

Artist Statement for Portrait of Clara Eva Hardenbrook

Clara Eva Hardenbrook was an important pioneer for women's right to vote in the Minnesota.

Clara attempted to vote in 1914, years before women were granted the right to vote. Her act of defiance and circumstances regarding the lawsuit that followed raise questions. What were her motivations when her ties to any suffragist groups at the time are not obvious? Who funded her legal representation since her income was limited? Clara's background and challenges suggest answers to these questions and provide a glimpse into the complexities of the Suffragist movement.

Clara's Early Years

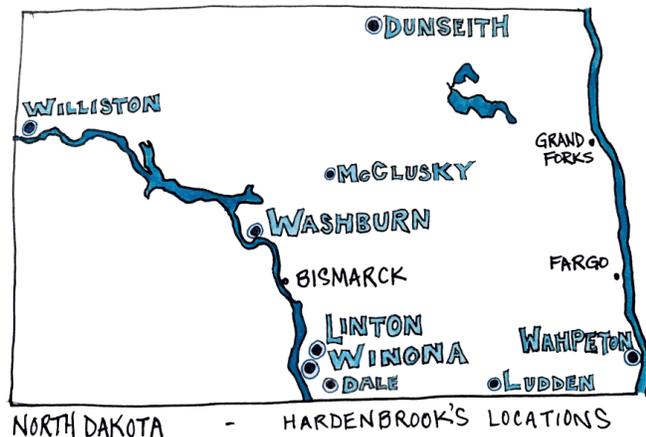
Clara Eva Sheeks was born on August 27, 1877 in Dover, Minnesota. She was the eldest of the eight children of Hugh and Rosa Sheeks. When Clara was three, the Sheeks family moved to a farm in North Dakota. Her father participated in local politics.¹ Her family stressed the importance of education. She helped with ranch chores and attended a country school where her uncle taught. She then trained as a teacher herself.² Clara was 22 and teaching school in the area of Wahpeton, North Dakota, when she met and married 27-year old Methodist minister Harry Gessells Hardenbrook from Ohio.

As a minister's wife, Clara was in the public's eye. The following newspaper entries from North Dakota describe the couples first years together:

7/1/1898 *Local Round-Up*

Williston Graphic (Williston ND):

Rumor has it that H.G. Hardenbrook, formerly in charge of the Methodist church in this place, but now located at Washburn, was to have been married at Wahpeton yesterday to a Miss Sheeks. And therefore, it is safe to say that he is married.



4/29/1899 *Local Items* Washburn Leader (Washburn, ND):

Rev. Hardenbrook has been assigned to Winona, Emmons County, by General Conference.

When Winona was formed in 1874, its primary business was to entertain off-duty soldiers from a nearby fort and was known as the "Devil's Colony". Winona boomed to a population of 200 in 1894, but was in decline when the Hardenbrooks moved there five years later. The

¹ Star Tribune, Minneapolis, MN. September 22, 1982

² Ford, Alyssa. Clara Eva Sheeks Hardenbrook Memorial, 7/31/2014.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/133600275/clara-eva-hardenbrook>

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Hardenbrooks must have found the strict Methodist tenet of temperance at odds with the nine saloons, gambling parlors and other attractions operating outside the law.

6/9/1899 *In Town and Out* Emmons County Record (Linton, ND):

The Rev. H.G. Hardenbrook of Winona ... is a young man of pleasing address and he is making many friends in those parts of the county where his duties have led him.

10/6/1899 *In Town and Out* Emmons County Record (Linton, ND)

The little daughter of Rev. H.G. Hardenbrook was quite sick for several days, but is now convalescing.

10/14/1899 *The City* The Bismarck Tribune (Bismarck, ND):

Rev. and Mrs. Hardenbrook of Winona are in the city today, en route to Wahpeton with the remains of their little daughter, who died of whooping cough yesterday morning.

4/27/1900 *In Town and Out* Emmons County Record (Linton, ND):

At the recent Methodist conference ... the Rev Hardenbrook was continued at Winona, which will be entirely satisfactory to the many friends in this county of the young minister and his pleasant family. Mr. and Mrs. Hardenbrook were in town yesterday, having just returned to Wahpeton, where, after the conference, they visited with Mrs. Hardenbrook's relatives.



9/14/1900 *In Town and Out* Emmons County Record (Linton, ND):
The neat little Methodist Church at Dale, in which the people of that and adjacent neighborhoods take so much pride, will be dedicated next Sunday. Mr. Hardenbrook and the Dale people extend a cordial invitation to people generally to be present.

