

RURAL REALITIES SHAPE RURAL TENNESSEE WOMEN'S ATTITUDES
ABOUT WOMAN SUFFRAGE

by

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in Public History

Middle Tennessee State University

May 2020

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the large number of people who have helped me throughout its creation. It is with the deepest gratitude that I wish to thank all those who made it possible for me to write this thesis.

First, I would like to thank my parents and brother for all the support they have given me in my educational endeavors. Their tireless ability to cheer me on through my education and through the stress I have no doubt caused them during graduate school and the writing of this work will never be forgotten, and I am forever grateful to them. I would especially like to thank my mother for being patient and listening to me as I would repeatedly regale her with the fruits of this study. Without my family I doubt I would have gotten this far in my life and I fully acknowledge that fact.

I would also like to express my unending gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Mary Evins. As a thesis advisor I could not have asked for anyone better. Her patience with me and encouragement were driving forces in finishing this work, and I will be forever grateful to her taking the time out of her busy schedule to work with me on every step of its writing.

My gratitude also goes out to Dr. Mary Hoffschwelle. I thank her for not only the work she did on my committee but also the guidance she gave me throughout my undergraduate and graduate career. It was through her encouragement that I began my path into public history, and I will forever be grateful for that.

I would also like to thank the staff and professors at MTSU for their work and guidance throughout my education. I also wish to thank the staff and workers at the Tennessee State Library and Archives for all their help during my visits. I also thank the

Tennessee State Museum for providing the internship that allowed me to explore and discover the topic of this thesis and to research more deeply into the history of suffrage in Tennessee.

Finally, I would like to thank all the women and men of the past and present who have fought for the right for everyone to fairly participate in their right to vote and participate politically.

ABSTRACT

The 19th Amendment in America gave women the right to vote and federally protected their enfranchisement. Tennessee played a major role in the passage of the amendment by being the 36th state to ratify. During and after the suffrage movement, scholarship has explored the work of women and men in the fight for suffrage both nationally and in the state of Tennessee, but as with all histories there are gaps in the narrative. In the past, rural women of Tennessee have been depicted as indifferent to suffrage or have been left out of the Tennessee suffrage story entirely. By exploring the suffrage and progressive movements in which rural women of Tennessee participated, the scholarship gains a fuller picture of the political and cultural issues that surrounded suffrage in the state. Rural representation in the suffrage story brings to light the need to fill their silence both in scholarship and on the physical historical landscape.

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CHAPTER 1:
SUFFRAGE HISTORY AND FINDING RURAL WOMEN'S VOICES

Women's activism at the turn of the 20th century in the United States reshaped the American landscape both politically and socially. When women became part of the American electorate in 1920, they became publicly visible citizens whose votes fulfilled the aspirations the women activists who had been pushing for 72 years to achieve women's right to vote. Much of the activists' work was accomplished during the height of the Progressive Era, which was a period of new thinking in the United States that ushered in drastic shifts in many aspects of American life. The Progressive Era spanned at least from the late 1800s into the 1920s. It was a period that developed as a reaction to the excesses of the industrial revolution, urbanization, and a changing political climate.¹ Those who identified themselves as progressives sought to fight against problems caused by industrial capitalism in order to uplift those less fortunate who were victims of the economy. During the Progressive Era, in order to push political agendas, movements were created and expanded to aid society's most vulnerable. Different groups of activists and social reformers focused on a wide range of issues, among them prohibition, rural reform, public health, education reform, labor policies, and woman suffrage—including constitutional amendments to institutionalize structural realignments. Most progressives supported the 16th, 17th, and 18th Amendments as well as the 19th Amendment that guaranteed women the right to vote. Before the 19th Amendment's passage, women did

1. Daniel Rodgers, "In Search of Progressivism," *Reviews in American History* 10, no. 4 (Dec. 1982), 124-25.

not have federal protection of their voting rights.² Instead, until 1920, their ability to vote was dictated by individual state laws.

Journalism, photography, and the production of affordable newspapers and magazines spread information widely to the public at the beginning of the 20th century, bringing attention to injustices and the behaviors of large business companies and politicians.³ Attention to issues such as dangerous working conditions, child labor, and extreme poverty drew more and more people to participate in discourse surrounding national social problems and to join movements that could help bring alleviation to suffering. Women, often major contributors and members of many of the social groups calling for action, worked toward garnering support for specific issues for which they advocated, via lobbying, petitions, and demonstrations. However, progressive women's lack of true political power circumscribed what they could achieve and created hurdles that limited them from reaching the goals of some of their crusades, such as prohibition and child labor.⁴

Before the passage of the 19th Amendment in the United States, women relied on men—their husbands, fathers, and brothers—to cast votes to better their wives, families,

2. Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1923), 3-7.

3. Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1983), xv-xix.

4. *Ibid.*, 155-56; Mattie Duncan Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State* (Kingsport, TN: Kingsport Press, 1962), 10-11; Noralee Frankel and Nancy S. Dye, *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era* (Lexington: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 1991), 110-12.

and society.⁵ Obviously, men voting for women's interests met with mixed results. Money-powered lobbying and illegal bribes limited legislative advancements.⁶ Women wanted the right to vote and to have their numbers weigh in on matters that they felt related to their private sphere—the well-being of the family and home—and to the public sphere—the public good, community, and the betterment of a moral society.⁷ The ability for women to vote differed from state to state, since no law federally protected or enforced enfranchisement for women nationally. Some women could vote in a limited capacity as early as 1869, when the territory of Wyoming granted women's suffrage, but the suffrage movement was a very slow process state by state. To get the entire country to secure women's right to vote would require federal legislation.⁸ The state-by-state and then national movement for female suffrage, with women explicitly fighting to get access to the franchise, was a diverse social reform undertaking that formally spanned 72 years of American history.

Limited by gender, women's voting was also limited by racial attitudes and Jim Crow laws, which kept both female and male African Americans disenfranchised. Other minorities, such as Native Americans, were also left out of full enfranchisement, many

5. Elna C. Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1997), 2-3.

6. Mattie Duncan Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State*, 10-11.

7. Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics: Women and American Political Society, 1780-1920," *American Historical Review* 89 (June 1984), 621.

8. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, ed., *One Woman, One Vote: Rediscovering the Woman Suffrage Movement* (Troutdale, OR: NewSage Press, 1995), 11.

not gaining the guaranteed right to vote in all states until the 1960s.⁹ Civil Rights protests and Congressional legislation of the 1960s helped open up the ability to vote for minority groups. Also, the ratification of the 24th Amendment in 1964, which eradicated the poll tax, smoothed participation in elections for tens of thousands of Americans who had not previously been able to afford the cost of voting.¹⁰ Although the 19th Amendment took away gender as an obstacle to voting for half of the U.S. population, equal suffrage still had to be fought for throughout the twentieth century, as it must be now, continually, as well. The 19th Amendment was not a universal win for women's rights as sometimes portrayed in popular media or as telescoped in history survey classes. Still, the 19th Amendment was a powerful Constitutional *du jure* achievement realized through struggles, organizing, and dogged political maneuvers of suffragists of the Progressive Era.

It was a movement that gained traction through the early 20th century across the United States, including in Tennessee. There are stereotypes within historical narratives about suffrage and progressive movements that suffragists were predominantly northern and urban women. Although Texas, Missouri, and Arkansas in the West had already ratified the 19th Amendment in advance of summer 1920, no former Confederate state

9. "Securing Indian Voting Rights," *Harvard Law Review* 129, no. 6 (April 2016): 1731–54.

10. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, ed., *Votes for Women!: The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee, the South, and the Nation* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1995), 4; Laura Visser-Maessen, *Robert Parris Moses: A Life in Civil Rights and Leadership at the Grassroots* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2016), 67, 145, 186.

east of the Mississippi river ratified the Nineteenth until after Tennessee did. The southern states of Kentucky and West Virginia, not part of the Confederacy, had ratified the Nineteenth before summer 1920, but the Deep South states had not. Tennessee's suffrage movement, however, along with those of the other ratifying rural southern states, certainly dismantles the only-northern-women misconception.

That rural women, when compared to their urban counterparts, were passive observers, mere receivers of political events and programs,¹¹ is another stereotype. It is true that rural communities have largely been left out of the suffrage narrative, but the idea that rural women—around the U.S. and in Tennessee—did not actively participate in the political world around them during the early twentieth century is patently false.¹² Sustaining the falsehood, concomitant with the lack of identification of women in the rural communities as active suffragists, is a lack of monuments or plaques recognizing what rural women contributed. This continued dearth of women's representation in the public landscape perpetuates the belief that rural women were not interested in women's rights and suffrage. These lacunae parallel a pattern across the U.S. of lack of women's

11. A. Elizabeth Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee* (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957), 38.

12. Sara Egge, *Woman Suffrage and Citizenship in the Midwest, 1870-1920* (Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 2018); Mary A. Evins, ed., *Tennessee Women in the Progressive Era: Toward the Public Sphere in the New South* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2013); Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Ellen Carol DuBois, *The Elizabeth Cady Stanton-Susan B. Anthony Reader: Correspondence, Writings, Speeches* (Boston: Northeastern Univ. Press), 1992.

visibility in the physical environment in historic contexts that might extol, or at least acknowledge, women's roles in history.¹³

In Tennessee, the socioeconomic realities of rural women's cultures directly shaped the nature of rural women's involvement and attitudes toward suffrage. In support of the thesis that rural culture developed unique responses to suffrage by Tennessee women in the state's non-urban counties in the early 20th century, the ways in which women participated in the national suffrage movement and the Tennessee suffrage movement, and how they were recorded, are herein reviewed.

Suffragists of the Movement

At the beginning of the 19th century the legal status of women was, as Carrie Chapman Catt writes, "dead to the law."¹⁴ In other words, women were attachments to their husbands and had no autonomy when it came to legal matters. Catt lists the lack of married women's rights as a preeminent aspect of all women's legal powerlessness; upon a woman's marriage, all her rights were transferred from her father to her husband. A husband had total control over his wife's property, wages, and decisions about their children.¹⁵ Husbands could legally punish their wives, with courts interfering only if the

13. Martha Norkunas, *Monuments and Memory: History and Representation in Lowell, Massachusetts* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003), 67-110; Jon Marcus, "Tourism Industry is (Finally) Shining a Light on the Women of the World," *Boston Globe*, Jan. 24, 2020, <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2020/01/24/lifestyle/tourism-industry-is-finally-shining-light-women-world/>, accessed Jan. 28, 2020.

14. Catt and Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics*, 6.

15. Ibid.

punishment was considered too harsh by the popular opinion of the time. Those realities were what women faced once they married. They had no recourse for changing such laws unless through the voting of, and beneficence of, men. The attitudes of the period did not promote the education of women, and, although greater access to education for women was starting to change, advanced education was largely barred to women and certainly limited only to women of means. The restrictions women faced reveal that women were considered no more capable than children and were legally treated as such. The suffrage movement particularly had stemmed out of abolitionist work. There had been women's rights discourse happening simultaneously with the abolition movement of the early 1800s due to women's inferior legal status that paralleled certain aspects of African Americans' lack of liberty. Many women activists involved in the abolition movement began to feel restricted in their advocacy however, because they were not always welcomed at conventions or meetings, and if they were allowed entry, they were often never invited to speak, only to observe. In response, women held their own abolitionist assemblies and formed their own groups, often attended by both sexes.

The catalyst for the suffrage movement began in 1840 when Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott tried to attend the World Anti-Slavery Convention held in London in July of that year.¹⁶ The convention began with a debate and then a vote that barred women from the convention. Catt went on to state that that debate in London "will always stand as a landmark showing the world's opinion of the capacities and rights of

16. Ibid., 17.

women at that date.”¹⁷ The indignation that Stanton and Mott experienced from the international event led them to plan to have a woman’s rights convention in the future back home in the United States. Eight years later, in 1848, their envisioned women’s advocacy meeting became a reality, when, on the 19th and 20th of July, a Woman’s Rights Convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, in the Wesleyan Chapel.¹⁸ There, the Declaration of Sentiments written primarily by Stanton was publicly presented,¹⁹ which put forth a list of grievances that affected women, one being “the denial of the elective franchise.”²⁰ Inclusion of suffrage in the Declaration of Sentiments was really the beginning of the fight for women’s enfranchisement. That 1848 convention was soon followed by the formation of suffrage groups in the surrounding area in upstate New York. The fight for suffrage shows women trying to make a place for themselves and their issues in politics.

The pushback women faced in participating in the abolitionist movement was similar for them in their early public participation in temperance activism. Prohibition, historically remembered as a women’s movement, began with popular sentiment that

17. Ibid.

18. Spruill Wheeler, *Votes for Women!*, 4-6.

19. The Declaration of Sentiments was the Seneca Falls Convention's manifesto that called on women to fight for their Constitutionally guaranteed right to equality as U.S. citizens. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was one of the main contributors to the declaration. The convention discussed the eleven resolutions on women’s rights in the declaration. All passed unanimously except for the ninth resolution, which demanded the right to vote for women, still considered quite controversial in 1848.

20. Catt and Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics*, 20.

women ought not engage in the fight to achieve it. Attitudes of the time reflected the value that women's space was the home and their rightful place in the private sphere.²¹ The attitude was based in conventional ideas of propriety about financially stable families of the middle class and up.²² Across all movements of the time, women who participated in activism were viewed as intruders, and if they entered to be a part of a group it was expected that they would be silent observers and supporters. The idea of women protesting or holding petitions was not acceptable in the early 19th century, and it is only women's push to be active in temperance, abolitionism, and suffrage that set a public path for women, allowing society later to loosen restraints on women's involvement in politics, as witnessed in the latter half of the 19th century. Susan B. Anthony,²³ both an abolitionist and supporter of temperance, got involved in the suffrage movement and became a partner with Stanton throughout their fight for woman suffrage.²⁴ These two women, along with Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, and others, were some of the foremothers of the fight for enfranchisement.

21. Susan Goodier and Karen Pastorello, *Women Will Vote* (New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 2017), 32-34.

22. Frankel and Dye, *Gender, Class, Race and Reform in the Progressive Era*, 78-79.

23. Susan B. Anthony was an American social reformer and women's rights activist who started her social work in temperance and abolitionism. She became one of the leading figures of the suffrage movement along with her friend and colleague Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Anthony traveled and gave lectures on suffrage all over the United States. The 19th Amendment, also known as the Susan B. Anthony Amendment, was named for her.

24. Spruill Wheeler, *One Woman, One Vote*, 104-6.

Throughout the historiography of suffrage, highly prominent women such as the early 19th century suffragists are often the main subjects of review and analysis. From the beginning of suffrage scholarship, there has been historically a narrow focus on the bigger events and bigger players within the movement. Studies through the years appropriately reify the honored leaders of national suffrage: Jean Baker's *Sisters*, for example, tells about the lives of Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Frances Willard, and Alice Paul.²⁵ Other classic narratives track pivotal events such as the World Anti-Slavery Convention with Lucretia Mott, the Declaration of Sentiments, and, in the 20th century, protests outside the White House by National Women's Party activists who were then incarcerated and force-fed in Occoquan prison. It is only more recently that more layered parts of the history have been filled in. No longer are these foremothers on an untouchable pedestal. Their flaws can be looked at and the problematic beliefs held by many in the suffrage movement examined. When studying the history of woman suffrage, racial attitudes had a lasting impact on events and processes both inside and outside the movement.

