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THE QUEST FOR WOMAN SUFFRAGE  
IN ARKANSAS

by  
Michele Roussel

December 1974

The struggle for woman suffrage in Arkansas and the entire United States did not end until the twentieth century. It was a long and difficult process but in 1917 with the passage of the Arkansas Primary Suffrage Bill, Arkansas women were allowed to vote in primaries. Then, in 1920 they were given full suffrage rights through the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. In order for these events to occur, women's traditional role had to change in Arkansas and the nation, and it had to be accepted by both men and women. The traditional view of woman given by Anne Scott in her book, The Southern Lady--From Pedestal to Politics, is as follows: "This marvelous creation was described as a submissive wife whose reason for being was to love, honor, obey and occasionally amuse her husband, to bring up his children and manage his household."<sup>1</sup>

By the eve of the Civil War some women were discontented with their assigned role. The 1850's were years of considerable population movement, economic development, and population growth. Political tension, a condition of this decade, was another one of the forces that contributed to the restlessness of women to their assigned role.<sup>2</sup> With the coming of the Civil War the entire southern society became disheveled. The role of southern women particularly underwent a major change; this was true of Arkansas' women.

The men went off to war and the women were forced to provide for themselves and their families. Arkansas women cheered for their soldiers when they marched away and then set to work to furnish the necessities for the fighting men and those left behind.<sup>3</sup> Many of the men who received these cheers did not return. Therefore, a large number of women became widows and were left to provide for themselves. The Civil War and Reconstruction marked the beginning of a widening gulf between the sexes concerning the question of woman's appropriate role. The war had given many women the experience of self-sufficiency and consequently cracked the door open slightly to the "strong-minded" woman.<sup>4</sup> Not only did some women recognize their changing role and welcome it, but also some men realized and greeted the change.

One such man was Miles Legford Langley of Clark County Arkansas. Mr. Langley, a Utilitarian who had been an Abolitionist, introduced into the 1868 Arkansas Constitutional Convention the following amendment:

"All citizens twenty-one years of age, who can read and write the English language, shall be eligible to the elective franchise, and be entitled to equal political and legal rights and privileges."<sup>5</sup> Langley offered these arguments in support of his amendment.

The right of woman... to the elective franchise, etc., is based on the principles of scientific truths. I call special attention to this proposition that woman does not differ from man in any particular that disqualifies her from rightly exercising the same political and legal rights that he does. ... The patriotic faculty is as strong in women, is rightly cultivated as in man as it is gross ignorance or inveterate prejudice, or both combined which denies woman any political or legal right

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which is exercised by men.<sup>5</sup>

In conclusion Langley had this to say: "If woman is equal to man, she is entitled to the same rights. If she is inferior she is in greater need of protection. Therefore, I say, put the ballot into her hand."<sup>7</sup>

This spokesman for woman suffrage was in much earnest, but his remarks brought laughter from his colleague, Eugene Offert of White County made this amendment to Langley's proposal: "Providing that no man who has a wife shall be allowed to vote when the right is exercised by his wife."<sup>8</sup> He also expressed the contention that if both husband and wife were allowed to vote "it will be fraught with consequences which cannot, in all their horror, be anticipated by anyone."<sup>9</sup> Not only were the members of the Constitutional Convention unsympathetic with Langley's amendment, but also the majority of Arkansas women failed to sympathize with Langley and the suffrage cause at this time.<sup>10</sup> Some women, though, became interested in organizing women's clubs and working for social reforms.

Women became very active in the reform movements and began to form religious societies. The southern churches encouraged women to participate in benevolent causes and to work in the temperance movement but opposed the women's rights movement. Because many of the early suffragists were Abolitionists, the southern suffrage movement was unpopular and slow in beginning. When the women's organizations began to produce leaders and followers, a considerable number of working women began to feel the vulnerability of

of their votelessness, and the situation began to change. The conditions were right for an organized suffrage movement.<sup>12</sup>

This became true in Arkansas in the year 1885. After attending the annual convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association the previous year (1884), Mrs. Lizzie Dorcas Fyler decided to organize a suffrage society in Eureka Springs. She was assisted in her efforts by Mrs. Faebe Cousins, a suffrage worker in Missouri. A native of Massachusetts, Mrs. Fyler moved to Missouri and then to Arkansas in 1880. This woman worked hard and courageously for the cause of women's suffrage. Because few people shared her enthusiasm, the society she had formed lasted only a few months. Mrs. Fyler continued to be optimistic and tried to persuade others to her point of view. Perhaps this woman could have made some permanent gains had she been able to continue working for the cause. With her death in November, 1885, the woman's movement in Eureka Springs ended.<sup>13</sup> Since the Eureka Springs Suffrage Society lasted for only a short period, not much is known about it and its activities. In fact, three years later when Mrs. Clara A. McDiarmid organized a suffrage league in Little Rock, the members claimed to be the "path finders."<sup>14</sup>

After moving to Arkansas from the North, Mrs. McDiarmid discovered she was not permitted to vote in any elections or to practice law in the courts. Mrs. McDiarmid did not passively resign herself to her new status but instead set up an office in Little Rock to give free legal advice to women. It was also at this time that she organized

the first suffrage league in Little Rock.

