Late in life, in order to aid her deteriorating health, Frances Willard learned to ride a bicycle. She approached this with her usual determination and vigor. As she had done all her life she kept a journal and published these experiences in *A Wheel within a Wheel: How I Learned to Ride the Bicycle*. The following is an excerpt from her daily journal regarding the joys of two-wheel travel.

Working away on my “bike.” It’s a regular study in mental philosophy, Christian Science mind culture and balance all in one. When I think I’m all right, or better still think nothing about it, I go nicely; when I waver in my mind wobble goes the machine. When I put before me a picture of my Mother, that great balanced character, & figure her holding a pair of balances in hand like a bird; when I think the words” Reel to & fro & stagger like a drunken man” – over I go! There’s more taught by the bike than meets the eye & ear.

- How did Willard apply her approach to life to bicycle riding?
Rest Cottage with Willard, her Mother and Anna Gordon (Undated Photo, Willard Archives)
Frances Willard’s Bicycle, Frances Willard Historical Association, Evanston, IL
Frances Willard died in New York City in 1898, bringing to a close her lifelong effort to reform American society. Through her work with the WCTU, Willard sought to expand the role of women in addressing the issues which affected urban America in the nineteenth century. In joining forces with other progressive movements of the era, Willard looked to form a united front for change and equality. Her death prompted a national remembrance of her life and achievements as her remains were transported from New York to Chicago.
“Death of America’s Foremost Woman,” Evanston Press February 19, 1998
(“Willard Dead” Scrapbook, 1898, Willard Archives)
Miss Frances E. Willard, the uncrowned queen of American women, the woman whose life was given up to making the world better, died at 1:30 o'clock yesterday morning at the Empire hotel, New York City. For three weeks those nearest to the great temperance leader had watched anxiously in fear of a sudden decline, but none realized that the end was so near.

In an effort to get away from the press of work and worry attendant upon her position, Miss Willard had taken apartments at the Empire, doing little more than to keep up with the important part of her correspondence. When she was taken ill, it seemed little more than an attack of the grip, and neither she nor her friends who were with her felt that it was serious enough to cause apprehension. However, in order that no precautions should be slighted, Miss Willard gave up the occasional drives and the mild exercise which had enlivened the early part of her stay. Late last week she began to fall, and her watchful secretary, Miss Anna B. Gordon, did all in her power to ease the pressure on the over-worked mind, and to facilitate recovery. Letters written at this time by Miss Gordon showed great concern, and caused much anxiety in Evanston.

Up to Wednesday Miss Willard stubbornly held her own, but on Wednesday night a change set in. It was evident that her physique had been sadly impaired by the worries of the past year, and gastric complications were added to the original trouble. Dr. Mills, who had attended her from the start, called in Dr. Draper, and the two physicians did all in their power to check the disease, and, failing in that, to relieve the sufferer: Mrs. L. M. N. Stevens, of Maine, National Vice-president of the W. C. T. U., and a number of friends and office assistants, worked with tireless energy, and prayed for a hopeful change. Miss Willard would seem occasionally to rally, but would eventually slip back farther than before. Thursday night it became evident that the end was near, and the few loving friends who were within reach waited with struggling hope until 1:30 Friday morning, when quietly passed away.

Much as Miss Willard was beloved in Evanston, the scene of her early efforts and the home that was nearest to her heart in all the travel and labor of her busy life, the country, and even the world, will feel equally the loss. For she was not only a leader in her home and among her friends, but the guiding spirit in the largest organization of home-loving women the world has ever seen. Not only a worker for the right whose influence extended wherever women hope and love and work—no, she was more: she was an inspiration to the world. There have been reformers, thousands of them. There have been stormy Quakers, valiant Joan, martyred Savaranlas, glorious Lincoln, but there never was a reformer who could hold up the inspiration of personal example to a more mighty and faithful multitude. She who took upon her the task of removing the curse of liquor from the world was more than a reformer, for there was in her a quiet dignity, a modesty and abnegation, and an unswerving faith in the ultimate salvation of humanity. She never lost ground through personal ridicule; for there was no act in her long career which was not at once noble and womanly. She believed in right, and the belief that it was her task to lead the mothers of the world she accepted because it was pressed upon her until her duty was plain. From the start she acted with greatness where others would employ force, she used reason and logic where others would waste themselves in frantic appeals, and through it all she conveyed a personal dignity and a purity of character that drew out with compelling force the wonder and admiration of the world.

As an organizer, an executive officer with international influence, she stood with a light that would not be mistaken for another's. She gathered the scattered fragments of a struggling temperance army and welded them into a compact and orderly system. She drew to her the love and confidence of hundreds of thousands of workers by her sincerity, simple honesty, and wonderful capacity for work, and by her graces. She united factions with moral strength where all others had failed. She wrote books whose tender
80

charm clung to the memory, delivered lectures whose truth struck home to the heart. She traveled extensively, almost unceasingly, but where others passed for pleasure she pressed on for right; and if wrong has not yet entirely succumbed, it has received so many setbacks that Miss Willard's followers will find their task much easier for her life and for her work. Funeral services will be held in New York tomorrow, and in Kranston Thursday of next week.

