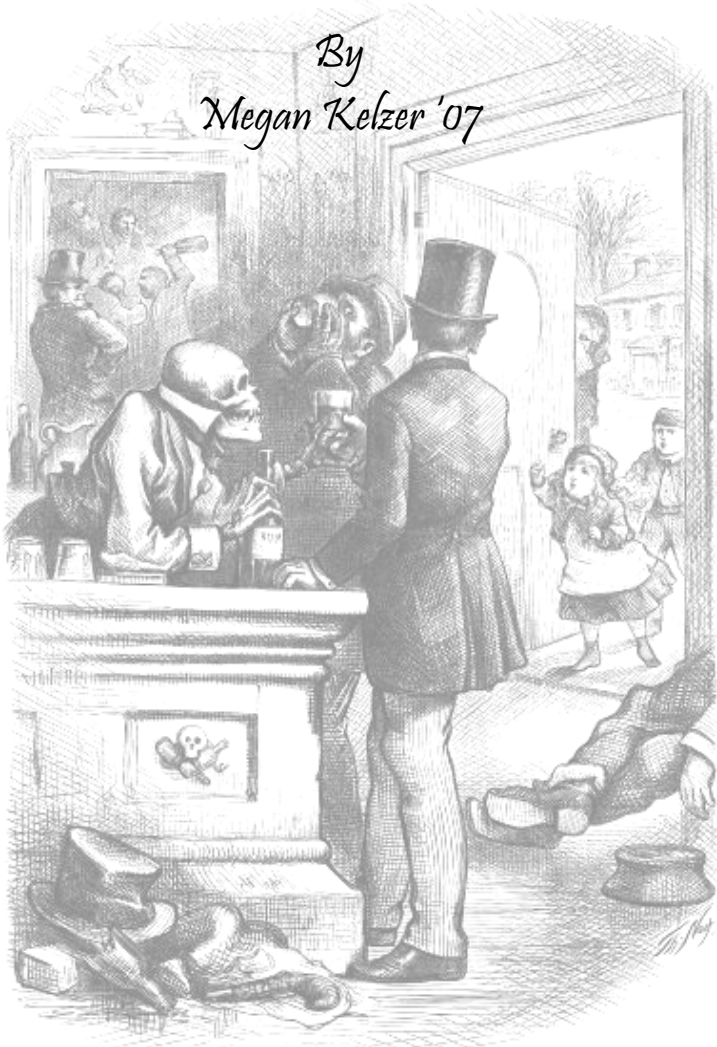


# THE TEMPERANCE MOVEMENT IN NAPERVILLE IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

*By  
Megan Kelzer '07*



North Central College Undergraduate Archives Publication  
Number Three

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## **Introduction**

The most widely known movement in favor of temperance in the United States occurred in the latter quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, culminating with the national ratification of the 18<sup>th</sup> amendment prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcohol. This temperance movement was rooted most notably among upper and middle class Protestants. The Midwest was the proud home of a strong Protestant presence, and institutions with Protestant influence flourished in its small towns. The small town of Naperville, Illinois was a shining example. During the 1870s, Naperville proudly boasted an established college, a newly established seminary, and several Protestant congregations. North-Western College, which moved to Naperville in 1870, had a strong affiliation with the Evangelical Association, a church that practiced and preached the belief of temperance and the complete abstinence from alcohol.

Advocates organized chapters of several temperance groups in Naperville with the Women's Christian Temperance Union being one of the longest-lived and most influential. The

women involved with the group reflected the middle-class Protestant tendencies of the temperance fighters and many were affiliated with North-Western College as students, instructors, or faculty wives. One of the most active crusaders for temperance in Naperville was Lovisa Steck, a woman unaffiliated with the College, but heavily involved in the local W. C. T. U. Her writings characterize the thoughts and feelings of the temperance advocates.

For several reasons, Naperville remained a 'wet' town. Economically, the license fees and fines for violations provided income to the town's treasury. Culturally, Naperville was home to a recent immigrant population, often members of the active Catholic church, who did consume wine and beer, a practice they brought with them to their new home in America. Therefore, despite concerted efforts on the part of the temperance organizations and the men and women involved, Naperville did not become a 'dry' town until national prohibition.