This Little Rock organization was apparently active and made new inroads. The members of the suffrage association affiliated with the National Woman Suffrage Association and sent delegates to the national conventions. When Mrs. Lida A. Merriwether of Tennessee "gave twelve lectures under the auspices of the National Association" in 1896 the six members of the league marched down Markham and Main Streets announcing the time and place of the lectures. Mrs. Francis A. Griffin of Alabama also spoke in Arkansas on the same topic as Mrs. Merriwether. Besides these activities, members of the league published a weekly newspaper.

In March of 1888 the Woman's Chronicle, which was edited and managed by Miss Catherine Campbell Cunningham, Mrs. Burt Brooks, and Maryet H. Cahoon, began to be published. The paper, devoted to the interests of women and favoring everything pertaining to "true womanhood, both in the home and before the world," was the first one published by southern women that took a "decided and equivocal stand for woman suffrage."<sup>16</sup> During the five years of the Chronicle's existence, it contained "suffrage news, reprinted speeches of the suffrage leaders and gave reports of meetings."<sup>17</sup>

In 1892, the National American Woman Suffrage Association Committee on Southern Work became aware of the Chronicle's merit and requested copies for each committee member. Members of the Arkansas Legislature also received courtesy copies of the paper when a session was in progress.<sup>18</sup>

Interested persons could subscribe to the Woman's Chronicle by paying a dollar per year. Publication of the paper ceased in 1893 with Miss Summington's death.<sup>19</sup> Work for women suffrage continued though, and Little Rock continued to be the center of suffrage activity in the 1890's.

The capital city association held frequent meetings at which "spirited progress, consisting of talks, original papers, readings and recitations were rendered by Mrs. McDiarmid, Miss Fannie Chum and others active in the movement."<sup>20</sup> At this time the League was unable to accomplish one of its objectives, which was forming auxiliary leagues throughout Arkansas. In 1893 Mrs. McDiarmid thought that societies would soon be organized in Hot Springs, Conway, Mareks Springs, and Fort Smith, since some people in these towns had expressed an interest in the suffrage movement.<sup>21</sup> Evidently these societies did not materialize, because the report on the work in Arkansas at the 1895 National Association meeting stated that no more organizations had been formed in Arkansas.<sup>22</sup>

Finding supporters for the cause was a difficult task. A nineteenth century suffragist needed courage and determination in order to to endure social disapproval and ridicule. Indifference was a major obstacle to the suffragists. An editorial in the Chronicle stated: "One of the greatest hindrances to the movement is found in the apathy manifested by numbers of women. . . . Custom made it unwomanly for them to think and act for themselves as rational beings and they are not yet fully awake to the vital importance



of the movement.<sup>23</sup> Many people did not support this movement, and thought they had valid arguments in opposing this cause.

One argument was that the woman's place was in the home and if she was given the right to vote, she would become involved in politics and neglect her home. Some felt that politics was too dirty for women and that woman suffrage was contrary to the teachings of the Bible.

On the other hand, there were those who thought women should have the vote since the United States was supposedly a democracy where people should have a voice in making the laws. Others felt that women's votes would clean up politics and help instigate the necessary reforms. Some thought women should be able to vote if Negroes could. Arkansas women voiced their opinion concerning the right to vote. Fanny L. Chunn believed that

women should have the ballot to help make laws by which she can represent herself. ... We believe that woman should have the ballot, because we think God meant from the beginning she should be equal with men in all things, social, religious, and political, everything in which there is no sex.<sup>23</sup>

Kate H. Stafford of Little Rock had this to say:

As long as laws are made by men only, when the interests of woman and man conflict, woman will be forced to the wall. The Golden Rule demands justice, yet the clergy are our worst oppressors by their teachings.<sup>24</sup>

Another view was given by Jean Jennings also of Little Rock.

I need the ballot because I am a human being, although only a woman. I am the daughter of a woman, the sister of women, I have the care of a little woman child, I am the wife of a man and the mother of a boy, and I need to vote to do my duty to all these and society.<sup>25</sup>

These individuals who advocated woman suffrage did help to advance the cause, but perhaps the strongest supporter of the suffrage movement in Arkansas were members of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. In fact, many suffrage organizations were originally branches off a temperance organization and drew a sizable portion of their membership from the WCTU. The workers in the temperance movement were quick to realize that the ballot was one of the best methods of fighting for temperance legislation. In her article about the history of woman suffrage, Mrs. S. S. Wassel said: "The prohibitionist have been the leaven in the great cause, working and waiting for opportunity to do great work."<sup>27</sup> Since a large number of women were active in both movements there was a rapport between the two.

