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# “Lady Teachers” and the Genteel Roots of Teacher Organization in Gilded Age Cities

*Karen Leroux*

May the work of the L.T.A. go on ever upward and onward—gaining ground year by year; so that in future it will have its *voice* in the community, not low & sweet—but clear and resonant showing power and strength; may it gain that strength by increased membership, held together by strong bonds of love.  
Let us then be up and doing,  
With a heart for any fate;  
Still achieving, still pursuing  
Learn to labor and to wait.<sup>1</sup>

Miss Ophelia S. Newell believed that teachers occupied a public office of unappreciated responsibility. As the secretary of the Lady Teachers' Association (LTA) in Boston, she penned these hopeful remarks as a coda to her 1875 annual report, borrowing the last stanza of a popular Henry Wadsworth Longfellow poem. For Newell and her fellow teachers, “learn to labor and to wait” underscored their steadfast commitment to the schools. They founded the association attempting to bring women-teachers “nearer together in sympathy and friendship and also for a mutual benefit in debate and parliamentary rules.” Frustrated with being “accused of a lack of enthusiasm in our profession,” they hoped such criticism could “be remedied by an organization of this kind.”<sup>2</sup> Honing their debating skills represented one of

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<sup>1</sup>18 February 1875 secretary's report, Volume I, Box 2, [Boston] Lady Teachers' Association [hereafter LTA] records, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup>Minutes of first meeting [undated], Volume I, Box 2, LTA. Study of parliamentary rules was common in early teachers' organizations, see Marjorie Murphy, “From Artisan to Semi-Professional: White Collar Unionism Among Chicago Public School Teachers, 1870-1930,” (Ph.D. diss., University of California-Davis, 1981), 161.

the women's objectives, but they aspired to do more than polish their chances for professional advancement.

Through association, these women hoped to provide each other with the professional and social security they needed. The drumbeat of demands for teachers' selfless service to the public presupposed access to resources that most women teachers lacked. Most were unmarried or widowed; they did not enjoy the family support that enabled middle-class women to work for community betterment without concern about remuneration. School boards employed men with the presumption that they supported themselves and sometimes others, but they did not extend that recognition to women, regardless of their family status. Obtaining school employment required some education and social graces, marking women who taught as socially privileged while masking their financial plight. To protect their precarious independence in the wage-based urban economy, women organized among themselves to replace the kinds of family support they had foregone. Like many other nineteenth-century Americans, teachers looked to voluntary organization to fulfill needs unmet by either family or state. They enlisted the "sympathy and friendship" of other teachers as a substitute safety net.

Most narratives of teacher activism begin at the turn of the twentieth century. Though historians acknowledge the formation of earlier local associations, they tend to dismiss them as merely "social organizations."<sup>3</sup> The clubs that teachers formed between the 1870s and 1890s were indeed social, but I argue that their social character did not preclude serious occupational concerns. This research reveals urban women appropriating elements of educator associations, women's self-improvement societies, and fraternal orders to protect themselves against loss of income due to illness and infirmity, while attempting to strengthen their position as female professionals in the service of the public.

Gilded-Age "lady teachers" began to develop a collective identity, construct networks to protect themselves from dependency, and formulate a critique of their peculiar employment relationship with the state. "It is a high crime and misdemeanor," one teacher wrote in 1879, "for the State to ask teachers to expend their best energies in the instruction of her youth, and then require them to use the balance in solving the problem of how to make the week's wages meet the week's necessary expenses."<sup>4</sup> How could a self-supporting teacher labor selflessly and still fulfill obligations to her landlord and other creditors? Like professionals, women teachers viewed their skilled service to others as part of an exchange that ought to make possible the self-sufficiency required by good citizenship. Yet they were

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<sup>3</sup>For one example, see Wayne J. Urban, *Why Teachers Organized* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 9.

<sup>4</sup>"The Teacher's Profession," *Journal of Education*, 15 May 1879, 312.

not like professionals; they were women obliged to sacrifice themselves in the service of the schools. Confronting this untenable dilemma, Boston teachers dubbed themselves “inexperienced *citoyennes*” and attempted to reconstruct genteel public service as a basis for their claims on the state and a means to their empowerment.<sup>5</sup> Embracing the moral distinction between serving the public and working merely for wages, they hoped their public service would translate into desired professional privileges.

From the 1870s until the turn of the century, teachers’ clubs formed in cities small and large, including Boston, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, and St. Paul. These organizations, typically local, sometimes represented a single neighborhood. Highly attuned to hierarchy, they often defined themselves by their gender or rank in the schools. Status consciousness had implications for organization: by 1900, the city of Boston (not including its suburbs) had at least eleven different teachers’ organizations and St. Paul had at least four.<sup>6</sup> Most of these organizations either kept poor records or failed to preserve them, but two associations—one in Boston and one in St. Paul—kept detailed minutes of meetings which form the basis of this study. Seemingly unexplored by previous historians, these sources show strikingly similar concerns about teachers’ income security and comparable strategies taken to address them. Indeed, teachers’ clubs in different parts of the country shared advice on programs, organization, and membership.<sup>7</sup> This essay peers into these local associations, where teachers began to trace the practical difficulties they experienced to their vulnerable status as professionals, women, and citizens.

The Boston women who founded the LTA sought self-culture, friendship, and mutual aid—opportunities unavailable to them in the

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<sup>5</sup>M.P. Colburn, “Lady Teachers’ Associations,” *Journal of Education*, 4 December 1875, 254.

<sup>6</sup>The Lady Teachers’ Association in Boston formed in 1874, the Women Teachers’ Association in Buffalo in 1889; the Chicago Teachers’ Club in 1892, and the St. Paul Grade Teachers’ Association in 1898. Minneapolis teachers organized sometime before 1879; and teachers in Chicago formed the School Mistresses’ Club sometime in the 1880s. See “Teachers’ Organizations in Buffalo,” *Education* 16 (May 1896), 570; Julia E. Sullivan, “The Boston Teachers Club: 1898-1948,” *Boston Teachers’ Newsletter* 36:3 (December 1947), 17; Michael J. McDonough, “St. Paul Federation of Teachers, Fifty Years of Service, 1918-1968,” 3 in Folder 1, Box 8, Series V, St. Paul Federation of Teachers Collection, [hereafter StPTF Collection] Walter Reuther Library; Financial Secretary to Mr. Thos. McLachlan, 18 November 1904, Folder: Sept-Dec 1904, Box 38, Chicago Teachers’ Federation Papers, (hereafter CTF) Chicago Historical Society; John T. McManis, *Ella Flagg Young and a Half-Century of the Chicago Public Schools* (Chicago: A.C. McClurg & Co, 1916), 94; Ella F. Young, “Women in Education in Illinois,” *Journal of Proceedings of the 50th Annual Meeting of the Illinois State Teachers Association and Sections* (Carbondale: ISTA, 1904), 16-17.

<sup>7</sup>The Lady Teachers’ Association in Boston recorded inquiries from teachers in distant cities like Louisville KY, as did Chicago teachers. See minutes of meetings, March 1877 entry, Volume I, Box 2, LTA; J.E. McKean to Catharine Goggin, 25 December 1899, Folder: 1868-1899, Box 35, CTF. They also made inquiries with other associations, see minutes of meetings, 11 March 1890 entry, Volume I, Box 2, LTA; Sullivan, “Boston Teachers Club,” 17.

workplace or from existing educator associations or women's clubs. All unmarried or widowed, they described yearning to create between them "a nearer bond than that which exists." Country schoolteachers endured long separations from friends and family, but even those in city schools complained of feeling isolated in their classrooms.<sup>8</sup> Progressive educator Ella Flagg Young explained how teachers' working conditions left them feeling detached, powerless, and lonely in her 1900 book, *Isolation in the Schools*. Teaching in the Chicago area since the 1860s, Young synthesized the problems she had seen throughout her career. By "establishing a means of mutual improvement and culture in teachers, and assistance as friends," these Boston teachers hoped to alleviate the sense of alienation Young would eventually address.<sup>9</sup>

State and national teachers' associations did not offer women a sense of belonging either. Quite the opposite, they kept women at the margins of membership. Dominated by men, annual meetings of the National Education Association (NEA) brought a few high-achieving women to the attention of the profession. But the NEA made no effort to develop local branches and thus held limited appeal for women whose small salaries left little to pay membership fees and travel to annual meetings. Moreover, the NEA downplayed problems of teacher pay and welfare, issues far more important to women than comparatively well-paid men. Though female teachers had outnumbered males since the Civil War, NEA meetings continued to attract more men until 1884, when organizers made an effort to appeal to female delegates as a "penance for past shortcomings."<sup>10</sup>

Larger numbers of women attended state association meetings. Yet even when the numbers of women exceeded the men, few women joined in discussions. In Massachusetts, well-known and accomplished teachers like Electa Walton and Annie E. Johnson might decry "the injustice which every woman teacher suffers in this Commonwealth," but the women for whom they claimed to speak often preferred to keep silent. Many urged the "necessity for both local and general organizations among lady teachers ... to accustom ... members to speaking on the various questions of the day,

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<sup>8</sup>Constitutions 1874 and 1879, minutes of meetings 20 February 1874 and 11 March 1875, Volume I, Box 2, LTA. On feelings of isolation, see 11 December 1894, 12 December 1894, 4 January 1895 and 6 February 1895 entries, Louise Bailey Diaries (Microfilm edition, 1976) State Historical Society of Wisconsin; Katherine Reddington Morgan, ed., *My Ever Dear Daughter, My Own Dear Mother: The Correspondence of Julia Stone Towne and Mary Julia Towne, 1868-1882* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1996); and "A Fit of the Blues," *Western Journal of Education*, (August 1875):181-2.

