

GENDER, POLITICS, AND POWER:
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LADIES REST ROOM AND LOUNGE IN RURAL
AMERICA, 1900-1945

by

Katherine Merzbacher O'Bryan

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Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Carroll Van West, Chair

Dr. Mary Hoffschwelle

Dr. Brenden Martin

Dr. Susan Myers-Shirk

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates a little-known and largely-forgotten rural public institution – the ladies rest room. Individual parties had differing motives for advocating the establishment of ladies rest rooms in rural market towns during the Progressive Era. Town businessmen hoped to encourage the patronage of rural women and their families to their stores. Male city and county authorities wanted to appear benevolent. Rural women often merely wanted a place where they could feel comfortable in the male-gendered town square. In many communities these different interests shared a consensus that the establishment of ladies rest rooms in a central location of town would be of benefit, first and foremost, to the women and their children. Beyond this, however, some thought that the ladies rest room had the potential to benefit local businesses, and subsequently, the town economy. Some also hoped, perhaps condescendingly in some cases, that by providing home demonstration and improvement activities at the rest room, the lives of rural women and their families could be further improved, strengthening the quality and vitality of both the town and the country.

The history of the development of ladies rest rooms is one small chapter in the larger story of the Progressive Era transformation of rural America. An analysis of the establishment of several ladies rest rooms throughout the country during this time period demonstrates the growing relationship between gender and the growth of consumerism in the early-twentieth century. This pattern was facilitated, in part, by rural women's organizations, the home improvement movement and accompanying home demonstration activities, and the role that local merchants and businessmen played in acknowledging

women as consumers and providing wares that encouraged and facilitated the sale of “modern” merchandise that assisted women in their daily lives.

An analysis of the establishment and development of ladies rest room facilities in small market towns demonstrates that gender and consumerism worked together to shape public space. As this study illustrates, rural women had a great deal of agency in their own lives, and were active participants, if not often the catalyst, for the establishment of rest rooms. In this way, rural women worked to “regender” traditionally male public spaces – including county courthouses, community buildings, and, to a larger extent, the central business district – for themselves and their use.

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CHAPTER I

During the Progressive Era, several different groups of citizens advocated for the establishment and development of ladies rest room facilities, largely for the benefit of rural women and their families.¹ These groups included local town and rural women, who were often members of local women's clubs and organizations and frequently the catalyst for the development of a ladies rest room, as well as leading male citizens, including the community of local businessmen. These downtown businessmen and city leaders often advocated for the development of ladies rest rooms in order to help women feel more comfortable and at ease in what was, at this time, a predominantly male gendered space – the downtown square.² These male leaders felt that if women had a facility in the downtown business area where they could safely and comfortably rest, either by themselves or, ideally, with their children, while the men of the family conducted business, women would be more likely to venture into town with their male relatives and spend money in establishments that catered to their needs, such as grocery and dry-goods stores.³

¹ During my research and fieldwork, I have noted that these facilities have been referred to as both the “ladies rest room” and the “ladies lounge,” depending on the community. For the purposes of this study, since the majority of historical documentation, as well as the majority of the people that I interacted with at the sites that I visited, referred to the sites as “rest rooms,” this is the term that I will employ during general discussion of these facilities. In the case study chapters, however, I will use the term that the historical documentation of that facility, as well as the community itself, uses when discussing the facility.

² Ted Ownby, *Subduing Satan: Religion, Recreation, and Manhood in the Rural South, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 38-55.

³ Carroll Van West, “The Ladies Rest Room: Gender and Space in the Rural South, 1910-1990” (paper presented at the Women in Historic Preservation Conference, Atlanta, GA, March 23, 1996). The case study chapters that follow include several examples of rural families choosing to conduct business in market centers that offered ladies rest room facilities over those that did not, including: “The Rest Room,” *Lyons Daily News*, February 12, 1909, page 3, Microfilm roll, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas,

The development of ladies rest rooms coincided with the growing relationship between gender and the growth of consumerism in the early twentieth-century. As rural women became engaged in home improvement and home demonstration work, local merchants and businessmen recognized women as a growing market of consumers by providing the wares necessary for these women to “modernize” their homes and lives. Gender and consumerism worked together to shape public space when women worked to create a physical space for themselves in the central business district of small market communities. Ladies rest rooms are the physical representation of the work of women to “regender” traditionally male public spaces – including county courthouses, community buildings, and, to a larger extent, the central business district – for themselves and their use.

The communities that created ladies rest rooms shared several characteristics. All of the communities were, and still are, small market towns with a central business district surrounded by a rural agricultural countryside. In each of these communities, women were involved in rest room establishment, either as the catalyst or as advocates. The physical locations of the rest rooms were all in the central business districts of town and consisted of at least two distinct spaces – a large lounge area and a toilet area. Likewise, all of the rest rooms employed a matron.

None of these communities, however, share all of the same characteristics, which is why the establishment history of each rest room is unique. Some communities

Lyons Daily News, January 19, 1909- November 1, 1909, roll L2130; “President Hunt’s Report to Chamber of Commerce,” *The Observer*, March 24, 1911, page 3, Google News Archive <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=_h5EAAAIAIBAJ&sjid=97AMAAAIAIBAJ&pg=7155,3266056&dq=newberry+ladies+rest+room&hl=en> (accessed October 15, 2012).

established rest rooms in courthouses, others in multi-purpose community buildings, while one rest room was freestanding and purpose built. In some communities women sought the assistance of men, whether merchants or city or county officials, to help with rest room establishment or funding. Most, but not all, of the rest rooms had close ties with the home improvement movement. The establishment of ladies rest rooms was a dynamic movement, and each individual town and community that developed a rest room did so with its own individual interests in mind.

Hundreds of communities newly constructed, or developed within existing buildings, facilities for ladies rest rooms. While building types and floorplans might have differed, these facilities shared key characteristics. A “rest room,” properly situated, had at least two separate areas. One area contained toilet facilities. An adjoining area was a large lounge space, with adequate furniture for women and their children. These lounge areas often featured such amenities as sofas, chairs, or chaise lounges; beds or cots for women, and cribs for babies and small children; and tables where the women could eat or socialize with one another. Some rest rooms had ornate mirrors, magazines or other reading material, and playing cards. Many rest rooms had either a designated or separate kitchen area, where meals could be prepared and served. Ideally, a matron supervised the rest room, who was charged with attending to the needs of the women who visited the rest room, and keeping the rest room clean and in good working order.

Ladies rest rooms developed in some small communities as early as the late-nineteenth century, and grew in popularity during the first two decades of the twentieth. The United States Department of Agriculture in 1917 recognized the earlier community efforts by concerned citizens to develop ladies rest rooms. In the *Yearbook of the United*

States Department of Agriculture, Anne M. Evans, an investigator in women's rural organizations, authored a brief article titled "Rest Rooms for Women in Marketing Centers."

In this piece, Evans discussed various ways in which citizens throughout the nation had successfully advocated for ladies rest rooms. Evans first noted that several specific groups of local citizens had successfully worked to establish public rest rooms for ladies. She credited the cooperation of women's organizations, observing that ladies rest rooms "have been established by women's rural organizations in cooperation with other local organizations, with individuals, and with village, town, or county authorities; by business corporations operating private city markets; and by individual merchants."⁴ Evans utilized several specific examples to discuss how interested women could work within their own organizations, with local government authorities, and with merchants, to bring a rest room to their town. She noted that in Guthrie, Oklahoma, four women's rural clubs joined together to support the establishment of a rest room in the county courthouse. Despite the lack of interest from local businessmen, the rural women were able to persuade the county commissioners of the viability of a ladies rest room in this central location.⁵ In Chickasha, Oklahoma, and Salisbury, North Carolina, the county agent played an integral role in the development of local ladies rest rooms. In Chickasha, the rest room was established in the office of the county agent and the secretary of the local chamber of commerce. Similarly, in Salisbury, the rest room adjoined the office of

⁴ Anne M. Evans, "Rest Rooms for Women in Marketing Centers," *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1917* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1918): 217.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 217-218.

the county agent in a building that was utilized as a community center.⁶ Evans listed several examples of rest rooms established privately by businessmen or corporate interests. She asserted that “the number of country women dealing with these business houses warranted the establishment of rest rooms by proprietors to meet the needs of their customers.”⁷

Evans also noted the most common types of rest rooms that were being constructed in small market towns throughout the country. Small town and rural residents established several different types of ladies rest room facilities, largely within existing buildings, including county courthouses and government offices, local cooperatives, railroad stations, libraries, community buildings, public and private markets, and dry-goods or grocery stores. Rarely did communities construct separate buildings for ladies public rest rooms.⁸

Citizens often developed rest rooms in different building types, but these buildings were predominantly located in the town’s central business district. A central location allowed the women to visit the stores on the square and have a space that they could reach with little additional walking as they waited for their husbands or other male relatives to finish conducting their business. Locations in close proximity to the central

⁶ Ibid., 219.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Evans, “Rest Rooms for Women in Marketing Centers,”; Wayne Crocker Nason, “Rural Buildings for Business and Social Uses,” *U. S. Department of Agriculture Farmers’ Bulletin No. 1622* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1930); Wayne Crocker Nason, “Uses of Rural Community Buildings,” *U. S. Department of Agriculture Farmers’ Bulletin No. 1274* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1924); Wayne Crocker Nason, “Plans of Rural Community Buildings,” *U. S. Department of Agriculture Farmers’ Bulletin No. 1173* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1921).

business district also suited the town merchants who sold household wares and, in at least one instance, town businessmen paid for the establishment of a ladies rest room adjacent to the town square.⁹

Public ladies rest rooms in rural market towns shared some similarities with “tea rooms” in larger urban locales. Both filled the need for public spaces for women, and did so by mimicking the physical appearance and setting of the home. The similarities end there. First, urban tea rooms were popular largely during the 1910s and 1920s, while ladies rest rooms remained in use in some rural areas until the end of the twentieth century. While ladies rest rooms proliferated in the central business districts of small towns and catered to a largely rural population, tea rooms were established in urban storefronts and along motorways. Additionally, ladies rest rooms were spaces where Progressive rural reformers could display reform literature and promote rural reforms to country women. Perhaps most importantly, while ladies rest rooms were established to provide comfortable, home-like spaces for women, free of charge in town, tea rooms were businesses spaces that charged a fee for a product.¹⁰

Primary source documentation relating to the establishment and development of ladies rest rooms exists, but is scattered through local newspapers, historical societies, and a handful of agricultural bulletins. Evans’s article and three United States Department of Agriculture Farmers’ Bulletins authored by Wayne Crocker Nason that discuss rural community buildings are the few government publications that examine and provide examples of the establishment of ladies rest rooms across the country.

⁹ This was the case in Lyons, Kansas.

¹⁰ Cynthia A. Brandimarte, “‘To Make the Whole World Homelike’ Gender, Space, and America’s Tea Room Movement,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 30 (Spring 1995): 1-19.

Fortunately for historians, the small rural communities that established these facilities generally expressed their support for development in local newspapers. In some cases, where local government support was involved, record of ladies rest room development can be traced through public documents, such as county court records.

Also unfortunate is the lack of interest that has, thus far, been paid to the history of these facilities by both traditional and public historians. The history of the establishment and development of ladies public rest room facilities throughout the nation, as well as the study of the remaining facilities themselves, can help to shed new light on several fields of historical study, including gender studies, rural women's history, early twentieth-century consumerism, and material culture.

The historiography of gender studies in twentieth-century American women's history is too complex to fully delineate in this introductory chapter; however, over the last three decades, the interpretation of gender in women's history has undergone a rapid transformation. It has shifted from a metaphor of "separate spheres," to a recognition of gender as a social and cultural construct, to the use of gender as its own analytic framework for historical analysis.

Women's historians writing in the mid-to-late 1980s advanced the interpretation of gender from the then-prevalent framework of the "separate spheres" metaphor to an analysis of gender as a social and cultural construct. In "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women's History in the 1980s," Nancy A. Hewitt argued that the formative works in American women's history had focused on the formation of separate

sexual spheres for women and men.¹¹ Hewitt asserted that feminists of the 1970s claimed that gender was the primary source of oppression in society, and that women were initially viewed as victims of oppression at the hands of powerful males in medicine, the church, education, the state, and the family.¹² Women's historians writing in the late-1960s and 1970s soon began to view this oppression as a double-edged sword, claiming that the exclusion from areas of male dominance could mean an inclusion in an all-female enclave. Hewitt contended that these women's historians, including Barbara Welter, Nancy F. Cott, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, observed that a rich female subculture was the foundation for a community of middle-class women in antebellum and Victorian America. Through the work of these early feminist historians, the true woman/separate spheres/woman's culture triad became the predominant framework for interpreting the lives of North American women.¹³ Hewitt asserted that women's historians broadened this interpretive framework to include women of different classes and races by claiming patriarchy as the common force that women held in common and modernization as the force that spread the idea of true womanhood and separate spheres throughout society.¹⁴

According to Hewitt, however, as more women's historians began examining the lives of the black and white working class, they became increasingly dissatisfied with the

¹¹ Nancy A. Hewitt, "Beyond the Search for Sisterhood: American Women's History in the 1980s," *Social History* 10, no. 3, North American Issue (October 1985): 299-321.

¹² *Ibid.*, 299.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 300-301. Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 2, part 1 (Summer 1966): 151-174; Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations between Women in Nineteenth-Century America," *Signs* 1, no.1 (Autumn 1975): 1-29.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 303-304.

ability of the separate spheres metaphor to explain the apparent differences in the lives of Victorian middle- and working-class women.¹⁵ Historians writing in the mid-to-late 1980s contested the interpretation of the prior two decades that separate spheres was a reality in the lives of historical women and an appropriate metaphor for historical analysis. These historians asserted that the metaphor of separate spheres was an oversimplification that created the perception of a homogenous womanhood and failed to account for the differences that were the reality of the lives of individual women. Additionally, they alleged that the interpretive metaphor of separate spheres did not acknowledge the importance of class and race in differentiating the experiences of individual women.¹⁶

Hewitt admitted that analyzing women in history in terms of a “separate spheres” metaphor was problematic because this idea was itself a cultural construct. She explained that there was a culturally dominant definition of sexual spheres that was promulgated by an economically, politically, and socially dominant group and that this definition was based on the sexual division of labor appropriate to that dominant class, but that other classes and/or racial groups also developed their own definitions of sexual spheres based upon their sexual divisions of labor.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid., 300.

¹⁶ Hewitt exemplifies this point well herself, in her discussion of Southern enslaved communities. She asserts that while southern enslaved women did develop strong bonds with one another, these “were rooted not in the culture-bound concept of the separation of spheres but in the material realities of the sexual division of labor,” and that these work roles were complementary to those of enslaved males. She contends that this led to a strong sense of community interests, and that these class and racial community interests overrode and prevented the development of any form of “universal sisterhood.” Ibid., 300-302, 306-307.

¹⁷ Ibid., 215.

In 1986, Joan W. Scott, in “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” agreed with Hewitt that gender was a cultural construction, a “social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for women and men.”¹⁸ Scott provided her own definition of gender, the core of which she asserted, “rests on an integral connection between two propositions: gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.”¹⁹ Scott further explained that it was necessary to analyze the interrelationship between the individual and the larger social organization in order to better understand how gender has worked historically.²⁰ Scott was one of the earliest historians to call on women’s historians to develop gender as an analytic category.

Linda K. Kerber agreed with Hewitt in “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” citing the “hard and constant work required to build and repair its boundaries” as evidence that women’s sphere is a social construction.²¹ She also concurred with Scott, asserting that, while the metaphor of separate spheres enabled historians to move the history of women from the trivial and anecdotal realm of history into the arena of analytic social history, “to continue to use the language of separate spheres is to deny the reciprocity between gender and society, and to

¹⁸ Joan W. Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91, no.5 (Dec. 1986): 1056.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1067.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1067-1075.

²¹ Linda K. Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *Journal of American History* 75, no. 1 (June 1988): 28.

impose a static model on dynamic relationships.”²² Kerber argued that historians writing in the mid-to-late 1980s attempted to demonstrate that the “separate” sphere of women was both affected by what men did and, in turn, influenced the activities of men.

Women’s history scholars of the early-1990s, influenced by scholarship in the social sciences, asserted that cross-cultural and historical interpretations of gender frontiers and cultural encounters could expose contests of power in history. Joan W. Scott began to discuss the implications of gender constructions and power as early as 1986, and by the early-1990s, other women’s historians were agreeing with her analysis. In “‘Opinionative Assurance:’ The Challenge of Women’s History,” Linda K. Kerber criticized the lack of attention given to historical women in high school and college survey courses on United States and European history. She identified that the primary challenge for women’s history in the early-1990s was to strive to understand and interpret “economic and social relationships not as ‘natural,’ but as socially constructed arrangements that benefit one group at the expense of another.”²³ Kerber encouraged educators to place these gender-based contests of power at the center of history curriculum, rather than continuing to define the work and lives of historical women as subsidiary to those of historical men.

Additionally, by the early-1990s many women’s historians were analyzing how a multiplicity of social constructions, especially gender and race, created dichotomous relationships of those with power and those who were oppressed. Evelyn Brooks

²² Ibid., 18, 37-38.

²³ Linda K. Kerber, “‘Opinionative Assurance:’ The Challenge of Women’s History,” *OAH Magazine of History* 6, no. 1, History Education Reform (Summer 1991): 32.

Higginbotham called on women's historians to consider race as a factor in their analyses of power in "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race." She observed race, like gender, was also a social construction. Like Nancy A. Hewitt, who argued that class predominated over gender and prevented a unification of all women, Higginbotham claimed that, in the lives of black women, race was the predominant social construction. She explained that, while historians of black women have asserted the dominance of race in the lives of black women, they have failed to differentiate the gender and class positions of black men and women within the black community, thereby further accentuating race and creating a "monolithic black community."²⁴

While women's historians were developing new analyses of power and production in the early-1990s, they were also beginning to incorporate ideas from the social sciences, including psychology, sociology, and perhaps most notably, anthropology, into their analyses. The influence of this "new cultural history" on the field of women's history helped to produce scholarly works that incorporated cross-cultural analyses. In "Brave New Worlds: Women's and Gender History," Kathleen M. Brown advocated for interpreting the cultural differences in gender divisions as "gender frontiers," and as locations where contests of power can occur. She contended that examining gender cross-culturally and historically within a comparative framework will allow women's historians to avoid essentialism and begin to better appreciate the critical role that gender played in colonial encounters and conflicts of power.²⁵

²⁴ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, "African-American Women's History and the Metalanguage of Race," *Signs* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1992): 253-256.

²⁵ Kathleen M. Brown, "Brave New Worlds: Women's and Gender History," *The William and Mary Quarterly* Third Series, 50, no. 2, Early American History: Its Past and Future (Apr. 1993): 311-319.

Women's historians at the turn of the twenty-first century continued to broaden this interpretive lens to focus, to an even larger degree, on cultural representations as central in lives of women of different genders, classes, and races. In "Productive Collaborations: The Benefits of Cultural Analysis to the Past, Present, and Future of Women's History," Kathi Kern contended that the analysis of cultural representations of gender and race were a positive development in the field of women's history. It was critical for historians to understand the ways that women were historically constructed, Kern thought, because these constructions shaped the reality of their lives.²⁶ She asserted that "the study of cultural discourses has deepened our understanding of women's structural realities."²⁷

Perhaps the greatest development in the interpretation and analysis of gender in women's history occurred in the early twenty-first century, as several prominent women's historians began to recognize the importance of gender as its own paradigm for historical analysis. In "Recent Directions in Gender and Women's History," Nancy F. Cott and Drew Gilpin Faust recognized a new direction in scholarship, one in which gender became a framework or analytic category for the historical study not only of women, but of men, as well. They argued that, "this perspective presumes that every historical actor is shaped and influenced by gender attributes and by the existence of gender categories in social organization and in structures of representation."²⁸ Similarly,

²⁶ Kathi Kern, "Productive Collaborations: The Benefits of Cultural Analysis to the Past, Present, and Future of Women's History," *Journal of Women's History* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 36-38.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁸ Nancy F. Cott and Drew Gilpin Faust, "Recent Directions in Gender and Women's History," *OAH Magazine of History* 19, no. 2 (March 2005): 4-5.

writing a year later in “The New Political History and Women’s History: Comments on *The Democratic Experiment*,” Kathryn Kish Sklar advocated for a paradigm that centered around women and gender and that located women and gender in the larger historical discourse of American political history.²⁹

In order to fully examine the history of the establishment and development of ladies public rest rooms, it is necessary to analyze not only the role of gender in the lives of women, but the multiplicity of ways that constructed and accepted gender norms affected the lives of a specific group of women – rural women. Over the last three decades, several scholars have published detailed studies of early twentieth-century rural women, including Deborah Fink, Rebecca Sharpless, Mary Neth, Jane Adams, and Melissa Walker. While these studies are all excellent sources of information on the lives of rural women who lived in the early-to-mid-twentieth century, they are also exemplary for their focus on how socially constructed gender roles structured the lives of rural women. Each of the authors analyze the gendered division of labor that occurred on rural family farms in their geographical area of study, and while they come to different conclusions as to the flexibility of gender roles, and, consequently, the power of women in rural farm households, their recognition of the importance of gender in the lives of rural women is an important scholarly contribution.

Deborah Fink examined the development of female identity through an analysis of the changes in women’s roles as wives and mothers in Boone County, Nebraska, in *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940* (1992). Fink

²⁹ Kathryn Kish Sklar, “The New Political History and Women’s History: Comments on *The Democratic Experiment*,” *The History Teacher* 39, no. 4 (Aug. 2006): 509-514.

argued against an interpretation of the lives of rural women that advocated an agrarian ideology, insisting that rural women were not somehow liberated by their work on family farms, but faced challenges in achieving social, political, and economic goals, like independence from husbands and from rigorous work in the home. Fink highlighted the contradictions between agrarian ideology and the reality of the daily lives of rural farm women as wives and mothers. She contended that rural women shared some of the same dilemmas as non-rural women; however, the physical location, as well as the distinct demands placed on rural wives and mothers, differentiated their circumstances from those of non-rural women.³⁰ Like Fink, in *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900-1940* (1999) Rebecca Sharpless analyzed the responsibilities that filled the daily lives of rural farm women. She asserted that, for many women in their roles as daughters, wives, and mothers, life was a near-constant struggle to balance domestic work like rearing children, preparing meals, and clothing and sheltering a family with the arduous labor involved in making a cotton crop annually, both tasks that were seemingly never-ending for rural women of the Blackland Prairie.³¹

Several scholars have analyzed how the development of commercialized agriculture and the subsequent transition from subsistence to market production led to a shift in the gendered division of labor on small family farms during the early-to-mid twentieth century. In *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (1995), Mary Neth contended

³⁰ Deborah Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992).

³¹ Rebecca Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

that modern agricultural practices began to develop as early as 1914, with the creation of the extension service and its farm bureaus, homemakers clubs, and 4H clubs. She asserted that those reform efforts and other programs, espoused by both government policy and progressive rural reformers, altered gender relationships on small family farms by promoting individualized, rather than communal, responsibilities. Government policy and reform efforts promoted independent farms with male farmers who practiced capitalist-oriented production and female homemakers who practiced middle-class consumption patterns. Neth asserted that, prior to the 1920s, the gender relations on small family farms could be both hierarchical and mutual. Although men controlled the farm economy and the division of labor, the necessity of the work of women and children meant that they had some power over their labor and lives. Neth credited farm women with forging the neighborhood bonds that socially, and, in some instances, economically, sustained individual farm families, as well as entire rural neighborhoods during these early years of the twentieth century. Neth argued that new gender hierarchies, by altering the role of women within the farm household and neighborhood, weakened rural neighborhood ties, promoted class stratification, and ushered in the era of modern agribusiness in the Midwest.³²

Jane Adams (1994) took one Midwest community, Union County, Southern Illinois, and analyzed the shift in agricultural production from one based on close bonds of family and kinship to one that emphasized industrialization and mechanization. Like Neth, Adams found that farm roles and responsibilities shifted within families during this

³² Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

time, especially the role of women. She claimed that, prior to World War II, gender roles in farming families were less differentiated, and both men and women acted as producers, but that following World War II and the complete mechanization of agriculture, Union County farm women became consumers. She asserts that “under the triple processes of the adoption of modern technologies, the elimination of women’s traditional agricultural production, and women’s entry into the labor force, the rural home, as a site of family life, came to look very much like its urban counterpart in both appearance and function.”³³ Adams concluded that the economic shift caused by World War II altered the social and cultural institutions of Union County, and altered the close bonds of kin and community present in Union County prior to the war. Adams contrasted the large amounts of labor and the local economic and social dependencies of pre-World War II days with the social breakdown of the small farming community after the war, when many people fled to the cities for urban employment and the remaining farmers operated in a national economy.

Similar to Adams and Neth, in *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (2000), Melissa Walker examined the shift in the gendered division of labor on rural family farms that occurred when agricultural production transitioned from subsistence-based to market-oriented. She asserted that one result of this transition was that gender roles were altered. Walker explained that when family farms were producing crops largely for subsistence, the work roles of women were flexible, but as small farms became increasingly focused on production for the market,

³³ Jane Adams, *The Transformation of Rural Life: Southern Illinois, 1890-1990* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 250.

men took over the majority of the market-oriented farming responsibilities, leaving women with the burden of the family's maintenance. Walker analyzed the development of commercial agriculture and industry in East Tennessee, southwestern West Virginia, and northwestern South Carolina from prior to World War I to the end of the New Deal and asserted that, prior to industrialization and commercialized agriculture, social status in the upcountry South was based on communal values, and that property and resources alone did not determine one's social status. With industrialization and the advent of commercialized agriculture, however, class stratification increased and became more fixed. Through an analysis of farm women's work, mutual aid networks, and gender roles in the farm family, both prior to and after the development of commercialized agriculture and heavy industry, Walker argued that gender roles were altered and class divisions were rigidified. She admitted that the transition from a society based largely on subsistence and mutual aid to one based on commercial production and cash provided more material advantages to rural upcountry women, but it often also led to the devaluation of their work and position within the family home.³⁴

In 2006, Walker and Sharpless co-edited *Work, Family, and Faith: Rural Southern Women in the Twentieth Century*, a volume of nine essays that discuss a large range of topics related to the social, cultural, and economic lives of twentieth century rural southern women. Contributors address the importance of farm women's work, both subsistence- and market-oriented, to a successful farm household; the relationship of rural

³⁴ Melissa Walker, *All We Knew Was to Farm: Rural Women in the Upcountry South, 1919-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

reformers and southern farm women; and the impact of the transition that some rural women faced as they relocated to urban centers.³⁵

Historians, including Jane Adams, have closely associated the shift in the gendered division of labor on small family farms that occurred in the early-to-mid twentieth century with specific government-sponsored rural reform efforts, including the development of the agricultural extension service. Several women's historians have analyzed the impact of rural women's organizations, including home improvement clubs, and the county home improvement agents that typically organized the clubs, on the lives of rural women and, consequently, the communities in which they lived. Several scholars have studied both black and white Progressive Era rural women's clubs, including Mary S. Hoffschwelle, Ann Elizabeth McCleary, Debra A. Reid, and Lu Ann Jones. They have successfully employed a material culture analysis of the impact of rural reform and clubwork. These important studies provide a better understanding of how the work of both agents and clubwomen resulted in positive tangible results for their families and communities.

