

THE WOMAN SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT IN FLORIDA

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EARLY IN THE nineteenth century many persons began feeling acute dissatisfaction with the status of American women. Because of this sentiment they wrote, spoke, and organized for the purpose of changing this status. By the latter part of the century their efforts were producing results. In ever increasing numbers women were attending institutions of higher learning. They were engaging in many professional and business activities. In the political realm also their status was improving, and a few states were even allowing them to vote.¹

It was during this period that the movement for woman suffrage reached most of the southern states. For the first time southern women began manifesting interest in their own enfranchisement, and in some states they formed suffrage societies. This agitation, often instigated by a few strong-minded individuals, sometimes proved abortive and productive of few tangible gains. Nevertheless it represented a beginning and caused many southern people to give serious consideration to the question of votes-for-women.

The woman suffrage movement in Florida originated in Tampa through the initiative of Mrs. Ella C. Chamberlain of that city. In 1892 Mrs. Chamberlain attended a suffrage conference in Des Moines, Iowa, and while there resolved to begin crusading in her home state, especially in the realm of press and organizational work.²

Upon returning to Tampa she secured permission to write a column for a newspaper. When it was suggested that she write about topics of interest to women and children, Mrs. Chamberlain replied that "the world was not suffering for another cake recipe

1. During the 1890's three states permitted women to vote. In 1890 the territory of Wyoming was admitted to statehood with woman suffrage. In 1893 and 1896 Colorado and Idaho adopted constitutional amendments enfranchising women.

2. *Woman's Journal* (Boston and Chicago, 1870-1917), XXIV (February 4, 1893), 34.

and the children seemed to be getting along better than the women." She resolved, therefore, to devote her column to women's rights, especially their right to vote. She was allowed to do this in spite of the fact that contemporary public opinion evidenced little sympathy for her feminist ideas.³

Some time later, at a social gathering, Mrs. Chamberlain was asked to give a recitation. Taking "taxation without representation" as her theme, she delivered a speech on woman suffrage. So favorably did she impress her audience that one of the men present suggested the formation of an equal suffrage society. The group then formed a club of twenty members, eight of whom were men. Mrs. Chamberlain was elected president of this newly created organization, which came to be known as the Florida Woman Suffrage Association.⁴

The Florida Woman Suffrage Association, organized January, 1893, affiliated with the National American Woman Suffrage Association, of which Susan B. Anthony was president. It paid dues and made reports to that organization. Within the next three years Mrs. Chamberlain attended two of the association's annual conventions. In 1893 she went to the meeting in Washington, D. C., and, thereby, became the first person to represent Florida at a national suffrage convention. Two years later she went to Atlanta, Georgia, to attend the first national suffrage convention ever held in a southern city.

Under Mrs. Chamberlain's leadership the Florida suffragists launched their votes-for-women crusade. Since they were especially anxious to acquaint the public with their ideas, they distributed many leaflets and pamphlets. In answer to a request from Mrs. Josephine K. Henry, a prominent Kentucky suffragist, Mrs. Chamberlain issued a statement of her reasons for favoring enfranchisement. She said: "I am a free-born American woman. . . . I deny that my brother American can properly represent me. How can I, with the blood of heroes in my heart, and with the free and independent spirit they bequeathed me, quietly submit to representation by the alien and the negro?" She concluded by stating that disfranchised southern women faced all of the hu-

3. *Proceedings of the Twenty-fifth Annual Convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association*, 1893, 132. Cited hereinafter as N. A. W. S. A. *Proceedings*.

4. *Ibid.*, 133.

miliations of their northern sisters plus that of being governed by their ex-slaves.⁵

Although the suffragists considered written propaganda very effective, they did not neglect verbal appeals. Whenever the occasion permitted, they addressed clubs and other gatherings. In December, 1894, they sponsored a bazaar and in this way raised \$125.00 for their cause.⁶ They attempted to organize additional suffrage clubs but without success. Concerning their attempts Mrs. Chamberlain wrote that they had "not had much encouragement" . . . but felt "that the effort was wise" . . . and would "result in organization in the future."⁷

As the months passed Tampa continued to be the center of activity, but some individuals in other parts of the state joined the suffrage association. By 1895 its membership was approximately one hundred. In January of that year it held a state convention in Tampa, and on that occasion Mrs. Chamberlain was reelected president. Other officers were Mrs. Emma Tebbitts of Crescent City and Mrs. Jessie M. Bartlett of St. Petersburg, vice-presidents; Miss Nellie Glenn of Melrose, secretary; and Mrs. J. L. Cae of Limona, treasurer.⁸

During the next two years the Florida suffragists continued their agitation. They found their campaign a slow and difficult one, for to most of their contemporaries the philosophy of feminism was a strange and distasteful belief. In spite of this discouraging factor, the suffragists maintained their organization until 1897. During that year Mrs. Chamberlain left the state, and the movement, thereby, lost its leader and chief sponsor. Soon the Florida organization became less active. It stopped sending reports to the national association and apparently disbanded.⁹ From 1897 until 1912 the woman suffrage movement in Florida was dormant. Mrs. Chamberlain and her followers had endeavored to sow the seeds of feminist thought in Florida but had failed to establish any enduring organization there.

