

12-2017

Westward to Equality: An Analysis of Frontier Life and the Suffrage Movement of Abigail Scott Duniway

Jordan Bonnell

Follow this and additional works at: https://pilot scholars.up.edu/hst_studpubs

 Part of the [United States History Commons](#), and the [Women's History Commons](#)

Citation: Pilot Scholars Version (Modified MLA Style)

Bonnell, Jordan, "Westward to Equality: An Analysis of Frontier Life and the Suffrage Movement of Abigail Scott Duniway" (2017).
History Undergraduate Publications and Presentations. 17.
https://pilot scholars.up.edu/hst_studpubs/17

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the History at Pilot Scholars. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Undergraduate Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of Pilot Scholars. For more information, please contact library@up.edu.

Westward to Equality: An Analysis of Frontier Life and the Suffrage Movement of Abigail Scott

Duniway

By

Jordan Bonnell

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts in History

University of Portland

December 2017

Introduction

The Middle of the 19th century was a pivotal time in American history for many reasons that all connect to one exceptional historical event: The Great Westward Migration. In no other place or time in U.S. history has a region been developed so quickly. Settlers championed the exploration of western land (known as the frontier) and took the most dangerous journey of their lives in the hopes of finding riches and success. New legislation, for example, like the Homestead Act (which provided free land for any man who wanted to move out west), gave people hope for an opportunity on the frontier.¹ America effectively became the land of dreams due to the tremendous amount of opportunity, which prompted an influx of immigration by people who were yearned for a fresh start. Throughout the 19th century, the American population steadily grew from 5 million to 76 million, the majority coming from the German Empire and Ireland. The belief in Manifest Destiny (which originated in the early 19th century), gave Americans motive to make this westward movement because they believed God was on their side. Manifest Destiny by definition is, “A popular slogan of the 1840s. It was used by people who believed that the United States was destined- by God, to expand across North America to the Pacific Ocean”; John L. O’ Sullivan first employed the term who wrote the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*.² They thought it was their purpose to pack up their entire lives, and travel through the unknown, settling the land as they went. Many did, indeed, become successful. But at the same time, there was as much tragedy on the trail West as there was triumph.

¹ West throughout this paper will refer to the Trans-Mississippi West

² Adam Gomez, “Deus Vult: John L. O’Sullivan, Manifest Destiny, and American Democratic Messianism.” (*American Political Thought*, vol. 1, no. 2, 2012)

Through death and peril came a new society, the American Frontier. With a new set of rules. On the Frontier, many realized that starting a new life and finding fortune was not going to be as easy as they thought. The West gave women the opportunity to influence their husbands and, little by little, obtaining more control of their own lives. For the first time, there was a rise in female doctors, lawyers, businesswomen, and even women in the senate. Many women enjoyed newfound freedoms, but still had a constant reminder that their husbands were in charge. They could not choose where to live, go to court, or handle money without their husband's permission, and they had no right to any business profits. Along with, the inability to vote, many women believed it was their natural right to be equal to men. Without the right to vote there would be an inability to make changes in their lives.

From moving out West, the growing need for equality strengthened. The progression of male's life on the Frontier only angered women more because they could become reckless, and lose everything they owned. All the meanwhile could do absolutely nothing about their husbands' choices. Women were beaten by their husbands, and could take no legal action. For many, their unwillingness (but legal mandate) to move out west on their husband's accord changed their perception of equality. Women started to stand up for what they believed in most: equality through the right to vote. In particular, one suffragette's determination for the right to vote developed with growing up out West. This was Abigail Scott Duniway. She once stated that her biggest piece of advice was, "do not yield to difficulties, but rise above the discouragement," and was most well known for testing the limits of her time in hopes of achieving a better life and equal opportunity for women.³

³ Abigail Scott Duniway, *Path Breaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in the Pacific Coast States* (Oregon: James Kerns and Abbott Co, 1914), 11

Abigail Scott Duniway was born in Illinois in 1834. She was an American pioneer and moved out West during the Great Westward Migration and settled on the frontier. There were many times in her life where her patience was tested due to the men around her making unwise choices and she had no ability to help or even make disapproving statements. Far too many women experienced disempowerment by their husbands. During the time, Abigail Scott Duniway wanted to change this injustice. A.S.D, like all women of her time, experienced limitations because of societal standards that did not see women as equals.⁴ It was not until her family rode the Oregon Trail and lived on the Frontier that Abigail Scott Duniway obtained more significant responsibilities in her family. These events drew Duniway to become one of the most influential suffrage speakers of the late nineteenth century and to create a newspaper in Oregon, which spread the word about equal rights to both women and men across the Northwest. The adventure of journeying out west, living on the Frontier, and establishing a new society inspired Abigail Scott Duniway (as well as many other Frontier Women) to fight for equality between the sexes.

The Move Out West

In 19th century America, with the upsurge of opportunity, becoming rich and successful was very possible and idealistic. Many families believed this was only possible with the move out west. The most popular movement, known as the Great Westward Migration, which peaked in the 1850's, departing from Independence, Missouri to Oregon Country,⁵ Once a person became a pioneer, whether man, women, or child, their world would never be the same again. Women played a significant role in settlement, through receiving small amounts of influence at a

⁴ A.S.D- Abigail Scott Duniway

⁵ Susan G Butruille, *Women's Voices from the Oregon Trail and a Guide to Women's History Along the Oregon Trail* (Boise: Tamarack Books, 1993)

time. Throughout the journey, many women had to mourn the loss of their male companions such as husbands and fathers, soon leaving them in charge. Many of the women's journals repeat the same story: a family leaves everything behind believing they will make riches out West, no harm will come to them, and it will be a challenging but successful journey. Yet, most end the same, with broken hearts, pioneers turned back to their old lives. To understand the desire to move out West, it must be recognized why families left the East in the first place.

In the 1800s, men were legally in charge of their wives according to a series of laws and rules that left women powerless. In the case of Abigail Scott Duniway, her mother and her older sister had no desire to move to Oregon. Her mother, Ann, wanted to stay where they were because they had always lived on the American Frontier, particularly now that society and technological advances were finally catching up with them. It was Abigail's father, Tucker who decided to move the family again. An interview, years later, from one of Abigail Scott Duniway's brothers narrates his father's response to his mother protesting; he stated, "Don't be foolish, Annie! We'll take civilization with us wherever we go."⁶ It was clear that this was going to be the father's choice and his choice only. Because of this, later in life, a common theme in Abigail's fiction is the imposition of the father's will upon his family; originating to her father's decision to push them to Oregon when everyone, except for him, was happy where they were residing.⁷ This was one of the first times, with many more to come, where the command of a man interfered with Abigail's life, and the women in her family were not the only ones whom felt this way.

⁶ Ruth Barnes Moynihan, *Rebel For Right: Abigail Scott Duniway* (London: Yale University Press, 1983) 29

⁷ *Ibid*, 29

If the husband or father wanted to move, the women had no say and had to leave everything behind. A popular poem that articulates the theme of how women felt about leaving their lives is "The Emigrant Bride," which was first published in March 1835 by *Western Monthly Magazine*.⁸ The poem, as a whole, captures the positives and negatives of women's involvement in the Great Westward Migration. The poem recites:

A snow-white marble marks the mound, Inscribes with my mother's name
O! How can I go and leave that spot so hallowed and so dear?
And, who will be there, when I am not, to give it the secret tear⁹

The bride realizes she will never see her mother again and is leaving the only place she has ever known.¹⁰ She was traveling across the country, to an unfamiliar place. She was not alone with her feelings, as she was not the only one who was facing this same dilemma. Men of all different colors, ages, and health statuses, thought packing all their belongings and traveling over 2,000 miles over unknown territory for an unknown destiny was a necessity. According to Will Bagley in *With Golden Visions Bright Before Them: Trails to the Mining West 1849-1852*, "people came to Oregon and California seeking health, cheap land, and milder climate, a fresh start in new home, a chance to win a better life...some had been the young lifeblood of their communities, but many came from society's margin and had nothing to lose."¹¹ All emigrants had more to lose than they thought. With perils like disease, lack of provisions, uncharted territory, and threats from others, the Great Westward Migration was the biggest gamble of their lives.