In *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community: Reformers, Schools, and Homes in Tennessee, 1900-1930* (1998), Mary S. Hoffschwelle explored the history of Progressive rural reformers and their efforts to create a better life for rural Southern residents in the early-twentieth century. Hoffschwelle examined several rural reform initiatives, including white and African American school building campaigns, efforts to teach home economics in rural schools, and the reform efforts of home demonstration agents,

³⁵Melissa Walker and Rebecca Sharpless, eds., *Work, Family, and Faith: Rural Southern Women in the Twentieth Century* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006).

asserting that it was the rural people, not the rural reformers, who determined which initiatives would be accepted or rejected, and on what terms. Her discussions of school consolidation and new school building for white students and the construction of model schools for African American pupils through the Julius Rosenwald Fund are particularly insightful. Hoffschwelle thoroughly identified the motivations behind the consolidations and constructions, and utilized a multitude of images and plans of both consolidated schools and Rosenwald schools throughout her study. Hoffschwelle successfully employed a material culture analysis to demonstrate the differences in white and black school reform.³⁶

Ann Elizabeth McCleary likewise utilized material culture evidence to support her argument in “Shaping a New Role for the Rural Woman: Home Demonstration Work in Augusta County, Virginia, 1917-1940.” In her thorough study of the history of white county home demonstration agents and rural clubwomen in Augusta County, McCleary challenged the argument posited by other scholars that the home improvement program was one of attempted social control of rural women. She asserted that, to the contrary, little contention existed between rural women and the home demonstration agents who organized the clubs and that, at the local level, clubwomen and agents worked together to craft a program that best suited the needs of the participating women. McCleary highlighted the participation of clubwomen in home improvement initiatives, and noted that “rather than blindly signing on to the middle-class ideal, agents and club women

³⁶ Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community: Reformers, Schools, and Homes in Tennessee, 1900-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998).

sought to create a program that would suit rural women's particular needs."³⁷ McCleary then provided an analysis of several rural homes and kitchens, arguing that rural women selectively chose which, if any, agent recommendations to follow.³⁸

In *Reaping a Greater Harvest: African Americans, the Extension Service, and Rural Reform in Jim Crow Texas* (2007), Debra A. Reid analyzed the work of the employees of the Texas Agricultural Extension Service's Negro Division and the impact of reform work on black farmers in Jim Crow era Texas. She contended that both challenges and rewards existed for Negro Division employees, and that, while they constantly fought to receive equal treatment from the white Extension Service supervisors, being segregated into a separate division provided employees of the Negro Division with some autonomy. Reid examined several rural reforms that employees of the Negro Division promoted to rural African American farmers and notes that one of the most successful reform efforts was the development and construction of community canning centers. Reid utilized detailed descriptions of the canning centers, as well as images and drawings, to argue that the construction of community canning centers taught rural African Americans valuable lessons on economy, cooperation, sanitation, drainage, landscaping, and home conveniences that participants could then apply to other community facilities, as well as their homes. Reid concluded that rural canning centers "stabilized rural communities."³⁹

³⁷ Ann Elizabeth McCleary, "Shaping a New Role for the Rural Woman: Home Demonstration Work in Augusta County, Virginia, 1917-1940" (PhD diss., Brown University, 1996), 312.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 313-379.

³⁹ Debra A. Reid, *Reaping a Greater Harvest: African Americans, the Extension Service, and Rural Reform in Jim Crow Texas* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 68-77.

In *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (2002), Lu Ann Jones found that the work and ingenuity of rural farm women were essential to the survival of their families, particularly during the Depression. Jones demonstrated the agency that rural farm women asserted in their dealings with itinerant merchants, home demonstration agents, and their male relatives. She analyzed rural reform efforts from multiple female perspectives, including those of government-supported home demonstration agents, as well as rural clubwomen. She contended that home demonstration work provided both of these groups of women positive opportunities. Home demonstration agents were able to fulfill personal ambitions while remaining financially independent, allowing them to forgo the seemingly inevitable path of marriage and motherhood, if they so desired. Through demonstration work, many clubwomen found increased opportunities for socializing, the ability to continue their educations and shape their communities, and a venue in which to develop and showcase their talents and find value in their work. During the first half of the twentieth century, Jones concluded, rural women utilized the resources at their disposal, whether it be their labor on their farms or in home demonstration clubs, or their ability to trade or produce, to provide for themselves and their families.⁴⁰

Throughout her work, Jones successfully identified how women shaped material culture, perhaps most persuasively in her discussion of feed bag dresses. Jones explained how, in the 1920s and 1930s, farm women repurposed poultry feed bags as a method of “making do.” Women would take the cheap cotton sacks and sew them into dresses and

⁴⁰ Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us to Work: Farm Women in the New South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

other clothing for members of their family in an effort to avoid spending money purchasing store-bought fabrics.⁴¹ Jones asserted that, through their creation of feed bag clothing, resourceful women not only literally reshaped feed bags into dresses, but also reshaped the image that the producers of the feed bags had for their own product. In order to accommodate what they understood as a new use of their product, feed bag producers altered their bags from plain sacks with the company name and logo to bags that featured an array of patterns and prints. They likewise altered the advertising and marketing of their product to appeal to women and the new use for their product. This new marketing strategy by the feed bag producers also implied some acknowledgment of the power that women wielded as both decision makers in their households and consumers.

This dissertation follows in the tradition of works like those of Hoffschwelle, McCleary, Reid, and Jones, placing an emphasis on the role of women as shapers of material culture.⁴² In the five rural communities discussed in the following chapters, women were either the catalyst or, at the very least, were significantly involved in the establishment of ladies rest room facilities in their communities and participated in the establishment and development of the spaces. Although they often had to appeal to men

⁴¹ Ibid., chapter six.

⁴² In addition to the works discussed above, there have been several other scholars whose material culture analysis of building types has influenced my scholarship. These include Thomas Carter and Elizabeth Collins Cromley, *Invitation to Vernacular Architecture: A Guide to the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2005); Charles E. Martin, *Hollybush: Folk Building and Social Change in an Appalachian Community* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press 1984); Sally McMurry, *Families and Farmhouses in Nineteenth-Century America: Vernacular Design and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Abigail A. Van Slyck, *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

for support or funding, local women arranged the spaces and served as matrons, and women, along with their young children, were the users of these spaces.

This dissertation is the final product of a year-long research and documentation effort. I first spent several months researching to locate existing ladies rest rooms and lounges that possessed historical integrity. This proved to be quite challenging, but I was greatly aided by the discovery of several United States Department of Agriculture Farmers' Bulletins.⁴³ Through these bulletins, as well as online research, I discovered documentation of dozens of small towns that had established ladies rest rooms during the first half of the twentieth century. These rest rooms were located in towns throughout the nation, as well as in Canada and New Zealand, and were present in many different building types.⁴⁴

Citizens of small towns established ladies rest rooms in courthouses in Newberry, South Carolina; Pulaski, Tennessee; Lyons, Kansas; Crosbyton, Texas; Bonham, Texas;

⁴³ Nason, "Rural Buildings for Business and Social Uses"; Nason, "Uses of Rural Community Buildings"; Nason, "Plans of Rural Community Buildings."

⁴⁴ Evidence confirms that women worked to establish ladies rest rooms, in the sense that they are described in this dissertation, throughout the world during the first half of the twentieth century. Donna Norell of the University of Manitoba has written an article describing the development of ladies rest rooms in rural Manitoba, Canada: "'The Most Humane Institution in All the Village': The Women's Rest Room in Rural Manitoba," *Manitoba History* no. 11 (Spring 1986) <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/mb_history/11/womensrestrooms.shtml> (last accessed November 7, 2011). Likewise, several historic newspaper articles, as well as a Historic Places Trust nomination, document the existence of ladies rest rooms in New Zealand: "Rest-Room for Women and Girls," *Ashburton Guardian*, August 2, 1904, page 4, PapersPast <<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=AG19070802.2.44.1>> (last accessed June 23, 2011); "Local and General," *Wanganui Chronicle*, May 16, 1917, page 4, PapersPast <<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=WC19170516.2.21>> (last accessed June 23, 2011); "Women's National Reserve," *Hawera & Normanby Star*, June 26, 1922, page 1, PapersPast <<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&d=HNS19220626.2.2.2>> (last accessed June 23, 2011); "Hastings Municipal Women's Rest," New Zealand Historic Places Trust Nomination, March, 30, 2007, <<http://www.historic.org.nz/TheRegister/RegisterSearch/RegisterResults.aspx?RID=1105>> (last accessed June 23, 2011). Similar to many of the ladies rest rooms discussed in this dissertation, the rest rooms that were established in rural Canada and New Zealand were created by women's organizations – the Manitoba Women's Institute in Canada, and the Women's Christian Temperance Movement in New Zealand.

Lodi, California; Lincoln, Nebraska; Mansfield, Ohio; Warsaw, Indiana, and Nevada, Missouri, to name a few.⁴⁵ Communities also developed ladies rest rooms in the shared space of community buildings in Northfield, Minnesota; Wheaton, Minnesota; Redwood Falls, Minnesota; Blue Grass, Indiana; Blue Lake, California; Washington and Butler, Pennsylvania, and Valrico, Florida.⁴⁶ Residents established ladies rest rooms in farmers' cooperative buildings in Hastings, Florida; Plant City, Florida; Mora, Minnesota; Kittson County, Minnesota; Greenwood, Wisconsin; and Elephant Butte, New Mexico.⁴⁷ The citizens of Orange Township, in Blackhawk County, Iowa, established a ladies rest room

⁴⁵ The greatest amount of evidence recorded pertaining to courthouse rest rooms is in local newspapers, where there were frequent mentions of activities that occurred at the courthouse, including patronage and maintenance of the ladies rest room. Examples of this that will occur in later chapters of this dissertation include: *The Newberry Observer*; *The Lyons Daily News*; *The Central Kansas News-Democrat*; *The Pulaski Citizen*. Also "New Offices are Built in Courthouse this Week," *The Crosbyton Review*, September 19, 1941, page 1 < <http://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metaph243238/m1/1/>> (last accessed January 24, 2013); "Rest Room is Now Ready," *The Bonham Daily Favorite*, August 20, 1913, Google News Archive <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=m15fAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=SVwNAAAAIIBAJ&pg=4144,4339867&dq=ladies+rest+room+courthouse&hl=en>> (last accessed January 24, 2013); "County Ladies Rest Room in New Location," *The Lodi Sentinel*, August 6, 1925, page 3, Google News Archive <http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2485&dat=19250806&id=9hs_AAAAIBAJ&sjid=T08MAAAAIBAJ&pg=6480,2694599> (last accessed January 24, 2012); "Ladies Rest Room," *The Jeffersonian Gazette*, May 23, 1906, page 3, Google News Archive <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=SjVdAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=01oNAAAAIIBAJ&pg=3541,952767&dq=ladies+rest+room&hl=en>> (last accessed January 24, 2012); "'Rest' Room for Ladies Open," *Mansfield Daily Shield*, February 11, 1910, page 3, Google News Archive <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=g2BZAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=jUgNAAAAIIBAJ&pg=5218,2737549&dq=ladies+rest+room&hl=en>> (last accessed January 24, 2012); "County to Repair Ladies Rest Room," *Warsaw Union*, December 5, 1917, page 1, Google News Archive <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=rwlHAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=0HkMAAAAIBAJ&pg=3167,6421279&dq=ladies+rest+room+courthouse&hl=en>> (last accessed January 24, 2012); "Rest Room Furnished," *The Nevada Daily Mail*, September 17, 1908, page 4, Google News Archive, <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=qfowAAAAIIBAJ&sjid=b-AFAAAAIBAJ&pg=6217,2703424&dq=ladies+rest+room+courthouse&hl=en> (last accessed January 24, 2013).

⁴⁶ Nason, "Plans of Rural Community Buildings," 27-28; Nason, "Rural Buildings for Business and Social Uses," 34; Nason, "Uses of Rural Community Buildings," 10, 13.

⁴⁷ Nason, "Rural Buildings for Business and Social Uses," 3, 6, 8, 11, 27; Nason, "Uses of Rural Community Buildings," 16.

in a local church,⁴⁸ while the communities of Lewisburg, Tennessee, and Rushville, Nebraska, constructed freestanding, purpose-built facilities for ladies rest rooms.⁴⁹

As I researched, I compiled a database of ladies rest rooms. I then contacted local Chambers of Commerce, historical societies, archives, museums, and historians in dozens of towns in an effort to verify if the building that housed the ladies rest room in their area was extant. In cases where I had successful dialogue with these contacts, I utilized them, as well as the property owners of the buildings that housed the former rest rooms and lounges, and arranged research trips to the sites that I felt would yield the greatest amount of physical and archival information, while at the same time representing different regions of the country and building types. I visited and documented the sites of former ladies rest rooms and lounges, with both photography and measured drawings in Lewisburg and Pulaski, Tennessee; Newberry, South Carolina; Lyons, Kansas; and Northfield, Minnesota.

Although the ladies rest rooms in these communities share several characteristics, each has its own unique story to tell. The following chapters are arranged chronologically, beginning with the establishment of the Lyons, Kansas, Ladies Rest Room in 1908 and concluding with the development of the Lewisburg, Tennessee, Ladies Rest Room in 1924. In Lyons, Kansas, women, including many who were members of the Woman's Christian Temperance Movement, worked with local businessmen to

⁴⁸ Wayne Crocker Nason, "Rural Planning: The Social Aspects of Recreation Places," *U. S. Department of Agriculture Farmers' Bulletin No. 1388* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), 23.

⁴⁹ West, "The Ladies Rest Room: Gender and Space in the Rural South, 1910-1990;" Nebraska Historic Buildings Survey, "Historic Overview of Sheridan County" (Lincoln: Nebraska State Historical Society, *n.d.*), 41.

establish a rest room, first in a rented location in the central business district, and, later, in a newly constructed county courthouse. In Pulaski, Tennessee, as well as Newberry, South Carolina, individual women who were prominent members of their community, Mary Galloway White, and Mary Ann Butler Evans, respectively, established ladies rest rooms in county courthouse spaces in 1911. In Northfield, Minnesota, the establishment of a ladies rest room coincided with the development of a community organization, and the adaptive reuse of an old Young Men's Christian Association facility into a multi-purpose community building in 1918. In Lewisburg, Tennessee, residents struggled for years to establish a ladies rest room, but when they finally accomplished their goal in 1924, they created a freestanding, purpose-built facility that subscribed to all of the United States Department of Agriculture's recommendations for ladies rest rooms.

The history of ladies rest room development in Progressive Era rural America is the story of the growing recognition of women as active participants in community and commercial development. Through their involvement in women's organizations, such as home improvement and home demonstration clubs, not only did women gain recognition for their efforts to improve their homes and communities, they also became accepted as consumers by local businessmen and merchants. The increased acceptance of women as consumers in the central business districts of rural towns necessitated the "regendering" of public spaces that had traditionally been the domain of only males. Ladies rest rooms are the physical representation of this "regendering" of public space on the rural American landscape.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL REFORMERS TURN TO AGRICULTURAL NEEDS: LYONS, KANSAS,
1908-1960

Visitors from beyond Geneseo report that they had given up trading in Lyons as it was too tiresome to stay in stores and on the streets all day waiting for the trains. Now that the Rest Room is here they do all their trading in Lyons as the bus takes them from train to Rest Room, and at night from Rest Room to train, and they appreciate the courtesy of the merchants and ladies of the city in providing for out of town trade.¹

Similar to the establishment of countless other ladies rest rooms during the Progressive Era, the establishment of a ladies rest room in Lyons, Kansas, was based largely on the principles of providing a comfortable place, in an appropriate location, for rural women and their children to rest when they visited town. However, the establishment of the Lyons Ladies Rest Room differs from that of others included in this study in both the partnerships involved in the establishment of the rest room as well as the method of funding the rest room during the early years of its existence. The women of Lyons, like the others, relied on men for financial assistance in the creation of the rest room, but here leadership came from members of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Although non-WCTU women also played key roles, the strong participation of WCTU women indicates how early twentieth-century female reform efforts shaped the creation of ladies rest rooms.²

¹ "The Rest Room," *Lyons Daily News*, February 12, 1909, page 3, Microfilm roll, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, *Lyons Daily News*, January 19, 1909-November 1, 1909, roll L2130.

² It appears as though the WCTU was particularly strong in Kansas, and, in addition to prohibition-related activities, Kansas WCTU women were concerned with anti-cigarette and narcotics legislation, child welfare, motion picture censorship, Americanization, women's suffrage, morality, prison

Shortly after Lyons women agreed to establish a ladies rest room circa 1907, they first approached the town's businessmen to provide the complete costs of the establishment and maintenance of the rest room. Therefore, as the abovementioned excerpt from the *Lyons Daily News* illustrates, women reminded local male leaders that a Lyons Ladies Rest Room would boost commerce and trade. All of those who participated in the creation of the rest room were aware of this relationship, and saw it as mutually beneficial.

Lyons is the seat of Rice County, which the state established on February 26, 1867, and named in memory of Brigadier General Samuel A. Rice, who died July 6, 1864, from wounds received in the Civil War battle at Jenkins' Ferry, Arkansas. The seat of Rice County was originally established in 1872 in a township called Atlanta; however, in 1876 the county seat was relocated to nearby Lyons.³ Rice County is located in central Kansas, and Lyons is located in central Rice County. The population of Rice County grew exponentially over the next decades, from 5 in 1870, to approximately 9,000 in 1880, and to nearly 15,000 by 1900.⁴

reform, parliamentary procedure, the peace movement, and care for the elderly. Based on the breadth of their activities, it is not, therefore, surprising that Lyons WCTU women would advocate for the establishment of a ladies rest room. Kansas Historical Society, "Kansas Woman's Christian Temperance Union/Mary Evelyn Dobbs Collection/Manuscript Collection No.170" description, www.kshs.org/p/kansas-woman-s-christian-temperance-union-mary-evelyn-dobbs-collection (accessed November 19, 2012). There are several scholarly works that examine the development of the WCTU, as well as WCTU activities in Kansas, including Ruth Bordin, *Francis Willard: A Biography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986) and Michael Lewis Goldberg, *An Army of Women: Gender and Politics in Gilded Age Kansas* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

³ John M. Muscott, "The History of Rice County," *Rice County Gazette*, March 30, 1876, edited and reprinted by Max Moxley (Sterling Kansas, 1976), 37.

⁴ "Kansas Counties: Rice County, Kansas," Kansas Historical Society, http://www.kshs.org/geog/geog_counties/view/county:RC (assessed November 19, 2012).

The creation of a ladies rest room in Lyons resulted from the need for a public space for rural women in the commercial business district and the desire of local businessmen to capture this growing segment of consumers. The Lyons Ladies Rest Room opened on January 18, 1908, in a rented location two doors south of the post office, in the central business district of Lyons. Three groups of Lyons citizens were integral to the establishment of the rest room – women living in Lyons who were members of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, women living in Lyons who were not WCTU members, and Lyons businessmen. According to a *Lyons Daily News* article commemorating the second anniversary of the rest room:

a few of the ladies of our city determined that their out of town sisters should have a comfortable place to rest with their children, and toilet conveniences, when they came to Lyons to do their shopping. These ladies presented the subject to the W.C.T.U. [...] a committee from the W.C.T.U. was appointed to co-operate with these ladies in presenting the subject to the business men of the city. The Lyons business men were greatly pleased with the idea, for it would make their customers comfortable and show them that they wanted to make their patron’s interests their aim. The business men then assumed the financial support and a room adjoining the square was rented. The ladies of the W.C.T.U., assisted by several other ladies of our city, with the generous donations of the merchants, then prepared the room for occupancy.⁵

This partnership between the women and the businessmen of Lyons to establish and fund a ladies rest room was a typical strategy to launch many efforts. Local women

⁵ “Rest Room Anniversary,” *Lyons Daily News*, January 22, 1910, page 4, Microfilm roll, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, *Lyons Daily News*, November 2, 1909-December 31, 1910, roll L2131. Interestingly, within a mere few months the discourse surrounding the establishment of the Lyons Ladies Rest Room located in the *Lyons Daily News* would shift to highlight the role of the WCTU women, and largely credit them with the impetus for the creation of the Rest Room, still in cooperation with the businessmen, but largely forgetting the role of local non-WCTU women in the Rest Room’s establishment. “Lyons Rest Room A Fine Institution,” *Lyons Daily News*, August 12, 1910, page 1; “The Rest Room,” *Lyons Daily News*, February 1, 1911, page 1, Microfilm roll, Kansas Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, *Lyons Daily News*, January 2, 1911-August 25, 1911, roll L2132.

immediately viewed the local merchants and businessmen as potential beneficiaries of the development of a ladies rest room, and enterprisingly sought their financial sponsorship. Clearly, the businessmen agreed, and saw the potential of rest room benefactorship as a possible boon to business.

Several articles published in the *Lyons Daily News* shortly after the establishment of the rest room indicated that both parties were correct. Noting that the businessmen provided financial support for the rest room, a June 1909 article stated that, “this gives the merchants an opportunity to show their interest in the comfort of their patrons, and those who come to Lyons as purchasers appreciate it. Many have remarked that they seldom came to Lyons until the Rest Room was provided, but now they do all their shopping here, as they have a home-like place in which to spend the tedious hours of waiting.”⁶ These statements, made by women who, due to the presence of the rest room, chose to bring their business to Lyons, rather than other nearby towns, attempted to demonstrate a direct link between the establishment of the Lyons Ladies Rest Room and an increase in local commerce.

Additional evidence shows a direct correlation between the businessman’s financial support of the rest room and increase in his sale of goods. A *Lyons Daily News* reporter noted that, “many who are ill and come here for doctor’s treatment and mothers with babies and small children say they do not see how they could do without the rest room and ask to know just what merchants and physicians contribute to its support so they can give them their patronage.”⁷ The businessmen who funded the rest room

⁶ “The Rest Room,” *Lyons Daily News*, June 11, 1909, page 1.

⁷ “Rest Room Anniversary,” *Lyons Daily News*, January 22, 1910, page 4.

recognized women as a growing market of consumers, and understood that providing a physical space for women in town would encourage them to bring their dollars to Lyons and, perhaps, spend more time in town and more money in their stores. Perhaps it is not surprising that “only a very few of the business men of the city have failed to help support the Rest Room from the beginning until the present time, and each month as the collector came for dues they have responded generously and for the most part with enthusiastic interest.”⁸

Another way to assess the success of the ladies rest room in Lyons is through “rest room reports” published in Rice County’s two leading newspapers, the *Lyons Daily News* and the *Central Kansas News-Democrat*. One such report noted that, from January 1908, when the rest room opened, through January 1909, there were 3,409 visitors from out-of-town who utilized the facilities, coming from eighteen different states, as well as Canada.⁹ Another report stated that, in the month from January 23, 1909, to February 23, 1909, there were 397 women from out-of-town who visited the rest room, and 601 visitors total, indicating that out-of-town visitors comprised approximately two-thirds of rest room users, while one-third of the women who utilized the facilities were local to Lyons.¹⁰

The popularity of the rest room as a secure and comfortable social space for women and their children grew quickly. A January 1910 report noted that, over the past year, 7,640 women from out-of-town, representing twenty-two states, had utilized the rest

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ “The Rest Room,” *Lyons Daily News*, February 12, 1909, page 3.

¹⁰ “The Rest Room,” *Lyons Daily News*, March 12, 1909, page 5.

room facilities, more than double the number of visitors from the previous year. The reports also demonstrated that the women and businessmen who established and funded the rest room placed great importance on its function as a space for the care of small children. The January 1910 report also noted that 268 babies had been cared for over the past year.¹¹ A year later, the number of out-of-town guests utilizing the rest room had climbed to 8,536, averaging 711 women a month, with care provided to 364 babies throughout the year.¹²

Based on this rapid growth and success, the number of out-of-Lyons users, and the financial support of the men of the local business community, it is not surprising that space for a ladies rest room was included in the plans for the new Rice County Courthouse. The existing courthouse had been built in 1876, and the consensus of the Rice County Commissioners, as well as the public, was that a larger courthouse was necessary (Figure 2.1).¹³

¹¹ “Rest Room Anniversary,” *Lyons Daily News*, January 22, 1910, page 4.

¹² “The Rest Room,” *Lyons Daily News*, February 1, 1911, page 1.

¹³ “Rice County Courthouse Three Faces?,” Newspaper and Date unknown, Coronado Quivira Museum, Lyons, Kansas, “Court House” resource folder.



Figure 2.1 Circa 1910 image of the Rice County Courthouse that stood in the square from 1876 until April 1910. Located in “Court House” resource folder, Coronado Quivira Museum, Lyons, Kansas.

Courthouses are usually constructed with longevity in mind, and they represent a preponderance of the remaining physical sites of early twentieth-century ladies rest rooms. As Anne M. Evans noted in her *USDA Yearbook* piece, it was not unusual for citizens to establish ladies rest rooms in centrally located public spaces, like county courthouses, during the first decades of the twentieth century.¹⁴ A National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Nomination for County Courthouses of Nebraska asserts that county officials recognized the need to provide for the comfort of the farmer and his family when they came to town, and they often did this by establishing rest rooms

¹⁴ Evans, “Rest Rooms for Women in Marketing Centers,” 217-218.

in the courthouse.¹⁵ Courthouse rest room facilities existed in several Nebraska counties, including Platte, Deuel, Lincoln, Dodge, Seward, and Dawson.¹⁶

Plans for a new Lyons courthouse dated to August 1908, months after the opening of the Lyons Ladies Rest Room in a rented location adjoining the square.¹⁷ Members of the Board of Rice County Commissioners quickly selected the well-reputed Topeka-based firm of J. C. Holland and Son as architect for the new courthouse. The court approved the architect's plans on January 5, 1909.¹⁸ Over the next two years, officials razed the 1876 courthouse, and let contracts for the builder, the Topeka firm of E. J. Cuthbert and Sons, as well as contracts for other courthouse fixtures, including the vault, wiring, water pipes, windows, furniture, electrical fixtures, and tower clock.¹⁹ The construction of the new courthouse proceeded rapidly, and county officials held a dedication celebration on October 12, 1911 (Figure 2.2).²⁰

¹⁵ National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Nomination, "County Courthouses of Nebraska," 1989, 36-37, <<http://www.nebraskahistory.org/histpres/nebraska/MPD/CountyCourthousesNe.pdf>> (last accessed January 28, 2013).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Minutes of Rice County Commissioners, August 18, 1908, page 400, Coronado Quivira Museum, "Court House" resource folder.

¹⁸ Minutes of Rice County Commissioners, December 8, 1908, pages 405-406; January 5, 1909, page 409.

¹⁹ Minutes of Rice County Commissioners, March 29, 1910, page 446; April 11, 1910, page 448; May 8, 1911, page 5; "Court House Contract Let," *Central Kansas News-Democrat*, March 31, 1910, page 1, Microfilm roll, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Central Kansas News-Democrat, June 24, 1909-March 28, 1912, roll L2612.

²⁰ Minutes of Rice County Commissioners, September 9, 1911, page 11; "October 12 To Be Dedication Day," *Lyons Daily News*, September 9, 1911, page 1, Microfilm roll, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Lyons Daily News, August 26, 1911-August 2, 1912, roll L2133.



Figure 2.2 *North elevation, current Rice County Courthouse, constructed and dedicated in 1911, image by author, January, 2012.*

Just as the new courthouse redefined civic space on the Lyons public square, within the walls of the courthouse, officials redefined the space of the Lyons Ladies Rest Room. The rest room was located in the northeast corner of the first floor of the new courthouse. It consisted of two separate rooms – an approximately twenty-three foot long by nine foot wide room that contained toilet facilities for women, and an approximately twenty-three foot long by twenty-three foot wide room that served as a lounge space for women and their children. Historical accounts noted that the facility was to be a “first class rest room,” fitted with steam heat and electric lights.²¹ The rest room in the rented location had been well-appointed, with at least four couches, rugs, a lunch table and six

²¹ “Clock for the Court House?” *Central Kansas News-Democrat*, April 13, 1911, page 1.

chairs, and children's comforts. Officials likely relocated many, if not all, of the furniture pieces and décor to the new courthouse rest room (Figure 2.3).²²



Figure 2.3 Historic image (1915) of Lyons Ladies Rest Room, located in the northeast corner of the 1911 Rice County Courthouse. Image located in “Architecture: Ladies Lounge, Lyons Court House, 1915 Government” resource folder, Coronado Quivira Museum, Lyons, Kansas.

