DOWN FROM THE PEDESTAL:

KATE CHASE, A SUBTLE FEMINIST

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate exactly how Kate Chase manifested feminist characteristics. She is compared with what was expected of women in mid-nineteenth century America and with the ladies who were a part of the woman's rights movement. It is the contention of this thesis that while Kate may have looked and acted the perfect lady at first glance, her motives and desires were far removed from the mold of the Victorian woman. Indeed, her political machinations and unsuccessful attempts to help her father, Salmon P. Chase, become President of the United States could almost be labeled "masculine."

Chapter One sets the stage for Kate Chase. It is a discussion of women in nineteenth century America. It opens with an explanation of what women were expected to be and do according to pre- and early Victorian rules. It then moves on to the development of the woman's rights movement up to the Civil War era. Finally, there is an examination of the role of women in the Civil War. Chapter Two

delineates Kate's life from birth to 1865, when her father became Chief Justice. In Chapter Three, Kate's role in her father's campaigning, which is introduced in the second chapter, comes to the forefront with the election of 1868. Her influence over Roscoe Conkling as well as the disastrous scandal which spelled an end to her marriage are also discussed. Finally, Chapter Four ties the first three chapters together. The theme of the image Kate projected and the reality of her true character, which has been woven throughout the thesis, is emphasized here. This final chapter, which brings Kate to the end of her life, demonstrates where she deviated from her society's idea of femininity. It also points out Kate's differences and similarities with active feminists. The thesis concludes with its premise that Kate Chase, despite her outward appearance, was, in her own unique manner, a feminist.

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INTRODUCTION

> [She] was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when caught by her charms . . .

These words were written to describe the fictional character, Scarlett O'Hara, in Margaret Mitchell's Gone With the Wind. They could just as easily be used to describe a real life Civil War belle, Kate Chase, daughter of Chief Justice Salmon Portland Chase. Kate was a remarkable woman who used her natural charm and intelligence to their best advantage. Her goal in life was to make her father President of the United States, and in the process, she would become First Lady. To this end, she cultivated influential people who would make powerful political allies. During the Civil War, Kate became the acknowledged leader of Washington society, an advantageous position for her and her father to carry out their plans. By associating with and gaining influence over important people, she gained a great deal of power. She enjoyed and used this power in the best way possible.

Kate's deep concern and involvement with politics was something only a very small minority of women in the nineteenth century would ever have thought about doing. Those who did, often became involved in the woman's rights struggle; they were the Elizabeth Cady Stantons and Lucretia Motts. Kate was the only woman of her day who

used subtle means to amass the enormous amount of power she had. Her love of the intrigues of the political arena took Kate out of the mold that was considered desirable for Victorian women. In defying tradition, Kate Chase stepped down from the pedestal and became a subtle feminist.

In order to understand Kate in her proper perspective, Chapter One has been devoted to an examination of woman's position and the woman's rights movement during the first half of the nineteenth century. It offers a comparison between the Victorian ideal of womanhood and the ladies involved in the fight for woman's rights. By examining the former, it can be demonstrated exactly where Kate deviated from the ideal. By studying the latter, a contrast can be drawn between the tactics of the suffragists and the technique of Kate Chase.

The field of woman's history has only recently become an important area of study. Little has been written on even the feminist leaders. The single most complete work on the woman's movement is the six volume History of Woman Suffrage, edited by various leaders of the movement. The two volumes pertinent to this work were edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage. This massive work contains a great deal of primary material; its drawback is that it is one-sided.

The best secondary source on this topic is Century of Struggle: the Woman's Rights Movement in the United States by Eleanor Flexner.

Studying Kate Chase proved to be somewhat of a problem due to the fact that she left only a few letters behind. There is no doubt she destroyed many of them; what she did not destroy was lost after her death in the 1907 San Francisco earthquake.[1] The few that do remain tell only a little about this amazing woman. The observances of her contemporaries were helpful, through memoirs, diaries, and newspapers. The secondary sources proved to be useful, especially the works by Ishbel Ross, Mary M. Phelps, and Thomas and Marva Belden. Ross' Proud Kate: Portrait of an Ambitious Woman and Phelps' Kate Chase: Dominant Daughter are both excellent biographies. The Beldens' So Fell the Angels is an excellent triple biography of Kate, her father, and her husband. It is an extension of Thomas Belden's doctoral dissertation, which was also used in this thesis. The most recent biography of Kate, called Kate Chase for the Defense, by Alice Hunt Sokoloff, is nothing but a whitewash of Kate's life. All of the secondary sources, especially both of Belden's works, reprinted many of Kate's letters which

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[1]Kate's eldest daughter, Ethel, had moved to San Francisco; her belongings, including many of Kate's letters and souvenirs were burned in the fire following the earthquake, Ishbel Ross, Proud Kate: Portrait of an Ambitious Woman (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1953), p. 287.

are in manuscript collections in Philadelphia, Washington, and Rhode Island.

An examination of Kate as a feminist has never been done before, possibly because woman's history is such a new field. Evidence shows that Kate was cunning and artful, playing the political game for what it was worth, even to the point of making a loveless marriage. This is something that the true woman ideal would not encompass by any stretch of the imagination. By presenting Kate in this light, she appears to have been as much of a feminist as Susan B. Anthony. Kate is an important woman to study, because while she may have been a feminist, on the surface she was all sweetness and light. In her case, the image did not fit the reality. Her ambitions and desires separate her from the great majority of women of her day, while her tactics separate her from the suffragists. Kate demonstrated an important aspect of nineteenth century society--she was accepted by men as an equal, only as long as she appeared to be a perfect lady. When she deviated from that, as she did in her affair with Roscoe Conkling and subsequent divorce from her husband, her political influence was nullified and she became persona non grata.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine exactly how Kate Chase manifested her feminist tendencies at different points in her life. This is also a study of Kate's relationship with her father and how that

relationship involved her in the web of political intrigue. By studying the woman's rights movement and the societal norms regarding women in nineteenth century America, it can be shown where Kate fits into the entire scene.

CHAPTER I

WOMEN: THEIR POSITION AND THEIR MOVEMENT, 1800-1865

Background - 1800-1848

The Declaration of Independence in 1776 proclaimed that "all men are created equal." Unfortunately for the ladies, nineteenth century society took this literally. Women were considered second class citizens, with few or no rights, certainly not equal to the male of the species. Nineteenth Century mores taught that only white men were superior in the eyes of God and the law. Eventually, some women got the idea that they, too, were human, with the same unalienable rights as men. It was these women who nurtured the seeds of the woman's rights movement in the United States. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, and countless others labored to obtain for women legal standing before the law and the opportunity to find gainful employment in fields normally considered outside of the "woman's sphere." In other words, they believed that all men and women were created equal and thus deserved to be treated as such. They found their position decreed by proper society to be an anomaly in a country that was a self-proclaimed democracy.

Marriage condemned women to a virtual non-existence before the law. However, the majority of women did not

reject their role. On the contrary, American women in the nineteenth century were taught exactly what they were and were not to do in married life. Most entered matrimony freely and happily, believing that their goal in life was to enter on the road to domestic happiness for their entire lives.[2] Once a woman was entitled to use "Mrs." in front of her name, any legal rights she may have previously enjoyed, were now stripped from her. Until 1848, married women could not own their own property. They were also denied the right to sue or be sued, control their own wages, and the right to vote--even if they paid taxes. They could not sign any legal papers nor were they granted equal guardianship over their minor children. In some states, wife beating with a "reasonable instrument" was legal.[3]

The first half of the nineteenth century saw the beginning of what Barbara Welter calls the "cult of true womanhood." This cult was perpetuated by nineteenth century women's magazines, gift annuals, and religious literature.[4] An example of an early guide for the way

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[2]Alexis de Tocqueville, "American Women and American Wives," Nancy F. Cott, ed., Root of Bitterness: Documents in the Social History of American Women (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1971), p. 120.

[3]Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States (New York: Antheneum P ress, 1972), p. 64.

[4]Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," Jane E. Friedman and William G. Shade, eds., Our American Sisters: Women in American Thought and Action (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1973, p. 96.

women were to act, was Samuel K. Jennings' The Married Lady's Companion, or Poor Man's Friend. In this work, Jennings admonished women to be obedient to their husbands' every whim and to make them as comfortable as possible. He further stated,

> . . . it is in your interest to adapt yourself to your husband, whatever may be his peculiarities. . . . St. Paul adds his authority to its support. 'Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands, as unto the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife.'[5]

Men were not the only ones who contributed to the defining of woman's place in society. In 1841, Mrs. A. J. Graves published a treatise entitled Women in America: Being an Examination into the Moral and Intellectual Condition of American Female Society. Mrs. Graves supported the prevailing notion that woman's place was in the home, using God's word as her chief inspiration and justification. She wrote,

> . . . that home is her appropriate and appointed sphere of action there cannot be a shadow of doubt; for the dictates of nature are plain and imperative on this subject . . . That woman should regard home as her appropriate domain is not only the dictate of religion, but of enlightened human reason . . . In this age of excitement, it is specially incumbent upon woman to exert her utmost influence to maintain unimpaired the sacredness and power of the family institution.[6]

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[5] Samuel K. Jennings, "Proper Conduct of the Wife Towards Her Husband," Cott, ed., Root of Bitterness, p. 113.

[6] Mrs. A. J. Graves, "Woman in America," Cott, ed., Root of Bitterness, pp. 141-146.

The image perpetuated by writings like those mentioned only served further to enslave women to their households and bind even tighter the chains of domesticity. Women were brought up to be pious, pure, and submissive. Anyone who dared step out of this mold was viewed as a menace to society. From girlhood, they were told that if they did everything propriety dictated, they would most assuredly be the recipients of true happiness and contentment. Piety was valued because it gave women strength and kept them in the home. Purity was essential to the "true woman"; without it, she lost her femininity. The most feminine of all virtues was submissiveness to God and man in all things. Women were instructed to read only morally acceptable novels and religious literature was supposed to be especially desirable. A book like Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century would have been taboo for the proper Victorian lady.[7]

Lydia Maria Child, an early feminist writer, observed that upper and middle class women were saddled with a long list of things not to do, if they wanted to remain ladies. They could not love anyone until a suitable match was made. Laughing loudly was considered vulgar and walking quickly was not genteel. If they worked in a garden, their complexions would be ruined

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[7] Ibid.; Welter, "True Womanhood," pp. 96-108.

and if they studied, they would never get a man, because men disliked literary ladies.[8]

The worship of femininity and the "true woman" was aided and abetted by female seminaries. These schools were limited to upper and middle class girls and the curriculum consisted mainly of "feminine" pursuits such as French, sewing, and music.[9] Catherine Beecher, daughter of Lyman Beecher, was highly critical of female seminaries and the courses they offered. In the schools she founded for women, she instituted courses which would give a broad education in order for women to perform better their domestic functions.[10]

Troy Seminary, in Troy, New York, which was opened in 1821 by Mrs. Emma Willard, broke the traditional mold. It was the first endowed institution for girls and introduced such inovations in education as courses in natural sciences and physiology.[11] Oberlin College, which opened its doors in 1833, was the first to permit women to enter. At first, female students followed a shortened course of study, but in 1841, the first women were permitted to

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[8]Letter XXXI, 31 December 1844, Lydia Maria Child, "Letters from New York," Gail Parker, ed., The Oven Birds: American Women on Womanhood, 1820-1920 (New York: Anchor Books, 1972), p. 98.

[9]Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 23.

[10]Parker, Oven Birds, pp. 145-146.

[11]Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 26.

pursue the full course.[12] Mount Holyoke, the forerunner of the women's colleges like Smith and Radcliffe, was founded by Mary Lyon in 1857. A broad curriculum was offered, which included subjects ranging from homemaking to science.[13]

Despite these advances, women's education still fell short of adequate in the United States. Part of the problem which educational reformers like Emma Willard and Mary Lyon faced was a prejudice on the part of the American public against educating women. Since women were considered to be second-class citizens, most taxpayers felt that education for them was a waste of money. However, the growing shortage of professional men along with the influx of women into industry and the expansion of the frontier demanded that women learn more than how to run an efficient household.[14]

The "cult of true womanhood" was made even more ludicrous when a large number of women were forced, by circumstances, to deviate from the ideal. Thanks to the industrial revolution, many women, for various reasons, took jobs in the textile factories, especially in New England. Between 1810 and 1830, this occupation was considered respectable. In the beginning, mill girls

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[12] Ibid., pp. 29-30.

[13] Ibid., pp. 31-36.

[14] Ibid., pp. 23-24.

received fairly decent wages and had a relatively high social status. But by the 1830's, with the heavy influx of immigrants, women became a cheap labor source. Thus, they were forced to accept low wages and long hours.[15]

The Lowell Offspring, a publication of the Lowell mill girls and owners, presented a view of life in the factory as being very rosy and idyllic. In the short story, "Susan Miller," the heroine was forced to go to work in the textile mills in order to help support her family. "Susan" is described as having at first been frightened by all the mill machinery, but eventually grows more interested in her work each day, until the time veritably flies while she works.[16] This picture of happiness and contentment was, to say the least, fascinating; to say the most, it was unmitigated propaganda. The Petition for a Ten-Hour Workday, which was presented to the Massachusetts Legislature in 1845 by Sarah Bagley and the Lowell Female Reform Association, gave a far different picture of women in the mills. The petitioners presented evidence that factory work was long and arduous, the pay was poor, and their health had been impaired by the working conditions. Despite this

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[15]Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," Friedman and Shade, eds., Our American Sisters, p. 89.

[16]F.G.A., "Susan Miller," Cott, ed., Root of Bitterness, pp. 130-140.

evidence, a Committee of the Legislature decided against the petitioners, preferring to believe the mill owners' presentation of factory life, à la "Susan Miller," instead.[17]

In such an atmosphere, it is easy to understand why some women came to the conclusion that their minds were being stifled by social norms. These women who became feminist leaders were mostly middle class and were fairly well educated.[18] While the image of the true woman was being perpetuated, other forces were at work which resulted in women playing a larger role in society.[19] Perhaps the most important movement which sired the agitation for woman's rights was abolitionism. Women involved in the antislavery movement, however, did not receive equal treatment. The liberalism of the men was hindered by customs and prejudice instilled in them by their society. The women soon turned their attention to developing a crusade aimed at improving their own lot in life. Moreover, the principles of freedom, liberty, and equality which they advocated for slaves, made them desirous of these rights for themselves.[20]

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[17]Lerner, "Lady and the Mill Girl," p. 92.