Other supporters were found in the Arkansas legislature. Senator E. P. Hill in 1891 introduced Senate Bill No. 232 entitled "An Act to Confer Right of Suffrage Upon White Women." This measure was tabled after its second reading. Senator M. M. Erwin introduced into the same session an act to "allow females to serve on school boards." It was referred to the Judiciary Committee and never acted upon.<sup>29</sup> A third senator, J. P. Russ introduced "an Act to give white women the right to vote and hold offices and all other rights the same as accorded to male citizens." It was defeated by a vote of four for, fourteen against and fourteen not voting.<sup>30</sup>

Later in 1893 Senator Hill introduced a new bill, No. 310, that would "confer the right of school suffrage

on the women of Arkansas and to make them eligible to membership on school boards." The bill passed sixteen to nine and was sent to the House to be acted upon. The House refused to go along with the Senate by postponing action on the bill indefinitely.<sup>31</sup> Passage of the Three-Mile Law was effected in 1895. This law permitted adult women and men to petition the county court to remove all saloons from a radius of three miles of a designated church or school house.<sup>32</sup> In effect this gave women the right to "vote" (by signing and circulating petitions) for removal of particular saloon from a certain location.

Furthermore, in 1899, Senator Turner Butler presented Senate Joint Resolution No. 5, proposing an amendment to the constitution granting women the right of suffrage in school elections. The bill was read twice and referred to the committee on Constitutional Amendments. On February 17, 1899, Senator Hardy, chairman of the committee, stated that "after due consideration," the committee wished to submit the report "that this bill do not pass." Senator Butler was then allowed to withdraw Joint Resolution No. 5 and introduce Joint Senate Resolution No. 8, which was an amendment providing for women to vote in school elections and on questions involving moral issues. It was referred to the same committee and ultimately received the same fate as Senate Resolution No. 5.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, when the nineteenth century ended, there was no woman suffrage legislation and no real leader

for the movement since Mrs. McDiarmid's death in 1899. Without her enthusiastic leadership, suffrage activity came to a standstill and practically disappeared. Mrs. Chester Jennings wrote an occasional article that was printed in various papers in the state.<sup>34</sup> Other than this, there was not much activity.

Interest in the movement was rekindled in 1911, when Mrs. D. D. Terry of Little Rock wrote an article that was published in the Arkansas Gazette. This article, which demanded suffrage for women, indirectly brought about the formation of the Political Equality League. After the publication of this article, Mrs. J. W. Markwell called a public meeting in one of Little Rock's Methodist churches. The women who met decided to form the Political Equality League and elected Miss Mary Spargo as their president. They also voted to ask permission to speak at the House Constitutional Committee's hearing on an equal suffrage bill pending in that committee. The women had no part in initiating the measure, but after they received permission to speak at its hearing, they began to work diligently for its passage.

This equal suffrage bill was introduced by Representatives George L. Grant (Jackson County) and George P. Whittington (Garland County). At first no one had considered it a serious resolution, but both representatives made it known that they were very serious about the resolution. The Arkansas Democrat recorded Mr. Whittington as saying: "If every Negro in the state is allowed to cast his vote

on questions of state importance, even though they may not own a foot of land or possess enough property to be recorded on the assessor's books, then I see no reason why women should not be allowed to vote."<sup>35</sup> An editorial in the Democrat had this to say about the bill and the suffragists:

...the great majority of the American women are content to be a potent influence in managing the affairs of the country, and care nothing for the right to cast a ballot. ...

It is the woman without home life, more often, who must needs have something to employ her mind, and having, tired of theatre parties, card parties, and peedles, her mind naturally reverts to the suffrage question.<sup>36</sup>

The Democrat went on to say that it is not likely that woman suffrage will be attained in this generation or the the next, and that "the surest safeguard any woman can have is the protection and fidelity of some good man."<sup>37</sup>

Apparently this editorial did not have very much effect upon the results of the hearing between the members of the suffrage league and the Judiciary Committee for the Gazette reported the outcome of the meeting in these words:

Overcome by feminine attractiveness and overpowered by forceful argument, the Constitutional Committee of the House, known as the "old guard," went down to defeat...before a committee from the Woman's Political Equality League and with meekly bowed heads and subdued voices voted that the bill proposing an amendment to the constitution to give women the right to vote recommended favorable to the House.<sup>38</sup>

Mrs. Minnie U. Rutherford and Miss Alice Gatlin of the Little Rock League made eloquent speeches before the committee. Mrs. Rutherford made the point that in

Colorado where women had the vote, more "elevating and uplifting reforms laws had been passed."<sup>39</sup> Miss Gatlin argued that "economic questions dealing with pure food laws, street cleaning departments, the tenement evils, and other municipal questions were even <sup>more</sup> vital subjects to women than men, because they struck at the home, of which woman is the ruler."<sup>40</sup> After these effective arguments, the House Constitutional Committee agreed to recommend the resolution for House consideration.

