

Our Missouri Podcast

Title: Summer Series 2020: Carrie Lee Carter Stokes & the WCTU

Guest: Janet Olson

Air Date: July 27, 2020

KEVIN WALSH: Welcome to *Our Missouri*, a podcast about the people, places, culture, and history of the 114 counties and independent city of Saint Louis that comprise the great state of Missouri. Each episode focuses on a topic related to the state ranging from publications about Missouri's history to current projects undertaken by organizations to preserve and promote local institutions. The *Our Missouri Podcast* is recorded at the Center for Missouri Studies in Columbia, and is generously provided to you by the State Historical Society of Missouri. And now, here's your host, Sean Rost.

SEAN ROST: Good morning, good afternoon, and good evening, or at whatever hour you are tuning in to listen to the Our Missouri Podcast. My name is Sean Rost and I will be your guide as we explore the memories, moments, and misfortunes from our Missouri.

One hundred years ago this summer, Missourians awaited news regarding the ratification of the 19th Amendment. The state had approved the amendment, which prohibited the federal government and states from denying a citizen the right to vote based upon sex, a year prior, in 1919. However, it would take another year before Tennessee became the 36th and final state needed to ratify the new constitutional amendment in August 1920. As we consider the centennial of women's suffrage, the Our Missouri Podcast invites listeners to join us as we explore the fight for the right to vote through the eyes of a group of "Show-Me Suffragists" who are not well-known in Missouri History. Today's episode will be presented in two parts. First, we will turn our attention to southeast Missouri and the life of Carrie Lee Carter Stokes. Second, Janet Olson, archivist for the Frances Willard House Museum & Archives, will explain how women such as Carrie Stokes worked through the Woman's Christian Temperance Union to secure temperance as well as suffrage.

Our story begins in Stoddard County. Nestled in the northern section of Missouri's Bootheel, the county had been home to the Carter family for a little less than a generation before Carrie Lee was born to Allison and Louisa Carter on March 12, 1866. Originally from Tennessee, the Carters made their home near Bloomfield, and at the start of the Civil War, Allison worked as a merchant. By the time that Carrie was ready for school, her family had moved closer to the nearby town of Dexter. At some point, Carrie went to Saint Louis to complete her education before attending Cumberland Female College in McMinnville, Tennessee. She returned to Dexter and briefly taught in a local school, but decided to enroll in a

music program at the Beethoven Conservatory in Saint Louis. By her early twenties, she moved back to Dexter and taught music.¹

Not long after returning to Stoddard County, she joined the local branch of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union at Dexter. From the very beginning with the WCTU, Carrie was noted as a young member to keep an eye on going forward. One of her first major roles within the Dexter union was branch secretary, but she quickly rose through the ranks to become a state convention delegate and president for the 14th congressional district by the age of twenty-four. In the 1890s, she regularly toured Missouri as a state lecturer for the WCTU and helped communities develop their own unions.²

On the lecture circuit, Carrie Lee Carter became well known for her eloquent speaking style and her youthful presence. Not surprisingly, she was regularly appointed as a state lecturer, and even served as the WCTU's State and National Youth Secretary. She easily rallied women to the cause of temperance, and worked hard to embody to the WCTU "Do Everything" mentality.³ "Every year from now till doomsday," she told a large gathering of her fellow white ribboners, "let us continue the fight, alternating each year with attacks through the initiative and the legislature until victory comes."⁴

Carrie Lee Carter closed out the 19th Century on a tour of the western United States on behalf of the WCTU. Her speeches in California, Arizona, Nevada, and Utah demonstrate her rise through not only the state WCTU, but also as a leader for the national organization.⁵ She was even selected to manage the WCTU's temperance hotel that operated in Saint Louis during the entirety of the 1904 World's Fair.⁶ Yet, while she seemingly felt comfortable on the lecture circuit—speaking not only on behalf of the WCTU, but also at Chautauquas and reunions of Civil War soldiers—there was a notable hesitancy to serve in a major capacity as an officer for the state WCTU. While some of her fellow members may have felt that she was the heir apparent of long-time president Clara Hoffman, Carrie seemed uncomfortable in the role. In fact, when Hoffman died in 1908, Carrie served as state president for less than two years before opting not to seek re-election and turning the office over to Kate Franklin Newton.⁷

¹ Blanche Butts-Runion, *Through the Years: A History of the First Seventy-Five Years of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Missouri, 1882-1957* (n.p., 1957), 23; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 18 March 1899; *Kansas City Star*, 26 March 1899.

