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Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank the Berkeley Historical Society for their help and inspiration with research for this project, to Dr. Biggs for shepherding this paper and encouraging submission for publication. And I would especially like to thank my husband, Gabriel Baty, for his patient help and insightful comments: he is my first and best editor.

AMERICA'S MOTHERS: HOW THE MOBILIZED WOMEN OF BERKELEY HARNESSSED THE POWER OF WOMEN TO SUPPORT THE GREAT WAR AND CHALLENGE THE GOVERNMENT

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ABSTRACT:

This paper examines how middle-class and upper-class women of Berkeley, California harnessed their already-established roles as community organizers and leaders to support the United States Government and their efforts in World War I. These women used the imposed limitations of their role as domestic protector in order to change the scope of their sphere from private to public and assert their political voice by highlighting their reciprocal relationship with the federal government. In their founding document, the Mobilized Women of Berkeley state that "all of the 151 women's organizations of Berkeley are willing to give their sons, husbands and brothers to do the bidding of the government and die, if necessary, in the cause of democracy, but in return demand that the government protect these young men while in its own training camps against organized vice and the saloon. We believe the honor of the home as important as the honor of the flag." This document, and other club records of the Mobilized Women of Berkeley, illustrate the vigor with which these women focused their energies and engaged their communities to support a wide variety of programs, work with the Red Cross, and generate volunteer time and funds to prove their worth as citizens, remarkable during when the government had not granted them the full rights of citizenship.

The first part of this examination will focus on the mobilization of women at a national level, delving into how President Wilson drafted the leadership of the Women's Committee of the Council of National Defense to act as outreach to the powerful resource that was American women. The second part of this paper examines how that organizational blueprint was enacted on a local level in the city of Berkeley, California. Both of these examples will highlight how these privileged women used their status, education, competency, and time to harness a network of volunteers and implement a range of programs on behalf of the government and, in turn, made demands on the administration to assert their political agendas. While these documents and the club efforts never touch on the women's suffrage issue, they amply illustrate the formidable power that they were able to wield in their communities and the attention and respect they demanded from the men holding political office.

“For generations women have been left inside their homes, have been told their interests lay there, been denied expression of their opinions.”¹

“This War cannot be won without the help of women.” --*Secretary of the Interior Franklin Lane, June, 1917.*²

In April 1917, women stepped out of their homes and mobilized by the thousands when the United States finally entered the Great War. Before the war, many of these women had been vocal pacifists advocating against committing American troops to the European conflict; many were suffragists who viewed the federal government as withholding full rights of citizenship to them and their sisters. So why did these women organize themselves to support a war and a government that they did not agree with? It was, in part, because the U.S. government actively courted their support. President Woodrow Wilson’s administration, facing strong objections to American involvement in the war, framed women in their role as mothers and protectors as the bulwark of society through propaganda. These campaigns, conducted through posters, newspaper articles, commercial advertisements, and popular entertainments such as music (Fig. 1) and “moving pictures,” emphasized the ideal of “Woman” supporting the war effort. Women were urged to encourage their sons to fight for liberty and volunteer their own time for the war effort. But these mobilized women saw the call to the war effort as more than the simple narrative that the government was peddling: they viewed themselves as having a reciprocal relationship with the government and a right to leverage to push for power. While it may seem that women in supporting the war effort were submitting to the authority of the state by embracing their domestic role, they were actually taking the opportunity to assert their political voices. In so doing, they transposed their sphere of influence from domestic to public.



Figure 1. Sheet music from 1917 highlighting the patriotic mother sacrificing her son to the Great War. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

Before America’s involvement in the Great War, women in the United States organized themselves into clubs, harnessing their collective power to influence their communities. At the start of the war, national, state, and local organizations sprang into existence to tap into the structure of these clubs. Government and committee reports, books, and journal articles, both at the time and afterwards, have discussed the role of women in fund raising, charity and war relief, Red Cross efforts, and paid war work.³

¹ Emily Newell Blair, *The Woman’s Committee United States Council of National Defense: An Interpretative Report, April 21, 1917 to February 27, 1919* (Washington, n.d.), 60.

² Ida Clyde Clarke, *American Women and the World War* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1918), 9.

³ While the significance of the American Red Cross’s efforts in the Great War has been the focus of a number of works including Henry P. Davison, *The American Red Cross in the Great War* (New York: Macmillan, 1919); Foster Rhea Dulles, *The American Red Cross* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), Patrick F. Gilbo, *The American Red Cross: The First Century* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981), and *An Illustrated History of the First*

But the scope of this research, white women's volunteerism channeled through the local clubs of middle and upper-class women of the early twentieth century, has received limited attention.⁴ While Lynn Dumenil has explored how club women, especially in Los Angeles, used their volunteer efforts during the Great War to assert their political agendas,⁵ Claudia Roesch has emphasized that the unpublished documents of the Mobilized Women of Berkeley (MWOB), the club that is the primary subject of this paper, have not received focused historical study.