## **The National Temperance Movement**

People in communities all over the United States, especially in the Midwest, thought that temperance could succeed in their towns. Although the activism for temperance appeared to be a noble and just cause, it was not welcomed or adopted in all communities. Protestant church members fought on behalf of the cause of temperance, with Evangelical Christian groups very active in the fight. Both men and women took up the fight against temperance but, in the early 1880's, the battle shifted from one led by a largely male membership to a woman's cause. As portrayed by female temperance activists, alcoholism was a threat to the home and drunken males ruined the lives of their children and their marriages. The home was traditionally the woman's domain and it was a woman's duty to fight against the threat of alcoholism in an attempt to preserve a healthy and moral home. The fight for temperance was then a fight to preserve the home, an idea that appealed to women of all classes, rural or urban, middle and upper class. The

establishment of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (W. C. T. U.) organized women in the temperance fight.

The ranks of the W. C. T. U. and other temperance organizations were mostly filled with native-born, educated women of the upper and middle classes. Many recent immigrants did not feel that temperance was a necessary fight; consumption of alcohol was a cultural norm without dire consequences. Temperance activists believed that consumption of alcohol in any manner, other than religious, was detrimental to the development of the community. Although, at this time women may have been hesitant to act on their beliefs and take up activism on behalf of temperance, urging them to act in defense of their home arguably laid the groundwork for suffrage and other movements.

### **Temperance in Naperville**

Although advocates spread their message throughout the United States, the Midwest became the heart of the temperance fight from the smaller farming communities to the metropolises. To temperance activists, Chicago stood as a symbol of the

destruction that alcohol could cause, and rural towns and small communities surrounding the intemperate metropolis of Chicago fought for alcohol abstinence and morality in contrast to the sinful city. About 35 miles outside of Chicago lay DuPage County, home to several small but prosperous communities that shared a similar European and Protestant heritage.

Many communities in DuPage County, including Wheaton and Batavia, were ‘dry’ towns. Given the close proximity of Naperville to those exemplar towns, early prospects for temperance in Naperville seemed to be favorable. However, Naperville resisted temperance and did not prohibit the sale of alcohol until national Prohibition.

Naperville in the nineteenth century did have some industry to boast. Although it was a small community in



Kroehler Manufacturing Company

population, it possessed a very successful furniture factory, brewery, and

quarries.<sup>1</sup> Many recent immigrants, largely German, found community and work in Naperville. The main industries in Naperville required skilled labor in fields that generally were a specialty of German immigrants. For example, Stenger Brewery employed many local residents and also supplied the town with beer. Naperville residents were generally supportive of the Brewery, a key provider of their livelihood.<sup>2</sup> Although the Brewery closed in 1882 for financial reasons, there remained a thriving supply of alcohol in Naperville. Another example, the Pre-Emption House, opened in 1834, was an inn for those traveling through Naperville and a tavern for the local men, serving alcohol to both. Groceries and other establishments were also licensed to sell liquor and beer.

The local German immigrant population did not feel an overwhelming need for temperance. It simply was not a moral issue to them. Beer was a central part of German culture and was enjoyed responsibly. As one author notes, “Germans were

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<sup>1</sup> Ann Durkin Keating, *Chicagoland: City and Suburbs in the Railroad Age* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 189.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Durkin Keating and Pierre Lebeau, *A Shared History*. (Naperville: North Central College, 1995), 14.

not noted for binge drinking, both Irish and German immigrants keenly resisted virtually all legal attempts to control drinking.”<sup>3</sup> Temperance seemed to be an extensive and unnecessary measure to the immigrant population. Keeping a dry and quiet Sunday was largely a Protestant American ideal, but recent German immigrants often enjoyed a Sunday spent with friends in the local tavern or café.<sup>4</sup> Although Naperville was not a stranger to the strong teachings of the Protestant religious organizations, which fundamentally practiced temperance, there were very limited instances of temperance activism among the German immigrant population.