During the first decade of the twentieth century the movement gained momentum nationally. The desirability of women's

5. *Woman's Journal*, XVI (January 26, 1895), 26.

6. Mrs. C. S. Burnett-Haney, "Florida," *History of Woman Suffrage* (6 vols. New York, 1881-1922), IV, 577.

7. N. A. W. S. A. *Proceedings*, 1895, 59.

8. *Ibid.*

9. Burnett-Haney, "Florida," *History of Woman Suffrage*, IV, 577.

participation in political affairs was winning more general acceptance, and additional states were allowing them to vote. These developments did not pass unnoticed in Florida, and in June, 1912, the movement was revived when a group of thirty women in Jacksonville organized the Florida Equal Franchise League. They elected Mrs. Katherine Livingston Eagan president. Shortly thereafter Mrs. Eagan left Jacksonville, and her position was then filled by Mrs. Roselle C. Cooley, who served as president for the next several years.¹⁰

After securing office space in a downtown building the league began distributing suffrage literature and holding monthly meetings. Soon its membership had increased to forty-five. It affiliated with the National American Woman Suffrage Association but made little effort to extend its activities beyond the city of Jacksonville.¹¹

Although the league was a suffrage society, its members avoided the use of that term. They felt that there was so much feeling against woman suffrage that the label would handicap their organization. Hence they preferred that it be known as the Equal Franchise League.¹²

Several months later, in October, 1912, a small group of Florida women attempted to register to vote. The occasion arose when the mayor of Orlando issued an announcement that "all freeholders" should register for a sewerage bond election. Since the mayor did not specify *male* freeholders, a few property owners went to the city clerk's office and asked to register. The astonished clerk "referred them to the mayor, who referred them to the councilmen, who, in turn, referred them to the city attorney, who found that the law of Florida granted women no voting privilege whatsoever." This refusal did not surprise the women for they had expected to be turned away. They felt that they had gained their purpose, however, in that they "had brought about a discussion of the question, and furnished a concrete illustration of women's ability to pay taxes and inability to have any voice as to how they should be used".¹³

Several months later, in February, 1913, a group at Lake

10. Mrs. Alice G. Kollick, "Florida," *History of Woman Suffrage*, VI, 113.

11. N. A. W. S. A. *Proceedings*, 1914, 159

12. *Ibid*

13. *Woman's Journal*, XLIII (Oct. 19, 1912), 329.

Helen formed a suffrage society. Avoiding the term suffrage they called it the Political Equality Club and elected Mrs. S. A. Armstrong president.¹⁴ This incident was followed by the organization of a league at Orlando. The Orlando league chose as its president Mary A. Safford, a suffrage worker of much experience. Mary Safford had participated in the movement in several states before moving to Florida in 1905. For eleven years she had lived in Des Moines, Iowa, where she served as pastor of the Unitarian Church. Miss Safford soon became one of the leaders of the movement in Florida.¹⁵

With the formation of the Orlando league there were three equal suffrage societies in Florida. In addition there were some individual suffragists scattered throughout the state. As yet there was little unity or cooperation among them. In order to remedy this weakness, in April, 1913, a group met at Orlando to discuss the formation of a state association. A call was issued for a convention in Orlando in November, 1913. Twenty-five or thirty women from more than a half-dozen towns attended. On this occasion they organized the Florida Equal Suffrage Association, adopted a constitution, and elected officers. Mary Safford was elected state president.¹⁶

Although the Equal Franchise League of Jacksonville had participated in the convention's call, no one from Jacksonville attended. For the next several years the Equal Franchise League maintained its separate existence and continued its separate affiliation with the National American Woman Suffrage Association. In 1916, however it joined the Florida Equal Suffrage Association and, thereby, brought unity into the ranks of the suffragists of the state.¹⁷

One of the chief functions of the Florida association was the holding of conventions. The first of these took place in Pensacola in December, 1914, and the second in Orlando in February, 1916. In 1917 it held two conventions. One met in Miami in March and the other in Tampa in November. In November, 1918, the suffragists convened in Daytona, and in October, 1919

14. Kollick, "Florida," *History of Woman Suffrage*, VI, 114.

15. *Ibid.*, 116.

