

Ada Powers' Diaries: Politics, Sisterhood, and the WCTU

Jennifer James

ABSTRACT

Through the diaries of her great-grandmother travelling to attend the world convention of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, Jennifer James illustrates the concerns that preoccupied maternal feminist social reformers.

RÉSUMÉ

Jennifer James se sert du journal de route tenu par son arrière-grand-mère, lors de sa participation à un congrès mondial de la Ligue de tempérance des femmes chrétiennes, pour illustrer les préoccupations que pouvaient avoir les réformatrices sociales de cette époque-là.

The history of Nova Scotian women is still, for the most part, locked behind the covers of forgotten diaries or folded between the yellowing pages of old family letters. Only in the last dozen years have feminist historians and writers begun to search for and examine a rich literary heritage left by women diarists. The contents of diaries and journals, in particular, bring to light the complexities of women's private and public lives which, hitherto, have received only cursory mention in published accounts of Nova Scotian life. By setting such journals within their own context, it is possible to see a picture of the writers' lives emerging from the sometimes terse, sometimes eloquent passages written in their own hand.

One set of journals in particular, written during the final burst of energy of the first wave of the women's movement, provides layers of meaning which reveal historical context, social conditions, and a rare glimpse into a woman-centred world existing within the so-

cial/political milieu dominated by patriarchal ideologies. Ada Silver Powers (1859-1942) was sixty years old when she travelled from Lunenburg, her home and birthplace, to London, England, to attend the World Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) Convention in 1920. During her nearly three-month trip she wrote two journals. The first, her daily personal journal, recorded events and impressions dating from her departure from St. John, New Brunswick, on Saturday, April 3, to her arrival home in Lunenburg on Saturday, June 19. The second contains a detailed account of every session of the WCTU conference, officially dated April 21 to 23, and also includes an entry for Monday, April 19; "Devotional Day, a preparation for the Conv."¹ The conference notes provided details for Ada's official report as a Canadian delegate. Her personal journal, a myriad of details of people, places, and events, supplied substance for stories at gatherings of family and friends. These two journals are among six remaining diaries written by Ada be-



Figure 1. Ada Powers. Photo courtesy of Jennifer James

tween 1916 and 1941.

Ada at Home

Journal writings, WCTU-Lunenburg Chapter minute books, as well as collected family remembrances, reveal the portrait of a complex, adventurous, intelligent woman. Following her early education in Lunenburg, Ada Silver boarded with distant relatives in Pictou, Nova Scotia, in order to attend Pictou Academy, where she trained as a teacher. Her teaching career in Lunenburg lasted until her mid-twenties when she married Frank Powers. They had three sons Archibald, William, and Frank. When the boys were still in their early teens, Flora Smith, Frank's granddaughter by the daughter of his first marriage, arrived to live with the family. Following his daughter's death from tuberculosis, Frank had travelled to Alberta to bring back his granddaughter and Ada took on the task of raising Flora as a younger sister to her own sons. Letters from Ada to Flora, in later years, are signed "Love, Mom," indicating a continuing affection between the two.

Frank died in 1911, leaving Ada a widow at age 52. To supplement her income, shortly after her husband's passing, Ada turned the ground floor of her home into an apartment, where she continued to live until her death in 1942. Frank left behind a thriving hardware business which was continued by sons Archie and William (Billy). Thrift in household management and an income left by her husband allowed Ada the freedom to live comfortably, with paid daily household help, and to pursue her already established life's work with the WCTU. Minute books of the local chapter, dating from 1892 to 1942, indicate Ada's steady involvement during that period.

