, 1894-1930 (Piscataway, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 2.

concern. In their support for shifting the burden of Nevada’s taxation from residents to visitors, these women expressed a strong belief in the heterosexual family unit, even if they were not living that value themselves. In essence, their policymaking rewarded men and women who married, bought property, and raised families in Nevada with certain benefits, such as good schools, without requiring them to pay much to the state for those benefits. Those who came temporarily to Nevada to divorce, to wed, to gamble, or to buy things would be the ones who would pay. If any of the visitors chose to stay, so much the better for both them and the state.

These women lawmakers demonstrated what I call fiscal maternalism. Nevada’s economy and families were two sides of the same coin for them, which meant that their political and legislative interests were simultaneously economic and social. They did not choose one over the other. Thus, their identities as women and as businesspeople were complementary, not contradictory. Helen Williams expressed it best in 1941 when she explained “that her main legislative interests as a rancher are livestock raising and agriculture, and as a woman all types of social legislation.”5 Indeed, she served on the two Assembly committees tasked with issues concerning agriculture and livestock and introduced legislation to assist needy children. Their expressed concern for Nevada’s women and children provided them access to legislative positions from which they

5 “Lone Woman in Legislature is Resident of Nye,” Tonopah Daily Times-Bonanza, 22 January 1941.
participated in fiscal policymaking, and these business-minded female lawmakers successfully melded motherly authority and financial expertise. Fiscal maternalism was most apparent in the 1950s when women lawmakers, ably assisted by a corps of female lobbyists colloquially known as the “little mothers,” successfully maneuvered the establishment of a state sales tax by associating it with the education of children.

Vigorous politicians, effective legislators, and champions of their state, these women were not social reformers. They did not set out to change – in any radical way – Nevada as a whole. They liked Nevada. They liked their communities and their neighborhoods. They did not want to alter them fundamentally, but they did want to improve them. Each female lawmaker had a different idea, however, of what to improve and how to do it. Alice Towle insisted that “[c]onditions must be made as favorable as possible for the reclamation of new land, the up-growth of new industries and the in-coming of new people.”6 Rita Millar worried about getting government spending under control “before we all become bankrupt.”7 Mary Rose advocated “the cutting down of useless expenditures and giving work wherever possible to our own citizens.”8 For Sadie

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6 “Miss Towle’s University Work Fits Her For Legislative Duties,” Churchill County Eagle, 9 September 1922.

7 “For the Assembly,” Walker Lake Bulletin, 12 August 1922.

Hurst, prohibition of alcohol would improve her home city of Reno; for Lois Washburn, New Deal programs promised a better life for Nevadans; and for Mabel Isbell, a thriving construction industry was necessary for a healthy economy. Maude Frazier, arguably the most successful female lawmaker in this group, focused her ten-year tenure on laws governing education and elections. None of them proposed an extensive codification of sexual equality. Instead, they focused on rather narrow legislation that sought to improve the daily lives of all Nevadans, women included.

These lawmakers were not feminists as the term was then understood. Women who publicly donned that label, after suffrage and before the women’s movement of the 1960s, tended to be members of the shrinking National Woman’s Party (NWP). In 1918 Nevada, Sadie Hurst successfully campaigned by advertising that she was not a member of that particular political organization,

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which enhanced her appeal to male voters, obviously, and also to the many women who were politically active but not in the same way as those in the NWP.¹¹ No evidence exists that any of the twenty-nine women legislators applied the term “feminist” to herself, but evidence is plentiful that many of them were concerned about power relations between men and women. Linda Gordon has suggested a more inclusive definition of the word “feminist”: “a political perspective that considers women unjustly subordinated, finds that oppression to be humanly changeable, and strategizes for women’s advancement.”¹² Applying this standard to the legislation introduced by these women brings to center-stage the Republican Hurst and Democrats Ethel McGuire, Luella Drumm, and Maude Frazier, all of whom sponsored bills that sought to equalize the economic relationship between spouses. In addition, many examples abound of the involvement of these twenty-nine women in legislative activity that could be interpreted as feminist. They supported the easy dissolution of unhappy marriages, advocated minimum wages for women, obtained higher salaries for teachers, and assisted in the creation of more employment opportunities, many of which went to women (including themselves). This particular list reveals their

¹¹ Political advertisement, Reno Evening Gazette, 1 November 1918. Hurst’s declaration also served to separate her from the more militant suffragist, Anne Martin, a Nevada native who was the first national chair of the National Woman’s Party and was running in Nevada as an Independent for the U.S. Senate.

tendency toward a feminism that accepted basic differences between men and women, yet some also introduced bills that would have legally codified the sameness of the sexes, particularly within marriage. Significantly, not one of these lawmakers proposed the necessary legislation for Nevada to ratify the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Simultaneously, some of these women engaged in other areas that would bring any feminist credentials into question, reflecting (and perhaps refracting) what Nancy Hewitt calls the “messy multiplicity of feminist activism.”

Conversely, these women cannot be labeled as conservative as that term is now understood. One significant difference concerns religion, which was simply not a factor in their political lives. These women illustrate that progressive and conservative visions were not necessarily dichotomous, and both could be embodied in the same official. Democratic and Republican women both reflected a pragmatic conservatism, which is much different than evangelical conservatism. The radical suffrage movement opened the door to elected offices, but it was these women’s experiences within American capitalism, typically deemed conservative, and not religion, that shaped their politics. They endorsed what we now call economic development; they worked with male colleagues to minimize taxation of the state’s residents; and they sought some expansion of the social welfare

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system. Feminist or conservative or perhaps both, these empowered women suggest that the distinctions between the two are more blurry than initially thought and challenge any monolithic notions of American political women after suffrage.

The difficulty with applying labels comes into sharp focus with female legislators’ continual interest in the state’s educational system. The women in this study tended to agree that state government should have a larger role in that system, especially in terms of paying for it. With few exceptions, they had all worked as teachers; some had been school principals, school board trustees, or district administrators. They knew how tough a teaching job was and how rotten the pay, and their experiences enhanced their authority on the issue as legislators. Fighting to improve Nevada’s educational system, especially through increased funding, was a productive way to improve the lot of Nevada’s women and children. A strong education system with fairly compensated teachers would have ramifications throughout the state. Female teachers would earn both a living wage and respect; female students would be well-educated toward professional careers and raising good citizens. Male students would also be educated into well-paying jobs that would benefit their future wives and children. Legislation that established welfare programs might provide immediate relief for Nevada’s women and children, but a solid education system, from the earliest years to university, would produce long-term results. Furthering such a system was the one consistent legislative interest among these lawmaking women and one in which gendered norms worked to their benefit. As persons who could biologically
give birth, they were assumed to be fundamentally concerned about children who, obviously, were key components of the educational system. But the legislation championed by these women, unquestionably imbued with maternal authority, was concerned with adults, not children. Their bills addressed bonds and other funding, demanded certain curricula, and instructed school boards. They parlayed that maternal authority into political authority.

This dissertation explores how women lawmakers were involved in the development of Nevada’s twentieth-century tax policy. It focuses on the women’s business and legislative experiences and examines their involvement in three key areas addressed by the Nevada Legislature: the development of a tourist industry through liberal laws governing divorce, marriage, and gambling; the rapid increase in the amount of federal funding to the state; and the imposition of a sales tax. This dissertation does not purport to be a comprehensive analysis of state revenue generation in the first half of the twentieth century. Like the other states, Nevada’s fiscal system became exceedingly complex as it shifted from a primary reliance on property taxes to a multiplicity of taxes, fees, and grants, which is more than can be covered here.

In addition, this dissertation will not explore the ways that social expectations of female behavior constrained women legislators’ activities or ambitions. The effect of sexism—a belief in the inferiority of women—on women’s professional and political aspirations throughout the twentieth century has been well-studied. In particular, Anna L. Harvey graphically elucidates the
“downstream effects” of women’s disenfranchisement, arguing that the ways in which women shaped their political activities before enfranchisement handicapped them when they were finally allowed (at least, legally) full access to the political process. More interesting to me is how women negotiated the legislative process and achieved certain accomplishments despite sexism. The rules of procedure were mostly gender-blind, which could work in the women’s favor, but the politics of being male/female had to be managed. They worked with the tools that they had and accomplished more than that for which they have been given credit. These women were integral parts of their county delegations, their policy committees, the Assembly, and the entire Legislature. They did not typically hold formal leadership positions, but, as historian Elisabeth Israels Perry asserts, “the absence of visible women on the front lines of state-building does not mean that they were absent from the process.”

**Historiography**

This dissertation responds to Eileen Boris who recently observed that “we lack research on women’s power in municipalities over time and space” and advocated the speedy marriage (without any additional waiting period) of policy

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history and women’s history.¹⁶ By considering the connections between businesswomen and political women, this dissertation also strives for Kathryn Kish Sklar’s two-perspective paradigm of “women and gender in political history.”¹⁷ It builds on the important work of historians such as Gayle Gullett who demonstrates the clear link between clubwork and politics, and of political scientists, like Kristi Anderson who documents many women’s post-suffrage partisan and political achievements.¹⁸ This dissertation also resumes the historical study of state legislatures, ably begun by Ballard Campbell and Philip Vandermeer, and adds a gendered component to that discussion.¹⁹ It challenges the dichotomy of feminism and political conservatism and suggests new directions in understanding mid-twentieth century political women by proposing


the centrality of business experience to women’s experience in governance, especially for those women who held elected offices.

The passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution opened voting booths around the country to women, but it said nothing about whether women could run for and hold public elected offices. As they had from the time the national Constitution was ratified, state legislatures maintained the authority to determine who could or could not run for local and state offices. They had exercised this authority before 1920—allowing women to run for school district offices, for example—and continued to do so after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. Several states persisted in precluding, either by statutory or constitutional fiat, women from holding office. In Iowa, for example, women could vote for male legislative candidates in the 1920 election, but no woman could run for a seat in the Iowa Legislature until after the state’s Constitution had been amended in 1926.²¹

Nor were the post-suffrage election opportunities the first for women. Hundreds of women had been elected to public office well before the Nineteenth Amendment was passed. By 1894, more than half of the states authorized women

²⁰ The entire text of the Nineteenth Amendment: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.”

to hold the office of school trustee or superintendent or both. Women could stand for election to those offices even in states, such as Nevada, where they could not vote for any of the candidates, including themselves.22 Marilyn Shultz Blackwell explains that school suffrage originated in the mid-nineteenth century “as a political strategy devised to help overcome entrenched ideas about women’s proper roles,” but concludes that the strategy did not work as well as politically-inclined women had hoped.23 Blackwell, repeating the common assumption that suffrage included both voting and office-holding, draws a connection between early office-holding and later voting, but no other historian has explained how women holding public office before getting the right to vote shaped women’s post-enfranchisement office-holding experiences. This dissertation touches on that connection, suggesting that women who held offices in the late nineteenth century served as role models for girls who became politically active as adults in the twentieth century.


The total number of women who were elected to public offices by mid-twentieth century, either before or after national enfranchisement, is not known. Part of the reason is that the number of public offices in the United States—at federal, state, and local levels—has never been static and continued to rise over time, but another, perhaps more important reason is the overwhelming assumption by men and women, scholars and amateurs, that women did not get elected to many offices. In 1973, William Chafe considered the handful of women who served in Congress or as Governors during the 1920s, found little evidence of social reform, and concluded that “[n]o female officeholder during the 1920’s served with special distinction.” Although Chafe was clearly talking about a narrow group of office-holders, his conclusions have been applied to women in all elected offices and proven surprisingly resilient. Such assumptions obscure the female presence in American governance. Among state legislators, however, the number of elected women is known, thanks to Elizabeth M. Cox’s impressive

24 Swarthmore College hosts a collaborative online effort, “Her Hat Was in the Ring!,” to document the women who ran for public offices before 1920 at http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/wchmiel1/women%20in%20politics/index.htm.


compendium Women State and Territorial Legislators, 1895-1995: A State-by-State Analysis, with Rosters of 6,000 Women. In the year following national suffrage in 1920, twenty-one state legislatures seated women from both major parties. By 1959, every state legislature had seated at least one female member, and in that year alone, 341 women served as legislators, an increase of almost 900 percent over the number of women legislators serving during the first session after national enfranchisement. For the most part, these women achieved legislative office in the same way that men did. They declared their candidacies, campaigned, and were elected by voters, yet Cox noted a serious absence of any “political analysis of … what [women] did while they were legislators.” Women, she continued,

proved to be effective legislators, often wielding an influence far beyond what might be expected from their limited numbers….Nevertheless, I found that attitudes which dismiss the contributions of these women are remarkably persistent.  

Scholarship concerned with voting for women, rather than voting by women, tends to concentrate on the candidacy experience, and the literature typically conflates candidates and officeholders. Although the two roles were held by the same person – one must typically be a candidate to be an officeholder, and an officeholder could become a candidate (sometimes simultaneously, sometimes sequentially) – the roles were not the same. Women’s candidacies for public

27 Cox, Women State and Territorial Legislators, 6-7, 269, 120, 24, 327-328.
office are the focus of Gayle Gullett’s and Linda Van Ingen’s analyses of women in California politics, Carole Nichols’s work in Connecticut, and Richard McCormick and Kathryne McCormick’s studies in New Jersey. These monographs contribute important aspects to our understanding of political women on the state level, but do not explore, in any great detail, women’s activities after they were elected.

When women officeholders do appear, the emphasis tends to be on their work as social reformers. As Eileen Boris observes, “most women’s historians have replicated the gender division of labor,” focusing “on the politics of conventionally defined women’s issues” that typically get lumped under the policy category of “social welfare.” Examples include Linda Gordon’s *Pitied But Not Entitled* and Theda Skocpol’s *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*. Catherine Rymph explains that some “women’s historians often assumed that

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U.S. women’s politics were reliably liberal, progressive, or radical.”31 Not all public women sought social change, however. Indeed, many women agitated to stop, or even reverse, reforms endorsed by other women. Categorized together as “conservatives,” these women have drawn the interest of twenty-first century scholars, such as Rymph, Lisa McGirr, and Kim Nielsen.32

Whether focused on progressive agitators for reform or conservative champions of the status quo, historians have not yet thoroughly explored women’s involvement—as lawmakers, activists, or administrators—in fiscal policy issues. Historians have analyzed women as wage earners, as entrepreneurs, and as government employees.33 Most recently, Susan Ingalls Lewis convincingly argues that nineteenth-century U.S. women’s involvement with business was much more

31 Rymph, Republican Women, 9.


ordinary than previously assumed. Cognizant of what Wendy Gambler calls the “hierarchical gender relations of the corporate office,” many historians disdained the application of the word “businesswoman” to clerks and stenographers, especially teachers, and constructed sharp distinctions among different kinds of female economic activities. Such classifications create a silo effect (similar to the public/private spheres distinction that shaped women’s history for many years) that does not adequately reflect women’s lived experiences. Many women, particularly those in this study, recognized a more inclusive definition of “businesswoman” derived from personal experiences that, more often than not, simultaneously blended various roles. For example, a woman who worked on a family ranch might also operate a business or take a government job; a woman who taught elementary school might go into retail sales; or a woman who claimed “housewife” as her occupation might manage rental properties or take in boarders. To be sure, an early-twentieth-century teacher might not have referred to herself as a businesswoman, but she certainly considered herself a salaried professional, and as such, an active participant in the community’s economy. Employed as school principals or district superintendents, women performed the same tasks as

34 Susan Ingalls Lewis, Unexceptional Women: Female Proprietors in Nineteenth-Century Albany, New York, 1830-1885 (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 2009).

other business managers: allocating resources, balancing budgets, and supervising employees. The diverse membership of local Business and Professional Women’s clubs and the active involvement of teachers in local Chambers of Commerce expressed women’s (and many men’s) acceptance of the more inclusive term. Regardless of the terms applied, however, women’s experiences in commerce, in all forms, provided them with a fiscal sensibility, as well as the ability to manage conflict with men, that enhanced their skills as lawmakers.

Localized studies of political women enrich U.S. women’s history by exploring their similarities and noting their differences. Like Pamela Tyler’s female political activists in New Orleans, none of these Nevada politicians “overtly embraced the concept of ‘women’s rights’ or knowingly participated in a women’s movement.”36 Although the female lawmakers in Arizona and Nevada shared an emphasis on business in their backgrounds and life experiences, Heidi Osselaer argues that Arizona legislators worked from a tacit agreement that women lawmakers worked on so-called women’s issues while men managed all of the rest.37 In Nevada, those lines were not so clearly drawn, and many male legislators in Nevada considered themselves advocates of women’s rights and children’s welfare. Nevada women, as candidates for the legislature, would assert


that “[o]f course,” they were “particularly interested in legislation that will be of benefit to women and children.” 38 Once elected, however, these particular female legislators rarely championed a radical legislative agenda of women’s rights and children’s welfare, which would seem, at first glance, to be a betrayal of a campaign promise. A careful re-consideration of those words—“legislation that will be of benefit to women and children”—reveals that these lawmakers were interested in the welfare of women and children, but in a larger context and mostly within the status quo.

As a result, these women served on existing committees and worked within the existing institutional structure—not one woman legislator in this study proposed a rule change of any kind—to promote legislation that they believed would benefit most of the state. Their efficacy should not be understated. 39 As in the political parties after suffrage, where historians have noted that men and women often “were in tension with one another, continually negotiating with one another for power, influence, and place,” so, too, were female and male legislators negotiating for their places within the legislative institution, and women enjoyed


much success.⁴⁰ It is difficult, however, to comprehend what Kristi Anderson refers to as the renegotiation of gendered political boundaries without considering women’s activities in all aspects of lawmaking, including the fiscal. As Glenda Gilmore argues in her study of political women in North Carolina, “limiting analysis to the electoral sphere impoverishes political history and creates a false dichotomy between the public and the private spheres.”⁴¹ Limiting political women to social reform legislation impoverishes women’s history and perpetuates that false dichotomy.

Theory and Methodology

Historians thrive on explaining social and political transformations and often concentrate on events that people—at the time or in the present—deemed dramatic. But history is change over time, and dramatic events sometimes do not adequately reflect or explain people’s lived experiences. The continuity is as much history as the dramatic event is. Judith Bennett (not related, as far as I know) notes that “[t]ransformation is the accepted or even canonical story; ‘continuity’ is troublesome, worrisome, and even dismissible.” She continues, “Historians of women sometimes highlight ‘transformation’ when the more


important story may be about ‘continuity.’”\textsuperscript{42} Although the women highlighted in this dissertation filled a new role—that of legislator—the female presence was not new to the legislative process nor did this new role immediately and significantly change lawmaking. In addition, these women legislators did not represent the first women to hold elected office. Nevadans (both as newspaper readers and migrants from other states) were aware that voters had elected various women to various public offices in this state and others. This dissertation argues that gradual change served an important function in women’s struggle for full political and economic citizenship.

I am also persuaded by Nancy Hewitt’s challenge to the now-standard periodization of feminism’s first wave, which ended with the 1920 ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, and second wave, which began with the 1961 establishment of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women. Nevada’s women lawmakers do not fit neatly between these two national markers. Rather, a periodization built from local markers is more useful. In Nevada, women began to vote and run for legislative office in 1916, and women designed and executed the wildly successful 1956 political campaign to retain the new statewide sales tax. Hewitt suggests that the metaphor works best when considered as radio waves that “coexist, overlap, and intersect” rather than ocean waves that advance and

recede. The experiences of Nevada’s women lawmakers join other studies to demonstrate, in Hewitt’s words,

> that efforts to advance women’s interests and gender justice never disappear completely but continue in local areas or in muted form until changed circumstances allow them to ignite broad mobilizations and new contestations over priorities, strategies, and alliances.\(^4\)

Some of the legislation introduced by Nevada women between what some call the two feminist waves tinkered around the edges of gender justice, suggesting the continued existence of a muted form of feminism in at least one local area.

Sources for women’s history are notoriously difficult to locate in the traditional sense. Few women left papers in archives, and until the women’s history movement of the 1970s, few archives bothered to collect women’s papers. Also complicating the collection of evidence was the verbal nature of campaigning and lawmaking in states with small populations, such as Nevada. Legislators presented oral, rather than written, amendments; committees did not keep written minutes; and constituents typically communicated with their representatives when they saw them on the street back at home. Many legislators considered their service to be temporary, so both men and women failed to keep documents related to their legislative terms. Archives contain collections of material generated during the legislative terms of only two of the women in this study. At the University of Nevada in Reno are the papers, including some

correspondence and committee minutes, of Louise Aloys Smith, an Assemblywoman who served in 1949 and 1951. At the University of Nevada in Las Vegas are the valuable and rare daily journals maintained by Assemblywoman Hazel Denton during the 1953 and 1955 regular sessions.

Men who served only in the state legislature before 1960 are also not well-represented in the archives. Assemblyman Clel Georgetta’s 1931 legislative diary provides captivating color commentary about the Legislature, especially the social life that surrounds it, but frustratingly few details about major policy issues, such as the final approval of wide-open gambling and the six-week divorce law. The boxes of paper collected by Charles Hendel during his eight years in the Assembly are stored at the State Archives in Carson City, but have not yet been processed. The papers of Noble H. Getchell, a powerful Republican Senator from 1922 through 1942, however, were immensely useful. He corresponded with and about numerous political women, and much of that correspondence is preserved at the Nevada Historical Society and Special Collections at the University of Nevada, Reno. In addition, I reviewed the papers of George Wingfield and Patrick McCarran, arguably the two most powerful political men in Nevada’s first half of the twentieth century. Women, including some of these legislators, appear in those papers, but not in abundance.

Retrospective materials were also useful. Thirty years after their terms, Josie Alma Woods and Marguerite Gosse responded to letters, one from a university scholar and the other from an undergraduate student, that contained
questions about their legislative service. The letters from Woods and the undergraduate’s term paper to which Gosse contributed are housed at Special Collections at the University of Nevada, Reno. Although Maude Frazier did not include her legislative tenure in her unpublished autobiography, the document is a delight to read and is helpful for understanding the woman. It is available at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The University of Nevada Oral History Program (OHP), begun in 1964, captured the memories of political elites now long-gone, such as Robbins Cahill, an assemblyman who became a tax and gaming regulator, and Charles Russell, a legislator who became Governor. The OHP’s publications convey valuable context. I also enjoyed conversations with the offspring of many of these women lawmakers. Children and grandchildren kindly shared photographs, campaign material, and memories about their legislating mothers and grandmothers.

An important collection of sources for this dissertation are government documents. At the end of each legislative session, the Nevada Legislature publishes the daily record of official actions taken during the session, known as the *Journal of the Assembly* and the *Journal of the Senate*. The *Journals*’ indices, especially for sessions before 1947, do not adequately locate women’s activities; consequently, the *Journals* require close reading, which is not easy considering their general disregard for conventional narratives. Verbs were rarely used, and the content of legislators’ “remarks” was typically not recorded. I was surprised, however, by the significant amount of activity, especially women’s activity,
buried within the tedious recitations of bills introduced, referred, and considered. In a sense, a *Journal* is like an old-fashioned flip book: the action becomes visible when all of its pages are engaged.

Also indispensable for this dissertation were the annual reports from the State Controller and the State Treasurer. The exponential growth of state government was revealed in the ever-increasing budgetary numbers and also in the reports’ expanding complexity. These reports were printed in the biennial *Appendices to the Journals of the Senate and Assembly*, thick publications that also include reports from a myriad of state officials, such as the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and the Governors’ messages to the Legislature. The records of the Nevada Tax Commission and the Nevada Taxpayers’ Association were also consulted.

The most informative resources were the *Reno Evening Gazette*, a Republican-leaning newspaper published every evening, and the *Nevada State Journal*, a Democratic-leaning newspaper published every morning for most of the twentieth century. Both newspapers served Reno, the state’s major city during most of this study period, yet both attempted to appeal statewide by regularly printing regular columns from many of Nevada’s smaller communities. Most of the issues produced between 1877 and 1977 have been digitized and made available online through newspaperarchive.com, a subscription service.

In this sense, this dissertation is very much a digital dissertation. The ability to word-search newspapers resulted in an accumulation of much more
material than could be produced by skimming newspapers on a microfilm reader. Headlines often did not reflect all of an article’s content, which meant that women were found in seemingly unrelated articles. Skimming newspapers on microfilm often missed much evidence related to women’s activities and easily led to conclusions that women candidates or legislators were ignored or dismissed. Word-searching by computer yielded marvelous examples of the exact opposite.

Computer-assisted searches of digitized newspapers also revealed a surprising source: the society pages included a great deal of information about women’s business and political activities. Long dismissed as lightweight jottings about betrothals and marriages, the society pages—one or two sheets in a newspaper that targeted women as their audience—actually offer up much more substantial information. Community notes—typically headlined by something that did not match the entire article—established relationships and demonstrated women’s mobility as the columns documented visits and often explained women’s travel as business-related. These seemingly superficial notes show a network that shaped women’s political activities. The society pages, too, at least in Nevada, document women’s political activities by announcing upcoming meetings of organizations such as the League of Women Voters, the Business and Professional Women’s Clubs, the Parent-Teacher Associations, and the Republican and Democratic Women’s Clubs. Typically, a follow-up article reported what happened at these various meetings and who attended. Digitized newspapers provide a new source for twenty-first century historians that was
unavailable to earlier historians. This material is particularly important for historians of women in general and this dissertation in particular.

Another significant digital resource was Ancestry.com, an internet-based collection of databases accessible through a paid subscription. Its value to this dissertation cannot be understated. At a minimum, the various databases available through Ancestry.com generated basic demographic data of birth, marriage(s), child-bearing, and death. With a few clicks, I had complete access to national census reports, voter registration lists, ship arrival manifests, and death records. These databases were immensely helpful for narrowing date parameters for newspaper searches, establishing family connections, and, essentially, for following these women through time as their names and locations changed. Through all of these sources, paper-based and online, I discovered much more detail about each of these women than could be included in this dissertation.

The Significance of Nevada

My interest in this topic originated in eighteen years of daily involvement in Nevada’s legislative process, first as an employee and then as a lobbyist. As a result, I possess a thorough working knowledge of this particular legislative process, which can be complex and arcane. As Assemblywoman Helen Williams fittingly observed in 1941, the Legislature is a “strange country and a strange language.”44 Nevada’s legislative process is also different from other states’

procedures. Although the federal and state components of the American lawmaking system—Congress and the state legislatures—share the broad outlines of turning a bill into a law, nuances exist in each of those components, and no one state legislature operates exactly like another, or even Congress. It is a mistake to assume that they do and especially to conflate Congress and a state legislature. The twenty-nine women who served in Nevada’s Legislature had different experiences than women in other legislatures. As Jo Freeman explains, it is important to understand these experiences because “[o]nly after many local studies have been written will the building blocks exist to construct a solid edifice.”

My personal interests aside, Nevada presents a complex setting within which to study the intersection of state policymaking and female office-holding. Early twentieth-century Nevada could hardly be considered a progressive environment for public women. Nevada’s male business elite had resisted the woman suffrage movement for decades and effectively blocked its progress in the state legislature more than once. By 1913, Nevada was one of only two states in the Pacific and Intermountain West that had not yet granted full suffrage to women. Nevada was also the most male state in the country during much of the

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twentieth century. The state’s economy traditionally centered on the masculine industry of mining, but was beginning to rely on other elements for which it would become world-famous. Visitors were increasingly drawn to Nevada by laws that provided for quick marriages, easy divorces, and other games of chance, issues that some women opposed. In addition, with seventeen Senators and no more than forty-seven members in the Assembly before federally-enforced reapportionment in 1966, Nevada had one of the smallest legislatures in the country, which could be both bad and good for women. The small, clubby Senate, buttressed by ranching and gambling elites, managed to keep women out, except in staff positions. The Assembly, however, could not marginalize female members. The rules demanded a certain number of members on each committee, and passage of legislation required cooperation among members. The effectiveness of women in an arguably non-progressive political environment calls into question certain assumptions about political women in the early and mid-twentieth century.

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46 In 1910, Nevada was the sixth largest state in size; the smallest in population, by far, with fewer than 82,000 residents; and the most heavily male. In 1910, Nevada had 179 men for every 100 women; in 1920, 148; in 1930, 140; in 1940, 125; in 1950, 113. and in 1960, 107. The U.S. average was 106, 104, 102, 101, 99, and 97, respectively. Nevada maintained the highest male-female ratio until 1950 when Wyoming eclipsed it at 117 and in 1960 after Alaska (132) and Hawaii (115) had become states. Frank Hobbs and Nicole Stoops, Demographic Trends in the Twentieth Century (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Census Bureau, 2002), A-1, 14, 25-28.
Nevada is also unusual in terms of its geology and geography. Its difficult terrain affected both its residents’ ability to participate in state government (Nevada’s capital, Carson City, is not centrally located nor was it easily accessible) and their success or failure at revenue-generating industries. Agriculture struggled in the harsh desert environment, and manufacturing, which also often required substantial amounts of water, never took root. This state simply could not sustain a population large enough to generate revenues for state and federal projects. The landscape was not conducive to intense farming or ranching, except in a few valleys. Mining, primarily the production of gold, silver, and copper, was unpredictable and had already been protected from taxation by the state’s constitution. By 1925, the state’s unappropriated public land comprised 74 percent of its total landmass, which constrained the utility of property taxes. Nevada’s huge expanse meant that the number of residents per square mile remained small throughout this study period. Its challenging environment inhibited settlement, and by 1920, its population of 77,407 made Nevada the most sparsely populated state in the country. Even at the time of this writing, there are fewer people in all of Nevada than are in the Phoenix metropolitan area.

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Nevada’s density rate did not reach one person per square mile until 1940. In the 1950s, Las Vegas began its rapid rate of growth, and Nevada’s average density rate rose to 2.6 in 1960, the lowest among the states except for Alaska. Biennial Report of the Surveyor-General and State Land Register, 1923-1924 (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1925), 7; Hobbs and Stoops, A-2.
As a result, by 1956, with the establishment of a thriving tourist trade, Nevada had firmly attached its tax policy to other peoples’ money. This outcome was not pre-ordained. As Kermit Hall says in *The Magic Mirror*, “[o]ur legal history reflects back to us generations of pragmatic decision making rather than a quest for ideological purity and consistency.” The members of the Nevada Legislature faced the state’s problems during every odd-numbered year and chose to take specific actions that they believed would increase tourism (make marriage and divorce easier than anywhere else; legalize casino gambling; turn a blind eye to prostitution) and provide public revenues (by taxing gasoline, gaming profits, and retail sales). These issues were rarely considered “women’s issues,” unless women were acting as opponents, yet women lawmakers participated in advancing this legislation. Considered as a whole, this set of legislative actions shifted, from residents to visitors, the burden of funding state government, and women fully participated in making that shift.

**Overview of Chapters**

Chapter Two examines women’s involvement in Nevada’s politics and legislative process before 1919 and demonstrates that a female presence had become an acceptable part of the Legislature, especially in the Assembly, long before women were elected to the body. As staff, lobbyists, and newspaper reporters, and as wives who accompanied their legislating husbands, women had

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been part of the legislative process since the first territorial legislature in 1861. In addition, many Nevada women had served as elected officials before their 1914 enfranchisement.

Chapter Three provides an overview of the twenty-nine female legislators in this study. These women represent what I call the “Bridge Generation”: women whose political careers spanned the years between suffrage in the early part of the twentieth century and the women’s movement of the late twentieth century. Suffrage made it possible for them to vote and hold office, but it did not define their politics. These women did not move in lock-step on every issue—they frequently voted against each other because of differences based in party, geography, or economic philosophy—but they shared certain key characteristics. They were comfortable socializing with men and making their own decisions; involved in the party apparatus and socially connected to the state’s political structure; experienced in business as employees and entrepreneurs; at ease with travel and in new environments; and secure in the simultaneous performance of multiple roles. They also played a lot of cards.49

Chapter Four begins an exploration of the fiscal maternalism of these legislators by inquiring into their involvement in Nevada’s growing reliance on

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49 Bridge, a common pastime included in most social and political events, functioned to knit together Nevada’s social and political networks, much like the politically social events explored by Catherine Allgor in Parlor Politics: In Which the Ladies of Washington Help Build a City and a Government (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998).
federal funding and a tourist-based economy in mid-century. This chapter concentrates on state receipts from the federal government and from tourism, two of the largest categories of revenue in the state budget. Female lawmakers worked alongside male colleagues to increase federal funding and protect Nevada’s tourist industry, which was based on gambling, easy divorces, and quick weddings. Rarely, if ever, did women lawmakers attempt to slow or reverse Nevada’s increasing reliance on the activities that the rest of the country deemed immoral. As businesswomen, women lawmakers perceived most marriage, divorce, and gambling legislation as economic issues first, moral ones second. The legislative experiences of the Bridge Generation demonstrate that votes could not be predicted by the voter’s biological sex. The connection between federal funding and women lawmakers is most vivid in the appointment of this study’s one female Senator, so this chapter also provides the opportunity to ponder women’s limited interaction with the state Senate.

Chapter Five demonstrates the melding of a mother’s moral authority with a keen sense of money—fiscal maternalism—by focusing on the establishment of a tax on retail sales in Nevada. Angry at legislative inaction to augment education funding or to address problems caused by a rapidly increasing population, Nevada women organized in 1950 to elect experienced female educators to the Legislature. By 1954, the Legislature, under the leadership of Assemblywoman Maude Frazier, had instigated significant reforms in the state’s educational system. Continued public agitation by women, combined with aggressive efforts
by female legislators, resulted in the establishment of the sales tax in 1955. Debated and rejected over the previous twenty years, the new sales tax law was immediately subjected to a referendum. Women organized statewide and conducted a tremendously successful campaign, organized similarly to the 1914 Nevada woman suffrage campaign, to retain the tax. Both the female legislators and the grassroots activists laid claim to women’s authority to engage in these public debates by focusing on women’s roles as mothers and educators of children. Their rhetoric was maternal, but their goal was fiscal.

In the conclusion, I contemplate the numerous women who followed the Bridge Generation into legislative service. By 1995, the Nevada Legislature was one-third female, one of the highest ratios in the country, and women were more likely to be re-elected to their seats than the women legislators of earlier years.50 In 2010, the ultimately unsuccessful candidacy of Sharron Angle, a former Nevada Assemblywoman, for the U.S. Senate, vividly demonstrated that women, like men, could fundamentally disagree with each other over government and taxation. The Bridge Generation would not have recognized Angle’s form of conservative politics, which was marked by religious fervor, focused on dismantling government, and stridently unwilling to compromise. While an Assemblywoman, Angle cast the only vote against a vast number of bills and was

marginalized by her Republican caucus, the Assembly, and the Legislature as a whole.  

Certainly Lois Washburn, who campaigned as a New Deal Democrat, would not have had much in common with Angle, but neither would the Republican Mabel Isbell, who demonstrated through her votes for educational reform and the sales tax that state government had an important role in education, including its funding. Although most of these women were concerned about the extent of taxes, there was no question among them that a basic level of taxation was needed, and they were willing to work within the existing legislative and political infrastructure to reach their goals.

Previous assumptions that the radical nature of women’s political fight for citizenship also meant that subsequent political women were radical or at least progressive led to faulty conclusions about political women in the twentieth century. The dearth of any radical political change or social revolution after women began to win elections seemed to some historians to be directly related. In other words, an expectation existed that the election of women to office would result in some significant and immediate social and political change, but no rapid transformation occurred. Analyzing women by what did not happen made them out to be passive and weak, suggesting that they had done nothing as lawmakers and other officeholders. By analyzing women’s participation in what did happen, a richer, more complex picture emerges. The Nevada experience demonstrates

that these women were vital, active, and vigorous politicians and lawmakers. They did not go to the ramparts for sexual equality, but they fully participated in making laws that touched all of the people in their state.

These twenty-nine Nevada women were not extraordinary. Women like them could be found in legislatures and other governing bodies across the country. They are, instead, exemplary of a different category of political women about whom little is known. They were not the progressives, about whom scholars now know so much that the arguments are about definitions, not existence. They were also not the anti-progressives who fought against change of any kind. They challenge our notion of modern women by exhibiting a pragmatic conservatism and a fiscal maternalism. They were public women who pursued different agendas. Ignoring one group in favor of another silences women. Giving voice to these women, who had been empowered by voters and partisan politics, is what makes this dissertation a feminist history.
Chapter 2

“WOMEN OF TALENT, PUBLIC SPIRIT, AND BUSINESS TACT”: WOMEN IN POLITICS BEFORE 1919

For much of its early existence, Nevada was the smallest state in the country by population. In 1920, the state had fewer than eighty thousand people scattered over a hundred thousand square miles. With an economy heavily dependent on mining and ranching, almost two-thirds of the population was male. It would seem that Nevada would not have been a welcome place for women to participate in politics or policymaking. The right to vote and hold any public office was, indeed, a long, protracted battle for Nevada women, but many Nevada women actively participated in the development and execution of school policy, as elected trustees and superintendents, and in state legislative policy, as lobbyists and staff, long before they successfully attained full enfranchisement.

This chapter explores Nevada’s legislative process and women’s participation in it before they were elected members, demonstrating that the Nevada Legislature was not a completely all-male bastion. By 1914, when Nevada women won the right to vote, women had already been integral parts of the legislative process for over four decades. They had also been winning, since 1890, elections to offices of responsibility in local school districts. Women in neighboring states had also served as state senators and representatives, sometimes catching the attention of Nevada newspapers, and demonstrated women’s ability to function properly as legislators. Holding elected office and
participating in the legislative process exhibited the abilities of women to fill policymaking roles, but memories proved short and social expectations for women, deeply entrenched.

_Placing the Nevada Legislature_

Until 1971, the Nevada Legislature met in the Capitol Building in Carson City.52 Located on the western edge of the state, Carson City was a small town at the base of the Carson Range, a spur of the Sierra Nevada Mountains. By 1920, it had a population of 2,450. As the seat of government for the state, Carson City grew with the bureaucracy, slowly at first and then accelerating after 1950. By 1960, the population had almost quadrupled to 8,063.53 As the crow flies, the capital city is 25 miles from Reno, which was Nevada’s most populous city and its social and political hub during much of the twentieth century; 325 miles from the embryonic Las Vegas area, which was small and essentially irrelevant until the 1950s, and 160 miles from Tonopah, the seat of government for Nye County, which sent the most women to the Legislature before 1960. But air miles are meaningless as few people (then or now) flew to the capital for state business.

52 After 105 years of making laws in the capitol building, the Nevada Legislature moved about two blocks away to a newly-constructed, 96,000-square-foot, three-storied building that was designed and built solely for legislative business. “Legislative Building Ceremony Set Today, Reno Evening Gazette, 9 June 1970.

Before the mid-century explosion in the number of personal automobiles and improved roads, the Virginia and Truckee Railroad (commonly known as the V&T) transported legislators and lobbyists between Carson City and Reno, which originated and grew with the east-west Central Pacific Railroad.\footnote{Russell R. Elliott, \textit{History of Nevada} (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1987), 113. The cost of traveling around Nevada during the early twentieth century was detailed by deputy school superintendent A.B. Lightfoot: “The railroad fare from Ely to Carson City and return is $52.50, not including Pullman fare nor meals while en route.” Railroad fares ranged from six cents to ten cents per mile; “livery charges for a team are from $7.50 to $10 per day; automobile hire is $35 per day.” John Edwards Bray, \textit{Biennial Report of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1911-1912} (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1913), 39.} For the 1920 Special Session, the V&T sponsored a special “suffrage train” to transport fifty animated suffragists from Reno to Carson City to witness the ratification of the federal suffrage amendment at the “extraordinary session.”\footnote{“State Legislature Convenes in Special Session,” \textit{Reno Evening Gazette}, 7 February 1920.} During regular session, many legislators stayed in hotels and rented rooms around Carson City, but it was not unusual for them to stay at the Golden Hotel in Reno and take the train to Carson City, walking the six blocks (often in the snow because the legislature met from mid-January to mid-March) between the depot and the Capitol Building, for the day’s legislative business.

The few roads in existence were notoriously difficult to use during the first half of the twentieth century. Created by the 1917 Nevada Legislature, the State Highway Department first turned its attention to building a paved motor vehicle
route between Carson City and Reno. Constructed as a fifteen-foot-wide concrete road in 1920, the Reno-Carson highway was widened to twenty feet in 1931 and reconstructed again in 1944, making it much easier to travel between Nevada’s two most important cities. The physical difficulty in traveling to the capital, at least in the geographically large states of the American West, cannot be discounted when considering the various reasons many people—women and men, both—may not have run for legislative office, either initially or for re-election. For those elected, it was no small feat to travel to the capital (especially for those who did not drive), secure living quarters, and be away from homes and businesses for two months or more. Many male legislators relocated their entire families to Carson City for the duration of the session. The logistics of serving as a legislator certainly contributed to the longevity of the biennial legislative system in Nevada.