Photo: Becker, Steve

<http://theusgenweb.org/nd/emmons/churchdale.htm>

3/29/1901 *No Rest for the Wicked* by D.R. Streeter. Emmons County Record (Linton, ND):

Prohibby papers were served on P. Flynn at Linton Wednesday. The papers were sworn to on the 8th of last January - the anniversary of the battle of New Orleans - by Mr. George Burge. The gentleman swears that he purchased alcohol from said Flynn on the 16th day of last October. The complaint was sworn out before C.A. Patterson and is supposed to have been worked up by H.G. Hardenbrook, the local prohibition spotter, backed by the Horton-Patterson push, who have "got it in" for everybody that wouldn't dance to their music last fall.

They say that Spotter Hardenbrook is now after everybody that plays a social game of poker once in a while. Barring three or four, that will take in all the hemales in the old town. It is said

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that the use of tobacco and coffee will be the next things tackled by this truly good man. The reverend is indeed a warm number.

4/12/1901 *In Town and Out* Emmons County Record (Linton, ND):

The state of affairs is just this: Every man in the county - regardless of likes and dislikes or the habits of a life-time - must conform to the likes and dislikes of the Rev. Hardenbrook... The Record believes that - notwithstanding the evident idea of the Rev. Hardenbrook that he holds the people of this county in the hollow of his hand - the folks who live here and intend to live here permanently, and many of whom have paid taxes here for nearly a score of years - are entitled to some privileges and consideration, even if their conduct does not entirely conform to the rules by which the meek, lowly, gentle and unassuming Hardenbrook is supposed to govern himself.

4/26/1901 *In Town and Out* Emmons County Record (Linton, ND):

Rev. Hardenbrook has put up a notice in the Linton post office that his household goods at Winona are offered for sale. The reverend will soon take charge of Dickey county, being located at Ludden. During their residence in Emmons county Mrs. Hardenbrook has, by her kind and friendly disposition and many ladylike qualities, made friends of everyone who has become acquainted with her, and all regret that she is to take up residence elsewhere.

5/10/1901 *Ludden Gossip*, The Oakes Times (Oakes, ND):

Rev. Hardenbrook, wife and baby arrived Sunday from Ellendale and Rev. Hardenbrook preached his first sermon Sunday evening, making an excellent impression on his hearers.

Jamestown Weekly Alert (Jamestown, ND)

10/16/1902: *H.G. Hardenbrook was appointed to Dunseith, ND.*

10/18/1906: *H.G. Hardenbrook appointed to McClusky, ND.*

10/22/1908: *H.G. Hardenbrook has retired from the ministry at his own request.*

The reason for Harry's retirement is not documented. The friction of strict Methodist beliefs in communities with the spirit of the wild West, but also the upheaval of moving four times in ten years had to be challenging. By 1908, Clara had four young children and one on the way and one could imagine wanting a more permanent home.

New Beginnings in Saint Paul

In 1909, Clara and her family moved to Saint Paul, Minnesota. Clara was 32 and was raising 5 children under the age of ten. Harry worked as a street car conductor. They first rented apartments on the east side of Saint Paul: 1206 Ross, 885 Earl and 1063 Earl. The Hardenbrooks joined the Asbury Methodist Church at the corner of Frank and Ross. Clara

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was active in the church, serving as organist, singing in the choir and teaching Sunday School.³

In 1912, the Hardenbrooks moved further north to where Harry built the home at 1016 Cook Street. It was then when hardship fell on the Hardenbrook family:

Harry G. Hardenbrook, Plaintiff, vs. Joseph Winkler, James J. Heider, Charles C. Meisel, Defendants

COMPLAINT filed 1/10/1913 (filed by Harry's lawyer Daniel Doty)

Plaintiff alleges:

- 1.) That on the 26th day of October 1912, at the city of St. Paul, in said County, the Defendants without the slightest excuse or provocation therefor, willfully, wantonly, maliciously, and murderously assaulted and beat the Plaintiff, until he became insensible; and so remained for a period of about ten hours.
- 2.) That the Defendants in said assault cut a deep wound on Plaintiff's scalp, injured his right eye so that it swelled shut, and paralyzed the Pupil thereof; bruised and injured his spine and shoulder blade, which rendered his hand and arm numb and powerless.
- 3.) That by reason of said injuries Plaintiff was compelled to remain in the hospital for five days, and be under the care of a Physician ever since, and was wholly disabled from attending his business for ten weeks, and is now, able only partially, to perform his duties as Conductor of a street car.
- 4.) That said injuries caused Plaintiff loss of sleep and intense pain and suffering, in both body and mind.
- 5.) That Plaintiff was compelled to and did employ a Physician to heal his injuries and has incurred an expense therefore to this date of \$45.00 and Plaintiff will require the services of a Physician in the future.
- 6.) That Plaintiff will never fully recover from said injuries but as long as he lives will suffer pain and inconvenience therefrom and be partially disabled from working and earning a living for himself and his family, all to the Plaintiff's damage in the sum of \$5,000.00.