<sup>9</sup>Ella Flagg Young, *Isolation in the Schools* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1900); Jackie M. Blount, *Destined to Rule the Schools: Women and the Superintendency, 1873-1995* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), 167; Minutes of meetings 20 February 1874, Volume I, Box 2, LTA.

<sup>10</sup>"A Word from a Country Teacher," *Woman's Journal*, 26 November 1870, 370; Edgar B. Wesley, *NEA: The First Hundred Years, The Building of the Teaching Profession* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 334, quotation is from 260.

and for systematizing plans for the improvement of their position.”<sup>11</sup> Lack of practice in public speaking, however, was not the only problem women teachers needed to overcome.

When male superintendents and principals controlled meetings, female teachers weighed carefully the costs and benefits of participation. Some teachers’ meetings did not invite discussion. Male supervisors used the guise of voluntary association to bring teachers to administrative meetings, often on Saturdays, without having to pay for their time. Teachers were not invited to meetings like these to engage in discussions of interest to them but to receive instructions from their supervisors. Although deemed “voluntary” meetings, the men presiding often determined teachers’ reemployment each year. Decades later, American Federation of Teachers activist Ruth Gillette Hardy labeled these male-led teachers’ associations as “company unions,” observing that they operated in the interest of school authorities, not teachers. The didactic nature of these meetings often carried over to state and national association meetings, suggesting why many women teachers chose not to attend and why the men leading them complained about women’s lack of enthusiasm and commitment to teaching. In a session on primary teaching at a state association meeting, one woman observed that of the hundred or more women in attendance, only three joined in the discussion. In contrast, she noted that “every gentleman present spoke, some more than once, though probably, with [one] exception . . . , not one of them had ever actually taught a primary school.”<sup>12</sup> Women comprised the majority of teachers, but male educators’ power inhibited their participation.

Gilded-Age women’s clubs offered teachers only slightly more of a sense of inclusion. In Boston, the New England Women’s Club (NEWC) and the Woman’s Education Association (WEA) sponsored public meetings on education, occasionally inviting teachers to speak. Strong supporters of self-improvement and community betterment initiatives, these elite groups also organized lectures to help teachers supplement their knowledge of

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<sup>11</sup>“Massachusetts Teachers Convention,” *Woman’s Journal*, 24 January 1874, 26. Annie E. Johnson became the first woman principal of a state normal school in Massachusetts in 1866. She quit in 1875 for a higher paying position. Electa Walton also taught in several Massachusetts state normal schools, serving temporarily as principal in 1849 when Cyrus Pierce became ill. She was passed over for the permanent appointment, which went to a man. See “Gov. Bullock’s Remarks,” *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Board of Education* [Massachusetts] (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1867), 37–40; “Framingham,” *Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Education* [Massachusetts] (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1876), 27–28; and *Historical Sketches of the Framingham State Normal School* (Framingham: Alumnae Association, 1914), 42, 51, 96–97.

<sup>12</sup>“The Teachers Meeting Yesterday,” *St. Paul Daily Press*, 13 October 1872, Roll 81, Frame 242, Annals of Minnesota microfilm, Minnesota Historical Society (hereafter Annals). For another example see Minute Books, Box 1, Folder 1, Atlanta Normal Schools, Georgia Department of Archives and History. Ruth Gillette Hardy, “Historical Setting of the American Federation of Teachers,” Folder 1, Box 2, StPFT; “Massachusetts Teachers Convention,” *Woman’s Journal*, 24 January 1874, 26.

advanced subjects like chemistry, geology, and rhetoric.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps most importantly, women's clubs in cities around the nation organized to place members on school and library boards, hoping to bring their influence to bear on public education in ways that teachers could not. Focusing on shared educational attainments and moral values, many Americans regarded teachers and club women as natural allies, despite their class differences.<sup>14</sup>

At best, however, club women treated teachers as junior partners in educational reform. The WEA boasted that club work placed members "*en rapport* with the actual practical work of teaching," but the organization tended to treat teachers as objects of reform or as gatekeepers whose support was needed for reform initiatives to succeed. Even Ednah Dow Cheney, a NEWC member and long-time champion of gender alliances between reformers and teachers, thought teachers could benefit from the "advice and guidance" of club women but failed to consider how much club women could learn from teachers as well. The WEA claimed to seek teachers as members, even waiving membership fees for them, but like most elite women's clubs, it did not even schedule meetings so that working teachers could attend. Though it could count most of the city's female school officers among the membership, few public school teachers joined. Still, LTA members invited club women, as well as male educators, to their meetings as honored guests and speakers. Teachers cultivated these relationships for the social and professional advantages they might bring but always with the knowledge that economic necessity and lack of political influence rendered them "a group apart."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>"Report of the Committee on Education," *Woman's Journal*, 13 July 1872, 224; "Women and Public Schools: A Report to N.E. Woman's Club," *Woman's Journal*, 17 August 1872, 258; *Third Annual Report of the Woman's Education Association of Boston, 1874* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1875), 8-13; *Annual Report of the Woman's Educational Association* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1878), 6; Polly Welts Kaufman, *Boston Women and City School Politics, 1872-1905* (New York: Garland, 1994), 68-69. On similar developments between club women and teachers in Chicago, see Maureen Flanagan, *Seeing With Their Hearts: Chicago Women and the Vision of the Good City, 1871-1933* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 62.

<sup>14</sup>Julia A. Sprague, *A History of the New England Women's Club from 1868 to 1893* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1894), 17; Kaufman, *Boston Women*; Flanagan, *Seeing With Their Hearts*, 33. The Minneapolis Woman's School and Library Organization worked to place women on school and library boards. See Box 2, Volumes 5 and 6, Political Equality Club of Minneapolis Records, Minnesota Historical Society. Atlanta women undertook similar initiatives in the 1890s. See Scrapbook 1 (1895), Atlanta Women's Club Collection, Atlanta History Center.

<sup>15</sup>*Second Annual Report of the Woman's Education Association of Boston, 1873-74* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1874), 9, 4-5. See also *First Annual Report of the Woman's Education Association for the year ending January 16, 1873* (Boston: W.L. Deland, 1873), 7, 10; *Third Annual Report of the Woman's Education Association of Boston, 1874*. (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1875), 3, 8-13; and *Annual Report of the Woman's Education Association for the year ending January 16, 1878* (Boston: Alfred Mudge & Son, 1878), 6; Ednah Dow Cheney, "Place of Women in our Public Schools," *Woman's Journal*, 23 October 1875, 341, 338; Sprague, *History of the New England Women's Club*, 17; Kaufman, *Boston Women*, 76; "St. Paul Federation of Women Teachers," p.1 in Folder: 1, Box: 2, Series II, StPFT.



The source of women teachers' marginalization was the simple fact that most women who taught were unmarried or widowed and needed to earn their living. The antebellum practice of hiring young women to spell off the men who taught winter schools paved the way for school boards to replace higher-paid male teachers with women in need of income.<sup>16</sup> The Civil War and western migration contributed to rising numbers of widows and spinsters seeking employment, casting new attention on the inequalities of a market economy which presumed "all men supported all women." The oversupply of unmarried women needing employment became the stock explanation for why women teachers were so poorly paid, but women's rights activists like Mary Livermore, a former teacher who became an honorary member of the LTA, countered that it was not the quantity of women seeking employment but the few lines of work open to them that fostered the excess of women workers and depressed their wages. In a narrow field of options, teaching became especially sought-after work because it conferred the respectability of motherhood on self-supporting women.<sup>17</sup> Teachers could take pride that their work served the nation's children and remained at a distance from the market. Women's work in schools set them apart from other wage-earning women, creating a new and growing category of economically needy but morally deserving single women.

Some women taught until they married, but others saw in teaching a potential alternative to marriage and family life. After the Civil War, the prospect of living apart from family was becoming a real, though difficult, life choice for women. Changes in attitudes towards matrimony led the journal *The Nation* to ask "Why is the Single Life Becoming More General?" The answer described singlehood as a personal choice, not merely the result of a demographic shift: "Men and women can less easily find anyone whom they are willing to take as a partner for life; their requirements are more exacting; their standards of excellence higher; they are less able to find any who satisfy their own ideal and less able to satisfy anybody else's ideal."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Antebellum schools often employed a male teacher in the winter and a female teacher in the summer, when the older boys were likely to be working. Schools replaced male teachers with women to economize on labor costs. Kathryn Kish Sklar, "The Schooling of Girls and Changing Community Values in Massachusetts Towns, 1750-1820," *History of Education Quarterly* 33 (Winter 1993): 528-529.

<sup>17</sup>Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, A Better Husband. Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 29. Quotation is from Mary A. Livermore, *What Shall We Do with Our Daughters?* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 1883), 59, also 85. See also Caroline H. Dall, "Woman's Right to Labor," *Or, Low Wages and Hard Work* (Boston: Walker, Wise & Co., 1860), esp. 5-9; and Virginia Penny, *The Employments of Women: A Cyclopaedia of Woman's Work* (Boston: Walker, Wise, & Co, 1863), 37-39; "Too Respectable!" *Journal of Education*, 16 October 1879, 207-8; Hiram Orcutt, "A Circular Letter to Public School Teachers," *Journal of Education*, 13 January 1881, 21.

<sup>18</sup>*The Nation*, 5 March 1868, quoted in Zsuzsa Berend, "The Best or None! Spinsterhood in Nineteenth-Century New England," *Journal of Social History* 33 (Summer 2000): 948.



