



*The Frances Willard House Museum and Archives in Evanston document the life of social reformer Frances Willard (who lived in Evanston most of her life) and the history of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), the largest U.S. women’s organization of the 19th century, with a world-wide presence. In addition to the history of the WCTU’s work for temperance and women’s suffrage, the WCTU Archives is an unexpected resource for **Chicago stories, national and international stories of women’s empowerment, and stories of innovation, change, and conflict.***

Into Uncharted Territory: The WCTU on the Frontiers of History

Members of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) were pioneers on many frontiers. They were women who fought against societal expectations to insure a better life for their families through wide-ranging social change. Though women couldn’t vote when the organization was founded in 1874, the WCTU was at the forefront of teaching women how to “**agitate, educate, and legislate,**” as influential leader Frances Willard put it. WCTU members pushed the boundaries of women’s roles, moving out of their accepted place in the domestic sphere and into the world of protesting, lobbying, petitioning, and public speaking.

The foundational goal of WCTU leaders was the elimination of alcohol that destroyed many families. They soon realized that alcoholism was influenced by factors ranging from poverty to powerlessness. Willard expanded the WCTU mission to “Do Everything” to improve social conditions and prevent addiction. And the WCTU’s “Home Protection” campaign convinced women that they needed to be able to vote in order to shape legislation that affected their families. **WCTU members pushed social boundaries, crossing new frontiers** in the U.S. and the world, and **paving the way for women to vote, lead, and effect positive change.**

“IDEAS AS FRONTIERS: Frontiers are not just geographical. Another definition of frontier is ‘an undeveloped field of study’... Frontiers are crossed by those who challenge conventional thinking.” (quoted from the NHD website)

The Frances Willard House Museum and WCTU Archives is also at the **frontier of historical research.** Historians have realized that the story of our country has often left out many voices, including those of women and people of color. The **extensive primary sources** in our Archives can help **bring hidden voices and untold stories to light** in unexpected ways. The WCTU intersected with women in almost every city and town in the U.S., and in countries around the world. (For example, our “Truth-Telling” online exhibit (see link below) explores the debate between Willard and Ida B. Wells, and a new ongoing project will document the lives and work of the many Black leaders in the WCTU.)

How we can help History Day students “Do Everything,” whatever topic they are thinking about:

- This handout offers possible **research topics and recommended resources—see reverse.**
- For students who are comfortable **visiting in person,** the Archives is **open by appointment** for individuals or teams of 2-3. More information: <https://franceswillardhouse.org/research/collections/>
- We are readily available for **virtual interviews** and **consultation** by phone and email
- We can supply **scans of photos and documents** from our collection.



Frances Willard House Museum and Archives 1730 Chicago Avenue, Evanston IL
archives@franceswillardhouse.org www.franceswillardhouse.org

Some potential topics for “Frontiers in History: People, Places, Ideas” (Contact us for details and more resources!)

- The Frances Willard/Ida B. Wells Debate
- Knowledge is Power: Women and Education
- Domestic Frontiers: The Home Protection Campaign and Women’s Changing Roles
- The Uncharted Territory of Prohibition
- Uncovering Hidden Voices: African American Women in the WCTU
- Towards a New World: The WCTU Fights for Suffrage
- “Do Everything”: On the Frontiers of Social Change [including topics such as prison reform, Labor and Child Welfare Laws, Dress reform, Increasing the Age of Consent for Sex]
- The Power of the Petition: Women’s Tools to Push Boundaries
- Oratory for Women: Skills for Debate and Public Speaking
- Should Women Preach?
- Scientific Temperance Instruction: Injecting Temperance into Education
- Learning Leadership: WCTU as an Incubator for Women’s Activism

Need more ideas?

- Be inspired by our blog posts: <https://franceswillardhouse.org/blog/>
- Check out the list of topics covered by our Subject and Biographical files: <https://tinyurl.com/4p94vyyf>

Digital resources and exhibits on our website (<https://franceswillardhouse.org/digital-exhibits/>)

- “Truth-Telling: Frances Willard and Ida B. Wells”: <https://scalar.usc.edu/works/willard-and-wells/index>
- Digitized journals of Frances Willard: <http://www.franceswillardjournals.org/>
- “Womanly Liberty” or “Home Protection”: Frances Willard and Woman Suffrage: <https://franceswillardhouse.omeka.net/exhibits/show/-womanly-liberty---frances-wil>
- Frances Willard’s Travels Through the South, 1881-1992: <https://uploads.knightlab.com/storymaps/dea57e66fde9faff75ea24a2bcbd1785/frances-willards-travels-through-the-south/index.html>
- “From ‘Teaching the Children’ to ‘Just Say No’: How the WCTU and Scientific Temperance Instruction Influenced Health Education in the Public Schools”: <https://franceswillardhouse.omeka.net/exhibits/show/scientific-temperance-instruct>

Digitized books by Frances Willard (through the Internet Archive or HathiTrust)

- *Glimpses of 50 years* <https://archive.org/details/glimpsesoffifty00will>
 - *Willard’s autobiography, written when she was 50, contains images and copies of documents*
- *How to Win: A Book for Girls* <https://archive.org/details/howtowinabookfo00willgoog>
 - *Willard communicates the importance of being independent starting at a young age*
- *Do Everything* <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001744118>
 - *An overview of all aspects of WCTU work according to Willard’s “Do Everything” plan*
- *Hints and Helps in our Temperance Work* (<https://archive.org/details/9605531.nlm.nih.gov>)
 - 1879 handbook to help women organize and administer a WCTU, hold meetings, publicize the WCTU’s mission, and learn the fine art of lobbying.

Digitized, transcribed speeches (Frances Willard and other women leaders)

- Speaking While Female Data Bank <https://speakingwhilefemale.co/temperance/>

We are always happy to work with History Day students!

Note: The House Museum is open for tours March through October, but the Archives is open all year.

Frances Willard House Museum and Archives 1730 Chicago Avenue, Evanston IL
archives@franceswillardhouse.org www.franceswillardhouse.org