

1-1-2008

Soil sisters: Independent land owning women in Coles and Douglas counties, Illinois, 1870-1930

Rachel E. Kleinschmidt

Eastern Illinois University

This research is a product of the graduate program in [History](#) at Eastern Illinois University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

Recommended Citation

Kleinschmidt, Rachel E., "Soil sisters: Independent land owning women in Coles and Douglas counties, Illinois, 1870-1930" (2008). *Masters Theses*. 426.
<http://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/426>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact tabruns@eiu.edu.

THESIS MAINTENANCE AND REPRODUCTION CERTIFICATE

TO: Graduate Degree Candidates (who have written formal theses)

SUBJECT: Permission to Reproduce Theses

The University Library is receiving a number of request from other institutions asking permission to reproduce dissertations for inclusion in their library holdings. Although no copyright laws are involved, we feel that professional courtesy demands that permission be obtained from the author before we allow these to be copied.

PLEASE SIGN ONE OF THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS:

Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University has my permission to lend my thesis to a reputable college or university for the purpose of copying it for inclusion in that institution's library or research holdings.

Rachel E. Kleinschmidt

10-23-08

Author's Signature

Date

I respectfully request Booth Library of Eastern Illinois University **NOT** allow my thesis to be reproduced because:

Author's Signature

Date

This form must be submitted in duplicate.

Soil Sisters: Independent Land Owning Women in Coles and

Douglas Counties, Illinois, 1870-1930

(TITLE)

BY

Rachel E. Kleinschmidt

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Arts in History

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2008

YEAR

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING
THIS PART OF THE GRADUATE DEGREE CITED ABOVE



THESIS COMMITTEE CHAIR DATE



DEPARTMENT/SCHOOL CHAIR DATE
OR CHAIR'S DESIGNEE



THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER DATE

THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER DATE



THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER DATE

THESIS COMMITTEE MEMBER DATE

EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

SOIL SISTERS: INDEPENDENT LAND OWNING WOMEN IN COLES AND
DOUGLAS COUNTIES, ILLINOIS, 1870-1930

A THESIS SUBMITTED AS PARTIAL REQUIREMENT FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

BY
RACHEL E. KLEINSCHMIDT

CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

SEPTEMBER 2008

Copyright © 2008 Rachel E. Kleinschmidt
All Rights Reserved

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all of the people who have made this project possible. My faculty mentor, Dr. Debra Reid, always provided prompt and insightful feedback and encouraged me throughout every stage of the project. Dr. Mark Voss-Hubbard and Dr. Sace Elder both served on my thesis committee and challenged me to approach my thesis from different perspectives. Dr. Edmund Wehrle and Dr. Lynne Curry also provided advice and encouragement throughout the project. I would especially like to thank my family. My parents Kent and Brenda Elam provided me with support throughout my academic career, and without the love and support of my husband Micah, this thesis would not have been finished.

ABSTRACT

In the Midwest during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many women owned and worked on farmland, but the male-dominated capitalistic farming system negated much of the legal and economic authority they had as farmers. Progressive Era changes in the farming system shifted family farming systems to profit-driven, business-oriented farms, marginalizing women's productive contributions. Single and widowed women farmers in Coles and Douglas Counties in Illinois managed to retain ownership of farm land despite gender and legal biases inherent in common law practices defined by patriarchy.

A survey of local history sources, including federal census data, probate records, and land grants, as well as *The Farmers' Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas County* published in 1918, shows that many widowed and never-married women owned and managed significant amounts of farmland. Obituaries and other local histories show that these women were well-respected in their communities, but their position as farmers is never mentioned. This demonstrates that although these women were able to function and become prominent community members, they were not known for their occupation as farmers. The case study of Martha Balch and her sisters, four women from Coles County who never married, is an excellent example of how land-owning women gained notoriety in the community, but did not participate in the business of farming.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER

1. HISTORIOGRAPHY 11

2. WOMEN AND PROPERTY LAW 26

3. COLES AND DOUGLAS COUNTIES: A REVIEW OF WOMEN
LANDOWNERS FROM THE *FARMERS' REVIEW* 35

4. THE BALCH SISTERS: A CASE STUDY 48

CONCLUSION 57

APPENDICES 63

WORKS CITED 67

INTRODUCTION

“Anyone who has been on a farm, even today, knows that only a few farm women do not work outdoors as well as in.”¹ This statement is seemingly obvious, but often women gained no recognition for their contributions to farm work. In Coles and Douglas Counties in Illinois during the early twentieth century, many women owned and worked on farm land, but the male-dominated capitalistic farming system negated much of the legal and economic authority they had as farmers. These single and widowed farm women managed to retain ownership of their land despite gender and legal biases inherent in common law practices defined by patriarchy.

The single farm woman encountered a variety of difficulties in her life. Whether never married by choice or circumstance, or widowed, these women navigated rural life on their own. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the law allowed single women certain property rights. Women had the same rights as men to own and dispose of land as they saw fit. The women in this study owned land, executed their own wills, and acted as administrators of the wills of others.

These women also participated in community activities. Many of the single or widowed women were well known in their communities. Church activities encompassed much of these women’s prominence, as well as just general visibility in the community. Given these references in such sources as obituaries, and the tone employed by the obituary writers, it would seem that the specific women mentioned in this study were beloved by the community.

¹ Joan Jensen. *Promise to the Land: Essays on Rural Women* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991), 261.

Despite the community visibility, these women land owners played no apparent part in the actual business of farming. When widows or single women exercised their legal power, through owning land or executing wills, they did it in ways that enabled males to continue the paternalistic business of farming. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, farming transformed from a family oriented subsistence enterprise to an increasingly business-orientated capitalist enterprise. Progressive reformers of the Country Life movement advocated “capital-intensive agricultural methods” and “new opportunities to decrease their [Midwesterners] cultural isolation.”² In this new imagining of farming, business concerns became more important than family and community ties which had previously encompassed the lives of family farmers. This new form of farming devalued women’s contributions, as Mary Neth notes, “because farm women were crucial to building gender and community interdependence and mutuality, agricultural policies asserted a new patriarchal structure that created a gendered division of economic and social concerns.”³

Business-oriented farming still depended on women’s productive capacity in the farm family, but took away women’s authority over their work. According to Nancy Grey Osterud, “the transition to capitalism in the United States...involved structural shifts in the orientation, organization, and evaluation of work; new notions of value were part and parcel of the process of capitalist expansion.”⁴ The value of women’s work was part of this transition, as the small productive enterprises that women participated in either

² John J. Fry, *The Farm Press, Reform, and Rural Change, 1895-1920* (New York: Routledge, 2005), xviii.

³ Mary Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.

⁴ Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 204.

became less important to the functioning of the family farm, or grew into the most important enterprise. When women's small sideline businesses became more profitable, men took over the decision making, leaving women as strictly unpaid laborers.⁵

Women also contributed to the household, but these contributions were not rewarded with economic remuneration. According to Christopher Schnell, "women made valuable contributions to household production and maintenance on farmsteads across Illinois. While women were producing marketable products for the profit of their families, their household work also sustained their families; all this work went uncounted in the eyes of Illinois."⁶ Until 1869, women in Illinois were not even allowed to keep their own earnings, and after that time "those earnings did not include 'any right to compensation for any labor performed' for her family."⁷

Women are less visible than men in historical documentation due to legal hindrances that subjected them to men, and single women especially faced the hardship of not following the societal norm of marriage. Any marginalized group proves difficult to document. But steps can be taken to draw women out of the historical record. As with all aspects of women's history, the social historian encounters certain disabilities in researching the common farm woman. Like the aforesaid problems in finding sources, the relative invisibility of everyday women from the public record makes drawing out the facts of women's lives difficult. Even when the facts are known, the task of integrating the facts into a usable history is even more challenging. John Mack Faragher has noted

⁵ Monica Richmond Gisolfi, "From Crop Lien to Contract Farming: The Roots of Agribusiness in the American South, 1929-1939," *Agricultural History* 80 (2006): 180.

⁶ Christopher A. Schnell, "Wives, Widows, and Will Makers: Women and the Law of Property," in *In Tender Consideration: Women, Families, and the Law in Abraham Lincoln's Illinois*, ed. Daniel W. Stowell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 131.

⁷ *Ibid.*

these difficulties. According to Faragher, “simply writing women into the historical narrative does not suffice, for by an equally complex web of custom, law, and political economy women have been subjected to the individual and collective will of man. Demography does not, on its own, take up the ‘politics’ of the family or household.”⁸ In other words, just finding women does not necessarily give an indication of how women lived within their community, but only enumerates them.

Single women farmers in farming communities prove elusive, because while these women legally could own land, most of them had men perform the actual farming. Documenting cases of women farming is extremely difficult, and their land ownership generally has not been documented. But single women and widows did own land, and they have yet to be studied. Their inclusion in the historical record is important, as it brings to light women’s relationship to the land, and how they made use of their own land in the male-dominated business of farming.

The farm woman has in recent years become a source of historical study. As part of the growing field of women’s history, farming and rural women provide an interesting variant to common generalizations made about certain theories regarding gender studies. The dynamics of rural and farm life present different circumstances that make the “separate spheres” argument less potent.⁹ The rural woman, while still subjected to the will of men, maintained a much different role than an urban woman. While traditional gender norms that confined women to domestic roles dominated throughout the rural community, oftentimes the realities of daily life on the farm blurred gender ideology.

⁸ John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), xiii-xiv.

⁹ The separate spheres theory is discussed in detail in Linda Kerber, “Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman’s Place: The Rhetoric of Women’s History,” *Journal of American History* 75 (1988): 9-39.

This juncture both liberated and subjugated women as they negotiated the imprecise gender boundaries. As farm women, farm life dictated their actual roles.

In his influential essay, John Mack Faragher described writing the history of rural women as history from the “inside-out.” According to Faragher, “we need to analyze, then, how gender and kinship derive their meanings from concrete relations to the social and sexual division of labor...to the ownership of productive property, to the forms of sexual reproduction...and finally, to the nature of institutional stratification, hierarchy, and authority.”¹⁰ Looking within these institutions, Faragher argues, brings to light the fact that “the relationship between men and women was at the heart of rural society.”¹¹ The relationships between women, men, the farming economy and the law form the basis for my argument.

I began this study with the intention of finding women farmers who were not married. As marriage comprises the essential legal relationship between men and women, I was interested in determining how non-married women navigated the male/female legal relationship, and if single women acted within traditional gender roles or filled in male roles. To find what answers I could for these questions, I began a microstudy of farmers in Coles and Douglas Counties in Illinois. By examining local history sources, such as census data, land grant records, and probate records, I tried to find out all I could about female farmers who were not currently married.

Coles and Douglas Counties in Illinois provide an interesting backdrop for the study of men and women farmers. Coles and Douglas, adjoining counties in east central Illinois, contain excellent farmland and were populated mainly by farmers. Coles County

¹⁰ John Mack Faragher, “History from the Inside-Out: Writing the History of Women in Rural America,” *American Quarterly* 33 (1981): 545.

¹¹ Ibid.

was formed in 1830. It holds the distinction of being the final home of Thomas Lincoln, the father of Abraham Lincoln. Coles County gained notoriety because of the Lincolns, as Abraham Lincoln's law circuit passed through the area and one of the famous Lincoln Douglas Debates was held in Charleston, the county seat. Douglas County, named after the aforementioned Stephen A. Douglas, was formed out of Coles County in 1859. Douglas County gained prosperity through farming as well as the railroad.¹² Both counties boasted a considerable amount of farming families.

To find these farming families, I discovered a published, publicly available source which included women farmers. The *Farmers' Review*, a popular farm journal, published *The Farmers' Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties, Illinois: a complete Directory of all farmers, pure bred livestock breeders and business houses together with valuable statistics and information of Coles and Douglas Counties, Illinois, classified and arranged for handy reference* in 1918. The *Directory* was a compilation of information of all farmers in the two counties. This information included the head of household, spouse and children, and amount of farmland owned or worked among other vital data. Upon examination of this document, I found that a significant amount of the heads of household listed were women. Using the *Directory* as a keystone of sorts, I compiled the female heads of household, then took those names to the census to determine their past or present marital status, occupation, and other pertinent facts.

With information in hand, I attempted to put together a profile of the typical single woman farmer. The majority of the women were widowed with a small handful being never-married. I then chose a select few women with the most information

¹² *The Farmers' Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties, Illinois* (Chicago: The Farmers' Review, 1918), 11, 12, 84, 85.

available about them, including full occupation listing in the census record, land grants, wills, and obituaries. While I was not able to find any narrative sources, such as diaries or letters, the information found did provide ample evidence to the fact that single women did own farmland and did consider themselves to be farmers. Unfortunately, without the narrative evidence, it is impossible to know to what degree the women participated in farm work. Sources do indicate, however, visibility in the community.