When the resolution came before the House, Representative Hurst (Washington County) made it known that he was totally against the resolution. He said it was introduced in a spirit of fun and returned by the Constitutional Committee in a spirit of fun and therefore should be killed.<sup>41</sup> Representative Whittington denied that any levity had gone into preparing such an important bill. Hurst replied that "if the measure passes, the entire power of the county will be vested in cities and towns for the reason that countrywomen will not vote."<sup>42</sup> He went on to say that the society belles might be able to make election day a special event, but the majority of women would continue the same way of not voting.<sup>43</sup>

Representative Grant retaliated by emphasizing that women had to pay taxes to support the government but had no voice in its conduct. Grant presented another common argument: "At present she has not as much voice as her negro sic servant. ... Are you going to say that your wife or sister has not the intelligence of the old

uncle who mows your lawn and tends to your horses?

George F. Brown of Cleveland County opposed the resolution for two reasons. The first reason was because it did not require women to pay a poll tax in order to vote; furthermore, the woman to whom he was most inclined to listen were opposed to the measure. Representative Clark (Lonoke County), who also opposed the bill, said "it is not in the interests of women to vote."<sup>45</sup> Then Representative Joseph Hardage of Clark County discovered the "joker." Hardage informed his colleagues that if they passed this resolution, they would repeal the part of the constitution which said that the legal voters shall be men. They would in fact make the entire Arkansas electorate female. After the legislators heard this, the bill had no chance. It was defeated by a vote of sixty-three to thirteen.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the women of the League would have to wait two more years until the next legislative session to renew their attempt to get suffrage legislations passed.

In the meantime they began to hold semi-monthly meetings in the Public Library. One gathering was held in the afternoon and the other at night to enable working women, teachers, and men to attend. Most of the League's activity centered on studying important local, state, and national affairs and having different speakers address the members. In 1913 the suffragists again turned their energy and activities towards influencing the members of the Arkansas General Assembly.

Robert Martin (Pulaski County) introduced an equal suffrage resolution into the House, and E. M. Carl-Lee

of Augusta introduced one into the Senate. Martin's resolution was referred to the Committee on Constitutional Amendments, which returned the recommendation that the measure pass. Representative Martin was one of the chief supporters and speakers for the bill. He declared that many women own property and pay taxes and should be entitled to have some voice in the questions concerning their property.<sup>47</sup> Representative Westmoreland (Sebastian County) charged that to submit this question to the voters would cost a considerable amount that would be wasted since the people would surely reject it. He also charged "that if women are allowed to vote, the finest women in Arkansas would be thrown in contact with inmates of resorts and negresses at the polls."<sup>48</sup>

George Grant (Jackson County) defended the bill by saying: "If women are given the ballot they will clean up Arkansas as the state has never been cleaned before."<sup>49</sup> Representative Boggs of Little River County said he had found no general demand for women suffrage. Representative Kidder (Pulaski County) added that "the manhood of Arkansas in the future as in the past, ... can be depended upon to protect the womanhood of Arkansas."<sup>50</sup> In conclusion, Davis of Lafayette County stated that he did not understand why women who were property owners could not vote when a "shiftless, and irresponsible negro [sic] could."<sup>51</sup> The arguments in favor of the resolution apparently were not very convincing at this time because the vote was thirty-five for and fifty-five against.<sup>52</sup>



The Senate's attitude toward Senator Carl-Lee's resolution was more favorable. The senators passed the resolution without debate nineteen to nine. It was the House that ended women's hope for the vote that year when it failed to act on Senator Carl-Lee's resolution.

The year, 1913, seems to have been a somewhat stagnant year for woman suffrage advocates as far as progress in the state legislature was concerned. Two years had passed since the last session, but still not enough support could be mustered in the legislature to pass an equal suffrage measure. The two state newspapers, the Arkansas Gazette and the Arkansas Democrat, in covering the discussion of the 1913 suffrage bills, stated that there had been no new arguments, and that both sides had used the same arguments they had two years before. The Arkansas suffragists did not give up but began to expand their activities.

One new activity was the observance of the National Suffrage May Day in 1914. This event was held on the steps of the Old State House. The crowd that assembled stood two hours and a half listening to leading Little Rock men and women ask for the right of suffrage for Arkansas women. Mrs. S. S. Thomas and Mrs. Fleure Cornelius Feuguay were the principal speakers at a luncheon held at the New Capital Hotel. 53

Another activity was a joint conference between the representatives of the Little Rock and Hot Springs leagues to set up a state association. The meeting was a success, for in October the Arkansas Woman Suffrage Association

was formed. Little Rock was the site of the first annual convention in 1915. The main business of the convention was to make plans concerning work with the legislature.<sup>54</sup>

The legislators had been in session earlier that year and had considered a suffrage measure. Senator George Garrett of Okalona introduced a bill that would amend the Arkansas Constitution to provide equal suffrage for men and women.<sup>55</sup> Garrett, in supporting his bill, pointed out that votes for women would mean the raising of moral standards. He declared "that the time has come to allow the 'larger half' of the population, now disfranchised, the right of participating in the affairs of the state and nation."<sup>56</sup>

Senator Irison C. Burgess, who opposed the measure stated that the rural woman would not vote. He also asserted that the bill would "turn the negro [sic] woman loose to vote and more of them will vote than white women."<sup>57</sup> The Senator also stressed that the women were "queens of the home" and that their place was there.<sup>58</sup>

Another senator, Clyde L. Going, said that it was only right that women should be given the right to be heard. He believed the question of woman suffrage should be submitted to the people of the state to see how they felt about it. Senator E. H. Greathouse of Washington County stated: "Women have been the power behind the throne on all good laws. I challenge anyone to show that where they have worked for a measure it was not a good measure-- measures that meant better homes."<sup>59</sup> In answering the

statement made about Negro women's votes, the Senator had this to say: "The Anglo-Saxon race has always taken care of its problems and it will take care of the Negro question as well."<sup>60</sup> The senators voted to pass the bill by a vote of twenty-three to twelve.