In the past two decades the problem of race vis-a-vis women's suffrage progress has begun to be explored in a way that does not excuse racist behavior, which previous scholarship acknowledged.²⁶ A major event of early suffrage, later mirrored in similar ways on the state level in Tennessee about the 19th Amendment, was the national split over ratification of the 15th Amendment. During the Civil War, advocacy for woman

25. Jean H. Baker, *Sisters* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005).

26. Ibid.; Lisa Tetrault. *The Myth of Seneca Falls: Memory and the Women's Suffrage Movement, 1848-1898* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2014).

suffrage was pressed to the side in support of the Union and the focus on abolition of slavery. After the war, there came to be a division between those who supported universal suffrage, which would include both African Americans and women, and those who focused on the 15th Amendment, with enfranchisement for African American men only, passed through Congress and ratified.²⁷

As Reconstruction was beginning, the dangers that African Americans faced in the South needed be addressed as quickly as possible. Due to extreme and widespread racial violence against freedmen, many advocates of broader universal suffrage switched their position over to the immediate, singular objective of gaining enfranchisement for male African Americans. Women who wanted to be included in the 15th Amendment and were angry that the word “male” had been embedded in the Constitution for the first time in the 14th Amendment saw the 15th Amendment as yet another hurdle that would have to be overcome in order to gain the vote for women.²⁸ Infighting over ratification of the 15th Amendment among women suffragists like Stone, Stanton, Anthony, and their supporters, caused a wide rift in the women’s movement. In 1868 the suffragists split into two separate groups. One group was the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), headed by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who did not support the 15th Amendment because women had been left out of it.²⁹ NWSA understood that women would need their own federal voting amendment since they had been cut from the

27. Spruill Wheeler, *One Woman, One Vote*, 61-65.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Spruill Wheeler, *Votes for Women!*, 7.

Fifteenth. The other faction was the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), led by Lucy Stone and her husband Henry Blackwell.³⁰ AWSA supported the 15th Amendment but then wanted to focus, sequentially, on women's enfranchisement after the Fifteenth's ratification was accomplished. AWSA, while endorsing a federal amendment for women, energized grassroots work and worked for state and local voting laws to provide access for women. AWSA supported state amendments and partial-suffrage legislation.

During this time period, Stanton through her writing and Anthony through her traveling lectures in the West began to publicly promote racist attitudes in order to gain support for suffrage. White supremacist reasoning, such as the preeminence of white women, who should hold priority in voting above African American men, and systemic disenfranchisement of African American men especially in the South, permeated the woman suffrage movement throughout its history. Racist arguments were used by both pro- and anti-suffragist factions across the United States. More recent scholarship, such as Laura Free's monograph *Suffrage Reconstructed*, shows the dark truth of racism that had been underplayed in many earlier accounts of the suffrage movement.³¹ The breadth and depth of American racism, the bitterness of white-black schisms over voting, hostilities between and among national leaders, and racist attitudes throughout the suffrage establishment would follow the woman suffrage cause across its history.

30. Ibid.

31. Laura E. Free, *Suffrage Reconstructed: Gender, Race, and Voting Rights in the Civil War Era* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2015).

Both NWSA and AWSA competed for political and financial support and successes over the years. Both gave potent effort and attention to the new territories in the West to promote and expand woman suffrage. Suffrage achieved remarkable victories in several of the future western states, with Wyoming becoming the first territory, latter state, to pass enfranchisement for women in 1869.

Following the split into NWSA and AWSA in 1870, both organizations worked separately up until they united in 1890 to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), with Elizabeth Cady Stanton as its national leader until 1900.³² The organization would focus heavily on advocating for a Susan B. Anthony Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which became the 19th Amendment, to ensure the federal right to women's vote. However, NAWSA also continued to work for stepped, forward movement within individual states in passage of suffrage legislation at the state level. Although NAWSA was reasonably successful state by state, especially in the West, its main goal remained an overarching federal amendment that would curtail any need for further state-by-state campaigns.

The movement's focus on state support did ultimately help in Congressional passage and state ratification of the 19th Amendment, because many states, by the time of ratification in 1920, had already built state suffrage associations, had organized statewide campaigns, had political lobbying networks in place, and had achieved passage of state laws to guarantee the right for women to vote in municipal, school board, and other local

32. Spruill Wheeler, *One Women, One Vote*, 157.

elections.³³ After the passage of the 19th Amendment by Congress in 1919, the amendment still of course had to be ratified by 36 states, as specified in Article V of the U.S. Constitution, in order for the woman suffrage amendment to become law.

Ratification in Tennessee

Ratification came down to states in the South as the deciding region of the country. Some southern states, led by Georgia and Alabama in 1919, voted explicitly against the Nineteenth's ratification. Many states had already blocked state woman-suffrage laws and did not want a federal amendment that, as they saw it, interfered with states' rights and their state legislative authority. Nineteenth-century secessionist sentiment—state v. federal, North v. South—was still extremely prevalent across the South. Adding to states' rights attitudes were racist beliefs and fear that states' Jim Crow disfranchisement laws, which had successfully removed African American men from access to voting across the South, would be under threat. By July 1920, legislatures in seven southern states—Georgia, Alabama, South Carolina, Mississippi, Virginia, Maryland, and Louisiana—had expressly rejected the 19th Amendment. Two legislatures—North Carolina and Florida—had not taken it up. Five southern states had actually voted to ratify the 19th Amendment—Texas, Missouri, Arkansas, Kentucky, and West Virginia. Texas had voted for it as early as June of 1919 and West Virginia in March of 1920. By March 1920, 35 states in total had ratified the Nineteenth, primarily across the North, New England, the Midwest, and the West. Inaction from spring into

33. Catt and Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics*, 316-18.

summer of 1920 meant that if Tennessee were to meet, support, and vote for the amendment, Tennessee would be the 36th state and would make the right for women to vote federal law across the entire nation.

The first history of the woman suffrage movement was written by the women who led it. As is typically true in understanding history, those who write it inform and color collective knowledge through their unique perspectives, lenses, and biases. Early suffragists' takes on events in the movement would have lasting effects on the scholarship on the topic. The first formal organizations that were founded, the American Woman Suffrage Association and National Woman Suffrage Association, are well documented by their own members, who controlled the suffrage narrative.³⁴ After the two main national organizations combined into the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1890, women already had begun to put down on paper the stories of their movement up to that point.³⁵ Early documentation, together with recorded public evidence, have offered later historians many archives to access to study first-wave suffrage activities. After the passing of the 19th Amendment in 1920, Carrie Chapman Catt used her own personal papers and the writings of many state chapter presidents to compile the history of the suffrage movement from beginning to end, as she could encompass it. Within the voluminous corpus of Catt's correspondence, just looking at the

34. Carrie Chapman Catt Papers, Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, TN (hereafter, TSLA); Catt and Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics*; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Matilda Joslyn Gage, and Ida Husted Harper, eds., *History of Woman Suffrage, Vols. I-VI* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1881-1922); Tetrault, *The Myth of Seneca Falls*, 112-44.

35. Spruill Wheeler, *One Woman, One Vote*, 102.

Tennessee slice of the story, letters written between Catt and the Tennessee suffrage leaders, such as the chairman of the ratification committee of the Tennessee Equal Suffrage League, Catherine Talty Kenny, provide evidence that there was a carefully chosen, intentionally formed narrative around the suffrage movement at both the national and state levels.³⁶ Downplaying infighting in the movement, omitting acknowledgment of those who were not the leaders in urban areas, and minimization of African American women's contributions created a very specific storyline for suffrage that has followed the movement's historiography until recent decades.

The northern women at the core of the national suffrage narrative were women typically from townships or small communities in northern states, but the history, for some of them, of having actually been farm daughters, is never really explored; and none of them, early on of course, was from the South or Tennessee. *Woman Suffrage and Politics* is a retelling of the suffrage story about major events, written by one of the critically important middle-class white women of the movement, Carrie Chapman Catt.³⁷ Arguments for these national narratives by historians emphasize that without the women prime movers, suffrage would never have been successful. Embedded in the histories are that large city centers were where everything positively impacting suffrage took place. Most scholarship on suffrage was similarly framed until recent years.

The study of the suffrage movement in the South and in Tennessee has its own "take" on southern white women's involvement in and commitment to movements for the

36. Correspondence, Box 1, Folder 14, Carrie Chapman Catt Papers, TSLA.

37. Catt and Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics*.

political advancement of women and the vote. Embedded in southern suffrage analyses is how white southern women viewed patriarchal government, women's place as proper white southern ladies, and their relationships with white men, as well as with black women and men. These post-Civil War framings are necessarily baseline issues in studies of both white and black women's interactions with the suffrage question. Consistent pushback on suffrage in the South relied on the idea that women were supposed to be helpers in order to convince men of voting for women's interests, but were never supposed to be taking an active part in politics directly themselves.³⁸ The idea of happily accepting men's goodwill and men's voting authority stems heavily from southern romanticism of chivalry, as well as from religious beliefs that women were not meant to participate in governing on any level.³⁹ Antiquated ideas protecting privilege, propriety, and position in society are attributed to city and middle-class white women, more so than to any other group participating in suffrage.⁴⁰ Affluent white city and town women had free time, in contrast to rural women, working women, and women of lower status, which allowed them the leisure and access to go to group meetings and be involved in petition-raising.

The anthology *Votes for Women!*, which looks at the suffrage movement in the South and Tennessee, explores the struggles of different suffragists and how women

38. Spruill Wheeler, *Votes for Women!*, 108-9.

39. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 75-82.

40. Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930*. (Chicago: Univ of Chicago Press, 1970), 154-55, 192-95.

interacted with accepted southern norms of decorum and with pervasive racial attitudes in the context of the right to vote.⁴¹ Another work that investigates women's activities during this time period is *Tennessee Women in the Progressive Era*, which examines women's efforts in social movements at the turn of the last century, and their attitudes about creating safer homes through their advocacy for and direct participation in legislation that would achieve those goals.⁴² The collection's differing essays are studies of Tennessee women's diversity in religion, race, and education. Both works, like most in suffrage historiography, have attempted to widen the scope of vision beyond just city life but still seem heavily focused on urban women.

All works that center on Tennessee use A. Elizabeth Taylor's original research, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, published in 1957, as a baseline resource.⁴³ Her book provides a chronological re-telling of the development of the suffrage movement in Tennessee and gives details of where suffrage unions were located geographically across the state. Taylor follows the trend of the scholarship of the national movement, though, and largely ignores rural women. Taylor's book is comprehensive in its coverage of suffrage in Tennessee, following the racial attitudes of the suffrage discourse, the infighting over where the national convention would be held in the state, the split in the movement in Tennessee following that fight, and the move from, at first, supporting state suffrage legislation to, by summer 1920, driving hard for ratification of

41. Spruill Wheeler, *Votes for Women!*.

42. Evins, *Tennessee Women in the Progressive Era*.

43. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*.

the federal amendment. A concern in reviewing Taylor's suffrage history is her express perpetuation of the idea that rural women were not really interested in suffrage and did not participate in dialogue about the movement,⁴⁴ which is counter to evidence she herself provides in her research, so there is clearly incongruity.⁴⁵ Lack of clarity on rural attitudes about woman suffrage calls for greater research into rural women's perspectives to study rural counties more closely, looking more deeply for activities in which rural women may have participated during the time period of greatest discussion about the vote for women.

The history of the state of Tennessee, as support grew for women's suffrage and as Tennessee was becoming the unlikely key state in the battle for ratification, is complex and provocative. It's a study in how southern attitudes both hindered and helped the ratification of the amendment. The trajectory of Tennessee's development of a suffrage movement and the increasing pro-suffrage, and anti-suffrage, activism in the state parallel in many ways the national narrative's arc. Although different, the national story and the Tennessee story have some commonalities. Many of the same pro- and anti-suffrage attitudes accompanied the national movement into the state. A. Elizabeth Taylor writes that, "Among the more active southern suffrage crusades was the one in Tennessee, which may be considered to have started in August, 1876, when Mrs. Napoleon Cromwell of Mississippi asked permission to address the Democratic convention

44. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 38-39.

45. *Ibid.*, 38-39, 131 n. 6.

assembled in Nashville.”⁴⁶ The convention officials treated her with a condescending attitude of parental indulgence, but they did allow her to speak on the matter, in which she offered an example of the very southern attitude white women held on the idea of suffrage. Cromwell wanted the Democrats of the time to “unite the white race by enfranchising women.”⁴⁷ Cromwell articulated the prevalent belief of the southern suffrage movement, including in Tennessee, that white women were more deserving of the vote than formerly enslaved African American men and that white women’s lack of enfranchisement—that the educated wives, sisters, and daughters of voting men could not cast a ballot—was invalidating and highly disrespectful. The convention did not adopt a resolution to endorse suffrage for women.⁴⁸

Over the following years, various bills and resolutions were introduced to the Tennessee House and Senate to give limited voting rights to women, but no action was taken on them. Continued rejection of women’s citizenship did not however deter those fighting for it; they continued to push for the right to vote. In 1889 the first woman suffrage league in Tennessee was formed in Memphis and elected its officers, one of whom was Mrs. Lide Meriwether, a staunch supporter of prohibition and leading member of the state’s WCTU, who served as the suffrage league’s first president.⁴⁹ After Memphis, in the last decade of the 1800s, suffrage leagues began to form throughout

46. *Ibid.*, 15.

47. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 16.

48. *Ibid.*

49. Spruill Wheeler, *Votes for Women!*, 53-54.

Tennessee, spreading support for the movement and educating the public on how suffrage was necessary for the good of the home and country. While it was still technically in existence in Tennessee, the suffrage movement fell somewhat dormant and inactive for a time at the turn of the new century. Visible activity began to resume however in the state and picked up increased momentum in 1906 after a convention was held in Memphis that led to the creation of the Southern Woman Suffrage Conference. The Southern Conference's position on voting was that education rather than sex should be the determining factor in one's right to vote.⁵⁰ Its position was obviously not about equal suffrage, as voting for an educational requirement would have left out those without adequate schooling, many of whom would have been African Americans, rural southerners, and the poor. The conference also had a strong stance against a federal amendment and advocated for enfranchisement only through state legislation.⁵¹ The Southern Conference's position, again, confirmed widespread southern attitudes that adhered to Civil War framings about states' rights over federal jurisdiction. Fear of federal authority would continue to be a point of conflict in future debates in Tennessee on who should provide women their right to vote. Nevertheless, many suffrage supporters in Tennessee would get behind the 19th Amendment in 1920. Positive consequences from the Southern Woman Suffrage Conference were that it boosted interest in the suffrage movement throughout Tennessee and generated the establishment of the Tennessee Equal Suffrage Association, organized by Lide Meriwether.

50. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 25.

51. *Ibid.*, 26.