Although Naperville remained a ‘wet’ town, there were many influential forces, including prominent members of Naperville society from several religious denominations, demanding that temperance be the law of the village. Physically, Naperville was still a fledgling town in the process of growing from a small outpost to a thriving community. Temperance

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Pegram, *Battling Demon Rum: The Struggle for a Dry America, 1800-1933*. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998), 33.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 98

rumblings began in the 1850's in Naperville. In the fall of 1850, the Sons of Temperance became the first official organization to speak out against intemperance and the evils of alcohol. At the height of its membership in the early 1850's, there were about 300 members (20% of Naperville's population<sup>5</sup>). As the name suggests, it was a male organization comprised of the prominent business proprietors and other professionals; the Sons of Temperance did not include recent immigrants in its membership. Soon after, a sister organization, the Daughters of Temperance, formed with a smaller and entirely female membership. Neither group enjoyed a long history and both disbanded after a few years. (Unfortunately there are no longer any records of their meetings or positions.<sup>6</sup>) Following in the footsteps of the previous organizations, the Good Templars formed after the Sons and Daughters of Temperance disbanded, but soon followed the same fate and disbanded for a short time

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<sup>5</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, D. C.: Robert Armstrong, Public Printer, 1853), 707.

<sup>6</sup> Rufus Blanchard. *History of DuPage County, Illinois*. (Chicago: Baskin, 1882), 229.

in 1873, although they later resumed their mission in 1878.<sup>7</sup>

The strongest temperance organization in Naperville prior to the Women's Christian Temperance Union was the Blue Ribbon Club (B. R. C.). The B. R. C. was formed by the prominent citizens of Naperville and led by Hiram Cody, a prosperous local businessman. Although the B. R. C. boasted a strong leadership and membership it eventually met the same fate as previous organizations.

### **North-Western College's Influence on Naperville**

North-Western College moved to Naperville from Plainfield in 1870, only nine years after it was founded. The College's new location, situated near the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy rail line,

brought easy access to Chicago and surrounding communities.<sup>8</sup> Naperville



Old Main 1870

began to grow as a college and industrial community.

Naperville also became the home of the Union Biblical Institute,

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 230.

<sup>8</sup> Keating, *Chicagoland*, 156-157.

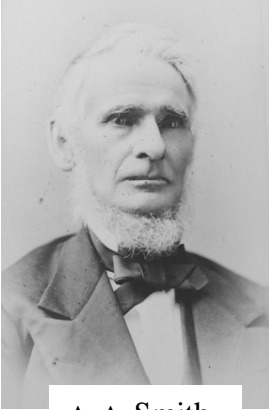
founded in 1873 to train young men as ministers in the Evangelical Association.<sup>9</sup> (In the early twentieth century, the Union Biblical Institute was renamed the Evangelical Theological Seminary.) The number of local Evangelical institutions, which included several congregations in addition to the college and seminary, demonstrated the strength of the Evangelical presence in Naperville. The North-Western College community fought, as an extension of the Evangelical Association, to combat intemperance. When the College moved to Naperville, the North-Western women arrived as middle class, Evangelical, and educated women who filled the ranks of fighters for morality in the community.

With the arrival of North-Western College in Naperville, the struggle for temperance took on renewed fervor. The professors, their wives, and the students took on the temperance fight in Naperville, adding their voices to other leaders of the community. The first President of North-Western College, A.A. Smith, was an advocate for temperance, in addition to many

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<sup>9</sup> Clarence N. Roberts, *North Central College: A Century of Liberal Education 1861-1961* (Naperville: North Central College, 1960), 134.

other causes, including abolition of slavery and equal



A. A. Smith

educational opportunities for women.

He wrote extensively in favor of temperance, and many of his articles are featured in the *Evangelical Messenger*, the publication of the Evangelical Association. In one such submission,

Smith wrote a sermon entitled “The Sin of Intemperance”, criticizing intemperance from a biblical as well as a scientific perspective.<sup>10</sup> The strict restrictions on the conduct of students, especially with regards to the consumption of alcohol, demonstrated the temperance position of President Smith, the College, and the Evangelical Association. In the College Catalog the consequences for unfavorable actions are clearly indicated:

...the following things are positively forbidden: ...injury to College property; the use of intoxicating drinks; the use of tobacco in public places, on the streets, and on the College premises... For the violation of these and other rules of the College, students

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<sup>10</sup> “The Sin of Intemperance by A.A. Smith” News clipping Scrapbook, Smith Family Papers, College Archives, North Central College Archives.

