



“THE WHOLE CROWD OF THE GANG”

KEEPING THE NEW WOMAN DOWN IN MISSOURI

BEFORE THERE WAS THE NEW WOMAN, THERE WAS THE TRUE WOMAN, A WILLING PARTICIPANT IN THE “CULT OF DOMESTICITY.” PIETY, PURITY, SUBMISSION, AND DOMESTICITY WERE THE FOUR CHARACTERISTICS BY WHICH WOMEN WERE JUDGED DURING THE VICTORIAN ERA. ANY GOOD AND PROPER YOUNG WOMAN DURING THIS TIME POSSESSED THESE CHARACTERISTICS, AND HER ABILITY TO PORTRAY HERSELF AS THE EMBODIMENT OF TRUE WOMANHOOD, AS THIS IDEAL WAS KNOWN, WAS THE MEASURE OF HER SUCCESSFUL JOURNEY THROUGH LIFE.

By *Tammie Busch*

Piety was thought to befittingly complement domesticity, as it did not take women away from the “proper sphere” of their homes. Indeed, religious work was thought to promote domestic duties. Essential, and also highly revered, purity was the second ideal of the True Woman. Without purity, a “woman was no woman,” only a “member of some lower order.” Women, especially those of the middle class, were expected to guard their virginity with their lives, as young women were taught that their wedding night would be the most wonderful night of their existence, when they would bestow upon their husbands the gift of their vigorously protected virginity. The view on the third ideal of the True Woman, submission, was

common: The place of women was fixed by God. If piety was one of the cardinal virtues to live by, submission was, therefore, the natural order of things and left no room for interpretation. “Women were warned that if they tampered with this quality they tampered with the order of the Universe.” The last ideal of the True Woman, domesticity, prescribed where she was supposed to perform the duties of the True Woman. “The best refuge for such a delicate creature was the warmth and safety of her home.” If a woman was to be pious, pure, and submissive, then the best place to avoid any outside stimulus that may upset the fragile balance of the True Woman was safely tucked away in the home. “Women remained in the home, as a kind of cultural hostage.” Often the “hostage,”

{ “The ‘New Woman’” (*satirical image of a woman reading a newspaper while a man does housework*).
Photograph (stereograph) by Keystone View Company, late 1800s.
Missouri History Museum.

however, did not believe in being bound by the “order of the Universe.” She did not believe her place was in the private sphere or that submission was prescribed by God. She did not believe in being held hostage, so she escaped. This escapee was the New Woman.

Who was the New Woman? No single definition can describe her, as she was as multidimensional as her predecessor was one-dimensional. The New Woman was a wife, if she chose to be a wife; a mother, if she chose to be a mother; college educated, if she chose to pursue a formal education; employed in a factory or office, if she chose to work outside the home. The one tenet the New Woman did embrace was the belief that she should not be confined to the home like the True Woman had been. Nonetheless, when she did step outside the confines of the home and succeed in a career, or placed that career before her marriage, no one said, “Oh, that is of no issue, because she is a New Woman.” Instead the majority of the population saw her violating “virtually every late-Victorian norm.” She was seen to be challenging defined gender roles and trying to infringe upon the established power hierarchy. In short, she was seen to be trying to emulate her male counterpart. However, the New Woman did not want to be a man; she wanted to be a woman with “greater options and more power.” In an editorial in the *St. Louis Republic*, Elizabeth Cady Stanton expressed her views on what the New Woman was seeking in 1900:

Will women in freedom marry? Certainly. Man has married in freedom; woman will do the same. . . . Will the new woman bear children? Yes. Motherhood is one of the strongest desires of all women. . . . The new woman, having a brain and two hands, will be self-supporting and not a fashionable parasite on man, depending on him for shelter, food and clothes, but a real helpmate in every position in life. . . . The new woman has come to stay; now let the new man rise up to welcome her.

