WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT AND INTEREST IN WILLIAM McKinley’S
POLITICAL CAREER AS RECORDED IN QUILTS

A Thesis
Presented to
The Graduate Faculty of the University of Akron

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

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August, 2006
WOMEN’S INVOLVEMENT AND INTEREST IN WILLIAM McKinley’S
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Thesis

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ABSTRACT

When William McKinley ran for President in 1896, women did not yet have the right to vote. In spite of their limitations in politics, women expressed great interest in McKinley’s political life. He was first elected to Congress in 1876, was elected governor of Ohio in 1891, successfully ran for President in 1896, and in 1900 was the first President to be re-elected since Ulysses S. Grant. Women continued to admire McKinley after his assassination in 1901. Evidence of women’s admiration and support for McKinley is located in primary sources, such as newspapers, and is also recorded in a great number of quilts made during and after his lifetime. Many of the quilts contain campaign memorabilia that has been stitched into the quilts with care. Others contain signatures or outlines of President McKinley. The number and variety of quilts suggest that McKinley was widely respected by women and the public as a politician throughout his political career.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to share my appreciation for all of the people and organizations that assisted me throughout my research. I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Virginia Gunn, for introducing me to the possibilities within quilt research.

I owe much gratitude to Janet Metzger and Kimberly Kenney at the William McKinley Presidential Library & Museum in Canton, Ohio; Frank Pisano and Laura Casey at the National McKinley Birthplace Memorial and the McKinley Birthplace Home and Research Center in Niles, Ohio; Beth O’Dell at the Church of the Savior United Methodist in Canton, Ohio; Beth Donaldson and Pearl Yee Wong at the Michigan State University Museum in East Lansing, Michigan; Claudia Dant at the Wabash County Museum in Mt. Carmel, Illinois; Leslie Floyd at the Ohio Historical Society in Columbus, Ohio; Patricia Martinson at The Minneapolis Institute of Arts in Minneapolis, Minnesota; and Megan Spagnolo and Danielle Routhier at the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Ohio.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to both Dr. Sandra Buckland and Dr. Virginia Gunn for guiding and inspiring me in the field of clothing and textiles while at the University of Akron. The encouragement of my thesis committee, consisting of Dr. Gunn, Dr. Buckland, and Dr. Jennings, has been invaluable. In addition, I would like to thank my parents and family for being supportive throughout all my endeavors.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I have been a resident of North-East Ohio all my life and have many fond memories of visits to the Wm. McKinley Presidential Library and Museum in Canton, Ohio, to see the history and science exhibits. Outside of Ohio, however, the significance of the name McKinley has largely been forgotten. My initial intention for this research was to shine some light on Ida Saxton McKinley as a fashionable, strong-willed woman. Ida, the wife of the twenty-fifth President of the United States, is typically cast as an invalid and unworthy of much recognition. I decided to use a research paper required by my Ohio History class to explore the background of the McKinleys. As I began to look through archives and through period magazines and newspapers, my research quickly began to gravitate toward William McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign. The newspapers had a great number of articles discussing women’s involvement in McKinley’s campaign. His front-porch campaign took place primarily at his home in Canton, Ohio. Some of the articles mentioned that the women who visited Canton wore badges and presented gifts to the McKinleys. I was able to locate some ribbons inscribed for specific women’s delegations at the Wm. McKinley Presidential Library and Museum. I next discovered that Virginia Gunn, a Clothing, Textiles, and Interiors professor at the University of Akron, owns a quilt top that contains a McKinley ribbon. It was after these discoveries that I decided to focus on women’s participation in
McKinley’s Presidential campaigns and use quilts containing campaign memorabilia as support for their participation and enthusiasm.

This research is very important because women’s political participation and political quilts in the nineteenth century receive little attention from current researchers. Those who do discuss women in politics have failed to acknowledge the importance of William McKinley and his 1896 Presidential campaign. Also, McKinley seems to be omitted from books and research on political quilts. During this research, I have discovered that quilts are a credible tool in helping uncover the magnitude of women’s political participation in the late-nineteenth century. Sources, such as contemporary newspapers, clearly indicate that women participated in McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign. The quilts act to clarify the meaning of women’s political participation. Just looking at the newspapers, one might not be able to grasp the great impact McKinley had on the women who traveled to his home. The newspapers do not reveal the residual effect McKinley left upon the women who gathered to hear his campaign speeches. By making and preserving quilts, women recorded the lasting impression McKinley had on their lives. It was not just the excitement and enthusiasm that enticed women to participate in McKinley’s 1896 campaign. The quilts discussed in this research show that women valued McKinley as a politician as early as his Congressional years and loyally followed him throughout his political career.

For this research, I used the library in the Wm. McKinley Presidential Library and Museum, microfilm of newspapers and magazines from 1896 and 1900, and quilts from various museums and historical societies. I began by reading some of the biographies of William McKinley from my local libraries. Finding little relevant
information, I began scouring the files on McKinley and his 1896 Presidential campaign at the Wm. McKinley Presidential Library and Museum. I also looked through microfilms of 1896 and 1900 newspapers and magazines. Because the excitement of the Presidential campaigns was confined to approximately four months, newspapers proved to be one of the most useful sources for this research. The local newspapers, the Canton Repository and the Akron Beacon & Republican, were filled with articles of day-to-day coverage of McKinley’s front-porch campaign.

My initial search for campaign textiles and quilts was confined to local museums and historical societies. I expected to find only a few quilts containing such memorabilia. After locating several quilts from the Wm. McKinley Presidential Library and Museum in Canton, Ohio, the McKinley Birthplace Home and Research Center in Niles, Ohio, and the Western Reserve Historical Society in Cleveland, Ohio, I realized that the number of quilts in local collections related to McKinley’s political career were more numerous than initially thought. Using online databases, I decided to geographically expand my search for quilts related to McKinley. The number of quilts I discovered went well beyond my expectation.

During McKinley’s Presidency, women took an exuberant interest in politics and political issues. Not only had women’s interests increased, but campaign paraphernalia technology had improved as well. Women combined the use of textiles from McKinley’s political campaigns and popular quilt styles to recognize McKinley’s value as a politician. Using either crazy, outline, or pieced quilts, many women celebrated each stage of McKinley’s rising political career. Because these memories
have been recorded in quilts, we are able to see the lasting impact McKinley had on women.
CHAPTER II
WOMEN IN POLITICS

Women have played a role in politics throughout history, but in the United States, women did not have a public role in political campaigns until well into the nineteenth century. Women’s involvement grew throughout the century and culminated in a unique set of circumstances which made McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign distinctive. Textiles are frequently used as historic documents that provide nonverbal insight to our understanding of the past. In the nineteenth century, textiles were thought to be part of the woman’s sphere. Women had access to a growing number of political textiles and certain textiles were actually provided to women to elevate their interest in political campaigns. This chapter follows women’s growth and acceptance into politics through the nineteenth century, beginning with their indirect and unseen involvement and then tracing their increasing visibility within the political realm. The number of available political textiles correlated with the growth of women’s participation, interest, and opportunities in politics.

Women’s Early Political Access

Early in this country’s history, women avoided the public nature of political campaigns. Instead of involving themselves in political campaigns and issues, they promoted patriotism by displaying patriotic items and textiles within their homes. The earliest politically-related textiles in this country commemorated the Revolutionary War
and its battles and leaders.\textsuperscript{1} Some of these early textiles took the shape of bandannas, banners, handkerchiefs, kerchiefs, and yard goods. The early Presidential campaigns were not surrounded by the frenzy associated with later campaigns; consequently, there are few textiles from the early political campaigns. Though rare and not used as a campaign device, a few ribbons exist from as early as George Washington’s presidency.\textsuperscript{2}

The Presidential election of 1824 had more exuberance than previous campaigns due to the close race between John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, Henry Clay, and William H. Crawford.\textsuperscript{3} The 1824 Presidential campaign was the first campaign where political items were produced and circulated before the election.\textsuperscript{4} In this close campaign, the parties circulated items that appealed to women even though they could not vote. Politicians must have envisioned women’s potential influence on men through the display of campaign memorabilia in the home. According to Julie Powell, “John Quincy Adams and Andrew Jackson were the first to distribute feminine campaign souvenirs nearly 100 years before women were granted the vote.”\textsuperscript{5} Both Adams and Jackson distributed colored cardboard thread or sewing boxes with a velvet pincushion for the lid. The boxes had slogans on the outside, such as “Adams Forever” and “Jackson and No Corruption.”\textsuperscript{6} The boxes exhibited a photograph of the candidate on the inside of the lid. Lincoln later employed a similar idea when he used Mauchlineware boxes for his campaign that had his picture on the top and the advertisement “Use Clark’s O.N.T. Spool Cotton” on the inside.\textsuperscript{7}

Sewing boxes, however, were not the only campaign items used by Adams and Jackson. Memorabilia remaining from Jackson’s campaigns consists of bandannas, buttons, printed fabric, ribbons, snuffboxes, and thread boxes. The controversial results
of the 1824 campaign, when the House of Representatives chose John Quincy Adams as President over Jackson who had more popular votes, likely promoted the exponential increase of campaign memorabilia for the campaign of 1828. The use of promotional items for Presidential campaigns became traditional as the campaigns began to evolve over the next several elections.⁸

In 1840, William Henry Harrison’s campaign launched the move toward effervescent Presidential campaigns as we know them today.⁹ Harrison’s supporters are credited with the influx of campaign paraphernalia used to encourage his election.¹⁰ During Harrison’s campaign in 1840, referred to as the Log Cabin and Hard Cider campaign, the party portrayed him as a common man. Scores of people, 25,000-50,000, flocked to see him.¹¹ Harrison was the first to widely use campaign ribbons throughout his campaign. The variety of ribbons, commonly made of silk, reached over one-hundred.¹² The next year the first mourning ribbons, trimmed in black, were made for William Henry Harrison who died in office in 1841.¹³

Whigs were the first political party to invite women to campaign meetings during their 1840 Hard Cider and Log Cabin campaign. Women participated in a number of domestic ways, such as providing baked desserts in the shape of log cabins, but also by providing a positive atmosphere with their cheery nature and smiling faces. Whig newspapers were the first to praise women for their beaming presence and encouraged them to put pressure on their husbands, suitors, and sons to vote for the Whig candidates. The descriptions of the ladies used by the newspaper editors in 1844 became a standard fixture for campaigns over the next fifty years. Women were described as always smiling and beaming, with as much enthusiasm as men. The number of similar references at each
campaign event suggests that women had a significant presence in these political campaigns.  

Both ribbons and handkerchiefs were significant for the 1844 campaign as a means of showing enthusiasm for a favored candidate. Women who attended the Whig convention and political parades threw flowers and waved their handkerchiefs. Many bandannas and kerchiefs, made of cotton, linen, or silk, were printed specially for the campaigns and were popular from the 1840s onward. Other items that became popular for Presidential campaigns in the 1840s were flags and banners that featured the names and portraits of the candidates for both parties. They could be purchased through a magazine or catalog.

According to historian Rebecca Edwards, “both Whigs and Democrats invoked womanhood to signify republican virtue” during the 1840s and 1850s. By 1844, some Democrats were copying the Whig strategy by being more open to women. Other Democrats, however, continued to attack members of the opposite party who allowed women to participate in campaign functions and discussions. They also disliked the new public interest in candidates’ wives and accused the women who received public attention of being controlling and manipulative of weak husbands. By the end of the century, however, the domestic sphere had become an important extension of a candidate’s character. Democrats eventually acknowledged the woman’s sphere, but were careful to make the distinction that a Democratic woman was intelligent, but knew her place was in the home. They characterized women in the opposing party as ambitious and domineering.
In 1856, the new Republican Party sought women’s approval by marketing Jessie Fremont, the beautiful wife of their young candidate, John Fremont. Popular songs were written about Jessie and some women even wore ‘Jessie’ badges. According to Edwards, “by 1860 young women were marching in Republican parades, giving stump speeches, and organizing as Republican Young Ladies.” Stump-speaking became a popular activity for women. Clarina Nichols, from Kansas, who was a Republican stump-speaker in 1856, was possibly the first female American partisan stump-speaker. She was paid by an anti-slavery group and spoke approximately fifty times.19

Post-Civil War

The Civil War opened new doors in politics for women and the strong party ties that resulted from the war issues remained. The question was how women should use their efforts. Because of their intense involvement in the war, women’s new roles in the public sphere were more accepted in the Republican-dominated North. Women in the South responded as well, but the Democratic Party dominated in the South and did not offer as much support for women in the public sphere.20 Even between the sexes, men and women had differing opinions concerning women’s place in politics.

Thoughts on Women in Politics

Men involved in politics had two schools of thought following the Civil War. One school of thought among men was that women had no place in politics. Horace Bushnell, a leading Protestant minister in the late 1860s, believed that women were on earth for different purposes than men and if they entered politics, they would “ultimately dissolve the bonds of delicacy and the proprieties of good manners” between men and women.21 Men in the second school of thought believed that it was acceptable for
women to participate in politics, but on a limited and separate basis. Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune* from 1841-1872, believed that women could vote separately by mailing in ballots on issues that had to do with marriage, family, divorce, maintenance of children, education, and women’s property rights.22

Women were also divided on the issue of their involvement in politics. In the nineteenth century, both anti-suffragists and many suffragists agreed that women belonged in the home. What they could not agree upon, however, was how best to channel their power of moral superiority. Women in one school of thought believed that women should utilize their talents to be equally involved with men in politics through voting and office holding.23 In the 1880s, Susan B. Anthony and other suffragists tried to form an independent party for women to compete with the Republicans, but met with little success.24 Women who followed an opposite school of thought believed that holding office would be a departure from society’s expectation of separate spheres and they feared that upsetting the balance of separate spheres could bring “social disorder, political disaster, and, most important, women’s loss of position as society’s moral arbiter and enforcer.”25 Many of these women believed that they could do more using pressure from outside the public sphere than if they obtained suffrage and held public offices.26

A third school of thought among women was similar to that of Horace Greeley. These women believed that women should have a political structure that was separate from that of men and dealt specifically with women’s issues. In 1869, Sorosis, a professional women’s club in New York City, briefly considered creating a parallel government that could handle issues dealing with the woman’s sphere that male legislators often avoided. These women were against women’s suffrage because they did
not want to eliminate the woman’s sphere.⁷ Women who opposed this idea did not like the concept of a separate political sphere, because they would not be able to choose what issues fell within their sphere and a separate political sphere did not change their status as second-class citizens.⁸

Women’s Growing Involvement

In the nineteenth century, women were the sex that upheld moral character. Having moral character meant that women needed to be above corrupt and crude masculine politics. Still, women tried to indirectly affect politics because their moral responsibilities led them to participate in moral reform and use their moral and nurturing ways to improve society. Moral reform, unlike direct political action, met with little opposition from men, who agreed that it was women’s place to uphold morals.⁹

Throughout history, American women have formed voluntary associations and clubs as a means of channeling their interests and energies. Even as early as the 1820s and 30s, middle-class women were often involved in benevolent and moral reform societies. Often in the name of religion, these societies targeted gambling, profanity, prostitution, and sabbath breaking. The New York Female Reform Society, for example, was formed in New York City in 1834. Though they were not directly involved in politics or campaigns, women in New York, especially working-class women, were encouraged to keep aware of the city’s social and economic problems. One settlement-house leader argued that “running New York is just a big housekeeping job, just like your own home, but on a larger scale.”³⁰

More and more women began to turn to women’s clubs in order to raise a public effort against social problems. This effort expanded and received more public attention
after the Civil War. Women had gained experience and discipline in the public sphere in the North through their participation in the Sanitary Commission which raised money and gathered supplies for Northern troops during the Civil War. After the war, however, women still could not vote or hold office. Women began to take a larger interest in political issues and campaigns because they realized that decisions politicians made often affected their way of life. Many of the women’s groups began to fight for causes, such as prison reform, clothing reform, health education for women, and elimination of prostitution.