shall be liable to a Fine, Private of Public Reproof, Suspension or Expulsion.<sup>11</sup>

Another temperance crusader brought to Naperville with the relocation of North-Western

College was Henry H. Rassweiler, a North-Western College graduate of 1868. Professor Rassweiler was a popular member of the faculty and later became the second president of



H. H. Rassweiler

the College. Like many other faculty and community members, he was a member of the Evangelical Association.<sup>12</sup> The Evangelical Association was founded in Pennsylvania in 1816 by Jacob Albright and ministered to the large German-American population in the United States.<sup>13</sup> As stated previously, temperance was a moral code supported by the Evangelical Association and Rassweiler, as a College leader, took up the cause. While he was a professor at the College, he helped to

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<sup>11</sup> North-Western College Catalogue, 1876-1877, NCC Publications, College Archives, North Central College Archives.

<sup>12</sup> Roberts, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 4.

revive the temperance movement in Naperville by creating the National Temperance Alliance on September 31, 1881.<sup>14</sup> The alliance had specific goals to accomplish:

The object of the alliance was to combine for united action all other temperance bodies of the place. It has a women's section, a children's section and a voter's section and is to be a branch of a county organization of the same general plan, which in turn is to be an auxiliary of a state association.<sup>15</sup>

### **Women's Christian Temperance Union**

Prior to the Civil War there were some 'dry' communities, but in general, temperance advocates did not make an impact until later in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some smaller temperance organizations, mostly led by men, tried to take up the temperance fight in the name of morality. Like Naperville's experience, most of those organizations were short lived and largely ineffective. With Francis Willard, the face of the temperance movement changed. Frances Willard was a prominent social activist in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century who fought for women's suffrage and economic rights, in addition to

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<sup>14</sup> Blanchard, 230.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 230.

temperance. Born in New York, Willard grew up in Janesville, Wisconsin before moving to Evanston, Illinois to complete her education. In the 1870's, Willard organized the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (W. C. T. U.), formed in Evanston, Illinois and served as its president through her lifetime.

Willard's tireless fight in the name of temperance brought worldwide attention to the cause. Through her efforts, women became the activists on behalf of temperance and the fight to bring morality back into society and to preserve the home and family. The familiar image of women praying outside saloons in order to deter men from entering created a visual of the temperance crusader, but temperance activism was much more common in other forms. Through the W. C. T. U., a new form of activism was created with women as political actors. Even though they did not have the power to vote at this time, the W. C. T. U. brought influence and power to women,. As one author notes:

“In the late nineteenth century, the temperance movement came under female leadership and was transformed into what was largely a female drive against

the intemperance and irresponsibility of men, a campaign against the masculine culture that these women saw as supporting such irresponsibility, through this process, the women's culture that had begun to emerge through evangelical Christianity and the sexual antagonism around which that culture revolved were politicized. The temperance movement provided the basis for a demand for public recognition of women's values and for family life in which they were embedded."<sup>16</sup>

Of all the temperance organizations, the W. C. T. U. made the biggest impact on Naperville as evidenced by its local support and also by its longevity. The Naperville chapter of the W. C. T. U. was founded on September 20, 1883 at the Congregational Church in Naperville. Through its formation, the Protestant women of Naperville took up the holy fight against intemperance. The Naperville W. C. T. U. met monthly in the cause of battling 'demon rum' in their town. The ladies of the Naperville W. C. T. U. were passionate supporters of the temperance movement and strongly fought for a dry Naperville. The membership of the Naperville W. C. T. U. was mostly

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<sup>16</sup> Barbara Leslie Epstein, *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America*. (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1981), 90.

comprised of prominent ladies of Naperville and women from the College. The women of North-Western College became leaders of the chapter due to their “education and ability.”<sup>17</sup>



Mary Dreisbach Smith

One such example was Mary Dreisbach Smith, the wife of H. C. Smith, a North-Western College professor, and the daughter-in-law of College President A. A. Smith. Mrs. Smith was a member of the Naperville W. C. T. U. for 37 years

and led the group as President for 10 years.<sup>18</sup> Her impact was felt by all who knew her. Professor Henry H. Rassweiler noted her devotion in such a way:

In the great cause of temperance in the field of work in the interest of Christian missions and in all other worthy movements of reform, as others will duly mention, Mrs. Smith was never missing from her place in the very vanguard of the heroines in the ranks of reform.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>Steck, 253.