[18]Welter, "True Womanhood," p. 115.

[19]Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., History of Woman Suffrage, 6 vols. (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1882, reprint ed., New York: Arno and the New York Times, 1969), 1:52; Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History from the Colonial Period to the Outbreak of the Civil War (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), pp. 225-226.

[20]Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds., Woman Suffrage, 1:52.

Sarah and Angelina Grimké, along with Abby Kelly, were the first female public speakers against slavery. In fighting tyranny against color, they were also breaking ground for women in public speaking.[21] Sarah Grimké was also a proponent of woman's rights, and in 1838 published a pamphlet entitled Letters on the Equality of the Sexes. Throughout the letters, Miss Grimké used the Bible to discuss the equality of women. She also drew a comparison between the rights of women and the rights of slaves and attacked many of the fantasies held sacred in nineteenth century society regarding the inferiority of women. Miss Grimké felt that men unjustly dominated women under the guise of protection.[22] In another letter, she attacked the entire relationship between men and women as defined by nineteenth century rules, as being degrading and derogatory to both sexes. Miss Grimké went on to state that no Christian can fulfill God's plan until men and women mingle together as equals.[23] Miss Grimké's letters were radical statements that would eventually work their way into the rhetoric of the woman's rights movement.

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[21]Letter III, Haverville, July, 1837, Sarah M. Grimké, Letters on the Equality of the Sexes. Addressed to Mary S. Parker, President of the Boston Female Anti-slavery Society (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1838, reprint ed., New York: Source Book Press, 1970), p. 21.

[22]Letter IV, Andover, 27 July 1837, Ibid., pp. 22-26.

[23]Maria W. Stewart, Meditations from the Pen of Mrs. Maria W. Stewart (Washington: W. Lloyd Garrison and Knapp, 1879), pp. 76-77.

Maria W. Stewart, a black abolitionist and feminist, had a short, but distinguished speaking career which lasted from 1831 to 1833. Mrs. Stewart attempted to convince her listeners of the high status that women had been given in Biblical times. She cited the examples of Deborah and Queen Esther.[24] She also described the high positions women throughout history have attained. Citing the example of the woman of fifteenth century Bologna who studied Latin and law, Mrs. Stewart asked,

> What if such women as here described should rise among our own sable race? And it is not impossible; for it is not the color of the skin that makes the man or the woman, but the principle formed in the soul.[25]

Margaret Fuller, journalist, critic, and reformer, wrote the first American book defining the place of woman in society, Woman in the Nineteenth Century. The tract had originally been published in the transcendentalist newspaper, The Dial, in 1843, under the title of "The Great Debate: Man Versus Men, Woman Versus Women." The book's publication aroused a great deal of controversy, since Miss Fuller discussed some of the major abuses against women in all aspects of life--economic, social,

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[24]Ibid., p. 78.

[25]Margaret Fuller Ossoli, Woman in the Nineteenth Century and Kindred Papers Relating to the Sphere, Condition, and Duties of Women (Boston: John P. Jewett and Company, 1855, reprint ed., New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1971), pp. v-vii.

political, and even sexual.[26] Her attack on the failure of the republic to institute badly needed reforms is both eloquent and justified. For example, if a woman became a widow, she inherited only a small part of her husband's estate, " . . . often brought him by herself, as if she were a child, or a ward only, not an equal partner.[26]

Miss Fuller found these laws to be archaic, insulting, and debilitating. Criticism was heaped by her on those who believed that "biology is destiny." Many felt that women were physically and mentally unsuited for work outside the home and therefore could not take part in anything like politics or even writing. If women stepped out of their prescribed sphere, the sanctity of the home would be destroyed. She dismissed all of this as ridiculous by writing,

> Those who think the physical circumstances of Woman would make a part in the affairs of national government unsuitable, are by no means those who think it impossible for negresses to endure field work, even during pregnancy, or for sempstresses [sic] to go through their killing labors.[27]

She also appealed to the women of the United States to protest against the injustices against their sex,

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[26] Ibid., p. 31.

[27] Ibid., pp. 34-35.

> You hear much of the modesty of your sex. Preserve it by filling the mind with noble desires that shall ward off the corruptions of vanity and idleness . . . It will not so much injure your modesty to have your name, by the unthinking, coupled with blame, as to have on your soul the weight of not trying to save the whole race of women from the scorn that is put upon <u>their</u> modesty.[28]

Miss Fuller, like other feminists, intertwined the themes of woman's position, slavery, and religion in her writings. Clearly, she and her fellow feminists were products of the anti-slavery and other reform movements, along with the Protestant religiousity prevalent in the nineteenth century.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was the daughter of a well-to-do judge in upstate New York. She attended Troy Seminary but also learned a great deal by listening to people who came to her father for legal advice. In 1840, she married abolitionist Henry B. Stanton and thus became involved in that movement. In the 1840's, she and her husband moved from Boston to Seneca Falls, New York. There, she was faced with the boredom and drudgery of being a small-town housewife.[29] She wrote,

> I now fully understand the practical difficulties most women had to contend with in the isolated household, . . . My experiences at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, all I had read of the legal status of women and the oppression I

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[28]<u>Ibid</u>., pp. 166-168.

[29]Flexner, <u>Century of Struggle</u>, pp. 72-73.

> saw everywhere, together swept my soul, intensified now by my many personal experiences. It seemed as if all the elements had conspired to impel me to some onward step.[30]

Susan B. Anthony, the greatest organizer of the woman's rights movement, joined with the cause in 1851. She came from a New England Quaker family, the daughter of a farmer. Susan became a teacher, but eventually went back to helping out on the family farm, then located in Rochester, New York. Her father was an abolitionist and she became involved in the temperance crusade. Susan soon gave that up when she encountered difficulties in getting funds from the men for the women's temperance groups. The Seneca Falls convention in 1848 eventually inspired her to join up with the woman's rights movement three years later. Other feminists, including Lucretia Mott, were Quakers. Miss Mott was a Quaker minister and had grown up believing that all women were equal to men in the eyes of God. The Quaker religion allowed a great deal of freedom to women, which is one reason many Quakers did join in the reform movements of the nineteenth century.[31]

The World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London in 1840, was an important step leading to the Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention in 1848. The division that had

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[30]Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Eighty Years and More (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1898, reprint ed., New York: Source Book Press, 1969), pp. 147-148.

[31]Flexner, Century of Struggle, pp. 71-85.

plagued the United States Anti-Slavery Society concerning those who desired active women participants and those who opposed them, was evident at this Anti-Slavery Convention. Several American societies had sent some female delegates to the Convention, fully expecting them to take an active part in the proceedings. This caused a great deal of excitement in London, which never expected the women to appear. The convention took a vote and promptly rejected the women as delegates. Some of the men who cast affirmative votes were Wendell Phillips, George Thompson, and Henry B. Stanton. William Lloyd Garrison, who was late in arriving in London, refused to sit as a delegate upon learning of the vote against the women. He sat instead, in the galleries as a spectator, along with the ladies who had been refused a part in the Convention.[32]

Two members of the United States female delegation were Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott. These two met while in London and, while they were discussing the proceedings of the Convention, decided to hold a woman's rights convention when they returned to America. " . . . as the men to whom they had just listened had manifested their great need of some education on that question."[33] Thus was born the Seneca Falls Convention and the organized agitation for the long denied rights of women in the United States.

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[32]Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds., Woman Suffrage, 1:53-61.

[33]Ibid., p. 61.

> Woman's Rights Convention--A convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of woman, will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel, at Seneca Falls, New York, on Wednesday and Thursday, the 19th and 20th of July, current; commencing at 10:00 a.m. During the first day the meeting will be exclusively for women, who are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited to be present on the second day, when Lucretia Mott, of Philadelphia, and other ladies and gentlemen will address the convention.[34]

This call, which appeared in the Seneca County (New York) Courier of July 14, 1848, was issued by Lucretia Mott, Martha C. Wright, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Mary Ann McClintock. Mrs. Stanton, according to Lucretia Mott, was really, " . . . the 'moving spirit of that occasion' . . . aided so efficiently by the M'Clintock's."[35] These four women who issued the call met before the convention and drew up eleven resolutions and a Declaration of Sentiments to be approved by the convention. Mrs. Stanton claimed to have been wholly responsible for the Ninth Resolution, which "proved to be the contentious plank of our platform."[36] The Ninth Resolution read as follows,

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[34]Seneca County (New York) Courier, 14 July 1848, Ibid., p. 67.

[35]Lucretia Mott to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 16 March 1855, Theodore Stanton and Harriot Stanton Blatch, eds. Elizabeth Cady Stanton as Revealed in Her Letters, Diary, and Reminiscenses, 2 vols. (New York: Arno and the New York Times, 1969), 2:18n.

[36]Ibid., 1:146.

"Resolved: That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise."[37] Advocating woman suffrage at a time when females were not supposed to know about politics, let alone actually vote on issues, was radical indeed. It is easy to understand then why the Ninth Resolution was not carried unanimously as the others had been. Many of the woman's rights supporters felt it was still too soon to ask for woman's suffrage. The resolution passed the convention by a small majority only through the persistent efforts of Mrs. Stanton and Frederick Douglass.[38]

The Declaration of Sentiments was based on the Declaration of Independence and was signed by sixty-eight women and thirty-two men who were present at the convention. The preamble stated,

> When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course. We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal . . .[39]

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[37] Woman's Rights Conventions: Seneca Falls and Rochester, 1848 (New York: Robert J. Johnston Publisher, 1870, reprint ed. New York: Arno and the New York Times, 1969), p. 4.

[38] Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds., Woman Suffrage, 1:73.

[39] Woman's Rights Conventions, p. 5.

The eleven resolves were equally radical, advocating such reforms as property rights for married women, equal education and opportunities, and guardianship of their own children. The resolves ended with the hope that a series of conventions would follow Seneca Falls throughout the United States.[40]

This convention was quickly followed by one in Rochester, New York on August 2, 1848. The Rochester Convention was the first to have a female President, Abigail Bush (James Mott presided at Seneca Falls), although this move was opposed as a hazardous experiment by Mrs. Stanton and Mrs. Mott. Those present at Rochester adopted the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments and discussed such topics as equal education for women. This convention, as well as Seneca Falls before it and the many ones that followed, was denounced and ridiculed by the press and the clergy.[41]

Between 1850 and 1860, national woman's rights conventions were held every year with the exception of 1857. In between, gatherings were held throughout the states of Ohio, New York, Indiana, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts.[42] One of the more notable national conventions was held in Akron, Ohio, on May 28 and 29, 1851.

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[40] Ibid., pp. 4-7.

[41] Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds., Woman Suffrage, 1:75-80.

[42] Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 81.

It was at this convention that Sojourner Truth, the former slave, made one of her most moving and eloquent speeches on the rights of women. She pleased the audience and reprimanded the hecklers by saying:

> . . . dat little man in black dar, he say women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Whar did your Christ come from? . . . From God and a woman! Man had nothin' to do wid Him! /sic/[43]

Francis Dana Gage, who presided over that convention, claimed never to have seen anything like it, writing that Sojourner's speech " . . . turned the sneers and jeers of an excited crowd into notes of respect and admiration."[44]

Unfortunately, without the right to vote, these women could do little more than discuss their problems. More effective than the conventions, were the petitions sent by women to their legislators. Susan B. Anthony led one of the most massive petition campaigns in New York in 1854. In ten weeks, 6,000 signatures were secured for the petition which advocated that married women be entitled to their own wages and have equal guardianship of their children. Four thousand of the signers also asked for woman suffrage. Miss Anthony and sixty women "captains" went from door to door getting the signatures. The New York assembly, which had passed the first property laws

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[43]Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds., Woman Suffrage, 1:116-117.

[44]Ibid., p. 117.

for married women in 1848, turned down the petition.[45] But the efforts of these women were not in vain, because in 1860, New York passed a law which gave women the right to control their own wages, ability to own property, and the right to sue in court.[46]

Other states also gave women more rights. Ohio, in 1857, passed a bill that no married man could dispose of personal property without his wife's consent. The wife was duly empowered to bring suit against her husband in her own name. Also, any woman who was deserted or neglected by her husband was entitled to his wages and those of her dependent children.[47] Massachusetts passed a bill in 1854 which gave all women married after its passage, control over their own property. They could also make wills without the husband's consent. In the case of the death of the husband, with no minor children involved, the widow was entitled to receive up to $5,000 and one half of the remaining property. Along with this the divorce law was also liberalized. The credit for the Massachusetts reforms belongs to Mary Upton Ferris, who

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[45]Flexner, Century of Struggle, pp. 85-86; Ida Husted Harper, Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony, 3 vols. (Indianapolis: The Hollenbeck Press, 1898, reprint ed., New York: Arno and the New York Times, 1969), 1:108-110.

[46]Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 88.

[47]Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds. Woman Suffrage, 1:67.

traveled over 600 miles to get signatures for the petitions.[48] Despite these small gains, more reforms in other states had yet to be enacted.

One reform which women attempted to bring about themselves was that of their dress. The new costume some women adapted, consisted of a skirt falling below the knees like a tunic over trousers which were gathered around the ankles in a Turkish style. This outfit was first worn by women in sanitariums who were taking what was called the "water cure." The first person to wear the costume on a regular basis in society was Elizabeth Smith Miller, daughter of United States Senator Gerrit Smith of New York and cousin of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Mrs. Stanton herself began wearing the outfit in the winter of 1851, after seeing the comfort her cousin experienced when wearing it. Amelia Bloomer, editor of the feminist newspaper, The Lily, also started wearing the costume and discussed its merits in her newspaper. Because she advocated and wore the new short dress (called the "shorts"by its many critics), Mrs. Bloomer's name became forever associated with it.[49]

The "bloomer"costume enabled women to work and live more comfortably than did the fashionable dress of

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[48]Ibid., pp. 211-212.

[49]Harper, Susan B. Anthony, 1:112; Stanton and Blatch, eds., Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1:171; Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds., Woman Suffrage, 1:469-470.

the mid-nineteenth century. For many years, doctors and physiologists lectured and wrote on the dangers to women's health posed by their cumbersome dress. Clothing that pressed the waist as small as it could go, cramped the legs with voluminous skirts, and hung several pounds of clothing on the hips, could hardly be called a rational style. This type of dress, with the skirts dragging on the ground, forced women to sacrifice the pleasures of walking, running, dancing, and skating with ease. It was also a nuisance to women who held jobs outside of the home and was even cumbersome to those doing housework.[50]

When a few brave women did start to affect the bloomer costume, they were ridiculed for their attempt at dress reform. A few realized its advantages, but the majority of men and women scorned and criticized the rebels. Many associated the bloomer with radical feminism. The press charged that those who wore it advocated "free love," "easy divorce," and woman suffrage. Its wearers finally gave it up due to the pressure put on them by society.[51]

The woman's rights movement never developed in the South. This was due to several factors. First the South's agrarian plantation system, while far from being universal, had a social code which dominated all of

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[50]Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds., Woman Suffrage, 1:470.

