

Standing Behind, Riding Astride: The Patriotic Order of Americans and Its Status as a Fraternal Auxiliary in the Nativist Movement, 1900-1925

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Abstract

Americanists have long acknowledged the interdependent relationship between fraternal secret societies and the Nativist Movement of the mid-nineteenth to early twentieth centuries. Because such organizations were the province of white, native-born men, any contributions women may have made to the efficacy of these groups has been dismissed as insignificant, if not non-existent. Although the most well-known orders did indeed relegate women to purely supportive roles, another group, the Patriotic Order Sons of America, allowed its female offshoot to do far more than organize picnics and afternoon teas. This auxiliary — The Patriotic Order of Americans — was invested with both autonomy and authority that is virtually unaccounted for in historiography. This article seeks to introduce this heretofore little known group of women by examining the roles it played within the larger parent organization. Secondly, the group's fervent activism indicates an explicit like-mindedness that challenges the common perception of female auxiliaries as inconsequential and disassociated from the ideology and objectives of the male orders to which they were linked.

The last chapter of the two-volume history of The Patriotic Order Sons of America features a remarkable photograph. One of the several images of the massive parade celebrating the avowedly nativist organization's "Diamond Jubilee" of 1923 shows columns of smartly-outfitted women on horseback leading an army of marchers. Some of the riders gaze straight ahead, others salute an unseen flag or personage — all with a militaristic bearing indistinguishable from those of the numerous male contingents depicted alongside them. Regalia-clad women led several divisions of the parade and — according to the chronicle's author — their horsemanship won the riders salvos of cheers.¹ While the parade's largest

¹ John Henry Stager, *An Authentic History of the Junior Sons of America, 1847 to 1868, and Patriotic Sons of America, 1869 to 1923* (Philadelphia: The Order, 1925), 382-399. J.H. Stager was a long-time, high-ranking officer in The Patriotic Order Sons of America. Stager's prolific account of the parade and the accompanying festivities features numerous photographs of primarily Patriotic Order Sons of America participants. However, four

contingents hailed from the Jubilee's host state of Pennsylvania, John Henry Stager notes that there were nearly ten thousand female participants from "all across the nation," including strong delegations from states including Maryland, Tennessee, and Illinois. Many of these took part in one of the Jubilee's most impressive shows of unity as Mrs. Lyda Callahan — with the help of two mounted aides — marshaled a battalion of more than two thousand uniformed flag bearers and musicians. These were the women of The Patriotic Order of Americans.

The parade was an awe-inspiring display according to newsmen of the day. A survey of Philadelphia newspaper reports suggests that the pageantry surpassed anything the city had witnessed in its recent memory. Described by the *Chester Times* as a "monster parade thirty blocks long," other papers noted the prominent role accorded the "women's branch of the Order."² Twenty-five thousand participants from the organization's satellite camps in twenty-two states played instruments in one of a hundred marching bands, re-enacted historical tableaux, and rode on floats emblazoned with rousing slogans including "Fight for Free Education!" and "One Flag, One Country, One Language." John Higham maintains that in the decade from 1905 to 1915, popular nativism struggled to recover the vitality it had exhibited in the previous decade. The celebratory August spectacle in Philadelphia was a flamboyant indication of how nativist sentiment had regained a renewed strength during the tumultuous 1920s.³

The Order's female auxiliary significantly contributed to this vitality. Incredibly, women who closely allied themselves with the practices and objectives of the exclusively male parent organization comprised nearly half of those marching through Philadelphia's streets. Credible evidence also suggests that the splash they made at the Diamond Jubilee served as but one — albeit highly visible — indicator of the surprisingly high esteem and influence The Patriotic Order of Americans enjoyed within the P.O.S. of A.⁴ This is not to suggest that the Auxiliary and the Order were separate but equal. It is very apparent, however, that the Order accorded these female compatriots a status that is unaccounted for in modern historiography. The respect given to the Auxiliary, coupled with a host of other evidence, proves that it served the nativist movement in two capacities: as a key part of The Order and as a fraternal organization in its own right.

As an organization, the Order embodied a marriage of classic fraternalism to a secret society. While historians differ in their definitions of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century fraternalism, they generally agree on certain elements. Primary among these is the creation of

photographs depicting the organization's female auxiliary The Patriotic Order of Americans are included, along with several notations that deem the auxiliary as having playing an important role in the celebration.

² Editorial, *The Wellsboro Agitator*, Sept 19, 1923 and *The Chester Times*, August 24, 1923. Both papers described in detail the particulars of the parade, including the number of floats and bands. *The Wellsboro Agitator* excitedly declared the parade to be the "biggest parade ever held in the city."

³ John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New York: Atheneum, 1967), 70, 71, 266. Higham thoroughly delineates the vicissitudes of the Nativist Movement — the waxing and waning of anti-immigrant sentiment that at times diminished, increased, or evolved in response primarily to economic depression and the challenges posed by the Spanish-American and First World Wars. He marks the nativism of the early 1920s as being characterized by "two leading nativist traditions" of Anglo-Saxonism and anti-Catholicism.

⁴ From this point forward, The Patriotic Order Sons of America and its offshoot, The Patriotic Order of Americans, will be primarily referred to as "the Order" and "the Auxiliary" respectively.

symbolic relationships sustained by ritual, idealization of hierarchy, and solidarity in perceptions of fellow members as “brothers.”⁵ But where to place the auxiliary that appeared alongside it? Heretofore, the scholarship points to a very narrow view of the role that these women’s groups played and how they and others perceived those roles.