Next, the measure had to pass the House. It was submitted to the members of the House at a special night session. The galleries were filled with eager suffragists and interested persons, but an atmosphere of hilarity prevailed upon the House floor. The representatives continually shouted and laughed while some of their colleagues attempted to make speeches. The Speaker even broke his gavel attempting to stop the uproar. This was the prevailing situation when Mrs. T. T. Cotnam, representing the Women's Equality League, was granted the floor. Mrs. Cotnam concisely sketched the growth of the suffrage movement and presented arguments in behalf of the movement. Her speech had a convincing effect upon those who heard her.<sup>61</sup>

Representative Gray of Independence County began with the story of Eve and showed how women had led men astray even on down to their time.<sup>62</sup> On a comical note, "Speaker Sawyer announced that Mr. Hately of Polk, who had fiddled his way into the legislature, would play for the assembly."<sup>63</sup> Mr. Hately, when asked if he was going to play for or against woman suffrage, answered that "he was going to vote for it and that if fiddling would make it win he had plenty of string."<sup>64</sup> By a vote of fifty-one to eighteen, the House members made it possible for the

amendment to be voted upon by the people.

At first it seemed as though the suffragists had experienced a real victory, but then we discovered that only three amendments can be presented to the people at an election. The suffragists had tried to speed the bill through the legislature, but much to their disappointment three amendments had already been filed with the Secretary of State by the time the House passed the bill. Although Arkansas women did not gain the right to vote in 1915, they evidently found new and promising support in the legislature.

This proved true when both Houses of the Arkansas Legislature voted to pass the Primary Suffrage Bill in 1917. The bill, introduced by Representative John A. Riggs of Hot Springs, gave Arkansas women the franchise in all primary elections as long as they could meet the same qualifications as male voters, including the payment of a poll tax.<sup>65</sup> The equal suffrage bills in previous years had required an amendment to the Arkansas Constitution; and therefore, had to be passed by the legislators as well as the voters. Since primaries were made possible through statutory law, they could be amended by a vote of approval by both legislative houses.<sup>66</sup> This was a new and different type of suffrage bill. The idea originated with a Louisiana woman in 1912.

In June, 1912, Miss Kate Gordon offered a Primary Suffrage Bill to substitute for a constitutional amendment that was pending in the Louisiana Legislature.<sup>67</sup> Next, Mr. William Hedges, then Associate Justice of the Court of Civil Appeals, Texarkana, Texas, discovered that the Texas

Constitution did not prevent women from voting in primary elections. Senator O. S. Lattimore subsequently presented a primary bill to the Texas Legislature.<sup>68</sup> A Gazette reporter, Earl E. Plowman, read a story about the bill and decided to see if a similar one was possible in Arkansas. The Hot Springs New Era states that "Mr. Plowman was not a suffragist but saw a good story for his paper and wanted it."<sup>69</sup> Knowing that Representative Riggs was an advocate of woman suffrage, Plowman contacted him and presented his idea. Riggs evidently went along with the idea because on February 7, 1917 he introduced the Primary Suffrage Bill.

Reaction to the bill was most favorable. The New Era stated February 10, 1917 that "there is a big demand on the floor of the House that the measure be brought up" and that there was "an effort being made to have the bill made a special order for the coming Monday." In an editorial the Gazette gave its support by writing: "Let the legislature take a great step forward by giving the overwhelming majority of the white women of Arkansas the privilege of having a voice in the selection of our officers."<sup>70</sup>

Suffragists themselves were excited about the bill. A large number of them from other sections of the state arrived in Little Rock to be present when the bill came up for debate.

Representative Claude Brinton (Craighead County) spoke for the measure when it came before the House. He urged that Arkansas should be the first of the southern states to "remove the bandages around the feet of our women" and give them the right to vote.<sup>71</sup> J. A. Choate of White County declared that "politics is too dirty for some

men to dabble in, " and objected to the fair women of the country becoming involved in it. Oscar Robbins, also of White County, differed in opinion with his colleague. He believed that "if it is right for the negro sic to vote, then it is right for the white woman to vote and it is unchivalrous and unjust to deny them the privilege."<sup>72</sup> When the debate ended and the votes were counted, the bill passed with seventy-one affirmative votes and nineteen opposed. The bill was then sent to the Senate for consideration.