[51]Stanton and Blatch, eds., Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 1:172.

Southern life. The so-called "southern chivalry" was a method which kept all women tied to the home. Secondly, slavery itself stifled any dissent and the possibility of reform movements. Southerners were so busy defending slavery that there was little inclination for reform. There were also no true colleges in the South like Oberlin for women. There was little industry there and thus, there existed no demand for women workers. In the South, women's lives were set up in a framework of bondage that left little chance to break out. Any dissenters that appeared were forced to either reconcile themselves and remain silent or move North.[52]

By 1860, women had made some gains toward obtaining rights for their sex, but still had a long way to go. They were hindered by many problems, not the least of which was the prejudice they faced from the general public, men and women alike. Many saw the feminists as overstepping the bounds that society, in the name of God and nature, had dictated. Certainly, they did not fit the image of the empty-headed, docile, submissive creature which the cult of true womanhood offered up to the world. Just the fact that some of these women were actually intelligent frightened a good number of people, for if all women began to think, the security that held their life style together would be threatened. However, the Civil War did more to

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[52]Flexner, Century of Struggle, pp. 94-95.

change that very society in four years than the woman's rights conventions had done in twelve years, with women benefiting in the long run from this upheaval.

The Civil War: An End and a Beginning, 1861-1865

With the call to arms in 1861, the woman's rights movement, for all intents and purposes, came to a temporary halt. The feminists held their last convention in Albany in February of 1861. Women in both the north and south desired to contribute in some way to their side's battle. The war brought with it a shortage of male laborers in every field. Because of this, women were often used to fill many of these positions, even if the employers were reluctant to hire them. Teaching, nursing, and government jobs were fields which saw the heaviest influx of female employees.[53] Feminists, many of whom were still very much involved in the antislavery movement, saw fit to halt their agitation for woman's rights, while continuing the battle for the abolition of slavery.[54]

One of the first campaigns conducted by the feminists took place in the months following Abraham Lincoln's election. Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and others toured New York and lectured

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[53] Ibid., p. 106.

[54] Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds. Woman Suffrage. 2:3.

in favor of the complete abolition of slavery. Like many others who were in the antislavery sturggle, they felt that Lincoln was not radical enough in his stand on slavery.[55] By 1863, however, these women had found a more constructive outlet for their energies, abilities, and experience. In that year, the National Woman's Loyal League was founded by Miss Anthony and Mrs. Stanton. The League was started in order to educate the people about sound principles of government and to make the nation aware that the emancipation of the slaves was the only route to victory. Its platform voiced liberty for all, national protection for all citizens, universal suffrage, and universal amnesty. A mass effort was launched by League leaders to circulate a petition favoring the passage of a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery. People like Mrs. Stanton were worried that the Emancipation Proclamation was not sufficient to abolish slavery. throughout the United States forever.[56] They were also concerned that the Proclamation only reached the slaves in the rebel states, whereas in border states like Kentucky that had remained loyal, slavery was still permitted.[57] The goal of the petition's originators

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[55]Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 108.

[56]Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds., Woman Suffrage, 2:3; Stanton and Blatch, eds., Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 2:92n.

[57]Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Martha Wright, 20 February 1864; Stanton and Blatch, eds., Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 2:93n.

was one million signatures before Congress adjourned in 1864. By January of 1864, they already had 100,000 names on the petition. When the League disbanded the following August, 400,000 signatures were presented to Congress in behalf of the passage of the thirteenth amendment.[58]

Of course, feminist leaders like Miss Anthony and Mrs. Stanton, were not solely dedicated to saving the black. They were also fully intent upon having their rights looked after in the thirteenth amendment and were very disappointed when this did not come to pass.[59] Much of the opposition to adding woman's rights to this law came from abolitionists like Wendell Phillips, who felt that arguing for woman's rights along with rights of blacks, would only serve to harm the blacks more and help women less.[60] Mrs. Stanton wrote a rather acid retort on this subject, stating, "My question is this: Do you believe the African race is composed entirely of males?"[61]

While Miss Anthony, Mrs. Stanton, and others were carrying on their drive to abolish slavery, other women were involved in the war movement in different ways. With the creation of the Sanitary Commission in 1861, many

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[58] Ibid., Harper, Susan B. Anthony, 1:238.

[59] Harper, Susan B. Anthony, 1:201.

[60] Wendell Phillips to Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 10 May 1865, Stanton and Blatch, eds., Elizabeth Cady Stanton, 2:105n.

[61] Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Wendell Phillips, 25 May 1865, Ibid., p. 105.

women of the Union came to serve their country as nurses. The Sanitary Commission was the right arm of the Union medical and hospital services. Although led entirely by men, it certainly would not have survived without the service of women. Dorothea Dix, well known for her reform work in insane asylums and prisons before the Civil War was appointed Superintendent of Women Nurses by Secretary of War Simon Cameron.[62] "Dragon Dix" as she was often affectionately referred to, quickly outlined the qualifications she felt were desirable in her nurses. The minimum age was thirty and the women were to be plain looking. Their dresses were to be somber, unadorned, and hoopless--clearly the most sensible type of woman's clothing that the nineteenth century could approve and provide.[63] Miss Dix found herself in the position of having authority but no power of enforcing obedience. She also had to face the jealousy of the male doctors with whom she worked. They were, no doubt, envious of her efficiency and resentful of her brusque manner.[64]

Nursing was considered to be in woman's "proper sphere," although many people wondered if it was socially

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[62]Flexner, Century of Struggle, pp. 106-107; Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds., Woman Suffrage, 2:13.

[63]Mary Elizabeth Massey, Bonnet Brigades (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. 47.

[64]Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds., Woman Suffrage, 2:12-13.

proper for women, especially unmarried ladies, to be nursing strange men in army hospitals. But the exigencies of war made nursing proper work for even the most modest of women.[65] The work of nursing quickly destroyed any romantic illusions a novice nurse may have had. She would come in contact with diseased bodies and the fetid odors so common to nineteenth century Army hospitals.[66] Dorothea Dix, understanding these conditions, set up the aforementioned stringent qualifications. No starry-eyed maiden with romantic notions about finding a husband among the wounded would survive long under these conditions. Only the truly dedicated nurses could do the necessary work effectively and efficiently, either in the hospitals or at the medical units on the field of battle.

Teaching, a field which women were already permitted to enter, broadened during the Civil War. Before the war, females were permitted to teach only in elementary schools or female seminaries. However, the realities of war often demanded that a female teacher be hired instead of a male. Part of this was due to the availability of funds. Women were ready to accept lower wages than men, with the differential ranging from 30 per cent to 50 per cent. As the war continued, more and more

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[65]Lerner, "Lady and the Mill Girl," p. 88; Massey, Bonnet Brigades, p. 130.

[66]Mary Alice Livermore, My Story of the War: A Woman's Narrative (Hartford: A. D. Worthington and Company, 1896), pp. 202-203.

female teachers were being hired, giving them a firm grip on that profession. In 1860, approximately 25 per cent of all teachers in the United States were women; by 1888, the figure was 63 per cent (90.04 per cent in urban areas); and in 1910 it was up to 80 per cent of the total.[67]

During the war, many women disguised themselves as men and enlisted in the armed services of their nation. The sex of the women was usually discovered when they were either wounded or killed. If they managed to survive their wounds, the women masqueraders were promptly mustered out of the service. One woman participated in several engagements, served in seven different regiments, and was wounded three times. She was discovered and mustered out of the service eight times but also managed to re-enlist under different names eight times.[68] Four hundred has been given as the estimated number of female soldiers; it may have been higher, especially if many escaped detection. Unfortunately, most contemporaries saw these women as either being immoral or as candidates for the local insane asylums.[69] One author voiced some of the prevalent feeling on this subject,

> Such service was not the noblest that woman rendered the country during its four years' struggle

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[67]Massey, Bonnet Brigades, pp. 133-134.

[68]Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds., Woman Suffrage, 2:1.

[69]Ibid., 1:747-748.

> for life, and no one can regret that these soldier women were exceptional and rare. . . . And it is to the honor of American women, not that they lead hosts to the deadly charge, and battled amid armies, but that they confronted the horrid aspects of war with mighty love and earnestness. . . . The men at the front were sure of sympathy from the homes, and knew that the women remembered them with sleepless interest.[70]

Government jobs were also opened to many women during the war. Francis Spinner, Treasurer of the United States, hired the first "government girls," and after the war, was most influential in fighting to retain them in the Treasury Department. By 1865, 447 women worked in the Treasury Department as clerks, currency counters, and copyists. All employees in Washington received the full-time standard $600 per year salary which was increased to $720 late in the war. Other government departments also began hiring women in the Washington offices, as clerks, postmistresses, and copyists. Naturally, the "government girls" drew their share of criticism from both men and women. It was alleged that they were either immoral, inefficient, ill-mannered, or all three.[71] There were, no doubt, women who were "government girls" that fit this description, but they were a small minority. Most of them were women who did their jobs well and were respectable, decent ladies. The "government girls" made a breakthrough for working women, opening

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[70]Livermore, My Story, p. 120.

[71]Massey, Bonnet Brigades, p. 357.

a new field that they could enter in which the pay and conditions were fairly reasonable.

Those women who did not become nurses, teachers, "government girls," industrial laborers, or even soldiers, did their share of work on the homefront. Many were involved in preparing lint and bandages, canning fruits and vegetables, marking graves of dead soldiers, gathering medical supplies for the army, writing letters for the wounded, and taking care of farms, homes, and businesses in the absence of the men.[72] No matter what they did, women on both sides desired in some way to help their country. Women aided their nation in many ways, yet the politicians and much of the populace did not see fit to give women equal rights when, at the same time, they were giving those very rights to black males. The state of New York actually took a step backward in this area. On April 10, 1862, the New York Legislature amended the 1860 law by taking away the equal guardianship of children and replacing it with a kind of veto power whereby the father could not bind out or will away a child without the mother's consent. The law which guaranteed the widow control of her husband's property for the care and protection of her minor children was also repealed. This only served to

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[72]Stanton, Anthony, and Gage, eds., Woman Suffrage, 2:88; Flexner, Century of Struggle. p. 112.

anger the feminists even more, and intensified their desire for the right to vote.[73]

The Civil War caused a great deal of economic and social dislocation in the United States. It also made more women, especially breadwinners, aware of their own second-class status and thus desirous of more education and more legal rights.[74] The outbreak of hostilities in 1861 saw the leaders of the woman's rights movement temporarily concentrate their energies on ending slavery, although they never ceased to hope that they would get Constitutional rights along with the black. After the war, the woman's rights movement split into two groups--the Stanton-Anthony group which worked on obtaining national suffrage and the Blackwell-Howe-Livermore faction which concentrated on obtaining suffrage state by state.[75] Thus, the war brought an end to the first phase of feminism and saw the beginning of a new phase that created a fragmentation of their movement. The war also broadened employment opportunities for women and aided the slow change in society's attitude toward women who worked and even in the image of the "true woman." Granted, social mores and beliefs did take a long

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[73]A new legislature had been elected in New York which did not favor woman's rights. They amended the earlier laws literally while the women's backs were turned. Stanton, Anthony and Gage, eds., Woman Suffrage, 1:747-748.

[74]Ibid., 2:88; Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 112.

[75]Massey, Bonnet Brigades, p. 357.

time to really alter and it was another fifty-four years before woman suffrage was a reality. By 1865, women had made some gains in the direction of becoming first class citizens.

Kate Chase grew up at a time of great social upheaval in the United States; her own father was a member of the abolitionist movement. However, while a few young women with similar backgrounds were joining forces with the woman's rights movement, she was far more involved in furthering her own and her father's political interests. Kate cared little for issues; they were only peripheral to her ambitions. She would become the queen of Washington society, a role she basked in. Kate had beauty and charisma; she would gain wealth and influence, only to lose everything in the end.

CHAPTER II

KATE CHASE: PROLOGUE TO POLITICS

> Born--August 13, 1840 at 2 a.m., Catherine Jane Chase, [the] 2nd. daughter of S.P.C. and E.S.C. The babe is pronounced pretty. I think it quite otherwise. It is, however, well formed and I am thankful. May God give the child a good understanding that she may keep his commandments.[76]

It was with this diary entry that Ohio lawyer Salmon P. Chase recorded the birth of his beloved daughter, Catherine, who was to be known as Kate. Kate's mother, Eliza Ann Smith Chase, died in 1845.[77] As she grew up in her native Cincinnati, Kate became the mistress of her father's household and the center of his attentions. From an early age, Chase tried to teach his headstrong daughter to be God-fearing. He taught her the Scriptures and constantly attempted to train her along the path of Christian righteousness. Kate, rebellious and stubborn almost from birth, apparently had quite a few run-ins with her stepmother, Sarah Bella Ludlow Chase. Chase once wrote,

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[76]Thomas Graham Belden and Marva Robins Belden, So Fell the Angels (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1966), p. 13.

[77]Chase's first wife, Catherine Garniss, died in childbirth in 1834. His third wife, Sarah Bella Ludlow, whom he wed in 1846, died in 1852, Alice Hunt Sokoloff, Kate Chase for the Defense (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1971), pp. 25-31.

> This evening little Kate disobeyed her step-mother and made untrue representation; admonished her and promised to punish her, if could not otherwise induce her to amend.[78]

It is easy to understand the resentfulness of a child toward a stepmother, especially upon losing the real mother at an early age, as Kate did. It is even more clear when applying this natural resentment to a child as possessive as Kate--a possessiveness with which she would later thoroughly entrap her father. The birth of her half sister, Janette ("Nettie"), in 1847, could only have increased Kate's jealousy, a feeling which would later turn into a mothering instinct that Kate would bestow on her. Perhaps this entered into Chase's decision to send Kate to Miss Henrietta Haines' well-known boarding school for girls in New York City. Previous accounts had Kate enrolling at the school at the age of seven, however, she once wrote,

> . . . when I was eight Grandpa taught me to print my letters and the first correspondence after I went away from home to school, at nine years of age, that I held with my father, was in printed characters . . .[79]

Although it was common practice in the nineteenth century to send girls to boarding school, Chase probably

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[78]Belden and Belden, So Fell the Angels, pp. 14-15.