² Butts-Runion, *Through the Years*, 23; *Poplar Bluff Citizen*, 6 November 1890.

³ Butts-Runion, *Through the Years*, 23.

⁴ *Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Convention of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Missouri, Carthage, MO., September 7-10, 1909* (St. Louis: W. S. McAdoo & Co., Printers, 1909), 40.

⁵ *King City Democrat*, 2 June 1899.

⁶ *Greenville Sun*, 31 March 1904; *Holt County Sentinel*, 22 April 1904; *Mexico Message*, 28 April 1904.

⁷ Butts-Runion, *Through the Years*, 23-27; *Proceedings of the Twenty-Seventh Annual Convention of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Missouri, Carthage, MO., September 7-10, 1909* (St. Louis: W. S. McAdoo

Despite her concerns about heading the organization she had devoted roughly twenty years of her life to, there was little hesitation about rallying her fellow Missourians to the need for a constitutional amendment on the prohibition of alcohol. In 1905, she made headlines when she called out Governor Joseph Folk for drinking in public. She told white ribboners of the WCTU's 31st district that, "Gov. Folk drinks. I know he drinks. He does it publicly on railroad cars, and has his own bottle. If he does it there he will do it anywhere."⁸ Not long after her public comments, Carrie set up temporary accommodations in Henry County during a heated campaign for local option prohibition.⁹ Her efforts to turn Henry County dry resulted in prohibitionists and temperance advocates in several counties reaching out to her for advice and in-person appearances.¹⁰

Having publicly called out Joseph Folk for his indifference regarding alcohol, Carrie Stokes did not allow his successor, Herbert Hadley, much time in office before she targeted him as well. In February 1909, the *Hermitage Index* noted that the governor was, "besieged...by about one hundred ladies of the W.C.T.U." The women marched on the capitol in Jefferson City to lobby members of the executive and legislative branches. Rising to the platform in the House of Representatives, Carrie called upon those assembled to take up and vote on a constitutional amendment for prohibition.¹¹ She remained in Jefferson City for the remainder of the 1909 session, only to watch the legislation fail. She later wrote in the *Missouri Counselor*, the state's WCTU newspaper, that Saint Louis brewers supplied "wet goods" to legislators throughout the session to defeat the amendment.¹²

While temperance was her main goal, it is easy to see how suffrage emerged as Carrie's second major cause. As early as 1893, she spoke out in favor of suffrage during a lecture tour in southeast Missouri. She told her audience that the voting rights recently extended to women in Colorado should also be given to Missourians.¹³ By the turn of the 20th Century, newspapers had taken notice of her activism and mentioned her name alongside Susan B. Anthony while covering conventions for the Mississippi Valley Conference on Women and the Missouri Equal Suffrage Association in Saint Louis.¹⁴ Though the state WCTU had had a franchise department since its earliest days, attention towards suffrage increased during and immediately after Carrie's

& Co., Printers, 1909), 41; *Report of the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Thirty-Fifth Annual Convention held in The Auditorium, Denver, Colorado, October 23-28, 1908* (n.p., n.d.), 207-208.

⁸ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 20 September 1905, 21 September 1905, 22 September 1905; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 20 September 1905, 21 September 1905, 22 September 1905.

⁹ *Henry County Republican*, 19 October 1905.

¹⁰ *St. Joseph Gazette*, 12 August 1916; *Bloomfield Vindicator*, 8 September 1916.

¹¹ *Hermitage Index*, 18 February 1909.

¹² *Kansas City Times*, 4 May 1909; *St. Joseph Gazette*, 15 May 1909; *Pemiscot Argus*, 24 June 1909.

¹³ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 24 December 1893.

