Frances Willard
1839–1898

“I would not waste my life in friction when it could be turned into momentum.”
Frances Willard

Arguing for “Home Protection” against the evils of alcohol, Frances Willard linked the movements for Temperance and Woman’s Suffrage.

Sober Minded
Growing up in Janesville, Wisconsin sixteen year old Frances Willard passed this poem into the family Bible. “A pledge we make, no wine to take/ nor brandy red that turns the head...So here we pledge perpetual hate to all that can intoxicante.”

WCTU
As President of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union Frances Willard was one of the most widely known figures in America. Susan B. Anthony saw potential support for suffrage in this movement. At an 1888 congressional hearing she introduced Willard as “the commander-in-chief of an army of 250,000 women.” Distillers were concerned. The President of an industry group warned members: “Gentlemen, we need fear the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and the ballot in the hands of women: therefore, gentlemen, fight woman suffrage.”

Do Everything
Willard’s legacy is extensive. In addition to “home protection” through prohibition and suffrage, she urged followers to “Do Everything,” embracing a wide range of reforms. She called herself a “Christian Socialist,” endorsed an eight hour day and government ownership of utilities and railroads, as well as prison reform (including separate women’s facilities), free kindergarten, less restrictive clothing for women, and vegetarianism.

Womens’ Education
Frances Willard became President of the Evanston College for Ladies and was the first Dean of Women at Northwestern University. After a falling out with the university President, her former fiancé, she turned to the cause of temperance.

Ida B. Wells
With Southern advocates of prohibition Willard argued that black men would commit fewer crimes if denied access to alcohol. Ida B. Wells, a black journalist and activist, strongly objected to the implication that lynching was caused by the behavior of black men. Willard eventually stated her opposition to lynching, as did the WCTU through resolutions. This controversy and her advocacy of temperance (admired in the nineteenth century but unfashionable today) have affected her reputation yet she retains a legacy as a significant advocate of woman’s suffrage and reform.