16. *Florida Equal Suffrage Association Bulletin*, I no. 1 (July, 1914), 1-2.

17. *Jacksonville State*, March 10, 1916.

they met in Tampa. Their conventions usually lasted one day and were primarily business conferences. Delegates from the affiliated leagues attended, elected officers, and planned suffrage activities.¹⁸ Sometimes prominent speakers addressed these conventions, and on those occasions the meetings were open to the public.

Although the state association gave unity and guidance to the movement, much of the agitation was, of necessity, conducted by the affiliated local leagues. The association began with two affiliates but as interest in the cause grew, the number increased. By 1915 there were nine affiliated leagues, and by March, 1916, there were sixteen.¹⁹ Sometimes a group of local women would become interested in woman suffrage, organize a club, and ask the state association to recognize it. Sometimes an industrious suffragist would visit a town for the purpose of forming a club there. During the movement suffrage societies were organized in at least twenty-one Florida towns.²⁰

The size of the local leagues varied, and at first the one in Jacksonville was the largest. By 1915, however, it had been surpassed by the Pensacola league. Then, for a while, the Ocala league was the largest. By 1917, however, the one in Miami had the largest membership.²¹

It is difficult to estimate the number of suffragists in Florida. In March, 1916, the state association reported an affiliated membership of between seven and eight hundred.²² In addition there were a few suffrage clubs and some individuals that never joined the state association.

As one might expect, women took the lead in conducting suffrage activities. Some men were sympathetic, however, and in many ways cooperated with the women's organizations. In

18. Mary Stafford served as president of the Florida Equal Suffrage Association until March, 1917, when she was succeeded by Mrs. Frank Stranahan of Ft. Lauderdale. Mrs. Stranahan served until November, 1918, at which time Miss Stafford again became president.

19. *Jacksonville State*, March 10, 1916.

20. References were found to suffrage organizations in the following places: Jacksonville, Orlando, Pensacola, Orange City, Tarpon Springs, Lake Helen, Zellwood, Pine Castle, Winter Park, Miami, Tampa, Coconut Grove, Tallahassee, Ruskin, Milton, Palm Beach, Ft. Lauderdale, Davie, St. Petersburg, Winter Haven, and Florence Villa.

21. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 21, 1917.

22. *Jacksonville State*, March 10, 1916.

several Florida towns men's equal suffrage clubs were formed. The first of these was the Orlando league with the Hon. D. F. Sperry as president.²³ The second was the Men's Equal Suffrage League of Pensacola, organized in December, 1914, with A. C. Reilly as president.²⁴ During 1915 men's leagues were formed at Coconut Grove,²⁵ Miami, and Tarpon Springs.²⁶ Of the four organizations the one in Miami was perhaps the most active. In 1915 it circulated a petition asking that Miami women be permitted to vote in city elections. It was reported that many of the most prominent men of Miami signed this petition and that very few of those approached refused to sign.²⁷ The following year the Miami men's league joined the women's in sponsoring a lecture by William Jennings Bryan.²⁸ In general the activities of the men's leagues supplemented those of the women's and afforded them both moral and actual support.

As a means of publicizing their ideas the Florida Suffragists often sponsored public lectures. In the fall of 1912 the Equal Franchise League invited Miss Jean Gordon of Louisiana and Mrs. Florence Kelley of New York to speak in Jacksonville. Much to the suffragists' surprise both the Board of Trade and the Woman's Club refused to rent their auditoriums for the lecture. They finally secured the use of a room adjoining their headquarters, opened the connecting door, and, thereby, improvised an auditorium. Despite unpleasant weather the lecture was well attended and the rooms crowded with men and women who came to hear Miss Gordon and Mrs. Kelley speak in behalf of the emancipation of womanhood.²⁹

In March, 1914, the Jacksonville league once again focused the city's attention on suffrage by sponsoring a lecture by Miss Kate Gordon³⁰ of Louisiana and Congressman J. W. Bryan of Washington. Speaking in the Duval Theater Miss Gordon stated that women were being recognized as men's equals in other fields and that they now wanted the franchise—"the full badge of their

23. *Florida Equal Suffrage Association Bulletin*, I no. 1 (July, 1914), 2.

24. *Florida Times-Union*, December 11, 1914.

25. *Woman's Journal*, XLVI (March 27, 1915), 100.

26. *Ibid.*, XLVI (August 29, 1915), 275.

27. *Ibid.*, XLVI (April 17, 1915), 124.

28. *Ibid.*, XLVII (March 25, 1916), 101.

29. *N. A. W. S. A. Proceedings*, 1914, 159.