⁸ Julie Roy Jeffery, *Frontier women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979) p, 3

⁹ Hannah F. Gould, *The Emigrant Bride* (The Western Monthly Magazine, and Literary Journal (1833-1837)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3

¹¹ Will Bagley, *With Golden Visions Bright Before Them: Trails to the Mining West 1849-1852*. (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012) xvi

There have been strides in scholarly work on the Oregon Trail and advances in gender studies of the Great Westward Migration and frontier living. An emerging trend in Oregon Trail history that has been unveiled in the last few decades is retracing the footsteps of the emigrants that crossed the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. In 2015, Rinker Bunk (a journalist for *Vanity Fair*, *New York Life*, and many other publications) wrote a popular history about the modern-day trail. He started in Kansas City, Missouri with an end destination of Portland, Oregon. He wrote in great detail about what pioneers would have rode in, how their oxen and horses pushed through the journey, and, most importantly, he brought modern day facts to famous Oregon Trail Monuments. Bunker states, “I would have to cover stretches of forty miles or more without water. And why did I think that the notorious and often fatal obstacles that the pioneers faced would miraculously vanish from the trail for me.”¹² Adding comparison to Bunk’s book, historian Susan G. Butruille drove the Oregon Trail and only focused on landmarks that emigrant women had an impact on. She used inspiration from her experiences from being a teacher, student, and writer to be an advocate for women’s history. Butruille started in Independence, Missouri and ended in Oregon. She used a vast amount of small excerpts from the journals of women of all different ages and backgrounds in her book about her time on the Oregon Trail.

Butruille’s book on *Women’s Voices from the Oregon Trail* was so successful that a few years later, she wrote another similar work, *Women’s Voices from the Western Frontier*. Butruille wrote about what she believes were the most significant transitions from the East Coast, life on the Trail, and, finally, life on the frontier; she wrote, “What you are sensing are the many western frontiers: the disease frontier, which killed millions of the first Americans; the

¹² Rinker Buck, *The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey*. (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperback, 2015) 7-8

mining frontier, the carnival, military, agricultural, and urban frontiers.”¹³ Additionally, a secondary source that shows an overall picture of the Oregon Trail is *Overland West: The Story of the Oregon and California Trails Volume II 1849-1852*. It covers topics such as why the people went west, difficulties faced, various routes, gender roles, and other broad topics with accompanying statistical analysis. All of these secondary sources work in conjunction with one another to provide a larger picture of the Oregon Trail and the Frontier.

The Great Westward Migration had huge emotional factors and in order to recognize the role women had in creating this new society, it is useful to compare the differences between the diaries that men and women created while on the Trail. As a whole, emigrants became new people after crossing the Plains. To get a males perspective, *the Oregon Trail* written by Francis Parkman (who traveled the Oregon Trail in 1846) is an important primary source. Parkman, a Harvard graduate, who had everything he needed in the East, but, nevertheless, decided to pack everything up and start anew. Throughout his journal, he writes of sicknesses, being a single man on the road, and mostly of hunting. His perspective is important because he writes in depth about jobs that women did not have the ability to do, such as hunting and handling a gun.

Likewise, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1852* brings together four different women’s journeys. The women include: seventeen-year-old Abigail Scott Duniway (who would later become prominent in the suffrage movement), Martha Reed, (who writes about the darker sides of her journey) and other women who were in charge of keeping a diary for their entire company¹⁴. This is a unique and important primary source collection because the background information and introduction come from David C. Duniway,

¹³ Susan G. Butruille, *Women’s Voices from the Western Frontier* (Boise: Tamarack Books, 1995) 2

¹⁴ David C Duniway and Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1852*. (Arthur H. Clark, 1986)

grandson of A.S.D. Among the journals that so many women wrote, one stands out and that is *One Woman's West* written by Martha Gay Masterson. Her work is unique because she continues to write after crossing the Great Plains and kept a strong detail about her new life on the Frontier. Lois Barton, a historian, states, "she provides us with an authentic version of what an ordinary girl from rural Missouri family experienced on her wagon trip west. She furnishes us an eye-witness glimpse of how pioneer women saw beauty and bleakness of the frontier wilderness."¹⁵ This wide variety of primary sources shows evidence of the shift that men and women had to make to survive completing the Great Westward Migration and life on the Frontier.

Especially, over the past five decades there have been many advances in gender studies. In particular, the huge roles women have played in trying times. From diaries, letters, and journals, women wanted their voices to be heard loud and clear that they could step up and take on the responsibilities of their late male companions if needed. As stated earlier, death was very common on the trail and it had huge repercussions once families arrived to their destination. The loss of men, women, and children had very different outcomes simply because of the roles each played in survival. When moving out West, women did not necessarily have the intention to obtain more power in the household and in society. Women realized they had to step up, and from there, some liked having this new freedom. In other instances, many women could not handle it and turned home.

The Great Westward Migration

Understanding the shift in gender roles, one must start with life before the Great Westward Migration and awareness of how quickly the Western World had to evolve much in terms of dress, attitude, and social norms. According to Julie Roy Jeffrey, nineteenth century

¹⁵ Martha Gay Masterson, *One Woman's West: Recollections of the Oregon Trail and Settling the Northwest Country*, edited by Lois Barton (Eugene: Butte Press, 1986)

frontier life was about the changing expectations of sex roles.¹⁶ This is an important concept to grasp because the move out west was an ideal opportunity. Women could be given more power outside the home, if they desired. Many women in the east had a desire to achieve more than what men expected of them. Southern men tried to control women in excess force; it was believed that women must be guarded at all cost. A white male who believed he was defender of gender institutions stated, “Women naturally shrink from public gaze, and from the struggle and competition of life. Thus, each women should have a husband, a lord, a master.”¹⁷ Similarly, in the Northeast, women had little work to do and had no responsibilities put onto them. Many middle and upper class women spent their days reading magazines; focusing on fashion and romance.¹⁸ In their urban civilizations there were farmer’s markets, factories, and manufactured goods. Moving out West meant altering what an urban society meant, as the industrial revolution had not hit the frontier to this degree. Throughout the move out west and settlement on the frontier the line between masculine and feminine roles blurred, for the sake of survival; “As all family members worked to feed, clothe, and protect themselves, pioneer women regained the economic importance which most women in settled areas had lost.”¹⁹ The transition was obviously not immediate. There are a few keys factors necessitated women playing a larger role and having a newer, more traditional, masculine identity.

Sickness and death was more common than health during the Great Westward Migration. Every author writes of sickness in themselves and others. The worst of these diseases was Cholera because the cause was unknown, “the disease swept up the Mississippi Valley, killing at

¹⁶ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979) xiii

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 8

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 11

least 4,500, some six percent of the population.”²⁰ Symptoms of Cholera included pain in the arms, legs, stomach, and abdomen along with extreme thirst and dehydration. The victims would be healthy in the morning and dead by afternoon. Another disease that swept through the Oregon Trail was mountain fever, transmitted by ticks.²¹ In addition too malaria, scurvy, and smallpox, one man even stated at the end of his journey, “death has been busy.”²² The multitude of sicknesses defined the choices people made. Sickness meant longer travel and the threat of winter, loss of supplies, along with families being torn apart by death. All journals tell of the same despair.

The Impact of Sickness and Death On the Trail

Throughout Francis Parkman’s journal, he repeatedly writes that sickness has overpowered him, “I have been slightly ill for several weeks, but on the third night after reaching Fort Laramie a violent pain awoke me...in a day and a half I was reduced to extreme weakness, so that I could not walk without pain and effort.”²³ The reason Parkman was able to publish his journal was because he had to take such extensive bed rest after his time on the Oregon Trail (which he was unable to complete).²⁴ Other stories of illness don’t end with just bed rest. The journal of Polly Coon (who went from Wisconsin to Oregon in 1852) tells of the quick death of a young teenager named Jane, who was married to the love of her life before the journey.²⁵ On the 13th of August, Polly writes that Jane was sick but hopefully, it was not too serious. On August

²⁰ Will Bagley, *With Golden Visions Bright Before Them: Trails to the Mining West 1849-1852*. (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012) 63

²¹ *Ibid.*, 66

²² *Ibid.*, 346

²³ Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*. (Feather Trail Publishers, 1847)

²⁴ David, Levin, *The Oregon Trail by Francis Parkman: An Introduction*. (Penguin Random House, 1982)

²⁵ David C Duniway and Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1852*. (Arthur H. Clark, 1986) 177

19th, Jane was doing better, and finally on August 22nd, they put Jane to rest after she passed away in the night.²⁶ Sickness could turn for the worse and quickly. Families had choices to make with regard to how they would accept the death of their loved ones and it plays a huge part in how men and women came together in the face of adversity and their new realities.