Teachers' responses to marriage confirm the article's thesis. When members of the LTA announced nuptials, their colleagues celebrated their good fortune to find a man worthy of matrimony. Though marriage and motherhood were idealized, those who did not find a man were not pitied. Far better not to marry than to make a bad match or risk a "degrading alliance." No longer simply a temporary condition of women in their youth, singlehood became understood as a perfectly respectable decision not to settle for an unworthy man. Nineteenth-century spinsterhood, as historian Zsuzsa Berend has shown, signified a woman's "uncompromising morality," and came to represent "a respectable variation on motherhood rather than its antithesis."<sup>19</sup>

Calls for professionalizing the work of teachers reinforced the development of teaching as unmarried women's work. Harvard University President Charles W. Eliot denied women's potential as professional teachers because marriage prevented them from devoting their lives to work beyond the family circle. Putting Eliot's views into practice, one school superintendent explained: "[I]n every contract with a teacher there is an implied stipulation that he shall put his whole being into his work .... This is a service which admits no divided empire .... It must have the whole heart or it is nothing." While a man could marry and still "put his whole being" into his school or profession, few believed a woman could do both. The growing emphasis on affective labor in teaching and the rising respectability of spinsterhood, however, led the Reverend A.D. Mayo to spearhead arguments for single women as lifelong professionals in the service of the schools. He preached that "public instruction in America cannot be conducted by teachers who come to it with half a mind, regard it a hateful drudgery, and toil with mechanical stolidity while the soul is far away. It demands the complete consecration of human powers. It is a thing to work up to, to pray over, to purify one's self for."<sup>20</sup> Alluding to male teachers who aspired to more lucrative and prestigious employment, Mayo envisioned a professional corps of spinster teachers wholly devoted to the vocation of teaching. Coupled with the assumption that respectable women had families to support them, Mayo's arguments helped shape postbellum education as a low-paying branch of public service employing mostly single women.

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<sup>19</sup> "The Matrimony Clause," *Brooklyn Eagle*, 2 February 1876, 2; Minutes of meetings: 18 February 1875 entry; also see 10 June 1884 entry, Volume I, Box 2, and Annual Report of Secretary for Sept 1901, p.166, Volume II, Box 2, LTA; Berend, "Best or None," 941. Also on positive views of spinsterhood, see Ruth Freeman and Patricia Klaus, "Blessed or Not: The Spinster in England and the United States in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Journal of Family History* 9 (October 1984), 395.

<sup>20</sup> Charles W. Eliot, "Wise and Unwise Economy in the Schools," *Journal of Education*, 29 May 1875, 254; "School Committees' Reports," *Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Education [Massachusetts]* (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1876), 26; "American Teachers," *Minnesota Teacher* 1 (September 1868): 11.

Regarding teachers as models of purity and patriotism, northern school boards continued to hire teachers with the image of white republican motherhood in mind. The teaching corps in nineteenth-century city public schools remained far more segregated and ethnically homogeneous than their classrooms. School boards seldom hired women who were not native-born and English-speaking. Even as late as 1910, one source reported nearly three-quarters of teachers were native-born, though growing numbers had one foreign-born parent. Only the daughters of Irish immigrants made significant inroads into teaching, comprising about one-quarter of the teachers in several northern cities in the early twentieth century. Yet even in Boston, where Irish families had settled for decades, school board preferences for hiring Yankee Protestants kept the numbers of Irish-American teachers low until the turn of the century.<sup>21</sup>

Very few black women found employment in northern public schools. Though a number attended state normal schools in Massachusetts—Charlotte Forten and Olivia Davidson among them—one black normal graduate who applied for a position in the Boston public schools was reportedly told, “Go down South among your own people.”<sup>22</sup> While some states willingly trained blacks as teachers, blacks stood little chance of teaching in public schools that were not strictly segregated. Some light-skinned black women probably worked in public schools while passing as white, but nineteenth-century northern school boards seldom knowingly employed blacks, unless they were hired to teach in all-black schools.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Urban, *Why Teachers Organized*, 16; Lotus D. Coffman, *The Social Composition of the Teaching Population* (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1911), 55-56, 59. Irish-American women comprised about 20 percent of teachers in Boston and San Francisco and about 30 percent in Chicago and New York by the 1910s. See Janet Nolan, *Servants of the Poor: Teachers and Mobility in Ireland and Irish America* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2004); John L. Rury, *Education and Social Change: Themes in the History of American Schooling* (Mahwah NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002), 97; Kaufman, *Boston Women*, 232-233, 240 n40, 241-3.

<sup>22</sup>Before 1900, Boston public schools reportedly employed only one black teacher full-time, as well as one substitute and three evening teachers who were black. Elizabeth Hafkin Pleck, *Black Migration and Poverty: Boston 1865-1900* (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 34. Sarah Deutsch found four black women teaching in “greater Boston’s public schools” by 1902; they included Miss Maria L. Baldwin, Miss Hattie Smith, and Miss Gertrude Mabel Baker. See *Women and the City: Gender, Space and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 368, n232. Baldwin was principal of an interracial Cambridge, Massachusetts public school from 1887 until 1922. See Dorothy Porter Wesley, “Maria Louise Baldwin,” in *Black Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, Darlene Clark Hine, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 79-80. Forten attended the State Normal School at Salem. See Brenda Stevenson, ed. *The Journals of Charlotte Forten Grimké* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). Davidson attended the State Normal School at Framingham. See Olivia A. Davidson to Ednah Cheney, 28 August 1881, Folder #43, Ednah Dow Cheney Papers, Boston Public Library.

<sup>23</sup>John B. Reid found a few black teachers in nineteenth-century Detroit and Chicago; nearly all taught in segregated schools located in black neighborhoods. See John B. Reid, “A

School boards' preference for hiring white spinsters of respectability was inextricably tied to the women's race, class, and marital status. They assumed that without families in need of their labor, unmarried white women could choose to devote themselves to the public schools. The Boston school committee regarded normal school graduates as the "daughters of our citizens," presupposing their family dependency. School boards across the nation defended low salaries paid to women, contending that they lived in comfortable homes, had no dependents to support, and needed no more than a token wage for a few years until they found a husband who could provide as their father had. Even the Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics acknowledged that women teachers did not earn enough to support themselves—sometimes less than needlewomen and factory operatives—but justified their low pay arguing that teachers, *unlike other working women*, could rely on relatives and friends to meet living expenses.<sup>24</sup>

While school boards continued to imagine that teachers' families supported them, teachers' difficulties supporting themselves proved all too real. The lure of higher-paying work in city schools separated women from their homes. In 1882 Minneapolis teachers reported only 20 percent could live with family members if they chose; 80 percent had come to the city on their own. Newspapers poked fun at the things teachers did to supplement their earnings: "Schoolma'ams run reapers during vacation in Dougals county" sneered the *Minneapolis Tribune*. The image of refined city teachers running heavy farming equipment made for humorous headlines, but it spoke directly to the inability of women teachers to support themselves. Former teacher and suffrage lecturer Mary F. Eastman charged the nation treated teachers like half-paupers, denying them wages for two months of the year. Even teachers expert enough to lead state teachers' institutes, like

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Career to Build, A People to Serve, A Purpose to Accomplish: Race, Class, Gender and Detroit's First Black Women Teachers, 1865-1916," in *"We Specialize in the Wholly Impossible": A Reader in Black Women's History*, Darlene Clark Hine, Wilma King, Linda Reed, eds. (Brooklyn: Carlson, 1995), 310; and "Race, Class, Gender and the Teaching Profession: African American Schoolteachers of the Urban Midwest, 1865-1950," (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1996), 142. On black women's mostly private school teaching, see Stephanie J. Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and to Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). On passing, James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912; New York: Vintage, 1989); Nella Larsen, *Passing* (1929; New York: Collier, 1971).

<sup>24</sup>"Report of the Board," *Thirtieth Annual Report of the Board of Education* [Massachusetts] (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1867), 8, 12; "Report of the Committee on Normal School, 12 March 1872," Box: 1872, Boston School Committee Records, Boston Public Library (hereafter BSC); "Report of Visitors of the Normal Schools-Bridgewater," *Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the Board of Education* [Massachusetts] (Boston: Wright & Potter, 1876), 40; "Teachers' Salaries," *Journal of Education* 1 June 1882, 345. For the criticism of Massachusetts Bureau of Labor Statistics see "New England Woman Suffrage Association: Address of Mary F. Eastman," *Woman's Journal*, 31 May 1873, 173.

May Church, had trouble piecing together a living. Emphasizing her plight as a widowed mother, she appealed to a new female county superintendent for help locating summer employment: "My wages amount to only three hundred and twenty dollars here and you know that will not with closest economy last twelve months when one has a family of four and board to pay."<sup>25</sup>

Teachers' wage dependency became impossible to ignore after the depression of the 1870s, when numerous cities slashed women teachers' salaries while preserving other public employees' pay. Widespread retrenchments exposed the fallacy that women teachers enjoyed family support, but instead of placing them on an equal footing with other wage earners, revelations of their dependency put teachers in the ironic position of needing to defend their moral fitness to teach.<sup>26</sup> Women's prowess as teachers had long been assumed to be rooted in domesticity, but neither the overcrowded classrooms of city schools nor the rough-hewn surroundings of country schoolhouses shared much in common with the fictive sanctuary of the middle-class home. Women perceived to work for material rather than spiritual rewards ran the risk of being dismissed as unfit to teach. In her pursuit of more money, May Church attempted to preempt criticism by emphasizing her tragic, "unprotected" status and all the professional institutes she had led. She also addressed her appeals to a superintendent who was a former teacher and had experienced her own share of financial troubles. Other educators proved less sympathetic. Addressing primary teachers in Boston, reformer and future school supervisor Louisa Hopkins acknowledged that teachers' pay ought to be better, but she blithely advised, "in the meantime you must bear up as best you may." Infusing feminine benevolence and middle-class morality into the definition of teacher professionalism, she insisted teaching was "too noble a work and too near your heart to be measured by money." Discounting women teachers' financial needs, Hopkins called for their sacrifices as proof of their fitness for the privilege of teaching. "If you merely

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<sup>25</sup>Jurgen Herbst, *And Sadly Teach: Teacher Education and Professionalization in American Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 86; "Teachers' Salaries: What the Teachers of Minneapolis Have to Say," *Journal of Education*, 1 June 1882, 346; *Minneapolis Tribune*, 19 August 1878, Roll 80, Frame 1305, Annals; "New England Woman Suffrage Association: Address of Mary F. Eastman," *Woman's Journal*, 31 May 1873, 173; May Church to Sarah Christie Stevens, 15 February 1891, Folder Feb-Mar 1891, Box 14, James C. Christie and Family papers (hereafter JCC), Minnesota Historical Society.