The two-story Capitol was built in the heart of Carson City in 1871 to provide offices for the state’s constitutional officers as well as chambers for the


57 Local newspapers often printed brief notes about who accompanied legislators to Carson City and where they planned to reside during the session. For example, in 1941, legislators Ray Robb, C.C. Boak and, C.F. Wittenberg each rented apartments in Carson City for their wives and children. *Tonopah Daily Times-Bonanza*, 17 January 1941.
Legislature and Supreme Court. A small annex, built in 1905, housed the State Library, and wings were added in 1914 to provide for larger legislative chambers on the second floor, accessible by two large staircases that begin near the side entrances of the Capitol and end facing the entrance of each legislative chamber.58 Such locations were strategic, as they provided the members of each house with their own entrances. Although the building was small, a legislator could enter the Capitol, ascend one of two matching staircases, and walk into either the Senate or Assembly Chambers without even seeing the other Chambers. Any member who wanted to avoid a member of the other house could do so easily, which underscores the separation between the two houses of the Legislature. Legislators debated the installation of an elevator for several sessions; in 1941, Assembly-woman Helen Williams, who occasionally caught her heel on one of the narrow stairs, advocated the device, warning, “They’ll find a woman piled up at the foot of the steps one of these days.”59 Six years later, the Legislature finally appropriated funding for what one former legislator characterized as a “little one-horse elevator … creaking up and down to the second floor” of the Capitol Building, and staff were no longer required to carry infirm legislators up the thirty-three steps in the long staircases. Before the elevator’s installation, an aged


59 “Proposal Made To Install Capitol Lift,” Reno Evening Gazette, 3 February 1941.
legislator with heart trouble, such as Senators John Robbins or Noble Getchell, would be transported to the second floor by (presumably) male staff members.

Robbins Cahill, whose long tenure in Nevada government began as a 1939 Assemblyman, later described the scene:

> they took Getchell [up in] one of these old armchairs and put long two-by-fours on each side of it, and the capitol staff would get on each end of it, at least four of them, two in front and two in back, and maybe sometimes more, and they would pack him upstairs….and then would only leave when he knew he could leave permanently, and then they would pack him downstairs.\(^{60}\)

The Senate Chambers filled the second floor of the wing to the south; the Assembly Chambers, to the north. Lavatories were installed at opposite ends of the second floor when the Capitol’s wings were added in 1913. Legislators did not have private offices, and committees met in various empty rooms in the Capitol Building, in the hallway, or at off-site locations, such as the nearby Arlington Hotel.

The physical accommodations in which the Assembly met changed over the years. For example, the Assembly Chambers had notoriously awful acoustics, so members in the 1930s borrowed velvet drapes from a Reno movie theater to

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\(^{60}\) Robbins E. Cahill, Recollections of Work in State Politics, Government, Taxation, Gaming Control, Clark County Administration, and The Nevada Resort Association, An oral history conducted by Mary Ellen Glass. (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Project), 174-177.
hang in the corners in an attempt to manage the sound. At the beginning of the 1943 session, a Reno newspaper glowingly reported that the members gathered in bright spic-and-span chambers renovated since the 40th session. Brilliantly painted white and cream walls reflected the sunshine as it streamed through newly purchased Venetian blinds and was caught by the shiny recently renovated desks of the members. New brown carpets covered the floors.

At the beginning of each session through the mid-twentieth century, Speakers typically appointed a furniture committee, which occasionally included female lawmakers to arrange and re-arrange the desks in the Assembly. Such arrangements were for strategic purposes, not esthetics. Sometimes, county delegations were grouped together, regardless of party, as they were for the 1921 Assembly (but not the Senate). Sometimes, the room was divided between Republicans and Democrats. Desk arrangements occasionally had legislators facing each other, such as in 1937, “over the heads of the newspapermen at the press table.” In 1949, the desks were moved into a semi-circle around and facing the Speaker to allow people to see and hear each other. Particularly important, the new arrangement made it easier for the Speaker to see each of the members, who were not allowed to speak until recognized by the Speaker.

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63 Mary Rose served on the furniture arrangement committee for the 1925 Assembly. *Journal of the Assembly 1925* (Carson City: State Printing Office,
arrangements made it difficult for more timid members, female and male, to attract the attention of the Speaker. This Speaker-focused arrangement soon became the standard, and desks were rarely rearranged again.

The Legislative Process

The legislative body is a key player in the U.S. system of government at both the national and state levels. One of the three branches of government, the legislature at the national level is the Congress, which is a bicameral body composed of a Senate and a House of Representatives, a model replicated by most of the states. By the time Nevada’s second constitutional convention opened on July 4, 1864 (the first having been rejected by the voters), thirty-five states had already had long experiences with bicameral legislatures, and no serious consideration was given to establishing a different lawmaking structure for Nevada. The vast majority of the members of Nevada’s constitutional convention came from California (including a former Governor of that state), so Nevada’s Constitution closely resembled California’s, which, in turn, had been based on New York’s.64 Not surprisingly, then, these states are three of only four that refer to one house of the legislature as the “Assembly.” Making Nevada simply an

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eastern version of California was not the goal of the convention, however. The preponderance of former Californians in Nevada’s constitutional convention explicitly sought not to repeat what they considered to be mistakes made in California, especially in regards to taxation, and contributed to a long line of anti-California discourse in Nevada politics.

Approved by Nevada voters and formally accepted by President Abraham Lincoln on October 31, 1864, the Nevada Constitution outlined the duties, privileges, structure, and composition of the Nevada Legislature. For the most part, these sections were not much amended before the 1960s; consequently, the structure of the Legislature was essentially the same during this study period as it had been from the moment of statehood. Although many of those provisions still remain in force, not all do. I will use the past tense of verbs when I discuss the legislative structure and process as it was in the past, but the reader should not assume that verbs in the past tense also indicate that the practice no longer exists. Indeed, much of the structure and process established during the nineteenth century remains in place in the twenty-first.

According to the Nevada Constitution, the state’s lawmaking authority was “vested in a senate and assembly, which shall be designated ‘The Legislature of the State of Nevada.’”65 The Constitution directed the Legislature to hold biennial sessions that began on the third Monday in January of every odd-

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65 Nevada Constitution, art. 4, sec 1.
numbered year and continued for sixty calendar days. Each and every regular session between 1919 and 1955, however, continued for more than sixty days. The longest session consisted of seventy-one days in 1933. To circumvent the constitutional requirement, legislators covered the clock near midnight of the sixtieth day and simply assumed that it consisted of as many hours as were needed to finish the session.66

Legislation did not roll from one session to the next. If a bill died in one session, the rules prohibited the issue from being considered again in the same session. In order to be considered in the next session, a legislator had to introduce the issue under a new bill number. If a bill passed one house and was pending in the other when the Legislature adjourned sine die, the bill died, and was not automatically brought back to the next session.67 The Constitution authorized the Governor to call the Legislature into special sessions, of no more than twenty days each, for purposes that could be specified only by the Governor. During this study’s forty-year period, the Legislature met in special session only five times, three of those before 1929. The Constitution also specified that members must be “qualified electors,” a phrase statutorily defined, and that their number could not


67 At the completion of each day’s formal floor session, a legislator moved to adjourn until a specific day and time; at the conclusion of a regular or special session, a legislator moved to adjourn sine die (the Latin equivalent of “without a specific date”).
exceed a total of seventy-five. State Senators served for a term of four years; Assembly members, two years. As a result, Assembly members gathered in legislative session only once during their terms, but Senators met twice.68

The Constitution explicitly authorized the Legislature to adopt more detailed laws to govern its operation, such as each house’s specific number of seats and their apportionment among the population, additional qualifications for legislators and their salaries, and the rules of operation. Until forced to reconsider its apportionment strategies by a series of U.S. Supreme Court decisions in the 1960s, the Nevada Legislature, like the U.S. Congress and many other state legislatures, mandated that each of the state’s counties be represented by one Senator and at least one Assembly member. Additional Assembly seats were granted to more populous counties. Consequently, from 1919 to 1956, the Nevada Senate contained seventeen members, and the number of Assembly members ranged between thirty-seven and forty-seven. Their pay was approximately $600 for a session plus mileage and stationary expenses. Legislators often manipulated various allowances to provide them with additional income near the end of a session. In 1953, critics adopted “bonus babies” as the nickname for legislators who voted for the state reimbursement of some of their daily expenses.

68 Nevada Constitution, art. 4, sec. 2-4 and 29; art. 5, sec. 9; and art. 15, sec. 6.
Assemblywoman Hazel Denton ignored the name-calling and joyfully welcomed her extra income with a gleeful “Whee!”

The Legislature specified that its members must be at least twenty-one years of age and a resident of the state for at least one year prior to election. Neither the Constitution nor the statutes specified, however, that a legislator must be male, which was significant when Nevada women won the right to vote in 1914. The suffrage battle focused on legalizing women as voters, but once it was won, women discovered that additional struggles awaited. In several states, such as Iowa, women could vote for state legislative candidates but could not be one of those candidates themselves until the state’s constitution was amended to remove the specific provision that legislators be male. No such battle was necessary in Nevada as neither constitutional mandate nor statutory provision reserved the legislative role for men.

Although the Constitution specified certain basic legislative procedures – that any bill could originate in either house and be amended by either house and that a bill may encompass only one subject – it reserved to each legislative house

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70 Nevada Revised Statutes 218.010.

the right to establish its rules of parliamentary procedure. At the beginning of each session, the Senate and the Assembly each acted to adopt the rules that would govern the process by which bills would be considered, amended, passed, or rejected. From 1889 to 1911, those rules were adopted each session without amendment. The 1911 Legislature reconsidered and reconstructed those rules and by 1919, the Senate had fifty-six rules, and the Assembly, eighty-five. Nine items were included in the Joint Rules promulgated by both houses.

Anyone could suggest an idea for legislation, but only a duly-seated legislator could introduce the pertinent bill. By 1919, the Assembly employed a bill drafter each session to draft the necessary language onto paper, which would also specify the sponsoring legislator or group of legislators. Upon introduction, the bill would be read by the pertinent staff person. If it was introduced by a Senator, the Secretary of the Senate would read the bill aloud to the Senate; if introduced by an Assembly member, the Chief Clerk would do the reading. The bill would then be assigned to a committee for consideration and recommendation to the entire body.

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72 Nevada Constitution, art. 4, sec. 6, 16, and 17.


A committee could recommend that a bill be passed as written, passed with suggested amendments, or indefinitely postponed, which, in effect, removed the bill from further consideration during that session (commonly known as killing a bill). The Clerk or Secretary would read the bill again (“Second Reading”) at which time amendments from the floor could be considered. During the 1920s, when much of the legislative work was processed verbally or in longhand, few amendments were proposed. For example, Assemblywoman Ethel McGuire lost her 1929 attempt to delay until printed the consideration of certain proposed amendments.\footnote{Journal of the Assembly 1929 (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1929), 88.} The introduction of the typewriter and duplicator to the process resulted in an increase in the number of amendments that a body could consider. Typically, amendments were adopted or rejected by voice vote, which was rarely recorded individually. After amendment, the bill went to “Third Reading” (also known as “General File”) where the house members would vote in alphabetical order as the Clerk or Secretary called out their names. Upon passage, the bill would be sent to the other house to repeat this same process. If both houses agreed to pass the same version of the bill, it would be sent to the Governor for signature or veto. If both houses adopted different versions of a bill, a conference committee, composed of three members from each house, would be formed to negotiate the final language. Each house had to approve the conference committee report before the bill could be sent to the Governor.
This process contained many opportunities for different actions, most of which were addressed in the Senate or Assembly Rules. The Joint Rules directed procedures that involved both houses simultaneously, such as the formation of conference committees. The Senate and Assembly Rules also specified that *Jefferson’s Manual of Parliamentary Practice* would govern situations that were not addressed by the state’s constitution, statutes, individual house rules, or joint rules. In 1947, the Assembly replaced *Jefferson’s Manual* with *Mason’s Manual of Legislative Procedure*. The emphasis on written rules and formal parliamentary procedures mitigated the effects on the legislative process of cultural constructions of gendered behavior. The rules governed lawmakers’ actions, regardless of how men and women might have been expected to interact with each other as gendered beings. Anyone could study the rules and learn to maneuver through the legislative process, but in reality, not everyone did, much to the benefit of new lawmakers, especially those who might have been constrained by their gender and later, their race.77


77 In 1923, Assemblywoman Marguerite Gosse successfully passed a controversial nurse registration bill, one that had died in several earlier sessions, and credited her accomplishment to her careful study of the rules. The archival collection of Hazel Denton, an Assemblywoman in the 1950s who was one of the few legislators to leave papers for future study, includes a carefully underlined copy of the Assembly rules. Joseph M. Neal, Jr., Nevada’s first African-American Senator, emphasized that his legislative achievements were attributed to his thorough understanding of parliamentary procedure and recognized Leola Armstrong, the Secretary of the Senate when he arrived in 1973, as the one who
Women in the Legislative Process Before 1916

After several attempts, Nevada women won the right to hold office in 1914, which meant that the first election in which they could stand as candidates for statewide office was in 1916. That year, Jean Dwyer of Reno was the only woman who appeared on the general election ballot for the state legislature; she did not win. But she was not the first woman to become involved in the legislative process. Women had been participating in the legislative process in Nevada from the beginning of statehood. As individuals and members of organizations, they had lobbied the male legislators, covered legislative business as reporters, and worked as paid employees during sessions. The constant presence of women in the Capitol, in both the executive and legislative branches, is revealed in the $300 appropriation approved in 1899 “for constructing and furnishing a ladies’ toilet in the Capitol Building.”

Female Advocates

Lobbyists are rarely remembered outside the legislative process, but one whose fame has endured in Nevada history is Hannah Keziah Clapp. An important educator of Nevada’s youth from kindergarten through university, a pointed him in that direction. Grace E. Puddington, “A Biography of Marguerite H. Gosse, ” unpublished manuscript, 19 August 1960, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno, page 15; Denton Papers, MS 97-03, Special Collections, UNLV; Joseph M. Neal, Jr., an oral history by Dana R. Bennett (Carson City: Legislative Counsel Bureau, 2009), 30-31.

landowner with extensive holdings, and an “astute businesswoman,” according to one of Nevada’s best-known historians, Clapp was one of the first lobbyists at the Nevada Legislature. Her long relationship with that body began in 1861 when she successfully lobbied the Territorial Legislature to support the building of her private coeducational school in Carson City. Subsequent legislatures also considered, and typically provided, financial support for her school, the Sierra Seminary. She was a key correspondent of U.S. Senator William Stewart and often served as his liaison with the Nevada Legislature. In 1875, Clapp and Eliza Babcock, her business partner and life-companion, successfully submitted the low bid to supply the iron fencing for the new barrier that would surround the Capitol and keep nearby cattle from roaming onto the grounds. The fence stands today, a reminder that the Capitol has not been an entirely male enclave.79

Clapp was not the only woman who lobbied the legislature on various issues. In addition to advocating both for and against women’s enfranchisement from the first time it was considered in 1869 until the Legislature finally passed the measure in 1913, women expressed their opinions on a number of legislative issues by mail, petition, and in person. In 1873, the Sisters of Charity of Virginia City asked the Assembly to withdraw a pending Senate bill that would benefit the Nevada Orphan Asylum, a private competitor to the orphans’ home operated by

the Sisters, and the Assembly quickly obliged.\textsuperscript{80} In 1889, a letterwriting campaign, organized by Mrs. Lucy Van Deventer among the members of the Nevada Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), facilitated the defeat of a bill to legalize lotteries, and the Assembly considered “petitions from numerous ladies relative to prohibiting the further manufacture or sale of intoxicating liquors.”\textsuperscript{81} During subsequent sessions, the lobbying efforts of the WCTU attacked, sometimes successfully, various pieces of gambling legislation and supported the establishment of an industrial school for boys. Women’s lobbying presence intensified after the turn of the century with the rise of women’s clubs and a growing interest in suffrage. In 1910, Reno’s prestigious Century Club (later renamed the Twentieth Century Club) boasted:

At the last legislature, the club was responsible for the passing of the probation law, the truancy law and the law making women notary public. This year they have several other very important questions to be settled before the legislature.\textsuperscript{82}

\textsuperscript{80} Jacket of the Assembly 1873 (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1873), 209-211.

\textsuperscript{81} The Assembly Committee on Public Morals recommended that the prohibition petitions be considered in a Committee of the Whole, but that the woman suffrage petitions be ignored because they had previously been before the Assembly. I retain the use of the titles “Mrs.” and “Miss” if they were utilized in the sources in which the women appear. Such titles were considered part of their identities then and should not be arbitrarily erased now. Journal of the Assembly 1889 (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1889), 163, 169.

\textsuperscript{82} The head of the legislative committee for the Nevada Federation of Women’s Clubs, of which the Century Club was a prominent member, was Josephine Gosse, mother of future Assemblywoman Marguerite Gosse who would be elected to the Assembly in 1922. Anita Ernst Watson, Into Their Own: Nevada Women Emerging Into Public Life (Reno: Nevada Humanities Committee, 2000),
Three years later, almost two hundred women filled the galleries of the Legislature in support of a proposed bill to double the residency requirement to obtain a divorce in Nevada. When the question of woman suffrage reached a crucial point during that 1913 session, a Reno news reporter emphasized the presence of female lobbyists: “Miss Anne Martin, president of the state suffrage association, and her followers marched to the senate chamber and began work for a speedy consideration of the bill in the upper house.”

Like their male counterparts, female lobbyists occasionally sought to become legislators. In 1915, Sadie Hurst and Anne Martin testified to legislative committees about pending bills concerning race tracks and Nevada residency requirements. Hurst attempted to win nomination from the Washoe County Republican Party for an Assembly seat in 1916, but was not chosen. Two years later, both women ran for office: Martin for the U.S. Senate and Hurst for the Nevada Assembly. Martin’s campaign was unsuccessful, but Hurst became the first woman elected to the Nevada Legislature. Although both women were suffragists who supported prohibition and opposed Nevada’s liberal divorce laws,


84 “Reno Women to Protest Again,” Reno Evening Gazette, 10 February 1915.
their electoral outcomes can be attributed to some key differences. Martin was not affiliated with either of the major political parties; Hurst ran as a Republican. A native Nevadan, Martin had been out of the state working actively with radical suffragists in Washington, D.C., and Britain, which contributed to “the Nevada perception of the campaign as an eastern one supported by eastern money,” according to Martin’s premier biographer. A relative newcomer to Nevada, Hurst campaigned on her status as a leader in some of Reno’s best-known women’s clubs. Perhaps the most crucial distinction between the two women concerned their targeted voters. Martin deeply believed that women would vote for women, simply because of a shared biological fact, but Hurst ensured that she appealed to both male and female voters who shared certain political attributes.85

Both the Senate and the Assembly typically did not allow anyone, other than state and federal officers, to address them while in formal session. Occasionally, the Assembly made exceptions, especially in cases of complicated or controversial legislation. In 1871, Assemblyman Clifton H. Patchen successfully sponsored a resolution to invite Miss Laura DeForce Gordon to a special “seat upon the floor of this House” to speak about woman suffrage, a subject about which, he said, “numbers of the members of this body greatly need

information.” Unfortunately, the Assembly postponed the legislation and altered the invitation to Gordon. Rather than talking about woman suffrage to the members during their regularly-scheduled floor session, Gordon was granted access to the Assembly Chambers “for the purpose of lecturing on any subject she may deem proper.” The key difference was in the timing. Her new lecture would take place in the evening, which meant that legislators would not be required to attend. It would be forty years, when the fight to vote reached its peak, before the Assembly allowed women, such as Mrs. H. Stanislowsky and Miss Felice Cohn, to give formal speeches about woman suffrage during its regular afternoon session.86

Female Reporters

Female reporters also covered the daily business of the legislative sessions. Nellie Verrill Mighels reported on the 1877 and 1879 sessions for the local newspaper, the Morning Appeal, which she and her husband owned. After Henry Mighels died in 1879, Nellie continued publication of the paper, which remained in her family’s ownership until her death in 1945, providing consistent coverage of legislative business.87 At the end of the 1881 session, the members of


the Assembly resolved “[t]hat a vote of thanks be extended by this House to the reporter of the Virginia *Enterprise* and Carson *Appeal* for correct and impartial reports of the proceedings of the Assembly during this session.” The response from that reporter, Mrs. E.C. Carlton, was recorded in the *Journal of the Assembly*:

> Please return the thanks of the reporter of the *Enterprise* and the *Appeal* for their uniform good nature and courtesy in giving information whenever called upon. Also, return my thanks and assurance that I appreciate the kindly feelings which prompted their most pleasing testimonial.88

Sending a woman to report on the legislature, at least in the Assembly, was a smart strategic move by any newspaper editor. According to an Assembly rule that had been in place as early as 1873, all persons were prohibited from joining Assemblymen while they were in official session on the floor of the Assembly “except Senators, State officers, and ladies.”89 Likely, the rule originally intended to include the many legislators’ wives in Carson City for the duration of the session, but “ladies” turned out to be a broad term that encompassed reporters and lobbyists, allowing them unfettered access to the members. The rule remained in place in 1919, the first session in which a woman


served as a legislator. In 1921, however, the Assembly removed women’s special access after some women became rowdy while lobbying the members about legislation concerned with the direct primary, county officers’ salaries, and prohibition. “[T]he activity of the ladies as lobbyists is interfering with work in the chamber,” reported the Carson Appeal. The article continued:

The question of women was rather sharply discussed, and it was contended by [Assemblyman Harlan] Heward that woman had taken her place as an elector and must be made subject to the same conditions that her brother undergoes. In order that the ladies be inside the rail … they must be there as invited guests.90

Female Employees

Like other corporate-like institutions across the United States in the nineteenth century, the Nevada Legislature developed a system of hiring clerks, stenographers, pages, and other support staff. Until the 1870s, men held all of these positions, which were designed to assist legislators and manage the legislative process during a session. In 1875, the Nevada Legislature began hiring women and continued to do so in ever-increasing numbers, reflecting what was happening on a federal level. Between 1870 and 1880, the number of women in federal government jobs almost doubled, and as Cindy Aron explains, the federal government “became the first large, sexually integrated, white-collar bureaucracy

90 Heward was one of six first-term Republican Assembly members from Washoe County, having defeated, among others, 1919 Assemblywoman Sadie Hurst in the primary. Hurst returned to the 1921 session as a lobbyist and may have been one of the unruly women who instigated the rule change. “Assembly Standing Rules,” Handbook of the Nevada Legislature, 1919, 44; “Object to Lobby Made By Members,” Carson City Daily Appeal, 10 February 1921.
in America.”91 In Nevada, state government, in both the executive and legislative branches, followed suit.

Because these state session-related jobs were temporary, lasting slightly more than two months every other year, they quickly became women’s jobs. Although clerical work had first been considered men’s work, those men who were already employed as clerks could not leave their permanent positions for the temporary legislative jobs. Women, newly trained as stenographers and other clerical workers, were more readily available and quickly began to dominate the clerical staff of the legislature in sheer numbers and eventually obtained election to the highest staff positions. The Assembly appointed its first female Assistant Chief Clerk in 1917, but it was 1969 before it elected its first female Chief Clerk. The Senate appointed its first female Assistant Secretary in 1919 and elected its first female Secretary in 1926 for a special session. In 1943, women began their dominance of the Senate Secretary position that continued into the twenty-first century.92


92 Mae McNamara, Assistant Chief Clerk, 1917; Theresa Loy, Chief Clerk, 1969; Vivian Rickey, Assistant Senate Secretary, 1919-1923 and Secretary, 1926; Florence Buckingham, Secretary, 1943 and 1945. Three men were elected Secretary after Buckingham, who had been an attaché for ten years previously, but no man held the position between 1957 and 2010. “List of Assembly and Senate Staff,” Research Division, Legislative Counsel Bureau, 1995. In 2010, the Nevada Senate Majority Leader, a Democrat (for the first time since 1991), chose
Aron asserts that “[w]omen’s experience in [federal] government offices reveals that many enjoyed highly paid and diversified work” and that these jobs provided women with a new sense of independence and self-reliance.93 Nevada women enjoyed similar benefits. Women and men in the same position earned the same salary, which was established by statute.94 They also enjoyed a certain level of prestige. Although both men and women obtained these positions through their relationships with various legislators, these patronage jobs, officially known as attachés, were also elected positions, and newspapers published numerous articles about their elections. For example, in 1887, a Reno newspaper practically glowed with this report:

The Carson papers say Miss Mollie Roff, of Reno, the Journal Clerk of the Assembly, is making a beautiful record. Her penmanship is very fine and exactly suited to the work. The Assembly could not have selected a better Journal Clerk. In fact, Reno always presents competent persons for legislative positions.95

The first female attaché was Miss Mary E. Wright, hired by the Assembly in 1875 as a copying clerk and rehired two years later. The first woman to appear as an employee of the Senate was Miss Frances Hodgkinson who, in 1879, was paid a male Senate Secretary. “David Byerman Nominated for Nevada Senate Secretary,” Reno Gazette-Journal, 20 August 2010.

93 Aron, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Civil Service, 7.

94 Nevada laws from 1891 through 1911 specified that most clerks made $6 per day during each session. See Statutes of Nevada for each session.

forty dollars for making one copy each of the Governor’s Message and the state library’s report. Hannah Clapp was also employed as an Assembly committee clerk for the 1883 Session and a Senate copy clerk two years later. From 1875 onward, no session occurred without at least one woman employed by one of the houses. After the turn of the twentieth century, both houses hired women as a matter of course, and they filled nearly half of the available legislative jobs.

Many of these women resided in Ormsby County in which Carson City was located. During this time, Ormsby County did not elect any woman to the legislature. Considering how much easier it would have been to be the representative from Carson City than from, say, Tonopah (which sent five women to the Assembly during the 1920s alone), the omission seems odd until one considers the economic advantage inherent in being employed by legislators rather than being a legislator. Many factors impeded women’s candidacies for public office, including increased economic opportunities in other fields. Carson City women could make decent wages as clerks or stenographers and still

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96 Journal of the Senate 1879 (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1879), 83. MeasuringWorth.com estimates that $40 in 1879 would be equivalent to $6,279 in unskilled wages in 2009, although Hodgkinson’s work was clearly skilled at that time. She was hired again for the same task two years later.

97 Watson, Into Their Own, 93.
participate in the legislative process.\textsuperscript{98} By the mid-1940s, attachés outnumbered legislators by almost two to one, and most of them were women.\textsuperscript{99}

Aron and other historians, such as Olivier Zunz, explore the effects on middle-class configuration in the United States wrought by this shift in employment of both men and women in bureaucratized institutions, but the effects on state-building and governance are less well-understood.\textsuperscript{100} This study submits that sexually integrated policymaking began long before women won the right to drop a ballot into a box. As lobbyists, reporters, public speakers, staff, and members’ relatives, women inundated the Nevada Legislature, especially the Assembly, earlier than they began to appear as elected members of the body. The bodies and voices of women filled the Capitol, climbing the stairs to the galleries, sitting with legislators in the Chambers during formal sessions, occupying the press table, processing paperwork, and giving impassioned speeches to diverse

\textsuperscript{98} Credit for this idea goes to my good friend Joe Guild. Part of a family with long roots in Nevada’s political landscape, Joe responded to my wondering about the lack of Ormsby County female legislators by noting that women who might be inclined both toward politics and working outside the home probably enjoyed increased economic success as boardinghouse or restaurant operators when legislators came to town. They would not have been able to run their legislatively-related businesses if they also ran for legislative office. His observation gained weight as I noticed the number of Carson City women employed as clerks during the sessions. The attachés came from all over the state, but a substantial number came from Carson City.


audiences. Their active and abundant presence demonstrated that the process was not entirely male and that many women, with diverse agendas, moved with confidence through this environment.

*ELECTING WOMEN BEFORE NEVADA SUFFRAGE*

In the states that had granted them full suffrage, women could run for any state or local office and often did. Many won. Other state legislatures granted women the right to hold the offices of school trustee (or school board member) and school superintendent. Some states, such as Nevada, authorized women to hold these offices, but did not allow women to vote in their own election. Historian Marilyn Shultz Blackwell postulates that school suffrage originated in the mid-nineteenth century “as a political strategy devised to help overcome entrenched ideas about women’s proper roles.” She concludes that the strategy did not work as well as politically-inclined women had hoped, but she did not take into account the cumulative effect of thousands of women serving in elected office.101

At the turn of the twentieth century, the Federal Commissioner of Education reported that women filled the offices of state school superintendent in Idaho and Colorado and the offices of city school superintendent in twelve cities. In twenty-five states, including Nevada, almost three hundred women served as

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county school superintendents. Although only four states had granted women full suffrage, many more had authorized women to vote in school elections, fill school offices, or both.¹⁰²

Tapped by Iowa voters in 1869 to be Mitchell County Superintendent of Public Schools, Julia Addington was, most likely, the first U.S. woman elected to a public office.¹⁰³ As Blackwell emphasizes, male voters tended to approve of women in school offices because they were perceived as an extension of their domestic roles as mothers. The maternal instinct to care for children was believed to be crucial for those who managed schools, but a facility for commerce was also prized in women. In 1872, the Rhode Island Educational Union reported that it was “fully satisfied that it is wise to appoint women of talent, public spirit, and business tact, as school officers” (emphasis mine).¹⁰⁴ Although veiled by the focus on the maternalistic relationship between teacher and child, the necessary combination of fiscal acumen and leadership skill contributed to the professional status of women employed in educational endeavors. Although Polly Welts


¹⁰³ Sharon E. Wood, University of Nebraska, to H-Women, email, 3 May 2009. Subsequent emails in this conversational thread revealed a website, housed at Swarthmore College, that seeks to identify all women, who ran for public office before 1920. “Her Hat Was in the Ring” is at: http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/wchmiel1/women%20in%20politics/index.htm.

Kaufman did not focus on the business side of education in her seminal work on frontier teachers, their diaries and letters clearly reveal that these women were effective managers (of both children and adults) and fundraisers. For success, teachers in the scattered school districts of the U.S. West required business skills at least as much as they needed to be concerned about children.

The record is silent about the reasons that the Nevada Legislature began the constitutional amendment process in 1887 to authorize women to hold the elected, partisan office of school superintendent and the elected, apparently nonpartisan, office of school trustee. Perhaps the legislators were aware of positive examples in other states. Maybe it was considered an important step in educational progressivism since the ballot question was approved amid a flurry of school reform legislation. Perhaps not enough men were willing to run for office in the hundreds of school districts around the state. Women served on school boards in at least two Nevada mining camps before the constitutional amendment was officially approved. Regardless of the reasons, Nevada women gained the right to hold these offices in 1889 and did not waste time filling them. In 1890, Humboldt County voters chose Democrat Susan Miller for County School Superintendent; Elko County elected Republican Josephine Taylor; Agnes


106 Items such as this one – “Mrs. M.A. Hawthorne was elected Clerk of the Seattle School Board last Saturday” (*Reno Evening Gazette*, 8 November 1888) – appeared in Nevada newspapers with some frequency.
Timson joined the Hamilton town school board; and five women whose names
have been lost comprised the entire school boards for two small towns in Lander
County.\textsuperscript{107}

What the Legislature gave, it could also take away. At about the same
time, legislators approved a law that allowed counties to economize by combining
the offices of district attorney and School Superintendent. Male school leaders
and political women protested loudly, but the Legislature refused, as one
administrator lamented, “to look this question squarely in the face.”\textsuperscript{108} By 1900,
school superintendents were filled ex officio by other elected county officers for
which women were not qualified to run.\textsuperscript{109} Seven years later, Nevada Attorney
General Richard C. Stoddard issued an opinion, with little supporting argument,
that women could not be appointed to the position of deputy superintendent,

\textsuperscript{107} Helen Bain and Mrs. Lewis were school trustees in Gold Run in 1882
and White River in 1888, respectively. Binder of Compiled Election Results,
Nevada Historical Society; \textit{U.S. Education Commissioner Report, 1899-1900};
\textit{Daily Nevada State Journal}, 29 August and 26 November 1890.

\textsuperscript{108} John E. Bray, the Virginia City High School Principal, argued that “an
educator (male or female)” with the appropriate qualifications, not a law
enforcement officer, should supervise the schools. Some women, such as Miss
Grace McAffee of Esmeralda County, announced their intention to campaign for
county superintendent as a way to force the issue, but their names were not
advanced to the general election ballot, even if they “would get a solid vote down
this way” were the two offices separated. W.C. Dovey, \textit{Biennial Report of the
Superintendent of Public Instruction, 1887-1888} (Carson City: State Printing
Office, 1889), 6, 15; “Walker Wavelets,” \textit{Hawthorne Bulletin}, 20 August 1890,

\textsuperscript{109} Henry C. Cutting, compiler, \textit{The Compiled Laws of Nevada In Force
From 1861 to 1900 (Inclusive)} (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1900), 805.
which the Legislature had created to replace county superintendents, because they
were not qualified to fill the superintendent position. His ruling “aroused[ed] much
unfavorable criticism, both in education circles and among prominent citizens,
[with] many lawyers asserting that Mr. Stoddard has not given the matter
sufficiently careful attention.”110 Regardless, Nevada women could not function
as school superintendents until the Constitution was amended again in 1912, two
years before they won full suffrage in the state.111

In the meantime, however, Nevada women filled school boards around the
state in untold numbers. In 1896, women’s candidacies for school boards
throughout Nevada were “nothing new or novel … and if they cannot do as well
as some men who are elected woman suffrage is a failure and the Lord have
mercy on the people.”112 By 1911, when the State Superintendent began reporting
the names of school board clerks (trustees who had been elected by their fellow
board members to fill this leadership role), female trustees were no longer a
novelty. The list noted twenty-seven female clerks, including a future lawmaker.

110 Letter to the Editor from W.M. Gotwaldt, *Reno Evening Gazette*, 11
May 1907. Attorney General Stoddard, a Silver-Democrat, issued Opinion No.
1907-5 on 8 May 1907. Ironically, he later married Assemblywoman Marguerite
Gosse after she finished her first session in the Nevada Assembly.

The same ballot question also allowed the appointment of women as notaries
public.

112 “Several Ladies Have Been Elected in Nevada,” *Daily Nevada State
Journal*, 22 May 1896. See also “Ten Ladies in the Field in Eureka,” *Daily
Although their names were not compiled in some central location, many more women certainly served as other school board members.\textsuperscript{113}

In addition to school officers in Nevada and many other states, women served as lawmakers in states that neighbored Nevada. All of the legislatures in which women had been seated before 1916 governed western states. The first female legislators were three Colorado Republicans who, in 1895, conspicuously engaged in—and won—floor fights in the Denver Statehouse, attracting attention from Susan B. Anthony and hundreds of women around the country. Carrie Clyde Holly became the first woman in the United States to introduce a bill when she proposed to raise, from sixteen years to eighteen, the legal age at which a woman could consent to engage in sexual activity. A man who engaged in sex with a younger female would be exposed to prosecution for statutory rape. Obviously controversial, the passage of Holly’s bill by the Colorado House of Representatives garnered national approbation.\textsuperscript{114} Table 2.1 lists, by year and state, the women who filled legislative seats before the enfranchisement of Nevada women.

\textsuperscript{113} \textit{Educational Directory}, (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1911), 60-67. Mary Sharp was the clerk of the Kaiser School Board in Nye County in 1911; thirty-one years later Nye County voters sent her to the Assembly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session Year</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Senate</th>
<th>Assembly-equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Claro Cressingham, Carrie Clyde Holly, Frances S. Klock</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Olive Butler, Martha A.B. Conine, Evangeline Heartz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>Martha Hughes Cannon</td>
<td>Sarah Elizabeth N. Anderson, Eurithe K. LaBarthe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Mary F. Barry, Frances S. Lee, Harriet G.R. Wright</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>Clara L. Campbell, Hattie F. Noble, Mary A. Wright</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>Martha Hughes Cannon</td>
<td>Alice Merrill Horne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Evangeline Heartz</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1903</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Alice M. Ruble</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>Mary Anna C. Geigus Coutler</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Alma V. Lafferty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>Lettie J. McFadden</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Louise M. Kerwin, Alma V. Lafferty, Agnes L. Riddle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>Mary G. Bellamy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Helen R. Robinson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Frances S. Lee, Agnes L. Riddle</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Women State and Territorial Legislators

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session Year</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Senate</th>
<th>Assembly-equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td>Utah</td>
<td>Anne Wells Cannon, Ann Holden King, Edyth E. Read, Jane W. Manning Skolfield</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>Frances C. Axtell, Nena J. Croake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>Anna B. Miller, Nettie Truax</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Cox, *Women State and Territorial Legislators*

Nevadans knew of these women because their local newspapers reported about many of them, such as Utah’s Martha Hughes Cannon, the first female state senator. Mary Wright’s “impartial and firm” leadership in the Idaho House of Representatives received favorable notice in 1899. In 1913, the election of two women in Washington merited a small headline.¹¹⁵ Newspaper coverage, however, was not thorough plus it is impossible to determine exactly who was reading which newspapers. Women office-holders, in Nevada and other states, were quickly forgotten. During the final push toward full suffrage for Nevada women, the Nevada Equal Franchise Society explained that “[w]omen are not eligible to any public office in Nevada, with the possible exception of superintendent of public schools or school trustees, although we are told they have never succeeded in securing recognition except as school trustee,” obviously

overlooking Susan Miller and Josephine Taylor.\textsuperscript{116} It seemed an ongoing surprise to voters and newspaper readers that women had been candidates and had won public office in the past. For much of the twentieth century, historians enabled such astonishment. Carl Becker said that “[h]istory is the memory of things said and done.”\textsuperscript{117} Not remembering elected women, many historians, mostly male, did not look for them, and their stories remained untold and their power as role models, diminished. Political women continued to face, as historian Melanie Gustafson demonstrates, the frustrating “process of continually starting over.”\textsuperscript{118}

\textit{Conclusion}

As policymakers, the hundreds of women who served as legislators or school officers provided role models for others, even if their impact was limited to friends and neighbors. Blackwell argues convincingly that school suffrage, a “gender-based constricted form of citizenship,” did not persuade men to accept women as equal citizens.\textsuperscript{119} Certainly, Nevada’s male politicians felt no compunction to maintain women’s access to elected school offices, but the power of seeing a woman actually win and hold a public office should not be

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{footnotes}
\item[116] “Woman Suffrage Department,” \textit{Reno Evening Gazette}, 2 March 1912.
\item[117] Carl Becker, “Everyman His Own Historian,” \textit{American Historical Review} 37 (January 1932): 223.
\end{footnotes}
\end{footnotesize}
underestimated. By 1900, a dozen women had been superintendents and trustees in Nevada, mostly in small communities. While policymakers bickered about women’s status as superintendents, at least three dozen women served their ranching and mining towns as elected trustees and clerks of their various school boards. These women modeled office-holding to their neighbors and themselves. They gained political experience, and some went on to other elected offices. They also demonstrated to other women that the role of political woman was feasible and to men that cooperation was possible. These were small steps toward full citizenship, but steps forward nonetheless.

Women’s nonelected participation in the legislative process provided them much useful experience and demonstrated that the Legislature was a place of and for women. Experience as lobbyists or staff allowed women to learn the process, which became useful when they ran for office. The first female legislator in Nevada, Sadie Hurst, gained important legislative knowledge as a lobbyist before her election, and Maude Frazier lobbied for educational issues for many years prior to her long legislative tenure.\(^{120}\) Luella Drumm campaigned on her

\(^{120}\) As a deputy school superintendent, Frazier wrote reports that recommended specific education-related legislation in the 1920s; in 1937, she demonstrated political savvy by sending flowers to the President of the Senate at the end of the session. By the time Frazier was first elected to the Assembly in 1950, she was probably more familiar with the legislative process than the other nineteen Assembly freshman combined. See, for example, Frazier’s report to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction printed in W.J. Hunting, *Biennial Report of the Superintendent Public Instruction, 1919-1920* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1921). The arrival of Frazier’s apparently hand-picked flowers were reported in “Legislative Sidelights,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, 24 March 1937.
experience as a legislative attaché during the session preceding her election, and Fronica Castle’s 1953 staff assignment impressed the Elko County commissioners who appointed her to replace her ailing husband at the 1954 special session. Assemblyman James Wood sent them a telegram that commended Fronica Castle’s “outstanding job” as an attaché and assured them that “both the Republicans and the Democrats in the assembly would welcome” her appointment.\(^{121}\)

Castle also represents another frequent role for women: the legislative wife. It was so common for wives to accompany their lawmaking husbands to Carson City and into the Chambers that they appeared in official legislative photographs of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century, the continuing existence of the legislative wife was familiar enough that the image could serve as fodder for political humor in the local newspaper, as illustrated on the next page.