Women found that they could make a difference when they came together to form clubs. Women used this growing power to nudge politicians and influence legislation. Women began to exert more and more influence with some success over issues that previously were overlooked by legislators. They were limited, however, to issues relating to the women’s sphere which included domestic, child, and health issues. Some groups were able to get bills passed into legislation that would protect married women’s property rights. A group of women from New York who wanted to make adultery and seduction punishable crimes pressured assemblymen and representatives who were against the legislation for over a year to get the bill passed into law.

In the 1890s, women’s clubs joined together to form the General Federation of Women’s Clubs. By 1896, women had become a powerful moral force in politics. The clubs began to exert more influence as they raised money and reached out for city reform including parks, sewage disposal, juvenile court systems, and public health legislation.
Showing Support for a Candidate

Presidential campaigns became more intense after the Civil War. Women took a more active role and began to support particular candidates by making flags or banners, illuminating windows, cheering for the men, or marching in parades representing symbolic figures such as Miss Liberty. Before the Civil War, women made flags, but not for political purposes. During the Civil War, women made flags for their local regiments. After the Civil War, flag presentation became more ceremonial and women often made flags or banners to present to the local party leaders they favored.38

Women frequently came together to show their support for a preferred candidate by creating a flag. In 1868, for example, the ladies of Mobile, Alabama, presented a flag to the local Democratic candidates.39 By the 1870s, women frequently created flags and designed banners for the men who marched in parades and as presentation gifts.40 The women of Greenfield, Indiana, presented a silk flag to the Republican Garfield and Porter Club in 1880. Mrs. Inez Lyon, wife of Captain Stephen Lyon said, “I place this flag in the hands of Republicans because I know that under their care never a single stripe will fade or a star grow dim.”41 Women continued to be attracted to participation in flag ceremonies through the end of the nineteenth century. In 1905, however, Congress passed a law prohibiting the “desecration of the American flag by printing, painting, or advertising for public display or private gain.” This stopped the production of flags made for political campaigns.42

Women were restricted from attending elections because they were held in private masculine spaces such as saloons or barber shops.43 Though women were not directly involved in most of the Presidential campaigns during the nineteenth century,
they had opinions about which candidate would be a better leader for the country. Women frequently chose which candidate they would support based on his moral character. They seemed to concern themselves most with the morality of the candidate and whether the party seemed sympathetic toward the woman’s sphere. History Professor Eric Foner noted that at a political meeting encouraging the Republican candidacy of Ulysses S. Grant in 1868, many black women in attendance wore supportive campaign buttons. Women continued to back President Grant, the Republican candidate in 1872, because he seemed open to women’s rights, and his running mate, Henry Wilson, was a known supporter of women’s suffrage.  

The Republican Party acknowledged women’s support and enthusiasm. After Lucy Stone’s husband, Henry Blackwell, addressed the party at the 1872 convention, the Republicans adopted a resolution:

> The Republican party is mindful of its obligations to the loyal women of America for their noble devotion to the cause of freedom; their admission to wider fields of usefulness is viewed with satisfaction and the honest demand of any class of citizens for additional rights, should be treated with respectful consideration.  

There were limits, however, to Republican support. Republicans tolerated women’s increasing interest in politics, but never endorsed their direct involvement or desire for power and leadership within party politics. Women supported the Republican Party throughout the nineteenth century because the party seemed more sympathetic to their causes; but as time went by, some women began to feel as though they were being used for political gain. Since women’s rights never matured beyond promises and insinuations, many women decided to withdraw their support from the Republican Party.
The Role of the Candidate’s Family

Women often looked to the wife of a candidate to judge his morality. Lucy Hayes, Rutherford B. Hayes’ wife, had a college education and was praised for her moral standing. Some men and women believed that if Hayes was elected in 1876, the purity and morality of his wife would extend throughout the country and make it a better place. When Grover Cleveland was a Presidential candidate in 1884, Republicans attacked his moral character, accusing him of having inappropriate relations with women and even fathering an illegitimate child. In order to quiet the outrage at his suspected immoral past, Grover Cleveland became romantically interested in his ward, Frances Folsom, whom he married in the White House in 1886. Frances was young, beautiful, and beloved by the public. After their marriage, Cleveland was no longer questioned as to his respectability. In 1891, Cleveland and his wife had a daughter, Ruth. By the 1892 election, the talk of White House babies, marriage, and family sometimes seemed to overshadow the Presidential candidates themselves. Many candidates, especially Cleveland, capitalized on the growing attention to their wives and families. Politicians added a feminine touch to their campaign items by incorporating their wives in their campaign memorabilia. In Cleveland’s 1892 Presidential campaign, his wife appeared on many of the campaign items including badges, banners, handkerchiefs, and milk pitchers. She also appeared occupied in domestic activities on advertising trade cards.

Women Becoming More Active

A great majority of women who participated in politics did so from within the domestic sphere. Some women believed it was their political duty as a mother to instill virtue and good character in their sons so they would become good upstanding citizens
and assure the future of this country. Women needed to pay increasing attention to public affairs in order to properly educate their sons as citizens. A number of women did take an active role in tracking and understanding political issues. The National Women’s Republican Association (NWRA), founded in 1888 by Judith Ellen Foster, encouraged women to start local clubs which could meet and discuss party literature. The pamphlet they created, called “The Home and the Flag,” addressed campaign issues from a Republican perspective. Foster, who was also President of the NWRA, offered prizes for well-written political essays by women. Foster said, “I don’t want you to stand near the polls and peddle votes, but I want you to think, read, and influence the husband, brother, or sweetheart. . . . If there isn’t a sweetheart, get one until after the election.”

Women’s clubs for candidates also began to appear in the 1880s, such as the Ladies’ Garfield and Arthur Club of Cincinnati, Ohio. Working-class women began to appear in parades and cheer at rallies to support their candidates.

Handkerchiefs and ribbons increased in popularity in the 1880s. Both Grover Cleveland and Benjamin Harrison used textile objects such as bandanas as campaign tokens in the 1888 election. These bandannas or handkerchiefs were easily accessible to women. Democratic men often gave a recognizable red silk campaign handkerchief to their wives or sweethearts in support of Cleveland. While some of these bandannas were incorporated into quilts, one woman used two repeats of Harrison bandanna fabric to create an apron in 1889. Campaign ribbons were also popular keepsakes. They could be lithograph-printed with candidates’ names, slogans, and pictures. Later in the nineteenth century, some ribbons were woven or embroidered with writing or portraits on silk.
Because they were inexpensive to manufacture, ribbons were easy to distribute and sufficed as simple souvenirs by which to remember a campaign or special event. Ribbons were often reused as bookmarks and so were frequently well-preserved.60

The Republicans understood that invoking the support of women would raise universal support. Newspapers published a statement by Ellen Foster in 1888, made when fighting for the Republicans, in which she said:

The Republican Party has always been the champion of protection--protection of the citizen, protection of the negro, protection of the ballot-box, protection to the wage earner, protection to the wage payer, and now, right in the line with its past professions and performances, it declares protection to the home.61

Republicans encouraged tariffs in the 1880s saying that they protected a man’s wages and allowed the wife to stay in the home and the children in school. Republicans soon noticed that women understood prices and were knowledgeable and involved in campaigns concerning protective tariffs. An article pushing Republican sentiment, titled “Singer Women in Danger,” claimed that if there was free trade, the women at the Singer sewing machine factory would have their jobs removed to Scotland, leaving the women out of work and in moral danger, a concern which was likely successful in grabbing the attention of women. Young ladies who supported Benjamin Harrison displayed banners in parades across the Mid-West asking for men to vote for protection.62

Women Campaigning for Husbands and Fathers

According to historian Robert Dinkin, “some women on the national scene went to considerable lengths in trying to get their menfolk chosen president and themselves first lady of the land.” These women believed that their political duty was to help elevate
their husbands politically. There were several cases of women getting involved in a husband or father’s political career. Though not allowed on the convention floor, Salmon P. Chase’s daughter, Kate Chase Sprague, fought valiantly to get her father nominated for President in 1868 by meeting with delegates and attending private caucuses. Most women were not as forward as Chase’s daughter, but certainly were visible during their father or husband’s political campaigns.

Mary Logan, wife of John Logan, a lawyer from Illinois, was highly active in her husband’s political career and accompanied him on his campaigns. When her husband became president of the Grand Army Republic (GAR) following the Civil War, she formed a women’s auxiliary group. According to Dinkin, she was possibly one of the “most politically astute women of her age.” She was well versed on current affairs and politics and was known for her charm and ability to handle any situation. Once, on her husband’s campaign tour for Vice President in 1884, when he was too hoarse to speak, she spoke to the public and fielded questions for him.

Probably the most famous politically involved woman was a white Southerner, Rebecca Felton, whose husband, Dr. William Felton, was first elected to Congress in 1874. Besides serving as her husband’s chief administrative assistant in Washington D. C., she is said to have “virtually [run] her husband’s congressional campaigns.” Rebecca remained active in politics even after the death of her husband. She is most famous for making history in 1922, while in her eighties, as the first woman to serve in the U. S. Senate.

Rebecca Felton was known as a populist speaker in the South. By 1880, some women were being employed as regular campaign speakers. One such woman, Lizzie
O’Brien Pollok of Brooklyn, spoke for Democratic presidential nominee Winfield S. Hancock. Republicans used M. Adele Hazlett of Hillsdale, Michigan, who was known to be an eloquent speaker. In the West, California produced a couple of well-known speakers, Nellie Holbrook Blinn and Clara Shortridge Foltz. Blinn was an actress, but Foltz was an active politician and was later nominated trustee of the State Normal School. By the end of the century, Foltz tried to run for California’s governor, but lost.67

Knocking on the Government’s Door

American women had always shown some interest in politics, but women were rarely members of the government at any level before the Civil War. Afterward, women began to ease their way into the public realm of the government. Though controversial, by 1872, women had obtained jobs in the Patent Office, Census Bureau, and Department of Interior, and as many as four hundred women worked in the Department of Treasury. Twenty-seven percent of the 27,600 government jobs belonged to women in 1900. Most of these jobs were clerical, however, and not elected.68

Mary L. Hall, a light-skinned former slave from Georgia, began working for the Republicans in Savannah in 1869 to encourage blacks to vote and increase their political education. In 1870, Iowa’s lower house hired Mary Spencer of Clinton County as its first female clerk.69 In 1876, Samuel Tilden, the Democratic governor of New York, chose Josephine Shaw Lowell as a replacement on the State Board of Charities. She had previous experience working for prison and asylum reform, but the new position gave her much more prestige. This action received great attention not only because Lowell was the first woman to hold such a position, but also because it meant a huge blow to the Republicans. Hiring Lowell was significant because she was previously a model
Republican and some of the public knew of her strong ties to the party’s ideals, so Republicans were afraid that a number of women might follow Lowell’s lead and turn Democrat. Despite the attention and party concerns, Lowell served effectively on the board until 1889.

A few women were assertive enough to push the equal rights issue by running for office. Elizabeth Cady Stanton became the first woman to run for Congress in 1866, and Victoria Woodhull, an eccentric young woman, ran for President under the briefly formed Equal Rights Party in 1872. In 1884 Belva Lockwood ran for President. While none of the women were taken seriously, they foreshadowed the increased interest women were going to have in politics in the future. In spite of some women’s push for equality following the Civil War, however, many women still thought that it was too radical for women to run for primary government positions.

Women’s Heightened Interest in Politics

Once political parties realized that women formed a large part of the consumer base, they began to use that consumerism as a tool to push political issues. Women became involved in the tariff issue in the 1890s because it directly impacted them. Women purchased most of their households’ dry goods and a growing number of women were poor or supporting themselves. The tariff caused an exorbitant price hike on goods, inspiring women to take action. Democrats took advantage of the shocking price increase, blaming it on the Republican tariff. They encouraged women to push their husbands to vote Democrat. Democrats were early in realizing that it might be more beneficial to take a more economic view of women’s interest in politics rather than
focusing on their moral and religious interests. Their campaigns began to focus on the economics of the home.

Another party that appealed to women who wanted more rights began to rise toward the end of the century. In the new Populist Party, which began to play a role in the 1892 Presidential campaign, women had equal footing with men, so there was no need for separate women’s clubs. This party was particularly appealing to suffragists. Women’s involvement in the Populist Party helped them gain women’s suffrage in the Western states. Women in the Populist Party are described as incredibly enthusiastic and energetic. Farm women working for the Populist Party often rose early and put in long days in order to make banners and food and help prepare for Populist rallies and meetings. Some ladies magazines and newspapers took sides against Populists due to women’s political freedom and characterized men involved in the Populist Party as feminized and weak leaders.