I also took into account the changing property law in the years preceding the 1918 *Directory*. Women's legal status was defined by a hierarchy of law, starting with English common law, but modified by the federal system in the United States. Individual states maintained authority over matters that affected citizens, and thus state legislators had authority over legislating women's rights issues. During the nineteenth century, men's rights expanded, but so did women's, leading ultimately to the Illinois Married Women's Property law in 1861. Advancements in women's property law add to the picture of women's expanding legal rights from the mid-nineteenth century. By examining the evolution of property law for married women, widows, and single women, I hoped to add to my discussion of women's visibility and rights. This information is important to the study of women farmers, as well as the overall study of women's rights. The addition of property law helps to bolster my thesis.

This study was inspired by and partially modeled after several works on women in agriculture. Featuring prominently in the historiography as well as methodology is "Women as Agricultural Landowners: What Do We Know About Them?" by Anne B.W. Effland, Denise M. Rogers, and Valerie Grim. Published in *Agricultural History* in 1993, the article examined several twentieth-century agricultural land surveys to determine the

extent of female land ownership. Their data is from a later time period than my study, but the structure of the methodology is similar, namely the examination of specific surveys, not unlike my use of the *Farmers' Review Directory*. Effland, Rogers, and Grim come to several very basic conclusions about women landowners, most importantly that they do exist. From that point, I began my research.

Community studies also added to the depth of my project. Works such as *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* by John Mack Faragher and *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York* by Nancy Grey Osterud provide examples of integrating the history of women in rural communities with the lives of men as well. Both Faragher and Osterud put men and women in roles of mutuality rather than opposition. Faragher believes that “family history offers a way of bringing authentic, everyday actors, of both sexes, into the historical narrative” as “both men and women constitute the integrated and indivisible web of everyday life.”¹³ Faragher sees genealogical research, such as the kind presented in my study, as a way to bring to life individuals and individual families.

Osterud, in turn, also uses family history sources to piece together the lives of women in rural New York, and the relations of these women to the men in their lives. According to Osterud, “women and men may be brought together as ‘opposite sexes,’ but brought together they must be.”¹⁴ Osterud looks at “how gender structured women’s interactions with their families and neighbors, their place in the farm family economy,

¹³ Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, xiii.

¹⁴ Nancy Grey Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 3.

and their participation in community organizations.”¹⁵ Men’s and women’s relationships with each other formed the basis of the farm community.

In these communities studied by Faragher and Osterud, men and women worked together for common goals rather than against each other in an oppressive patriarchal system. Although I do not use much narrative evidence, I believe that the evidence I have found shows that women could be just as visible in the community as men. None of this discounts the fact the women were subordinate to men in many aspects of life, especially farming, but only points to the fact that after passage of certain laws, women were not necessarily legally subordinated by men.

This study seeks to add to the historiography of rural and farm women in the Midwestern United States, as well as to the already slim historiography of single women in the United States. Other than stories of highly visible single women, active in women’s movements such as abolitionism, temperance, and suffrage, not much work has been done on ordinary women who never married for their own personal reasons or for lack of any other suitable option. Because a single woman was a *femme sole* in common law tradition, not covered by the status of a husband, she legally had more rights than her married counterparts. On the other hand, single women were not free from domination by men in the form of fathers, brothers, or other family members. Generally speaking, single women have not been diligently explored in historical study. With this study, I hope to contribute to the understanding of single women farmers and how they fit into the legal and economic strictures of rural communities.

This thesis is divided into four basic sections. First, a historiographical essay brings together various works on the subjects of rural women, the farming community,

¹⁵ Ibid., 2-3.

and single women, and how this thesis fits into the current historical scholarship. The historiography contains a variety of viewpoints on the perspectives of women's marginalization or relative power in farming and rural areas. The second section is a review of the evolution of property law for women, highlighting important laws that allowed for greater autonomy in women's property ownership. The third section contains an analysis of the women heads of household in the *Farmers' Review Directory* of farmers in Coles and Douglas Counties and the different characteristics that are similar and different among these women. The fourth section is a case study of the Balch sisters, women in Coles County in the late nineteenth century, who never married and owned farmland on their own. These women provide an excellent example of the way single women could own their own property and have control of their own lives without husbands. Finally, a conclusion offers comments on the implications of this research and comments for further study on single women in history.

The single and widowed women farmers in Coles and Douglas Counties had lives and have a distinctive history of their own. By drawing them out of the historical record, I wanted to give them a voice. The present thesis attempts to do just this.

CHAPTER 1: HISTORIOGRAPHY

Single and widowed women have always existed and managed to survive and flourish throughout history, but have yet to be thoroughly studied. In the nineteenth century, single working-class women in urban areas could survive by working wage-earning jobs in factories and other industries. Middle-class single women even became early reformers and women's rights activists. More has been written about these exceptional single women, but often without context of their singleness and how their marital status affected them in their lives.

One of the very few monographs written on single women in the antebellum United States is *Liberty, A Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840* by Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller. Chambers-Schiller chose to focus on a single period of time as well as a single region, the Northeast. The author based her work on "the lives and writings of more than one hundred northeastern spinsters."¹⁶ Not only were these women unmarried, they were single because they chose to be single. According to Chambers-Schiller, "the decision not to marry followed from a rigorous assessment of the marital institution that found it wanting and in conflict with female autonomy, self-development, and achievement."¹⁷

Chambers-Schiller traces the growth of the idea that singleness was not necessarily a bad thing, but that the "Cult of Single Blessedness" was side-by-side with the nineteenth-century "Cult of Domesticity" in the antebellum era. The Cult of Single Blessedness "offered a positive vision of singlehood rooted in Protestant religion and the

¹⁶ Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, A Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

concepts of woman's particular nature and special sphere. It promoted singlehood as at least as holy, and perhaps more pure, a state than marriage."¹⁸ By having more time to devote to helping others, single women occupied a particularly blessed space. This attitude prevailed until the post-Civil War era when ideas about marriage and singleness began to change. Single women in this era could be viewed "as masculinized women or perhaps hermaphrodites," which "cut far more deeply into individual self-esteem, gender consciousness, and gender solidarity than anything else had—or perhaps could."¹⁹

While *Liberty, A Better Husband* is a path-breaking work, it is narrow in its scope. By focusing on the Northeastern United States, Chambers-Schiller limits herself to a certain type of woman, which she readily acknowledges. These women largely fall into certain categories, such as middle to upper class, white, Protestant, and educated.²⁰ These were the types of women that fled the country for "a sense of independence and freedom, and a degree of control over their earnings," and "began to think of themselves as individuals with their own identities, goals, rights, and callings separate from those of kin, church, or community."²¹ These women had very different motivations than the single landowning women in the rural Midwest, with more opportunities to live independently in urban areas. Chambers-Schiller has also drawn most of her evidence from diaries, writings, and literature, focusing more on specific urban women rather than a social history method of surveying local and census archival data.

A work by Martha Vicinus takes up the subject of single women in the next time period, 1850-1920, but in England instead of the United States. In her book *Independent*

¹⁸ Ibid., 18.

¹⁹ Ibid., 203.

²⁰ Ibid., 3.

²¹ Ibid., 205-206.

Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920, Vicinus examines the same kinds of women that Chambers-Schiller studied, specifically white, middle-class, urban women. Vicinus's women "pioneered new occupations, new living conditions, and new public roles that have all had important implications for the twentieth-century woman, single or married."²² Vicinus studied single women in various occupations, including health care and education, where they exerted an influence on the patriarchal gender dynamic. Vicinus argues that single women took the Victorian gender ideal and reinterpreted it, as they "transformed this passive role into one of active spirituality and passionate social service."²³

Single women in urban areas faced their own challenges, but women on the family farm faced a much different situation than urban women. Women participated in farm life and could even own and manage farmland, but were generally subordinated in the actual work of farming. In recent years, the historiography of rural and farm women has flourished. Rural women, once a relatively overlooked topic, are now at the forefront of rural studies. The unique situation of farm women allowed for greater participation in the public sphere without necessarily challenging the traditional gender roles. In discussing farm women and their actual roles versus idealized ones, historians have uncovered a rich body of evidence to enlighten the study of women on farms and rural areas.

Historiographically speaking, very little has been written on single women land owners, although single women played an important role in the shaping of the United States. Evidence exists that from the very beginnings of America, women had the ability

²² Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 6.

²³ *Ibid.*, 5.

to own and manage land under various circumstances. In “The Planters Wife: The Experience of White Women in Seventeenth-Century Maryland,” Lois Carr and Lorena Walsh examine the experiences of women who emigrated from England to the colonies as indentured servants. Indenture contracts bound these women for a certain amount of time, but after the time passed, these women faced a myriad of options. Due to an overall lack of women in the newly established colonies, these servant women had their pick of eligible planters for husbands. This led to a departure from the traditional societal norms that dictated a patriarchal system.

Inevitably, these planters had shorter life spans than their wives, which meant that widows could be left with considerable amounts of land. Husbands generally willed their land to their wives, making them in charge of the land and all debts associated with it.²⁴ This did lead to extra burden on the women, as “she would have to feed her children and make her own tobacco crop. Though neighbors might help, heavy labor would be required of her if she had no servants until...she acquired a new husband.”²⁵ As the previous statement indicates, women usually remarried quickly, but wills generally convey that husbands held much faith in the wife’s ability to manage the property and provide for the children.²⁶ Overall, seventeenth-century Maryland offered women a considerable amount of freedom and respect due to a unique societal situation.

Other historians have taken up the topic of single women or women heads of household.²⁷ “Gender and the Structure of Planter Households in the Eighteenth-Century

²⁴ Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, “The Planter’s Wife: The Experience of White Women in Seventeenth-Century Maryland,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 34 (1977): 556.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 555.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 557.

²⁷ For information about urban women heads of household and wage earners, see Jeanne Boydston, “To Earn Her Daily Bread: Housework and Antebellum Working-Class Subsistence,” in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History*, Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois,

Chesapeake” by Kathleen Fawver evaluates the household makeup of Harford County, Connecticut in the late eighteenth century, concluding that women heads of household did become autonomous in widowhood, although “she may not have enjoyed true independence, as the presence of children continued to limit her economic opportunities, and the risks of poverty were always at least imminent.”²⁸ In her analysis of never-married women, Fawver concludes “forming an independent household before marriage was not an option for the majority of unmarried women,” and these women faced a higher likelihood of poverty as well.²⁹

Looking at more recent times, Anne Effland, Denise Rogers, and Valerie Grim have put together a survey of women’s landownership titled “Women as Agricultural Landowners: What Do We Know about Them?” The authors combine a sociological study with a historical perspective describing the state of women’s land ownership in the United States.³⁰ A lack of sources hampers much study of women land owners, but these writers gathered as much census and narrative data as possible to create a basic profile of the women who owned land.

Surveys of the United States Department of Agriculture make up the bulk of sources available about land ownership. Works such as the Census of Agriculture and the Agricultural Land Ownership Survey provide the best information about women and landowning. Although very few details exist, the authors do prove that women did and do own agricultural land. Unfortunately, laws tended to subordinate even women

eds. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 80-90; and Patricia Kelleher, “Maternal Strategies: Irish Women’s Headship of Families in Gilded Age Chicago,” *Journal of Women’s History* 13 (2001): 80-106.

²⁸ Kathleen Fawver, “Gender and the Structure of Planter Households in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake,” *Early American Studies* (2006): 470.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 460-461.

³⁰ For a similar sociological study, see Charles C. Geisler, William F. Waters, and Katrina L. Eadie, “The Changing Structure of Female Agricultural Land Ownership, 1946 and 1978,” *Rural Sociology* 50 (1985): 74-87.

landowners. One such area of contention involves joint-ownership. According to the authors, “while many women have owned farmland independently, women have also owned land jointly with men. Such joint ownership could be recorded on land deeds or derived from laws that protected women’s rights to property acquired during a marriage. In both cases, women’s joint-ownership interests have been marginalized legally.”³¹

Effland, Rogers, and Grim also combine historical narrative with survey data. From the records that they found, the authors note, “historians have unearthed an impressive array of examples in newspapers, land records, diaries, correspondence, and published accounts of the experiences of women on the land.”³² These resources prove invaluable in finding instances of women owning and working their own land. Overall, Effland, Rogers, and Grim conclude that “women’s agricultural landholding in the United States is a vitally important subject for research.”³³ Increasing research in this area illuminates the issues of women’s vital importance to the land and their relationships to it.

“Women as Agricultural Landowners” serves as a model for research on women who have owned land historically. By identifying sources available, the authors have spurred others to delve more deeply into a challenging topic. This type of research will prove to be especially important in women’s history, as the concept of female land ownership overturns many long-held notions about women’s legal identity in history. By finding these women, historians can build an image of a much more complicated legal relationship between men and women.

³¹ Anne B.W. Effland, Denise M. Rogers, Valerie Grim, “Women as Agricultural Landowners: What Do We Know about Them?” *Agricultural History* 67 (1993): 237.

³² *Ibid.*, 251.

³³ *Ibid.*, 261.