When the 1919 session began, a woman filled a new elected and legislative role—that of lawmaker—but she was neither the first woman to be elected to a public office nor the first woman to participate in the legislative process in Nevada. As legislators, however, women entered a new phase of political and policymaking activities.
Chapter 3

“HER BUSINESS EXPERIENCE FULLY FITS HER FOR THE OFFICE”:

POLITICAL WOMEN AFTER SUFFRAGE

The first woman elected to a seat in the Nevada Legislature had been on the front lines of Nevada’s suffrage battle. Sadie Hurst served as an officer in both her local and state pro-enfranchisement organizations and lobbied the Nevada Legislature for suffrage and prohibition. Despite her diminutive height of five feet and two inches, she “addressed large street crowds in Reno every Saturday night.”\(^{122}\) Her election to the Legislature as a Republican illustrated that Hurst easily combined women-centered public activism with partisan politics.\(^{123}\) In 1918, she ran a partisan race that deliberately appealed to both women and men (at least, those men who supported prohibition) while Anne Martin ran a nonpartisan race for the U.S. Senate, campaigning as an Independent and

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\(^{122}\) Hurst was secretary of the Nevada Equal Franchise Society and president of the Washoe County Suffrage League, the Reno Woman Citizens’ Club, and the Reno League of Women Voters. Sadie Hurst to Mrs. Wardin [likely, Anna H. Wardin], 17 February 1931, Maude Sawin Taylor Collection, NC1196, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno; Lura Ward, “Nevada’s Women Spent Fifty Years Campaigning for the Right to Vote,” *Nevada State Journal*, 11 April 1954. Voter registration cards are helpful sources for women’s physical attributes. Washoe County Registrar of Voters, “Registration Affidavits, 1918-1952,” Roll No. 349.

\(^{123}\) In 1920, Hurst was temporary chair, and then second vice-president, of the newly-formed Harding and Coolidge Republican Club of Washoe County and hosted political meetings for local Republican women. “Washoe Republican Club Organized Last Night,” “Republicans Form Strong Club in County,” and “Fifth Ward Women To Hold Political Meeting,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, 31 August, 14 September, and 27 October 1920.
appealing to women’s solidarity as women. Nevada voters rejected Martin, but chose Hurst. The two women had once worked in tandem for a cause, but once won, their competing visions of women’s involvement in politics took them in separate directions.  

Hurst’s vision was based in her life experience in a politically active and partisan family. Her father, Charles A. Dotson, was a lifelong zealous Republican and had held local elected offices in Jasper County, Iowa, where he had been an original homesteader. Dotson joined his daughter and her two sons in Reno and by 1912 was the oldest voter in his new hometown. The Reno Evening Gazette delighted in detailing the colorful story of Dotson’s first vote for President—a shout for William Henry Harrison into the window of a log cabin under the watchful eye of “armed advisors” despite Dotson’s underage status. 

As Kristi Anderson astutely notes, many of the early twentieth century...

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124 In 1914, Hurst and Martin worked together through the Nevada Equal Suffrage Society to enfranchise Nevada women. After the successful election, the Washoe County Equal Suffrage League, with Hurst as president, lauded Martin “for her leadership during the campaign.” Within weeks, the women clashed over whose organization would more appropriately represent Nevada women. See, for example, “Citizen’s Club Won’t Affiliate,” Reno Evening Gazette, 20 March 1915. With its more inclusive membership and interest in partisan politics, Hurst’s club eventually topped Martin’s who soon turned her attention to a bid for national office. Hurst clearly did not support the notion of female solidarity in politics. In 1931, she claimed the status as the first president of Reno’s League of Women Voters and then explained, “That is where Miss Martin clashed when she tried to take over the Women Citizens against their consent. ha ha.” “Annual Convention of Suffragists Held,” Reno Evening Gazette, 8 January 1915; Hurst to Wardin, 17 February 1931, Taylor Collection.

125 Jasper, Marshall, and Grundy Counties, Iowa, Containing Biographical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens of the Counties
suffragists, such as Hurst, had been raised in the nineteenth-century “political culture that was aggressively and universally partisan.” Consequently, Hurst and many of her contemporaries were comfortable engaging in the political and partisan fray of campaigning for office.

Hurst was sixty-two years of age when she took the oath of office in Carson City and nearly the oldest person in the Assembly where the average age of her male colleagues was a youthful forty-five years. She was a vigorous lawmaker, but nearing the end of her political life. Hurst left Nevada after her defeat for re-election and though she lived nearly thirty years more, no evidence of subsequent political activity as an activist, candidate, or elected official has been located other than her continued registration as a Republican. Hurst’s election to a partisan office of local and statewide importance capped her political career and demonstrated immediately after suffrage that women could effectively participate in lawmaking, an activity from which they had been previously excluded. In this sense, then, she represents the Suffrage Generation: those

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politically active women whose adult lives paralleled the final march to enfranchisement.

The women who were elected to the Legislature after Hurst, however, do not fit easily under the “Suffrage Generation” label. They may have been adults at the time suffrage was won, but not necessarily on the front lines of the battle, and their political activity occurred in the years following that watershed event. Suffrage made it possible for them to vote and hold office, but it did not define their politics. These women comprise what I call the “Bridge Generation”: women whose political careers spanned the years between enfranchisement in the early part of the twentieth century and the women’s movement in the later part of the twentieth century.

I deliberately chose the word “bridge” for its double entendre. It refers to the linkage between two points while simultaneously conjuring the card game that was a popular pastime during this period and provided numerous social interactions among political women and men. Women’s clubs often included bridge and other card games at their events, and lawmakers indulged during session. Newspapers reported the games and named the participants, but were silent about the topics discussed over cards. One can safely assume, however, that politics in general and legislation in particular would have been discussed at a 1914 card game at Reno’s Twentieth Century Club in which both Sadie Hurst and Anne Martin participated; at a 1931 “card and drinking party” at former Assemblywoman Alice Towle’s home attended by legislators and staff; at the
“bridge games [that] sprang up around members’ desks” in the closing days of the 1945 session; and at the many bridge parties, in and out of Carson City, that Assemblywoman Hazel Denton recorded in her daily diaries during the 1953 and 1955 legislative sessions.128 Card parties proliferated in all of Nevada’s communities and were consistently featured in newspapers’ society pages throughout the first sixty years of the twentieth century.

When Nevada women won enfranchisement in 1914, one Elko suffragist who had crusaded for the inclusion of women’s “morale vigor and highest motives” in politics expressed her disgust that women celebrated the victory with wine and card parties. Had she known that political women would turn out to be just like men, she declared, she would not have supported suffrage.129 Her opinion had no effect, however, on bridge’s popularity among Nevada’s socially- and politically-connected residents. Women lawmakers, without exception, played bridge with each other, with male political and business colleagues, and with members of opposing parties. At these events, which occurred in private homes, club houses, and public buildings, both men and women developed relationships


129 Mrs. R. Ronan, Letter to the Editor, Elko Free Press, 9 November 1914, in Anita Ernst Watson, Into Their Own: Nevada Women Emerging Into Public Life (Reno: Nevada Humanities Committee, 2000), 56.
that informed and shaped the state’s business and political activities. Social interaction, therefore, cannot be separated from lawmaking.

The Bridge Generation includes Nevada’s lawmaking women before 1956. The appendix contains a full list of their names, party affiliations, and other details. These women were old enough to be cognizant of the final skirmishes in the suffrage battle, perhaps watching their mothers’ activism, but their principal political activity occurred after suffrage. Many of these future legislators were enfranchised when Nevada women won the right to vote in 1914, and most were of voting age at the time of national suffrage in 1920. Some of these women were galvanized by suffrage opposition within their own families. Daisy Allen’s father had thundered against woman suffrage in 1897 when she was twenty-two years

\footnote{The mother of Aloys Smith was president of the Woman’s Civic Improvement Club of Lovelock. Marguerite Gosse’s mother, Josephine Mudd Gosse, and her aunts, Anna Mudd Warren and Lizzie Mudd, were active Reno suffragists. Rita Millar’s mother, Ada Holmes McCarthy, was president of the Mineral County Suffrage Association. Millar’s brother, J.A. (Jack) McCarthy, served one crucial term in the Nevada Assembly. To amend the state’s constitution to enfranchise women, two consecutive Legislatures were required to approve the amendatory language in an identical form. At the first general election after that passage, the language was presented to Nevada voters for final approval. Previous attempts at suffrage had been passed by one Legislature only to fail at the next, so suffragists did not take any chances with the 1913 session. They enlisted male relatives to run for legislative office in 1912 and, on election day, handed voters printed lists of pro-suffrage candidates. Jack McCarthy was one such candidate who did not disappoint and voted with the overwhelming majority to move the suffrage amendment to the 1914 ballot. The Nevada Clubwoman (May 1921): 7; Sara Bard Field, “The Clash in Nevada—A History of Women’s Fight for Enfranchisement,” Out West (August 1914), 63; Journal of the Assembly 1913 (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1913), 20; and various articles in Reno newspapers.}
old. During the two-session process in which the Legislature finally approved the suffrage amendment, Hazel Bell Wines’s father and Frances Friedhoff’s new father-in-law were among the few votes in opposition. For these Nevada women, the suffrage campaign was an important factor in their political development. Those who participated, or watched their relatives, learned important political skills, such as how to conduct a campaign. Smith may have been born too late to participate in the suffrage campaign, but she was certainly aware of the efforts. In 1951, she wrote to elderly Felice Cohn, the lawyer who had authored the 1911 suffrage legislation:

> I cannot forget for one moment that the untiring and persistent efforts of such women as yourself, who have pioneered in procuring equal rights for the women of our State and Nation, have paved the way for me and all women in public life.

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132 Forty-nine Assemblyman, including newly-elected George Friedhoff whom Frances married in 1912, voted in favor of the suffrage amendment; only three, including Charles Friedhoff who was George’s father, voted against it. *Journal of the Assembly 1913*, 20. The three opposing Assemblymen did not return to the next session. In the Senate, W.J. “Johnny” Bell, father of Hazel Wines, voted against the suffrage amendment and also lost re-election. *Journal of the Senate 1913* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1913), 26. Hazel Wines’s daughter enjoyed repeating the story about her errant grandfather. The third generation of the family to be elected to the Nevada Legislature, Gene Segerblom explained that her grandfather opposed suffrage because he did not want women in his saloon. Jane Ann Morrison, “Segerblom Fills Family’s Shoes,” *Las Vegas Review-Journal*, 3 January 1993.

133 Smith’s letter responded to Cohn’s “lovely note of congratulations” for becoming the first woman elected to a leadership position in the Nevada Assembly after her ascension to Assembly Speaker Pro Tempore. Aloys Smith to Felice Cohn, 28 February 1951, fldr 7, Louise Aloys Smith Papers, 1942-1960, 94-13, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno. A biography of Cohn, an
Suffrage, however, did not define their own political actions. Between the two feminist waves, these Nevada lawmakers spoke of a concern for women and children, reflecting a sense of maternalism—motherly care for Nevada and its residents—but their actions reflected a simultaneous concern for fiscal issues, typically coded conservative. They championed legislation that would benefit women, but rarely in the sense of promoting equality between the sexes. They did not advance Nevada’s ratification of the federal Equal Rights Amendment, but they sought to equalize the economic relationship of men and women within marriage. Much of their legislation related to public schools and welfare focused on the acquisition and distribution of funding. Additionally, they did not oppose—and sometimes voted for—legislation that facilitated gambling, easy divorce, alcohol consumption, or even prostitution in their state, perceiving these issues to be more economic than moral in nature. Suffrage certainly “paved the way” for them, but these women were not radical social reformers who set themselves apart from male politicians; indeed, their participation with men in business, party politics, and bridge games prepared them well for the legislative environment of cooperation, conflict, and compromise. These twenty-nine legislators were modern women who traversed the state and the Capitol’s attorney of Jewish heritage who lived a long and active public life in Nevada, is sorely needed.
hallways with ease, and their legislative service reflected a financial acumen that
had been incubated in complex lives of paid work and politics.

Bridge Generation Demographics

For the most part, these Nevada women remained politically active throughout their lives. Nevada’s female legislators typically took on lawmaking commitments during a time when they had the freedom to campaign and to serve, but a few successfully combined politics with motherhood or marriage. Initially, women’s politically-active natal families eased their foray into electoral politics, but Nevada roots became less important as the Bridge Generation matured and as the state’s population grew exponentially. Table 3.1 lists each of Nevada’s female legislators in order of her age at her first session, notes her marital and maternal condition during her legislative service, and provides her age in 1920, the year American women achieved national suffrage.\(^\text{134}\)

\(^{134}\) Full birthdates were not located for all of the women, so ages were calculated by simply subtracting the birth year from the session and suffrage years. Data for this table came from numerous sources: census reports; newspaper articles, especially obituaries; biographies associated with political and community activities; and vital statistic data available on Ancestry.com, especially California’s death records and the Social Security Death Index.
Table 3.1  Female Legislators in Order of Age at First Session, 1919-1956

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Session</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age At Session</th>
<th>Marital/Maternal Status</th>
<th>Age In 1920</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>Ruth Averill</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Unmarried; no children</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Alice Towle</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Unmarried; no children</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>Aloys Smith</td>
<td>32</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>Marguerite Gosse</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Unmarried; no children</td>
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<td>1937</td>
<td>Lois Washburn</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Neva Waters</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Unmarried; children &lt; 16</td>
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<td>Rita Millar</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Unmarried; children &lt; 12</td>
<td>36</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>Frances Friedhoff</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>25</td>
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<td>Lillie Pinger</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Married; children &gt; 18</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>Pauline Olson</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>Married; children &gt; 12</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>1954</td>
<td>Fronica Castle</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Married; no children</td>
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<td>1923</td>
<td>Louise Hays</td>
<td>43</td>
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<td>Florence Swasey</td>
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<td>48</td>
<td>Married; children &gt; 18</td>
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<td>Helen Williams</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Unmarried; children &gt; 21</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>1925</td>
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<td>50</td>
<td>Married; child &gt; 21</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>Hazel Wines</td>
<td>50</td>
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<td>Maym Schweble</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Married; child &gt; 16</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Session</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Age At Session</td>
<td>Marital/Maternal Status</td>
<td>Age In 1920</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
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<td>-------------</td>
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<td>1925</td>
<td>Daisy Allen</td>
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<td>1943</td>
<td>Alma Woods</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Unmarried; no children</td>
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<td>Edna Montrose</td>
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<td>66</td>
<td>Unmarried; children &gt; 21</td>
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<tr>
<td>1943</td>
<td>Mary Sharp</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>Unmarried; children &gt; 21</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Glenn Grier</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>Unmarried; children &gt; 21</td>
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<td>67</td>
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<td>1945</td>
<td>Martha Woolridge</td>
<td>68</td>
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<td>1951</td>
<td>Maude Frazier</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Unmarried; no children</td>
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The women of the Bridge Generation fall into three categories that reflect a woman’s life cycle. The first category contains the youngest women who were, not surprisingly, unmarried and child-free. One-third of these legislators were forty years of age or younger during their first legislative sessions; nearly all of those served before 1938. Two-thirds were unmarried. The married third had children ranging from five to twenty years of age. Legislators who were simultaneously mothers of small children were, not surprisingly, under forty, but
motherhood was not necessarily a barrier to legislative duties. Rita Millar’s daughter, who was eleven when her mother served in the Assembly, campaigned with her mother and fondly recalled playing with other children and sliding down the banister in the Governor’s Mansion while her mother was there on official business. Millar and Neva Waters, also a mother of young children, were widows, and the part-time, paid status of legislators probably appealed to them as a way to support their families. In 1929, women around the country were encouraged to run for state legislatures because “the holding of such office enables women to have a career without sacrifice of home.” Nevada legislators did not earn enough money, however, to attract any other young mothers to follow suit.

Young children were not a primary responsibility of the women in the second group. Over 40 percent of the women in this study were between the ages of forty-one and fifty-six when they held office, and married women without children are found in this group. Of the mothers, all had children who were teenagers and older. The paternal status of male legislators in Nevada was not

135 Robert Burns, telephone conversation with author, 15 August 2009; Thomas Burns, email to author, 4 June 2010.


137 Millar preceded legislative service with six years as an elected county recorder, which paid a substantial $200 monthly. A legislator received a salary of $600 (plus some expenses) for the term. Surely, she must have been disappointed by the decrease in income.
recorded, but an analysis of their ages demonstrates that they tended to be younger than their female counterparts. Nearly 70 percent of male legislators were younger than fifty years of age at the time of their first session; 75 percent of the women were forty or older. The third group, fully one-quarter of the Bridge Generation legislators, were over sixty-five years of age and almost completely free from domestic duties. Most were not married; their children, fully-grown adults. Unlike the younger women, nearly half of these women were re-elected to their Assembly seats, suggesting that political women had become savvier as they became older, and voters, more open to female representation. It is neither surprising that most women legislators tended to be past child-bearing ages nor that many of these women were often older than their male Assembly colleagues. Women’s older ages provided them the freedom from domestic chores to facilitate their relocation to Carson City for two or three months and concentrate on lawmaking. Additionally, their maternal maturity enhanced their perceived authority, inherent in mothers and schoolteachers, among voters and with the younger men in the Legislature, and they did not hesitate to invoke that authority. “This, children, is the last chance,” the seventy-four-year-old Maude Frazier lectured her Assembly colleagues during a floor debate.138

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Regardless of age, well over half of these women were not married during their legislative terms, and three never married. The available evidence is often so silent about the husbands of the married women that I wonder if more couples were divorced than the records reflect.

139 Aloys Smith, Maude Frazier, and Alma Woods never married. No evidence exists of an intimate relationship in Smith’s life. Frazier was courted by a rancher whom she decided not to marry because he “hadn’t the gumption to run a pipe from the well into the house.” A.D. Hopkins, “Breaking the Mold,” The First 100 Persons Who Shaped Southern Nevada (Las Vegas: Stephens Press; 1999). Woods maintained a long relationship with a woman who died before Woods began her political career. An assistant to itinerant dentist Dr. Mabel Young, Woods traveled northern Nevada from about 1910 until 1918 when the two women bought a ranch near Eureka, Nevada. The 1920 census recorded Young as the head of the household and Woods as her partner. Young moved to California in the 1920s for health reasons, and Woods obtained sole ownership of the ranch, paying off its initial debts by trapping fur-bearing animals. Until Young’s 1939 death, social notes recorded Woods’s annual winter trip to visit Young. Not surprisingly, Woods did not leave details about the extent of this relationship, but one contemporaneous observer interpreted the women as a loving, committed couple. “Woman Rancher Meets Success By Own Effort,” Reese River Reveille and the Austin Sun, 26 November 1949; “Contract is Let for New Mail Service,” Reno Evening Gazette, 4 May 1935; “Eureka Pythians Have Initiation,” Reno Evening Gazette, 29 March 1935; Josie Alma Woods Correspondence, 1973, NC 826, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno; J. Kenny Halstead, telephone conversation with author, 30 January 1997.

140 Beverly Schwartzberg argues that late-nineteenth century marriages and divorces were more fluid than historians first believed. American men and women negotiated personal relationships in a variety of ways, she demonstrates, despite the substance of state laws that attempted strict governance over marriage and divorce. Beverly Schwartzberg, “‘Lots of Them Did That’: Desertion, Bigamy, and Marital Fluidity in Late-Nineteenth-Century America,” Journal of Social History 37 (Spring 2004): 574. Schwartzberg’s argument assists in understanding the matrimonial situations of Sadie Hurst who self-identified as a widow despite the 1910 census record of her divorce and Florence Swasey who also was identified as a widow when the man she had married was still alive. Regardless of labels, 1920s voters in Nevada did not seem to care about
Assemblywoman from 1926 to 1930, is a case in point. The 1920 census does not include Ethel’s husband in the same household as she and their children nor does he appear in any newspaper articles about her political career. Although information about a divorce or formal separation was not located, they were clearly living two hundred miles apart until his death in 1937.  

These women did not exhibit hostility toward men through either campaign speeches or legislative actions, but they did demonstrate an extraordinary amount of freedom from male authority and a comfort with personal decision-making. Assemblywoman Luella Drumm gave legal expression to this independence in a 1939 bill that amended Nevada’s election laws to allow married women to register to vote and file for public office in their own names and not that of their husbands. The subsequent appearance of a husband did not necessarily deter wives’ political activities, either: Marguerite Gosse filed for re-election under her new married name in 1924; Florence Swasey remained active in Republican Party politics after marrying a Democrat she had met when both candidates’ marital status. Daisy Allen’s 1905 divorce was not mentioned during the 1924 campaign.


142 Assembly 232, Statutes of Nevada 1939 (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1939), 145-146. At the time Drumm introduced this bill, she had been married to the same man for forty-four years.
served in the 1925 Assembly; and Lois Washburn divorced one husband and
married another between her 1936 election and the 1937 session.\textsuperscript{143} Independent
as these women were, however, the demands of intimate relationships could still
affect their political plans. For example, in 1935, the husband of Hazel Wines
moved to Reno, some two hundred miles southwest of her district. She soon
joined him, which eased her living situation during the session, but precluded her
from running for re-election to her Assembly seat.\textsuperscript{144}

In Nevada, a woman’s birth family, rather than her married family,
significantly enhanced her electability.\textsuperscript{145} Over half of the women who were
elected before 1936 grew up in Nevada families where both men and women
actively participated in party politics, agitated for political issues (particularly
suffrage), or served in local or state elected offices. Family discussions and
activities often centered on politics, and no one was excluded simply on the basis

\textsuperscript{143} “Fifty Candidates In Field For Washoe County Offices,” \textit{Reno Evening
Gazette}, 4 August 1924; “Politicians wed,” \textit{Nevada State Journal}, 13 June 1926;
“Mrs. Lois Deimel Weds George Washburn Here,” \textit{Nevada State Journal}, 27
December 1936.

\textsuperscript{144} Gene Wines Segerblom, personal conversation with author, Boulder
City, Nevada, 15 August 2009. Hazel Wines later ran unsuccessfully for an
Assembly seat from the county to which she and her husband moved.

\textsuperscript{145} Nevada women’s experience appears similar to Irene Diamond’s
finding that political women in the four New England states in her study tended to
grow up in political families. Irene Diamond, \textit{Sex Roles in the State House} (New
Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 36. By contrast, Heidi Osselaer found
Arizona’s female legislators to be more closely linked to a political spouse than to
a political natal family. Heidi J. Osselaer, \textit{Winning Their Place: Arizona Women
of sex. Indeed, families expected political consciousness on the part of their daughters. Daisy Allen’s father, an ardent Democrat who was an Assembly Speaker, “remarked that it was a sad thing in his life that his sons had married Republican women and his daughters had married Republican men.”\footnote{Although Lemuel S. Allen voted in 1889 for legislation that allowed women to hold school offices, he voted against woman suffrage in 1897, arguing loudly on the floor of the Assembly that Eve’s perfidy in Eden demonstrated Nevada women’s inadequacy to vote. Allen represents the complexity of political men when it came to political women: he supported the election of women to school offices; he vociferously opposed women voting and, thus, holding other offices; but he cared deeply about the political affiliations of the women in his immediate family. Allen died before his daughter ran for office. Cecyl Allen Johnson, \textit{Pioneer History of Life in Churchill County, Nevada: The Allen Family and Their Descendants}, An Oral History Conducted by Mary Ellen Glass (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 1970), 45; “Equal Suffrage: The Assembly Has an Interesting Session” \textit{Daily Nevada State Journal}, 17 February 1897; “Lemuel Allen, Prominent in State’s Politics for Many Years, Passes Away,” \textit{Nevada State Journal}, 25 October 1918.}

The family of Hazel Wines, according to her daughter, “talked politics at the table from the day we were born.”\footnote{Morrison, “Segerblom Fills Family’s Shoes,” 1993. Gene Wines Segerblom later clarified that her mother had grown up in a family where politics was a loud and frequent dinner table topic, but that political discussions were more muted at the Wines’s table because Hazel was a Democrat and her husband Stanley was “a staunch Republican.” Segerblom, personal conversation, 2009.} Many of the natal families of the early women legislators, such as Allen and Wines, included former Nevada legislators among the men and former legislative staff among the women.\footnote{Men who preceded their female relatives into the Legislature included Ruth Averill’s grandfather and father, Louise Hays’s father, Rita Millar’s father and brother, Daisy Allen’s father, Florence Swasey’s brother, Neva Waters’s uncle, and Hazel Wines’s father. Female relatives who had been legislative} Not only did these
relatives serve as lawmaking models, but they also contributed—even by observation alone—toward women’s knowledge of the lawmaking process, which could be complicated and arcane.

Observing female officeholders of the 1920s, political scientist Gretchen Ritter concluded that, “[a]s the tendency to elect the widows, wives, and daughters of male political leaders suggests, even in public office women were thought of as fundamentally relational beings.” In early twentieth-century Nevada, however, the state’s small population meant that all politics was “fundamentally relational.” Men often won campaigns due to their relationships to formerly-elected men and, later, women. Far from being detrimental, women’s family connections clued voters to support them and the political establishment not to oppose them. Additionally, these relational experiences introduced them to the knowledge and skills that they needed to operate in a political world where most of the actors may have been men but where relationships mattered. Helen Williams certainly agreed. Pointing to her mother, “an ardent follower of


politics,” and her grandfather’s seat in the Canadian Parliament, Williams explained to a reporter that she came “by her political leanings naturally.”

The women of the Bridge Generation tended to be well-educated and well-traveled. Most had some post-high school education, and nearly half completed their course of study. Many of them, like Louise Hays who “came through with the highest honors of her class,” attended the local University of Nevada. Others attended schools in other states, such as Ruth Averill, Alice Towle, and Lois Washburn who graduated from the University of California at Berkeley. Most of the college-educated women had been students in their late teens or early twenties, but Mary Sharp used her legislative earnings to obtain her teaching credentials from the University of Nevada. She was nearly seventy years old. Although normal college was common, not all majored in education. Averill obtained a degree in Letters and Science, and within a year, had passed the Nevada Bar Exam. Towle graduated with a degree in Economics and Political

150 “Lone Woman in Legislature Is Resident of Nye,” Tonopah Daily Times-Bonanza, 22 January 1941. When this article was reprinted by the Reno newspaper, the headline writer ignored several other substantive paragraphs and focused on one short phrase at the end of her comments: “Social Legislation Holds Interest Of Sole Woman Member of Assembly.” Nevada State Journal, 24 January 1941.

151 “Wedding Was in the Nature of a Surprise,” Tonopah Bonanza, 29 December 1913.

152 “Mary McCann Sharp,” typed transcript of an audio recording of Sharp talking about her life, 16 December 1959, Central Nevada Museum Research Library, Tonopah, Nevada.
Science; Washburn, in English. Neva Waters and Alma Woods attended business colleges. According to the available records, which are incomplete, Nevada Assemblymen were not as well-educated as their female counterparts. Only one-fifth attended some form of post-secondary institution.

Another common characteristic of the Bridge Generation was their mobility, even among women born and raised in Nevada. Some traveled because they and their families moved around the country, eventually landing in Nevada. Women also traveled for both business and pleasure. By the time native Nevadan Marguerite Gosse was elected in 1922, she had vacationed in the remote territories of Alaska and Hawaii, visited Mexico, and worked in California.153 Daisy Allen disguised herself as a male jockey to race horses around Nevada and California and was a “Nevada Hostess” at the 1915 Exposition in San Francisco.154 Lois Washburn and then-husband Ed Diemel lived in Mazatlan, Mexico, from 1923 until the revolution caused them to move to New York City in 1926.155 The women also traveled within Nevada, a geographically huge state.


The distance from Tonopah to Carson City is almost identical to the distance from Washington, D.C., to New York City or from Nashville to Atlanta. As the deputy superintendent for schools in southern Nevada, Maude Frazier drove across a vast, virtually roadless territory of almost forty thousand square miles in the early 1920s. “I was not afraid of desert driving,” she declared and conferred with “garage men” who
drew crude maps on any scrap of paper available, listed landmarks along the way, made lists of supplies and equipment I must carry. I would need a shovel, an axe, tow ropes, two jacks, good tire pump, canteens of water, gas and oil. Neither must I ever be without an abundance of canned goods, which in turn necessitated a can opener.  

Even women who did not learn to drive a car, such as Hazel Denton, freely traveled the state, usually by railroad, for employment or to participate in organizations, such as the Order of Eastern Star or the Nevada Federation of Women’s Clubs. As a result, these women were at ease with change and new environments. Historian Virginia Scharff explains:

> Women, supposedly, move seldom and reluctantly, and when they do, it’s a departure from their real stories, not a central plot line. The freedom to move is a marker of social power and of legitimacy.

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These women certainly engaged in a freedom of movement in their quest for political power and position. They left their homes to campaign door-to-door, ranch-to-ranch, and mine-to-mine in Nevada’s rugged deserts. After winning, they packed their suitcases and boxes and moved across the state to the capital city for nearly seventy days of lawmaking. Once in Carson City, they walked to the Capitol Building, climbed the stairs to the Chambers, loitered at desks, and chatted in the hallways. Always in motion, these women—those who could drive like Maude Frazier and Alma Woods and those who couldn’t like the two Hazels—lived lives that defy the conventional stories of mid-twentieth century women. With all the markers of modernity, these were New Women.

As historian Martha Patterson explains, the term “New Woman” can no longer be considered as simply another label for a turn-of-the-twentieth-century suffragist or settlement worker. Rather, those two short words encompassed “at once a character type and cultural phenomenon” that varied by class, race, and politics. Peterson argues for a multifaceted understanding of the term that “could signal multiple and contradictory positions on the most pressing issues of the day.” The term’s complexity could certainly be affected by the region of the

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158 Maude Frazier’s autobiography and Alma Woods’s reminiscences recorded the women’s deep affection for their vehicles. Neither Hazel Wines nor Hazel Denton learned to drive, according to their children, but newspapers and Denton’s diary reveal two freely mobile women. The stereotype of passive, homebound American women has been challenged by several historians, most notably Joanne Meyerowitz in *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).
country: a New Woman meant something different in New York City than, say, in Nevada. These legislators illustrate and add to her argument. They were, indeed, “distinctly modern” women who were not bound to hearth and home, but their politics leaned more toward the conservative than the radical.¹⁵⁹ Not necessarily freewheeling bicyclists in bloomers, they were active participants in their state’s economy—astute businesswomen who embodied both maternalist concerns and fiscal acumen.

The Work Experience of the Bridge Generation

Historians have correctly pointed to women’s experiences with clubs and other voluntary organizations as opportunities to learn and polish political skills. The scholarly attention paid to women’s clubwork originated in an attempt to understand women’s shift from home-centered, private lives to more public activities in the male world of politics. Karen Blair advanced this scholarship with her exploration of clubwomen as activists; Elizabeth Varon found women’s political power incubated in charitable organizations; and Gayle Gullett demonstrated the centrality of clubwomen to California’s suffrage victory. Cydnee McMullen determined that Nevada clubwomen “renegotiated the prevailing gender ideology that found public life unsuitable for” middle-class

women. These clubs facilitated women’s political involvement, but were not predominantly political in nature. Political scientist Anna Harvey postulates that women’s political power diminished immediately after suffrage because these clubs were not prepared to mobilize women as a political bloc, leaving political parties to absorb women and minimize their influence as a special interest.

The evidence is clear, however, that women learned important political skills by participating in and presiding over these organizations. Conducting meetings permitted women “to increase their familiarity with the literate practices of legislative activity [because they] relied on parliamentary procedure and followed Robert’s Rules of Order at their meetings.” In that regard, club activity directly enhanced women’s knowledge of the law-making process. These organizations also assisted many of them to develop negotiating skills, sharpen

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their proficiencies at public speaking, and meet each other. Often concerned with community building, the clubs provided opportunities for women and men to work together, as McMullen explained, “not as enemies or opponents, but as partners and collaborators,” toward common goals.163

Like their counterparts in New Jersey and Arizona, these Nevada women belonged to and served as officers of a myriad of organizations.164 They were active in women’s auxiliaries and fraternal organizations, such as the Order of the Eastern Star and Daughters of Rebekkah; hereditary organizations, such as the Daughters of the American Revolution and Nevada Native Daughters; and school-related associations, such as the Mothers’ Clubs and the Parent-Teacher Association. Most of the women also belonged to traditional women’s clubs in their communities, such as Reno’s Twentieth Century Club, which Marguerite Gosse’s mother helped form, and Lovelock’s Woman’s Civic Improvement Club, which Aloys Smith’s mother led. These two clubs and other community organizations affiliated as the Nevada Federation of Women’s Clubs, and the Bridge Generation was active in its leadership. Hazel Denton soon became president.


Nevada’s clubwomen participated in a variety of activities around the state, including politics. They tracked the progress of legislation, lobbied legislators, and encouraged voters to get to the polls. Felice Cohn, a Reno attorney, prominent Nevada suffragist, frequent political candidate, and the first president of the Nevada Federation of Women’s Clubs, encouraged women to become more active in the state’s legislative process:

I would suggest that the women of the State be more active in its political life, in all branches of the government, but especially the legislative, by taking a stand and becoming active in stemming the trend in government toward paternalistic and socialistic legislation.\textsuperscript{165}

The connection between clubwomen and politics is clear; that between politics and businesswomen has not been fully explored. Although these women were active and enthusiastic club members, that did not define their legislative experience. Club work provided them with political skills, but it was work experience, which all of them had in some measure, that shaped their political actions. The range of their business involvement is remarkable for both the diversity of occupations and the length of their involvement in income-producing activities. Both before and after their legislative tenures, and sometimes during, these women were employees, employers, entrepreneurs, or combinations of the three. Their business experience, whether as manager or employee, was important

to their personal identities, and without a doubt, it was a crucial identifying marker for their voters. In 1924, Daisy Allen’s local newspaper assured its readers that the woman who had established restaurants and operated hotels was “known for her executive ability.” Ten years later, the campaign announcement for Glenn Grier, who had worked for the federal government and the local J.C. Penney store, emphasized that her “friends believe that her business experience fully fits her for the office she seeks.” A dental assistant, coyote trapper, and ranch owner, Alma Woods ran for office in 1942 because “I was a business woman and could do as well as anyone else.” The women who successfully moved from a locally-elected position to the Legislature had held offices that required business management skills: Rita Millar was Mineral County’s Recorder/Auditor for three terms; Ethel McGuire served four years as Nye County’s Public Administrator; and Neva Waters and Hazel Denton were elected to school boards.

Digital newspaper searches, obituaries, and women’s manuscripts reveal a multitude of occupations in which these women engaged throughout their lives. The appendix lists all of their known occupations, including entrepreneurial


activities, such as taking in boarders and owning a motel; private business employment, such as store clerk and office worker; government employment, such as census enumerator and legislative attaché; and family-operated businesses, such as construction and ranching.

One particularly important occupational category for these women was education. Most of them taught school at one time or the other, and many worked as school principals and district administrators. Although the twentieth century occupation of teaching has been coded female because of its perceived extension of the maternal role, it is important to note the fiscal and business components of education. For one, teachers were employees. For another, school administrators acted much like business managers: they hired and fired people; balanced incoming revenues and outgoing expenses; and handled inventory. As such, they were accepted members of business organizations. After her appointment as the superintendent of the Las Vegas Union School District in 1927, Maude Frazier became active in the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce and served on the Chamber’s board of directors for many years. Twenty years later, in northern Nevada, the Churchill County Classroom Teachers Association joined the Churchill County Chamber of Commerce where former teacher and former legislator Lois Washburn provided expertise on legislative matters for both
These women considered teaching a profession and education a business equal to any other in their communities, hence their involvement with the Business and Professional Women’s clubs, “the only national organization for women who work including all businesses and professions.”

Founded in St. Louis in 1919, the National Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW) quickly spread throughout the country, and a year later, Marguerite Gosse brought ideas to Reno from a business women’s luncheon she attended in San Francisco. Reno’s BPW soon took shape, and other clubs began to appear around the state. In 1929, Felice Cohn led the establishment of the Nevada Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs, which were “carefully conservative.” The club members, assured the founder of the Reno BPW, “do not rush into anything they do not understand,” and their “tendency is to work with the world instead of against it.”

The female legislators in this study, as well as many of the unsuccessful female candidates for elected office, were more likely to be members of BPW.

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than any other organization in Nevada. Many were charter members and first presidents. Gosse and her opponent in the 1922 election, Martha O. Davis, helped establish the Reno club; Lillie Pinger, the Fallon club; Hazel Denton, the Caliente club; Alma Woods, the Eureka club; Glenn Grier, the Ely club; Martha Woolridge, the Tonopah/Goldfield club; and Maude Frazier, the Las Vegas club. In addition, Helen Williams presided over the Tonopah club after her legislative tenure. Mary Sharp was a member of the same club, and during the 1943 session, she and Alma Woods attended meetings of the Carson City BPW where Sharp reviewed legislation that might interest the members. Lois Washburn was a member of the Fallon club, Aloys Smith belonged to the Lovelock BPW, and Pauline Olson led the Ely club.  

Although the focus of the clubs was clearly business-oriented, and often had political overtones, newspapers typically reported their activities in the women’s pages and the society columns. With wedding announcements published next to BPW reports, these pages graphically

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illustrate Felice Cohn’s description of Nevada women as “homemakers or business women, or perhaps both (for we frequently combine these talents).”\textsuperscript{173}

Nevada BPW clubs supported “all qualified women in or seeking public office,” regardless of party. They did not recruit candidates, but proudly celebrated their members who held public office, such as in 1951 when the cover of \textit{Nevada Business Woman} featured that session’s three Assemblywomen, all BPW members, with Governor Charles Russell.\textsuperscript{174} After World War II, Nevada’s BPW clubs’ “greatest achievements [came] in the field of legislation.” They reported to the national organization about their major activities between 1944 and 1960:

Many of our clubs held meetings with members of the legislature (or candidates) as speakers, followed by questioning. Individual contacts were encouraged and maintained. Boulder City (BPW), as an example, was active in the Clark County Legislative Council. Our Federation sponsored and obtained an Aid to Dependent Children’s program in our state. We worked for several years to secure an equitable community property law. Legislation was promoted to enlarge clinical care, hospitalization and educational facilities for handicapped children, either physical or mental. We were one of the few organizations supporting a sales tax, because the money so derived is used solely for school facilities. We supported legislation for medical and dental clinics to be held in the smaller towns of the state. We have opposed all legislation

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\textsuperscript{173} Felice Cohn, “Women of Nevada Interested in Politics,” in Max Binheim, ed., \textit{Women of the West: A Series Of Biographical Sketches Of Living Eminent Women In The Eleven Western States Of The United States Of America} (Los Angeles: Publisher’s Press, 1928), 134.

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discriminatory to working women and have supported all measures for women’s advancement including equal pay for comparable work and equal rights.\textsuperscript{175}

Businesswomen and clubwomen came together in Nevada’s BPW, sharing similar organizational styles, with events that typically featured a meal, card games, singing, and speakers. Like other women’s clubs, BPW provided a congenial place for women to “strengthen the bonds of friendship to create a safe haven to build skills and launch pressure on government to improve the lives of women and all its citizens.”\textsuperscript{176} In addition, BPW explicitly sought “to secure combined action by” working women and featured “forceful and informative” tributes to women in public life.\textsuperscript{177} Reported on the social pages and determined to eliminate discrimination against women in business and employment, Nevada’s BPW vividly demonstrates the mid-twentieth-century tension between women’s political strategies of separation—the establishment of female-only clubs—and integration—supporting club members who served in public office.\textsuperscript{178}

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\item \textsuperscript{178} Melanie Gustafson, Kristie Miller, and Elisabeth Israels Perry, ed., \textit{We Have Come to Stay: American Women and Political Parties, 1880-1960} (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1999), xiv.
\end{itemize}
clubs provided a safe haven from which lawmaking women could confidently parlay their identities as businesswomen to gain access to and participate in the state Legislature.

The Bridge Generation as Partisans

The Bridge Generation illustrates Jo Freeman’s argument that it was party women, not the suffragists or social activists, who laid the foundation for women’s political gains during second-wave feminism.\(^{179}\) Nevada women, like women in other states, registered with one of the major parties and often became active participants. Women stood as candidates for the legislature and other offices, and many were elected. There is no question that women could be thwarted by the male leaders of either party. For example, some Democratic men encouraged Assemblywoman Ethel McGuire to run for a higher office while others drew in another female candidate who beat McGuire in the primary.\(^{180}\) Male political leaders certainly did pit female candidates against each other, such as in the 1930 State Treasurer’s race and in the 1922 Assembly race in Washoe County when Republican leaders recruited Marguerite Gosse to run because “they


\(^{180}\) A Reno political pundit pointed out the dilemma faced by Democratic party leaders who had separately recruited Ethel McGuire and Carrie Devine to run for State Treasurer in 1930. Devine clobbered McGuire in the primary, winning fifty-nine percent of the vote. With forty-four percent of the general election vote, Devine lost to Republican George Russell. Politix, “Politics,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, 16 August 1930; *Official Results of the Primary Election of 1930; Political History of Nevada 1996*, 290.
wanted someone of the same social status as Mrs. Martha Davis who was running on the Democratic ticket.”

But some men encouraged women to run, fully expecting them to win, regardless of the gender of their opponents. Also in 1930, the Democrats included Katherine Redman on their preferred slate for the Assembly. She did not win, but the Washoe County Commission appointed her to complete the term of an Assemblyman who died in 1933. In 1954, leaders in the construction industry recruited Mabel Isbell, a Republican, to run. Isbell won two terms in the Assembly. Nevada women did not fit the post-suffrage “pattern” of partisan women running “only when that party was destined to be outvoted.”