Simply stated, female fraternal auxiliaries have been thrown into a single, cramped box. In fact, scholars normally cast these groups as affiliates *of* fraternities, rather than groups that embodied an independent status in their own right. Much of this rigid approach is a consequence of historiography that normally focuses on the secret societies such as the Masons, Odd Fellows and the Knights of Pythias — orders in which female offshoots were restricted to support functions with structures bearing little resemblance to their parent orders.⁶ Indeed, despite the Order’s status as one of the most enduring secret society fraternities, historians have given it comparatively little scholarly attention.⁷ Furthermore, in the scholarship that does exist, scholars relegate its auxiliary to the same sphere as its Masonic and Pythian counterparts.

Because this group is scarcely known, this examination also serves the purpose of briefly introducing the organization. Simply stated, usable information on the Auxiliary is hard to come by. Apart from the inherent obstacles that hamper the study of any quasi-secret organization, archived material from this group is presently held in only two state repositories in New Jersey and Illinois. Despite this limitation, however, the historian can nevertheless glean substantive insight into the goals, perspectives, and procedures that guided the women’s branch of the Order. A cache of records from Springfield Illinois’s four “camps” (the term “lodge” is analogous) indicates that the group was both a semi-autonomous organization and a loyal, subordinate group. It is precisely this dual status that separates the Auxiliary from old conceptions regarding how female affiliates functioned in relation to their male parent organizations.⁸

This study is focused primarily on the Auxiliary as it operated in one Midwestern city, and as such, the particulars may not reflect conditions nationally. With this acknowledged, it seems appropriate that the group deserves the consideration given to any other exclusionary patriotic organization. In the history of bygone auxiliaries — including that of the Order — many female members sat demurely on flower-encrusted floats. Others, like Parade Marshall Callahan, led their charge astride horses.

⁵ Mary Ann Clawson, “Fraternal Orders and Class Formation in the Nineteenth Century United States,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, no. 4 (October 1985): 688-689. See also Alvin J. Schmidt, *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of American Institutions and Fraternal Organizations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 4-6. These are two examples out of several historians who cite these criteria as necessary for an organization to be classified as a true fraternal group.

⁶ The work of Mary Ann Clawson typifies this approach. In her “Nineteenth-Century Woman’s Auxiliaries and Fraternal Orders” *Signs* 12, no.1 (Fall, 1986): 40-61, she remarks on the especially tight strictures the Masonic order placed on its female auxiliary, *The Order of the Eastern Star* (OES).

⁷ The term “secret society fraternal” is used throughout this article. This denotes a group which had elements of ritual and secrecy, such as initiation rites and ceremonies that were closed to all but fully initiated members.

⁸ To avoid confusion, hereafter, The Patriotic Order of Americans will be referred to as simply “the Auxiliary.”

A Place to Make a Stand: Springfield

The Springfield of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was an agreeable—if not wholly uncontested — site for a nativist auxiliary. Host to a fractious political assembly, it was also the site of equally contentious relations that existed between those occurring within various European nationalities and also within these groups and the city’s small African-American community.⁹ Although its ethnic and religious demography gently shifted during the decades between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the city remained predominantly Protestant and overwhelmingly white: the majority of both native and foreign born residents were German, English, or Scottish with either Methodist or Presbyterian affiliations. This demography, however, did not preclude the city from warmly welcoming other Western European nationals. For example, when military conflict erupted on the Isle of Madeira in 1848, several local businessmen put out the call for refugees to make their homes in the city.¹⁰ The editorial page of Springfield’s largest newspaper urged that these Portuguese “be welcomed with open arms ... and be Americanized, not isolated.”¹¹ 350 citizens of Madeira responded. In the ensuing decades, the Portuguese community blossomed into a thriving community — several descendants of whom would later become members of Springfield’s P.O. of A. camps. Beginning in the mid-1850s, an influx of German and Irish immigrants brought Catholicism to the area. Four decades later, the number of Roman Catholics quickly increased with the arrival of Italian and Lithuanian miners who sought work in Sangamon County’s thriving coal industry.¹² Although census records indicate that many ethnicities co-existed in several of the city’s working-class wards, tensions between members of established groups and these new — and decidedly foreign — job competitors continued throughout the teens and twenties.¹³ African-Americans and whites of various ethnicities had similarly checkered relations. The city was home to one of the first free black communities in the state — and with its close connection to Abraham Lincoln, a frequent site of abolitionist activity and anti-slavery proclamations. The

⁹ Proportionately, the black population of Springfield remained consistently small during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Censuses of 1900, 1910, and 1920 show that this community never comprised more than two-and-a-half percent of the city’s populace. U.S. Census Bureau records as cited in Douglas K. Meyer, “Foreign Immigrants in Illinois,” *Illinois Periodicals Online* (1998). <http://www.lib.niu.edu/ih519815.html> (accessed November, 25, 2013).

¹⁰ Bruce A. Campbell, *The Sangamon Saga: An Illustrated Bicentennial History of Sangamon County* (Springfield: Phillips Brothers Inc., 1976), 52.

¹¹ Editorial, *The Illinois State Journal*, November 13, 1849. The paper’s call to “Americanize” the new arrivals fits neatly with the philosophy espoused by The P.O.S. of A., which was founded near the time of this proclamation.

¹² James Krohe Jr., *Midnight at Noon: A History of Coal Mining in Sangamon County* (Springfield: Sangamon County Historical Society Press, 1975) preface, 6-8, 104. While the Southern European population of Springfield certainly increased after 1900, Krohe notes that the numbers of Italians and Lithuanians entering the city remained fairly low. This assessment is also supported by the 1920 Census records which note that out of a foreign born population of approximately 6500, 843 emigrated from Southern or Eastern-European nations. U.S. Bureau of the Census, 14th Census of the United States.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 105; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 13th Census of the United States: *Population of Springfield, Illinois*, 1910; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 14th Census of the United States: *Population of Springfield, Illinois*, 1920. A survey of auxiliary members reveals that many of them lived very close to Eastern and Southern European people. A further expansion of the search indicates that this was a general trend in the working class wards of the city.

black community, although scattered in several neighborhoods throughout the city, was not well integrated into the community and relations were strained. In 1908, The Springfield Race Riot erupted, during which two black and four white citizens were killed, making it one of the most violent racial confrontations in United States' history.¹⁴ After the carnage, the city attempted to make restitution to those victimized by the rioters, and no subsequent outbreak of large scale violence occurred. Not surprisingly, however, racial tensions throughout the ensuing decades continued to simmer, and occasionally threatened to boil over.