By 1896, the Populist Party was at a peak and the Presidential campaign was a test that would make or break its power. The 1896 campaign was a difficult battle for women. Women were now torn between the Populist and Republican parties. Some women who had been devout Republicans now turned to the Populist Party because they believed that they might have a better chance at winning women’s suffrage. Elizabeth Cady Stanton caused quite a stir when she placed women’s suffrage over Republican ideals and joined the Populist Party in 1896. Republicans never condoned women’s suffrage and were careful to limit their support to women who simply had a moral interest in politics. Also, by 1896, the Republicans were no longer appealing to the working-class citizens, but to the upper-class ladies and gentlemen. The Populist Party
began to fade once McKinley was elected, most likely because it was too early for a majority of the country’s population to accept its radical nature. Many of the women who had joined the Populist Party to fight for women’s suffrage became frustrated and discouraged after the Populist Party fizzled in the 1896 campaign.\textsuperscript{75}

Earning the Right to Vote

In some states, women were able to rise above discrimination and earn the right to vote in state issues.\textsuperscript{76} Women in sixteen states could take part in school elections by the late 1880s.\textsuperscript{77} Women also began to win elected offices, especially as school superintendents by the 1880s and 90s. While some of these offices were won due to partial suffrage, many positions were negotiated for women years before suffrage was granted in individual towns.\textsuperscript{78} Sarah Christie Stevens of Minnesota beat the odds and was elected superintendent in Mankato County in 1890 and after a satisfactory performance was reelected four years later.\textsuperscript{79} Around 1885, Fannie Foss was chosen as a Republican delegate in Chugwater, Wyoming. Against her husband’s recommendation, she decided to attend the GOP convention with only her friend, Therese Jenkins, as a companion. Foss nominated a woman for superintendent of the schools and, as predicted by her husband, the nomination was not taken seriously. Frustrated by her experience, she attended the Democratic convention where she again nominated a woman candidate who was later elected. According to Jenkins, “we have never had a man for county superintendent since.”\textsuperscript{80}

By 1896, women were gaining power in the schools. Most states outside of the South had some women holding posts whether they had suffrage or not. Women held between 5 and 50 percent of such jobs in any given state. They commonly resided in
office in the Western states, including Kansas, Minnesota, North and South Dakota, and
Oklahoma, where a third party upset the balance of Democrats and Republicans. In fact,
women held a majority of the county school superintendent positions in Montana and
Wyoming.81

Once women were granted partial suffrage in Kansas, the number of women in
municipal offices initially ballooned. While in most towns the number of men elected to
office greatly outnumbered women, some towns, such as Syracuse, in a western county of
the state, had an all-female town council. This was a significant change considering that
in this growing town, the population of women had been small just two years prior to the
election. In 1888, the Kansas town of Okaloosa not only had an all-female council, but a
woman mayor as well.82 In 1896, one paper reported that Gaylord, Kansas, had been
entirely governed by women for the past year. According to the paper, because of the
women in office, the town was governed honestly and efficiently. Successful leadership
was demonstrated by the clean streets and the elections were held in a “ladylike manner.”
The mayor, Mrs. Antoinette L. Haskell, a wife and mother of two sons, was then in her
second term. The City Clerk office was held by Miss Florence Headly, who was also the
editor of the Gaylord Herald. Mrs. Mary L. Foote was the police judge who defeated her
husband by a large margin in the same election. According to Mr. Foote, he “has decided
to keep out of politics hereafter.” There were also five women members making up the
city council.83

Western states provided more opportunities than others. In 1869, the Wyoming
Territory was the first state or territory to grant women full suffrage.84 Colorado women
won full suffrage in 1893.85 Besides Wyoming and Colorado, by 1896 other Western
states, including Utah and Idaho, had given women the right to vote.\textsuperscript{86} Kansas allowed women full participation in all local elections in 1887; they were eventually granted full suffrage ten years later, one year after William McKinley was elected President.

1896 Presidential Campaign

By 1896, women across the country had become more interested in national policy and politics rather than just local issues.\textsuperscript{87} An article in the \textit{Akron Beacon and Republican}, October 24, 1896, encouraged women to familiarize themselves with economic and political issues so that they could make decisions for themselves as to what was right. The article claimed that many women stump speakers just repeated what they were told, but a good ‘new’ woman learns all she can from both sides, talks among the members of her club, and comes to a full understanding and opinion for herself about political issues and candidates.\textsuperscript{88}

In 1896, Miss Hellen Gougar was praised in the August 15\textsuperscript{th} issue of the \textit{Akron Beacon and Republican} for being a grand speaker and politician. She was even credited with helping to write the law that granted women municipal suffrage in Kansas.\textsuperscript{89} Speaking for the Prohibition Party, the September 14, 1896 \textit{Akron Evening Journal} made a plea for a gentleman to come forward to debate with Miss Gougar at the Randolph Park where the topic would be the Presidential campaign issue of free silver.\textsuperscript{90}

In 1896, the Republican Party came up with a new statement on behalf of women that contained more specific promises to women than the previous resolution when it stated:

\begin{quote}
protection of American industries includes equal opportunities, equal pay for equal work, and protection to the home. We favor the admission of women to
\end{quote}
wider spheres of usefulness, and welcome their co-operation in rescuing the country from Democratic mismanagement and Populist misrule.\footnote{91}

Though the Republican Party demonstrated no real action to follow through on its promise, it did recognize women’s participation by giving the Women’s National Republican Association separate headquarters for the first time in Washington D.C. after William McKinley’s election.

McKinley continued a Republican tradition used by James A. Garfield in 1880 and Benjamin Harrison in 1888 by having a front-porch campaign. The front-porch campaigns appealed to women by showcasing the candidate as a devoted family man. The candidates opened up their home life and allowed the public to see their domestic side. The public became fascinated with the lives, wives, and families of the candidates. Newspapers often featured sketches of their homes, wives, and families to demonstrate their high character.\footnote{92} There were sketches of both Bryan and McKinley and their families in the papers during the 1896 campaign. Sometimes papers even published special interest articles, such as a heartfelt article on how Bryan and his wife originally met.\footnote{93} The August 2, 1896 Canton Repository published an interview with Mrs. Bryan discussing her views on women’s role within society.\footnote{94}

Though most women could not vote in 1896, there was a rise of female political participation as women came out to support either McKinley or Bryan.\footnote{95} In fact, McKinley received 54 percent of the votes from women in Colorado, Idaho, Utah, and Wyoming where suffrage had been already been granted.\footnote{96} In 1896, the Postum Cereal Food Coffee Co. of Battle Creek, Michigan, gave voices to the majority of women who could not vote by presenting them with the opportunity to “publicly express their choice
for president.” Women who wanted to participate were told to mail their choice for Presidential candidate by postcard to the company where the votes would be counted and reported to major newspapers periodically to show the progress of the women’s vote. They were told to mail their choice for Presidential candidate by postcard to the company where the votes would be counted and reported to major newspapers periodically to show the progress of the women’s vote. The final results were published in the November 11, 1896, Akron Beacon and Republican and showed that out of the 13,350 votes counted, 77 percent of those votes were cast in favor of McKinley. Even though these votes did not count toward the actual election of candidates, the event allowed many women the ability to freely and openly express their political opinion for the first time and be taken seriously.

William McKinley’s Presidential campaigns provided a plethora of campaign memorabilia. It seems as though the number of campaign items reached a new high at the same time that women had reached a new high in their political interest. Political enthusiasts could purchase badges, bandannas, bread trays, canes, clocks, cups and saucers, mechanical gold bugs, pitchers, ribbons, serving trays, shot glasses, and tumblers. During the 1896 campaign, some manufacturers offered a variety of parade helmets with photos or names of McKinley and Garrett Hobart on them. Umbrellas were popular for both of McKinley’s campaigns and sported images of McKinley and his running mate. Organizations often offered members free badges bearing the name of their club and the date of their excursion to Canton (see figure 2.1). Some items offered especially for women during the 1896 campaign were six-inch long hatpins topped with either McKinley or his wife’s photograph and the slogan “protection.”

McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign was marked by new button technology. McKinley’s 1896 campaign had the first modern celluloid buttons. The concept of campaign buttons is credited to George Washington who wore a set of brass or copper
Figure 2.1. *Collection of Ribbons.* McKinley Presidential campaign ribbons produced for women’s organizations including: (counter-clockwise) The Canton Women’s McKinley Club, Flag Day, October 31, 1896; Canton Ladies’ Reception Committee; Ladies’ McKinley Club, Norwalk, O., October 22, 1896; Women’s McKinley Club, 1896; and Womens’ Excursion to Canton, July 15th 1896. Used by permission from The Wm. McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, Canton, Ohio. Photograph taken by researcher.
buttons on his clothing for his inauguration. These buttons likely inspired the use of medals, sulphide brooches, and hand-painted brooches. From these evolved miniature tintypes or ferrotypes and later cardboard photographs of candidates which were precursors to the modern campaign button. Abraham Lincoln, however, was one of the first candidates to use ferrotypes during his 1860 campaign and cardboard photographs during his 1864 campaign. Photographic souvenirs continued to improve through the 1870s and 1880s, but it was not until 1896 that campaign buttons existed as we know them today. Whitehead and Hoag Company of Newark, New Jersey, patented a process of placing a photograph in celluloid surrounded by a metal ring in 1896.

During McKinley’s 1896 campaign, the streets of Canton, Ohio, were likened to that of the World’s Fair where “one is besieged on every side by fakirs selling badges, pictures of ‘McKinley wife & home,’ peanuts, canes, etc. etc.” Many of the people swarming the streets of Canton in 1896 were women. Though women in most states could not vote at this time, they were drawn to Ohio to hear and meet McKinley and took a great interest in him and his political policies. Unfortunately, women’s involvement in the 1896 Presidential campaign is absent from most historical studies of McKinley’s life as a politician. The next chapter will document women’s significant involvement throughout McKinley’s illustrious political career.

Notes

1 Herbert Ridgeway Collins, Threads of History: Americana Recorded on Cloth 1775 to the Present (City of Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1979), 47.

3 Ibid., 13, 48, 14.


6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Gores, 15, 14.

9 Powell, 28.

10 Gores, 15.

11 Powell, 28.

12 Hake, 101.

13 Gores, 58.


15 Collins, 4.

16 Hake, 11.

17 Collins, 18, 24.

18 Edwards, 16, 18, 33, 64.

19 Ibid., 28, 29.

20 Ibid., 12, 13.


25 Baker, 620.

26 Edwards, 148.

27 Baker, 634.

28 Dinkin, 63.

29 Baker, 631-32.


31 Baker, 631, 635.

32 Edwards, 14.

33 Baker, 632.

34 Ibid., 640, 633.

35 Ibid., 640.


37 Baker, 640.

38 Dinkin, 78.

39 Edwards, 12.

41 Dinkin, 78.

42 Collins, 25.

43 Baker, 629.

44 Dinkin, 80, 68.

45 Ibid., 68.

46 Edwards, 13.

47 Dinkin, 70.

48 Edwards, 33, 62-64.

49 Powell, 30.

50 Baker, 625.

51 Edwards, 13.

52 Edwards, 86; Gustafson, 61.

53 Edwards, 86.

54 Dinkin, 75, 76.

55 Collins, 11.

56 Powell, 29.

57 Collins, 4, 284.

58 Powell, 29.

59 Hake, 101.

60 Powell, 29.

61 Edwards, 75.

62 Ibid., 75, 78, 82.
63 Dinkin, 64.
64 Ibid., 65.
65 Ibid., 80, 81.
66 Edwards, 99.
67 Dinkin, 78, 79.
68 Ibid., 65.
69 Ibid., 79, 65.
70 Edwards, 61.
71 Dinkin, 66, 73.
72 Edwards, 64.
73 Ibid., 70, 61.
74 Ibid., 103, 105, 115.
75 Ibid., 108, 138, 146, 131, 150.
76 Baker, 631.
77 Dinkin, 103.
78 Edwards, 134.
79 Dinkin, 74.
80 Edwards, 134.
81 Ibid., 134, 135.
82 Dinkin, 104, 105.
84 Edwards, *xi*. 
85 Ibid., xii.

86 Dinkin, 105.

87 Edwards, 135.


89 “A Brilliant Woman,” Ibid., 15 August 1896, 3.


91 Dinkin, 98.

92 Ibid., 32.

93 “Flirted At College The Early Romance of Mr. Bryan And His Wife,” Akron Beacon & Republican (Ohio), 29 August 1896, 5.

94 “Mrs. Bryan’s Views,” Canton Repository (Ohio), 2 August 1896, 3.

95 Dinkin, 97, 111.

96 Edwards, 147.


98 “Ladies In Earnest,” Ibid., 11 November 1896, 4.

99 Gores, 20.

100 Hake, 21.

101 Gores, 35.

102 “On To Canton,” Akron Beacon & Republican (Ohio), June 12, 1896, 1.

103 Gores, 102.

104 Ibid., 20.

105 Powell, 27.

106 Hake, colored plate opposite 44.
107 Powell, 29.

108 Hake, 88, 82.

109 Powell, 29.

110 Blanche [last name unknown], Cleveland, to Papa and Mother, 25 October 1896, William McKinley--Addresses, Lectures, Campaign 1896 file, Wm McKinley Presidential Library and Museum, Canton, Ohio.
CHAPTER III
WILLIAM McGINLEY, A POLITICIAN

William McKinley, elected twenty-fifth President of the United States in 1896 and again in 1900, has faded into the background of history. He is best known for his involvement in the Spanish-American War and his assassination in 1901. The well-known biographies that have been published about McKinley fail to acknowledge women’s participation and hardly mention the excitement surrounding his campaigns. The most recognizable biographies on McKinley are written by Margaret Leech, H. Wayne Morgan, and Lewis L. Gould. Margaret Leech published her biography in 1959 and went beyond McKinley’s political career to explore his domestic life. She briefly discussed the excitement surrounding his 1896 Presidential campaign in a chapter titled “Front Porch.” Though Leech discussed McKinley’s front-porch campaign more than any other prominent biographer, she failed to dedicate more than one small paragraph to the outpouring of women’s support.¹ Morgan, who published a biography in 1963, did not describe the 1896 campaign as much as Leech; however, in passing, he mentioned women’s enthusiasm for McKinley’s Presidential nomination during the month of June.² Gould, who published his biography in 1980, had access to the recently released papers of McKinley’s secretary George B. Cortelyou. These papers could have shed an intimate light on McKinley as a politician; however, Gould chose not to explore women’s participation in McKinley’s political career.³
Paul W. Glad’s book on the 1896 campaign entitled *McKinley, Bryan, and the People*, published in 1964, contains little information about the actual front-porch campaign. One of the few statements he included is a reference to the *New York Times* which claimed that a record breaking 80,000 people came to Canton, Ohio, on September 18, 1896.4 Edward Thornton Heald’s *The William McKinley Story*, published in Canton, Ohio, in 1964, had the most extensive depiction of McKinley’s political career, especially the 1896 Presidential campaign. In all of his descriptions, however, he does not incorporate direct references to women’s support for McKinley.5 Even the recent biographies about him repeat similar information and themes covered in earlier works. Richard L. McElroy published a pictorial biography of McKinley in 1996 that contains one nondescript photo of women seated with McKinley and his wife during the 1896 campaign.6 Lastly, the most recent biography, published in 2003 by Kevin Philips, whose goal was to shed new light on McKinley as a politician and President, fails to mention women’s outpouring of support.7 These biographies make few references to women and their involvement in his life and political campaigns. This chapter brings to light the interest and involvement women had throughout McKinley’s political career.