Not surprisingly, most of the women elected before 1932 were Republicans and after that year, Democrats, which reflected both national and local politics of the time. Historian Elizabeth Varon’s elucidation of “Whig womanhood” demonstrated that the Republican Party had a longer history than

\footnote{Puddington, “A Biography of Marguerite Gosse,” 9}

\footnote{“Mrs. J.R. Redman Is Appointed to Nevada Assembly,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, 6 April 1933. Because the Legislature did not meet during her short tenure, Redman was not sworn into office and, thus, was not included in this study.}


\footnote{Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 110.}
the Democrats of including women in partisan activities and events. In Nevada, Republicans controlled the Governor’s office and the Senate when the state suffrage movement began its successful march toward enfranchisement.

Nationally, the Democratic Party had been slower to incorporate women into its ranks, but by the time of suffrage, Democrats controlled the Nevada Legislature, and a Democratic Governor signed Nevada’s ratification of the national suffrage amendment. Nevada’s Democrats held the majority of Assembly seats beginning in 1930, and the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt as U.S. President cemented that control for the next few decades.

Women’s elections also reflected their county’s majority party. For example, Lois Washburn, a New Deal Democrat, won easily in Nye County, a mining county controlled by the Democrats as a result of labor activism, and in the Democratic primary in Churchill County to which she moved after her Assembly tenure. Churchill, however, was primarily agricultural and mostly Republican, so Washburn lost both of the times she ran in the Churchill County general election. The agrarian counties tended to lean Republican, which meant that Democrats like Washburn lost and Republican women like Alma Woods won, regardless of the national strength of either party.

Nationally and locally, the Republican Party had the reputation of being the party of business, but Nevada Democrats also tended to be conservative

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185 Varon, _We Mean To Be Counted_, 3.
before 1960. Indeed, the two parties did not differ substantially in Nevada. Regardless of whether the titular head of Nevada’s political establishment was Republican operative George Wingfield in the 1920s or Democratic Senator Patrick McCarran in the 1930s and 1940s, public perception persisted that a bipartisan machine controlled state government.\textsuperscript{186} Nevada historians and political junkies continue to debate the existence of such a machine, but the likely reality was that Nevada’s small communities facilitated a neighborliness among politicians regardless of party. Partisans knew each other as classmates, family friends, and business acquaintances, and cross-party cooperation not only occurred but was expected. During the heated sales tax debate in 1949, Aloys Smith, a Democrat and Pershing County’s only Assembly member, asked for input from the head of the county’s Republican Party and became miffed at his “prompt, though cryptic response.”\textsuperscript{187}

For women, party work can be understood as an extension of club activity: both consisted of local and statewide gatherings of likeminded people in pursuit of both social interaction and a vision of the good life in Nevada, which typically

\textsuperscript{186} C. Elizabeth Raymond, \textit{George Wingfield: Owner and Operator of Nevada} (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1992), 255.

\textsuperscript{187} Smith clearly expected that their party memberships would be of secondary importance to a shared concern for their county. Aloys Smith to W.G. Emminger, Chairman, Pershing County Republican Central Committee, March 9, 1949, Louise Aloys Smith Papers.
focused on varying degrees of economic success.\textsuperscript{188} In that regard, the vigorous participation of these women in party activities was not unusual. Ethel McGuire was a Nye County delegate to the Socialist Party’s state convention in 1916 and transitioned into the Democratic Party along with other former Socialists as that party’s organization disintegrated.\textsuperscript{189} Most of the women were delegates to county and state conventions of the two major parties who often held their state conventions at the same time and place. Many women had even larger roles in their parties. In 1954, the Churchill County Democrats honored Luella Drumm for her “long work for the party,” which included several years on that county’s central committee. Martha Woolridge, acknowledged in the press as “a prominent Tonopah businesswoman,” was a delegate to Republican national conventions and

\textsuperscript{188} For example, the 1938 platforms of both parties in Nevada contained early references to business, although they differed on the relationship between government and industry. The Democrats advocated “a progressive and keen business administration,” and the Republicans pledged themselves “to the restoration of confidence in American business and industry of all kinds, and the removal of government from competition with private business.” “Swartz Reelected State Chairman by Democrats of Nevada,” \textit{Reno Evening Gazette}, 28 September 1938; “Platform of the Republican Party,” pamphlet, 27 September 1938, fol. 10, series I, C. Clifton Young Collection, MS 96-06, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno.

served many years on the Nye County Central Committee. The legislative
appointments of Woolridge and Frances Friedhoff, a McAdoo delegate to the
1924 Democratic National Convention and a Democratic Presidential elector in
1932, obviously resulted from their extensive and faithful party work.190

For the most part, these women were successful the first time they ran for
the Legislature. Only three lost in their first attempt: Hurst in the 1916 Washoe
County nominating process, Drumm in the 1936 Churchill County general
election, and Frazier in the 1948 Clark County primary election. Hurst won the
Republican primary two years later because the Legislature replaced the caucus
nominating procedure with a direct primary system that allowed all party
members to vote without attending the state convention. Women’s votes, minimal
at the convention, represented a more substantial number in the primary election;
consequently, campaigning on her clubwoman status paid off for Hurst. Drumm
and Frazier redoubled their efforts two years later and easily won at the next
election.

In virtually all of the races after Hurst’s, the women’s status as local
property owners and taxpayers was more important than any club affiliation.
Local newspapers carefully noted that Glenn Grier was “a home owner and

taxpayer” and that Mary Sharp was the owner of “extensive property interests in the eastern part of [Nye] county.”\textsuperscript{191} Their position on taxes was also vitally important to potential supporters. Millar, “an energetic and capable woman,” announced her candidacy for the Assembly with her concern that “the present enormous state and county expenditures can be and should be stopped before we all become bankrupt.”\textsuperscript{192} In her 1932 re-election attempt, Mary Rose intoned, “The matter of taxation is the most important question in the public mind today and something should be done to relieve the burden of the property owners of our state.”\textsuperscript{193}

The Bridge Generation did not run women-centered campaigns. Even Sadie Hurst, who emphasized her club memberships, purposefully advertised that she was not a member of the Woman’s Party, not to distance herself from women but to separate herself from Anne Martin who was running for the U.S. Senate as a woman appealing to the solidarity of women.\textsuperscript{194} Legislative candidates’ comments about women’s issues, about which they were invariably asked,

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\textsuperscript{191} “Mrs. Glenn Grier Is Assembly Candidate” The Ely Record, 10 August 1934; “Mrs. Sharp Files for Reelection,” Tonopah Daily Times-Bonanza, 21 July 1944.
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\textsuperscript{192} “For the Assembly,” Walker Lake Bulletin, Hawthorne, Nevada, 12 August 1922.
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\textsuperscript{193} “What Washoe Candidates Have To Say,” Nevada State Journal, 2 September 1932.
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\textsuperscript{194} Political advertisement, Reno Evening Gazette, 1 November 1918.
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typically appeared secondary to other topics. Helen Williams told an inquiring reporter that “her main legislative interests as a rancher are livestock raising and agriculture, and as a woman all types of social legislation.” Even Hurst clarified that she was “pledged to but one thing and that is to vote for the ratification of the federal prohibition amendment.”

Candidates were successful after 1920 because they minimized any interest they may have had in political issues considered only of interest to women and deliberately appealed to a wide range of voters. Luella Drumm felt no compunction to give even lip-service to women’s issues. The state’s leading Democratic newspaper reported that when “[a]sked what sort of legislation interested her, she said: ‘Well I’m a rancher’s wife, so draw your own conclusions.’”

Only once did Nevada women specifically and successfully organize to elect a woman to the Legislature. In 1950, a group of Las Vegas women formed a club for the express purpose of electing Maude Frazier, recently retired superintendent of Las Vegas schools, to the Legislature to champion educational reform.

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Lawmaking women energetically engaged in many legislative duties, some of which have become obscured with changes over time in legislative structure and process. Women’s roles that have been largely forgotten include leading their county delegations and presiding over the Assembly. Like the men with whom they cooperated, clashed, and compromised during their sessions, and the women who currently hold legislative office, these women lawmakers also chaired various committees, juggled numerous assignments, and processed legislation.

Leadership and Committee Assignments

Before the U.S. Supreme Court demanded the reapportionment of state legislatures in 1966, the Nevada Assembly was organized by county with seats apportioned according to a county’s population. Sparsely populated counties, such as Eureka and Pershing, had one Assembly representative, which meant that their legislative delegations were entirely female with the election of women such as Alma Woods and Aloys Smith. The larger counties each held a number of Assembly seats. These delegations were led by the Assembly member who polled the largest number of votes in the preceding election. Women held these leadership positions at various times: Ruth Averill in 1921, Lois Washburn in 1937, and Maude Frazier in 1953.199 Women in single-member delegations

199 County delegation leaders processed the county’s legislation, which included referring bills to the appropriate committees, introducing amendments,
functioned simultaneously as chair and committee. Neva Waters and Edna Montrose, sole representatives of Mineral County in 1929 and 1945, respectively, received and reported on Senate legislation that concerned their county. This long-forgotten aspect of legislative service emphasizes the inherent complexity of evaluating women as individual actors within an organizational structure.

In 1951, Aloys Smith’s fellow Assembly members elected her to serve as Speaker Pro Tempore for the remaining three weeks of the session. The first woman officially promoted to a leadership position in the Assembly, Smith was not, however, the first woman to preside over that house. That honor belonged to Sadie Hurst in 1919. Assembly rules authorized the Speaker to delegate to other members the authority to preside over daily floor sessions, and in the early

and summarizing the bills’ contents before final votes. The pertinent *Journal of the Assembly* reveals that Averill, Washburn, and Frazier all conducted these tasks. See, for example, *Journal of the Assembly 1921* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1921), 172; *Journal of the Assembly 1937* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1937), 46; and *Journal of the Assembly 1953* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1953), 356. Helen Williams also received the highest number of votes, but did not perform the duties of county delegation chair, for some unknown reason.


201 *Journal of the Assembly 1951* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1951), 209. In 1929, Ethel McGuire had been expected to be elected as one of the Democrat’s leaders for that session. Although the *Journal of the Assembly 1929* indicates that she performed many of the duties now associated with an assistant floor leader, no such position was then acknowledged in the official records. “3 Women Law-Makers To Sit in Lower House Of Nevada Legislature,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, 17 January 1929.
twentieth century, other members were often called to the chair to replace the Speaker as he attended to other duties or went to the lavatory. Twelve days into the 1919 session, a single line in the *Journal* recorded the first time a woman controlled the Assembly: “Mr. Speaker requested Mrs. Hurst to occupy the chair.” Hurst also took the Speaker’s chair for most of the one-day special session called to ratify the federal woman suffrage amendment and presided “at this triumphant moment.” The local newspaper explained that “Mrs. Hurst took the chair and put the question and announced the vote with as much decorum and familiarity with parliamentary usages as could have any of her colleagues of the opposite sex.”

Four years later, Marguerite Gosse, “whose poise was perfect,” was presiding over the Assembly when “the first real ruction of the session” broke out over a livestock bill. The *Reno Evening Gazette* assured its readers that Gosse “was in complete command of the situation at all times.”

Not all of these women were handed the gavel during their legislative tenures, but neither were all of the men. During the 1919 Session, when Hurst answered the call to the chair, only five of the other thirty-six Assemblymen stood

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in for the Speaker. After 1923, however, Speakers rarely called for substitutes, and no woman presided again over the Assembly for many years. Indeed, the competent leadership of Hurst, Gosse, and Louise Hays had been forgotten. Near the end of the 1949 session, the Speaker handed the gavel to Aloys Smith, who presided while various committee chairs reported legislation. After the Speaker returned, Smith gave a brief speech, proudly taking credit as the first woman to preside over the Assembly and declaring that “most of all, I’m thankful because you have accepted me as one of you, and I believe that is one of the greatest honors I could ever receive.” Smith did not preside again during the 1949 session, but her election to Speaker Pro Tempore in 1951 often put the gavel in her hands. Her obviously pleased hometown newspaper explained her rise to power:

> She has gained the respect of her fellow lawmakers by sincere attention to duty and insisting upon knowing all about a measure before voting on it. Her colleagues have found her a poor “yes” legislator.

Assembly leadership also included chairing a Committee of the Whole, which occurred when all of the Assembly members were included in the deliberation on a complex bill or controversial issue. The process was also used

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frequently in the years before multiple copies of bills could be easily produced. Sometimes, the Speaker acted as the chair of the Committee of the Whole; sometimes, the chair was the sponsor of the bill under consideration; and sometimes, the Speaker delegated the role to a member. Women legislators in the 1920s, such as Ruth Averill, Alice Towle, and Ethel McGuire, chaired numerous Committees of the Whole, but by the mid-1930s, the Speaker typically chaired any such committee and after 1945, they were rarely formed. This transition away from the Committees of the Whole augmented the power of the Speaker while simultaneously removing women from the Assembly floor as leaders.

The Speaker assigned women, if they were members of the majority party, to chair various standing committees, which tended to capitalize on the women’s experiences and backgrounds.\textsuperscript{206} Averill and Towle chaired, in 1921 and 1923, respectively, the Committee on Engrossment, which was responsible for proofreading legislation. In particular, the committee ensured that each bill’s supposedly-final print properly included all adopted amendments before that bill would be presented for a final vote on General File. Although the committee’s vital function was admittedly a housekeeping duty, Averill and Towle probably did not received the assignment because they were women, but because, as college graduates, they possessed the necessary literacy skills and a careful attention to details. During their respective sessions, former librarian Mary Rose

\textsuperscript{206} Committee assignments are typically located within the first ten pages of each session’s \textit{Journal of the Assembly} and \textit{Journal of the Senate}. 

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chaired the Committee on the State Library; former local school board member Neva Waters chaired the Committee on Education; irrigation district employee Lillie Pinger chaired the Committee on Irrigation; and World War II veteran Aloys Smith chaired the Committee on Veterans Affairs. Down the hall, rancher Frances Friedhoff chaired the Senate Committee on Public Lands, even though her husband, whom she replaced, had not. Women also chaired committees that were not necessarily female-oriented. Lois Washburn chaired the Assembly Committee on Military and Indian Affairs; Pauline Olson chaired Counties and County Boundaries; and Florence Swasey chaired Public Morals to which was referred bills concerning liquor and legalized gambling. That committee, under Swasey’s leadership, reported out a key gambling bill, which nearly brought casino gambling to Nevada six years before it was ultimately legalized.

Committee assignments also reflected the interests of the various legislators who submitted their lists of preferences to the Speaker who made the final assignments. Those lists were not saved, so they cannot be compared against the actual assignments to determine if women received the assignments they requested, but a consideration of women’s backgrounds indicates that they did. For example, Hurst, the president of the Washoe County Equal Suffrage Association, was assigned to the committee responsible for the federal suffrage amendment; Pinger and Towle, residents in the state’s largest federal reclamation project, were assigned to the committees concerned with irrigation issues. Millar, a member of a prominent newspaper family, sat on a committee concerned with
public printing; Woolridge, a business owner, was on the Insurance Committee; Olson, a labor union officer, sat on the Labor Committee; and the ranchers—Drumm, Williams, and Woods—were members of the Agriculture Committee. The Mines and Mining Committee included Schweble who operated a mine and Isbell whose family owned the construction company that brought open-pit mining techniques to Nevada. Party affiliation clearly mattered more than gender: In 1945, Martha Woolridge was assigned to the same committees as the man she replaced.207

The list of committee assignments definitely includes committees charged with topics that came to be coded female, such as the Committee on the State Library, the Committee on Social Welfare, and the Committee on Public Health, but it also reveals that every one of these women was assigned to at least one committee typically coded male, such as the Committees on Judiciary, Agriculture, Taxation, Civil Defense, and Ways and Means. Women’s assignments covered a wide range of topics and cannot be explained by biology alone. Many of these women lawmakers certainly agreed with Woods who insisted that she “was put on some of the best committees, and took part in discussing anything that came before the committees like all the members did.”208

207 Journal of the Assembly 1945, 415.

208 Woods to Glass, 21 September 1973, Woods Correspondence.
The correlation between interests and committee assignments is particularly reflected in the membership of the Assembly Committee on Education. Nearly half of the women in this study were assigned to the committee, and most of those assigned had been teachers at some point in their lives. Only one of the teachers in this group did not serve on that committee. Although education is often categorized as a woman’s issue, presumably because of its focus on children, it is misleading to assume that these legislators were appointed to that committee simply because they were women. As leadership anticipated, the female members brought an expertise, developed through their experiences in teaching and school administration, to the committee’s deliberations. In addition, many more men than women were assigned to this committee, which was tasked with one of the state’s most important functions. In 1923 and again in 1949, the Speaker Pro Tempore remained a member after having chaired it the previous session.

During the two sessions when the only elected women did not have direct experience in the educational system (1939 and 1941), the Education Committee was all-male. An important policy committee that introduced and processed a multitude of bills, it was a plum assignment for many legislators.\(^\text{209}\) As such, the Assembly Committee on Education, which appeared to be an ostensibly natural

assignment for women because of their alleged maternal instincts, provided them with significant public visibility in the policymaking process. In particular, Maude Frazier successfully enhanced her political authority through ten years of chairing this committee through which significant educational reforms were processed. By her third term, which included the crucial funding session of 1955, Frazier’s expertise in educational financing landed her in a coveted seat on the Assembly’s premier money committee.

Legislation

The processing of legislation, which began with the introduction of bills and resolutions, involved many intricate steps. Legislative measures were strategically assigned to committees (for easy passage or immediate rejection), subjected to hearings and debates, occasionally amended, and if they survived to reach General File on the floor, presented for votes. This complex process occurred in both houses before a bill reached the Governor who usually signed it into law, but did occasionally wield veto power. Newspapers and official legislative records disclose that women legislators energetically participated in every one of those steps as well in some of the more unusual parliamentary procedures, such as conference committees. Women legislators maneuvered a conference committees consisted of three members from each house who attempted, sometimes successfully, to reconcile different versions of the same bill that each house had approved. Appointed by house leadership, these committees were first charged to work with the amendments already processed; if they failed, leadership appointed a Free Conference Committee that had the authority to completely rewrite the bill. Conference committees became more
large number of bills and resolutions through this process, and many were successful at getting their legislation into law.

At first glance, it would appear easy to determine the number of legislative measures introduced by each legislator. The Journal published at the end of every session provides an index of bills and resolutions that includes the name or names of each bill’s sponsor. Since at least 1983, the name of the legislator listed first in the list of sponsors was considered the primary sponsor and the others, co-sponsors. A more detailed reading of the Journals reveals, however, that co-sponsors could, and often did, act as primary sponsors by referring the bill to committee or moving for passage when it came to the floor. In addition, in this era before one-representative districts, each county delegation had a chair who was responsible for processing the county’s introductions and chairing the delegation, which often acted as the committee of referral. Consequently, some legislators, such as Ruth Averill, managed both their personal introductions and their county’s legislation. In 1921, Averill introduced seven measures, of which only two successfully advanced. She was, however, also responsible for Nye County’s bills, two-thirds of which were signed into law. Considered together, her legislative success rate became a respectable 40 percent.

common as typewriters and copying machines made it easier to produce amendments and new bill drafts. Women legislators were appointed to conference committees throughout this period.
Committee chairs could also introduce bills on behalf of their committees, and these must be considered, too, when assessing a legislator’s activity. In 1953, Maude Frazier managed thirty-eight bills in her roles as Assemblywoman, Education Committee chair, and Clark County delegation chair. She also signed on as a co-sponsor to five additional bills. Currently, a legislator’s bills are considered to be only those where his or her name appears alone or first in a list of named sponsors. Applying that standard to past legislative sessions obscures the amount of work each legislator was actually doing to process legislation. Considering the full range of bills for which they had authority provides a much different, more complete picture.

Women lawmakers were also savvy about the whims of personalities in a group dynamic. Luella Drumm, who had preceded her lawmaking tenure with two sessions as an attaché, wisely decided to forego formal sponsorship of one of her bills. Had her local newspaper not noted it, no one would now know that Assembly Bill 186, officially introduced by the Assembly Committee on Labor, was actually her bill:

This is one of the many cases of legislators gaining their objectives by withdrawing their own identity in connection with bills for the purpose of assuring greater success in passage. Mrs. Drumm, who had worked on this piece of legislation since early in the session, will not have her name connected with it as its author. 211

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The legislation sought to limit the amount of interest that could be collected by individuals or companies “engaged,” as the bill expressed it, “in the business of making loans of money” and was as controversial then as are the strip-mall-based, cash-advance companies seventy years later. Drumm’s reason for handing off this bill to the Labor Committee is not known, but the composition of the Assembly Committee on Labor suggests one possible strategy. The chair of the committee, Harry E. “Hap” Hazard, and the Assembly Speaker, Berkeley Bunker, were both Clark County Democrats. Additionally, the Speaker Pro Tempore, Peter Burke, was also a member of the Labor Committee. Those relationships might have made it easier to get the bill on the schedule for a final vote. The best-laid plans, however, could go awry in the legislative process. The bill did not receive a hearing in the Senate and died there.\(^{212}\)

Despite its reputation as the legislative “gas chamber,” the Senate passed most of the women’s legislation when their bills and resolutions arrived in that house for consideration.\(^{213}\) Seventy percent of the Assemblywomen had


\(^{213}\) With seventeen members, only nine Senators were needed to kill a bill on a final Senate vote. It was even easier to kill a bill in committee, which consisted of three to five Senators. The 1935 Assembly referred to the Senate as the “Gas Chamber.” (Chas. H. Russell, “Carson Chatter,” *The Ely Record*, 1 March 1935) The name continued to be used for several sessions “because of the large number of bills which pass the assembly and never see the light of day in the
legislation that made it over the first hurdle – passage in the Assembly – and into the Senate. Of that legislation, 87 percent passed the Senate and was sent on to the Governor. Most of those bills were approved. A small handful were vetoed and, as was usually the case in Nevada, sustained at the next session. For the most part, women’s success in the Senate compared favorably with the success rate for all bills, which indicates that women’s legislation was not dismissed simply on the basis of the sponsor’s sex.

In sheer numbers, the women lawmakers, like their male counterparts, did not introduce a substantial number of measures until the Legislature began developing its professional staff branch in 1947. Between 1919 and 1949, each woman introduced ten or fewer; the one exception was McGuire, who introduced a total of eighteen bills during her two-term tenure. Exceptions existed among the men, too, such as Anthony Jurich who personally introduced twenty-eight measures in 1923 and Julian Thurston who sponsored thirty-eight in 1937, but male legislators also introduced, on average, fewer than ten measures before 1949. Although the Assembly employed an attorney to draft bills, he was engaged only during the course of the session, so the total number of bills also stayed fairly consistent during this time. In 1921, the entire Legislature introduced just under upper chamber.” The Senate returned the favor by calling the Assembly “the snake pit.” (“2 Chambers Adopt Nicknames—Only For Other House,” Nevada State Journal, 23 March 1949.) The “large number” of Assembly bills that did not pass the Senate in 1949 was fifty-four, out of two hundred and fifty-three sent to the Senate, illustrating the power of perception over reality.
five hundred; twenty-four years later, in 1945, the total barely passed five hundred. By 1947, the Assembly was ten members larger, and the Legislature employed year-round staff to draft legislation. In 1949, the number of bills shot up 48 percent and continued to increase. In 1955, legislators introduced well over eight hundred measures, a 70 percent increase over the 1921 session. The numbers of women-sponsored bills increased, too. The twenty-three female lawmakers who served between 1919 and 1947 introduced a total of one hundred and twelve measures. The six Assemblywomen who served between 1949 and 1956 introduced one hundred and sixty-five measures. To be fair, that number reflects the astonishing number of bills introduced by Maude Frazier in her various capacities, but the employment of year-round bill-drafting staff certainly benefited both men and women lawmakers.

Many of these women told reporters that they were interested in women’s legislation. But female-focused legislation was rare and typically focused on the fiscal relationship between husband and wife. In 1919, Sadie Hurst introduced a bill that would have required a wife’s consent, in addition to husband’s, for the sale of community property; it died in the Senate. Twenty years later, Luella Drumm introduced a bill that would have given one spouse full title of community property upon the other spouse’s death. The measure was obviously intended to benefit widows. Her local newspaper supported the “entirely fair amendment to the existing law,” but lamented its expected failure, explaining that “most of the opposition to it can be traced probably to something that dies hard in
many men—a profound belief in their own superiority.”\textsuperscript{214} Despite Drumm’s attempts to move the bill, it remained in parliamentary limbo until she returned to the Assembly after her own husband’s funeral. Although the Assembly did not pass the bill easily, the members obviously advanced the measure out of respect for an esteemed colleague. The Senate, feeling no such camaraderie, did not approve the legislation.\textsuperscript{215} Maude Frazier attempted to move a similar bill in 1955, but it was the only one of her eight personal bills that failed to reach the Governor’s desk.

Of the women lawmakers’ successful bills, only one concerned women alone. Drumm successfully moved Assembly Bill 282, which permitted married women to register to vote and file for office in their own names, rather than their husbands’ names. For the most part, however, one looks in vain at the long list of women’s post-suffrage legislation for bills, or even resolutions, that obviously attempted to advance women’s equality. Instead, one is likely to find an array of interests, some of which provided certain benefits to Nevada women and Nevada families.


\textsuperscript{215} “Sudden Death of A.D. Drumm, Sr., Is Shock to Fallon Community,” \textit{The Fallon Eagle}, 4 March 1939. Assembly Bill 5 was reported out of committee three days after the funeral. It failed on the first vote, then was reconsidered and passed by a small margin. \textit{Journal of the Assembly 1939}, 254, 269, 336, 337, 342, 353. It died in the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Elections. \textit{Journal of the Senate 1939}, 235.
So what kinds of topics did interest the Bridge Generation? Marguerite Gosse successfully established Nevada’s nurse licensing program; Mary Rose championed free public libraries; and Frances Friedhoff addressed workers’ compensation. Mary Sharp “was a recognized authority on farm and ranch problems” during the 1943 session; her one bill, which was successful, concerned school funding. Glenn Grier introduced legislation concerned with banking; Hazel Wines, with historical exhibits; and Lois Washburn, with law enforcement-related interstate compacts. Helen Williams, Edna Montrose, and Aloys Smith introduced bills concerned with children’s welfare. Williams was successful; Smith was not. Both Williams and Edna Montrose also introduced measures to institute the federal Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program in Nevada; neither passed. Certainly, much of this legislation involved topics that tend to

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216 Attempts had been made in previous sessions to require nurse licensure, but none succeeded until 1923 when Gosse utilized sophisticated parliamentary maneuvers and skillful lobbying in the Senate to get her bill, A.B. 82, to the Governor and signed. Rose successfully shepherded A.B. 168 in 1925; Friedhoff’s only measure, Senate Bill 176, passed unanimously.


218 In 1935, Grier introduced A.B. 171, which passed, and A.B. 172, which did not; Wines succeeded in getting her controversial A.B. 101 to the Governor’s desk, but he vetoed it. The veto was sustained in 1937. Also in 1937, Washburn introduced four interstate compact measures, but all died.

219 In 1941, Williams’s A.B. 94 would have established a county tax to pay for the ADC program; Montrose’s A.B. 145, introduced in 1945, relied on state and county funds, but did not specify a means by which to generate them. In 1951, Smith was a cosponsor for two adoption bills that were referred to—and
be categorized as women’s issues—nurses, libraries, education, children’s welfare—but many men in both parties were also interested in legislation that addressed these concerns. Indeed, women lawmakers needed to work with men to get the bills drafted, considered, passed, and signed. To do so, they utilized fiscal language and related their interests to the state’s economic situation. Maude Frazier, arguably the most effective education advocate in the Nevada Legislature before 1960, said, “I realize these schools need much more money than my bill proposes to give them, but we’ve got to be realistic about this problem on the legislative level, too.” Concerned about both children and the state’s financial situation, Frazier demonstrated fiscal maternalism in action.

The vast majority of women’s successful legislation can be categorized as concerned with either government organization or the educational system. Measures that concern government organization include those that regulated optometrists and nurses, reduced the terms of the Relief Board members, and concerned state and local libraries. Much of the education legislation addressed salaries and benefits for teachers, curriculum requirements, bonds and other funding for school construction, and instructions to school districts about facilities and purchasing materials. Legislation that fundamentally reorganized Nevada’s
died in—the committee she chaired. Nevada finally began an ADC program in 1955. Women’s involvement (and strategic noninvolvement) in the establishment of ADC is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

220 “Increased School Aid Is Sought in Measure,” Reno Evening Gazette, 11 February 1953.
school system in 1955 and 1956 came from the Assembly Committee on Education, chaired by Maude Frazier.

The Bridge Generation’s legislation must be understood as originating in their business experiences as managers of employees, structures, and money, but this does not mean that their sense of themselves as women did not come into play. Not surprisingly, they did not self-identify as feminists, a label attached to the more radical National Woman’s Party, but most of their successful measures did improve women’s lives in Nevada by facilitating government employment opportunities, higher salaries for teachers, and better school facilities for children.

After Legislative Service

The entire membership of the Nevada Assembly was elected during every even-numbered year, which meant that all of these women had to choose whether or not to run again. Most chose to do so: eighteen of the twenty-eight Assemblywomen ran for re-election at least once. Of those, six women won at least one of their bids for re-election. Ethel McGuire, Alma Woods, Aloys Smith, Maude Frazier, Hazel Denton, and Mabel Isbell all won their campaigns to return to the Nevada Assembly. As a percentage, it seems the women had a dismal re-election rate—22 percent of all of the Assemblywomen returned to the Assembly—but a comparison to the return rates for the entire Assembly is instructive. From 1919 through 1943, the percentage of all Assembly members, as well as of Assemblymen, who were re-elected to the next Legislature never exceeded thirty-nine. In other words, nearly two-thirds of the members in each
Assembly failed, for whatever reason, to return to their Assembly seats. Among the male members who served between 1919 and 1943, only 26 percent returned.

Beginning in 1943, the re-election rate improves in total and for both men and women, reflecting a growing professionalization of legislative service, yet it rarely exceeded 50 percent. After 1948, women legislators tended to run for re-election and tended to win. All but one of the women who served between 1948 and 1956 were re-elected at least once, and Maude Frazier was returned to the Assembly multiple times. Table 3.2 lists the women who ran for re-election and the outcome of their campaigns.

Table 3.2  Assemblywomen Who Ran For Re-election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year First Elected</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>County</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Outcome Of Re-Election Attempts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>Sadie Hurst</td>
<td>Washoe</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Lost in 1920 primary election</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Marguerite Gosse</td>
<td>Washoe</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Ran under new married name; lost in 1924 primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Louise Hays</td>
<td>Nye</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Lost in 1924 general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Mary Rose</td>
<td>Humboldt</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Lost in 1926. Lost in 1932 primary in different district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>Maym Schweble</td>
<td>Nye</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Lost in 1936 general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year First Elected</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>County</td>
<td>Party</td>
<td>Outcome Of Re-Election Attempts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------</td>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>Ethel McGuire</td>
<td>Nye</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Won in 1928. Ran for State Treasurer in 1930; lost in the primary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Glenn Grier</td>
<td>White Pine</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Lost in 1944 general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>Hazel Wines</td>
<td>Humboldt</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Lost in 1942 primary in different district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>Lois Washburn</td>
<td>Nye</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Lost in 1948 and 1954 general elections in a different district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1938</td>
<td>Luella Drumm</td>
<td>Churchill</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Lost in 1940 and 1944 general</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>Mabel Isbell</td>
<td>Washoe</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Won in 1956. In 1958, won in primary, but lost in general</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Women had many reasons for not running again for an Assembly seat.

Rita Millar had not enjoyed legislative service, apparently feeling, as one of her
contemporaries observed, “naïve and ineffective in the face of rough and tumble state politics.” Helen Williams had run unsuccessfully for a county office; Aloys Smith accepted a job with a local utility that prohibited political involvement; Hazel Denton’s health precluded any attempt at a third term; and Maude Frazier had been appointed Lt. Governor of Nevada. Newspaper rumors held that Pinger would run for her Assembly seat again in 1930 and Frances Friedhoff would run for the Senate seat to which she had been appointed in 1935. Although their success was probable, neither ultimately filed for the office. Marriage (or remarriage) immediately following a session probably prevented some women from running. A few moved out of their districts, such as Fronica Castle who was divorced and eventually moved to California. One factor that should not be overlooked was the cost of running. In 1932, Mary Rose expressed dismay at the high fee of $15 required to be paid at the time she filed her statement of candidacy.


Choosing not to run for re-election or losing the bid did not remove these women from Nevada politics and governance. Rita Millar ended up in the State Treasurer’s Office where she was hired as a clerk in 1935 by newly-elected Treasurer Dan Franks, a Democrat, who continued to promote Millar until she was Deputy Treasurer, the position she held when she died twenty years later. Governor Charles Russell, a Republican, ordered the state’s flags flown at half-mast in honor of her service to Nevada.223 Other women, such as Glenn Grier, Lois Washburn, and Helen Williams, also transitioned into government jobs.224 Ethel McGuire and Mary Sharp taught school; Maym Schweble opened a café; and Alma Woods returned to her ranch and her reputation as the best cattle judge in central Nevada.225 Most of the women, like Florence Swasey and Martha Woolridge, maintained their political party activities, and some continued to


interact with the Legislature. Nearly a decade after her session, Alice Towle
hosted, in her Carson City home, a party for legislators and staff, and at least three
former Assemblywomen returned to the Assembly Chambers as visitors.\textsuperscript{226} When
the former Assemblywomen and Senator died, the Legislature paused to
recognize their contributions to the Nevada, including their legislative service,
and lauded these women with echoes of Senator Friedhoff’s own response to the
question of whether her work had had value:

\begin{quote}
Yes, indeed. Not because of public recognition—but for the deep
down inside me feeling that I did try to do my best to be of service
in my little world. Therefore, I should have no regrets when day is
done and I face the setting of the sun.\textsuperscript{227}
\end{quote}

With few exceptions—Alice Towle was killed in a car accident at age
thirty-eight; evidence of Ruth Averill after age forty-four cannot be located, and
Lois Washburn died from cancer at age fifty-seven—these women lived long
lives. Over two-thirds of them lived to be seventy years of age or older, and

\textsuperscript{226} Georgetta daily diary, 12 February 1931; “News About People You
Know,” \textit{Nevada State Journal}, 20 February 1937; \textit{Journal of the Assembly 1947}  

\textsuperscript{227} The Assembly and Senate each occasionally adopted memorial
resolutions in the first half of the twentieth century, but the passing of most
legislators, men and women both, happened without legislative
acknowledgement. After the addition of full-time staff to draft bills, memorial
resolutions became more common. Memorialized were former Assemblywomen
Denton, Drumm, Frazier, Isbell, Montrose, Olson, Sharp, Smith, and Woods and
former Senator Friedhoff, all of whom died after 1958. See the legislative
database (http://www.leg.state.nv.us/dbtw-wpd/LegSim.htm) for links to
memorial resolutions. Friedhoff’s words, which first appeared in the 1954 “Life
Story of First Woman State Senator,” were included in her memorial.
thirteen women survived into their eighties. Many of their descendents also
became active in politics and governance in Nevada. Alice Towle’s sister,
Charlotte Towle Sanford, was a legislative attaché and elected three times as
Churchill County Recorder, and her grandson, Bill Young, was elected Sheriff of
Clark County. Hazel Wines’s daughter, Gene Wines Segerblom, served in the
Assembly in the 1990s, and her grandson, Richard “Tick” Segerblom, was elected
to his third term in 2010. Frances Friedhoff’s son, George Friedhoff, Jr., married
Florence Swasey’s niece and served as Mayor of Yerington. Hazel Denton’s son,
Ralph, ran for Congress and, in 1958, managed Grant Sawyer’s successful
campaign for Governor. Myrtle Isbell, the daughter of Mabel Isbell, was on the
staffs of Nevada Senator George Malone and President Dwight D. Eisenhower
and served as the Nevada chair for the 1957 national convention of Republican
women. Mabel Isbell was also the godmother of James Todd Russell, the son of
Governor Charles Russell and, as of this writing, District Court Judge of the First
Judicial District Court in Carson City. Lois Washburn’s daughter-in-law, Gwen
Washburn, served fifteen years on the Churchill County Commissioner, and her
daughter, Lois Deimel Whealey, an environmental and progressive community
activist, helped found the International Museum on Women.228

228 “Charlotte Sanford,” Nevada State Journal, 23 November 1964; former
Clark County Sheriff Bill Young, personal conversation with author, Las Vegas,
Nevada, 29 June 2007; Segerblom, personal conversation, 2009; “Nevada
Legislators” online database; Helen Strosnider Friedhoff, telephone conversation
with author, 21 November 1994; Ralph Denton, A Liberal Conscience, ed.
Michael S. Green (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Program, 2001);
Conclusion

These Nevada women demonstrate that women who held public office tended to be women who could and would juggle multiple roles at the same time. They conducted busy, full lives in constant motion. The daughter of Assemblywoman Lois Washburn remembered that her mother was “a good parent and a community activist. Plus she always had a full-time job outside the home—teaching, ranching, civil service, whatever—in addition to political activity.”

Computer-assisted searches of digitized newspapers for references to these women revealed that they were daughters, wives, mothers, businesswomen, teachers, employees, and officers in charitable, religious, and political organizations, often simultaneously, and traveled often for business and pleasure. Many would probably have agreed with Alma Woods who, at the age of eighty-five years, wrote from her retirement home in Sun City, Arizona: “I have had such an interesting life and traveled so much and still do.”


229 Lois Whealey, email, 3 June 2010.

230 Woods to Glass, 21 September 1973, Woods Correspondence.
Their legislative experiences—committee assignments that related to their working lives and legislation that shared a sense of financial acumen more than any other factor—demonstrated that a business sense was more important to them, their colleagues, and their constituents than was a feminist perspective. Careful politicians, they acknowledged their sense of responsibility toward other women while simultaneously exhibiting a larger concern toward their districts and their state. By 1950, however, with the state’s educational system in disarray, women lawmakers could be more public about a shared female consciousness. In 1951, safe in the BPW bosom, Maude Frazier could state that “while men are prone to look at things from a business angle, women in politics are more interested in such things as child welfare, social legislation, and health.”231 Although the septuagenarian Frazier reflected suffragists’ hopes for post-suffrage political women, she also knew that BPW members would understand that “such things” also included an understanding of finances—in essence, a fiscal maternalism. Women’s concern for the welfare of women and children was not divorced from their care for the state’s economic health.

The Bridge Generation consisted of dynamic, mobile, and successful legislators. Their legislation did not plainly advance women’s equality, but many Nevada women benefited from women lawmakers’ legislative efforts. Their bills professionalized nursing, provided veterans’ exemptions from property taxes,

facilitated the adoption of children, and improved state institutions. In particular, education bills provided Nevada teachers, most of whom were women, with the highest salaries in the country, better benefits, and modern facilities. Nevada mothers obtained safe places to send their children for a sound education that produced good students for higher education, such as that offered at the new junior college—later, a full-fledged university—in Las Vegas, which resulted from Maude Frazier’s political savvy and legislative determination.

The next chapter explores the participation of these legislators in key legislation that shaped Nevada’s twentieth-century economy and policy of relying on nonresidents for the revenue to fund a growing state government. Their experiences vividly demonstrate that gender alone did not predict how the Bridge Generation would vote on these issues and complicate the evaluation of women’s legislative efficacy.
Chapter 4

“THE UP-GROWTH OF NEW INDUSTRIES”: FEDERAL FUNDING, SIN TAXES, AND WOMEN LAWMAKERS

Like newly-elected Assemblywoman Alice Towle, most twentieth-century Nevada legislators focused on “the up-growth of new industries and the bringing in of more people.” The state’s physical attributes, however, challenged those legislators. Natural resources, especially water, did not abound in Nevada and, therefore, did not contribute significantly to the state’s revenue. Minerals, arguably Nevada’s most valuable and prolific natural resource, enjoyed constitutional protection from most taxation: during this time, mining taxes rarely exceeded 2 percent of the state’s total receipts and usually were less than 1 percent. Any efforts to increase state revenues had to consider what one university professor deemed Nevada’s “peculiar economic conditions,” such as its “very small and unstable population,” its lack of industrial diversity, and its weak

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232 “She’s Going To Assembly,” Reno Evening Gazette, 13 November 1922.

233 The percentage of total revenue derived from the tax on the net proceeds of mines hit a high of 2.17% in 1919. After that, the percentage typically did not exceed 1 percent. In 1945, when the gambling tax was established, the percentage of receipts from the mining tax was 0.44; in 1955, when the sales tax was instituted, it was 0.29. The new sales tax produced much more revenue from mines, through their purchase of equipment and materials, than the net proceeds tax did. Annual Report of the State Controller, 1919-1960. The State Controller’s Report was produced by the State Printing Office each year. After every legislative session, the two reports that comprised the pertinent biennium were compiled with numerous other state agency reports and published in The Appendix to Journals of Senate and Assembly for each session.
Consequently, state legislators, regardless of party or gender, often turned to what some might call “unnatural resources” for revenue. With a growing reliance on federal funding and a tourist-driving economy, Nevada’s government was becoming more dependent on nonresidents, and women legislators’ business experiences prepared them for participation in the lawmaking that, directly or indirectly, sought money from those who did not live in the state. “Combin[ing] charm with plenty of business ability,” the women of the Bridge Generation brought their skills to the Legislature.