<sup>18</sup> Calvin Steck ed., *Lovisa M. Steck: Her Life's Work and Character as Reflected by Her Writings*. (Chicago: Hammond Press, 1924), 253.

<sup>19</sup> In Memoriam-Mary Dreisbach Smith, Smith Family Papers, College Archives, North Central College

## Lovisa Steck

Lovisa Steck was a prominent member of the Naperville social community and a member of the Naperville W. C. T. U. In her lifetime, Steck wrote a series of motivational essays on temperance which clearly demonstrate her devotion to the cause. Together, her writings chronicle the history of the Naperville chapter of the W. C. T. U. Mrs. Steck's writings provide extraordinary insight into the methods and efforts of the organization. Although it was a non-denominational organization, the Naperville W. C. T. U. often met in local Protestant churches and many of Steck's speeches were delivered from the pulpit of the Congregational Church in Naperville. Monthly meetings lasted for a few hours and activities included prayer, listening to speakers and discussing the temperance fight and how their activism could grow.



Lovisa Steck  
Photo courtesy of  
Naper Settlement

The Naperville W. C. T. U. aligned with national temperance teachings, specifically the movement to reform

youth by teaching temperance in schools. Temperance advocates widely believed that drunkenness began in youth and felt that by educating the youth there was a greater chance for a temperate adult. They felt that the temperance education of the youth should not be limited to teaching the physiological consequences of alcohol use, but also the moral consequences. Lovisa Steck felt that there was negligence in the instruction of temperance in the schools, and colleges and universities were especially rampant in the indulgence of alcohol and narcotics. Steck used Princeton College (later University) as an example of this indulgence because, "...her faculty signed a petition for a saloon license, where ale and beer are sold to her students."<sup>20</sup> Further demonstrating her opinion regarding the mandate and direction of the W. C. T. U., which was in question at various points of its existence, Steck addressed the foundation of the organization with:

I have been told since that it is not the work of the W. C. T. U. to reform drunkards, but to train the youth in temperance ways. If this is true, I do not see

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 186.

why we talk of the work among miners and railroad men, the prison and alms-house. But the work of the W. C. T. U. is founded on God's Word, and that commands, 'Bear ye one another's burdens.'<sup>21</sup>

By its name, the W. C. T. U. fought in the best interest according to the teachings of Christ and was not affiliated with one church in particular. In some instances, the W. C. T. U. was critical of the various denominations and their inaction on the temperance issue. The W. C. T. U. felt that temperance should be a cause that should be fought for by the Church, as intemperance was corrupting the youth and the future generations who would carry on the work of the Church. Steck believed the W. C. T. U., "Like a loving mother or gentle sister we have been pleading with the church for a quarter of a century to remove this curse which is blighting our homes and bringing sorrow and anguish to so many hearts, and robbing the church of her young men and women, which should be her glory and strength."<sup>22</sup> Steck was very critical of the apparent lack of

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 116.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, 162.

action taken by the Church in the fight for temperance. The W.

C. T. U. was proud to say:

We believe we can truthfully affirm that outside of the Christian Church we are the greatest organization in the world today, because our motives are as a society, pure and unselfish, our motto for God and home and every land, while other societies, especially secret organizations, are founded upon selfish motives, and, we believe, for self-glory, and are among the great hindrances to our work, and also the work of the church.<sup>23</sup>

The W. C. T. U. felt that their cause was the most important and righteous cause to fight for. Steck lamented that there was a lack of religion in politics and felt that politicians were not especially looking out for the best interest of the community. Politicians don't fight for temperance, "...unless it is just before election when the worldly wise begin to be very discreet about mixing politics with religions, forgetting to mix a little religion with their politics."<sup>24</sup> For the W. C. T. U., neither the Church nor the politicians were Christian enough in their fight for temperance.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 182.