Disease was not the only killer on the Trail. Weather and terrain were equally as deadly. Winter meant no hunting, which led to pioneers being forced to kill their horses for food. Hundreds died of starvation.²⁷ Many emigrants were taking longer than expected to cross the Oregon Trail. By September 1849, no more than a third who had set out for the West had reached the mountains. One man from Sacramento wrote, “If the emigrants do not get to this side of the California Mountains before the last of October, it is very doubtful whether they will be able to get through the winter.”²⁸ Snow, however, was not only problematic during the winter. Abigail Scott Duniway writes in her journal about how mentally and physically challenging the snow was to her group in April. A.S.D wrote in her journal, “April third- eat breakfast this morning in snow storm, an although the prospect did look rather gloomy, still we kept in good cheer, and victuals, crusted not with sugar, but snow.”²⁹ Still, many others write of their experience of the harsh weather. One woman wrote that the hail and lightning were so strong that it killed two of their oxen. Without much preparation for such disastrous storms, many nights they had to, “crowd into the wagons and sleep in wet beds with their wet clothes on, without

²⁶ Ibid., 200

²⁷ Will, Bagley, *With Golden Visions Bright Before Them: Trails to the Mining West 1849-1852*. (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012) 69

²⁸ Murphy. *Letters from California* (Missouri Whig, 1849)

²⁹ David C Duniway and Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1852*. (Arthur H. Clark, 1986) 40

supper.”³⁰ This was a daily struggle. Men were unable to find food, women were unable to cook, parents were powerless to protect their children from the freezing Plains, and many were beginning to contemplating whether the journey is worth it or not.

Preparing and packing for the long journey was the first obstacle of many. Most traded their valuable possessions such as earthenware pots for camp stoves, paintings for wagon wheels, and whatever they could not fit into their wagon was given away to family members.³¹ To move west truly meant to lose the comforts of life. Their new home for four months would be a ten-foot by four-foot wagon that could carry about 2,000 pounds of weight. The wagons could not hold much compared to what the pioneers felt they needed to be secure with on the journey, so many had to walk behind the wagon with a handcart for additional storage.³² Even after getting rid of most of their valuables before they left, much more had to be thrown out of the wagon during the move because of exhausted and dying oxen. For example, one traveler wrote, “Yesterday we passed several piles of the most beautiful bacon, which had been thrown away by companies preceding us, to lighten the load.”³³ Provisions for survival became expendable, luxury goods were as good as trash, the remnants of lives back East meant nothing if they could not make it to their new beginning.

At the commencement of the journey, roles were the same as they would have been in everyday life back East. Abigail Scott (like many women) starts her journal at the commencement of their journey, by introducing every member of her group and the role they played. Such members included her Father, John “Tucker” Scott (whose responsibility was

³⁰ Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Pioneer Women: the Lives of Women on the Frontier*. (New York: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996) 33

³¹ *Ibid.*, 32

³² *Ibid.*, 20

³³ Will Bagley, *With Golden Visions Bright Before Them: Trails to the Mining West 1849-1852*. (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012) 87

driving the mother wagon).³⁴ John Tucker Scott (whom is referred too as Tucker in most of the text) like many others, was “seized” by the Oregon fever.³⁵ The group also included Mary Frances, 19 (the oldest daughter who was assigned to cook), Harvey Whitefield, 14 (who shared in driving the mother wagon), Catherine Arnold, 13 (who took care of the youngest children), and John Henry, 9 (who also drove a wagon).³⁶ Even being a decade older, Mary Frances was reduced to cooking while a nine year old boy had a much more significant role in their journey across the Plains as he had a responsibility to everyone in their group. Meanwhile Mary Frances only cooked for her direct family. It was John Henry, whom had a large control on how the move out West was going to proceed. The editor of Abigail's book is her grandson, David Duniway, and he highlights the importance of this family group. Abigail's brother, Harvey, was a forty-year-old editor of the *Morning Oregonian* and also a leader in the Republican Party. As a young man, he, along with many of the other youth, played a huge role in shaping the West.³⁷ Not only did Harvey play a role in shaping the West, he had a leading role in shaping Abigail's competitiveness, due largely to the fact that her brother got things in life easier because he was a man. Their mother made it very clear; he was the favorite because he could carry on the families' ambitions.³⁸ Abigail was not a fan of this, and jealousy grew because she did not understand why she could not be as successful as her brother. They rivaled throughout their lives, both even coming into the same passion of writing. Without Harvey's opposition through her life, Abigail's journey to the suffrage movement would have been different. As, without him, she would of not

³⁴ David C Duniway and Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1852*. (Arthur H. Clark, 1986) 20

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 24

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 33

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 22

³⁸ Ruth Barnes Moynihan, *Rebel For Right: Abigail Scott Duniway* (London: Yale University Press, 1983) 29

had a constant reminder on why men have it easier along with her pride to show her brother that she could carry on the family ambitions as well as he could. It can be said that Abigail's passion for writing grew as she wrote her families' journal on the Oregon Trail. Abigail wrote mostly of miles traveled in a day and the condition of that stride. An average journal went: "June 5th- we came about twenty miles this day; we found the roads very sandy; about the middle of the afternoon a storm came up, and we halted."³⁹ Even though many of her journals entries were similar to this, many also wrote of tragedy. Her mother died of Cholera on the Trail, about thirty miles west of Fort Laramie.⁴⁰ The day after her mother's death, Abigail writes sorrowfully on how they are already moving on, but that she writes that her mother was buried in a romantic and safe place.⁴¹ Not moving on meant everyone was at risk for impending weather, lost provisions, and added time, which meant they could face the same fate.

Other instances where groups moved on quickly were after childbirth. Pregnancy was extremely common on the trail and these circumstances made for an uncomfortable journey. One woman, Lucy Henderson Deady, wrote the day after her mother had a child that, "the going was terribly rough, the men walked beside the wagon and tried to ease the wheels down in rough places, but in spite of this it was a very rough ride for my mother and her new born babe."⁴² The birth is not the only problem on the trail; it meant another person to take care of. In her diary, Martha Gay Masterson writes, "I asked mother whose baby was crying so. She said it was hers. I said not a word for some time, fearing I might have to welcome another brother. I already have

³⁹ Ibid., 61

⁴⁰ Ibid., 32

⁴¹ Ibid., 71.

⁴² Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Pioneer Women: the Lives of Women on the Frontier*. (New York: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996) 42

nine brothers.”⁴³ Women did not have the same support they did back home, which made family dynamics difficult, especially for older children. Cholera and other diseases, split up families too often on the Oregon Trail. No one could hide from the brutality. “The once protected had to learn how to protect others,” Bagley states in his book *With Golden Visions Bright Before Them: Trails to the Mining West 1849-1852* that one Oregon-bound family had, “lost so many men that their ladies had to shoulder their whips and assume the place as drivers.”⁴⁴ This is so different than the job roles Abigail Scott Duniway writes about in her journal. The women, in her party, had the responsibilities of cooking and taking care of young children. Meanwhile the men, even the youngest of boys, were driving the wagons. This means if women were driving, most of their men in their company were dead. Back East, women romanticized what the move out West was going to be like due to popular literature. Some tales described the West as the place where women could capitalize on their moral authority and be a part of the transformation.⁴⁵ Soon enough, many women realized this was not the case and a title emerged for people who gave up: discouraged pilgrims.⁴⁶

Move Forward or Go Home

Eventually, a term was coined for reformed overlanders: go-backs and backs-outs, which meant that they were not strong enough to complete the trail and had no choice but to turn back; “many are turning back with their teams, having become discouraged in anticipation of the long

⁴³ Martha Gay Masterson, “One Woman’s West: Recollections of the Oregon Trail and Settling the Northwest Country”, edited by Lois Barton (Eugene: Butte Press, 1986)

⁴⁴ Ibid., 270

⁴⁵ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979) 20

⁴⁶ Will Bagley. *With Golden Visions Bright Before Them: Trails to the Mining West 1849-1852*. (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012) 79

and tedious journey before them.”⁴⁷ Backing out was the most common outcome on the Trail for new widows, who often did not foresee themselves being able to make a life out West without their companion. In the *Journal of Travels*, a man (who is writing the journal) tells the story of a woman he encountered on the Trail who began her journey with her husband and four children. But quickly, their journey to a better life turned into a nightmare when her husband died. After the death, the woman and her young children were on their way back home, alone and scared, wondering what life would be like once they arrived back East. The author did not know any more information about this particular family, but it was clear from his account that this woman's situation was not an uncommon occurrence. The wife either had the choice to continue on and possibly make enough money on her own to survive, or go back East, to where she knew she had family that could help her. In this particular case, the grieving woman went back. Nevertheless, many women continued on, determined to make a better life for themselves and their families.