30. Miss Kate Gordon was a sister of Miss Jean Gordon.

freedom." She asked: "Has woman the right to express her opinion? Then what is the ballot but an expression of opinion? . . . Would you deny woman a weapon with which to defend herself? Then what is the ballot but a weapon of defense?" She described the legal disabilities of women in Louisiana and asked if men would be willing to live under such laws. She said that the Democratic party was on trial relative to the suffrage issue and warned that its failure to champion the federal amendment might affect its success in the 1916 election.³¹

Congressman Bryan, who represented a woman suffrage state,³² said that he strongly favored the enactment of the proposed Susan B. Anthony Amendment. He maintained: "The only true democracy is a democracy that really extends equal rights to all and special privileges to none, and that can come only when woman and man together cast the ballot and together assist in making the laws that shall govern them both by the consent of both."³³

This lecture by Miss Gordon and Congressman Bryan was considered an outstanding success. It was reported that "the entire theater was filled from the bottom to the top gallery and the audience remained for the entire evening, evidencing its approval by repeated and prolonged applause at apt hits or some extra good sentiment."³⁴ The Equal Franchise League considered that "much genuine enthusiasm was awakened" and that interest in its activities increased following the lecture.³⁵

A prominent speaker who often visited Florida was Anna Howard Shaw, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association from 1904 to 1915. In March, 1915, she visited Winter Haven as the guest of Dr. Mary Jewett, an active Florida suffragist. While there, she gave several suffrage talks.³⁶ She also went to Pensacola where she addressed an audience that filled the Opera House.³⁷ For two days she held conferences in Tampa but gave no public lecture.³⁸ Accompanied by Mary

31. *Florida Times-Union*, March 4, 1914.

32. Washington had enfranchised women in 1910.

33. *Florida Times-Union*, March 4, 1914.

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*, April 13, 1914.

36. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, March 3, 1915.

37. *Woman's Journal*, XLVI (April 3, 1915), 107.

38. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, March 3, 1915.

Safford she went to Miami where she addressed an "enthusiastic audience."³⁹

Two years later Dr. Shaw returned to Miami to speak before the state association's convention. On this occasion the *Miami Herald* called her "one of the greatest women America has produced" and stated that her speech was "one of the wittiest, wisest, and sanest expressions of the suffrage arguments" ever delivered.⁴⁰ In March, 1918, she spoke in Jacksonville under the auspices of the Florida women's committee of the council of national defense. Although her address was about national defense, she "frequently touched on the suffrage movement."⁴¹ In January, 1919, she was the chief speaker at a suffrage mass meeting in Orlando.⁴²

Another out-of-state suffragist who lectured in Florida was Mrs. Pattie R. Jacobs of Alabama. In an address before the state convention in Pensacola in 1914 she explained her reasons for wanting to vote.⁴³ In November, 1917, she addressed the state convention in Tampa. On that occasion she said that the United States was a democracy in name only and that there could be no true democracy as long as women were excluded from participation in government. She thought that the mother's viewpoint was needed and that woman suffrage should be adopted as a war measure. She observed: "Some state that the woman's place is in the home, and yet the war is thrusting them into fields they never occupied before. Economic conditions forced woman to seek her livelihood. It was not from choice but necessity. We agree that woman's place is the home, but not in the home. We regard the world as the home, and we want the ballot to protect the home."⁴⁴

In August, 1918, Mrs. Guilford Dudley of Tennessee toured Florida in behalf of the federal woman suffrage amendment. She maintained that President Wilson had approved the amendment and that it should be enacted. To the objection that it would violate state rights she replied: "I believe in state rights, too, when they do not conflict with human rights, but has it ever oc-

39. *Woman's Journal*, XLVI (March 27, 1915), 100.

40. *Miami Herald*, March 16, 1917.

41. *Florida Times-Union*, March 26, 1918.

42. *Ibid.*, January 10, 1919.

43. *Ibid.*, December 9, 1914.

44. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 20, 1917.

curred to you that men never stop to think of state rights in relation to anything but suffrage."⁴⁵

Besides these out-of-state lecturers many Floridians spoke in behalf of the cause. Suffragists, public officials, and others often addressed meetings and participated in discussions relative to the enfranchisement of women.