At 5'7", tall for a woman according to the standards of the day, Ada cut an imposing figure in her home town and at WCTU gatherings across Canada, in England, and in Europe. She is remembered by her granddaughters as always dressing in dark colours and

wearing dresses coming just above the ankle. A number of family photos reveal the presence of the ubiquitous white ribbon, symbol of the WCTU, pinned to her lapel. She was considered the Powers' matriarch and Lunenburg residents stood in awe of her. In 1922, she was elected to the town's school board as its first woman member. When the Presbyterian and Methodist churches merged to become the United Church, Ada followed the progress of the negotiations with avid interest. In the mid-1920s, upon completion of the union, Ada severed her affiliation with the Presbyterians to join the new church. She was the only member of her family to make the transition. In 1934, she was the only female listed among the first officers of the newly formed Lunenburg Hospital Society. Her notebooks and journals reveal, as well, her level of interest and participation in current women's issues. Names such as Nellie McClung, Cora Hind, and Emmeline Pankhurst appear as speakers at national meetings and events Ada attended in pursuit of her life's mission. A clipping from a 1940 Halifax newspaper typifies her indomitable spirit and lifelong joy in travel and adventure. Eighty-year-old Ada is pictured descending from an airplane on her return from visiting Flora in Montreal. The accompanying article refers to the span of her travels, from stagecoach trips to Halifax in the early years to her current trip by air. (See Figure #2)

In contrast, the image of the formidable public figure is deepened and softened by her own words. She wrote in her diaries of the everyday events which composed her life. Mention of church activities, household chores, family visits, afternoon teas, sermons of interest, illnesses and death suffered by young and old friends and neighbours, and recipes are interspersed with items of community, national, and international news. Throughout her writings, comments about her beloved WCTU act as the binding thread of her life.²

Ada was both a product of her era and a woman ahead of her time. Her solidly middle-class back-



Figure 2.

ground and evangelical Christian heritage prepared her well for her chosen role in the last thirty years of her life as a feminist activist and reformer. There still persists a view that most Maritime women were politically immobilized in a "stronghold of conservatism"³ and "remained outside of the public discourse about their place in society".⁴ However, Ada's journals offer new evidence that a number of Nova Scotian women worked actively to define their place in the public, political sphere.

Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU)

In 1920, Ada was chosen as a Canadian delegate to a global WCTU women's conference. This event did not arise in a vacuum. A number of feminist organizations existed at the time in Canada; most notably the Ontario-based National Council of Women of Canada and the Equal Franchise League. Their historical experience with evangelical activities, however, made the WCTU the natural choice for Nova Scotia women engaged in feminist political and social work.⁵ The WCTU publicly proclaimed its strong evangelical Christian bias. Its meetings were opened and closed with hymn singing and bible readings. According to Ada, on several occasions during the 1920 convention, women broke out in spontaneous singing of spiritual songs.

Still in the grip of the social changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution and heavily influenced by Victorian morality, Ada and her sisters formed successful strategies to circumvent the ideology that women belonged only in the roles of mother and homemaker. Early feminist reformers demonstrated tenacity in challenging the notion that "anonymity . . . is the proper condition of women".⁶ Designing a model for social change based on domestic skills and organization and claiming motherhood a public as well as a private virtue, extended the private sphere into the public realm. This strategy did not radically challenge the prevailing social structure, so conservative organi-

zations, especially the WCTU, appealed to a large number of women. In fact, "concern for the domestic institution was a bond which united the great majority of organized women".⁷

A rapidly changing social and economic milieu provided fertile ground for the rise and growth of the WCTU. Formed in 1874 following the Temperance Crusades of the American mid-west, the organization flourished over the next thirty-five years, but its influence began to wane during the second decade of the twentieth century. Begun with the single focus of stopping the liquor trade, it rapidly expanded its mandate to include a number of social issues. Faced with their inability to achieve long range goals, because of the lack of a political voice, WCTU leaders joined forces with suffrage societies to make suffrage one of their primary objectives. By 1880, six divisions of work had been identified: preventative, educational, evangelical, social, legal, and organizational. With the establishment of its own successful publishing company, the WCTU was able to supply books, pamphlets, and tracts to its member groups for use in their educational endeavours.

