





MAINE
WOMAN'S CHRISTIAN TEMPERANCE UNION
PLEDGE

I hereby solemnly promise, God helping me, to
abstain from all Distilled, Fermented and Malt Liquors, including
Wine, Beer and Cider, as a beverage; and to employ all proper
means to discourage the use of and traffic in the same.

Name

Date

Guardians of family virtue

1 By the late nineteenth century, these temperance reformers emerged with
a new organizational capacity and a new appreciation for state-sponsored
social change. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), estab-
lished in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1874, became the most powerful female reform
5 organization of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. [...]

These middle-class Protestant reformers, identifying themselves as
guardians of family virtue, saw the abolition of liquor consumption as the
linchpin¹ in an effort to protect vulnerable women and children and discipline
male, and especially working-class, breadwinners. New armies of male
10 wageworkers labored long hours in the nation's burgeoning cotton mills,
machine shops, steel foundries, and coal mines by the end of the nineteenth
century. Their wives labored in their households raising children, cooking,
doing laundry, and sometimes taking in boarders². They relied on their
husbands' wages³ to make ends meet. Working-class women's budgetary
15 challenges were compounded⁴ by spouses' periodic unemployment. Layoffs,
economic downturns, and manufacturers' seasonal production cycles made
bouts of unemployment common for wage earners.

The saloon added insecurity to their home lives: poor women had to fear
that much-needed cash would land in a saloon. To make matters worse,
20 inebriated husbands returning home threatened domestic violence as well
as family destitution. The paternalist Protestant elite women who filled the
ranks of the grassroots crusaders drew upon the well⁵ of earlier temperance
ideas. Their solutions, however, no longer focused on converting individuals
to an abstinent life. They sought social means to promote temperance and
25 launched local-option campaigns and eventually statewide prohibition battles
to abolish the liquor traffic.