Men and women both felt a negative impact of losing a spouse on the Trail. When Abigail Scott Duniway and her family finally made it to Oregon (still recovering from the death of their mother) their father wasted no time in finding a new and younger wife. Soon enough, he brought home his new bride, Ruth Stevenson, who was 25 years old. They married quickly so he could claim an extra 160 acres of land, which he received from the Donation Land Act.⁴⁸ However, to receive the acres of land, Tucker had to remarry in the same year that he lost his wife, which horribly angered his still grieving children.⁴⁹ One of the definite ideals that came out of this marriage came from Abigail, as she had a new sense of feminism through her father's ideals. He thought the law was wrong for its injustices to women, in large by the fact a new

⁴⁷ Ibid., 79

⁴⁸ Act to promote homestead settlement in the Oregon Territory

⁴⁹ Ruth Barnes Moynihan, *Rebel For Right: Abigail Scott Duniway* (London: Yale University Press, 1983) 29

widow could obtain no land for her own. Such injustices were common themes in Abigail's fiction and non-fiction books. Soon after Tucker and Ruth's marriage, they found out she was pregnant and it was not his child. Nevertheless, Tucker decided to stay with her and give her and her son a good life. Ruth had few other options if Tucker decided to leave her. One person who was truly upset was Abigail because of the double standards in this situation. The father of the child received no punishment. Meanwhile, Ruth had to deal the disgrace of her sin, "women bore the unjust suffering caused by male lust...men were not the protectors."⁵⁰ Without Tucker, Ruth and her three children would have been left with absolutely nothing and this idea did not sit well with Abigail. This was just another time where the ideals of men changed Abigail Scott Duniway's perspective on equality and feminism.

Spouses also felt negative impacts from a husband leaving his children and wife back east to secure a suitable lifestyle before they traveled the Plains. Regardless, men and women started to realize that their realities were very different when they had to take care of themselves or their families without their partners. The typical jobs roles for men were more labor specific, outside of the home. Women's tasks, on the other hand, were focused on homebuilding activities including cleaning, cooking, taking care of the children, and helping other women in need in their new communities. Nevertheless, both genders had to learn either labor-intensive jobs or how to help around the house once moving to the Frontier. Many men had to step in and take charge of traditionally feminine tasks (due to their wives not coming with them on the initial journey); they soon developed a new perspective on how challenging some household duties were. James Lynn, a male pioneer, wrote in his journal, "I have always been inclined to deride

⁵⁰ Ibid., 48

the vocation of ladies until now.”⁵¹ He wrote this after trying to use a washboard for the first time (after he has not washed his clothes for months because his wife was not there to do it for him). Simultaneously, it was being reported that women began to hunt, drive oxen, became doctors to fight disease, and negotiated with Indians. Women needed to adapt quickly due to the prominent needs of their children. Men and women were comparably having a hard time adjusting to the new lifestyles and of what western standards suspected of them.

Elijah Spooner, a miner, wrote to his wife in 1847 that he, “[had] to cook, wash dishes, make beds, wash our clothes, darn old stockings, patch the old pants, cut and bring wood, and then rock the cradle all day. And aint this tuff now.”⁵² Yet, even though men like Elijah Spooner, insisted that he needed his wife to help him with a multitude of daily necessities, women were treated horribly. A traditional song that grew popular during migration out west that depicted that women were strong, but nevertheless, had to worry about violent marriages, “and now you see what a woman can do, she can outdo the devil and her old man too.”⁵³ Many women did feel restricted in their relationships. Women could not sue, divorce was nearly impossible, and domestic violence was common. If a woman did not work hard, she was subject to verbal or even physical abuse. An old English saying that was commonly used in the Midwest asserts the degradation of women during this time period: “A woman, a dog, a hickory tree, the more you beat them the better they be.”⁵⁴ It was not until the era of Oregon Trail and Frontier life that women could see a possibility to show they could handle more responsibilities outside of the home. The new frontier was one many women could not fathom. To survive, they had to work

⁵¹ Will Bagley. *With Golden Visions Bright Before Them: Trails to the Mining West 1849-1852*. (Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012) 320

⁵² Elijah Allen Spooner, *Letters and Diary, 1849-1850*. (BYU: BYU library)

⁵³ Susan G. Butruille, *Women's Voices from the Oregon Trail and a Guide to Women's History Along the Oregon Trail*. Boise: (Tamarack Books, 1993) 46

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 45

side by side: “men and women working together as equals to build home and community.”⁵⁵ This transformation of roles and standards gave women, for the first time, the opportunity to make a move for equality and to be able to stand up for their own freedoms.

Frontier Wife

For many, becoming a frontier wife was seen as an exciting new experience. Similarly, it was a very difficult transition, as they only knew how to take care of the home and their children. One of these women was Abigail’s mother, Ann. Therefore; it’s not a surprise that Abigail depicted mothers as mostly conscientious and self-sacrificing in her fictional novels.⁵⁶ This, however, was not the ideal that Abigail herself wanted to obtain. Abigail learned from her mother, that when she grew up, she wanted to be nothing like her, “Her poor invalid mother, as she always called herself, served Abigail Jane as an example of what not to be herself.”⁵⁷ Abigail did not want to be self-sacrificing and, as a frontier wife, she felt as though she had the ability to put herself first due to the wider range of freedom many women had

Being a frontier wife was a huge transition: “The Pioneer woman did what she did without fanfare of self-pity... She was sustained and strengthened by the very fact that she was a pioneer, that she was playing a significant part in a major American experience- conquering of the last frontier.”⁵⁸ Exploring the diary of Martha Gay Masterson gives one a strong idea of an ordinary American frontier wife. At the age of 33, she married J.A Masterson who was a

⁵⁵ Ibid., 141

⁵⁶ Ruth Barnes Moynihan, *Rebel For Right: Abigail Scott Duniway* (London: Yale University Press, 1983) 6

⁵⁷ Ibid,6

⁵⁸ Nancy Wilson Ross, *Westward the Women*. (San Francisco, California: North Point Press, 1985) 191

widower with nine children; she stepped in and raised them.⁵⁹ Masterson's story with her husband embodies a transition of the expanding freedoms women had for a multitude of reasons. First, she and J.A owned a hotel together. Within months of marriage in 1871, she was managing one of the most popular hotels in Silverton, Oregon and she was often left alone to operate the hotel.⁶⁰ Second, after twenty years of marriage she and J.A separated and in some secondary sources it has been stated that she even received a divorce. This was because she did not want to move anymore, and by law the husband had the decision of telling the wife where to move, so she left. As shown in previous journals from different women, it can be determined that this would have not been acceptable in earlier times.

Divorce soon became more popular in the West due to these states being more liberal. Indiana and South Dakota are passed lenient divorce laws; the first of their kind.⁶¹ Even though divorce laws were passed, husbands still had ownership of land, which meant women could be left with nothing, yet many still went ahead with the separation. In the Report of the Woman's Rights Convention, held at Seneca Falls in 1848, a statement was made that embodied how women should uphold the covenant of marriage:

[A woman should] promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master- the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement. He has so framed the law of divorce as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women- the law in all cases, going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands⁶²

⁵⁹ Martha Gay Masterson, "One Woman's West: Recollections of the Oregon Trail and Settling the Northwest Country", edited by Lois Barton. (Eugene: Butte Press, 1986) p, 91

⁶⁰ Ibid., 91

⁶¹ Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith Pioneer, *Women: the Lives of Women on the Frontier* (New York: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996) 89-90

⁶² Elizabeth Clark, *Matrimonial Bonds: Slavery, contract, and the Law of Divorce In Nineteenth-Century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin- Madison Law School, 1987) 1

For example of the laws of divorce and what the power the men has comes from the divorce story a woman named Kate Carmack (one of the wealthiest women out west) whom started a mining business with her husband that grew to 1.5 million dollars. In the late end of the nineteenth century, when she sued for divorce, she obtained nothing and lived off of a state pension for the rest of her life because the law favored men.⁶³ Many women saw divorce as a possibility to leave their abusive husbands for the first time because they could now get paid wages to work outside of the home, even though this type of work was looked down upon. The jobs, which were mostly available to women, included domestic servants and were for the most desperate, “Though women’s work performed for others received little respect...divorced or widowed with children were glad enough to have any pay at all. And, as poor as the wages were, it was the only honorable way to survive on the frontier.”⁶⁴ This job included taking out chamber pots and other disgusting jobs. Domestic servants were pushed to their limits because they could be. Families hiring knew if that a woman wanted a job, she was desperate enough to do whatever it took to help her family survive.