¹⁴ *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 28 March 1895, 3 May 1895, 4 May 1895; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 29 March 1895, 3 May 1895; *Kansas City Star*, 3 May 1895; *St. Joseph Daily News*, 3 May 1895; *Springfield Leader*, 3 May 1895.

term as president. As passage of the 19th amendment drew near, she shifted some of her major lecture topics to include "Votes for Women" and "My Duty at the Ballot Box."¹⁵

Through her temperance and suffrage work, Carrie Lee Carter found a partner and advocate who felt the same way about social reform as she did. His name was Charles Stokes, and he was no stranger to the Carter family. Both had grown up in Stoddard County, with Stokes serving as mayor of Dexter and managing the *Dexter Messenger*. He later moved to Mexico, Missouri, and eventually Kansas City to operate the *Kansas City Leader*. He ran for the United States Senate once and governor twice on the Prohibition Party ticket, though he finished well back of the eventual victors.¹⁶ In 1904, the couple married and made their home in Kansas City.¹⁷ Though Carrie spent much of her time on the lecture circuit, it was not uncommon for Charles to join her as a fellow temperance speaker.¹⁸

In 1913, the Stokes made, perhaps, the biggest decision of their lives. Though both had deep ties to Missouri and the statewide temperance movement, they decided to move to California so that Charles could continue his work in the newspaper business.¹⁹ She still returned to Missouri throughout the 1910s to aid in local option campaigns and pressure legislators into backing statewide prohibition. As she did back home, Carrie continued as a WCTU lecturer and enjoyed passage of the 18th and 19th amendments—passed in Missouri in January and July of 1919 respectively—under the glow of the California sun.²⁰

After years on the road convincing audiences of the validity of temperance and suffrage, Carrie Lee Carter Stokes slowed down near the end of her life. Well, define "slowed down." While her time on the lecture circuit declined, she briefly served as president of the Los Angeles WCTU, headed the Los Angeles County Women's Prohibition Club, and helped her husband publish the *Golden West* and *National Prohibition Defender*. To the very end, she advocated from temperance, voting rights, and world peace.²¹

¹⁵ *Kansas City Times*, 19 September 1912; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 22 September 1912; *Los Angeles Express*, 28 October 1914.

¹⁶ Butts-Runion, *Through the Years*, 23; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 8 May 1896, 5 May 1898, 11 November 1908; *Bloomfield Vindicator*, 26 October 1900, 19 July 1901; *Kansas City Times*, 17 June 1904; *Caruthersville Democrat*, 1 November 1912.

¹⁷ Butts-Runion, *Through the Years*, 23; *Kansas City Times*, 17 June 1904.

¹⁸ *Henry County Republican*, 11 May 1905; *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 14 May 1905; *Caruthersville Democrat-Argus*, 20 June 1905; *St. Joseph Gazette*, 12 August 1916.

¹⁹ Butts-Runion, *Through the Years*, 24-25; *Kansas City Times*, 19 June 1913.

²⁰ Butts-Runion, *Through the Years*, 25; *St. Joseph Gazette*, 12 August 1916; *Bloomfield Vindicator*, 8 September 1916.

²¹ Butts-Runion, *Through the Years*, 25-27; *Kansas City Times*, 19 June 1913; *Dexter Messenger*, 28 May 1931.

Carrie Lee Carter Stokes passed away in Los Angeles on May 13, 1936. Despite spending the last two decades of her life in California, her body was returned to Stoddard County.²² Before his own passing, Charles wrote a book about her life entitled, "Press and Pen Portraits," and made a large donation in her name to the Dexter library, in the hopes that her legacy would live on.²³ He died in 1943.²⁴ As they were for so much of their life—whether advocating on behalf of social reform or lecturing on the need for temperance—Charles Stokes and Carrie Lee Carter Stokes are together in the Dexter Cemetery. Their shared gravestone notes Charles' newspaper and political career, and acknowledges that Carrie "gave a beautiful sacrificial life to humanity."²⁵

Now that we know a little more about Carrie Lee Carter Stokes, let's turn our attention to Janet Olson to tell us a little bit about the history of the WCTU. Welcome to the Our Missouri Podcast, Janet.

JANET OLSON: Hi Sean. Good to talk to you again.

SEAN ROST: Could you tell us a little bit about the origin story of the WCTU?