Suffrage activity, while not heavily reported across Tennessee in the early 20th century, was indeed beginning to garner attention in local hometown and county newspapers. Around the year 1915 there was an increase in articles on suffrage activities across the state. The *Fayette Falcon* of Fayette County reported in 1915, “At the court house on last Friday night several hundred citizens heard the first woman’s suffrage speeches ever made in this city.”⁵² Another example of early Tennessee reporting on suffrage came from *The Parisian*, the local paper of Paris, Tennessee, in Henry County, in 1915: “‘Paris Society Seeks Votes for Women in Suffrage Campaign,’ About 100 present for event held at courthouse with speakers from state campaign committee, local league formed.”⁵³ There were both pro- and anti-suffrage sentiments expressed in the early Tennessee newspaper articles, and both used traditional ideas on the nature of women as reasoning behind their stances. Despite negative positions, it is nevertheless obvious in the local newspapers that suffrage support was growing throughout the state between the years 1912 and 1919, because the number of suffrage leagues in Tennessee increased to at least seventy-eight organizations by 1919.⁵⁴ These state and local leagues were active in gaining support through grassroots methods like holding lectures, public debates, and passing out suffrage literature. In doing so they began to gain power in numbers and increased public popularity in order to influence legislation in the state.

52. “Suffrage Speaking,” *Fayette Falcon*, Oct. 22, 1915, Fayette County Newspapers, TSLA.

53. “Paris Society Seeks Votes for Women in Suffrage Campaign,” *The Parisian*, Nov. 26, 1915, Henry County Newspapers, TSLA.

54. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 36.

Increased visibility did not mean that Tennessee's suffrage movement was always a united front. Much like the national associations' divisions, the Tennessee Equal Suffrage Association would split apart in 1914 due to competition between factions, which in Tennessee's case was also regional. A split into two major cohorts of Tennessee suffragists was caused by an argument about where exactly the National American Woman Suffrage Association would hold its national convention that was being hosted in 1914 in Tennessee.⁵⁵ In which Tennessee city the convention would take place had been narrowed down to either Chattanooga or Nashville. Regional wrath then ensued because there was an inability to amicably negotiate the choice of location site for the convention, which resulted in Tennessee's suffragists' splitting into the Tennessee Equal Suffrage Association, predominantly in West Tennessee, and the Tennessee Equal Suffrage Association, Incorporated, predominantly in Middle and East Tennessee.⁵⁶ The two groups would stay entirely separate entities until 1918, when they finally recombined into the Tennessee Woman Suffrage Association (TWSA).⁵⁷ Much like the national organization NAWSA, TWSA benefited from a more integrated statewide structure and strengthened allocation of (wo)manpower once they merged back together and were no longer divisively jockeying for separate support.

55. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 67.

56. *Ibid.*

57. Carole Stanford Bucy, "'The Thrill of History Making': Suffrage Memories of Abby Crawford Milton," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (Fall 1996): 229-34.

World War I had a colossal effect on the suffrage movement, as one of the main arguments of the “antis” was that women were not involved with war.⁵⁸ Women’s participation in WWI helped women gain heightened respect from many power politicians, including President Woodrow Wilson. By the end of the war President Wilson sent out a message in support for the 19th Amendment that allowed many legislators to feel that they also could publicly back it and that, if they did not, they would be going against popular opinion.⁵⁹

Approval for suffrage also grew in Tennessee during and after the war. Taylor writes that Mary Ellis Butler, from Jackson in Madison County, reported the change in public opinion: “Hostility in 1913, ridicule in 1914, tolerance in 1915, frank approval in 1916,” she wrote.⁶⁰ By war’s end, there was a feeling of inevitability in women getting the right to vote. Newspaper articles around the state at the time expressed that same sentiment. One such article appeared in the *Grainger County News*, stating,

Anti-Woman Suffrage advocates had as well bow to the inevitable. It is a question of only a short time until the good women of every precinct in the nation will be given the ballot. Whether they need this privilege, whether it will be beneficial to the country, or, regardless of the result, it’s coming.⁶¹

58. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 84-85.

59. Spruill Wheeler, *Votes for Women!*, 175-80.

60. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 73.

61. “Grainger County News,” *Grainger County News*, March 18, 1920, Grainger County Newspapers, TSLA.

In Tennessee, strident attitudes were softening. Other states that were beginning to support suffrage influenced Tennessee. Tennessee itself was beginning to pass legislation that granted partial suffrage to women in the state. In May 1915, a resolution in the state legislature was passed to remove the word “male” from state suffrage criteria in the Tennessee constitution.⁶² The passage reads,

Every person of the age of twenty-one years, being a citizen of the United States, and a resident of this State for twelve months, and of the county wherein he or she may offer his or her vote for six months, next preceding the day of the election, shall be entitled to vote for members of the General Assembly and other civil officers for the county or district in which he or she resides.⁶³

This was a victory for the Tennessee suffrage movement and was a step closer to getting a state constitutional amendment passed allowing at least partial suffrage in Tennessee for women in categories of elections. It was not until 1917, though, that the state House of Representatives passed the bill that gave Tennessee women enfranchisement in presidential and municipal elections. The state Senate however defeated the bill, and thus Tennessee women were still unable to vote. Although the defeat was a blow to the women’s vote movement, the women who had fought for the bill were not discouraged from their path and continued to lobby for state legislation for enfranchisement.

On March 19, 1919, a limited suffrage bill was once again introduced to the state House, where it passed. That April, the state Senate began debate on the bill, and the bill

62. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 93.

63. Tennessee Constitution, Art. IV, Sec. 1.

also passed in the Senate, seventeen to fourteen. The new law gave women partial voting rights. It allowed them to vote for the electors for president and vice president and for municipal officers.⁶⁴ It had taken four years to achieve this victory, from 1915, with the adoption of a resolution to amend the state constitution, to 1919, when partial woman suffrage became part of Tennessee state law.

The same year that limited suffrage for women was passed in the Tennessee legislature, the 19th Amendment was passed by the U.S. Congress and began winding its way through the 48 states for ratification. A new federal priority, with the vision of altering the U.S. Constitution to include participatory citizenship for women, shifted Tennessee suffragists' efforts from seeking new state laws for woman suffrage to their diligent work to secure Tennessee legislative support for the federal amendment for woman suffrage.

The battle for ratification of the 19th Amendment in Tennessee started to pick up in the summer months of 1920 preceding the Nashville vote on it in August. That vote in the Tennessee legislature, both in the state Senate and state House, would determine if Tennessee could support the principle of women's civic equality. And it would, since more southern states had explicitly refused to ratify the federal amendment, also determine the national outcome of the 19th Amendment itself. Historians often retell the dramatic story of the days leading up to the vote, as well as into the one-on-one politics of individual legislators' ayes or nays. During the summer of the vote, suffragists spoke personally with almost all the legislators to gain their promises to vote in favor of

64. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 102.

suffrage.⁶⁵ While many of the representatives and senators vocalized that they were for suffrage, they were bribed and pressured to change sides as the vote loomed closer. Abby Crawford Milton was recorded in an interview published in 1996 as saying, “They were all bribed....After they were in session, the votes that were for women's suffrage were swindled so badly.”⁶⁶ Although the men who originally had sworn support for suffrage outnumbered those who were against it, as the day of the vote approached, the number of aye votes began to dwindle and the number of nays go up. After successful passage of the amendment in the state Senate, it was almost stopped in the state House. Split, with a small lead blocking ratification, the House vote looked as though the amendment would fail.

The storied “War of the Roses,” the yes vote cast by Harry T. Burn, and the “Perfect 36,” retold in past and present scholarship and in the media, have long been the major narratives of Tennessee suffrage history, including in Taylor, for example, who goes into great detail.⁶⁷ The Tennessee “War of the Roses”⁶⁸ suffrage story recalls

65. Sarah Spence DeBow, *The History of the Case*, privately printed booklet, TSLA.

66. Bucy, “The Thrill of History Making,” 233.

67. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 104-25.

68. The phrase “War of the Roses,” which classically references the fifteenth century struggle between two houses of Plantagenets for the throne of England, was first used in Tennessee to frame a political campaign that pitted brothers Robert Love Taylor and Alfred A. Taylor against each other in a heated run for governor of Tennessee in 1886. (Democrat Bob Taylor defeated his Republican brother Alf in 1886, but both eventually did serve as Tennessee governor.) The term was adopted again in 1920 to reference the 19th Amendment ratification vote in Tennessee, where pro-suffrage legislators wore yellow roses and opponents of suffrage wore red.

politicians wearing roses pinned to their lapels to show which way they were planning to vote on the Anthony amendment: pro-suffrage legislators wore yellow roses and opponents of suffrage wore red. Burn, a Republican member of the Tennessee state House of Representatives from McMinn County, is most well known for switching his vote in the August 1920 suffrage convention in Nashville from “against” ratification to “for” the vote for the Nineteenth Amendment after reading a letter from his mother who urged him to “be a good boy” and help Mrs. Catt.⁶⁹ His vote is typically credited as the decisive vote that led to the amendment’s ratification. While present-day histories do not ignore the classic suffrage narrative, its exciting conclusion, and an unsuccessful aftermath struggle to up-end the vote’s outcome, there are inevitably gaps in the standard scholarship, some of which are lacunae about rural participation in suffrage and in other progressive movements.

Studying Rural Tennessee Women

Rural women of Tennessee were not indifferent to the progressive movements around them nor were they passive observers of the social changes being implemented in their lives. Women actively participated in multiple progressive movements that addressed their specific worries, just as much as their urban counterparts did. The progressive movements rural women involved themselves in not only exposed rural women to suffrage ideas, but also led them to participate in active dialogue about

69. Spruill Wheeler, *One Woman, One Vote*, 347; Carol Lynn Yellin and Janann Sherman, *The Perfect 36: Tennessee Delivers Woman Suffrage* (Oak Ridge: Iris Press, 1998).

women's rights and woman suffrage. By exploring the movements in which rural women immersed themselves, connections are made as to why and how and in what ways they participated in suffrage politics. Fuller exploration of rural women's concerns and activities during the era of the push for women's suffrage shows that rural women were just as involved in the political discourse of suffrage perspectives as were their urban counterparts. Deeper examination of rural women's activities in Tennessee can offer a fuller understanding of how women across the state worked with, and around, each other in navigating women's positions in society.

Deciding what defines or constitutes rural women vis-à-vis city women, in order to study rural Tennesseans' unique positions in terms of attitudes about women's rights and woman suffrage, necessitates establishing and narrowing criteria for an examination, such as looking at population densities and agricultural production, and then comparing such statistical parameters to women's activities in their communities, their public work, and their involvement in suffrage. Tennessee is made up of 95 counties. To engage in a focused, contained, accomplishable study of rural women's potential suffrage activities requires, as a beginning point, studying just an initial sampling of rural Tennessee counties may offer insights into rural women more widely across the state. Therefore, this thesis looks at a sample of carefully chosen counties. For geographic comparison across Tennessee, one county is selected for investigation in each the Three Grand Divisions of Tennessee: East, Middle, and West. Given Tennessee's horizontal spread and 95 counties, one study-county per grand division is not statistically representative. Rather, such an investigation provides examples and case studies, offering anecdotal reference comparisons. It also allows for an interpretive overview of rural Tennessee during the

period of examination and offers an investigative model for deeper, more extensive studies in the future by other researchers.

Within the selected counties, local chapters of suffrage unions, Women's Christian Temperance Unions, and other local social clubs, organizations, and movements are explored through newspaper articles and other primary and secondary resources. One of the parameters for the counties selected for study is that each should have a similar population density in the early twentieth century, a population of c.10,000-20,000 county residents, which was the average rural Tennessee county density at the time.⁷⁰ An agricultural parameter is that the counties should have similar farming crops that were the majority of their agricultural output.⁷¹ Limiting the study to counties with similar farm crops ensures similar lifestyles in relation to farming and harvest culture. Each of the counties must have a local hometown newspaper that can be accessed. Additional variables that the chosen counties should have in common are that they ought to have an active Women's Suffrage League but also no easily accessible college present in the county that might have helped accentuate and spread suffrage literature and ideals. Meaning, suffrage activities in the selected counties were not supplemented by an additional cohort of elite, educated women from outside the county; likely therefore,

70. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920: Population Number and Distribution of Inhabitants*, Table 49, Area and Population of Counties or Equivalent Divisions: 1850 to 1920 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921).

71. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920, Vol. VI, Part 2: Agriculture, Tennessee County Table IV, Value of All Crops, and Acreage* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1922), 464-72.

suffrage work was begun and sustained by local county women. The lack of colleges also suggests that the dissemination of information would have come primarily from newspapers and through personal interactions with the community's local suffrage league members.

The focus of the present study is therefore narrowed down to the following three counties of Tennessee: Marion, Jackson, and Benton. These three counties meet all the criteria set forth: similar population numbers, a newspaper, lack of easily accessible colleges, and all three having had the same major crop output, which was corn. It is acceptable that the counties may have differed in cash crops due to differences in regional micro-environments. All three counties had an active women's suffrage league, which was known before this study and was one of the key components when searching for counties to study. Another acceptable variation is that Marion County's economy was supplemented at the time with manufacturing: Marion had both a farming economy and industrial output. These three counties, though in separate divisions of the state, are alike each other in fitting the criteria. They are not typical of every county in their respective divisions, although they do share some traits with their surrounding counties.

The following information are the data that led to these three counties having been chosen for the study:

Marion County, established in 1817, is located in the southwestern corner of East Tennessee. Of the three counties selected, it held the most population, at 17,402 in the year 1920.⁷² While at the end of the 19th century into the 20th century, coal and iron

72. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census...1920: Population Number and Distribution of Inhabitants*.

mining industries became the dominant economic industry in the county, agriculture was still the way that many of the citizens earned their livelihoods. The number of farms in the county was 1037.⁷³ The county had no colleges operating during the beginning of the 20th century. Its suffrage league was located in the town of Jasper.

Jackson County, located in northeastern Middle Tennessee, was established in 1801 with an act of the Tennessee General Assembly. It had a population of 14,955 in the year 1920, and any colleges it had had were no longer operating after the year 1900.⁷⁴ Its major exports were corn and tobacco, with corn producing over 1,000,000 bushels in the year 1920, which was higher than most of the counties in the state.⁷⁵ It also produced over 1,000,000 pounds of tobacco. It had 2,403 operating farms that year as well.⁷⁶ This county was heavily into agriculture, and its suffrage league was located in the town of Gainesboro.

Benton County had the smallest population of the counties pulled for the study, at 12,046 in 1920.⁷⁷ Benton was established in 1836 and is located in northeastern West

73. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census...1920, Vol. VI, Part 2: Agriculture*, 446-51.

74. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census...1920: Population Number and Distribution of Inhabitants*.

75. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census...1920, Vol. VI, Part 2: Agriculture*, 464-72.

76. *Ibid.*, 446-51.

77. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census...1920: Population Number and Distribution of Inhabitants*.

Tennessee. Its only college was converted into a high school in the year 1914, and its suffrage league was located in the town of Big Sandy. Its main cereal crop was corn and the main cash crop produced was tobacco. Jackson and Marion counties had similar agricultural production numbers, although their populations did differ markedly in 1920.