STORY OF MISS WILLARD'S LIFE

Came to Kranston in 1858 at Nineteen Years of Age.

Frances Elizabeth Willard was born on Sept. 28, 1838, at Cheshire, near Rochester, N. Y., to Jonathan Fryatt and Mary Thompson Hill Willard. When she was two years of age the family removed to Oberlin, Ohio, where they lived until 1856, going then to "Forest Home," in the vicinity of Janesville, Wis. The early life of the Willard children was remarkably happy and congenial. In their Wisconsin home they were compelled to draw upon one another for amusement and for companionship, as they had no near neighbors. Their childhood was passed in an idyllic atmosphere, full of health-giving outdoor life and of the kind of work that goes to build up supple muscles and energetic minds. The favorite amusement was the planning of an imaginary city on the farm, concerning which Miss Willard says in her "Glimpses of Fifty Years."

"'Rome was not built in a day,' neither was Fort City. We studied carefully the pages of father's favorite Janesville Gazette and copied out names for the streets. Mother said of course the road in front of the house must be Broadway, because that was the most famous street in America.

"* * * The by-road at right angles that led to the river we called Market street, because it ran along past the barn, the cowyard, granary, etc."

In 1854, after some travel and a great deal of study, the family moved for the last time, settling at Kranston. From that time to the present Frances E. Willard's life has been so insolubly linked with Kranston's growth and welfare that her fame is our glory.

She attended the Northwestern Female college here, at the time Prof. W. P. Jones was president. The college building at that time was situated at the corner of Lake street and Chicago avenue. Two years after the conclusion of her college work she accepted the chair of natural science in her alma mater in the meantime she had taken the master of arts degree at Syracuse University. For one year, 1869-70, she was preceptors of the Genesse Wesleyan seminary at Lima, Ohio. She also taught in Kanahakee and in Pittsburgh.

The two years following her work at Lima were spent in foreign travel. She devoted much time and care to the study of the romance languages, the history of the fine arts, and of the work of the great masters of European art. On her return, in 1871, she was made dean of the Woman's college of Northwestern university, and professor of aesthetics in the University. All who knew her during the time she was impressing her noble personality on the University work unite not only to praise her, but also to pay deference to the wonderful strength and simplicity of character that afterward raised her to a place among the greatest women of all time.

In 1874, feeling that she was called to a broader work, she gave up her position and identified herself with the growing Woman's Christian Temperance Union. She rapidly sprang into prominence as a leader and organizer, and after a series of minor triumphs, was elected national president in 1879. She found time while working for the cause of temperance to join Dwight L. Moody in a series of revival meetings in Boston, which met with unprecedented success. The same year she was elected president of the largest organization of women ever brought together, her brother Oliver died, and she succeeded him as editor of the Chicago Evening Post.

Honor came to her from every side, she was recognized as the head in nearly all the movements of the time which concerned the welfare of women. She was a member of the executive committee of the Prohibition party, of which she was one of the founders. During 1883 alone she traveled 30,000 miles in her efforts to spread the cause of temperance and to bring light into the dark spots of our country. She founded the World's Christian Temperance Union, and the White Cross movement; she brought her genius to the solidifying of the many scattered organizations of the Union, and so thoroughly completed its organization that it became one of the most influential bodies in the world.

Miss Willard passed through perhaps the severest crisis of her life during the last six months. With continually failing health, she found the de-
The national officers remained uncommitted until the day of the Temple debate. Miss Willard was known to be friendly to Mrs. Garce, but she, too, had remained silent. Unexpectedly, however, she announced in her annual address that, take what steps the convention might, she would assume the burden of the Temple debt of some $300,000 herself and intended to devote her life to paying it out. Those who knew her tremendous personal ascendency in the ranks of the W. C. T. U. readily understood that this ended the fight. The convention’s repudiation of the Temple would mean nothing if Miss Willard were reelected and no one had the slightest hope of opposing her successfully.

With the end of the convention Miss Willard’s career went into history as a splendid victory. She had never been successful in raising money for temperance work and she did not know where to begin. The responsibility she had assumed weighed heavily on her mind, however, and it is believed was one of the burdens which hastened her end. To the last, however, she was hopeful and strong in spirit and the keenest regret of those who love her most is that she did not live to carry out successfully one of the noblest burdens ever assumed by a single loyal soul.

HER LITERARY WORK.