JANET OLSON: Yes. I'll give you the short version, or we'll be here all day. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union was founded in Cleveland, Ohio, in November 1874. The organization was inspired by what was known as the Woman's Crusades which took place between 1873-4, notably in upstate New York and Ohio where groups of respectable, middle-class women left their respectable, middle-class homes and churches and went to the local saloons where they knelt down and prayed for the saloonkeepers to close up shop. This actually worked in some places for a short time, but was not a permanent solution to the problem that women were facing across the country with drunken husbands and sons facilitated by the thriving businesses of alcohol producers and purveyors. Although there had been, and were, many temperance organizations, their membership and leadership was almost exclusively men. After the crusade, a group of ministers' wives decided to form a temperance organization consisting exclusively of women. A national organization that would have a presence in every state and territory to organize women at the local level into unions following a national plan but with local control. The meeting in Cleveland in 1874 was the first national convention of what was to be called the Woman's Christian Temperance Union where the organizational structure and mission were determined. The goal of the WCTU from the first was to educate and reform. The first plan of work reflecting the lessons learned from the short-lived Women's Crusade stated that, "If nobody would drink, then nobody would sell." The methods for advocating abstinence included meetings and lectures offering alternatives to saloons, enlisting the support

²² *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 15 May 1936; *Dexter Statesman*, 22 May 1936.

²³ Charles E. Stokes, *Press and Pen Portraits of Carrie Lee Carter Stokes: Tributes to Her Mentality, Personality, and Wealth of Expression in Presenting the Principles of Woman's Christian Temperance Union* (n.p., n.d.); *Dexter Statesman*, 8 October 1937.

²⁴ *Los Angeles Times*, 4 July 1943; *Dexter Messenger*, 8 July 1943.

²⁵ Tim Crutchfield, "Carrie Lee Carter Stokes," Find A Grave, 12 March 2007, accessed 1 July 2020, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/18372215/carrie-lee-stokes>.

of churches, providing scientific information, installing drinking fountains, protecting women, and teaching children. Fast forward to the 1880s. The WCTU went international establishing the World's WCTU which had unions around the globe. The WCTU grew rapidly. By 1900, it was the leading organization in both temperance and women's issues due to its flexible organizational structure, its remarkable skills in promotion and publicity, and its strong leaders at all levels, including, of course, the redoubtable Frances Willard, second president of the WCTU from 1879 until her death in 1898, whose total reform views and charismatic personality empowered women to become leaders in their communities. Even after Willard's death, which changed the nature of the organization, and through the trials and tribulations of Prohibition and repeal, the WCTU pursued its goals and retained a strong membership throughout the 1960s, and it still exists today.

SEAN ROST: Now thinking about—you talked a lot about that cornerstone on temperance. What are some of the other major issues of the eras that the WCTU was focused in on?

JANET OLSON: Well, from the beginning, and increasingly as time went on, the WCTU took a broad view of its goals recognizing the complexity of alcoholism's causes. The early declaration of principles stated that the WCTU believed in a living wage, an eight hour day, courts of arbitration, and justice as opposed to greed or gain. Sounds very Progressive Era. As Frances Willard said in describing the WCTU's approach, "The temperance reform lies at the foundation of all reforms." Typical of Willard's habit of creating catchy mottos, she called this the WCTU's "Do Everything" policy. Basically, the WCTU was involved in almost every social welfare effort in its time from health education in schools to the Pure Food Act of 1906, always in the context of eliminating the use of alcohol. While the national WCTU eventually established some thirty or fifty departments of work, focusing on areas from kindergartens to state fairs, parlor meetings to legislation, the structure of the organization allowed local and state unions to focus on their particular needs. For example, the Department of Work Among Lumbermen was popular in the Northwest, Work Among Railroad Men or sailors in other parts of the country. Even the Department of Franchise, working for woman's suffrage, was not in force in some states while it was in great interest to most others. Some state and town's WCTUs established temperance coffeehouses, homes for unwed mothers, or orphanages. The Loyal Temperance Legion was established as the department dedicated to teaching children's about the dangers of alcohol by providing camps, classes, and activities for kids.