Women in the Work Force

The Western Frontier was at a crossroads. Many women had a strong need to work for a wage yet the ideal was not what the “true woman” was supposed to do. A “true woman” was an expectation most men had for their brides, yet it was almost nearly impossible to fulfill. She was supposed to follow any command her husband gave her. According to Butruille, when a young American man reached the age of 21, the women of the family would present him with a

⁶³ Ibid., 90

⁶⁴ Ibid., 102

freedom quilt, to celebrate liberation.⁶⁵ The ideal behind the freedom quilt is that once the boy received it at the age of 21 he was to leave the home and start his own. Women's liberation was to leave their families was getting married, and loose the freedom they never had to another man.

It was difficult transition in the conception of what embodied a "True Woman". A huge role in this came from the Bible; especially The Creation Story, which highlights what, happened when a woman (Eve) tried to do more than God had originally planned for her. After all, it was Eve, not Adam, who brought sin into our world. Any woman was capable of such sin, if she tried to push the norms of society. According to Rev. T. De Witt, who wrote in the *Ladies' Home Journal*, in the late 19th century, the women's role should be in the home, "A perfect God made a perfect woman...but she rebelled against God's government, she launched upon the word the crimes, the war, the tumults, that have set the universe a-wailing."⁶⁶ Becoming a sinner was actually quite easy for women. It could come from some as simple as dancing and include any pleasures women indulged in.

Throughout these decades of change for men and women living on the Frontier, there came an unintentional shift of more jobs and possible success for women. The growing workforce available for women out West was strong. By the end of the 19th century, 4% of the nation's females were out west and they held a noteworthy percentage of positions available to women United States. According to a Census at the beginning of the 1860s, 17% of the female actors, 15% of the female literary writers, 14% of female lawyers, 11% of female artist, 10% of female doctors, and 5% of female professors lived out West."⁶⁷ But by far the most popular job

⁶⁵ Susan G. Butruille, *Women's Voices from the Western Frontier* (Boise: Tamarack Books, 1995)

⁶⁶Ibid, 80

⁶⁷ Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Pioneer Women: the Lives of Women on the Frontier* (New York: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996)

for females was teaching. This was because, for married women, teaching could be viewed as a respectful job.⁶⁸ But, many women started to move outside the realm of primary education for other jobs such as becoming physicians. The desire to become a physician started because this was a skill, which most women needed to help their families through illness and injury, however a few women decided to take their education to the next level and become doctors, a rare accomplishment. One of the most famous doctors on the Frontier was Martha Hughes Cannon. She graduated from Medical School at the age of 22 in the year 1880 and was the only female in her class amongst 75 men.⁶⁹ She was not satisfied with this achievement. She had a thirst for education and went to Pennsylvania to study the latest in germ theory and earned a bachelor's degree in pharmacology.⁷⁰ When she returned back west, she was the only female doctor in her town. Even this was not enough for her. Almost 3 decades before women had the right to votes; Martha beat her own husband in the senate election and became the first female senator in Utah and in the United States.⁷¹ She even held two terms while other women were not allowed to vote for her.

There was another first on the Frontier: the first practicing female lawyer. This proved to be a great challenge due to a California law, which prohibited women from being called to the bar. The law stated, "only white male citizens," could become a lawyer.⁷² Nevertheless, Clara Foltz wrote a bill to delete "white male" and replace it with "any person" from the original statute and eventually the bill passed. In 1878, when the bill passed, she was able to become the

⁶⁸ Julie Roy Jeffrey, *Frontier women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979)

⁶⁹ D, Marianne. *Frontier Grit: The Unlikely True Stories of Daring Pioneer Women*. (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, 2016) 133

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 133

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 141

⁷² Linda Peavy and Ursula Smith, *Pioneer Women: the Lives of Women on the Frontier* (New York: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996) 123

first female lawyer in California and in the Nation. At the same time Clara Foltz was trying to make a name of her own, she was also taking care of five children after her husband left them for a mistress. Nevertheless, without a husband, she was still able to become successful due to the transitioning times; which started to blur typical sexual distinctions in the home, workforce, and ideals.

Naturally, many men started to be concerned with women's roles outside of the home. In the field of medicine, male doctors started felt threatened because women preferred to be treated by other women and the male doctors lost a significant amount of patients⁷³. Due to the men who were trying to keep women in the homes and out of what they believed to be manly jobs, "women often solved the dilemma by moving west, establishing themselves in tiny villages and scrambling new frontier towns."⁷⁴ Small towns had less men to help create their new societies thus women had to fill in to provide for their communities, which meant less objection from men when women wanted to leave the home. But, once they started thriving on the frontier, some women found husbands that were supportive of their wives' determination to work independently on their dreams. Specifically, one of these husbands gave his wife enough determination to start a suffrage movement that changed the face of women's voting: this was Ben Duniway who supported his wife, Abigail Scott Duniway.

The Fight for Equality

From the journey out West to Frontier life, there were instances where women began to thrive. Abigail Scott Duniway, in particular, was a woman who changed how the equal rights movement was seen. At birth, her parents were heartbroken because she was a girl, and her

⁷³ Cathy Luchetti, *Medicine Women: The Story of Early-American-Women Doctor* (New York: Crown Publishers, 199)

⁷⁴ Ibid

mother even told her that she was devastated, she had not had a son. Abigail Duniway wrote, “I remember that my mother informed me on my tenth birthday that her sorrow over my sex was almost too grievous to be borne.”⁷⁵ Growing up, her duties on the family farm were extensive but it only helped her love of writing to grow as a way to get away from the stress of her young life. Through her autobiography, Abigail Scott Duniway affirms that the best time of her childhood was learning to spell and write. Decades later, she used her knowledge to write books about her time on the frontier, and the need for equality for women by creating the *New North West*, a suffrage newspaper. Her transition from being a young girl moving out West, growing up, and being at the forefront of the suffrage movement, leads back to how frontier life challenged her ideals about women’s roles and equality.

Abigail Scott Duniway fought for women’s rights for 42 years before her death in 1915, and it was only five years later when the 19th amendment was ratified and women got the right to vote. Yet, throughout her life she had a need to test the limits of what a proper lady should exemplify. Growing up, she was taught that any women who demanded more rights than she was given was a man-hater, and there was no possible way Abigail could act this way.⁷⁶ Alas, even in her younger years, she wanted more rights than women were typically given. A.S.D had a need to learn how to spell and read. Her mother had children at a rapid pace and, therefore, Abigail was never the focal child; she writes, “Another baby of only fifteen months lay in a trundle bed near by, begging for “mama”, who, occupied with the newcomer, was weeping in her helplessness and begging without avail.”⁷⁷ Abigail had great responsibility at a young age, helping to care for her multiple younger siblings and her mother, who was an invalid. At one

⁷⁵ Abigail Scott Duniway, *Path Breaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in the Pacific Coast States* (Oregon: James Kerns and Abbott Co, 1914), 3

⁷⁶ Scott, 1

⁷⁷ Scott, 6

point, when her father was recovering from an illness, Abigail and her older sister were in charge of taking care of the house and more manly responsibilities, as her father was not able. Between her responsibilities of taking care of the children, taking care of her sick mother's duties, along with taking over her father's chores, Abigail had very little time to be a child.

At the age of seventeen, in the year 1848, her father decided to pack up her whole family and move out West. This only strengthened her love for writing, as she was in charge of keeping the family journal, and it was her job vent from the horrible mishaps on the Oregon Trail. Her sister Etty remembered Abigail on the trail as, "with the old book in her lap sitting...father was giving her commands to keep the diary correct!"⁷⁸ At some points in the journal, her father, John Tucker Scott writes entries, but it is obvious when he does. This is because throughout the journal, Abigail uses her best punctuation and spelling, where John Tucker uses no punctuation and spells most words incorrectly. A.S.D used the journal to practice and, as she states in her autobiography, the most important item that she brought to the Frontier was her *Webster's Elementary Spelling* book that she was not supposed to bring with her.⁷⁹ However, this spelling book gave her the first taste of how unequal the access to education was between men and women in her time. In 1855, she was teaching women in her community to read and write. After the lesson, a woman asked Abigail if she could take the spelling book back to her children so she could teach them as well.