All three of these counties' main cereal crops were corn, with corn being over 90% of the cereal crop produced by each. Their cash crops were tobacco and cotton, though dominated more by tobacco than cotton. Jackson County's tobacco production was equal to that of its corn production, however more acreage in Jackson was dedicated to corn than tobacco. The three counties met the criteria established for the study. Each county is, and was, considered "rural" for the time period. Consistently, all three counties, given their 21st century economic, transportation, education, and societal shifts, are still considered rural counties in Tennessee in the present day. Benton and Marion counties' population numbers have increased since 1920, but by fewer than 10,000 people in each.⁷⁸ Jackson County conversely has reduced in density; its population was only 11,638 in 2010.⁷⁹

Exploring the issues and political actions in these counties shows that the rural women who lived there were involved in suffrage discourse as well as in many other societal movements in which women's voices and enfranchisement would benefit. Rural women's cultures, and the rural realities that differed from life in urban centers,

78. U.S. Census Bureau, 2010 Census of Population and Housing, *Population and Housing Unit Counts, CPH-2-44, Tennessee, Table 7: Population by Urban and Rural 2010* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, Sept. 2012), 11.

79. Ibid.

influenced rural Tennessee women's involvement with social movements such as suffrage. To investigate their commonalities and divergences requires examination of the realities of being a rural woman living in Tennessee at the height of suffrage politics and digging into the specific interests' rural women had with progressive activities. This study looks at the issues that rural women were interested in and shows that there were indeed crossovers with urban issues and there was communication between country women and their urban counterparts. Rural women did become immersed in suffrage and other progressive reforms. Variabilities in geographic distance, transportation, information dissemination, communication, social class, education, religion, and race are analyzed in this study to evaluate how rural cultures across Tennessee differed from urban lifeways and shaped women's interactions with political processes.

The research question—what were rural Tennessee women's attitudes toward woman suffrage and were rural women involved in suffrage discourse?—provides a means to investigate how the perspectives on suffrage over the first twenty years of the 1900s evolved and matured and how events that took place in the larger cities were creating attitude shifts across Tennessee, transforming average women's sense of themselves in society and what was possible for them to achieve. New thinking included growing acceptability for woman suffrage. The first two decades of the 20th century generated an increasingly receptive environment in which more and more communities were becoming openly supportive of the suffrage movement, even among rural women.

Rural women's socioeconomic realities directly shaped the nature of rural Tennessee women's involvement in suffrage and progressive movements. Exploring rural county women's concerns, how rural women addressed their concerns through

participation in progressive movements, and rural values around women's enfranchisement offers a fuller narrative of rural women vis-à-vis the Tennessee story of suffrage and Tennessee women's participation in politics, formally a male-dominated sphere. Investigation to recover and identify rural representation in the Tennessee suffrage effort is researched through the use of primary documents. Also evaluated is the lack of physical representation of rural women's participation in landmarks on the Tennessee historic landscape and how that can be rectified. This research into rural women of Tennessee in the suffrage movement, and in other progressive crusades, begins to reduce the silence and invisibility of rural women in suffrage scholarship of Tennessee and give them voice and position.

CHAPTER 2:
SOUTHERN WOMEN AND SOUTHERN CONCERNS

Motives are required to spur participation of individuals into the world of activism and political transformation, especially in the cases of those who have been socially oppressed and forbidden from taking part. Women of the United States sought to bring about their political rights, but not necessarily to transform the expectations of their gender. The issues that women faced in their lives at the beginning of the 20th century were a result of drastic transitions in the American societal landscape over the previous one hundred years. Urban women saw that the industrial age had built factories and developed mass production. Factory work and paid jobs had pulled white women and children into labor outside the home. Rural women, especially in the South, witnessed the change from large farms to the rise of smaller farms, but in which land ownership was limited.¹ Tenant farming also escalated throughout the South and in Tennessee.² Pricing for farm goods was lower than in previous decades at the turn of the century, and economic disparities increased for rural farm families, many of whom barely eked out a subsistence living.

1. Mary S. Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community: Reformers, Schools, and Homes in Tennessee, 1900-1930* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1998), 3.

2. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census...1920, Vol. VI, Part 2: Agriculture*, 464-72.

Progressive legislation has been known for its focus on many of the issues surrounding the industrially produced social problems in the cities. During the early 1900s in the country, there began to be a concentrated effort to culturally and economically revitalize rural areas as well. Rural women's interests in reform efforts that directly affected their families and communities created the motives that propelled their support, or disavowed the activism of the time. Much like their urban counterparts, rural women worried about the unique problems that impacted them directly. Crossover, however, was not uncommon between urban and rural women due to shared interests and to revitalize agricultural areas of the nation in the years after the Civil War.

This chapter focuses on southern attitudes, including differing gender and race perspectives, that led to women's involvement in societal discourse that engaged them in public work, based on the cultural concerns and specific issues facing the lives and communities of rural women. These issues and anxieties would lead to rural women's involvement in clubs, organizations, and social activism. In order to understand the activities that surrounded the suffrage movement, and connected progressive crusades, one must find the reasoning behind the action. Focusing on issues such as temperance, suffrage, racial enfranchisement, and rural reform through the lenses of southern women, allows for a better understanding of the concerns rural women had and the reasoning behind their eventual activism and organizational interactions. Rural women did not just join in discourse on enfranchisement blithely. Rather, they engaged to push for solutions to problems they wanted addressed through law and progressive initiatives.

Southern Women

While all American women had the expectations of their sex placed upon them by society, women in the South had specific criteria they had to meet that called forth the pure ideals of being a southern lady.³ Although the southern-lady principle was especially true for middle- and upper-class white southern women, it was also the expectation for all women in the South, rich and poor, black and white, to some extent or another, to live up to a form of a revered standard of southern womanhood. Women as a sex were promoted as more pious and purer than men in all classes of society. This double standard is clear in an article from Benton County, one of counties studied in this research, which expressed the opinions of farmers:

We are opposed to the equal rights of woman—we want her to ever remain our superior....Woman is the medium through which angels whisper their messages to mankind; it is her hand that plants thoughts in the intellectual vineyard; it is through her heart that hope, love, and sympathy overflow and bless mankind.⁴

Women as pure—purity as reflected through a religious lens—is common throughout the South and in Tennessee. Women were celebrated as their husbands' moral compass during 19th and early 20th centuries. A woman guided the choices of her family, through her husband's actions, and created a space in the home that shielded the family from outside corruption. Beliefs such as these were part of the larger narrative on women's place in southern society. Anne Firor Scott's *The Southern Lady* follows the experiences

3. Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930*. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970), ix-x.

4. "Why Should Women Vote? Woman's Suffrage from the Viewpoint of Leading Farmers," *Camden Chronicle*, June 25, 1915, 4, *Chronicling America*.

of southern women and their history from the antebellum period to women's gaining the right to vote. Scott's main argument is that even with new economic, political, and educational freedoms, women of the South were still expected to maintain southern ladylike behavior.⁵ The concept of the southern woman is a collection of ideals that changed very little over time in base message. Scott describes the ideals as being portrayed continually in southern literary material. The southern woman, she states, is 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. Physically weak, and "formed from the less laborious occupations," she depended upon male protection...She was timid and modest, beautiful and graceful, "the most fascinating being in creation...."⁶

Sentiments such as these followed women throughout southern history, in the antebellum period as the Southern Belle and then, after the Civil War, promoted as part of Lost Cause propaganda. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler writes in her monograph on southern women suffrage leaders, "Serene and compassionate, she cared for the health and welfare of her family, servants, and others in her community who needed her beneficence. But she played an even more important role as preserver of religion and morality...."⁷

It was so ingrained in southern culture that women were the pillar of social piety and morality that it became a major part of suffrage debate as well as in arguments on

5. Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 225.

6. *Ibid.*, 4.

7. Marjorie Spruill Wheeler, *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1993), 6.

whether women should be involved in social reform at all. Southern women's behaviors, and expectation about them, were woven throughout the idea of the woman's sphere, which consisted of home and the family. Ideals about the domestic sphere however were not finite, but were flexible in their adaptive application to broadened meanings of what women's duties actually were. Behaving as a proper southern lady who protected the home could mean, literally, women staying within their family sphere and only interacting outside the home on personal matters. Or, interpreted more societally, women's tasks in the domestic sphere could be taken to mean that women had a duty to protect and uplift the family both at home and in the public arena. It is this latter reasoning that brought women into social reform movements, because they saw it their duty to improve the conditions in which families of all social classes functioned. It can be further argued that women used the domestic-sphere and home-protection ideal to gain ground on issues such as suffrage and temperance.

Women's presumed higher morality for the home was utilized by women to allow their entry into the public sphere and helped build their rationale for acquiring the vote. An article from the Benton County *Camden Chronicle*, "Housekeeper Needs the Vote," illustrates how important it is that homemakers participate in voting:

Housekeeping today is not what it used to be. One hundred years ago our great grandmothers spun the cloth and made the clothes for the family. They employed the family cobbler for a week at a time, who made shoes for the year from leather cured and tanned on the premises. They baked the bread, churned the butter, cured the meat, and made the candles; in short, housed under their roofs all the activities that ministered to the necessities and comforts of the family. Today all these processes are carried on outside the home. The shoes are made in factories, the clothes go through sweatshops, the meat is cured by big companies, the bread is made at the bakeries, and the butter comes from the creameries....All of these matters of food, clothes, housing, water and garbage are subject to

legislation. The state has taken the place of parents. The question of regulation of all of these matters so vital to a housekeeper is one of collective opinion, expressed by the ballot.”⁸

The shift in the way goods were made and distributed, no longer from local farms and tradesmen but now from mass production, meant that the home was subject to outside forces. Women at that time, with no legal recourse nor way in which to participate politically, needed to be able to defend the family, contend with the outside factors impacting the family, and engage in the franchise to support the regulations they needed for the home. Publications like Ida Tarbell’s *History of Standard Oil Company*⁹ and Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle*¹⁰ had been released in the first decade of the 20th century. These and other muckraker publications were consumed by mass audiences across the nation and educated the public about the failures of big business. They fanned the flames of the Progressive movement and led to worries about products coming into family homes, how they were made, and what dangers could come from them. As seen in the “Housekeeper Needs the Vote” article, industrial society itself was a motivator for women to get involved in suffrage since the sacred duty of southern women was to

8. “Housekeeper Needs the Vote,” *Camden Chronicle*, Aug. 13, 1920, 4, *Chronicling America*.

9. Tarbell’s 1904 exposé was written about the Standard Oil Company’s aggressive, both legal and illegal, techniques to take over and outmaneuver its competition. It addressed the power of big business and led to the company’s being found in violation of the Sherman Antitrust Act. At the time, the company was run by oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller.

10. Sinclair’s *The Jungle*, written in 1906, portrayed the exploitation and poor working conditions of industrialized cities including Chicago. There was a focus on the meat industry and its unsanitary production practices. The book led to federal investigations into U.S. meat packing facilities and to the passage of the Meat Inspection Act and Pure Food and Drug Act.

protect the wellness of their family unit. They no longer had direct control over what was being produced. While many rural women did still create many of the goods their family used, they were unable to participate in establishing laws that would affect the environment around their farms and homesteads. Southern women were promoted as the authority in the home sphere, the ones who took care of the family's needs, yet they had no say in legislation on the production of the products they consumed. The women understood what was lacking and used home-protection reasoning to argue for their right to make decisions on their legislators, and in turn have a voice in the passage of laws. Southern women used societal expectations placed upon them as wives and mothers to provide justification for their advocacy to participate in the perceived-as-masculine public sphere.

The Temperance Issue

One of the first ways women, benefiting from the accepted framework of women as naturally morally uncorrupt, began making a political path for themselves was through the temperance movement. Women had been involved in the temperance movement from the beginning of its establishment.¹¹ The moral ideals of womanhood allowed women to see the principled work of anti-alcohol as part of their sphere. Ruth Bordin writes on the early temperance movement that "Although leadership and public participation were denied them, they [women] were encouraged to use their roles as mothers, sisters, and

11. Ruth Bordin, *Woman and Temperance: The Quest for Power and Liberty, 1873-1900* (London: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1990), xxiv.

daughters to exercise moral suasion and set a good example for the family.”¹² Women saw temperance as a way to protect the home from the dangers of drunkenness, abuse, and financial ruin. The moral character of women as presumed by society, especially in the South, demanded that they set a standard in the home that shunned the consumption and purchase of alcohol. Through their participation in temperance advancement, women began to enter the public sphere as active contributors. They created their own meetings when they were excluded and denied participation in male-dominated forums,¹³ which generated the growth of women-run temperance societies, including the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. The WCTU was established in 1842 with the goal of prohibiting the production and sale of alcohol, both by state and national law.¹⁴ The group was active in Tennessee from the 1870s and remained active well into the 1950s.¹⁵ A look at the activism of the WCTU in the research-counties examined in this study is explored in the next chapter, which focuses specifically on activism and participation in social reform groups. The overview here is that women justified their involvement with temperance advocacy.

Southern women of Tennessee saw it their moral duty to participate in bettering their families and communities. Temperance was both a political and moral problem, but

12. Ibid.

13. Mattie Duncan Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State* (Kingsport, TN: Kingsport Press, 1962), 2.

14. Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1983), 161-64.

15. Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State*, 2-4.

it was the moral connection that allowed the women of Tennessee to participate in the political discourse about it. The *Sequachee Valley News* of Marion County in 1912 debated whether temperance was more morally or politically important:

The truth is, that it is both a political and a moral question. And people who insist that it is a moral but not a political question, or a political but not a moral question, have not taken a proper view of the question as a whole....The liquor traffic is demoralizing to those engaged in it. It is [ruinous] mentally, morally, physically, and financially to those that drink,

argued Silena Moore Holman, before then addressing alcohol as a solidly political problem because of the business operations behind it and the legislation that guided and allowed those business interests to thrive.¹⁶ Temperance fell under the umbrella of moral reform that would aid in the betterment of society and, by extension, create a safer home environment. With moral justification, women entered the public arena of temperance politics. A Benton County article written for the women who participated in the temperance movement stated,

Remember, you are the pioneer county superintendents of a reform that is coming as fast as the onward march of civilization, and every prayer you offer, every song you sing, every little good you can do for the cause is hastening the day of our ultimate success. Your steadfast faith and loyal, patient work are the mightiest existing factors in woman's contribution to the greatest moral work the world has ever known.¹⁷

16. Silena M. Holman, "A Moral or a Political Question," *Sequachee Valley News*, 1, Oct. 10, 1912, *Chronicling America*; cf. Carole Stanford Bucy, "Shall the Women be Silent?" in *Tennessee Women in the Progressive Era: Toward the Public Sphere in the New South*, ed. Mary A. Evins (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2013), 95-122.

17. "Woman's Christian Temperance Union," *Camden Chronicle*, Sept. 19, 1913, 1, *Chronicling America*.