This divisive environment may well have fed the impulse many had to seek the comfort of shared beliefs and purpose that came with voluntary association. Like the dueling politicians making their cases in the State House, the city provided a forum for its citizens to express their points of view. The number and variety of the societies and organizations active in Springfield during this time indicate that citizens felt free to form groups that championed any number of causes and espoused a wide range of views. The 1905 edition of *The Springfield City Directory*, for example, lists 33 clubs large enough to be required to register with the city. Although half of these had overt patriotic or nativist agendas, others included temperance organizations, three Catholic societies, a chapter of B'nai B'rith, and five women's social groups.¹⁵ Within this diverse environment the four Order Auxiliary camps collectively staked their flag.

Same Song, Similar Verses: Inter-Organization Cohesion

To fully appreciate the exceptional position of the Auxiliary within the schemata of female fraternal organizations, we must recognize the degree to which it aligned itself with the Order in ideological, structural, and procedural matters. The evidence makes it plain: to know the Order is to know its subordinate. As with many secret societies and fraternities, both the Order and the Auxiliary penned their own histories for exclusive dissemination among their members. In one such account written in 1898, the Order declared itself as “one of the most progressive, popular, influential, as well as the strongest patriotic organization in the country” — boosterism to be sure — but nevertheless an accurate representation of how the Order perceived itself.¹⁶ Their claim to be the oldest patriotic society for “native Americans” appears somewhat

¹⁴ The riot was sparked by the claim made by Miss Mabel Hallam that black construction laborer George Richardson sexually assaulted her. The police managed to spirit Richardson out of town, but two other men — both well into old age — were lynched in his place by members of the 2000-strong mob. Hallam later recanted her story. See Carole Merritt, *Something So Horrible: The Springfield Race Riot of 1908* (Springfield: Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Foundation, 2008) for a detailed description of the riot and the conditions that made the city ripe for the racial conflagration. See also Matthew Coryell, *1908 Springfield: Illinois Race Riot Revisited* (Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2007) for a discussion of the complete lack of justice for the black victims. Coryell describes several factors — including all white juries and investigators — that precluded guilty verdicts from being handed down to white rioters who were credibly accused of wholesale theft and murder.

¹⁵ *The Springfield City Directory* (Springfield: R.L. Polk and Co., 1905). Other city directories from the years after 1905 yield a similar number and composition of organizations active in the city. Fraternal organizations tend to be the longest lived; the GAR and the Odd Fellows maintained lodges in Springfield during the entire span surveyed for this report: 1905-1923.

¹⁶ The Order, *A Brief History of the Inception, Rise, Progress, and Achievements of The Patriotic Order of Americans* (Philadelphia: The Order, 1898). This volume was written anonymously by one or more officers based at

elastic as none of the prominent fraternities barred white male members solely on the basis of birthplace.¹⁷ Founded in 1847 on the eve of The Know Nothing Party's political ascendance, the organization regained its footing and by 1861, had a strong presence in twenty states. By the late 1890s, there were 600 camps in Pennsylvania alone.

To gain a sense of how the Auxiliary was bound to the Order, it is necessary to look at its construction. The Order had a simple, three-tiered hierarchy. The Philadelphia-based National Camp oversaw the subordinate camps regardless of their location. If, however, there were twenty or more camps in a state, a State Camp could be chartered resulting in the transfer of authority from the National Camp. All State Camps reported directly to the National Headquarters. Delegates chosen by each subordinate camp administered the State Camps.¹⁸

Comparison of Auxiliary and Order materials clearly indicates that, with minor exception, the women's branch closely followed this organizational template. Auxiliary camps were considered to be true; consequently, they too were eligible to come under the jurisdiction of their own State Camps that would in turn be governed by a national overseer. The one significant — and perhaps surprising — deviation from the Order's regulations involves the criteria the auxiliary needed to apply for a State Camp charter. According to *The Laws of the State Camp of Illinois and Subordinate Camp Constitution*, women could apply for a state camp charter if the state had at least seven subordinate camps with no fewer than 25 members apiece.¹⁹ Although the exact number of Auxiliary subordinates remains unknown, there must have been in excess of six because Springfield camps 3, 6, 9, and 16 came under the jurisdiction of a State Camp.

The Springfield auxiliary also adhered to the same codified hierarchy of personnel that the Order did. Both maintained a corps of twelve officers in each of its subordinate camps, including a President, Assistant President, Receiving Secretary, and Ritual Conductor. Although records indicate that each of the four camps had, at times, short-term vacancies in the lesser roles of assistant conductor and trustee, the women's camps enjoyed general stability of leadership. In Camp 6, for example, Bernadetta Abbey served as Receiving Secretary from 1910 to 1923, and Mary Clifford switched between Financial Secretary, Assistant President and trustee from the

the State Camp of Pennsylvania. The book was printed only one year after The P.O. of A. was formally inaugurated as its auxiliary, which probably explains the absence of any reference to the group. It is interesting to note, however, that the author(s) mentions how likeminded women formed an association for the purpose of preserving the Valley Forge headquarters of Gen. George Washington (138).

¹⁷ Dale Knobel offers a credible explanation for this apparent contradiction between the Order's espousal of "pure" American heritage and the composition of its membership rolls. Knobel posits that while many groups were content to drum certain classes of native born out of the ranks of "real Americans," they were sometimes willing to consider foreign born of selected classes (from predominately the "better stock" of Western Europe) as acceptable. Dale Knobel, *America for the Americans: The Nativist Movement in the United States* (Twayne Publishers: New York, 1996), xvii.

