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Woman Suffrage in Dallas County

I. Context

Women in the United States were granted the right to vote on August 26, 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment was officially added to the federal constitution. The amendment declares: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." This momentous victory for women's rights and for the expansion of American democracy was the result of more than seventy years of organized struggle. Many Americans today are familiar with the leaders of the national woman suffrage movement, especially Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The winning of woman suffrage, however, would not have been possible without the energy, determination, and commitment of thousands of women working together on behalf of the cause on the state level and in their local communities. As was the case in other southern states, Texas women did not become involved in the suffrage movement in great numbers until the early twentieth century. Texas stands out, nonetheless, for being the first southern state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment. Within Texas, Dallas County was the site of one of the largest and most effective woman suffrage efforts.¹ The women of Dallas County who participated in the suffrage struggle as leaders and members of organizations and as voters deserve to be recognized for the important contributions they made to advancing women's rights and furthering democratic participation in Dallas County, the state of Texas, and the nation.

¹ Elizabeth York Enstam, "A Question to Be 'Settled Right': The Dallas Campaign for Woman Suffrage, 1913-1919," *Legacies: A History Journal for Dallas and North Central Texas* (Fall 2001): 30.

The Declaration of Independence declares that “all men are created equal.” This document, and the Constitution of the United States that followed it, promised to guarantee the “inalienable rights” of American citizens. Women, however, were not included in the promises for self-sovereignty and political equality laid out in the founding documents of the new nation. At the time of the establishment of the American republic, women were governed by the principle of *coverture* (derived from English common law), which submerged their legal identity under that of their husbands. When women married, they could not own property or sign contracts. Except for a brief period in the state of New Jersey, no woman in the new nation had the right to vote.²

In the early nineteenth century, some women began to organize to fight for their full and equal citizenship rights. In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and others organized the first woman’s rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York. The participants of this convention signed “The Declaration of Rights and Sentiments,” modeled on the Declaration of Independence, which protested women’s economic, social, civil, legal, and political inequality. In a series of resolutions, the signers of the Declaration declared that women were endowed by God with the same moral and intellectual capacities as men and therefore had the same rights and responsibilities to participate fully in every aspect of the life of the nation, including the activity of voting. According to Stanton, the vote was of the utmost importance for women because it was only by securing political rights that women would be able to achieve equality in all realms of public and private life. During the 1850s, women’s rights activists held annual conventions, where they gathered to discuss ideas, articulate goals, and formulate strategies for securing gender equality. Their efforts were ridiculed and dismissed by the vast majority of Americans --

² Linda K. Kerber, “‘Ourselves and Our Daughters Forever’: Women and the Constitution 1787-1876” in *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement*, ed. Majorie Spruill Wheeler (Troutdale, OR: NewSage Press, 1995), 26-27.

men and women alike -- who believed that women ought to remain in the private sphere of home and family, while men participated in and presided over the affairs of the public sphere.³

Although undeterred by popular criticism, women's rights activists temporarily suspended their efforts during the Civil War. When the war was over, they held great hope that women, along with African Americans, would at last be welcomed as full citizens in the life of the nation. In 1866, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, and others formed the American Equal Rights Association (AERA), which was dedicated to securing both black suffrage and woman suffrage. However, women's rights activists soon split over disagreements over the proposed Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution. Stone and others supported the passage of the amendments, which guaranteed the voting rights of black men. Stanton and Anthony refused to support them, despite their previous allegiance to the cause of abolitionism, because they did not further the voting rights of women. In speaking out for woman suffrage, Anthony and Stanton sometimes made racist appeals. They argued that "refined" white women deserved the vote more than African-American and immigrant men, who were not intellectually or morally prepared to properly carry out their duties as citizens.⁴

In 1869, the two camps formed two distinct woman suffrage groups – the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), led by Stone and her husband Henry Blackwell, and the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), led by Stanton and Anthony. In the 1870s, the more radical of the two groups, the NWSA, began to argue that women were already enfranchised by the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments, since these amendments declared that all persons born or naturalized in the United States were citizens and the federal constitution

³ "The Seneca Falls Convention" in *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement*, ed. Majorie Spruill Wheeler (Troutdale, OR: NewSage Press, 1995), 37-44; Andrea Moore Kerr, "White Women's Rights, Black Men's Wrongs, Free Love, Blackmail, and the Formation of the American Woman Suffrage Association" in *One Woman, One Vote*, 62-63.