Some officials began working in the new Rice County Courthouse before the formal dedication. Newspaper accounts indicated that the new Lyons Ladies Rest Room, now located in the courthouse, had been open in this location since at least mid-July.²³ The movement of the Lyons Ladies Rest Room from the rented location in the central

²² “The Rest Room,” *Lyons Daily News*, April 9, 1909, page 1; “The Rest Room,” *Lyons Daily News*, June 11, 1909, page 1.

²³ “Rest Room,” *Lyons Daily News*, July 18, 1911, page 1.

business district into the Rice County Courthouse meant that, at this time, the county assumed responsibility for paying for the maintenance of the rest room. However, the county did not pay for the work of the rest room matron, whose support came from the businessmen of Lyons.²⁴

Women and children of Rice County and Lyons, as well as visitors from throughout the nation, continued to use the rest room in large numbers after its relocation. A November 1913 “Rest Room Report” noted that, from October 15, 1913, to November 15, 1913, 1,029 women from out-of-town used the rest room facilities, and sixty-one babies were provided care.²⁵ The article also stated that the largest number of women to utilize the rest room in one day that year was 111 – an astonishing number for a single day.²⁶

A comparison of yearly figures from the time the rest room opened, in 1908, to a mere five years later, in 1913, reveals the extent to which the rest room rapidly grew in popularity. In 1908, 3,409 visitors from out-of-town utilized the rest room, and 1,526 from in town, for a total of 4,935. By the end of 1913, 11,211 visitors from out-of-town used the rest room, as did 4,852 women who lived in town, for a total of 16,063.²⁷ Considering that the rest room was not open on Sundays, this means an average of approximately fifty women per day were visiting the ladies rest room in 1913.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ “Rest Room Report,” *Central Kansas News-Democrat*, November 27, 1913, page 1, Microfilm roll, Kansas State Historical Society, Topeka, Kansas, Central Kansas News-Democrat, April 4, 1912-October 22, 1914, roll L2613.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ “Rest Room Report,” *Central Kansas News-Democrat*, February 19, 1914, page 1.

The Lyons Ladies Rest Room functioned as a physical space where both women and children from town, country, and out-of-state could find a clean, comfortable place of respite in Lyons. The rest room also was a social space for these women. In 1909, for example, women of the Lyons WCTU voted that a box should be placed in the rest room to collect money to provide flowers for local funerals.²⁸ Evidence suggests that the rest room served as the primary secular social gathering space for local women. Moreover, it also created a space where local residents could interact with visitors. For rural women, visiting with women from other states, even other countries, must have been an interesting and informative experience. Scholars have argued that the lives of rural farm women could be rigorous and isolated.²⁹ For some of these rural women, the opportunity to visit with women from other areas of the country and hear about different lifeways and news of distant places perhaps provided a welcome interruption from their daily lives.

Josie Smith, a Lyons resident, fondly recalls spending time in the rest room as a teenager in the late-1940s. She remembers leaving school for lunch hour and, during the winters, charging cold cuts to her family's account at the local grocery and eating lunch with friends in the rest room. She and her friends ate quietly while the ladies socialized in the lounge area. Smith recalls a great camaraderie amongst the women who frequented the rest room, and notes that it was a busy and bustling place, with women always visiting.³⁰

²⁸ "Lyons W C T U Ladies have a Picnic," *Lyons Daily News*, May 24, 1909, page 1.

²⁹ Fink, *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940*; Sharpless, *Fertile Ground, Narrow Choices: Women on Texas Cotton Farms, 1900-1940*.

³⁰ Discussion with Josie Smith, January 17, 2012, Coronado Quivira Museum, Lyons, Kansas.

In rest rooms throughout the country, one woman, typically known as the matron, had the job of supervising the rest room, ideally making the patrons feel as comfortable as though they were in their own homes. For its first six months of operation in 1909, WTCU women took turns acting as matron, with one member of the organization having the responsibility for one day of the month. After six months, the businessmen took on the financial responsibility of paying a salary to a hired matron, Cynthia Armilda “Millie” Crist.³¹ Crist, who was unmarried, was the matron of the Lyons Ladies Rest Room for twenty-three years, until approximately 1933; she prepared the monthly and annual “rest room reports,” as well as provided a clean, comfortable space and companionship for visiting women and their children.³²

Lucy D. Ebright, also unmarried, was matron of the Lyons Ladies Rest Room after Crist’s tenure. She continued the tradition of the “rest room reports” into at least the 1930s, and was matron for many years, until her health failed and she died in 1948.³³ In the 1950s, Jane Ford (her marital status is unknown) was the matron of the rest room. In addition to her other regular duties as matron, Ford would make “rag rugs” from pieces of material brought by women visitors.³⁴ Mrs. Gertie Wilkins was the matron for a period of time beginning in 1957, and, like Jane Ford, she also kept visitors to the rest room

³¹ “Rest Room Anniversary,” *Lyons Daily News*, January 22, 1910, page 4.

³² “Miss Millie Crist,” publication unknown, January 21, 1935, Coronado Quivira Museum, Lyons, Kansas, “Court House” resource folder.

³³ “Lucy Ebright Passes,” publication unknown, October 29, 1948, Coronado Quivira Museum, Lyons, Kansas, “Court House” resource folder.

³⁴ Phyllis Kuffler, “Memories Brought Back,” publication unknown, March 25, 1996, Coronado Quivira Museum, Lyons, Kansas, “Court House” resource folder.

entertained with her handiwork. In three years, Wilkins made 112 aprons.³⁵ While matrons maintained responsibility for the cleanliness of the rest room throughout the years, it appears as though, as time passed, the role of matron became more one of providing companionship and female camaraderie than one of maintaining records and caring for young children.

In early twentieth-century Lyons home improvement and home demonstration activities were occurring at the same time that local citizens were working to establish a ladies rest room. Unfortunately, there is no available evidence that directly connects home improvement or home demonstration activities as occurring in the Lyons Ladies Rest Room, as there is for several other towns and counties examined in this study. However, local newspaper articles frequently advertised home demonstration activities. For example, a 1909 article titled “Demonstration a Success,” notes that “the Demonstration of Cooking on the Malleable Ranges at the Lyons Hardware Store last week was a success in every respect [...] there were eight persons who were so well pleased with the work of the stove that they made purchases and will hereafter enjoy them in their homes.”³⁶ Similarly, a May 1910 article, conveniently located directly beneath the “rest room report” for the month, advertised a three-day demonstration in the Lyons Hardware Store for women on “Chi-Namel work.”³⁷ Although there is not necessarily a direct connection in the historical record between the Lyons Ladies Rest

³⁵ “Courthouse Lounge Matron Provides Haven of Rest,” publication unknown, November 26, 1960, Coronado Quivira Museum, Lyons, Kansas, “Court House” resource folder.

³⁶ “Demonstration a Success,” *Central Kansas News-Democrat*, September 16, 1909, page 1.

³⁷ Untitled Advertisement, *Lyons Daily News*, May 11, 1910, page 1.

Room and home improvement and demonstration work, the businessmen of Lyons recognized the power of Lyons women as consumers when they held demonstrations of available products in their stores. Additionally, the fact that the rest room was financed wholly by the town's businessmen during the first years of its existence, that the owners of these businesses advertised demonstrations of products that they sold, and that evidence shows that women who utilized the rest room often patronized the establishments of the businessmen who funded it, makes it highly probable that, if home demonstration and improvement activities were not occurring in the rest room itself, the women who utilized the rest room were certainly aware of, and perhaps participated in, these activities.

The Lyons Ladies Rest Room remained open until at least the 1960s, and possibly until the mid-1980s, when the courthouse building was renovated. A December 1939 "rest room report" authored by matron Lucy Ebright indicated that the space continued to grow in popularity throughout the years. In November 2, 199 women utilized the facility, 1,474 from out-of-town and 725 from in town.³⁸ 611 women visited the rest room on November 11, the largest number ever recorded in a single day.³⁹

Currently, the former lounge space is used for county offices and features wood paneling and interior partitions (Figures 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, and 2.8). However, it is still possible for one to comprehend the spatial relationship between the lounge area and the toilet facilities, as well as the relationship between the space that functioned historically as the ladies rest room and the courthouse as a whole. The exterior door placement of the

³⁸ Lucy Ebright, "Rest Room Report," *Lyons Daily News*, December 18, 1939, Coronado Quivira Museum, Lyons, Kansas, "Court House" resource folder.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

lounge area and the toilet facilities has remained unaltered. These doors are located directly adjacent to one another, and one can understand how women would have been able to easily walk back and forth from the lounge area to the toilet facility. Although the rest room space is located near one of the main entrances to the courthouse, it occupies a large corner location, and would have afforded the women a certain amount of privacy and separation from the predominantly male spaces that occupied the remainder of the courthouse.



Figure 2.4 *Image of entrances to current and historic women's toilet facilities (right) and space that functioned historically as lounge area of Lyons Ladies Rest Room (left). West interior elevation, Rice County Courthouse, image by author, January 2012.*



Figure 2.5 Facing East, location of current and historic ladies toilet facilities, Rice County Courthouse, image by author, January 2012. The dropped ceiling and fluorescent lighting likely date to renovations that occurred c.1983.



Figure 2.6 *Northeast elevation, historic location of lounge area of Lyons Ladies Rest Room, Rice County Courthouse, image by author, January 2012. It is likely that the interior partitions and faux wood paneling were added in renovations that occurred c. 1983.*



Figure 2.7 *Southwest elevation, historic location of lounge area of Lyons Ladies Rest Room, Rice County Courthouse, image by author, January 2012.*

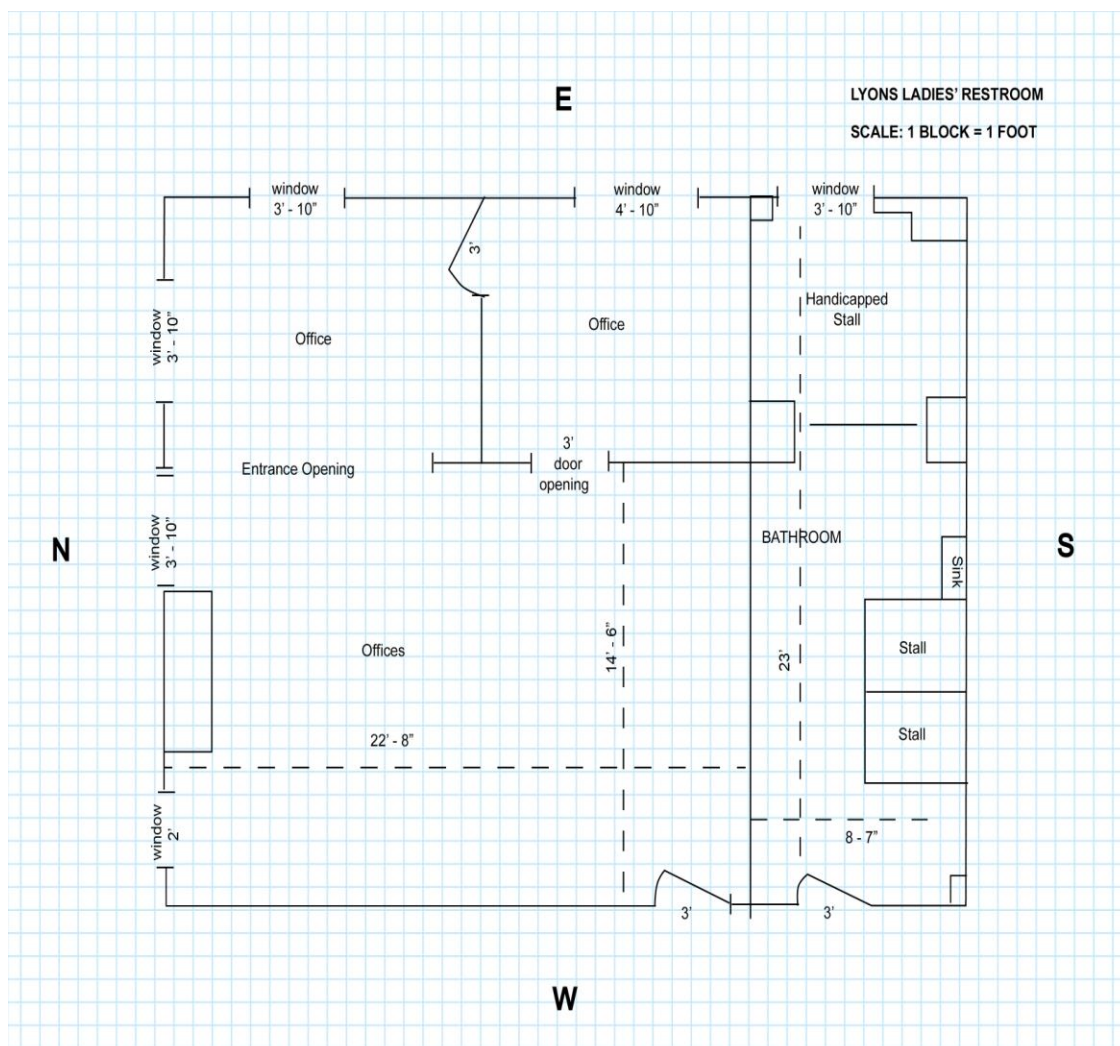


Figure 2.8 Scale drawing of the Lyons Ladies Rest Room, 2012. Drawing courtesy of Allegra Print and Imaging, Nashville, based on measurements and figures drawn by the author.⁴⁰

The Lyons Ladies Rest Room features several characteristics typical of Progressive Era ladies rest rooms. Located in the central business district, the Lyons Ladies Rest Room contained two separate spaces, a narrow, functional area for toilets and

⁴⁰ Scale drawings by the author of rest rooms that are located within existing facilities, including those of Lyons, Kansas, Pulaski, Tennessee, Newberry, South Carolina, and Northfield, Minnesota, depict only the space of the ladies rest room itself, not the building as a whole. The entire building is depicted only in the Lewisburg, Tennessee, drawing, where the ladies rest room encompassed the entirety of the building.

then a large, almost square space for all other activities. How the matron and the patrons separated uses within the large lounge is unknown. The corner first floor location of the room, however, helped to make it a well ventilated and lit space: note the five large windows.

Lyons leaders, both male and female, made a powerful statement of how they viewed the relative importance of the ladies rest room by locating it within the courthouse, the symbolic heart of town. In its public-private partnerships for funding, it also represents a typical community response to the call for a ladies rest room. While business and commercial interests would support rest rooms in some towns, in others, like Pulaski, Tennessee, and Newberry, South Carolina, a single determined woman could be the catalyst for rest room establishment.

CHAPTER III
CIVIC LEADERS AND LADIES REST ROOMS: PULASKI, TENNESSEE, AS A
CASE STUDY

And here in the splendid capitol of Giles, where all the roads of the county lead, what an opportune place is the ladies rest room, where multitudes of travel-worn mothers, tired daughters and weary saleswomen may enter and find rest.

To her who is recognized as the founder of this rest room, together with her sisters who are faithfully perpetuating her work of beneficence, I most respectfully lift my hat with admiration and commendation and with an earnest desire for the perpetuation of the good work.¹

The ladies rest room in Pulaski, Tennessee, is also located in a courthouse, but unlike Lyons, Kansas, the creation of the Pulaski Ladies Rest Room was not so much a community initiative as it was a response to single female civic leader, Mary Galloway White, president of the local Civic League. She used her influence as a well-respected community leader to establish a ladies rest room in the newly constructed Giles County Courthouse of 1909.

Giles County was a prosperous agricultural county located in southern middle Tennessee. Best known as the place where residents established the Ku Klux Klan in 1867, Giles County had an older history, being established by an Act of State Legislature on November 14, 1809 and named in honor of Governor William B. Giles of Virginia. The same Act of Legislature stipulated that a county seat, named Pulaski in honor of the

¹ Address honoring Mary G. White, given by Reverend M.S. Kennedy, "Mary White Rest Room," *Pulaski Citizen*, February 4, 1915, page 1. Microfilm roll, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Pulaski 20, *Pulaski Citizen*, Aug 7, 1913 – Feb 3, 1916.

Polish Count Casimir Pulaski, who served with the Continental Army in the Revolutionary War, be established as near to the center of the county as practicable.² Giles County grew steadily throughout the nineteenth century, and by 1900 the county's population reached over 33,000, with 4,000 people residing in Pulaski.³ The arrival of rural free delivery in the county in 1901 helped to strengthen the ties between the county seat of Pulaski and these rural areas.

In 1907, a fire destroyed the Giles County Courthouse, and a new courthouse was constructed in its place in 1909.⁴ In the southwest corner of the basement of this new courthouse Mary Galloway White created a ladies rest room in 1911. Mary Galloway White and her husband, James Alfred White, were both civic-minded individuals and highly active in their community. James was the first president of the Board of Trade, a precursor to the local Chamber of Commerce and the most active civic organization in Pulaski, and Mary was the president of its female auxiliary, the Civic League.⁵

The history of the establishment of the Pulaski Ladies Rest Room is brief. It appears as though Pulaski leaders accepted the arguments for a ladies rest room in the downtown commercial district. Evidence of community dissent does not exist and the

² Executive Committee, Giles County Sesquicentennial, "Giles County, Tennessee, Sesqui-Centennial Official Program 1809-1959" (n.p., 1959), 29, 69.

³ Richard L. Forstall, ed. "Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900-1990," Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C., <www.census.gov/population/wwwcensusdata/cencounts/files/tn190090.txt>, March 27, 1995 (accessed September 24, 2012); Cohen, Nelle Roller, *Pulaski History, 1809-1950: The Beginning, the Building, the Development, the Institutions, and the People of the town of Pulaski, Tennessee* (n.p., 1951), pages not numbered.

⁴ Executive Committee, Giles County Sesquicentennial, "Giles County, Tennessee," 36.

⁵ Roller, *Pulaski History*.

process in Pulaski – compared to the neighboring county seat of Lewisburg (see chapter 6) – moved quickly. On August 7, 1911, N. H. White, chairman of the Civic Improvement Commission of the Giles County Court, made a motion that the county court appropriate \$100 to the commission with the intention of establishing “a Rest Room for the Ladies of the County in the Court House.” Although J. D. Rhea seconded the motion, it lost by a motion to amend made by J. F. Black; the commission tabled the motion until October.⁶ On October 2, the motion was made again, and the commission appropriated \$100 to R. L. Culps, who was charged with the task of having a water closet and other fixtures installed in the southwest corner room of the courthouse basement.⁷

The ladies rest room opened to the public by the end of 1911. The rest room featured an outside entrance, on the south elevation, that led directly to the rest room space. This entrance to the rest room was secondary compared to the larger, architecturally ornate south first floor entrance. A December 14, 1911, article in the *Pulaski Citizen* extolled the benefits of the rest room, reporting that “this room had its beginning through the effort of Mrs. J. A. White, and was made possible by the Giles County Court.”⁸

This article also reported that “Mrs. White and her co-workers have held a rummage sale in the room this week to raise funds to pay the matron ‘aunt’ Mary White,

⁶ Minutes of the Giles County Quarterly Court, August 7, 1911, page 79, “Ladies Restroom in Basement” file, Old Records Department, Giles County Courthouse. It is unclear what, if any, relation N. H. White was to James White and Mary Galloway White.

⁷ Minutes of the Giles County Quarterly Court, October 2, 1911, page 95, “Ladies Restroom in Basement” file, Old Records Department, Giles County Courthouse.

⁸ “Ladies Rest Room,” *Pulaski Citizen*, December 14, 1911, page 3, Microfilm roll, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Pulaski 19, *Pulaski Citizen*, June 1, 1911 – July 31, 1913.

col., and other expenses.”⁹ One wonders how black matrons that were employed at rest rooms exclusively for white women felt, knowing that they were entrusted to care for a space that they themselves were forbidden to use. While the hiring of a black woman as matron did not occur in all rest rooms, or even in all rest rooms located in the South, this was the case in the early years of the Pulaski Ladies Rest Room. The decision to hire a black or white matron reflects the differences in the establishment of rest rooms throughout the nation. Some communities viewed service work as inappropriate for white women, and this was reflected in their rest rooms when they chose to hire black matrons. In Pulaski, the African American matron likely only served a service function, and did not attempt to inform white women patrons about the town, or interact with them as equals. In other communities, like Newberry, South Carolina, rest room founder Mary Ann Butler Evans served as the first matron, setting the precedent for white matrons in this community. Although it was rare for black women to have a similar rest room facility for their use, there were exceptions to this, as in Newberry, by the 1930s.

The Pulaski Ladies Rest Room seemingly operated on a shoestring budget. R. L. Culps reported to the January 1912 session of the county court that R. L. Young completed improvements, including plumbing and painting, at a cost of \$52.50. He then recommended appropriating the remaining \$47.50 to the ladies who were caring for the rest room. The court agreed to this, and Culps gave the remaining money to the women.¹⁰

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Minutes of the Giles County Quarterly Court, January 1, 1912, page 106, “Ladies Restroom in Basement” file, Old Records Department, Giles County Courthouse; Receipt of services by R.L. Young,

On April 7, 1913, N. H. White made a motion, which A. J. Reaves seconded, that the county court appropriate \$50 to sheriff J. Roy Pittard to make necessary repairs to the ladies rest room.¹¹ Pittard reported to the July 1913 term of the county quarterly court that he spent \$29.39 to have stone cut and a door installed for an entrance to the ladies rest room, and returned the remainder of the money to the court.¹²

The ladies rest room met with success and must have been used enough to encourage greater public support. In 1914, the Giles County Quarterly Court passed a motion by R. L. Culps and N. H. White which ordered that \$100 be appropriated annually in January of each year for the rest room.¹³

Mary Galloway White died in 1912, and in early 1915 the ladies rest room in the Giles County Courthouse was named the “Mary White Rest Room” in honor of its founder. At this time a plaque donated by the Civic League honoring White was placed in the rest room (Figure 3.1). It reads “In Remembrance of Mary G. White Originator of this Rest Room 1909. She Worked That Others Might Have Rest.”

plumber, to “Giles Co. Court House for Ladies Rest Room,” “Ladies Restroom in Basement” file, Old Records Department, Giles County Courthouse.

¹¹ Minutes of the Giles County Quarterly Court, April 7, 1913, page 276, “Ladies Restroom in Basement” file, Old Records Department, Giles County Courthouse.

¹² Letter, J. Roy Pittard to County Court, June 26, 1913, “Ladies Restroom in Basement” file, Old Records Department, Giles County Courthouse.

¹³ Minutes of the Giles County Quarterly Court, January 5, 1914, page 397, “Ladies Restroom in Basement” file, Old Records Department, Giles County Courthouse.



Figure 3.1 *Plaque honoring Mary G. White, Mary White Rest Room in the Giles County Courthouse, image by author, July 2011. The bottom of the plaque is obscured by a desk.*

It was also at this time that the Civic League unveiled the portrait of Mary G. White in the ladies rest room (Figure 3.2).¹⁴



Figure 3.2 *Portrait of Mary G. White that hung for decades in the Mary White Rest Room. It is currently hanging in a small alcove on the third floor of the Giles County Courthouse, near the Old Records Department. With it are a baby cradle and mirror that are said to date to the founding of the rest room in 1911. Image by author, July 2011.*

¹⁴ “Mary White Rest Room,” *Pulaski Citizen*, February 4, 1915, page 1.

By 1921 the Mary White Rest Room had an adjoining “library room” with books and a piano. An article in the *Pulaski Citizen* noted that, “the Library Room adjoining the Rest Room has been accessible as a comfortable restful and convenient waiting room meeting place and lunch room for the citizens ... the daily paper and magazines furnished by the clubs of the county are to be had for the asking in the Library Room.”¹⁵ The article noted that the County Court, as well as the contributions of citizens, largely financed the rest room, but that the Civic League of Pulaski did the work that made these rooms possible.¹⁶

It was not rare for ladies rest room facilities to also feature a “library room” or adjoining library that might also be maintained by the women’s groups that were responsible for the ladies rest room, especially in small towns that did not support a Carnegie Library. Wayne Crocker Nason included several community buildings that contained both ladies rest rooms, as well as libraries, in “Plans of Rural Community Buildings,” and the majority of the buildings that housed ladies rest rooms that are highlighted in this study also contained libraries, at one time or another, including those in Newberry, South Carolina, Wheaton, Minnesota, Northfield, Minnesota, and Lewisburg, Tennessee.¹⁷ There are several possible explanations for the prevalence of library facilities in the same location as ladies rest rooms, including the overlapping interests of many Progressive Era clubwomen, women’s interest in the creation of libraries in what many females considered to be a natural extension of their role in the

¹⁵ “Do You Know?” *Pulaski Citizen*, February 6, 1923, Microfilm roll, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Pulaski 23, *Pulaski Citizen*, April 21, 1921 – December 26, 1923.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Nason, “Plans of Rural Community Buildings.”

home, as well as the necessity that public buildings with multiple spaces serve multiple functions.¹⁸

The Mary White Rest Room remained open until 1985 when changing times and the addition of an elevator and the construction of new restrooms caused the room to be closed.¹⁹

The Pulaski Ladies Rest Room consisted of only one large room. The original entrance to the rest room from the outside of the building was located on the south elevation (Figures 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5). The small door led down a short flight of stairs into the full doorway and the ladies rest room (Figure 3.6).

¹⁸ Karen Blair has explored the varied interests of clubwomen, dating from the Civil War through the Progressive era in both *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980) and *The Torchbearers: Women and Their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). She asserts that many women formed and joined clubs and literary organizations in an effort to spread what they considered to be their domestic and moral influences into the public sphere, and also notes that women were oftentimes members of more than one club or organization.

¹⁹ "Courthouse Restroom Closes After 75 Years," *Giles County Historical Society Bulletin*, October 27, 1985, page 11.

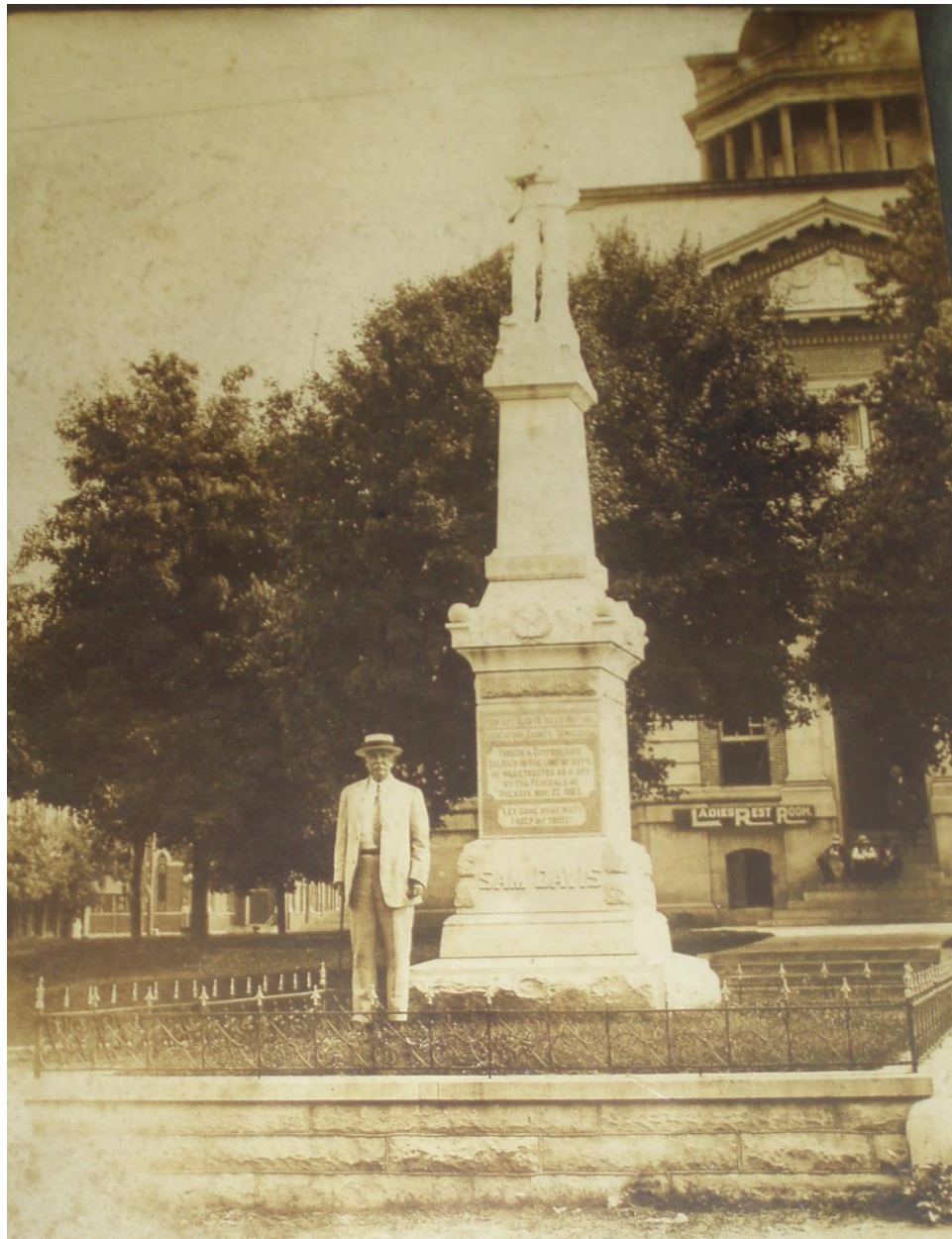


Figure 3.3 1912 image of Pulaski Ladies Rest Room entrance, South elevation, courtesy of Roger Strickland.