[79]Kate Chase Sprague to William Sprague, Jr., January 13, 1877, cited in Sokoloff, Kate Chase, p. 296n.

found it expedient to send Kate away at such an early age due to her relationship with Nettie and her stepmother.

At this early age, Kate was still the youngest student then enrolled at Miss Haines' school. Because of this, she stayed in a room with the French teacher, Mademoiselle de Janon. Mlle. Janon taught Kate how to dress and act properly, as well as a thorough knowledge of French, which would eventually excel Chase's facility in that language. Kate attended the school until she reached fifteen years of age. During that time, she learned everything which would prove to be necessary in her role as her father's hostess. Kate was taught music, penmanship, literature, history, dancing, riding, and proper decorum.[80] The daily regimen at the school was strict. The girls arose at 5:15 every morning and studied until 7. Breakfast and prayers followed, lasting until class began at 9. Classes lasted until 2, after which they walked until 3. From 3 to 4 was free time for the students, They studied from 4 to 5 and dined until 6:15. They then studied until 9 when they retired. Study hours were fairly severe, with no talking permitted during that time.[81] For enjoyment, the girls had tableux or music

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[80]Ross, Proud Kate, pp. 19-21.

[81]Ibid., p. 20; Julia Newberry, Julia Newberry's Diary (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1933), pp. 35-36.

programs on Tuesday nights in which Kate often performed. On Saturdays, they could receive callers or they could visit friends in New York City. Kate also enjoyed the theater and the opera to which Miss Haines' students were occasionally treated.[82]

Miss Haines herself was somewhat mysterious. Tall and dignified, her students always felt that there had been some sort of romantic tragedy in her past. With her students, she was always distant yet attentive and good-natured. Her school was tightly disciplined, academically strict, and was the most fashionable girls' school in New York City at the time. Kate lived up to the school's standards by learning all her lessons well, since she was intelligent and blessed with a quick mind.[83]

During her school years, Kate's letters home to Chase reveal little except for homesickness. She rarely saw her father while in school. Chase seldom came to New York and summers were usually spent with relatives in New England. However, she did learn to adapt herself to city life and acquired a taste for the social world and fashionable living. By the age of fifteen, she also managed to learn how to spend money, especially when it came to her clothing. For example, one bill of hers in 1855 totaled

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[82]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 23.

[83]Ibid., pp. 19-21.

$305 for dress material and accessories.[84] When Kate graduated from Miss Haines' school in June of 1856, her entire tuition and the expenses equaled her inheritance of her late mother's share of the Smith estate. Kate's penchant for expensive items would be a constant source of harassment for Chase a good part of his life; she was always spending far more than he earned. Chase constantly had to face the embarassment of meeting his extravagant daughter's bills.[85]

Salmon P. Chase, in the years that Kate spent at school, was gaining a reputation for himself as a defender of black people (his critics derisively referred to him as the "Nigger Lawyer"). Politically, he at first allied himself with the Democrats, in 1836 he was a Harrison Whig, and by 1844, he had become a member of the Liberty Party. Before his election to the United States Senate in 1849, Chase spent most of the decade of the 1840's dedicated to the antislavery cause. He was known as an efficient organizer, having been involved in the formation of the Southern and Western Liberty Conventions in Cincinnati in 1842 and 1845. However, Chase did not really fit into any established party, and was seen as a radical by many Democrats and Whigs,

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[84]Mary Merwin Phelps, Kate Chase: Dominant Daughter (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1934), pp. 71-79.

[85]Ibid., pp. 79-80; Sokoloff, Kate Chase, p. 34.

and a moderate by the abolitionists. His election to the Senate in 1849 was a coalition vote between Free Soilers and discontented Democrats. The Whigs refused to support him, saying that the whole affair was nothing but a sly political bargain. When he entered the Senate, he was one of a very few number of antislavery advocates elected that year. His political alliances and attitudes toward slavery rankled many in his home town of Cincinnati, a city in which many of its inhabitants supported the South's peculiar institution.[86]

In 1855, Chase was elected as Ohio's first Republican governor. In this position, which both Chases hoped would be their springboard into the Presidency, Chase continued his fight against slavery. He and Kate closely followed the John Brown raid at Harper's Ferry with interest.[87] Chase was also involved in other reforms, for example, in his annual message in 1857, he supported a change in the property law governing women.[88]

Kate finished boarding school the same year that Chase was elected governor. At age sixteen, she returned to Columbus and she became mistress of her father's household and the first lady of Ohio. Chase moved his family

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[86]Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 37-45; Ross, Proud Kate, pp. 24-25.

[87]Belden and Belden, So Fell the Angels, p. 22.

[88]Xenia Torchlight, 7 January 1857.

to the state capitol, becoming the first Ohio governor to take up residence there. During her first year in Columbus, Kate attended Lewis Heyl's Institute, along with Nettie. The younger Chase daughter differed in personality from the volatile Kate. Where Kate was a tempestuous hoyden, Nettie was easygoing and likable. In later years, as Kate's ambition grew and her attachment to her father became even stronger, Chase would find Nettie a source of comfort and relaxation.[89] At the Heyl Institute, a kind of stopping-off place between finishing school and marriage, the girls were taught painting, a fashionable hobby among Victorian ladies. Kate apparently tolerated this activity, but Nettie enjoyed it, and as an adult she became an excellent illustrator of books.[90] The elder Miss Chase was far more interested in becoming involved in her father's political ambitions. Chase's desire for the presidency early infected Kate and would eventually become the driving force in her own life.

Kate, with her eastern clothes, New York manners, and French language, took Columbus by storm. This passionate young lady caused all of the local gossips to wag their tongues for a long time. Most of the Columbus matrons and their daughters were just plain envious of the elegant and worldly Kate Chase. Certainly, she herself

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[89]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 34.

[90]Belden and Belden, So Fell the Angels, pp. 21-22.

must have viewed the Ohio capitol as a socially backward place, especially when compared with New York City. The boys who lived near the Chase home loved nothing better than to tease the haughty and self-superior Kate. As she matured, however, most young men preferred to court her rather than harass her. She did eventually attain a large following in her own neighborhood, and at one point, Kate organized an amateur theatrical company.[91]

While reigning as the first lady of Ohio, Kate had one romantic fling which would come back to haunt her in later years. There was a young married man who began to flirt with her, at first covertly, later openly. They even began to take drives around the city together. The man's wife supposedly would sit behind the window of the Carter home, which stood across the road from the Chase house and cry while she watched her husband escort Kate to her door after their drive. Kate cared little about the gossip she ignited and only stopped this relationship when she grew bored with him. Exactly how serious this affair was is debatable, for no doubt it was blown out of proportion both at the time and even later when Chase's enemies dredged this story up to hurt his career.[92] Many years later, one woman who knew Kate well at the time,

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[91]Sokoloff, Kate Chase, p. 59; Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 86-87.

[92]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 45; Sokoloff, Kate Chase, pp. 41-42.

wrote, "I am satisfied that the evil things said about . . . [Kate Chase] during her residence here were simply the work of a coterie of envious young women who were jealous of the lady's beauty."[93]

While Kate was still at Miss Haines' school, Chase often wrote letters to her concerning some political news. When she came home to stay, she became her adored father's intimate confidante. Even as a young girl, she had been interested in her father's political life; she now became even more deeply involved in it. Kate read much of her father's correspondence, and the two of them no doubt plotted their political maneuvers together. She had graduated from being Chase's sounding board for his ideas to an intimate advisor. By the time she reached eighteen, her father's friends, many of whom were national figures, acknowledged her position in Chase's life, and even treated her as an equal.[94]

Kate early realized that the combination of her charms, manner, hospitality, and intelligence could easily be put to use in aiding Chase's political career. She began wooing the right people who might perhaps be inclined to support Salmon P. Chase as the Republican nominee for President in 1860. When she entertained, Kate always

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[93]Cincinnati Enquirer, 13 August 1879.

[94]Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 90-91; Ross, Proud Kate, pp. 26-37.

took an active part in the conversation, making sure that the topic never veered too far from politics.[95]

Even at such an early age, Kate was already deviating from the image of women in the nineteenth century. She certainly was not the docile, quiet ornament which society dictated as the norm. Kate was almost the antithesis of that image. If she did not fit the mold set up for a woman in her place and time, neither was she about to become a feminist in the forceful tradition of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Rather, Kate wore the veneer of a perfect lady which hid the relentless ambition that drove her to a most unlady-like preoccupation with politics. This young girl easily got away with partaking in every aspect of her father's political career. Kate impressed possible allies with her perfect hospitality and decorum; she set the stage for Chase to further his own ambitions in his manner. She was clever enough to become a part of her father's discussions without seeming out of place. Politics may have been anathema for most ladies in the nineteenth century, but it wasn't for Kate Chase. Certainly few Presidential hopefuls have ever had a more able or more beautiful campaign manager.

Carl Schurz, the eminent German refugee to the United States, was very much impressed with young Kate

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[95]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 39.

when he met her in 1860 and attended one of her well-known breakfasts. Schurz gave an excellent description of Kate:

> His daughter Kate, who presided over his household, he said, would be down presently. Soon she came, saluted me kindly, and then let herself down upon her chair with the graceful lightness of a bird, that, folding its wings, perched upon the branch of a tree. She was then about eighteen years old [twenty], tall and slender, and exceedingly well-formed. Her features were not at all regularly beautiful according to the classic rule. Her little nose, somewhat audaciously tipped up, would perhaps not have passed muster with a severe critic, but it fitted pleasingly into her face with its large, languid, but at the same time vivacious hazel eyes, shaded by long dark lashes, and arched over proud eyebrows. The fine forehead was framed in waving golden-brown hair. She had something imperial in the pose of the head, and all her movements possessed an exquisite natural charm. No wonder that she came to be admired as a great beauty and broke many hearts. After the usual polite commonplaces, the conversation at the breakfast table, in which Miss Kate took a lively and remarkably intelligent part, soon turned to politics. . . .[96]

Schurz was known to be influential among the Germans in Wisconsin. Both Chases hoped that he would vote for the Ohio Governor at the 1860 Republican Presidential Convention.[97] Schurz, however, felt that Chase would not make a good President. When Chase broached the subject of the nomination, he replied, "If the Republican Convention at Chicago have courage enough to nominate an advanced

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[96]Carl Schurz, The Autobiography of Carl Schurz (New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1969) pp. 153-154.

[97]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 41.

antislavery man, they will nominate Seward; if not, they will not nominate you."[98] Schurz felt that Chase was possessed with "presidential fever" to the point that he felt "he owed it to the country and the country owed it to him.[99]

Despite Schurz's pessimism regarding the possibility of Chase's nomination for President, both Kate and her father had high hopes. Chase felt that he had only two serious rivals for the nomination, William Seward and Edward Bates of Missouri. However, when the convention met in May of 1860 to choose the Republican candidate, the delegates decided on the dark horse Abraham Lincoln of Illinois. Chase could not even get the Ohio delegation to support him unanimously as a favorite son candidate, although he did win the third highest number of votes at the convention. Chase's friends, like Senators Charles Sumner and Gerrit Smith, were full of consolation, telling him that Lincoln respected him and would most likely offer him a position in the Cabinet. In the meantime, Chase had won election as United States Senator, and no matter what happened, he would be going to Washington in 1861.[100]

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[98]Schurz, Autobiography, p. 155.

[99]Ibid.

[100]Belden and Belden, So Fell the Angels, pp. 22-23; Phelps, Kate Chase, p. 93.

Kate was angry that her father had been rejected in favor of the backwoods lawyer from Illinois, but she showed no one except her father her true feelings. She was a shrewd enough politician to understand the effectiveness of the Lincoln campaign and also comprehend the middle-of-the-road stance he represented. Kate was astute enough to realize all of this, but yet could not see the lanky, clumsy Lincoln being chosen over her tall and dignified father. However, both of the Chases were of a resilient nature and soon turned their backs on this defeat and began looking forward to 1864.[101]

Chase himself was confident that Lincoln would ask him to accept the position of Secretary of State. In December of 1860, Lincoln invited him to Springfield for a conference. The President-elect told Chase that he could be Secretary of State only if his first choice, William Seward, declined. He then asked Chase if he would accept the position of Secretary of the Treasury. In March, 1861, Lincoln submitted Chase's name for the Treasury post without even telling him. Chase was, to say the least, angry but after a few days of pouting and at the urging of friends, he accepted the Treasury job. As a member of the Cabinet, he would be a party to the most intimate details and workings

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[101]Ross, Proud Kate, pp. 48-50.

of the government. A Cabinet position could also be an advantageous springboard to the Presidency.[102]

Kate, for the most part, was relieved to leave backwards Columbus for the excitement and sophistication of the nation's capitol. She found herself in the spotlight as first lady of the Cabinet, since Mrs. Seward was a sickly woman who rarely gave or attended state functions. For all intents and purposes, Kate was also the social leader of Washington. The matronly First Lady, Mary Todd Lincoln, whom Kate would come to despise (and vice versa), was hardly competition for the beautiful, young, charming girl from Ohio.[103] This position also gave her more and better opportunities to work for her father's candidacy. As the acknowledged leader of Washington society, she met and entertained the most influential people in the country. Kate's relentless ambition to see her father as President and herself as First Lady knew no bounds. During the Civil War, Kate perfected the fine art of politicking that she had learned as a girl and was to put to good use in the years ahead.

At age twenty-one, Kate had almost everything going for her--charisma, beauty, and position. There was only one thing she lacked in order to make her dreams for Chase's presidency a reality--a sufficient supply of money.

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[102]Belden and Belden, So Fell the Angels, pp. 24-26

[103]Sokoloff, Kate Chase, p. 53.

Despite her father's close relationship with the financial wizard, Jay Cooke of Philadelphia, the Chase family's personal debts mounted. Chase's moral upbringing coupled with the knowledge that backdoor financing was dangerous, prevented him from using his Treasury position to enrich his coffers. He was not, however, loathe to use the Treasury Department as the basis for his Presidential dreams. The only solution to this financial problem was for Kate to marry a wealthy man. Her choice was Senator William Sprague IV, former governor of Rhode Island, war hero, and multimillionaire. Sprague's family had amassed their fortune in cotton manufacturing and calico printing. The future husband of Kate Chase was neither particularly handsome nor intelligent. Actually his only real asset was his twelve million dollar fortune, which no doubt was his main attraction for Kate.[104]

Kate had met then-Governor Sprague in 1860, when she attended the unveiling of the Oliver Hazard Perry monument in Cleveland. Since Perry was from Rhode Island, Sprague had been invited to give the main address. The first question Miss Chase apparently had about Sprague was, "Is he wealthy?"[105] At the ball which followed the

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[104]Thomas Graham Belden, "The Salmon P. Chase Family in the Civil War and Reconstruction: A Study in Ambition and Corruption," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1952), pp. 13-14.