Rural women in Tennessee counties cared about the issue of temperance and the legislation surrounding alcohol, and saw it their duty to address the crisis of liquor consumption. Temperance as both moral and political is embedded across all the actions of women in the WCTU and other temperance groups. Women especially saw it as their responsibility to keep their children informed about and safe from alcohol consumption. A 1915 pro-temperance-movement *Camden Chronicle* article expressed support for the schooling programs WCTU women provided local youth to address the issues of alcohol and promote young people's rejection of it: "Through the study course touching the liquor problem from the stand point of health, morals, and finance, the young people get the training to enable them to render practical, intelligent social service in this line of reform."¹⁸ Other articles continued the focus on the dangers of liquor consumption and strongly supported the education done by women as a moral priority.¹⁹

Morality was key in getting women, including Tennessee women, to participate in political dialogue on the issue of temperance. Rural women actively worried about liquor consumption and its corrupting power on the family. Their role as traditional southern mothers demanded that they intervene, and, because the moral imperative necessitated political involvement, modest, domestic-sphere women entered the public arena to act against the interests of the liquor industry. As seen in the publications in Tennessee

18. "Woman Christian Temperance Union," *Camden Chronicle*, July 2, 1915, 4, *Chronicling America*.

19. "Will the Temperance Wave Recede?" *Camden Chronicle*, Sept. 9, 1910, 8, *Chronicling America*.

newspapers, the rural areas of Tennessee held strongly to the conviction that morals were naturally a part of southern womanhood.

The Suffrage Issue

“Women Suffrage is vital to the right solution of the great problems which we must settle and settle immediately. We shall need women in our vision of affairs as we never have needed them before[—]the sympathy, the insight and clear moral instinct of the women of the world,” wrote Woodrow Wilson in his support of the suffrage movement.²⁰ What did he mean by “clear moral instinct”? During the fight for suffrage, women were held to the standard of being divinely gifted with a naturally pious nature. Their godly nature justified their space in the world as pure helpmates to men, as well as to their place in the home and their motherhood. Women on a moral pedestal, as Anne Firor Scott argues, was especially true in the South because womanhood was tied to the ideals of antebellum society and beliefs.²¹

Southern womanhood played a major role in the campaigns of both suffragists and anti-suffragists. Both groups used the ideals of what it meant to be female in the South to further their respective agendas, and both males and females of the opposing groups used women’s godly nature to their advantage. Since the idea of what it meant to be a proper southern woman was so broad, it could be applied in several different ways.

20. “The Case for Woman Suffrage,” *Jackson County Sentinel*, Aug. 12, 1920, 4, *Chronicling America*.

21. Scott, *The Southern Lady*.

Who could fully define what it meant to be a good wife and mother? The suffragists saw having a say in government as a way to protect the home, while anti-suffragists thought that women turning their eye toward the public sphere would cause suffering in the home and the destruction of gender boundaries.

Rural women also had to come to terms with the ideals of what it meant to be a southern woman vis-a-vis the reality of their political powerlessness. They, like the rest of the women of the nation, had to address the issue of suffrage as part of the greater political effect it would have on their future lives and communities. The way in which they participated in suffrage would be regulated by the ideal of the pious, soft southern woman. Women of the South and of Tennessee spurned the idea of any form of radicalization in their suffrage actions. Crassness and extremity did not fit into the ideal of a southern lady.²² Other than thinking it was beneath their creed as southern women, it was also due to their not wanting to alienate any of the moderates who might be sitting on the fence on the suffrage issue and to avoid more criticism to fuel anti-suffragists. Anti-suffragists of course used much the same reasoning to disavow women's right to vote. The suffragist argument, especially among rural women, was that women had the right to the ballot in order to protect their family interests. There was an appeal to farming families in rural areas that farm women's ability to vote was a vote for the benefit of the family farm. An article that was distributed throughout Tennessee newspapers, and published in the papers of the three counties of this study, was a call to action on what

22. Ibid., 180.

would be achieved if women, specifically rural women, acquired the right to vote. The article states,

The MOTHER WILL GAIN the power to reduce the high cost of living, to get better schools and recreation places for her children and decent working conditions for her older sons and daughters.

The CHILDREN WILL GAIN double the protection when the father and mother both can vote.

The FARMER WILL GAIN because farm women will vote for farm interests.²³

The article goes on to explain, to the citizens of Benton, Jackson, and Marion counties, and all the other rural Tennessee counties in which this strong pro-suffrage article addressed to farming families was published, that once woman suffrage was acquired, a myriad other societal and familial issues could be addressed by the future beneficent vote of farm women. The logic of course was built on the portrayal of woman as the ideal of southern lady, mother, wife, and protector of her children, farmer husband, and family farm.

Health of the family unit stood as a major concern for women, and suffragists employed that worry to show the benefits of women's enfranchisement. Appearing in both Marion and Benton counties' newspapers was the essay "Lowest Infant Death Rate in Full Suffrage Countries: Ballot Safe Guards the Home."²⁴ The article addresses the

23. "The Case for Woman Suffrage," *Jackson County Sentinel*, Aug. 12, 1920, 4, *Chronicling America*; "Why American Women Want the Ballot," *Camden Chronicle*, Aug. 13, 1920, 8, *Chronicling America*; "Everything to Gain by Woman Suffrage," *Sequachee Valley News*, Aug. 5, 1920, 2, *Chronicling America*.

24. "Why American Women Want the Ballot," *Camden Chronicle*; "Why American Women Want the Ballot," *Sequachee Valley News*, Aug. 19, 1920, 4, *Chronicling America*.

problem of infant mortality and child death: “When, of all the civilized world, the country that has had woman suffrage the longest has the lowest death rate, and the countries with the next lowest rate all have woman suffrage, can there be a doubt, that woman suffrage helps to bring about healthier living conditions for all the people?”²⁵ The story gives death rate numbers for the countries about which it reports. Advocacy publications such as this embraced the need for women to protect their children’s health, making the point that the wellbeing of the family relied on legislation. The position further implied that strengthening laws for family health required women gaining the ballot. The health of the family, which exploited the emotional toll of losing children, was a strong argument that fit into the expectations for the female sphere.

Rural women were an explicit target in the fight to achieve woman suffrage. In 1920, rural populations in Tennessee greatly outnumbered urban populations: 1,725,659 rural to 611,226 urban in Tennessee, according to the 1920 census.²⁶ Rural buy-in was required for the Nineteenth to be successful in Tennessee. Accomplishing the goal of reaching rural audiences to gain their support meant disseminating information through the media available to the public of that era, newspapers. Newspapers reached those who may have not gone to community meetings or been active in public events. One regular

25. “Why American Women Want the Ballot,” *Camden Chronicle*; “Why American Women Want the Ballot,” *Sequachee Valley News*.

26. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920: Population, Composition and Characteristics of the Population, Table 1, Population, Tennessee* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921), 956. This table gives separate population data for Tennessee’s rural and urban populations.

public opinion space in the Marion County newspaper was “Uncle Tom’s Letter” that allowed for community members in Jasper and surrounding areas to voice their opinions.²⁷ One op-ed piece was an account of a meeting its writer had with an anti-suffragist who bemoaned that women would do nothing with the vote.²⁸ The writer defended rural farm women, saying women would use the vote for the betterment of their home, family, and farm, and went on to state, “women have always done well by the home,” and gave religious moral reasoning behind women’s right to enfranchisement. Published contributions like this and others were local, organic ways to insert suffrage support into rural communities and express to the rural populace that women’s voting was acceptable.

Popular sentiment for women’s voting was also beginning to change because of World War I. Soldiers’ letters home were published in Tennessee newspapers, including articles about farm women overseas, toiling away at perceived men’s work on European farms, as observed by U.S. doughboys. Such articles bolstered support for women’s rights back home. One letter published in the *Sequachee Valley News* that a young Jackson County man, stationed in France, wrote home to his mother reflected the shifting attitudes:

...they [women] are doing all kinds of work—in the fields, on the farm, in the factories and in fact there is no kind of work in which they have not

27. Opinion articles ran in the *Sequachee Valley News* during the early 19th century. Anyone could write in and be published anonymously. This research found that most such submissions in the Marion County newspaper were signed either as Tracy City, Uncle Tom, or Old Gruff.

28. Uncle Tom, “Uncle Tom’s Letter,” *Sequachee Valley News*, Aug. 26, 1920, 1, *Chronicling America*.

been equal to the occasion. So you see one never can tell what can be done until the emergency arises. The crops this year are larger and more of them than since the war started, and all the men at war. Doesn't that speak well for the women? I never was very strong on the suffrage question until I saw this. It has opened my eyes, and shows what women are capable of doing. Of course, I know your resources and capabilities, dear mamma.²⁹

There was a broadening appreciation of women's realities on rural farms during the First World War, as women took the places of their husbands and sons in farm work. The rural areas of Tennessee recognized suffrage as an issue that pertained to the women of their districts and acceptably fit community expectations for women's roles within the rural family. Yet, the woman's role on the farm was also appropriated in the anti-suffrage argument.

Anti-suffrage Arguments

The ideal of woman being the purer sex was also used to discourage the passage of women's suffrage. An article taken from Josephine A. Pearson's³⁰ papers states,

The...refinement of womanhood and the...chivalry of womanhood are the two most important elements in nature and [in] the movement for woman's political equality, [that if tainted by the vote] would destroy both. Womanly nature, biologically speaking[,] is unfit for politics, and if

29. "From Our Boys in Khaki," *Jackson County Sentinel*, Dec. 20, 1917, 1, *Chronicling America*.

30. Josephine A. Pearson was the president of the Tennessee State Association Opposed to Women's Suffrage and later became the president of the Southern Woman's League for Rejection of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. She, like her suffrage supporting opponents, would travel around the state of Tennessee and the South promoting her side of the suffrage argument. Her papers located in the Tennessee State Library and Archives (TSLA) hold multiple documents from throughout the state of Tennessee that she used for her anti-suffrage lectures.

the public work is being done by men, the only remedy is to do it better, not shift the burden to weaker and already over-laden shoulder[s].³¹

This anti-suffrage article from Grundy County,³² next door to Marion County, maintained that women were more delicate than men and would suffer under the masculine duty of voting.³³ Much like the articles that showed the rural realities of women on farms in support of their need for the vote, anti-suffragists used the ideal of gendered separation of work to fight against the vote. In a 1915 Benton County article, a citizen wrote that “women shouldn’t vote because they do not do the farm work of a man.”³⁴ It played into the stereotype of southern women as staying in the sphere of the house, not the field—although for farm women, such a discrete physical separation was most assuredly not their true lived experience. Another Benton County article at about the same time supported the same value of gender-role separation that should preclude women from the franchise:

The plow handle, the forge and the struggle for bread afford experience necessary to properly mark the ballot. Government is a great big business and civilization from the very beginning assigned woman the home and man the business affairs of life....There has been much freakish legislation enacted during the past decade that no doubt appeals to woman's love for the ridiculous, but to undertake to unsex the human race by law is the

31. “Woman Suffrage, A Resume,” *Grundy County Times*, Apr. 27, 1916, Box 1 Folder 6, Josephine A. Pearson Collection (hereafter, Pearson Collection), TSLA.

32. Grundy County is adjacent to Marion County and was extremely rural in 1920 with a population of under 10,000. The *Sequachee Valley News* often published articles that included opinions on suffrage and the WCTU from the town of Tracy City, which the two counties share on their boundary.

33. Green, *Southern Strategies*, 80-81.

34. “Why Should Women Vote? Woman’s Suffrage from the Viewpoint of Leading Farmers,” *Camden Chronicle*, June 25, 1915, 4, *Chronicling America*.

height of legislative folly and a tragedy to mankind... We are opposed to the equal rights of woman we want her to ever remain our superior.³⁵

Women's perceived space, in the anti-suffrage position, was that women operated outside of farm work. Also, allowing women into political discourse would lead to their fall from the pillar of southern grace.

Unlike the pro-suffrage position, anti-suffragists pushed the idea that women would not moralize the political system, but, rather, politics would taint them and be a burden on the delicate, ideal southern lady,³⁶ a sentiment illustrated multiple times throughout Tennessee's rural county newspapers. An article titled "Farmer Radford on Woman Suffrage" states that

American chivalry should never permit her to bear the burdens of defending and maintaining government, but should preserve her unsullied from the allied influences of politics, and protect her from the weighty responsibilities of the sordid affairs of life that will crush her ideals and lower her standards. The motherhood of the farm is our inspiration, she is the guardian of our domestic welfare and a guide to a higher life, but directing the affairs of government is not within woman's sphere, and political gossip would cause her to neglect the home, forget to mend our clothes and burn the biscuits.³⁷

Marion County had multiple articles in the Uncle Tom's Letter columns that went into the same reasoning that women's moral purity would be lessened by the act of voting. Some examples from these columns are, "We want to shield and protect her [woman] from the corrupting influence of politics... We are all willing to recognize their

35. Ibid.

36. Green, *Southern Strategies*, 81-83.

37. "Farmer Radford on Woman Suffrage," *Sequachee Valley News*, Feb. 25, 4, 1920, *Chronicling America*.

finer qualities, and as such would shield them from the coarser habits of men, and thus preserve their womanly modesty,”³⁸ and “...we would shield them [women] from the corrupting influence of politics and protect them from the blackguard element. We know what our mothers, grandmothers and great grandmothers were and we desire to preserve those great and noble traits they had.”³⁹ Throughout many of these opinion pieces is the idea of shielding women from the political world that would be a danger to them.

Both suffragists and anti-suffragists drew on the ideals of southern womanhood and women’s roles in their sphere. Scott states, “Men were not alone in opposing suffrage in the South. Substantial numbers of southern women were slow to see any advantage to themselves and were afraid to believe in something which displeased men....Giving women the vote...would lead to divisions and dissensions in the home.”⁴⁰ The sentiment of many of the anti-suffrage mentality often employed the same reasoning as used by those who believed women *should* be involved in politics: their God-given morality surpassed that of men. The way in which the arguments differed, though, focused on what each group speculated would change: suffragists said politics would change for the better, anti-suffragists said women would change for the worse.

The problem with the ideal of the southern woman, other than its constricting gender norms of the time, was that it relied, equally by both groups, on the existence of

38. “Uncle Tom’s Letter,” *Sequachee Valley News*, Apr. 22, 1920, 1, Chronicling America.

39. “Uncle Tom’s Letter,” *Sequachee Valley News*, Mar. 11, 1920, 2, Chronicling America.

40. Scott, *The Southern Lady*, 169.

the southern man as the protector of the family on all fronts.⁴¹ The crisis between the two social constructs in suffrage is that men were supposed to vote in the interest of their wives and families, which was the ideal southern-gentleman trope. A perfected southern gentleman ideal was, however, obviously not reality. There were consistent reports of corruption in government, as well as of men voting expressly their personal interest.⁴² Women were supposed to use their morality as a way to curb man's nature, seen as their direct opposite. Curbing the actions of the men in their lives was not always possible though. The southern lady was also a construct, not an actuality. But the lack of reality of the southern-male and southern-female ideals, tropes, and stereotypes did not stop either the suffragists or the anti-suffragists from using them to validate their diametrically opposed positions on the vote for women.