Figure 3.4 *Original exterior entrance to Pulaski Ladies Rest Room, South elevation, image by author, July 2011.*



Figure 3.5 *Original exterior entrance to Pulaski Ladies Rest Room, South elevation, image by author, July 2011.*



Figure 3.6 *Historic interior entrance to Pulaski Ladies Rest Room, South elevation, image by author, July 2011.*

The south elevation also features two three-pane arched windows (Figure 3.7).



Figure 3.7 *Exterior South elevation Giles County Courthouse, featuring original door to ladies rest room and two windows, image by author, July 2011.*

The west elevation features four three-pane arch windows. Viewed from the exterior, the middle and left panes of the far southwest window are original (Figures 3.8 and 3.9).



Figure 3.8 *Exterior Southwest elevation, showing ladies rest room area, image by author, July 2011.*



Figure 3.9 *Interior West elevation, Pulaski Ladies Rest Room, image by author, July 2011. Note the difference between this corner basement space and the corner first floor space in Lyons, Kansas (figure 2.3). In Pulaski, the smaller windows and presence of pipes diminish the space.*

The north elevation of the Pulaski Ladies Rest Room features the modern entryway into the historic ladies rest room, which currently functions as office space (Figure 3.10).



Figure 3.10 Northwest elevation, Pulaski Ladies Rest Room, featuring modern entrance to room, image by author, July 2011.

The east elevation features an entrance to another room, possibly the area that would later serve as a library. This elevation also contains the plaque honoring Mary G. White. Unfortunately, the plaque is somewhat obscured by an office desk (Figure 3.11).



Figure 3.11 *East elevation, Pulaski Ladies Rest Room, featuring plaque honoring Mary G. White, image by author, July 2011.*

The space that contained the ladies rest room was approximately twenty-three feet wide and twenty-eight feet, ten inches in length (Figure 3.12). According to a 1913 article in the *Lewisburg Tribune*, citizens were extolling the benefits of nearby ladies rest rooms in a bid to convince their own county court officers to support such a facility in their town. Pulaski Civic League president Mrs. W. B. Romine writes that the rest room is:

a very large, airy, comfortable room, cool in summer and delightfully heated in the winter, having steam heat, electric lights, beds, rockers, tables for lunch and also reading tables on which are kept the late magazines and periodicals, a water cooler kept filled at all times with cold pure water, a stationary wash basin with soap and sanitary towels, mirrors, toilet articles, dressing screens, water closet and every convenience and comfort for tired women and children.²⁰

²⁰ W.B. Romine, "Mrs. Romine on the Rest Room," *Lewisburg Tribune*, September 19, 1913, page 1, Microfilm roll, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Lewisburg 6, *Lewisburg Tribune*, [1899-], Sept. 3, 1912-March 30, 1915.

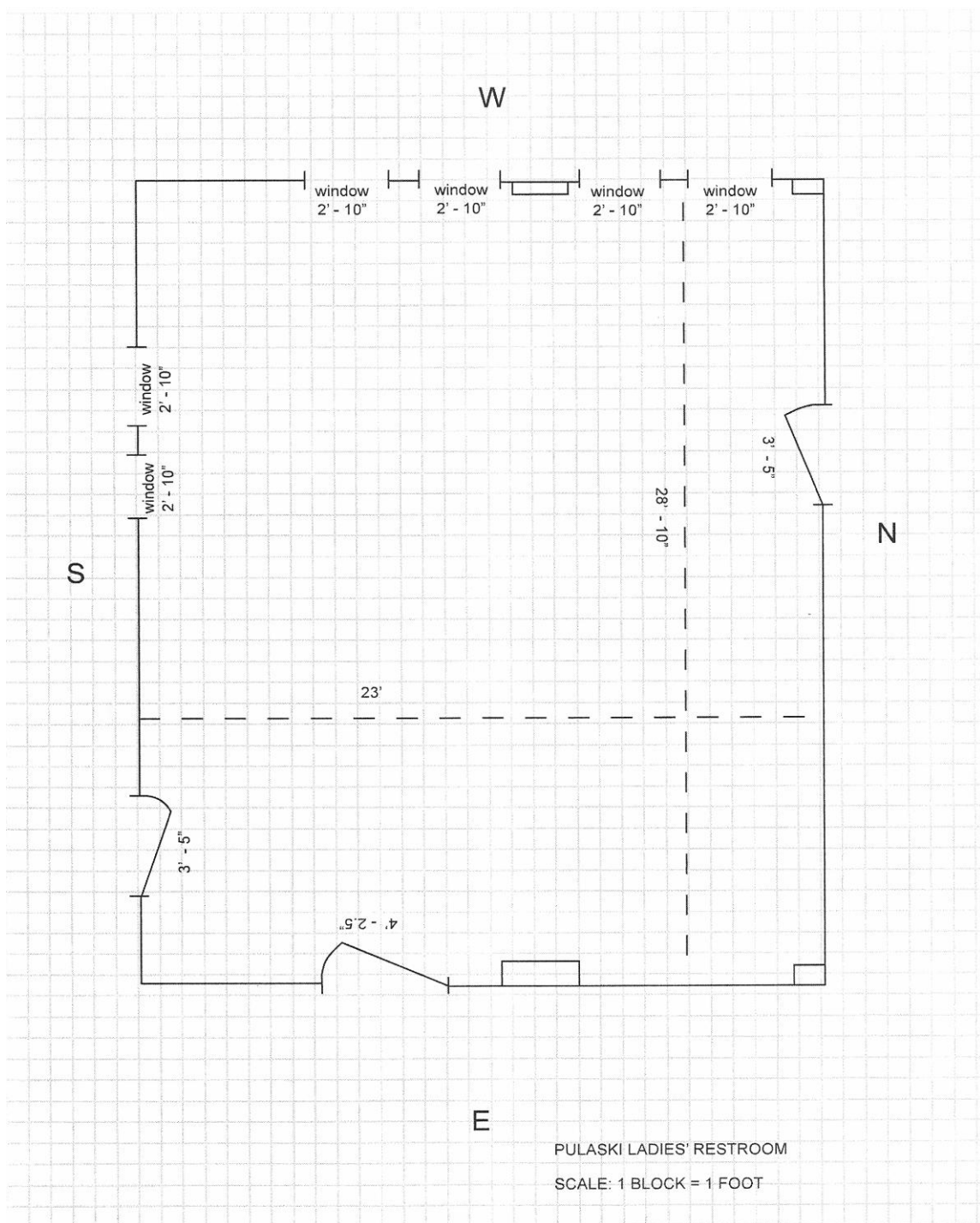


Figure 3.12 Scale drawing of the Pulaski Ladies Rest Room, 2011. Drawing courtesy of Allegra Print and Imaging, Nashville, based on measurements and figures drawn by the author.

Clara M. Parker, an employee in the Old Records Department of the Giles County Courthouse since the mid-1980s, similarly noted that the Civic League handsomely furnished the room with several cribs, tables, rugs, and chairs. She stated that the room contained an old wooden cradle that was in the possession of Mary G. White; she also either loaned or donated a wooden mirror. The portrait of Mary G. White was probably installed in the rest room c. 1915 and moved to the third floor alcove when the rest room closed, c. 1985 (Figure 3.13). Parker recalled that there were four or five toilets that were located in this main rest room area, but were partitioned off from the lounge section of the room. She also stated that there was no kitchen that provided meals, but that people brought their own food and ate at the rest room.²¹

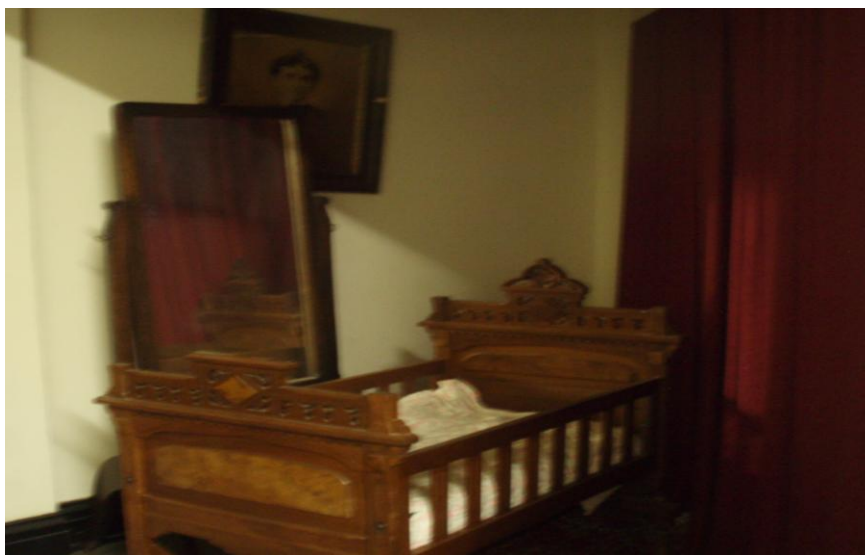


Figure 3.13 *Baby cradle, mirror, and portrait of Mary G. White that hung for decades in the Mary White Rest Room in the basement of the Giles County Courthouse. These items are currently stored in an alcove on the third floor of the courthouse, near the Old Records office. Image by author, July 2011.*

²¹ Discussion between the author and Mrs. Clara M. Parker, Giles County Courthouse, July 19, 2011.

As one of the few, if not the only, public spaces for women in the downtown commercial district, the Pulaski Ladies Rest Room was often the central secular social gathering place in the county for both town and rural women. As such, this rest room was the site of meetings of women's clubs, specifically, home improvement clubs. Mary S. Hoffschwelle discusses the importance of home improvement work in her book, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community: Reformers, Schools, and Homes in Tennessee, 1900-1930*. In her analysis of the lives of rural Tennesseans during the Progressive Era, Hoffschwelle argues that rural Tennesseans were not passive recipients of progressive rural reform; rather, they had a great amount of agency in their own lives, and determined for themselves which Progressive reforms they would accept. She notes that "home economists, home demonstration agents, and home improvement campaigns encouraged rural women of both races to expand their roles in the family and community by adding new tasks, such as interior decoration and club work."²²

In Pulaski women were active in the home improvement movement, and white women held club meetings in the ladies rest room. The Pulaski Homemakers' Club, formed in December 1911, held a meeting of thirty-two of its members in the rest room in December 1913, in which a member of the club, Miss Lizzie Abernathy, gave a demonstration on butter making. The president of the club, Mrs. H. A. English, presented a paper on the founding of the club and the purpose and goals of home improvement work. She stated that the Homemaker's Club was created specifically for country women. English hoped that they could "learn the way of right living, the use of labor

²² Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community: Reformers, Schools, and Homes in Tennessee, 1900-1930* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998), 10.

saving devices, the orderly classification of work, sanitary methods which are so rapidly replacing old fashioned ones and many other things that would lighten the burden of tired women on the farm.”²³

By 1921, the women of the Civic League maintained the “library room” that adjoined the ladies rest room, and home improvement and demonstration literature was available in this space. In this, the era of Carnegie libraries, the citizens of Pulaski either could not or would not financially support a public library, but rather allowed local women to maintain a library facility as part of the ladies rest room.

In Giles County, Tennessee, Mary Galloway White, prominent citizen and president of the Civic League, saw the need for a space for women in the Pulaski central business district. In 1911, she took the initiative to create such a place, the Pulaski Ladies Rest Room, in what was considered one of the prominent male-gendered public spaces in town, the Giles County Courthouse. Although receiving financial support from the Giles County Court, White founded and was a regular fixture at the Pulaski Ladies Rest Room. Similar to other ladies rest rooms that were being established around the nation at the time, the Pulaski Ladies Rest Room was not only a space for women and their children to visit and wait for the males of the family to finish their business in town, it was a space where women could participate in the growing home improvement movement of the 1910s and later served as the town’s library.

²³ “Homemaker’s Club. Interesting Meeting at Rest Room Friday,” *The Pulaski Citizen*, December 18, 1913, page 1, Microfilm roll, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Pulaski 20, *Pulaski Citizen*, Aug 7, 1913 – Feb 3, 1916.

The close connection between home improvement work and ladies rest room establishment and development is perhaps nowhere more clear than in Newberry, South Carolina, where the local home improvement club was charged with maintaining the rest room for nearly seventy years. Additionally, although there was initial interest among businessmen in Newberry to establish a ladies rest room, as in Pulaski, the Newberry Ladies Rest Room was eventually established by one prominent female citizen; however, this combination of business interest and female initiative makes the history of the establishment of the Newberry Ladies Rest Room all the more interesting when viewed alongside the development of rest rooms in Lyons, Kansas, and Pulaski, Tennessee.

CHAPTER IV

LADIES REST ROOMS IN PIEDMONT CAROLINA: NEWBERRY, SOUTH CAROLINA, AS A CASE STUDY

Other towns in the state have established rest-rooms and have found them to be practicable and beneficial in every respect. The business men of Newberry should attend to this matter at once and give to our trade and our customers the accommodations and conveniences they are entitled to. If possible, three rooms should be secured and properly furnished; one to be used as a reading, writing and reception room; one to be a rest-room in every sense of the word, with appropriate and comfortable furniture, and the other as a toilet room. The rooms should be in charge of a responsible matron and be kept open from 9 o'clock in the morning until late in the afternoon. It should be a place where the ladies could safely leave their wraps and their bundles and where they could have their purchases sent and be safely kept until called for, instead of having to carry them around town or gather them up from store to store when their shopping is complete.¹

Dear County Women – those of you who have not yet visited the rest-room at Newberry, when you are in town go there; it is a place for you, and you will be made just as welcome and comfortable there as when you are at your own home.

Two [sic] much praise cannot be said of Mrs. Evans for her untiring kindness, and we venture the assertion that there could not have been found another woman or man in Newberry county who could have so successfully organized and carried on this work.²

The establishment of a ladies rest room in Newberry, South Carolina, has characteristics similar to the development of ladies rest rooms in both Lyons, Kansas, and

¹ “President Hunt’s Report to Chamber of Commerce,” *The Observer*, March 24, 1911, page 3, Google News Archive
<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=_h5EAAAIAIBAJ&sjid=97AMAAAIAIBAJ&pg=7155,3266056&dq=newberry+ladies+rest+room&hl=en> (accessed October 15, 2012).

² T. J. W., “Praise for the Rest Room,” *The Observer*, April 23, 1912, page 7, Google News Archive
<<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=wBFEEAAAIAIBAJ&sjid=tLMAAAAIAIBAJ&pg=3011,1402106&dq=newberry+ladies+rest+room&hl=en>> (accessed October 15, 2012).

Pulaski, Tennessee. As in Lyons, there was great interest among the businessmen of Newberry to establish a ladies rest room in the early-twentieth century. The words of Newberry Chamber of Commerce president I. H. Hunt demonstrate that businessmen of Newberry had a definite idea of what a rest room should be. They felt strongly that the business interests of the town should be involved, and that, in communities where merchants did assist in the establishment of rest rooms, they saw an increase in their trade. Additionally, as in Lyons, the businessmen of Newberry saw women as consumers, as people who had the ability to take their purchasing power elsewhere, if they so desired. Although accounts indicate that the merchants of Newberry advocated strongly for the establishment of a ladies rest room, like in Pulaski with Mary Galloway White, it was prominent Newberry citizen Mary Ann Butler Evans who led the establishment of the Newberry Ladies Rest Room in 1911.

Newberry County, known as Newberry District until 1868, lies in the fork of the Broad and Saluda Rivers in northwestern South Carolina, and was formed in 1785, one of six counties created from Ninety-Six District.³ It is unknown for whom or what Newberry District was named. The village of Newberry formed in the late-eighteenth century, and developed into a market town during the first third of the nineteenth century.⁴ On the eve of the Civil War, Newberry District was largely agrarian, with an economy based on cotton that was cultivated with slave labor.⁵ The market town of

³ Thomas H. Pope, *The History of Newberry County South Carolina, Volume One: 1749-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1973), vii, 54.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 111-113, 285.

Newberry was a hub of activity at this time, with a new college and courthouse, two newspapers, and service from two railroads.⁶ At the turn of the century, the town of Newberry, now the seat of Newberry County, had a population of approximately 4,600. The area remained largely agricultural, although some entrepreneurs developed textile mills to take advantage of the cotton-based economy.⁷

In 1906, county leaders replaced an 1852 courthouse, designed by architect Jacob Graves, with a modern neoclassical building, constructed several blocks away, on College Street.⁸ Newberry residents looked at the old courthouse and explored new uses. In 1908 citizens asked for a ladies rest room and lounge to be established in this space (Figure 4.1).⁹ A 1908 article in *The Observer* stated that the Newberry Civic Association hoped for the courthouse's preservation, adding that the building be renovated, with a downstairs room given to the Library Association for a public library and that, "another room be converted into a 'rest room' for ladies who come into town to do their shopping; that a toilet room be fitted up and a competent stewardess be employed to look after children who are left there by their mothers."¹⁰ This article noted that voters in the upcoming election would decide the building's future, and "the Civic association appeals

⁶ Ibid., 105-106.

⁷ Thomas H. Pope, *The History of Newberry County South Carolina, Volume Two: 1860-1990* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992), 113-115.

⁸ Newberry County Historical Society, *Bicentennial History of Newberry County* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing Company, 1989), 4.

⁹ Laurie Drafts, "Respite for the Weary: Newberry's Historic Ladies Lounge," *Sandlapper* (Summer 2003), 81; "The Civic Association of Newberry City," *The Observer*, May 22, 1908, page 1, Google News Archive <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=BSZEAAAIBAJ&sjid=DLEMAAAAIBAJ&pg=6014,2767225&dq=newberry+ladies+rest+room&hl=en>> (accessed October 15, 2012).

¹⁰ "The Civic Association of Newberry City."

to every woman of the county to use her influence to have it left.”¹¹ As women were unable to vote at this time, the Civic Association was hopeful that women would make an effort to persuade their husbands, fathers, or other males in their families to vote to preserve the building for these historically female uses.



Figure 4.1 1852 *Newberry Courthouse*, designed by Jacob Graves, image is of the West elevation “on a busy day.”¹²

Voters decided to preserve the former courthouse, but local officials did not immediately implement the recommendations of the Newberry Civic Association. The business community of Newberry, however, began to take interest in establishing a ladies rest room. In an address to the Newberry Chamber of Commerce, I. H. Hunt, the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Cynthia Mower Martin, et al, *Newberry As It Was* (Newberry, S.C.: Diversified Graphics, Inc., 1980), 36.

organization's president, noted the importance of a ladies rest room to the Newberry business community:

For the past two or three years some of the business men of Newberry have been considering the advisability and practicability of establishing and maintaining a rest-room for the ladies of the country who came to Newberry on business or pleasure. This matter should appeal most strongly to the merchants, as they would be the most direct beneficiaries of such an institution. Other towns are furnishing such conveniences and are reaping an indirect profit therefrom. The merchant should not only reach out for new business, but be sure that he holds the trade that he has.¹³

I. H. Hunt's address underscores the growing recognition of women as consumers in early twentieth-century America. Hunt observed the competitive environment; other nearby towns, like Columbia, were developing "shopping weeks," in which the local merchants paid the costs of railroad fare to and from rural areas into town, provided the recipients spend a certain amount of money at local business establishments. Hunt told his fellow businessmen not to overlook this sales tactic, or they risked losing trade that might have otherwise remained in Newberry to other nearby towns, like Columbia. He asserted:

a great many ladies who live a considerable distance from town come here for the purpose of shopping, and spend the entire day. While here they often buy cloth, hats, dresses and supplies of that kind for the entire family and spend anywhere from fifty dollars up. That is the class of trade that we are in danger of losing by that 'shopping week' proposition ...the establishment of such rooms will cost several hundred dollars and it will take considerable money to properly maintain them; but it would prove a paying investment for the merchants, and would do much to keep our trade at home and induce other customers to come to Newberry.¹⁴

¹³ President Hunt's Report to Chamber of Commerce."

¹⁴ Ibid.

Hunt cautioned the businessmen of Newberry not to undervalue the female consumer dollar, and suggested that one way to be certain that trade stayed in Newberry was to provide a ladies rest room. Hunt admitted that the Chamber of Commerce lacked the funds to establish a rest room on its own, but asked merchants to work independently to raise the necessary money.

By the end of 1911 local Newberry resident Mary Ann Butler Evans made Hunt's vision a reality. Evans was born in Charleston in 1836, but relocated to Newberry circa 1870.¹⁵ While she was active in the Newberry community, it appears as though establishing and maintaining the rest room was one of her crowning achievements.¹⁶ In late 1911 Evans, then 75 years old, approached the Newberry County Council, which approved her proposal to establish a ladies rest room and lounge in the old courthouse space. She furnished the lounge with furniture from her own home, and took upon herself the task of serving as the first matron, attending to the lounge and the women and children who visited.¹⁷

The Newberry Ladies Rest Room featured two distinct spaces, a spacious lounge area that was approximately twenty-two feet long and fourteen feet wide, and a toilet area, that was almost as large as the lounge area. The lounge space was furnished with

¹⁵ "Mrs. Mary Butler Evans," *The Observer*, October 5, 1917, page 8, Google News Archive <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=311Fh14WnZcC&dat=19171005&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>> (accessed October 2, 2012).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Drafts, "Respite for the Weary: Newberry's Historic Ladies Lounge," 81.

tables for eating, rocking chairs for mothers to comfort small children, and a coal burning fireplace (Figure 4.2).¹⁸



Figure 4.2 *Image of Mary Ann Butler Evans, founder of Newberry Ladies Rest Room. Image courtesy of the Newberry County Chamber of Commerce and Visitor's Center.*

A woman would have entered the Newberry Ladies Rest Room through an exterior side entrance located on the south elevation of the building, on Main Street (Figure 4.3).

¹⁸ Ibid.



Figure 4.3 *South exterior elevation, Main Street entrance, Newberry Ladies Rest Room, image by author, December, 2011.*

Patrons then walked into a small entrance hallway, where the door to the ladies rest room was located to the left, on the east side of the building. A woman entered immediately into the lounge space, with the entrance to the toilet area located a few feet to the right, on the north elevation of the lounge space (Figure 4.4). While this space currently features both male and female toilet areas, it is likely that, during the years that the ladies rest room existed, this would have been only a female toilet area, as it would have been inappropriate to have males filtering through this female space.

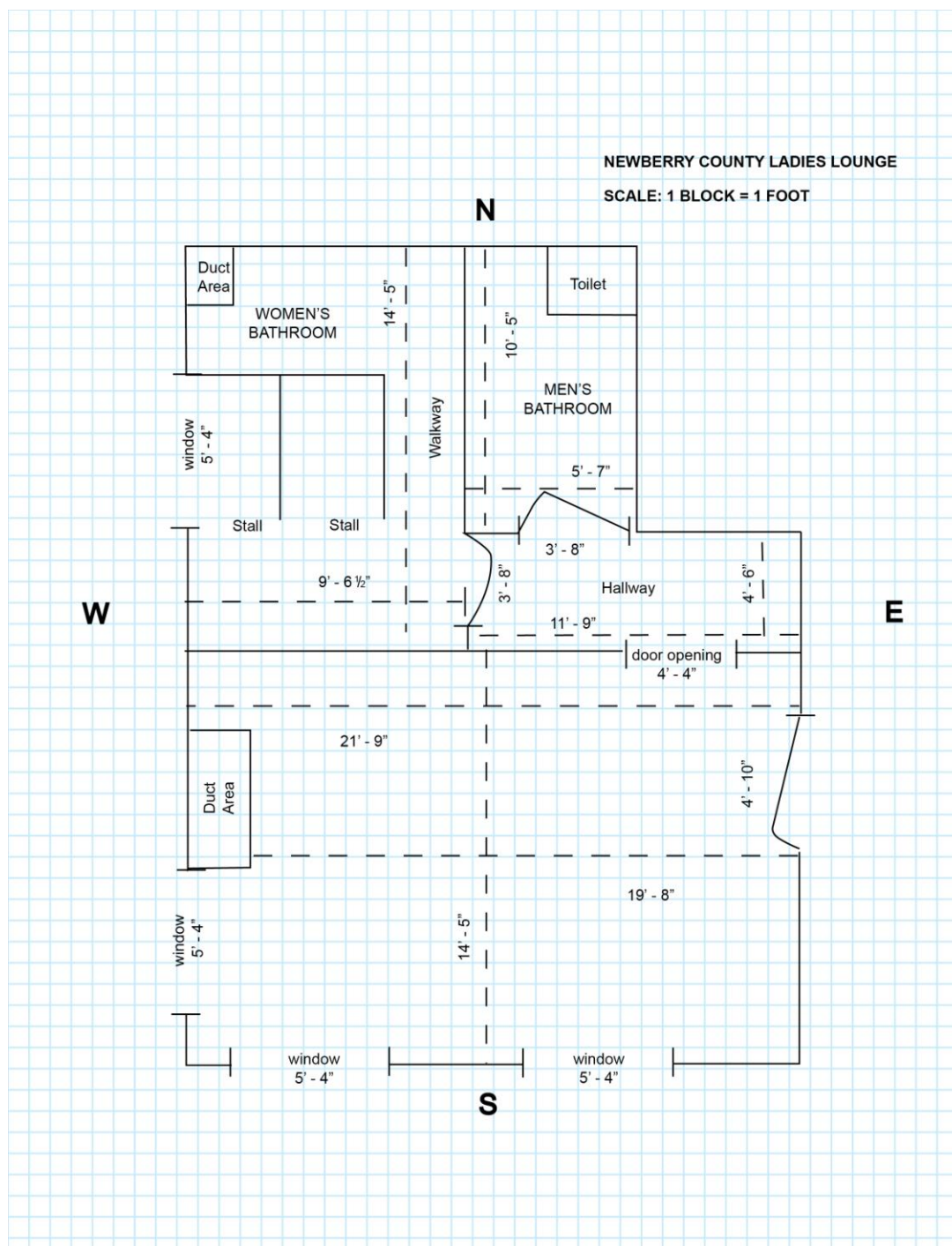


Figure 4.4 Scale drawing of the Newberry Ladies Rest Room, 2011. Drawing courtesy of Allegra Print and Imaging, Nashville, based on measurements and figures drawn by the author.