**McKinley’s Early Political Career**

William McKinley Jr. was born on January 19, 1843, to a modest family living in Niles, Ohio. It would have been difficult to predict that McKinley would one day become the 25th President of the United States. As a young man, McKinley served in the Civil War, leaving the service at the end of the war with the title Brevet Major.8 Following the war, McKinley decided to attend law school, an appropriate preparation for a career in politics.9 After graduation McKinley was fortunate in his endeavors. He
moved to Canton, Ohio, quickly becoming a respected citizen and a successful lawyer. Driven by his convictions and beliefs, McKinley often took serious political risks. One such risk helped to launch him into Congress. The Panic of 1873 caused a local coal mine to make frequent wage reductions. When the wages hit a low in 1876, the workers began to strike. The strike escalated into violence and several miners were arrested. At the risk of public disapproval, McKinley decided to defend the miners. He was successful on behalf of the miners and did not accept payment for his services. Instead of ruining his chances in politics, the news of his actions gained him widespread support among laborers. Soon after, McKinley was urged to run for Congress and was elected the same year.¹⁰

McKinley earned respect as a congressman and fought for that which he believed. His convictions gained him esteem from voters. When McKinley first began his study of law, he became greatly interested in tariffs and protective tariff legislation. After much discussion and haggling in both houses of Congress, the McKinley Tariff Bill, which installed a high protective tariff, finally passed in both houses in 1890. Soon afterward, due to Democratic gerrymandering in the state of Ohio, McKinley lost his Congressional seat. What seemed like a loss in 1890 opened the opportunity for McKinley to be elected Governor of Ohio in 1891, further elevating his political career. After two sessions as Governor, McKinley’s four years of hard work nudged him closer to the office of President. There had been talk of McKinley’s presidential nomination at the 1892 national convention, but it was in 1896 that Mark Hanna, McKinley’s friend and campaign manager, had full confidence in McKinley’s political future and he became the Republican Party’s nominee.¹¹
The 1896 Presidential Campaign

McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign created mass excitement and enthusiasm. Individuals and delegations gathered on the front lawn of his home in Canton, Ohio, by the hundreds and thousands. McKinley was a must-see attraction in the summer of 1896. Delegations traveled across the nation to meet McKinley and hear one of his eloquent speeches. Among the delegations were numerous women. Some women came individually, some with men’s delegations, and some women organized delegations of their own. Women supported McKinley as a politician and respected him for his moral character. Even though women could not legally vote, they continued to show their enthusiasm for this candidate during the 1896 campaign through visits, speeches, letters, flowers, gifts, and other signs of appreciation.

Excitement Surrounding the Campaign

The fervor created by William McKinley’s front-porch campaign affected men, women, and children not only from Canton, Ohio, but from cities across Ohio and beyond. McKinley’s campaign was called a front-porch campaign because he did not travel the nation giving speeches. Instead, he stayed in Canton, Ohio, where he gave speeches from his front porch to the numerous people who flocked to his home. The Republican Convention opened in St. Louis, Missouri, on June 16, 1896. The day McKinley was officially nominated as the Republican candidate, crowds and parades formed spontaneously and descended upon his Canton household. Canton, which had a population of approximately thirty thousand people in 1896, began bursting at the seams as large delegations poured into the city. An estimated fifty thousand people came to Canton to see McKinley on the first official day of his presidential campaign. Adding to
the initial crowds, several delegations including four thousand from Akron and one hundred from Niles arrived to celebrate his nomination. Many of the thousands of people who swarmed to celebrate McKinley’s nomination took pieces of fence and other removable items as a souvenir of the evening, leaving nothing of the fence or his landscaping. The June 18 delegations were just the first of many to come and steal a glimpse of this seemingly majestic candidate. Canton school children skipped school so frequently to participate in the campaign festivities that there was an ‘epidemic’ of bad attendance. The delegations, numbering in the thousands, continually came throughout the campaign, eventually reaching record numbers in October.

McKinley was known to be an eloquent speaker, and he was an expert at enchanting listeners because he made sure to fully understand each delegation and to address each of their concerns. McKinley did not, however, spontaneously create the variety of speeches that he gave. Each group that planned to come was required to send a copy of its intended remarks in advance. Joseph Smith, McKinley’s general advisor and publicity expert, helped retrieve backgrounds on each group so that McKinley could give a speech that was the most effective and appropriate for each group. Even though McKinley’s speeches were not completely spontaneous, he still had to be quick of mind because he often had only a half-hour warning before he was to give a speech. His speeches always flowed well and awed his public. McKinley’s oratorical abilities are well documented in letters and other sources for their quality, concern, and overall enchantment.

The excitement mounted around Canton during the months leading up to the 1896 Presidential election. So many people and groups desired to come to Canton over
the summer that the Traffic Association, on September 12, 1896, began to offer record low rates for traveling parties of forty or more.\textsuperscript{18} Inexpensive travel was not the only reason to come to Canton. The great crowds that journeyed to Canton were able to participate in the festive exuberant election as well as enjoy a pleasant outing, often including a picnic in the park.\textsuperscript{19}

In her biography of McKinley, Margaret Leech captures the excitement of the crowds pouring off of the trains, garbed in campaign memorabilia, mostly of red, white, and blue. Natives of Canton created committees to greet the arriving visitors and the delegations were often led by uniformed members of the Canton troops in a parade to McKinley’s house. The parades were surrounded by cheering and music from bands. Just before the crowds reached McKinley’s home, they passed beneath McKinley’s large portrait mounted on a plaster arch of a grand scale. Massive cheers greeted McKinley when he appeared on his front porch. After listening patiently to the speech from a member of the delegation, McKinley would give a speech to the public and always invited everyone to shake his hand afterward.\textsuperscript{20} At times, the crowds were overly exuberant, causing potential harm by their great numbers as described in the following newspaper article:

Major McKinley had several times passed through the crowd to and from the house and in doing so nearly had his clothes torn from his back by the thousands eagerly waiting opportunity to shake hands with him. . . . A step at the porch had broken and several people had been slightly affected by the surging of the great mass of humanity.\textsuperscript{21}

One woman described the streets of Canton as “a moving mass of people. . . . Lunch counters can be seen along the streets, bells ringing at restaurants and general pandemonium reigns supreme.”\textsuperscript{22}
The enthusiasm and energy surrounding the campaign again swelled on Saturday, October, 31, 1896, Flag Day. Approximately twenty thousand voters from twenty six delegations accompanied by three thousand wives crowded for one last large show of support for William McKinley before the election. Hanna, Chairman of the Republican National Committee, had suggested the ‘Flag Day’ for October 31st to get people in the patriotic spirit for the upcoming election. He requested that intended voters display the stars and stripes and national colors on that day. The newspapers glorified the coming occasion stating that, “millions of banners will be added to the millions now floating in the breeze the country over.” People, whether Republican or Democrat, were encouraged to display pictures of their candidate, put on their badge, and join the festivities. All the local Republican marching clubs were said to be present in the big parade. Several factories, represented by floats in the parade, including the sewer pipe pottery manufacturers, closed that Saturday so the workers could take part in the festivities.

Women’s Feelings toward McKinley

William Jennings Bryan of Lincoln, Nebraska, the Democratic candidate, had a good reputation for his speaking abilities, but women in the Northeast tended to be drawn toward McKinley. They saw him as an ideal representation of a politician. This idealization came because women noted that McKinley was an honest man with a past virtually free of scandal. The Democratic newspapers and other people who wanted to tear down his character found little to criticize and had much more success attacking McKinley’s manager and financial backer, Mark Hanna. Numerous women visited Canton in the summer of 1896 to show their support. Women appreciated his concern
and respect for the “weaker sex.” McKinley had personally favored women’s suffrage since he was a young lawyer and politician.

Women also valued the devotion he had to both his mother and wife. McKinley’s attention to his mother was well known. He made it a custom in Canton to escort his mother to church every Sunday morning. Even when he was elected governor, he always attempted to return to Canton in time to take his mother by the arm and walk her to church. McKinley’s invalid wife, Ida, drew many inquisitive visitors who were curious to meet her in person. He gained more support and respect from women because of the selfless devotion he had for her, which said more about his character than if Ida had been a central figure in his campaign. According to McKinley’s biography printed in the newspaper, Ida McKinley had always been encouraging and supportive of her husband’s political campaign. Her unfortunate circumstances of being an invalid did not prevent her from basking in the rays of McKinley’s rising political career. Mrs. McKinley is credited with encouraging her husband to pursue his political career as the positions were presented to him. She was always confident of his abilities to successfully serve the public in his political positions. She believed in all of his policies and actions and did not see why others should not have the same confidence in her husband.

Women’s awareness of Ida’s close relationship with her husband was realized when some McKinley clubs placed her photo on campaign ribbons, making Ida the first First Lady to be portrayed on a campaign ribbon (see figure 3.1).

Women for McKinley

During William McKinley’s presidential campaign of 1896, some women tried to raise support for McKinley by writing to their local or state governments. A small
Figure 3.1. *Ida McKinley Campaign Ribbon*. The image of William McKinley’s wife can be seen on this 1896 Presidential campaign ribbon. Used by permission from The Wm McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, Canton, Ohio. Photograph taken by researcher.
article in the *Canton Repository* on February 23, 1896, discussed one woman’s enthusiasm and action to see William McKinley nominated as a presidential candidate. Miss Kiihn from Massillon, Ohio, formerly of Wyoming, strongly believed that McKinley was a good upstanding man and should be the leader of the nation. In efforts to sway his nomination, she wrote to Miss Estella Reel, the state superintendent of public instruction in Wyoming, and encouraged her to rouse the women of Wyoming to support McKinley. She also wrote to the Governor of Wyoming to encourage the delegates to vote for him. McKinley soon heard of her efforts and was grateful for her support.

Though evidence of similar enthusiasm was typically seen closer to McKinley’s home state, it was not out of the question for women across the country to show such exuberance for McKinley as a Presidential candidate. Most of the women that visited McKinley could not vote; however, a small number that could vote in the upcoming election came to Canton including Mrs. Robert Pier Fuller of Cheyenne, Wyoming, where women had recently been granted full suffrage. Under the leadership of Ida Wells-Barnett, black women in Chicago showed active support for William McKinley. Some papers, such as the *Boston Herald*, a Republican paper, wrote articles targeted at female readers.

Women showed a phenomenal support for William McKinley during his 1896 presidential campaign not only because the Northeast part of the United States contained many Republicans, but because women, who were becoming more involved in politics, became enchanted with McKinley as a speaker and as an upstanding, moral man. Women had the opinion that he was the best candidate to enter the White House and run the country effectively.
Delegations of women both large and small visited William McKinley over the months before the election. When they came, they tended to be exuberant and showed more fanfare than many of the men’s delegations. Though this phenomenon has been neglected by publications concerning McKinley’s political career, women’s enthusiasm is consistently recorded in primary sources. The newspapers often described the women’s delegations as some of the handsomest, and most inspiring. To accommodate the women, travel agencies advertised in local newspapers. A notice in the Boston Herald by Raymond and Whitcomb Tours assured women that they would be safe on a pilgrimage to the home of McKinley without any gentlemen escorts.

Almost more significant than the number and exuberance of women who came to see McKinley are the speeches and responses exchanged between the women’s delegations and McKinley. They illustrate that while some women were traditional and valued McKinley mainly for his moral standing, others took his political issues, such as protective tariffs and sound money, into consideration as well. The women of Canton and Stark County arranged a reception for Governor and Mrs. McKinley to celebrate McKinley’s presidential nomination. Mrs. Alice Danner Jones delivered a message to McKinley, his wife, and mother. She praised his wife and mother, and expressed to McKinley that while being elected would take him from Canton, she and the women she represented were assured that he would not forget their interests and his memory of the people. The women presented flowers to show him how much he meant to such “simple” women before they joined the McKinleys for the reception.
Men’s Delegations Accompanied by Women

Frequently, women would accompany the men’s delegations that visited McKinley. Early in the campaign, eighteen women accompanied the 250 members of the Foraker Club on their visit to Canton. The women marched before the Cleveland Foraker Club in the parade. On such occasions, ladies were frequently able to greet Mrs. McKinley. When the People’s Patriotic Club of Cleveland came on September 26, 1896, they brought the Ladies Marching Club arranged by Mrs. J. W. Shepherd, the East End Marching Club, and the association’s Trumpet and Drum Corps to join in a parade to the McKinley home. Later, two hundred members of the Ohio 104th Regiment visited McKinley. The ladies who accompanied these gentlemen told Mrs. McKinley that “they had formed the first tent organization of the Daughters of Veterans and that it was called the Mrs. Maj. McKinley tent.” The Ladies’ McKinley Club of Bowling Green, Ohio, came on September 23, 1896, in ceremonial caps accompanied by the McKinley First Voters who wore uniforms. After parading to McKinley’s home and listening to McKinley, the women were received by his wife Ida in her parlor. The West Virginia delegation that brought a crowd of nine hundred on October 7, 1896 and the Oil City, Pennsylvania, delegation that came on October 4, 1896, both brought large scores of women to accompany the men’s McKinley clubs (see figures 3.2 and 3.3).