Racial Arguments and Beliefs

Working in perfect feedback with the southern white woman ideal was the pervasive racism of the time. Racist beliefs spurred much of the argument over suffrage nationally, regionally, and by state.⁴³ Racism was especially visible in the South and in Tennessee. Although racism can be argued as having been a major reason women

41. Ibid., 6-10.

42. Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State*, 11.

43. Catt and Shuler, *Woman Suffrage and Politics*, 107-31; Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote, 1850-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1998), 24-39.

ultimately did acquire the vote in the 19th Amendment, to strengthen the white vote, the topic of woman suffrage early on highlighted the fear that any change to voting rights would bring about inspection of the Jim Crow laws that left African Americans largely disenfranchised.⁴⁴ There was southern white anxiety, promoted by Lost Cause propaganda, that if voting rights were expanded, whites would be outvoted by African Americans, bringing about the end of white supremacy.⁴⁵

At the same time, white southerners were very much aware that people in the North knew how the South legally kept African Americans away from the ballot. An anti-suffragist broadside clarified that “Congress has...been kind to the South in that it has not exercised the authority as vested under Section Two of the Fifteenth Amendment, [and]...had we not best let well enough alone.”⁴⁶ Comparisons between the 15th and 19th Amendments were often made in promoting the belief that woman suffrage would endanger the racial status quo of the South. It was a reminder of the power of the federal government to enforce the amendments on the states. A booklet titled “Woman Suffrage A Menace to the South” had an entire section dedicated to promoting African American disenfranchisement.⁴⁷ It focused on the danger African American women would be to white supremacy if they gained the vote:

44. Spruill Wheeler, *Votes for Women!*, 27-28.

45. Green, *Southern Strategies*, 86-91.

46. “That Deadly Parallel,” Box 1, Folder 6, Pearson Collection, TSLA.

47. George R. Lockwood, “Negro Suffrage,” in “Woman Suffrage A Menace to the South,” Nov. 15, 1917, Box 1, Folder 3, Pearson Collection, TSLA.

The negro women are also better educated than their men, and through the urging of their “pastors” will put aside the dollar or two for their poll tax, which the men will not pay for the privilege of voting. In short, the possible one hundred per cent added to the negro vote through woman suffrage will more than double the difficulty of controlling that vote.⁴⁸

Antis strongly feared African American women accessing the ballot. Nationally there was a consistent creed among African American women that the goal of gaining suffrage was to uplift their communities. Lisa G. Materson explores this sentiment in her book *For the Freedom of Her Race*.⁴⁹ She argues that black women viewed voting differently from their white counterparts. Black women saw voting, rather as than a personal right, more as important in their community efforts to lift up the black race through social reform.

The fear of racist laws being overturned was recognized by both white suffragists and white anti-suffragists of all classes in the South. Both sides, much like their belief in southern women’s morality, used racial fears to promote their political endeavors. Anti-suffragists, people like Josephine A. Pearson, gave out pamphlets and booklets with titles such as “Beware: The Negro and the New Social Order,” which admonished southerners to “Remember, that Woman Suffrage means a reopening of the entire Negro Suffrage question; loss of State rights; and another period of reconstruction horrors....”⁵⁰ In the broadside, its writers used excerpts from the African American magazine *The Messenger*, on demands by African Americans activists of the day for increased black rights, to

48. Ibid.

49. Lisa G. Materson, *For the Freedom of Her Race* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 2009), 2.

50. “Beware: The Negro and the New Social Order,” National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, 1919, Box 1 Folder 4, Pearson Collection, TSLA.

promote racist southern fear of universal suffrage, racial intermarriage, and loss of states' rights. The type of race hatred promoted by anti-suffragists was common in their arguments against women's enfranchisement. They especially wanted to discredit and vilify pro-suffragists for any comments they may have expressed in support of African American women's voting.

Suffragists, however, were no better in their racist actions. They used the argument that white women would outnumber African American women's vote, to defend themselves against anti-suffragist arguments.⁵¹ White suffragists embraced the strength of white racial demographics. White voting would overpower the black vote. Such a position essentially supported Jim Crow laws, keeping African Americans in their place. Anita Shafer Goodstein writes that "Most white suffragists did not consider voting rights for black women to be part of their campaign. [They were d]etermined to prove that [white] women would purify politics by their presence..."⁵²

Yet, even with the racism pushed by both suffragists and anti-suffragists, African American women persevered in fighting for their own right to vote in order to raise their community. They hoped that with ratification of the 19th Amendment they would be able to get legislation passed that would better the racial situation in the South and nationwide.

African American women were not inactive in suffrage in the South, but they had more hurdles to jump than did black suffragists in the North. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn

51. Anita Shafer Goodstein, "A Rare Alliance: African American and White Women in the Tennessee Elections of 1919 and 1920," *Journal of Southern History* 64, no. 2 (May 1998): 221.

52. *Ibid.*, 222.

writes that southern white women would not allow African American women to join their leagues.⁵³ Indeed, the suffrage leagues in the South, including in Tennessee, were race segregated. There were, however, certain cases in which white and black women's groups worked together to accomplish objectives in which each group derived benefits.⁵⁴ One story, of an alliance between black and white women in Nashville in which the "black women of Nashville would turn out to vote and, in return, the white women would support a number of specific social services to the African American community" is recorded by Goodstein.⁵⁵ The alliance was surprising due to the substantive and ongoing use of race-baiting as political propaganda in both suffrage and anti-suffrage arguments, as well as the rise in violence against African Americans after returning from WWI. More typically, though, African American women operated on their own for suffrage and for increased rights for black Americans. They would continue to do so beyond the passage of the Civil Rights acts of the 1960s.

The Country Life Movement and Rural Worries

Concerns surrounding rural living and farm livelihoods received state and federal attention in the early 1900s. Actual land ownership by Tennessee farm families was

53. Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote*, 118.

54. Janice M. Leone. "'Practical Religion': The Settlement Work of the Woman's Missionary Council of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in *Tennessee Women in the Progressive Era: Toward the Public Sphere in the New South*, ed. Mary A. Evins (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2013), 19-46.

55. Goodstein, "A Rare Alliance," 219.

limited. Tenant farming was widespread across the state.⁵⁶ Benton, Jackson, and Marion counties all had tenant farm numbers that were just below the average of the state, which was 41.1 percent.⁵⁷ Meaning, whereas approximately three-fifths of all farmers in Tennessee, and in the counties examined in this study, were family-owned farming enterprises, on which farmers lived and worked, on land they owned (together with their banks, for some), conversely, two-fifths of all Tennessee farms were operated by tenant farmers who did not own their own land.⁵⁸ Compared to pre-Civil War years, farms were increasingly smaller in acreage by the 1920s, as large antebellum holdings were broken up into smaller farms. The landscape of Tennessee farms had changed, from an average farm size of 251 acres in pre-Civil War times to only about 90 acres per farm by the turn of the new century.⁵⁹ Farms also produced less crop and cash for each farmer, and many farms were tenant run. Poverty in rural areas was high and the standard of living low. Progressives sought to fix rural poverty and farmers' lack of access to the benefits of 20th century progress through legislation. Reformers saw themselves as helpers of those who fit the reformers' definition of the less fortunate, although those on the receiving end were not so quick to label themselves as such. The main way in which progressives, both

56. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Bulletin Agriculture: Tennessee County Table 1 - Farms and Farm Property 1920* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1921), 12-20.

57. Ibid.

58. There was of course a racial component embedded in that average: about a third of white farmers were tenant farmers, whereas two-thirds of black farmer were tenants (Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*, 3).

59. Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*, 3.

rural and urban, began to enact programs was through the “country life movement” that was active during the early part of the 20th century. Mary Hoffschwelle writes, “the Country Life Movement was [an] alliance of urban-oriented Progressive reformers and agricultural interests” whose goal was to work toward the advancement of the lives of rural citizens in the United States.⁶⁰ Part of the agenda was formed under Theodore Roosevelt in 1909 as the Country Life Commission. Its aim was to collect data, identify problems, and form solutions for the rural areas of America.⁶¹ Its objectives were to raise the standard of living, modernize farming, encourage citizens to stay in the business of agriculture, and strengthen rural economies. A report reads,

It is true that country life has improved greatly in attractiveness, health, and comfort, and that the farmer's earnings are higher than they were. But city life is advancing even more rapidly, because of the greater attention which is being given by the citizens of the towns to their own betterment. For just this reason the introduction of effective agricultural cooperation throughout the United States is of the first importance.⁶²

The statement acknowledges that, compared to the last years of the 19th century, by the time of the report in 1909 the situation in rural areas was becoming more stable.

However, there was a misunderstanding about “attractiveness.” In the early 20th century, movement out of farm areas into urban cities was taking place, and rural farm life was being romanticized by urban progressives as a purer way of life, a return to

60. Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*, 13-5.

61. Theodore Roosevelt, *Report of the Country Life Commission, Special Message from the President of the United States Transmitting the Report of the Country Life Commission* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), 3.

62. *Ibid.*, 5.

American roots. The wording “attractiveness” is a paradox in the report itself that, at the base of it, states that rural life is so behind the times that it needs direct intervention to make it comparable to its urban counterpart. Country life reformers’ main plan was to reach out to farmers. “There are three main directions in which the farmers can help themselves; namely, better farming, better business, and better living on the farm.”⁶³ Reformers sought to assist rural regions through programs that did not aid farmers directly but rather educated them in better agricultural and business techniques that would give them a leg up to prosper.

The outside forces coming into the rural South were not always appreciated. Rural resistance was predicted by both reformers and the Country Life Commission, so they formed strategies to pull in rural participation. One of the main ways to deal with farmers was to help them see the problems in their agriculture procedures. Agents from the United States Department of Agriculture would teach farmers new techniques and expose them to modern farming equipment.⁶⁴ Direct on-the-ground personal interactions were understood as the best means to ease rural populations into making agricultural-behavioral modification. The Country Life Movement was more than just advocacy for agricultural advancements. Reformers believed that all aspects of rural life could be improved.

Interventions in rural culture were not always accepted easily nor immediately. While the movement did help rural communities by introducing many progressive ideas

63. Ibid., 3.

64. Ibid., 6.

and institutions into rural areas, the movement is perhaps most illustrative of the progressive push for citizens to put increasingly greater reliance on centralized government and on educated experts with broad experience beyond the traditions of the local community. The strategies to gain rural buy-in involved getting a few of the locals in the community interested in the work, hoping that then their neighbors saw improvements in their friends' livelihoods and they too would join in the program.⁶⁵

Critical to achieving successful culture change, women, reformers believed, were the best way to impact farming homes. Education was provided to rural women and girls in home economics and demonstration clubs that focused on subjects such as gardening and canning.⁶⁶ The Country Life Commission wanted women to become involved in clubs and group settings, stating in its report, "There is much need among country women themselves of a stronger organizing sense for real cooperative betterment."⁶⁷ Thus, in combination with the movement and reformers, a push began for women in rural counties to start participating in community betterment.

Rural women were not passively receiving reformers' ideals and actions. Instead, rural women adopted what they saw would work with their lives to meet their needs.⁶⁸ Rapid shifts in farm ownership, economic stability, and urban migration had already

65. Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*, 97.

66. Minoa Uffelman, "Tomato Clubs as Salvation: Canning Clubs for Girls and the Uplift of Southern Rural Society," *Tennessee Women in the Progressive Era: Toward the Public Sphere in the New South*, ed. Mary A. Evins (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2013), 71-94.

67. Roosevelt, *Report of the Country Life Commission*, 46-47.

68. Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*, 2.

caused wariness by rural populations, so they fought defensively to hold onto a semblance of consistency in their lives even while picking and choosing among reform policies. In addition to the heavily encouraged adjustments farm families were being asked to make to their everyday lives, rural women began increased networking with each other, often in reform groups. They started to see the effects government involvement could have in their farming lives.

All of this was taking place at a time of when women were grappling with ideas of political morality, entering the public sphere to change government policies, and evaluating the potential impacts of the franchise. During the same year as the Country Life Commission report, 1909, Tennessee passed major prohibition legislation. A few years later followed a resurgence of the state suffrage movement. Collectively, the ideas of the new age were attracting the attention of Tennessee rural women, who blended them with the core societal precept of women as moral centers of the family and home. There is no question that rural women were involved and aware of the progressive changes coming to the political landscape of Tennessee.

All the issues of the day had a major integrative theme, which was legislation that would have direct bearing on the traditional position of woman's sphere, the home, vis-à-vis the local community. Suffrage linked all these issues together because it offered the ability to vote on laws that would affect people's lives. It positioned women as direct arbiters of legislative governance.

Gender, race, and southern attitudes impacted rural women's involvement in social discourse about specific concerns affecting their homes and communities and brought women into engagement in clubs, organizations, and activism outside of their

rural lives as farm wives and daughters in the Tennessee countryside. Temperance, prohibition, suffrage, social reform, African American enfranchisement, and rural renewal were all issues that rural women, both African American and white, had to address in some form, whether they were for them, against them, or indifferent to them. Rural women were exposed to these matters through publications, social interactions, and life choices. The ideal of southern womanhood restrained women to some degree, but the “ideal” proved sufficiently malleable that it could be adapted by women in ways that suited them and that their economic situations allowed. It is no surprise that women began to confront the need for civic suffrage vis-à-vis the societal reform objectives about which they cared and for which they were active. Rural women, including the women in this study’s researched counties, had an interest in the efforts of suffrage and other social matters that affected their personal lives and those of their families. They, just like their urban counterparts, had concerns that personally touched them, such as prohibition, the Country Life Movement, and rural uplift.

Rural women identified and dealt with social problems in their own lives that needed attention. The women of Marion, Jackson, and Benton counties were called to participate in these issues through newspaper articles and direct governmental interactions in their local communities. The idea that women of Tennessee’s rural areas were not knowledgeable of, nor invested in, wider societal needs and the political concerns of their day would be faulty. Country women were not indifferent to the larger issues of 20th century reform nor to the push for woman suffrage, which was the major state and national question that would certainly dictate their own future. On the contrary, the women of Marion, Jackson, and Benton counties were indeed involved. Whereas

Tennessee's urban women leaders were visible in the national and state suffrage movement and receiving historic attention, rural women were also engaged in local actions mirroring the work of their urban sisters.

CHAPTER III

RURAL WOMEN'S ACTIVISM IN THE SUFFRAGE ERA

The issues surrounding rural women at the turn of the last century differed from those faced by their urban counterparts, but some were also very similar. As previously explored, concerns such as southern women's behavior, temperance, lack of voting rights, racial fears, and the advancement of rural society were part of the conversation for all groups of women. Rural women have been portrayed as not connected to these issues because of their distance from suffrage leagues and due to the economic disparities of rural versus urban lives. Although dissimilar concerns were true depending on locale, culture, and socioeconomic status, women—rural women, city women, Tennessee women, women across the nation—shared commonalities. Women of poor economic realities, including farm women, did not have the means or free time to participate as fully in political discussions and social movements as did middle- and upper-class women of urban areas, but their limitations did not imply they were not interested. Middle-class women of the rural counties, however, were also rural women and identified as such. Some of them were more in a position in their counties to involve themselves proactively in their communities. They were the ones in their areas who more regularly were able to participate in raising up the local women and in leading progressive efforts to improve the conditions of those around them.