¹⁸ The Order, *Constitution and General Laws of The Patriotic Order Sons of America: Together with the Constitution and Laws of the State Camp of Illinois and Subordinate Camps* (Chicago: Frank Hart Publishing, 1891), 72-75, 89. There is great consistency between State Camps; *Pennsylvania State Camps and Subordinate Camp Constitutions Patriotic Order Sons of America* contains almost the exact information found in the Illinois Camp publication.

¹⁹ "The Order," *The Laws of the State Camp of Illinois and Subordinate Camp Constitution* (Chicago: Frank Hart Publishing, 1913), 21.

start of her membership in 1902 until her death or re-location in 1923.²⁰ Although not prohibited in the Camp constitution, no President listed in 3, 6, 9, and 16 records served a term of more than three years, although in the aggregate, Sarah McNeil of Camp 9 served somewhat longer. After she served a term spanning the period 1908-1911, she later resumed her duties in 1915 for another year.

Rules governing the admission of new members also align, with minor exception. The Order stipulated that candidates must be men sixteen years of age or older, white, and native born. Additionally, prospective members had to profess a belief in God and His Son.²¹ Membership applications in the Springfield archives show that the four camps adhered to these criteria with the obvious exception being the admission of female members. An Auxiliary manual reveals, however, that men were permitted to join a women's camp provided that they were members in good standing with a nearby Order camp — although the text implies that this was not common.²² There are also no substantive differences between their respective membership pledges. The Auxiliary candidate application reads in part:

I believe in maintaining and perpetuating our unsectarian public schools and other institutions peculiarly American.

I am opposed to the use of our public funds for any sectarian purposes.

I am opposed to foreign interference, directly or indirectly in the affairs of our government.

I am opposed to any organized disregard for American laws and customs.

I am in favor of admitting only those to our shores who come with the intention of protecting our Constitution and laws.

I promise to preserve forever secret, all of the signs, tokens, etc., of the P.O. of A., if admitted to membership.²³

This creed mirrors that found in a number of the parent order's materials. Examination of the records also indicates that these affirmations remained unchanged throughout the tenure of the Springfield camps.

²⁰ "Membership Applications," 1905-1908, The Patriotic Order of Americans Collection. Box 1, folder 1-2. Abraham Lincoln Library. Springfield, IL. Accessed March 2014.

²¹ John Stager relates how, in the late 1890s, considerable debate arose over whether the "white condition" should continue to be named as a requisite to membership since several African-American P.O.S. of A. camps actually operated in the Northeast. The southern states most stridently advocated for the prohibitive language. Eventually, the matter was decided in favor of retaining the "white" clause, although it was effectively shrugged off by a portion of the Order's membership. See John Stager, *An Authentic History of the Junior Sons of America*, Vol. 1, 362-365.

²² "The Order," *Ritual: Subordinate Camps Patriotic Order of Americans* (The Order: Philadelphia, 1923). In the section of this handbook devoted to rites of initiation, references are made to both male and female initiates. The book also strongly implies, however, that male initiates were uncommon. Moreover, there were no male initiates to the Springfield P.O. of A. during the entire period the records cover.

²³ Text printed on Nellie Arnold's signed application for admission to The P.O. of A. Camp 9, Patriotic Order of Americans Collection, Box 1, Folder 2, n.d.

We Will Decide: Self-Rule and Independence

Alongside this conformity to the Order's basic structure was a considerable degree of autonomy. The same constitution that governed the Order also enumerated Auxiliary State Camp powers, including the right to grant charters, approve of subordinate camp financial expenditures, and by-laws.²⁴ There is no evidence that indicates that any of the Springfield camps reported to the male order for guidance or approval in the matters aforementioned. The correspondence issued from the camps was mailed to the Auxiliary State Camp, and in a few cases, to the National Camp. Moreover, it is critical to understand that these outposts *operated completely outside of the physical purview of the parent order*. According to the city's directories, the Order did not have a single subordinate in Springfield.²⁵ This means that camps 3, 6, 9 and 16 essentially — and perhaps uniquely — operated without the benefit of male guidance, interference, or censure.

Clearly, the camps' adoption of both the external and internal hierarchy of its parent signals a strong compliance with the Order and its rules. At the same time, this structure afforded the Auxiliary its own leadership that was invested with genuine authority. The effect was that of a dual existence of sorts: the Auxiliary was ultimately accountable to the National Camp of the Order while at the same time, it maintained its own structure of authority, and autonomy. In this way, it occupied a position that is seldom accounted for in contemporary historiography.²⁶

We Hereby Swear: The Women of the Springfield P.O. of A.

Exactly who filled the membership rolls of the Springfield Auxiliary? While complete rosters are not available to us, much can be learned by surveying what does exist: two lists of members seeking to transfer to another camp, a compilation of new Camp 6 members from 1905-1908, and a few intermittent lists. Taken together, the records suggest that the Auxiliary in Springfield was a surprisingly diverse group.²⁷ Apart from the shared requisites of membership, there were disparities in age, marital status, and occupation. Of the 64 initiates admitted to the Camp between 1905 and 1908, three were under 20, 34 were in their 20s and 30s, 18 were in their 40s, and 12 were between 50 and 67 years of age. The majority were married, or, in four cases, widowed and listed as "housewives." However, eight were unmarried, including Mildred

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 28-31.

²⁵ *The Springfield City Directory*. There is no record of The Sons operating a camp anytime between 1895 and 1930. The P.O. of A. is listed every year after 1905, although the auxiliary had at least one camp before this year; the archives include a roll of Camp 6 officers from 1902.