Its success in reaching and maintaining the loyalty of its mainly conservative, middle-class membership lay in the strategy of President Frances Willard's "Do everything" policy, formulated in 1882. "This brilliant organizing strategy allowed more conservative chapters to avoid issues . . . if they wished while unleashing the energy and creativity of militant activists."⁸ The approach encouraged local chapters to work on any and all issues they deemed important. More radical approaches by some of the Union leaders were played down in order to retain the extensive grass-roots support necessary to maintain the size and influence of the organization. Frances Willard's suggestion to drop the word Christian from the group's name, in order to broaden and benefit their platform, was never implemented. The WCTU remained the public vehicle for change for many rural and small-town women

for several decades and was "a major force in nearly half a million women's lives in 30 nations."⁹

Ada's own intelligence, commitment and integrity was, in part, nurtured by a strong, active local chapter of the WCTU in Lunenburg. Here she met bi-monthly with nearly 50 women who shared her enthusiasm for social activism. Topics discussed and acted upon covered local, provincial, national, and international issues. In January 1921, it was indicated in the chapter minutes that a vacancy would soon occur on the Lunenburg School Board. The WCTU members agreed to lobby the board in order to have the position filled by a woman. Later that year, Ada joined the school board as its first woman member. Books and magazines were regularly packaged to be carried on the fishing schooners sailing from the port. Remaining faithful to their belief in total abstinence from liquor, the Lunenburg WCTU made their presence felt at the launching of the *Bluenose*, the famous Nova Scotia racing schooner. At a chapter meeting, the ladies discussed christening the schooner with a bottle of grape juice instead of wine. How successful they were in converting others to their point of view is not recorded in the minutes. As in other branches of the WCTU, prohibition and suffrage became closely linked in the work of the Lunenburg women. Accounts of granting suffrage to American women and the progress of the suffrage campaign in Europe were topics of readings at local chapter meetings. In 1920, the year Canadian women were granted the vote, all the members went to every house in Lunenburg and surrounding areas to encourage and educate women in the exercise of their franchise during the prohibition referendum. The local chapter received congratulatory letters and telegrams on their success from Dublin Shore (Lunenburg County), New Glasgow, and Montreal. In addition to the larger political issues of prohibition, suffrage, and world peace, the Lunenburg WCTU chapter worked diligently on child poverty, dental health programs for school children,

anti-smoking education, sexuality education, and literacy. A regular correspondence was maintained between other Nova Scotian chapters and the national body. Readings from newsworthy material, relevant to their interests, were regular features of their meetings. On October 3, 1922, for example, an extract from the *Manchester Guardian* was read, explaining Turkish ambitions and the crisis in the Near East. This was followed by a reading encouraging anti-war sentiment in young people. For Ada, who served several terms as President and Secretary, the local chapter was an intellectually and socially nurturing homebase from which to move out into the world.¹⁰

Resonating Sisterhood

Ada's journals reveal a strong sense of self which is reflected in her observations and analysis of situations and people. Despite the fact that she lived in a small, two-story house on a narrow corner lot across from a blacksmith shop, Ada, as an educated woman of Lunenburg's economic and social elite, had developed confidence in herself and was not intimidated by either individuals or institutions encountered during her travels. Throughout the texts discussed here, she articulates a powerful sense of sisterhood with women of a variety of races, cultures, religions, and ages. She records the public recognition of their connectedness across time as set out in the opening activities of the convention: "The service was in memory of those who had passed away since last we meet in Brooklyn, U.S. in 1913 . . . particularly of . . . Mrs. Stevenson Presdt. of Mass. who was a poet as well as a devoted worker."¹¹ Women ranging in age from early twenties to late eighties shared common goals and ideas. Considerable respect for the older delegates of the convention is evident in the pages of both journals. Ada, for example, writes, "There is a delegate from Montreal. Mrs. Cutler 83 years of age who has not missed a meal and is as bright and interested as anyone. She objects to being called an old

woman - elderly lady is what she prefers."¹² Ada is astute in her recognition of the self-possession and emotional depth still possible regardless of advanced age. She is also deeply touched by the words and manners of Madame Kaji Yajima of Japan in thanking the convention for the gift of flowers in celebration of her 88th birthday. "She thanked all the donors most gracefully and fluently. The little catches in her voice and the inflections spoke volumes even before we got the translation by Mrs. Gauntlett."¹³ The Countess of Carlisle, also in her eighties, so impressed Ada that she wrote lengthy descriptions of her on several occasions in both journals.¹⁴ She appreciates the beauty of elderly women and respects the knowledge and wisdom acquired through a long life:

She is a large woman with snow white hair which she wears parted & combed back quite simply with a velvet band around the top ending in a bow behind. She wears pearl earrings ... She is a fine looking woman ... and leans heavily on a stick. But what a mind!¹⁵

Ada's own regard for and curiosity about history re-enforces her feelings of continuity across generations of women who shape her world. The strength of the historical bond of sisterhood resonates in her words: "Dr. Leigh, once Presdt of the Natl. T.L. [Temperance League] 86 years old, a very strong voice - reminiscent. Attended the Centennial Expo in Phila., 1876 . . . Also attended a meeting of women presided over by Lucretia Mott - Chief speaker - Susan B. Anthony."¹⁶

Younger women were also included in both convention and social activities. Following speeches given by several older delegates at a reception hosted by the Wesleyan Methodist Temperance Committee, "Several young ladies sang solos."¹⁷ An auxiliary con-

ference of Little White Ribboners, a branch of the WCTU devoted to temperance education for mothers and children, was held on April 21.¹⁸ Although part of the rationale for including them was to further the mandate of the WCTU in eradicating the international liquor traffic, Ada's writing indicates that younger women received equal respect among the majority of members who appear to be middle-aged or older: "I have made friends with Miss Anthony of Bergen, Norway, a lovely girl, who is a nurse. She told me she had been saving up to come but her sister who is a teacher and has more money than she has gave her 500 kroners for the trip."¹⁹ Although the majority of WCTU women were of white Anglo-Saxon descent, they extended these feelings of sisterhood to include women of other religions and races. The delegates included Japanese women, representatives of the "coloured races" of South Africa and "native" Burmese, and Moslem women. Stories from widely geographically separated countries touched familiar chords in all delegates. Issues such as child prostitution, physical abuse, and suffrage crossed all boundaries. Native women from Ceylon sent a message through their white delegate, who related a story of a native woman and her unborn child kicked to death by her drunken husband: "Tell the women we stand with them."²⁰ In Ceylon, WCTU women sat on committees with members of Buddhist temperance societies.²¹

Despite the fact that the WCTU is no longer the public vehicle for feminist activism in Nova Scotia, historian Veronica Strong-Boag points out its relevance for women today: "For all its limitations ... the WCTU ... identified many of the problems which would obsess feminine activists for many years to come."²² World peace, wife battering, prostitution, and the social consequences of alcoholism, identified as issues at the 1920 convention, remain part of the agenda of the current women's movement. For Ada, and other women, their organization represented the means to maintain contact with women of like mind who be-

lieved deeply in the value of sisterhood.

Passion, Intellect, and Politics

Ada's record of the convention captures the sense of moral superiority, central particularly to the form of evangelical and maternal feminism practised by WCTU women.²³ United States delegate Mrs. Mary Harris Armor, for example, declared her allegiance to a quality of goodness ascribed uniquely to women and warned of the negative attitude pervasive outside the protective walls of sisterhood, insisting: "We must be good for something not for nothing."²⁴ Ada called her "Matchless Mary" and commented: "She is a deeply religious woman, expressed her faith in God and said if we do our duty God would give us the victory."²⁵ These few lines embodied the often repeated belief of the convention delegates that "women make history and that when they set out to accomplish anything they do it."²⁶ For Ada this idea is such a strong personal conviction that it weaves itself into the very fabric of her writing.