The Senate considered two suffrage measures that would give women the right to vote in primaries. One was the Riggs bill and the other was a bill introduced by George W. Garrett. The two bills were almost identical but differed in that the Riggs required that women must pay a poll tax and the Garrett bill did not. Both bills were read twice and referred to the Committee on Elections.

The Committee on Elections returned the Riggs bill with three amendments and failed to recommend it. The first amendments provided that if 12% of the Arkansas voters signed petitions and filed them with the Secretary of State, asking that the measure be presented to the people, it would be voted upon in the next general election. Another amendment stated that if the people did not petition to put the bill to a vote, it would become effective in ninety days. Last of all, the third amendment required that when women voted, they had to declare they belonged to the party in whose primary they were casting their vote.<sup>73</sup>

Debate on the Riggs bill lasted two hours.

Senator George F. Jones defended the constitutionality of the bill which had been questioned by some of his colleagues. Senator Walker Smith of Magnolia stated that he did not believe women wanted to vote and that "too many senators intend to vote for the bill because of sentiment." On the other hand, Senator B. H. Greathouse said equal suffrage was favored by the Democratic leaders and that he was for any measure that would give women a part in public affairs.<sup>74</sup>

A woman suffrage victory occurred when the Arkansas senators voted seventeen to fifteen to approve the amended Riggs bill.<sup>75</sup> Following this eventful decision, the Senate debated the Garrett bill and decided to add some amendments to it. Senator Garrett objected to the amending of his bill (addition of the poll tax as a voting qualification) because it would make his practically the same as Mr. Riggs's bill. Garrett said his purpose in introducing the measure was to have two different bills before the Governor, who would then select the one he felt was the best. Garrett went on to say that he would rather have his bill killed than amended.<sup>76</sup>

Riggs' bill was then sent back to the House to be voted on again. The New Era explains the events that took place on March 2, 1917.

The House on yesterday concurred in the Senate amendments to the Primary Suffrage Bill amid the greatest legislative uproar ever witnessed in the Arkansas Assembly. . . . Yesterday's minority filibuster was by far the greatest of its kind ever witnessed in the Arkansas Assembly. Action was blocked by the majority by every parliamentary

movement known and notwithstanding the fact that a big majority favored the bill it was delayed for hours by the opposition.<sup>77</sup>

The next day it was decided that the House's approval the day before had only approved the Senate's amendments. Therefore the House voted again and approved the bill.

To celebrate the support received in the legislature and the passage of the Primary Suffrage Bill, a large suffrage rally was held at the Marion Hotel. It was here that Governor Brough signed the bill into law. Not only was there a meeting at the hotel, but an automobile parade featuring John A. Riggs as the central figure processed through downtown Little Rock.

The passage of the Arkansas Primary Suffrage Bill was unique. It was the first of its kind to be passed in the South. An editorial from the St. Louis Post Dispatch had this to say about the bill: "In the south [sic] the Arkansas plan may be expected to become as popular as the Illinois plan has already prove in the north [sic]"<sup>78</sup> In addition an editorial in the Democrat pointed out that the Riggs bill opened the way for complete enfranchisement. Since this was such a different type bill from the previous suffrage bills considered, the question arises why did Representative Riggs introduce the bill and work so diligently for its passage.

One possible answer is that Riggs was pressured by his local suffrage league. A look at the history of Hot Springs' suffrage organization shows that in 1913 a Political Equality League was formed there. Members of the League



helped to organize the state association in 1914 and Mrs. J. P. Henry was elected the first Corresponding Secretary. Mrs. Elizabeth Miller of Little Rock, a suffrage speaker and organizer of prominence, made two speech in Hot Springs about the same time as the Primary Bill was introduced by Riggs. The New Era stated that Mrs. Miller "put new life into the suffrage cause in Hot Springs" and that as a result many joined the local club.<sup>79</sup> Furthermore, in a personal interview, Miss Adele Johnson, who was an active member of the Hot Springs League, stated that they had a small group that held meetings and talked things over. Miss Johnson also said that the women never really felt like they had accomplished anything, but remained organized to show that they were interested in the vote. She went on to emphasize the fact that the women who belonged to the Hot Springs League were small in influence and that most of the people in Hot Springs thought the organization was silly and were not interested at all.<sup>80</sup> It would seem from the above evidence that Representative Riggs did not introduce the bill due to strong pressure from a suffrage organization in Hot Springs. Actually the introduction of the bill influenced the growth and work of the club.

Sources reveal that Mr. Riggs was probably enthusiastic about his bill because he wanted "to do justice to the women of Arkansas," and in order "to keep a promise to his mother that if he ever was elected to the Legislature he would introduce and work for one."<sup>81</sup> Whatever the real reason was, Arkansas did not stop at this

point but continued to work for full woman suffrage.