<sup>26</sup>On depleted city treasuries and subsequent retrenchments, see Murphy, "From Artisan to Semi-Professional," 18-19; David B. Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 177-178; Kaufman, *Boston Women*, 92; "Women Teachers," *Woman's Journal*, 28 December 1878: 413; *Annual Report of the School Committee of Boston, 1878* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1878), 15-16; "Teachers' Salaries," *Journal of Education*, 24 March 1881:197.

want high wages, and teach only because you can get your living by it, you are not a teacher in any high sense of the term."<sup>27</sup>

By organizing, women teachers attempted to defend themselves as female professionals. LTA founders agonized over the public image they conveyed. They considered calling themselves the teachers' club but decided that "club" had masculine connotations and might be perceived as a challenge to the existing principals' club. Their concerns had a precedent in Boston. Six years earlier NEWC founders had the same debate, some members shying away from the word "club" and others insisting that it would mark their organization with a "combination of sociability and freedom" and "a degree of exclusiveness." While the elite women of the NEWC decided the gamble worthwhile, teachers were unwilling to risk reproach for not knowing their place. They settled on calling themselves an "association," only to confront fears that a Women Teachers' Association would be confused with a Women's Suffrage Association. Ultimately they arrived at the name Lady Teachers' Association, a prudent choice they thought would reflect their genteel, not strident, pursuit of professionalism. Teachers in other cities likely went through the same process, for that name was not unique to Boston. But prudence failed the Boston teachers. Male principals mounted a "strenuous opposition" to their proposed organization, attempting to discredit the women as agitators.<sup>28</sup> But as LTA president Lucy C. Bartlett explained, the LTA did not seek to be associated with either the woman question or the labor question, but rather to "be a teacher's union in the highest sense of that term." They worried that even the perception of political ambitions might hinder their occupational aspirations. Instead LTA members pursued an agenda of reform and self-help, emphasizing their ladyhood in an attempt to make it commensurate with professionalism and wage earning.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup>Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 58-59; May Church to Sarah Christie Stevens, 15 February 1891, Folder Feb-Mar 1891, Box 14, JCC; Jean Christie, "Sarah Christie Stevens, Schoolwoman," *Minnesota History* 48 (Summer 1986): 246-48; Louisa P. Hopkins, "An Address to Primary School Teachers," *Journal of Education*, (4 November 1880): 309. See also Rev. E.A. Rand, "The Teachers High Privilege," *Journal of Education*, 18 September 1879: 145.

<sup>28</sup>Minutes of first meeting [undated], Volume I, Box 2, LTA; Sprague, 3; "Lady Teachers' Association," *Woman's Journal*, 22 November 1873: 348. For another women's club, Sorosis, with similar concerns about their name, see Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1980), 20-21. Isabella L. Bissett, "Fifty Years of the L.T.A.," *Boston Teachers' Newsletter* n.d. [1924?], 24, Massachusetts Historical Society. The formation of the Chicago Teachers' Club in 1892 also incited opposition from male principals. See Financial Secretary to Mr. Thos. McLachlan, 18 November 1904, Folder: Sept-Dec 1904, Box 38, CTF papers.

<sup>29</sup>Minutes of meetings, 20 February 1874, Volume I, Box 2, LTA. Also quoted in Bissett, "Fifty Years," 24. On concerns about being labeled as suffragists, see "School-teachers,"

The LTA attempted to fashion a public identity analogous to women's literary, self-improvement, and benevolent reform societies. Meetings featured readings of members' essays and staged debates on topics of pedagogical and cultural interest, ranging from whether unjust laws ought to be obeyed to whether keeping pupils after school served a useful purpose. Less experienced teachers could seek advice on delicate or difficult issues by submitting anonymous questions for group discussion. These self-culture activities confirmed for all present that they were not girlish, dime-novel readers whiling away their time until marriage but serious professionals worthy of contributing to the important debates of the day. Women teachers wanted a "voice in the community," rooted in professional attainments, not influence dependent on feminine charms. Patiently testing the best ways to improve themselves, teachers regarded these evenings as "the power house from which have come the currents of strength to help one another."<sup>30</sup>

LTA members espoused positive goals, disavowing conflict with principals and discouraging unseemly divisiveness or scrambles for power among themselves. They took pride in their mastery of parliamentary procedure and, above all, their commitment to building consensus. As one member recalled of their founding: "Then as now, there was no contest over elections." Historian Paul H. Mattingly has argued that postbellum schoolmen saw engagement in social conflict or partisanship as marks of poor character. Advice literature confirms the high value placed on avoiding conflict; educational journals insisted that good teachers elicited unconscious obedience from pupils. Clashes with pupils or administrators were the mark of a poor teacher. To "work well with others," articles urged teachers to respect their place in the school hierarchy, to stay out of others' classes, and most importantly, "to be absolutely silent on school affairs."<sup>31</sup> Working well with others might seem synonymous with cooperation, but for teachers in the public schools, the desired form of cooperation more closely resembled

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*Woman's Journal*, 4 November 1871: 346. Even the comparatively militant Chicago Teachers' Federation tried to distance itself from the labor question as late as 1899. See Murphy, "From Artisan to Semi-Professional," 173. A leader of the Chicago Teachers' Club wrote that it "was organized on purely professional lines;" see Financial Secretary to Mr. Thos. McLachlan, 18 November 1904, Folder: Sept-Dec 1904, Box 38, CTF papers. St. Paul teachers put a similar premium on mutual improvement and professional development in their founding objectives. Minutes p.2, Volume 1898-1901, Series VI, Box 9, StPTF.

<sup>30</sup>Colburn, "Lady Teachers' Association," 254; Minutes of meetings, 6 February 1874 and 18 February 1875, Volume I, Box 2, LTA; "Massachusetts Teachers Convention," *Woman's Journal*, (24 January 1874): 26. On dime-novel reading, see Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999). Bissett, "Fifty Years," 25.

<sup>31</sup>Bissett, "Fifty Years," 24. See also minutes of meetings, February 1877 entry, Volume I, Box 2, LTA. Paul H. Mattingly, *The Classless Profession: American Schoolmen in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1975), xiii. H.E. Paine, "Requisites for Practical Success as a Teacher," *Journal of Education*, 11 September 1884:163-64.



unquestioning obedience, an expectation difficult to reconcile with professionalism.

Enjoined to submit to authority, women teachers were nonetheless expected to provide students with a carefully calibrated model of independence in the classroom. In contrast with Catholic teachers' supposedly unthinking obedience to the priesthood, leading educators, including William T. Harris, the United States Commissioner of Education, insisted that secular public school teachers cultivated "critical acuteness and independent thinking" in the classroom. At the same time, educators advised women against showing too much independence. One writer conceded: "it is a good thing to be a thoughtful, reasonably independent, and self-respecting teacher," but he reserved higher praise for the "teachable teacher." The paradox of being expected to educate without displaying any capacity for critical thought incited teachers' scorn. In lady teachers, LTA member Mary Colburn declared, there was "talent dormant which, for the well-being of the community, should be roused," as well as "latent energy, and insight and intelligence which would make us all more valuable members of society." Simmering under Colburn's assertions was the frustration of being underestimated by male colleagues. Critiquing the proceedings of a state teachers' association meeting, a teacher from Salem, Massachusetts prefaced her remarks by asking her readers whether she, as a female country teacher, had "any right to form or express an opinion on educational affairs." Being at the bottom of the educational hierarchy, she noted that "it does not become a country teacher" to question the esteemed gentlemen's remarks from the platform. But in her written review, she highlighted the gentlemen's flawed logic and unwarranted assumptions about gender, proving herself to possess a mind that rivaled theirs. In discussions at LTA meetings, women teachers resolved that they could not afford to ignore insults to their professionalism but needed to work together to demonstrate their accomplishments with tact.<sup>32</sup>

Cultivating sociability represented an important aspect of local association. LTA meetings featured an assortment of genteel parlor entertainments—singing, piano playing, and readings—followed by refreshments and informal discussions. Teacher Louise Hotchkiss contended that "there are two ways for a teacher to progress: one poring over her books, the other mingling with the world." After days spent delivering lessons to children, Hotchkiss insisted on the importance of sociable adult

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<sup>32</sup>Harris quoted in John T. McGreevy, *Catholicism and American Freedom: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2003), 118; "Teachable Teachers," *Journal of Education*, 22 May 1884: 329. Emphasis mine. Colburn, "Lady Teachers' Associations," 254; "A Word from a Country Teacher," *Woman's Journal*, 26 November 1870: 370; O.S. Newell, Report of the Secretary, February 1876, Folder 1876-1899, Box 1, LTA.