Unquestionably angry over the emergence of the New Woman, Charles George Harper, in his 1894 book *Revolted Woman: Past, Present, and to Come*, decries the New Woman by reminding her that her mission as a woman is submission. Harper, feeling as if women’s characteristic adornments are proof that they are not

capable of the faculty of men, says that “cosmetics have no commerce with common sense, and high heels are not conducive to lofty thinking; rouge, violet powder, tight-lacing, or an inordinate love of jewelry are not earnest of brain power.” It is no wonder, then, that some New Women began to change their style of dress in an effort to separate themselves from the stereotypical Victorian woman. Three short years later, in 1897, the revised image that some New Women were seeking was expressed by the Reverend Dr. Hancher in an editorial in the *Kansas City Journal*, titled “The New Woman Discussed.” Hancher paints an image of the New Woman that evokes “a sense of disgust” with her short hair, style of dress, and bold manner. Lavinia Egan was no less agitated with the New Woman. *The St. Louis Republic*, promoting Egan’s new novel in 1904, cites the “strikingly spicy” novel’s purpose as exposing the folly or “questioning the good” of the New Woman. Egan suggests that social unrest occurs in all classes of women, but women must still accept their role in life regardless of what it may be. Says Egan of the social unrest women were experiencing, “the cook who leaves her bread to burn while she satisfies her sensationalism . . . is just as much of a social criminal as the woman who cheats her family of her attentions.” The New Woman had many obstacles to face on her journey to equality. Nationwide she would come up against men and women alike who would try to put her in her proper place. Yet that proper place could equate to a place she never dreamed she would find herself: a place for which, in certain instances, she would find no escape.

[Euphemia “Feemy” Koller](#) may not have known that she would become the model of the New Woman that she turned out to be. She was born in 1860 in Pennsylvania, and her family moved to Ralls County, Missouri, shortly after the Civil War. By 1880, Feemy found herself back on the East Coast, married, and tending to a rather large extended family. John Koller, Feemy’s husband, a man nearly twice her age, had taken responsibility for his mother, his widowed sister, and his widowed sister’s daughter. As John’s wife, Feemy may have found herself with more demands upon her than she cared to give her attention to. On August 5, 1893, after thirteen years of marriage, Feemy filed for divorce. The reasons behind Feemy’s divorce from John are not entirely clear, but a future encounter with her brother, Tom, gives evidence that mothering and caretaking were not high on Feemy’s



Euphemia "Feemy" Koller with one of her nieces, Ruby Sykes, ca. 1905. Koller enjoyed her independence and refused to care for her brother's six children after his wife died. Photograph courtesy of John Hemeyer.

list of priorities. Newly independent and free to travel, Feemy began pursuing her new life while supporting herself as a writer. Sometime before 1909, Feemy had become quite proficient in two areas: property transactions and the legal system. Most likely Feemy was a self-made scholar in these areas. However, as educated as Feemy was in law and property, her knowledge could not save her from a future string of events that would ultimately claim her livelihood and her life.

Although Feemy's life of carefree independence was quite satisfying to her, it was not looked upon fondly by some members of her family. In 1901, Feemy's sister-in-law died, leaving Feemy's brother Tom with six children to rear. Members of Feemy's family expected her to

assume the role of caretaker of her nephews and nieces. Feemy refused. This refusal, combined with the fact that Feemy had chosen divorce and a capricious lifestyle over marriage and stability, made her appear quite selfish in her family's eyes. In addition, the more appearances Feemy made in Ralls County, the less some members of the community found her attributes endearing. Consequently, in 1909, when Feemy agreed to help her sister, Mollie Heinbach, in a legal matter regarding property of Mollie's deceased husband, Feemy may have sparked the animosity of several ambitious men who eventually set their sights on taking Feemy out of the picture for good.