⁴ Kerr, 64-73.

guaranteed all citizens equal protection of their rights, one of which was the right to vote. In the 1872 presidential election, Anthony was arrested after trying to vote. She was found guilty and was charged with a fine that she did not pay. Hundreds of other women engaged in similarly bold acts of direct political action. Virginia Minor, a suffragist from St. Louis, sued the registrar who refused to allow her to vote. Her case went all the way to the Supreme Court. In 1875, in the case of *Minor v. Happersett*, the Court ruled in favor of anti-suffragist views. Chief Justice Morrison Waite, who delivered the unanimous decision of the Court, declared that the gender limitations on voting set by the state of Missouri did not violate the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. While Justice Waite affirmed that women were indeed citizens, as the Fourteenth Amendment guaranteed, he also asserted that voting was not an inherent right of national citizenship. With this ruling, women's rights activists realized they would need a separate amendment to the federal constitution to secure women's voting rights.⁵

As the nineteenth century drew to a close, the tenor and scope of the suffrage movement began to change. As women's reform organizations proliferated during the decades surrounding the turn of the century, increasing numbers of mainstream and even conservative women got behind the cause of the vote as a way to bring about the social changes they desired. The Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), founded in 1874, for example, eventually drew more women into the suffrage camp than any of the major suffrage organizations. WCTU president Frances Willard claimed that women needed the vote to protect the values and well-being of the middle-class Christian family. Thus, the issue of the vote was increasingly associated with women's roles as wives and mothers, rather than with their natural rights as sovereign individuals. Women were more nurturing and moral than men, the argument went,

⁵ Ellen Carol DuBois, "Taking the Law Into Our Own Hands: *Bradwell*, *Minor*, and Suffrage Militance in the 1870s" in *One Woman, One Vote*, 81-98.

and as such they would use the vote to make a better world.⁶ Up to the time of her death in 1902, Elizabeth Cady Stanton continued to insist that women deserved the right to vote on the basis of their common humanity with men and continued to advance a broad-based program for women's rights that went beyond the issue of political equality. Other suffragists also drew on justice and equality arguments to advance their cause. The majority of early-twentieth-century suffrage advocates, however, argued that women should get the vote on the basis of their differences with men. In 1890, the AWSA and the NWSA combined to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). During the early twentieth century, the NAWSA drew hundreds of thousands of women from across the social spectrum into the cause, by focusing exclusively on the issue of the vote and linking that issue with the notion of fundamental sexual difference. Working-class women, elite women, and college students joined in the struggle. Racism persisted in the movement, however. African-American women were left to form their own suffrage organizations, through which they fought for political equality for black women *and* men and worked for the "uplift" of their race.⁷

Stanton and Anthony served as the first presidents of the NAWSA, followed by Carrie Chapman Catt, who served from 1900 to 1904 and again from 1915 to 1920, and Anna Howard Shaw, who served from 1904 to 1915. Initially, the NAWSA worked to secure suffrage by amending state constitutions. In the 1890s, four western states were the first to grant women equal suffrage: Wyoming, Colorado, Idaho and Utah. Other states granted women partial suffrage – the right to vote in school board, municipal, or presidential elections. Between 1910

⁶ Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, "Frances Willard and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union's Conversion to Woman Suffrage" in *One Woman, One Vote*, 117-133.

⁷ Sara Hunter Graham, "The Suffrage Renaissance: A New Image for a New Century, 1896-1910" in *One Woman, One Vote*, 157-178; Victoria Bissell Brown, "Jane Addams, Progressivism, and Woman's Suffrage: an Introduction to 'Why Women Should Vote' in *One Woman, One Vote*, 179-189; Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "African American Women and the Woman Suffrage Movement" in *One Woman, One Vote*, 135-155.

and 1918, eleven more states gave women full voting rights. At the same time, defeats of suffrage initiatives in several states led some in the movement to turn again to a national strategy.⁸

In 1913, two young women who had experience with the British suffrage movement began to work within the NAWSA to return focus on a federal amendment. Alice Paul and Lucy Burns organized a suffrage parade in Washington D.C. the day before Woodrow Wilson's inauguration to draw national attention to the suffrage cause. Frustrated by the NASWA leadership's lack of support for their more militant efforts, Paul and Burns went on to form their own organization, first called the Congressional Union and renamed the National Woman's Party (NWP) in 1916. Once again, the suffrage movement split into two camps. The NWP, which focused exclusively on securing a suffrage amendment to the federal constitution, was more radical than the NAWSA. In early 1917, members of the NWP began picketing the White House to pressure President Wilson into supporting a federal amendment. When the U.S. entered the Great War (World War I) in April, the NWP's actions were perceived as being disloyal to the government. Some of the protesters were arrested (for ostensibly obstructing traffic) and jailed. Many of those imprisoned went on hunger strikes to protest their detention.⁹

The NWP helped to convince Carrie Chapman Catt that the NAWSA's state-by-state strategy had to be joined with attention to securing a federal amendment. Even so, Catt and other members of the NAWSA were horrified by the NWP's militant tactics, especially during war time. Catt herself had been an advocate for peace before the U.S. entered the war, but once America joined the fight she and other suffrage activists got behind the war effort, believing that this was a chance for women to display their patriotism and hoping that women would be

⁸ "Appendix One, The Electoral Thermometer" in *One Woman, One Vote*, 375-76.