The introduction to Abigail Scott Duniway's autobiography about the necessity of the suffrage movement starts off with a very passive aggressive statement. Even though passive, it is truly a strong argument about the puzzling reasons behind denying women the right to vote. The

⁷⁸ David C. Duniway, and Kenneth L. Holmes, *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1852*. (Arthur H. Clark, 1986), 24

⁷⁹ Abigail Scott Duniway, *Path Breaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in the Pacific Coast States* (Oregon: James Kerns and Abbott Co, 1914), 3

introduction reads, “When the business of mothering the race shall become recognized in its true relation to the race itself, the mother will be held responsible, as she ever ought to have opportunity to be, for the character of the child she releases to the world.”⁸⁰ Frontier life had multiple new challenges for both men and women. Nevertheless, women had to take on more than they could usually handle due to the fact that they did not have the support they used to have back East. In the case of Abigail Scott Duniway, she was very overwhelmed with her duties:

If I was not washing, scrubbing, churning, or nursing the baby, [I] was preparing their meals in our lean to kitchen. To bear two children in two and a half years from my marriage day, to make thousands of pounds of butter every year for market, not including what was used in our free hotel at home; to sew and cook, and wash and iron; to bake and clean and stew and fry; to be, in shorty, a general pioneer drudge, with never a penny of my own, was not pleasant business for an school teacher⁸¹

Her frustration came from the society she lived in. Her husband was an invalid from an injury. She had to take care of everything, while being pregnant in recurring years. But, she legally had no right to any of the profits from the work she put in for her family business. Without her, the family would have been homeless, with no money to survive on, yet in eyes of the men in her community and the law, her husband was still doing everything for the home.

After years of having to be obedient to the men in her life without any credit, she had enough. Duniway, Reminisces in her autobiography, about how she believed after publishing her first book, that she was not good enough (as a writer, homemaker, and mother) yet she wanted to prove to herself and her children that she could rise above. But, as she worked to rise above, she continued to have setbacks from men in her life and in the community. She knew her place, even

⁸⁰ Abigail Scott Duniway, *Path Breaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in the Pacific Coast States* (Oregon: James Kerns and Abbott Co, 1914), xiv

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 10

though she believed it to be wrong. In one instance, men came to her house to sign three financial notes; she knew that her husband should not sign because it could ruin the family farm. However, in the law she was a nonentity; it did not matter what she thought. Sarcastically, looking back at this moment, she remembers what her husband said along with what she thought, “Mama, you don’t need to worry; you’ll always be protected and provided for! I wanted to say: I guess I’ll always earn all the protection I get, but I remembered that I was nothing but a women.”⁸² The next day, they lost the farm. It was yet another burden for Abigail to handle. But, she was not the only woman to feel the burden of the law that allowed men to dictate even the smallest parts of their lives.

In Abigail’s autobiography, she writes of a hysterically upset woman, whose abusive husband who had sold everything they owned, and had left her and their five children. At this time, there was nothing to protect the wife from such cruelty. Eventually, with the help of neighbors, Abigail was able to pull together enough funds to get furniture for the poor woman, until her husband came back. With his return, he took legal possession of everything, “he repudiated the mortgage, which the wife had had no legal right to contract, and there was nothing left for her but the divorce courts.”⁸³ If the woman had the ability to take legal custody of her self and the children, he could have not come back and taken everything once more. But, due to the fact women could not own property or handle money. She and every other woman were defenseless. It would not be until decades later (in 1900) that the Married Woman’s Property Act would be passed, which stated that wives were not liable for her husband’s debt, could file lawsuits, and for all purposes be an individual to the state.⁸⁴

⁸² Ibid., 14

⁸³ Ibid., 24

⁸⁴ Liberty of Congress, *Married Women Laws* (Washington D.C: 2006)

In the years before creating her newspaper, *The New Northwest*, Duniway had many epiphanic moments when she realized that there were serious injustices in society. This was one of many events, which lead the suffrage moment to be an essential part of her life. One night, while cooking for her family and feeding her child, Duniway opened a letter addressed to her and found the most atrocious picture and poem. It was a picture of a scared husband and children, with the wife depicted as toothless, illy-clad women with the poem underneath stating:

“Friends, devil’s imp, or what you will
You surely your poor man will kill,
With luckless days and sleepless nights
Haranguing him with Woman’s Rights!”⁸⁵

This broke her heart and naturally went to her husband for support, but he did not understand why she was so upset. A few years later, on the anniversary if this letter, she was speaking at a suffrage meeting, where she presented the envelope. She stated it was so important because without it, promoting the suffrage movement would have not become such a priority in her life.

Abigail Scott Duniway affirms that even though her work was hard and what she dealt with in life was challenging, it was meant to be. Through her business experience, especially in the case of her invalid husband, and learning from his financial mistakes; it showed what God’s purpose was for her, “[it] brought me before the world as an evangel of Equal Rights for Women.”⁸⁶ Abigail’s participation with the suffrage movement began when she was about 36 years old. At this point she wrote two books and was growing popular. She decided to open a suffrage newspaper, *The New Northwest*. It broadcasted liberal ideas to the territories of Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. She used her platform of “earned rights” rationale in her Newspaper and

⁸⁵ Abigail Scott Duniway, *Path Breaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in the Pacific Coast States* (Oregon: James Kerns and Abbott Co, 1914), 28

⁸⁶ Julie Roy Jeffery, *Frontier women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979) 190

speeches. The main ideas Abigail was trying to articulate are enclosed in the first publication of *The New Northwest* published in Portland, Oregon on Friday, May 5th, 1871.

The New Northwest

The top of the newspaper reads, “Free Speech, Free Press, Free People”, years later, in her autobiography, Abigail states that she could not believe she was so bold. “As I look backward over the receded years [she writes] I cannot but wonder my own audacity which can be compared to the spirit of adventure which led the early pioneers to cross, or try to cross, the unknown plains.”⁸⁷. When she decided to open a suffrage newspaper, Abigail was aware she would be leaving her comfort zone, and that she would be ridiculed for trying to make women an equal party in society. It was going to be hard work. All she could compare it too was the journey she had taken when she was a child: the adventure men experienced traveling across the country and settling into a completely different society. Abigail Scott Duniway life experiences’ from traveling the Oregon Trail to creating *The New Northwest* comes full circle. Like the pioneers forging the new West, Duniway was trying to make a completely new world for women.

The first publication of the newspaper included topics that were totally taboo, not only in spoken word but especially in writing. It was pushing the limits. On the first page, there is a section for correspondence. Abigail wanted to reassure women that even if their letters were not directly answered, they were being read. In each newspaper, the correspondence section would consist of a few letters, which could apply to the greater audience. Such prints include how to survive widowhood, the newspaper makes valuable points such as, “we do not advise you to come to the city. You have little idea of the expense of city life. Under manmade laws the city is

⁸⁷ Abigail Scott Duniway, *Path Breaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in the Pacific Coast States* (Oregon: James Kerns and Abbott Co, 1914), 41

a wretched, abode for a widow's children.”⁸⁸. Another important communication made through the newspaper was the upcoming equal rights association in Portland. It is important to realize that this was in the correspondence section, which means it was a frequent subject of reader's letters. One of the most popular requests that were posed to the *New Northwest* was the question of whether the equal rights movement would be grow stronger in the West. Many women wanted to change their situations, and they felt, as *the New Northwest* was one of the first chances they had to have support from a large network.