This chapter concentrates on state receipts from the federal government and from tourism, two of the largest categories of revenue in the state budget. During this time, funding attached to federal programs increased exponentially. Women lawmakers both contributed to the state’s growing dependence on federal funds and benefited from federally-funded employment. When federal funding faltered, the Legislature filled in the gaps with revenue from the state’s thriving industries in gambling, divorces, and weddings, and female lawmakers worked alongside male colleagues to facilitate these industries. Rarely, if ever, did women lawmakers attempt to slow or reverse Nevada’s increasing reliance on these


activities that the rest of the country deemed immoral. Women were not the leaders in these efforts, but their participation should not be overlooked. Indeed, the legislative experiences of the Bridge Generation graphically demonstrates that votes could not be predicted by the voter’s biological sex. Women’s leadership would emerge in the dogged pursuit of enhanced educational funding in the 1950s, culminating in the establishment of a sales tax, which is the topic of the next chapter. In this chapter, I explore their participation in the establishment of state programs to draw in federal funds and in the maintenance of Nevada’s unusual industries. In the process, I also ponder women’s limited interaction with the state Senate.

Federal Funding in Nevada

Nevada’s reliance on money from the national government arguably began with the Newlands Reclamation Act of 1902, which diverted river water to irrigate desert lands and facilitated the agricultural development of the western part of the state. The subsequent development attracted the families of future legislators Daisy Allen, Alice Towle, and Luella Drumm, all of whom settled in the reclamation district. That particular federal law did not deposit funds directly into the state’s bank account, but it demonstrated that federal investment could facilitate growth of the state’s population and industries, which would then make direct deposits in the form of property taxes. By the 1920s, Nevada also began receiving direct federal funding for highways, and in the 1930s, as New Deal programs expanded, Nevada became the highest per capita recipient of federal
funds in the country. Through the middle of the twentieth century, Nevada benefited both directly and indirectly from the construction of federal public works projects, especially Hoover Dam near Las Vegas, and military complexes, such as the Hawthorne Army Depot, Nellis Air Force Base, and the Nevada Test Site. Like other western states in the twentieth century, Nevada leaned on Congress and federal administrative agencies to assist in shaping the state’s economy.

Highway and road construction first brought federal funds into the state budget in significant amounts. The percentage of state receipts that come from federal sources rose quickly once it began, then fluctuated as other sources were added to the state budget, as illustrated in Chart 4.1.

Chart 4.1 Percentage of State Receipts from Federal Funds, 1919-1960

Source: State Controllers’ Reports, 1919-1960


The percentage of the state budget that came from federal funds increased when state revenue sources lagged and decreased when the Legislature significantly raised the property tax rate (as it did with a nearly 10 percent jump in 1932) or instituted a new revenue source, such as the gas tax in 1923 (doubled in 1925) or the gambling tax in 1945. Sometimes, legislators took both actions. During the heart of the Great Depression in 1935, the Legislature, with the encouragement of the Governor, increased the property tax rate by 13 percent and created a new liquor tax, supported by Assemblywomen Glenn Grier and Hazel Wines and Senator Frances Friedhoff. Other sources of revenue, such as taxes on gambling and retail sales, caused the percentage of federal funds to drop, but in raw numbers, the amount of federal money rarely decreased from year to year as illustrated in Chart 4.2.

Chart 4.2 Amount of Nevada’s Federal Funding, 1919-1960

Source: State Controllers’ Reports, 1919-1960

238 “Legislative Session Is Over as Assembly Attacks Senate,” Reno Evening Gazette, 30 March 1935.
At the beginning of the 1931 session, Governor Fred Balzar, a Republican, assured the Legislature that “the existing Nationwide condition of financial stress is but lightly felt within our own borders, when comparisons are made with conditions prevailing in other states, and this is partly due to our solid financial standing and partly to the large federal expenditures which have heretofore been made within the State, or those authorized to be made.” Balzar’s speech occurred well before the commencement of the New Deal programs, so he was referring to federal spending on programs that affected the landscape, such as highway construction, forest protection, and livestock grazing leases. The Governor was also anticipating revenue from the sale of power and water from Hoover Dam, on the southern tip of the state, where construction had begun.

In 1941, Helen Williams and other legislators introduced a number of measures seeking to capitalize on the huge dam’s production, making it one of the major issues of the session. The Clark County delegation worked diligently to keep the $300,000 annual payment in the county coffers, but they were outvoted by the rest of the Legislature, and the money was deposited in the state general fund. Humor often revealed true feelings. From the spoof of that Legislature came this song put to the tune of “Mexicali Rose”:

Boulder Revenue, I love you.
Say that you'll be mine, some lucky day!

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Boulder Revenue, I need you.  
Come into my arms, and there you'll stay! 
Boulder Revenue, you charm me! 
I love your power and waste line. 
Boulder Revenue, I crave you! 
Boulder Revenue, be mine!²⁴⁰

By 1944, Nevada’s portion of the Boulder Dam revenue was one of the largest payments the state received from the federal government for non-human services.

Federal spending on programs that directly affected people, such as subsidy payments for the elderly and needy children, came late to Nevada. When Governor Balzar presented his message, nearly 95 percent of federal funding was generated by or for landscape-related projects, but by fiscal year 1951, spending on human-related programs had cut that percentage to sixty-seven. Regardless of their source or destination, federal funds early became crucial to the state’s financial health and remained so throughout the twentieth century.

This section explores the participation of women legislators in three specific areas funded by the federal government: highway construction, vocational education, and assistance to needy children. Among the numerous programs created or enhanced by federal funding or Congressional mandates, three topics, in particular, reflect different aspects of women’s involvement with the Legislature. Highway construction established the first major federal/state partnership, which was supported by women legislators. One woman

²⁴⁰ Sponsored by the Rotary Club, this spoof replaced the traditional Third House. “Commonwealth Saved Unanimously As Rotary One Horse Legislature Winds Up 2-Hour, 2-Bill Session,” *Nevada State Journal*, 11 March 1941.
unsuccessfully attempted to maintain some of the federal money at the county level (not surprising considering that the Legislature was apportioned by counties), and another benefited personally. Federal funds for vocational education programs facilitated, in many ways, the political career of the one woman who was appointed to the state Senate. In addition, women lawmakers participated directly in the adoption of the federal Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program. Early efforts failed, but the final success was a direct result of women’s focused drive to establish a sales tax.

Highway Funding and the Gas Tax

Americans quickly fell in love with the new automobile early in the twentieth century, and by 1918, almost five million vehicles of various types scooted around the country, driving the necessity for more and better roads. Between 1890 and 1929, the Good Roads movement ensured that “[g]raded and graveled rural highways became the primary good offered by the state to their citizens,” and the number of road miles in the United States rose well over 200 percent between 1904 and 1925. Some states, especially those with small

populations and tax bases, turned to the federal government for funding assistance. In 1916, the Federal Aid Act provided matching funds to states with highway departments. The next year, the Nevada Legislature instituted the Highway Department, but had difficulty raising the state portion of the match.

Nevada, like most states, relied on property taxes to provide the necessary revenue to support state government in the nineteenth century. By the end of that century, it was not a sufficient mechanism. In 1921, Governor Emmet Boyle, a Democrat, lamented that “some 40% of our citizens pay no very substantial tax on property.” Act.

Actually, the percentage of Nevadans who paid property tax was much lower. During the 1920s, 53 percent of Nevadans did not own their own homes and, thus, did not pay general property taxes. The majority of property taxes in Nevada were paid by railroads and ranchers, both of whom were well-represented at the Legislature and able to keep the rate low. Additionally, the small number of registered motor vehicles in Nevada limited the usefulness of licensing fees.

The 1921 Federal Highway Act, designed to funnel federal dollars to states for the construction of a national highway system, provided a funding formula friendly to states with small populations and large swaths of public land, such as Nevada where a large percentage of the state consisted of unappropriated

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public land. This change significantly enhanced the amount of federal money available to Nevada. In the 1920s, Nevada’s Congressional delegation worked vigorously to ensure that the narrow end of the federal funding funnel pointed directly at their state, which set a pattern for future federal representatives.

While the Congressional delegation diligently shook the federal coffers, lawmakers in Carson City searched for alternatives to the property tax to pay for the maintenance of the new road system and the construction of local roads. In 1922, staff from the Nevada Department of Highways surveyed other state highway departments and found enthusiastic support for a levy on gasoline, an option already exercised by the Legislatures in the neighboring states of Oregon and Arizona. As the four Assemblywomen settled into their seats for the 1923 Legislative Session, most legislators already favored the imposition of the gas tax at two cents for each gallon of motor vehicle fuel sold. By the end of the session, a two-cent-per-gallon excise tax, distributed to state and county highway funds, had been approved by most legislators, including all of the Assemblywomen. Revenues quickly accumulated, assisted by a 1925 doubling of the tax rate, again supported by all Assemblywomen.\(^{243}\)

In 1927, Assemblywoman Ethel B. McGuire attempted to preserve the counties’ share of the gas tax bonanza, but was not successful as the State, in

response to federal demands, retained more of the motor vehicle fuel revenue.\footnote{McGuire’s legislation was Assembly Bill 31, ultimately killed on the last day of the session. The motion to table a bill was typically handled by a voice vote, but McGuire requested a roll call vote in order to get her colleagues on the record about this important state/local issue. Twenty Assemblyman voted to table it; McGuire, obviously, voted against the motion. \textit{Journal of the Assembly 1927} (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1927), 304.}

Two years later, Governor Balzar recommended that the Legislature maximize federal highway funding opportunities “inasmuch as there is an immediate need for a far-reaching and comprehensive highway program for the coming two years to relieve the unemployment situation.”\footnote{Gov. Balzar, “Message to the Legislature,” 1931, 17.} Federal highway funds ebbed and flowed over the next two decades, then received a significant increase from President Dwight Eisenhower’s interstate construction project. As a contractor, the Isbell Construction Company benefited greatly from Nevada’s highway-building program. In 1954, C.V. Isbell encouraged his wife, Mabel, a major stockholder in her family’s business, to run for the Legislature and protect the construction industry’s interests. Long active in the Republican Party and a close friend to Governor Charles Russell, also a Republican, Mabel Isbell did not need much convincing. She easily won a seat in the Assembly and, during her two terms, “did much to assist the construction industry in resolving some of its
problems,” according to a company executive, especially through her membership on the Assembly Committee on Roads and Transportation.\textsuperscript{246}

Highway construction served several purposes in Nevada. For one, it marked a modern state. The movement of people and goods was accelerating, and Nevada was not going to be left behind. Improved and additional roads provided important routes for Nevada’s products—particularly minerals, such as gold and silver—to leave the state and for other items, including tourists, to be imported. A decent road system was useful, too, for people in the habit of moving about, looking for the next big strike. The roads also brought visitors and potential residents to Nevada, and more people, as Alice Towle astutely noted, provided the key for the continued improvement of her state. From the legislature’s perspective, highway funding demonstrated the economic power that the federal government could bring to an area. Through federal funding, a sparsely-populated area could aspire to enjoy the same amenities as the more populated parts of the country without excessively taxing its residents.

Vocational Education

Two congressional measures, the Smith-Hughes Act, passed in 1917, and the George-Barden Act, passed in 1946, sent millions of dollars to Nevada and

other states for vocational education. Typically focused on high school training in agriculture, industry, and home economics, many boys and girls benefited from these programs, which appeared to be noncontroversial in Nevada. The Legislature adopted the necessary enabling legislation, including the speedy establishment of a State Board for Vocational Education. In 1923, however, the Legislature balked at adding two additional representatives—one for agriculture and one for home economics—and settled on mandating just the agricultural representative. Governor James Scrugham, a Democrat, countered the action by appointing Frances Friedhoff, both a rancher and a homemaker, to fill the new slot. She had participated in drafting the proposed legislation and would be a long-serving, active member of the board. Her able work with vocational education programs facilitated her appointment to the Nevada Senate in 1935.

Federal programs had not only enhanced Friedhoff’s political reputation, but had directly caused the open Senate seat. Frances’s husband, George Friedhoff, was a ten-year veteran of the Nevada Senate and a member of the powerful “bull bloc [that had] dominated the state’s taxation and fiscal policies”

247 Federal policy concerning vocational education has not been thoroughly investigated by historians. A useful monograph that includes the topic is David B. Tyack, The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974).

since World War I. Early in 1935, George was appointed director of the Federal Housing Administration in Nevada, and his new federal employer soon demanded that he chose between his vocation and his avocation. George attempted to hold onto his Senate seat during the key 1935 session, but finally capitulated and resigned less than two weeks before the session’s scheduled end. The Lyon County Commission soon appointed Frances to the open seat, an action that was hailed happily by many political observers. Carson City’s newspaper reported:

The highly accomplished widely known and universally respected and liked Mrs. Friedhoff enjoys the distinction of being the first member of the fair sex to be a member of the senate of Nevada. The list of ladies who have been elected to the Nevada assembly and who have made fine records in that legislative body is quite long, over a period of sixteen years, but to date the men have had the title of “senator” all for their very own. It will be up to Mrs. Friedhoff now to prove that a woman can be every bit as good a senate member as a man—and she will.

Frances Friedhoff had already had extensive political experience within the state’s Democratic Party. She was Nevada’s Democratic national

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251 “Seen, Heard, Or Thought,” *Carson City Daily Appeal and Carson City News*, 18 March 1935. Although this newspaper’s publisher was female, the paper did not report much about the new Senator after her appointment.
committeewoman in 1924 and chosen by the voters as a presidential elector in 1932. As the primary manager of her family’s ranch, she had also significant financial expertise. Not insignificantly, she was likely to follow her husband’s wishes. Forty-two years old and the mother of one seventeen-year-old son, Friedhoff told a newspaper reporter that she was particularly “happy to know that the people had so much faith in my husband and that they trusted I would carry out his policies.” When it came to political issues, “I always found he was right. All in all, I think he has been a very good senator, even if he is my husband.” When quizzed about pending legislation to provide assistance to expectant mothers in dire financial straits, Friedhoff firmly replied “that she favored any legislation which was beneficial to the welfare of womanhood.”

252 The bill was moving quickly through the legislative process, and its unanimous approval in the Senate indicated that it was likely that her husband would have also favored this particular legislation. Passed by both houses and signed by the Governor, the bill made the counties, and not the state, responsible for providing assistance to needy mothers. By placing the fiscal onus on the individual counties, legislators were not terribly concerned about the legislation.253


Although Friedhoff was expected, both by herself and others, to follow in her husband’s footsteps, she was not given his leadership roles. Instead, she was assigned to chair the Public Lands Committee, a result of her extensive knowledge of federal land issues and agriculture. She did not serve on any other committees, probably because the end of session was so near. Her one piece of legislation also reflected a federal relationship. Designed to extend workers’ compensation protection to state employees who were working on federal relief projects, the bill passed both houses and was signed into law.\textsuperscript{254} Although there was talk of her running for the seat in 1936 when her term ended, she did not, most likely due to her chronic, but unexplained, bad health. Friedhoff used her title during the remainder of her term, but her actual legislative service totaled only fourteen days. As it turned out, Friedhoff was the only female Senator before Helen Herr’s election in 1966 to a new seat created by the federally-forced reapportionment of the state Senate.\textsuperscript{255}

\textbf{Nevada Women and the State Senate}

The lack of women in the Senate—indeed, the few numbers of women who even ran for that office—vividly demonstrates the entrenched clubbiness of


the Legislature’s “gas chamber” for much of the twentieth century. The Assembly could be boisterous and had consistently high turnover rates, but the Senate, composed of one man from each county, was “kind of on a different level, a little bit ‘on high.’”257 The average age of a Senator was nearly fifty-four years, and Senators, who served two sessions during each four-year term, typically won re-election, which meant that the Senate turnover rate each session was much lower than the Assembly’s. Although it no longer had the power to name Nevada’s U.S. Senator, the state Senate maintained an aura of power and mystique through the use of closed-door executive sessions. Much of its business was conducted so secretly that its published journals are half the size of the Assemblies, even though both houses met at the same time on the same days.

256 “After many of the assembly bills met defeat in the senate (some needed that), the assembly unofficially named the upper house the “Gas Chamber.” Charles H. Russell, “Carson Chatter,” The Ely Record, 1 March 1935. A newspaper editor, Russell was also a member of the 1935 Assembly. Assemblyman Clel Georgetta declared that “[i]f it were not for our good conservative Senate this state would have some terrible laws.” Clel E. Georgetta daily journal, 9 February 1931, Clel E. Georgetta Papers, Nevada Historical Society, Reno. Robbins Cahill, a 1939 Assemblyman, recalled that Senate committees “had just virtually complete power to throttle a bill.” Robbins E. Cahill, Recollections of Work in State Politics, Government, Taxation, Gaming Control, Clark County Administration, and The Nevada Resort Association. An oral history conducted by Mary Ellen Glass. (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Project), 141.

257 Cahill, Recollections of Work in State Politics, 142. Mel Close, who was Speaker in 1967, remembered that the Assembly “was kind of a wild and wooly place. The Senate, I think, was more thoughtful because there were older people and it didn’t turn over as often….The Senate had more institutional knowledge and longevity.” Melvin D. Close, Jr., An Oral History by Dana R. Bennett (Carson City: Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau, 2009), 15.
The two houses operated completely as separate institutions, and often one did not know what the other was doing. In 1943, each house introduced and passed a bill to resurrect an old statute about the performance of wedding ceremonies. Both houses became aware of the identical legislation when the two bills literally passed in the hall as staff carried each from one end of the Capitol Building to the other. The sponsors flipped a coin to see whose bill would go forward, and the assemblyman won.\(^{258}\) As late as 1955, Maude Frazier’s visit to the Senate merited a rare mention of that body in Hazel Denton’s diary: “Miss Frazier walk[ed] alone to the Senate and [came] back smiling” upon the discovery that an important Assembly bill was nearly identical to a pending Senate bill.\(^{259}\)

The only women allowed to remain in the Senate Chambers on a regular basis were staff, but even then the clubbiness prevailed. The first woman appointed as Secretary of the Senate, Florence Buckingham, was the daughter of long-serving Senator John H. Miller.\(^{260}\) Nevada’s Senators and those who assisted them into office simply could not conceive of a woman as a full-fledged member.

\(^{258}\) “Haight Winner In Toss Of Coin,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, 4 March 1943.

\(^{259}\) The Assembly bill was introduced by the Committee on Education, which Frazier chaired and of which Denton was a member. In her diary, Denton refers to the legislation as “our” bill. Hazel Baker Denton daily journals, 16 March 1955, Hazel Baker Denton Papers, MS 97-03, Special Collections, UNLV Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

\(^{260}\) Buckingham had been an attaché in both the Assembly and Senate for several years. The Observer, “Off the Record,” *Tonopah Daily Times-Bonanza*, 18 January 1941.
The Senate closed its doors on female membership at the first opportunity. In 1919, Oline Stewart, supported by both Republicans and Democrats, was nearly chosen to replace her husband, a Nye County Republican Senator who had died just prior to the start of the legislative session. Ultimately, some Nye County political elites, satisfied that their interests would be protected by the large Republican majority already in the Senate, blocked her progress. Nye County went without a Senator in 1919 rather than send a woman. Oline Stewart was, however, appointed to replace her husband in business as the resident agent for blasting powder businesses in southern Nevada. “Long prominent in public and political affairs in Nevada,” Stewart ran for several local and state offices, winning some at the county level, but never filed for the Legislature despite the urging of friends to run for the Senate in 1920.261

During this period, only three women filed the necessary paperwork and formally campaigned for a state Senate seat. Grace Thompson, secretary of her county’s Democratic central committee and tagged by the press as a “prominent resident,” ran for the Mineral County Senate seat in 1932, but lost to the entrenched male incumbent. In 1942, Reno teacher Margaret Pilkington sought

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the Washoe County Senate seat, but lost by a large margin in the Democratic primary, coincidentally, to former Senator George Friedhoff. In 1952, rural schoolteacher and BPW member Mabel W. Niceley came in dead last in the Republican Party primary for Nye County Senator.262

Nevada’s political elite worked hard to maintain control of the Senate because, as Senator Noble Getchell asserted, that house could kill any “radical bills” or “anything detrimental.”263 In other words, any legislation that might adversely affect ranching, mining, or the nascent tourist industry could be stopped in the Senate. Controlling that body was not hard to do. The Senate had only seventeen members (one from each county), and in Nevada, as Getchell patiently explained to an inquiring university professor from the East Coast, “[t]he political leaders … knows [sic] nearly everyone in the State by their first name.”264 Under Getchell’s direction, the Republicans established a particularly effective organization at the state and county levels and maintained a long hold on the Senate throughout the twentieth century, despite Democratic majorities in the

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263 Noble Getchell (NG) to W.C. Dewey, 22 November 1954, fol. RNC 427/1/22/25, box 1, Noble H. Getchell Collection, MS NC 427, Nevada Historical Society, Reno. (hereinafter, “Getchell, NHS”)

264 NG to Professor R.A. Chaddock, Columbia University, 30 March 1929, fol. 2, box 1, Noble Hamilton Getchell Papers, NC 395, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno. (hereinafter, “Getchell, UNR”)

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Assembly and at the national level. Getchell did support political women, such as his Republican national committee colleague, Oline Stewart, to whom he would give his proxy, and he was proud of his two nieces in public life. Christine Russell served many years as a deputy sheriff in Ely, and Lena Streshley was one of the first Nevada women elected to a county office. Getchell advocated the appointment of a woman as the federal postmaster at Midas, and he insisted that “[i]t would please me to see [Mrs. McNeeley] get the reappointment” as game warden in Lander County. But the state Senate was different. Much of the legislation that passed during the first half of the twentieth century facilitated wealth-creating activities for men in mining and other business ventures, such as gambling and saloons (even during Prohibition), making the membership of the Senate vital to their economic interests. Getchell’s political and business colleague, George Wingfield, despaired when just one Senate seat appeared to be a sure win for the Democrats: “[w]e have lost control absolutely.”

Wingfield was the personality around whom many Nevada politicians orbited in the 1910s and 1920s. As the wealthiest man in the state, his considerable economic resources contributed to the development of his political

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265 NG to Herman A. Wagner, 28 December 1943, fol. RNC 427/1/13/52, box 1, Getchell, NHS; NG to unknown, 11 May 1940; fol. RNC 427/1/8/37, box 1, Getchell, NHS; NG to Congressman Samuel S. Arentz, 29 March 1928, fol. 1, box 1, Getchell, UNR; NG to Humphrey Kearsn [sic], Lander County Commissioner, 3 March 1928, fol. 9, box 1, Getchell, UNR.

266 George Wingfield to John H. Miller, 21 September 21, box 10, George Wingfield Papers, Nevada Historical Society, Reno.
power, which he chose to exercise behind the scenes. He was, for a time, the Republican national committeeman for Nevada, but he did not hold any elected office, other than University Regent. Instead, he worked his relationships with state and federal politicians to affect changes that would be favorable not only to his personal business interests but to the state’s economy as he perceived it. Although Wingfield’s power waned decades ago, many Nevadans continue to believe in the existence of a political machine that he controlled from his office on the second floor of the First National Bank building in downtown Reno.

Comprised of Wingfield and his business friends, such as George Thatcher, the Democratic National Committeeman with whom Wingfield shared a receptionist and telephone number, the political machine was assumed to be issuing directions to, and ensuring the elections of, legislators whose most desirable attributes were not the political parties to which they belonged, but whether they would support Nevada business. Wingfield biographer C. Elizabeth Raymond cogently refutes the existence of a traditional political machine, however, and effectively demonstrates that “Wingfield never felt that he was in a position simply to issue political orders. Instead, he consulted and coaxed, laboriously currying favor for his positions among the relevant players and repaying their loyalty, in turn, with his gratitude and the prospect of future favors.”

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machine can be debated, but Wingfield’s political power and influence was certainly extensive.

For Getchell, Wingfield, and other Republican elites in Nevada, the best man for a Senate job was, without question, a man. Despite their dedication to their party, these men did not demonstrate any inclination to recommend or even encourage a Republican woman to run for the state Senate. Considering that Wingfield stayed connected to Tonopah long after he moved to Reno, he may have been involved in blocking Oline Stewart from the 1919 Senate. Forty years later, however, the political influences of both Wingfield and Getchell had waned considerably, When Mabel Nicely filed for the Republican nomination in 1952, both men were long retired and nearing the ends of their lives, but the pattern had been established.

Although split by factions, especially between those who supported U.S. Senator Patrick McCarran and those in Vail Pittman’s camp, the Democrats were no less interested in the state Senate, but they rarely succeeded in taking control of that house.268 In 1950, lobbyist John Mueller analyzed the Senate’s membership for McCarran, concluding that “it is a good Senate and one that can be of great help.” Even though the vote was not yet taken, he assured the U.S. Senator, “[a]lmost everyone one is a personal friend of mine.” Mueller reported

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that over half of the State Senators were “100% McCarran,” but none were “100% Pittman.” Mueller correctly expected the Republicans to control the Senate, but he noted that at least six were “liberal.” Mueller had much experience with the state Senate, having built the necessary relationships and facilitated sufficient campaign funds to ensure that the Senates of the 1920s were friendly to George Wingfield’s interests.

It is likely that the Democrats recruited Grace Thompson to run for the state Senate in 1932 from Mineral County. She did not have a primary, indicating that the Democrats fully expected to lose to the powerful Republican Senator John Miller who had held the office for nearly a decade. As historians have noted, political parties were not shy about nominating female candidates for races they expected to lose. Thompson garnered a respectable number of votes, losing by fewer than ninety, and was rewarded for her efforts. After the election, Congressman James Scrugham, also a Democrat, appointed Thompson postmaster for her hometown of Mina, and she was considered for other patronage

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269 John V. Mueller to Patrick McCarran, 11 September 1950, fol. 84, box 4, Eva Bertrand Adams Papers, 82-11, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno.

270 Raymond, George Wingfield, 152.

It is doubtful, however, that party officials encouraged Margaret Pilkington to enter the primary against such a party stalwart as George Friedhoff. Perhaps the teacher, who also served as first vice-president of Reno High School’s Parent-Teacher Association, was urged into the race by educational reformers, but little information about her campaign has survived. Regardless of the reasons, the candidacies of only two women for the state Senate between suffrage and 1966 indicate that Democratic leaders were no more interested in female Senators than were the Republicans.

With members of both sexes coming from various towns and occupations around the state, the Assembly reflected Nevada’s diverse population, and female members could and did do well in that house. Many women of both parties served on key committees and shepherded their legislation into law. Some were re-elected. Their various successes gave the appearance of some parity in the legislative environment, but the structure of the state’s mini-Congress ensured that the Senate’s doors remained closed to female members. Small and stable, with significantly fewer freshmen and one-termers than in the Assembly, the Senate remained under the control of, essentially, seventeen men and those who facilitated their elections. Until the Senate was reapportioned in the mid-1960s,

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women’s role in the Senate remained that of staff to the real power center of the Nevada Legislature.

**Assistance for Needy Children**

Long considered women’s first legislative success on a national level, the Sheppard-Towner Act was the first federal/state program for maternal and child health. Linda Gordon explains that one of the outcomes of the short-lived law was a deepening of the involvement of state governments in the provision of welfare services and of the cooperation between federal and state agencies in the provision of services, foreshadowing the New Deal structure.\(^{273}\)

The experience in Nevada illustrates that the process of developing this cooperation between the national and state governments was slow and rife with conflict. If legislators determined that the fiscal impact on the state was minimal while simultaneously bringing in federal dollars, bills would pass. In 1937, Assemblywoman Lois Washburn joined her colleagues in support of legislation that would provide Nevada with a share of the federal unemployment insurance tax.” It did not require the state to provide any matching funds. In the next session, Assemblywoman Luella Drumm voted with her colleagues to provide assistance

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for Nevada’s blind residents, knowing that few would benefit but that no federal money was forthcoming unless a state law was in place.274

The Nevada Legislature, despite urging from female lawmakers and constituents, was less receptive to the federal program known as Aid to Dependent Children (ADC). In 1937, the enabling legislation died without a vote because of fears that it would cost the state $50,000.275 By 1940, Nevada was the only western state not participating the program. In 1941 and again in 1943, assemblywomen introduced the pertinent legislation, which combined fiscal considerations with maternal consideration of needy children. The first, Helen Williams’s bill, would have required counties to institute a tax to pay for the state’s match necessary to obtain the federal funds. Four years later, Edna Montrose proposed to restructure the existing locally-based aid program. Nevada women strongly supported both bills. In 1941, a rare letter to the editor of the Reno Evening Gazette, simply signed “A Taxpayer,” merged a care for needy children with a concern for both the antiquated funding system for mothers’


pensions and Nevadans’ payment of federal taxes that they were not recouping by participating in the program. Neither bill was processed, however.276 In 1952, a statewide committee, including aging suffragist Felice Cohn, studied the issue and drafted proposed legislation for consideration by the 1953 session. Although Assemblywoman Hazel Denton’s diary reports that she and Maude Frazier worked diligently on the issue, the bill died in the Assembly, again without a vote.277

In 1955, the legislation was introduced again by Chet Christensen, Speaker Pro Tempore, and again received much public support. Despite being “back in the harness of legislative confusion, uncertainty, and distress,” Denton found hope in the first public hearing of the ADC bill. She declared that the meeting had enjoyed a “[f]ine turnout, wonderful talks and a feeling among all


that it just must be passed.” 278 Although none of the three Assemblywomen signed A.B. 33 as co-sponsors, they obviously endorsed the bill. Denton’s 1955 diary clearly demonstrates active support by Frazier and her, both Democrats, and the official record notes that Denton gave remarks during the final floor debate on the bill. Denton’s diary never mentions Republican Mabel Isbell, even though Isbell indicated her support of the measure by signing the majority report in which the committee of first reference recommended passage of the bill. Both Democrats voted for the bill, but Isbell was absent. 279 The bill’s passage was heralded by Denton who exclaimed it was “a day to mark and remember! Our Assembly Sales Tax was passed today, and A.D.C. tonight!” 280 With the establishment of a sales tax to provide revenue for the required state match, the bill finally passed the Legislature and was signed by Governor Charles Russell, a Republican. Nevada BPW chapters were so active in their support of the legislation that one of the members was the only woman—and the only non-elected official—who participated in the bill-signing ceremony. 281 The involvement of BPW in the passage of legislation that established both the sales

278 Denton Diary, 14 February 1955.


280 Denton Diary, 22 March 1955.

tax and ADC reflected the fiscal maternalism of public women in Nevada. Needy children received benefits, and the state received even more money from the federal government. As a result, the amount of federal funding received by Nevada shot up again.

Federal Funding and Jobs

The Bridge Generation’s involvement with government was not restricted simply to serving in a partisan, elected office. These women also filled public jobs, funded both by state and federal funds, and served on advisory and regulatory boards. In 1935, Rita Millar became a clerk in the State Treasurer’s office, where she worked until her death nearly two decades later.282 A year later, a Reno newspaper commented that the “[r]esignation of two members of the legislature yesterday, because they are holding federal positions, may start an avalanche of such resignations as numerous members of the assembly are now on the payroll of the federal government.”283 The article did not list the names of the federally-employed legislators, but Assemblywoman Glenn Grier had to be one of them as she was appointed, about two months after the session’s end, to lead the Women’s Work Division of the Federal Emergency Relief Administration in Nevada, a job she held for five years. Also after the 1935 session, Senator Frances Friedhoff continued in her position on the federally-supported State Board for


Vocational Education and chaired the state advisory committee of the National Youth Administration. In 1937, Governor Richard Kirman considered appointing Assemblywoman Lois Washburn, a recognized expert on ranching issues, to a state committee “to go to Washington to obtain loans for agriculture.” Although “she ‘knows her way around’ in Washington,” according to the press, she was not chosen. Instead, after the session ended, she was employed in the Tonopah office of the Nevada State Employment Service and eventually transferred to the Fallon office. The 1941 Legislature combined the Service with the Unemployment Compensation Division to create the Nevada Employment Security Department and Nevada Employment Security Council. Governor Edward P. Carville appointed Assemblywoman Helen Williams, who had voted in favor of the legislation, to a four-year term on the Employment Security Council just a few days after the session ended. She was one of three members representing the general public and was reappointed twice.²⁸⁴

Women participated in the legislative progress of establishing various programs funded by federal and enjoyed success if their proposals did not require much state money. The rapid increase of federal funds created jobs for many Nevada women, including former legislators. They and other Nevada women benefited from those programs as employees and recipients of assistance. Although many male legislators were reluctant to expand programs and commit the state to provide that funding, many were not. They cooperated with women lawmakers and BPW members to take advantage of federal funding, but soon discovered that federal funding was not enough to pay for desired services. Consequently, Nevada legislators soon considered other sources to support state-provided services.

*Taxing the Tourists*

In the twenty-first century, Nevada is best known for gambling. In the southern end of the state, the casinos that now line the Las Vegas Strip generate an instantly recognizable skyline. When construction of the Strip’s first casino-resort began in 1940, no other state in the country allowed casino gambling where people could legally play slot machines and table games for monetary rewards, yet at that time, Nevada was more famous as a place where a marriage could be dissolved or launched with relative ease.\(^{285}\) Nevada maintained its hold on these

\(^{285}\) Recent publications explore Nevada’s twentieth-century tourist development in some depth. See, in particular, Alicia Barber, *Reno’s Big Gamble: Image and Reputation in the Biggest Little City* (Lawrence: University of Kansas
particular and rarely lauded industries for many years, but by the turn of the twenty-first century, the rest of the states had loosened their divorce and marriage laws, and gambling ventures by Indian tribes located casinos in every region of the country. Although few people come to Nevada anymore to obtain a divorce, they continue to come in significant numbers to gamble and to wed.

For much of the twentieth century, Nevada government relied on the revenues generated from those industries of divorce, marriage, and gambling. The escalating number of duties assigned to state government, driven by a rapidly growing population and participation in federal programs, required increasingly more revenue for which legislators would point to tourists and temporary residents, claiming that various proposals would affect them more than the state’s permanent residents. The best funding proposal, in the minds of legislators and voters alike, was described by a Nevada tax expert as one “that brought a lot of money in and nobody paid. It was a tax the other guy paid; it was an easy way out.”\footnote{Cahill, \textit{Recollections of Work in State Politics}, 127.} Lawmakers, including the women in this study, facilitated the growth of the peculiar industries of divorce, marriage, and gambling and justified their actions in economic terms. As businesswomen, female legislators understood the nuances of enhancing Nevada’s appeal as a destination for visitors, and for most of them, like many of the male legislators, such legislation represented economic

\footnotesize{Press, 2008) and Eugene P. Moehring and Michael S. Green, \textit{Las Vegas: A Centennial History} (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2005).}
issues first, moral ones second. An analysis of legislators’ actions on these three issues illustrate that a legislator’s sex was not an accurate prognosticator of how he or she would vote.

**Divorces and Weddings**

Every Nevada Legislature from 1919 through 1955 considered some issue concerning the legal parameters of marriage and divorce. Early in the twentieth century, Nevada’s reputation—particularly Reno’s—as a famous destination for both divorce and marriage was shaped by laws that contained few requirements other than a short residency period to obtain a divorce and none to marry. Nevada had an economic stake in its marriage and divorce laws, and the Legislature fought to protect that stake. The brief extension of the residency period for a divorce, from six months to one year, had such a deleterious effect on Reno’s economy that the 1915 Legislature quickly returned to the six-month requirement. By the time that women were seated in the Legislature and authorized to act on such legislation, Nevada legislators were cognizant of the importance of the two industries to the state’s economy and, in particular, to the economy of its largest city, Reno.

The divorce business was particularly lucrative as the state’s residency requirement ensured that people—usually women—moved to Reno and stayed for

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several weeks at a time.\textsuperscript{288} Legislative battles over divorce tended to center on the length of required residency and were usually precipitated by another state lowering its residency requirement. The bulk of this legislation occurred during the twenties. In 1921, reform-minded residents presented a petition to the Legislature to increase the residency period to obtain a divorce in Nevada. According to the initiative petition process, which Nevada voters approved in 1912, legislators could accept or reject the residents’ proposal. If rejected, it would go to a vote of the people. The Assembly, including Ruth Averill, the schoolteacher who had just passed the Nevada bar exam, voted to reject the petition. The Legislature, however, could also propose an alternative, which it did with legislation to maintain the state’s current six-month residency requirement, introduced by the joint Assembly Committees on Public Morals and Judiciary. Averill was a member of the prestigious Judiciary Committee, which meant that she was, essentially, a cosponsor of the legislation. When the divorce bill came up for a vote on the floor, Averill joined thirty of her male colleagues in favor of retaining the six-months’ residency requirement.\textsuperscript{289}

\textsuperscript{288} Conventional wisdom held that the vast majority of people who came to Reno for a divorce were women. In the 1930s, at least, women represented just a slight majority—57.6\%--of divorce-seekers, but they were a majority, nonetheless. The divorce trade also provided economic benefits to many Reno women who operated boardinghouses. Mella Rothwell Harmon, “Divorce and Economic Opportunity in Reno, Nevada During the Great Depression” (M.A. thesis, University of Nevada, Reno, 1998), 76.

\textsuperscript{289} All of the opponents were men, including the Speaker of the Assembly. \textit{Journal of the Assembly 1921}, 11-12, 84-85, 127, 154-155.
Both proposals—the initiative petition for a residency of one year and the legislative alternative to maintain the six-month requirement—appeared as questions on the 1922 general election ballot. The supporters of the status quo appealed to women’s concerns for other women and for the economic health of their state. On the day before the election, a large advertisement from the Nevada Business Men’s Association exhorted female voters to preserve the six-month residency requirement and “help retain this state as a ‘women’s refuge.’” Included in the advertisement was a letter from George Wingfield who recalled that “property values in Reno dropped over fifty per cent and other business suffered in proportion” during the last imposition of the twelve-month prerequisite.290

Women’s maternal care was extended to a concern about their state’s economic condition. The appeals effectively convinced Nevada voters, male and female, to reject the initiative by a resounding margin of almost three to one. That action alone would have retained the six-month residency, but Nevada voters put an exclamation mark on the law with decisive support for the Legislature’s bill.291

The legislators and their constituents had agreed together that divorce was good for the state’s economy.


291 The vote on the initiative was 4,877 in favor and 12,900 opposed; the vote on the referendum was 10,965 in favor and 7,605 opposed. The Legislature did not answer an initiative petition with a legislative alternative again for another sixty years later. *Political History of Nevada 1996*, 287, 316.
Five years later, rumors circulated that legislation would appear in the 1927 session to lower the residency requirement to three months. For sixty days, no such bill surfaced. Then, late on the last night of the session, a conference committee proposed that Assembly Bill 195, a measure that added insanity as a legal cause for divorce, be amended to accomplish that reduction. The buzz in the hallways of the Capitol Building and the bars of the capital city about the imminent proposal had been sufficient to pack the galleries with observers well after midnight when, with voice votes, both chambers quickly approved the change and sent the bill to the Governor for approval. Ethel McGuire was the only female member of the 1927 Assembly, and the evidence indicates that she supported the reduced residency for divorce. Assembly Bill 195 was referred to the Assembly Committee on Judiciary, of which she was a member. The committee recommended that the bill be amended and passed, which the Assembly did without any opposition, although that version of the bill concerned grounds for divorce and not residency. The bill’s progress from that point reflected clever parliamentary maneuvering to allow legislators to support the shortened residency period without their names appearing in the written record. At no point did Assemblywoman McGuire raise an objection to the bill or the process. Some observers claimed that the legislators did not understand exactly what was happening because it was late and the tired members were inattentive, but immediately after the late-night passage of the new residency requirement, McGuire adroitly kept a Senate bill tabled, which demonstrated that she, for one,
had not nodded off. In addition, the Reno newspaper reported that many Senators and Assembly members asserted “that the new divorce bill was passed to appease” legislators, such as McGuire, who had supported the earlier, unsuccessful bill to allow wide-open gambling.\(^292\) Whether it would be through an easier divorce process or more gambling, McGuire joined her male colleagues in trying to attract more visitors to Nevada and inject additional revenue into the state’s economy.