Whenever possible the suffragists publicized their ideas and activities in the newspapers of the state. On two occasions they sponsored equal suffrage editions. On July 3, 1914, the Jacksonville league edited a special issue of the *State*, a weekly published in that city. It contained cartoons, articles, endorsements by persons of national prominence, statistical data, and statements by Florida suffragists. Twenty thousand copies were printed.⁴⁶ The edition was considered a "grand piece of suffrage propaganda," and copies were sent to members of the legislature and to the Florida delegation in Washington.⁴⁷ In September, 1914, a similar edition of the *Pensacola Journal* was published in behalf of the suffrage crusade.⁴⁸

Accounts of meetings, announcements, and other news and propaganda appeared in the newspapers. Sometimes there were editorials on equal suffrage. Some of the editorials were favorable, but most were not overly enthusiastic. Some expressed doubts that a majority of women wanted the vote. Most assumed that they would be enfranchised at some future date. The editorial writers seemed to feel that woman suffrage was coming but were not convinced as to its wisdom or desirability.

Besides newspaper publicity the suffragists used letters and leaflets as propaganda devices. At the Orlando meeting in 1916 it was announced that fifteen hundred letters had been written and "thousands of pieces of literature distributed."⁴⁹ In reporting to the national association in 1917 Mrs. Frank Stranahan said that the state association had sent out five hundred and seventy-five packages of mail and received three hundred communications.⁵⁰ Most of the literature appealed to the public to favor

45. *Woman Citizen* (New York, 1917-1927), III (August 10, 1918), 210.

46. Ida Clyde Clark, *Suffrage in the Southern States* (Nashville, 1914), 23.

47. N. A. W. S. A. *Proceedings*, 1914, 160.

48. *Woman's Journal*, XLVI (December 4, 1915), 385.

49. *Jacksonville State*, March 10, 1916.

50. N. A. W. S. A. *Proceedings*, 1917, 194.

equal suffrage, but some asked for monetary donations. One leaflet stated:

Let Florida be the first Southern State to Grant
Votes for Women.

I am in favor of Woman Suffrage and will give
.....to help win the ballot for the women
of Florida.⁵¹

Since the suffrage leagues charged nominal dues (\$.25 or \$.50 per year), it was often necessary to raise money in other ways. Sometimes they took up collections at public lectures. At the lecture by Kate Gordon and J. W. Bryan in Jacksonville in 1914, they collected \$120.00.⁵² At a lecture sponsored by the Men's League of Miami in 1917 Mary Safford made an appeal for funds, and the audience pledged \$775.00.⁵³ Also in Miami in 1917 Mrs. William Jennings Bryan gave a silver tea at which the guests donated \$66.00. On that occasion W. S. Jennings, ex-governor of Florida, announced that he would match the donation and, thereby, make the total \$132.00.⁵⁴ In 1919 the suffragists held a series of conferences for the purpose of raising funds. They raised \$1,000.00 at Orlando, \$198.00 at Tampa, and \$260.00 at Miami and West Palm Beach.⁵⁵

The leagues gave teas, banquets, and musical programs. They entered floats in parades. They sponsored booths at fairs at which suffrage literature was distributed. The group at Pensacola sponsored a Better Babies Contest in which over one hundred babies participated. The league conducted citizenship classes to prepare women for their eventual enfranchisement. They circulated petitions and adopted resolutions to send to state legislators and to the Florida delegation in Congress. They sought the endorsement of organizations in the state. In 1915, after failing the year before, they secured the approval of the Florida Federation of Women's Clubs.⁵⁶ Also during that year the State Federation of Labor endorsed woman suffrage⁵⁷ Several other groups, such

51. Leaflet on file in the P. Y. Yonge Library of Florida History, Gainesville, Florida

52. *Florida Times-Union*, March 4, 1914.

53. *Miami Herald*, March 16, 1917.

54. *Woman's Journal*, XLVIII (April 14, 1917), 87.

55. Kollick, "Florida," *History of Woman Suffrage*, VI, 117.

56. *Woman's Journal*, XLVI (Nov. 27, 1915), 375.

57. *Ibid.*, XLVI (March 27, 1915), 100.

as the county superintendents and school principals,⁵⁸ announced their approval of the enfranchisement of women.

Most suffrage activities in Florida were conducted by the Florida Equal Suffrage Association and its local auxiliaries. The Florida Equal Suffrage Association was an affiliate of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and, until 1917, was the only state association in Florida. During that year, however, a branch of the National Woman's Party was organized.

The Woman's Party, a national organization with headquarters in Washington, D. C., was headed by Alice Paul and was a rival of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. The chief differences in the two organizations were the Woman's Party's use of militant methods of agitation and its lack of interest in winning equal suffrage through state legislation. The Woman's Party worked solely for the federal amendment while the Suffrage Association worked for amendments to state constitutions as well as for the federal amendment.