The east elevation of the Newberry Ladies Rest Room lounge area features the entrance from the hallway into the lounge (Figure 4.5).



Figure 4.5 East elevation, Newberry Ladies Rest Room, image by author, December 2011.

The north elevation features the entrance leading from the lounge area into the toilet area (Figure 4.6).

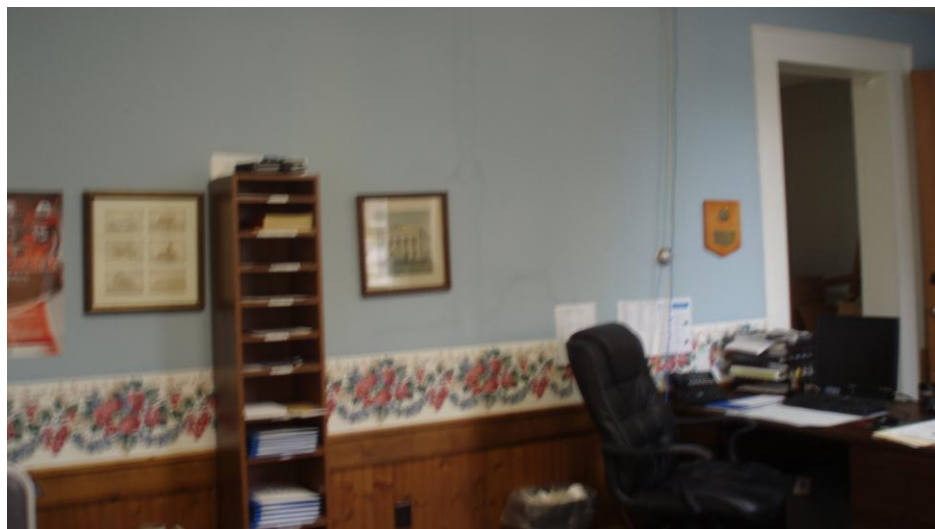


Figure 4.6 North elevation, Newberry Ladies Rest Room, image by author, December 2011.

The west elevation features a window of six-over-six double-hung sash with white, four-panel louvered shutters (Figure 4.7).



Figure 4.7 *West elevation, Newberry Ladies Rest Room, image by author, December 2011.*

The south elevation features two windows of six-over-six double-hung sash, both with white, four-panel louvered shutters (Figure 4.8).



Figure 4.8 *South elevation, Newberry Ladies Rest Room, image by author, December 2011.*

The toilet area was likely repartitioned either in the mid-1930s or late-1940s, making it difficult to discern how this area would have looked in the early-twentieth century. It is likely that this area originally was one large, open space with lavatories. From the entrance to the space on the north elevation, there is an approximately twelve foot long hallway, which features the entrance to the current men's toilet on the north elevation, and the current women's toilet on the west elevation (Figure 4.4).

Many women and children utilized the rest room, and a rest room report from 1915 states that 6,342 names were recorded in the register for that year.¹⁹ This report, authored by Evans herself, provides some insight into her thoughts about the importance of the rest room, as well as a contemporary commentary on what recent women's historians define as the municipal housekeeping movement. Evans states:

The Newberry rest room has a unique experience; it is given no financial aid from any board or benevolent association of women or men. It was, and is yet, the work of one woman, who knew and feels the necessity of a resting place for the thousands of her sex whose physical condition of health when from a hospital ward or invalid's chair should have the charitable consideration and municipal bounty which the county of Newberry owes to the widows and daughters of the Confederacy. On Monument Square the shaft bears their names who fell on battlefields – in memory of our sacred dead. And it is meet and proper that this old courthouse now be the home place of rest and comfort for their posterity as long as a brick stands to mark the place where the first apostle of temperance, John Belton O'Neill, preached the gospel of civic righteousness, honor, sobriety and virtue, and consecrated by a grateful county to the service and uplift of women, and provision made for a small annuity to its support from a contingent fund or special act by tax paying citizens. Thousands of these are women in all counties who need the help of the rest rooms, especially in Newberry, where there

¹⁹M. B. Evans, "The Annual Report Newberry Rest Room," *The Observer*, January 21, 1916, page 2, Google News Archive
<<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=311Fh14WnZcC&dat=19160121&printsec=frontpage&hl=en>> (accessed October 15, 2012).

are no hospitals, infirmaries or retreats for women, rest rooms are a physical necessity.²⁰

In her report, Evans utilizes the language and terminology of what recent women's history scholars define as municipal housekeeping, connecting the necessity of a physical space for women with the Lost Cause, temperance reform, and other issues that were thought to be the domain of women, and which, through activism, women were to assert their place in the public sphere.²¹

Based upon her own words, it appears as though Evans intended for the rest room to be a comfortable and convenient space where women of poor health could socialize with one another. Similar to other ladies rest rooms, however, sources indicate that the principle use of the Newberry Ladies Rest Room was as a place where women who were visiting Newberry from surrounding rural areas could safely and comfortably socialize with other women while their male relatives completed their missions in town. In a 1912 editorial in *The Observer*, noting that the rest room had been opened for five

²⁰ M. B. Evans, "The Annual Report Newberry Rest Room." Scholars have produced several excellent studies on the history of the United Daughters of the Confederacy and their efforts to commemorate the Lost Cause through public monuments and memorials. These include Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003) and Cynthia J. Mills and Pamela H. Simpson, eds., *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Arts, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003).

²¹ There is a rich history of scholarly work on female reformers and municipal housekeeping. Groundbreaking studies include Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868-1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1980); Karen J. Blair *The Torchbearers: Women and Their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890-1930* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994); Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981). More recent works include Sarah Deutsch, *Women and the City: Gender, Space, and Power in Boston, 1870-1940* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) and Elizabeth York Enstam, *Women and the Creation of Urban Life: Dallas, Texas, 1843-1920* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1998).

months, T. J. W. commented that, “Mrs. Evans has not only given her own time to this work, but has taken her own money, and, with the aid of a few considerate men and women of her town, she has instituted one of the noblest little enterprises for the comfort, convenience and accommodation of the poor, tired, wornout women who have to sit around in stores[...].”²²

Evans was the matron, as well as the sole financial support of the Newberry Ladies Rest Room, until her death on October 2, 1917.²³ Unfortunately, little information exists about the history of the rest room in the 1920s; however, it appears as though after Evans died, the city and county assumed a shared financial responsibility for the maintenance of the rest room, and hired a matron, Miss Eugenia Epps.²⁴

For Epps, a single white woman, the position of rest room matron offered the opportunity for respectable self-sufficiency. These matrons were viewed on equal terms as the other white women who utilized the facility. Epps herself viewed the position of rest room matron as an answer to her prayers, noting that, after the passing of her father in 1916, “I went to Jesus, on my knees, asking that He show me what I could and should do to make my living.”²⁵ Several days later, two local women offered her the position of

²² T. J. W., “Praise for the Rest Room.”

²³ “Mrs. Mary Butler Evans.” According to this, Evans’s health failed only a few weeks prior, and, until this point, she worked at the rest room.

²⁴ “Miss Epps Had Her Prayer Answered,” *The Newberry Observer*, July 4, 1958, page 1, Google News Archive
<<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=8ltDAAAIBAJ&sjid=zK0MAAAAIBAJ&pg=3166,3672515&q=newberry+ladies+rest+room&hl=en>> (accessed October 15, 2012).

²⁵ Ibid.

rest room matron. Epps remained matron of the Newberry Ladies Rest Room for forty years, retiring in 1958.²⁶

The women of Newberry city and county continued to utilize the rest room space for social gatherings throughout the remainder of the twentieth century. Rural women, especially, continued to heavily utilize the rest room as a meeting space for their social organizations. In 1931, when the state president of the Farm Council of Women called for a meeting of the Newberry County Council of Farm Women, the meeting was held at the Newberry Ladies Rest Room.²⁷ One can surmise that rural farm women were the principal users of the ladies rest room during this time, for in 1935, city and county officials gave the women of the Newberry County Council of Farm Women complete control over the rest room space.²⁸

Similar to other ladies rest rooms, including those in Pulaski and Lewisburg, Tennessee, local women who utilized the rest room space were also active in the home improvement movement. Home demonstration activities began in Newberry County in 1915, with the hiring of a home demonstration agent.²⁹ Several communities in the

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ "Women's Farm Council to Meet," *The Newberry Observer*, February 3, 1931, page 3, Google News Archive
<<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=HQVEAAAIBAJ&sjid=dLAMAAAIBAJ&pg=1132,402510&dq=newberry+women's+rest+room&hl=en>> (accessed October 15, 2012).

²⁸ "Rest Room to be Remodeled," *The Newberry Observer*, September 13, 1935, page 1, Google News Archive
<<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=fv1DAAAIBAJ&sjid=S7AMAAAIBAJ&pg=1619,2861301&dq=newberry+women's+rest+room&hl=en>> (accessed October 15, 2012).

²⁹ Mildred K. Holliday, "History of Newberry County Extension Homemakers Club," *The Newberry Observer*, May 16, 1984, page 15, Google News Archive
<<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=JjtdAAAIBAJ&sjid=LlsNAAAIBAJ&pg=2979,4301199&dq=lounge&hl=en>> (accessed October 15, 2012).

county formed home demonstration clubs over the next seven years, and, in 1922, these seven clubs joined together to form the Newberry County Council of Farm Women.³⁰ It was to these women that Newberry city and county officials gave control of the ladies rest room in 1935, cementing the close relationship between the home demonstration women and the Newberry Ladies Rest Room.

While the women of the Farm Council, as well as the matron, Eugenia Epps, were charged with the daily operations of the rest room, the city council and county commissioners continued to support the facility financially. This support made renovations to the space possible in 1935, and an account of the re-opening of the rest room provides vivid detail as to how the space would have appeared during this time. According to an article in *The Newberry Observer*, a committee composed of members of the Council of Farm Women supervised the purchase and arrangement of new window shades and draperies, linoleum, rugs, and a new wicker furniture set.³¹ It appears as though the rest room space was also expanded at this time, as the article mentions a “reception room,” decorated in green with green chintz draperies, and a “dining room,” decorated in “Chinese red and black,” with red chintz draperies and red furniture.³² Renovations to these areas also included scraping and staining the floors and the installation of a new drinking fountain.³³ Additionally, the women of the Farm Council

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Mrs. Clarence Matthews, “Remodeled Rest Room is Credit to Newberry,” *The Newberry Observer*, December 10, 1935, page 1, Google News Archive <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=l_1DAAAIAIAJ&sjid=S7AMAAAIAIAJ&pg=3352,3883490&dq=newberry+women's+rest+room&hl=en> (accessed October 15, 2012).

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

were permitted to renovate an additional downstairs room for use as another lounge area. Renovations to this area included adding a window, a lavatory, drop lights, and new flooring. The walls of all of the spaces were painted ivory.³⁴ The addition of the downstairs space meant that, in the mid-1930s, the Newberry Ladies Rest Room contained at least four distinct spaces on two floors of the building.

The Newberry Ladies Rest Room was a segregated space, where only white women were welcome. Unlike citizens in many other towns and counties who established ladies rest rooms, however, the citizens of Newberry also established a similar facility for local black women, albeit at a much later date. In 1939, a committee of Civic League members was charged with investigating the possibility of establishing a rest room for black women. It reported that a county delegation and the city council had agreed to provide funding for the rest room, and a location had been selected on Nance Street, a major thoroughfare located one block from the white ladies rest room.³⁵ Evidence indicated that this facility was likely well-patronized, as it remained open until at least the late-1960s.³⁶

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ “Civic League Reports Big Accomplishments,” *The Newberry Observer*, October 3, 1939, page 4, Google News Archive <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=ZPxDAAAIBAJ&sjid=RrAMAAAIBAJ&pg=4562,4316168&dq=newberry+women's+rest+room&hl=en>> (accessed October 15, 2012).

³⁶ “Ordinance,” *The Newberry Observer*, May 30, 1967, page 18, Google News Archive <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=_ihEAAAIBAJ&sjid=ErEMAAAIBAJ&pg=903,3309825&dq=newberry+ladies+rest+room&hl=en> (accessed October 15, 2012). This article also notes that both the “keeper” of the “ladies’ rest room” and the “colored rest room” were each paid the same salary of \$1500.

For the next several decades, until the mid-1990s, the Newberry Ladies Rest Room for white women remained open, and continued to receive periodic renovations.³⁷ Extensive renovations occurred in the late-1940s, when a group of citizens, concerned with the deteriorating condition of the building, organized a restoration campaign. Mrs. Mamie Summer, president of the Civic League of Newberry, organized the campaign, and it was successful, with individuals, organizations, and the county all making contributions. As a result, the interior of the building was “ripped out” and the entire building was “refurbished;” however, the floor plan of the building remained as it was, with the exception of the repartitioning of some first floor office space.³⁸ County officials did not consider further interior or exterior renovations necessary until the late-1970s, when they contacted the Central Midlands Regional Planning Council to conduct a Historic Resources Survey for the City of Newberry and applied for a Department of the Interior matching preservation grant through the South Carolina Department of Archives.³⁹

³⁷ “Rest Room in the Old Court House is Open to Public,” *The Newberry Observer*, July 12, 1940, page 1, Google News Archive <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=x2xDAAAIBAJ&sjid=860MAAAAIBAJ&pg=1844,3645167&dq=newberry+women's+rest+room&hl=en>> (accessed October 15, 2012); “Meeting of the Newberry County Historical Commission with the Newberry County Council, February 24, 1977,” included in “City of Newberry, S.C., Historic Resources Survey, Volume 1: Individual Properties, Public Square Extension, Boundary Street, Caldwell Street,” Central Midlands Regional Planning Council, 1979.

³⁸ “Meeting of the Newberry County Historical Commission with the Newberry County Council, February 24, 1977.”

³⁹ “Newberry Community Center (Old Courthouse),” included in “City of Newberry, S.C., Historic Resources Survey, Volume 1: Individual Properties, Public Square Extension, Boundary Street, Caldwell Street,” Central Midlands Regional Planning Council, 1979; “County Employee Classification, Pay Plan Being Studied,” *The Newberry Observer*, March 29, 1977, page 4, Google News Archive <<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=I01DAAAIBAJ&sjid=xK0MAAAAIBAJ&pg=708,2450095&q=newberry+ladies+rest+room&hl=en>> (accessed October 15, 2012).

In December 1989, the Newberry County Council agreed to a resolution to officially name the Newberry Ladies Rest Room the “Mary Ann Butler Evans Lounge,” and a sign noting this currently hangs above the exterior Main Street entrance that women would have historically utilized to enter the facility (Figure 4.9).⁴⁰ In 1996, the Newberry County Development Board received permission from the county to use the Lounge as a Visitors Center.⁴¹ Until at least 2003, the Farm and Community Leaders, formerly the County Extension/Home Demonstration Club, preserved the space as a lounge; however in the mid-to-late 2000s, the space was needed for offices for Chamber of Commerce/Visitor Center staff.⁴²

⁴⁰ “County has a \$3 Million Surplus,” *The Newberry Observer*, December 8, 1989, page 9, Google News Archive
<<http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=b8BDAAAIBAJ&sjid=Q68MAAAAIBAJ&pg=1047,5306922&dq=lounge&hl=en>> (accessed October 15, 2012).

⁴¹ “A Brief History of the Visitors Center,” <http://www.newberrycounty.org/visit.html> (accessed April 27, 2011).

⁴² Drafts, “Respite for the Weary: Newberry’s Historic Ladies Lounge,” 81.



Figure 4.9 Signage for the “Mary Ann Butler Evans Ladies Lounge,” Main Street entrance, Newberry, South Carolina, image by author, December 2011.

There are many similarities between the Newberry Ladies Rest Room and other ladies rest room facilities that were constructed throughout the country during the Progressive Era. Women, especially rural women, utilized the rest room as a social and organizational space. The home improvement movement and home demonstration activities were so closely associated with the Newberry Ladies Rest Room that city and county officials eventually allowed the women of the Newberry County Council of Farm

Women, an organization composed of seven local home demonstration clubs, complete control over the ladies rest room facility.

The establishment history of the Newberry Ladies Rest Room, when compared with those of Lyons, Kansas, and Pulaski, Tennessee, provides insight into how both the business and civic communities of one town could advocate for the creation of a space that they saw as being necessary, and even advantageous. It appears, however, that neither of these groups did more than discuss establishing a rest room and, although the business community and the civic community argued for the establishment of a ladies rest room at approximately the same time, it was Mary Ann Butler Evans who, without any financial support, established the Newberry Ladies Rest Room in 1911. To better understand how various groups in one community could successfully join together to establish a ladies rest room, we must turn our attention to the community of Northfield, Minnesota.

CHAPTER V

COMMUNITY ACTIVISM AND LADIES REST ROOMS: NORTHFIELD,
MINNESOTA, AS A CASE STUDY

That the rest room is a highly necessary institution as well as one of Northfield's most worthy community projects, is shown by the large registered attendance, several thousand visitors having entered their names in the register last year. There are often as many as seventy-five visitors a day besides those who register.

During the winter the room is used largely by country women, while in the summer the tourists predominate. The rest room is also used frequently by clerks as a lunch room and as a place to rest during the noon hour. Because it has demonstrated its importance and value, members of the community council are convinced that little difficulty will be experienced in obtaining the necessary funds to maintain it for another year.¹

Similar to other Progressive Era ladies rest rooms, the Northfield Ladies Rest Room was a public space where women from rural areas, as well as those who resided in town, could socialize comfortably while other family members conducted business. As at other rest rooms, Northfield women took ownership of the rest room, and helped to ensure that it was physically and financially maintained. In Northfield, however, the ladies rest room was included in the development of a multi-purpose facility that was established by a community organization to benefit and be utilized by residents of Northfield, as well as the surrounding countryside. Additionally, perhaps owing to the mixed-use nature of this facility, or possibly because the Northfield Ladies Rest Room was established at a later date, business and professional women, including female sales clerks, appear to have had a greater presence at this rest room than at others.

¹ "Funds Needed for Public Rest Room," *The Northfield News*, April 22, 1921, page 1, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, The Northfield News, Northfield, MN, Jan. 2, 1920-Dec. 30, 1921.

In Northfield, Minnesota, both city and country residents worked together to cultivate a strong sense of community, and the establishment of the Northfield Ladies Rest Room and the Northfield Community Hall in 1918 was the culmination of a process that took several years. In Northfield, the movement to develop a multi-purpose community building and accompanying rest rooms coincided with the rise of an advertising club, the development of special sales days, and the transformation of the Commercial Club to the Community Club. The citizens of Northfield recognized the importance of connecting the town and rural communities, and successfully achieved this through the creation of the Northfield Community Club. The Northfield Community Hall, with its ladies rest room, was the physical representation of the relationship that existed between the citizens of Northfield and their neighbors in the surrounding countryside.

There was some precedent for the development of ladies rest rooms in community buildings prior to the 1918 establishment of the Northfield Ladies Rest Room. In 1916, the community of Wheaton, Minnesota, approximately 250 miles northwest of Northfield, established a similar facility, through the cooperation of both rural and town residents. A 1916 newspaper article in the *Wheaton Gazette-Reporter* noted that the facility would:

serve the purpose of binding the people of the entire tributary territory in closer bonds of fellowship as it is a place where all can meet on terms of equality, a place in which all have a common interest, a place that provides comforts and conveniences that the farmer and his family, when in town, can enjoy on an equal footing of freedom with those who live within the corporate limits. The influences arising from this mingling of people in this edifice which stands as a substantial testimonial to existing interest in each others lives and welfare, cannot be other than uplifting and helpful. It is the final step in centralizing and uniting with ties of mutual friendship an entire community in its educational and social

affairs and in establishing among the people thereof a better understanding of their duty toward each other in public affairs and in their business relations.²

In Wheaton, as occurred two years later in Northfield, members of the rural/agricultural and town/business communities worked together to establish a multi-purpose building in an effort to better serve the needs of the entire community. As exemplified above, the rhetoric that supporters utilized to advocate for the development of community buildings was different than that used by women and men that championed ladies rest room facilities. While, as in Wheaton, supporters of community buildings acknowledged the benefit of these facilities to farmers and their families, they often also noted the advantages that such a facility would provide the entire town and rural community. Supporters of ladies rest room facilities, on the other hand, appear to have largely accepted that the primary beneficiaries of ladies rest rooms would be the women themselves, as well as the businessmen who supported the facilities.

The city of Northfield, located in south central Minnesota, in northern Rice County, dates to 1855. Its founder was prominent Minnesotan John W. North. A staunch abolitionist, North moved to the Minnesota Territory from New York in 1850 to improve his health and finances, as well as help to ensure that the Midwest remained anti-slavery territory.³ The population of Northfield expanded slowly throughout the late-nineteenth

² “Wheaton’s New Community Building,” *Wheaton Gazette-Reporter*, January 21, 1916, page 1, in “School Days,” 170 <<http://cityofwheaton.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/10-School-Days.pdf>> (last accessed January 28, 2013).

³ Northfield Heritage Preservation Commission, *Northfield: The History and Architecture of a Community* (Northfield, MN: Northfield Heritage Preservation Commission, 1997), 4-5.

and early-twentieth centuries, climbing from 867 in 1860, to 3,210 at the turn of the century, to 4,023 in 1920.⁴

In Northfield, the town and the surrounding agricultural community were closely connected from the earliest days of settlement. By the late-1870s, dairy farming began to expand and replace wheat farming in the county, and by 1917 there were at least six creameries operating in the Northfield area.⁵ The dependency of the creameries on the surrounding Holstein dairy farmers helped to ensure a close relationship between the businessmen in Northfield proper and the farmers of the surrounding countryside.

The building that eventually housed the Northfield Ladies Rest Room has a rich history that dates to the 1880s. From its earliest days as a Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) building, it was intended to be a multi-purpose building, to be shared by males of the Northfield community. In the spring of 1884, Northfield businessmen met with YMCA officers to determine if it would be worthwhile to construct a building specifically for YMCA use, as the organization had outgrown its current space and desired a permanent facility. The businessmen favored the new facility, and determined to raise at least \$5,000 and attempt to construct the building the following year.⁶ Architect George M. Goodwin of Minneapolis designed the building.

⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁵ Ibid., 11, 46.

⁶ "A Permanent Home for the Young Men's Christian Association," *The Journal*, May 22, 1884, page unknown, Northfield Historical Society, Northfield, Minnesota, "Northfield Organizations/Clubs/YMCA" resource folder.

Officials laid the cornerstone in May 1885, and dedicated the completed building in December 1885.⁷ It was the first YMCA building in Minnesota.⁸

The Northfield YMCA building is located on North Division Street, and, at the time of construction, was located next to City Hall, in the heart of the Northfield central business district. It is three stories, constructed of stone on three sides, with a brick facade, and an Ohio stone foundation and cornice. An oriel window extends through two stories of the building and contains several pieces of stained glass from the early-1900s. A stone tablet over the door bears the word “Welcome” carved in relief, and another tablet contains the date of the building, 1885. Originally, the tablet bearing the date of the building also contained the words “Young Men’s Christian Association” and “Library, Reading Room, and Gymnasium,” but these phrases were removed from the building during remodeling in 1918-1919 (Figure 5.1).⁹

⁷ “Northfield’s Y. M. C. A. Building,” *The Pioneer Press*, December 11, 1885, page unknown, Northfield Historical Society, Northfield, Minnesota, “Northfield Organizations/Clubs/ YMCA” resource folder; “Northfield,” *The Tribune*, May 28, 1885, page unknown, Northfield Historical Society, Northfield, Minnesota, “Northfield Organizations/Clubs/ YMCA” resource folder.

⁸ “Northfield,” *The Tribune*, May 28, 1885.

⁹ Kirk Jeffrey, “The Northfield Guild Hall: (Formerly the Y. M. C. A. Building, the Community Building, the City Hall),” (unpublished paper, December 1978), 2, Northfield Arts Guild Archive, Northfield, Minnesota, single untitled resource folder.

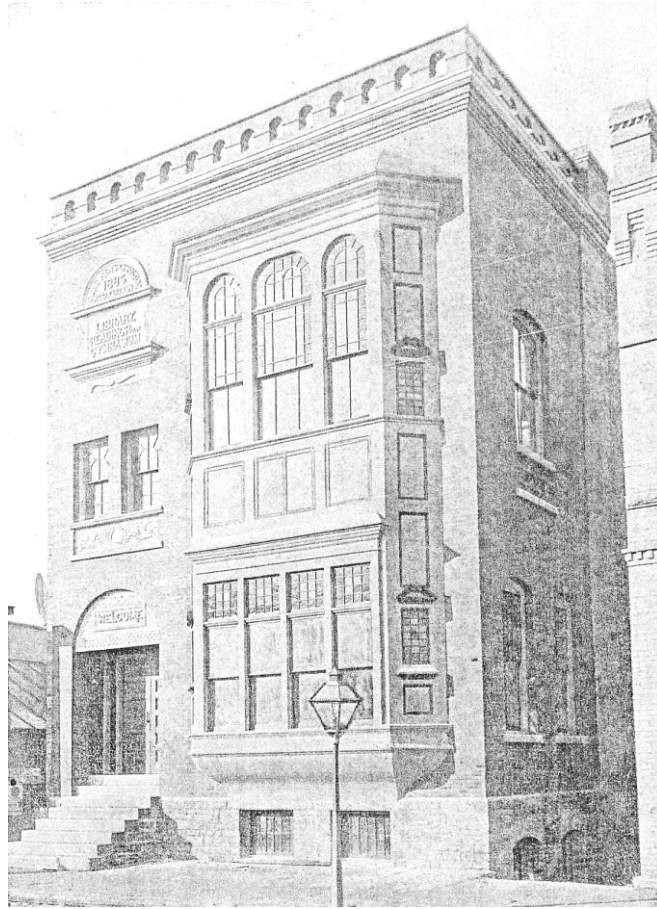


Figure 5.1 *Image of façade of Northfield YMCA Building, as it appeared from 1885 – 1918. Image courtesy of the Northfield Historical Society, Northfield, Minnesota, “Northfield Organizations/Clubs/YMCA” resource folder.*

The Northfield YMCA facility was a multi-purpose community building with a gymnasium occupying the entirety of the basement floor. The first floor featured a reading room with a fireplace (which became the eventual location of the ladies rest room). This space opened into a coat closet, which was connected by folding doors to a library. This floor also contained a member’s parlor with fireplace. A long hallway

extended from the front entrance, past the reading room and library, into the parlor.¹⁰

The second floor contained an open assembly room (Figure 5.2).¹¹

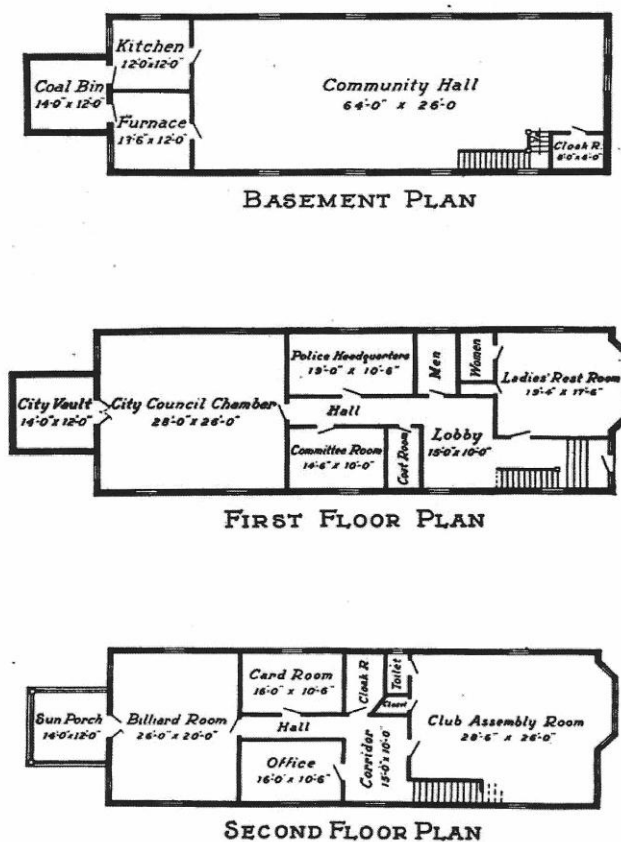


FIG. 48.—Plans of Northfield building.