Two years later, a male legislator tried to increase the residency requirement to six months. McGuire was again a member of the Judiciary Committee to which the bill was assigned and which recommended that the Assembly not pass the bill. Indeed, it did not, rejecting the legislation on a decisive vote of two in favor and thirty, including Neva Waters, opposed. None of the three women seated in the 1929 Assembly attempted, in any legislative way, to assist their male colleague with his efforts to make it more difficult to obtain a Nevada divorce.\(^293\) Like most of the male legislators, female legislators recognized the economic benefits to their state in general and in particular to the


\(^{293}\) “Divorce Law Change Killed In House This Afternoon By Vote of Thirty to Two,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, 20 February 1929; “Nevada Kills Divorce Bill,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 February 1929; *Journal of the Assembly 1929* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1929), 18, 102, 113, 119-120.
women who sought “Reno-vation” as well as to the women who housed and fed
them. Women lawmakers undoubtedly accepted the existence of this peculiar
Nevada industry.

In 1931, the Nevada Legislature adopted the final change to the residency
requirement, which was “designed to keep Nevada and Reno foremost in the
business of severing unsuccessful marriages,” and reduced to six weeks the length
of time someone must reside in the state before filing for divorce, which remains
in effect.294 The absence of female legislators in that particular session was not
considered a factor in the passage of the legislation. Nevada women, according to
the Reno newspapers, were more upset by the wide-open gambling bill also
passed in 1931. None of the women’s clubs focused on the new divorce law. Most
agreed with the two-term president of the Nevada Federation of Women’s Clubs
who spoke at the clubwomen’s national conference. “We are not playing the
hypocrite in Nevada,” Louise Spencer Ellis asserted.

Many charming people come to Reno in search of divorces and I
am sure that ninety per cent of them are entitled to their decrees.
Other states might do well to pattern their divorce laws after
ours.295

Reno’s divorce business suffered during the early years of the Depression,
but not as a result of other states’ legislation. Financial losses in the stock market,

294 “Gaming, Divorce Bills Signed,” Nevada State Journal, 20 March
1931; Nevada Revised Statutes 125.020.

295 “Woman Speaker Defends Laws Of This State,” Reno Evening Gazette,
particularly in New York from which most of Nevada’s divorce business came, had had a deleterious effect, and the number of divorces dropped precipitously.

The Carson City newspaper editorialized:

> It is not, however, a question of divorce volume so much as it is of profitable divorce volume. Reno’s weakness is for the type of divorce seeker who willingly spends $500 per week for living and has no objection to dropping a few thousand at gambling tables or passing it across speakeasy bars.  

The industry soon recovered sufficiently for the Nevada Legislature to impose a fee on the filing of civil suits, most of which were divorces. After World War II, other states began to take Ellis’s advice, and divorce became, as Nancy Cott explains, “a feature of the American marital landscape.” Nevada’s role in the dissolution of dissatisfied spouses began to wane. In the process, its importance to the Nevada economy also diminished, and for the first time, a woman legislator cosponsored an anti-divorce bill. Pauline Olson, a forty-one-year-old married mother of six, joined four Assemblymen in the re-introduction of legislation that proposed “a startling innovation” by requiring judges to attempt to reconcile unhappy couples before proceeding with divorce actions. The bill died with its

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referral to the Assembly Committee on Public Health and Public Morals, the committee also responsible for Nevada’s liberal gaming laws. Although the legislation did not receive any serious consideration from the Legislature, its introduction signaled that the industry no longer had the force in the state’s economy that it once had.

Nevada maintained simultaneous industries in rapid divorces and instant weddings, but did not challenge the notion of marriage itself. As Nancy Cott elucidates, national and state policies determined the shape of marriage in the United States by authorizing and prohibiting various combinations of people. A white man and a white woman could marry with relative ease, sanctified by both church and state, but a black man and a white woman could ignite a legal conflagration across the country as Jack Johnson’s marriage to Lucille Cameron did in 1913. Nevada did not differ much from other states when it came to authorizing the people who might legally be married, and women legislators did

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not differ from their male colleagues on the issue unless it was to maintain the status quo. In 1919, Assemblywoman Sadie Hurst led the unsuccessful opposition to a bill that allowed whites and Native Americans to marry, “saying that she did not believe in the intermingling of races.” Although the successful legislation allowed the marriage of whites and Indians, Nevada law continued to prohibit the marriage of “any person of the Caucasian or white race …with any person of the Ethiopian or black race, Malay or brown race, or Mongolian or yellow race” until required by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967 to allow interracial marriages.

Peggy Pascoe brilliantly elucidates the development of similar laws across the country, arguing that, although the lists varied somewhat from state to state, “miscegenation law acted as a kind of legal factory for the defining, producing, and reproducing of the racial categories of the state.” As lawmakers, women participated in these legislative actions to embed in the law “white supremacy [that was] rooted in notions of white purity.” Scholars have argued that these same ideas were vital to the final success of suffrage. In this sense, Hurst


simultaneously embodied notions tagged liberal and conservative—women’s empowerment and racial discrimination. Although outside of the scope of this dissertation, an interesting study awaits of women lawmakers’ participation, in legislatures across the country, in the development of miscegenation laws in the twentieth century.

Such legislation was not inconsistent with the Nevada Legislature’s efforts to increase the volume of marrying visitors because, in the eyes of the white, middle-class legislators, the issue was not about making marriage available to everyone. It was about making marriage available to those who had money to spend on hotels, restaurants, and (later) casinos. By 1942, it was estimated that the average amount spent by brides and grooms was fifty dollars, a substantial amount for people who had just lived through the worst years of the Great Depression and entered into a global war of frightening proportions. Five years later, the Legislature instituted a state marriage license fee. 304

Where Nevada differed from other states was in its laws concerning the wedding itself. If a man and woman were white and could afford the costs of travel and the marriage license, they could marry anywhere in Nevada without waiting for any reason, including the results of a blood test. The Nevada Legislature rarely questioned its law that allowed people to marry in Nevada

without waiting for any reason. In 1935, newly-appointed Senator Frances Friedhoff asserted that she would “not favor a gin marriage law,” certain that “people would go to other states to get married, thus taking away Nevada business.”\textsuperscript{305} Neighboring California had a “gin marriage law,” which required a waiting period of three days between the acquisition of a marriage license and the wedding itself, so many Californians popped across the border to wed and often stayed to gamble. California residents represented 81 percent of Reno’s booming wedding business in 1934.\textsuperscript{306} Senator Friedhoff was not alone in her opinion. The 1935 Nevada Legislature gave more serious consideration to the imposition of a tax on bachelors than it did to a waiting period for weddings.\textsuperscript{307}

The Nevada Legislature soon felt the pressure of a national movement toward requiring premarital blood tests as a means to eradicate venereal diseases. Such tests meant that aspiring spouses faced a waiting period before being allowed to marry, and legislators battled over many sessions between two


\textsuperscript{307} Although Assemblyman Albert Hopkins (D-Esmeralda) threatened to introduce a bill to require a three-day waiting period, he did not do so. “Gin Marriage Law Proposed,” \textit{Nevada State Journal}, 19 March 1935; Journal of the Assembly 1935, v-xxxiv. Senator Frank Ryan (D-Clark) introduced S.B. 111 “to provide for an annual tax upon all unmarried men” of a certain age. Journal of the Senate 1935, xviii. The bachelor tax is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.
competing desires: identifying carriers of venereal disease or selling licenses for rapid weddings. The conflict began when the 1939 Assembly, including Luella Drumm, tabled a bill that would have required premarital blood tests “because they believed it would deprive the state of its marriage trade.” Three months later, the California Legislature approved, and the Governor signed, a bill requiring all applicants for a California marriage license to submit to a premarital syphilis exam. Nevada legislators had to have been delighted at the establishment of yet another reason to travel to Nevada to wed, and within two years, it was estimated that California’s action meant another quarter of a million dollars for Nevada with more to come as Utah would likely pass a similar law. The issue of premarital tests did not die easily, however, and Nevada legislators continued to wrestle with concerns about escalating venereal disease cases and the state’s wedding trade.

Not all women legislators shared the same opinion about requiring such tests, but their exact positions are difficult to determine. Most of the time, the premarital testing bill died in the Assembly before a vote could be recorded.

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Advocates claimed that the premarital test was easy and convenient and angrily accused the legislators of choosing “dollars against health and morality … as simple as that.” To legislators required to balance the budget, it was not all that simple. The estimated revenue “from the purchase of licenses alone amounted to approximately a quarter of a million dollars annually.”

Nevada legislators ensured that the state maintained “a continued edge over California in competition for the marriage trade.”

In 1945, the legislative fight became bitter. Thirty other states already had a similar law, and the Reno Evening Gazette editorialized that “[t]here can be no reasonable opposition to the measure, either on moral or health grounds.” The editor continued, “The only opposition can be on an economic basis, the feeling that such a law would result in a decreased “marriage” business, particularly for Las Vegas and Reno.

March 1943; Journal of the Assembly 1941, 289; Journal of the Assembly 1943, 310.


An attempt was made and lost on March 18 to pull the bill from committee. Journal of the Assembly 1943, 338; “Medical Exam Bill Is Lost,” Nevada State Journal, 19 March 1943.

This time, the bill to require premarital tests enjoyed unprecedented public support from individuals and organizations, including the Women’s Civic Club of Reno and, notably, the Business and Professional Women’s Clubs of Pioche, Lovelock, and Las Vegas.\footnote{315} Those concerned about Nevada’s marriage industry remained strongly opposed, however, and public support could not sway enough legislators. Although this bill, too, never came to a vote, parliamentary maneuvers recorded legislators’ various positions on the issue. All three women lawmakers (and BPW members) voted with the majority to keep the bill alive by referring it to a different committee, but only Alma Woods voted to bring the legislation to the floor for a final vote. That effort failed, and the bill died.\footnote{316} In 1949, Assemblywoman Aloys Smith was more actively involved than any of her female predecessors in the effort to move legislation requiring premarital tests, but her efforts also went for naught.\footnote{317} Economic forces prevailed, and the Nevada Legislature never did approve premarital blood tests or a waiting period.

Nevada’s divorce and marriage industries were shaped by laws, none of which were challenged in any meaningful way by the women who were elected to the Legislature. Other than Olson’s co-sponsorship of a bill that was dead on arrival, these women did not introduce any legislation that might have adversely

\footnote{315} “Many Endorsements for Pre-Marital Tests,” \textit{Reno Evening Gazette}, 2 March 1945.

\footnote{316} \textit{Journal of the Assembly 1945}, 228, 368, 369.

\footnote{317} \textit{Journal of the Assembly 1949}, 349, 561.
affected these important industries. Some of Nevada’s women lawmakers had personally experienced divorce. Many operated businesses, such as restaurants and hotels, that surely enjoyed patronage from marriage-seeking tourists. Certainly, many Nevada women, like many women throughout the country, opposed quickie weddings and divorces, but the women who counted—the women who voted for or against laws—typically supported the state’s unusual industries. Divorces and marriages that could be obtained with relative ease were, for these women legislators, necessary steps toward full citizenship and full personhood. Women’s moral authority and the state’s economic considerations were, again, two sides of the same coin. Those women also did not challenge the growth of Nevada’s most controversial industry.

The Gambling Industry

Retroactively, Nevadans explained (and continue to explain) that the 1931 Nevada Legislature legalized gambling as a means of grappling with the economic catastrophe wrought by the stock market crash of 1929. The myth centers on Assemblyman Phil Tobin who introduced the bill and later claimed to have done so out of a concern for Nevada’s declining revenues. As Eric Moody elucidates, however, “[t]he wide-open gambling law was not a sudden inspiration on the part of legislators, but the result of years of continuing pressure from

318 Women lawmakers who had been divorced before their sessions began were Sadie Hurst, Daisy Allen, Florence Swasey, Lois Washburn, and possibly Ethel McGuire. Daisy Allen operated a boarding house in Reno in the 1930s, and Martha Woolridge owned a motel in Tonopah.
business interests for a liberalization of the state’s gambling statutes.”319 This section concentrates on women’s support of the efforts to establish and benefit from legalized gambling in Nevada. Much of women’s opposition may have been expressed by volunteer women’s organizations, but women’s support came in the crucial form of lawmakers who voted in favor of legalization. Although no women served during the 1931 Legislature, women lawmakers had supported legalization in previous sessions. Perhaps it is more telling that women supported the bill when its passage was in doubt and it would have been easier to oppose it.

The 1909 Legislature completely outlawed gambling in Nevada, but subsequent lawmakers chipped away at the prohibition. Nevada historians agree that games continued relatively unmolested by law enforcement. In 1916, George Wingfield conducted a letter-writing campaign to men around the state about an issue of “importance to us all, as business men” and urged them to ensure that we get the right kind of men into the Assembly this year, whether they be Democrats or Republicans, who will help us block any attempts to change the present so called liberal laws on racing, gambling and divorce. The State has never been better than it is right now and we do not want any changes.320


By 1919, when women began serving as lawmakers, Nevada allowed a county licensing process that helped to conceal and simultaneously facilitate a great deal of illegal activity. Some in the 1919 Legislature, including Assemblywoman Sadie Hurst, attempted un successfully to outlaw gambling completely. Hurst would be the last female legislator to cast a vote against gambling in Nevada.

In 1923, three Assemblywomen joined their male colleagues in approving legislation that authorized counties to license and tax “billiard or pool halls, dancing halls, bowling alleys, theaters, soft-drink establishments, and gambling games.”

The Nevada Legislature first came close to approving wide-open gambling in 1925, and one of the Assemblywomen was a key player in that process. Assembly Bill 135 was referred to the Assembly Committee on Public Morals, chaired by Florence B. Swasey, the secretary of the Nye County Republican Central Committee. Opposition to the bill on both moral and economic grounds was fierce, but the bill did not die in committee as the press had anticipated. Swasey reported the bill to the floor without recommendation, indicating that the

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322 Assembly Bill 34, which would have eliminated gambling, died for lack of consideration in the Senate, after passing the Assembly in a floor fight. Hurst voted for it. Journal of the Assembly, 1919 (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1923), 121-129.

members could not muster enough votes to recommend its passage or kill it outright. Once the bill came before the entire Assembly for a vote, however, its end was swift and decisive after Speaker Albert Henderson, a Republican from Clark County, rose to oppose it. The large number of legislators voting against the bill included two women, one a Republican and one a Democrat. Florence Swasey voted in favor of the bill. In addition, Swasey was one of three Assembly members appointed to confer with three Senators to resolve differences over another piece of legislation concerned with boxing matches, which occurred, essentially, for wagering. It is clear that Swasey, forty-three years old, divorced, and a boarding-house operator in Tonopah, cooperated with Nevada’s political elite and gambling-oriented businessmen to protect and attempt to legitimize the gambling industry.

Two years later, the Legislature considered another controversial gambling bill. Similar to the previous session’s legislation, Assembly Bill 141 generated numerous petitions and protest letters, particularly from women and churches, but neither BPW nor the Nevada Federation of Women’s Clubs sent

324 Opposed was Nye County Republican Maym Schweble, probably no longer Wingfield’s “good friend.” He had considered having her introduce a business-friendly bill earlier in the session. William E. Zoebel to Wingfield, 16 February 1925, box 24, George Wingfield Papers. Of the other Assemblywomen, Mary Rose, a Democrat from Humboldt County opposed the gambling bill. Daisy Allen, a Churchill County Democrat was absent, but the vote was not close. Twenty-two legislators voted against the bill; only thirteen (including the man Swasey would later marry) supported it. Swasey was one of three Assembly members appointed to the conference committee on Senate Bill 15. Journal of the Assembly 1925, 147, 224.
any formal communication to the Assembly. The only woman in the 1927 Legislature, Ethel McGuire, aligned with George Wingfield whose support for the legalization of gambling was well-known. The bill’s fortunes were expected to be good that session because Wingfield and Getchell had worked hard during the 1926 election to increase the numbers of Republicans in public office. Despite an outcome that must have disappointed the men—the number of Republicans and Democrats were tied in both the Senate and the Assembly, and a handful of Independents held the balance of power in both houses—Wingfield assured other pro-business interests that “there are several Democratic Senators that will play decently on any bills that are aimed for economy.” Although not a Senator, McGuire was one Democrat he clearly had in mind. The Assembly, including McGuire, voted two-to-one in favor of this economic development bill that Wingfield had personally lobbied. It died in the Senate by one vote.

Public concern about the legalization of gambling extended into the next election, compelling two newly-elected Assemblywomen to declare that they were “absolutely opposed to a wide-open gambling bill.” The one re-elected

325 Journal of the Assembly 1927, 158, 165, 175, 180, 212, 235, 245.

326 Quoted in Raymond, George Wingfield, 154.

327 Tracy T. Fairchild, a prominent member of the Senate bull bloc, was credited with killing the bill. Although a Republican, he was an Elko County rancher and probably immune to Wingfield’s particular charms. “Former Nevada Senator Dies in Sacramento,” Reno Evening Gazette, 18 October 1950; Journal of the Assembly 1927, 253; Journal of the Senate 1927, 220.
Assemblywoman, Ethel McGuire, had already expressed her opinion on the subject when she voted in favor of the 1927 gambling legislation. These women were not required to record a vote on that issue, however. Wingfield had suffered economic and political embarrassment early in 1928 and chose not to participate in the 1929 session. Gambling was not far from the minds of the legislators, however. Senator Getchell bet $1,000 on Herbert Hoover to win as U.S. President, but a larger bet by “some Reno gamblers” caused the pool to fail. The legislation did not appear again until 1931 when a complex bill was passed by the Legislature and signed by the Governor. No women served in that session, but the previous voting records of female legislators exemplify that a connection cannot be assumed to exist between legislators’ gender and their votes.

Did Legalized Gambling Doom Female Candidates?

The new wide-open gambling law was not universally accepted and had an uncertain start. Some gamblers feared that it might soon be repealed by legislative action or referendum. Efforts to repeal the gambling law seemed to gain momentum, and women’s organizations appeared to be poised to participate in those efforts. The Nevada Federation of Women’s Clubs sponsored a public

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329 N.S. Easton to Noble Getchell, 5 November 1928, fol. 4, box 1, Getchell, UNR.

meeting at which many prominent women disparaged the legalization of gambling, but not all of its members opposed gambling. Louise Ellis, the Federation president who had also defended the divorce industry, spoke up in favor of the new law in her state, asserting that “I’ve been by the gambling places many times and they have always appeared orderly. They are under strict supervision and they are ‘on the square.’” Ultimately, the Federation did not adopt any official stance on gambling.

Eric Moody notes that the anti-gambling forces, led by Las Vegas resident and University Regent Frank Williams, focused on getting like-minded candidates elected to the Legislature, but Moody did not analyze the actual races. Considering the outcome of the 1932 election, it appears that the anti-gamblers may have had some success. Among the legislators who had voted against gambling in 1931 and stood for election in 1932, two-thirds won. That success was qualified, however. Among those who had voted for gambling and ran for re-election, fewer than half lost, which meant that some of the original supporters returned to the Legislature. Certainly, the pro-gambling forces worked to elect friendly legislators, too.

331 “Woman Speaker Defends Laws Of This State,” Reno Evening Gazette, 14 June 1932.

332 Moody, 94fn10. Moody explains that “important women’s” groups were assumed to support the effort, but his analysis establishes that it was a male-driven effort in which some individual women participated. [emphasis mine] Moody, “The Early Years of Casino Gambling in Nevada,” 74.
It is possible, although the evidence is not conclusive, that legalized gambling might explain why no woman was elected to the 1933 session. Because some socially prominent Nevada women had spoken out against the new law, there may have been an expectation that all women opposed it and would support any effort toward its repeal. Indeed, one of the unsuccessful Reno candidates was former Assemblywoman Mary Rose who had voted against the 1925 gambling bill. Keeping women out of the Legislature, however, did not stop anti-gambling legislation in 1933. Williams had also worked diligently to gather signatures to present the Legislature with an initiative petition that would have completely outlawed all forms of gambling. Emphasizing that social bridge games would also be prohibited, the Assembly decidedly rejected the petition.\footnote{Ibid., 83-85.} In his zeal to eliminate gambling from the Nevada landscape, Williams threatened, perhaps unwittingly, one of Nevada’s favorite pastimes.

Nevada women’s losses in legislative races were part of a national trend in 1932, which was one of the few election years that did not result in an increased number of women in state legislatures. Contemporary opinions suggested that women were not effective legislators or possessed of enough business experience to manage the Great Depression’s
problems. But sexism cannot be the only explanation for women’s losses. Nevadans had witnessed dozens of women in their own and neighboring Legislatures, so the idea of a female lawmaker had already been accepted as a matter of course. In a speech to the Reno Rotary Club, state Controller Ed C. Peterson, a Republican, exhorted his audience:

You must send men and women to the legislature that you know are able to cope with the situation. A legislature to accomplish much must be a body of determined, honest, fair-minded men and women who can turn a deaf ear to the lobbyist and not see the letters and telegrams that pour in at the instigation of the organized minority when any of their pet schemes are in danger. [emphasis mine]

Many of the women who ran for the Nevada Legislature in 1932 had been expected to win. Edna Eddy, a member of the State Board of Embalmers, was “quite popular throughout [Humboldt] county,” and Katherine Redman had been endorsed by the Democrats. A few months later, the Washoe County Commission appointed Redman to fill the term of Assemblyman Clyde Johnson who had died near the end of the session,

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but she was never sworn into office. In addition, the county conventions elected a handful of women, including future Assemblywoman Luella Drumm, to the 1933 state convention called for the express purpose of ratification of the U.S. constitutional amendment that repealed Prohibition. Lillie Clinedinst served as the convention’s secretary. Some of the women who lost in 1932 won future elections. Just six years later, Anna Wardin trounced George Wingfield for a seat on the Board of Regents for the University of Nevada.

A combination of factors offers the most likely explanation for the lack of female members in the 1931 and 1933 Legislatures. The belief that a man may be a better lawmaker than a woman was long entrenched in American politics and subscribed to by voters of both sexes. In both elections, only the 1930 ticket for Clerk of the Supreme Court featured two female candidates, so a woman was guaranteed to win. In all other statewide and legislative races, female candidates faced—and lost to—male opponents. Sexism was—and remains—a powerful force and may have been exacerbated by the economic stress wrought by the 1929 stock market crash. The economic crisis may also have curtailed women’s access to campaign materials, newspaper advertisements, or potential

337 “Mrs. J.R. Redman Is Appointed to Nevada Assembly,” Reno Evening Gazette, 6 April 1933.

338 Political History of Nevada 1996, 186.
voters who lived far from the candidates’ homes. In Nevada, the desire of certain powerful men to institute legalized gambling may have added weight to local efforts that urged voters to choose one particular legislative candidate over another. Ingrained cultural expectations that a woman, simply by virtue of her sex, was not suited to making business decisions and would not support legalized gambling, despite evidence to the contrary, offer the most likely explanation as to why Nevada had three Assemblywomen in 1929 but none in 1931 or 1933.

In the next election, however, two women did win Assembly seats, and they defeated male opponents in the process. Hazel Wines was the daughter of an influential Humboldt County politician, and Glenn Grier was a well-known businesswoman in White Pine County. Both women had campaigned vigorously, which probably explains their success more than any other one factor. As the 1935 session began, several Reno women sought “a sponsor for a measure to outlaw slot machines but most legislatures [sic] feel it is a difficult scheme with wide-open gambling all over the state.”339 No evidence indicates that those women contacted the female lawmakers, but no legislator—male or female—introduced any anti-gambling bill during the 1935 session. Subsequent female legislators also accepted the legality of gambling and did not seek to reverse the state’s course. They also did not hesitate to tax Nevada’s newest industry.

Although the state received some revenue from gambling activities before 1945 (including revenue from boxing matches, horse racing, and dance halls before 1931), the Legislature did not immediately institute a state gambling tax. In the first few years following legalization, gambling was simply another business being conducted in Nevada, and the revenue generated by its licensure was split among the state and the affected cities and counties. Gamblers, who had operated illegally until 1931, were slow to draw attention to themselves and their operations. By the end of the decade, however, gambling was becoming a major tourist draw, and the business of gambling was beginning to boom. \(^\text{340}\) By the beginning of the 1945 session, which included three Assemblywomen, public support for taxation of gambling operations was widespread. A Carson City newspaper editor spoke for many in the state:

> The idea of upping the taxes on the larger gambling establishments which is being discussed in the Nevada senate sounds good to us. These concerns in most cases are making an enormous profit, and the state should have a larger share of it. It is to be remembered it is the traditional liberal policy of Nevada which allows open gambling such as exists in no other state, and which permits these establishments to operate at all. So long as they are highly profitable, they should pay fully for this privilege. \(^\text{341}\)

\(^\text{340}\) Moody, “The Early Years of Casino Gambling in Nevada,” 100-104.

\(^\text{341}\) Wes Davis, “Rambler,” Carson City Daily Appeal, 8 March 1945. Like other newspaper editors and publishers in Nevada, Davis actively participated in partisan politics. He was elected to the Assembly in 1952, serving one term; a Washoe County delegate to the state Republican convention in 1954. He had also served as Assistant Secretary of the Senate in 1949 and was a Republican candidate for Congress in 1950.
The Assembly and the Senate differed over possible taxing mechanisms, but the bill that finally prevailed was Senate Bill 142. The Assembly proposed extensive amendments to the bill, passed it unanimously, and launched a protracted battle with the Senate that extended the session. The power of the gambling lobby was clearly evident when the two houses finally agreed, through a free conference committee, to reduce the proposed tax from 10 percent of gross gambling revenue to 1 percent.

When presented with the final legislation, Governor Edward P. Carville, a Democrat, argued that the new tax was an inequitable imposition on only one type of business in Nevada, rather than across all businesses, and, thus, was unconstitutional. His original budget had proposed an increase of one cent in the property tax rate, so he was not opposed to taxation in general. Carville had also already signed bills that increased state spending in various ways, especially for education, and he knew that revenue was needed even beyond the amount that would be generated from the Legislature’s five-cent increase in the property tax rate and an expected post-war increase in assessed valuation. The new gambling tax bill boxed in the Governor. If he signed it, he believed that he, a former U.S. attorney, would be committing an unconstitutional act. If he vetoed it, he feared accusations of being too close to the gambling industry, especially by those in the press, such as Carson City’s Wes Davis, who had been calling for the state to take a portion of the casinos’ obviously high profits. The Governor chose, then, to allow it to become law without his signature. He hoped that the next Legislature
would review the tax’s production, find it wanting, and repeal the law. He hoped in vain. Even at a low 1 percent, the revenue from the gambling tax doubled from 1945 to 1946, and by the middle of 1947, it was producing nearly as much revenue as the property tax.\footnote{Journal of the Assembly 1945, 316, 377, 386, 390-395; “Tax Rate One Cent Higher in Budget from Governor,” \textit{Reno Evening Gazette}, 29 January 1945; “Legislature Ends Overtime Session Early This Morning,” \textit{Reno Evening Gazette}, 19 March 1945; “Gambling Tax Unsigned But Becomes Law,” \textit{Nevada State Journal}, 28 March 1945; “For Two Years Only,” \textit{Nevada State Journal}, 28 March 1945; “Sound Objections,” \textit{Reno Evening Gazette}, 29 March 1945; State Controllers’ reports, 1945-1947.} After 1945, the Nevada Legislature’s debate about the gambling tax focused on the rate and never again on its existence.

Chart 4.3  
State Receipts from Gambling-Related Enterprises, 1919-1955

Note: Included in “gambling-related enterprises” are receipts from the State Racing Commission, dance halls, and boxing matches. State Controllers’ Reports, 1919-1955
The 1945 Assemblywomen had clearly been involved in tax issues. Edna Montrose served on the Assembly Committee on Taxation. Alma Woods, who had been on that committee in 1943, recalled that “some of our smartest men in the Senate” would seek her advice.343 Yet the evidence of their direct involvement in the establishment of the gambling tax is scant. Within a few short years, however, Assemblywomen noticed the sharp increase in gambling tax revenue and did not hesitate to seek additional taxes from Nevada’s gaming industry, especially if it could be used to fund the educational system.

In 1953, Hazel Denton cosponsored Assembly Bill 257, which proposed to raise the gambling tax rate to 5 percent and use the additional revenue for school support. The first public vetting of the bill occurred at a joint meeting of the Assembly Committees on Education and Taxation at which Maude Frazier presided. The bill died after a floor fight in which Denton participated.344 During the next session, Denton and Frazier successfully maneuvered the Legislature toward both an increased gambling tax and a new sales tax. After the Senate agreed to the Assembly’s gambling tax bill on condition that the Assembly pass the Senate’s sales tax bill, Denton gloated about the victory in her diary:

343 Josie Alma Woods to Mary Ellen Glass, 21 September 1973, Woods Correspondence, NC 826, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno.

Had them [the Senate] thinking we [the Assembly] wouldn’t vote for any Sales Tax, when all along we were saving it for a trade knowing the Senate has been recommending it openly.\textsuperscript{345}

\textit{Conclusion}

Assemblywomen’s voting records reflected a complex approach, which was shared by many Nevadans. When it came to legislation concerning divorce, marriage, and gambling, which many considered economic issues first and moral issues second, the sex of the lawmaker was not an accurate predictor of support or opposition. Both male and female legislators could be found on each side of the issues. For Assemblywomen Ruth Averill, Ethel McGuire, and Hazel Denton, as for many Nevadans concerned about the state’s economic development, quickie divorces and marriages and wide-open gambling were acceptable parts of the state’s burgeoning tourist industry and provided desirable sources of revenue for state government.

In the early 1950s, however, population growth and budgetary inadequacies came directly into conflict. People were moving to Nevada in droves to work on construction projects driven by federal funding and the tourist industry, and construction soon became Nevada’s second largest industry.\textsuperscript{346} As Alice Towle and other legislators in the 1920s had wanted, the growing construction industry and the post-World War II baby-boom combined to increase

\textsuperscript{345} Denton Diary, 19 March 1955.

\textsuperscript{346} Bennett, “The Up-Growth of New Industries,” 194.
the number of families in the state and, significantly, to increase the number of children in Nevada’s classrooms.

Chart 4.4 Nevada’s Population Growth, 1920-1960

More children forced the State to increase its spending on education. Between 1919 and 1944, state expenditures on education did not change much and never exceeded one million dollars, but once it passed that amount in 1945, the numbers began rising significantly. In 1948, the state disbursed almost three million dollars, which was an increase of nearly 300 percent over 1944, and in 1953, the amount increased again by another 57 percent.

Simultaneously, despite an increase in population, state revenues from the property tax was declining, partially because the rate was relatively low. Between 1919 and 1956, the rate averaged around sixty-five cents per one hundred dollars
of assessed value. Property-owners enjoyed the lowest rate of fifty-eight cents in 1927 and again during the course of World War II. The highest rate of seventy-three cents was imposed in the midst of the Great Depression. The 1955 Legislature finally adopted the sales tax on the agreement that the property tax rate would drop significantly.

Chart 4.5 Percentage of State Budget from Taxes on Real Property, 1919-1953

Source: Controllers’ Reports, 1919-1953

But parents and teachers were becoming angry with a weak educational system, mostly under local control, that paid low salaries and relied on inadequate facilities. By 1950, the pressure on legislators to produce more revenue was

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347 State Controllers’ Reports, 1919-1956.
becoming intense. Federal funding was proving unreliable and typically earmarked for specific purposes, such as highway construction or assistance for the needy. Revenue from sin taxes, levied on gambling, liquor, and booze, was steadily increasing, but not rapidly enough. Lobbyists successfully kept the rates low, arguing to legislators that high taxes would kill the nascent tourist industry.

Chart 4.6 Percentage of State Receipts from Federal Funds and Sin Taxes

Note: The percentage of state receipts from federal funds dropped significantly in 1935 because Nevada did not receive highway funds. Controllers’ reports, 1919-1953.

Tax opponents also pointed to Nevada’s reputation as the “cyclone cellar of the tax oppressed,” which was touted nationally in efforts to increase the state’s population of independently wealthy people. Nevada’s national campaign to attract new money originated in a 1937 bill that sought to codify the state’s tax policy as “One Sound State, Without an Income Tax, a Corporation Tax, an
Inheritance Tax, a Gift Tax, and a Sales Tax, and with the most Liberal of Mining Laws.” According to its sponsor, Assemblyman Cada C. Boak, a Republican from Nye County, the bill served two purposes. One, it would preclude any future legislator from proposing any such taxes. Two, he insisted, the law would “bring in hundreds of millions of dollars of new taxable wealth and give the state increased income” through existing taxes on the new residents’ property, which was expected to be quite valuable.348 The slogan stuck, and the rhetoric against so-called nuisance taxes became “drummed into us so long that … you didn’t even talk about ‘em except in a whisper,” explained Robbins Cahill who was deputy state controller and served on Nevada’s Tax Commission. The second purpose for the bill failed, however. Nevada’s tax haven status attracted a few wealthy people, such as E.L. Cord and Max C. Fleischmann, whose generosity funded public buildings and university scholarships. But the monetary results for the state were disappointing. In the fifteen years after Boak’s bill passed, property tax revenue to the state increased by only one million dollars. Legislators certainly knew that the ad campaign was failing, but felt constrained by the national attention. Cahill remembered Senator Aaron Tallman, in the early 1940s,

looking around him to see if anybody was listening, and … putting his hand up over his mouth, and whispering to me very cautiously, “You know, I think someday we may have to have a sales tax.”349

Legislators may have whispered about sales taxes, but they refused to take any action.

Women lawmakers had, for the most part, cooperated with male colleagues to protect Nevada’s unusual industries and keep the state’s taxes in check. They did not attempt to reverse Nevada’s course. Women legislators also participated in the establishment of state programs that would bring in federal funding. Although some women occasionally attempted to spearhead such programs (such efforts would not succeed for many more years), women lawmakers were not the driving force. When it came to money for education, however, women legislators came into their own in the 1950s. More than three decades after Nevada suffrage and nearing the end of their political careers, the Bridge Generation focused their efforts on revenue generation. Refusing to whisper anymore, women roared for more funding, and the establishment of a general tax on retail sales was the result.

349 Cahill, Recollections of Work in State Politics, 186-187.
Chapter 5

THE “LITTLE MOTHERS” TRIUMPH: ADOPTING THE SALES TAX FOR EDUCATION

Nevada’s tourist industry, fueled by post-war prosperity, enjoyed an unprecedented boom in the late 1940s, and the numbers of both visitors to and new residents of Nevada increased exponentially. In 1950, the U.S. decennial census recorded a 45 percent increase in Nevada’s population in the previous decade. More astonishingly, the number of Nevadans under the age of fifteen years shot up by almost 67 percent. These new children increased the pressure on a funding system patched together with federal funds and gamblers’ losses, which quickly proved inadequate, leading legislators to bicker about additional sources of revenue. Despite a serious consideration of a sales tax in 1949, the Legislature instead chose piecemeal solutions to the growing budget crisis.

Becoming angry about crowded classrooms and substandard facilities, Nevada women—some mothers; some not—began agitating about better funding for schools. Women in southern Nevada, where the skyrocketing population of Las Vegas made the need especially acute, organized specifically to elect Maude Frazier, an experienced female educator and administrator, to the Legislature in 1950. In subsequent sessions, groups of women, sometimes dubbed “the little mothers,” descended on Carson City to lobby legislators for better education.

funding. In 1955, after years of community activism by women around the state and the dogged efforts of female legislators, such as Frazier and Hazel Denton, the Nevada Legislature finally answered the demands of Nevada women for more funding for education. When a tax on retail sales emerged as the means to provide that funding, Nevada women vigorously supported the new tax through a statewide referendum in 1956 reminiscent of the campaign to win woman suffrage in 1914.

A vibrant demonstration of fiscal maternalism, Nevada women—both inside the legislative process and out in the public—invoked their authority as mothers to engage in the debate about the state’s financial condition. They pinned their advocacy to families, arguing that the sales tax would impact Nevada’s tourists more than it would residents and that any other tax, especially an income tax, would disproportionately and adversely affect Nevada families. They asserted that no other tax would raise as much revenue, which was also expected to provide the state match to obtain federal funding for the new Aid to Dependent Children (ADC) program. Proponents successfully centered the debate on the needs of the educational system, glossing over both the new welfare program and the fact that revenue from the sales tax would be deposited in the state general fund and not directly into any particular account. Women’s concern for children

351 Las Vegas Democrats trumpeted the best features of all of their candidates, including Frazier, in the 1950 election. Las Vegas Review-Journal, 27 October 1950. Hazel Denton also campaigned on her status as a former teacher and school board member in Lincoln County.
and families finally compelled legislative action. Simultaneously, their motherly care for the state’s economy placed the financial burden on Nevada visitors. Maternal instincts clearly encompassed monetary intelligence.

This chapter considers the early efforts to establish a sales tax in Nevada; introduces Maude Frazier, whom a Senate leader deemed “one of the most respected legislators” in the state; and explores the ultimately successful legislation and referendum that finally institutionalized the sales tax in Nevada.352

**Early Attempts to Impose a Sales Tax**

Nevada’s Constitution directed the state to provide “support and maintenance” for the “common schools” and the university. The interpretation of that mandate ensured that one of the Legislature’s most consistent issues was how to finance the state’s educational system. At the beginning of the twentieth century, local communities had the primary responsibility for funding schools, but as parents demanded better facilities, teachers, and curriculum, and local property taxes reached their maximal allowed levels, that duty devolved to the state government. By 1935, lower assessed valuations resulted in a shortfall in the state’s school fund, which led the Nevada State Educational Association to advocate the adoption of three significant taxes—income, sales, and inheritance—

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352 Few legislators, male or female, made as indelible a mark on Nevada as did Maude Frazier. This appellation came from Senator Jim Gibson, the Senate Majority Leader, nearly twenty years after her death. Pat Schank, “Good LV schools are Frazier’s memorial,” *Nevadan*, 23 May 1982.
with the proceeds directed toward educational needs. Nevada Governor Richard Kirman, a Democrat, and legislators from both parties also called for more revenue to address the growing costs of education as well as old age pensions and state losses from closed banks. During that session in the midst of the Great Depression, Nevada legislators, including Assemblywomen Glenn Grier and Hazel Wines and Senator Frances Friedhoff, seriously considered the following types of taxation: income, sales, liquor, gross receipts, chain store, bachelor, margarine, inheritance, and motor fuel imports.


354 Members of both parties argued about the need for more taxation. Democrats who spoke out for taxes included George Friedhoff, the Senate’s President Pro Tempore. The most notable Democrat in opposition was John E. Robbins, the Senate Majority Leader and chairman of the Senate Committee on Taxation. With the Democrats controlling both the Legislature and the Governor’s office, many Republicans looked to State Treasurer George Russell who relied on the anti-tax position of the Nevada Taxpayers Association. Yet Senator George Dressler and Assemblymen Charles Russell (the Treasurer’s nephew) and Ralph Lattin, all Republicans, introduced legislation to institute new taxes. “Friedhoff Warns Increase in State Tax Rate Likely,” *Carson City Daily Appeal*, 1 February 1935; “More Revenue Need Stressed Today by Senator Friedhoff,” *Carson City Daily Appeal*, 15 February 1935; “Sales Tax Is Not Needed, Declares Senator Robbins,” *Nevada State Journal*, 8 February 1935; George B. Russell, “Claims No Need of Great Increase in Nevada Revenues,” *The Ely Record*, 15 March 1935.

355 Democrats proposed to tax retail sales, liquor, gross receipts of businesses, chain stores, and bachelors. Republicans suggested taxes on inheritances and oleomargarine, the latter proposed by dairy farmers. “Several Tax Bills Being Studied By Legislators,” *Carson City Daily Appeal*, 13 March 1935.
Taxing Single Men

“Bachelor tax”? Although this chapter focuses on the sales tax, the efforts to impose a tax on unmarried men provide an interesting diversion. The 1935 legislation, introduced by Senator Frank Ryan, a Las Vegas Democrat, generated much amusement, including a call to expand that particular category of taxpayers to spinsters, childless married couples, and “married women with a dog on a leash.” A long-married man over fifty years of age, Ryan reasoned that a significant sum might be generated by the significant number of Nevada men who were unmarried and presumably employed, but not homeowning property taxpayers. To add to his bill’s appeal, he earmarked the tax’s revenues for the state’s old age assistance program. Properly introduced as Senate Bill 111, the measure was formally processed until it died in hail of laughter on the Senate floor. 356

This was not the first such bill, however. In 1923, Assemblywoman Marguerite Gosse, a Republican from Washoe County, introduced a tax on bachelors and referred the bill to the delegation from Esmeralda County, which consisted of one unmarried man. Much frivolity also accompanied her legislation, introduced as Assembly Bill 206, but after the merriment subsided, the number

was re-assigned to another measure concerning the sale of law-books, leading an amused reporter to intone, “You can lead a bachelor to a law-book but you can’t make him wed.” Gosse, an unmarried woman over thirty years of age, did not pursue the issue; indeed, her bill does not appear in the Assembly’s official records. Newspaper articles are the only documentation of its existence.

Gosse’s bill shows that many of the first women legislators did not hold themselves apart from their male colleagues. Women could get down into the fray with the best of them, joking and negotiating and using whatever tactics they could to advance their legislation. Gosse successfully moved other, more important, bills, including a long-delayed and hard-fought law to license nurses, which suggests that her willingness to mix it up with her colleagues was rewarded.