The family farm offers another site to expose issues between men and women in rural communities. Studies of women and their place in the family farming system have shown strong ties of mutuality with men and the community. As farm women worked to maintain the family farm, certain gender norms had to be violated, as the work necessitated greater participation by women in “male” activities. Through this inclusion in the productive aspects of farming, women relied on relational and community bonds to perform their required duties. One thread of relatively recent historiography focuses on women in the family and community farming systems and the ways they negotiated gender norms and productive roles on farms.

The farming community provided a way for women to expand their influence outside of the immediate family and also to strengthen family bonds between men and women. Recent works have explored the relationships between women and their families and women and their communities. Authors have noted that women relied on community bonds in their daily lives for sources of help and strength through the difficulties of farm life. Several of these works, as community studies, show the demographic makeup of particular rural areas and provide a window into the lives of the men and women living in those areas.

An early study of women in the family farming system is Nancy Grey Osterud’s aptly titled *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York*. Osterud examines farms and family life in New York State. According to Osterud, “in contrast to urban women, whose position was increasingly defined by their difference from men, rural women were defined through their relationships with men.”³⁴ On the family farm, as Osterud has discovered, gender roles were not dichotomous, but

³⁴ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 1.

relational. A farm woman worked with her male counterparts, rather than against them. Through this relational system, “rural women tried to transform the bonds of kinship and labor into sources of sharing and strength, renegotiating the terms of gender relations and modifying them in a more symmetrical and egalitarian direction.”³⁵

These kinship bonds allowed for women’s growth and strengthened the farming system. Women also extended this idea into the community. In all forms of social relationships, these women made inclusion foremost, including men, women, and children into all activities, thereby strengthening the kinship system. These women did not view the community in terms of gendered groups, but as a family.³⁶

Osterud noted issues that women faced in negotiating gender norms. According to Osterud, “women were integral members of the farm households that controlled the productive property on which the rural economy was based, yet they were formally subordinated to men and gained access to land only through their fathers and brothers, husbands and sons.”³⁷ Although women were partners in the productive workings of the farm, in the early nineteenth century, they were denied the basic right of ownership of their productive work. The women Osterud studied were marginalized in the farming business despite their vital contributions.

Joan Jensen’s work *Promise to the Land* discusses women’s productive work in the same light. Although women’s work provided vital income to the family farm, women lost much of their market early in the twentieth century due to commercialization and centralization of markets. Men continued to rely on women’s production, however, as a supplement to their own field work, and frequently used the money women earned

³⁵ Ibid., 2.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid., 85.

for advancements in farm and home technology.³⁸ Jensen's work examines a wide range of topics concerning women in agriculture, but the theme of women's lack of productive ownership dominates throughout the work.

Two complimentary works from the same era discuss these same themes of mutuality and subordination of farm women within the family farming system during the early twentieth century in the Midwest. Katherine Jellison's *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* and Mary Neth's *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940* mark a monumental achievement for the history of rural and agricultural women. Both of these monographs explore women's agency, as well as their relative subordination. They combine issues of women's production, labor, and consumption in an increasingly modernized farming system. Jellison and Neth stress the importance of women's productive labors on the farm and the ways in which the emerging urban ideal of the consuming housewife and the modern farming business threatened to marginalize their position on the farm. Although Jellison and Neth succeed in making a case for women's agency in farming families, these farming women's roles were still secondary to the business of agriculture, despite their contributions to the family economy.

Jellison analyzes the way in which the growth of farm technology in the early to mid-twentieth century gave women more power outside the home. She argues that while urban women reformers stressed women in homemaking roles and advertised for the adoption of new technology within the home, rural women went against the grain and advocated for new farm technologies to increase farm production. This enabled women to

³⁸ Jensen, *Promise to the Land*, 196.

“maintain a modicum of economic power and influence within the patriarchal structure of Midwestern family farming.”³⁹

Jellison specifically challenges the idea that women within farm families passively acquiesced to the will of their husbands. Women, according to Jellison, advocated for their important productive role and “criticized male behavior, demanded greater recognition of women’s work, called for a share of the farm income, and requested greater decision-making power within the farm home.”⁴⁰ The modern housewife ideal held no place of prominence for these women, because in the traditional rural system, women held a place of productive power within the home.⁴¹

Neth treats the family farm in a similar fashion with her analysis of the farming community. Her work focuses on women’s roles and how they related to the transition to a more capitalistic form of farming and the growth of larger, more business-oriented farms. Neth’s main argument centers around the ways “farm people responded to a shifting economy with strategies for survival that had developed from circles of gender, family, and community relations inherent in the system of small, interconnected family farms.”⁴² She focuses on women’s roles as cooperative with those of men as well as children. She argues that artificial separations of work into idealized gender roles had little meaning on the family farm, as men, women, and children performed labor that kept the farm going.⁴³ She also asserts, like Jellison, that women, and even children, had autonomy over their lives due to their unique positions as producers.

³⁹ Katherine Jellison, *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), xxi.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁴² Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 12.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 17.

Neth places much emphasis on the idea of community. For example, she provides an interesting description of a typical rural community activity, the threshing, and how this ritual “celebrated both the alterations caused by the new technology, the threshing machine, and the preservation of the interdependence of men and women, neighbor and neighbor.”⁴⁴ Although the rural community adopted new technologies, they did so on their own terms, continuing to rely on bonds of community. This promotion of new technology differed from the one prescribed by the government, as the government placed new technology at the forefront, favoring the disbandment of the traditional community system.⁴⁵ By proceeding in the traditional methods of farming, small communities held on to their preferred way of life.

Neth also includes a discussion of the ideal urban consumer housewife. The families Neth describes practiced the same types of adaptation and rejection of this ideal as they did with technology. As far as modern household appliances, farm people chose products that fit into their own family farming practices, which went against the way government agents envisioned family farms going.⁴⁶ In attempting to get farm families to conform to these new ideals, government agencies tried to redefine the gender roles common on the family farm. The promotion of the urban ideal and devaluation of women’s productive roles especially hurt smaller farms dependent on income from women’s labor.

Jane Adam’s analysis of farm life in Southern Illinois treats the topic of women in farming communities but in a different setting. *The Transformation of Rural Life* focuses on the work of the farming community, as “it is the world of work that seems to provide

⁴⁴ Ibid., 182.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 212.

the organizing principle around which social life revolved and through which individual identities were created."⁴⁷ Adams looks specifically at women's work and how it shaped the identities of women within the family farming system. She traces the changes of the rural economy throughout the twentieth century and how these changes led to the ultimate decline of the farming community system. The women that lived in this community suffered as a result, as their work was less important in the newer business-oriented farm enterprises.

Adams builds a narrative of the farm community in one county in Southern Illinois. With a wealth of narrative sources, including memoirs and oral interviews, Adams has compiled an interesting account. Adams, however, approached her study from an anthropological viewpoint, rather than a strictly historical one. She incorporates her own history, making the work autobiographical as well. Through her own experiences and the experiences of others, Adams tells the story of farming from the people who actually did it. Her work adds to the growing historiography of rural women as a study of the ways women and farming families adapted to the changing motivations of the business of agriculture.⁴⁸

Discussions of the family farming system prompt the question of female-headed families. Undoubtedly, family farms existed without a male as head of household. Whether these women lost their husbands early or simply chose not to marry, their stories need to be discovered, as little evidence exists to support a unified vision of single women farmers. The historiography is fairly silent as far as single farm women are

⁴⁷ Jane Adams, *The Transformation of Rural Life: Southern Illinois, 1890-1990* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 4.

⁴⁸ For another anthropological farm study in more recent times see Sonya Salamon, *Prairie Patrimony: Family, Farming, and Community in the Midwest*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

concerned. Treated as an anomaly, single women hold the position of non-entity in the historical record. What little we know about them comes mainly from land-holding records and personal diaries and correspondence. Recent research into single women and women farmers has identified some resources for finding these women and learning about their lives. Most important in this research involves finding out why women could be single and through what avenues they could hold land and operate independently within the relational and communal structure of the rural Midwest.

Several authors who have treated the subject of family farming have touched on the topic of single women farmers. Mary Neth's *Preserving the Family Farm* contains an analysis of the diary of Anna Pratt Erickson, a woman who, for a time, farmed independently without a husband. Erickson recorded many instances of sharing labor with her first husband before he passed away. After his death, Erickson inherited the family land, which she shared with her second husband until their separation. From that point on, Erickson worked the land herself until she gave it to her son. Erickson's situation provides a concrete narrative of women landowners and farmers, but also emphasizes the importance of community, as Erickson had much help in her close-knit neighborhood.⁴⁹

Nancy Grey Osterud included a section in her book on rural women in New York dealing with single women. In her research, Osterud found that women who happened to be single for one reason or another did not live as men. According to Osterud, these women "were not free from the restrictions of womanhood. Although in principle they were able to act independently in civil society, in practice most controlled little property

⁴⁹ Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 34, 35, 38.

and were represented by the male heads of the households in which they lived.”⁵⁰ In many cases, single women still lived within the households of their parents, thereby under the authority of their fathers, rather than husbands. Osterud also makes the point that these single women did not fit in with the general community, as they did not have the same things in common with the married women.⁵¹ These women still conformed to traditional gender roles, only in a different household situation. Single women, in Osterud’s research, lacked the autonomy granted to single men.

Joan Jensen has identified similar patterns among single women in her research. According to Jensen, in the history of agriculture and rural life, land ownership inevitably has been denied to women, even when they labored on it.⁵² Like Osterud, Jensen also found that single women still found themselves under a patriarchal system regardless of their marital status. Jensen writes, “single women were seldom able to hold substantial acreage. Widows still found it necessary to have male kin—brothers, uncles, or sons—actually manage their large estates.”⁵³ From these accounts, it seems unlikely that women could gain any land, or at least the power associated with land-owning, although it was possible.

Historians have examined single women in very different environments. Chambers-Schiller and Vicinus, historians of single women in urban areas, looked at women from a very specific social standing who were able to become independent members of society through work and political involvement. Rural women rarely had the same opportunities. The patriarchal business of farming often kept farm women

⁵⁰ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 123.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 129-30.

⁵² Jensen, *Promise to the Land*, 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 5.

subordinated to husbands or other male family members. While agriculture and the family farming system had a very important place for women and valued their productive capacities, these were subordinate to the business aspects of capitalistic farming.

Rural and agricultural women occupy an important place in a rich historiography of farming and rural life. Women held such a vital position within the family farming system that often they could stretch the traditional gender boundaries, sharing work with men, and even owning and managing land in the absence of a male. Questions still remain as to the realities of women's life on the farm. The fact that women did not break out entirely from traditional gender roles speaks to the deep roots of the separation of spheres. Although due to labor constraints these did not have as much pull in rural areas, gender roles provided an idealized way of life comparable to that of urban areas. In exploring these roles and the ways women navigated in and out of them, more will be learned about the actual contributions women made to farm and home life.

Stemming from Effland, Rogers, and Grim's research on women landowners as well, questions involving women's relationships to the land arise that need to be answered. More research in this area is vital. Single women especially deserve more investigation. Single women who owned or worked on land have yet to be discovered, opening up a new branch of rural women's history. Women working the land provide a powerful image of women's place in farming, but single women farmers or women owning land would serve as an ultimate example of women's actual importance to the institution. When these women are found, their stories deserve to be told, contributing to the history of rural women.

CHAPTER 2: WOMEN AND PROPERTY LAW

Property law in America shaped the lived experience of rural women and the relationships between these women and the men in their lives. The relationship of married women to property, before pertinent laws were passed, shows how women were denied basic rights on the basis of their biological sex. In early America, married women forfeited their property rights upon marriage. Widows and single women legally had more rights, as according to Christopher A. Schnell, “with certain limitations, a widow had many of the same property rights afforded men.”⁵⁴ Although single women had significantly more rights, rights equal to men, in theory, they were still considered inferior to men for various reasons. Changing property laws throughout the nineteenth century reflect the growth of women’s rights, but not without certain caveats highlighting women’s so-called “inferiority.”

Marylynn Salmon notes that “control over property is an important baseline for learning how men and women share power in the family.”⁵⁵ Looking at the legal relationships of women to property shows the marginalization of married women. Because married women could not own property before the mid-nineteenth century, they had no legal right to determine how the land was used. Although women had a large role on the family farm, oftentimes participating in all forms of farm work, under typical circumstances, they had no ownership of the land on which they worked.

In the history of Illinois, women did not always have the right to their own property. Married women were especially hindered by the law. John Mack Faragher notes

⁵⁴ Schnell, “Wives, Widows, and Will Makers,” 129.

⁵⁵ Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), xii.

that “women labored under legal disability, for by the laws of Illinois, in accord with the English common-law doctrine of coverture, a married woman lost the rights she enjoyed as a single woman (a *femme sole*) to own or manage chattel or real property, or to enter into contracts without a countersignature.”⁵⁶ Married women fell under the rule of their husbands, as his status “covered” her legally.