Women-organized Delegations

The ladies of Cleveland showed great exuberance in their support for McKinley. Several ladies groups and ladies’ McKinley clubs combined to form a delegation of six hundred women from the Cleveland area who visited McKinley on July 15, 1896. Mrs. N. Cole Stewart, president of the Cleveland Sorosis, came to Canton early to make
Figure 3.2. Parade of Oil City Ladies. Print of Oil City (PA) ladies carrying flowers for Mrs. McKinley in a parade to William McKinley’s Home in Canton, Ohio (October 4, 1896). Used by permission from The William McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, Canton, Ohio.
Figure 3.3. Crowd of Oil City Ladies. Ladies from Oil City Delegation (PA) listening to McKinley at his home in Canton, Ohio (October 4, 1896). Used by permission from the Wm McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, Canton, Ohio.
arrangements for the large Cleveland delegation. A few hundred women from the Michigan Women’s Republican Club of Detroit were also expected to join the Cleveland delegation. Another group among the procession included the Daughters of the Revolution. Also, young ladies from the woman’s Canton excursion brought a large floral piece to present to Mrs. McKinley. When all of the women’s delegations arrived in Canton together, they were accompanied by the ladies’ band of Chagrin Falls and were escorted to McKinley’s house by the women of Canton. The newspapers praised the women for their pleasing appearance and noted that, “the populace of the city turned out en masse to witness the unique parade, and it was a matter of comment that the gay and varied costumes of the ladies produced a much finer effect than had the best efforts of the men with all their campaign regalia.”

Mrs. Elroy M. Avery, a member of the Cleveland Sorosis, the Cleveland Board of Education, the Daughters of the Revolution, and wife of a prominent Republican, was chosen to speak to McKinley on behalf of the Cleveland delegation. Mrs. Avery spoke to McKinley and discussed her faith in McKinley’s policies and his ability as the next President. Her comments received a great reaction from the crowds. In his response, McKinley said, “there is no limitation to the influence that may be exerted by woman in the United States and no adequate tribute can be spoken of her services to mankind throughout its eventful history.” He admitted that women had always played a role, though often inconspicuous, and stated that wives and mothers mold the future with their present actions and choices. After McKinley’s speech, Mrs. Mary Ellsworth Clark of Cleveland sang a song especially composed for the occasion by Mrs. Stewart. Following the song, the ladies presented Mrs. McKinley with an arrangement of roses. Miss
Birdelle Switzer, editor of the Plain Dealer society pages, gave the presentation speech in which she said, “these American beauties represent the queen of flowers, as you, by your sweet womanliness and grace, have won the right to represent our American queen of the home.” Afterward, the ladies retreated to a private lunch.

Toward the end of the campaign, women continued to come to Canton with great frequency (see figure 3.4). On October 25, 1896, McKinley addressed a group of fifty Akron stenographers from Whitman and Barnes and the Goodrich Company and a delegation of fifty teachers, mostly female, that came together from Akron, Cleveland, and around Northeast Ohio. The Akron stenographers had vowed to encourage others to vote for McKinley. When McKinley responded, he addressed their concerns and eloquently stated:

I am glad to know that it has been demonstrated in the United States that the women of the country can do so many things and do them equally well with the men, and I believe when they perform like service to men, they ought to be paid as well.

A delegation of seventy-five women from Wellsville, Ohio, visited on October 28, 1896. During McKinley’s speeches to the women of Wellsville and later Canton, he gave tribute to women’s support and power during the Civil War and said he believed that “a cause which has the support of the women is worthy of our commendation and approval.” Ladies from several women’s clubs in Zanesville also traveled to Canton during the Presidential campaign to visit McKinley.

The Ladies McKinley Club of Norwalk arrived on October 27, 1896, with 250 women, many of them bearing flowers for Ida McKinley. Though McKinley was good at capturing the sentiments of the women who visited, it was Mrs. Laylin, representing the Norwalk women, who best summed up women’s opinion of McKinley in her speech:
Figure 3.4. *Women’s Delegation*. Ladies of the Women’s Republican Club are seated with McKinley and his wife, Ida, in front of his home in Canton, Ohio. Used by permission from the Wm McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, Canton, Ohio.
We have long honored and revered you as the highest type of American manhood, the ideal son, husband, citizen and statesman; a man whose every act has been pure and noble, and who will grace the chair filled by Washington, Lincoln and Garfield. Though we are allowed no voice in the coming contest, yet we have the right to express our preferences. We want a statesman for our president, not a demagogue. We want a party in power that stands for purity, honesty, financial stability and protection to American industry, and not one that favors anarchy, repudiation and demoralization of our business interests. Though we are not politicians, yet we love our country and glory in those principles that will promote in the highest degree the welfare of our people. And we believe, sir, that you represent those principles and that your triumph in the coming contest is already assured. We wish to assure you that we shall use our influence in every way possible to help roll up that glorious majority that will greet you one week from today.\(^{59}\)

After a welcome reception from a group of Canton women, the Ladies’ McKinley Club of Norwalk participated in a gathering on Public Square and sang patriotic songs.\(^{60}\)

**An Individual Impression**

Blanche, a student who took an afternoon train trip with friends to visit McKinley’s home, described her experience in a letter to her parents. In her letter, written on Central High School of Cleveland stationary, dated October 25, 1896, she described the trip as paying respects to the “McKinley shrine.” She noted that the town was “swarming” with people and the crowds “worshiped” McKinley. In the short time she and her friend Lu Ella were at McKinley’s house, he spoke to delegations from Kansas, Indiana, Missouri, Pennsylvania, New York, and Ohio. Blanche stayed to hear several speeches and was impressed by the variety and eloquence of McKinley’s speeches which left the crowd “spell-bound.” She offered a concise description of people’s feeling about McKinley when she wrote to her parents:

I tell you he is a grand man in the broadest sense of the word and will if elected be the savior of our country. His very presence seems to electrify his hearers and they cannot help being inspired with higher ideas of loyalty and patriotism after hearing him speak.\(^{61}\)
She valued how he spoke on a level with the people so that everyone could understand
him. She also remarked on how people had stripped his yard bare in order to have a
souvenir and that people frequently lingered trying to get a glimpse into one of the parlor
windows. Even Blanche was able to shake hands with William McKinley and stole a
glimpse of Ida McKinley and Mother McKinley through the window (see figure 3.5). She
closed her letter by encouraging her father, “you must not fail to get in your vote
even if you have to ride down to the polls. Improve your time talking ‘sound money’
while sitting around downtown and do what you can to open the eyes of the poor blind
‘silver men.’”

McKinley’s Effect on his Neighbors

The women from McKinley’s town of Canton showed magnanimous support. Even
though the large Ladies’ McKinley Club of Canton did not make a public appearance
until Flag Day on October 31, 1896, they were very involved in reception committees and
other celebratory events. On Flag Day, just before the election, an astounding procession
of 1,500 women belonging to the Ladies’ McKinley Club of Canton and Youngstown
walked to McKinley’s house (see figure 3.6). McKinley received heavy support not
only from Canton but from adjacent cities. The surrounding townspeople felt attached to
McKinley because he was one of their neighbors and many Cantonians knew him on a
personal level.

Republican newspapers in Ohio and the surrounding states also encouraged the
McKinley craze. Local newspapers such as the Canton Repository and the Akron Beacon
& Republican vigorously publicized the presidential campaign which provided
entertainment that left the public craving more. The overpowering Republicanism and
Figure 3.5. *McKinley Shaking Hands*. Print of McKinley shaking hands with visitors, both men and women, on his front porch in Canton, Ohio, during his 1896 Presidential Campaign. Used by permission from the Wm McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, Canton, Ohio.
Figure 3.6. *Flag Day*. Photograph of Canton ladies listening to McKinley’s speech and waving flags at his home in Canton, Ohio on October 31, 1896. Used by permission from the collection of the Church of the Savior United Methodist in Canton, Ohio.
local pride worked to McKinley’s advantage. Before the election was tallied, many prematurely exuberant ladies from Canton went to the home of McKinley and his wife to congratulate them on his election. He shook their hands, though surprised at their enthusiasm before the results were final. After midnight when more complete results came in, he began to accept their congratulations.64

The 1900 Presidential Campaign

The campaign of 1900 differed dramatically from that of 1896. The atmosphere seemed much more subdued than before. A dramatic change was made when Vice-President Garrett Hobart died in November 1899 and Theodore Roosevelt was chosen as his replacement. In 1900, the country was still coping with the Spanish–American War. There was also growing concern over events unfolding in China.65 In this sober atmosphere, there was less information published on the events of the 1900 campaign. Roosevelt notified McKinley of his official Presidential nomination in Canton on July 12, 1900. McKinley was in Canton most of the summer, but was preoccupied with his duties as President rather than his re-election.66

McKinley decided not to have a front-porch campaign in 1900 because it was considered undignified for a President to have such an intimate campaign with the public. Teddy Roosevelt and Mark Hanna did most of the campaigning.67 Women attended speeches given by Roosevelt.68 McKinley discouraged delegations from making organized trips to Canton.69 Despite McKinley’s decision not to campaign himself, people came in surges to visit when he was at his home in Canton.70 A significant number of McKinley’s callers were women, but women’s excitement for McKinley was mentioned less often in the media than in 1896. What did increase, however, were
articles highlighting women’s expanding involvement in politics as a whole. In 1896, women were still portrayed as focused on the domestic sphere, but they had become caught in the excitement of the Presidential campaign. In 1900, newspaper articles featured women who were active as delegates for the political conventions. They also featured leading women politicians. One article highlighted Mrs. Pardee, a lady from Canton, who discussed the history of women’s politics in the West.

McKinley did not have to campaign to win the hearts of the American people in 1900. He already possessed a large following of loyal men and women. McKinley received a majority of the votes and was the first President to be re-elected since Ulysses S. Grant. In response to this honor, he said in the eloquence that made his speeches famous, “I am no longer President of a party; I am now the President of the whole people.”

William McKinley was fortunate as a politician to have respect from a majority of the public throughout his political career. Among the people who revered him was a large following of women. Women, not allowed to vote and often discouraged from seeking suffrage, participated vehemently in McKinley’s Presidential campaign. Throughout his career, they recorded their own opinions and preferences in textile objects. Quilts, in particular, made an excellent outlet for political expression. Political quilts leading up to and during McKinley’s political career will be discussed in the next chapter. The quilts related to McKinley’s political career are physical evidence that women recognized McKinley’s value as a politician early and continued their support through his untimely death.
Notes


8 Heald, 5.

9 Leech, 9.

10 Heald, 16, 39-42.

11 Ibid., 59-65.

12 Ibid., 72.

13 McElroy, 67.

14 Heald, 75, 79, 72.

15 “Great Crowds,” *Canton Repository* (Ohio), 18 October 1896, 1.

16 Leech, 89.

17 Blanche [last name unknown], Cleveland, to Papa and Mother, 25 October 1896, William McKinley--Addresses, Lectures, Campaign 1896 file, Wm McKinley Presidential Library and Museum, Canton, Ohio; “Many Women Come from Cleveland to Greet Governor McKinley,” *Canton Repository* (Ohio), 16 July 1896, 1; “The Women
Come,” Ibid., 29 October 1896, 5; “Ohio Women Participate In Inspiring Scenes In Canton,” Ibid., 29 October 1896, 5; “Woman’s Tribute,” Akron Beacon & Republican (Ohio), 15 July 1896, 1.

18 Heald, 79.
19 Leech, 88.
20 Ibid.
21 “Great Crowds,” 4.
22 Blanche.
23 Heald, 81.
24 “A Flag Day for McKinleyites,” Akron Beacon & Republican (Ohio), 17 October 1896, 1.
25 “For Flag Day,” Ibid., 29 October 1896, 1.
26 Leech, 75, 76, 89.
27 Philips, 30.
28 “Will’am M’Kinley,” Akron Beacon & Republican (Ohio), 6 June 1896, 5.
29 Leech, 89.
30 “Will’am M’Kinley,” 5.
31 Donna Boldt, tour of National First Ladies’ Library, 1 April 2005.
32 “Massillon,” Canton Repository (Ohio), 23 February 1896, 2.
33 Leech, 89.
35 “Ohio Women Participate In Inspiring Scenes In Canton,” Canton Repository (Ohio), 29 October 1896, 5.
36 “Ho for Canton: Boston Herald Pilgrimage to the Home of McKinley,” Boston Herald; Undated copy of notice found in William McKinley--Addresses, Lectures, Speeches- Campaign 1896 file at The Wm McKinley Presidential Library and Museum, Canton, Ohio.


38 “Wife And Mother,” Ibid., 27 June 1896, 1.

39 “Foraker Club, Of Cleveland’s Thirty-Second Ward, Comes to Canton,” Canton Repository (Ohio), 12 July 1896, 1.

40 “All Are For Him,” Canton Repository (Ohio), 27 September 1896, 1; “Cleveland Women Arrived In Full Force Saturday Afternoon,” Ibid., 27 September 1896, 1.

41 “McKinley’s Visitors,” Akron Beacon & Republican (Ohio), 14 August 1896, 2.

42 “Bowling Green Sends A Large Delegation To Meet Major M’Kinley,” Canton Repository (Ohio), 24 September 1896, 1.

43 “West Virginia Delegation Of 900 Arrives To Call On Major M’Kinley,” Ibid., 8 October 1896, 1.

44 Joseph Smith, comp., McKinley, The People’s Choice (Canton, OH: Repository Press, 1896), 42. This book is a compilation of the speeches William McKinley made between 18 June and 1 August of 1896.

45 “Date Changed Cleveland Women to Come to Canton Wednesday,” Canton Repository (Ohio), 12 July 1896, 6.

46 “For Mrs. M’Kinley,” Ibid., 12 July 1896, 5.

47 “Many Women Come From Cleveland to Greet Governor McKinley,” Ibid., 16 July 1896, 1.

48 Smith, McKinley, The People’s Choice, 42; “Many Women,” 1; “Date Changed,” 6.

49 “Woman’s Tribute” Akron Beacon & Republican (Ohio), 15 July 1896, 1.

50 Ibid.
51 “Many Women,” 1.

52 “Woman’s Tribute,” 1.


54 Smith, *McKinley Speeches in October*, 491.


56 Smith, *McKinley Speeches in October*, 518, 552.


59 “Ohio Women Participate,” 5.

60 Ibid.

61 Blanche.

62 Ibid.

63 Smith, *McKinley Speeches in October*, 552.

64 “Getting the News. . . . Ladies Congratulate,” *Canton Repository* (Ohio), 5 November 1896, 6.