interaction: “for a teacher to keep growing, she needs especially the quickening influence that comes from personal contact with live, human forces.” St. Paul teachers’ founding objectives for association included “the promotion of a more social spirit among the teachers.” Likewise, retired Boston teachers described the “dear LTA” with affection, remembering old friends and the “social spirit” that infused their meetings. In the hopes that genteel association would compensate for the absence of family bonds, LTA members described themselves as feeling “more as a band of sisters than a mere gathering of teachers.”<sup>33</sup>

Without the shelter of middle-class domesticity to shield against the self-interested world of market relations, teachers emphasized their shared gentility to establish their fitness to teach. Called upon to supplement the work of mothers, especially those working-class and immigrant mothers who “neglected” their home responsibilities in order to earn money, teachers knew they were expected to deliver more than lessons. “Unconscious character building” became an increasingly prominent part of teachers’ work. “The teacher is an object lesson [herself],” one reformer explained, “eyes are following her as she is silently imparting ideas of life.”<sup>34</sup> If wage-dependent teachers were to measure up to that ideal of silent, effortless role modeling, they not only needed to embody the moral perfection ascribed to native-born, middle-class women, but they also had to differentiate themselves from the racialized, working-class, and immigrant communities whose children they were charged with preparing for citizenship. To do so, teachers aligned themselves with middle-class reform. For example, LTA membership was initially open to all “lady teachers,” but when the association revised its constitution in 1879, members clarified that only “women employed as regular teachers in the Public Schools of Boston” were eligible to join. By expressly excluding teachers of private and parochial schools, members affirmed their loyalty to reformers’ agenda for nonsectarian public education. When LTA members voted to support the election of women to the school boards, they phrased their newspaper announcement to win reformers’ approval. Downplaying teachers’ interests in electing women, LTA members

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<sup>33</sup>O.S. Newell, Report of the Secretary, February 1876 and 1899 engraved invitation, Folder 1876-1899, Box 1; and minutes of meetings: 10 June 1875, December 1875 and January 1876, Volume I, Box 2, LTA; Louise Hotchkiss, “Teachers as Social Beings,” *Journal of Education* 8 April 1876: 171; Minutes p.2, Volume 1898-1901, Series VI, Box 9, StPFT. Quoted phrases are from Helen A. Emery to Miss Haskell, undated, and Mary E. Perkins to Miss Haskell, 23 November [no year], Folder: undated, both in Box 1, LTA and Colburn, “Lady Teachers’ Associations,” 254. Similar phrasing also appears in minutes of meetings, 11 March 1875, Volume I, Box 2, LTA.

<sup>34</sup>Louisa P. Hopkins, “The Primary Teacher: Her Work, and Her Fitness for It,” *Journal of Education*, 17 June 1880: 388; Rev. Smith Baker, “The Dignity of the Common School Teacher’s Mission,” delivered to the Minnesota Educational Association December 1891, Minutes of Annual Meetings, page 384, Minnesota Educational Association Records, Minnesota Historical Society [hereafter MEA].

resolved that “it is for the good of the schools that women be elected on the new board.”<sup>35</sup>

LTA members cultivated relationships with female reformers, especially those in positions of state educational authority, while they took pains to keep their support for woman suffragists separate from their occupational activism. They extended honorary membership to school committeewoman and supervisor Lucretia Crocker and activist Mary Livermore, both former teachers, and invited nearly all the women elected to school offices to address the association. Many teachers became avid suffragists at the turn of the century, but until then teachers often downplayed their political convictions.<sup>36</sup> Mary Colburn described the LTA as a “little *corps* of subordinates” who were “inexperienced *citoyennes*.” Her choice of words suggested their desire for more participatory citizenship but marked it as an immature aspiration, far less threatening than a demand for women’s rights. Nevertheless, most of the leaders of the LTA were also active in the South Boston Woman Suffrage Club.<sup>37</sup> Concerned that suffrage activism could impede the LTA’s objectives, they joined a separate organization, and in this case, “club” seemed a perfectly appropriate word to describe their group. With the well-respected reformer Julia Ward Howe serving as their first president, these suffrage club members had no worries about social disapproval. LTA member Isabel Kelren played a large role in this organization: petitioning, lobbying legislators, and contributing articles to the *Woman’s Journal*. Kelren acknowledged she was a teacher in one report, but for the most part, LTA members kept their suffrage activism apart from professional goals. A canvass

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<sup>35</sup>See original constitution, February 1874, and revised constitution, January 1879, in Volume I, Box 2, LTA. The Boston Primary Teachers Association, founded by LTA members in 1895, specified similar requirements for membership. See Bissett, “Fifty Years;” and Boston Primary Teachers Association Records, Massachusetts Historical Society. 11 November 1886 entry, Volume: Nov 1882–Apr 1887, Records of Meetings Box 1, Woman’s Education Association records, Massachusetts Historical Society. See also: “St. Paul Federation of Women Teachers,” p. 1, Folder 1, Box 2, Series II, StPFT; Baker, “The Dignity of the Common School Teacher’s Mission,” 384, MEA; Margaret J. Evans, “To the Women’s Clubs of Minnesota—”, September 1895, Box 1, Minnesota Federation of Women’s Clubs Records, (hereafter MFWC); Minnesota Historical Society Minutes of meetings, November 1875, Volume I, Box 2, LTA records; “Learning Self-Respect,” *Woman’s Journal*, 20 November 1875: 369.

<sup>36</sup>Lucretia Crocker to Isabel Kelren, 17 February 1877, and Mary A. Livermore to Miss Lyon, 27 May 1889, Folder: 1876–1899, Box 1; Minutes of meetings, 8 June 1876, January 1877, March 1877, 12 March 1889, and 10 December 1889, Volume I, and 15 September 1890, Volume II, Box 2, LTA. Patricia A. Carter, *Everybody’s Paid But the Teacher: The Teaching Profession and the Women’s Movement* (New York: Teachers’ College Press, 2002).

<sup>37</sup>Colburn, “Lady Teachers’ Associations,” 254. Among the LTA members active in the South Boston suffrage club’s leadership were: Miss Julia M. Baxter, Miss E. Frances Blacker, Miss Mary L. Howard, Miss Isabel M. Kelren, Mrs. Ann Elizabeth Newell, Miss Mary G.A. Toland. *The Woman’s Journal* frequently reported on their meetings. See *Woman’s Journal*, 8 May 1875: 148; 12 June 1875, 189; 18 November 1876, 372; 16 December 1876, 404–405; 13 January 1877, 13; 17 February 1877, 49; 7 April 1877, 112; 21 April 1877, 125; 12 May 1877, 148; 15 March 1879, 84; 19 April 1879, 126.

of over 800 Boston women, taken in preparation for an 1884 hearing on municipal suffrage, confirmed local teachers' support for suffrage as well as their hesitancy to engage openly in political activism. Suffragist Harriet Robinson reported overwhelming support for suffrage among teachers in South Boston, attributing it to equally strong support among local school committee members. She asserted that most teachers supported suffrage, "but do not dare even to sign a petition, because they are afraid of losing their places."<sup>38</sup>

Alliances with elite women strengthened teachers' belief in the value of their work, but those alliances alone did not embolden them to make demands on school boards or city governments. After all, female school officers were not that powerful themselves; they held minority status on school boards everywhere they were elected. As school committeewoman Abby W. May's failure at the polls in 1878 showed, even wealthy, well-known women with long records of public service could not count on male support for reelection. The limits of female influence, however, represented only part of the problem teachers confronted. Philosophically, elite women's support for teachers stemmed from their faith in women's selflessness as a cornerstone of reform. Elite women perceived women's selfless labor for the schools as a bulwark against the partisanship, self-interest, and corruption in local politics that threatened to prevent the public schools from fulfilling their mission. Though many reformers held teaching in high esteem, their confidence placed weighty obligations on teachers. "We must not be mere operators or workers at a trade," Louisa Hopkins counseled teachers, "but members of a profession, masters of an art." Both male educators and elite women advised that "nothing great was ever done for wages" and insisted that teachers rise above self-interest. The Boston school committee agreed. "It is to be regretted," they warned, "to see so many of our teachers seeking personal gain."<sup>39</sup>

Genteel organization could not compensate for teachers' lack of political representation, but it enabled them to claim respectability and differentiate themselves from other female wage earners. Though generally more interested in mutual aid, LTA members raised money on behalf of Jennie Collins' Boffin's Bower, a charity for destitute girls, an endeavor that drew attention to the social distance between themselves and the recipients of their benevolence. Envisioning themselves on the favored end of the social ladder, teachers fumed at the "masculine autocrats" who failed to

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<sup>38</sup>"Our Legislators in South Boston," *Woman's Journal*, 20 March 1875: 92; "Woman Suffrage Hearing," *Woman's Journal*, 9 February 1884: 45.

<sup>39</sup>Kaufman, *Boston Women*, 84-85; "An Address to Primary School Teachers," *Journal of Education*, 4 November 1880, 309; Rev. Smith Baker, "The Dignity of the Common School Teacher's Mission," 383, MEA; "Report on Salary Reductions," *Annual Report of the School Committee of the City of Boston, 1878* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1878), 17-18.

recognize their social and professional attainments and dismissed all wage-earning women as “poor degenerate womankind.” Privileged women were just as guilty of harsh judgments. When school committeewoman Dr. Mary Safford-Blake addressed the LTA, she stressed the precariousness of working women’s moral conditions in the city. She commended LTA members for banding together, believing it was critical “that teachers, separated from their homes, would associate themselves in Clubs where they could have the privileges of home.”<sup>40</sup> Her address belied her suspicions about unmarried women, while confirming reformers’ belief in association as a substitute for the protections of family life.