There has also been scholarship examining how the suffragist movement was impacted by the war, as well as how women were recruited into industrial jobs to keep the economy moving. Interestingly, the MWOB documents or activities do not address question of women's suffrage though that was a significant issue with women at the time.⁶

The goal of MWOB was to harness the power of existing women's organizations in support of the war effort, from its founding in May 1917, to the end of the Great War. I will examine how this group of white middle- and upper-class women used the limitations of their role as domestic protectors in order to change the scope of their sphere from private to public, and assert their political voice by highlighting their reciprocal relationship with the federal government. The first part of this examination focuses on the mobilization of women at a national level, delving into how President Wilson drafted the leadership of the Woman's Committee of the Council of National Defense to act as outreach to American women. The second part of this paper examines how that organizational blueprint was enacted on a local level in the city of Berkeley, California. Both of these examples will highlight how these privileged women used their status, education, and time to harness a network of volunteers and implement a range of programs on behalf of the government and, in turn, make demands on the administration to assert their political agendas.

Since the late nineteenth century, some middle- and upper-class women, inspired by the Progressive era ideas and reforms, had been organizing themselves into civic and community clubs through the United States. In fact, by 1890, the General Federation of Women's Clubs was founded on a coalition of over 60 groups, dedicated to serving their communities and forwarding progressive ideas of reform.⁷ Often formed as a result of being excluded from holding municipal office and unable to enact changes through local government, these women's clubs harnessed the organizational competence and energy of white middle- and upper-class women who had the time to address reforms in a way that working class women did not. These clubs championed issues like education, child welfare, and morality: concerns that were firmly within the accepted sphere of a

Century of the American Red Cross, 1881-1981, this paper will focus on the mobilization efforts of women and will only touch on their interaction with Red Cross.

⁴ It is important to note that the volunteerism of minority women including, but not limited to, African American, Asian, and Hispanic groups, as well as the paid war work of all women, are fascinating topics well worth exploring but outside the scope of this discussion.

⁵ Lynn Dumenil, "Women's Reform Organizations and Wartime Mobilization in World War I-Era Los Angeles," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 10, no. 2 (April 2011): 213-45, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537781410000162>.

⁶ Susan Zeiger has written about government propaganda and popular culture sentiment during the Great War which equated opposition to the fighting as bad motherhood and tied patriotism to self-sacrificing mothers who give up their sons to the war effort. Her work is a strong counterpoint to the club women whose efforts were overtly patriotic and supportive of government efforts. See "She Didn't Raise Her Boy to Be a Slacker: Motherhood, Conscription, and the Culture of the First World War," *Feminist Studies* 22, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 6-39.

⁷ "History and Mission," *GFWC* (General Federation of Women's Club organization website), accessed March 10, 2020, <https://www.gfwc.org/about/history-and-mission/>.

woman's influence of home and family. At the inaugural meeting of the Civic Club of Philadelphia, their president asserted that "Women cannot eradicate corruption in the world any more than they can eradicate diphtheria. But they can keep it out of their own houses; they can drive it out and keep it out of their own neighborhoods."⁸ The familiar idea of Republican Motherhood played out in the club documents with the goal of protecting their sons and, by extension, society from corruption. By 1917, these clubs were working with local governments to enact changes in their communities.

When President Wilson finally moved the United States to enter the war, he recognized that he needed to sway public opinion as well as coordinate the efforts of a number of different industries, including channeling the combined efforts of the women of the nation. Initially, Wilson established the Council of National Defense (CND) headed by secretaries of key departments as well as leaders of industry which, in turn, created state councils all run by men. Recognizing that this group needed to utilize the untapped resource of women excluded from the traditional political structure, the CND and President Wilson established the Woman's Committee of the CND (WCCND), "to coordinate the women's preparedness movement" and manage "women's defense work."⁹ The Director of the CND contacted Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, a prominent national leader in the women's suffrage movement, to consult with her about the Woman's Committee. But before she had a chance to meet with him, the Council pre-emptively appointed Dr. Shaw, along with a complete board of nationally recognized and highly connected women, to head the new committee. Chronicling the WCCND, Emily Newell Blair wrote about the founding of the group: "No one of these women knew she was to be chosen or that such a committee had been decided upon until she received this announcement."¹⁰ Conscripted, rather than invited, these women ignored the patriarchal and heavy-handed method of the CND and organized themselves into a formidable and effective council, immediately establishing state-level Woman's Committees and connecting up with existing women's clubs.

The WCCND viewed their objective as being a clearinghouse of information as well as a directing body, striving to "coordinate the organized women of the country in such a manner as to provide a direct and organized channel through which the Government could convey to women its request and directions for war work."¹¹ This was critical and necessary at a time when information flowed slowly through standard channels of local newspapers and national magazines. The WCCND laid out their reasoning for a separate women's focused committee: first, women were naturally the guardians of normalcy during times of war and other extreme social disorders; second, women had already organized themselves into clubs to assert their political voices with the understanding that when a man wanted to communicate with the government he went to his local mayor, councils, or even governor, but when he wanted to communicate with women he appealed to these clubs; and finally, the mostly unstated assumption that these groups were comprised of women with time on their hands (i.e. not working women).¹² Even in these early days of the committee, the WCCND was fielding offers of help from club women throughout the United States. Their first order of business was to create working committees to handle areas of

⁸ Melanie S. Gustafson, "'Good City Government Is Good House-Keeping': Women and Municipal Reform," *Pennsylvania Legacies* 11, no. 2 (2011): 12, <https://doi.org/10.5215/pennlega.11.2.0012>.