Hidden beneath the rhetorical joshing about unhappy bachelors and wealthy spinsters, however, was a consistent American theme about equitable taxation to finance community-wide services. Ryan linked his bill directly to

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358 Article 10, Section 1, of Nevada’s Constitution, as do most other state constitution, directs the Legislature “to provide by law for a uniform and equal rate of taxation.” Similar to Article 1, Section 8, of the U.S. Constitution, which specifies “that all duties, imposts, and excises shall be uniform throughout the
old age assistance. A few days before introducing her bill, Gosse voted with a small minority to oppose the establishment of an old-age pension system in Nevada. The bill eventually passed, but proved a problem for both the State and its elderly residents. It could be argued that Gosse understood the bill better than most and knew it would not work because she had the business skills and legal contacts to understand the full effects of legislative language, which could be oblique. It is possible, too, that she introduced the bachelor tax to generate revenue for the new pension scheme. John Gilbert McCurdy argues that the American colonies taxed single men disproportionately on the theory that men who did not contribute to the social and civil well-being of their communities by establishing families should be required to relinquish to those communities a portion of their assets, which many believed to be excessive because single men were not supporting wives and children. Both Gosse and Ryan knew that Nevada’s population consisted of a large percentage of transient, unattached men.

United States” and was written after fighting a war against excessive taxation (among other issues), the intention was to preclude future lawmakers from singling out one business or aspect of the economy for more (or less) taxation than another. From 1789 through the present, policymakers have struggled to define the point at which the government’s revenue tips from being adequate to being excessive. This tension has been at the heart of American debates over the appropriate size of government at all levels. One economic historian argues that the fundamental system of American taxation changes only in response to a severe crisis, such as World War II. The same theory may very well hold for Nevada. W. Elliot Brownlee, Federal Taxation in America: A Short History, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

who were attracted to the state by jobs in mining, ranching, and construction, and their bills obliquely expressed anxiety about the fairness of the state’s developing financial system. The bills also suggested a tacit agreement among lawmakers that the good life in Nevada depended on families who were settled property owners.

In 1935, the Legislature continued to struggle with methods for easing the tax burden on property-owning families while spreading it elsewhere and gave more serious consideration to a tax on retail sales. Opponents argued that it was an inequitable “levy on the already overburdened property owners and poor inhabitants.” During the bill’s hearing, Assemblyman Clair Stewart, an Independent from Lincoln County, declared, “I am going to fight every suggestion of a sales tax that would tax the food and clothing of families.” Continuing, he argued that his income tax proposal was more family-friendly:

A sales tax penalizes a man for raising children. The exemptions we have provided would not burden the man with a family but would catch the single persons who are now working and the childless families.\textsuperscript{360}

Stewart estimated that 40 percent of Nevada men between the ages of twenty-one and sixty years were single (and presumably employed) and that over thirty-two hundred unmarried Nevada women worked for wages. All of these unmarried people could, in his estimation, bear an additional tax burden. Stewart’s estimates, however, were low. The 1930 census found that 52 percent of Nevada males of

employable age were unmarried and that almost nine thousand women of employable age were unmarried. Like many of his contemporaries, he assumed that unmarried people did not have dependents who might miss the income paid in tax, but the census also found that almost three thousand Nevada families were headed by women who, most likely, were unmarried and generating income of some kind. Interestingly, over half of female-headed households owned their own homes while only 43 percent of male-headed households owned theirs, indicating that women may have carried a larger tax burden from residential property ownership than did men.\textsuperscript{361} The argument soon became moot because the U.S. Supreme Court found Kentucky’s graduated tax rate unconstitutional, and the sales tax debate halted temporarily in Nevada.\textsuperscript{362} Instead, the 1935 Legislature adopted a liquor tax and substantially increased the state property tax rate, from sixty cents to sixty-eight cents per one hundred dollars of assessed valuation, despite the state’s and nation’s economic difficulties.\textsuperscript{363}


\textsuperscript{362} \textit{Stewart Dry Goods Co. v. Lewis}, 294 U.S. 550, decided on March 11, 1935, found that the arbitrary points of change in the tax rate caused Kentucky to violate the equal protection clause. “Gross Sales Tax Law Held Unconstitutional,” \textit{Carson City Daily Appeal}, 13 March 1935. Despite the state’s and nation’s economic difficulties, the 1935 Legislature adopted other taxes and increased the property tax substantially.

\textsuperscript{363} The 1937 Legislature raised the rate again to seventy-three cents. “Annual Assessment of Real and Personal Property, and the Net Proceeds of the
Other state legislatures avoided the arbitrary rate categories, which constituted the constitutional problem identified by the Supreme Court, and by 1938, twenty-four states, including neighboring California, had imposed a tax on retail sales. Sales tax advocates in Nevada began again in 1939, insisting that the state’s increasing need for revenue made the levy necessary. They emphasized that a sales tax would allow “the state to collect from those who tarry briefly within its boundaries.” A sales tax, proponents continued, also had the advantage of being somewhat under control of the taxpayer who could limit payment by controlling his or her retail purchases, unlike the property tax, which was imposed by others out of the direct control (except through the ballot box) of the property owner. State and local officials established the rates each year and determined the assessed valuation. Complicating Nevada’s property tax calculus was a constitutional maximum on the total rate of five cents for each dollar of assessed valuation. Still in effect, the property tax cap, as it is colloquially known, was instigated by the Nevada Legislature in 1931, affirmed by the 1933 Legislature, and approved by Nevada voters in 1936. Support for the sales tax was usually accompanied by an insistence that the property tax be simultaneously reduced:

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one newspaper editor insisted that “[a] new tax that is just another tax added to those we've got is no improvement and we believe that Nevada can get along without it.” The Legislature did not, however, seriously consider again the imposition of a sales tax until 1949.

In that post-war session, sales tax advocates noted that “[t]he crop of war children is just beginning to show up in the public budget, especially the schools,” and argued that teachers should be paid well to encourage the best ones to work in Nevada. Advocates explained that a property tax increase would be impossible in some counties because they were already at the maximum and would also be unfair because “a large part of [current property taxpayers] are the people and companies who give employment. They are already suffering under the trend that was established by the New Deal.” Some of the New Deal programs had been paid for by bonds secured by future property tax revenue. As some of the largest landowners in the state, farmers and ranchers would be particularly harmed by an increase in a tax on real property. Supporters of the sales tax argued that Nevadans paid that particular tax when they shopped in other states, so residents would already be used to the process. Additionally, Nevada’s draw as a tourist destination would not be harmed because visitors were accustomed to paying the tax at home. Indeed, the “[p]eople from the other 47 states coming to Nevada

would pay a great share of the sales tax.” The proponents insisted that Nevada “cannot rely on special taxes, such as the gambling tax. A depression would wipe it out.”

Opponents of the sales tax argued that the imposition of sales taxes in Colorado and Wyoming created more bureaucracy and that “the working man and woman” would bear the burden. “It is the most damnable tax ever foisted on the working people,” according to one opponent.

If there is any doubt in your mind as to what this one-sided law will do to our great State, let them telephone, wire or write that great humanitarian, State Representative Helen J. Miller, State House, Boise, Idaho. This great lady, who is a champion of the working people, had the Idaho sales tax knocked out when she proved what it was doing to the people who receive a pay check.

A Democrat from Glenns Ferry in Elmore County, Idaho, Miller served in the Idaho House of Representatives in 1937 and from 1943 to 1959. In a 1936 referendum, Idaho voters rejected a 2 percent sales tax that had been imposed by the 1935 Idaho Legislature. Idaho’s historic newspapers are not digitized and

366 Much of Nevada’s ad valorem tax revenue came, not from residential property owners, but from mining companies, railroads, and large ranches. “Favoring a State Sales Tax,” Lovelock Review-Miner, 3 March 1949.

367 “Against a Nevada Sales Tax,” Lovelock Review-Miner, 3 March 1949. The Reno newspapers also printed similar arguments for and against the sales tax.

368 Idaho’s newspapers are not available online, so it was difficult to connect Helen Miller with the referendum, which seems to be the assertion of the Nevada sales tax opponent. “Idaho Women Legislators,” Idaho State Historical Society Reference Series, No. 1055, November 1994; Kenneth F. Warren, Encyclopedia of U.S. Campaigns, Elections, and Electoral Behavior (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2008), 310.
available online, making it difficult to connect Helen Miller with the referendum, which seems to be the assertion of the Nevada sales tax opponent. This assertion, however, further demonstrates women’s direct involvement in the twentieth-century fiscal policies of their communities.

In Nevada, sales tax opponents demanded that “the politicians in Carson City run our state on its present income and stay within their respective budgets just as we small business men and taxpayers must do” and insisted that “[a]ny person who genuinely loves Nevada would rather pay a higher property tax than see a sales tax enacted.” Opponents also pointed to Nevada’s statutory declaration that it was “One Sound State” and to the state’s publicity campaign that centered on a widely-distributed pamphlet titled “Nevada: The Haven for the Tax Oppressed.” Nevada had staked its national reputation on its minimal number of taxes. By 1949, the Legislature’s conflict between needing to raise more revenue and trumpeting low taxes as its economic development policy came to a head.

The 1949 sales tax proposal was hotly debated in both the Assembly and the Senate throughout the session and reported in great detail in the Reno newspapers. Women, in particular, spoke out in favor of the tax and endorsed a


direct connection between it and the state’s educational needs. In a letter to the 
editor of the *Reno Evening Gazette*, Mrs. Edna Blair exhorted government to 
curtail its spending and listed specific examples of items that could be eliminated, 
but also pointed out that the local schools were in trouble.

Nobody wants a sales tax, but if the choice is between a sales tax 
and curtailing the services of schools, hospitals, and such essention [sic] activities, as it seems to be, I am definitely in favor of a sales tax.

Mrs. Blair ended her letter with: “I vote for schools. I vote for the sales tax.”371

Newspapers in smaller communities, such as Assemblywoman Louise Aloys Smith’s hometown of Lovelock, also engaged in the discussion. In an effort 
to advise the Assemblywoman, who was Pershing County’s only representative in 
the lower house, and her senatorial counterpart, the Lovelock newspaper 
conducted a survey that ultimately found that “[b]usiness and professional men 
and women, skilled and unskilled workers and housewives” expressed opposition 
to the sales tax.”372  Debating the bill, one Assemblyman chided teachers for 
supporting the tax, arguing that it would hurt working people. “Teachers, of all 
people, ought to know … that a sales tax is … the most unfair type of taxation 
there is,” he explained before suggesting an income tax as a solution to the state’s 
revenue problems. But another Assemblyman thundered, “If you want to raise 
money, put it on the tourists, not on the people of the State.” A sales tax, many


believed, would do just that, but Smith complied with her neighbors’ wishes. She voted against the Assembly’s sales tax bill, which lost on a close vote of twenty in favor and twenty-two against.\(^{373}\)

Aloys Smith did not explain her vote. Perhaps her business experience influenced her. She was employed in a pharmacy in her native Lovelock and an active member of the local Business and Professional Women’s (BPW) Club. The legislation would have affected her employer, and BPW had not yet come out in favor of a sales tax.\(^{374}\) It is also possible that her vote indicated her allegiance to her party. Nearly twice as many Democrats, including the floor leader, opposed the bill than voted for it.

Most likely, however, the “tall, handsome and charming” Assemblywoman voted as most of her constituents desired.\(^{375}\) Though few in number, the only references to the 1949 sales tax preserved in her papers are

\(^{373}\) *Journal of the Assembly 1949* (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1949), 540-543.


\(^{375}\) “Legislative Sidelights,” n.d., fldr 8, Louise Aloys Smith Papers, 1942-1960, 94-13, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno. Smith’s records from her honorable discharged from the Women’s Army Corps (WAC), also in her papers at UNR, note that she was five feet and 8.5 inches tall. In a photo on the cover of 1951 BPW publication, however, the former WAC sergeant appears to tower over Governor Charles Russell, who was six-foot-three, and Maude Frazier, who was nearly six feet tall. “B.P.W.s Confer With Governor,” *Nevada Business Woman*, Spring 1951, Louise Aloys Smith Papers.
negative. During both of her Assembly terms, Lovelock’s newspaper printed several articles that reveal a representative who paid attention to her constituents and was deeply informed about the issues in her county. There is little doubt that she read the sales tax debates printed in the *Lovelock Review-Miner*. Her careful consideration of her constituents’ wishes also is a logical explanation for her vote to regulate, and essentially legalize, prostitution. A never-married woman of thirty-two years of age, Smith had been educated in Catholic schools and was a popular soloist at church and weddings in her small, agricultural community. She would seem, on the surface, to be an unlikely proponent of legalized prostitution, so her vote in support of Senate Bill 218 appears almost nonsensical. But the evidence is clear that she paid close attention to her constituents. The month before the vote, the Lovelock City Council received a petition from residents asking for the regulation of brothels. During the debate on the bill, Assemblyman Jim Johnson, a Democrat from Ely, explained, “The main essence of this bill is regulation—giving citizens of counties the right to determine whether or not to regulate them.” She may have been personally opposed to prostitution (no evidence that indicated her true feelings could be located), but she took her duty as a representative seriously. When Governor Vail Pittman, also a Democrat from Ely, vetoed the bill, some legislative observers claimed that the bill had been whisked through the two houses far too quickly for the legislators to understand.
its full implication, but the Assembly’s official record clearly shows that the topic was not a secret. Smith knew exactly what she voted for.376

By the time the session ended on March 28, the 1949 Legislature had not established any new revenue source. Instead, the solons tinkered around the edges of existing revenue streams, such as a one-cent increase in the cigarette tax, and pinned their concerns about an economic downturn to the cushion provided by the post-war reserve fund. Smith joined the majority of her colleagues in approving a boost of 50 percent in the tax rate on cigarettes, originally imposed in 1947, late in the session.377 The issue of funding education, however, remained unresolved. Esteemed Nevada historian Mary Ellen Glass explains that other states, too, were suffering from postwar stresses on their educational systems, but Nevada’s rapidly expanding population made its situation far worse than the rest of the country. By 1951, Nevada ranked “twenty-eighth in revenue allotted for state support of schools,” and “only one-third of the state’s pupils attended classes in buildings rates satisfactory for occupancy.” Glass continues, “Worse statistics were easily predictable; the postwar baby boom children would arrive at school


age in about two years.”\textsuperscript{378} Mothers (including Glass herself) began to gather in public meetings and demand action from their legislators. One legislator would prove particularly forceful in changing Nevada’s educational system and its financing.

\textit{And Then Came Maude}

Only one woman, Aloys Smith of Pershing County, was elected to the 1949 Assembly, but Clark County voters almost doubled that number. Recently retired as the elected superintendent of the Las Vegas Union School District, an elected position she held for two decades, Maude Frazier declared her candidacy but apparently did not campaign very hard, perhaps believing that her reputation and prominence in the community would send her to Carson City. Like many other candidates, she discovered that electoral success in one area did not always guarantee success in another, and she “was barely beaten … for the fourth seat from the Las Vegas district.”\textsuperscript{379} A savvy politician and skilled administrator, Maude might have made a difference in the 1949 session. She certainly did when Las Vegas voters finally sent her to Carson City in 1951.

Imbued with a fearless sense of adventure, Maude Frazier left her home state of Wisconsin, where she was born in 1881, and traveled to Nevada in 1906

\textsuperscript{378} Mary Ellen Glass, \textit{Nevada’s Turbulent ‘50s: Decade of Political and Economic Change} (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1981), 49.

to teach in several of the state’s booming mine camps. Education was not her first choice of a career—“I had always been interested in studying law. I wanted to be an attorney”—but she chose to become a teacher, despite (or perhaps due to) her father’s opposition. A skillful administrator, she soon became principal of the Sparks grammar school. In 1921, she moved to southern Nevada to accept the position of deputy superintendent of public instruction, a state job. In 1927, Frazier became Las Vegas Superintendent of Schools (with a simultaneous appointment as the principal of Las Vegas High School), a position she held for almost two decades.

Nearly six feet tall with a sharp wit, Frazier was emphatically “undismayed by any mere man.” She defied her father by continuing into higher education, and she was disciplined at her first teaching job for wearing too many ruffles and riding a bicycle. Of her first meeting with her fellow deputy superintendents in Nevada, she wrote, “to say that they did not welcome me into their ranks would be the understatement of the year.” Frazier continued,

I was well aware that when a woman takes over work done by a man, she has to do it better, has more of it to do, and usually for less pay. In that respect I was fortunate. The law set the salary.

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380 No monograph about Frazier has yet been produced, though one is warranted. Biographical sketches were published in The First 100 Persons Who Shaped Southern Nevada (Las Vegas: Stephens Press, 1999) and on the website for the Nevada Women’s History Project. The University of Nevada, Las Vegas, demolished Frazier Hall, one of the campus’s first buildings, in 2007, generating several newspaper articles about Frazier and her legacy.
Although Frazier asserted that “[i]t was never any part of my makeup to be neutral on any important issue,” it is not clear if or how she was involved with the suffrage movement in Nevada.\(^{381}\) In 1914, she was in Goldfield, the county seat of Esmeralda County where the men voted, almost two-to-one, to enfranchise Nevada women.\(^{382}\) Her later comments suggest that she supported the issue. For example, she commented that her continual reelection as Superintendent of the Las Vegas Union School District, beginning in 1927, may have marked “that the ascendancy of women was already under way.”\(^{383}\) By 1933, she was the president of the Interscholastic High School League, which supervised high school athletic competitions in football and basketball. As the originator of the first statewide football championship, Frazier demonstrated a confident ability to work well with coaches and other men in positions of authority.\(^{384}\)

Continually conscious of the importance of money to education, Frazier’s advocacy for school financing appears in her reports as deputy superintendent. In 1920, she proposed a longer school year and a minimum salary for rural school


\(^{384}\) “Crack R.H.S. End Held Ineligible; Games Forfeited,” *Nevada State Journal*, 14 November 1933.
teachers of $1,200. Three years later, she argued that “[p]eople realize that supporting the present schools is not sufficient. They are preparing for the future. School Trustees, County Commissioners, and people in general are willing spend more and more money for schools, but they want their money’s worth.” She continued in 1927, “[m]ost people have come to realize that Nevada’s biggest job is the education of its youth so that the State may have that intelligent, upright, fearless citizenry without which material wealth is a menace.”

In 1930, she was a member of the State Board of Agriculture as well as the secretary-treasurer of the Nevada Council of School Administrators. She also presented a seminar at the annual state teachers’ institute titled “Financing the Junior High School.” Of the many sessions presented by female teachers and male administrators at the institute, it was the only one concerned with money in any form. In 1932, the U.S. Commissioner of Education appointed Frazier to Nevada’s “School Finance Survey Committee,” which was tasked with considering the educational funding problems. The committee consisted of three women, including Frazier, and twenty-three men, including legislators known for

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their knowledge of state finances and taxes.\textsuperscript{388} Although none were still serving when she was elected to the Legislature, she surely learned much from them that proved useful during her legislative tenure.

Frazier retired from her educational administrative career in 1946, but continued as a financial consultant to the local board of education. With that task completed, she started her political career with the unsuccessful 1948 bid for the Assembly seat. After that defeat, one of the few times in her life in which she was bested by an opponent, she took no chances and campaigned vigorously two years later. Twenty-five women, under the leadership of Mrs. Helen Marsh, formed the “Maude Frazier for Assembly Club,” which emphasized “the need for an experienced educator in the legislature who can carry on a continuous battle for the public schools and education in general.”\textsuperscript{389} They obviously did their job well for Frazier “romped away with” both the primary and general elections.\textsuperscript{390}

Frazier took the Nevada Legislature by storm. Although newly-elected, she was tapped to chair the important Assembly Committee on Education and State Library. She introduced seven bills that concerned the state’s public schools


of which four passed both houses and were signed by the Governor. One of her unsuccessful bills would have created a legislative committee to “study the financial needs of the school districts” and recommend a “system of financing and reorganizing the state’s school setup.” Although this legislation did not pass, it facilitated conversations in the legislative halls, local bridge games, and newspapers around the state, leading the Nevada Taxpayers Association to produce its own report.

Two of Frazier’s successful bills provided a roundabout way of setting up a junior college in Las Vegas and demonstrated her prowess as a politician and a lawmaker. Utilizing statewide language and never mentioning Clark County or Las Vegas, the two bills moved quickly and quietly through both houses and were sitting on the Governor’s desk when a handful of northern Senators discovered that the bills would, in effect if not in fact, establish a junior college in the upstart southern city. The Senate issued a call to retrieve the bills from the Governor, but the Assembly refused to comply, and they became law. This legislation cleverly fulfilled her major campaign promise.


392 “School Survey Report Planned,” Reno Evening Gazette, 11 November 1952. See also, for example, the meeting agenda for the League of Women Voters published under “Social Calendar,” Reno Evening Gazette, 25 February 1952.

393 “Stress Education,” Reno Evening Gazette, 22 March 1951.
Frazier maintained a singular focus on education funding, knowing that repetition would gain attention and supporters. In 1953, she was “an outspoken advocate of increased school aid” and took every opportunity to bring attention to her issue. For example, Frazier cast the only Assembly vote against the bill sponsored by her colleague and friend Hazel Denton to provide money for state parks, saying “every penny of the money we have left over should go to the schools. They should come first.” In her diary, Denton noted, but did not protest this vote. As a fierce advocate for schools, Denton understood the symbolism of Frazier’s action. Frazier could also be blunt about other legislators’ school financing proposals and unabashedly favored her own. A Reno newspaper reported that

Miss Frazier said she would support the Christensen-Covington bill “If I thought it had any chance whatever of passage.” She said she believes her bill calls for an amount the state can afford to spend and that it therefore has a good chance of passage.

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396 “Increased School Aid Is Sought in Measure,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, 11 February 1953.
Throughout her long career in the Assembly, no news story about education was complete without a memorable comment from Maude Frazier, such as her admonition to her Assembly colleagues in 1955:

Noting that every other school finance plan in sight had been defeated in either the assembly or the senate, Miss Maude Frazier (D-Clark) declared “This, children, is the last chance.”397

Frazier was a leader by action, if not in title, during her legislative tenure, and legislative photos reveal that she commanded a prominent desk in the center of the Assembly Chambers.

Illustration 2. Maude Frazier gazed directly at the camera. Courtesy of the Nevada State Library and Archives

Frazier was barely a month into her first legislative session when a political pundit wondered why the Assembly Democrats had not named her as their whip. She was already, declared the pundit, a “top notch law maker … who is very sound on brain matter.” She chaired the Education Committee, not at all a lightweight assignment, throughout her tenure; served as a member of the prestigious Legislative Commission in 1954; and during the crucial 1955 session, became the first woman appointed to the Assembly Ways and Means Committee. “[A] tireless worker for increased state aid to schools,” she remained on that important money committee through her last session in 1961. She resigned from the Assembly in 1962, at the age of eighty-one years, to accept Governor Grant Sawyer’s appointment to fill out the remaining six months in the term of the recently-deceased Lt. Governor. Maude Frazier passed away peacefully at her Las Vegas home on June 20, 1963.

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400 “Maude Frazier Dies in Sleep,” *Las Vegas Sun*, 21 June 1963. All of the mourners quoted in the article were men, from U.S. Senator Howard Cannon and Governor Grant Sawyer to a number of Republican assemblymen who probably opposed the outspoken Democrat. Demonstrating that strong relationships often formed in the crucible of legislative sessions despite gender, party, or age, Assemblymen R. Guild Gray, a fifty-two-year-old Republican from Las Vegas, lamented, “I have lost one of my best friends.”
Legislative Action

In 1952, the Reno League of Women Voters conducted a survey about the “facts and figures” concerned with school conditions. Chaired by Ellen Creek Thompson, wife of prominent Reno attorney and later federal judge Bruce Thompson, several women used the study as the basis of their presentations to organizations all around Reno in the months leading up to the 1953 legislative session.401 Despite their grassroots efforts and the diligence of Assemblywomen Frazier and Denton, the 1953 Legislature did not come any closer to addressing Nevada’s fiscal needs than any of its predecessors, and the legislative inaction galvanized women around Nevada. After the session, Governor Charles Russell appointed a committee to study the state’s educational system, especially its financing, and provide recommendations. The Governor, a Republican, also called the legislators into special session in 1954 because, as one political commentator noted, Governor Russell held “the conviction that if something is not done for the schools, the little mothers of the state will murder him at the polls in 1954.”402 Using an appropriation from the special session, the gubernatorial

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committee hired the George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, Tennessee, to conduct the study.\textsuperscript{403} Governor Russell barely survived reelection.

The exact origin of the phrase “little mothers” is unknown. Its appearance in the 1953 political column suggests that Governor Russell used that phrase at the time, but his memoirs, derived from interviews conducted by Mary Ellen Glass, do not include any mention of that phrase. He remembered that the sales tax legislation instigated “quite a fight,” but he did not reminisce about any of the legislators or lobbyists, male or female, who had been involved.\textsuperscript{404} A word search of Reno’s digitized newspapers yielded only the one 1953 reference. Assemblywoman Hazel Denton recorded in her diary the presence of many women during several floor sessions in 1953, 1954, and 1955, but she did not use the phrase.

A former Assemblyman who was on the Nevada Tax Commission in the early 1950s used a slightly different term in his description of women’s 1955 lobbying efforts:

I can remember the—as we termed it then—the “mamas” coming up, swarming into the legislative session, from the PTA and the mothers’ groups, and they really went to work on the legislator, as, we found later, females can well do….The legislators got to the point where they were almost afraid to come out of their doors.


\textsuperscript{404}Charles H. Russell, \textit{Reminiscences of a Nevada Congressman, Governor, and Legislator} (Reno: Center for Western North American Studies, 1967), 144.
‘cause they were going to get grabbed in the halls, and they were generally swarmed. The tactics weren’t so much individual; three or four of ‘em’d grab ‘em. I don’t know of any man that can argue with three or four women at one time…Hugh [McMullen] came striding out of the senate with that long rancher’s walk that he had, with a very definite purpose of getting from the senate side to the assembly side as fast as he could. I can remember seeing a little blond woman, hanging onto him and just giving him what for. [emphasis original] And it looked, for all the world, like a big bull mastiff striding along with a little banty rooster pecking at his heels….She was alternately at his side and in front of him, and [he] didn’t know how to shake her off.405

Mary Ellen Glass, a Nevada historian who produced a credible analysis of the state in the 1950s, corroborates Cahill’s memory: “The spectacle of many ‘little mothers’ (as one legislator wryly dubbed them) buttonholing lawmakers in the hallways of the statehouse to plead for action on behalf of their children made a heavy impact.”406 As an active participant in the various efforts on behalf of increased funding for education, Glass was one of the “little mothers” and sourced her recollection for the phrase. She did not name the legislator, however. Regardless of the origin of their label, Nevada’s “little mothers” proved a powerful force.

Between the special session and the 1955 regular session, women activists and educators continued to agitate for reform. State Superintendent of Public

405 Robbins E. Cahill, Recollections of Work in State Politics, Government, Taxation, Gaming Control, Clark County Administration, and The Nevada Resort Association. An oral history conducted by Mary Ellen Glass. (Reno: University of Nevada Oral History Project), 384-384. He later identified the woman as Ellen Thompson.

406 Glass, Nevada’s Turbulent 50s, 55.
Instruction Glenn Duncan spoke about educational legislation to the national meeting of the Business and Professional Women’s Club in Reno. On the same day, Alleta Gray was scheduled to talk about the same topic at a meeting of the Southside Parent-Teacher Association also in Reno. Gray stood before numerous groups, like the Lions and the Sparks Women’s Republican Club, and made impassioned pleas for support to reform Nevada’s education system. Regardless of the venue, Gray “pointed up the serious straits of Nevada schools, especially finances, and the threat of reduced schooling for Nevada children in the near future due to lack of classroom space” and asked her audience to urge legislators to pass the legislation pending in the 1955 session. Duncan deservedly received much credit for the ultimate passage of the legislation, but Gray arguably worked harder for that goal than anyone else.

Nevada native Alleta Day Gray quickly emerged as a leader in the fight for adequate school financing. She had statewide contacts with political women and the wives of political men from, among other activities, her 1947 stint as the membership chair for the Nevada Community Concert Association. The women in charge of individual community efforts included Margaret Muth, wife of the

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State Engineer, and Lois Washburn, who had served in the 1937 Legislature.\textsuperscript{409} Alleta’s husband, Leslie Gray, had been an Assemblyman in 1947 and was a politically active attorney who spoke often to women’s groups to urge them to increase their political activities.\textsuperscript{410} By 1950, Alleta Gray was a leader in community and state Republican and education organizations. As extension chair of the Washoe County Republican Women, Gray organized the Sparks Republican Women’s Club in 1952. Three years later, the Sparks Parent-Teachers Association rewarded her for her five-year tenure as the state PTA organization’s legislative chair. She spoke often and forcefully about Nevada’s educational problems to numerous organizations, sometimes alone and sometimes as a participant on panels, such as the one with Reno School Superintendent Earl Wooster at the 1954 meeting of the Nevada State Classroom Teachers Association. She also was the educational director for Girls’ State, an annual civic

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\textsuperscript{409} “Concert Group Seeks Members,” *Reno Evening Gazette*, 5 September 1947. Nevada’s small population meant that women’s social networks often overlapped their political networks, which illustrates why newspapers’ society pages can be so helpful in understanding political women. These networks persisted for much of the twentieth century and transcended generations. After Margaret Muth’s husband died, she began a second, illustrious career as a high school educator. The legendary Mrs. Muth taught this author’s senior honors English class.

\textsuperscript{410} For example, in 1948, Assemblyman Gray encouraged women, regardless of party, to vote and become politically active, urging them “to go to the Precinct meeting and select candidates, demand equal rights to help draw the platform, go to County and State Conventions and argue and insist on having a voice in the politics of your State, County and Community.” He also highlighted “the much discussed sales tax.” Minute Book, 21 January 1948, Sparks Business and Professional Women’s Club, box “Sparks BPWC,” BPW, NHS.
\end{footnotesize}
leadership conference for high school girls, through most of the 1950s. In 1954, Gray was one of the Washoe County delegates to the state Republican Convention, along with Mabel Isbell who would be elected that year to the Legislature, and joined Beverly Linnecke and six other women, on the Washoe County Republican Central Committee. Although she was a key member of the lobbying group of women known as “the little mothers,” Alleta Gray had no children of her own.

In 1955, Gray testified in favor of the Peabody report at a joint hearing of the Senate and Assembly Education Committees, chaired by Frazier. The school district consolidation plan, a key component of the Peabody report, was opposed by several city superintendents who would lose their jobs under the proposed bill. Although their opposing testimony centered around the notion that local control was superior to state supervision, the real sticking point proved to be the assumption of the bonded indebtedness of the older districts. To counter the male superintendents, Gray introduced several women who spoke knowledgeably about


the bonded indebtedness question, including Reno resident Ramona First, who held a doctorate in statistics from the University of Wisconsin and had served on the finance subcommittee of the Governor’s School Survey Committee. The women’s testimony was the featured part of the hearing, clearly displaying that financial acumen knew no gender. Additionally, Gray attempted to raise the problem inherent in financing schools through the property tax, but one of the Senators cut her off, insisting that the topic could not be considered in that context because it was not in the bill. Frazier, however, stated that this legislation was not in its final form and changes would probably be made.

The Peabody Report recommendations remained in Assembly Bill 241, which ultimately passed, and placed into law many of the reforms Frazier had begun advocating as a deputy superintendent in the 1920s. The necessary

413 The women who testified were Mrs. W.H. Kelly of Sparks; Mrs. Peter Test of Reno representing PTA groups, and Mary Ellen Glass who represented the Citizens Committee for the Public Schools. Ramona First’s academic credentials were not provided in newspaper coverage, except for the occasional reference to “Dr. First.” Usually, she was identified as Mrs. Darrell L. First, which demonstrates that, when it comes to women’s history, word-searching newspapers is more profitable than skimming headlines. Mary Ellen Glass ensured that Ramona First’s authority was acknowledged in her footnotes in Nevada’s Turbulent 50s (122fn16). “School Survey Sub-Committee Report Ready,” Reno Evening Gazette, 24 November 1954.


revenue-generator was left to other legislation. On February 2, 1955, six legislators, including Assemblywomen Hazel Denton and Mabel Isbell, introduced the first bill to institute a state sales tax. The significance of the female cosponsors cannot be underemphasized. Denton, a Democrat from rural Lincoln County, was a retired teacher and former county school board trustee who was intimately familiar with school finance issues. Isbell, a Republican from urban Washoe County, was a stockholder in the family-operated Isbell Construction Company, one of the state’s largest and most prosperous contractors. Rural county representatives and large business interests had helped kill earlier sales tax bills, so the cosponsorship of two women from a rural county and a large business interest sent a strong signal that this legislative session would be different. As it turned out, their bill did not move; instead, the Legislature debated and slowly processed Senate Bill 171, a substantially similar bill that was introduced almost two weeks later by the Senate Committee on Finance, chaired by Ken Johnson of Carson City.

Before the session ended, sales tax opponents proposed various other methods to raise state revenue. An income tax was considered, but rejected because it would not produce as much revenue and would not affect the large

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number of tourists who visited Nevada. An increase in the property tax rate was constrained by the constitutional limit of five dollars per one hundred dollars in assessed valuation. The constitutionality of a hotel room tax was in doubt. An estate tax was unquestionably unconstitutional. According to a post-session summary of legislative actions, the sales tax became the choice because of the comparative ease of administration, the relatively high income it produces and out of a desire to impose a levy that would not be borne wholly by Nevada citizens. The argument was advanced incessantly that tourists would pay a major share of the receipts from a levy on gross retail sales.

The debate continued into the final days of the session, and Denton recorded that the Assembly Speaker Cyril Bastian
gave us (Assembly) the works this a.m. on the necessity of passing the Sales Tax to finance the schools, welfare bills, building programs, etc. etc. It really cleared the air and made us all feel better! He himself wasn’t converted but last evening Miss Frazier told me they had a tax expert from Utah who showed them the sales tax in its true light as a savior of the schools and the state’s economy.

The air did not stay clear long.

Denton soon despaired that the major issues of the session had created a

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418 “Principal Arguments Against a State Sales Tax and Some Answer to Those Questions,” Speaker’s Kit, June 1956, State Committee to Retain the Sales Tax Papers, NC 1081, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno.


420 Denton Diary, 11 March 1955.
“dog biting dog” attitude between Assembly and Senate, and Heaven knows how it is going to turn out. Hope people come to their sense on the Sales Tax measure. It’s the one thing that will save the schools yet letters against it are already coming—some of them from Lincoln County anonymous and bitter which is a cowardly way to express their feelings.

Her despair turned to joy on March 22—“[a] day to mark and remember!”—as the Assembly finally passed Senate Bill 171 with all three of the women members voting in favor of it.

1956 Referendum

With the Governor’s signature, it appeared that success was secure, but the celebration did not last long. Soon after the session ended, at the annual meeting of the Nevada Congress of Parents and Teachers, Alleta Gray “expressed considerable concern about petitions being circulated at the present time for repeal of the recently enacted state sales tax, on which much of the state school system improvement is predicated.” Within weeks, a group called “Volunteers In Politics” had collected enough signatures from around the state to put the new law up for referendum at the next general election. As soon as the legislative session ended, the fight began to retain the tax. Glass wrote from first-hand experience, asserting that the “little mothers,” though wearied by the demands of

421 Ibid., 14 March 1955.

422 Journal of the Assembly 1955, 609.

the legislative session, were not about to lose the fight at the ballot box. Their first reaction was to determine the strength of the petition. The number of signatures was not in dispute, but the quality of those signatures was questionable. Glass remembered the process:

> With the cooperation of Secretary of State John Kootz, a team of perhaps ten women gathered for several days in the senate chamber of the capitol, writing the name and address of every signer of the petition on an index card, filing the cards alphabetically and by counties. Within a short time, it became apparent even to these amateurs that a court test would show enough duplications or illegal signatures to have the petition rejected.424

Consultation with politically savvy attorneys convinced the women that a court case would be costly and perhaps inconclusive. Allowing the voters to decide whether or not to affirm the sales tax law might very well result in protecting the law from future legislative mischief. According to the state’s constitution, a law affirmed by the voters could not be amended or repealed by the Legislature. Glass continues:

> After long discussion about both possibilities and the intricacies and political implications of either course, the Citizens Committee/PTA leaders decided to gamble on the good sense of the electorate and abandoned plans for a court test. The card file disappeared and the school lobby geared up for the fall election in 1956.425

424 Glass, *Nevada’s Turbulent 50s*, 58.

425 Ibid., 59. The Nevada Constitution (art. 19, sec. 1) authorizes referenda on state laws. This constitutional amendment was added in 1904 after an identical resolution was passed by two successive Legislatures (1901 and 1903) and approved by the voters. Eleanore Bushnell and Don W. Driggs, *The Nevada Constitution: Origin and Growth*, 6th ed. (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1984), 207-208; *Political History of Nevada 1996*, 278.
Several organizations joined forces to create a statewide organization determined to stop the repeal of the new state sales tax. Alleta Gray conducted the initial planning meeting, which included representatives, mostly women, from the Nevada Municipal Association, the Washoe County legislative delegation, school-based Parent-Teacher Associations (PTA), the Nevada Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs, the Reno Chamber of Commerce, the Governor’s Committee on Aid to Dependent Children, and the Nevada State Education Association. The representatives of these organizations feared that the repeal of the sales tax would force “the state to curtail its aid to schools and welfare operations, or to impose an income tax.”

The official name of the new group was “The State Committee to Retain the Sales Tax,” and the members adopted the campaign slogan: “S.O.S.—Save Our Schools.” Although Reno attorney Bert Goldwater was chosen as chairman, all of the other officers were women: Gray was vice-chair; Edna Colville, treasurer; and Beverly Linnecke, secretary. Gray and Colville also chaired the Committee on Extension. Like Gray, Colville and Linnecke were active in community organizations, especially those with business interests, such as BPW and Soroptomists, and local and state Republican politics. Linnecke was

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particularly active in the Republican party. Colville was an accountant and
appointed secretary of the seventeen men and women on the Washoe County
Grand Jury in 1954. She had been an active member of BPW since joining the
Reno chapter in 1941 and was the chapter president in 1947. She was also
president of the Reno Republican Women’s Club and the Nevada Federation of
Business and Professional Women’s Clubs, which required extensive travel
throughout the state. In 1955, Colville was western regional chair of the Business
and Professional Women’s Clubs and presided over a significantly large
convention of women’s groups with over five hundred women from throughout
the western United States.428 Combining business expertise with a woman’s
concern for community, these women were also part of the Bridge Generation.

The Nevada Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs
initially approached the sales tax issue cautiously. During the pitched legislative
battle of 1949, the issue was not mentioned in their publications, but just a year
later, the organization’s State Legislature Platform included the recommendation
that the membership study the “sales tax – ways to avoid same as well as how law

428 “Business Clubs Enjoy Dinner and Program,” Reno Evening Gazette,
18 October 1941; “Installation of Officers for Reno Club,” Reno Evening Gazette,
30 June 1947; “Precinct Work Discussion Set,” Reno Evening Gazette, 14 March
1950; “Hawthorne BPW Seats Officers,” Reno Evening Gazette, 1 June 1953;
“Washoe County Grand Jury Venire Drafted,” Reno Evening Gazette, 11
November 1954; “Washoe County Grand Jury Members Named,” Reno Evening
Gazette, 24 November 1954; “Reno Woman Will Preside Over Regional
Conference” and “BPW Regional Conference Opens,” Reno Evening Gazette, 13
July 1955.
would work if passed.” Two years after that, the Legislative Steering Committee recommended careful consideration of the issue, explaining “None of us wants a Sales Tax, but the 1951 legislators seem to think that the 1953 session will have to pass it, so we should know the facts in order to take a stand, either for or against, whichever the members decide.” By 1956, they had taken that stand, and their support was unqualified. When Hope Roberts, Legislative Chairman for the Nevada Federation, reported that the organization had been solicited to join the State Committee to Retain the Sales Tax, she urged the local clubs that comprised the Federation’s membership, “If you have not already done so, please make every effort to get behind this most important measure, which is so vital to the continued economy of our State.”