Mollie Heinbach was as conservative as Feemy was progressive. Whereas Feemy had chosen divorce and a life of self-sustainment, Mollie had long depended on the financial stability afforded by having a husband. Yet this difference in ideology did not keep the sisters from



Mollie Heinbach, sister of Feemy Koller, ca. 1880. The sisters fought a twenty-year battle in the legal system over a tract of land. Photograph courtesy of John Hemeyer.



State Hospital Number 1 in Fulton, Missouri, where Feemy Koller lived until her death in 1930, after being deemed mentally unhealthy. Photographer unknown, 1958. Missouri History Museum.

coming together in 1910 to fight the longest and most grueling fight of their lives. In 1908, looking for security through matrimony, Mollie had married Sam Heinbach. Sam owned a piece of land in Ralls County that was much coveted by the Atlas Portland Cement Company because of its proximity to the company's plant. When Sam died in 1910, Mollie inherited this valuable piece of land and Atlas went to work doing everything in its power to take the land as its own. Although she was the younger sister, Feemy was very protective of Mollie. This fact, in conjunction with a previous experience with incompetent lawyers, must have created an intense fervor in Feemy to help Mollie retain what was rightfully hers. And fight

is what she did for the next twenty years. Feemy battled against powerful and deceptive attorneys, politicians, and company men, and a consort Feemy disdainfully referred to as "the whole crowd of the gang"; she took their fight to the Missouri Supreme Court four times. However, having the fight within her proved futile. Using legislation established in 1835 that allowed any private citizen or county officer to petition the court to evaluate a person's sanity, the Ralls County prosecuting attorney and sheriff ordered an investigation into Feemy's mental health. On August 18, 1927, a jury of six men found Feemy "not only mentally incompetent but also 'so disordered in her mind as to endanger her own person and the lives and property



The outspoken Kate Richards O'Hare addresses a crowd in front of the St. Louis Court House on May 2, 1914, National Women's Suffrage Day. Photograph by St. Louis Times. Missouri History Museum.

of others.” That same month, Feemy entered Missouri’s [State Hospital Number 1](#) in Fulton. As a private patient, Feemy was responsible for paying forty dollars a month for her own confinement. This New Woman, who reveled in her freedom and took pride in her ability to support herself, sadly lived out the rest of her short life using her hard-earned financial resources for her own confinement. Euphemia Koller died a patient at the state hospital on February 24, 1930.

Despite the New Woman’s visibility in society in the 1900s, the image of woman as a mother remained at the forefront of American culture. The twentieth century was declared the century of the child, and married women were expected to devote themselves to their husbands and children. President Theodore Roosevelt declared that a woman who shunned her duty as wife and mother was “a criminal against the race, and should be an object of contemptuous abhorrence by all healthy people.” In

some cases, like that of Kate Richards O’Hare, even fulfilling these duties did not preclude a woman from this contempt.

By most accounts, [Kate Richards O’Hare](#) was a New Woman. She refused to be confined to the private sphere, actively pursued employment outside of the home, and endorsed the feminist movement. Yet, unlike some New Women who actively avoided traditional marriage and motherhood, Kate embraced it. She married Frank O’Hare in 1902, and by 1909 the O’Hares had four children. Kate and Frank were active in the Socialist Party, and both became popular speakers on the circuit for the cause. However, Kate soon overshadowed her husband in the socialist cause, becoming party leader and running for the United States Senate in 1910. In 1911 she became editor of the *National Rip-Saw*, a St. Louis–based socialist newspaper. Wearing the hats of wife, mother, political activist, politician, and editor, Kate tried hard to success-



Kate Richards O'Hare with Mott Osborne in the offices of the National Rip-Saw, a socialist newspaper for which O'Hare served as editor. Photograph, 1922. Missouri History Museum.