²⁶ For an overview of how historians see the relationship of female auxiliaries to fraternal orders, see Mary Ann Clawson, "Fraternal Orders and Class Formation in the Nineteenth-Century United States," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, no. 4 (Oct. 1985): 672-695 and Pamela Popielarz, "In Voluntary Association: A Multi-level Analysis of Gender Segregation in Voluntary Organizations," *Gender and Society* 13, no. 2 (April 1999): 234-250.

²⁷ See Mary Ann Clawson, "Nineteenth-Century Women's Auxiliaries," and Pamela Popielarz, "In Voluntary Association: A Multi-level Analysis of Gender Segregation in Voluntary Organizations," *Gender and Society* 13 no. 2 (April 1999):234-250. Both authors assert that female participation in a variety of auxiliaries was guided in part by their desire to be with those of the same demographic—for the most part, married women of similar age.

Johnson, listed as a 35-year-old “spinster.” Of these eight, six are listed as having professions outside of the home, such as 26-year-old “seamstress” Margaret Bass. Interestingly, three women were married *and* employed. On Mrs. Hattie Lankford’s application, she described herself as a “forty-four year old teacher and housewife.”²⁸

Cross-checking of census and camp records indicates that — for at least the period of time for which membership rolls exist — initiates of the four camps were indeed native born. Intriguingly, however, many of the women resided with immigrant husbands, fathers, or other foreign born relatives. Indeed, several long-standing members were married to men recently arrived from Western Europe. For example, Lucy DeFrates and sisters Lucinda and Lettie DeVault all had spouses who had emigrated from Portugal. Lizzie Reinboth and Cora Dailey’s husbands were Scotsmen. Mary Nass was the only native born member of her household; her husband was Norwegian, her parents were Portuguese, and all three spoke the languages of their homelands.²⁹ In total, nearly 25 percent of the Camp 6 initiates shared their homes with foreign-born family members. Certainly, in no case were these family members of Eastern or Southern European descent. However, this did not preclude members from regularly interacting with immigrants of diverse heritage. Because the vast majority of Camp 6’s initiates lived in the ethnically “North End” area, even member families who were not headed by immigrants had neighbors who were, and in a few instances, the census lists their neighbors as Italian or Jewish.³⁰

Living arrangements such as these indicate that Auxiliary members were not of the urban elite. Indeed, despite the aforementioned elements of diversity, the evidence points to a group that — at least in Springfield — was uniformly working-class. In addition to modest residences, the initiate rosters and census records list husbands’ occupations as unskilled or semi-skilled. The most commonly noted were drivers, painters, and miners employed in Springfield’s burgeoning coal industry.³¹ One possible exception is long-serving Camp 6 Secretary Mary Clifford’s husband who was employed as a train dispatcher. While likely only providing a modest income, this is one of the only recorded spousal professions that did not primarily involve manual labor.

Such statistics likely remained characteristic of the camps over a span of nearly 20 years. Membership transfer records from the year of the Order’s Jubilee (1923) are comprised of 23 women hailing from a similar mix of immigrant headed homes, occupations, marital, and economic status.³² There does appear to be, however, a slight deviation from the working-class

²⁸ Membership applications, Patriotic Order of Americans Collection, Box 1, folder 2.

²⁹ U.S. Census Bureau. (1910). *The Population of Springfield, Illinois: 1910*.

³⁰ It must be noted that this ethnic diversity was confined to whites; there was a small black enclave in the western part of downtown, but this was well away from the area where P.O. of A. members are known to have lived.

³¹ See James Krohe, *Midnight at Noon: A History of Coal Mining in Sangamon County* (Springfield, IL: Sangamon County Historical Society, 1975) for a succinct, yet textured discussion of how Sangamon County’s coal industry developed during the late 1800s into the first quarter of the twentieth century. The author discusses the ways in which competition for mining jobs caused numerous instances of strife between “old” and “new” immigrant populations.

³² *The Springfield City Directory*, 1923, n.p.

homogeneity represented in the earlier member roster. The professions of two employed female members, Vienna Becher and Sophia Marsh, may well have placed them squarely inside the middle class. The former was a chiropractor and the latter worked as the assistant funeral director in one of Springfield's largest mortuaries. Nevertheless, these are exceptional examples.

Sharing Signs and Keeping Secrets: The Importance of Ritual in the P.O. of A.

Perhaps in no greater way did the Auxiliary mimic the Order than in the arena of ritual. The existent historiography tends to minimize the importance of such performance to women's groups irrespective of whether they were affiliated with fraternal orders to whom such performance was highly valued. Bayliss Camp and Orit Kent provide a welcome counter argument to this view as they assert that rituals were far more important to female auxiliaries than previously assumed. They nevertheless claim, however, that women modified these liturgies to reflect their primary roles as wives, daughters, and mothers. Drawing on views expressed by Mary Ann Clawson in "Nineteenth-Century Women's Auxiliaries and Fraternal Orders," they contend that these rituals emphasized traditional domestic themes over the platforms of the parent order, and were "shorter and less impressive" to boot.³³ Camp and Kent do note that their scholarship is confined to orders with sufficient available data, and thus, their suppositions are limited both in scope and in the generality of analysis.³⁴ With such an admission, it is probable that they, and other historians, would espouse a different view if they made the Auxiliary a focus of study.

Part of the Springfield Camps' archive includes a handbook whose contents plainly refute such assumptions about the feminized and truncated nature of auxiliary rituals. This weighty volume provides detailed instructions for the proper conduct of a host of activities, including induction ceremonies, officer installations, and other secret rites. In contrast to the notion of female adaptation, the instructions are written using gender neutral wording.³⁵ None of the rituals outlined could be classified as markedly feminine. In fact, in several instances, the text evokes traditional masculinity. In fact, the designation of new initiates as "recruits" and their pledges to "solemnly promise that I will, if required, sacrifice my life in the defense of my country" could fairly be described as militaristic.³⁶ References to a distinctly feminine role are not entirely absent from this manual; the preface contains a reminder from the National Camp President that members possessed the "power of molding minds and shaping destinies."³⁷ Nevertheless, language that may rightly be considered as evocative of nineteenth-century domestic ideology

³³ Bayliss Camp and Orit Kent, "What a Mighty Power We Can Be: Individual and Collective Identity in African American and White Fraternal Rituals," *Social Science History* Vol. 28, no. 3 (2004): 439-483.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 443, 449.