⁹ Linda G. Ford, "Alice Paul and the Triumph of Militancy" in *One Woman, One Vote*, 277-294.

rewarded for their efforts at war's end with the rights of full citizenship. Most historians agree that the efforts of both the NAWSA and the NWP were necessary for finally securing women's voting rights. Indeed, Catt herself conceded the importance of the NWP to the cause. The NAWSA's conservatism led to the creation of the NWP, which helped to vitalize the movement in new ways. The NWP also helped to legitimate the NAWSA, since the latter's goals and approach seemed by many to be more reasonable than the radical philosophy and tactics of the former.¹⁰

As a result of the tireless work by suffrage advocates in the NAWSA and the NWP, the House of Representatives passed a suffrage amendment on May 20, 1919, followed by the Senate on June 4, 1919. Catt and Paul again mobilized thousands of women to carry out the long and difficult fight for state ratification. Victory was finally achieved when Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to vote for ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. On August 26, 1920, women's right to vote was at last guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.¹¹

II. Overview

The efforts of the NAWSA and the NWP were supported, enabled, and complemented by the endeavors of women in hundreds of state organizations and local associations around the country working on behalf of woman suffrage. As was the case in other states and in the nation as a whole, women in the state of Texas and in Dallas County fought a protracted and challenging battle for woman suffrage. The women of Dallas County deserve to be commemorated for the important contributions they made to securing women's right to vote and

¹⁰ Robert Booth Fowler, "Carrie Chapman Catt, Strategist" in *One Woman, One Vote*, 295-314.

¹¹ Anastatia Sims, "Armageddon in Tennessee: The Final Battle over the Nineteenth Amendment" in *One Woman, One Vote*, 333-352.

to furthering women's opportunities to participate as full citizens in the democratic life of the nation.

The influence of Spanish law (as opposed to English common law), combined with the harsh realities of frontier life, meant that women in early Texas had more legal rights than women in the former British colonies. As under the common law, single women and widows could make contracts, own property, and retain custody rights over their children. Married women could write wills, retained control over inherited property, and were entitled to half of whatever they or their husbands earned during marriage. Despite this, all Texas women were prevented from voting. As was the case elsewhere in the South, there was a great deal of hostility toward the antebellum women's rights movement in Texas, due in large part to the support of northern women's rights activists to the abolitionist cause.¹² Following the Civil War, woman suffrage garnered some attention by Texas lawmakers, but without success; at the state constitutional conventions of 1868 and 1875, woman's suffrage provisions were proposed and rejected.¹³

The latter decades of the nineteenth century witnessed profound economic and social changes in Texas – the spread of the railroads, the growth of business and industry, the influx of migrants and immigrants, and the rise of cities. Following the Panic of 1893 and the widespread suffering it caused, many Texans, motivated both by fear of social disorder and by compassion for the poor, turned their attention to solving the problems that attended an urbanizing and

¹² Texas State Library and Archives Commission website. <http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/exhibits/suffrage/index.html>, accessed 12/31/07. On the status of Texas women and the law, see Elizabeth York Enstam, "Women and the Law," Handbook of Texas Online. <http://www.tsha.utexas.edu/handbook/online/articles/TT/vit1.html>, accessed 11/6/08; Ocie Speer, *A Treatise on the Law of Marital Rights in Texas, Including Marriage, Divorce, Children, Community Property, Homestead, Administration and Death Actions* (Rochester, NY, 1916), 139-41, 163, 235, 292-93, 323-32, 368-70; and Loy M. Simpkins, ed. *Texas Family Law with Forms: Speer's Fifth Edition, Sections 15:1-34:8* (San Francisco, 1976), 595-99. I am grateful to Elizabeth Enstam for providing me with these citations.