[105]Phelps, Kate Chase, p. 126.

ceremony, Kate and Sprague danced together several times and he seemed fascinated by her. At the end of the ball she supposedly remarked, "What a charming man Governor Sprague is!"[106] When Sprague came to Washington in 1862 as a Senator, he had already made a name for himself as a hero at the disasterous battle of First Bull Run in 1861. When Kate and Sprague began courting, Washington became a running brook of gossip. No one could believe that the beautiful Miss Chase would take up with the weak and ineffectual Sprague.[107] At the turn of the nineteenth century, journalist Henry Villard wrote,

> He [Sprague] had very limited mental capacity, but had reached political distinction at an early age--he was then but thirty-one--through the influence of real or reputed great wealth. It was at his headquarters that he became acquainted with Kate, the beautiful and gifted daughter of Secretary Chase. The acquaintance quickly ripened into an engagement that was the social sensation of the day. She was far superior to him in every way and married him for the enjoyment and power of his money.[108]

In this marriage of convenience, Kate was not the only one who manifested her ambitions. Sprague was not so totally overwhelmed by the charms of the delightful Miss Chase. Her position as daughter of the Secretary of the

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[106]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 51.

[107]Phelps, Kate Chase, p. 126.

[108]Henry Villard, Memoirs of Henry Villard, Journalist and Financier, 2 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1904), 1:175.

Treasury would be particularly advantageous for Sprague's business interests. As a Northern textile manufacturer, Sprague was faced with the problem of the blockade imposed on the South by the Union at the beginning of the war. The only way Northern manufacturers could get cotton from the rebellious South was if trading was done with "loyal Union men" and if it did not "give aid or comfort to the enemy." A permit system was set up by the Union government, which ended up under the authority of the Treasury Department. It was no wonder that Sprague wanted to involve himself with the Chase family.[109]

Despite Sprague's love of liquor and high living, Chase liked this man who was to become his son-in-law. However, he felt that Sprague was not firm enough to control Kate. In making her final decision, Kate wondered if her role as Washington's chief hostess would be helped or hurt by her marriage to Sprague. A trip she and her father took to New England in the spring of 1863 allayed her fears, for they were warmly received in Sprague's native territory. Kate had no reason to believe that her social standing would be harmed, and went ahead with plans for a grandiose wedding.[110]

The marriage of Catherine Jane Chase and William Sprague IV took place on November 12, 1863, following a

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[109]Belden, "Chase Family," p. 23.

[110]Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 127-128.

two-year courtship. Kate wore " . . . a gorgeous white velvet dress, with an extended train, and upon her head wore a rich lace veil. But little or no other ornament was perceived on her person. The Senator was clad in a suit of rich black cloth, with the usual addition of a white satin vest."[111] This wedding was the social event of the season, with the gifts valued at sixty thousand dollars. The cream of Washington society attended the affair--diplomats, Cabinet ministers, congressmen. President Lincoln, "came in his private carriage without escort and alone," since Mrs. Lincoln was still in mourning for her son, Willie, who had died in 1862.[112] Music was provided by the United States Marine Band, which played the specially composed "Kate Chase Wedding March." Verses were written by Joel Benton and published in the New York Independent,

> Wind of summer, soft and sweet,
> Blowing up the coast today,
> Kissing all the snowy fleet
> In and out the silver bay--
> Waft up joy on rosy feet--
> Fan all clouds and care away.
>
> Sing, O Bird, the hero's praise,
> Bird of splendor, do your best;
> He who holds henceforth as his
> The fairest girl in all the West;
> Make, O Fate, his future bliss
> Greater than he ever guessed.[113]

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[111] New York Times, 15 November 1863.

[112] Ibid., 13 November 1863, 15 November 1863.

[113] New York Independent, 12 November 1863, cited in Phelps, Kate Chase, p. 138n.

Following the wedding, the newlyweds went on a honeymoon trip which included stops in Providence, New York City, and Ohio. In Providence, the Sprague clan made preparations to receive Kate and her husband. However, this grand reception was boycotted by Rhode Island's aristocrats. Upon investigation, Kate discovered that the Spragues had never been received socially. William Sprague was viewed locally as a rather coarse character, who was known to put his feet on his hostess' chair when visiting. It was made obvious that while the State's first families warmly welcomed Miss Chase, they were not about to do the same for Mrs. Sprague.[114]

Kate returned to her native Ohio in style. Her honeymoon also became a political campaign for her father. While in Ohio, she contacted many of her father's political friends and entertained them lavishly. Kate's thoughts never veered too far from Chase's political career. While in New York, Kate discussed the outlook for the 1864 Presidential nomination with New York Port Collector Hiram Barney. She also tried to convince Reverend Henry Ward Beecher to support her father in 1864, but did not know at the time how poor the influential minister felt Chase's chances were. During her entire honeymoon, Kate lived in a fantasy, dreaming about her father's future.[115]

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[114]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 143.

[115]Ibid., pp. 145-146; Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 143-145.

Upon Kate's return to Washington, she had no intention of leaving Chase despite her marriage. That her father would live with them was something she made clear to her husband even before their wedding. In order to facilitate Kate's plan, Sprague purchased a large sixty thousand dollar home on the corner of 6th and E Streets in Washington. Chase was to pay a fixed rent per month to live there and one-half that total when he was away. It is to Sprague's credit that he did not protest this arrangement, considering Kate's devotion to her father. Perhaps he had reconciled himself to the fact that he would always come a distant second in his wife's affections.[116]

Kate was shocked and angered to learn at this time that her father was being persuaded by one of her aunts to remarry. He still corresponded with Mrs. Charlotte Eastman, a matron whose many letters to Chase were often intercepted by the intrepid Kate. It was vital to Kate's ambitions that Chase remain single. If he should remarry and even become President, Kate would not be mistress of the White House and First Lady of the land as she desired. Her fears were unfounded, since Chase apparently found his single status preferable to marriage.[117]

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[116]Sokoloff, Kate Chase, p. 86.

[117]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 147; Belden, "Chase Family," p. 9.

With her new status as a matron, Kate became even more formidable than ever. If her father's presidential ambitions had flagged somewhat after his disappointment in the 1860 election, Kate's ambitions for him only increased with time.[118] Kate now had her eyes on the 1864 election. The wealth she gained in her marriage proved invaluable in promoting Chase's candidacy. Her famous matinees and receptions became more frequent and lavish, although always in good taste.[119] One observer stated,

> The more sordid pursuit of supporters, the angling for delegates, could be left to the politicians enlisted in the cause. Kate's activities were of more subtle kind--making friends by the adroit exercise of social flattery. Her receptions and dinners were the great events for Washington; and invitation to her home the most desired. In the critical winter of 1863-4 Mrs. Sprague distributed her favors mainly with one end in view. Any politician from the provinces, irrespective of his standing at home or personal graces, became the object of her attentions--if he was likely to control delegates to the June convention. Her smaller dinner and supper parties were occasions for the necessary prelude to the open contest. Even so strait-laced a Puritan as Lyman Trumbull after having been admitted to Kate's inner circle on E Street began to see value in her father as a presidential candidate.[120]

Openly, Chase denied his desire for the presidency, although he did nothing to stop Kate and his friends who were out intriguing for him. However, the carefully laid plans of Kate Chase Sprague went awry in this campaign.

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[118]Belden, "Chase Family," p. 3.

[119]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 148.

[120]Ibid.

On February 22, 1864, a pamphlet known as the Pomeroy circular was issued by Sprague and Samuel C. Pomeroy, the fraudulently elected Senator from Kansas.[121] The pamphlet extolled Chase's virtues as compared with Lincoln's vices. Naturally, its proponents felt that the former was surely more fit to be President.[122] At first circulated only among friends, the Pomeroy Circular was quickly published in the newspapers. Oddly enough, Chase apparently knew nothing about it, until he received his copy. It cannot be proven definitely, but Kate is a good suspect for being the instigator of the whole affair; certainly it is within keeping of her character.[123]

Instead of aiding the Chase cause, the whole thing backfired. Although the Secretary of the Treasury denied knowing anything about it to Lincoln, relations between the two were strained, despite the President's forgiving attitude toward Chase. On top of all this, a scandal broke concerning immoral goings on among Treasury Department employees. The Blair family, which included Major General Francis Preston Blair and Postmaster General Montgomery Blair, hated the Chase clan and used these opportunities to do them as much harm as possible. Finally, in June of 1864,

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[121]Phelps, Kate Chase, p. 153; Belden, "Chase Family," p.

[122]"The Pomeroy Bulletin" cited in Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 295-296.

[123]Ibid., pp. 154-155.

the Secretary of the Treasury resigned his post. This time, Lincoln had been pushed too far and accepted his resignation.[124]

Instead of gaining support in the Republican party as they had hoped to do, Kate and her father were terribly disappointed. Lincoln had the 1864 nomination all sewed up. Chase decided to back his former rival, especially since the possibility of the Chief Justiceship loomed before him. His supporters, like Charles Sumner, backed him for that post with the death of Chief Justice Roger B. Tanney in 1865. Lincoln nominated Salmon P. Chase to fill that opening, and apparently the former Treasury Secretary was satisfied.[125] Not so his ambitious daughter, Kate. According to Sumner, upon learning about her father's confirmation, she shook her finger at him and said, "And you, too, Mr. Sumner? You, too, in this business of shelving papa? But never mind! I will defeat you all!"[126]

Kate Chase Sprague's determination to reach the White House grew even more. She believed that her father

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[124]Ross, Proud Kate, pp. 153-157.

[125]Lincoln knew that the only way he could win the nomination was by gaining the support of Chase and his disciples. Apparently, the prospect of becoming Chief Justice appealed to Chase enough to give up any chance for the 1864 nomination, Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 165-167.

[126]Robert B. Warden, An Account of the Private Life and Public Services of Salmon Portland Chase (Cincinnati Welstack, Baldwin, and Company, 1864), p. 630.

"was not to be set aside by a place on the bench."[127] Kate was already looking forward to the 1868 election when she felt sure that her father would be nominated. It would be in this election that she would become even more actively a politician. More so than ever before she would break from the traditional mold of Victorian lady and act the role of a feminist, whose ambition would bring her destruction.

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[127]Marva Robins Belden and Thomas Graham Belden, "Kate was too Ambitious," American Heritage, August 1956, p. 92.

CHAPTER III

KATE CHASE: POLITICAL HIGH PRIESTESS

Salmon P. Chase's appointment to be Chief Justice was considered a fate worse than death in Kate's eyes. She knew that, historically, the Chief Justiceship was a dead end for advancement. No man who occupied that position ever sought the Presidency. For Chase to do so would be something akin to breaking a sacred law--it just was not done. This tradition did not matter to Kate. She was determined to see her father to the Presidency. Chase's acceptance of the Chief Justiceship leads to the conclusion that perhaps his own desire for the highest position in the land was waning. He also knew what becoming Chief Justice would mean for his candidacy. His 1868 bid for the Democratic nomination was done, no doubt, to please Kate more so than for his own interests. Kate long saw herself as First Lady by her father's side. Only time was needed, she believed, so that Chase could be given his rightful place as President.[128]

In the years that preceeded the fateful 1868 election, Kate basked in the knowledge that she was "the acknowledged queen of fashion and good taste," still the

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[128]Belden, "Chase Family," p. 176; Phelps, Kate Chase, p. 168.

belle of Washington society.[129] She was out of the 1864-1865 social season due to her first pregnancy. Kate gave birth to a boy in May, 1865. She wanted to name him after her father, but instead chose the name, William, at Chase's insistence,

> It is natural that you should want to name him after me in some way; but my only tolerable name is my surname; and William is not only a better one; but it is the name of the one to whom your duties belong, and it was the name of his father, was it not? It should be borne by his first boy. So please consider this case adjudged.[130]

The boy's birth caused a mild sensation throughout the United States, with descriptions of his layette appearing in many newspapers.[131]

Kate returned as quickly as possible to her entertaining. Her home was always filled with statesmen, diplomats, and artists. Occasionally, she had parlor lectures such as one for suffragist Julia Ward Howe. Her dinners were magnificent affairs, which were even held outdoors in warm weather.[132] Her own clothing was always the height of fashion. On one occasion, Kate was described as,

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[129]Emily Edson Briggs, The Olivia Letters: Being Some History of Washington City for Forty Years as Told by the Letters of a Newspaper Correspondent (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1906), p. 70.

[130]Salmon P. Chase to Kate Sprague, 24 June 1865, cited in Ross, Proud Kate, p. 176.

[131]Phelps, Kate Chase, p. 176.

[132]Claude G. Bowers, The Tragic Era: The Revolution After Lincoln (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929), pp. 253-254.

> . . . a lilac blossom today. Not a particle of jewelry is visible upon her person. She has copied her bonnet from the pansy wood or violet. A single flower, of lilac tinge, . . . rests upon her head, and is fastened by lilac tulle . . . An exquisite walking dress of pale lilac silk has trimmings of a shade darker, whilst lilac gloves conceal a hand that might belong to the queen of fairies . . .[133]

In 1866, Kate decided she wanted a mansion in Narragansett, Rhode Island, a desire which became realized by the building in 1868 of a Victorian Gothic edifice christened "Canonchet." The imposing structure combined Venetian, Gothic, and Victorian characteristics that Kate had seen in travels abroad. Much of the interior decoration was imported including a magnificent mahogany staircase.[134] It was at about this time that rumors regarding the stability of Kate's marriage were being circulated. When Sprague failed to make an appearance at his wife's social functions, such as at Chase's birthday party in January of 1866, many wondered if the marriage was foundering. The following spring, Kate left for Europe with Nettie and little William. Chase was disappointed, for he liked Sprague, and attempted to play the role of mediator between Kate and her husband. Sprague eventually joined his wife in Europe and together they returned home in December, 1866. This reunion was not to last, for Kate left again for Europe

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[133]Briggs, Olivia Letters, p. 70.