³⁵ The Order, *Ritual: The Subordinate Camps of The Patriotic Order of Americans* (Philadelphia: The Order, 1923 ed.). Owing to the fact that men were—at least on occasion — admitted into auxiliary camps, the term "Brother" exists alongside the term "Sister." However, owing to the fact that The P.O. of A. was primarily a women's group, the former designation is only used a few times in the entirety of the text.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, preface.

rarely occurs. The rites, procedures, and pledges the women made were not grounded on conceptions of femininity but rather on their tacit agreement with the objectives and philosophy of the parent order.

When considering the possibility that Auxiliary rituals were modified, it would be most helpful if a direct comparison between the practices of both groups could be made.³⁸ It is certainly possible that the Auxiliary' rites deviated, in content or length, from those of the parent order. However, any notion that their observances were inconsequential or perfunctory is disproved by the elaborate descriptions provided in the manual used in Springfield. Assuming that the camps utilized the handbook *Ritual*, it is evident that even regular meetings were highly choreographed. One diagram, specifying exactly how the camp meeting room was to be arranged, is illustrative of the acute attention to detail that characterized auxiliary proceedings. In all, there are 29 rules governing the appearance of the meeting chamber, anteroom, altar, flag placement and member seating. Furthermore, in addition to the badges and sashes worn by the general membership, officers and certain functionaries dressed in what the manual calls "regalia" — a term also noted throughout the Order's materials. For instance, color bearers donned "ribbon regalia, liberty caps, and white gloves." If a meeting featured speech-making, the orator dressed as Martha Washington if a woman, and as George if a man.³⁹

Even the movements of the rank-and-file members were scripted, and here too, the militaristic language appears. The manual instructed members that "in moving about the room, one must move in straight lines and turn square corners ... being careful to conduct oneself with precision."⁴⁰ Several passages outline the way in which members must progress from the anteroom to the meeting chamber, how they are to address the officers, and where they are to sit in relation to those officers. The impression given is that of a carefully choreographed performance with each participant following specific motions.

Most importantly, this ritual handbook does not appear to have been a revered, but seldom used, piece of auxiliary material. The meeting minutes contained in the archive indicate a clear pre-occupation with adhering to ritualistic practice. At several points, the secretary of each camp notes either the planned or actual purchase of new sets of ritual books. In one representative instance, a vibrant discussion ensued in Camp 9 concerning procedural mistakes made in an officer installation as well as an admonition to give the proper salute. In another, the secretary of Camp 6 called for a practice session to remedy errors made in an initiation rite. A few months later, the secretary ordered the color bearers to update their robes. While the regular members were perhaps less invested in adhering to these proscriptions — as evidenced by the

³⁸ A comparable P. O. S. of A. ritual handbook was unable to be located by the author of this article. Currently, there does not appear to be any such volume in circulation, nor are there any excerpts in online sources.

³⁹ The Order, *Rituals*, 52-54. At first glance, the scrupulous arrangement of the furnishings in Auxiliary meeting rooms seems to indicate that members may have been trying to emulate the orderliness of their private homes so highly idealized during and immediately following the Victorian era. Ascribing this practice to a domestic re-enactment, however, is unsupported simply because so many other Auxiliary practices have been found to mimic those of the male branch of the Order.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

repeated admonitions of officers to “do better” or “live up to the standard” — clearly, ritual keeping was no ancillary matter.⁴¹

Secrecy also attended these rituals. In keeping with traditional conceptions of fraternal organizations as “secret societies” in the mode of Masonic and Pythian orders, the Auxiliary guarded its proceedings against both the prying eyes of outsiders and the loose tongues of its membership. The camp minutes document several instances of members being alerted that private information was leaking out to the public. Minutes from Camp 9 point to several times in 1914 where new passwords had to be issued, and all four camps’ records name several instances in which members were reminded to not repeat what went on inside the meeting chamber.⁴² Unfortunately for those seeking to gauge how effective the Auxiliary was in promoting their nativist ideals, this scrupulous maintenance of secrecy poses an obstacle.

This zealous guarding of camp business from outsiders clearly aligns with the habits of their parent order. However, this mimicking of the Order’s mode of operation once again coincides with the Auxiliary’s authority to regulate itself. *The Laws of the State Camp* — which governed both the Order and the Auxiliary — stipulates that no instructions in ritualistic work could be officially implemented unless authorized by the State or National President of the respective organization.⁴³ Therefore, the Auxiliary’s leadership had the same power to alter the “secret work” of the subordinate camps as the Order’s leadership did. In this way, ritualistic practice makes the group part of the larger order, as well as a fraternal group in its own right. This activity, coupled with the insistence on secrecy, provided the women with a means of expressing solidarity with the Order’s mission. Conversely, it also gave the Springfield membership the ground to assert its own collective identity as an autonomous actor within both The Patriotic Order Sons of America and within the broader nativist movement.

Where They Stood: Perceptions of the P.O. of A. and its Place in the Order

Perhaps there is no greater indicator of how historians should view the Auxiliary than the way in which members perceived themselves. Certainly, the Auxiliary’s willingness to so closely conform to the parent order’s practices points to their fulsome embrace of its objectives and dictates. Apart from this submissiveness, however, their willingness to participate in public Patriotic Order Sons of America events shows that they believed they were accepted by the Order as an esteemed partner, if not a co-equal one. According to *The Dictionary of Secret Societies*, the Auxiliary maintained 544 camps in 22 states with an active membership of almost 50,000 — the vast majority of whom were women.⁴⁴ This fact alone implies that the organization’s members were very enthusiastic about the Order’s mission. If Stager’s estimate of 10,000 Jubilee parade participants is accurate, this means that a full one-fifth of its membership

⁴¹ Meeting Minutes for Camp 9 and 6, The Patriotic Order of Americans Collection, Box 1, Folders 1-2.