Organized teachers continued to seek alliances with more privileged women as confirmation of their moral character and class standing. Many teachers’ organizations eagerly affiliated with the new State Federations of Women’s Clubs in the 1890s. When the Massachusetts Federation extended an invitation, the LTA joined at the first opportunity, and St. Paul teachers made affiliation one of their first orders of business. By 1900, the two largest clubs belonging to the Minnesota Federation were the Teachers Club of Minneapolis and the St. Paul Grade Teachers’ Federation.<sup>41</sup> Yet, teachers remained subordinate members despite their numbers. Focusing on industrial and moral education and improving school sanitation in the interests of children, club women called for “close sympathy” and “cordial cooperation” with teachers. Club women recognized reforms “undertaken in the spirit of criticism” would not meet with “the warm cooperation of teachers.” But in adopting the motto “*noblesse oblige*,” the educational committee of the Minnesota Federation revealed how class distinguished some members from others.<sup>42</sup> Soon after joining, the LTA let its membership in the Federation lapse. St. Paul teachers voted to resign after a few years too, but careful to keep up appearances, they made certain their back dues were paid in full.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Minutes of meetings, 10 December 1874, 14 January 1875, and 14 December 1876, Volume I, Box 2, LTA; “More Insults,” *Woman’s Journal*, 11 February 1871: 43.

<sup>41</sup>Even the organization that has become the epitome of teacher militancy, the Chicago Teachers’ Federation, joined the Illinois Federation of Women’s Clubs the same year that it affiliated with the Chicago Federation of Labor. On the elite membership of the General and State Federations of Women’s Clubs and its interest in public schools, see Blair, *Clubwoman*, 95, 101. Minutes of meetings, 17 September 1895 entry, p.81, Volume II, Box 2, LTA. Minutes of meetings: 4 October 1899, p.20 and 9 March 1900, p.28, Box 9, Series VI; and Typescript, page 2: “St. Paul Federation of Women Teachers,” Folder 1 History, Box 2, Series II, StPFT; “Yearbook, 1900-1901,” Box 3, MFWC.

<sup>42</sup>Newsclipping: “Meet Next at St. Paul,” n.p., 6 October 1895; Newsclipping [undated]: Mrs. A.H. Pearson, Northfield, MN, “Relation of the Club to the Public School,” delivered at First Annual Meeting, 29-30 Oct 1895 at Minneapolis; and 1897 Program of the Educational Committee, Box 1, MFWC.

<sup>43</sup>Minutes of meetings, 8 June 1897, p.104, Volume II, Box 2, LTA, and minutes of meetings, 11 May 1908, p. 82, 1903-1915 Volume, Box 9, Series VI, StPFT. There is no record in their minutes that St. Paul teachers changed their decision to resign or that they

With an almost martyr-like conviction, teachers seem to have agreed that it was better to suffer injustices than indignities. In the popular Longfellow poem, "A Psalm of Life," teachers found meaningful counsel; verses from the poem appear in the reports and minutes of the LTA and the local suffrage club to which many of them belonged. "A Psalm of Life" urged readers not to submit to the empty life of a soulless laborer but to pursue their highest calling with patience for rewards. It celebrated class mobility as a product of self-improvement, perseverance, and moral leadership, describing how one individual could elevate an entire community: "Lives of great men all remind us / We can make our lives sublime . . . / A forelorn and shipwrecked brother, Seeing, shall take heart again." Though written in a highly sentimental idiom, the poem does not address women nor does its imagery include any women, children, families, or homes. Situated "in the world's broad field of battle" and "in the bivouac of life," the poem seems to speak to a male audience.<sup>44</sup> However, in blurring the entitlements and attributes of gender and insisting that class was a product of moral relations, Longfellow's tribute to character and duty resonated with women teachers. By embracing these same values as their own, women teachers asked that they be recognized for their commitment to public service, while they simultaneously implored those who had achieved higher stations in life to fulfill their duty toward them. "Let us then be up and doing, / With a heart for any fate" proclaimed their moral devotion to teaching. "Still achieving, still pursuing / Learn to labor and to wait" juxtaposed their devotion with their dependency on others. With patient fidelity to their work in the classroom, teachers endeavored to dispel criticisms of their professionalism and win social privileges they believed they deserved.

In order to wait patiently, teachers organized to protect each other's financial and social well being. At the first LTA meeting, founding members discussed the pressing need for "financial protection for members in case of illness" and passed a set of by-laws providing for mutual relief. Women's rates of illness had not risen, but the meanings attached to women's health had changed. Medical men had entered into debates over women's education and employment, and Dr. Edward H. Clarke popularized the notion that

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attended any MFWC meetings after 1902, but they continued to be listed in MFWC directories for several years. The Minneapolis Teachers' Club also resigned in 1908. See Yearbooks, Box 3, MFWC.

<sup>44</sup>"South Boston Suffrage Club," *Woman's Journal*, 21 April 1877: 125. David B. Tyack argues that reverence for character in "A Psalm of Life" correlated with the self-image of nineteenth-century male school superintendents in "Pilgrim's Progress: Toward a Social History of the School Superintendency, 1860-1960," *History of Education Quarterly* 16 (Autumn 1976): 259. For useful critical discussions of "A Psalm of Life," see Matthew Gartner, "Becoming Longfellow: Work, Manhood, and Poetry," *American Literature* 72 (March 2000): 59-86; and David R. Peck, "Let us then be up and doing," *ANQ* 16 (Summer 2003): 30-35.



“brain-work” interfered with women’s health. Countering Clarke’s claims, women’s rights advocates argued that women’s ill health was not a sign that women violated the laws of nature, but a measure of the obstacles women had to overcome if their intellectual and financial needs were not met by family. At the same time, disease became associated with immigrant homes and poor hygiene, while health became understood as a mark of good personal habits and self-control.<sup>45</sup>

For women teachers, good health became a crucial signifier of gentility, and when they did become ill, loss of income exacerbated their predicament. Some school boards simply did not pay absent teachers; others obliged teachers to pay for a substitute. To address the financial toll exacted by illness, LTA members agreed that whenever a member became ill for more than two weeks, other members would contribute a small sum each week for the benefit of the sick member. Focused on protecting sick teachers from descending into debt and dependency, the relief program grew more formal and elaborate, soon assessing members a flat fee, negotiating with local hospitals to provide preferential rates for teachers, and appointing a committee to visit sick members and to extend sympathy to survivors. Miles away, St. Paul and Minneapolis teachers would soon establish similar programs to meet social and economic needs that the schools did not.<sup>46</sup>

Stressing mutuality to share the burdens of illness, teachers’ relief programs paralleled the postbellum development of fraternal orders, such as the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows, the Knights of Pythias, and the Foresters of America. Offering sickness, disability, and survivor benefits, these organizations helped replace a portion of the family breadwinner’s wages when he was unable to work. Fraternal orders enrolled men for the most part. Some enlisted members’ wives in auxiliaries to help provide benefits to elderly members but not as individuals entitled to membership benefits themselves. In the 1890s, the Ladies of the Maccabees became the

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<sup>45</sup>Bissett, “Fifty Years,” 24, 25; Minutes of meetings: 20 March 1874 and 16 April 1874, Volume 1, Box 2, LTA. Martha H. Verbrugge, *Able-Bodied Womanhood: Personal Health and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century Boston* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 101-2, 114, 120-23, 126; Edward H. Clarke, *Sex in Education, or, A Fair Chance for the Girls* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1874). For a similar argument about women’s employment from a medical perspective, see Azel Ames, Jr., *Sex in Industry: A Plea for the Working Girl* (Boston: J.R. Osgood, 1875).

<sup>46</sup>Bissett, “Fifty Years,” 25; Constitution, article 1, and minutes of meetings, 16 April 1874 entry, Volume I, Box 2, LTA. Over time the LTA adjusted the amount contributed and the benefit paid, but the concept remained essentially the same throughout the nineteenth century. On the St. Paul Teachers’ relief efforts, see Yearbook: St. Paul Teachers’ Federation, 1905-1906, p. 7, Folder 7, Box 1, Series I, and Minutes of Meetings, 4 December 1899, p.26, 7 May 1900, p.34, 2 December 1901, p. 54, 3 March 1902, p.59, 5 May 1902, p.65, 29 September 1902, p.68, Box 9, Series VI, StPFT. On the Minneapolis Teachers’ Club and hospitalization fund, see “Educational Work,” undated newsclipping, Folder: Beginnings of MFWC, 1894-1901, Box 1, MFWC.

first exclusively female fraternal order.<sup>47</sup> Seeking to be “to the working woman what the woman’s club is to her sister of the leisure class,” it might have appealed to teachers, but its membership was comprised of working-class housewives. They stressed the importance of insuring a housewife’s life for the security of her children, believing that men were “often more helpless than a mother” after a spouse’s death.<sup>48</sup> Whereas these working-class women organized to protect their homes, which for them meant staying out of the labor force, women teachers sought to protect their incomes.

Female teachers had long needed income protection more than their male counterparts. In the 1870s, just three months before teachers organized the LTA, local newspapers exposed the gender inequity of school board policy on sickness. The headmaster of a South Boston school was stricken with typhoid fever, and while he was ill, two female subordinates performed his administrative and class work in addition to their own. The women received no additional pay and the headmaster’s salary continued in full. Shortly thereafter, those two women teachers became ill and confined to bed rest, however, their salaries did not continue as the headmaster’s did. They were required to pay for substitutes to take over their classrooms. The local newspapers shamed the school committee for its heartless treatment of the women, arguing that one of them was a widow with as many dependents as the headmaster. While the school board “freed” the sick man from financial worries, it “deprived” a sick woman of her salary under identical circumstances. However unjust the policy, no change was forthcoming.<sup>49</sup> As the economy sank into a depression at the end of 1873, school board members were more likely to take away privileges granted to a few principals than extend them to an army of women.