SEAN ROST: In thinking about franchise or suffrage, with an organization that was founded in the 1870s and really gets started in the 1880s there's still forty almost fifty years until the passage of the 19th Amendment with women's suffrage. How did that topic evolve with the WCTU over that span of time?

JANET OLSON: Well, Frances Willard, herself, had been in favor of women voting ever since she was a young girl, on the principle that the franchise was a right that women deserved equally with men. However, during its first nine years, the WCTU considered affiliation with suffrage movement was irrelevant to its own work. In 1876, Willard pushed the concept of "home protection," one of her mottos, as the rationale for women needing the power of the vote in order to keep their families safe from alcohol. Susan B. Anthony immediately praised her for speaking

out for the cause of woman's suffrage, but even after Willard became WCTU president in 1879, it took until 1883 to pass a resolution adding suffrage to the WCTU platform. After that, however, the WCTU went full speed ahead in support of suffrage and collaboration with the national suffrage organizations. After Willard died in 1898, however, at the age of fifty-nine, the National American Woman's Suffrage Association requested that the WCTU keep its distance because the temperance issue sidetracked potential supporters of women's rights. But, the WCTU had realized the importance of women voting and it pursued suffrage on its own as a significant issue for its work. When Prohibition was ratified in 1919, the WCTU said, "Next year, suffrage." Proof of the interconnectedness that continued between suffrage and temperance is the number of suffrage women revealed in this anniversary of suffrage year who, like Carrie Stokes, were also WCTU leaders. This has been a boon for our reputation, and has brought in a lot of interesting researchers and research questions.

SEAN ROST: Thinking of Carrie Lee Carter Stokes, as we look at her life, she had a major role to play in the Missouri WCTU, but she was also a national lecturer for the WCTU going across the country, going even internationally in some cases. Walk us through the day-to-day activities and life of a national lecturer of the WCTU.

JANET OLSON: Well, I'll start with the example of Frances Willard who was a renowned orator and she set the tone for this function of national lecturers and national organizers from her first years with the WCTU. By the early 1880s, Willard had traveled through all the U.S. states and territories speaking and organizing unions. In 1883, the WCTU established a department of organization—that was the same year they passed the suffrage resolution—which supervised a small army of national organizers, national lecturers, and national evangelists. These women, who were salaried, were responsible for traveling to organize new unions, increase membership, or revitalize existing unions, and to promote WCTU projects and principles. They mostly had assigned territories. As we know, Carrie Stokes organized and lectured in Missouri, in the South—I think Tennessee and Georgia—and then later in California. These women spoke at small group meetings, in town halls, auditoriums, and churches, and attended state and national WCTU conventions. Their lectures were reported on in newspapers, further spreading their reach. Obviously, not every lecturer was as famed for her oratory as Willard, although one reporter did call Carrie Stokes, "a second Frances Willard." All the organizers and lecturers were praised in newspaper articles as earnest, intelligent, eloquent, persuasive, and womanly—sometimes even charming and successful. By the 1890s, there were unions in half of the countries in the U.S.

SEAN ROST: Now, I had the pleasure of visiting the Frances Willard House Museum & Archives a couple of years ago, and you actually gave me a tour of the facility, so that was quite wonderful. Tell people who might be interested a little bit about that facility—the house, museum, and archives.

JANET OLSON: Well, the museum and archives comprise two buildings on one lot in Evanston, Illinois. The Frances Willard House is a modest board-and-batten structure built in 1865 by Willard's father based on a design by Andrew Jackson Downing. Frances Willard lived and worked in the house until her death in 1898. For many of those years, the house also served

as an informal headquarters for the WCTU. When Willard died, the WCTU moved its official headquarters from downtown Chicago into the house. Imagine conducting an international organization from the small rooms of an 1865 family home—not unlike what we are doing these days during the pandemic in a way. Part of the house was opened as a museum—a shrine in a way—to Willard's life. In 1910, the WCTU's offices moved into the new Literature Building behind the house. The second floor held bedrooms for WCTU staff until 1992. The Frances Willard Historical Association, which is now renamed the Center for Women's History and Leadership, was established in 1994 to restore and manage the house and to tell all of its stories. Since the house was used and adapted so much over the years by Willard and the WCTU, interpreting its history has been a challenge. Now, much of the house is restored—and it looks much better than the last time you saw it, Sean. Many of the rooms are restored to the 1890s when Willard was at the height of her fame and lived there with her mother. Three rooms reflect the way the house looked circa 1910 when the WCTU offices were in place. One front parlor is the museum reception area.