In the centerfold of the Newspaper, they make their mission and origin story clear. They state that their work belongs to all the readers and that the readers deserve to know more about Abigail and her husband. She shares their life story: losing the farm, David (her husband) becoming invalid, and their decision to open the newspaper and said that this is because of the inequality that women faced every day; “We see [Abigail writes] under the existing customs of society, one half of the women over taxed are underpaid hopeless, yet struggling dollars in the world's drudgery.”⁸⁹ Throughout her life, Abigail had financial responsibilities to both her father and her husband. Yet, she never got any of the profit. It was their money. She never got any credit for the hours she pushed through exhaustion to support the needs of her family. However, she still found herself extremely lucky growing up. She confirms this by writing in contradictions to why she decided to be an active suffrage speaker was not because of the cruelties of her own life, “My mother, my sister and myself had not been burdened with dissipated or cruel husbands [Abigail wrote] we had no reason for hating men.”⁹⁰ Nevertheless, she saw the lives of other women and how husbands and fathers would take advantage of the

⁸⁸ Abigail Scott Duniway, *The New Northwest: May 5, 1871* (Portland: The New Northwest) 1

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 2

⁹⁰ Abigail Scott Duniway, *Path Breaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in the Pacific Coast States* (Oregon: James Kerns and Abbott Co, 1914), 42

fact, that the law did not protect women; such as, taking earnings they did not deserve, beating their wives, and moving them across the country without their consent.

The first newspaper also brought up other poignant topics such as “feminine men and masculine women.” Throughout the 19th century, it has been reported by a historians such as Julie Roy Jeffery, that the sex roles started to blur. Living on the Frontier, there was less time to be concerned with heavy dresses, women’s confinement to home, and other feminine formalities. Jeffrey argues that, “to be both masculine and feminine at the same time was not an uncommon message for the nineteenth century...but it did suggest that sexual distinctions would be blurred.”⁹¹ Using both Jeffery's argument along with this passage about feminine men and masculine women from *The New Northwest*, it can be concluded that in nineteenth century frontier life, men and women were not quite sure what the true definitions of masculinity or femininity were or how these constricts fit in to their new lives.

In an article in her newspaper, Scott Duniway expresses distaste about the common perception of this blurring because it was affirmed that it was all right for men to start dressing up and caring about their appearance. But, a woman who believed in equality was seen as masculine, which was an extreme turn-off. In such a fashion, she writes sarcastically about the feminine male, “He parts his hair in the middle-the darling- and he twirls a cane a sports a moustache- a very impellent moustache it is too, but it is the best he can produce, dear fellow, and we must be charitable. He doesn’t believe in equality of the sexes!”⁹² The conclusion she is trying to reach is that society accepted men to taking on new identities and characteristics because it was still “manly”. However, if women decided to raise their voices and stand up for

⁹¹ Julie Roy Jeffery, *Frontier women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880*,(New York: Hill and Wang, 1979) 18

⁹² Abigail Scott Duniway, *The New Northwest: May 5, 1871* (Portland: The New Northwest) 2

what they believed in, it was horrifying. How could women ever stand up for themselves? Most men did not understand that they could. But, it was The New Northwest's missions to make sure the public was aware that women were strong enough to demand the right to vote and take care of themselves, and men should not have the right to dictate every aspect of their lives.

One of Duniway's other inspirations to become a leading voice in the suffrage movement (besides her own personal experience) came from accompanying other suffragettes during a two thousand mile journey across frontier lands. Throughout Duniway's career, she relied heavily on other women who were as prominent in the ideals of equality, to spread their movement throughout the states and territories. Nevertheless, even with the publishing of her suffrage newspaper, Duniway and other women were not even close to getting the equality they so desperately desired. Abigail Scott Duniway believed women had to put hard work in to get the right to vote, especially women living on the frontier. The day California became a state, Admission Day; Abigail Scott Duniway made a speech to the women of California and Oregon, who could now both fight for the right to vote in the United States:

The women of Oregon...have they not nobly and bravely borne their part as did the men? ... It is now my grateful privilege to recognize woman's part, often more difficult and dangerous, because accompanied by the added terrors of maternity, and always as important as man's in building up a state from its crude beginnings into such fruition as we now behold.⁹³

A.S.D wanted to affirm women's place in the changing culture of the frontier. Women proved themselves time and time again. They could be more than mothers and care takers inside the home. They could do most jobs given to them, sometimes even better than men. However, the fight to gain equality put these women ahead of the times. Unfortunately, more times than not, it pushed the men away from relinquishing their dominance.

⁹³ Tiffany Lewis, *Winning Woman Suffrage in the Masculine West: Abigail Scott Duniway's Frontier Myth* (Western Journal of Communication: 2011)

One of the largest obstacles in Abigail Scott Duniway's campaign for equality came from her own brother, who edited *The Oregonian*. Her brother twisted her words in his own articles after she published her work in her own newspaper, enough so that her work in the suffrage movement was identified as advocating temperance⁹⁴. A year before her death, Abigail wrote, “But I can foresee a time when free enfranchised women will be wise enough, and morally strong enough to quit the business of marrying inebriates or mothering drunkards or criminals.”⁹⁵ Especially out west, the corruptions of drinking and gambling grew. Many women had difficulties with their husband’s drunkenness and pushed to make drinking illegal. Men could not accept this call for prohibition and this only made husbands more unwilling advocate for women vote in any sort of election. Women were trying to take away men’s rights as the women were trying to receive more rights. Thus, even though A.S.D advocated temperance, she did not support the prohibition because it heightened divisive ideals and morals between husbands and wives.

In 1887, Abigail Scott Duniway wrote a letter to the *Oregonian* explaining why the focus should not be on prohibiting vices, but rather, on gaining equality for women. She wrote, “The two ideas of prohibition and liberty are in exact juxtaposition to each other. [She says] It is just as impossible to reconcile the two ideas and make them win together as it was impossible for this government to maintain itself any longer under the old discordant regime of freedom and slavery.”⁹⁶ Abigail wanted to remind the women who believed in equality that they had a much bigger fight before them. If women were so focused on controlling the men, they would never get the opportunity to vote, take legal actions by themselves, run a business, and so forth. Men

⁹⁴ Abstinence from alcoholic drink

⁹⁵ Scott, xiv

⁹⁶ Randall A Lake, *Abigail Scott Duniway* (Campbell, Women Public)

were in charge and Abigail was very aware. The best way to get men on the side of women's voting rights was to avoid seeking conflict with them.

Overall, taking the story of Abigail Scott Duniway, one of the most important women in terms of the suffrage moment in the Pacific Northwest, can show the struggles even average women had pre-suffrage. A compelling argument comes from "Winning Woman Suffrage in the Masculine West: Abigail Scott Duniway's Frontier Myth" by Tiffany Lewis. As a whole, Lewis makes an argument on why being a suffragette was so important. So many women, unintentionally, had to prove their manhood out West. Men helped their wives and daughters grow into strong, more independent women, but would not give them any legal power⁹⁷. They could face more hard labor on the farm; even take over the male's job entirely, without any of the perks. Abigail Scott Duniway decides to end her autobiography in a strange way. Instead of concluding with what she thought was most important about her suffrage work, she ends it with a poem. After a long analysis of the poem, its significance becomes clear. This is a more powerful ending. She chooses *The Burning Forest Tree*, which was written when she was only twenty years of age and makes sure her readers know the last stanza is the most important:

Thou art not dead, O tree; for nothing dies
Thou hast but changed thy form.
The waving grain, the sun-kissed fruit,
The growing edibles, which other lives
Consume for mortal sustenance,
Are vitalized through thy transaction.
Life reigns- and liberty-and all is well!⁹⁸

It is important to understand why she picked out this poem, in particular, along with this stanza.

Her family history holds the key. On the Oregon Trail, her mother and youngest brother died. At

⁹⁷ Tiffany Lewis, *Winning Woman Suffrage in the Masculine West: Abigail Scott Duniway's Frontier Myth* (Western Journal of Communication: 2011)

⁹⁸ Abigail Scott Duniway, *Path Breaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in the Pacific Coast States* (Oregon: James Kerns and Abbott Co, 1914), 285

this point, in Abigail Scott Duniway when she published this book in 1914, two of her children were dead along with her brother, Harvey. Abigail is also at the end of her life (she dies in 1915). At this point, a woman having the right to vote is still not legal. Nor, will it be in her lifetime. But, the last sentence, “Life reigns- and liberty-and all is well” could mean a multitude of things. Most importantly, she knew that women will get the right to vote and that the right choice will be made. Abigail’s career of writing began when she was a young seventeen-year-old, crossing the Oregon Trail, and was given the responsibility from her father to write a journal. The end of her life is very different. She wrote multiple books, and was a necessity to the suffrage movement. Without her move out West and her experiences living on the Frontier, Abigail would have never had the opportunity to experience the more masculine side of being a female and, thus, would not have started fighting for equality, but instead would have learned to be a proper woman from her mother; how every daughter learned from their mothers.