[134]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 173.

in the summer of 1867. When she returned, she devoted herself almost exclusively to the coming election of 1868. Kate's balls and receptions were her basis of operation. She grew in influence and power, enjoying this position of strength which she had.[135]

In 1868, Kate was given the chance to exert pressure on her husband for her political ends. The occasion was the impeachment trial of President Andrew Johnson. As a member of the Senate, Sprague would be called upon to vote on Johnson's innocence or guilt. As Chief Justice, Chase would preside over the trial. Both Kate and her father hoped that the President would be found innocent, for several reasons. Probably the most important, at least in Kate's mind, was the fact that should Johnson actually be convicted, Senator Benjamin Wade would take his place. Wade was an old political foe of Chase's back in Ohio before the Civil War. Kate could not stand the thought of him being President.[136] She was quoted by a newspaper as stating. "The idea of the horrid old Ben Wade being put in over my father!"[137] Chase himself was conscious of Wade's position, but he also felt that Johnson was not guilty of the Radical accusations. If Sprague dared vote

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[135]Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 178-192.

[136]Belden, "Chase Family," p. 171.

[137]Philadedelphia Evening Star, 15 May 1868, cited in Ibid.

"guilty," he would risk the wrath of Kate, who threatened to leave him if he did.[138]

The Radicals were concerned over Kate's influence on her husband. Would she exert pressure on him to vote against them by supporting Johnson's innocence? An article which appeared in the New York Herald reflected this concern,

> We are told that his /Chase's/ accomplished daughter, . . . is, and for a time has been, not only foolishly ambitious to be recognized officially as first lady of the land, but that to gain this end she has been and is playing the game of a remorseless politician. . . . Mrs. Sprague resolved to become herself the mistress of the Executive Mansion, and that being a lady of spirit and decision of character, who will not take no for an answer, she has led her father the Chief Justice, into this unseemly pursuit of the Presidential succession; and finally, that in view of the defeat of her aspirations in this direction, there is no telling the consequences in the Senate upon this impeachment business.[139]

Chase, by not siding with the Radicals, hurt forever any chance he may have had for the Republican nomination. He and Kate further outraged the Radicals by holding a party for Johnson the night before the proceedings began. Many felt that the Chief Justice would be biased during the trial. On the Saturday before the final vote was taken, Kate gave a dinner for all the Senators whose votes were uncertain. This incurred more disapproval by those who felt that Chase was trying to influence these

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[138] Ibid.

[139] New York Herald, 22 March 1868; cited in Ibid., pp. 165-166.

Senators to vote for acquittal. The general impression gained by many was that Chase and Kate were now angling for the Democratic Presidential nomination.[140]

And what of the errant Sprague? If he voted "not guilty" he would please his wife and father-in-law. However, he would at the same time incur the anger of former Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, something he could not afford to do. Stanton, who sided with the Radicals, knew about Sprague's blockade running experiences during the Civil War to get cotton. Harris Hoyt, Sprague's partner in that affair, turned state's evidence to Stanton, who completely dropped the entire matter where it concerned the Rhode Island Senator. There was also the possibility that the Chief Prosecutor of the trial, Benjamin Butler, also knew of this and could use the information against Sprague, as could Stanton, if he voted the wrong way. In the end, Sprague preferred humiliating his wife to being accused of treason and thus voted "guilty."[141]

Kate, who attended most of the trial, was forced to miss the voting. She had left Washington after a violent argument with her husband. Chase urged her to make up with Sprague, writing,

> How I do love you, darling! My whole heart yearns to go toward you while I write and tears come to my eyes. How wrong it is for those who

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[140] Ibid., p. 163; Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 194-197.

[141] Belden and Belden, So Fell the Angels, pp. 188-189.

> love not to express their love. I remember how often you have felt hurt by my apparent indifference to what interested you; and I feel sorry that I occasioned any such feelings to you. I see now in your husband something of that which I blame in myself. But I know how strong my love really was, and I know his is. . . . I never saw him so affected as by the difference that occurred between you just before you went away. He was almost unmanned--near to tears. . . . You must love away all his reserve.[142]

Kate was indeed angry with her husband for voting against Johnson, but did not leave him permanently as she had threatened. Instead, she directed all of her energies to the upcoming Democratic Convention in New York City in July, 1868.[143]

Her hotel on 94th Street and Fifth Avenue became Kate's basis of operation in New York City as Chase's campaign manager. In one letter that she received from her father, he demonstrated that he was not really happy with Kate's political interests and warned,

> I am afraid my darling, that you are acting too much the politician. Have a care. Don't do or say anything wich may not be proclaimed on the housetops. I am so anxious about you that I cannot help wishing you were in Narragansett or here where I take all things very quietly and play croquet every morning.[144]

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[142]Salmon P. Chase to Kate Sprague, 10 May 1868, cited in Belden, "Chase Family," p. 172.

[143]Ross, Proud Kate, pp. 199-201.

[144]Salmon P. Chase to Kate Sprague, 7 July 1868, cited in Belden, "Chase Family," p. 178.

Kate blithely ignored his advice, and continued making friends and influencing delegates. She also sent reports to her father on her progress at the Convention,

> . . . Amasa [Sprague, Kate's brother-in-law] is working here with all his might. The young men are the life of this movement. Things look a good deal clearer . . . [Horatio] Seymour . . . is perfectly sincere in his intention <u>under no</u> circumstances to be a candidate.[145]

Later, she reported,

> There is a noble work done here by your friends, and whether success or failure crown their efforts, they will be always proud to have had a hand in it.[146]

Kate sat in the galleries at the Convention during its entire proceedings. As a woman, she could not be out on the floor and actively campaign. No matter. She had done her own campaigning outside of the Convention's walls, at private caucuses, at levees, and at receptions. The entire voting process turned out to be very nerve racking for Kate. It was not until the sixth day that Chase's name was even mentioned. On the twenty-first ballot, he received four votes from Massachusetts, the most he would get in the entire Convention. His own state of Ohio rejected him in favor of another Ohioan, George Pendleton. Horatio Seymour of New York was finally nominated. Kate was upset by this,

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[145]Kate Sprague to Salmon P. Chase, n.d. cited in <u>Ibid</u>., p. 177.

[146]Kate Sprague to Salmon P. Chase, n.d. cited in Charles H. Coleman, <u>The Election of 1868: The Democratic Effort to Regain Control</u> (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), p. 221.

especially since Seymour told her that he would give a nominating speech for Chase. In the end, Seymour gave in and accepted the nomination.[147]

Chase's "inner circle" of campaign workers attempted to comfort Kate on the loss. This select group, which had done Chase's major campaign work, included John Van Buren of New York; Hiram Barney; John C. Cisco, former Assistant Treasurer; Hamilton Smith and James C. Kennedy, both old friends of Chase's, and of course, Kate.[148] The only one who deserted the ranks was Van Buren. Kate decided that the whole affair was a plan to humiliate her father, led by Seymour, Samuel J. Tilden, head of the New York delegation, and Van Buren. She wrote a lengthy letter to her father detailing her convictions,

> You have been most cruelly deceived and shamefully used by the men you trusted implicitly, and the country must suffer for the duplicity. I would not write to you yesterday in the excitement . . . until I had carefully gone over in mind all circumstances that had come under my knowledge of the action of Mr. Van Buren. . . . Mr. Van Buren though constantly at the Manhatten Club, next door, has not been near me. . . . had Mr. Kennedy the authority to act for you, you would have been as certainly nominated . . . as anything could be. Mr. Van Buren's telegraph to you to answer no questions in regard to the Platform was the block he put in the way of your nomination--and when at the critical juncture he was at last found, . . . he refused to take the responsibility for speaking for you and said he was not authorized. . . . Mr. Tilden and Mr. Seymour have done this

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[147]Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 204-208.

[148]Coleman, Election of 1868, pp. 215-222.

> work, and Mr. Van Buren has been their tool. This is my honest belief, . . . Do dear father in the future be guided by the advice of some of those who are devoted to you, but who are more suspicious than your own noble heart will allow you to be.[149]

Kate had played a major role in her father's campaign, only to have her dreams shattered. Of course, Chase's own stand supporting universal manhood suffrage did not sit well with the Democrats, and he was unwilling to compromise his principles. It was also a question of just exactly how much Chase did want the Presidency. He wrote Kate,

> I am glad that my name was not presented at first and shall be better pleased if it is not presented at all. You know how little I have desired a nomination and how anxious I have been to resist any efforts to secure it. I have feared all along that it could not be tendered to me on any platform which would allow any hope of considerable associations from the Republicans . . .[150]

Even in this confidential statement to his daughter, he seemed to be an almost reluctant candidate for President.

The Chase campaign also suffered from the loss of the Cooke family's financial and organizational backing. Furthermore, the Southern Democrats were not at all pleased with the idea of Chase being their nominee. According to one statement, "Judge Chase's daughter is here electioneering for the nomination of her father, but [I] would not see

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[149]Kate Sprague to Salmon P. Chase, 10 July 1868, cited in Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 204-208.

[150]Salmon P. Chase to Kate Sprague, 7 July 1868, cited in Belden, "Chase Family," p. 178.

her, for Southern delegates said if Chase were nominated, the party would cease to be the Democratic party."[151] Finally, there was Chase's support of "hard money" rather than the greenbacks which many of the Western delegates supported.[152]

Kate manifested her feminism in this election. Although she was not on the Convention floor, she again stepped out of the role society had decreed for good Victorian ladies. She was as active a participant in politics as possible, a field which was considered outside of the woman's proper sphere. At a time when women were supposed to be in the kitchen, Kate was out campaigning in a national election. An article which appeared in the Louisville Courier-Journal summed up her thoroughly unfeminine activities and ambitions,

> Mrs. Sprague is thoroughly ambitious. It has not been because of mere personal vanity that she has perfected herself as a woman of the world and a queen of society. . . . in the fond expectation of being one day presiding lady at the White House. Mr. Chase was credited with an overwhelming desire to be the Chief Magistrate; yet I believe that this was less due to his own ambitions than to his elder daughter's. A gentleman who acted as one of Mr. Chase's chief agents during the campaign, prior to the nomination of Mr. Seymour in 1868, has told me how, throughout, Mrs. Sprague was taken into consultation, how high were her hopes, and how constantly her father spoke of her in connection with his success or failure. When he thought success certain, as he

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[151]Joshua Livingston to Salmon P. Chase, 8 August 1868, cited in Belden, "Chase Family," p. 183.

[152]Ibid.

> did until the very day Seymore received the nomination, he rejoiced most of all for the joy it would give Mrs. Sprague. . . .[153]

In order to divert herself from her disappointment, Kate threw herself into the building and furnishing of Canonchet. Her Rhode Island home was to become her center for politically advantageous socializing. There was only one catch to her plans--Chase was determined not to run for President ever again. He was content to remain Chief Justice, no matter how determined Kate was that he become the Chief Executive of the United States.[154]

Right after the Democratic Convention, Kate and her husband had another parting of ways. Her father again determined to heal the wounds between them. His concern was reflected in a letter to her, where he wrote, "You must reflect, my darling that there can be but one head to a family, and that a husband will always find the happiness of both interested by mutual councils."[155] Kate was hardly the best of wives, but neither was she the worst. Certainly her husband's personal habits were hardly respectable and he was know to embarass Kate, especially with his heavy drinking. Kate must also have heard by this time about Sprague's old affair with Mary Eliza Viall

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[153]Warden, Salmon P. Chase, pp. 705-706.

[154]Phelps, Kate Chase, p. 213.

[155]Salmon P. Chase to Kate Sprague, 8 August 1868, cited in Belden, "Chase Family," p. 183.

Anderson, whom he had promised to marry, but then did not. Mary Eliza never gave up her love and admiration of Sprague, who was alleged to have been the father of her only child. Afterward, it was all downhill for the unwed mother, especially since she was a member of a socially prominent Prividence family. She would later cause more distress in the Sprague household in 1876 with the publication of "The Merchant's Wife," a pamphlet in which Mary Eliza gave a fictionalized version of her affair with Sprague.[156]

In 1868, Sprague was returned to the Senate. During his first term, he was not prone to orating at Senate meetings. However, in the spring of 1869, he made a series of speeches in the halls of Congress. Supposedly, Kate is the one who chided him into it. About this time, she had paid a visit to the Senate chamber, and quickly left the gallery after a speech by a Senator. Sprague, as was the custom then, got up to see her out of the building and asked her, "Is there anything I can do for you?" To which Kate replied, "Nothing but to go in there and make a speech, --and that you can't do!"[157] No matter what the cause, there is little doubt that Kate was embarassed by her husband's speeches. In one of them, he criticized the virtue of women in general--most likely a manifestation of his own

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[156]Sokoloff, Kate Chase, p. 158; Phelps, Kate Chase, p. 215.

[157]Phelps, Kate Chase, p. 302.

doubts regarding his wife's fidelity to him. He also attacked "corrupt" European manners and morals, another reference to Kate, who was by that time thoroughly captivated by the people, sites, and styles she had seen in the Old World.[158]

Kate quickly left Washington right after Sprague's adventure into oration. Chase did his best to quell the couple's argument, urging Kate, "not to criticize your husband's public action even in your thoughts. Of course you say nothing to outsiders except all you can say honestly in agreement and approval."[159] She did return to Washington to rejoin Sprague. In October, 1869, she gave birth to a girl, Ethel, which at least temporarily reunited the Spragues.[160]

Throughout 1869, Chase's health had been slowly deteriorating. In the summer of 1870, while on a tour of Niagara Falls with Nettie and Kate, Chase suffered a stroke. He recovered at Canonchet under the watchful care of Kate and Sprague. While nursing her father, Kate kept a modified social season, going to only a few parties and giving only a few herself.[161]

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[158] Ibid., pp. 220-221; Belden, "Chase Family," p. 185.

[159] Salmon P. Chase to Kate Sprague, 4 May 1869, cited in Phelps, Kate Chase, p. 225.

[160] Ross, Proud Kate, pp. 220-221.

[161] Ibid.

Kate had another daughter, Portia, in 1871. As soon as possible, Kate went back to her own brand of politicking. After all, the 1872 Presidential election was pending, and what better choice for a nominee would there be but Chase? At least, Kate thought so and her father's name was being tossed about as a presidential possibility.[162] In order to present to the world Chase's fitness for the Presidency, she gave a party in his honor in April of 1872. All the important and influential members of Washington society and political life were invited to this grand affair. Despite Chase's much improved health, Kate was only deluding herself in thinking that her father was still a viable presidential hopeful. Her father, being more of a realist than Kate where it concerned himself, knew that his political career was long over. That he did not issue an incontestable refusal regarding his candidacy was probably done more for Kate's sake than for anything else. Chase would probably have accepted the nomination if the Democrats had offered it to him, but he would not actively campaign for it. He did not have to worry, since the Democrats chose Horace Greeley instead.[163]

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[162]Discontented liberal Republicans seceeded from the party and were to hold a convention in Cincinnati. They hoped to find a candidate that would join them with disgruntled Democrats. To many of these people, Chase, whose health had been improving, seemed to be the logical choice for a candidate that they would run on the Democratic party ticket; Belden and Belden, So Fell the Angels, pp. 262-265.