⁴² Meeting Minutes for Camp 9 and 6, The Patriotic Order of Americans Collection, Box 1, Folders 2-3.

⁴³ The Order, *The Laws of the State Camp*, 23-24.

⁴⁴ Arthur Prenciss, ed., *The Dictionary of Secret and Fraternal Societies*, 1924 (Billings MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2007), 135-136.

traveled to Philadelphia to join their fraternal brothers. Moreover, the festivities encompassed an entire week and therefore, additional auxiliary members were probably involved in a host of other activities.⁴⁵

It is instructive that Stager's account of the women's contributions is tinged with admiration. He repeatedly notes instances of men and women working jointly on various committees and mentions several well-regarded presentations made by female officers. Recalling the events one year after they took place, Stager stresses the integral role of the Auxiliary with unreserved gratitude:

The widespread participation was not only the greatest advertisement this great ladies' order has ever had, but it contributed in a large way to the success of the demonstration of the parent order and drew closer together in *fraternal friendship* these two great departments of the Order.⁴⁶ (Emphasis mine).

Language is critical here. Referring to the Auxiliary as one of the "*Departments of the Order*" simply does not align with the present day perception that female auxiliaries functioned as social clubs designed to keep housewives and spinsters occupied in "helpmate" roles. Indeed, "*fraternal friendship*" is a similarly powerful term. These two words imply not only camaraderie, but something else far more elusive in the decades before mainstream American seriously considered the notion of gender equality: a sense of parity.

It might be tempting to somewhat diminish the noteworthiness of Stager's praise for the Auxiliary's activism because it was written after the Victorian-era heyday of constrictive social mores and domestic ideology. However, the seeds of what might be termed "quasi-egalitarianism" germinated well before The Patriotic Order of Americans became the Order's official adjunct. In *The History of the Patriotic Order of Americans*, the Order's National Secretary Theo Harris documents his efforts to create a female branch of the organization in 1889.⁴⁷ Clearly, Harris envisioned it as a full partner in the Order's work. In the midst of a month-long recruitment campaign he writes:

In the evening, we went to the Hall where we found a number of ladies waiting. After doing my best to explain the aims and objects of the Order, I invited all who felt a desire to unite with us, and had already not done so, to come forward and attach their name to the application for auxiliary

⁴⁵ Presently, it is not possible to determine how the Springfield camps participated in the Diamond Jubilee. However, Stager notes that Illinois was well represented, and moreover, the camps maintained an active correspondence with subordinates in states as far away as New York and Pennsylvania (where the Jubilee took place). It thus seems very likely that Springfield sent a contingent to Philadelphia.

⁴⁶ Stager, *An Authentic History of the Junior Sons*, 406.

⁴⁷ Prior to the creation of The Patriotic Order of Americans, women sympathetic to The Sons' cause first assembled into the "Daughters of Liberty" which later amalgamated into another women's group, "The Patriotic Order of True Americans." At the time of Harris' account in 1889, he was endeavoring to expand the latter into an official branch of The Order. Several years later, he and his compatriots succeeded, and the "true" was dropped from the name as the group became The Sons' official auxiliary.

membership ... my own experience convinces me that some such system would be most beneficial to the Order and would speedily put us on the highway to success.⁴⁸

Harris does mention encounters with men who objected to significant female involvement. However, this resistance took the form of apathy and sporadic arguments; the general impression Harris gives is of a generally receptive male membership. Clearly, the Auxiliary was founded with the hope that it would enter into a partnership. Far from being confined to an ancillary role, the women's branch was to be entrusted with the parent order's vital, activist work.

Although the Jubilee provides the most colorful example of male and female cooperation, other public appearances point to the Auxiliary's standing within the organization. *The Chicago Daily Tribune* records two instances in which the Auxiliary and the Order appeared jointly at large gatherings in the city. Interestingly, an editorial mentions that one event included a number of women from Springfield.⁴⁹ Certainly, these instances of mutual participation indicate the Auxiliary's perception of its importance both to the Order and the cause it espoused. Additionally, although the women's branch was governed by its own leadership, it could also send delegates to the Order's national conventions. Any county with more than 200 Auxiliary members could send one representative; Camp 9 minutes from June 1913 mention the selection process for the Order's 1914 convention in Brooklyn, New York.⁵⁰

Interestingly, the Order was not the only patriotic organization that conferred the women with legitimacy. Stager notes that the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) at times worked in concert with The P.O. S. of A. He includes a statement from GAR leadership that affirms that their principles are "in harmony with our own."⁵¹ Clearly, this feeling of kinship also extended to the Auxiliary. In Springfield, both city and camp records document that the women often held bi-monthly assemblies in a GAR meeting hall in the center of town. Moreover, it was not the only prominent fraternal that allowed them to use its facilities: The Odd Fellows regularly accommodated, albeit for a small fee, all four camps from 1905 to 1919.⁵² While no record of actual cross-fraternal activity exists, it seems unlikely that both of these exclusively male, "high profile" organizations would grant favorable rental privileges to a group of women unless they approved of their activities.⁵³

⁴⁸ The Order, *The History of the Patriotic Order of Americans*, 19-20.

⁴⁹ Editorial, "Meeting of sons of America: The Patriotic Order Elects Officers and Passes Many Resolutions," *The Chicago Daily Tribune*, February 25, 1891.

⁵⁰ The Patriotic Order of Americans Collection, Box 1, Folder 3.

⁵¹ Stager, *An Authentic History*, vol. 2, 367.