⁹ Blair, *The Woman's Committee United States Council of National Defense: An Interpretative Report, April 21 1917 to February 27. 1919*, 7.

¹⁰ Blair, 16.

¹¹ Blair, 18.

¹² Blair, 24.

concern such as finance, registration, food, educational propaganda, industry and labor, etc. These measures were then communicated to state committees and taken up throughout the country with rigor and enthusiasm.

The women of the committee, proactive and confident of their ability to do good, reached out to federal agencies and organizations to coordinate and direct programs with a mixed bag of results. Not surprisingly there was confusion, overlapping efforts, and disagreements about areas of responsibility. The WCCND's initial program was to create a nation-wide list of women willing to work on either a volunteer or paid basis, so they implemented a registration program. This effort coincided with similar programs run by both private organizations and another federal program, the National League for Woman's Service, which focused on coordinating a paid force of women to fill openings in industries left by men serving in the armed forces. In fact, the rapid organization caused confusion between the MWOB and the National League for Woman's Service specifically in regards to surveys of war relief, training in business classes for women, and the drive to sign the Hoover Pledge. In the summer of 1917, Francis Shattuck Robson, MWOB president, wrote to the WCCND President Dr. Howard Shaw insisting that cooperation with National League for Women's Service is "exceedingly desirable. Here in California, there has been regrettable misunderstanding with regard to the status of the League and the Council of Defense, as to overlapping." Mrs. Robson goes on to request that Dr. Howard Shaw write an article, similar to one she had already published in the Ladies Home Journal, clarifying that the WCCND had the ultimate responsibility, as agreed to by the National League. This issue must have been resolved to everyone's satisfaction because by September 1917, the MWOB received a letter from the National League for Women's Service, thanking them for their cooperation. Another instance of overlapping areas of responsibility and the desire for clarity is evidenced in a letter the MWOB's executive committee received in September 1917, from the CND "pointing out the distinction between the work of the Woman's Committee and that of the Red Cross"¹³ with the committee moving to include this information in future publicity and at all club meetings. The salient point is that these women were not reticent to take on a public role and assert their leadership capabilities on a national, state, or local level.

Reading through these documents and contemporary accounts, there is a distinct impression that the Wilson administration was throwing every resource at a problem as quickly as they could without slowing down to clearly define roles and responsibilities, understandable given that the United States had not fought a major war since 1865 and the logistical requirements to conscript, supply, and move two million men was massive. In addition to misunderstandings caused by haphazard organizing, the WCCND encountered difficulties in coordinating with federal agencies. In fact, after the initial efforts of Dr. Howard Shaw and the committee, Secretary of War Newton Baker pushed back on the WCCND, attempting to tell the women that their role as an advisory body only, not a directing one, with the actual work being channeled through the male-run CNDs. But Dr. Shaw and the WCCND blatantly ignored Secretary Baker's note and continued with their organizational efforts at the national, state, and local levels to a highly effective degree.¹⁴ Indeed, both the WCCND and the various agencies they overlapped with would continue to fight for dominance in various programs throughout the Great War.

¹³ Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, September 7, 1917, Carton 1, Folder 1, Mobilized Women of Berkeley Records, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁴ Breen, 122.

Regardless of the organizational difficulties, the WCCND was successful at extending their efforts through state, county, and local committees. One remarkable example of harnessing the combined efforts of club women in support of the war occurred in Berkeley, California. A core group of privileged white women, already active as leaders in clubs in their communities, eagerly organized themselves using the WCCND committee structures as their guide though with a local focus: Red Cross, Foreign Relief, Food Conservation, Moral Conservation, Americanization, Maintenance of Existing Social Agencies, Registration for Service, Liberty Loan, Speakers, and Thrift Stamps. Recognizing that they were part of a larger whole, the MWOB created an organizational chart that specifically placed themselves within the context of the national and state WCCND, and even proactively changed the name of their organization from the Mobilized Women of Berkeley to the Berkeley Unit of the Woman's Committee in their meeting minutes and club letterhead.

In 1917, Berkeley was the fifth largest city in California, an urban environment with the University of California as an anchor looking across the bay to San Francisco, still recovering from the 1906 earthquake. The University was a prominent institution and had established an aviation school to train cadets before they enrolled in the military. The local proximity of cadets was to be a large focus of the MWOB's efforts.