In May, 1917, Alice Paul visited Florida for the purpose of forming a branch of the National Woman's Party there. She was accompanied by Mrs. St. Clair Thompson of North Carolina, field secretary for the southern states. At a meeting in Jacksonville they organized a Florida chapter of their Party with Mrs. Hannah Detwiller as state chairman.⁵⁹

The Woman's Party was never very active in Florida but did try to influence Florida congressmen in favor of the federal amendment. It conducted no militant agitation in the state for most Florida women disapproved such tactics. A few did engage in militant activities, however. One was Mrs. Mary O. Nolan of Jacksonville. In November, 1917, Mrs. Nolan was arrested in Washington, D. C., and kept in jail for six days for picketing the White House. She was at that time seventy-three years of age but none-the-less determined to "stand up for her rights."⁶⁰

The practice of imprisoning suffrage agitators was dramatized when the "prison special" visited Jacksonville. A group of twenty-six women, all of whom had served prison sentences, chartered a railroad car and toured the nation to call attention to their struggle

58. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, May 2, 1917.

59. *Florida Times-Union*, May 10, 1917.

60. *Tampa Morning Tribune*, November 15, 1917.

for enfranchisement. They reached Jacksonville in February, 1919, and were received by Helen Hunt, then chairman of the National Woman's Party in Florida. They held an outdoor meeting in Hemming Park and an evening meeting in the Morocco Temple. At the evening meeting twelve of the women appeared in their prison garb. On this occasion Mrs. H. O. Havemeyer of New York City told the audience: "It is no fun to go to jail. It takes courage to go to jail and face such conditions." Miss Lucy Burns related her experiences in prison and said that the suffragists had been subjected to brutal treatment. She said: "We did it all for democracy and we get mockery." Miss Sue White of Tennessee, the last of the speakers, maintained that the Democratic Party would gain a great political victory through the enfranchisement of women and urged that this action not be delayed. The meeting then adopted a resolution asking President Wilson to urge the passage of the federal woman suffrage amendment.⁶¹

In 1913 the woman suffrage issue for the first time received serious consideration in a session of the Florida legislature.⁶² On April 14 of that year H. L. Bussey of Palm Beach introduced in the house a resolution to enfranchise women through an amendment to the state constitution.⁶³ On April 25 the committee on constitutional amendments conducted a public hearing on this issue. The hearing took place in the house chamber and attracted a large audience. The chief speaker was Miss Jeanette Rankin, a suffragist of national prominence and later United States Congresswoman from Montana. Miss Rankin gave a thirty minute talk which was said to have been most convincing and sincere and which "undoubtedly won a great majority of the auditors to the cause of equal citizenship."⁶⁴ In spite of this and other pro-suffrage appeals the committee failed to agree to a favorable report and referred the measure to the house without a recommendation.⁶⁵

A few days later, on May 2, the house debated the issue. H. L. Bussey, its sponsor, stated that he did not favor woman

61. *Florida Times-Union*, February 19, 1919.

62. A woman suffrage resolution had been introduced in the house in 1911 but had not been acted upon.

63. *Florida House Journal*, regular session, 1913, 270.

64. *Tampa Tribune*, April 28, 1913. Among the other speakers were Mrs. Roselle Cooley of Jacksonville and Mrs. Victor Starbuck of Orlando.

65. *Florida House Journal*, regular session, 1913, 829.

suffrage but had introduced the measure at the request of the Federation of Women's Clubs in West Palm Beach. He said that he would work for the passage of the proposal by the legislature but would vote against it when it should be submitted to the people for ratification. He conceded that woman suffrage might be a good thing some day, but for the present he did not favor it.⁶⁶

L. C. O'Neal of Hernando County made a strong anti-suffrage speech. He considered woman suffrage "contrary to tradition, history, manners, modesty, and the best thought of the country." He predicted that if "women were granted the ballot they would be lowered from the exalted position which they now hold."⁶⁷ John M. Gornto of Lafayette County denied that woman suffrage would improve political conditions but said that it would "bring on marital unhappiness, divorces, and a disruptive domestic condition." It would mean the enfranchisement of the Negro woman, as well as the white, and, therefore, would "entail such a train of evils that it would be impossible to conceive of what might follow."⁶⁸ H. Clay Stanford of Osceola County and St. Elmo W. Acosta of Duval both argued that equal suffrage was a northern ideal and that the South wanted none of it. No one spoke strongly in favor of the measure, and when the vote was taken, the house rejected it twenty-six to thirty-nine.⁶⁹

Most people assumed that this defeat would end consideration in the 1913 legislative session. On May 7, however, Fred P. Cone of Lake City introduced a woman suffrage resolution in the senate.⁷⁰ This measure was referred to the committee on privileges and elections which recommended that it pass.⁷¹ When the senate discussed it on May 28, Cone offered a substitute which included both woman suffrage and the grandfather clause. Senator Daniel A. Finlayson of Monticello objected to the substitute because it contained two separate issues. Cone replied that since the substitute provided for the enfranchisement of white women and the disfranchisement of Negro men, it would mean the replacement of Negro men by white women at the polls. In the

66. *Florida Times-Union*, May 4, 1913.