⁵² Meeting Minutes, The Patriotic Order of Americans Collection, Box 1, Folders 1-2; *The Springfield City Directory* (Springfield: R.L. Polk and Co., 1905-1921 eds.). The minutes of camps 3, 6, 9, and 16 each contain references to bi-monthly rental fees paid out to both the GAR and the Odd Fellows. In 1914, for example, the rent for each meeting was affixed at three dollars.

⁵³ It is reasonable to ask why the Springfield women chose to join the Order's auxiliary instead of the more well-known GAR and Odd Fellows. In both of these groups, the women functioned in a manner historians generally associate with female auxiliaries: supportive but not overtly activist. In contrast, The Patriotic Order Sons of America offered its auxiliary something unique: a measure of autonomy and respect that many other fraternal groups were unwilling to give.

Betting on a Horse: Why Did Women Choose the Order?

The late nineteenth century proliferation of patriotic fraternities — of either avowed or peripheral nativist bent — provided interested women with many options. Springfield itself was home to many such groups, including the GAR and Odd Fellows, two popular organizations whose memberships far exceeded that of the Order. And yet, it was to the Order's auxiliary that hundreds of the city's female citizens flocked. To an extent, socio-economic identity may have helped guide their selection. Unlike the aforementioned groups, the membership of the Auxiliary was largely working class, and many women may simply have felt more comfortable in that milieu.⁵⁴ Apart from this factor, however, why might such a considerable number of women forsake association with those more popular groups in favor of one lesser known?

In *America for the Americans*, Knobel asserts that there were three types of incentives that encouraged participation in these associations. Two of these, which he labels as “affective” and “utilitarian,” involve personal relationships and monetary benefits such as insurance. These inducements could be had in a variety of secret society fraternities, and therefore, do not offer a compelling reason for involvement in the Order's auxiliary. However, the allure of public validation and recognition (the third incentive Knobel terms as “normative”) undoubtedly played a strong role, and, as we have seen, the Patriotic Order Sons of America offered its auxiliary a remarkable degree of both.⁵⁵ But this elevated status — however unusual it may have been for the period — is not enough to explain the sort of fervent participation that characterized the female camps. Simply stated, there must be something more that explains that enthusiasm.

It seems likely that this “something” was a firm agreement with the organization's ideology. As we have seen, outwardly, the members of the Auxiliary took the Order's mission as their own. What is harder to discern is the degree to which members *inwardly* embraced its platform. The question is complicated by the fact that historiography does not adequately delineate differences that distinguished particular nativist groups. David Bennett, for example, asserts that these organizations were animated by a common vision of immigrants as dangerous intruders, even as he concedes that there was some variety in objectives and methods.⁵⁶ If this assessment is correct, one must question why these women supported the Order when many of them had foreign-born husbands and fathers.⁵⁷ The likely answer is members of the Auxiliary did not perceive the fraternity's platform to be against immigrants as such, but rather, against newcomers who resisted full assimilation into what they judged as the “American” culture and

⁵⁴ Throughout *Strangers in the Land*, John Higham devotes considerable attention to the particular concerns that motivated labor unions' uneven support of certain aspects of nativism. As it concerns the situation in Springfield, the competition for jobs created by the rapid influx of Eastern and Southern Europeans into the area's mining industry may have contributed to the women's activism. The chapter “The Nationalist Nineties” is especially insightful on this topic. *Strangers in the Land*, 68-105.

⁵⁵ Knobel, *America for the Americans*, xxvii.

⁵⁶ David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear: From Nativist Movements to the New Right in American History* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 2.

⁵⁷ Dale Knobel also ascribes a general fear and distrust of immigrants to nativist groups, but he also grants that “on the question of what was ‘alien’ and what (or who) threatened the national character they remained far from united.” *America for the Americans*, 234.

value system. Because their non-native family members conformed to this standard, these wives, mothers, and daughters likely saw no contradiction. In this way, the slogan “One Flag, One Country, One Language” proudly carried on an Auxiliary banner at the Diamond Jubilee posed no discomfort to a body of women who saw their European relatives as true Americans.

Conclusion

The Patriotic Order of Americans is classified as an auxiliary for good reason. As evidenced in both the Springfield records and in the Order’s accounts, it functioned as a true subsidiary. It adhered to the Order’s structure, values, and mission. Certainly, it served at the behest of its parent. Its viability as an organization depended on the strength of a group much larger and influential than itself.

However, not all auxiliaries are alike. The customary perception of women’s fraternal groups is that they existed in the shadows of the head organization. Scholars root their assumptions in the policies of prominent fraternities — a number of which only required that female applicants had familial ties to male members.⁵⁸ Undoubtedly, many organizations did restrict their auxiliaries to insignificant roles. However, this assumption of irrelevance cannot be extended to the Patriotic Order of Americans because it possessed a dual nature as both a servant to its parent and as a self-governing, semi-autonomous body. Furthermore, the Auxiliary maintained a structure and ideology that mimicked the Order in myriad ways. It truly was, as John Stager claimed, *a department of the Order*, as opposed to a mere association of wives, sisters, and daughters. The women who chose membership in the Springfield camps did not define their qualifications in terms of their relationships, but in their identification with the Order’s cause. Moreover, it seems equally significant that the parent organization these women served not only permitted this perception, but nurtured and appreciated it as well. The Patriotic Order of Americans had value as both a branch of The Order, and as an independently managed partner in advancing a specific nativist philosophy.

To further our understanding of the Auxiliary, much research remains to be done. It is abundantly evident that The Patriotic Order of Americans belongs in the schemata of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century patriotic fraternal organizations. What is not known is how effective the group was as a political, cultural, and social actor. It is possible that through continued study that explores other avenues of inquiry, this question can be answered.

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⁵⁸ The Masonic “Order of the Eastern Star” and The Women of the Elks were two such groups whose main requisite for membership was having a husband, father, or brother in the main order. See Alex Axlerod.