It was not until April 24, 1861, that the state of Illinois passed “An Act to Protect Married Women in their Separate Property.” The law reads as follows:

Be it enacted by the People of the State of Illinois, represented in the General Assembly, that all the property, both real and personal, belonging to any married woman, as her sole and separate property, or which any woman hereafter married owns at the time of her marriage, or which any married woman, during coverture, acquires, in good faith, from any person, other than her husband, by descent, devise or otherwise, together with all the rents, issues, increase and profits thereof, shall, notwithstanding her marriage, be and remain, during coverture, her sole and separate property, under her sole control, and be held, owned possessed and enjoyed by her the same as though she was sole and unmarried; and shall not be subject to the disposal, control or interference of her husband, and shall be exempt from execution or attachment for the debts of her husband.⁵⁷

Under this law, married women could have control over any property regardless of the financial situation of her husband. Even under *femme covert*, the wife’s personal property could not be subsumed by her husband. This law represents a huge leap forward in women’s rights, as coverture had always been part of the marriage contract under English Common Law. Now, a woman could retain certain, although limited, rights of her own.

From the 1830s to the 1870s, all states passed property laws similar to the one passed in Illinois in 1861.⁵⁸ The introduction of these laws to the United States, however,

⁵⁶ Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, 106.

⁵⁷ *Public Laws of the State of Illinois, Passed by the Twenty-Second General Assembly, Convened January 7, 1861.* (Springfield: Bailhache & Baker, Printers, 1861), 143.

⁵⁸ Stacy Lorraine Braukman and Michael A. Ross, “Married Women’s Property and Male Coercion: United States’ Courts and the Privy Examination, 1864-1887,” *Journal of Women’s History* 12 (2000): 59.

happened much earlier with the adoption of Spanish law in Texas. The example of Texas under Spanish law provides evidence of variations on the ideal of male ownership of land. When Texas gained its independence from Mexico, the settlers recognized some of the benefits of expanded women's rights within Spanish law, and incorporated them into traditional English Common Law. The Texans were most impressed with laws that "emphasized the importance of women and the family to the strength of the community," as these laws seemed well suited to life on the frontier.⁵⁹

Texas settlers effectively combined elements of English Common Law with traditional Spanish law to create a unique system which protected many rights of married women. Especially in instances where property was in danger of being seized by creditors, this hybrid law kept women's property separate from that of their husbands and therefore safe from creditors.⁶⁰ In time, these notions of community property spread throughout the country, even influencing laws today.⁶¹ The influence of Spanish law and the conditions of the frontier environment greatly expanded the property rights of married women.

Many states continued to pass laws that protected women's property from their husbands throughout the mid-nineteenth century. Even these rights were limited in some states due to what was known as a privy examination. In their article "Married Women's Property and Male Coercion: United States' Courts and the Privy Examination, 1864-1887," Stacy Lorraine Braukman and Michael A. Ross explore the process of the privy examination and how these laws were meant to "protect" women. With a privy

⁵⁹ Jean Stuntz, "Spanish Laws for Texas Women: The Development of Marital Property Law to 1850," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 104 (2001): 543-544.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 558.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 559.

examination, a married woman “had to be questioned in private by a male public official—usually a notary public—in order to determine whether she understood what she was doing” when she wanted to sell her personal property.⁶² This practice seemed to continue the laws of coverture despite the new laws giving women rights over their own property. It was not until the privy examination began to be challenged in court that courts began to realize how when they “were asked to interpret various state privy examination statutes, they were implicitly affirming or rejecting the paternalistic values on which the laws were based.”⁶³

The privy examination requirement reflected lawmaker’s opinions that women needed protection from men in dealings with their own property. In late nineteenth-century Illinois, the same feelings of protection were still predominant, as in the Supreme Court case *Bradwell v. Illinois* in 1873. While admittedly an urban case, the language of the ruling reflected the paternalistic values that still existed regarding women’s protection. The Supreme Court ruled that Myra Bradwell could not be admitted to the Illinois Bar Association, and the ruling stated that women in general were unfit for the occupation of law and the management of a business.⁶⁴ Because of women’s feminine qualities, men in power believed they should be protected from anything regarding law and finances. Despite this backward thinking, even married women could control their own property after the passage of married women’s property laws.

While married women rights could be severely hampered by common law notions of coverture, widows occupied a different legal status. In the early years of Illinois, married women remained under their husband’s control, but widows were granted more

⁶² Braukman and Ross, “Married Women’s Property and Male Coercion,” 58.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 73.

rights. According to John Faragher, about the Sugar Creek settlement, “provisions that allowed for the management and ownership of property by widows were the only real exemptions to the legal dispossession of Sugar Creek women.”⁶⁵ These widows were able to manage the family land independently under these provisions even though they did not have legal ownership of it.⁶⁶

According to Marylynn Salmon, in early America, “the most significant property right of women was dower, a share of the real property owned by husbands during marriage that was designated for the support of widows,” as “dower was a necessity in a legal system that denied women the ability to provide for their own financial security during widowhood.”⁶⁷ This dower represented some of the only financial support a woman was allowed after the death of her husband. The state of Illinois passed revisions to dower laws in 1874. One particular law abolished the practice of curtesy, or “a husband’s interest upon the death of his wife in the real property of an estate that she either solely owned or inherited provided they bore a child capable of inheriting the estate.”⁶⁸ The law stated that “the estate of curtesy is hereby abolished, and the surviving husband or wife shall be endowed of the third part of all the lands whereof the deceased husband or wife was seized of an estate of inheritance, at any time during the marriage, unless the same shall have been relinquished in legal form.”⁶⁹ This in effect gave the spouse of the deceased one third of all inherited lands the deceased had. The revision of inheritance laws opened up new doors for married and widowed women.

⁶⁵ Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, 106.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁶⁷ Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property*, 16.

⁶⁸ “Curtesy,” Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, www.merriamwebster.com, accessed 7 July 2008.

⁶⁹ *The Revised Statutes of the State of Illinois* (Chicago: Chicago Legal News Company, 1880), 443.

By 1890, all states had passed inheritance laws. Illinois remained a common law state, which meant “the common law of England, so far as the same is applicable and of a general nature... shall be the rule of decision, and shall be considered as of full force until repealed by legislative authority.”⁷⁰ Under common law, property acquired during a marriage remained separate. Because most property acquired in marriage was contracted by the husband, it remained his and the wife was only entitled to a portion of it.⁷¹ The laws of Illinois in 1874 state that “every male person of the age of twenty-one years, and every female of the age of eighteen years, being of sound mind and memory, shall have power to devise all the estate, right, title and interest, in possession, reversion or remainder, which he or she hath, or at the time of his or her death shall have... by will or testament.”⁷² In the common law property states, to the benefit of the wives, however, women could will their own separate property to whoever they chose, rather than the husband and his heirs being entitled to all of her property at her death.⁷³

Once widowed, a woman could legally accumulate property. John Faragher notes that “widows... filed nine out of ten of the federal land claims entered by women.”⁷⁴ Widows could also manage property after the death of their husbands, and given the preponderance of Illinoisans involved in farming, thus many widows found themselves responsible for farm land. This legal provision allowed widows to continue to work and manage family farmland on their own.⁷⁵ Because men often died much earlier than women, farms generally were left under the supervision of the wife. In central Illinois in

⁷⁰ Ibid., 276.

⁷¹ Carole Shammass, Marylynn Salmon, and Michael Dahlin, *Inheritance in America From Colonial Times to the Present* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 84.

⁷² *Revised Statutes of Illinois*, 1174.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, 108.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 107.

the early twentieth century, many widows maintained headship of family farms for many years. Nancy Bender, a widow from Newman, Illinois in Douglas County, outlived her husband by almost twenty years.⁷⁶ Mrs. Bender was listed as head of household over the family farm land in the 1918 *Farmers' Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties, Illinois*, about seven years before her own death.⁷⁷ This shows how widows had legal authority (once widowed) to hold family land on their own.

Single women held an entirely different legal status than married or widowed women. Legally speaking, single women retained the same rights as men, with no strictures such as *femme covert*. A *femme sole*, or single woman, could own and dispense with property as she saw fit in theory, if not in practice. Historically, single women could still be subjugated to the rule of men in the form of their fathers or other male family members.

The Homestead Act of 1862 gave single women the right to claim in their own names, and many did so “to add to claims made by fathers and brothers, to work the land by themselves, or to enhance their dowry.”⁷⁸ According to sources, by the end of the nineteenth century, about 250,000 women ran their own farms.⁷⁹ These women had ownership of the land and could manage it how they saw fit. Unfortunately, though, many of these women “often procured land late in life at the death of their spouse rather than during their peak productive years.”⁸⁰ Most of the women heads-of-household in the *Farmers' Review Directory*, such as Nancy Bender, fall into this last category. While

⁷⁶ *The Newman Independent*, 1 May 1925, 1.

⁷⁷ *Farmers' Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties, Illinois*, 88.

⁷⁸ Charles C. Geisler, William F. Waters, and Katrina L. Eadie, “The Changing Structure of Female Agricultural Land Ownership, 1946 and 1978.” *Rural Sociology* 50 (1985): 75.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

they were owners and operators, most of the women were too old to do the actual farming themselves. Most likely, these widows either became landlords and let others farm the land, or let sons or other relatives do the farming.

Not all women, or specifically single women, claimed homestead lands to benefit a male family member. Most famously, Elizabeth “Bachelor Bess” Corey claimed land and homesteaded in South Dakota on her own, sending letters back to her family describing her adventures. Her cheeky correspondences reflect the free spirit of independence Corey felt from leading a single life on her claim. “Bachelor Bess” embodies the single woman who “yearned for greater career options...[and] social changes which legitimized a single woman’s choice to ‘go west.’”⁸¹ Bess and her experiences add to our understanding of single women who owned and maintained their own property.

Despite previous legal hardships, by the time period that this study covers, women gained significant rights regarding property. Some of these advancements reflected the “the needs of a fluid and impersonal national economy,” such as changes in the laws concerning the privy examination for women.⁸² Instead of attacking the privy examination on the grounds that it hampered the rights of women, the Supreme Court’s rulings often seemed to have had more to do with the ability of women to dispense with their property when it benefited the economy without the interference of their husbands or other male guardians.

The farm women of Coles and Douglas counties listed in the *Farmers’ Review Reliable Directory of Farmers and Breeders* would have benefited from the previous

⁸¹ Philip L. Gerber, ed, *Bachelor Bess: The Homesteading Letters of Elizabeth Corey, 1909-1919* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990), xxviii.

⁸² Braukman and Ross, “Married Women’s Property and Male Coercion,” 74.

changes in property law. As widows or single women, the women farmers would have control over the land willed to them and the ability to use or dispense with the land in any manner they saw fit. While the farmers may not have taken part in the actual profession of farming, they would have had to find a way to make the farm work, whether it be having a neighbor or family member use the farmland or becoming a landlord and renting the land out to tenants. The women heads of household in the *Directory* must have used these strategies or more to continue the use of the land.

By 1918, Illinois women had gained significant rights. The widows and never-married women had a variety of options when it came to using their land. The *Farmers' Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties, Illinois* provides important information toward building a profile of the typical farming woman. By analyzing the information given, one can determine many factors that may have allowed women to be farmers or manage their own farmland.

CHAPTER 3: COLES AND DOUGLAS COUNTIES: A REVIEW OF WOMEN LANDOWNERS FROM THE *FARMERS' REVIEW*

While women farmers and landowners may be hard to find, it is not impossible and they did exist. *The Farmers' Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties, Illinois* provides a snapshot of the farming community of Coles and Douglas County, including all of the women heads of household. The *Directory* gives a minimum of information on each person, but the information given provides clues needed to piece together the status of women in the farming community. The single and widowed women heads of household listed in the *Directory* show that women without husbands continued to manage their farmland, and have a place as farmland owners and tenants. While these women did own or rent land and were well-respected in their communities, they did not gain recognition for their farming or economic contributions to their families.

The *Farm Directory* provides an example of the influence of farming periodicals in this time period. Allan Bogue has noted the importance of the agricultural press through the turn of the century. According to Bogue, "there is no doubt that the agricultural journals of the period could help a man to adapt to the peculiarities of prairie farming as well as to make himself a better farmer generally."⁸³ Typical farming journals during this period extolled the virtues of farming and Progressive beliefs in agrarianism as the most ideal form of life. At the turn of the twentieth century, Theodore Roosevelt and other Progressive reformers supported the Country Life movement, which characterized farming and rural life as vitally important to the health of the nation. These reformers "wanted to make the farm more organized and efficient," as well as "make

⁸³ Allan G. Bogue, *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 203.

country life as socially and culturally attractive as urban life.”⁸⁴ The *Farmers’ Review* and several such agricultural journals were published to the wide audience of Illinois farmers, espousing these Progressive beliefs. According to John J. Fry, “farm newspapers thus became a key element in the communication of reform recommendations to rural Midwesterners.”⁸⁵

The *Farmers’ Review* was a weekly farm journal published in Chicago, Illinois. The *Review* called itself “The Practical Paper for the Business Farmer” and by 1917 boasted a weekly paid circulation of over 100,000 weekly.⁸⁶ In 1918, the *Farmers’ Review* published directories of several counties in Illinois listing all of the farmers and breeders. Within this directory, the *Farmers’ Review* published its statement of beliefs: “Farming is the best business on earth, farm people have every reason to be and generally are the happiest people in the world, agriculture always has been, is now, and always will be the foundation of all material prosperity, and the farmer should be proud of his job.”⁸⁷ From this basis, the *Farmers’ Review* strove to provide the best information possible to the benefit of all farmers. The *Farmers’ Review* also promoted progressive farming techniques, such as “a permanent, profitable system of soil improvement,” “use of improved seeds and animals,” and “the elimination of wastes in marketing.”⁸⁸ They also promoted the farming community, advocating for “better churches, better schools, better roads, better homes—better communities,” “a country of land owners working their own land,” and “a square deal for every one.”⁸⁹ The *Directory* was published with the hope of

⁸⁴ Laura Lovett, *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890-1938* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 114, 117.