In April of 1913, a jury awarded Harry \$900 from two of three men, those who did not respond to the lawsuit. It is not certain whether Harry was able to collect on the judgment. The Hardenbrooks must have struggled while Harry was unable to work. Harry's sister Anna joined the family and worked as a seamstress and clerk at the Golden Rule. Harry was hired as a US Customs Inspector in 1914.

³ Ford, Alyssa. Clara Eva Sheeks Hardenbrook Memorial, 7/31/2014.
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The Act of Defiance

In the Spring of 1914, Clara registered to vote as “C.E. Hardenbrook”. No records exist indicating that Clara was a member of any pro-suffrage groups. She presented herself at the polling place, was refused and then escorted out. She filed suit against the City of Saint Paul the following day. The rapidity of the filing suggests coordination and planning.

Clara E. Hardenbrook, Plaintiff, vs.

Alexander E. Horn, Henry A. Merrill, David Wallblom, Ross Miller, Daniel J. Keefe, Emil Geist, and John J. Bullis as members of and constituting the Board of School Inspectors of the City of Saint Paul, and

Elbert A. Young, Charles W. Ames, Frederic A. Fogg, Jacob Dittenhofer, Howard Wheeler, Charles H.F. Smith, Arthur Christofferson, Karl Koch and Robert E. Olds, as members of and constituting the Board of Library Directors of the City of Saint Paul, and

Winn Powers, S.A. Farnsworth, C.E. Keller, Henry McColl, Anthony Yoerg, M.M. Gose, J.J. O’Leary, W.C. Handy, and the City of Saint Paul, a municipal corporation

Complaint file 5/6/1914

Great and irreparable damage has been done and is and will continue to be done to this plaintiff and to all other women in like situation and to the residents and citizens of the said City of Saint Paul generally, unless said defendants constituting said Board of School Inspectors and said defendants constituting said Board of Library Directors are restrained and enjoined from delivering over and surrendering the property and affairs in their possession and control respectively to said defendants, said Mayor-elect and said councilmen-elect, and unless said Mayor-elect and said councilmen-elect shall be restrained and enjoined from receiving, directing and managing the property and affairs of said school district... and libraries and reading rooms.

At the time, Minnesota state law granted women the right to vote in school and library elections. In Minneapolis, school and library offices were elected but the positions were appointed by the mayor in Saint Paul. The 1914 election was to amend the city charter to remove the Board of School Inspectors and replace it with a mayor appointed Commissioner of Education.

Clara’s attorney was Gustavus Loevinger, an attorney officing from the Germania Life Insurance Building. He had been practicing since 1907 and had tried a few small cases, but nothing like this.⁴ The suit argued that because Clara had been denied the vote, the city’s entire election should be deemed anti-democratic and the results thrown out.

Suggesting even more coordination and planning, five influential businessmen filed to joined Clara’s lawsuit as supporting “intervenor” the very day after her lawsuit was filed. The new city

⁴ Ford, Alyssa. *The Story of the St. Paul Woman Clara Hardenbrook, who Tried (and Failed) to Vote in 1914.* thelinemedia.com/features/clara11082016.aspx, 11/8/2016.

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charter included terms that would make city contracts and bonding more transparent and fair, and the businessmen's motives were questioned, alleging a conspiracy between the suffragettes and big business. Clara was in the media's spotlight again.

5/17/1914 *Disappointed Suffraget Leads Attack on St. Paul Commission Form Charter*, by John A. Arnold, Star Tribune, (Minneapolis, MN):

After going to all the bother and expense of framing a new commission form of charter, and it was a great bother, and then having all the fuss and rancor of electing candidates for the elective offices at the primary election, and later choosing the mayor, six councilmen, comptroller and municipal judges, and after settling down for a day or so of peaceful business enjoyment, St. Paul is in hot water again. The water is not as hot as it was, but it is still warm enough to make the old saint's toes red.