fully integrate all of these roles. Most women, let alone New Women, would have a difficult time trying to balance this sort of workload, but Kate's situation was unique compared to other women's during this time. In an effort to support his wife's public life, Frank enlisted the help of various live-in relatives to assist him with the children and household. In the century of the child, there were probably few men like Frank O'Hare, who was willing to take a backseat to his wife's career. Doing so ran Frank the risk of being stereotyped as the weaker vessel, a term that was normally reserved to describe women. Yet Kate not only complied with her roles as wife and mother, but also advocated the continued importance of domesticity in women as they ventured out into the public sphere. Still, this would not be enough to save her from the oppression

of a wartime government that had a much different idea of what it wanted from mothers. <image 6>

Passionately against the United States' participation in World War I, Kate traveled the country to deliver antiwar speeches. During the spring of 1917, according to the editors of *Kate Richards O'Hare: Selected Writings and Speeches*, Kate had one speech that she had "honed to perfection," having presented it seventy-five times. Nevertheless, on July 17, 1917, in Bowman, North Dakota, Kate's seventy-sixth delivery of this speech to a small group of women and children brought more than the usual attention to an antiwar socialist. On this day, Kate was accused of straying from the original version of her speech, below, in which she questioned the purpose of women during a wartime effort:

When the governments of Europe and the clergy of Europe demanded of the women that they give themselves in marriage, or out, in order that men might "breed before they die," that was not the crime of maddened passion, it was the cold blooded crime of brutal selfishness, and by that crime the women of Europe were reduced to the status of breeding animals on a stock farm.

Kate was accused of referring to American mothers as "brood cows" and American soldiers as "fertilizer." A charge against Kate was brought forth by the Justice Department, asserting her speech interfered "with the enlistment and recruiting services of the United States." This charge was based on the testimony of five men who claimed to have heard Kate's speech on that day. Kate Richards O'Hare became the first major Socialist Party leader indicted under the Espionage Act. Regardless of the eight witnesses who testified in Kate's defense that her speech had not strayed from what she had written, as well as Kate's insistence that three of the five men testifying for the prosecution had never entered the opera house in which she had delivered her speech, she was convicted. According to historian Kathleen Kennedy, Kate's conviction may have had more to do with antisocialist sentiments than with any interference in the draft. Certainly the harshness of her sentence was influenced by anti-socialism and antifeminism, as the presiding judge over the case, Martin J. Wade, "made no secret of his hatred of socialism or his opposition to women's participation in

public life.” Kate was not surprised by her conviction; as a socialist she had long dealt with “carefully planted and cultivated prejudices.” What Kate was not prepared for was the harshness of the sentence handed down by Judge Wade. Kate was sentenced to five years at the Missouri State Penitentiary; the typical sentence for someone convicted under the Espionage Act was six months in jail.

Another extraordinary New Woman was the erudite [Charlotte Rumbold](#), who began her career in St. Louis in the early 1900s as a social worker, eventually becoming city recreation supervisor. During this time, Charlotte found herself behind various aggressive reforms, including the creation of municipally financed bathhouses and free neighborhood playgrounds. With statistics collected through a collaborative effort of the Civic League Housing Committee and graduate students from the Missouri School of Social Economy, Charlotte wrote a report exposing the deplorable living conditions of residents in St. Louis slums. Charlotte’s career in St. Louis had, thus far, been a successful one, but she began to find her success rate diminish when she approached the Board of Aldermen for a raise in her salary. As much as Charlotte had accomplished for the City of St. Louis, she could not overcome the gender bias held by the powerful men of St. Louis. Her request for a salary increase was denied, prompting a public outcry by St. Louis women’s clubs and civic interest groups. The justification for the denial of Charlotte’s raise—that plenty of others could work for Charlotte’s salary and support a family on it—was handed down at a public hearing attended by her supporters and opponents. Charlotte, who was unmarried, was also reminded by Alderman Adam Wackerman that a “woman’s place is in the kitchen.” The committee that formed to hear Charlotte’s case upheld the board’s previous decision by a vote of 20 to 6. Unable to bear the public humiliation, Charlotte resigned her position in St. Louis and, in 1915, accepted a better-paying position in Cleveland. Of this experience Charlotte said:

After all, I am not sorry to have had the issue made on the fact that I am a woman. It is a splendid thing to be a woman in these days when we have to go to the trenches for our citizenship. Our equal pay for equal work, I rather like it.