Conclusion

Abigail Scott Duniway stated, “when women’s true history shall have been written, her part in the upbringing of this nation will astound the world.”⁹⁹ The nineteenth century was one of the most pivotal times in terms of women’s history. Before the Great Westward Migration, women were restricted in their roles, inside the home. Women were to keep the house clean, have children, and cook. Men were the protectors of the house, and they made all the choices. It was not until the Great Westward Migration and the move out West that masculine and feminine roles started to blur.

Manifest Destiny, “the 19th century belief that the expansion of the US throughout the American continents was both justified and inevitable” pushed many to the wonders of the new

⁹⁹ Abigail Scott Duniway, *From West to West: Across the Plains to Oregon* (Oregon: James Kerns and Abbott Co, 1914)

territories of the United States. Once on the Frontier, there were free lands, little to no rules, and the possibility of making riches. Women's newspapers and magazines glamorized being on the Oregon Trail and Frontier life. Soon enough, men, women, and children figured out the Oregon Trail were one of the hardest things they would ever face. Through death and accidents, one out of every ten pioneers would not make it out West. Men knew how to survive without their wives because they were allowed to live alone before marriage. However, when men died many women were not sure how to move on. If not with their fathers they were with their husbands. Women were not allowed to be alone. For the new widows, with their families back East, they could either go back or continue on. For the widows who persisted on, they had no choice but to take on a more masculine role.

To say women desired to be equal to men before the Oregon Trail is not exactly correct. Before the Louisiana Purchase¹⁰⁰, women were accustomed to their routine of being homemakers. Mothers and their mothers before them would train daughters how to be proper women and obey their husbands too, one day. But, with the move out West came the need for women to obtain more rights. For the first time, women were making huge strides in the law, such as obtaining property, growing rights, and being able to fight in court for their own rights, be lawyers and doctors, yet they still could not vote. There was irony of a women being voted in for senate twice, without women being able to vote for her, and without being able to vote herself.

Frontier life only increased the amount of women who wanted equality. Through new laws, and women financially taking care of the home, many women found it absurd they could not protect their hard earned money from their husbands; where drinking and gambling grew at

¹⁰⁰ The Purchase by the United States from France of the land known as the Frontier

staggering numbers. With obtaining small amounts responsibilities at a time, women started to realize that they were raising the children and often providing more then their husbands. Nevertheless, husbands would brag about protecting their families and hold control over women. Many men were not even aware that they were allowing their wives to branch out. Their intentions were not to give women equality. But, many women knew they needed to start a true revolution to gain the rights men have always had.

Abigail Scott Duniway was at the forefront of the suffrage movement. She had a good life and husband, but she knew she wanted more in life. She saw time and time again that men took advantage of the system to betray their wives and other women. With the help of other suffragettes she was able to kick-start her suffragette career. Even though she started at the late age of thirty-six, she accomplished much and is known as the reason the Washington Territory and Idaho gave women the right to vote in the 1880s. However, the national right to vote never happened in her lifetime. The creation of her Newspaper, *The New Northwest*, brought to the light political reforms along with questions women were concerned with about life with inequality.

It is important to recognize that every step man had to take across the West, so did women, “ a dimension of even greater sacrifice and difficulty existed for women. Only women contributed to the “terrors of maternity” that were an essential step to civilization on the difficult frontier, thus making their risks even more dangerous.”¹⁰¹ The roles of society were set before the Great Westward Migration; they were not questioned or acted upon. Only through the dangerous perils of creating a new life did women realize that they needed to make a new future for themselves as well. This was the only way was to become equal. Inspiration grew from the

¹⁰¹ Tiffany Lewis, *Winning Woman Suffrage in the Masculine West: Abigail Scott Duniway's Frontier Myth* (Western Journal of Communication: 2011)

West. In fact, such inspiration was because the all the states and territories that accepted suffrage were Western States. No Eastern states gave women the right to vote before the 19th amendment was passed in 1920. The frontier was ahead of the times for a multitude of reasons. But, most importantly, because women took control of their lives, believing they lost so much moving out West. In reality though, women gained much crossing the Plains: the prospect of equality.

Bibliography of Primary Sources

- Beeson, Welborn. *Diary of Welborn Beeson in 1853*. Oregon: Webb Research Group, 1987
- Duniway, Abigail Scott. *Journal of a Trip to Oregon (Oregon, 1852)*
- Duniway, Abigail Scott. *From the West to the West: Across the Plains to Oregon*. A.C McClurg and Co., 1905.
- Duniway, Abigail Scott. *Path breaking: An Autobiographical History of the Equal Suffrage Movement in Pacific Coast States*. Portland: James, Kerns and Abbot co., 1914.
- Duniway, Abigail Scott. *The New Northwest: May 5, 1871*. Portland: The New Northwest, 1871.
- Gould, Hannah F. *The Emigrant Bride*. The Western Monthly Magazine and Literacy Journal: 1835
- Holmes, Kenneth L., and Smith, Sherry., *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1864-1868* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska. 1999)
- Murphy. *Letters from California*. Missouri Whig 1849
- Parkman, Francis. *The Oregon Trail*. Feather Trail Press, 1846.
- Spooner, Elijah Allen. *Letters and Diary, 1849-1850*. Brigham Young University: Brigham Young University Library

Bibliography of Secondary Sources

- Clark, Elizabeth. *Matrimonial Bonds: Slavery, Contract and the Law of Divorce in Nineteenth-Century America*. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin- Madison Law School, 1987
- Gomez, Adam. *Dues Vult: John L. Sullivan, Manifest Destiny, and the American Democratic Messianism*. American Political Thought. 2012
- Masterson, Martha Gay. "One Woman's West: Recollections of the Oregon Trail and Settling the Northwest Country", edited by Lois Barton. Eugene: Butte Press, 1986.
- Bagley, Will. *With Golden Visions Bright Before Them: Trails to the Mining West 1849-1852*. Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012
- Butruille, Susan G. *Women's Voices from the Oregon Trail and a Guide to Women's History Along the Oregon Trail*. Boise: Tamarack Books, 1993.
- Butruille, Susan G. *Women's Voices from the Western Frontier*. Boise: Tamarack Books, 1995
- Buck, Rinker. *The Oregon Trail: A New American Journey*. New York: Simon and Schuster Paperback, 2015.
- Luchetti, Cathy. *Medicine Women: The Story of Early-American- Women- Doctors*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1999.
- Duniway, David C. and Holmes, Kenneth L. *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1852*. Nebraska: Bison Book Printing, 1997.
- Faragher, Johnny and Stansell, Christine. "Women and their Families on the Overland Trail to California and Oregon, 1842-1867". *Journal of Feminist Studies*, (1975)
- Holmes, Kenneth L., and Smith, Sherry., *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1864-1868* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska. 1999)
- Jensen, Kimberly, *Women Suffrage in Oregon* (Oregon: Western Oregon University)
- Jeffrey, Julie Roy, *Frontier women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979)
- Lake, Randall A. *Abigail Scott Duniway*. Campbell: Women Public
- Levin, David. *The Oregon Trail by Francis Parkman: An Introduction*. Penguin Random House, 1982
- Lewis, Taylor, *Winning Woman Suffrage in the Masculine West: Abigail Scott Duniway's Frontier Myth* (*Western Journal of Communication*, 2011)
- Liberty of Congress. *Married Women's Property Laws*. Washington District of Columbia, 2006.
- Mole, Rich, *Rebel Women of the West Coast: their Triumphs, Tragedies, and Lasting Legacy* (Surrey: Heritage House Publishing, 2010)
- Marianne, D. *Frontier Grit: The Unlikely True Stories of Daring Pioneer Women*. Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, 2016.
- Moynihan, Ruth B. *Covered Wagon Women: Diaries and Letters from the Western Trails, 1852: Introduction*. Nebraska: Bison Books Printing, 1997
- Moynihan, Ruth B. *Rebel for Rights: Abigail Scott Duniway*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983
- Ross, Nancy Wilson. *Westward the Women*. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985.
- Parkman, Francis. *The Oregon Trail*. Feather Trail Press, 1846.
- Peavy, Linda and Smith, Ursula, *Pioneer Women: the Lives of Women on the Frontier*. New York: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996
- Webber, Bert. *The Oregon & Applegate Trail Diary of Welborn Beeson in 1853: The Unabridged Diary with Introduction and Contemporary Comments*. Oregon: Webb Research Group, 1987