65 Gould, 208, 223.

66 Heald, 99.

67 Ibid.

68 “Thousands Cheer Roosevelt,” *Canton Repository* (Ohio), 7 October 1900, 1; “Women, Too They Vote Out in Montana,” Ibid., 24 September 1900, 7.

69 “In Their Canton Home Again,” Ibid., 23 October 1900, 1.

61
70 Canton Repository (Ohio), 12 July 1900; 20 July 1900; 21 July 1900; 22 July 1900; 5 August 1900; 16 September 1900; 17 September 1900; 26 September 1900; 1 October 1900; 2 October 1900; 3 October 1900; 5 October 1900; 27 October 1900; 31 October 1900.

71 “Women Arriving in Convention City Take Active Part In Political Work,” Canton Repository (Ohio), 15 June 1900, 6.

72 “Women in Active Politics,” Ibid., 14 October 1900, 11.

73 Heald, 100.
CHAPTER IV

POLITICAL QUILTS

As women became more interested in politics, they expressed their convictions and involvement in the political quilts they chose to make. By the end of the nineteenth century, women made quilts in support of Presidential candidates, to commemorate and praise the President in office, and as a scrapbook record of political ties. These quilts often included campaign memorabilia. The increasing number of items available to the public during Presidential campaigns, changing technology, and women’s growing participation in political activities contributed to William McKinley being well documented in quilts. Despite his popularity and the popularity of quilts, little research has been done to acknowledge the quilts related to McKinley’s political career. Quilts still exist, however, documenting McKinley’s popularity and successful years in politics. Women incorporated McKinley into their quilts as early as his Congressional years and continued to make quilts well after his unfortunate death in 1901. This chapter discusses women’s use of quilts as a means of political expression. Also, the incredible record provided by quilts remaining from McKinley’s political career increases our understanding of women’s ongoing support for McKinley as a politician.

Quilts as Political Expression

Women often use clothing and textiles to express their personality and sentiments.¹ Women use quilts to commemorate special occasions, as a means of
expression, and as a show of loyalty to a group or organization. In the nineteenth century, women decorated their homes with items that displayed their patriotic loyalty and some women carried that patriotic expression into their quilts. Women found the use of political motifs in quilts an excellent way to show their patriotism. These quilts can be used as a means of documenting social ideas of the time. Not only could quilts be general statements of patriotism, but they often commemorated specific political or social occasions, such as presidential campaigns. Women could even express their preference for a political candidate using just thread and fabric. They had varying motives for making political quilts. Women made quilts as an expression of their patriotism, to commemorate an event, and as fundraisers. The use of the quilt as a landscape for political expression was particularly important in the nineteenth century when women had few outlets for political expression.

In the beginning of the nineteenth century, quilts were not made for presidential campaigns. Women did, however, show their patriotism by using commemorative fabrics and appliquéing representative symbols, such as the eagle or the flag, on their quilts. Women also expressed their patriotism by making quilt patterns that were associated with the elected Presidents. These patterns had such names as, “Washington’s Plumes, Washington’s Own, Martha Washington Star, Martha Washington’s Wreath, Dolly Madison’s Workbasket, Madison’s Quilt Block, and Madison’s Patch.” The Log Cabin pattern was popularized by William Henry Harrison’s Log Cabin and Hard Cider campaign of 1840. The Smithsonian Institution owns a cotton appliqué quilt top with a log cabin design made in 1840 by Rebecca Digs.
Quilts made using campaign textiles began to appear after the 1840 Presidential campaign. According to Herbert Ridgeway Collins, an expert on political textiles, “it was not uncommon to gather flags, banners, and ribbons together after the political campaign was over and assemble them in a quilt as a permanent memento.” Women frequently wrote to President Harrison to ask for an autographed patch so they could sew the name of the President, written in his own hand, into their quilt. The Smithsonian owns a quilt from 1841 that consists of 1840 campaign ribbons and 1841 inauguration ribbons. In 1844, a woman or women made a vibrant quilt using textiles from James K. Polk’s Presidential campaign. The quilt, now owned by the White House, is made from red, white, and blue flag campaign banners with a black and white portrait of Polk in the center.5

As this country’s centennial approached, quilts become more patriotic. Some women even commemorated past politicians and campaigns. One young lady, for example, decided to commemorate past presidential campaigns by creating a flag quilt composed of campaign ribbons that cover a large span of years as well as several presidential and public offices. She incorporated all four presidential candidates from 1860, Abraham Lincoln, Stephen A. Douglas, John C. Breckenridge, and John Bell, into her flag quilt.6

By the 1880s, as campaign textiles became more prevalent, more quilts were made containing campaign souvenirs, such as bandannas and ribbons. Several quilts were made using campaign bandannas for James A. Garfield and his running mate, Chester A. Arthur.7 Women had also begun making crazy quilts by 1880. Women often sewed campaign ribbons into their crazy quilts.8 Some crazy quilts just include one or
two ribbons as in an 1884 crazy quilt for Grover Cleveland which includes a portrait ribbon of Cleveland and his running mate with the embroidered Democratic symbol of a rooster above the picture. Though they lost the election, James Blaine and John Logan were documented in an 1884 crazy quilt.9 There was not just one style of quilt, however, when it came to incorporating campaign textiles.

Ribbons seemed exceedingly fitting in crazy quilts, but women also incorporated ribbons, bandannas, and political textiles into other quilt styles. One quilt top from 1888, Benjamin Harrison’s campaign, used a bandanna circled several times by red, white, and blue stripes.10 Another quilt for Harrison’s 1892 campaign is made completely of bandanna yardage that has left the cutting and sewing lines for the handkerchiefs visible. Another quilt top contains a collection of bandannas supporting Cleveland pieced together, one from his 1888 campaign and the rest from 1892.11

Most quilts were likely created as personal family mementos; however, several quilts were created for fundraisers, using political ties to increase the value. Members of the Clay Hay Post No. 383, Grand Army of the Republic, in New Carlisle, Clark County, Ohio, decided to raise funds for needy veterans and their families. They appealed to wives and relatives of wartime Union leaders to help create several quilts in 1888. The group asked each woman participant to make a square for the quilt using old dress fabrics and to embroider inscriptions, insignias, and names of historic interest. The names of the three finished quilts were the “National” quilt, the “G. A. R.” quilt, and the “Clay Hay” quilt. The GAR quilt contains Corps badges. Though the group asked women to incorporate pieces of their clothing, Julia Grant, wife of General Ulysses S. Grant, decided it was more valuable to make a quilt square out of a piece of her husband’s suit
rather than left-over material from her dresses. The women contributing quilt squares embroidered the names of the men they represented. They hoped they were contributing to good by raising money to support the men’s comrades. Many other groups used quilts as fundraisers, including church-related ladies’ aid societies and clubs loyal to the Women’s Christian Temperance Movement. Quilts with political ties were often used to help raise money for a particular candidate or political party. Celebrity names on a quilt increased its selling value. Much subtle detail went into the making of these quilts.\textsuperscript{12}

Campaign textiles and quilts can contribute greatly to our understanding of women’s participation and interest in the realm of politics. Whether women were simply trying to show their patriotism through the use of symbols, to commemorate an event, to show their support for a candidate, or to fulfill a presumed duty to contribute to a fundraiser, the quilts they created throughout the nineteenth century helped tell and record the story of women’s growing concern for and knowledge of politics. Women’s attention to politics and use of quilts as a means of expression climaxed toward the end of the nineteenth century.

**Popular Quilt Techniques During McKinley’s Political Career**

The three quilting techniques most popular during William McKinley’s political career were crazy, outline, and pieced quilts. Crazy quilts were popular throughout McKinley’s political career. They were just coming into fashion when he was a Congressman and were fading from fashion when he was elected President. Crazy quilts, typically made using silk and wool, utilized a woman’s talent for fancy stitches. Outline quilts, also popular during McKinley’s political career, were simpler to create. They featured embroidered designs of cotton floss on cotton fabric. Pieced quilts were just
returning to fashion toward the end of McKinley’s political career. They were frequently made using cotton or silk. Within these three methods, women created numerous variations to display and celebrate McKinley as a politician.

Crazy Quilts

One of the most popular styles of quilt throughout McKinley’s political career was the crazy quilt. The first mention of a crazy quilt was at the Cleveland Sanitary Fair in 1864. In 1864, however, the term “crazy” had a negative connotation. To these women, the quilts appeared unbalanced, incongruous, unusual, or even grotesque. This style was initially found more repulsive than attractive. Log cabin quilts were more popular at the time of the Sanitary Fair. In 1872, Japanese designs, as well as aesthetic ideas from England’s John Ruskin and William Morris and from Charles Eastlake’s *Hints on Household Taste* began to influence women.\(^{13}\) Japanese art and artifacts shown at the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876 influenced the popularity of crazy quilts.\(^{14}\) Women began to use ornamental work, fancy stitching, embroidery, and painting on quilts.\(^{15}\) The Japanese influence brought beauty to asymmetry.\(^{16}\) By 1879, there was a noticeable increase in women using this asymmetric style to make crazy quilts.\(^{17}\) Crazy quilts were fully developed by 1882.\(^{18}\)

When making crazy quilts, women borrowed the technique they used for log cabin quilts by attaching the pieces of fabric to a backing beginning around a central piece.\(^{19}\) They were made with irregular pieces of fabric including velvet and silk. Crazy quilts were often economical because fabric scraps did not go to waste or have to be sold to a ragman. In fact, as crazy quilts became more popular, ladies who did not generate enough different scraps of their own would often make trades with friends. Department
stores and manufacturers had to be careful because some women tried to obtain free fabric under the pretense of getting sample fabric for dress goods. In 1884, manufacturers took advantage of the craze by selling scraps as kits for crazy quilts. The Victorian era was one in which people liked to collect and display pretty things which showcased their good taste and status. Crazy quilts were a type of fabric scrapbook women could use to display their artistic skills, social affiliations, hobbies, political preferences, and personal interests. They could incorporate “political ribbons, Masonic symbols, autographs, poems or sayings, painted or embroidered flowers, animals, Kate Greenaway figures, fans, insects, flags, and good luck symbols.”

As the craze grew, men desired to own crazy quilts made by women of their acquaintance. By 1887, however, people of fashion became tired of the “childish” crazy quilts. The crazy quilts continued to be made, but tended to be less ornamented. Periodicals stopped featuring crazy quilts. Women found that they did not have time to do all of the former ornamentation. By the end of the nineteenth century, crazy quilts had been eclipsed by other quilting techniques.

Outline Quilts

A “decorative art craze” hit the nation between 1876 and 1893. With that craze came outline quilts. In January 1881, Harper’s Bazar offered designs from the Kensington Royal School of Art Needlework for embroidery and fancy work, but they offered no instructions besides the outline drawings. Unsure how to fill the designs in with color, many women simply embroidered the outlines using a stem or outline stitch which came to be known as the Kensington Stitch. Outline quilts are typically made using white cotton fabric and Turkey red, or occasionally blue, cotton embroidery floss.
They were intended to be used as functional, washable quilts. Outline designs flooded the pages of magazines because they were easy to copy. Outline quilts were likely popular because they were fast and inexpensive to create. Over time, these quilts became more child-oriented and incorporated storybook outlines.23

Outline quilts were a very popular style by the time of McKinley’s death in 1901. It is not surprising that many of the quilts made memorializing his death are outline quilts. Women made some of the outline quilts related to McKinley during his Presidency. Most of the outline quilts found during this research, however, had been made after McKinley’s death. They contain outlined illustrations of the Temple of Music in Buffalo, New York, where he was shot, and images of the succeeding President, Theodore Roosevelt.

Pieced Quilts

Calico pieced patchwork began to re-emerge in the 1890s.24 Pieced quilts were not a highly popular form of quilting during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, but they had begun to return to fashion as the crazy quilt popularity faded with the onset of the twentieth century. Quilts could be pieced in a political or patriotic manner using patriotic colors or fancy fabrics. Women incorporated campaign materials which had specific dimensions in pieced quilts. They included handkerchiefs, ribbons, and any textiles used to promote a political candidate. Another type of material used in quilts was bunting from floats and campaign parades. Bunting, typically a flag or banner made of wool or cotton for the purpose of decoration and patriotism, would have been a practical material to recycle into quilts. It is likely overlooked as a campaign textile if the quilt is not marked or the provenance known.
Quilts from McKinley’s Early Political Career

Quilts relating to William McKinley’s political career still exist today. This research revealed that women made quilts related to McKinley throughout his political career, not just during his Presidencies. McKinley is recognized in a crazy quilt begun during his congressional years. His name appears alongside the 1884 Republican Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates Blaine and Logan. Two quilts found during this research contain campaign ribbons from McKinley’s 1892 gubernatorial campaign. The number of quilts discussed in this research that originate from McKinley’s congressional and gubernatorial years is significant because it suggests that women had already taken a great political interest in him early in his political career.

Congress

McKinley was recorded as a politician in a quilt twelve years before his first Presidential campaign. A crazy quilt owned by Virginia Gunn contains a ribbon embroidered with the names “Blaine Logan & McKinley” (see figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3). Blaine and Logan were the Republican candidates for President and Vice-President, respectively, for the 1884 Presidential campaign. The quilt top is unfinished and appears to have been made over a period of time, possibly worked on between 1884 and 1896. The quilt top is made using silk and embroidery with “1885” embroidered onto one piece of silk and several printed ribbons. These ribbons include a mourning ribbon: “General U.S. Grant, Ex-president U.S., Born April 27, 1822, Died July 23, 1885;” and a commemorative ribbon: “Complimentary Social given by Menuncatuck Lodge No. 62, I.O.O.F Guilford, Conn. December 19, 1894.” The spliced ribbon embroidered with “Blaine Logan & McKinley” is significant because McKinley was a
Figure 4.1. *Blaine Logan Quilt.* Crazy quilt containing a ribbon embroidered with Blaine Logan & McKinley from 1884. Used by permission from the collection of Virginia Gunn. Photograph taken by researcher.