Previous studies in other states have shown that rural women across the U.S. absolutely engaged in political discourse about suffrage and other social reform

movements of the Progressive Era.¹ It is not a stretch of the imagination to accept that country women in Tennessee were doing the same. The newspaper articles through the early 1900s up until 1920, the year of the 19th Amendment's ratification, show that there was widespread participation in suffrage and Progressive Era movements across Tennessee's 95 counties. This chapter looks at local newspapers to demonstrate that the women in the three rural sample-counties in Tennessee selected for this study—Marion, Jackson, and Benton—were participating in activities involved with the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, progressive betterment programs like home demonstration clubs, and woman suffrage. Examination of the three counties' newspapers reveals that not only were the women of their areas getting local, state, and national information about social and political movements of their time, but also, they were active participants in their communities in their own leagues, unions, and clubs, holding meetings and lectures, and taking public positions. The present examination demonstrates that the misconception in previous historical narratives that women of rural areas were merely passive observers and receivers of political events and programs was simply incorrect.² Tennessee rural women were involved with progressive movements and suffrage along with their urban counterparts. Exploration of their activism, in WCTU work, agricultural home demonstration programs, and World War I support, makes clear that women's societal efforts in the rural counties of Tennessee also included suffrage work and that

1. Goodier and Pastorello, *Women Will Vote*; Egge, *Woman Suffrage and Citizenship in the Midwest*; Uffelman, "Tomato Clubs as Salvation: Canning Clubs for Girls and the Uplift of Southern Rural Society"; Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*.

2. Cf., Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 36-38.

their participation contributed toward the 19th Amendment's ratification. This chapter provides primary documentation about rural women's involvement in these issues. The research presents evidence about county women's engagement with the political and public issues of the day including women's enfranchisement.

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union

The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, both nationally and in Tennessee, was the largest woman's association during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. It was women's organizational response to one of the serious societal concerns that troubled women in both Tennessee and across the country: alcohol consumption. The WCTU began in 1842, and since the 1870s it was active in Tennessee and continued to be well into the 1950s.³ WCTU's goal was to prohibit the production, sale, distribution, and consumption of liquor through advocacy for state and national prohibition laws.⁴ In WCTU's view, consumption of alcohol was a dangerous problem for the home. The issue's connection to the private sphere meant that even women who felt they had no place in politics saw the WCTU as organizational public advocacy in which they could participate without threatening the southern woman ideal. Defining a political movement as proper and appropriate for southern women's engagement resonated broadly. Home and family protection was woman's traditional role, and the extent to which social

3. Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State*, 2-4.

4. Dewey W. Grantham, *Southern Progressivism: The Reconciliation of Progress and Tradition* (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 1983), 161-64.

movements tapped into that social acceptability in the South advanced their cause. Added to it, religious fervor surrounded the temperance movement. These two frameworks—family care and Christian piety—combined to make the fight for temperance acceptable and respectable for women’s participation, especially southern women.⁵ Many attributed alcoholism and drunkenness to violence within families, adultery, and loss of income, which, in other words, were ways to break down and weaken the family unit. Though pushback by some southern conservatives was generated during early actions of the WCTU, much as later with suffrage, women found opportunities to become productive societally on the issue and become leaders in their communities in their local unions.⁶ Tennessee had an active early history with temperance and WCTU. Women throughout the state participated in dozens of temperance unions in small towns and rural communities across Tennessee. In fact, many of the laws that WCTU members were able to achieve were enforced in Tennessee rural areas first, before ever reaching urban areas, due to early county temperance ordinances that dealt with populations, schools, and churches.⁷

Women devoted their time and lives to make Tennessee a dry state. Their public promotion against alcohol trained women in rural counties in political action just as much as it did women in urban centers. Elna Green writes, “Institutionalized in the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), temperance activism provided an important

5. Spruill Wheeler, *Votes for Women!*, 127-30.

6. Green, *Southern Strategies*, 21.

7 Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State*, 11.

vehicle for southern women to develop their skills and talents.”⁸ The work done within temperance unions developed political capabilities in women that they would bring to other progressive movements and to suffrage. Those in the WCTU learned how to canvas city and rural areas, take on questioners, spread literature, start petitions, debate, and confront male political leaders to ask for their vote.⁹

An example of one of the major ways women would get the word out about temperance was their work in setting up public rallies and medal contests. WCTU women reached young audiences and taught about temperance and the dangers of alcohol consumption by giving out awards and holding contests for children. The women engaged in public education, pushing for Scientific Temperance Instruction (S.T.I.), which was enacted by law in Tennessee in 1915.¹⁰ S.T.I. taught children starting in 5th and 6th grades about the evils of alcohol and the virtues of temperance. The program expanded to teaching in the 4th grade as well, to reach even younger students, because many farming children dropped out of school early, never making it to the older grades.

In Benton County in 1913, a medal contest announced in the local paper said that “The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union will hold a medal contest at the Presbyterian Church in Big Sandy Monday” and went on to detail all the events for the program including scripture readings and songs.¹¹ Medal contests in which children would be

8. Green, *Southern Strategies*, 20.

9. *Ibid.*, 23.

10. Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State*, 67.

11. Olivia Robins, “Medal Contest,” *Camden Chronicle*, Dec. 12, 1913, 2, *Chronicling America*.

positioned to rail against liquor took place frequently in Benton County.¹² The medal contests gave prizes for oration, encouraging children's public-speaking skills, including girls. Many of the young girls of the community would end up using these skills acquired in the WCTU and later endeavors.¹³

The importance of these experiences and the freedom to speak publicly that Tennessee women gained from the temperance movement cannot be understated. Without the WCTU it's likely that woman suffrage would have taken much longer to have been realized in the United States. The respect that was garnered by and for WCTU women translated to women's visibility and acceptability in the suffrage movement. Also, there was national support for suffrage from the WCTU, and there was crossover among members. Although Tennessee's statewide WCTU did not make a public statement of support for suffrage after Lide Meriwether stepped down as state WCTU president in 1887, the state union certainly allowed WCTU members to support suffrage individually.¹⁴

The WCTU was extremely effective in rural areas of Tennessee. Woman's Christian Temperance Union activity appears in all three Grand Divisions of Tennessee and in the three counties of this study. Silena M. Holman, president of the state WCTU

12. Olivia Robins, "Woman's Christian Temperance Union Rally," *Camden Chronicle*, Sept. 26, 1913, 2, *Chronicling America*.

13 Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State*, 11-12, 68, 76.

14. *Ibid.*, 8.

from 1899 to 1915, supporter of suffrage, and a prolific writer,¹⁵ sent messages, essays, and articles to the county newspapers calling for temperance endorsements across the state. In Marion County newspapers, Holman published multiple appeals to the county voters, with a distinct emphasis on how important voting was in order to get legislation passed.¹⁶ Although she never explicitly stated support for woman's suffrage in her articles, that women should also vote was obvious in her messaging, as voting was required in order that like-minded legislators be elected, in order that prohibition laws be passed and protected. Linking voting to temperance legislation was the critical way women of the WCTU connected themselves to the need for woman suffrage. The frustration of relying on men, who were regularly lobbied and bribed by liquor groups to vote against prohibition laws, pushed many women into support for suffrage. Petitions could only take women so far against the power of corporations to sway the men on whom women depended to endorse favorable temperance legislation.¹⁷ Holman states in one appeal,

And so we come to you in the name of thousands of women belonging to the Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Tennessee, and in the name of other thousands of wives and mothers whose boys are in danger...that you send no man to legislature who is not in heart sympathetic with such a law. We Beg of you....¹⁸

15. Bucy, "Shall the Women be Silent?"

16. Silena M. Holman, "The Liquor Situation," *Sequachee Valley News*, Dec. 1, 1910, 1, *Chronicling America*.

17. Spruill Wheeler, *Votes for Women!*, 126.

18. Silena M. Holman, "An Appeal to the Voters of Marion County," *Sequachee Valley News*, Feb. 6, 1908, 3, *Chronicling America*.

Yet another plea by Holman, a couple of years later, was to those with protected voting rights, white men, asking them to would vote only for legislators who would keep state temperance laws, which had been successfully passed in 1909, intact.¹⁹ There was real fear that the work that had been done for decades to pass thirteen significant prohibition laws in Tennessee would be undone:

The men they [men voters] have honored by their votes, in electing them to the offices they wanted, cannot, and will not go against the will of the people in this thing. I think there can be no doubt but that the prohibitory laws of 1909 will remain unchanged on the statute books of Tennessee.²⁰

Holman was referencing the recent 1910 election, trying to assure Tennesseans that the suite of anti-liquor laws emplaced during the prior legislative session must not be rescinded. At the same time, to all who were reading her words, there is the reminder that the WCTU will continue to work to protect these laws with the support of those who can vote, men. Entreaties by women to the men who cast votes on women's issues illustrate that in the end women had absolutely no power to enact the legislation they wanted.

19. There were major steps taken for temperance in the years leading up to 1909, one being the Four Mile Law, originally enacted in 1877, which forbade the sale of alcohol within four miles of rural schools. In the years following it, multiple amendments to the law strengthened and extended it. At the turn of the century, the Four Mile Law was furthered to include restrictions on sale and distribution of liquor in any town with a population of 5,000 or less. In 1907 the Pendleton Act extended the Four Mile Law even more, such that only four large cities, Memphis, Nashville, Chattanooga, and Lafollette able to distribute alcohol. A turning point in the final push for full prohibition in Tennessee was the death of newspaper editor and former U.S. Senator Edward Ward Carmack. A vocal supporter of prohibition, Carmack was shot and killed on the streets of Nashville in 1908. The WCTU and other temperance supporters used his death, making him a martyr, to push through the final legislation for full prohibition in Tennessee (Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State*).

20. Holman, "The Liquor Situation."

Multiple times in the Marion County *Sequachie Valley News*, Holman and others called on the male voters to protect prohibition laws and stand with the women who had worked hard to get the legislation before the legislature.²¹ Historically the WCTU had faced this problem before, back in 1887, when, even after petitioning the legislature and gaining pro-temperance support, liquor lobbyists had been able to get legislators to reject prohibition in the state.²² Money and private interests had more power than petitions.

All three study-counties demonstrated some form of interest in the WCTU and temperance activities in their early 20th century newspaper articles. For example, Benton County's *Camden Chronicle* in 1917 reported that

The W.C.T.U. met with Mrs. S.S. Clayton Monday afternoon [with] a good attendance. In absence of the president, the vice president Mrs. Lula Thomas conducted the meeting by opening with devotional exercises. A letter was read from the county President Mrs. Fannie Pierce of Mr. Vincent to the effect that Mrs. Lem Gilreoth, a temperance speaker will be in Camden March 28. The main feature of the afternoon was the deciding of the quilt contest, Mrs. J. H. Jordon holding the lucky number (19). Resolutions of thanks were read to Mr. A.S. McGill, who was present, through whom the baking powder was furnished from Forbes & Co. for the contest.²³

Although Tennessee had legally been dry since the 1909 state prohibition laws had passed, the women of Benton County were still clearly active in their WCTU chapter.²⁴ The chapter was fully staffed with officers, active members, and benefactors. The rural

21. Silena M. Holman, "The Last Word," *Sequachee Valley News*, Nov. 3, 1910, 1, Chronicling America; "An Appeal to Voters."

22. Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State*, 10.

23. "Little Locals," *Camden Chronicle*, Feb. 23, 1917, 3, Chronicling America.

24. Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State*, 37.

women of the county had vested interest in participating in the WCTU, which, after the General Assembly's passage of the prohibition bills in Tennessee, worked to maintain the laws, get stricter enforcement of them, and advocate further for national prohibition through the U.S. Constitution's 18th Amendment.²⁵

Marion County had a similarly active temperance organization, which formed after Tennessee became a dry state. The *Sequachee Valley News* reported in June 1910 that a WCTU chapter was organized in Jasper after a state WCTU representative, Miss Jeanette Fuller, lectured at the Owen Church to a large audience. The article states that "After the lecture an effort was made to organize a W.C.T.U. here and an organization was made Monday afternoon after the exercises at the Hall"; the new members and officers' names were published.²⁶ Even before the Marion County chapter's formal organization, however, women already had information on and interest in temperance work. In August 1905 there was a meeting of a state Woman's Congress, held in Monteagle, that opened with a WCTU program, in which WCTU president Selena Holman participated, as did international guests such as Lillian M. Phelps, a well-known Canadian WCTU activist, who spoke.²⁷ Multiple women from around the state participated in the 1905 congress, which was reported in the *Sequachee Valley News* for all the women of Marion County. In the *Sequachee Valley News* in 1908, two years

25. *Ibid.*, 59.

26. "W.C.T.U. Organized," *Sequachee Valley News*, June 2, 1910, 2, *Chronicling America*.

27. "Temperance People: W.C.T.U. Day Marked the Opening of the Woman's Congress," *Sequachee Valley News*, Aug. 10, 1905, 1, *Chronicling America*.

before the official formation of the Marion County WCTU chapter, the paper reported that “Mrs. R. J. Frego...organizer of the W.C.T.U. gave a lecture course in Jasper this week.”²⁸ Marion County women were getting involved and being kept up to date.

Jackson County may possibly not have had its own formal WCTU chapter during those years, but multiple articles from its county newspaper, *Jackson County Sentinel*, provided details about citizens in the county, including WCTU members, contributing money to WWI efforts.²⁹ Other articles reported on state and national temperance activities that included the WCTU.³⁰ One 1919 article announced a conference on “child’s welfare, public health, the Red Cross, delinquency and poverty, and other subjects” taking place in Cookeville in Putnam County, adjacent county to Jackson County, fewer than 20 miles from Gainesboro.³¹ The article named orators from the WCTU and other organizations who would be speaking on social reform. This conference was accessible to the women of Jackson County, so it would not be surprising that some of Jackson County’s ladies traveled to participate. Such articles suggest that

28. “Items of the Valley,” *Sequachee Valley News*, Mar. 19, 1908, 1, *Chronicling America*.

29. “Red Cross Fund,” *Jackson County Sentinel*, June 28, 1917, 2, *Chronicling America*, reports that county members of the WCTU gave \$5 to the Red Cross; “Citizens of Jackson County Give Liberally to Y.M.C.A. Fund,” *Jackson County Sentinel*, Nov. 29, 1917, 1, *Chronicling America*, reports on the amount of money county WCTU members gave to the Army and Navy YMCA.

30. “U.S. Battleship Tennessee Starts Work for U.S. Navy,” *Jackson County Sentinel*, Sept. 23, 1920, *Chronicling America*, reports that the state WCTU presented comfort bags to battleship crew.

31. “Jackson County Sentinel,” *Jackson County Sentinel*, Oct. 2, 1919, 2, *Chronicling America*.

during the height of political debates in Tennessee meaningful for women, Jackson County women were also getting informed and involved in reform movements of state and national importance.

