

Dakota Images

For over thirty years, Anna R. Simmons personified the connections between the campaign for alcohol prohibition and other social and political reform efforts in South Dakota.

Anna R. Johnson was born in Nashville, Ohio, between 1847 and 1849 and moved to Iowa in the 1850s with her parents, Paul and Sarah Johnson. From 1870 to 1872, Johnson attended Cornell College in Mount Vernon, Iowa. She married Thomas Simmons, a fellow Cornell student, in 1871. Thomas served as a Methodist minister in Iowa for about a decade before accepting a missionary assignment in Faulkton, Dakota Territory, in 1884. Although his church work later involved transfers to Huron and Mitchell, the couple kept their homestead near Faulkton.

Anna Simmons involved herself in social reform work soon after arriving in Dakota Territory, becoming a leader in the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). As South Dakota WCTU vice president from 1892 to 1900, Simmons worked to convince her fellow citizens that no level of alcohol usage was safe. She also lobbied the South Dakota legislature for woman suffrage, toured Missouri as a lecturer for the National American Woman Suffrage Association, and, from 1895 to 1900, served as president of the South Dakota Equal Suffrage Association.

In 1900, Anna and Thomas Simmons moved to Chicago, where she worked with the National Equal Suffrage Association. The couple returned to South Dakota in 1905 and made their home in Faulkton, where Anna Simmons resumed her WCTU activities. As state president from 1909 to 1917, she led the organization's efforts for both prohibition and woman suffrage. When the South Dakota Universal Franchise League organized in 1912, Simmons served as its secretary. Although she retired as state WCTU president a few months after watching Governor Peter Norbeck sign the "bone dry" prohibition law in 1917, Simmons remained an advocate for woman suffrage and other causes, including welfare legislation to protect needy women and children, equal pay for men and women doing similar work, and a living wage for all workers.

After her husband died in 1930, Anna Simmons lived in Sioux Falls with her three grown children. She died in a Mitchell hospital on 23 May 1936 and was buried in Sioux Falls.



Anna R. Simmons

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On the covers: The prohibition of alcohol was a much-debated topic in early twentieth-century South Dakota, generating strong opinions among both “wets” and “drys,” as seen in these postcards distributed by prohibition advocates. In this issue, Chuck Vollan details the campaign to limit alcohol through a constitutional referendum in 1916 as well as the aftermath of voters’ approval of the measure.

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