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Florida House Journal*, regular session, 1913, 970.

70. *Florida Senate Journal*, regular session, 1913, 839.

71. *Ibid.*, 950.

ensuing debate John B. Johnson of Live Oak spoke against it because he thought that "woman's purity" would "suffer at the polls." John P. Stokes of Pensacola spoke for it, but his speech was reported to have been lacking in "earnestness and zeal."⁷² The senate then rejected Cone's substitute and postponed his original measure indefinitely.⁷³ Thus equal suffrage failed in both houses in 1913.

When the legislature assembled in 1915, the suffragists were very hopeful of favorable action. They sent a committee to Tallahassee to lobby for their measures. These efforts were in vain, however, for although proposals to enfranchise women were introduced in both houses, they failed in committees, and the legislature adjourned without taking any action. In spite of this failure, equal suffrage scored a small gain in 1915. By special act the legislature established the municipality of Fellsmere in Saint Lucie County with the provision that both males and females should be qualified to vote in general and special elections.⁷⁴ The adoption of this act marked the beginning of woman suffrage in Florida.

Two years later, in 1917, the suffrage issue once again came to the attention of the Florida lawmakers. A highlight of their session was an address by Mrs. William Jennings Bryan. Mrs. Bryan said that enfranchisement was both timely and expedient and would increase the dignity of woman. She thought that women could be both wives and voters and that suffrage would provide a broader basis of common interest between husband and wife.⁷⁵

A few days later, on April 20, the senate considered a proposed state constitutional amendment to enfranchise women.⁷⁶ After a brief debate the senators voted eighteen for the measure and eight against it.⁷⁷ Since the favorable votes were less than the three-fifths of the total senate required for constitutional amendments, the measure was defeated. On April 23 the senate reconsidered, and on that occasion, without debate, passed it

72. *Florida Times-Union*, May 29, 1913.

73. *Florida Senate Journal*, regular session, 1913, 1862.

74. *Special Acts Adopted by the Legislature of Florida*, 1915, 529.

75. *Florida Times-Union*, April 19, 1917.

76. Bills to permit women to vote in primary elections were introduced in both houses but were never acted upon.

77. *Florida Senate Journal*, regular session, 1917, 513.

twenty-three to seven.⁷⁸ The measure was then referred to the house.

Two days later the house debated and voted upon it. Speaking in its behalf, W. H. Marshall of Broward County said that equal suffrage had been successful in the western states and had become an important issue in Florida. He strongly favored adopting the pending measure and, thereby, submitting it to a referendum. A. C. Hamblin of Hillsborough did not believe that male voters were any better qualified to govern than female. In the realm of moral fitness he considered women superior. He commented: "Go to the saloons and see which sex will be found there." Amos Lewis of Jackson said that woman suffrage was right in principle and that it was the duty of the house to pass the measure. David Scholtz of Volusia did not think that enfranchisement would cause men to lose respect for women. He said that gentlemen respected ladies and "once a gentleman, always a gentleman."⁷⁹

Speaking in opposition, Frank Clark, Jr. of Alachua said that the right to vote was not a natural right and that there was no general demand for woman suffrage. Christopher Matheson of the same county maintained that the woman suffrage states had no better laws than other states. C. A. Stephens of Hamilton said that women should not get "mixed up in politics" because "divine law placed man at the head of the family and made him the ruler and governing power of nations."⁸⁰ At the close of debate forty house members voted in favor of the measure and twenty-seven against it.⁸¹ Since this was less than the required three-fifths total of the house, the measure failed.

The following day the house reconsidered. Several members argued that woman suffrage was inevitable and that the legislature might as well go ahead and submit the issue to the voters. Others said that woman suffrage would make for better government and that the liquor interests were its chief opposition. In spite of these arguments the measure once again failed to receive the required three-fifths majority.⁸²

78. *Ibid.*, 531.

79. *Florida Times-Union*, April 26, 1917.

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Florida House Journal*, regular session, 1917, 807.

82. *Ibid.*, 820. The vote was thirty-nine ayes and thirty nays.

During the 1917 session the legislature passed several local bills conferring municipal suffrage on women. The towns where municipal suffrage was authorized were Florence Villa, Moore Haven, Palm Beach, and Pass-a-Grille. Thus woman suffrage continued to make gains in the realm of local government.