The women who whipped the MWOB into being were led by Frances Shattuck Robson. A wealthy and socially connected young matron in her early thirties at the beginning of the war, Robson was a graduate of the University of California, a rare achievement for a woman of that time, and an active club woman well versed in local leadership and national delegations. It was her parents' hotel in Berkeley where the MWOB held their meetings. While wealthier than most people involved in the club, Robson reflected the type of woman drawn to social clubs: financially secure, educated, activist, and employing domestic staff giving free time to devote to social and charitable activities.¹⁵

These privileged women were imbued with a sense of duty to society, the exact target of the federal government's propaganda campaign. They were also practiced in organizing events and groups to forward a political agenda. While the WCCND acknowledged how this was an opportunity for women to advance a political viewpoint, proving their right to be in the public sphere as citizens through their efforts, the MWOB's official documents never explicitly state a political agenda. Perhaps this was a shying away from an overtly radical feminist stance and instead surreptitiously taking power within their accepted areas of "moral" authority without demanding codified political power. What the MWOB did assert was their reciprocal relationship with the United States government. In their inaugural meeting they started the proceedings with a patriotic song, included speakers from the Red Cross, a roll call of representatives from the different organizations, initial plans for food conservation and moral protection of training camps, and end with this declaration:

Whereas, the military mobilization of large numbers of young men is now taking place in various portions of this country in preparation for war and whereas the experience of Europe and our own recent experience on the Mexican border indicate that large numbers

¹⁵ The other women on the founding executive committee also reflected the connected profile of a club woman. A few examples include: Mrs. Carrie Hoyt, who would go on to become the first woman mayor of Berkeley; Mrs. Varina Merritt who was married to Ralph Palmer Merritt, president of Sun Maid Raisin Growers, a UC Regent, and during World War II the head of the Manzanar Internment Camp; Mrs. Mary Roberts Coolidge, writer, researcher, suffragist, and founder of the sociology department at Mills College in Oakland, CA.

of our young men and women will be contaminated both physically and morally by prostitution and venereal diseases to the serious impairment of character and efficiency of the men of the army and navy with resulting disintegration of whole sections of our social structures unless stringent measures are adopted, therefore Be it resolved, that we do call upon our president and upon our governors and the heads of state troops, upon our representatives at Washington, upon our national and state councils of defense, upon the mayors and councilmen or supervisors of our cities to adopt every measure which will reduce prostitution and venereal disease.¹⁶

At the first meeting of the Executive committee, they passed another resolution:

All of the 151 women's organizations of Berkeley are willing to give their sons, husbands and brothers to do the bidding of the government and die if necessary in the cause of democracy, but *in return demand* that the government protect these young men while in its own training camps against organized vice and the saloon. We believe the honor of the home as important as the honor of the flag.¹⁷ [*Italics added*]

This resolution was sent to President Wilson, Secretary of War Baker, Governor of California Stephens, the Chairman of the CND, the Chairman of the State Council of Defense, California Congressional Representatives, and the Chairman of the Committee on Military Affairs for the House and Senate. Explicit in the statement of "in return demand" is that these women felt secure in their right to exert an entirely reciprocal relationship with the federal government. And the response these women received to this statement was entirely positive, with the MWOB noting letters from California Senator James Phelan and Representative John Elston both giving "assurance of their hearty co-operation" regarding the protection of the military camps, as well as a letter from the CND asking for further information regarding local conditions and problems in the military camps.¹⁸ These politicians not only accepted these women's right to speak out on these moral matters, but even followed up with them as a source of information and experts.

What gave these women an advantage was their connectedness within their community. They contacted hundreds of other women and excited interest in attending a mass meeting as early as May 1917, a scant month after the official declaration of war. Through personal contacts and postcard mailings, they were able to include representatives from over one hundred and fifty social, charity, and mother's clubs, as well as church groups, and the Red Cross. Whether this reflected a measure of significant social leadership, a built-in readiness on the part of these clubs to assist in the war effort, or a bit of both, it was a remarkable turnout. And it was this broad commitment to the cause which facilitated a community-wide organization dubbed the Conservation Army.

Purposely structured along military lines with ranks, the Conservation Army (CA) was comprised of eight hundred volunteer women who did not require specialized training (unlike in the Red Cross) and were utilized to implement MWOB initiatives.¹⁹ The CA was well-organized and highly effective in disseminating information to each house in Berkeley within a day, no small

¹⁶ Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, September 7, 1917, Carton 1, Folder 1, Mobilized Women of Berkeley Records, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁷ Executive Committee Meeting Minutes.

¹⁸ Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, May 25, 1917, Carton 1, Folder 1, Mobilized Women of Berkeley Records, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

¹⁹ Interestingly, though purposeful about implementing a military structure with assigned ranks, those titles didn't seem to be applied in everyday usage, at least not in the meeting minutes. MWOB member Mrs. Hicks is noted as a Colonel in the Conservation Army but still referred to with the title "Mrs." not "Col."

achievement prior to radio and television and when few people owned telephones. The CA also helped track food pledge cards, conduct house to house canvassing, and assisted the Red Cross in their membership drive. The structure and success of the CA demonstrated that these women viewed their endeavors as parallel to the military efforts of the men in combat and worthy of the same serious effort, respect, and public acknowledgement.