Miss Willard Aided in Establishing ‘The Press’

So great a part of the labor of Miss Willard’s pen went into lectures, correspondence and magazine articles, little of which could well have been collected into more permanent form. That to call to mind the large number of books left to us is to realize with wonder the immense amount of work accomplished during her long life. From her earliest girlhood the fertile imagination was remarkably active, causing a flow of genial humor, delicate pathos, sound advice and expositions of sound principles that continued unceasingly until her last illness. Her style was fluent and facile, in some cases trenchant and incisive, she could ramble through reminiscences with the ease of the accomplished story teller, elevating slender facts to positions of apparent importance with the play of her kindly humor. Then, too, she had the exact sense of proportion which gives to a vital fact its true significance, never marring the scheme for the real, never wandering from the subject when a definite aim
in view. Between her reminiscences and her more serious work there is a wide difference. In 'Glimpses of Fifty Years' and in 'A Classic Town,' she has woven through the promptings of memory a gentle charm, a pleasant mingling of fact and fancy, which holds the reader until the last page is read.

Her humor is quiet, her wit is pointed without sending her pathos is deep and touching. All of these qualities entered into her other work, but to them was added a firmness of design and a penetrating standard of right which recognized no halfway measures in moral questions. Each of her many lectures was written and delivered with one great aim, stamping out wrong and encouraging right. She never faltered when evil blocked her way; she faced it with the calm face and the steady glance which early in her career was recognized as a precursor of victory. She wrote whenever duty called, for magazines and periodicals of many kinds, and for books. "Glimpses of Fifty Years" was written at the request of the W. C. T. U. and is a volume so full of purpose and of definite, consecrated aim, that to read it is to receive an inspiration for noble deeds and higher things.

"Nineteen Beautiful Years," is according to the author, one of the two books written by her which was not the result of solicitation. And the fact is patent to the reader. The book is such a gem, such a loving tribute to a loved sister, that it stands among Miss Willard's books, not greatest, but on some accounts, best. It is so dainty in sentiment, so sympathetic and spiritual in treatment, that it enables and enriches the reader. Where other books are secreted away in corners of the shelves, this book is beautiful; and its beauty is of the subtle tenderness that strikes straight into the heart. It was published originally in 1884 by Harper and Brothers, and was republished by the Woman's Temperance Publication Association in 1885.

Other books by Miss Willard are "Misses and Helpless," "Women and Temperance," "How to Win," and "Women in the Pulpit." One fact of interest to Evanstonians is not generally known. Probably if it had not been for Miss Willard's kindly encouragement and suggestions the Evanston Press would never have been started. It was in 1889, nine years ago, that Edwin L. Shinnan and

Robert O. Vandercook left Northwestern University and looked about for their life work. During their college courses, they had been associated in various printing concerns connected with the University. They had published the college paper and had done "job work" with success in both. Naturally enough they turned to newspaper work as the vehicles of their success.

At that time Miss Willard was contemplating writing "The Story of Evanston by an Old-Timer." Mr. Vandercook knew of this work, and when he was consulting with her as to the advisability of starting a new weekly newspaper in Evanston, he asked if she would be willing to publish her book as a serial in the new paper. She consented, and lent her best and most kindly efforts to make the venture a success. The "Story" appeared from week to week, and came as a delight to the hundreds of Evanstonians who loved the good old days, as well as to the thousands who knew only the present but who are interested in the past of our beautiful city.

After all, now that Miss Willard's work is done—now that the pen is laid down, the voice is stilled—it is difficult to place an accurate estimate upon her work. She did so much, she accomplished such great deeds, and her efforts spread over such a wide reach of emotions as well as of literal space, that not until time has set her life in far perspective shall we be able fairly to judge her. Time will show the results of her labors; time will reveal the strength of her hold upon the hearts of the world. But though we cannot consider each of her many great acts with an unbiased estimate of their ultimate value to the world, we can feel the sorrow of our loss. She lived for others; indirectly, she died for others; and through her life alone a pure soul, a pure heart, and a noble, self-sacrificing mind. She lived, spoke, wrote, and died that the world might be better; and each of the mourning ones knows that her aim is already a part accomplished. There may have been greater women—women who were more feared, more worshiped, more talked of, but more loved—never. By her works we know her.

The following telegram was received yesterday morning by Mrs. H. S. Kidder:

'Frances entered upon heavenly ministries midnight, translation peaceful. God comfort us. Services here Sunday; Evanston Thursday.'

Anna Gordon.
Sketches from the Chicago Chronicle, February 24, 1898 ("Willard Dead" Scrapbook, 1898, Willard Archives)
Virtual Tour of the Frances Willard House, “Rest Cottage” Evanston, Illinois

Let’s go on a Virtual Tour of the Frances Willard home and see how it has changed over the years.
Willard’s Assistant Anna Gordon (ca. 1888, Willard Archives)
Frances Willard Historical Association, Evanston, IL
Willard and Colleagues (1892, Willard Archives)
Frances Willard Historical Association, Evanston, IL
Willard in her Study (A Classic Town: The Story of Evanston, p. 384)
Frances Willard Historical Association, Evanston, IL
Frances Willard Historical Association, Evanston, IL
Meeting Flyer (1874, Frances Willard Historical Association, Evanston, IL)