While teachers’ immediate priority was to help their sick colleagues, suffragist Lucy Stone publicized this incident as evidence of why women needed political equality. Stone insisted that “charitable contributions for these wronged teachers” would merely provide temporary relief. The vote, she argued, could remedy the injustice. Stone’s editorial calling on teachers

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<sup>47</sup>As early as 1868, the Odd Fellows established female auxiliaries called Rebekah lodges. The Ladies of the Maccabees were founded in 1892. See George Neil Emery and John Charles Herbert Emery, *A Young Man’s Benefit: The Independent Order of Odd fellow and Sickness Insurance in the United States and Canada, 1860-1929* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1999), 21-22. Emery and Emery date the Foresters’ inclusion of women to 1899, but Robert L. Reid indicates that the Women’s Catholic Order of the Foresters operated in Chicago from 1891. Reid’s evidence suggests that, like the Ladies of the Maccabees, the Women’s Catholic Order of the Foresters provided insurance for women, and may have included more unmarried women. See Margaret A. Haley, *Battleground: The Autobiography of Margaret A. Haley*, Robert L. Reid, ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), 29 n11, 31.

<sup>48</sup>David T. Beito, “To Advance the ‘Practice of Thrift and Economy’: Fraternal Societies and Social Capital, 1890-1920,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 29 (Spring 1999): 599.

<sup>49</sup>“Not An Uncommon Case,” *Woman’s Journal*, 1 November 1873, 348.

“to make common cause with the suffragists” likely piqued principals’ suspicions that the formation of the LTA threatened their privileges.<sup>50</sup> Like Stone, the teachers did not want charity, but unlike Stone, they worried about preserving their tenuous independence.

To LTA members, mutual aid was not charity; it demonstrated their commitment to middle-class values of self-reliance and cooperation. Moreover, mutual aid did not entail conflict with school authorities; the women created the LTA to operate independently of the schools. Most importantly, it represented a commitment to each other: “What stronger bond can bind us together—what tie of friendship is more sacred than when affliction & adversity assails us ... than the helping and sympathizing hand of a fellow sister stretched forth for succor & help united with love.” Like a fraternal order, LTA members imagined themselves as an extended family, and they rejected the notion that teachers’ financial needs signified moral failings, agreeing that sickness “comes to all some time or other.”<sup>51</sup> St. Paul and Boston teachers both established “friendly” and “visiting” committees to visit and sympathize with sick members, turning the elite practice that emphasized surveillance of the poor into a supportive ritual among equally vulnerable women.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast with male-dominated educator associations, these local organizations championed members’ economic needs. In 1878, LTA members strengthened the organization’s provisions for mutual relief, agreeing that it had become the key advantage of their association. They also began publishing a monthly journal, aptly titled *The Budget*. The St. Paul Grade Teachers Federation placed an even higher premium on pay and welfare issues; their spirited discussions centered on new ideas to secure their income, increase it, or save more of it.<sup>53</sup> After two failed initiatives, first to obtain employment contracts, then to secure pension legislation, St. Paul teachers turned to sickness provisions, developing programs that could be sustained

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<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>Minutes of meetings, 18 February 1875. On teachers’ use of the word “sister,” see minutes of meetings, 18 February 1875, 11 March 1875, 10 June 1884; Report of Executive Committee Meeting for 1879 & 1880, and M. Bragdon to Sisters Howard and Danforth, undated and loose in Volume I, Box 2, LTA records; Colburn, “Lady Teachers’ Associations,” 254; Beito, “To Advance the Practice,” 589.

<sup>52</sup>Minutes of meeting, 19 June 1883, Volume I, Box 2, LTA; Minutes 4 Dec 1899, p.26, Volume 1898-1901, Series VI, Box 9, StPFT. On friendly visiting as social control, see Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career, 1880-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965); Clarke A. Chambers, “Toward a Redefinition of Welfare History,” *Journal of American History* 73 (September 1986): 418.

<sup>53</sup>Minutes of meetings, February and March 1878 and 14 December 1880, Volume I, Box 2, LTA. McDonough, p.3, Folder 1, Series V, Box 8, and Minutes 18 May 1898, p.1, 20 March 1899, p.11, 4 December 1899, p. 26, 7 May 1900, p. 34, 2 December 1901, p. 54, 3 March 1902, p. 59, 5 May 1902, p. 65, 29 September 1902, 68, Series VI, Box 9, StPFT.

with or without school board support.<sup>54</sup> In Boston, as well as St. Paul, sickness benefits became the mainstay of their organizations, while pensions for elderly and disabled teachers remained goals for the future.

Receiving relief was not their only objective; giving relief provided important returns. It demonstrated that wage work did not preclude ladylike selflessness. When Mary Howard proposed holding a fair to raise money for the LTA, she emphasized that her interest in fundraising “was not for the sake of increasing our bank account for ourselves, but that we might have more means with which to do good.” Unlike fraternal orders, which restricted benefits to members, the LTA sometimes extended its protection to nonmembers, opening their purses to pay for substitutes or provide a small cash gift to teachers who might otherwise be “reduced to want.” And even with nonmembers, the LTA attempted to “undertake the delicate task of bestowing the gift, so that it would not seem to be charity” but rather a symbol of their shared predicament as women who taught.<sup>55</sup>

In sickness, disability, and death, teachers asserted their collective entitlement to dignity. LTA by-laws codified procedures “to visit the sick and offer sympathy to them,” so that no teacher would have to endure ill health without the assistance and comfort of friends. They also developed genteel mourning rituals to express their deep sense of loss. When Miss Mary E. Stubbs died, LTA members passed an elaborate resolution regarding their obligations to a fellow teacher. Seeking to “perform some act worthy of her memory,” LTA members attempted to affirm their late colleague’s gentility as well as their own. Likewise, when Isabel Kelren passed away, members declared her memory “a precious legacy to us.” In mourning, LTA members transformed themselves into a genteel proxy family, providing each other with the assurance that no spinster teacher would go to a pauper’s grave.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup>Entries dated 6 November 1899, p. 26; 3 March 1902, p. 59; 5 May 1902, p. 65, 2 March 1902, p.72, Minutes 1898-1901 volume, Series VI, Box 9, and “Yearbook, 1905-1906,” Folder 7, Box 1, Series 1, StPFT. See also entry dated 14 October 1907, p.69, Minutes, 1903-1915 volume, Series VI, Box 9, StPFT.

<sup>55</sup>Minutes of meetings, 15 September 1896, p. 96, Volume 2, Box 2, LTA. Beito describes how fraternal orders’ reverence for mutuality also included “constant reminders of the sad fate suffered by those outside the reciprocal fraternal family.” Beito, “To Advance the Practice,” 589. In contrast, teachers repeatedly took up the cause of nonmembers. Murphy, “From Artisan to Semi-Professional,” 161; Minutes of meetings, 9 June 1885, 15 December 1885, and 27 September 1886, Volume I, Box 2, LTA.

<sup>56</sup>By-laws and minutes of meetings, 19 June 1883 and 12 Sept 1883, 4 and 12 February 1875, Volume I, Box 2, LTA; “South Boston Woman Suffrage Club,” *Woman’s Journal*, 19 April 1879: 126. Halttunen argues that mourning was both a mark of respectability in the mid-nineteenth century and a profound experience that could transform a common laborer into a genteel member of society. “Middle-class Americans,” she explains, “were obsessed with mourning their dead because in their sentimental scheme of social status, the capacity to experience deep grief demonstrated true gentility. For the same sentimental reason, they were almost equally obsessed with the act of offering sympathy to those who mourned.” Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 134-135, 144.

Mutual aid helped teachers maintain a semblance of collective self-sufficiency while they sought to improve their financial conditions. In a halting and uneven manner, Gilded Age teachers began to make claims on the state in exchange for their services. In addition to “the assurance of a comfortable living so long as we continue to give our services for the good of our fellows,” women teachers declared that after “serv[ing] our day and generation in school-work,” they should be entitled “to have a sufficient reserve against the ‘rainy days’ of the teacher’s life.”<sup>57</sup> They petitioned public officials asking them to acknowledge teachers’ faithful service. Though their decision to petition followed the example of a generation of antislavery women, in this case they were not petitioning on behalf of disenfranchised others, but for their own benefit. The difference gave Boston teachers pause, but after a second round of salary reductions in 1878, they gathered more than 700 teachers’ signatures. Their petition did not ask the school committee to reinstate their salaries; it asked only that the school committee make no further cuts in them. Still, the school committee denounced their petition as “evil,” advised teachers to desist, and accused the teachers of putting their own pecuniary interests before the public schools. Boston teachers faced further salary cuts in 1881 and 1882. Rather than risk a similar reproach, this time teachers gathered the signatures of one thousand “citizens and taxpayers” to a statement asking that teachers be treated like the faithful public servants they were.<sup>58</sup>

While Boston teachers enlisted the help of elites, those in Minneapolis mounted their own defense. Attempting to stave off the wave of cutbacks that had already reached Boston and Chicago, Minneapolis teachers issued a bold free labor appeal. They alluded to Abraham Lincoln’s famous claim that “there is no permanent class of hired laborers among us,” protesting that was, in fact, their fate. While the generation that fought for the Union wanted to believe that free citizens could better their conditions if they worked hard, teachers insisted they were destined for public dependency because they gave their lives in the service of the schools. They appealed to the board of education: “most of us are women for whom there is no chance of ‘growing into a larger business,’ of ‘being taken into the firm,’ ... hopes which buoy up the clerk working upon a small salary. We always work upon small salaries—we always expect to. Is it your wish and intuition

<sup>57</sup>“Salary of Teachers,” *Woman’s Journal*, 28 June 1879: 207, reprinted from “The Teachers’ Profession,” *Journal of Education*, 15 May 1879: 313.