While the women of Naperville did take on the temperance cause and many of the prominent ladies of Naperville did join the W. C. T. U., not every local woman sought to join this organization. Lovisa Steck felt that many women made time for other entertainments, but little time for temperance work. In a speech she gave to the local W. C. T. U. on March 9, 1899 entitled, “What the Women of Naperville Can Not Do for Temperance and Why!”, Steck stated:

If all our women were as intensely interested as they should be in the temperance cause, there can be no doubt that the saloons of Naperville would soon be a thing of the past, but looking over the history of the temperance movement here for the past fifteen years, I find that only about thirty of the large number of women who reside here are really interested in our work. Why? Not because it does not appeal to the heart of every true woman, wife, mother, sister, or friend, but instead of becoming interested, we find the majority complacently indifferent. We find our women sacrificing time, labor and money in obedience to the calls of society, fashion, amusement, musical and literary clubs, and even secret organizations, but no time for temperance work.<sup>25</sup>

Obviously, the ladies of the organization found temperance work to be the most noble and time-worthy. However, the women of Naperville did engage in other social activities; they

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 188.

did not find temperance work a pressing matter to take on.

Steck asked, “Why won’t the women of Naperville think and act for themselves on the saloon question? We believe that the majority of them at heart believe the liquor traffic is evil.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Why temperance failed in Naperville?**

Although there were extraordinary efforts by local temperance organizations, the sale of alcohol continued in Naperville. The local W. C. T. U. actively brought temperance speakers to town and sought to change local attitudes, but Naperville remained a ‘wet’ town. For years efforts were made to educate the youth and protest the sale of alcohol, but to no avail. No official change occurred in Naperville during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Two reasons exist for the failure to secure a prohibition of alcohol in Naperville. First, women did not enjoy suffrage and could not personally affect a political change. Although they could influence men to vote for prohibition, women themselves could not voice their choices by casting ballots. These activist women could only stand aside and watch

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<sup>26</sup> Calvin Steck ed., *Lovisa M. Steck: Her Life’s Work and Character as Reflected by Her Writings*. (Chicago: Hammond Press, 1924), 191.

as intemperate politicians were voted into office and continued to overlook the issue of temperance.

The second reason for the failure of temperance in Naperville was financial. The regulation of the sale of alcohol made a profit for the community. According to several township meetings, there were ordinances for the sale and regulation of alcohol with fines and fees attached. At the May 27, 1878 meeting of the Village of Naperville, provisions were put into place to control the illegal sale of liquor. If any business wished to sell liquor for recreational consumption, they were required to petition the board and pay a fee for a license. The Village received \$150 for each purchase of a license to sell liquor in Naperville. Exemptions to this fee were allowed in cases of religious or medicinal purposes. If anyone was caught selling liquor recreationally without a license, they were fined \$25 each offense.<sup>27</sup> In order to keep the license, merchants had to adhere to certain regulations. Sale to minors without consent of the parents or gaming on the premises was strictly prohibited

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<sup>27</sup> City of Naperville. *An Ordinance to Regulate the sale of Spirituous Liquors*. 27 May 1878.

and constituted grounds for removal of the license. Also, those who held liquor licenses could not sell liquor between 11 P.M. and 4 A.M., or on Sundays. In case of a fire in the town, the dram shop must close so all able bodied individuals could aid in subduing the fire. If any of these measures were violated, then the party would be fined \$25.<sup>28</sup> Many other smaller provisions were passed prior to and following this ordinance and in every case there were strict fines imposed on violations. Although nothing indicates that frequent violations of these regulations were cited, enough fines on alcohol were levied to increase the village's treasury.

## **Conclusion**

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, temperance swept the country. All over, women sought to end the evils of 'demon rum' in their communities. The temperance cause rallied huge support and gained a fellowship of loyal women in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Through this organization, women became political activists, laying groundwork for future victories

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

including suffrage. In Naperville, temperance would have seemed logical, for while Naperville was a license town that allowed legal sale and consumption of liquor, Naperville also was a community of Evangelical Protestant values. The faculty, wives and students of North-Western College, as well as prominent women of Naperville, rallied a large amount of support for the temperance cause, but ultimately to no avail. At its core, Naperville seemingly did not have the desire to become a dry town. A large number of recent German immigrants comprised the population and they found the idea of temperance unnecessary. Additionally, regulation on the sale of alcohol in Naperville provided a source of income for the town. It was remarkable that a strong and active local chapter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union fought so hard for temperance in Naperville, but economic and cultural forces prevailed.

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