¹³ Elizabeth Taylor, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Texas" in *Citizens at Last: The Woman Suffrage Movement in Texas*, ed. Ruthe Winegarten and Judith N. McArthur (Austin, TX: Ellen C. Temple, 1987), 13-14.

industrializing society. Among the most ardent supporters of reform were middle-class women, many of whom had taken eager advantage of opportunities for higher education that had opened up for women in the post-Civil War period. Increasingly, these educated women reformers began to recognize that the vote was a vital tool for bringing about the social changes they desired. Of great importance to many Texas women reformers in this period was the cause of prohibition. Some white women – and men – were also motivated to support the suffrage cause as a way to thwart the political power of African American men.¹⁴

The first organizational efforts on behalf of woman suffrage in the state of Texas began in May 1893 when Rebecca Henry Hayes of Galveston, who was Texas vice-president for the NAWSA, called a convention at the Windsor Hotel in Dallas to found a Texas Equal Rights Association (TERA). Of the forty-eight charter members of the TERA, fourteen were from Dallas. More than half of the group's members belonged to the Texas WCTU, which had endorsed woman suffrage in 1888, becoming the first union in the South to do so. The men and women gathered at the Windsor Hotel elected Hayes as the group's first president and chose Mrs. S.L. Trumbull of Dallas as first vice-president. Mrs. W.D. Knowles of Dallas was elected treasurer. Other Dallas women assumed important leadership roles in the TERA, as well. In 1895, Elizabeth Good Houston was elected president and Hattie Brewer was elected treasurer of the organization. An auxiliary of the NAWSA, the TERA's goals were to "advance the industrial, educational and equal rights of women, and to secure suffrage to them by appropriate State and national legislation." Its leaders encouraged the organization of local suffrage societies around the state, such as the one formed in Dallas in March 1894.¹⁵

¹⁴ Texas State Library and Archives Commission website, accessed 12/31/07.

¹⁵ Taylor, 16-18, 23; "The WCTU Endorses Votes for Women" in Winegarten and McArthur, 79; "The Texas Equal Rights Association" in Winegarten and McArthur, 87-93.

Members of TERA and its affiliates worked hard to advance the suffrage cause. In October 1893, TERA leaders helped to organize the Texas Woman's Congress, which met in Dallas at the State Fair. One of the speakers was Rebecca Hayes. "The ballot," declared Hayes, "means to women the same as it means to men. It is the medium whereby we may clinch our convictions. It is a weapon, a power, a force whereby we may realize the highest form of self-government." When the Woman's Congress met again in 1894, women's clubs from across the state sent delegates, including the Woman's Council of Dallas.¹⁶ Texas suffragists spoke and wrote widely in support of their cause, which won them some attention in the local press, including a weekly suffrage column published in the *Dallas Morning News* entitled "Women in Public." In the summer of 1894, they sought to convince the state Democratic, Republican, and Populist parties to include equal suffrage planks in their platforms. Mrs. L.A. Craig, president of the Dallas suffrage society, advocated for woman suffrage before the Democratic convention. However, her appeal, along with the appeals to the other two state parties, was rejected.¹⁷

Although championed and embraced by some women and men in Texas, woman suffrage was opposed by those who believed that women's political interests were taken care of by their husbands, that their femininity would be undermined by their participation in the rough realm of electoral politics, and that their ability to attend to their domestic responsibilities would be compromised by voting. In 1895, a woman suffrage amendment was introduced for the first time in the Texas House of Representatives, but it was sent to committee to be reviewed and was not reported out. Around this time, participation in and attention to the movement began to wane. By 1896 the TERA had dissolved due to lack of popular support and also, perhaps, to the loss of Hayes' leadership. Although the Texas WCTU continued its suffrage advocacy, no new

¹⁶ Taylor, 16- 18; "Texas Woman's Congress Meets in Dallas" in Winegarten and McArthur, 104.

¹⁷ Taylor, 19-23.

organizational initiatives on behalf of woman suffrage were advanced for the remainder of the decade.¹⁸

In February 1903, Annette Finnigan and her two sisters reawakened the movement when they formed an equal suffrage league in Houston. With seventy-five members by December, the leaders of the Houston league were emboldened to form a state organization called the Texas Woman Suffrage Association. Anne Finnigan was chosen as its president. As did the TERA, the Texas Woman Suffrage Association hoped to organize local clubs around the state. Most of these efforts were unsuccessful, however, because, according to Finnigan, women were “too timid to organize.” When Finnigan and her sisters left Texas in 1905, the Texas Woman Suffrage Association faltered and again, the cause of woman suffrage was without an organizational structure to support it.¹⁹