A higher, more superior form of passion acceptable to Ada and her friends and colleagues took the form of intense emotional friendships and working relationships with women. Carolyn Heilbrun notes that early feminism was full of eroticism, or its equivalent energy, expressed between friends in a shared passion for their work and for a body of political ideas.²⁷ One of the releases of passionate energy at the convention came through singing and shared prayer. Emotions, heightened by five days of intense meetings and socializing, peaked on the final evening as some of Ada's associates celebrated at the hostel they shared in a women's college in London. She writes: "We sang *Shall auld acquaintance be forgot* and *'God be with you till we meet again'* . . . Then Miss Newton led us in the most beautiful prayer I ever listened to . . ." ²⁸ It is possible to hear an audible sigh as Ada records the emotions she experienced that evening: "Oh it was certainly lovely to meet such re-

fin'd Christian women."²⁹

Special friendships were not uncommon among activist women who sought comfort and understanding outside the circle of their family members who were often not sympathetic to the women's public work. Ada notes one such well known friendship, ironically using terms generally connected with the drink that the temperance women so deplored for releasing violent passions. "Miss [Anna] Gordon was Miss Willard's constant companion and has imbibed much of her sweet spirit."³⁰ She expresses admiration and respect in describing and recording, sometimes at great length, a number of different women; and refers to one particular Canadian delegate, indicating a more personal attachment. She first "became acquainted on the ship with Dr. Sara Detwiler."³¹ References to Dr. Detwiler appear in both her personal writings and the more fact-based convention notes. Prior to the start of the convention, they shared the podium at two of Ada's three public speaking engagements in England. There is a shyness in the simple recording of facts surrounding these events which is not evident elsewhere in Ada's colourful, eloquent writings. Noting their second shared address at Weston on April 14, Ada writes simply: "I spoke on Prohibition in Canada and led up to Medical Temperance. Dr. Detwiler also was present and spoke on Travelers' Aid work . . . about 200 were there."³² Later, on April 23, she records that:

Our Dr. Sara Detwiler, Dom. Supt. of Travellers' Aid work, was given an opportunity to speak of the work. Her quiet modest statement of facts ensures her a hearing whenever she talks on this subject and she is so intensely interested that she loses no opportunity. An audience of one is of as much importance to her as 100.³³

The shared passion for their work seems to have opened the door for what appears to be a friendship based on deep understanding, with intense feelings running as an undercurrent in their public and personal conversations. A brief entry, made during the trip to England, suggests that early in their acquaintance they singled each other out. "WCTU delegates have a rug & steamer chair We got together in a group . . . Had a long talk with Dr. Detwiler about T.A. work and other things."³⁴ Their friendship and close working relationship continued after their return to Canada.³⁵

The intense energy created by the public and personal relationships of these early feminist reformers fuelled their belief in their power to precipitate change in the social and political status of women.³⁶ The feelings of strength in numbers provided by the mutual vision of female separateness from and moral superiority over patriarchal society, gave Ada and her WCTU sisters the courage to confront, head-on, political power structures of the day. The convention notes record Mrs. Barton of Scotland as expressing this determination: "The liquor trade it is at grips with us Now they know what it is to be up against an angry, indignant womanhood."³⁷ Ada later echoes the same confidence in their collective power, rooted in their unabating faith in divine guidance, native intelligence, and hard-earned political skills. She concluded her convention coverage by reflecting that:

The thing that impressed me most was the realization of all the women of all the countries of the need of faith and prayers and trust in God for ultimate victory. As long as there are women of that stamp at the head of our organization we need fear nothing.³⁸

Ada had developed what seems to be an unshakable confidence in her own intellectual abilities. Not