Charlotte Rumbold was a diligent and successful city recreation supervisor for St. Louis, yet she faced gender bias with regard to her salary. Halftone, 1916. Missouri History Museum.

Not all New Women had the determination to ask for what they deemed they had rightfully earned. [Florence Hayward](#) may very well have been every New Woman’s dream. Having secured a paid position that allowed her the ability to travel and write, Florence began to make a name for herself in St. Louis through her “travel letters” to various newspapers. While attending a play in Chicago presented in connection with the Chicago World’s Fair of 1893, Florence became increasingly interested in the prospect of a World’s Fair hosted in St. Louis. Her spirited interest came to the attention of Thomas Carter, president of the World’s Fair National Commission. He offered to send Florence abroad in the interest of the fair, perhaps because of her experience traveling internationally. Florence insisted on doing this in the capacity of a commissioner. When Carter said, “But we have no women on the board,” Florence responded, “Well, put



Florence Hayward, the only woman on the board of commissioners for the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair, poses with (left to right) St. Louis mayor Rolla Wells, Frank D. Hershberg, Fair president David R. Francis, Archbishop John J. Glennon, and Vatican commissioner Signor Coquitti at the opening of the Vatican Exhibit at the Fair. Photograph attributed to Jessie Tarbox Beals, 1904. Missouri History Museum.

one on then." Florence became the only woman on the St. Louis World's Fair board of commissioners.

As special commissioner to European countries, Florence was in charge of obtaining exhibits for the fair. She more than likely felt a great deal of pressure to prove that she could do the job just as well as, if not better than, any man on the commission. So when Florence set out for London to secure as an exhibit gifts that Queen Victoria had received for her Golden Jubilee, the fair's executive committee told her that "she might as well

try to bring over Westminster Abbey." Never before had the queen's gifts been loaned, but Florence managed to secure them for exhibit, and she was no doubt proud of her accomplishment. Yet in his 1913 account of the fair, David Francis, president of the St. Louis World's Fair, credits Florence as merely "suggesting" the acquisition of the exhibit. Instead, Francis attributes to himself the arrangement of the exhibit, "following the suggestion of Miss Florence Hayward." In the end, Florence did not have the confidence to demand the praise and acclaim

she felt she deserved. Perplexingly, this woman who so boldly suggested her place among the all-male board of commissioners, chose to remain silent, but she “never forgave the slight.”

Euphemia Koller, Kate Richards O’Hare, Charlotte Rumbold, and Florence Hayward are four incredible women of Missouri who illustrate how the New Women were as widely varied as they were similar. Never defined by any one role in society, they did share the common tenet that they refused to be held captive in the private sphere of the home. The New Women recognized that they were equal to men, and by the early 1900s, some men agreed. But many more men refused to accept this premise. So many more firmly believed that there was no necessity for women to work outside the home, pursue an education, vote in an election, or simply be heard. The result of these oppressive views, as shown through the lives of some of Missouri’s New Women, could be quite severe. Those lucky enough to have escaped severe social control still succumbed to a humiliation powerful enough to force them to relinquish the identity they once held firm.

Why was the New Woman’s acceptance met with such resistance? Conceivably, the New Woman’s aggressive personality was just too threatening for the majority of society to handle during the progressive era. Therefore, one might believe that in death the New Woman would no longer be a menace; that in death the New Woman could be whomever or whatever she chose to be. And yet for Euphemia Koller, death would still not bring resolution. A close look at Feemy’s certificate of death reveals that she still could not escape the heavy hand of the whole crowd of the gang. This New Woman, who carefully cultivated her identity as a woman who chose autonomy over marriage, still went to her grave labeled with the approved societal roles so many expected her to abide by: with her occupation listed as “housewife” and her marital status as “widowed.” ■

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