Figure 5.2 Floorplan of Northfield Community Hall, located in Wayne Crocker Nason, "Plans of Rural Community Buildings," U. S. Department of Agriculture Farmers' Bulletin No. 1173 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), 35. This floorplan shows the use of the building as a community center, post-1918.

¹⁰ "Northfield's Y. M. C. A. Building," *The Pioneer Press*, December 11, 1885; "Northfield," *The Tribune*, May 28, 1885.

¹¹ Jeffrey, "The Northfield Guild Hall," 2.

The building's use as a YMCA was relatively short-lived. According to Kirk Jeffrey, who conducted an extensive study of the building in the late-1970s, the rapid development of electric, water, and sewer systems in the late-1800s helped contribute to the facility quickly becoming outdated. Originally, the building had no water or sewer connections, electric lighting, or heating system, other than stoves, which was not unusual for the time; however, these systems developed rapidly over the next twenty years, and the building quickly became outdated.¹² Additionally, during the early-1900s, various groups developed newer, more modern facilities in Northfield whose functions overlapped with those of the YMCA building. In 1909, members of the Congregational Church added a two-story gymnasium to their facility. In 1910, Northfield acquired a Carnegie library, and the books from the YMCA were transferred here.¹³ The loss of the library contributed to a decline in the use of the building; in 1900 the YMCA used it for the last time.¹⁴ The YMCA closed the building and was unable to financially support its maintenance.¹⁵

Enterprising Northfield citizens explored a variety of uses for the vacant building. A movement to establish public rest rooms in the building began in 1907, and gained momentum in 1911.¹⁶ By 1915, the state attorney general ruled that the thirty-one men

¹² Ibid., 3.

¹³ MaryLou Street, "The History of the Building that is to become 'The Center for the Arts,'" unpublished history, 1988, p. 1, Northfield Historical Society, Northfield, Minnesota, "Northfield Organizations/Clubs/ YMCA" resource folder.

¹⁴ "Y. M. C. A. Would Lease to City," *Northfield News*, August 20, 1915, page 1, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, The Northfield News, Northfield, MN, July 4, 1913-December 31, 1915.

¹⁵ Maggie Lee, "Building Development Made Possible," *Northfield News*, March 19, 1993, page unknown, Northfield Historical Society, Northfield, Minnesota, "Buildings NAG Building" resource folder.

who were members of the YMCA when it discontinued its activities were the owners of the property, and it would be left to the seventeen who still lived in Northfield to decide how to dispose of it. That same year, YMCA members actively worked with Northfield citizens to reach an agreement to lease or sell the building to the city. At one meeting it was noted that, “in response to the general desire that the building ought to be put to some good community purpose, and also as a result of the conviction of the members of the Y. M. C. A. that something needs to be done three proposals were considered Monday evening.”¹⁷ Residents suggested several uses, including a rest room, farmers’ club hall, Commercial Club rooms and city hall.¹⁸ In November, the building owners agreed to convey the property to the City of Northfield for the sum of \$1, provided that the city utilize the building for community purposes and preserve its historic significance.¹⁹

The decision to make the old YMCA building a public facility coincided with a flurry of activity aimed at the development of both community and commercial interests. In 1915, in the same edition of *The Northfield News* that announced the city’s acquisition of the YMCA building, another front-page article gave notice of “Special Sales Saturday, Nov. 20.” The article describes the purpose of the event and stated that:

¹⁶ Maggie Lee, “Do You Remember? NAG Gets Nod from City Council,” *Northfield News*, October 13, 1988, page unknown, Northfield Historical Society, Northfield, Minnesota, “Northfield Organizations/Clubs/ YMCA” resource folder.

¹⁷ “Y. M. C. A. Would Lease to City,” *Northfield News*, August 20, 1915.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ “Y. M. C. A. Will Be A City Building,” *Northfield News*, November 12, 1915, page 1, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, The Northfield News, Northfield, MN, July 4, 1913-December 31, 1915; Lee, “Building Development Made Possible;” Torild Homstad, “The Arts Guild Renovation Project,” *The Northfield Magazine* (Fall 1988), 14.

forty-six merchants have combined to give special reductions and make it especially worth while for people to come miles to do their shopping. This special sales day is the first drive in a campaign to make Northfield better and more widely known as a trading center [...] these offers are made not only to every one in the Northfield trade territory but to many others who will find it worth while to make this city their trading point.²⁰

The Northfield Ad club, “a new organization formed to study advertising, and work to further the interests of the community in a business way,” organized the sales day.²¹

Local businessmen highlighted their sales on pages six and seven of that newspaper issue.

The emphasis on community and commercial development in Northfield took another major step forward in 1917, when the latent Commercial Club voted to expand its membership to include local area farmers’ clubs. Commercial Club members realized that, with a dozen farmers’ clubs operating in the Northfield area, both merchants and farmers had shared interests, and, therefore, farmers should be afforded the opportunity to become more vocal members of the business community.²² “The officers and members come from the ranks of professional and business people in town and from the farmhouses of the countryside,” noted a writer in *The Northfield News*, “Professors from Carleton and St. Olaf work with dairymen and alfalfa growers on committees and take part in programs together.”²³ The Commercial Club became the Community Club, and

²⁰ “Special Sales Saturday, Nov. 20,” *Northfield News*, November 12, 1915, page 1, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, The Northfield News, Northfield, MN, July 4, 1913-December 31, 1915.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Wayne Crocker Nason, “Uses of Rural Community Buildings,” *U. S. Department of Agriculture Farmers’ Bulletin No. 1274* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), 27.

²³ “Cows, Colleges, Contentment, Spell Success for Northfield and Its Famous Community Club,” *The Northfield News*, May 7, 1920, page 9, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, The Northfield News, Northfield, MN, Jan. 2, 1920-Dec. 30, 1921.

took an interest in activities that included both the town and farm communities, including a campaign to raise funds for remodeling the YMCA building as a joint community center and city hall.²⁴ Fred B. Hill, a professor of religion at local Carleton College, was named president of the new organization.²⁵

By early 1918, the Northfield community began renovations of the YMCA building, but the projected costs of remodeling of \$7,000 to \$8,000 proved too steep for a city council unwilling to borrow more than \$2000 in one year. Fortunately, by complete surprise, in March 1918, Fred B. Hill and his wife pledged \$5,000, contingent on the Community Club raising an additional \$4,000. As the Club had already raised \$2,650, the Hill's gift made the immediate remodeling of the facility possible.²⁶ By the time the project was completed fully, the town and country residents of the Northfield area combined to give approximately \$15,000 for the remodeling of the building, a testament to the interest of both town and rural residents in a community facility of this kind.²⁷

In 1919 the new facility was opened to the public.²⁸ The multi-purpose facility featured an assembly room with seating for 400, a kitchen, and cloak room on the

²⁴ "Community Club Becomes A Fact," *The Northfield News*, June 1, 1917, page 1, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, *The Northfield News*, Northfield, MN, Jan. 7, 1916-Jan. 28, 1918; Street, "The History of the Building that is to become 'The Center for the Arts,'" 3.

²⁵ Street, "The History of the Building that is to become 'The Center for the Arts,'" 3; Northfield Heritage Preservation Commission, *Northfield*, 59.

²⁶ "Hills Give \$5,000 for the Community Building," *The Northfield News*, March 22, 1918, page 1, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, *The Northfield News*, Northfield, MN, Jan. 29, 1918-Jan. 1, 1920.

²⁷ Lee, "Building Development Made Possible."

²⁸ Homstad, "The Arts Guild Renovation Project," 14; Maggie Lee, "First outstate YMCA was in Northfield," *The Northfield News*, August 4, 2007, page 8B, Northfield Historical Society, Northfield, Minnesota, "Northfield Organizations/Clubs/ YMCA" resource folder.

basement floor. The first floor contained a ladies rest room, supervised by a matron, as well as some city offices, including a combination city council chamber and municipal courtroom, and a police department. The location of the ladies rest room on the first floor, next to other city functions, and not in the basement, reflects the public importance citizens and officials placed on the new institution. The Community Club maintained its headquarters on the second floor (see Figure 5.2).²⁹ “Service clubs, farmers organizations, groups of all kinds had luncheon meetings,” at the new public facility, “with a calendar filled for weeks in advance.”³⁰

In Minnesota, residents of several small market towns worked with their agricultural neighbors to develop and strengthen the bonds of community, and this is reflected in the similarity of the physical spaces that these communities created. The arrangement of space in the Northfield facility is similar to that of the Wheaton building. The basement floor of the Wheaton building contained a combination auditorium and gymnasium, boys and girls locker rooms, and an office for the county farm bureau and farm agent. The first floor contained the “library and women’s rest room,” in the same location as the Northfield building, as well as an additional auditorium that could seat as many as 800 people, and an agricultural office. The industrial and vocational departments of the community’s high school, including a “sewing room,” “cooking room,” and “manual training department,” were located on the third floor (Figures 5.3 and 5.4).

²⁹ Lee, “First outstate YMCA was in Northfield.”

³⁰ Street, “The History of the Building that is to become ‘The Center for the Arts,’” 3.



FIG. 88.—Community house at Wheaton, Minn.

A building controlled by the school district and connected with the consolidated high school. Erected in 1916 in a town of 1,300 population at a cost of \$28,000, to serve the town and surrounding farming community. Financed by means of bond sales, entertainments, general contributions, etc. It houses the industrial department of the high school, the county farm bureau, annual agricultural exhibit, a community theater, a ladies' rest room, and a library.

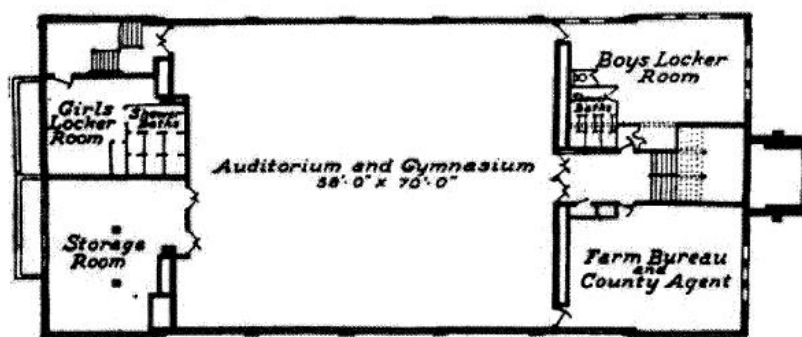


FIG. 89.—First floor plan, Wheaton building.

Figure 5.3 Floorplan of Wheaton Community House, located in Wayne Crocker Nason, "Plans of Rural Community Buildings," U. S. Department of Agriculture Farmers' Bulletin No. 1173 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), 28.

Plans of Rural Community Buildings.

29

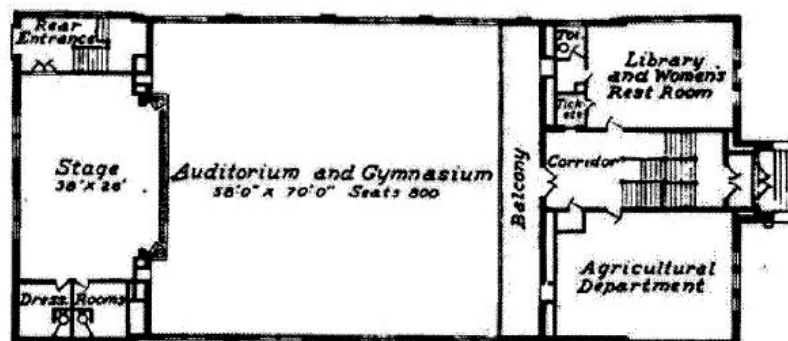


FIG. 40.—Second floor plan, Wheaton building.

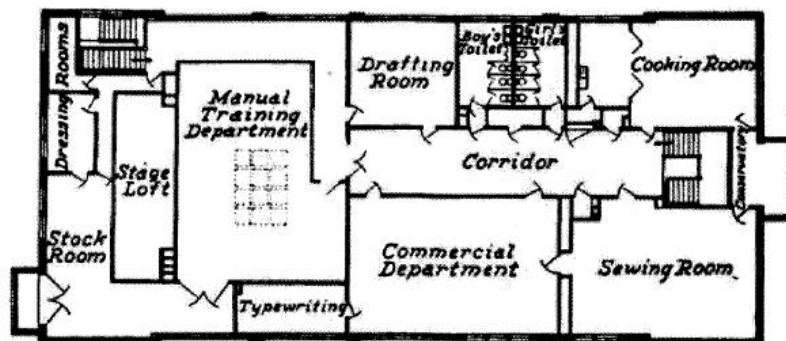


FIG. 41.—Third floor plan, Wheaton building.

Figure 5.4 Floorplan of Wheaton Community House, located in Wayne Crocker Nason, "Plans of Rural Community Buildings," U. S. Department of Agriculture Farmers' Bulletin No. 1173 (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1921), 29.

The Northfield Ladies Rest Room was located on the east end of the first floor of the Northfield Community Hall, in the space that was formerly the YMCA reading room. Similar to other ladies rest rooms, the Northfield Ladies Rest Room contained two distinct spaces, a spacious lounge area and a toilet area. In the lounge area, women were

able to enjoy the light provided by the large oriel window, as well as a warm fire during cold winter days. The lounge space contained several comfortable leather-covered chairs, a chaise lounge, and many interesting plants.³¹

Visitors entered the Northfield Ladies Rest Room through the main entrance to the Northfield Community Hall (now the Northfield Arts Guild building), on North Division Street (Figure 5.5).



Figure 5.5 *Façade of the current Northfield Arts Guild Building (second from right), former Northfield Community Hall, located in the Northfield central business district, image by author, February 2012.*

After ascending a flight of stairs to reach the first floor, the lounge space of the rest room was located in the first room to the right. The entrance to this space was located in the southwest corner of the room. The lounge area was approximately thirty feet long and

³¹ Street, “The History of the Building that is to become ‘The Center for the Arts,’” 3-4.

seventeen feet wide. The west elevation of the room features the entrance that historically led into the toilet area of the rest room from the lounge space (Figure 5.6). This toilet area did not have a separate entrance, and women who needed to use the toilet facilities had to enter that space through the ladies lounge area.



Figure 5.6 *West elevation, featuring entrance from hallway into lounge area, and door from lounge area to toilet area, Northfield Ladies Rest Room, image by author, February 2012.*

The north elevation features the fireplace (now covered), as well as two windows of two-over-two double-hung sash (Figures 5.7 and 5.8).



Figure 5.7 North elevation, featuring former fireplace, Northfield Ladies Rest Room, image by author, February 2012.

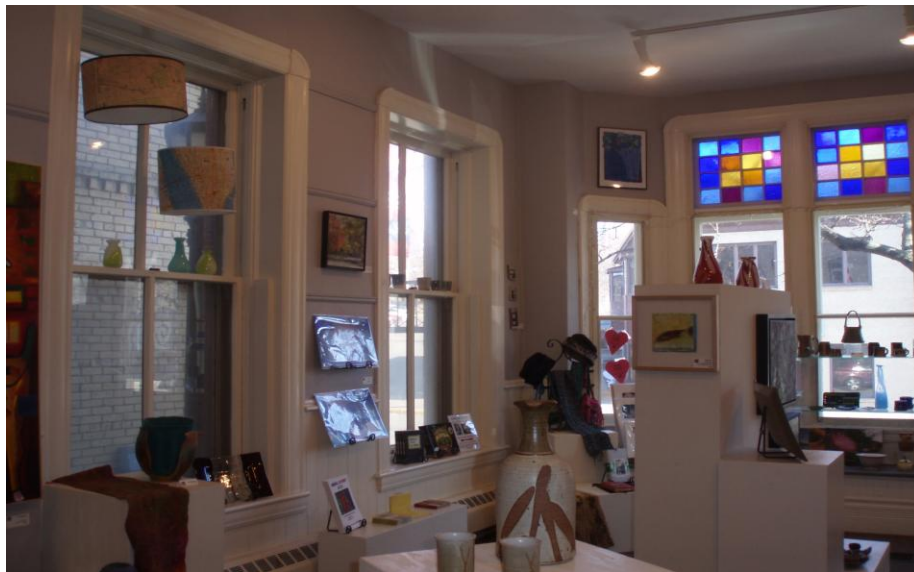


Figure 5.8 Northeast elevation, Northfield Ladies Rest Room, image by author, February 2012.

The east elevation of this room features the oriel window. The window has four sections that each feature one-over-one double-hung sash. Above each window section is a transom that contains sixteen small multi-colored panes of glass, some of which are thought to date to the early-1900s (Figure 5.9). The southeast and northeast corners of this room each feature a smaller window, also one-over-one double-hung sash (Figures 5.8 and 5.10).



Figure 5.9 *Detail of oriel window, East elevation, Northfield Ladies Rest Room, image by author, February 2012.*

In addition to the entrance to the lounge area, the south elevation features two three-pane windows.



Figure 5.10 *Detail of one of the two three pane windows, southeast elevation, Northfield Ladies Rest Room, image by author, February 2012.*

The toilet area of the Northfield Ladies Rest Room was approximately eleven feet wide and twelve feet long. The east elevation features the doorway from the lounge area into the toilet area. The north elevation features one two-over-two double-hung window. The west elevation currently features an entrance into what was historically the men's rest room, and this entrance did not exist at the time the space was utilized as a ladies rest room. The south elevation features one single-pane window and one opening that currently serves as the "box office" where tickets for local art and theater events are sold.

These openings were added later, likely when the Northfield Arts Guild purchased and renovated the building in 1988, as historically, this area would have looked into a ladies coat closet (Figures 5.2 and 5.11).

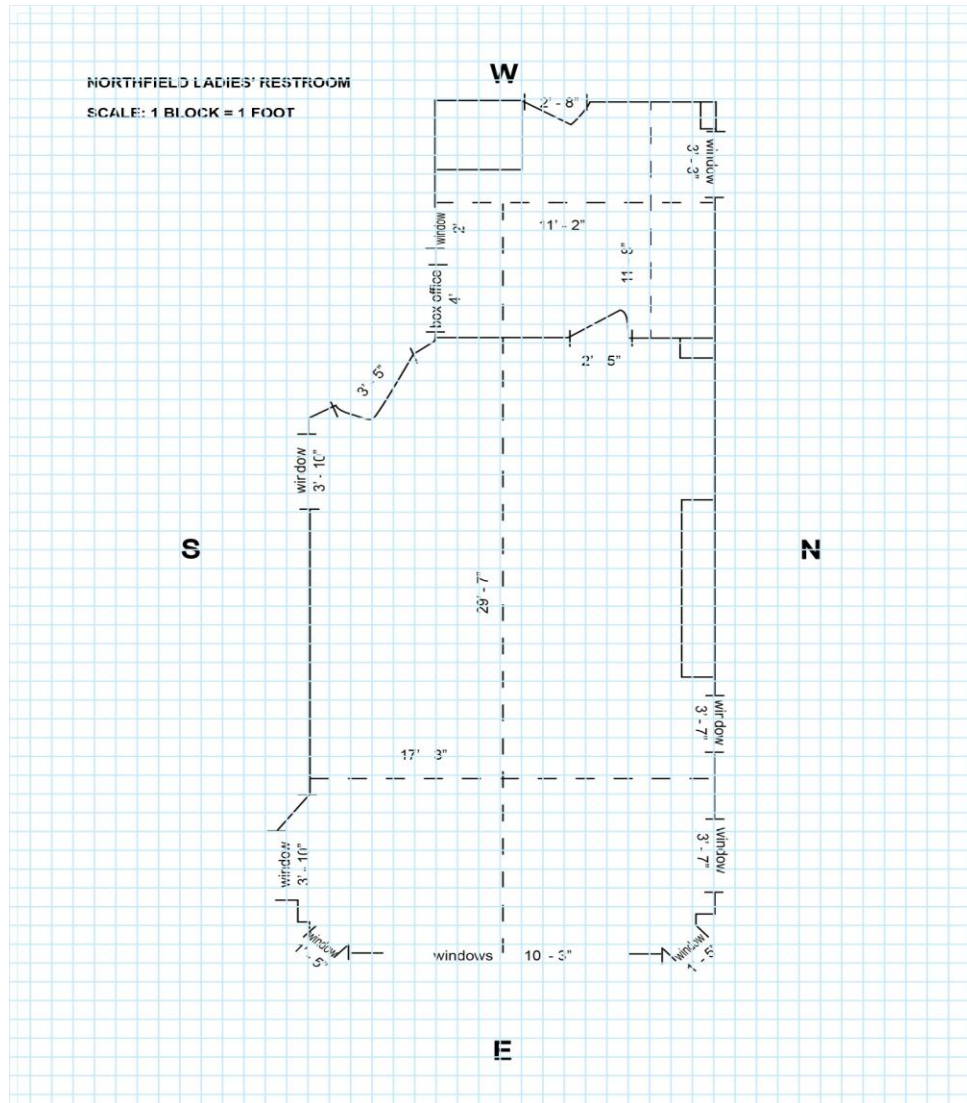


Figure 5.11 Scale drawing of the Northfield Ladies Rest Room, 2012. Drawing courtesy of Allegra Print and Imaging, Nashville, based on measurements and figures drawn by the author.

Local women were largely responsible for organizing efforts to ensure that the Northfield Ladies Rest Room remained well-funded and, in the work of the matron, for the day-to-day operation of the facility. The Northfield Women's Community Council, formed in 1919 and likely an auxiliary to the Community Club, assumed responsibility for maintaining and securing funding for the operation of the Northfield Ladies Rest Room.³² The Council established a standing committee, the Rest Room Committee, that reported on the condition of the rest room at meetings, as well as maintained responsibility for at least a portion of the rest room funds.³³

In Northfield a variety of individuals and organizations financially supported the ladies rest room. Unlike Lyons, Kansas, where businessmen were the sole financial support of the rest room in its early years, or Lewisburg and Pulaski, Tennessee, where city or county funds were the principal means of financial support, in Northfield individual citizens, as well as local businessmen, and members of local clubs who utilized the space, financed the maintenance of the rest room. In 1920, the Rest Room Committee reported that Alex Mackay, of the local retail establishment the Alex Marshall

³² "Wanted-\$1,000 for the maintenance of the Rest Room in the Community Building and for the support of Northfield's two public play-grounds," *The Northfield News*, July 23, 1920, page 1, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, The Northfield News, Northfield, MN, Jan. 2, 1920-Dec. 30, 1921. This states that "officers of the Woman's Community council and the Northfield Community club are co-operating in arranging for the canvas." "Funds Needed for Public Rest Room," *The Northfield News*, April 22, 1921, page 1, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, The Northfield News, Northfield, MN, Jan. 2, 1920-Dec. 30, 1921. This article notes that the Women's Community Council will "again conduct a canvas of the city to obtain the necessary funds."

³³ "Woman's Community Council Reviews Work and Elects Officers," *The Northfield News*, May 21, 1920, page 1, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, The Northfield News, Northfield, MN, Jan. 2, 1920-Dec. 30, 1921; "Funds are Received for Rest Room Maintenance," April 23, 1920, page 1, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, The Northfield News, Northfield, MN, Jan. 2, 1920-Dec. 30, 1921; "Wanted-\$1,000 for the maintenance of the Rest Room in the Community Building and for the support of Northfield's two public play-grounds;" "Rest Room 'Push' Brings Needed Funds," *The Northfield News*, August 6, 1920, page 1, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, The Northfield News, Northfield, MN, Jan. 2, 1920-Dec. 30, 1921; "Funds Needed for Public Rest Room."

Co., had voluntarily subscribed fifty dollars, a donation that topped a list of subscriptions from businessmen.³⁴ This same report expressed gratitude to the members of the Pioneer and Waterford Farmers' Clubs, who had raised \$101 for the rest room through the sale of baskets at their joint social.³⁵ Additionally, several of the local women's clubs worked together to raise funds to pay for the services of the matron, Cecilia Cziapa.³⁶

This multiplicity of funding sources highlights the mutual understanding that existed between the farmers and businessmen of the Northfield area. Both of these groups shared the facilities of the Community Hall, and both accepted the responsibility of financially supporting the hall's programming. Additionally, both farmers and businessmen had motivation to financially support the ladies rest room. The wives and daughters of farmers heavily utilized the rest room as a space for their club activities, and it was a safe place for them to rest and socialize while the males of the family conducted business in town. Local merchants who conducted business with the farmers could have surmised that their funding of the rest room would lead to increased patronage by both male and female members of farm families. Northfield was a close-knit community, with local businessmen and rural farmers sitting next to one another in Community Club board meetings, and conducting business with one another in town, so it is not surprising that they recognized a shared responsibility to each other and to one another's families.

Although the Northfield Ladies Rest Room was located in a multi-purpose building, the rest room remained a distinctly female space. Similar to other ladies rest

³⁴ "Funds are Received for Rest Room Maintenance."

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ "Cows, Colleges, Contentment, Spell Success for Northfield and Its Famous Community Club."

rooms throughout the country, the Northfield Ladies Rest Room was the predominant public social and organizational space for both town and rural women. A plethora of local women's clubs utilized the rest room space for gatherings, including the Women's Community Council, study clubs, the Red Cross, public health service, organizations of prospective voters (prior to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment), and a neighborhood exchange.³⁷ The Women's Community Council appears to have utilized the rest room as its regular meeting space. In 1920, it held its annual meeting and election of officers in the rest room.³⁸ In 1921, the Women's Community Council sponsored a program on community service that was held in the Community Hall and attended by over 200 women who represented such women's clubs as the Women's Faculty Club, the Northfield branch of the Association of Collegiate Alumnae, the Literary Gleaners, Monday Club, and the Town and Country Club.³⁹ Similarly, in 1921, when local women were organizing the Business and Professional Woman's Club, they advertised in the local newspaper that tickets for an organizational dinner event would be available for purchase at the rest room.⁴⁰

Karen Blair asserts that participation in clubwork was a form of feminism for turn-of-the-century, middle-class women. Blair argues that there were groups of middle-class women who united in the bonds of sisterhood to form literary organizations, like

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Woman's Community Council Reviews Work and Elects Officers."

³⁹ "Women Hear Community Service Program Described," *The Northfield News*, May 20, 1921, page 1, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, The Northfield News, Northfield, MN, Jan. 2, 1920-Dec. 30, 1921.

⁴⁰ "Plan Woman's Club," *The Northfield News*, March 11, 1921, page 1, Microfilm roll, Northfield Public Library, The Northfield News, Northfield, MN, Jan. 2, 1920-Dec. 30, 1921.

Sorosis and the New England Woman's Club, in an effort not to resist the traditional imagery of the late-nineteenth century lady, but rather, to assert that it was these very qualities of morality, domesticity, and sensitivity that society attributed to them that made these women the most likely candidates to initiate social and moral reform in the public sphere.⁴¹ While it cannot be known whether or not the women of Northfield joined the abundance of local clubs and voluntary organizations with aims of promoting progressive reforms in their community, some of the women's clubs that met at the community hall, including the public health service and the organizations of prospective voters, indicate that these women recognized that they could participate, and potentially effect change, in their lives and community.

By the early-1920s, the number of women working as paid employees in shops in the Northfield central business district was greater than the prior decade. There were enough working women in Northfield to merit the formation of the Business and Professional Woman's club, and some of these women utilized the ladies rest room during their workday. An article in *The Northfield News* notes that, "the rest room is also used frequently by clerks as a lunch room and as a place to rest during the noon hour."⁴² This function of the rest room, as a space for professional women working in town to enjoy a break from their work environment, can be found in some rest rooms, largely

⁴¹ Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist*.