⁸⁵ Fry, *The Farm Press, Reform, and Rural Change*, 158.

⁸⁶ *The Farmers’ Review*, 1917.

⁸⁷ *The Farmers’ Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties, Illinois*, Front Matter.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

disseminating these progressive ideals to the farmers of Coles and Douglas counties in Illinois.

According to the *Farmers' Review*, "a large force of men have been at work calling on the farmers, merchants and breeders of these counties, collecting the information which is now placed in your hands." These men went into the communities, presumably door to door, and gathered the information about each farmers' family. The *Directory* was not without its own motivations, though. A large amount of businesses advertised in the *Directory*, and the staff urged the readers to take advantage of the fine merchants as they "are deserving of your patronage and we hope that you will so favor them whenever possible." The *Directory* also increased the readership of the *Farmers' Review*, which the staff also noted. Despite the financial advantages, it is clear that the staff of the *Farmers' Review* went to great lengths to get accurate information to the farmers in Coles and Douglas Counties.⁹⁰

The information given on each farmer in the *Directory* includes the head of household, spouse and children if any, location of the farm, number of acres farmed, whether the farmer was an owner or a tenant, and the year the farmer moved to the land. Additional notations included whether or not the farmer owned an automobile or a tractor as well. The *Directory*, structured in alphabetical order, was divided between the two counties, with a list of breeders and what animals and breeds they raised at the end.

The federal population and agricultural census profile helps to flesh out the information found in the *Farmers' Review Directory*. While the *Farmers' Review Directory* only listed the farming households, the population census provides the total populations of the two counties, showing how the number of farming families compared

⁹⁰ *The Farmers' Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties, Illinois*, "Introduction."

to the rest of the population. The total population of Coles County in 1910 was 34,517 people. Of the total population, 16,977 were women. The total number of families in Coles County was 8,300 with 8,111 dwellings listed. Of the total population, 10,354 residents were 6 to 20 years old, so most likely not owners of farm land. According to information from the agricultural census, The total land area of Coles County was 336,000 acres, with 306,098 of those acres in farms, or 91.1 percent. For Douglas County, the total population was 19,591, with 9,657 women. 5898 residents fell into the 6 to 20 year old category. The population was divided into 4586 dwellings with 4654 families. The land area of Douglas County was 266,880 total acres, with 256,478 acres of it in farm land. This equaled 96.1 percent of the total land of Douglas County in farms.⁹¹ Coles and Douglas Counties together equaled only 0.96 percent of the total population of the state of Illinois, but constituted a significant amount of farmland for the state.

The information in the *Farmers' Review* helps to put a human face on the same kinds of data the census provides by listing the actual names of the farmers and their families. The *Directory* listed a total of 2337 farmers in Coles County. Out of those farmers listed, 73 of them were women heads of household, a total of 3.12 percent. Overall, the number of women heads of household was very small, but the fact is that women were represented. The vast majority of female heads of household were widows. Of all of the women heads of household in Coles and Douglas Counties listed in the *Directory*, only four were confirmed to have never married by the census. Only one woman was divorced. The rest of the women were widows, many with children still living under their roofs.

⁹¹ Department of Commerce and Labor, *Thirteenth Census of the United States taken in 1910*, vol. 2 and vol. 6 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 486-489.

Of the 73 women farmers, 57 of them were owners of their own land, a significant amount. The average number of acres owned by women was 90.53 acres, but the average represents a large disparity between the highest and lowest amounts owned. The woman who owned the highest number was Mrs. Marie Sargent of Charleston, with 576 acres owned. Susan Prather of Mattoon ended up with the lowest amount, at one-half acre owned.

The *Directory* listed tenant farmers as well as farm owners. Unlike the American South, "tenancy in the Midwest did not necessarily correspond to a certain income level. Midwestern farm tenants sometimes worked the best land and the largest farms," according to Mary Neth.⁹² This is true for Coles and Douglas Counties. With a tenant farmer, the *Directory* listed the owner of the land as well. In the case of a woman tenant, often the actual owner of the land was a family member. Out of the total women heads of household, only 15 were tenant farmers, with a total acreage of 1449 acres. However, these tenants worked more land than women who owned their own land, the average being 96.6 acres worked by women tenant farmers. Elizabeth Hill of Hindsboro rented the largest tenant farm, with 240 acres, and Mrs. Sam Empson of Arcola was listed with no acreage, but still a tenant. This could possibly be a typo or an oversight, or it could just mean that Mrs. Empson did not farm, yet still rented her home.

Of the women listed in the *Directory*, only 17 owned an automobile. None of the women owned tractors, which could mean that the women did not do their own farming. But by 1918, the fact that any women owned automobiles says that they may have been well to do. No pattern seems to exist among the women that owned automobiles. For the most part, the auto owners were also land owners, but not exclusively. Everyone from

⁹² Neth, *Preserving the Family Farm*, 72.

tenant farmers with limited acreage worked to single women owners with extensive landholdings were among the auto owners.

Douglas County provides a similarly stratified group of farmers. Douglas County was significantly smaller than Coles County, yet still had almost the same amount of acreage farmed, with just slightly more than half the number of total farmers, with 1201 farmers. Out of the 1201 farmers, only 46 were women heads of household, at 3.83 percent, slightly higher than Coles County. Of these women, 37 were owners, while only 8 were tenant farmers. The average number of acres that women owned was 120.88, with the highest amount being a 560 acre farm owned by Christina Jurgens of Tuscola. The lowest acreage belonged to Mrs. Nancy Bender of Newman's five acre farm.

Only 8 women were tenant farmers, but their acreage worked added up to 2083.5 acres, with an average of 260.44 acres per woman. This is over twice as many acres as the women who owned land. Again, the differential between the highest and lowest amount of acres was very large, with the lowest being 1 acre and the highest being 960 acres. A significant number of Douglas County women owned automobiles. Fourteen of 46 women, or about 30 percent of the women owned cars. Like Coles County, however, none of the women owned tractors.⁹³

As mentioned earlier, the *Farmers' Review* staff took great pains to provide accurate information about the farmers in the two counties. According to the 1910 census of agriculture, Coles County was home to 2695 farms. The *Directory* listed 2337 farm families, or about 87 percent of the total. In Douglas County, the census listed 1839 farms, whereas the *Directory* had 1201 listed farmers. This was only 65 percent of the

⁹³ The above information was taken from *The Farmers' Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties, Illinois*, 1918.

total from the census.⁹⁴ The *Directory* information collectors would have run into the same problems as census takers, such as people not being home when they stopped by to collect information. This could account for the disparity between the federal census record and the *Farmers' Review Farm Directory*.

The United States federal census records provide even more information about some of the specific women listed in the *Farmers' Review Farm Directory*. In the census listing, all residents were asked certain questions about themselves, including age, literacy, birthplace, and occupation. While not all of the women listed an occupation, some of the women identified themselves as farmers in various census years. From the women in the Coles County *Directory*, 12 different women called themselves farmers at some point in the census. Many of these women had listed "keeping house" or no occupation earlier, but after their husbands died, they listed their occupation of farmer. Other occupations listed by women included grocer, land lady, and capitalist. In Douglas County, 7 of the women listed themselves as farmers at some point in the United States census. Other occupations included washer and seamstress.

Looking more closely at specific women in the *Directory* reveals even more information about the status of women without husbands in the farming community. An examination of the wills of several women in Douglas County shows that these women had a certain amount of legal authority in executing their own estates. Nancy Bender had legal control over her family land after her husband died. In her own will, she decided to give her land to her daughter in sale. According to her will, Mrs. Bender said "I hereby direct my Executor to sell my real estate... at private sale to my daughter Hope Wax for

⁹⁴ Department of Commerce and Labor, *Thirteenth Census of the United States Taken in 1910*, vol. 6, Agriculture 1909-1910 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913), 427-428.

the sum of two thousand dollars.”⁹⁵ As for the rest of her estate, she wanted it divided equally between her three heirs, “share and share alike.”⁹⁶ Rather than offering to sell her only son the family farm land, Mrs. Bender instead sold it to her daughter, granted a married daughter. This may have been the most practical course of action, however, because her daughter and her husband were farmers, but her son Charles apparently was not. He is listed in the 1900 census as living with Nancy as a pianist, then again in 1910 as a bee-keeper. Being unable to track him any further in the census record, one would assume that he left the area or ended up living with one of his sisters. If his choices of occupation are any indication, he most likely was not farming material.

Lillie May Campbell of Douglas County also divided her assets equally between her sons and daughters when she passed away in 1942. She appointed her daughter as administrator of her will as well. With this, Fannie McAvene was given full power to execute the will her mother had written. This is a significant responsibility, and as a woman, Mrs. McAvene would have been in the public eye while executing the will.⁹⁷

Mrs. Bender and Mrs. Campbell had been married, and their daughters were married as well, but once widowed, Mrs. Bender and Mrs. Campbell had the power to put their daughters in charge of such important jobs as executing their wills and taking care of the family land they had inherited. This shows that these widows were not necessarily hampered by law because they no longer had husbands, but were able to legally dispense with their physical property as they saw fit, without necessarily having to have a man do it for them.

⁹⁵ Last Will and Testament of Nancy E. Bender, 1924.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Last Will and Testament of Lillie May Campbell, 1942.

The obituaries of these women provide more clues to their status in the community. A survey of obituaries of six of the women who were heads of household in the *Farmers' Review Directory* shows that these women were remembered and held in high esteem in their communities on their own terms, in some cases long after their husbands had died. The terms used to describe these women in their newspaper obituaries demonstrate the level of respect the community held for the widows in their own right. Many of the obituaries show the level of community involvement these women had in their local churches as well. Nancy Osterud has noted that "women were attracted to the churches in part because their spiritual worth was recognized."⁹⁸ Being a respected member of the local congregation implies visibility, as the church was often the center of the rural community. Visibility did not mean women were equal to men in the church, however. According to Osterud, "although women comprised the majority of all church members throughout the nineteenth century, experiencing conversion and affiliating with the churches in greater numbers than men, they did not serve as ministers or church officers in the major denominations."⁹⁹ Nonetheless, these women were notable for their dedication to the church.

From the words of their obituaries, what these women share is a deep respect from the communities in which they lived. With the exception of Nora Brady, who was only 51, the rest of the women lived very long lives. Lucy Bates and Olive Jones even lived into their nineties. All had been widows for a considerable amount of years, giving them much time to earn the respect of the communities on their own, as independent women. Although the obituaries mention community and religious activities, none of

⁹⁸ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 263.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 262.

them mention how the women earned money. With the exception of Olive Jones, the other five women listed occupations in at least one of the census years. Nora Brady, Lucy Bates, Nancy Bender, and Sarah Clark all identified themselves as farmers in the census, whereas Lillie Campbell listed herself as a washer. It is interesting that none of the obituaries mentioned how the women made a living. This could mean, especially for the farming women, that another family member farmed the land that they owned. For example, the obituaries of Sarah Clark, Nora Brady, and Nancy Bender all list sons or sons-in-law as surviving family. In the case of Nancy Bender, it could be the husband of her daughter she willed her land to that did the actual farming. The obituaries of notable Coles and Douglas County women provide important information about how these women were viewed by their communities.