The House Museum has a collection of original furnishings and objects, including Willard's famous bicycle, Gladys. The museum offers educational programs, as well as private and public tours, although it is currently closed due to the pandemic. Fortunately, a recent project, "Truth Telling," a comprehensive digital exhibit documenting the conflict between Willard and Ida B. Wells, is readily available online. Moving to the back building, the Frances Willard Memorial Library and WCTU Archives is located in the WCTU Administration Building, a three-story brick building directly behind the house. The building began life as the Literature Building in 1910, and was greatly expanded to become the administration building in 1922 during Prohibition. The library, a two-story addition to the administration building, opened in 1940 specifically to serve WCTU staff. Gradually, the library collection began to include archival material documenting the history of the national and international WCTU. After the WCTU moved its headquarters out in 1992, the archival function continued to grow as unions around the country divested themselves of their records. The holdings of the WCTU Archives reflect the history and impact of the WCTU and the women who were involved in it. Materials include letters, documents, images, serial publications, biographical and subject files, scrapbooks, and artifacts dating between the 1830s and 1990s. Meanwhile, interest in the collection has grown as well. The Archives offers a unique collection for scholars of women's history, temperance, rhetoric, social reform, and social/political movements, and addiction studies in national and international context. The collection is also used by independent writers, National History Day students, undergraduate and graduate students, and, of course, genealogists.

SEAN ROST: In closing, tell us a little bit about what your role is within the Frances Willard House Museum & Archives.

JANET OLSON: Well, I'll refer back to the first plan of work of the WCTU which included the recommendation to, "preserve the facts concerning our work in temperance scrapbooks to be placed in the hands of a special officer appointed for this purpose." 150 years later, that's a lot of scrapbooks, and reports and publications and photographs and letters. While not every WCTU in

the country or the world has sent its records to the national headquarters in Evanston, it's still a lot of material that has drifted in—and I do mean it has drifted. Since I started in 2007, we're still sorting through the piles of unorganized materials that have accumulated. So, organizing the backlog and new acquisitions continues to be a major responsibility, and as a small repository with two part-time staff, and some wonderful volunteers of course, it's a challenge, but the reward is in the researchers like you, Sean. Until the pandemic quarantine hit, we've averaged thirty or so on-site researchers a year, adding up to nearly 100 days of on-site research. We also get five or six reference inquiries a week from researchers around the world, which we attempt to answer by email. Genealogy inquiries—"My grandma was in the WCTU, what can you tell me about her?"—used to be the most frequent as they are with most historical societies. But in recent years, most of the inquiries come from researchers of all ages in many, many different fields. Because the WCTU was connected to so many other organizations, and kept such exhaustive records, we're a good resource for researchers in fields well beyond temperance. The past two years have been particularly busy with the anniversaries of Prohibition and, especially, suffrage. The suffrage anniversary has opened up a whole new window into the impact of the WCTU as researchers around the country have discovered links between the two movements.

SEAN ROST: You mentioned National History Day students kind of inquiring with you. I was thinking about some of the students we work with on their projects, and how they're really involved in checking in with outside entities and outside archives. So, I'm glad that History Day students are checking in with you all and getting research with you all.

JANET OLSON: Well, I think it's great to start people young to get them—I didn't discover archives until I was in graduate school. But, the thrill of touching an old document—and, of course, to kids these days, an old document is like 1970. To have them look at this 19th Century handwriting and these photographs and all that, I'm always hoping to get them hooked on history.

SEAN ROST: Thank you for joining us today, Janet.

JANET OLSON: It's been really a pleasure to work with you again, Sean.

KEVIN WALSH: Thank you for listening to the *Our Missouri Podcast*. If you would like to learn more about the podcast, including past and future episodes, information about guests, and upcoming events, please visit our website at shsmo.org/our-missouri.