Figure 4.2. *Blaine Logan Ribbon* (left). Figure 4.3. *And McKinley Ribbon* (right). Spliced ribbon embroidered with the 1884 Presidential and Vice-Presidential candidates along with congressman McKinley. Used by permission from the collection of Virginia Gunn. Photograph taken by the researcher.
Congressman during Blaine’s campaign in 1884 and had been in Congress for less than ten years, since 1876. In that same year, McKinley’s seat in Congress, which had been contested in the last election, was given to his opponent by the House of Representatives. In spite of his loss, McKinley was hailed upon his return to Canton as his townsfolk gathered to celebrate his return almost as though he was a victorious hero. McKinley remained active in the Republican convention held later in 1884 and was a speaker for Blaine’s Presidential campaign.26

Later that year, McKinley successfully ran to regain his seat in Congress. The managers of a rally held in Copley during McKinley’s 1884 congressional campaign against D. R. Page offered a banner as a prize for the ward or township that brought the most delegates. The sixth ward of Akron won the banner and later presented it to McKinley during his 1896 Presidential campaign. The banner displayed a painted picture of McKinley.27

The Gubernatorial Race

McKinley’s popularity had not decreased when he decided to run for governor of Ohio in 1891. McKinley began his campaign for governor in August 1891 in his birthplace of Niles, Ohio. Thirty thousand people traveled to the small town of Niles to hear McKinley’s speech. Men traveled to Cincinnati to give a large Labor Day parade for McKinley before he gave his campaign address there. Reporters from several large newspapers followed him throughout his gubernatorial campaign. McKinley campaigned hard giving multiple speeches day after day in city after city. His efforts paid off. McKinley was elected governor of Ohio in November 1891.28 Though McKinley’s
gubernatorial campaign is often overlooked, it had a significant impact on men and women living in Ohio.

Quilts exist that commemorate McKinley’s triumph in the race for governor. Both McKinley Museums, in Canton and in Niles, own a crazy quilt containing at least one gubernatorial ribbon. The quilt owned by the McKinley Museum in Canton, Ohio, measures 56 by 75 inches and is made of silk, wool, and velvet with a grey wool backing (see figures 4.4 and 4.5). The quilt contains twelve blocks that are sewn in a crazy style. Nearly every block has a painted initial or name, possibly made by several different women, and two blocks contain the date 1892. The block in the right-bottom corner contains one white gubernatorial ribbon with a printed image of McKinley and the writing “McKinley for Governor.” The crazy quilt owned by the McKinley Birthplace Home and Research Center in Niles, Ohio, contains three gubernatorial ribbons printed with McKinley’s photograph and “For Governor Wm. McKinley Jr.” (see figures 4.6 and 4.7). The suggestion that the quilt, acquired in 1993 by a local donor, was made locally is supported by the existence of a silk lining fabric incorporated into the quilt printed with “M. U. Guggenheim, Niles, Ohio,” but the provenance of the quilt is lost. The quilt is made in blocks, much like the style of the Canton quilt. It is made of silk, wool, and velvet, and has a green and white printed cotton backing. The quilt measures 74 by 76 inches. The ribbons are both white and gold and included in three different blocks. It is possible that these ribbons were sewn into this quilt to commemorate the initial gubernatorial campaign speech McKinley gave in Niles, Ohio.
Figure 4.4. *Canton Gubernatorial Crazy Quilt.* Crazy quilt containing a ribbon for McKinley’s gubernatorial campaign. Used by permission from the Wm. McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, Canton, Ohio. Photograph taken by researcher.

Figure 4.5. *Ribbon on Canton Gubernatorial Quilt.* McKinley’s gubernatorial campaign ribbon that has been sewn onto a crazy quilt. Used by permission from the Wm. McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, Canton, Ohio. Photograph taken by researcher.
Figure 4.6. *Niles Gubernatorial Quilt.* Crazy quilt containing three ribbons from McKinley’s gubernatorial campaign. Used by permission from the McKinley Birthplace Home and Research Center in Niles, Ohio. Photograph taken by researcher.

Figure 4.7. *Niles Gubernatorial Ribbon.* Ribbon sewn on crazy quilt in support of McKinley from his gubernatorial campaign. Used by permission from the McKinley Birthplace Home and Research Center in Niles, Ohio. Photograph taken by researcher.
Quilts Celebrating McKinley’s First Presidential Campaign

Women made numerous quilts to commemorate McKinley’s 1896 presidential campaign and his years as President. Women continued to make quilts related to McKinley after his death in 1901. The variety of quilts discovered spanning McKinley’s political career indicate that women had a significant, longstanding interest in him as a politician. Women’s support for McKinley, as shown through politically-related quilts, grew throughout his political career and peaked during his terms as President of the United States. Women’s enthusiasm for this politician, however, has not been included in key books focusing on political quilts. Three of these books, by Katy Christopherson, Robert Bishop and Carter Houck, and Herbert Ridgeway Collins, contain no mention of McKinley quilts.31

McKinley-Related Pieced Quilts

One quilt using bunting and made for McKinley’s 1896 campaign exists in the Wabash County Museum in Mt. Carmel, Illinois.32 According to museum information, the all-cotton quilt was made in 1896 by the wife of Thomas Gilkison, the owner of the Friendsville Coal Mine in Illinois. Mrs. Thomas Gilkison made the quilt from the bunting used on a political rally parade float in Friendsville, Illinois. The float represented the coal mine and it was drawn by horses and filled with coal from the mine.33 The quilt is made in a pieced diamond pattern in blue and white cotton with a Crossed T, Four T, or Double T pattern in the white blocks, possibly for temperance. The words “1896; Wm. McKinley, Pres.; John R. Tanner, Gov.; Gold Standard” can be seen in one blue block of the quilt. John R. Tanner ran for Governor in the state of Illinois in 1896 (see figures 4.8 and 4.9). The blocks of solid blue fabric are likely the original
Figure 4.8. *Bunting Quilt.* Pieced quilt using bunting from McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign. Used by permission from the Wabash County Museum, Mt. Caramel, Illinois.

Figure 4.9. *Embroidery on Bunting Quilt.* Close-up of embroidery on square of bunting quilt made for McKinley’s 1896 Presidential election. Used by permission from the Wabash County Museum, Mt. Caramel, Illinois.
bunting material that was later cut and pieced into this quilt where the embroidery in support of William McKinley has been preserved.

A patriotic pieced quilt pattern that has an early origin is the Liberty Tree, also known as the Pine Tree pattern. This pattern was particularly popular right after the Civil War. The Michigan State University Museum, however, owns a Liberty Tree Quilt made by Mrs. S. K. Daniels in 1896 (see figure 4.10).34 She signed and dated the quilt. The quilt is 69 by 80 inches with a white background. Blue and red fabrics form the leaves of the tree. The quilt is believed to commemorate McKinley and his Vice-President Hobart. Besides McKinley’s name and 1896 embroidered on the quilt, Mrs. Daniels recognized Hobart and the Illinois gubernatorial candidate J. B. Tanner. Many phrases are embroidered on the quilt including “One Flag, One Country,” “We love the dear old Flag,” and “Liberty Tree.” Beyond patriotic statements, Daniels also embroidered temperance phrases and names and dates of important Civil War people and events.

Though many of the quilts discussed in this research are commemorative, some quilts were made for the purpose of presentation. Several groups of women rallied together to make a silk pieced quilt to present to President McKinley in 1897 (see figure 4.11).35 The quilt appears to have some crazy quilt influence as it is decorated with fancy embroidery stitches using silk thread. The quilt is 74 by 76 inches and contains several painted and printed ribbons including “La. Society United States Daughters of 1776 & 1812,” “Daughters of the Confederacy,” “San Buenaventura,” “Philippines,” “Hawaii,” “Puerto Rico,” “From the Ladies of the U.S. Mint,” and “sons of American Revolution,” as well as the names of a majority of the States in America. According to Western Reserve Historical Society information, the quilt was presented to McKinley and his wife
Figure 4.10. *Liberty Tree Quilt*. Pieced quilt using the Liberty Tree pattern with McKinley’s name and Hobart’s name embroidered on the quilt. Courtesy of Michigan State University Museum, East Lansing, Michigan.
Figure 4.11. *Presentation Quilt.* Silk pieced quilt made to present to McKinley in 1897 after he was elected President of the United States of America. Courtesy of the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.
by the state chapters of the D.A.R. (Daughters of the American Revolution). The names of numerous states are painted along the silk borders of the quilt. The quilt took much time and care and likely reflected the gratitude and wide-spread appreciation from women for McKinley’s election.

Presidential Campaign Ribbons

Campaign ribbons were prevalent throughout McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign. Many men and women had ribbons printed for their particular delegation or organization. Women had ready access to ribbons that could either be used in pieced quilts or sewn into crazy quilts. The “Blaine Logan & McKinley” crazy quilt mentioned earlier on also includes a “Sound Money” ribbon which was likely from McKinley’s 1896 campaign. Although the exact date printed on the ribbon is partially obscured by the fancy embroidery stitches, “Sound Money” was one of the Republican slogans used by McKinley in his 1896 presidential campaign (see figure 4.12).³⁶

A crazy quilt owned by the McKinley Birthplace Home and Research Center in Niles, Ohio, also contains a presidential campaign ribbon (see figures 4.13 and 4.14).³⁷ This ribbon incorporates a cardboard photograph of McKinley which was likely from his 1896 campaign. The silk ribbon is deteriorating, but the words “Patriotism, Protection, Prosperity, Wm. McKinley The Nations . . .” is still visible. The quilt also contains a “South Norwalk Republican Club” ribbon which could have been worn by the Norwalk delegation when they traveled to Canton to visit McKinley in 1896 as well as “So Norwalk” embroidery. Another McKinley-related ribbon is printed: “30th Annual Encampment Department of New York, Grand Army of the Republic. Tuesday and Wednesday, May 19 and 20, 1896. Utica, N. Y. Delegate.” The quilt of pieced silk
Figure 4.12. *Sound Money Ribbon.* Ribbon from McKinley’s 1896 Presidential Campaign stitched onto crazy quilt. Used by permission from the collection of Virginia Gunn. Photograph taken by researcher.
Figure 4.13. *Niles Presidential Crazy Quilt*. Crazy quilt containing a ribbon from McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign. Used by permission from the McKinley Birthplace Home and Research Center in Niles, Ohio. Photograph taken by researcher.

Figure 4.14. *McKinley Presidential Campaign Ribbon*. Ribbon from McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign ribbon sewn onto a crazy quilt. Used by permission from the McKinley Birthplace Home and Research Center in Niles, Ohio. Photograph taken by researcher.
measures 59.5 by 79 inches and was completed over time between 1885 and 1912. The quilt contains other commemorative ribbons besides those for McKinley, including a flag ribbon for Harrison and Morton’s inauguration into the White House in 1889.

Pieced quilts were a practical choice for women planning to showcase a number of ribbons. Michigan State University Museum owns a pieced hexagon quilt fragment (see figure 4.15). The fragment consists of hexagon-shaped silk and velvet pieces spanning 15.5 by 13.75 inches. The fragment, dated 1896, contains three printed silk photos of McKinley and three printed silk photos of Hobart alternating around the central hexagon. Printed underneath McKinley is the word “President” and beneath Hobart is the word “Vice-President.” Not much is known about the quilt fragment, but it was likely meant to be a decorative piece to showcase a family member or group’s enthusiasm and participation in McKinley’s 1896 presidential campaign. The images of McKinley and Hobart are featured in the center of this quilt fragment and are stitched around a central red, white, and blue striped ribbon.

Figure 4.15. *Hexagon Quilt Fragment.* Pieced quilt fragment containing the images of McKinley and Hobart from the 1896 Presidential campaign.Courtesy of Michigan State University Museum, East Lansing, Michigan.
Figure 4.16. *Ribbon Quilt Fragment*. Pieced quilt fragment made primarily of ribbons from McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign. Courtesy of the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.
Barefoot Society of the New York State McKinley League,” “McKinley and Hobart Honest Money,” and “British American Republican Club, Jamestown, N.Y.”

Other women may have used the technique of piecing ribbons together as a political showcase either for themselves or a family member. The Church of the Savior United Methodist of Canton owns an image of a completed quilt made of campaign ribbons. The photograph of Henry G. Fries, found in a souvenir photo-book from McKinley’s funeral in 1901, shows a proud Fries standing in front of his butcher shop next to his collection of 412 campaign ribbons from 1896 that have been pieced together and bound (see figure 4.17).40

**Friendship Quilts**

Women often created quilts through a group effort. Sometimes this was for the purpose of coming together as friends or to make a quilt that could be used as a fundraiser. The Western Reserve Historical Society owns a quilt made in 1897 by several women’s groups in and around Cleveland, Ohio.41 The women came together to create a sunburst or wagon wheel signature quilt. The quilt was made using a white cotton background with red floss for the stitching and measures 74 by 80 inches. The organizations whose names are embroidered onto the quilt include the Wellington Ohio Club, The Dorcus Society, Girls Friendly Society, Home Foraged Women, REM Kisson Cleveland O., and The Book and Thimble Club. Some of the central circles featured names rather than organizations including Philip Acker, Mrs. J. Eisenman, Mr. C. H. Presley, Geo. Presley Jr., and Geo. F. Bowman. The quilt showcases a name or two names in the central circle with other names between the spokes or rays radiating from the center as well as across the corners of each block. One central block features the
Figure 4.17. *Campaign Ribbon Quilt*. Print of H. G. Fries standing next to his collection of ribbons from McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign. Courtesy of the Church of the Savior United Methodist in Canton, Ohio.
embroidered signature of William McKinley, with “President U. S. 1897” embroidered in blue beneath. The signatures of McKinley’s cabinet members are embroidered onto this block including Attorney General, Joseph McKenna; Postmaster General, James A. Gary; Secretary of Agriculture, James Wilson; Secretary of the Interior, Cornelius N. Bliss; Secretary of Navy, John D. Long; Secretary of State, John Sherman; Secretary of Treasury, Lyman J. Gage; and Secretary of War, Russell Alger. The square also includes the names of some prominent Cleveland, Ohio, citizens, such as Mark Hanna, a banker and McKinley’s campaign manager (see figure 4.18).