Although lacking a formal organization, individual women continued to advocate for the cause. In 1907, when a measure to amend the state constitution to grant women voting rights was again proposed in the Texas House of Representatives, several women testified before the Committee on Constitutional Amendments on its behalf. Even as the committee rejected the resolution, the *Dallas Morning News* threw its weight behind woman suffrage: “The truth is this prevention of female participation in the affairs of government is a barbarism that hangs to us. We wonder at the hardship which our male ancestors inflicted upon our female ancestors when they hitched them to the plow, and made them sit apart when men gathered, and yet right now we make them sit apart when men gather to consider matters of moment to the country, and thus to ourselves and to themselves...[T]he moment some one speaks of the fairness of permitting [women] to have a voice in public affairs, some hairy-breasted idiot of a man arises and, with

¹⁸ Taylor, 21-23; “The WCTU Endorses Votes for Women” in Winegarten and McArthur, 79.

¹⁹ Taylor, 25-28.

swelling voice, says ‘Woman is too nice to mix in public affairs...’ She is not too nice to be made to pay taxes, to be punished by laws she never made, to raise the children of men, to be consulted by man on his important matters, to be sought when man is in trouble; but she is too nice to be given rights which are natural.’²⁰

In 1908, NAWSA president Anna Howard Shaw sparked renewed interest in the cause when she spoke before women’s clubs in Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, and other Texas cities. Shaw’s visit spurred the organization of a woman suffrage club in Austin. With fifty-four members by 1911, the Austin group was for several years the only woman suffrage association in Texas.²¹

The suffrage movement in Texas was permanently revitalized beginning in 1912. That year, a group of seventy-five women organized a suffrage society in San Antonio with Eleanor Brackenridge as president. In April 1913, about 150 suffrage advocates from around the state, including women from Dallas, gathered in San Antonio for the first state suffrage convention since 1904. Participants elected Brackenridge as the first president of the revived Texas Woman Suffrage Association and adopted a resolution urging Congress to pass a federal suffrage amendment. Annette Finnigan, who had since returned to Texas, was elected president of the organization in 1914, followed in 1915 by Minnie Fisher Cunningham of New Waverly and Galveston, who served until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. At the state convention in 1916, which was held in Dallas, the group renamed itself the Texas Equal Suffrage Association (TESA) and passed a resolution urging the state Democratic Party to include a

²⁰ “Suffragists Testify as a Legislative Hearing” in Winegarten and McArthur, 119-121.

²¹ Taylor, 25-26.

woman suffrage plank in its platform. The TESA was an affiliate of the NAWSA. In 1916, the NWP also organized a branch in Texas, but this group did not garner much support in the state.²²

At the same time that suffragists were organizing on the state level, women in Dallas were beginning their own campaign for woman suffrage. On March 13, 1913, forty-three Dallas women gathered in a private home to establish the Dallas Equal Suffrage Association (DESA). The women who formed the DESA were white, privileged, and well educated. Some had participated in earlier suffrage initiatives in Texas and others had mothers and aunts who were officers and members of the TERA. Older members of the DESA brought with them years of experience working for civic improvement and social reform; younger members had witnessed their mothers' generation's involvement in community affairs and were eager to build on their legacy. The group elected Margaret Bell Houston Kaufman, granddaughter of Sam Houston, as its first president.²³ Subsequent presidents were: Texas Erwin Armstrong (1914-1916), Katherine Jalonick (1917), Vernice Reppert (1918), and Nora Boren Mahoney (1919).²⁴

In contrast to the public demonstrations that characterized the national suffrage movement, the Dallas suffrage movement was conducted primarily indoors. According to historian Elizabeth York Enstam, "[T]he suffragists in Dallas chose to camouflage their demand for the vote beneath conventional appearances." When they did take their campaign outside, Dallas suffragists did so as part of established community events. For example, beginning in October 1913, the DESA served as the annual host of the activities of the TESA at the State Fair. From their booth decorated in the suffrage colors of white and yellow, suffragists distributed suffrage literature and sold suffrage novelties. They circulated throughout the fairground talking

²² Judith N. McArthur, "Minnie Fisher Cunningham's Back Door Lobby in Texas: Political Maneuvering in a One-Party State" in *One Woman, One Vote*, 318; Taylor, 26-28, 35; The Handbook of Texas Online, accessed 12/31/07.

²³ Enstam, 31.