[163]Ibid.

Kate lost her moral support and a void was left in her heart when Chase died of a heart attack on May 7, 1873. She would never recover from his death. Chase was the only one who could fulfill her dreams and ambitions; he was the only one who understood her. Kate had revealed her innermost self to Chase alone, and now he was gone. Kate eventually found someone else to turn to--the dashing Senator from New York, Roscoe Conkling. As early as 1870, she may have formed an interest in the man, since she saw him whenever she went to the Senate gallery. Upon Chase's death, Conkling was offered the Chief Justiceship, which he refused. He was fiery, self-centered, and stubborn, a great deal like Kate herself. In a way, he was a rather strange man to replace Chase in Kate's affections, since he had little of the bearing, dignity, and puritan morality that had characterized the Chief Justice. This relationship was called everything from a "grand passion" to a "beautiful friendship," and was to become a mark for envy and hatred.[164]

After Chase's death, Sprague saw fit to cut off Kate's unlimited supply of money. He told her to ask her Washington friends for help when her outlay exceeded her allowance. In order to pay her debts, Kate held an auction of many of her father's possessions at "Edgewood," the estate he had built outside of Washington. Sprague himself was having financial

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[164] Ibid., p. 290; Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 240-244.

difficulties with the failure of the Cooke finances which touched off the Panic of 1873. Although his own business went bankrupt, he was not left penniless. Sprague also managed to save Canonchet from being confiscated by the government.[165]

Conkling became Kate's legal champion at that time. He introduced a bill in the Senate which would free Edgewood from all past and future taxes. The first time the general public had any inkling of their affair was during the disputed election of 1876 between Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel Tilden. A newspaper spread the story that Kate had used her influence on Conkling so that he would support Hayes. She was said to be out to avenge her father's defeat in 1868, for which she believed Tilden was partly responsible. Conkling was rumored to have made a deal to support Tilden, but at the last minute, Kate persuaded him to be absent from the Senate during that vote, thereby giving Hayes the election by a single vote.[166]

During the second week of August, 1879, the Sprague-Conkling affair occurred. This episode caused a sensation throughout the United States due to the publicity given it by the newspapers. On Monday, August 4, 1879, Kate was at Canonchet with her children and some weekend guests. The

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[165]Belden and Belden, So Fell the Angels, pp. 285-286.

[166]Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 245-246; Belden, "Chase Family," p. 237.

next day, Conkling arrived at the house. Sprague at that time was in Portland and was not expected to be back until the following Saturday. Late on Thursday, however, Sprague returned to Narragansett, but did not know of Conkling's arrival until Friday morning. Sprague promptly went back to Canonchet, found Conkling, and had a heated conversation with him.[167]

One of Kate's servants stated that Sprague ordered Conkling to leave the house in twenty minutes, or he would shoot him. Conkling was next seen leaving the home and walking in the direction of Narragansett Pier. When he reached the pier, he went into Billington's cafe. Sprague followed Conkling to the cafe and told him to leave town all together, or he would shoot him. This conversation took place sometime between 3:00 and 4:00 p.m.; Conkling went to the railroad station around 5:00 p.m. His trunk and valise were waiting for him at the depot. Back at Canonchet, Kate's guests all left and Kate and her daughters moved to the Lower Hill House, located about one-half mile from Canonchet. The next day, they left for Providence.[168]

Sprague refused to comment on the entire event, although an unnamed source reported statements supposedly made by him. When asked if he had ordered Conkling out of the house, Sprague was to have replied, "Yes I did . . .

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[167]New York Times, 12 August 1879.

[168]Ibid.

Because he has tried to destroy my household in Washington, and now he seeks to do it here."[169] Conkling, who had returned to New York City, also refused to say anything about his relations with Sprague. His friends did an excellent job of keeping the press away from the New York Senator.[170]

Another party whose name was connected with the Sprague-Conkling scandal was Willie Sprague's German tutor, Professor George Linck. Many who were trying to cover up Conkling's presence at Canonchet said it was really Linck, not Conkling whom Sprague chased out of his home. True, Sprague disliked Linck, but had actually thrown him out of Canonchet several days before he did the same to Conkling. According to Linck's own statement, he had been engaged as Willie's tutor by Kate at the beginning of July. Linck went on to Canonchet with the boy, where he finally met Sprague. The Senator treated him poorly, insisting he stay at a hotel. Kate was astonished when Linck wired her what had happened, since her husband told her he would not stand in the way of her arrangements. On July 9, 1879, Linck and Sprague exchanged several choice words, the upshot being that Linck went to New York City.[171]

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[169] Ibid.

[170] Cincinnati Daily Gazette, 13 August 1879.

[171] New York Times, 12 August 1879.

Kate was informed by the tutor of his whereabouts, and told him to meet her in Providence. From there, Linck returned to Narragansett where he had another encounter with Sprague. Sprague said to him, "Now, you d____d D_____, if I find you again near my children or place, I will surely kill you, that I will, and take my word for it." Linck returned to the Plimpton House and wrote Kate of his meeting with her husband. At the end of July, Kate asked Linck to come to Canonchet to settle the matter. Sprague, who was returning home at the same time the tutor was arriving, saw Linck, who then beat a hasty retreat back to the local wine house. Sprague followed him, threatening to shoot him. Luckily for Linck, he hid and the landlady's daughter threw Sprague off the track.[172] Linck's eviction was only a preliminary to the Sprague-Conkling arrair. According to an editorial, Linck was the only one who benefited from the scandal, because he became the most widely publicized tutor in the United States.[173]

The Sprague-Conkling scandal called to mind Kate's earlier involvement with a married man in Columbus. No matter how she tried to defend herself, many recalled this earlier affair and felt that if she would openly carry on with a married man once, she would not hesitate about doing it again. Because of this, there was more public sympathy

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[172] Ibid.

[173] Cincinnati Daily Gazette, 13 August 1879.

for Sprague, as the wronged husband, than there was for Kate. It was widely believed that she was a brazen woman of loose morals, with little respect for her father's memory. Apparently Kate cared little what people thought of her. The only person whose opinion she valued was her father's, and since he was dead, this blot on her name mattered little.

Three days after the scandal occurred, Kate returned to a friend's home near Canonchet. Her lawyer tried to get clothing for her and her daughters, but he was refused entrance to the mansion by Sprague. The enraged husband found out where Kate was staying, went to her, and during a violent argument, demanded the children. Kate gave in, and all of them returned to Canonchet, where it was rumored that she was being held under lock and key.[174] A newspaper reporter was given access to speak with Kate, so that she could give her version of the Sprague-Conkling affair,

> He [Conkling] came simply to use his influence with my husband to a certain policy in the management of the estate. . . . On Friday morning, when I came down to breakfast I was told that Mr. Sprague came home suddenly at three o'clock in the morning, and had left again. . . . I thought no more it it, and busied myself about household affairs . . . Just then, Mr. Sprague came up the staircase. He walked slowly into the room, Mr. Conkling rising to meet him. Some words passed which I did not hear . . . Mr. Conkling walked straight across the room to where I stood and said, 'Mrs. Sprague, your husband is very much excited.' I told him . . . if Mr. Sprague was

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[174]Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 240-250.

> in a passion it would be useless to argue with him and might only lead to violence. . . . As to what happened later when he followed Mr. Conkling, I do not know. I know he took a gun in the buggy and I know it was loaded . . . I have reason to be grateful that no one was murdered.[175]

Kate, virtually a prisoner at Canonchet, made a dramatic escape on August 31, 1879, with her daughters, and after a mysterious two-week disappearance, went to Edgewood. This signaled an end to the marriage of Kate Chase and William Sprague IV. It was just a matter of time as to which one would file for divorce first.[176]

On December 18, 1880, Kate filed for divorce from her husband. Her grounds were many and varied. She stated that Sprague had committed adultery with several women; that he was guilty of extreme cruelty to her; he violently assaulted her and threatened her life. Since 1879, Sprague neglected and refused to provide necessities for herself and her children; he had called her names both alone and in the presence of others; he often claimed not to be the father of their children and even said it to them. He accused her of adultery and sought to imprison her and her children in their home in August of 1879.

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[175]New York Sun, 17 August 1879, cited in Ibid., pp. 256-257.

[176]Ibid., pp. 257-258.

For more than two years he sought to annoy, disturb, and make life wretched for her.[177]

A cross suit was entered by Sprague, charging Kate with infidelity. It was eventually agreed that if Kate dropped the worst charges and asked for a divorce on the grounds of desertion and non-support, Sprague would drop the cross suit. It was also decided that Kate would receive custody of their daughters and Willie would go to Sprague. No alimony was decided at that time; it was to be settled later. Kate was also permitted to return to legal use of her maiden name; she wanted to be called Mrs. Catherine Chase.[178]

After her divorce, Kate lost her last tie with her glorious past. She had married Sprague at a time in her life when her future seemed bright and the White House was a viable dream. Her divorce was only a part of the rather sad ending to a brilliant career. For all intents and purposes, Kate's political days were over. Her dream of a home in the White House died with her father. Perhaps her involvement with Conkling, even though he was already married, was an attempt on Kate's part to regain some of the lost dream, since the New York

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[177]Benjamin Knight, Sr., History of the Sprague Families of Rhode Island, Cotton Manufacturers and Calico Printers (Santa Cruz: H. Coffin, Bok, and Job, Publishers, 1881), pp. 70-73.

[178]Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 259-260.

Senator was a presidential hopeful for a time. Her ambitions and hopes, unorthodox actions and life only brought her tragedy in the end.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

KATE CHASE: IMAGE VERSUS REALITY

Kate Chase presented an image to the world of a charming, intelligent socialite, interested in entertainments and expensive clothes. This was only a facade. The real Kate was ambitious, stubborn, a feminist, and a politician. Her life was centered on making her father President of the United States, a drive which made her step out of her role as a Victorian lady. On the surface, she was still the gracious, beguiling young hostess in the tradition of the nineteenth century true woman. It is highly unlikely that Kate Chase would ever be seen wearing a bloomer costume.

Her father's pursuit of the Presidency introduced a new phenomenon into American politics--the role of a woman as commander of the events rather than a victim of them. And that woman was Kate Chase.[179] She sought not only to be First Lady, but she also desired power, something that was supposed to be outside of a woman's world. Certainly, Kate did have a great deal of power as the female social leader of Washington. She knew the most prominent men of her day and also knew how to exert pressure in a

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[179]Burton J. Hendrick, Lincoln's War Cabinet (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1946), pp. 375-382.

most subtle manner. She made friends and allies through flattery and attention. Kate was the only woman of her time who had a great deal of public and political influence.[180]

Kate was known to step down many times from the pedestal that her culture had placed women on. This was best demonstrated by the electioneering she did at the 1868 Democratic convention. Her very actions at this convention let her do something many of the active feminists could not do--become intimately involved in the inner workings of the American political system. Susan B. Anthony was present at the convention, watching the proceedings from the gallery. When Miss Anthony made a speech at the convention asking for a woman suffrage amendment to the platform, she was loudly booed by the audience.[181] Kate would never have done anything like that. She knew that the way to power in a society like hers was better done behind the scenes rather than openly. Still, by virtue of her active participation in politics, Kate attained more than any active feminist, at least for herself. By virtue of this, Kate Chase was at least one-in-spirit with the feminists. She and the ladies in the woman's rights movement used different tactics to gain the same end--more say and control over their own lives.

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[180]John T. Morse, Jr., gen. ed., American Statesmen, 40 vols. (New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1899) 28: Salmon Portland Chase, by Albert B. Hart, p. 420.

[181]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 203.

It is doubtful that Kate Chase would have joined the woman's rights movement. She was a realist, and knew that the woman's rights movement was not for her.[182] Also, Kate was far too interested in her father and herself to take up with a movement that would have diverted her energies away from her life's goal of making Chase President. Evidence suggests that she must have felt some kinship with the active feminists, especially since her father was known to sympathize with their cause. Gerrit Smith and Henry B. Stanton, cousin and husband respectively of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, were close friends of her father.[183] Chase indicated his support of woman suffrage in a letter to Smith's daughter, Elizabeth Smith Miller, writing,

> You will not be mistaken if you believe me heartily desirous of all things which will really improve the condition of women. Among such things I count the increase of facilities for moral and intellectual culture; ample recognition and full protection to rights of property; and access to, and peaceful security in, all employments for which she is qualified by strength, capacity and integrity. I am so far in favor of suffrage for women that I should like to see the experiment tried in one or more of the states, and, if found to work well, extended to all. I am sufficiently confident of good results to be willing to vote for it in the state where I reside.[184]

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[182]Belden and Belden, So Fell the Angels, p. 203.

[183]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 222

[184]Salmon P. Chase to Elizabeth Smith Miller, n.d. cited in Ibid., pp. 221-222.

What was good enough for her father was usually good enough for Kate, too.

What caused Kate Chase to be a politician, a subtle feminist, especially at a time in history when the majority of men and women saw females as being inherently inferior creatures? Her education was really no different than many other young girls of her situation in life. The boarding school she attended was also typical of the nineteenth century boarding school. She was taught everything a young lady of her station should know in order to be a good wife and mother. Kate never went on to any of the women's colleges. Perhaps then, it was the sense of equality her father instilled in her. In this respect, she was different from most girls in mid-nineteenth century America. Chase always treated her as an equal, confiding in her and discussing and planning his political moves with her. He taught her how to be politically astute. She also learned law techniques from her father, since he often discussed his cases with Kate.[185] Kate's political involvement came through Chase. His desire to become Chief Executive became her desire, too. Through politics, Kate became a feminist, involving herself in a field that many thought no good woman should be involved.

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[185]Virginia T. Peacock, Famous American Belles of the Nineteenth Century (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1900), pp. 207-209.