When the legislature convened in special session in November, 1918, the suffragists attempted to induce the adoption of a resolution endorsing the Susan B. Anthony Amendment, then pending in congress.⁸³ This move was sponsored by the National Woman's Party in an effort to influence the Florida delegation in Washington. Encouraged by Representative E. W. Waybright of Jacksonville, Governor Sidney Johnson Catts sent to the house a message stating that President Wilson and the National Democratic Committee favored woman suffrage and asking the house to adopt a resolution urging the Florida delegation in Congress to support the proposed Susan B. Anthony Amendment.⁸⁴ On December 5 the house debated the resolution and rejected it thirty-one to thirty-seven.⁸⁵ Many voted against it because they did not favor votes-for-women but others because they did not think that the legislature should presume to instruct members of the Congress of the United States.⁸⁶ In spite of the resolution's failure, suffrage made some gains during the 1918 session, for the legislature passed local bills making women eligible for municipal suffrage in DeLand, Aurland, Daytona, Daytona Beach, and Orange City.

In his annual message in 1919 Governor Catts urged the legislators to give the suffrage issue a "respectful and careful" hearing. On April 18 Senator W. L. Hughlett of Cocoa introduced a resolution to enfranchise women through an amendment to the

83. During its history in Congress no Florida senator ever voted for the resolution to enfranchise women. When the United States house of representatives considered the issue in January, 1915, no one from Florida voted for it. In May, 1918 the representatives voted two for and two against it. In May, 1919 they voted three to one in favor of the measure.

84. *Florida House Journal*, extraordinary session, 1918, 202.

85. *Ibid.*, 291.

86. The suffragists took advantage of the occasion to circulate a petition in behalf of the proposed Susan B. Anthony Amendment. Fourteen state senators and thirty-one representatives signed it. This petition was presented to senators Duncan U. Fletcher and Park Trammell but apparently failed to influence them.

state constitution.⁸⁷ The senate immediately suspended its rules and within five minutes passed the measure without debate.⁸⁸ Only five senators voted against it. So quickly did they dispose of the resolution that some of the members of the house accused them of being insincere and of merely shifting the responsibility for the issue to the house.⁸⁹

A few days later the house debated the senate resolution. Speaking in opposition, Representative N. J. Wicker of Sumter County stated that morality and purity could not be legislated and that woman suffrage would undermine the government. George G. Brooks of Monroe County did not "care to lower women from the pinnacle" upon which tradition had placed them. He said, "Politics is a dirty game . . . and women can not mix with filth without some of it sticking." Murray Sams of Volusia said that "he was unconditionally and unqualifiedly opposed to woman's suffrage and everything that promotes it." He thought it "as impossible for women to be equals of men in determining questions involving suffrage as it was for them to be their equals physically."⁹⁰ None of the representatives strongly defended woman suffrage, but some argued that the house should adopt the resolution in order that the issue might be submitted to a referendum. When the vote was taken, forty voted for it and thirty-three against.⁹¹ Since the resolution did not receive the required three-fifth majority, it failed to be adopted.⁹²

Early in June the federal woman suffrage amendment was submitted to the states. A delegation hastened to Tallahassee to urge ratification. A small majority of the legislators indicated their willingness to vote for it. The day of adjournment was at hand, however, and Governor Catts refused to call a special session for he doubted that ratification would carry.⁹³ The legislature never

87. *Florida Senate Journal*, regular session, 1919, 307. At the beginning of this session the suffragists planned to seek only the right to vote in primary elections. This plan aroused so much opposition, however, that it was abandoned.

88. *Ibid.*, 308. The vote was twenty-six to five.

89. *Florida Times-Union*, April 23, 1919.

90. *Ibid.*

91. *Florida House Journal*, regular session, 1919, 472

92. In 1919 the legislature made women in the following towns eligible to vote in municipal elections: Cocoa, Dunedin, Ft. Lauderdale, Moore Haven, Orlando, Ormond, St. Petersburg, Tarpon Springs, Vero, Winter Park, and West Palm Beach.

93. Kollick, "Florida," *History of Woman Suffrage*, VI, 119-120.

considered this measure, and Florida, therefore, became the only state in the Union to take no action on the Susan B. Anthony Amendment.

During the months that followed, many states ratified the amendment, and in August, 1920, it was declared part of the United States Constitution. Florida officials considered that this amendment's ratification invalidated existing state laws against woman suffrage and, therefore, they permitted women to vote in the general election in 1920. The next year the legislature enacted a measure stating that all citizens over twenty-one years of age should be considered qualified electors.⁹⁴ In this way Florida women gained the political privileges they had been seeking, and their crusade came to a close.

94. *Acts and Resolutions Adopted by the Legislature of Florida, 1921*, 401.

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