²⁴ Correspondence with Elizabeth York Enstam, 10/23/08.

to visitors and sometimes giving speeches. Dallas suffragists' efforts at the State Fair and at other popular community events proved to be highly successful in drawing public attention to their cause.²⁵

The growing enthusiasm for suffrage among women in Dallas County and throughout the state did not win uniform public support or lead to easy legislative victory, however. In 1915, opponents of woman suffrage organized a Texas division of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage. Although their organizational efforts did not amount to much, members distributed anti-suffrage literature warning of the dangers to home and family that would ensue if women were to assume an active role in the public sphere by voting. These fears were exploited by the most powerful rivals to woman suffrage – the liquor industry, owners of textile factories (who made extensive use of child laborers), railroad magnates, and political machine bosses, who were all fiercely opposed to the social reforms around which women voters were expected to mobilize. During the 1915 and 1917 sessions of the state legislature, resolutions to adopt a woman suffrage amendment to the state constitution were proposed and the measures failed both times.²⁶

When the U.S. entered World War I in April 1917, Dallas suffragists joined their sisters around the nation in supporting the war effort. DESA officers served as leaders in local wartime organizations. One chaired the Woman's Liberty Loan Committee for the Eleventh Federal Reserve District. Another organized war bond societies in Dallas and Dallas County. As a group, the DESA planted a victory garden and volunteered as chaperones at the canteen for soldiers stationed at Camp Dick. They also worked tirelessly for the Red Cross, sewing surgical dressings and knitting garments to be shipped to soldiers and refugees overseas. At many a wartime DESA

²⁵ Enstam, 30-32.

²⁶ Taylor, 35-37; McArthur, 318; Texas State Library and Archives Commission website.

meeting, the suffrage talk was accompanied by the sound of knitting needles clicking, as Dallas women proudly proclaimed their devotion to their country at the same time that they devoted themselves to the cause of securing their own place as full citizens within it.²⁷

It was not, however, Texas women's wartime contributions, but rather their "back door" lobbying efforts, that led to their first major suffrage victory. When Governor James E. Ferguson, who was opposed both to prohibition and woman suffrage, was impeached in August 1917 for misusing public funds, suffragists saw an opportunity to use the ensuing rift in the Democratic Party to win support for their cause. In the 1918 gubernatorial campaign, Ferguson returned to run against Acting Governor William P. Hobby. TESA president Minnie Fisher Cunningham promised women's support to Hobby in return for his recommendation and endorsement of a primary suffrage bill. (Primary suffrage was appealing to suffrage activists because it could be secured with a vote from the state legislature and the governor's signature. It did not have to be approved in a referendum by the people. Such a measure was particularly appealing in a one-party state like Texas, where primary suffrage was almost equivalent to full suffrage.) Hobby said he would consider proposing a change in the election laws only if he received evidence of support by a majority of state legislators. Dallas women immediately set out to accomplish this task. Led by Nona Boren Mahoney, the DESA got more than 10,000 women in Dallas County to sign a pro-suffrage petition in order to convince Dallas representative and anti-suffragist Barry Miller to vote for the bill. Miller was won over to the suffrage cause and went on to chair the legislature's woman suffrage caucus. Similar efforts by suffragists around the state garnered the support Hobby sought and the primary suffrage bill was introduced in the state legislature on March 12. It passed both houses with large majorities and

²⁷ Enstam, 33-34.

was signed by Hobby on March 26. When the law went into effect on June 26, women in the state of Texas had the right to vote in primary elections.²⁸

Suffragists then turned their attention to conducting an energetic voter registration and education campaign to prepare women to vote in the primary on July 27th. Women in Dallas County organized by school districts, knocking on doors, making phone calls, and providing rides for women to voter registration sites. They also went to women's workplaces to hand out voter registration information. Mothers with small children in tow were joined by women in their eighties and nineties in voter registration lines. In total, 16, 816 women registered to vote in Dallas County, which amounted to 51 percent of the eligible female voting population. African American women were not among the women who registered to vote in Dallas County, as their attempts to do so were thwarted by Dallas County sheriff. In places such as Waxahachie and Houston, they met with more success and were able to register. Some 386,000 women across the state ultimately registered to vote.²⁹

The first woman to register to vote in Dallas County for the 1918 Democratic Party primary was Mrs. Marguerite Reagan Davis. The owner of a successful mortgage loan business, Marguerite Reagan married John Davis in 1904. John Davis went on to serve in the state legislature as a representative from Dallas County. Marguerite Davis was active in numerous women's civic organizations, including the Dallas Federation of Women's Clubs. She was an avid supporter of suffrage and held numerous leadership positions in the DESA, including Recording Secretary (1916 and 1919), second vice-president (1917) and member of the Executive Committee (1915-1917). In 1917, she gave up all other club work to focus on woman

²⁸ McArthur, 319-324; Enstam, 35-36.