But the path of the CA, like so many of the other efforts of organized women, faced resistance from the men leading established agencies. In the January 1918 minutes of the executive committee, a report was given about the CA putting their organization forward to work on the “Great Register,” the selective service push that was scheduled for June, 1918. The CA spoke with Mr. Gross (most likely the local organizer):

While at first he was not very enthusiastic about having the [Conservation] Army do the work, -- had in fact already promised 15 or 20 people part of the work, he agreed to it. After thinking the matter over, Mrs. Hicks saw him again and convinced him that it would not be quite fair to the [Conservation] Army unless they could have a clear field, and this was granted. The [Conservation] Army will receive 5 cents a signature and it is estimated that the total earned will be about \$1000. Which sum is to be used for the work of the MWOB.²⁰

But there was a problem with this plan of action. In the following month’s executive committee meeting, there was a brief entry in the minutes that the CA was not going to work on the Great Register and that their scope of work was only for federal and national efforts, not local activities. This was followed up by yet another entry, this time at the March, 1918, executive committee, clarifying that while the CA of MWOB was not working on the Great Register, Mrs. Hicks (previously mentioned as the driving force to sell this idea of the CA taking on this work) was leading a separate effort to work on the registration process “with 80 women chosen from the Army trained to do this special work.”²¹ Apparently the wrangling about jurisdiction, scope, and purpose of the CA was adequately resolved to allow Mrs. Hicks to continue to lead her women in this lucrative effort. This episode begs the question about the lengths these women went to convince male leaders that they were a force to be utilized and reckoned with. It is also an example of how these women asserted their leadership role publicly, even against opposition.

The Food Conservation committee was a key example of how seriously these women took their public role while focusing on a traditional woman’s sphere. Food Conservation programs highlighted tensions between men and women, federal and local administrations, and socio-economic classes. Food management was a critical part of the federal government’s goals, and the Food Administration headed by Herbert Hoover recognized that women needed to be directly involved in this effort since they were the ones who managed the family food shopping and preparation. Indeed, in her report on the WCCND, Blair notes that one of the first and most important areas that women could support the federal government was in regards to “the food problem” since “a conservation program was daily expected” and “food has ever been strictly inside women’s traditional sphere.”²² Hoover, initially, worked closely with the WCCND and

²⁰ Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, January 31, 1918, Carton 1, Folder 2, Mobilized Women of Berkeley Records, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

²¹ Executive Committee Meeting Minutes.

²² Blair, *The Woman’s Committee United States Council of National Defense: An Interpretative Report*, April 21 1917 to February 27. 1919, 18.

appointed both a man and a woman to head the groups in each state to further the policies of the Food Administration. Dr. Howard Shaw intended to integrate the WCCND into this structure; she appointed a state director to work with the state-level Food Administration to coordinate efforts. Again, the WCCND viewed the dissemination of information and directives to the everyday woman as fully within their purview and created organizations to enable that. Ida Tarbell, a WCCND board member and chairman of the Food Administration Department of the Woman's Committee, became a member of Herbert Hoover's staff. Further, it was agreed between the WCCND and the federal government that appointments to state divisions of the Food Administration would be made only with both Tarbell's and Hoover's approval. Unfortunately, many state divisions had already made their appointments without these approvals, causing confusion and conflict in the organizations.

Regardless of these administrative hiccups, when Hoover initiated his food pledge (figure 2) program asking women all over the country to voluntarily commit to a conservation program, he enlisted the help of the WCCND. The state divisions of the WCCND immediately and positively responded to his call, and in Berkeley one of the first actions that the MWOB took was to offer their assistance. In July 1917, the executive committee noted that for Hoover Pledge Day they would "collect data and prepare objections to the Hoover Pledge and send same to Mr. Hoover in Washington."²³ The need to "prepare objections" to the pledge indicates that many women felt that the U.S. government was intruding upon their sphere, and the MWOB felt empowered to raise these questions and pose them directly to Hoover in Washington, not up the chain of command through the state administration officials.

It was not just the executive board of the MWOB that felt entitled to voice their concerns. Other women's groups also registered objections regarding the government's food conservation initiative. In August 1917, the Berkeley Federation of Church Women (a member group of the MWOB), agreed to "gladly conserve food according to requests made by the authorities and will willingly do more should the necessity arise, but we demand that steps be taken to prevent the use of food stuffs in the manufacture of distilled and malt liquors."²⁴ This resolution was important on several points: one, the Federation of Church Women looked to the MWOB as the appropriate administrative body to lodge this complaint assuming it was an effective channel to get this message to the Food Administration; and two, these women did not accept government measures passively, but felt that it was their right and

THE PLEDGE.

**PLEDGE CARD FOR UNITED STATES
FOOD ADMINISTRATION.**

IF YOU HAVE ALREADY SIGNED, PASS THIS ON TO A FRIEND.

To the Food Administrator:

I am glad to join you in the service of food conservation for our Nation and I hereby accept membership in the United States Food Administration, pledging myself to carry out the directions and advice of the Food Administration in my home, in so far as my circumstances permit.

Name

Street

City..... State.....

There are no fees or dues to be paid. The Food Administration wishes to have as members all of those actually handling food in the home.