only did she find intellectual stimulation among her WCTU sisters, she displayed no timidity in conversation with men. Events at the convention offered a number of opportunities to engage in lively exchange. Even informal gatherings offered what Ada considered appropriate openings for expanding her mind. For example, as a consequence of a longer than expected sightseeing tour, Ada's group missed a light meal served at a reception given by a Methodist Temperance Society. They arrived in time, however, to hear several short addresses and solos sung by younger women and seemed fully satisfied by the offerings. "Refreshments were over when we arrived but we had an intellectual treat."³⁹ At the home of Mrs. Bully of Weston near Liverpool, her hostess prior to the convention, Ada freely enjoyed participation in animated conversation over dinner with Mrs. Bully's husband. There is no indication of shyness or coyness in their exchange. "We had a jolly time at dinner as Mr. B. was at home and he delights in giving puzzles and riddles also in drawing one into an argument on various subjects."⁴⁰ Apparently she never loses an opportunity to participate in a vigorous debate, whether or not she and her debating partner were acquainted. On April 25, her final day in London, Ada records an exchange with an unknown man. "We went to a restaurant nearby for something to eat. A young man sat [at] our table with whom I had quite an argument about drinking."⁴¹

Within the framework of their organization, WCTU women openly proclaimed and developed their intellectual capacities which led a number of them to hone their political skills. Clearly they viewed their work in the public domain as legitimately political. Recognizing Lady Carlisle's considerable skills in this area, Ada comments: "She was a political organizer for 30 years so she knows politics thoroughly."⁴² There was also an awareness of their ability to affect legal changes in legislative systems where women were denied direct participation. The collective sense of their politi-

cal work and power is present in the words of Mrs. Boole of New York, who spoke of successfully engineering prohibition legislation in the United States in 1920. "It was not an accident. There had been nearly 50 years of hard work."⁴³

Ada's journals also reveal an understanding of international political rivalry and the role of women in the reconstruction of Europe following the devastation of World War I:

Lady Carlisle made an impassioned appeal for help for the new European countries Poland, Jugo Slavia, Czecho Slavia [sic]. Also the Central Powers. Bury old scores - Unite them in the comradeship of the white ribbon. For this a fixed income is needed. She does not want to be beholden to the Stars and Stripes.⁴⁴

Despite the enthusiastic reports of the political acumen of certain delegates, the dazzle of their brilliance did not blind Ada to apparent personal shortcomings in political style. Among her editorial comments, there is this wry statement: "Lady Carlisle talked a good deal more than we would allow the chair in our Conventions."⁴⁵

Class and Character

Recognition of social distinctions did not deter Ada from passing judgement on certain people or seeking information from or discussion with others. She remarked on "the number of titled people that are linked up in one way and another with the temp. cause."⁴⁶ This, however, is made as a plain statement of fact and in no way infers that she is awed by wealth or elevated social status. Her interest in and admiration for Mrs. Bully does not stop her from expressing incredulity, then down-to-earth practicality, in reaction to Mrs. Bully's proposal to allow her

seventeen-year-old daughter, Lois, to go into domestic service. "I fairly gasped when her mother told me this . . . How she expects to be able to work in America when she has never done anything but go to school at home they did not explain."⁴⁷ Lady Carlisle also did not escape Ada's practice of rigorous character assessment. Following a detailed description of her physical appearance, Lady Carlisle's performance as convention chair received this treatment:

She has a very strong patrician face and is a thorough disciplinarian tho not always acting according to parliamentary practice. She is given to expressing her opinions in a masterful, often lengthy manner without vacating the chair. But the way in which she guided the Conv. thro' a rather delicate and difficult situation at one point won the admiration of all.⁴⁸

Ada gave equal consideration to and testament of the working-class people she encountered, based on her perception of their duties. She gave praise where she thought it was due. "The policemen direct traffic in such a way that accidents are rare. The bus drivers are most courteous always say 'fares please' and 'thank you'."⁴⁹ Never missing an opportunity to learn something new, Ada spoke with anyone she believed could provide her with a new perspective on her experiences during her travels. On the ship she recorded a brief history of the city of Liverpool told to her by a steward.⁵⁰ During a sightseeing tour in London, she opted to sit in the front seat with the driver "so as to get information altho there was a guide went along with us."⁵¹ She also wrote of her admiration for the driving skills of the Irish chauffeur. A lower member of the Anglican church hierarchy received more favourable comment than a bishop following a service where

both officiated. Although Ada considered the sermon, delivered by the Bishop of Croydon, to be "a good one," she responded to "a few plain words" from Canon Barnes with the comment: "I liked him very much indeed."⁵² Her democratic style of meeting and evaluating people counters the image of WCTU members, described by Evans in *Born for Liberty*, as hostile to lower classes and immigrants.