²⁹ Enstam, 35-36.

suffrage. So devoted was she to the suffrage cause that her daughter's first words are reported to have been "Votes for Women!"³⁰

The Dallas woman reported to be the first voter in the 1918 primary election was Mrs. Calvin Muse, who voted by absentee ballot.³¹ On election day, thousands of other Dallas County women followed, braving the heat and the crowds to cast their ballots. Many eagerly professed their enthusiasm for voting. "Well," one Dallas woman declared, "I never enjoyed myself so much in my life." An older woman, when told by her husband that they should abandon the voter lines rather than wait the hour or more it was going to take for them to cast their ballots, asserted: "That is not long to wait now. When I have already waited fifty years." The *Dallas Morning News* marveled at women voters' "self-confidence" and their knowledge of the electoral rules and procedures, in contrast to men's apparent confusion about some aspects of the process. The paper noted that women's participation generated great interest among their children in the workings of democratic government and that even though women were asserting their own individual interests in voting, "politics has not divided families."³²

True to their word, suffragists rallied around Hobby and convinced other women voters to do the same. Suffragists called on women to exercise their patriotic duty during wartime. They also linked a vote for Hobby to social reforms of particular concern to women's groups, including prohibition and raising the age of consent, and to women's role as superior moral beings who would secure "good government" for the state of Texas. Women across the state

³⁰ "Mrs. Marguerite R. Davis, State Political Figure, Dies," *Dallas Morning News*, September 30, 1948, section 2, p. 18; Sinclair Moreland, *The Texas Women's Hall of Fame* (Austin: Biographical Press, 1917), 148-149. I am grateful to Elizabeth Enstam for providing me with information about Davis and the Moreland citation.

³¹ "First Dallas Woman to Cast her Vote," *Dallas Morning News*, July 21, 1918, Part One, page 12.

³² "Women Enthusiastic as they Cast Votes," *Dallas Morning News*, July 28, 1918, 7; "Election Results Saturday Demonstrate Enormous Political Power Wielded by Newly Enfranchised Texas Women Voters," *Dallas Times Herald*, July 29, 1918, section 1, p. 4.

turned out for Hobby by a margin of ten to one and played a crucial part in his handy electoral victory.³³

In addition to casting their ballots, hundreds of Dallas County women participated in the precinct conventions held by the Democrats. About a hundred women were elected to serve as delegates to the Dallas County Democratic Convention, which amounted to one-sixth of the delegate total. Several Dallas County precincts resolved to support amendments to the state constitution guaranteeing prohibition and woman suffrage. During the month of August, 233 Democratic county conventions across the state endorsed woman suffrage. In September, the state Democratic convention held in Waco officially supported woman suffrage amendments to both the Texas state and the federal constitutions.³⁴

While Cunningham and the TESA next devoted their energies to securing the passage of the federal suffrage amendment, other Texas suffragists resumed the fight to amend the state constitution to secure full voting rights for women. A woman suffrage bill passed the state legislature in January 1919. Dallas suffragists again organized to mobilize support for the referendum, scheduled for May 24, 1919. DESA members canvassed door-to-door, issued voting reminders by phone, provided transportation to the polls, distributed literature, held public rallies, and gave speeches. To their pleasant surprise, they won widespread support from the Dallas business community and the media. Movie theaters showed pro-suffrage slides, local newspapers covered the story and endorsed the cause, local businesses donated goods and services, and department stores and restaurants provided positive publicity. The referendum campaign in Dallas County was “an unqualified success.” The amendment was approved by 63

³³ Enstam, 35-36; McArthur, 324-330.

³⁴ “Many Women Selected Precinct Delegates,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 28, 1918, 12; “Women Named Delegates to County Meet,” *Dallas Times Herald*, July 28, 1918, section 1, page 4; “About One Hundred Women are Delegates,” *Dallas Morning News*, July 29, 1918, 5; Taylor, 38-39.

percent of the voters in Dallas and 60 percent of the voters in Dallas County. Despite this important victory, the amendment failed statewide. Along with the woman suffrage measure, the amendment included a clause that guaranteed the right to vote only to full citizens. Opposed by foreign-born male residents (many of whom were also anti-prohibition), who were able to vote in the referendum, the amendment fell short of passage by some 25,000 votes.³⁵

The following month, the federal amendment went to the states for ratification. Anti-suffragists again warned of the collapse of civilization if the measure were to pass. A majority of Texas legislators, who learned from the Ferguson-Hobby battle and from years of watching women exert influence in the public sphere that it was to their own political advantage to support women's right to vote, rejected these arguments as out of step with modern times and stood in favor of woman suffrage. On June 28, 1919, Texas became the ninth state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment. Upon the adoption of the Amendment on August 26, 1920, women in Texas and the nation were finally granted full and equal suffrage rights.³⁶