Perhaps the really amazing part about Kate's career was the easy acceptance of her by the men who surrounded her. For a society as involved with the myth of true womanhood, as was nineteenth century society, that Kate had as much power and influence as she had, was surprising. Even by twentieth century standards, she was in a position that many people would find attractive today. Kate lacked nothing in the way of skill which dazzled Washington society. With people whom she felt would be influential and useful to her goal, Kate could be a creature of pure charm and delight. She often got what she wanted just by smiling in the right direction. It was not until about the time of the 1864 election that most realized exactly what Kate was up to. As long as she conducted herself like a lady, few were ready to condemn her actions. One reporter, who saw Kate in operation at the 1868 convention, found her to be refreshing and believed she had "brains almost of masculine fibre.[186]

The Washington Post, after the Sprague-Conkling scandal, ran a penetrating article on Kate's career as a politician. Its author wrote,

> Kate Chase . . . had been for several years the constant associate and chief confidante of her father and had become acquainted with his ambitions, his friends, and his strength. She studied politics with the zeal of a newly fledged orator, and devoted her whole mind and energies to the one object of placing her father

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[186]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 202.

> in the Presidential chair. It was a part of her ambition also, to reign as first lady of the land. . . . her marriage with Senator Sprague was generally believed to be one that had only this end in view. . . . The scheme failed . . . In 1868, he [Chase] was prominently mentioned as a possible Presidential candidate before the Democratic convention and his daughter, . . . again took an active part in his behalf. . . . Her passion, as well as her aptness for politics and political intrigue, seemed to increase with her social power. She cultivated public men until she knew a large number quite intimately and even so late as 1876, though known but to few, exercised influence on the last Presidential election which kept one man's mouth shut and possibly changed the result altogether.[187]

Kate was an extraordinary woman. She was not a model for the true womanhood ideal, yet her manner and bearing were always beyond reproach. Even when playing politics, she looked and acted like a lady, with her Worth gowns and regal pose. There is tragedy, however, in the story of Kate Chase. This woman, who led a brilliant life as the queen of Washington, died virtually unknown and friendless, only to be rescued from obscurity by the historian's pen.

Following her divorce, Kate and her three daughters (Kitty, the last was born in 1873), took up permanent residence at Edgewood. After the Sprague-Conkling affair, Kate's relations with Conkling came to an end. She was outraged and hurt by his public silence and failure to

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[187]Washington Post, 12 August 1879, cited in Belden, "Chase Family," pp. 246-247.

defend her honor. Because of this scandal, Conkling's own political career was finished. Any hope he might have had for the 1880 Presidential nomination was destroyed. He died an embittered man in March, 1888. For awhile after her divorce, Kate still held some power in Washington political circles. It was believed that the planning of the anti-James G. Blaine campaign was done at Kate's home. She was also consulted by her old friend, James A. Garfield on his choice of Chester A. Arthur as his vice-presidential running mate. Carl Schurz asked her advice on the Civil Service bill of 1883.[188]

Newspaperwoman, "Olivia," alias Emily Edson Briggs, in 1880, went to a luncheon at Kate's. Mrs. Briggs called her the "queen of American aristocracy."[189] She gave a rather flowery description of Edgewood and the meal she had there. She took note of Kate's antique Gobelin tapestry, Persian rugs, Irish damask tablecloth, priceless paintings, and other irreplaceable items. She also described each course as it was served, from the appetizer of beef broth to the dessert of charlotte russe. Even without her fortune, Kate's affairs were still the last word in elegance and perfection.[190] Mrs. Briggs warned,

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[188]Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 260-262.

[189]Briggs, Olivia Letters, p. 403.

[190]Ibid., pp. 403-411.

> The Hoosier housewife who is bold enough to attempt a Kate Chase Sprague lunch must look out that no fat swims on top of the boullion, for the fat had much better be in the fire, as its presence indicates plebianism.[191]

The newly divorced Kate could still give an impressive enough luncheon to please the discriminating Mrs. Briggs.

Despite this exterior appearance of business as usual, Kate's life had changed drastically. She still traveled to Europe, but not in the same style she had while still the wife of a wealthy Senator. She no longer occupied the best hotels, dined in the exclusive restaurants, nor hobnobbed with the best people of European society. Worth gowns no longer adorned her person, since she could no longer afford them. Her main interest in life now centered around her daughters. Kate wanted them to get a European education, and sent them to schools in France, Germany, and England, while she lived in a villa outside Fountainebleu. In order to finance her daughters' educations and her villa, Kate was forced to sell many of her jewels and clothes. Ethel, the eldest, developed at interest in acting, which her mother encouraged. She eventually went on to a New York drama school and toured with acting companies throughout the United States.[192]

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[191] Ibid., p. 406

[192] Ross, Proud Kate, pp. 264-266.

In the autumn of 1886, Kate returned home to the United States because her father's body was to be exhumed from its Washington resting place, to be brought back to Cincinnati for reinterment. Kate was a part of the cortege and returned to Ohio, the scene of her earliest conquests. Many people were shocked when Julia B. Foraker, wife of Ohio Governor Joseph Foraker, held a reception for a woman who had disgraced herself through public scandal and divorce. President Hayes' wife, Lucy, was one of the most incensed and outraged at Mrs. Foraker's action. She, like most people, would rather have forgotten about Kate Chase. Soon afterward, Kate returned to Edgewood, with very little reason for living. She was no longer a social or political leader and had few friends left. The luck she had been blessed with in her youth ran out. Her only son, Willie, committed suicide in 1890. Her youngest daughter, Kitty, was tubercular and had a mind which would be of a childish intellect the rest of her life.[193]

The years had taken a toll on Kate's appearance. She still was tall and slender, but the much admired burnished copper hair had faded to a dull and lifeless ash. The languid hazel eyes were constantly reddened and tired. Her mouth drooped at the corners. Her whole face gave the the impression of a woman who had been through

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[193]Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 264-267.

a great deal in a short lifetime. Kate had lived through and seen so much in her forty-odd years, that publishers wanted to publish her memoirs. She had been an active participant in the major events of her era. Kate knew Salmon Portland Chase better than anyone else and could give a good, detailed account of his life. She could fill in details about the Pomeroy Circular, the Johnson impeachment trial, the Democratic Convention of 1868, the disputed Tilden-Hayes election of 1876. She could describe specifically the magnificent parties of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras in Washington which she gave and attended. She could give her views on the giants of her time--Lincoln, Seward, Sumner, McClellan, Jay Cooke, Hiram Barney, and Grant. Kate could describe for her readers her own beautiful homes of Edgewood and Canonchet. She could have supplied all of this information and more, which would have filled many gaps in her own life and in the lives of others with whom she was associated. Her book would have been a best seller, for people loved to read about the people and events of the past, especially by a person who was so intimately involved in them.[194]

There was no reason why Kate should not have written her memoirs; many of her contemporaries were doing it. The money would have been its own reward. If her book did well, she would have made a small fortune. Writing her

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[194]Belden and Belden, So Fell the Angels, pp. 343-344.

memoirs also would have provided her with a golden opportunity for revenge on her enemies. At the same time, Kate could clear her own name, especially regarding the Sprague-Conkling scandal. She also had the chance to glorify her father's memory. Yet she refused to put her past down on paper for all to see. Kate probably felt that the pain of reliving her once glorious past in front of the reading public would have been more than she could bear. Furthermore, the information contained in any work by her would have to be more than descriptions of balls and parties. Kate would be expected to tell all she knew about the leading figures she communed with in her day. In the process, she might reveal too much about herself, information that would hurt more than help her reputation. In the long run, Kate would probably have caused herself more mental anguish than any of the advantages of printing her memoirs would be worth.

Although Kate never remarried, Sprague took a second wife in 1883, Inez Calvert Weed. He outlived both Kate and Inez, dying in 1915 on the day before his eighty-fifth birthday. Kate's last years were passed in relative poverty at Edgewood. All of the fineries which had once adorned the mansion were sold; the house itself had been mortgaged several times over. In 1893, Kate's home was threatened with foreclosure. In order to prevent this, she made a trip to Ohio to ask then Governor William McKinley for help. The Governor could do nothing, but

Kate did raise $5,000 from the donations of the citizens of Cincinnati and Columbus in the name of Salmon P. Chase. Kate's next trip was to Wall Street, New York City, to find a buyer for Edgewood, which she hoped to sell for $100,000. She failed in that effort until Henry Villard came to her rescue. He raised $80,000 among his millionaire friends. Forty thousand of that total went to pay off Edgewood's mortgage. From the rest, Kate was given an allowance of $3,000 a year for living expenses. Villard wanted to help Kate because she had aided him when he was still a struggling reporter.[195] His wife, Fanny, gave a good description of Kate in her last years,

> Mrs. Kate Chase looks like a wreck of her former self. False blonde hair, powdered and painted and weary, half closed eyes make a sad impression on one. . . . When I first saw her, she was queen of Washington society.[196]

It is obvious that Kate was a shadow of her former self. She had lost all of her beauty and most of her charm. Kate in 1861 when she made her national debut was a far cry from Kate nearing the end of her life in the 1890's.

At this point in her life, Kate was in a sorry state. The people she was closest to had all died before her. The major figures of her generation were also long

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[195]Belden, "Chase Family," p. 257; Ross, Proud Kate, pp. 275-280.

[196]Ross, Proud Kate, p. 281.

gone. Her father, Sumner, Conkling, Lincoln, had all passed away. Even Kate's greatest rival, Mary Todd Lincoln, whose own life was full of disaster, died before her. Kate Chase was a part of a bygone era that had long since faded from the scene. She did not fit in with the new era of electric lights and automobiles; she belonged to the past, the gas lights, fireplaces, horse and buggies, and crinolines and hoop skirts. When death finally came for Kate Chase, it was a blessing and a welcome relief for her. In the end, the only thing Kate had left was her pride, ever unflagging, even in the depths of despair.[197]

Kate spent the remaining years of her life at Edgewood taking care of Kitty. She tried her hand at farming and even raised a few chickens to sell to help eek out a meager existence. Kate's stamina was low and her health was poor. Finally, on a hot 31st of July in the year of 1899, Kate Chase passed away from a liver and kidney ailment, just thirteen days short of her fifty-ninth birthday. Her pall bearers were her former black servants; few of her old friends attended the funeral. The United States government did provide a special transport for her body from Washington to Cincinnati, where she would lie forever next to her father at Spring Grove Cemetery.[198]

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[197] Ibid., pp. 283-286.

[198] Phelps, Kate Chase, pp. 280-283.

Kate had risen to the very heights of the United States social scene, only to die alone in poverty. Her friends from her past, for the most part, deserted her. Kate's life had a rather ignominious ending for a person whose future had promised so much when she was but a young woman of twenty-one. The real tragedy of Kate Chase may lie in the fact that few people, at the end of her life, remembered who she was. This probably hurt her more than anything else, at least psychologically, since Kate thrived on her fame. The loss of the power she once had was painful to her; it hurt her almost as much as the loss of her father.

Kate also stepped out of the role of the submissive wife, a role that was highly valued in her time. The Biblical admonishment of "Wives, submit to your husbands" carried little weight with Kate. Actually, it was she who had the stronger character of the two. Kate usually did what she wanted to do and Sprague had little say over her. The only way he could force her to submit was by cutting off her supply of money so she could not do what she pleased. But, in personality, Kate was not to be the dominated one. It was she who dominated. It was not in her nature to be obedient to her husband's every wish, especially since Sprague did little to gain his wife's respect.

The image of the true woman called for females to be pious and pure. Piety, the virtue that was thought to keep woman in the home where she belonged, was not one of

Kate's strong points. She fared a little better with purity, at least until her involvement with Roscoe Conkling. The prevailing belief that woman's place was in the home did not sit well with Kate either. She would much rather have been at a political convention than at home cooking or cleaning.

In her own way, Kate demonstrated that the belief in the myth of true womanhood was unfounded. She had a keen mind and quick wit, and used both to their best advantage. However, even when rounding up delegate votes, Kate remained every inch a lady. She proved wrong the many people, male and female alike, who believed that intelligence in a woman was not feminine. Kate did use her mind, but she never lost her femininity.

The big difference between Kate and the active feminists was in how they demonstrated the fact that they could think and could be involved in interests outside of the home. The ladies in the woman's rights movement tried to gain their rights by holding conventions, signing petitions, and making speeches. On the other hand, Kate was far more subtle in her operations. She smiled and charmed her way into a rather unique position of power. Kate also differed from the feminists in that while they worked to secure legal status for all women, Kate was only interested in herself. She was basically self-centered and wanted to secure power and control for her own best interests. If the woman's rights movement did make gains, it was fine with Kate. But she would not, under any

circumstances, join up with them. Kate did not have to. Her position, charm, beauty, and wealth gave her almost everything she desired in the way of rights, status, and power.

If Kate did not fit in the mold of the true woman and was not a Susan B. Anthony type of feminist, exactly where did she fit? Kate was not one to be lumped together with anyone. She stood alone in her rank and life style. Few women of her time would have dared attempt the things she did. Few people had Kate's driving ambition instilled by a father whose life's goal was the Presidency. The majority of women were brought up with the goal of fitting the ideal of true womanhood. But not Kate Chase. Despite her rather traditional education, she grew up differently from other girls of her time. Her father, widowed three times, came to his elder daughter for advice concerning his political career. Kate was his most intimate confidante and closest friend. Few girls grew up in a household where the head of it was deeply embroiled in the political controversies of the era. She was Kate Chase and that says it all. If Kate had not had the opportunities life sent her way, chances are she would have made a name for herself. She was a vibrant personality who could do just about anything she wanted to do. With her quick mind and native intelligence, she would no doubt have been an outstanding woman, even without the position she had as Chase's daughter.

Unfortunately for Kate, her ambitions and desires pushed her too far. She was so busy playing politics, trying to raise herself on the social ladder, that she sacrificed her own personal happiness. Her unsuccessful marriage was made in order to further her ambitions. Any feeling she may have had for Sprague was lost early in their marital relationship. If Kate had been less ambitious, she may have married someone else whom she loved more deeply than Sprague. Kate really loved only two men--her father and Conkling. Both men were her intellectual equals and both had the same political dreams that drove Kate herself. Chase's death brought the most sorrow to her. Death took away the only person who knew and understood and loved her the way she was.

Kate's life was stormy and tempestuous. Her last years were fraught with calamity and misfortune. In the long run, her talents gave her power for a relatively short time. But in that time, Kate proved herself as brilliant and capable as the most acclaimed men and women throughout history. The political sway she held at her peak was indeed formidable. The most prominent men of her time came to her for advice even in her later years. Whether or not she herself would admit it, Kate Chase was a feminist. Granted, she was "ladylike" in her actions; she gave little hint of her true character and ideals in her outward appearance. Kate came down from the pedestal to take an active and vital part in one of the most momentous periods of American history.

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