<sup>58</sup>Minutes of meetings: 22 May 1878, Volume I, Box 2, LTA; Petition dated 11 June 1878, Box June–July 1878, BSC; “Report on Salary Reductions,” *Annual Report of the School Committee of the City of Boston, 1878* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1878), 17–18; *Proceedings of the School Committee of Boston, 1881* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1881), 78; “Report on Salaries,” *Annual Report of the School Committee of the City of Boston, 1881* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1882), 14–15; *Proceedings of the School Committee of Boston, 1882* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, 1882), 32.

that the day we cease to teach we become paupers to be supported at the public expense?"<sup>59</sup> Bolder than their counterparts in Boston, Minneapolis teachers stressed that their circumstances set them apart from both free laborers and protected women.

Significantly, however, neither teachers' group used equal rights arguments to make their case. Pointing out that the city wanted only ladies as role models in its schools, Minneapolis teachers warned: "if we are so limited by circumstances that we lose caste and tone, you must see the adverse influence upon the future of your city." Even though many women would gladly take up their positions, teachers contended that few had the desired education or cultivation. If the city wanted cheap labor, it was available. If the city wanted "scholarship, morality and refinement, lifelong training and the faithful service of years," however, teachers warned that it should not expect to procure those merits with subsistence wages. If their argument for class and professional entitlements failed, they stressed the responsibility of supporting others: "there are very few of your teachers who are not aiding in the support of others; —here it is a daughter contributing to the necessities of a widowed mother, there, a sister helping to carry a young brother through college, or it may even be a widow struggling for the daily bread of her fatherless little ones. And who shall say that this is not a woman's right?" Likewise, Boston teachers insisted that their protests were not selfish but motivated by their private and public obligations: "the expense of living has not been reduced; [and] many teachers have others dependent on them." Manipulating constructions of gender and redefining needs as rights, teachers argued that the "right" to support one's family was not unique to male breadwinners but extended to professional women.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, they contended that they deserved this right because of the special qualities they brought to the work of teaching, not because they possessed rights in equal measure with others.

Attempting to distinguish themselves from other wage-seekers, these teachers pursued gentility, not equality, as a means of resisting wage exploitation. They insisted that the schools owed lady teachers a respectable standard of living. Teachers tallied up their living expenses against their small salaries, publishing their budgets in educators' and women's journals to highlight the unreasonable economies expected of them. Clara Jennison

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<sup>59</sup>Lincoln quoted in Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Vintage, 1973), 133; Petition addressed "To the Honorable Board of Education," and petition addressed "The Board of Education," Folder: March-May 1879, Box 1, Minneapolis Board of Education Meeting Files, Minnesota Historical Society (hereafter MPLS Ed).

<sup>60</sup>Petition addressed "The Board of Education," Folder: March-May 1879, Box 1, MPLS Ed; Minutes of meetings, 22 May 1878 entry, Volume I, Box 2, LTA; Kaufman, *Boston Women*, 84; Petition, 11 June 1878, Box: June-July 1878, Petitions, 29 March 1881, Box: March 1881, Petitions, 14 February 1882, Box: Jan-Feb 1882, BSC.



of the Minneapolis Teachers' Club reported that a teacher's "necessary expenses" totaled \$574 when the average salary was \$483.<sup>61</sup> Even more egregious, teachers complained that the Chicago school board took advantage of teachers' illness to control labor costs, ruling that any teacher returning from a period of illness should "not expect her place back, ... she must be willing to take any place the exigencies of the schools may afford." A teacher reportedly earning \$800 a year returned from several weeks' illness to be offered the choice of accepting a position at \$350 or resigning. Even capitalists showed employees more respect, declared a writer in the *Journal of Education* who followed up with a spirited inquiry into whether other employers used the illness of a "faithful servant" as a "pretext to place a fresher person in his place" or to cut their salaries. The correspondent found that "the soulless corporations don't do it; the dry-goods men don't do it; the hardware dealers don't do it; the butchers and the bakers and the candlestickmakers don't do it; the farmers don't do it; the contractors don't do it; the members of firms don't do it; the other city departments of even Chicago don't do it; nobody...does it but the executive officers of Chicago public schools." Drawing attention to this unjust treatment by the sheltering arm of a supposedly benevolent state, educators suggested that market employment now gave workers more respect than the state gave its loyal teachers. Their protests evoked the contradictions of an emerging state bureaucracy that clung to old status relations—such as those between master and slave, baron and feme—while discarding the paternalistic expectations those relations entailed in favor of unencumbered contract practices.<sup>62</sup>

Having achieved a lady's education through their own efforts, teachers argued that self-made ladies should be treated with nothing less than equal respect. Which woman made a better teacher, they asked: "a girl brought up in easy circumstances," or "one who through industry, perseverance, and real force of character, had acquired an education and reputation sufficient [for teaching]?" The ethos of self-help put a democratic gloss on class distinctions, justifying teachers' pursuit of ladyhood as a socially meaningful, not a frivolous, endeavor. It also dissociated them from the class warfare of the Gilded Age. Newspaper editors distinguished teachers' pleas for salary increases from workers' demands, contending that the

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<sup>61</sup>"Teachers' Salaries," *Journal of Education*, 1 June 1882: 345; Untitled item, *Chicago Teacher* September 1873: 133; Solitude's Letter to the Editor, *Chicago Teacher*, December 1873: 191; "Pauper Teachers' in Natick," *Woman's Journal*, 16 January 1875: 23; "Reducing the Pay of Teachers," *Woman's Journal* (30 October 1875): 345. On Jennison's membership in the Teachers' Club see Yearbook, 1897-8, Box 3, MFWC.

<sup>62</sup>"The Looker-On," *Journal of Education* (8 April 1880): 234-235. For a similar comparison of postbellum sickness policies in which schools emerge as punitive toward women, see "Our Boston Letter," *Journal of Education* (29 May 1884): 345. On status and contract relations, see Amy Dru Stanley, *From Bondage to Contract: Wage Labor, Marriage, and the Market in the Age of Slave Emancipation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

teachers' "request is not made in the spirit of a strike. It comes from high-minded women who are putting their best personal force into the work that they are doing, and who feel keenly that their services should be properly paid for." Teachers surely felt vindicated by newsmen's pronouncements that "teachers earn much more than they are paid for." Editors also contrasted teachers' high public service and public officials' poor treatment of them: "When exhausted [from] labor, broken down, perhaps in the prime of life, with nervous prostration or disease growing out of close school-rooms, bad ventilation and want of exercise, they are made promptly to retire for the successors, without a pension or the means to live, with youth wasted and power to charm gone beyond recovery." Teachers, they argued, deserved the nation's "gratitude" and ought to receive the same honors paid to "all brave, heroic, and resolute souls" in public service.<sup>63</sup>

Banding together, women teachers sought to justify, and sometimes replicate, the protections they felt they ought to enjoy as ladies but were compelled to do without as teachers. Rejecting the equation of moral and material worth, they insisted their moral responsibilities as teachers demanded better than their salaries would suggest. Refusing to be used up and disposed of like a broken machine part or thrown upon outdoor relief like an injured worker, women teachers attempted to distinguish themselves from the vulnerable industrial laborers around them and to protect each other from such ignominious fates. Their pursuit of gentility represented an effort to resist being proletarianized. They insisted that social and intellectual stimulation, as well as a respectable standard of living, were not luxuries but fair entitlements for women who taught. As loyal public servants, late nineteenth-century teachers began to feel justified in making claims on the state that other workers could not.<sup>64</sup>

Some historians have portrayed women teachers at the turn of the century as nascent trade unionists, who occasionally "seemed to wander off the course" when leaders proposed alliances with women's clubs and the purchase of retirement homes where elderly teachers could live out their days in comfort.<sup>65</sup> As this research shows, those proposals were not aberrations. They were directly in line with two decades of prior organizing among teachers. Not simply social clubs, Gilded-Age teachers' organizations

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<sup>63</sup>"A Plea for Justice," *Journal of Education*, 17 July 1875: 39; "The Women Teachers of Boston," *Boston Herald*, (21 January 1896): 6; "Wages of Women Teachers," *Woman's Journal* (9 August 1879): 256.

<sup>64</sup>"The Necessity of Self-Culture," *Journal of Education*, 31 March 1881: 212; Mrs. Esther W. Matthews, "Sanitation and Education," *Journal of Education*, 18 October 1883: 244; Mrs. Eva D. Kellogg, "The Health of Teachers,—Who is Responsible?," *Journal of Education* 9 October 1884: 228.

<sup>65</sup>Quotation is from Marjorie Murphy, *Blackboard Unions: The AFT and the NEA, 1900-1980* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 63.

advanced women's occupational interests by stressing feminine gentility, mutual aid, and service to others. Meant to distinguish and elevate teachers above ordinary wage workers, these strategies surely complicated teachers' subsequent efforts to affiliate with labor organizations. Understanding these Gilded-Age teachers' organizations should lead us to a much sharper assessment of the conflicts teachers confronted when forming unions at the turn of the twentieth century.