Nora Alice Brady passed away on March 22, 1929 in Lerna, Illinois. Her husband, Robert Brady, had passed away in 1910, leaving her a widow for nineteen years. According to her obituary, Mrs. Brady "was a devoted mother and a most kind and helpful neighbor." She had been a faithful member of the United Brethren church, a fact which featured prominently in her obituary. Her death had been met with "a shock to the entire community," as she had apparently recovered from a long illness. Mrs. Brady was remembered fondly, as "being left a widow with five small children to care for she met each trial with great courage." It seems that being a widow had increased her community standing, as the community remembered her for being a strong woman. Mrs. Brady is a good example of an outstanding female community member.¹⁰⁰

Nancy E. Bender, mentioned above for her will, died on April 23, 1925, almost twenty years after her husband Henry. Again, religion figured prominently in the

¹⁰⁰ *Lerna Weekly Eagle*, 5 April 1929, 1.

remembrance of Mrs. Bender, as “in her girlhood she professed her faith in her Savior and had ever since remained a consisted [sic] member of the Christian Church.” Nancy “never denied herself to friends and neighbors being always cheerful buoyant and interested in their welfare as her own.” Mrs. Bender was beloved in the community, as is shown by the words written about her in her obituary.¹⁰¹

The “venerable and respected” Lucy Bates passed away on January 31, 1920. The headline of her obituary read “Pneumonia Fatal to Grandma Bates,” suggesting that the familiar use of “grandma” would mean that Mrs. Bates was loved by the community as a relative. According to the obituary, Mrs. Bates and her late husband were “included in the prominent and respected citizens” of Charleston, Illinois. Mrs. Bates “was a woman possessing the highest character and commanding the highest respect,” and the obituary writer believed that all of her many friends “were of the one opinion that the world had been made better by her presence among us.” Like the other women, Grandma Bates’ husband had passed away 20 years earlier, yet she held a place of very high esteem among the members of the community.¹⁰²

Sarah Ann Clark, widow of Granville Clark, died on August 2, 1921, twenty years after her husband passed away. Mrs. Clark was “well known and favorably known by many of the citizens of Hutton and Charleston townships,” according to her obituary writer. Also, she was “an excellent woman, having the respect and confidence of all who knew her.” Not much else is mentioned in her obituary, but the glowing record of her life speaks to her position in the Charleston community.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *The Newman Independent*, 1 May 1925, 1.

¹⁰² *Charleston Daily Courier*, 31 January 1920, 1.

¹⁰³ *Charleston Daily Courier*, 3 August, 1921, 2.

The aforementioned Lillie Campbell was another revered woman in her community. Mrs. Campbell died February 12, 1940 after being a widow for 31 years. Mrs. Campbell devoted her life to her invalid daughter, and “greater expression of a mother’s love than hers, there will never be,” according to her obituary. While her local church was not mentioned, Mrs. Campbell’s obituary highlighted her involvement in other community activities, mainly the Rebekah Lodge, the women’s auxiliary of the fraternal service organization of the Oddfellows. Mrs. Campbell “was serving as Vice Grand of the local lodge at the time of her death and also was a Past Noble Grand.” These were high ranking offices, showing Mrs. Campbell’s high esteem and community involvement.¹⁰⁴

Finally, “Grandma” Olive Jones, a respected member of the Arcola community passed away on June 7, 1930, 39 years later than her husband Calvin. Mrs. Jones was declared “one of Arcola’s oldest, most interesting and best loved women in the sunset of a long and well spent life.” Her obituary lists her many friends and relatives, some who traveled from as far as South Dakota, to attend her funeral. In her long life, she gained much respect from the community.¹⁰⁵ Jones, along with the other women, made their mark on their communities.

The *Farmers’ Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties*, along with census data, probate records, and newspaper obituaries help to create a profile of a typical woman who was the head of her household in Coles or Douglas County Illinois in 1918. According to these records, the typical woman head of household was a widow, probably with children, in her later years. The majority of these women were land owners rather

¹⁰⁴ *Arcola Record Herald*, 15 February 1940, 8.

¹⁰⁵ *Arcola Record-Herald*, 12 June 1930, 1.

than tenant farmers, with an average of about 100 acres of farmland. The typical woman may or may not have owned a means of transportation. From the examples given in the obituaries, the farm widow was often a respected member of her community, involved in religious or community charity organizations. These pieces of evidence point to the fact that these women landowners held a place of high esteem in the community, and came to this position on their own merits. These women were not marginalized, but gained community standing even while widowed. Although they held community standing, these single women were not respected publicly for their farming. The paternalistic structure of the farming system did not allow for women to be successful farmers on their own. Instead, unmarried women had to rely on male family members to carry on the farm work.

CHAPTER 4: THE BALCH SISTERS: A CASE STUDY

Women landowners in central Illinois certainly were notable in their communities, but were marginalized in the business of farming. Even when women inherited land or referred to themselves as farmers, they normally did not work the land themselves. Though given independence through the ownership of land, single women were still subjugated to the will of men in the business of farming. Of all the women landowners in Coles County, Martha Balch and her sisters represent the most intriguing situation. By piecing together genealogical and legal evidence, the following chapter tells the story of the Balch sisters and their unique status. Martha and her sisters owned farm land during a time when farming was growing into a progressive, capital-oriented business, dominated by men. The Balch sisters would have faced barriers within this gender-biased enterprise in which women's productive capacities were devalued. Despite owning land, the Balches did not appear to have contributed to the modern farm economy. Looking at specific women lets the historian into their lives and brings them front and center into the historical narrative. Due to a lack of narrative sources, Martha's life has been reconstructed using social history methodology. Despite this, I have been able to find out much about Martha's life and how a single woman would have lived in Coles County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Martha's father was John Luther Balch. John was born in Kentucky in 1800 and married Malinda White in 1829. The Balches came to Pleasant Grove Township in Coles County in 1830 where they were among the earliest settlers of the area. According to an early history of Coles County, John L. Balch owned 120 acres of farmland and was "a

school-teacher in this township in an early day, and was an author of considerable note; some of his writings were published on the slavery question.”¹⁰⁶ Other contributions John made to the community included teaching the first Sunday School and providing the first library “which he brought 75 miles by horseback.”¹⁰⁷ Not much is known about Malinda, except that “she was a good illustration of Solomon’s description of a virtuous woman,” meaning a trustworthy, obedient wife.¹⁰⁸

John and Malinda had eight children, four girls and four boys. Alfred Bolivar, the eldest son, was born in 1830. After serving in the Civil War, Alfred and his family settled in Kansas.¹⁰⁹ Brothers Alexander and William also served in the Civil War. Alexander was killed in action, and William settled in Kansas along with Alfred. A fourth brother, James, died at the age of 22. The Balch brothers boast an impressive military record, with Alfred who was captured twice by the Confederates, and William, who “carried a dispatch through a cross-fire of the enemy and escaped unharmed.”¹¹⁰

John and Malinda had four daughters as well. Albina, the eldest, was born in 1832. Mary Malinda came next in 1836, then Martha in 1842 and Angeline in 1844. Martha Balch, the focus of this study, was the third daughter, born May 11, 1842. Martha was born and raised in Pleasant Grove Township, where she remained for her entire life. Albina, Mary, Martha, and Angeline lived together their entire lives, as none of them ever married. It is unclear why four such eligible women would never marry. Nancy Osterud mentioned in her book *Bonds of Community*, that a primary reason why women did not

¹⁰⁶ W.H. Perrin, A.A. Graham, and D.M. Blair, *The History of Coles County, Illinois* (Chicago: Wm. Le Baron, Jr. and Co., 1879), 583.

¹⁰⁷ Galusha Burchard Balch, *Genealogy of the Balch Families in America* (Salem, MA: Eben Putnam, 1897), 465-466; Biblical passage probably referring to Proverbs 31:10-11.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 466.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 480-481.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 480, 482.

marry was because they were needed to take care of their aging parents.¹¹¹ Even if this was the case for the Balch sisters, it would have made more sense if one of the daughters stayed home with her parents while the rest left and married. Regardless of the reason, the Balch sisters never married and seemed to have been of note for that fact. In the 1860 United States Census, Martha was 17 years old and listed “home” as her occupation, most likely meaning that she had no outside job that earned income.¹¹² By the 1870 census, Malinda, the mother, had died, and all four daughters were listed as living under the household of their father, and all listed “keeping house” as their occupation.¹¹³

John Luther Balch died on October 3, 1870, following his wife who died in 1865. In John’s will, he decreed, “I will to my before mentioned four daughters the following described real estate,” from which point he enumerated the exact boundaries of the family land.¹¹⁴ He also wanted his daughters to have everything from his household. To his sons and their children, he left funds to be distributed when the grandchildren were of legal age. The possible reason for this may be that because John’s sons moved out of state they did not want to be responsible for the land, or that the sons had created a rift somehow in the family. The daughters, who had remained with their parents, became the owners of the family land. This all happened within the context of changing and expanding property rights for women, only nine years after the passage of the Married Women’s Property Act. While single women had always had the legal right to own land, it was not common. After 1861, however, women’s landholding expanded.

¹¹¹ Osterud, *Bonds of Community*, 124.

¹¹² 1860 United States Census, Coles County, Illinois (National Archives microfilm publication M653, Roll 171; image copy at www.heritagequestonline.com), 340.

¹¹³ 1870 United States Census, Coles County, Illinois (National Archives microfilm publication M593, Roll 197; image copy at www.heritagequestonline.com), 310.

¹¹⁴ Last Will and Testament of John Luther Balch, 1870.

In 1880, the Balch sisters (as they were known) lived together on the family land. Albina was listed as the head of household, with the other three women living under her. Martha was 38 years old at the time. All four women listed farming as their occupation.¹¹⁵ Narrative evidence of the women farming for themselves does not exist, but without a father or brothers nearby, it is unclear if the Balch sisters worked their own land or not. The census lists a George B. Balch as a neighbor to the Balch sisters, who appears to be a relative. George was a farmer, so it is possible that he farmed the land. But according to the 1879 history, George B. Balch “has just established the post office and station of Larna, both of which offices he fills; it is the intention to erect necessary buildings, open a store and a shop or two here, and start a town.”¹¹⁶ This is a large responsibility, and farming twice as much land would have added greatly to his responsibilities. Regardless, this is a piece of evidence that has eluded discovery, and it is doubtful if it exists at all. For now, all there is to go on is what the women listed in the census, which was that they considered themselves to be farmers.

Along with farming, the family biographer mentioned the sisters’ dedication to the church. According to Galusha Balch, “They have all been members of the Methodist church, earnest workers in the Sabbath school, and their lives have led along pathways of pleasantness and peace. Martha and Angeline E. received diplomas for work in the Chautauqua courses of Bible study,” the popular religious and educational training sessions of the day.¹¹⁷ Census data shows that all four of the women were completely literate, and because their father had been so instrumental in starting and teaching Bible

¹¹⁵ 1880 United States Census, Coles County, Illinois (National Archives microfilm publication T9, Roll 183; image copy at www.heritagequestonline.com), 267.

¹¹⁶ Perrin, Graham, and Blair, *The History of Coles County, Illinois*, 584.

¹¹⁷ Balch, *Genealogy of the Balch Families in America*, 481.

studies and Sunday school, it is no surprise that his daughters also were actively involved in the local church.

Mary Malinda passed away on August 2, 1894. She was the first sister to die at 58 years of age. Mary appointed her sister Angeline as executor of her will, with Martha listed for security. In her will, Mary gave her share of the land, "being the farm on which we now reside, and owned jointly by us, having been willed to us by our father John L. Balch," to her living sisters.¹¹⁸ She also stipulated that if any one of her sisters were to pass away before she did, the land was to remain divided among the remaining two sisters. Interestingly, Mary had a strange request to will her brothers. According to Mary's will, "I will and bequeath to my two brothers Alfred Bolivar Balch and William Balch one dollar each to be paid without interest at any time they may call for it." She requested the same for her niece and nephew, the children of her deceased brother Alexander.¹¹⁹ This could mean that she was unhappy with her brothers and wanted it known. There is no practical reason that she would will such a small amount to her relatives, unless that is absolutely all that she could afford, which is doubtful. Whatever the reason, Alfred and William did not seem to be held in much esteem by their sisters.

Angeline died in 1896 and granted the land in her will to Albina and Martha. In 1910, Albina is still listed as the head of the household in the United States census. At this point, Albina was 78 years old and Martha was 67. Neither of them listed any occupation. Albina died on June 21, 1914, four years before the *Farmers' Review Directory* was published. In the farmers' *Directory*, Martha Balch is listed by herself as the head of the household. She was the owner of 80 acres of land, which she reported that

¹¹⁸ Last Will and Testament of Mary Malinda Balch, 1894.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

she had lived on since 1852. She had no automobile or tractor to her name, only the farm land that had been passed down to her from her father and her sisters who predeceased her. By 1918, Martha was 76 years old, unlikely to be farming anyway.

In the 1920 census, Martha is again listed as head of household, only this time with another woman, Martha Suret, listed as a boarder. Martha Suret is not listed in any other census year, so the relationship between the two is unclear. In 1920, Martha Balch was 77 years old and Martha Suret was 61, so it is possible that Martha Suret helped an aging Martha Balch around the house, or simply provided income from rent.¹²⁰

According to a genealogical source, the “Balch Sister” place was sold “just after World War I” to a Robert Best for \$200 an acre.¹²¹ This would have to be just after the *Farmers’ Review Directory* was published. Martha Balch died on June 12, 1928, and according to her obituary in the *Lerna Weekly Eagle*, Martha resided on the family farm “until about ten years since when she sold the farm and moved to Lerna where she resided until her death.”¹²² Martha was the last surviving member of her immediate family, but had “surviving nieces and nephews...in addition to many more distant relatives and a host of friends.”¹²³ Martha must have been ill for quite some time before she died, which might also have been the reason for taking on a boarder. According to her obituary, her brother Alfred had placed a financial adviser in charge of her estate for the past ten years “owing to her growing infirmities.”¹²⁴ Her obituary from the *Decatur Evening Herald* mentioned that she had suffered from a lingering illness of two years.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ 1920 United States Census, Coles County, Illinois (National Archives microfilm publication T625, Roll 304; image copy at www.heritagequestonline.com), 252.