⁴² "Funds Needed for Public Rest Room." Northfield citizen MaryLou Street also mentions this in her account of the building's history, "The History of the Building that is to become 'The Center for the Arts,'" noting that, "many a girl working in an office or store used the lounge during the lunch hours with the solicitous matron Cecelia Cziapa fluttering around to make her comfortable," 4.

after 1915. There is some historical reference to this in Pulaski, Tennessee, where “weary saleswomen” were noted to have utilized the rest room.⁴³

Additionally, as in Lyons, Kansas, the Northfield Ladies Rest Room was a popular space for women visiting from out-of-town. A retrospective on the history of the building notes that there was a registry book located in the Northfield Ladies Rest Room. Women from nearly every city in Minnesota, as well as women from dozens of other states and three foreign countries, visited the rest room.⁴⁴ As in other ladies rest rooms throughout the nation, in the Northfield Ladies Rest Room, women visiting from out of town, state, or country could enjoy the companionship of other women while in Northfield.

While the women of Northfield utilized the ladies rest room for several social and organizational functions, it also served the principal function of other ladies rest rooms, that is, as a comfortable physical space where rural women and their children could rest and socialize while in town. The rest room matron for nearly forty years, Cecelia Cziapa, was present at the rest room “from 10 a.m. until after evening entertainments end, enabling farm women to drop into the club rest room at whatever time they come in town.”⁴⁵ However, at the Northfield Ladies Rest Room, unlike other rest rooms, a wide

⁴³ Address honoring Mary G. White, given by Reverend M.S. Kennedy, “Mary White Rest Room,” *Pulaski Citizen*, February 4, 1915, page 1, Microfilm roll, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Pulaski 20, *Pulaski Citizen*, Aug 7, 1913 – Feb 3, 1916.

⁴⁴ “More about Building..” *Northfield News*, September 21, 1972, page 1, Northfield Historical Society, Northfield, Minnesota, “Northfield Organizations/Clubs/ YMCA” resource folder.

⁴⁵ “Cows, Colleges, Contentment, Spell Success for Northfield and Its Famous Community Club;” “Do You Remember,” *The Northfield News*, May 12, 2010
<http://www.southernminn.com/northfield_news/archives/article_7390e11a-d2e3-5b0d-9ced-6276b974a1a5.html> (last accessed January 28, 2013).

spectrum of women utilized the space together. The rest room was a place where the rural woman could socialize with friends while her husband was at the courthouse, but it was also a space where the members of a literary club could hold their monthly club meeting, where women who were visiting from out of town could socialize with local women, and where the woman working down the street at the local grocery could enjoy her lunch break. This idea of many different groups of women, from both town and country, utilizing the rest room space together, achieved the goals that many advocates of community buildings purported, albeit in a single-gender space.

The Northfield Community Hall, as well as the ladies rest room, operated successfully for several decades. Gradually, however, the need for additional space for city functions appears to have taken priority over the need for a ladies rest room. According to local journalist Maggie Lee, “although the building had for several years been used entirely for community gatherings and functions and for the rest rooms, it had gradually been taken over by city departments until it was almost solely used as city hall. The area of the fought-for rest rooms was dramatically reduced.”⁴⁶ Jeffrey notes that there were several “ad hoc remodeling projects” that occurred by 1958. On the first floor, officials expanded clerical and administrative space, necessitating the relocation of the City Council chambers from the first floor to the second. This caused a chain reaction that led to the removal of many of the features of the Community Club space, including the billiard room, to make space for the City Council chambers and municipal court.⁴⁷ He states that the main floor was “again remodeled in 1963.”⁴⁸ Other sources

⁴⁶ Lee, “Do You Remember? NAG Gets Nod from City Council.”

⁴⁷ Jeffrey, “The Northfield Guild Hall,” 7-8.

note that the police office took over the ladies rest room lounge area.⁴⁹ Additional evidence indicates that, while rest room matron Cecilia Cziapa retired May 1 1960, after 41 years of service, a new matron, Alberta Olberg, was hired, indicating that the rest room continued to remain in service until at least late-1960.⁵⁰ A likely scenario, therefore, is that the police office moved into the lounge area at some point between late-1960 and 1963, causing the lounge area of the ladies rest room to be discontinued. Officials continued to use the building primarily for city offices until the late-1970s, when the City Council relocated to a recently-vacated school building, leaving the fate of the Northfield Community Hall in question.⁵¹

In the last decades of the twentieth century, members of the Northfield community found new use for the Community Hall. In 1978, the Northfield Arts Guild leased the building from the city, and when its lease on the building expired in 1988, the Guild conducted a capital campaign and purchased and renovated the building.⁵² The building is currently home to the Northfield Arts Guild. The former ladies rest room lounge area is currently the gift shop, and the toilet area contains the Guild's box office.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Street, "The History of the Building that is to become 'The Center for the Arts,'" 4; Lee, "First outstate YMCA was in Northfield."

⁵⁰ "Do You Remember," *The Northfield News*, May 12, 2010; "Do You Remember," *The Northfield News*, April 14, 2010
<http://www.southernminn.com/northfield_news/archives/article_ebb6aab2-e0bb-5423-9ae1-f3ae2be98bfc.html>(last accessed January 28, 2013).

⁵¹ Jeffrey, "The Northfield Guild Hall," 8.

⁵² Ibid.; "Arts is the Soul of Northfield's Being," *Northfield Sesquicentennial*, 33-34, Northfield Historical Society, Northfield, Minnesota, "Buildings NAG #2" resource folder.

The Northfield Arts Guild has done an excellent job of preserving the historical integrity of the space, and one can envision how women would have utilized it so many years ago.

The Northfield Ladies Rest Room features many of the characteristics of other successful Progressive Era ladies rest rooms throughout the country, including both lounge and toilet facilities, a matron, and the determined efforts of local women to ensure the physical and financial maintenance of the facility. However, the establishment of the rest room in a mixed-use community development, as well as the large spectrum of women, especially professional working women, that utilized the rest room distinguish the Northfield Ladies Rest Room from many others.

The story of the Northfield Ladies Rest Room is one that cannot be told without understanding the unique and close relationship that existed between the town and rural communities of Northfield. The history of the establishment of the rest room is inextricably connected to the successful joint commercial and community development in Northfield. Citizens of Northfield and the surrounding countryside understood that commercial and community development would benefit all residents, and the establishment of the Northfield Community Hall, with ladies rest room, was the physical representation of this.

CHAPTER VI

ACHIEVEING THE IDEAL LADIES REST ROOM: LEWISBURG, TENNESSEE, AS
A CASE STUDY

In Lewisburg men from all over the county have the courthouse with all the public offices as rest rooms. Here they have good fires in the winter and the coal is paid for by the county and the rooms are cared for by officials paid by the county, and the men feel at home with usually some one to talk to and pass off the time pleasantly. There often they write letters and wait for their wives and daughters to get through shopping. There are long tables upon which occasionally a man reclines when he feels bad. There is always a checker-board to be used by those inclined to such pleasures. There is plenty of ice water in the summer and a toilet for their use and even a clock to strike the hour, and tell them their wives and daughters are 'waiting' for them.

But where are they waiting? If they are at home they are no doubt in comfort, and treated as the good women of this county deserve. But if they are in Lewisburg, unless they have money enough to go to a hotel or have a special friend living in town, they are compelled to wait in a most uncomfortable condition. They must ask for ice water in summer, and for a stove in the winter; they have no toilet or dressing room, they have no place to meet a friend; no place to recline if they are not well; no place to lay the baby when it wants to sleep; no comfortable place to set and rest.¹

What was the proper recourse for such an uncomfortable predicament for the rural woman who came into town with her children? Many early twentieth-century women and men, including W. M. Carter, owner of the *Lewisburg Tribune* and author of the above editorial, felt that the construction of public rest rooms for ladies and their children was the answer to this problem. Not unlike thousands of citizens in hundreds of other rural market towns throughout the country in the early-twentieth century, the citizens of

¹ W. M. Carter, Editorial, *Lewisburg Tribune*, September 26, 1913, page 2, Microfilm roll, Marshall County Memorial Library, Lewisburg Tribune, 1912-1913, Roll # T6.

the city of Lewisburg, located in Marshall County, Tennessee, constructed a ladies rest room largely for the benefit of the rural women of Marshall County. Although it took over a decade from the time that proposals for a ladies rest room first appeared in local newspapers and the county court records to the time that the permanent rest room was constructed and opened in 1924, the intrepid citizens of Lewisburg and Marshall County eventually prevailed, and the rest room remained as a functioning and viable institution for almost eighty years. In some ways, the history of the establishment and functions of the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room were similar to other ladies rest rooms that were created throughout the country in the early-twentieth century. In other ways, however, including that it was built specifically and solely as a ladies rest room, that it had all four functions recommended by the U.S.D.A., and that it had full public financial support, the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room is the ultimate example of what the ladies rest room could be.

Marshall County, located in southern middle Tennessee, was established in 1836 and formed from portions of Giles, Bedford, Lincoln, and Maury Counties.² Lewisburg, the county seat, was named for Captain Meriweather Lewis of the Lewis and Clark expedition to explore the Columbia and Mississippi Rivers. The town was platted in 1836, and the first business opened on the town square in 1837.³ By the 1920s, Marshall

² Carroll Van West, "Marshall County," *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*, Online Edition (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2012), <http://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entry.php?rec=839> (accessed September 25, 2012); Marshall County Historical Society, *Marshall County, Tennessee: A Sesquicentennial History* (Marceline, MO: Walsworth Press, 1986), 1.

³ Marshall County Historical Society, *Marshall County, Tennessee: A Sesquicentennial History*, ii, 17.

was a largely rural and agricultural county, with a population of approximately 17,000.⁴ Dairying was the primary agricultural enterprise, and several facilities were developed in Marshall County to support the industry in the 1920s, including the Borden Southern Company Milk Plant in 1927, the Marshall County Creamery in 1928, and a U.S.D.A. Dairy Experiment Station in 1929.⁵

Citizens of Lewisburg expressed an interest in establishing a ladies rest room as early as 1912. The owner of the *Lewisburg Tribune*, W. M. Carter, consistently published editorials, as well as testimonials from women in nearby counties who had already established successful ladies public rest rooms, from June 1912 until December 1913. On several occasions, he published four or five such editorials and articles in a single month. Although it is unknown whether Carter initiated the idea to establish a ladies rest room in Lewisburg, according to his frequent postings in the *Tribune*, it appears as though by the summer of 1913 there was an organized group of both female and male citizens who were advocating for the founding of a ladies rest room. The *Tribune* noted that on August 7, a number of women of Lewisburg met with Mrs. W. K. Kercheval, whose husband, with James Nance McCord, was part-owner of *The Marshall Gazette*, to discuss procuring money to establish a ladies rest room and, several days

⁴ Richard L. Forstall, ed. "Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900-1990," Population Division, U.S. Bureau of the Census, Washington, D.C., www.census.gov/population/wwwcensusdata/cencounts/files/tn190090.txt, March 27, 1995 (accessed September 24, 2012).

⁵ Marshall County Historical Society, *Marshall County, Tennessee: A Sesquicentennial History*, 39-46.

later, on August 12, the ladies elected a committee of three prominent local men, including Carter, to go before the county court to advocate for the rest room.⁶

The establishment of a ladies rest room was clearly an issue of importance for both newspapermen and, presumably, many citizens of Marshall County in 1913, for Carter and his *Tribune* were not alone in their ardent support of the rest room. James Nance McCord, county court justice and owner of *The Marshall Gazette* also supported the formation of a ladies rest room in Lewisburg and, like Carter, voiced his support through his newspaper. For four months, from July through October of 1913, multiple editorials appeared in the *Gazette* calling for the establishment of a ladies rest room. In what might have been a conflict of interest, McCord, who was himself a justice on the county court, and Carter, were elected by the abovementioned group of women in August of 1913 to advocate for the establishment of a ladies rest room before the county court.

These efforts appear to have been successful for, on October 6, 1913, the Marshall County quarterly court appointed a committee composed of Noble C. Hill, S. F Phillips, J. F. Lane, and J. N. McCord, to “investigate and see if a suitable place can be purchased near the square and the probable cost of same and to report to the January term of this court 1914.”⁷ The committee was not ready to make a report in January, but in April they recommended the T. C. Black property as a preferred location for the rest room.

Although the property could be purchased for the sum of \$2000, the committee did not

⁶ “In Interest of Rest Room,” *Lewisburg Tribune*, August 8, 1913, page 1, roll # T6; “Rest Room Meeting,” *Lewisburg Tribune*, August 15, 1913, page 1, roll # T6.

⁷ Minutes of the Marshall County Quarterly Court, October 6, 1913, page 26, Marshall County Memorial Library, Microfilm roll Marshall/County Court, volume JJ October 1913-July 1916, TSLA Roll # Marshall – A -2168.

recommend purchase at this time. G. W. Ewing made a motion to purchase the property, however, J. C. McKnight moved that the motion to purchase be tabled, and this motion, carrying a majority vote, prevailed.⁸

The establishment of a ladies rest room was not discussed in the Marshall County quarterly court again until a year later, in April 1915, when it was again tabled.⁹ In July of that year, however, another motion was raised to purchase property for a ladies rest room, this time the W. J. Whitsett lot, for \$2000, but this motion was tabled as well. The vote was close, with seven justices voting to table the motion and six voting to purchase the property. Interestingly, this recording of the court minutes reveals who voted to purchase and who voted to table and both Noble C. Hill and S. F. Phillips, who were on the 1913 committee that originally investigated the possibility of purchasing land for the rest room voted to table the motion, while J. N. McCord voted to purchase the Whitsett property. The vote of J. F. Lane is not recorded, and it is likely he was no longer a member of the county quarterly court at this time.

While it must have been difficult for the advocates of the ladies rest room to see the issue continuing to languish for years in the county court, they were undeterred. Although unconfirmed in the historical record, those who supported the rest room effort must have continued to hold meetings and voice their desire publically for a ladies rest room throughout the 1910s, or else the issue likely would not have been continually revisited in the county quarterly court. Similarly, it would appear that the majority of the

⁸ Minutes, April 6, 1914, page 120, vol. JJ.

⁹ Minutes April 5, 1915, page 355, vol. JJ; Lynda Potts and Robyn Cain, "The Legacy of Lewisburg's Ladies Rest Room," *Marshall County Historical Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (Winter 2008-2009): 65.

court justices felt that the ladies rest room was a cause of some merit, for the votes concerning the rest room were close.

On October 2, 1916, the court justices showed their support for a ladies rest room in Lewisburg when they voted to appropriate \$300 “for the purpose of renting and assisting in equipping a rest room for ladies in the town of Lewisburg for the next 12 months.”¹⁰ Again, Noble C. Hill and S. F. Phillips voted against the motion, while J. N. McCord voted in favor of the appropriation. This motion and affirmative vote indicates that, while perhaps the court justices were not necessarily in favor of appropriating funds to purchase a property for a ladies rest room, the majority of the justices supported the idea of providing a place specifically for the comfort of women and their children in town.

The advocates of the rest room were able to rent a room and establish a ladies rest room in 1916. Both newspaper accounts and county court minutes indicate that the women of the Civic Club operated and maintained the rest room, while the county court funded the monthly rental of the room. In a November 1916 article in the *Gazette* titled “Rest Room Now Secured,” the author notes that members of the Civic Club and county court representatives met at the Marshall County courthouse on November 4th to select a location for the rest room. Together they chose “a four-room apartment over Scott Bros., property of Mrs. Alice Collins,” and announced that the rest room would open to the public on Tuesday, November 14th, with Monday, November 13th set as a “shower day” in which all citizens were encouraged to bring a donation of chairs, tables, rugs, and toilet

¹⁰ Minutes of the Marshall County Quarterly Court, October 2, 1916, page 73, Marshall County Memorial Library, Microfilm roll Marshall/County Court, volume KK July 1916-June 1919, TSLA Roll # Marshall – A -2169.

articles.¹¹ A year later, on October 1, 1917, the Marshall County quarterly court justices approved a motion to appropriate \$350 dollars for the ladies rest room, to be paid in monthly installments of about \$26 to Mrs. J. L. Marshall, president of the Civic Club, implying that this arrangement, the work of the women of the Civic Club, and the rest room itself, was successful.¹²

For approximately two years the women of the Civic Club, with financial assistance from the county, provided a rest room for ladies in this rented location in town. Then, in October 1918, came a turning point. The county quarterly court justices appropriated \$87.50 to be paid in monthly installments of approximately \$29 to Mrs. Walter Drake, the rest room matron, to defray the expenses of operating the rest room for three months. At this time, the court also appointed a committee composed of W. U. Collins, Noble C. Hill, and J. C. McKnight to investigate and report to the next term whether the rest room was being “patronized sufficiently and is of such service as to make its continuation advisable.”¹³

Although the county court minutes do not recount the report of the committee, they must have discovered that the ladies rest room was highly successful for, in January 1919, the court justices voted 9-5 against appropriating \$350 for the continued maintenance of the rest room in the rented location and instead voted unanimously to appropriate \$1000 to construct a ladies rest room in the courthouse courtyard. A

¹¹ “Rest Room Now Secured,” *The Marshall Gazette*, November 10, 1916, page 1, Microfilm roll, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Lewisburg 5, *Marshall Gazette*, [1871 -], May 2, 1913 – November 17, 1916.

¹² Potts and Cain, “The Legacy of Lewisburg’s Ladies Rest Room,” 66; Minutes, October 1, 1917, page 265, vol. KK.

¹³ Minutes, October 7, 1918, page 486, vol. KK.

committee of three justices was selected to devise the plans for the building and oversee its construction.¹⁴ While it is unknown whether the opinions of the matron or other women who advocated or utilized the ladies rest room were considered, no women were included on this committee.

Unfortunately, the county court chose not to make provisions for the operation of the ladies rest room while they were devising plans for a rest room in a new, permanent location. They denied the \$350 appropriation to the ladies of the Civic Club to continue the operation of the rest room in the rented location. A January 1919 *Tribune* article stated that “on account of the County Court refusing to continue the Rest Room appropriations the ladies of the town will continue to operate the rest room for another month. After that time it will be closed unless further funds are available.”¹⁵ It appears as though the rented rest room operated by the Civic Club likely closed at this time.

In April 1919, the committee selected to develop plans and supervise construction of the rest room issued a report. They selected a location in the northeast corner of the courtyard between the sidewalk and the Confederate monument and gave the contract for construction to R. E. Chunn, who bid \$1600. However, as Chunn began work at the site, “some opposition developed, especially among the town people.”¹⁶ Therefore, the work was delayed until the next meeting of the county quarterly court, in April. At this meeting, perhaps in light of the opposition of some town citizens to placing a building on

¹⁴ Minutes, January 6, 1919, page 552-553, vol. KK.

¹⁵ “Rest Room Opened Month Longer,” *Lewisburg Tribune*, January 17, 1919, page 1, Microfilm roll, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Lewisburg 7, *Lewisburg Tribune*, [1899 -], June 1, 1917 – Sept 24, 1920.

¹⁶ Minutes, April 7, 1919, page 596, vol. KK; Potts and Cain, “The Legacy of Lewisburg’s Ladies Rest Room,” 66.

the courthouse property, the court justices entertained several other possibilities for location of the ladies rest room. These included a club room that could be purchased from J. L. Sanders for \$2500, which they considered a good price, as well as a proposition to utilize the chancery court room in the courthouse as a ladies rest room by relocating the chancery clerk upstairs and converting two upstairs rooms for the clerk. The second was the option favored among the justices, and they voted unanimously that if it were possible to make the conversion for \$750, this should be done.¹⁷

A month later, in May 1919, a new rest room committee was formed, and was reaffirmed in July of the same year.¹⁸ At this point, there is no more information about the ladies rest room included in the Marshall County quarterly court minutes for the next four years, and it is unclear what became of the fledgling ladies rest room during this time. In “The Legacy of Lewisburg’s Ladies Rest Room,” Lynda Potts and Robyn Cain assert that “the rest room continued to exist because the Study Club minutes make reference to the library and the rest room attendant during these years.”¹⁹ Perhaps during these four years private contributors maintained the ladies rest room and it was located in a rented facility with a local library. It appears, however, that from January 1919, until July 1924, the county quarterly court did not help to finance the operation of the ladies rest room, and ceased to be concerned with it.

¹⁷ Minutes, April 7, 1919, page 596, vol. KK.

¹⁸ Minutes, May 5, 1919, page 613, vol. KK; Minutes of the Marshall County Quarterly Court, July 7, 1919, page 36, Marshall County Memorial Library, Microfilm roll Marshall/County Court, volume LL June 1919- September 1922, TSLA Roll # Marshall – A -2169.

¹⁹ Potts and Cain, “The Legacy of Lewisburg’s Ladies Rest Room,” 66.

In April 1923, for reasons unknown, the topic of the ladies rest room reappears in the Marshall County quarterly court minutes, with the justices voting to appropriate \$1250, or what sufficient amount was required, to construct a ladies rest room on property that was already owned by the county. A committee was appointed that included W. P. McClure as chairman, Noble C. Hill, J. N. McCord, Mrs. W. A. Haynes, wife of the county agricultural agent, Mrs. Ross A. Woods, an active member of the community club and PTA organizer in nearby Farmington, and Mrs. C. S. Sanders, marking the first time that the justices of the county court directly included women in their decisions concerning the ladies rest room.²⁰

From here, the construction and establishment of a permanent ladies rest room in Lewisburg proceeded at a rapid pace. In January 1924, the site for the rest room was selected. It was determined that the rest room would be constructed on a lot that had been purchased by the county court for \$1650 from P. D. Houston in 1905. Half of the lot was already the site of the Marshall County jail, and the court appropriated \$5000 to construct the ladies rest room on the remainder of this lot.²¹ Potts and Cain note that this property was adjacent to the club building in which the rest room had been previously housed.²² By April 1924, the contract for construction had been let to J. L. Sanders for

²⁰ Minutes of the Marshall County Quarterly Court, April 2, 1923, page 154, Marshall County Memorial Library, Microfilm roll Marshall/County Court, volume MM September 1922-May 1925, TSLA Roll # Marshall – A -2170; Marshall County Historical Society, *Marshall County, Tennessee: A Sesquicentennial History*, 43, 164, 169.

²¹ Minutes, January 7, 1924, page 314, vol. MM; Potts and Cain, “The Legacy of Lewisburg’s Ladies Rest Room,” 66.

²² Potts and Cain, “The Legacy of Lewisburg’s Ladies Rest Room,” 66.

\$3571.50.²³ In July of the same year, the rest room committee reported to the county court that the rest room was completed, with approximately \$492 of the \$5000 appropriation remaining. The rest room committee suggested that the remaining funds be utilized to provide furnishings for the rest room, to which the court justices unanimously agreed. The court justices also appropriated \$250 to be used as a one-year salary for a rest room matron.²⁴

The permanent ladies rest room for which many women and men in Lewisburg and Marshall County had fought so hard is a one-story brick building. Its design is Colonial revival-inspired, with a prominent cornice and Doric columns on the facade. The building has a large wrap-around porch on the west and south elevations. On the west elevation, a set of five concrete steps leads to the porch and front entrance to the rest room (Figure 6.1). The porch, and Doric columns, continue around the south elevation, where there is a door that leads into an alcove where the two-stall bathroom was located (Figures 6.2 and 6.3). This elevation also features a door that leads downstairs into the former kitchen. The west and south elevations feature original twelve-over-twelve double-hung windows. The east elevation features original six-over-six double-hung windows and a replacement door on the basement level and eight-over-eight double-hung replacement windows on the upper floor (Figure 6.4). The north elevation has been recently reconstructed with new red brick (Figure 6.5). Originally, this wall was connected to a building that directly adjoined it. In 2003, when this building was torn

²³ Minutes, April 7, 1924, vol. MM; Minutes, July 7, 1924, page 264, vol. MM; "Rest Room Contract Let to J. L. Sanders," *Lewisburg Tribune*, April 3, 1924, page 1, Microfilm roll, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Lewisburg 8, *Lewisburg Tribune*, [1899 -], Oct 1, 1920 – July 8, 1926.

²⁴ Minutes. July, 7, 1924, page 399, vol. MM.

down to create space for a new jail, the contractor did not realize that the building shared a common wall with the ladies rest room. The structural integrity of the north wall of the rest room was compromised, and it had to be reconstructed.



Figure 6.1 *West elevation, Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, image by author, April 2011.*



Figure 6.2 *Southwest elevation, Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, image by author, April 2011.*



Figure 6.3 *South elevation porch, showing doors to alcove and former kitchen, Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, image by author, April 2011.*



Figure 6.4 *East elevation, Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, image by author, February 2012.*



Figure 6.5 *North elevation, Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, image by author, April 2011.*

Upon entering the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room from the west elevation entrance, the rest room contains a large, approximately nineteen by twenty-two foot front room (Figure 6.6). This room has a large fireplace and mantle and historically served as the actual rest room – the space where women and their children could relax and feel comfortable while in town (Figure 6.7). This room historically had a bed and ample seating room.²⁵ There is a doorway at the east end of this room that leads to a small alcove. This area contains a door that one could enter from the south side of the building, if a person only wished to use the toilet. This alcove area also contains a closet and the toilets (Figures 6.8 and 6.9). In the rear of the interior is an approximately sixteen by twenty foot room that historically served as the bedroom and living quarters of the woman who served as rest room matron (Figures 6.10, 6.11, and 6.12).



Figure 6.6 *View of the East elevation of the West room of the recently renovated (2011) Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, image by author, Feb. 2012.*

²⁵ Potts and Cain, “The Legacy of Lewisburg’s Ladies Rest Room,” 68.



Figure 6.7 Northwest elevation, West room, Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, image by author, Feb. 2012.



Figure 6.8 North elevation of the toilet area of the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, image by author, Feb. 2012. Note the original signage that historically hung outside of the building. The white shutter on the left was one of the original bathroom stall doors.



Figure 6.9 Furniture piece that was original to the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, currently located in toilet area, image by author, Feb. 2012.



Figure 6.10 Southeast elevation, East room, Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, image by author, Feb. 2012.



Figure 6.11 Northwest elevation, East room, Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, image by author, Feb. 2012.