The reason for this post-election distress and turmoil is that a lone woman, a suffraget, Mrs. Clara E. Hardenbrook, has brought suit against St. Paul and all St. Paul officialdom, to throw the new charter, new officials and all, into the garbage can ... and five high-up business men, habitués of the Minnesota Club, who are on all the committees whenever St. Paul starts in to do anything big in earnest, have intervened, which means that they are helping the suffraget. The five are Charles W. Gordon, A.B. Driscoll, Max E. Toltz, W.B. Dean and Dr. Burnside Foster... This suit will be heard May 26, according to present plans, by the judges of the district court of Ramsey county, sitting en banc - for which a lawyer always charges more.

Newspapers also pointed to the involvement of Emily Dobbin:

5/7/1914 *Charter Survived Two Other Attacks* The St. Paul Daily News (St. Paul, MN)

Two months ago Miss Emily Dobbin, a suffragist, announced that she would bring a suit to test the constitutionality of the new charter on the grounds that it is in opposition to the amendment giving women voting privileges in school and library matters and officers. The belief was expressed last night that Mrs. Hardenbrook's suit was brought by the faction to which Miss Dobbin belongs and that the businessmen in the intervening suit were behind the original announcement made by Miss Dobbin.

Emily Dobbin was a University of Chicago-educated astronomer who taught math at the Mechanic Arts High School. She served as President of the MWSA in 1911 but was not re-elected due to her radical beliefs. Her father was a physician and druggist in Louisville, Kentucky. He died early, and Emily lived with her widowed mother for most of her life. It is not evident if Emily had additional income beyond her teacher's salary.

On May 30, 1914, five district judges denied the motion of Clara and the Intervenors.

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The Minnesota Historical Society holds the Clara Hardenbrook case file of Gustavus Loevinger. Notes from the initial correspondence between Emily Dobbin and Gustavus Loevinger identify Clara as a potential voter, but list her address as 1016 East Fifth Street, suggesting that Emily and Clara were not close. Additionally, the following letter from after the lawsuit point to remuneration:

June 25, 1914

*Miss Emily Dobbin
Shady Knoll Camp, Dorsett Minn.*

Dear Miss Dobbin,

Some days ago, I wrote you a letter with reference to disbursements in the Hardenbrook case, which you evidently did not receive, judging by yours of the 22nd instant at hand.

You are correct that an appeal has been perfected in the injunction proceedings and of course, will be brought on for hearing in due time in the Supreme Court unless the quo warranto proceedings take its place. The attorney general has not yet decided to issue the quo warranto and seems very much disinclined to do so, and it is doubtful whether he ever will. We are therefore, in a position where we are told on the one hand that only the state can sue in this matter, and on the other hand, that the state refuses to sue.

I enclose a copy of the letter and statement that I sent to you at your old address, which apparently has not been forwarded to you, They are self explanatory.

*Yours very truly,
Gustavus Loevinger*

Efforts to appeal to the Minnesota Supreme Court were denied.

Over time, sentiment changed. The 19th amendment to the US Constitution granting women the right to vote was ratified in 1920.

Emily Dobbin and her mother moved to San Diego, CA in 1925, where Emily worked as a real estate broker.

Gustavus Loevinger practiced law until 1931, when he was appointed to the Ramsey County District Court. As a judge, he was known for his modern and progressive approach.

Clara and her family suffered a blow when Harry was hospitalized with tuberculosis in April of 1918. He was placed in quarantine for three years, which allowed Clara only weekly visits. She worked as a bookkeeper at E. A. Northrup Coal, Coke and Wood and other odd jobs to provide for her children. Harry died at the Saint Paul City and County Hospital on April 10, 1921, at the age of 49.

In November 1922, Clara married a family friend, John Nebbitt. John was 15 years Clara's senior and he had lost his wife to apoplexy in 1917. The 1930 census lists John's occupation as a truck driver. They lived on 886 Phalen Ave, across from Phalen Lake, with her daughter,

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son-in-law and grandchildren. Clara passed in 1936, from a stroke at the age of 59. She was laid to rest next to Harry Hardenbrook.

Conclusion

Documentation of Clara Eva Hardenbrook's life suggests a number of motivations likely led her to try to vote in 1914. Not only were Clara's legal expenses paid for, either by the radical feminist Emily Dobbin or the self-interested business men, but she was compensated for her efforts. But what is more important is that Clara contributed to changing public opinion. She instilled in her daughters the importance of exercising their right to vote. They worked as election judges and drove people to the poles.⁵ Clara left a legacy of valuing the right to vote and taking a stand.

⁵ Ford, Alyssa. *The Story of the St. Paul Woman Clara Hardenbrook, who Tried (and Failed) to Vote in 1914*. thelinemedia.com/features/clara11082016.aspx, 11/8/2016.