¹²¹ “Balch Book,” Balch Family File, Charleston Carnegie Library, 74-75.

¹²² *Lerna Weekly Eagle*, 15 June 1928, 1.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Decatur Evening Herald*, 14 June 1928.

With Martha's passing, the "Balch Sisters" of Pleasant Grove were lost to history until now.

This is the story of the lives of Martha Balch and her three "old maid" sisters. Their lives followed the normal path of rural women in farming communities with one major difference—none of them ever chose to marry. But was being a single woman a hindrance to Martha in her public life? The evidence presented would argue that Martha and her sisters were not marginalized by their status as single women. In fact, the "Balch Sisters" seem to have been an institution in the community. The sisters did not live the same as men, however. There is no evidence that they participated in farming on their own, or that they were recognized as farmers by the community.

The fact that John L. Balch willed the land to his maiden daughters shows that he held them in high enough esteem to entrust the land that he traveled from Kentucky for to them. Although his sons did not live in the area, making it more logical for the daughters to be his heirs, at the same time, John did not sell off the land and will his daughters money or physical items. Specifically willing the daughters the land gave them a legacy and a name for themselves in the community, as well as possibly economic responsibility in the principal occupation of Coles County residents.

Martha also had status in the community through her activities in the church. Earning a Chautauqua diploma for Bible study would have been a great accomplishment, and would have allowed Martha a greater depth of knowledge in her Sunday school teaching career. Her obituary also highlighted her dedication to her church. According to the newspaper, "during all of her life until impaired health made it impossible she was

always regular in attendance at church and Sunday school.”¹²⁶ Her presence was known in the church, and she was undoubtedly missed when she was unable to attend.

The Balch sisters seem to have been a community institution as well as a kind of legal entity. They were known as the “Balch Sisters” or simply “the sisters” in contemporary written works, such as the 1879 history. They are also listed in the 1879 Coles County Tax List as the Balch sisters, rather than listed separately, or with only the eldest sister listed.¹²⁷ When their farm home was sold, it was known as the “Balch Sister place.” These women were very visible in the community regardless of their marital status.

Martha’s obituary also provides clues like the obituaries listed in the previous chapter as to their level of community involvement. Martha’s obituary lists the many friends and family members who she left behind, as well as a number of community and church members who helped with the funeral by providing music, flowers, and the service itself. Martha also was given a very large obituary in the center of page one of the *Lerna Weekly Eagle*. The space and detail she was awarded in her obituary show her prominence in the community.

One item that would possibly challenge Martha’s autonomy as a single, prominent woman is the financial adviser that managed her estate. According to Martha’s obituary, “during the past twenty years R.G. Hall has been her financial adviser, and during the past ten years owing to her growing infirmities, acting under instructions from her brother, Alfred B. Balch, he assumed the responsibility of managing her estate up to the

¹²⁶ *Lerna Weekly Eagle*, 15 June 1928, 1.

¹²⁷ Perrin, *The History of Coles County, Illinois*, 673.

time of her demise.”¹²⁸ It would appear from this statement that, despite a possible estrangement, Martha’s brother had some degree of control over the family estate. She also had a man, R.G. Hall, overseeing her estate for quite some time. This could be a result of marginalization, or it could simply be a result of Martha’s advanced age or living situation.

Today, Martha Balch resides in the Upper Muddy cemetery in Pleasant Grove Township, Coles County, Illinois. Martha and her sisters provide such an interesting example of the way in which unmarried women functioned in the community despite not having a husband. Like the other women in the *Farmers’ Review Directory* of farmers, Martha was a land and home owner and the head of her household. But unlike most of those women, Martha never had a husband to start a farm with or children to continue farming the land after her death. Although Martha’s father must have been an influential male influence, when he passed away, Martha and her sisters were basically on their own to make their way in the community.

Drawing Martha Balch’s story out of the historical record was difficult, but ultimately rewarding. A preponderance of evidence revealed many interesting anecdotes about her life and the way she was viewed by her community and family. While narrative evidence would be required to get into Martha’s mind and find out how she felt about her life as a single woman, the genealogical evidence helps to determine how Martha lived and worked to a certain extent. Martha’s story is important in the field of single women’s history, as she provides an example of an unmarried woman engaged in a labor and capital intensive male-dominated occupation that went through great change during the range of her life—farming.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

CONCLUSION

Single women present a historical difficulty—by not conforming to the traditional societal roles of wife and mother, how do these women find a place in the rural and farming community? This thesis was designed to bring the issue of single women in farming communities to the forefront of the historical narrative and explore the difficulties that come with trying to find these women. To be single in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not necessarily a social hindrance to the women in Coles and Douglas Counties, as Martha Balch and the other women were very visible in the community. They were beloved by the communities they lived in, and managed to live their lives successfully without husbands. But the Balch sisters and other women in situations like theirs did not seem to have any economic significance in the community. The women used their legal rights to dispense with their property in pragmatic ways which eliminated their need to manage the farm business, a business traditionally the domain of men.

Some qualifications need to be made. The women studied in this thesis were either single, because they never had married, or widowed. Divorce was not common during this time period, and I only found one woman was divorced, rather than widowed or single. There are differences in the situations of never married women versus widowed women. While a widow had the benefit of financial support from her deceased husband's estate, as well as possible physical support from her husband's family, a single woman had her own family, if any was living, and herself to depend on. A woman who never married also could be looked down upon, or stereotyped, by the community. The term

“old maid” was never used to describe the Balch sisters in any sources I found, but they were referred to as “maiden” in a genealogical source, connoting a sense of immaturity due to the fact that the sisters had not married. Despite the seeming advantage a widowed woman had over a woman who had never married, both types of women found themselves in potentially difficult situations. Without a husband to speak for them, or to “cover” them legally, a single woman could possibly be marginalized by the community.

The research presented in this thesis brings to light several problems in the study of single women landowners. First of all, it is not easy to ascertain if a single woman owned land or not in a given community. It takes an in-depth study of a variety of genealogical sources to determine small amounts of evidence about the women themselves. The United States census records data such as marital status, occupation, and homeownership, but these facts can only tell the historian so much. As we have seen, occupation listed in the census could be a relative term. Only a small amount of the women landowners in the *Farmers' Review Directory* listed themselves as farmers in the census record. Anne Effland, Denise Rogers, and Valerie Grim noted in their study of women landowners that a major problem in identifying women landowners is the equating of owning land to operating farms.¹²⁹ Just because a woman owned the land did not mean she operated the farm herself. This is why the *Farmers' Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties* provided such a keystone source. Without the thorough listing of women and the land that they owned, this project would have required line by line search of the census records, followed by line by line search of land grant and probate records.

¹²⁹ Effland, Rogers, and Grim, “Women as Agricultural Landowners,” 236.

A second problem encountered in the study of single women who never married is the absence of heirs. Any land owned by the single women would not have a logical line of succession. As in the case of Martha Balch, the family land and home was sold off to a third party when Martha presumably became too infirm to take care of it. Single women could bequeath land to other family members, but the land then becomes tangled in a genealogical web. Other family property would also be subject to sale or distribution to nieces, nephews, or more distant relatives. Depending on the strength of single women's relationship to other relatives, her story could be lost completely. If she died an "old maid" without any family, there would be no one to pass on family traditions, stories, or even the family surname.

The microstudy of women landowners in Coles and Douglas counties, as well as the case study of the Balch sisters both tell us much about women without husbands during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These women owned land, were active in church activities, and were held in high esteem by their local communities. But much more work needs to be done on the history of single women landowners in the United States. While this study provides but a snapshot of the lives of single women landowners, many more such women exist, most likely with more rewarding evidence available.

First, historians need to seek out the average unmarried woman from the historical record. Studies such as Lee Chambers-Schiller's on notable single women are rewarding, but often these women have very different socioeconomic backgrounds than single farm women might have, making it harder to draw broad comparisons across their lives. Chambers-Schiller's women all came from a certain region with a certain point of view

and motivation to be single. Her study is excellent, but her conclusions cannot necessarily be applied to Midwestern farming women who happened to never marry. A close study of the Midwest would be to the benefit of the discipline.

Second, more sources need to be sought out. The *Farmers' Review Directory* proved to be an invaluable source in tracking down women landowners. Through my research I found that *The Prairie Farmer*, another farm periodical published in Chicago, also researched and published directories of farmers and breeders for counties in Illinois. With a wealth of farm journals, such as *Wallace's Farmer*, *Capper's Farmer*, and *The Farmer* published through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century, other *Directory*-type sources could be available for other states and other areas.

Narrative sources could be invaluable to the study as well. Local libraries and archives often procure family papers, containing letters, memoirs, and diaries written by prominent people of their community, as well as previously completed genealogical material. Finding such narrative sources would provide a window into the life of the woman, expressing her feelings and her day to day struggles and triumphs as a single woman. By revealing more than just simple biographical and legal information, narrative sources would add depth to the historian's study.

In the absence of narrative sources, grueling social history methods are needed. While social history is no longer in vogue in the world of historical study, the information gained from methodical examination of local and archival records remains very rewarding. As mentioned earlier, this kind of study often requires line by line reading of census data and legal records such as land grants, probate, and tax lists. According to Stowell, "in 1979, Joan Hoff Wilson called attention to the 'hidden riches' in county

court records for the study of women's societal and legal status. However, such hidden riches abounded in legal records only 'for those historians who want to take the time to do such painstaking research and to develop legal and quantitative skills for analyzing the riches.'"¹³⁰ Without a strong desire to do this painstaking work, the historian cannot tap into the information in the legal record. Oral histories can also be very helpful. The statements of relatives or people who knew the single women may be able to provide more insight into their lives, and also provide interesting anecdotes about the women, as well as information about how they lived and how they were perceived by members of the community.¹³¹

Finally, more work needs to be done on the motivations for rural women to remain single. *Bonds of Community* provides several probable reasons for rural women to remain unmarried, but none of these reasons fully explain why all four Balch sisters would stay together unmarried for their entire lives. Without narrative evidence, we cannot know the motivations behind the Balch sister's singleness, but further study of other women could provide insight into other reasons that a woman would remain single, whether it be by choice or from extenuating circumstances.

This study has provided a profile of how widowed or never married heads of household lived, and has also spurred further research into how women without husbands functioned in rural communities during this specific time period in American history. Women who never married have a distinctive history in this country, and their stories deserve to be told within the historical narrative. Hopefully the information provided

¹³⁰ Daniel W. Stowell, "Introduction," in *In Tender Consideration: Women, Families, and the Law in Abraham Lincoln's Illinois*, Daniel W. Stowell, ed. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 3.

¹³¹ For more information about oral history in rural communities, see Nancy Grey Osterud and Luann Jones, "Breaking New Ground: Oral History and Agricultural History," *Oral History Review* 17. (1989): 1-23.

gives depth to the study of rural women and explains how these women fit into John Faragher's "complex web of custom, law, and political economy."¹³²

¹³² Faragher, *Sugar Creek*, xiii-xiv.