Practicality and Sentiment

Ada's writing style reflects both her evangelical Nova Scotian background and her sensitivity. Her attention to detail and her clear, concise form of recording her observations and feelings can be attributed, in part, to her early education. Both the *Travel and Convention Journals* are full of meticulously recorded numerical information. There are exact statistics on the number of members in Little White Ribboner groups in six countries and the number of delegates from each country represented at the convention. She counts verses sung in hymns and the number of collection plates used in a service at Westminster Abbey.⁵³ Inside the covers of both volumes there are notes on costs of tickets, small amounts of money owed, and prices of small purchases. The travel journal contains comments on the cost of taxi fares and hotels and the occasions when billeting was provided free, therefore saving expenditure.⁵⁴ Her fascination with monetary figures also appears in her detailed descriptions of London landmarks, where she records the restoration costs of St. Bartholemew's church.⁵⁵ It appears that Ada used this collection of trivia as souvenirs which she shared with friends and family on her return home. At times Ada's practicality gave way to other facets of her personality. She declared that she was so moved by the beauty of Westminster Abbey that she was at a loss for words. However, she painted a vivid word picture of the cathedral which had precipitated her emotional reaction. "Words fail to describe the wonderful architecture, stained glass win-

dows, carved choir stalls, marble statues lining the walls."⁵⁶ She allowed her emotions to rise to the surface once again when an abbreviated tour of the National Gallery caused her to remark: "We did this in about twenty minutes, which was only an aggravation of the soul, as we could only glance at the pictures and stop to look at one here and there to which the guide called particular attention."⁵⁷

The form, style, and content of Ada's journals reflect the reality of the vibrant woman-centred world in which she lived and worked. The multiplicity of details and descriptions combine to create a strong affirmation of a self-confident female sphere which claimed its place of equality within an andro-centric society. Recording her experiences made the structure of Ada's life visible through the written word; her diaries reflect the parameters of her life. For example, the frequent references to Christian doctrine signify a belief which gave her personal stability and a definition of her place in the world. Evangelicalism allowed Ada and her contemporaries to take their reform work into the public sphere and, as a consequence, to exercise political influence through the driving energy of a powerful sisterhood developed there. However, there is no challenge to the patriarchal assumptions of Protestantism. Therefore, their analyses of the dilemmas faced by women could not extend beyond a perception that removal of the symptoms (i.e., alcohol, prostitution, war, and lack of suffrage) was the solution to their problems. However, Ada's written record gives us a vivid picture of individual female intelligence and creativity, a carefully crafted political agenda, and the sisterhood of the first wave of the women's movement. As a diarist, she offers evidence that Nova Scotia women were part of a larger movement which laboured to improve the status of women. Her words moderate the prevailing view that "Maritime women may have been leaders of evangelical reform, but the battles for secular women's rights were fought primarily in urban environ-

ments elsewhere.”⁵⁸ As a member of a small town WCTU chapter, Ada worked locally, but maintained strong connections to like-minded women from countries around the world who struggled to achieve their vision of social change.

Discovery of my great-grandmother’s journals has allowed me to acquire valuable insight into one branch of my family’s past and to restore the history of some of my foremothers, whose presence was overlooked in my early formal education. An unspoken acknowl-

edgement of the value of Ada’s writings has been demonstrated in the careful preservation of her diaries by her granddaughters Marion Powers Pyke, Gretchen Powers Finley, and my mother, the late Ruth Powers James. Their awareness of the importance of her life bridges three generations of our family, providing a link between Ada and myself and, by extension, between two active Nova Scotian members of the first and second waves of the women’s movement.