Anyone may have the Home Card of Instruction, but only those signing pledges are entitled to Membership Window Card, which will be delivered upon receipt of the signed pledge.

Figure 2. Food Administration Pledge Card encouraging women to voluntarily comply with any programs the government issues. Image from Hathitrust Digital Library.

²³ Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, July 20, 1917, Carton 1, Folder 1, Mobilized Women of Berkeley Records, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

²⁴ Executive Committee Meeting Minutes, August 3, 1917, Carton 1, Folder 1, Mobilized Women of Berkeley Records, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

duty to exert their voice in a public way, (though they were limiting their area of concern to what they thought of as a woman's sphere of food, home, and temperance), invoking a reciprocal relationship with the male-dominated government.²⁵

In April 1918, Hoover extended his food conservation requests further, asking that housewives voluntarily adopt a program of eliminating wheat with the goal of being able to provide bread to the troops. Again, the MWOB was entirely willing to support these voluntary food conservation efforts and passed a resolution that highlighted their loyal cooperation on behalf of the women of Berkeley as citizens who would readily eliminate wheat and wheat products in their food preparations (figure 3). But these women took this opportunity to emphasize their demands on the government, again asserting their reciprocal relationship, fully aware that the Food Administration needed their compliance. They demanded that President Wilson would “declare National Prohibition for the period of the War and that all grain and sugar now being held in stock by the Brewers be at once released.”²⁶ The women once again asserted a political viewpoint tied directly to their support and cooperation. It was their right to speak out publicly and make demands on the government to protect the moral integrity of the country; in fact, it was only logical, since the Wilson administration, through their propaganda efforts, had placed women in the role of the ultimate mother and protector of civilization. It is interesting to speculate that federal government's reaction if these women had taken this opportunity to assert a more progressive idea of expanding their public influence to national suffrage in return for their cooperation with the war efforts.

The local government, as well as the MWOB, took the food measures seriously (fig. 3). There are several instances noted of local police canvassing grocers, bakers, and schools in the Berkeley area, reporting on the use of flour and wheat. In fact, in June, 1918, Chatterton Bakeries was closed for ten days “because of violation of the Conservation Laws – using too great a percentage of wheat.”²⁷ A sense of fairness pervaded this monitoring, the women announcing that if they must make sacrifices, then everyone must be held to the same standards.

The MWOB was also involved with helping housewives monitoring food prices. One of the major drivers of food prices was the grocery shopping system. A typical shopping trip entailed multiple stops: to the dry goods for flour, bakeries for bread and pastries, butchers for meat, grocers for fresh produce. These stores operated with counter service



Figure 3 Propaganda from the Food Administration to encourage voluntary elimination of wheat. From “Better Fruit” Magazine, October 1918, Internet Archives.

²⁵ Not all political assertions by women of the community were accepted or acted upon by the MWOB. In September 1917, the executive board received a letter from “a mother of three sons” proposing the “conscriptio[n] of wealth and offering a resolution to that effect.” The only action taken on this letter was to table it in the minutes. It would be interesting to know how the wealthy and privileged women on the executive committee felt about this proposal.

²⁶ Executive Committee Meeting Minutes.

²⁷ Executive Committee Meeting Minutes.

and delivery. A shopper would give their list to the counter server who would gather the items from inventory and have them delivered to the shopper's homes.²⁸ This model required a substantial workforce of men and boys to make deliveries several times per day throughout the city. The CND made a point of tackling this issue, recognizing that the manpower was needed for the armed services, and requested that tradesmen limit deliveries to once daily.²⁹

However, the local tradesmen and the County Council of Defense were unable to initiate this change on their own based on customer demand and recognized that the MWOB was the most effective channel for this communication. In fact, as early as August, 1917, shop keepers in Berkeley had already contacted the MWOB and asked for their assistance in reaching out to the housewives to support this change. The MWOB took up this effort to "urge upon the housewives to ask for but one delivery a day of tradesmen to the end that public sentiment in this matter may be created."³⁰ Having this request come directly from men and the government was a hard pill for many of the women to swallow. Blair, in her report on the Woman's Committee, asserts that "a woman's kitchen is her castle. All tradition of housekeepers were against a government coming in to tell her what she should do there."³¹ This sentiment applied not only to the food delivery schedule, but also to the Hoover food pledge, and food replacement programs. But the message coming from women was far more acceptable.

Another ongoing and surprisingly successful effort that the MWOB undertook in regards to the Food Administration's initiatives was the Conservation Cook Book. Recognizing that food management was going to be a significant issue in terms of feeding the army fighting in Europe, Hoover implemented a voluntary conservation and food management policy. Food Pledge cards introduced the concept to American women that conservation and substitutions would be necessary throughout the duration of the war. Efforts focusing on saving wheat, beef, and sugar were constant themes in government propaganda. At a national level, Hoover wrote in the August, 1917, edition of *The Ladies Home Journal*, about the need to conserve food and gave examples including using substitutes for butter. His food conservation notice was followed by detailed articles and advertisements explaining how to use less wheat-flour in bread-making by including substitutions such as potatoes, corn, and oatmeal (fig. 4).