The State Committee to Retain the Sales Tax adopted and widely published a detailed statement of principles explaining their support for the new sales tax. The first principle flatly accepted the premise “that the schools need more money and the state must provide that money.” The remaining four principles dismissed other revenue options on the basis that existing sources were “needed for other functions of government” at all levels and that proposed sources either would not raise sufficient funds or “would place a greater burden on the

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low-income.” The statement concluded that “[t]he sales tax is a fair tax.”430 Carefully worded, this and other statements from the committee did not proclaim that all of the sales tax revenue collection would support the educational system because, in fact, the sales tax law did not earmark the proceeds for education, for the Aid to Dependent Children match (passage of that legislation had also been predicated on the passage of the sales tax bill in 1955), or for any other program. The state’s general fund was the destination for revenue generated by the 2 percent levy on retail sales in Nevada and on materials purchased in other states and used in Nevada.431 This legal disconnect between collection and distribution had doomed the lottery bill in 1939, but sales tax advocates in 1955 successfully maintained voters and—more importantly—legislators’ expectations that the proceeds would fund education.432

Whether the women knew it or not, their campaign, begun in June 1956, mirrored the strategy of the 1914 suffrage campaign, which depended on local organizations and grassroots activism. Both campaigns tapped socially and politically prominent men as the titular heads of their organizations, but the work


431 Nevada Tax Facts (Carson City: Nevada Taxpayers Association, 2003), 84.

432 Robbins Cahill explained how he, as a newly-elected Assemblyman, killed the 1939 lottery bill, which had been expected to pass. Cahill, Recollections of Work in State Politics, 127-132.
was done by numerous women who traveled throughout the state and met with the voters individually. In 1914, “personal contact with the voter was accomplished by street meetings, rural voters by train, automobile, stage, and even on horseback.” Regardless of modes of transportation, women affiliated with each campaign traveled widely and often to spread information about their respective issues. Both efforts included precinct-level organizations “with a woman precinct leader” and effectively utilized mass media—newspapers for the suffrage campaign and television and radio for the tax referendum committee. Direct mail became mandatory for both campaigns because voters were so widely dispersed around the huge state.433 The 1950 campaign had the advantage of being able to build on recent and successful ventures, by Alleta Gray and Edna Colville in particular, to establish Republican women’s clubs throughout the state.434

433 Sarah (Mrs. O.H.) Mack, “History of the Suffrage Movement in Nevada, 1900-1920,” 11-12, NC 798, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno. Anne H. Martin is credited with developing the strategy for the suffrage campaign, which she then deployed in her own run for the U.S. Senate in 1918 and 1920. Although unsuccessful, her campaign garnered the attention of Nevada male politicians, such as U.S. Senator from Nevada Pat McCarran who declared Martin’s 1918 effort as “the best managed campaign that has ever been conducted in this state,” [emphasis original] and proceeded to adopt those methods as their own. Kathryn Louise Anderson, “Practical Political Equality for Women: Anne Martin’s Campaigns for the U.S. Senate in Nevada, 1918 and 1920” (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1978), 157. See also Anne Bail Howard, The Long Campaign: A Biography of Anne Martin (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1985) and Phillip I. Earl, “Bustles, Broadsides and Ballots: The Story of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Northeastern Nevada, 1869-1914,” Northeastern Nevada Historical Society Quarterly 6,7 (Spring, Summer, Fall, 1976): 25.

Gray and Linnecke traveled Nevada, explaining the new sales tax to the residents of the various communities and urging their support in November. The Reno newspapers closely followed the two women as they met “with various civic leaders in nearly all of Nevada’s seventeen counties and with many of the candidates in the forthcoming election.” They left Reno on June 18, planning to stop in most of the larger towns and spend four days in rapidly-growing Las Vegas. By June 27, the women were in Tonopah to establish county committees to retain the sales tax in both Nye and neighboring Esmeralda Counties. They presented “[a]rguments designated to show that the sales tax is essential to the state’s economy, and especially to the school system” and “explained also that plans are being made to organize local groups … for a pro-sales tax campaign.” On July 6 they were in Lander County. Returning to Reno a few days later, Linnecke and Gray reported that they had visited thirteen of Nevada’s seventeen counties, an impressive travel schedule even by 2011 standards. Gray’s and Linnecke’s visits resulted in the formation of eleven county committees, six of which named women as chair or vice-chair.435

Gray’s individual speaking engagements continued into the fall. In September, she spoke to the Reno council of the Parent-Teachers Association to outline the problem and the need to keep the sales tax in place, urging “that all parents take an active part in retaining the sales tax and that all PTA units have speakers give factual data on the sales tax to their members before the November elections.” She emphasized that “[t]he committee to retain the sales tax is made up of people from all organizations throughout the state of Nevada” and announced that Nevadans would be educated about the importance of the sales tax through television, radio, and newspapers.436

Sales tax opponents suggested other forms of taxation, but most such efforts were disingenuous. The battle was not about the type of tax, but about whether there should be a tax at all. Indeed, the debate continued the time-honored American argument about the extent of government. Some Nevadans believed that educational reform was not necessary and attempted to maintain the status quo. Those who argued in favor of an increased role for the state in what had initially been a local system focused on the needs of a rapidly increasing population, the effects of inflation, and a desire for higher teacher salaries in order “to attract and hold competent people.” For these advocates, the sales tax had the added advantage of being the only available form of taxation not borne entirely by Nevada residents. They insisted that “Nevada residents do not pay the entire bill.”

Instead, they emphasized, “[r]esidents pay only about one-half of the total amount. Out-of-state tourists and businesses pay the balance.”

Those Nevadans who wanted to maintain the status quo organized as the Committee for Repeal of Nevada Sales Tax, which was based in southern Nevada. Its officers included Richard Ham of Boulder City and former Assemblyman George Rudiak of Las Vegas, who had vigorously, but unsuccessfully, pursued a boost in the gambling tax rate in 1953. The pro-repeal committee had succeeded in getting the question onto the ballot by utilizing a statewide network, but the anti-repeal committee, based in northern Nevada, was better organized and welcomed “support from all classes of people in the State – from P.T.A.’s, Women’s Clubs, Wholesalers, Retailers, Gamblers, Professional Groups, Individuals, Church Groups, Bankers, Housewives, Parents, Teachers, Clerk, Utilities, Labor Groups, etc.” Sales tax advocates had successfully obtained formal endorsements from four of the state’s major newspapers and from influential organizations such as the Nevada Taxpayers Association, the Nevada State Farm Bureau, and the Nevada Federation of Business and Professional Women. The group seeking to repeal the sales tax could count only a handful of individuals and the Storey

437 “Principal Arguments in Favor of A. Additional Revenue for Schools [and] B. the Sales Tax as the Method of Raising That Revenue,” Speaker’s Kit, State Committee to Retain the Sales Tax Papers.
County Republican Convention among its few public supporters.\textsuperscript{438} This organization vividly demonstrated the effect a small group of people could have on the lawmaking and democratic processes.

On the evening of November 1, 1956, parents all over the state campaigned door-to-door in their communities in favor of the tax, a strategy spearheaded by Glass, who had succeeded Gray as legislative chair for the Nevada Congress of PTA.\textsuperscript{439} Five days later at the general election, Nevada voters incontrovertibly approved the retention of the sales tax in state law by passing the ballot question by a two-to-one margin, “the first time that an initiative or referendum proposal led the ticket.” Even Dwight Eisenhower did not receive as many “yes” votes as did the sales tax.\textsuperscript{440} Reno’s Republican-leaning paper editorialized:

The agitation to do away with this tax was started in Clark county by a group that considered itself a liberal element in politics. Efforts were made to enlist labor support, but with the exception of a few of the more radical characters, the union leaders and the rank and file backed away from the issue. The sales tax was not a labor issue or a class issue, or a partisan one. Very sensibly, the voters of Nevada recognized that there must be more money for education,

\textsuperscript{438} Bert Goldwater, Chairman, “To All Editors of the State of Nevada and To All Citizens of the State of Nevada,” 31 July 1956, State Committee to Retain the Sales Tax Papers.


\textsuperscript{440} Austin W. Hutchison and Don E. Driggs, “The 1956 Election in Nevada,” \textit{The Western Political Quarterly} 10 (March 1957): 132, 134.
for extended state services, for the increasing cost of government at all levels.\textsuperscript{441}

As a regressive tax, an aspect that the pro-sales tax forces readily admitted, the sales tax had the potential to become a class issue. It is remarkable, and most likely a reflection of the Nevada’s small population, that it did not. Certainly, many poor Nevadans stood to suffer from the imposition of the tax, which originally affected purchases of food and other basic necessities. Groceries for home use were not exempted from the sales tax until 1979.\textsuperscript{442} But many more Nevadans were not poor. By 1954, Nevada had by far the highest per capita personal income in the country—over 130 percent of the national average.\textsuperscript{443} Many advocates insisted that a tax on retail sales was manageable by individuals: if a person did not want to pay it, he or she could avoid buying taxable items. An income tax or property tax was unavoidable and typically in the hands of legislators. Those people with a comfortable income believed they could manage a sales tax, and certainly welcomed the commensurate reduction in the state property tax rate, but those without did not have anyone speaking up for their concerns.


\textsuperscript{442} \textit{Nevada Tax Facts}, 82.

According to the press, women had ensured that the sales tax did not become a labor issue. In Sparks, one of Nevada’s largest Democratic-leaning, labor towns, “the local labor groups who opposed the sales tax saw their school-minded wives and neighbors go for the retention of the sales tax almost five to one.”444 Fiscal maternalism won the day.

Conclusion

Pragmatic and business-like, Nevada women identified the financial needs of the state’s schools, placed talented women in the state’s lawmaking body, and ensured that the resulting tax law was secure. With their sights firmly focused on the money and their oratory centered on the children, they skillfully capitalized on Nevada’s now-entrenched reliance on nonresidents for revenue and safely navigated Nevadans’ tendency to assume that their current taxes were burdensome.445 By utilizing the referendum process, the women who labored on the campaign became lawmakers. Together with the duly-elected Assemblywomen—Hazel Denton, Maude Frazier, and Mabel Isbell—the “little mothers” exercised a loud and powerful political voice. Their fiscal maternalism succeeded in providing Nevada schools with, as Glass elucidates, “a firm and


445 Female candidates often bemoaned Nevadans’ tax burden, but like male candidates, they rarely detailed that burden. See, for example, “What Washoe Candidates Have To Say,” Nevada State Journal, 2 September 1932.
generally adequate financial foundation [and] a place in the power structure that they had not previously enjoyed.”

In the first year of collection, the amount of revenue from the sales tax exceeded the amount of gambling tax revenue by 23 percent and exceeded the amount the State expended on education in 1951 by almost 80 percent. The Legislature began decreasing the property tax rate, and within three years, it had dropped by a third. The “One Sound State” advocates never envisioned such a decrease. They believed that new Nevada residents who were wealthy would be drawn to Nevada by the lack of certain taxes—a retail sales tax among them—but would then buy valuable property, build expensive homes and commercial buildings, and thus enlarge Nevada’s tax revenue through increased property tax assessments. Instead, almost twenty years after Assemblyman C.C. Boak proposed his program, the Legislature with the endorsement of most voting Nevadans chose a different route: lower property taxes and higher sales taxes. By 1958, the state property tax rate was thirty-eight cents per one hundred dollars of assessed valuation, nearly 50 percent lower than it had been in 1938 during the Great Depression. Despite Nevada’s rapidly increasing population, state revenue from the ad valorem tax was nearly the same: $1.5 million in 1938 and $1.9 million in 1958. The new sales tax, however, more than made up the difference. In four years after the tax’s inception, its revenue had almost doubled and was

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446 Glass, *Nevada’s Turbulent 50s*, 60.
more than the combined revenue from property, mining, gambling, and liquor
taxes.\textsuperscript{447}

For many years, the chosen path appeared to be strong and sound.
Nevadans enjoyed high incomes and good schools. In 1964, the state Department
of Education reported that Nevada was first in the nation in per capita income and
personal income per child of school age. In state rankings, Nevada was nineteenth
in per pupil expenditures and sixteenth in average teacher salaries. Among
western states, Nevada was sixth for teacher salaries. Nevada’s economic
development officials crowed that “[t]he state’s schools are uniformly good, and
the larger counties boast schools which are the equal of almost any city in the
nation.”\textsuperscript{448} In 1972, Nevada’s per capita income, nearly 9 percent higher than the
preceding year, exceeded that of any western state and was third in the country.
Reno’s per capita income was third in the West behind San Francisco and Los
Angeles. The astonishing growth in Las Vegas increased that city’s per capita
income by nearly 13 percent. A study commissioned by the Legislature and the
Governor found that “Nevadans were receiving ‘a good return on their tax
dollars’” in their educational system and that “60 per cent … felt Nevada’s

\textsuperscript{447} \textit{Report of the State Controller} (Carson City: State Printing Office,

\textsuperscript{448} “Employers Note This: Nevada’s a Good Place to Live,” \textit{Reno Evening
Gazette-Nevada State Journal}, 1 February 1964; “Per Capita Pay Highest In
schools were doing a good job.” 449 Tourists continued to spend their money in Nevada in steadily increasing numbers, visible reminders that Nevada families did not have to pay for those schools.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

The 1956 sales tax referendum marks the only time that a legislatively-established tax was presented to Nevada voters for approval or disapproval in the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{450} With their vote to retain the tax statute and shelter it from future legislative tinkering, Nevadans essentially agreed to impose a tax upon themselves. That effort’s success can be directly attributed to women’s active participation in the organization and execution of the campaign. Women’s leadership consisted of three significant factors. First, they asserted their moral authority as mothers. They argued that revenue from the tax was vitally important for Nevada’s children—primarily for the schools, but also to assist the needy—and did not oppose the assessment on groceries. As such, their advocacy for the tax was not perceived as self-serving, but rather as an example of motherly care and maternal self-sacrifice. Second, women contributed a monetary intelligence gained from many years of business experience. Their economic expertise, demonstrated in numerous speeches and legislative testimony, generated public confidence in their political position. They also understood the financial aspects of running a statewide campaign. It was not an accident that statistician Dr. Ramona First presented the fiscal implications of educational reform nor that Edna Colville was the treasurer of the State Committee to Retain the Sales Tax.

\textsuperscript{450} Michael J. Stewart, “Questions on the Ballot,” Political History of Nevada 2006, 150.
Finally, the women exhibited a sophisticated savvy about Nevada politics. They utilized a campaign style that named prominent men as titular leaders and combined mass media with women’s personal visits throughout the state. Begun with the successful suffrage campaign in 1914, this particular campaign structure had become, by mid-twentieth-century, the norm in Nevada politics. More importantly, these women continually emphasized that much of the revenue would come from non- Nevadans. Tourists, they argued, would generate nearly half of the sale tax revenues, some of which would be used as a match to obtain even more money from the federal government. As a result, women assisted in the extension of a central trope in mid-century Nevada politics, and the state’s fiscal policy, heavily dependent on gambling and federal funding, became firmly attached to other people’s money.

I suggest the term “fiscal maternalism” to express a significant—and previously overlooked—aspect of women as policymakers. Demonstrated most vividly by the women involved in the 1956 referendum, who acted essentially as nonelected lawmakers, fiscal maternalism encompasses the themes that emerged from this study of women legislators and Nevada tax policy in the first half of the twentieth century. These women’s social concerns were mitigated by their

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451 Former Nevada Congresswoman Barbara Vucanovich provides a marvelous explanation of this campaign structure, which she calls “Politics, Nevada Style.” Barbara F. Vucanovich and Patricia D. Cafferata, Barbara F. Vucanovich: From Nevada to Congress, and Back Again (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2005), 49.
recognition of the state’s economic limitations. For them, legislation that might expand the state’s social responsibilities, whether introduced by themselves or their male colleagues, could not be separated from their understanding of fiscal issues, which they had gained through extensive experience in the business sector. As a result, women lawmakers displayed a motherly care for their state’s economic condition that sometimes dominated any expected concerns for other women. Fiscal maternalism explains how women lawmakers from both parties could directly support Nevada’s unusual industries of gambling, weddings, divorces, and prostitution by voting for enabling legislation, even when other women lobbied in opposition, and indirectly endorse them by not acting legislatively to attempt to retreat from that particular economic course.

This study focused on the twenty-nine women who served in the Nevada Legislature between 1919, the first year that a woman officially joined the Assembly, and 1956, the year of the sales tax referendum. All but one of these women served in the Assembly, and most won their seats through contested elections. A complete list of these women is attached as Appendix A. These women differed by party and region of the state, but they shared one important characteristic. They were all experienced businesswomen, steeped in Nevada’s economic life. Appendix B contains a list of all of their known occupations. Almost without exception, as discussed in chapter 3, they also actively participated in the Nevada Federation of Business and Professional Women’s Clubs. Whether as employees, employers, or entrepreneurs, these women
understood money. More than another factor, that fiscal acumen shaped their politics and their legislative experiences.

I refer to these women as the Bridge Generation. For the most part, they were alive when suffrage was achieved, but had not been active in the particular movement, and their political activities were over well before the beginning of the second feminist movement, which is generally dated from the early 1960s. I selected the word “bridge” for its dual meaning. It acknowledges that this cohort of public women spans the lightly-studied period of time between the suffrage generation—those women who battled for the franchise—of the early twentieth century and the women of the second feminist wave in the late twentieth century. Simultaneously, the word invokes the popular card game that facilitated the social interaction of Nevada’s political women and men. Events held by women’s clubs featured bridge and other card games, and legislators often filled lulls during sessions with bridge games. The society pages of Nevada’s newspapers consistently reported such games throughout much of the twentieth century and, in the process, revealed the social and political networks that criss-crossed the state. Women lawmakers, without exception, played bridge with each other, with male political and business colleagues, and with members of opposing parties. Over cards, both men and women developed relationships that informed and shaped the state’s business and political activities. Successful politicians interlaced lawmaking and socializing.
Evidence strongly suggests that these women’s legislative and political experiences were mostly positive. Some of them transitioned into government jobs, and some ran for re-election to the Legislature or stood for some other public office. Most likely, many of them would have agreed with two-term Assemblywoman Alma Woods who wrote, “I loved every minute I was in the Legislature.” Yet they could also be thwarted by male political leaders and frustrated in their efforts by recalcitrant voters. Sexism was certainly a daily occurrence in their legislative lives. In 1927, the male colleagues of Assemblywoman Ethel McGuire proclaimed her “the Sweetheart of the Assembly.” Lois Washburn, who served a decade later, “privately but bitterly denounc[ed] the ‘political boss’ of Nye County—an old gent in a wheelchair.” Hazel Denton named Assemblyman William Swackhamer as “the offender” in a 1955 encounter with a female attaché at a party. Assemblywomen’s re-election rates were dismally low until the 1950s, and women were excluded from the Senate unless they were staff or related to a Senator. Sometimes, as in the case of

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452 Josie Alma Woods to Mary Ellen Glass, 21 September 1973, Josie Alma Woods Correspondence, NC 826, Special Collections, University of Nevada, Reno.


454 Lois Deimel Whealey, email to author, 4 June 2010.

455 Hazel Baker Denton daily journal, 8 March 1955, Hazel Baker Denton Papers, MS 97-03, Special Collections, UNLV Libraries, University of Nevada, Las Vegas.
long-time Senate attaché, Florence Miller Buckingham, they were both. The one female Senator in this study, detailed in chapter 4, certainly reflects the entrenched clubbiness of the Nevada State Senate. Appointed in 1935, Frances Friedhoff replaced her husband, a tenured Senator who had been forced to resign by his federal employer, and served a mere fourteen days. This dissertation, however, did not focus on sexism, or the unequal power relationships between men and women. Instead, this dissertation attempted to understand how lawmaking women, in the years between the two feminist waves, negotiated the legislative process and achieved certain accomplishments despite sexism.

Chapter 2 elucidated that the first women elected to the Legislature were not entering a formerly all-male preserve. In actuality, women had participated in Nevada’s legislative process since Hannah Clapp lobbied for an appropriation from the Territorial Legislature in 1861. In subsequent years, the number of women steadily increased. Lobbyists agitated for and against various issues, and both the Assembly and the Senate hired women for clerical positions. Newspapers sent female reporters. In a myriad of ways, women’s voices and women’s bodies infused the Capitol Building. When Assemblywoman Sadie Hurst took her seat in 1919, the Legislature was used to the presence of women, and the women who were elected to the body, like Hurst, were comfortable with the legislative process and with dealing with men.

These women were also comfortable with partisan politics. Chapter 3 described how these women, who were active partisans, became effective
legislators. They participated fully and energetically in the legislative process, chairing committees, presiding over the Assembly, and maneuvering a large number of bills and resolutions. Many were successful at getting their legislation into law. Their bills established free public libraries, licensed nurses, provided workers’ compensation to certain employees, and reformed the state’s educational system. They gave hundreds of speeches, cast thousands of votes, and participated in countless parliamentary procedures. They led; they followed; they balked; and they cooperated. In short, they acted like legislators.

Many of the women had been raised in politically-active families, and some of their mothers had been suffragists. For the Bridge Generation, however, suffrage made it possible to vote and hold office, but it did not define their politics. Instead, it was their business experience, combined with their sense of themselves as women, that shaped their legislative actions. They were astute businesswomen who embodied both maternalist concerns and fiscal acumen, and they leveraged their maternal authority to legitimize their participation in economic discussions. Well-educated, mobile, and independent of patriarchal authority, Nevada’s female legislators challenge the conventional notion of the modern American woman. Their experiences suggest that the modern woman also had an economic component. In addition, their commitment to limited government indicates that political conservatism cannot be mistaken as a marker of non-modernity.
The Bridge Generation’s interaction with fiscal legislation, as considered in chapters 4 and 5, demonstrated that sex could not be used to predict a legislator’s vote. In the 1920s, women from both parties voted for bills that maintained Nevada’s status as a place to obtain a relatively quick and painless divorce, despite lobbying from other women who thought that divorce should be more difficult to achieve, and for legislation that nearly legalized gambling. For them, these were economic issues first, moral ones second. The legalization of gambling in 1931 appears to have, at first, made it more difficult for women to get elected to the Legislature, but by the mid-1930s, women again sat in the Assembly as Nevada continued to increase its reliance on federal funding. Some Assemblywomen, like their male colleagues, accepted federally-funded appointments after their legislative service.

By 1950, the state’s booming economy, driven by an expanding tourist industry and an escalating construction industry, caused a steep increase in the population. Combined with the post-World War II baby boom, the growing number of children began to exert tremendous pressure on Nevada schools. Nevada had a long history of maintaining government services, such as education, at the local level, and the Legislature, including its female members, had been reluctant to extend state government.456 Women in Las Vegas organized to elect

an experienced female educational administrator, as discussed in chapter 5, to the Legislature. Maude Frazier embodied the moral authority of a teacher (assumed to be an extension of a mother’s authority) with a thorough understanding of school financing. The fiscal maternalism of Frazier and her colleagues, Hazel Denton and Mabel Isbell, enhanced women’s authority in the legislative sphere and contributed to the construction of women’s political power in Nevada. Together with the aggressive lobbying from the “little mothers,” these women successfully led a legislative transformation of the state’s educational system and of the establishment of the sales tax. The 1956 referendum affirmed Nevadans’ approval of their work and focused sharply on the centrality of economics to many so-called women’s issues.

Nevada political scientists Don Driggs and Leonard “Pat” Goodall describe the state’s culture of individualistic politics and relational policymaking as “conservatism in an open society.”457 Much like the state they served, these lawmaking women demonstrated political behavior that can be interpreted as liberal at times and conservative at others. Newspapers of the 1930s trumpeted Nevada’s “liberal” laws, referring to legal gambling and easy divorce. Women legislators did not challenge these laws and sometimes, as was the case in 1921 and 1927, they supported them. These women—like their state—can also be

considered “conservative.” Their legislative efforts rarely sought wholesale change. They did not pursue legislation to equalize the sexes; instead, they introduced bills that affected specific aspects of the relationship between men and women, such as increased economic equality within marriage and the legal authority to run for office under one’s own name, rather than under a husband’s name. When they introduced bills that proposed assistance to less-fortunate Nevadans, they were careful not to extend state government unduly. Even Assemblywoman Washburn, who campaigned and was elected as a “New Deal Democrat,” did not propose any sweeping social legislation. These Nevada women defy easy categorization and challenge dichotomous notions about elected women in the first half of the twentieth century. The women of the Bridge Generation also demonstrate the value of state-based studies. As political scientists Anne Marie Cammisa and Beth Reingold assert, “[w]e cannot truly understand women, gender, and politics in the states without acknowledging and exploring all these variations and interactions.”

The use of the word “bridge” also suggests the end of one thing and the beginning of another. This study ended with the 1956 sales tax referendum, which was a vibrant exhibition of fiscal maternalism as the foundation for women’s political power in a particular policy debate. Is that the best marker for the end of  

the Bridge Generation? Are the women who follow the Bridge Generation into
legislative service substantially different?

As explained earlier, the suffrage movement of the early teens and the
sales tax movement of the mid-1950s shared certain characteristics. Both utilized
a campaign that placed prominent men in nominal positions of leadership, but
relied on women’s work to achieve success. In each case, women organized local
clubs, gave public speeches, conducted mass mailings, and physically traveled
from house to house, ranch to ranch, and mine to mine to generate votes. Both
campaigns raised women’s political awareness, but neither campaign resulted in a
significant increase in the number of women who won legislature seats. Nevada’s
suffrage campaign ended in 1914, four years before a woman was elected to the
Assembly. The 1956 election sent three women to the next session, which was the
same number as in the previous session. Consequently, the potential exists to
challenge 1956 as the end-point for this particular bridge. Perhaps it should be
1965 when the U.S. Supreme Court forced state legislatures to reapportion both
houses based on population. This demand finally pried open Nevada’s Senate
Chambers to women. In 1966, Helen Herr was elected to a seat created by
reapportionment and positioned herself in the chronicles of Nevada legislative
history as the first woman elected to the Senate, the first Assemblywoman to
make the move across the hall, and the first female Senator to be re-elected. The
last session without a female Senator was 1965.
Despite the effects of reapportionment, the earlier year is the better endpoint for the Bridge Generation. Historian Mary Ellen Glass argues that the 1956 referendum placed Nevada schools in a new position of power.\textsuperscript{459} The same could be said for women in the Nevada Legislature in 1956. At the end of the special session, which occurred in February, the press lauded the female lawmakers for their legislative skills:

The State’s three Assemblywomen were, as usual, outstanding. Maude Frazier is an experienced legislator who sees her aims accomplished by persuasion and tactics; Hazel Denton quietly does an efficient job; and Mable Isbell’s vote is always worth watching, for she speaks her piece and votes her mind with frankness, courage and no worry at all about who thinks what.\textsuperscript{460}

Both of the Assemblywomen who sought re-election that November won. The Assemblywoman credited with reforming Nevada’s schools and their financing, Maude Frazier, became Lt. Governor in 1962. The Bridge Generation, elected with all the youth and vigor of Ruth Averill and Alice Towle in the early 1920s, had matured into policy leaders as demonstrated by Frazier in the late 1950s. They had also aged. At the end of the 1956 Special Session, these three

\textsuperscript{459} Mary Ellen Glass, \textit{Nevada’s Turbulent ‘50s: Decade of Political and Economic Change} (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1981), 60.

Assemblywomen were over sixty-five years of age. By the end of 1963, they were dead.\textsuperscript{461}

The 1956 election also marked the beginning of Helen Herr’s long legislative career. Unlike most of her predecessors, Herr would be re-elected many times to the Legislature during the subsequent two decades and came to be known for, as one Senate leader noted, wielding “a great deal of power and a great deal of influence.”\textsuperscript{462} Indeed, there are some significant differences between the women legislators of the Bridge Generation and subsequent lawmakers. Following Herr, the number of women in the Nevada Legislature escalated, and most were re-elected at least once.\textsuperscript{463} The first twenty-nine women legislators served in the sessions from 1919 through 1956, but for the rest of the twentieth century, it took fewer and fewer sessions to count to twenty-nine new female legislators. The next group of twenty-nine arrived between 1956 and 1985; the next, in less than ten years. I would not argue for the women to be divided up into


\textsuperscript{462} Senator Joseph Neal, the first African-American elected to the Senate and one of the longest serving legislators in Nevada history, reminisced about serving with Senator Herr when she was inducted into the Nevada Senate Hall of Fame. \textit{Journal of the Senate 1993} (Carson City: State Printing Office, 1993), 740.

\textsuperscript{463} All of the subsequent data about women in the Nevada came from the legislative database. Research Division, compiler. \textit{Nevada Legislators 1861-2011}. Carson City, Nevada: Legislative Counsel Bureau, 2011. Online: http://leg.state.nv.us/dbtw-wpd/LegSim.htm.
groups of twenty-nine for any particular reason other than to illustrate the growing likelihood that women would be elected to the Legislature as the twentieth century came to an end. After 1956, they were also more often re-elected, and each session contained a mixture of both new and experienced female legislators. This was a much different experience than before 1956 when all of the women in any particular session were likely to be inexperienced lawmakers. By 2011, women comprised nearly a third of each house, and a woman had held every leadership position in both houses combined except Senate Majority Leader and Senate President Pro Tempore.\textsuperscript{464}

The number of women legislators rose for many reasons. By creating new seats and redrawing districts, the 1966 reapportionment increased opportunities for women to be elected to both the Senate and the Assembly. The resurgence of feminism and the escalation of the second women’s movement in the 1970s must also be considered a factor. Women were urged, publicly and privately, to become active in politics and to run for office at all levels of government. As a result, many women were elected, particularly to the Nevada Legislature. A significant number of the Nevada women who won state and local offices after 1980 were Democrats, reflecting that party’s willingness to embrace feminist themes, and many female candidates were also vigorously engaged in issues concerning

\textsuperscript{464} The leadership positions are Assembly Speaker, Assembly Speaker Pro Tempore, Assembly Majority Leader, Assembly Minority Leader, Senate President, Senate President Pro Tempore, Senate Majority Leader, and Senate Minority Leader.
women and families. The first woman elected to lead the Nevada Assembly, Barbara Buckley, was a Democrat and attorney whose legal career centered on providing services to low-income Las Vegans.

The conservative ascendancy, despite its patriarchal overtones, also encouraged women to run for election to public offices. Ann O’Connell, the owner of a Christian bookstore in Las Vegas and arguably one of the most politically and socially conservative legislators of either sex, served in the Senate for two decades as the twentieth century rounded the corner into the twenty-first. Ultimately, she was defeated for re-election as a result of her conflict with the gambling industry over taxes.\(^{465}\) Her district had changed, too. Between the time she first took office in 1982 and her lost election in 2002, Southern Nevada senate districts had grown from an average of 38,485 (338) residents per Senator to 97,432.\(^{466}\) In twenty-first century Nevada, candidates were more likely to be campaigning among newly-arrived strangers than among friends and neighbors.

By the 1990s, Nevada’s conservative women lawmakers became synonymous with tax issues. Republicans O’Connell and Joan Lambert developed solid reputations for understanding taxation and the increasingly complex state budget. After Lambert’s fourteen years in the Assembly, she was appointed to the Nevada Tax Commission and served there for another twelve. In 2010, Sharron


\(^{466}\) *Political History of Nevada 2006*, 338, 346
Angle, a former Nevada Assemblywoman who had never served on a committee concerned with the state budget or taxation, nearly got elected to the U.S. Senate as a result of her rigid positions against taxation, both federal and state. It might also be argued that her uncompromising opposition to taxes contributed to her loss in that election.

Conservative women, however, did not have a lock on the state’s fiscal issues. Democrats Christina Giunchigliani, Jan Evans, and Sheila Leslie, all employed in the fields of education or human services, served a total of twelve sessions—or twenty-four years—as members of the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means. Each woman was, at least once, the vice-chair of this important money committee. In 2011, Debbie Smith, also a Democrat, became the first woman to chair Ways and Means. Bernice Mathews, the first African-American woman elected to the Senate and to the Legislature as a whole, co-chaired the powerful Senate Committee on Finance in 2009. Two years later, Leslie chaired the Senate Committee on Revenue (formerly the Taxation Committee) during her first term as a Senator.

These brief vignettes indicate that much more research is required to understand political women of the twentieth century and their interaction with fiscal issues, such as tax policy development. Like their predecessors, these post-1956 female lawmakers demonstrate that the analysis cannot be limited to one category of women. Does the concept of fiscal maternalism hold over time, or did women find different routes to legislative authority? How did the relationship
between women legislators and Nevada’s economy, in terms of both tax revenue and state expenditures, evolve? Future studies are necessary to answer these questions.

One aspect of lawmaking that has certainly changed over time is the regulation of elected officials’ social interaction with each other, with lobbyists, and with their constituents. Social activities were a central part of the Bridge Generation’s legislating experience and occurred as easily in the Assembly Chambers as in the local restaurants. When Nevada’s Legislative Building was built in 1970, the desks were fastened to the floor, and leadership no longer appointed a furniture committee, as discussed in chapter 2, to rearrange the Chambers at the beginning of each session. The only possible configuration now requires legislators, divided by party and seniority, to face the Speaker in the Assembly and the President in the Senate. They do not face each other as they did in 1937. Committee members, too, no longer gather around a large table. They are now all on one side of a raised dais, facing the audience. Additionally, the strict rules over gifts and shared meals have discouraged social interactions with

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467 Hazel Denton’s diary is filled with entries about lunches and dinners with colleagues, lobbyists, and visitors to the Capitol. She recorded formal parties at the Governor’s Mansion and Carson Hot Springs Resort and numerous informal gatherings. Denton daily journals, 1953 and 1955, Hazel Baker Denton Papers.

468 In a 1941 newspaper photo, the members of the Assembly Committee on Livestock, including Assemblywoman Helen Williams, are huddled around a table. “Livestock Legislation Studied by Committee,” Reno Evening Gazette, 17 March 1941.
and among legislators. Consequently, bridge games have not broken out on the floor of the Assembly in several decades, and none are likely to appear any time soon. Simultaneously, lamentations over the lack of civility in politics have increased. In 2009, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Conner’s former home was moved to an Arizona municipal park for the purpose of providing “a gathering place where people find the level of compromise and consensus needed to move society forward.” Justice O’Connor credits the informal events held in that house when she was an Arizona legislator in the 1970s with facilitating bipartisan and cordial working relationships among lawmakers. A bridge game at lunch or an informal dinner-dance were successful strategies employed by political women, suggesting a resilient nexus between socializing and governing that should be considered in the evolution of civil political discourse.

This dissertation vividly demonstrates the power of women’s history to illuminate policy history and of policy history to enrich women’s history. Together, they offer a thorough and more complete analysis of how an existing situation or condition developed over time. In this case, this dissertation details Nevada women lawmakers’ participation in the development of the state’s policy of relying on non-residents to pay for state government services. This central principle served Nevada and its residents well for many years, but the economic implosion begun in 2008 starkly exposed the weaknesses in that policy. As

historians and policymakers seek to understand how that strategy for financing state government continued to develop between 1956 and 2008, they cannot ignore women. Without women, the story would be incomplete and potentially inaccurate. History effectively confirms that current situations are not static, indicating that change is not only possible but probable. With a thorough understanding of the development of a particular issue, policymakers can more effectively develop criteria for future innovation and action.
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APPENDIX A

NEVADA FEMALE LEGISLATORS, 1918-1956
The following table lists the twenty-nine women who served in the legislative sessions from the regular session of 1919 through the special session of 1956. All were in the Assembly except Frances Friedhoff, who was appointed to the Senate. In bold font are the family names they used at the time they were in legislative service and are the names utilized throughout this study. Natal names are in italics. Many women married after their elections and changed their names accordingly; those new names are noted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year First Elected</th>
<th>Number of Sessions</th>
<th>Full Name</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>County Represented</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>1 regular; 1 special</td>
<td>Sarah (Sadie) <em>Dotson Hurst</em></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Reno</td>
<td>Washoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>1 regular</td>
<td>Ruth Ella <em>Averill Logan</em></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Tonopah</td>
<td>Nye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>1 regular</td>
<td>Marguerite Haveli <em>Gosse Stoddard Clark</em></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Reno</td>
<td>Washoe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 regular</td>
<td>Mary Louise <em>Pohl Hays</em></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Tonopah</td>
<td>Nye</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 regular</td>
<td>Margarita (Rita) <em>McCarthy Millar</em></td>
<td>E</td>
<td>Hawthorne</td>
<td>Mineral</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 regular</td>
<td>Alice Sheridan <em>Towle Young</em></td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Ranch near Fallon</td>
<td>Churchill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>1 regular</td>
<td>Mary Daisy <em>Allen Williams White</em></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Fallon</td>
<td>Churchill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 regular</td>
<td>Mary Grace <em>O’Donnell Rose</em></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Winnemucca</td>
<td>Humboldt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 regular</td>
<td>Maym <em>O’Connor Schweble</em></td>
<td>R</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year First Elected</td>
<td>Number of Sessions</td>
<td>Full Name</td>
<td>Party</td>
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<td>County Represented</td>
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<td>1924</td>
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<td>Florence Bell Strosnider Swasey Smith</td>
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<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>2 regular; 2 special</td>
<td>Ethel B. Jewell McGuire</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>1928</td>
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<td>Lillian (Lillie) Simson VanVoorhis Pinger</td>
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<td>Churchill</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 regular</td>
<td>Neva Harriet Miller Waters Ferretti</td>
<td>R</td>
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<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>1 regular</td>
<td>Glenn Edna Park Grier</td>
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<td>Hazel Bell Wines</td>
<td>D</td>
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<td>1936</td>
<td>1 regular</td>
<td>Lois Elizabeth Hatch Deimel Washburn</td>
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<td>1938</td>
<td>1 regular</td>
<td>Luella Kirkbride Drumm</td>
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<tr>
<td>1940</td>
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<td>Helen DuPont Williams</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Hot Springs Ranch</td>
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<tr>
<td>1942</td>
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<td>Mary A. McCann Sharp</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Josie Alma Woods</td>
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<td>Willows Ranch</td>
<td>Eureka</td>
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<td>Year First Elected</td>
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<td>Full Name</td>
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<td>1944</td>
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<td>Edna J. Malo McKeough Montrose Puffer</td>
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<tr>
<td>1948</td>
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<td>Louise Aloys Smith</td>
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<td>Pershing</td>
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<tr>
<td>1950</td>
<td>7 regular; 3 special</td>
<td>Maude Frazier</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Las Vegas</td>
<td>Clark</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Pauline Lundberg Olson Norris</td>
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<td>Ely</td>
<td>White Pine</td>
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<tr>
<td>1952</td>
<td>2 regular; 2 special</td>
<td>Hazel Adelia Baker Denton</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Caliente</td>
<td>Lincoln</td>
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<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>2 regular; 2 special</td>
<td>Mabel Crowder Isbell</td>
<td>R</td>
<td>Reno</td>
<td>Washoe</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>Last 2 weeks of 1 regular</td>
<td>Frances Gertrude Price Friedhoff</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Mason Valley Ranch</td>
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<td>1945</td>
<td>Two-thirds of 1 regular</td>
<td>Martha Caroline Schmidt Woolridge</td>
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<td>1954</td>
<td>1 special</td>
<td>Fronica (Betty) Elizabeth Holm Castle</td>
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<td>Elko</td>
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<td>First Session</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Teacher?*</td>
<td>Other Paid Occupations</td>
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<td>Sadie Hurst</td>
<td>No</td>
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<td>1921</td>
<td>Ruth Averill</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>1923</td>
<td>Marguerite Gosse</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Secretary, hotel manager</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Louise Hays</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High school principal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rita Millar</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Newspaper employee, newsstand operator, wedding singer; bookkeeper; stenographer, county officer, notary public, state employee</td>
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<td>Alice Towle</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rancher, health clinic employee</td>
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<td>1925</td>
<td>Daisy Allen</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Restaurant owner/operator, federal census enumerator, rancher, bookkeeper, apartment house owner, hotel manager</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Mary Rose</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maym Schweble</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Prospector, mine operator, café operator</td>
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<td>Florence Swasey</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rooming house owner, federal census enumerator, took in boarders</td>
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<td>Ethel McGuire</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>County officer, elementary school principal</td>
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<td>1929</td>
<td>Lillie Pinger</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Irrigation district employee</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Neva Waters</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Took in boarders</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Session</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Teacher?*</td>
<td>Other Paid Occupations</td>
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<td>1935</td>
<td>Frances Friedhoff</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Domestic help, waitress, rancher, state board member</td>
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<td>Glenn Grier</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Dressmaker, office clerk, sales manager, state business census enumerator, federal employee</td>
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<td>Hazel Wines</td>
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<td>1937</td>
<td>Lois Washburn</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Classified ad sales, copywriter, fashion designer, seamstress, model, rancher, federal employee, state employee, realtor, insurance saleswoman</td>
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<td>1939</td>
<td>Luella Drumm</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Rancher, state business census enumerator, Assembly clerk</td>
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<td>1941</td>
<td>Helen Williams</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Drug store employee, rancher, realtor</td>
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<td>1943</td>
<td>Mary Sharp</td>
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<td>1945</td>
<td>Edna Montrose</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>State employee, stenographer, county employee, notary public, telephone company employee, federal employee</td>
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<td>Martha Woolridge</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Motel operator</td>
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<td>1949</td>
<td>Aloys Smith</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Session</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Teacher?*</td>
<td>Other Paid Occupations</td>
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<td>1951</td>
<td>Maude Frazier</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Store clerk, seamstress, state employee, high school principal, school district superintendent</td>
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<td>Pauline Olson</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Union officer and employee, bookkeeper</td>
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<td>1953</td>
<td>Hazel Denton</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Newspaper columnist, rental property owner/manager, took in boarders</td>
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<td>1954 (special)</td>
<td>Fronica Castle</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Assembly clerk</td>
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<td>1955</td>
<td>Mabel Isbell</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Construction company stockholder</td>
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*Unless positive evidence discovered of teaching job, assumed not a teacher.