NOTES

1. Ada Powers, *Convention Journal* (Unpublished 1920), 1.
2. Biographical information on Ada was obtained from research notes made in 1988-89. Sources include interviews with her granddaughters Marion Powers Pyke, Ruth Powers James, Gretchen Powers Finley, and their first cousin Mildred Herman. The hand-written minute books for the Lunenburg chapter of the WCTU, dating from 1892-1942, and given to me by my mother Ruth James, were placed on permanent deposit in the manuscript division of the Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS) in 1992. All but one of Ada's known diaries and notebooks have been microfilmed by PANS and are available to researchers. These originals remain in my possession. One travel journal is still with Gretchen Finley in Saint John, New Brunswick.
3. Margaret Conrad, *Recording Angels: The Private Chronicles of Women from the Maritime Provinces of Canada 1750 - 1950* (Ottawa: CRIAW 1982), 1.
4. Margaret Conrad, Toni Laidlaw, and Donna Smyth, *No Place Like Home* (Halifax: Formac 1988), 301.
5. Conrad, Laidlaw, Smyth, *No Place Like Home*, 20-1. Alice Chown, *The Stairway* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1988), xvii.
6. Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (New York: W.W. Norton 1988), 12.
7. Veronica Strong-Boag, "Setting the Stage": National Organization and the Women's Movement in the Late 19th Century," *The Neglected Majority* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1977), 91.
8. Sara M. Evans, *Born for Liberty* (New York: The Free Press 1989), 127-8.
9. John G. Woolley and William Johnson, *Temperance Progress* (Philadelphia: The Bradley-Garretson Co. 1903), 211.
10. Records of the activities of the Lunenburg chapter of the WCTU are contained in the organization's minute books dated from 1892 to 1922. Selected details from these records are contained in Jennifer James, "Women's Issues in the 1920s," (Unpublished 1989), 1-9.
11. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 1.
12. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 6.
13. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 41.
14. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 14-15, 17, 36-7.
15. Powers, *Travel Journal*, (Unpublished 1920), 30-1.
16. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 57.
17. Powers, *Travel Journal*, 29.
18. Powers, *Travel Journal*, 24-6.
19. Powers, *Travel Journal*, 29.
20. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 26. Patricia Meyer Spacks, *The Female Imagination* (New York: Avon 1975), 4.
21. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 46.
22. Strong-Boag, "Setting the Stage", 91.
23. Chown, *The Stairway*, xvii.
24. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 3.
25. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 32.
26. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 51.
27. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life*, 108.
28. Powers, *Travel Journal*, 35.
29. Powers, *Travel Journal*, 35.
30. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 5.
31. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 15.
32. Powers, *Travel Journal*, 14.
33. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 47-8.
34. Powers, *Travel Journal*, 2.
35. An entry in one of the WCTU minute books notes that on October 25, 1920, Dr. Sara Detwiler drove Ada to Blue Rocks to swear in and register local women to facilitate their voting in the prohibition referendum. Further research is required to determine where Dr. Detwiler lived, how far she travelled to come to Lunenburg and where and for how long she stayed while assisting Ada in her work.
36. Nancy F. Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," *Heritage of Her Own* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1979), 168.
37. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 36.
38. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 56.
39. Powers, *Travel Journal*, 29.
40. Powers, *Travel Journal*, 15.
41. Powers, *Travel Journal*, 49.
42. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 38.
43. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 28-9.
44. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 17.
45. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 34.
46. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 58.
47. Powers, *Travel Journal*, 11-12.
48. Powers, *Convention Journal*, 14-15.

49. Powers, Travel Journal, 36.
50. Powers, Travel Journal, 4.
51. Powers, Travel Journal, 27.
52. Powers, Travel Journal, 22.
53. Powers, Convention Journal, 14-15, 24. Powers, Travel Journal, 48.
54. Powers, Travel Journal, 17-18.
55. Powers, Travel Journal, 37.
56. Powers, Travel Journal, 22.
57. Powers, Travel Journal, 47
58. Conrad, Recording Angels: The Private Chronicles of Women from the Maritime Provinces of Canada, 1750 - 1950, 21.