²⁸ This shopping experience was on the way out by the 1920s, replaced by the modern set-up of an inventory of stock on shelves that customers selected themselves and carted home. This model was pioneered by the A&P grocery chain, which also required immediate payment (instead of store credit) and did not take phone-in orders, all of which lowered prices. Ironically, credit, phone-in (or online) orders, and home delivery have been reintroduced as attractive shopping options today.

²⁹ Donald W. Paden, *Delivery Pooling for Retail Stores* (Department of commerce, Bureau of foreign and domestic commerce, 1944), 2-3.

³⁰ Executive Committee Meeting Minutes.

³¹ Blair, *The Woman's Committee United States Council of National Defense: An Interpretative Report, April 21 1917 to February 27, 1919*, 59.

At a local level, grocers were asked to make substitution displays to encourage potatoes and corn in recipes instead of wheat. MWOB committee members worked with the Grocers Association in Berkeley to determine acceptable butter, wheat, and meat substitutes (fig. 4). The Oakland Tribune, the largest paper in the area, solicited the MWOB to assist in planning and endorsing a public food conservation exhibition and demonstration at the Oakland Auditorium. By November, 1917, the MWOB's Food Conservation committee created a Conservation Recipes cook book with substitution suggestions which became so successful it went through multiple printings and was requested from groups as far away as New Hampshire.

But not everyone in America agreed with the goals of the Food Administration. Writing in 1918, progressive activist Marion Stanton Blatch challenged many of the government recommendations in regards to the role they urged women to play during the war. Stanton Blatch argued that women were a powerful resource whose time should be used wisely, replacing men in the workforce to keep the economy moving forward; initiatives encouraging women to bake their own bread, produce home-made soap, and concentrate on their own individual kitchens was the government focusing on minutiae and idealizing drudgery. Stanton Blatch's contention was that the men who created these directives were coming from a backwards-looking ideal of what their own mothers did in their homes fifty years prior. They were not taking into account the new scientific understandings of Home Economics and industrialization: that factory-produced soap was safer and cleaner than home-made, and bread from a bakery was more efficiently and better made than home-made. Additionally, Stanton Blatch advocated for women and schools to pool their resources to provide warm school lunches and child care, creating economies of scale better able to utilize food resources with less waste.³²

Stanton Blatch notes that women had already been successfully organizing themselves in groups to make changes in their communities for more than fifty years. Furthermore, she excoriates the federal government for not consulting with women prior to sending out the food conservation directives, for being ignorant of how busy women already were, and undervaluing women's time because they were not being paid for it.³³ Her ideas are strikingly modern and address issues that women still grapple with in the twenty-first century. Regardless of this progressive criticism, the federal government was successful in its specific directives to women to focus on the minutia that Stanton Blatch warned against, and the MWOB furthered their message locally through meetings, speakers, and educational programs. It was the details of home life that defined a woman's sphere, and, unlike Stanton Blatch who questioned the nature of that sphere, MWOB embraced that conservative and regressive framework, even while taking a public stance and challenging the government on other details. These women were so entrenched in their privilege within a system

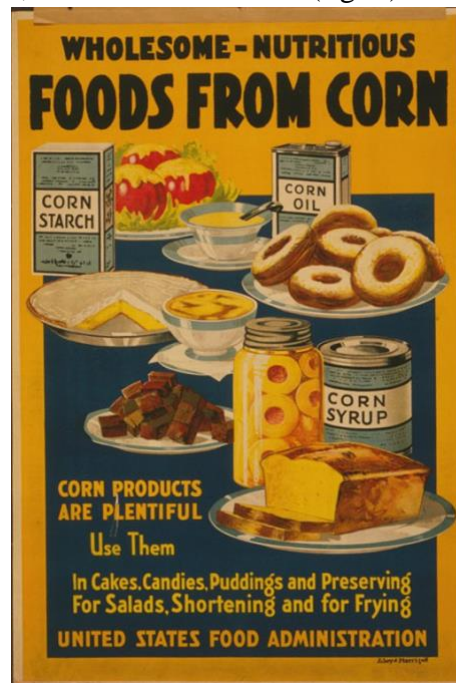


Figure 4. Poster from the Food Administration encouraging corn substitutions. Image from Wikimedia Commons.

³² Marion Stanton Blatch, *Mobilizing Woman-Power* (New York: The Womans Press, 1918), 156-162.

³³ Blatch, 156.

created by and for men, that they were uninterested in questioning the validity of that system and supporting more progressive ideas like Stanton Blatch's.