APPENDIX A

Coles County: Data on Women Heads of Household*

Last Name	First Name	Township	Year Came to Land	Status	Acreage	Occupation**
Alexander	Laura	Mattoon	1874	Owner	4	
Alexander	Mary	Charleston	1859	Owner	118	
Ames	Mrs. Anna	Mattoon	1887	Owner	70	
Ashby	Mrs. Louise	Charleston	1860	Owner	26	
Bareither	Mrs. Marie	Mattoon	1907	Tenant	120	Farmer
Bates	Mrs. Lucy	Charleston	1857	Tenant	80	Farmer
Beasley	Mrs. G.W.	Hindsboro	1860	Owner	60	
Beck	Mrs. Sarah	Casey	1875	Owner	80	
Brady	Nora	Lerna	1879	Tenant	100	Farmer
Brummet	Marjory	Humboldt	1890	Tenant	200	
Burke	Mrs. Mary	Charleston	1872	Owner	65	
Carlyle	Nannie	Mattoon	1870	Tenant	35	
Cassaday	Alma	Charleston	1875	Owner	98	
Clark	Mrs. Sarah	Charleston	1839	Owner	7	Farmer
Craig	Mrs. M.J.	Bushton	1844	Owner	113	
Crowder	Nancy	Mattoon	1858	Owner	2	
Empson	Mrs. Sam	Arcola	1892	Tenant		
Graham	Mrs. Ida	Allenville	1860	Owner	145	
Hall	Mrs. Nancy	Toledo	1869	Owner	20	Farmer
Hamilton	Mrs. Lola	Mattoon	1865	Owner	38	Farmer
Handley	Mrs. Maude	Mattoon	1882	Owner	40	Farmer
Hart	Mrs. Mary E.	Mattoon	1867	Owner	17	
Hart	Mrs. Rhoda	Mattoon	1860	Owner	2	Grocer
Harstine	Mrs. Martha	Humboldt	1845	Tenant	40	
Hill	Elizabeth	Hindsboro	1900	Tenant	240	
Hill	Mrs. Mary	Charleston	1854	Owner	70	
Hill	Mrs. Maude	Lerna	1879	Owner	50	
Holtgrewe	Mrs. O.R.	Mattoon	1866	Owner	145	
Hodd	Anna	Arcola	1898	Tenant	160	
Horsley	Mrs. Catherine	Charleston	1898	Owner	60	
Ingram	Mrs. Lizzie	Charleston	1867	Owner	80	
Jackson	Mrs. Oscar	Humboldt	1874	Owner	145	
Jones	Emma	Rardin	1837	Owner	41	
Kissling	Mrs. H.L.	Mattoon	1900	Owner	58	
Lannan	Gladys	Charleston	1892	Owner	130	
Lawyer	Mrs. Nettie	Charleston	1867	Owner	194	
Leitch	Mrs. Nannie	Mattoon	1860	Owner	40	
Long	Ellen	Rardin	1862	Owner	200	Farmer
McGinnis	Julia A.	Lerna	1872	Owner	54	Land Lady
McTaggart	Mrs.	Arcola	1874	Owner	80	

	Margaret					
Michael	Sarah	Rardin	1850	Owner	60	
Miller	Mrs. C.H.	Charleston		Tenant	42	
Moore	Mrs. Rebecca	Mattoon	1900	Owner	2	
Moulton	Sarah C.	Mattoon	1853	Owner	20	Farmer
Newby	Mrs. Rhoda	Mattoon	1863	Owner	225	
Newell	Mrs. Thomas	Charleston	1868	Owner	43	
Patton	Mrs. Margaret	Charleston	1894	Owner	80	
Pedigo	Ellen	Oakland	1883	Tenant	3	
Pforr	Mrs. Elizabeth	Charleston	1842	Owner	160	Farmer
Prather	Susan	Mattoon	1902	Owner	0.5	
Price	J.A.	Humboldt	1855	Owner	80	
Radcliff	Mrs. Julia	Tuscola	1871	Owner	40	
Reynolds	Susan	Hindsboro	1859	Owner	40	
Sargent	Mrs. Marie	Charleston	1848	Owner	576	
Sexson	Mrs. W.A.	Mattoon		Owner	20	
Tarrell	Mary	Humboldt	1875	Tenant	140	
Tatkenhost	Mrs. Kate	Mattoon	1860	Owner	110	
Taylor	Rese	Humboldt	1875	Owner	160	Farmer
Wadbridge	Mrs. Mamie	Mattoon	1896	Owner	70	
Weber	Mrs. Ida	Westfield	1872	Owner	110	
Allison	Kate	Mattoon	1898			
Balch	Martha	Lerna	1847	Owner	80	
Butler	Mary	Gays	1880	Owner	178	
Conley	Lucinda	Charleston	1865	Tenant	180	
Daughtery	Myrt	Rardin	1883	Tenant	9	
England	Emma	Atwood	1882	Owner	10	
Hart	Esther	Mattoon	1859	Owner	23	
Rardin	Lucy	Rardin	1873	Owner	232.5	Farmer
Stallman	Anna	Humboldt	1904	Owner	378	
Stites	Lucinda	Charleston	1867	Owner	40	Capitalist
Sullivan	Mary	Humboldt	1889	Owner	100	
Suopp	Winnie	Mattoon		Owner	70	
Swinford	Nally P.	Oakland	1880	Tenant	100	

Douglas County: Data on Women Heads of Household*

Last Name	First Name	Township	Year Came to Land	Status	Acreage	Occupation**
Barger	Mrs. A.L.	Tuscola	1902	Tenant	180	
Bender	Mrs. Nancy E.	Newman	1868	Owner	5	Farmer
Brambleet	Mattie C.	Tuscola	1871	Owner	79	
Brewer	Mrs. Mary	Camargo	1856	Owner	70	
Brian	Mrs. Lora	Tuscola	1857	Owner	160	

Campbell	Lillie	Arcola	1865	Owner	40	Washer
Carmack	Pearl	Camargo	1880	Owner	80	
Carter	Mary	Arcola	1907	Owner	80	
Chandler	Martha	Bourbon	1861	Owner	78	
Clinger	Mrs. J.E.	Tuscola	1916	Tenant	400	
Comwell	Elizabeth	Newman	1872	Owner	160	
Conlin	Anna Finch	Tuscola	1901	Owner	199	
Cox	Esther	Arcola	1876	Owner	160	
Craig	Mrs. George	Tuscola	1901	Owner	400	
Di Miner	Mrs. George	Arcola	1894			
Elles	Mary	Arthur	1834	Owner	31.5	
Frahm	Cynthia	Tuscola	1839	Tenant	960	
Gwinn	Mrs. Jennie	Fairland	1900	Owner	7	Farmer
Hawkins	Mrs. Ann	Newman	1880	Owner	20	
Helmuth	Mrs. John C.	Arthur	1872	Owner	100	Farmer
Hite	Mrs. Lena	Fairland	1911	Tenant	1	
Johnson	Mrs. Florence	Hindsboro	1895	Owner	80	
Jones	Mrs. Olive	Arcola	1872	Owner	100	
Jurgens	Christina	Tuscola		Owner	560	
Kingery	Mary	Tuscola	1846	Owner	73	Farmer
Lawyer	Clementina	Arcola	1877	Owner	167	
McIllvaine	Sally	Tuscola	1865	Owner	160	
McTaggart	Mrs. Rose	Arcola	1892	Owner	80	
McWilliams	Mrs. Samuel	Bourbon	1843	Owner	180	
Mitchell	Mrs. Martha	Camargo	1917	Tenant	240	Seamstress
Nussear	Mrs. Edith	Tuscola	1916	Owner	13	Farmer
Otto	Lydia	Arcola	1880	Owner	160	Farmer
Overturf	Rose	Camargo	1877	Owner	80	
Rahn	Mrs. Maggie	Atwood	1871	Owner	120	
Riley	Sarah C.	Tuscola	1863	Owner	40	Farmer
Scott	Mrs. Hiram	Arcola	1854	Owner	150	
Sievers	Mrs. Claus	Tuscola	1871	Tenant	7.5	
Thayer	Mary M.	Allerton	1850	Owner	240	
Thoeming	Mrs. C.	Tuscola	1880	Owner	120	
Timm	Mrs. Bertha	Arcola	1886	Owner	60	
Vaughan	Mrs. L.E.	Tuscola	1863	Owner	40	
Young	Mrs. M.J.	Newman	1854	Owner	160	
Barracks	Enid	Tuscola	1903	Owner	83	
Chandler	Miss Lydia	Bourbon	1854	Owner	137	
Crawley	Belle	Tuscola	1890	Tenant	95	
Lyons	Kathryn	Arcola	1909	Tenant	200	

*Data taken from *The Farmers' Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties, Illinois, 1918.*

**Occupation data from United States Federal Census, Coles and Douglas Counties.

APPENDIX B

Comparison of Data from Coles and Douglas Counties*

	Coles County	Douglas County
Total Farmers in <i>Directory</i>	2337	1201
Total Women in <i>Directory</i>	73	46
Women Owners	57	37
Women Tenants	15	8
Average Number of Acres Owned	90.53	120.88
Average Number of Tenant Acres	96.6	260.44
Number of Women with Automobiles	17	14
Number of Women with Tractors	0	0
Highest Acreage Owned by Women	576	560
Lowest Acreage Owned by Women	0.5	5
Highest Tenant Acreage for Women	240	960
Lowest Tenant Acreage for Women	0	1
Percentage of Total Women Heads of Household	3.12%	3.83%
Percentage of Women Owners	2.44%	3.08%
Percentage of Women Tenants	0.64%	0.67%

*Data taken from *The Farmers' Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties, Illinois*, 1918.

WORKS CITED

Primary Sources

Journals/Newspapers:

Arcola Record-Herald

Charleston Daily Courier

Decatur Evening Herald

Lerna Weekly Eagle

The Farmers' Review

The Newman Independent

Archival and Manuscript Collections:

Balch Family File, Charleston Carnegie Library, Charleston, Illinois.

Coles County, Illinois, Clerk of the County Court. Coles County Courthouse, Charleston, Illinois. Land grant records.

Coles County, Illinois, Clerk of the Circuit Court. Coles County Courthouse, Charleston, Illinois. Probate records

Douglas County, Illinois, Clerk of the Circuit Court. Douglas County Courthouse, Tuscola, Illinois. Probate records.

Published Primary Sources:

Balch, Galusha Burchard. *Genealogy of the Balch Families in America*. Salem, MA: Eben Putnam, 1897.

Department of Commerce and Labor, *Thirteenth Census of the United States taken in 1910*, vol. 2 and vol. 6. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913.

The Farmers' Review Farm Directory of Coles and Douglas Counties, Illinois. Chicago: The Farmers' Review, 1918.

Perrin, W.H., A.A. Graham, and D.M. Blair. *The History of Coles County Illinois*. Chicago: Wm. Le Baron, Jr., 1879.

Public Laws of the State of Illinois, Passed by the Twenty-Second General Assembly, Convened January 7, 1861. Springfield: Bailhache & Baker, Printers, 1861.

The Revised Statutes of the State of Illinois. Chicago: Chicago Legal News Company, 1880.

United States Federal Manuscript Census. 1830-1920.

Secondary Sources

Books:

Adams, Jane. *The Transformation of Rural Life: Southern Illinois, 1890-1990.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Bogue, Allan G. *From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963.

Chambers-Schiller, Lee Virginia. *Liberty, A Better Husband: Single Women in America: The Generations of 1780-1840.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.

Curry, Lynne. *Modern Mothers in the Heartland: Gender, Health, and Progress in Illinois, 1900-1930.* Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999.

Danbom, David B. *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.

Faragher, John Mack. *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986.

Fink, Deborah. *Agrarian Women: Wives and Mothers in Rural Nebraska, 1880-1940.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.

Fry, John J. *The Farm Press, Reform, and Rural Change, 1895-1920.* New York: Routledge, 2005.

Gerber, Philip L. *Bachelor Bess: The Homesteading Letters of Elizabeth Corey, 1909-1919.* Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1990.

Jellison, Katherine. *Entitled to Power: Farm Women and Technology, 1913-1963.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

Jensen, Joan. *Promise to the Land: Essays on Rural Women.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1991.

- Lovett, Laura. *Conceiving the Future: Pronatalism, Reproduction, and the Family in the United States, 1890-1938*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007.
- Neth, Mary. *Preserving the Family Farm: Women, Community, and the Foundations of Agribusiness in the Midwest, 1900-1940*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Osterud, Nancy Grey. *Bonds of Community: The Lives of Farm Women in Nineteenth-Century New York*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Rugh, Susan Sessions. *Our Common Country: Family Farming, Culture, and Community in the Nineteenth-Century Midwest*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001.
- Salamon, Sonya. *Prairie Patrimony: Family, Farming, and Community in the Midwest*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992.
- Salmon, Marylynn. *Women and the Law of Property in Early America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986.
- Shammas, Carole, Marylynn Salmon, and Michel Dahlin. *Inheritance in America From Colonial Times to the Present*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1987.
- Stowell, Daniel W., ed. *In Tender Consideration: Women, Families, and the Law in Abraham Lincoln's Illinois*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002.
- Vicinus, Martha. *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

Articles:

- Boydston, Jeanne. "To Earn Her Daily Bread: Housework and Antebellum Working-Class Subsistence," in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 80-90.
- Braukman, Stacy Lorraine and Michael A. Ross. "Married Women's Property and Male Coercion: United States' Courts and the Privy Examination, 1864-1887." *Journal of Women's History* 12 (2000): 57-80.
- Carr, Lois Green and Lorena S. Walsh. "The Planter's Wife: The Experience of White Women in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 34 (1977): 542-571.
- Effland, Anne B.W., Denise M. Rogers, Valerie Grim. "Women as Agricultural Landowners: What Do We Know about Them?" *Agricultural History* 67 (1993): 235-261.

- Fawver, Kathleen. "Gender and the Structure of Planter Households in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake." *Early American Studies* (2006): 442-470.
- Geisler, Charles C., William F. Waters, and Katrina L. Eadie. "The Changing Structure of Female Agricultural Land Ownership, 1946 and 1978." *Rural Sociology* 50 (1985): 74-87.
- Gisolfi, Monica Richmond. "From Crop Lien to Contract Farming: The Roots of Agribusiness in the American South, 1929-1939." *Agricultural History* 80 (2006): 167-189.
- Kelleher, Patricia. "Maternal Strategies: Irish Women's Headship of Families in Gilded Age Chicago." *Journal of Women's History* 13 (2001): 80-106.
- Kerber, Linda K. "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History." *Journal of American History* 75 (1988): 9-39.
- Osterud, Nancy Grey and Luann Jones. "Breaking New Ground: Oral History and Agricultural History." *Oral History Review* 17 (1989): 1-23.
- Stuntz, Jean. "Spanish Laws for Texas Women: The Development of Marital Property Law to 1850." *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 104 (2001): 542-559.