On August 25, 1920, Governor Hobby proclaimed September 4th a state holiday, calling on the people of Texas to "suspend their labors...and honor the indomitable spirit of American womanhood." In the Texas Suffrage Ratification Proclamation establishing the holiday, Hobby proudly declared that it was Texas's ability to blend "the progressiveness of the West, with the Chivalry of the South" that secured for Texas women their primary suffrage rights and that put Texas at the forefront among the southern states in ratifying the Nineteenth Amendment. "The tremendous significance of this achievement," he further pronounced, "affecting as it does the political status of half the people of the nation, and promoting the political well-being of all the

³⁵ Texas State Library and Archives Commission website; Enstam, 36.

³⁶ Texas State Library and Archives Commission website; Taylor, 46.

people of the nation, at once taxes our imagination with its magnitude, and makes our hearts rejoice with its roseate promise for the future.”³⁷

The first woman in Dallas County reported to vote in the November 1920 election was Fannie Emma Peek. Born Fannie Emma Hanna on August 30, 1883 in Jacksboro, Texas, she moved to Dallas County in 1905. In 1906, she married Robert Boon Peek, a farmer and a police officer in the city of Dallas. At the time of the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment, Fannie Emma Peek was employed as a dressmaker for the Helen May Company. She and her husband lived in the Old Dallas County Jail House, where Robert was the county’s jailer. It seems that Fannie Emma was able to benefit from her husband’s position as a civil servant, becoming the first woman to cast a ballot a ballot in Dallas County in the 1920 election.³⁸

Even as the fight for the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment entered into its final stages, suffragists in Dallas, in Texas, and around the nation looked ahead and began to organize to provide women with support as they carried out their voting rights and responsibilities. In March 1919, Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the NAWSA, shared her idea for reconstituting NAWSA into an organization dedicated to educating women about the political process, encouraging women’s political participation, and offering women assistance in matters related to the exercising of their voting rights. Catt’s vision was realized in February 1920 when the NAWSA formed the League of Women Voters. In the meantime, on October 10-11, 1919, the TESA met in the St. Anthony Hotel in San Antonio and reorganized as the Texas League of Women Voters (TLWV). On October 13, Nora Mahoney announced that the Dallas Equal Suffrage Association would become the Dallas League of Women Voters. The Dallas League immediately set out to convince women to pay their poll taxes so they could vote in the next state

³⁷ “Texas Suffrage Ratification Proclamation” in Winegarten and McArthur, 196-198.

³⁸ “Mrs. Peek, 90, Dies in Jacksboro, *Dallas Morning News*, January 31, 1974, 16; Dallas County Records 1910 Census; Dallas County Records, 1921 City Directory.

and national elections. The League also planned to educate women about political candidates' qualifications and platforms. On June 18, 1921, about fifty Dallas women met and formed an organization called the Women's Good Citizenship Association. Several of the officers of this organization were the same ones that reorganized the TESA into the TLWV. The current League of Women Voters of Dallas traces its formal founding to 1938. (In 1938, the organization was known as the Dallas Branch of the Texas League of Women Voters. It became the Dallas County League of Women Voters in 1942 and the League of Women Voters of Dallas in 1953).

Historians have much to learn about the history of the League of Women Voters in Dallas between 1919 and 1938. It can almost surely be concluded that through their participation in the Dallas League of Women Voters, the Women's Good Citizenship Association, and other groups, former Dallas suffragists played an important role in laying the foundation for the current League of Women Voters of Dallas, which is vital to the political participation of women in Dallas County today.³⁹

III. Significance

The passage and ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment forever changed American politics and women's relationship to it. Enfranchisement did not apply to all women equally, since most African American women were prevented from voting in the South until the 1960s; nor did it guarantee women's full citizenship rights, since, for example, women in many states (including Texas) continued to be prevented from serving on juries well into the twentieth century. Nonetheless, the adoption of woman suffrage made an unparalleled contribution to the advancement of the cause of gender equality and to the expansion of democratic participation in

³⁹ League of Women Voters Minutes, A92.247c, Women's Collection of the Blagg-Huey Library, Texas Woman's University. I am grateful to Elizabeth Enstam for providing me with information about the development of the League of Women Voters in Texas and Dallas. Linda Wassenich provided crucial details as well.

the United States. Commemorating the women who fought for suffrage in Dallas County by forming, leading, and joining organizations and by exercising the right to vote is a way to honor the significance of the Nineteenth Amendment to the people of Dallas County, the state of Texas, and the nation as a whole.

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