Another significant contribution that women all over the United States, including the MWOB, took on was working with the Red Cross to support a massive knitting project. The men in the trenches needed wool sweaters, scarves, mittens, and especially socks. Soldiers were issued heavy-duty cowhide boots with hobnails hammered into the soles to provide traction. Unfortunately, while intended to be waterproof, the stitching would often pull apart enough to allow water to leak in and the hobnails transferred the cold through the sole to the soldier's foot. Consequently, wool socks were needed to keep their feet warm, dry, and prevent fungal growth. Women and men all over the states were encouraged to volunteer to knit socks, with the Red Cross vetting and approving the skills of the knitters and shipping the final products to the soldiers.³⁴

Again, and with very good reason, Stanton Blatch questions the efficacy of these activities, wondering why, in that age of industrialization, socks and other knitted items were not made in factories instead of asking people to spend hours of their time. Indeed, some experienced knitters had to correct errors in other's work since so many contributing were beginners. And some knitting circles utilized knitting machines as a more efficient way to produce the tubes of the socks, finishing up with hand knitting the heel and toes. However, Stanton Blatch's criticism misses the fact that the hand-made woollens were greatly appreciated by the men in the trenches. Nor did this contemporary criticism sit well with the volunteers who felt that their efforts were not only necessary but critical to the war effort: they recognized that it was not just the finished product that was important, but the patriotism and effort that the knitters were contributing to their boys on the front lines. The effort was so important nationally that President Wilson had sheep farmed on the lawn of the White House to contribute wool to the Red Cross effort.³⁵ The MWOB were actively involved in the knitting programs, harnessing not only knitting circles and meetings and creating a number of finished items, but also coordinating the efforts of school children knitting squares and collecting yarn, and club member's fundraising programs. The solidarity of feeling created by the effort was perceived as more important than actual volume of production.

While the MWOB's meeting minutes reflect a large portion of their activities on behalf of or coordinated with the Red Cross, there were notes of controversy. In the same September minutes there is a mention of criticism from the Ladies Aid Society of the First Presbyterian Church of Berkeley protesting against the Red Cross sending cigarettes to soldiers and sailors. And in another instance, the MWOB responded to an article in the *Saturday Evening Post* which was critical of the Red Cross's lack of training programs to prepare volunteer nurses working in field hospitals. This article pointed to the number of young women who were inspired by government propaganda and "moving pictures" to volunteer to be a "ministering angel" but were utterly unprepared for the reality of service. Aware of how this type of negative publicity would impact their own efforts, the MWOB tasked one of their members to contact the Red Cross and get official direction on how to deal with the criticism in that article.

In addition to the Food Conservation and Red Cross committees, the MWOB exerted their political power and organizational abilities to further the efforts of a number of other initiatives,

³⁴ Becker, Paula, "*Knitting for Victory – World War I*," <https://www.historylink.org/File/5721>, accessed March 19, 2020.

³⁵ Anne L. Macdonald, *No Idle Hands: The Social History of American Knitting*, 1st ed (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988).

including Moral Protection, Americanization, Liberty Loan Campaigns, Public Singing, Child Welfare, and Women's Labor issues. These women felt that their natural interests were wide and justified their public engagement and leadership. The Moral Protection committee objected strongly to any activities in and around the military training camps that were not deemed socially appropriate and implemented different initiatives and resolutions to press their agenda, including funding and staffing hostess houses, and inviting the young men home to family dinners and entertainments. They also actively engaged the immigrant community in Berkeley through their Americanization program, coordinating with the Berkeley Board of Education to conduct home teacher visits, encourage immigrant families in learning about "proper" nutrition and food preparation, and working to simplify the naturalization process. While these efforts were firmly rooted in racism and cultural superiority, they were intended to bring immigrants firmly within in the fold of citizenship, an especially poignant issue for many women who were actively fighting for their full rights of citizenship on their own behalf.

The MWOB also took an active role in addressing the issue of women's work: not forcing women into jobs they weren't suited for and monitoring labor conditions. By December, 1917, the MWOB was looking into store's compliance with state laws on behalf of shop girls, and recommending in January that an employment bureau for women be established in Berkeley. Interestingly, members of the community must have continued to reach out to the MWOB for assistance because the meeting minutes reflect several mentions that problems should be referred to the Bureau of Employment and that a woman should be added to the bureau's staff to handle women's labor issues. This is reflective of the understanding that initiated the WCCND at the beginning of the war: men were used to dealing with other men and seemed to be unaware of the unique circumstances that women found themselves in. The existing infrastructure was not yet equipped to handle these new situations. Because women had been systematically shut out of so many situations (e.g., employment, property ownership, political decision making), during this time of transition when women were needed in a public role, it was necessary to employ effective intermediaries between the white, male-dominated establishment and the newly public population of women.

From moral protection to public singing, from women's labor to food conservation, from Liberty Loan programs to Red Cross volunteerism, the Mobilized Women of Berkeley harnessed the power of over one hundred and fifty existing women's clubs and coordinated the efforts of thousands of women, children, and even men in what they saw as their patriotic duty to support the boys in the trenches and the United States Government in the Great War effort. Their efforts reflected the fact that these women were accomplished at exerting their voices publicly for the greater good of the community while embracing the traditional sphere of a woman's concerns: home, children, morality. Following leadership at a national level, local club women all over the United States utilized their existing organizations, just like the MWOB, to lend their collective power to forward an uncontroversial woman's agenda while at the same time quietly forwarding a woman's right to full engagement with the wider community and asserting their fundamental rights as citizens.

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