In 1918 a new state constitution containing a clause that would give Arkansas women full suffrage rights, was submitted to the voters but failed to pass.<sup>82</sup> The Senate passed a full suffrage bill presented by Representative Riggs, C. V. Holloway, Buch Andrews, and G. C. Carter in January 1919 by a vote of twenty-seven to one. The House passed it in February seventy-three to three. Defeat of the bill came in November of 1920 when it went before the voters.<sup>83</sup>

Although Arkansas women failed to achieve full suffrage through amendment of the Arkansas Constitution, they did receive it through amendment to the United States Constitution. In June of 1919 the United States Congress submitted the Nineteenth Amendment to the states for ratification. A special session of the Arkansas Legislature was called in July to consider ratifying the amendment. When the Legislature met July 28, Arkansas became the twelfth state to approve the Equal suffrage amendment. Women of Arkansas and the other states received full suffrage rights in August, 1920 when the Nineteenth Amendment became a part of the United States Constitution.

Thus the women in Arkansas were finally given the vote and therefore able to have a voice and influence in their government. The legislators passed the necessary laws but it was the suffrage workers who supplied the work and pressure necessary to persuade a large portion of the populace and legislators to their point of view. In Arkansas the center of women suffrage was the capital city of Little Rock,

which was located in the central part of the state and had the largest population of any Arkansas city. There were more women there who had the time and means necessary to be active in such a cause.

More and more women were attending college and hearing of new and forthcoming ideas. Many Arkansas women saw things wrong in their world and they wanted to do something about these evils. A large number of women reacted by affiliating with the temperance organizations and women's clubs which later branched out into suffrage work.

Acquiring suffrage rights for Arkansas women had been a long process but it still was not over. Many women were indifferent to their new right and many were unprepared to exercise it. This is not hard to understand because the woman suffrage thrust began at a time most of the people saw women in the Victorian image. In the years following the turn of the century this image began to slowly change. As a result of this it became more acceptable for women to do things they had never been able to do before in society. The following statement exemplifies the change in attitude toward women's rights. When a man was asked why he favored equal suffrage he replied: "Good gracious alive, ... the idea of asking a thinking individual such a question in the twentieth century. ... There is no logical reason why we should not have equal suffrage and innumerable reasons why we should."<sup>84</sup> The attitude toward woman suffrage had certainly changed.

BACKNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Anne F. Scott, The Southern Lady--From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1970) p.4. Cited hereafter as Scott, Pedestal.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>3</sup>David Y. Thomas, Arkansas In War and Reconstruction, (Little Rock: Daughters of the Confederacy, Arkansas, 1926), p.351.

<sup>4</sup>Scott, Pedestal, p. 101.

<sup>5</sup>Debate and Proceedings of the Convention Which Assembled at Little Rock January 7, 1868 Under the Provisions of the Act of Congress of March 2, 1867 and the Acts of March 23 and July 19, 1867 Supplementary thereto to Form a Constitution for the State of Arkansas, (Little Rock, 1868), p. 704. Utilitarians believe that the value of anything is determined by its usefulness. They also believe that the purpose of all action should be to bring about the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Mr. Langley desired universal suffrage for all men and women.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 708.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Letter to Susan B. Anthony from Miles L. Langley contained in the History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. III, pp. 805-6.

<sup>11</sup>Scott, Pedestal, p. 137.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 176

<sup>13</sup>Elizabeth A. Taylor, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Arkansas," Arkansas Historical Quarterly 15 (Spring 1956), p. 20. Cited hereafter as Taylor, "Movement."

<sup>14</sup>Mrs. T. T. Cotnam, "History of Woman Suffrage in Arkansas," Gazette, 20 November 1919, p. 14, Centennial edition. Cited hereafter as Cotnam, "Woman Suffrage."

<sup>15</sup>Mrs. S. S. Wassel, "History of Woman Suffrage In Arkansas," Arkansas Gazette, February 19, 1919, p. 30.

Cited hereafter as Wassel, "History," Cotnam, "Woman Suffrage," says that Mrs. McDiarmid attracted forty adherents. It is not clear but she probably means forty followers instead of actual member of the Little Rock league.

<sup>16</sup>Wassell, "History," p. 30.

<sup>17</sup>Taylor, "Movement," p. 22.

<sup>18</sup>Wassel, "History," p. 30.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. The Chronicle had been encouraged and sustained by Miss Cunningham's father, Charles E. Cunningham.

<sup>20</sup>Proceedings of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1894, p. 45 as quoted from Taylor, "Movement," p. 22.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 1893, p. 132 quoted from Taylor, "Movement," p. 23.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 1895, p. 53 quoted from Taylor, "Movement," p. 23.

<sup>23</sup>Woman's Chronicle 4 (February 1892) p. 1 as quoted from Taylor, "Movement," p. 26.

<sup>24</sup>Woman's Journal 26 (January 1895) p. 27.

<sup>25</sup>Joshephine K. Henry, "Women of the New South," The Arena 12 (February 1895) p. 358. The clergy seemed to emphasize doing things to serve others rather than trying to gain more rights. In a search through the minutes of the Arkansas Baptist Convention and the minutes of the Methodist--Episcopal Convention meetings 1895-1920, I could find no mention of the woman suffrage movement. The Baptists mostly mentioned their work in the WNU.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 359.