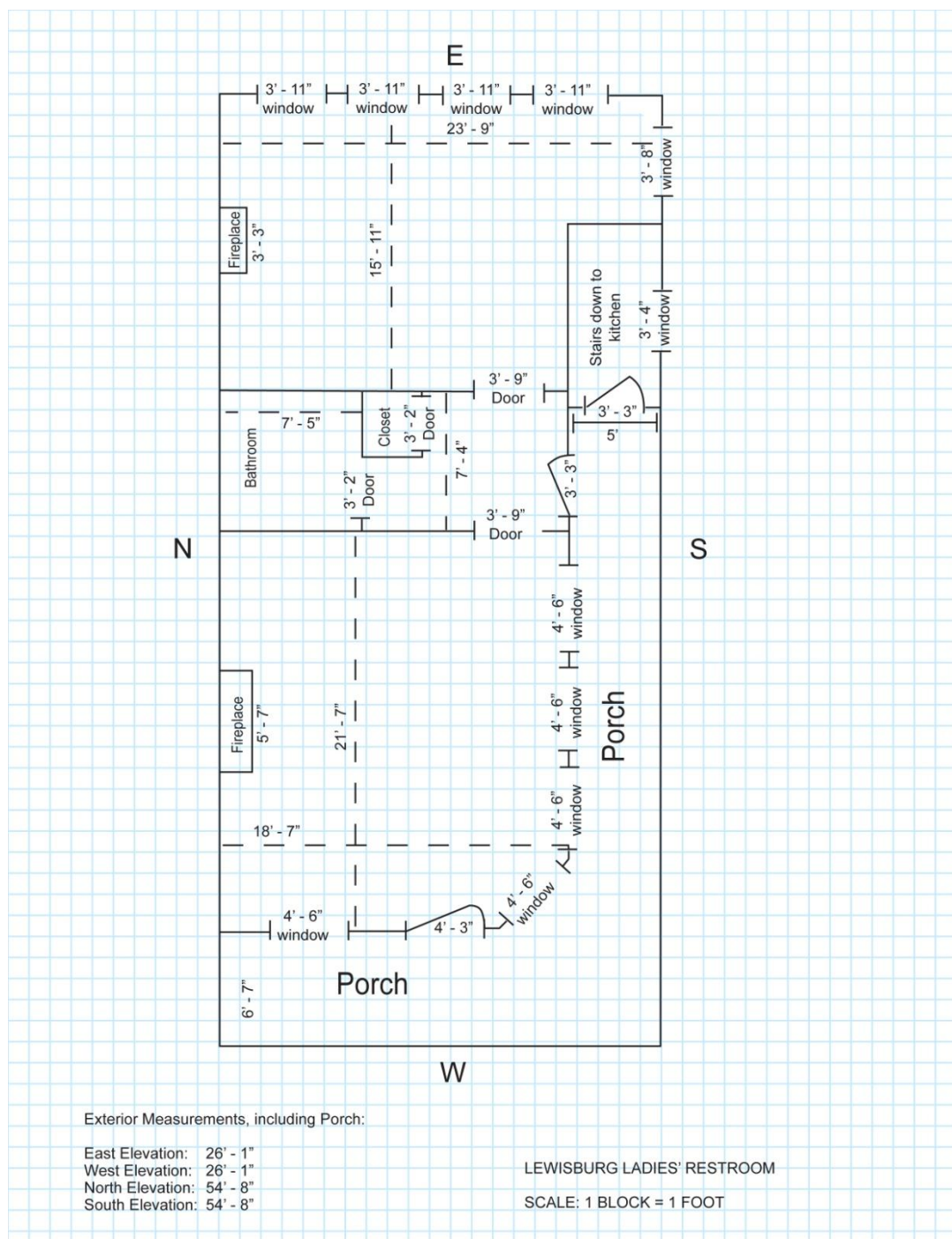


Figure 6.12 Scale drawing of the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, 2011. Drawing courtesy of Allegra Print and Imaging, Nashville, based on measurements and figures drawn by the author.

Similar to women who used ladies rest room facilities in Pulaski, Tennessee, and Newberry, South Carolina, Lewisburg women who visited the ladies rest room participated in home improvement activities. The new rest room was dedicated and presented to the public on July 28, 1924, to coincide with Marshall County Home Improvement Day. On this day, women from home improvement and demonstration clubs throughout Marshall County came to Lewisburg to hear a program presented by the Marshall County Home Demonstration Clubs. This program included singing, lectures on what local home demonstration club women were doing throughout the district and the state, the dedication of the ladies rest room, a dress parade, and visits to local stores, whose merchants were encouraged to display items in keeping with the home improvement theme.²⁶ In choosing to officially dedicate and open the ladies rest room on Home Improvement Day, officials recognized the importance of home improvement work to the women of Marshall County and wisely chose a day that they knew many rural women from throughout the county would be in Lewisburg.

The Marshall County quarterly court minutes reveal that both farm and home demonstration activities were of enough success in the county to merit funding the salaries of farm and home demonstration agents for several years. Although a motion to hire a farm demonstration agent for the county was tabled in 1917 and failed in early 1919, and the court bluntly “refused” a request for \$200 toward ladies demonstration work in 1918, by mid-1919 the county court had changed its tune, appropriating \$800 for

²⁶ Potts and Cain, “The Legacy of Lewisburg’s Ladies Rest Room,” 67; “Club Day to be Quite an Event,” *The Marshall Gazette*, June 26, 1924, page 1, Microfilm roll, Marshall County Memorial Library, Marshall County Gazette, 1923-1925, roll # G7; “Home Improvement Day Soon,” *The Marshall Gazette* June 19, 1924, page 1, roll # G7.

farm demonstration work and \$400 for home demonstration work.²⁷ In July 1920, the county court appropriated \$1200 and \$800 to hire farm and home demonstration agents, respectively.²⁸ In 1921 the appropriation for the home demonstration agent was raised to \$960, and so high had demonstration work risen in the eyes of the county court, especially in such a short period of time, that they elected a representative to send to Knoxville to attend a farm and home economics meeting that June.²⁹ Over the next several years, the county court continued to fund at least a portion of the salary of the county farm and home demonstration agents at the rate of \$1200 for the farm agent and \$960 for the home agent.³⁰ Although it seems as though the court made no appropriations for farm or home agents in 1924, which might explain why it appears as though a coalition of county demonstration clubs organized the 1924 meeting in Lewisburg, at the end of 1925 the county court reenlisted the appropriation for a farm agent, at a rate of \$1500 a year, and in the beginning of 1926 re-appropriated \$1200 for a home agent.³¹ The service of these agents continued for several more years, until the Great Depression meant a loss of funding by the county court.³² In 1934, the county

²⁷ Minutes, July 2, 1917, page 221, vol. KK; Minutes, April 7, 1919, page 595, vol. KK; Minutes, January 7, 1918, page 303, vol. KK; Minutes, July 7, 1919, page 34, vol. LL.

²⁸ Minutes, July 5, 1920, page 218-219, vol. LL.

²⁹ Minutes, July 4, 1921, page 392, vol. LL; Minutes, April 4, 1921, page 378, vol. LL.

³⁰ Minutes, July 4, 1921, page 392, vol. LL; Minutes, July 3, 1922, page 571, vol. LL; Minutes, July 2, 1923, page 183, vol. MM.

³¹ Minutes of the Marshall County Quarterly Court, October 5, 1925, page 74-75, Marshall County Memorial Library, Microfilm roll Marshall/County Court, volume NN June 1925-December 1927, TSLA Roll # Marshall – A -2170; Minutes, January 4, 1926, page 112, vol NN.

³² Minutes, October 4, 1926, page 288-289, vol. NN; Minutes of the Marshall County Quarterly Court, October 1, 1928, page 78, Marshall County Memorial Library, Microfilm roll Marshall/County Court, volume I January 1928-March 1934, TSLA Roll # Marshall – A -2173.

quarterly court again appropriated funding for a county farm agent, and approved an appropriation for a home demonstration agent in 1936.³³ The county continued to fund at least a portion of these agents' salaries until the late-1930s.

The citizens of Marshall County relied extensively upon both farm and home agents, and valued their work. This is exemplified in dozens of newspaper articles written concerning the work of the agents in both the *Tribune* and the *Gazette* from 1919 to the mid-1920s. For several years, the *Gazette* printed the weekly itinerary of the home improvement agent, as well as notes from home demonstration meetings, oftentimes on the front page, in an effort to inform county women of the work of the agent and the various home improvement clubs that she helped to facilitate.³⁴ Likewise, the *Tribune* printed many articles on the work of both the home and the farm agent, including periodic reports written by the agents detailing their work in the county.³⁵

In his research on the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, Carroll Van West links the role of these agricultural reformers and the progressive ideals that they advanced to the establishment of the rest room. West asserts that reformers encouraged “a consumer

³³ Minutes, January term 1934, page 584, vol. I; Minutes of the Marshall County Quarterly Court, April 13, 1936, Marshall County Memorial Library, Microfilm roll Marshall/County Court, volume II April 1934-October 1938, TSLA Roll # Marshall – A -2173.

³⁴A few examples include “Home Demonstration Notes,” *The Marshall Gazette*, April 10, 1924, page 1, Microfilm roll, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Lewisburg 8, Marshall Gazette, [1871 -], Sept 8, 1922 – June 25, 1925; “Itinerary of Home Demonstration Agent May 15 to 20,” *The Marshall Gazette*, May 16, 1922, page 5, Microfilm roll Tennessee State Library and Archives, Lewisburg 7, Marshall Gazette, [1871-], Oct 3, 1919 – Sept 1, 1922; “Home Demonstration Club,” *The Marshall Gazette*, June 30, 1922, page 1, Microfilm roll Tennessee State Library and Archives, Lewisburg 7, Marshall Gazette, [1871-], Oct 3, 1919 – Sept 1, 1922.

³⁵ A few examples include “Home Demonstration News,” *Lewisburg Tribune*, April 28, 1922, page 1, Microfilm roll, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Lewisburg 8, Lewisburg Tribune, [1899 -], Oct 1, 1920 – July 8, 1926; “Report of Our Home Demonstration Agent,” *Lewisburg Tribune*, July 16, 1920, page 1, Microfilm roll, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Lewisburg 7, Lewisburg Tribune, [1899 -], June 1, 1917 – Sept. 24, 1920;.

ethic among rural women” and supported the establishment of a rest room with the understanding that if rural women had a place near the town square where they could feel comfortable, they would come into town more often to shop. Furthermore, the rest room also provided a place for reformers, “through conversation, magazines, and other items available at the rest room, to convert farm women to the reform cause.”³⁶ The fact that the presentation of the ladies rest room was timed to occur on one of the few days of the year that a great number of rural women would be in town, and that this day was a Home Improvement Day, speaks not only to the importance of demonstration and club activities in many of these women’s lives, but also to the importance rural reformers in the lives of the women, and of these rural women and their purchasing power to the prosperity of the city of Lewisburg.

After the opening and dedication of the rest room, there is little information pertaining to it in the Marshall County quarterly court minutes. The county court continued to fund at least a portion of the salary of the rest room matron for decades. The last matron to serve was Mrs. Christine Evans, who was matron for almost twenty-nine years, until 2002.³⁷

Until the late-1970s, the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room was a racialized space, as no African American women were allowed to enter. Rural African American women in

³⁶ Carroll Van West, “The Ladies Rest Room: Gender and Space in the Rural South, 1910-1990” (paper presented at the Women in Historic Preservation Conference, Atlanta, GA, March 23, 1996).

³⁷ Potts and Cain, “The Legacy of Lewisburg’s Ladies Rest Room,” 70.

Marshall County were not provided with a rest room of their own, and had to be content with the segregated toilet located in the courthouse, or choose not to come to town.³⁸

After 1970, the county court discussed closing the rest room on numerous occasions. Some felt that, as the landscape of the city of Lewisburg and Marshall County had changed, the rest room was a relic of the past; however, local citizens rallied to support the rest room, and it escaped closure in the 1970s. When the county court again proposed to close the rest room in the mid-1990s, citizens again rallied in support of the building and worked successfully to get it nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 1996. When Mrs. Evans, the matron, passed away in 2002, the doors to the rest room were closed, seemingly for good. Efforts to attain grant funding in the mid-2000s were unsuccessful, and the building continued to deteriorate. In 2007, however, ownership of the building was transferred from Marshall County to the City of Lewisburg, and the Lewisburg City Council quickly appropriated \$30,000 from its general fund for the restoration of the rest room.³⁹

Today, the restoration is complete, and the building currently hosts meetings that pertain to city business, with tentative plans to make the building more accessible to the general public in the near future. The restoration of the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room is largely sympathetic and those responsible made judicious efforts to preserve existing historical materials, as well as repurpose some of the original rest room features, where possible. The front door, wood floors, and front room fireplace and windows are all original to the building and have been successfully preserved. The ceiling had to be

³⁸ Potts and Cain, "The Legacy of Lewisburg's Ladies Rest Room," 70; Minutes, October 3, 1921, page 458, vol. LL.

³⁹ Potts and Cain, "The Legacy of Lewisburg's Ladies Rest Room," 71-73.

replaced throughout the building, as did the windows in the rear room. With the exception of anachronistic crown molding and recessed lighting in the rear room, the restoration maintains the historical integrity of the building. Additionally, some materials original to the building have been successfully preserved and repurposed, including the original “Ladies Rest Room” sign that originally hung outside above the front door and now serves as an art piece in the toilet area, as well as two shutters that originally served as doors to the toilet stalls and now frame either side of a full length mirror in the toilet area (Figure 6.8). An antique vanity original to the Rest Room has been fitted with a modern sink (Figure 6.9). These sympathetic restorations and successful repurposings allow the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room to maintain a high degree of historical integrity.

During the same time that the citizens of Lewisburg and Marshall County were advocating for the construction of a permanent ladies rest room in the Lewisburg town center, it was not lost on some journalists that an impetus to establish public rest rooms for ladies was spreading throughout the country. As has been noted, Anne M. Evans, an investigator in women’s rural organizations, wrote “Rest Rooms for Women in Marketing Centers,” which was published in the U.S.D.A’s *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture* in 1917. Evans discussed the establishment of several ladies rest rooms throughout the nation, including who was involved in their establishment, how and in what types of spaces these facilities were developed, how rest rooms were funded, and the principle functions of ladies rest rooms.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Anne M. Evans, “Rest Rooms for Women in Marketing Centers,” *Yearbook of the United States Department of Agriculture, 1917* (Washington, D. C.: Government Printing Office, 1918).

Interestingly, in several ways, the establishment of the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room does not conform to the formation of the rest rooms that Evans mentioned in her *U.S.D.A. Yearbook* piece. Evans did not include the building type of the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room in her article. Throughout her essay, Evans discussed the formation of ladies rest rooms in county courthouses, near railroad stations where the waiting rooms were thought to be inadequate, in libraries, in the offices of county agents and other local public authorities, and in public and private markets and dry-goods or grocery stores. She did not, however, ever mention the possibility of constructing a free-standing building for the specific purpose of establishing a ladies rest room. Evans noted that “aroused community interest frequently results in securing a vacant room in the town hall, county courthouse, public market, or other public building.”⁴¹ All of the specific examples of ladies rest rooms that Evans utilized are incorporated within a portion of an already existing building.

Additionally, although one of the subheadings in Evans’s article is “Financing the Rest Room Depends Upon Women at First,” and she stated that “a rest room may be financed wholly or partially by the women’s organizations until arrangements are made to meet the expenses through public appropriations,” it appears as though, almost from the beginning, those involved in the establishment of the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room sought public financing for the facility. An August 8, 1913, article in the *Lewisburg Tribune* described a meeting in which several women discussed the establishment of a ladies rest room and how it could be funded. An article published in the *Tribune* several

⁴¹ Ibid, 218.

days later, on August 15, noted that “at the meeting Tuesday afternoon of the ladies who were interested in the Ladies Rest Room Messrs. J. N. McCord, J. A. Loyd, and W. M. Carter were appointed a committee to go before the county court and ascertain what the court would contribute toward its establishment.”⁴² It appears as though the women wasted no time in seeking out public sources of funding for the establishment and support of the rest room.

There are some similarities, however, between the formation of some of the rest rooms that Evans discussed in her *U.S.D.A. Yearbook* article and the establishment of the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room. Evans specifically noted the importance of the county agent as an advocate for the ladies rest room.⁴³ While it is not completely clear what, if any, role the Marshall County home demonstration agent played in the establishment of the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room, there was a strong connection between the establishment of the rest room and home improvement and demonstration work in Lewisburg. In the early-1920s in Marshall County, farm and home demonstration agents had been funded by the county court for several years and were established members of the local community. Likewise, agitation for a ladies rest room was at its apogee during this same time. That the presentation and dedication of the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room occurred on Marshall County Home Improvement Day is also strong evidence of the close connection between improvement and demonstration work in the county and the ladies rest room.

⁴² “Rest Room Meeting,” *Lewisburg Tribune*, August 15, 1913, page 1, roll # T6.

⁴³ Evans, 218-219.

Additionally, Evans stated that “the rest room may become the center for various community activities,” including a rural civic library, a woman’s exchange, a labor and commodity exchange, and a restaurant.⁴⁴ In Lewisburg, the ladies rest room served several of these functions. According to Potts and Cain, for the first twenty-two years of its existence, the basement of the ladies rest room, as well as the basement of the building that it was attached to, served as the town library. In 1939, the Study Club was planning to move the books upstairs into the main public area of the rest room, but flooding from a nearby creek damaged many of the books and the library subsequently moved to a different location.⁴⁵ Also, the basement was at some point, presumably after the library relocated, converted to a kitchen and lunches were served at the rest room. Mrs. Christine Evans served lunches for several years during her nearly twenty-nine year tenure as rest room matron. People enjoyed her home cooking, and she fed as many as eight people a day at lunch thanks, in part, to the fresh vegetables that people provided her. Several women who were employed at the Marshall County courthouse would, likewise, take their lunches to the rest room to eat with Mrs. Evans.⁴⁶ In this regard, the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room possessed more than the four key features that Anne M. Evans espoused in her article as contributing to an ideal ladies rest room, namely, clean toilet facilities, a large and comfortable lounge space for women and their children to rest, a kitchen area where lunches could be served, and the services of a matron.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 223.

⁴⁵ Potts and Cain, “The Legacy of Lewisburg’s Ladies Rest Room,” 69.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 70.

Throughout her article, Evans highlighted the importance of women in advocating for the establishment of ladies rest rooms, noting that women were oftentimes the catalyst for the establishment of a rest room. Researching almost one hundred years later, it is difficult to determine whether or not the women of Lewisburg and Marshall County were as active in the establishment of the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room as Evans claims that women in other areas of the country were. It is highly likely, and, in fact, stated in two brief local newspaper articles, that women were operating behind the scenes, that is, outside of the official channels of government, to advocate for the establishment of a rest room in Lewisburg. Unfortunately, like the voices of so many women in the early-twentieth century, their voices are largely absent in the majority of records in which the rest room was discussed. With the exception of two brief articles printed in the *Lewisburg Tribune*, until the mid-1920s, the recorded discussions surrounding the establishment of a ladies rest room in Lewisburg were conducted almost entirely by males, though the largely male channels of the local newspaper, the *Lewisburg Tribune*, and the Marshall County court.

It is not rare, during this time period, that it was largely male voices that appeared in the official records. In the Marshall County quarterly court minutes from the second decade of the twentieth century, when interest in establishing a ladies rest room first appears in the court minutes, it is the all-male court justices who are on record as appointing a committee to investigate the possibility and cost of purchasing a place near the square for a ladies rest room. The committee was composed of four of the justices,

and no women were invited to join the committee.⁴⁷ It is not until 1917 that a woman makes an appearance in the quarterly court minutes in association with the rest room, when the court voted to provide Mrs. J. L. Marshall, president of the Civic Club, three hundred and fifty dollars to help defray the costs of rent associated with the ladies rest room, which at this time was likely located in a building being utilized by the Civic Club.⁴⁸

The quarterly court minutes show that several other committees were formed in the late-1920s to investigate into the success of the rest room in the Civic Club building, as well as the possibility of constructing a free-standing ladies rest room. These were also composed entirely of male court justices.⁴⁹ It was not until April, 1923, that a committee was formed that included not only the male court justices, but several local women, as well, including Mrs. W. A. Haynes, Mrs. C. S. Sanders, and Mrs. Ross A. Woods.⁵⁰ In less than a year after the formation of this committee, the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room was constructed and opened for public use.

Although the role that the women of Lewisburg played in advocating for the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room is somewhat unclear based on the historical record, once the rest room was constructed and dedicated it was a huge success, as evidenced by its continuous operation for almost eighty years. The men and women of Lewisburg and

⁴⁷ Minutes, October 6, 1913, page 26, vol. JJ.

⁴⁸ Potts and Cain, "The Legacy of Lewisburg's Ladies Rest Room," 66; Minutes, October 1, 1917, page 265, vol. KK.

⁴⁹ Minutes, October 7, 1918, page 486, vol. KK; Minutes, January 6, 1919, page 552, vol. KK; Minutes, April 7, 1919, page 596, vol. KK; Minutes, May 5, 1919, page 613, vol. KK; Minutes, July 7, 1919, page 36, vol. LL.

⁵⁰ Minutes April 2, 1923, page 154, vol. MM.

Marshall County fought for several years for the creation of a public rest room. They successfully established a rest room in a rented space in 1916, and were able to achieve their goal of establishing a permanent, free-standing rest room for the ladies of Lewisburg and Marshall County in 1924.

The Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room represents the effort of the citizens of Lewisburg and Marshall County to provide a place in their town where women who were coming from rural parts of the county could feel safe and comfortable while in town with their families. It also represents the efforts of local businessmen and city leaders to encourage commerce in their town and the continued development of the town economy, as well as the efforts of county home and farm authorities to improve the home and domestic lives of rural women and their families.

Like other ladies rest rooms that were constructed throughout the country in the early-twentieth century, the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room provided a multi-functional space where women, especially rural women, could meet, wait for husbands or fathers to finish business, care for children, eat a hot meal, read library books, or gather information on the latest technologies for their homes and farms. Unlike other ladies rest rooms, however, in Lewisburg, the advocates of the rest room explored the possibility of public funding for their establishment, almost from the beginning. That the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room is free-standing, was designed for the specific purpose of establishing a ladies rest room, and conforms to all four of the key functions of a ladies rest room espoused by the U.S.D.A., makes it perhaps the best example of all that a ladies rest room could be.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Town and rural residents developed ladies rest rooms throughout the nation during the Progressive Era. These facilities shared several features. They were all located in the central business districts of small market towns that were surrounded by a rural, agricultural countryside. Women were involved in the establishment of the rest rooms, either as the catalyst and driving-force for establishment, as in Pulaski, Tennessee, and Newberry, South Carolina, or as advocates for the facility, as in Lyons, Kansas, Northfield, Minnesota, and Lewisburg, Tennessee. All of the rest rooms contained two distinct physical spaces – a large lounge area and a smaller toilet area – and all employed a matron.

While there are characteristics that all rest rooms held in common, the establishment history of each individual rest room is unique because the movement to create ladies rest rooms was dynamic, with each community developing a ladies rest room with its own needs in mind. In this way, the establishment of ladies rest rooms parallels other Progressive Era reforms in that women showed agency in choosing to adopt reforms that best suited their needs and the needs of their families and communities, and rejected those reforms that they felt were not beneficial.¹

Many different groups of people, as well as individuals, were responsible for the creation of ladies rest rooms. Both individual women, like Mary Galloway White in

¹ Several scholars make this point well, including Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*; Lu Ann Jones, *Mama Learned Us To Work*; and Ann Elizabeth McCleary, “Shaping a New Role for the Rural Woman.”

Pulaski, Tennessee, and Mary Ann Butler Evans in Newberry, South Carolina, as well as groups of women, like members of the WCTU in Lyons, Kansas, successfully supported ladies rest room establishment in their towns. In some communities, like Northfield, Minnesota, rest room establishment was the product of male and female members of the town and rural countryside joining together. Prominent male citizens, like members of the county courts of Pulaski and Lewisburg, Tennessee, and the businessmen of Lyons, Kansas, also supported the creation of ladies rest rooms.

Individuals and groups were motivated to advocate for rest room establishment by several factors. Women who supported the development of ladies rest room facilities were largely concerned with having a comfortable and appropriate female space to rest and socialize in what was, at the time, the largely male-gendered town square. The motivations of men were more varied. Some men, especially in those communities where county court support was involved, also advocated for ladies rest rooms, seemingly out of concern for the needs of the women and children of their community.

Businessmen also supported the establishment of ladies rest rooms; however, while they may have genuinely had the best interests of women in mind, evidence suggests that they were motivated by the opportunity to increase their sales. In Newberry, South Carolina, although it was Mary Ann Butler Evans that established the ladies rest room, newspaper accounts indicate that local businessmen had definite ideas about what a ladies rest room should be, and understood that if they did not provide rest room facilities to women, they could potentially lose trade to nearby towns that offered such amenities. Likewise, in Lyons, Kansas, and Lewisburg, Tennessee, the community of local businessmen began to recognize the value of the female consumer and her

purchasing power, and businessmen supported the establishment of ladies rest rooms in each of these communities.

One reason for the growing recognition of women as consumers can be attributed to rural reformers' development of home improvement and home demonstration activities during the Progressive Era, and rural women's acceptance of these activities. Rural women's acceptance of home improvement activities provided the businessmen of small market towns with a new and growing clientele. Many businessmen took advantage of the potential for increased sales, and worked with local home agents to schedule demonstrations of products that they felt would appeal to this new group of consumers. This occurred in Lyons, Kansas, when the local hardware store conducted a demonstration of cooking on new ranges that resulted in the purchase of eight ranges, as well as in Lewisburg, Tennessee, when the opening of the Lewisburg Ladies Rest Room was timed to coincide with the county's "Home Improvement Day."² The majority of ladies rest rooms examined in this study served either as locations for home improvement and demonstration activities, or the promotion of these activities through club meetings and the presence of reform literature.

Moving forward, scholars, preservationists, and community leaders could explore additional themes related to the history of Progressive Era ladies rest rooms that were unable to be fully addressed in this admittedly limited study. Continued efforts to identify, survey, and document these spaces, and the buildings in which they are located, is critical not only to physically preserving these rapidly-vanishing resources, but

² "Demonstration a Success," *Central Kansas News-Democrat*, September 16, 1909, page 1; "Club Day to be Quite an Event," *The Marshall Gazette*, June 26, 1924, page 1.

also to preserving the unique histories of these spaces, and the stories of the communities that created them.

Additional research on rest room matrons would also be beneficial. Similar to other facets of rest room development, the role of the matron of the ladies rest room was a dynamic concept that individual communities handled differently. While matrons were employed at all of the rest rooms included in this study, whether they were white or black appears to have depended on the attitudes and race relations in the individual community at the time of rest room establishment. In communities like Lyons, Kansas, and Newberry, South Carolina, where white women set the precedent as matron, the matrons continued to be white, and appear to be viewed by the users of the rest rooms on relatively equal terms. In communities like Pulaski, Tennessee, however, where the first matron was black, the role of matron could contain a certain amount of irony. One wonders how these women, who were charged with the role of caregiver to young white children, yet were deemed unfit to utilize the very facilities that they were charged with maintaining, felt about their experience as a white ladies rest room matron.

Necessity dictated that this work focus on the establishment and development of ladies rest rooms, and little is said here regarding the reasons that these facilities eventually closed. Further exploration and analysis is needed to determine what, if any, societal changes were occurring at the national level that might have impacted the viability of ladies rest rooms. In most of the rest rooms included in this study, it appears as though either the space was needed for other functions – as in Northfield, when the police office needed additional space – or that the idea of the necessity of a separate space for women in the central business district became outdated.

One wonders, however, if larger changes that were occurring at the national level contributed to the close of some of these rest rooms, and several hypotheses can be made. In the South, especially, it is possible that Civil Rights legislation, including *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which made the segregation of public facilities illegal, contributed to the close of ladies rest rooms. As was the case with other segregated public facilities, one can speculate that some white southerners would have rather closed ladies rest room facilities altogether than accept their integration. It is also possible that the increase in suburbanization that occurred in the 1950s and 60s contributed to the closing of ladies rest room facilities. As people moved out of cities, strip malls and other retail spaces began to develop closer to the suburbs, shifting commerce away from the central business district. These new retail centers had their own toilet facilities for ladies. Additionally, as consumption levels continued to increase and society became increasingly mobile, there were numerous locations other than ladies rest rooms where women could socialize. It is possible that the need or desire to have a rest room/lounge space where women could rest and socialize in the central business district of small market towns became an outdated concept.

Regardless of the reasons why ladies rest rooms closed, for thousands of women in dozens of towns and rural areas throughout the country, whether in town with her family on a shopping excursion, visiting from another part of the country or world, or taking a break from her job in a local shop, a visit to the ladies rest room was a regular occurrence. The development of Progressive Era ladies rest rooms coincided with the growing recognition of women as consumers. This was closely related to home improvement and home demonstration activities, in which rural reformers encouraged

women to invest in the well-being of their families with “modern” amenities, which were available for purchase in local retail stores. The increased presence and acceptance of women in the central business district of small market towns during the early-twentieth century necessitated the creation of physical spaces in which they could feel comfortable, and both women and men worked to create ladies rest rooms for the use of local and out-of-town women. The creation of these female spaces in public spaces that had traditionally been the domain of only males – including community buildings, county courthouses, and, to a larger extent, the central business district – is the physical representation of the work that was necessary to “regender” the public space of the rural American landscape.

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