The Canton McKinley Museum owns an outline quilt that is believed to be a friendship quilt. The quilt was assigned an approximate date of 1920, but was probably made or begun closer to the years of McKinley’s Presidency, 1896-1901. It measures 70 by 81 inches and is created using 42 squares of white cotton with smaller nine-patch squares formed at the corner of each square by strips of red cotton. Within each nine-patch are five signatures in black ink. As there is little recorded history about the quilt, this researcher is uncertain of the significance of the signatures. They could be the names of the people who participated in making the quilt, friends of the person who made the quilt, or have some other relationship to the quiltmaker. Near the center of the quilt are outline traced images of William and Ida McKinley with “18 W. McKinley 96” and “Mrs. McKinley” embroidered beneath their likenesses (see figures 4.19 and 4.20). The quilt came through the Belden Family (Mrs. McKinley’s relatives), but it is difficult to determine who made the quilt and whether it was made, given to, or acquired by the Belden family before it came to the museum.
Figure 4.18. *Signature Block Illustration*. One block of a signature friendship quilt embroidered with the names of William McKinley, his cabinet members, and other prominent Clevelanders. Quilt is owned by the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio. Computer-generated reproduction of signature block by researcher.
Figure 4.19. *Signature Outline Quilt.* Outline quilt containing images of William and Ida McKinley. Used by permission from the Wm. McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, Canton, Ohio. Photograph taken by researcher.

Figure 4.20. *Outline of Ida and William McKinley.* Used by permission from the Wm. McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, Canton, Ohio. Photograph taken by researcher.
Memorial Quilts

While many quilts were made during McKinley’s life and career as a politician, women continued to make quilts after his death as commemoration and also respect for McKinley’s tragic assassination shortly into his second term as President. Ribbons made for the death of a President were frequently edged in black. Other ribbons were made later in commemoration of previous Presidents. Some cigarette companies, such as the American Cigarette Company, offered silk pieces with images of past Presidents with the purchase of their product. The Ohio Historical Society owns a crazy quilt made with several silk ribbons and velvet scraps. One ribbon on the quilt says, “In Memoriam, Thy Will Be Done, William McKinley, died Sept. 14, 1901” (see figure 4.21). The ribbon displays McKinley’s image lined in black to signify his death. The quilt is believed to have been made around 1901 and the ribbon was likely included to reflect the great impact McKinley’s death had on the public.

The Church of the Savior United Methodist in Canton, Ohio, owns an outline child’s quilt that was made after McKinley had died (see figure 4.22 and 4.23). The quilt contains an outline of both Ida McKinley and President Theodore Roosevelt. This simple quilt was made with squares of white cotton embroidered with red floss. The quilt is tied instead of quilted. Not much is known about the history of the quilt, but it was likely made for a child during Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency as his image is labeled “President Roosevelt.”

The Minneapolis Institute of Arts also owns an outline quilt containing McKinley imagery. Outlines of William and Ida McKinley are stitched in the center with the words “We Mourn our Loss, President McKinley” (see figure 4.24). The quilt
Figure 4.21. *Mourning Ribbon.* Ribbon memorializing McKinley’s assassination in 1901. Courtesy of the Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio.
Figure 4.22. *Tied Outline Quilt.* Outline quilt containing the outline of Ida McKinley (second square from bottom, right) and President Roosevelt (second square from bottom, left). Used by permission from the Church of the Savior United Methodist in Canton, Ohio. Photograph taken by the researcher.

Figure 4.23. *Outline of Mrs. Wm. McKinley.* Used by permission from the Church of the Savior United Methodist in Canton, Ohio. Photograph taken by researcher.
Figure 4.24. *Memorial Outline Quilt.* Outline quilt containing images of William and Ida McKinley and the Temple of Music in New York where McKinley was shot. Courtesy of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, Minnesota.
also contains images of the Temple of Music where McKinley was assassinated in Buffalo, New York, and an outline labeled “President Roosevelt.” The quilt had to have been completed after McKinley’s death, possibly early in Theodore Roosevelt’s presidency, around 1901. Besides the imagery suggesting that it is a memorial quilt for McKinley, the quilt contains other outline designs including Abraham Lincoln, George Washington, Martha Washington, Rear Admiral Sampson, Admiral Dewey, Prince Henry of Prussia, Wife of Prince Henry, James A. Garfield, a Philippine village, triumphal bridge, USS New York, New York State Building, Cleopatra’s Temple, and an Ohio building. The quilt is made of white cotton blocks decorated with red floss outline designs and measures approximately 80 by 72.5 inches.

**Bringing Quilts to Light**

Very few of the quilts relating to McKinley have been discussed in published works or catalogs. One quilt that has been researched is a one-patch or postage stamp quilt. After researching the quilt, E. Duane and Rachel Kamm Elbert found that the campaign ribbon incorporated in one square of the quilt was worn by Illinois Republican D. E. Ray for the “Sound Money and the Nation’s Honor” parade during McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign. After McKinley was elected, Ray’s mother incorporated the ribbon into a quilt creating a “colorful collage of silk squares.” The quilt was intended to be decorative, not a functional piece, and was completed in 1898.48

Another quilt was pictured in the April 1999 *Antiques Review*.49 The photograph is of a pieced American Flag quilt made using red, white, and blue cotton. The quilt, made circa 1900, has appliquéd stars containing the signatures of state governors in the Union and Indian territories. A circular patch with President
McKinley’s signature has been sewn onto one of the stripes. The quilt is 66 by 84 inches and made by Mary Isabell Patrick Hallam and the Ladies Aid Society of the Christian Church in McKinney, Texas, while McKinley was President.

Quilts relating to McKinley’s political career are more common than most quilt researchers expect. McKinley-related quilts are likely spread throughout the country. Quilts related to McKinley, however, have often been overlooked heretofore. The number of quilts women made that refer to McKinley’s political career is not surprising when one knows how fully he was supported by women. It would be several decades before women could vote in a national election, but they carefully recorded the choice they would have made in a variety of fashionable and functional quilts. The quilts contain various artifacts and are made using several methods to display women’s outpouring of support. The amount of time and care women dedicated to their quilts allowed the quilts to reflect the personality and values of the woman working on each quilt.

Political quilts serve as a record of women’s interest in politics throughout the nineteenth century. The number and variety of political quilts that exist from the nineteenth century indicate that women were greatly interested and involved, whether publicly or privately, in politics. The increase of political textiles correlated with women’s expanding involvement in politics. By the end of the nineteenth century, women’s involvement in politics had reached a new level. This increase of participation can be seen during McKinley’s political career. Women strongly supported McKinley throughout his career in politics and felt comfortable showing their support by traveling to his home in Canton, Ohio, during his 1896 Presidential campaign. Women traveled by
the hundreds in organized delegations to show their support for McKinley in 1896. During McKinley’s Presidency, though women’s suffrage was uncommon and few women could legally vote, women were already exploring their increasing freedom in the realm of politics and were able to express themselves verbally as well as graphically in quilts. The quilts discussed in this research demonstrate the incredible loyalty, respect, and support women had for William McKinley as a politician. The effort women took to record McKinley’s political career in quilts was meant to insure that their cherished memories of this candidate and his campaigns would not be forgotten.

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Notes


5 Ibid., 28, 107, 120.

6 Powell, 29.

7 Ibid., 30.

8 Collins, 219.

9 Powell, 30.

10 Collins, 263.
11 Powell, 30.


16 McMorris, 46.


19 Ibid., 143.

20 McMorris, 42, 45.

21 Gunn, “Crazy Quilts and Outline Quilts,” 145-147.

22 McMorris, 46.

23 Gunn, “Crazy Quilts and Outline Quilts,” 131, 140-142, 147.

24 Ibid., 147.

25 Quilt from Virginia Gunn’s personal collection (professor of Clothing, Textiles, and Interiors at the University of Akron, Akron, OH).


28 Heald, 62-63.
29 Quilt owned by Wm. McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, Canton, Ohio, accession no. 1986-0076-0001-0001.

30 Quilt owned by the McKinley Birthplace Home & Research Center, Niles, Ohio, accession no. 95.01.305.


32 Quilt owned by the Wabash County Museum, Mt. Carmel, Illinois.


34 Quilt owned by the Michigan State University Museum, East Lansing, Michigan, accession no. 2001:158.5.

35 Quilt owned by the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio, accession no. 50.161.

36 Quilt from Virginia Gunn’s private collection (professor of Clothing, Textiles, and Interiors at the University of Akron, Akron, OH).

37 Quilt owned by the McKinley Birthplace Home & Research Center, Niles, Ohio, accession no. 05.00.01.050.

38 Quilt owned by the Michigan State University Museum, East Lansing, Michigan, accession no. 6817.2.

39 Quilt owned by the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio, accession no. 2003.0.7.

40 *Souvenir. . . of the funeral of our martyred President William McKinley* (Canton, OH: The Watts Printing Co., 1901). Found in the collection of The Church of the Savior United Methodist, Canton, Ohio.

41 Quilt owned by the Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio, accession no. 55.497.

42 Quilt owned by Wm. McKinley Presidential Library & Museum, Canton, Ohio, accession no. 1995-0005-0036.


45 Quilt owned by the Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio, accession no. H18248.

46 Quilt owned by the Church of the Savior United Methodist Church, Canton, Ohio.

47 Quilt owned by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, Minnesota, accession no. 2002.251.


CHAPTER V

SUMMARY

American women have always had an interest in patriotism and politics, but they became more involved in political campaigns during the nineteenth century. Politicians recognized women’s moral superiority and began offering campaign textiles and memorabilia in order to earn their endorsement. During the Civil War, women, especially in the North, gained experience operating organizations, such as the Sanitary Commission, and heading fundraisers. Because of this newly discovered strength, women began to take a more involved interest in politics and political campaigns. They also worked to improve society and influence politics through various clubs and reform societies. Not everyone agreed on the new roles to which women should have access. Men and women had become used to functioning in a society of separate spheres. The thought of introducing equality between the sexes was frightening.

Entering the last quarter of the nineteenth century, more and more women began to join together and form clubs to actively support the Presidential candidate of their choice. They also gathered to discuss political issues that affected the home. In the West, some women received municipal suffrage and were free to vote and or run for office in local elections. Women had gained full suffrage in four states by 1896. Women’s increasing freedom and their growing attention to politics peaked in the 1890s and influenced their role in William McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign.
Women used textiles as a form of expression throughout the nineteenth century. Early in the century, textiles were used more for patriotic expression rather than a direct response to a politician or political issues. As women became more involved in politics, they began to incorporate their memories and political preferences into quilts. Women took advantage of the growing number of campaign textiles politicians offered and began to synthesize them into their quilts. Women began to form political clubs in support of a particular candidate in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Some of these clubs worked together on quilts and flags to present to their candidate of choice as a testament of their support.

The increase of campaign textiles coincided with advancing technology and advertising. Magazines and newspapers printed advertisements for the purchase of banners and other campaign items. A growing number of campaign items were especially made to encourage women’s interest in politics. Candidates offered practical items such as sewing boxes or hatpins and decorative items such as fine dishes to women. Today, we see advertisements on television. Before television, however, campaign funds were spent on such things as buttons and lapel devices, ceramics, glassware, and textiles. Women may have influenced the choice of campaign merchandising techniques including the use of slogans and magazine advertisements because they appealed more to the female population. Also, it was the woman in the family who did most of the shopping for the home and family. Textiles and memorabilia likely appealed to women because they would have been the family members who had the most access and exposure to the items being purchased.
McKinley earned respect from women throughout his political career. McKinley quickly made friends when he began his career as a lawyer in Canton, Ohio. He gained national recognition for his actions as a Congressman. He was active in the Republican Party and became famous for the McKinley Tariff Bill which was passed by Congress in 1890. By the time he was elected governor of Ohio in 1891, he was practically a celebrity. After two sessions as Governor, McKinley was easily nominated for President of the United States in 1896. Great excitement reigned in Canton, Ohio, during his front-porch campaign as delegations large and small from across the nation poured into town.

Women displayed phenomenal support for McKinley during his Presidential campaign. Some women accompanied larger masculine delegations with their husbands and fathers while other women organized their own delegations. Women strongly believed in McKinley’s moral character and trusted his political decisions. Women continued to support him during his 1900 Presidential campaign. By 1900, women were less afraid to stand up and take a political stance or discuss political issues in public.

Given the number of quilts related to McKinley discovered by this research, it is surprising that McKinley quilts have been neglected by quilt historians. During McKinley’s political career, there were three popular quilting techniques. Crazy quilts became popular early in McKinley’s political career. Outline and pieced quilts became popular toward the end of the nineteenth century. Quilts using each of these techniques exist in support of McKinley as a politician. In fact, McKinley is recognized in a quilt as early as 1884 when he was a Congressman and orator for the Republican Party. At least two crazy quilts incorporate ribbons from McKinley’s gubernatorial campaign in 1891.
Many quilts represent McKinley’s 1896 Presidential campaign, Presidency, and death. These quilts contain campaign memorabilia, such as campaign ribbons or bunting. Other quilts contain outline designs of McKinley, his wife, or icons from his Presidency. Each quilt is unique and provides valuable insight into the impact McKinley had on women throughout his political career.

Textiles are a credible tool used to learn about the past. For example, political ribbons stitched onto a crazy quilt give us a glimpse into important events in the life of its creator. The quilts made during William McKinley’s political career illustrate the impact McKinley had on ladies and families of ladies who made the quilts. Women liked him because he was a majestic speaker, a moral man, trustworthy, congenial, and appeared to regard their interests. Also, his attention to his mother and wife was well known.

The quilts identified in this research indicate that women recognized McKinley’s talent as a politician early in his career. By the time McKinley ran for governor of Ohio, he was already a household name throughout Ohio and was gaining attention nationally. The quilts that incorporate memorabilia from his gubernatorial campaign show that even though women could not vote, they were taking notice of McKinley and were participants in his gubernatorial election.

Most of the biographies written about McKinley fail to recognize the significance of women’s participation in his campaigns. Women, however, left their own records of the campaign. The multiple quilts that commemorate McKinley’s 1896 Presidential election and the countless descriptions of women’s participation remaining in primary source materials provide substantiative evidence of women’s widespread support and enthusiasm for William McKinley.
More research needs to be done to compare McKinley’s impact on women with that of the preceding and succeeding Presidents. Also, this research could be expanded to locate other McKinley quilts still in existence and to determine how widespread the phenomenon of McKinley quilts was across the nation. The quilts commemorating McKinley can be studied in depth to uncover individual histories of each quilt and better understand women’s political participation which has previously gone overlooked. This research can perhaps inspire others to explore political quilts and quilts intended for particular politicians more thoroughly.

Women took great care to preserve their memories of McKinley in the quilts they made. Quilts were an outlet where women could voice their thoughts and political opinions. Because of this, these quilts contain valuable impressions that have long outlived their makers. These women’s voices remain intertwined in their quilts and are simply beckoning, waiting to be heard.
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