

Egalitarian Transformations: The Religious Culture of the Western Reserve, 1800-1830

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“Pious women” played an integral role in the development of the religious culture of the Western Reserve of Ohio from 1800 to 1830. The religious culture of the Western Reserve frontier offered increased opportunity for women to play a leading role in the religious culture beyond what the pioneers’ native New England offered. The relative absence of organized churches or settled ministers, the proliferation of religious sects, and the preoccupation of men with economic affairs all contributed to a greater religious presence for women on the Western Reserve. In this atmosphere, it was the “pious women” of the Western Reserve who took the lead with a few “pious men” in setting the parameters of the religious culture. Missionaries and itinerant preachers in particular took notice of “pious women” in the Western Reserve, seeing them as an important ally in the war against irreligion.

“Pious women” served as the driving religious force of their families, constantly pushing their husbands and children to consider religious matters. Beyond the home pious women participated in neighborhood religious meetings and church discipline, particularly cases concerning other

church women. Most importantly, women played leading roles in the most influential religious institutions on the frontier, the numerous moral, temperance, bible and anti-slavery societies which emerged on the frontier starting in the 1810s. Overall by 1830, "pious women" had taken their place alongside "pious men" as arbiters of the religious culture of the Western Reserve.