<sup>27</sup>Wassel, "History," p. 30. Through my research I found that many of the active member in the suffrage leagues were interested in and worked in the temperance movement.

<sup>28</sup>Senate Journal, General Assembly, 1891, p. 344. Cited hereafter as Senate Journal.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 640.

<sup>30</sup>Catherine Cunningham, "Arkansas" History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. IV, p. 476. Cited hereafter as Cunningham, "Arkansas."

<sup>31</sup>Senate Journal, 1893, p. 603.

<sup>32</sup>Public and Private Acts and Joint Resolutions and Memorials of the General Assembly of the State of Arkansas, (Little Rock: Brown Printing, 1895) p. 86.

<sup>33</sup>Senate Journal, 1899, pp. 65, 94, 150. The state newspapers seemed to be indifferent about the bills introduced in the 1890's since the bills were barely mentioned in the newspapers.

<sup>34</sup>Mrs. T. T. Cotnam and Mrs. O. F. Ellington, "Arkansas," History of Woman Suffrage, Vol. VI, p. 16. Cited hereafter as Cotnam and Ellington "Arkansas."

<sup>35</sup>Arkansas Democrat, January 21, 1911. Cited hereafter as Democrat.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., ed., February 15, 1911, p.4.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Arkansas Gazette, March 16, 1911, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., April 13, p.3.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid. It seems as though the two Representatives were earnest in their desire to introduce and pass this bill. The Gazette reports them as being sincere and later in 1913 when another equal suffrage resolution was before the House Grant speaks in its defense and seems somewhat bitter about the defeat of his bill in 1911.

<sup>47</sup>Gazette, February 20, 1913, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>House Journal, Arkansas General Assembly, 1911, p. 578.

<sup>53</sup>Some of the speakers who gave short talks were as follows: Mrs. George Pratho, Mrs. T. T. Cotnam, Miss Josephine

Miller, Mrs. D. D. Terry, Mrs. S. S. Wassel, Mr. J. D. Gibson, Rabbi Louis Wiż, J. F. Loughborough, Robert E. Wait and others.

<sup>54</sup>Cotnam and Ellington, "Arkansas," pp. 16-17.

<sup>55</sup>Since this was an amendment to the Arkansas Constitution, the amendment would have to be voted on by the voters in the next general election if it was first passed by the legislature.

<sup>56</sup>Democrat, February 1, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 10. Black men were in actuality disfranchised at this time through such measures as the poll tax and discrimination. There was no White Primary Law in Arkansas.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid.

<sup>61</sup>Gazette, February 6, 1915, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>(Hot Springs) New Era, February 8, 1917, p. 1. Cited hereafter as New Era. Women would have to meet the age, residence and citizenship requirements.

<sup>66</sup>There are two types of law, constitutional and statutory. Constitutional laws are the basic laws set forth in a constitution. Statutory laws are those established by a legislative body and in addition to the already established constitutional law. Changing the constitutional law in Arkansas requires that the Arkansas Legislature first approves the change and then the amendment must be approved by the people in the next general election. Statutory law in Arkansas can be changed simply by both Houses voting their approval.

<sup>67</sup>Cotnam and Ellington, "Arkansas," p. 24. Miss Gordon's proposal never made it out of committee.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid. The bill was defeated.

<sup>69</sup>New Era, February 19, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup>Gazette, ed., February 14, 1917.

<sup>71</sup>Democrat, February 16, p. 2.

<sup>72</sup>Gazette, ed., February 17, 1917.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., February 26, p.3.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., February 28, 1917, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid. Two member os the Senate, Senators Irison C. Burgess and Samuel C. Sims, who were known to be against the suffrage bill were absent due to bribery charges against them.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., the bill was killed later.

<sup>77</sup>New Era, March 3, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., ed., March 12, p. 4. The Illinois plan allowed women to vote for certain state officers.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., February 7, 1917, p. 1.

<sup>80</sup>Interview with Miss Adele Johnson, Hot Springs, Arkansas, 24 October 1974.

<sup>81</sup>Cotnam and Ellington, "Arkansas," p. 24. Mrs. D. D. Terry said in a personal interview that she recalled that this was the reason Mr. Riggs had introduced and worked for the Primary Bill. I find no concrete proof for any other answer as to why Riggs introduced the bill.

<sup>82</sup>It is thought that the suffrage clause had little effect on the defeat of the Constitution. Voting was light due to bad weather and influenza. Many voters did not like provisions in the constitution pertaining to taxation, prohibition, and initiative and referendum.

<sup>83</sup>The amendment received more votes than any other amendment up for consideration but did not receive a majority of the largest number of votes cast at the election. In the case of Brick vs Hill the Arkansas Supreme Court declared "that under the initiative and referendum amendment of 1910 only those submitted by initiative and referendum." In 1926 the amendment was ruled to be in force. Taylor, "Movement," p. 52.

<sup>84</sup>New Era, March 3, 1917, p.5.



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