In Tennessee, while there was not an active call for suffrage support by the statewide WCTU, there was crossover in the membership in the suffrage leagues and the temperance unions.³² It is well documented in suffrage history that the WCTU opened the door of respectability to women in political engagement, making women's direct actions in political matters more commonplace and fitting.³³ In due course, overt support for women's voting was vocalized at the 1923 WCTU state convention, as reported in the Benton County *Camden Chronicle*: "They [the WCTU members] certainly believe in woman's suffrage and women voting."³⁴ Some of the frustrations that women working on prohibition felt pushed them to the understanding that suffrage was the only true way to have real input into laws. There were also county newspaper articles that connected the work of temperance to the need for woman voters. A powerful article from Tracy City in Marion County as early as 1911, regarding temperance and other progressive laws, stated pointedly that "men and women with equal suffrage need to right the wrong in politics."³⁵ It went further to say,

32. Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State*, 59.

33. Spruill Wheeler, *One Woman, One Vote*, 127-30.

34. Mrs. J.V. Travis, "State W.C.T.U. Convention," *Camden Chronicle*, Nov. 14, 1913, 1, *Chronicling America*.

35. Old Gruff, "Take It Into Politics," *Sequachee Valley News*, Nov. 30, 1911, 1, *Chronicling America*.

That would happen in Tennessee if these ten thousand W.C.T.U. women could actually go into politics backed up by the church membership of the state in the overthrow of every form of injustice....Men and women with equal suffrage with opportunity to govern themselves will soon right every wrong....Together with equal suffrage for men and women, and we will do what is best for society, and it won't take long.³⁶

There is palpable emphasis in this opinion piece that once women gain the ability to vote, there will be a drastic increase in social reform being passed across the state. The difficulties that the WCTU faced—countering liquor lobbyists, relying on men to be responsive to their petitions, being often ignored—showed how much women needed enfranchisement to make their voices matter politically. The necessity of women's political empowerment bolstered suffrage participation in rural counties. The work Tennessee women did in the WCTU, including rural woman, brought respectability to the work of women in the political field, helping suffrage gain traction and acceptance.

Home Demonstration Clubs

Along with social reforms for moral purity, during the early 20th century there was a push for rural reform that focused heavily on schools, homes, and farms. The Country Life Movement, as earlier explored, was a program that worked on the advancement of the lives of rural citizens through progressive urban-rural alliances.³⁷ Initiatives such as Country Life brought urban progressives and college-educated women into rural areas to teach values, skills, and improve the areas' quality of life. The

36. Ibid.

37. Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*, 13-15.

assistance programs of the movement and the Progressive women and men sent to rural areas in order to advance the programs were not always welcomed by the rural locals. Even though the programs may have been forced upon them, rural women did participate in the programming that sought to reinvigorate and restructure the ways in which rural women took care of their homes and families. Rural women did not passively participate in these activities nor did they accept everything taught to them. While rural women did take in some of the supplied educational instruction, they altered it to fit their needs, cultures, and economic realities.³⁸

One strategy for rural uplift in Tennessee was the focus on education, both for children in school and for adults through public programming. Clubs were formed to teach women how to can vegetables, which was heavily encouraged during WWI.³⁹ The magazines *Home Demonstration* and *Progressive Farmer* were publications popular in rural areas in Tennessee, including in the three counties of this study. A *Sequachee Valley News* article in Marion County in 1914 describes the creation of the Division of Extension Work of the College of Agriculture at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. It states that “Operations will reach out into every rural community in the state” through “extension work in agriculture and home economics.”⁴⁰ It goes on to explain how the department would be involved in schools and would be organizing

38 Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*, 2.

39. Uffelman, “Tomato Clubs as Salvation,” 71-76.

40. C.A. Keffer, “Extension Work in Agriculture,” *Sequachee Valley News*, Aug. 27, 1914, 8, *Chronicling America*.

“girls’ and women’s clubs for the promotion of rural welfare in matters concerning the home.”⁴¹ The outreach efforts were headed by professionals who would be sent out as extension agents from the university to all the rural counties. An example of these professionals teaching in home demonstration programs is discussed in another Marion County article in 1917 that explains that “Miss Conway, Division of Extension, Knoxville, Tenn, will give a canning demonstration at the Farmers’ Union meeting at the Blowing Spring this...Thursday, morning. All are especially invited to witness the demonstration.”⁴² Canning demonstrations were among of the most prevalent types of meetings offered for women and girls. County newspapers describe that canning was one of the main skillsets taught, due to the universal need for safe food preservation.⁴³ Before the days of frozen food, preserving fresh vegetables—nutritional improvement over salted and dried foods, and which could supplement stored grains and root vegetables—from the growing season through the winter, was an important forward step in the health and welfare of county families. Later, improved food preservation would prove imperative for maintaining U.S. soldiers during the Great War. Adding to the nutritional objectives was the reality that canning clubs could be maintained and run by county

41. Ibid.

42. “To Give Demonstration Home on Canning,” *Sequachee Valley News*, Aug. 23, 1917, 1, *Chronicling America*.

43. “Farmers of Marion in Annual Outing,” *Sequachee Valley News*, Aug. 30, 1917, 1, *Chronicling America*; “Demonstration by County Agent,” *Sequachee Valley News*, July 18, 1918, 3, *Chronicling America*; “Many Women Hear Call of Ripe Fruit,” *Sequachee Valley News*, Nov. 6, 1919, 4, *Chronicling America*; “Granville Department,” *Jackson County Sentinel*, Sept. 27, 1917, 3, *Chronicling America*.

women rather than only by the Division of Extension; local clubs could be self-sustaining. A 1918 article in the *Sequachee Valley News* tells that “canning clubs have been formed at various points throughout the county.”⁴⁴ Not only were women of the rural counties participating in the demonstrations, learning from the county agents, but they were starting their own local home demonstration clubs and spreading the training through the rural communities of their county.

Canning clubwomen, Minoa Uffelman writes, “belie[d] the lofty and transformative goals reformers who organized them in small southern towns felt these clubs could achieve in southern society.”⁴⁵ In other words, canning clubs, or tomato clubs as some were called, were only the beginning of what the extension agencies wanted to bring to Tennessee. Their end goals were to increase education and health across rural Tennessee in order to uplift poverty-stricken rural communities and needy farm families. Because rural women’s lives were primarily focused on sheer family survival, technological innovations in farm life raised farming families’ abilities to succeed, thrive, not to have to live simply hand-to-mouth, to have time and energy to participate in communities, to engage in other employment and perhaps bring in wage labor, and to build fuller lives in their home counties generally.⁴⁶

Other forms of progressive programs rural women of the counties participated in were about education on gardening and supplementing household income by selling

44. “Demonstration by Count Agent,” *Sequachee Valley News*.

45. Uffelman, “Tomato Clubs as Salvation,” 72.

46. *Ibid.*, 75.

produce from their gardens. In the Benton County paper in 1917, there was an article that listed the activities in which rural women could participate to better their family incomes. The activities included home gardens, raising poultry, milk and butter production, and providing better nutrition for children including food, clothing, and shelter improvement.⁴⁷ The educational programs, and the magazines that supported them, engaged country women in techniques and ideas to better their families' homes, lives, and economics. The demonstration clubs also opened up farm wives' and daughters' social networks, getting them off the farm to gather at meetings with their friends and community members. The clubs and demonstrations, as stated in the *Jackson County Sentinel*, "helped women to accomplish their ambition. Women by working together can do more than they can working separately."⁴⁸

Working together is the model of so much of the work done during this time period by women who were stepping beyond the domestic sphere to engage and talk outside of the home. Women's lack of political power may have hindered them in accomplishing certain objectives, but it did not stop their need to acquire new information, be out in the community, open up to the ideas and thinking of the day, and better their lives. Agricultural clubs were not social groups of privilege, such as the Women's Clubs in which some women in rural counties enjoyed membership, but, rather, the canning clubs and home demonstration groups were for hardworking rural farm

47. "Home Clubs for Women," *Camden Chronicle*, Mar. 23, 1917, 1, *Chronicling America*.

48. "Women Working Together," *Jackson County Sentinel*, Mar. 29, 1917, 1, *Chronicling America*.

women and girls. But the social benefits to farm women in exchanging ideas and engaging together in shared objectives created networking opportunities for them that had much the same benefit, to them and for their communities, as did upper- and middle-class women's social clubs.

Newspaper articles provide evidence from the counties that rural Tennessee women actively participated in home demonstration clubs. Marion County's *Sequachee Valley News* in 1920 wrote that in the county,

...home demonstration agents report 400 girls' clubs holding regular meetings with an attendance of 25,942. Women's clubs holding regular meetings 250 (clubs) with an attendance of 22,942. Community activities are being developed in the counties as a result of this work.⁴⁹

Regular home demonstration club activity took place in Marion County, where the women of the county worked on canning, poultry raising, gardening, and other forms of agricultural demonstration work to better their lives and communities. County women saw the benefits in participating in the educational programming provided through home demonstration clubs.

Similarly, Jackson County reported, "Numerous labor-saving devices were introduced in farm homes, egg circles, and cooperative poultry associations were organized, a large number of women's community clubs were formed, and many other lines of work were carried on."⁵⁰ Jackson County women, like Marion County's, were

49. "Tension Division Benefits Thousands of Tennessee Farmers," *Sequachee Valley News*, Dec. 30, 1920, 4, *Chronicling America*.

50. "Middle Tennessee Farmers' Institute Splendid Success," *Jackson County Sentinel*, Aug. 19, 1920, 1, *Chronicling America*.

actively creating and running their local agricultural clubs. There could be only a limited number of agents, typically only one, from the Division of Extension for each county, thus the numbers given by Marion and the report from Jackson show that the rural women of the county were the ones truly advancing the home demonstration programs and organizations in their communities. The social networks they gained through active participation in these groups, and the abilities practiced in communicating and teaching outside the home, also gave them opportunities for wider vision, improved skills, increased experiences, and broadened knowledge that blended seamlessly into their being drawn into and included in efforts for WCTU work and suffrage.

Woman's Suffrage

The counties had active participation in their home demonstration clubs. Women attended these meetings that promoted involvement within their county communities and with the ideas of thinkers and speakers with outside expertise in the Country Life Movement. The agricultural improvement leaders though tried to stay away from political talk and discussion of suffrage.⁵¹ But in Marion, Jackson, and Benton counties, agricultural news and suffrage conversations were absolutely not dissociated. All the news of the day was presented together, in the same place, on the pages of the local newspapers. On the front page of the July 23, 1920, paper in Benton County, for

51. Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*, 5.

example, were two articles, one on home demonstration for cleaning up the town, while the other was suffrage news.⁵²

Other examples of overlapping subject matter can perhaps been identified in the court minutes of the counties researched in this study. For the purpose of this study, three years of court minutes from Marion, Jackson, and Benton counties, 1918, 1919, and 1920, were read, to investigate legal issues in each county. In three years of court matters, over three counties, in only two instances did women address the court. And in both instances, the women did not have political power to harness for their interests. They must have been exceedingly frustrated and likely turned to suffrage as the means to resolve their problems.

In the Benton County Court Clerk's minute book of 1918 to 1920, most legal issues therein recorded dealt with inheritance and matters of land and estate and with men's petitions to the courts. There was however one instance in which a woman made a plea to Benton County, on a home demonstration matter: "Miss Moffitt addressed the court asking for an approbation from the county in order to employ a demonstrator for their work of Home Demonstration in this county for the year 1918. No action was taken by the Court."⁵³ Similarly, in Jackson County, Mrs. Minnie McNew wanted to create a New Mother's Pension to help those who did not have adequate funding after losses in

52. "Camden Could Clean Up Town, Too," *Camden Chronicle*, July 23, 1920, 1, Chronicling America; Untitled, *Camden Chronicle*, July 23, 1920, 1, Chronicling America.

53. Benton County Court, Minute Book, vol. 15, July 1917-July 1919, Jan. 7, 1917, 96, TSLA.

WWI, for which Mrs. McNew petitioned the court in 1919, but her request was denied by the county court.⁵⁴ These two cases show that, in three years of Marion, Jackson, and Benton county court minutes, only twice did women make a request of the county, and in both cases the women were rejected. Both women's petitions presented progressive ideals and plans, one seeking a county agent and one wanting to support needy families. At the same time as their rejections, suffrage was a large part of statewide political conversation. So, as the women's petitions were being turned down and their activism was ignored in their county courts, there was obviously, as argued by the WCTU, genuine political need for women to be able to vote in order to gain respect, full citizenship, and clout to leverage political power for county decision-making.

After exploring these activists' activities on the betterment of community rural life, it is not surprising that the three study-counties all had working suffrage leagues, with activities and dissemination of information. Marion, Jackson, and Benton newspapers reported about their local suffrage events and about state and national affairs relevant to county citizens' interests. The *Sequachee Valley News* communicated President Woodrow Wilson's support for suffrage.⁵⁵ The president is quoted as saying, "Women are bringing an elevating influence into public life that will tend to correct many of the evils to which our present unrest is due,"⁵⁶ giving voice to the attitude, widely held,

54. Jackson County Court, County Court Minute Book, vol. 24, Jan. 1919-July 1920, April Term 1920, 461, TSLA.

55. "Advertised By Its Great Allies," *Sequachee Valley News*, Aug. 5, 1920, 4, *Chronicling America*.

56. "Women Voters Hailed by Wood," *Sequachee Valley News*, Aug. 1, 1920, 2, *Chronicling America*.

that women would be saviors in politics because of their moral superiority. Wilson called upon Governor Roberts of Tennessee to hold a special session for the 19th Amendment ratification vote. As cited in Taylor's suffrage monograph,

The state constitution in Article II, Section 32, provided that: "No Convention or General Assembly of this State shall act upon any amendment to the Constitution of the United States proposed by Congress to the several states unless such Convention of General Assembly shall have been elected after such amendment is submitted."⁵⁷

The 1870 Tennessee state constitution stated that no vote on a federal Constitutional amendment could take place until after a new state election had been held. But President Wilson's urging, along with local political objectives such as Roberts' strategy to defeat his Democratic-primary rival W.R. Crabtree, pushed the Tennessee governor to go ahead and call the ratification session. Without the special session of Tennessee's General Assembly in August 1920, passage of the 19th Amendment would not have been achieved in time for women to participate in the upcoming November 1920 election.⁵⁸

The importance of national and state information reaching rural women, especially through local newspapers, cannot be overstated. Rural women needed to be kept up to date. They wanted to be abreast of the news. What Marion, Jackson, and Benton counties did not have, however, were local colleges or normal schools. Institutions for higher education were another means that brought speakers, current events, and suffrage writings into rural counties, through which current information was

57. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 104; Tennessee Constitution, Art. II, Sec. 32.

58. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 105-6.

disseminated widely beyond just the big cities. All three of the study-counties, Marion, Jackson, and Benton, however, had no colleges at the time the suffrage movement was making its resurgence in Tennessee. Tennessee rural women in non-college towns needed to follow the woman suffrage amendment to learn whether it was being successfully ratified in other states. Their means to get information was therefore primarily their local newspapers.

In January 1920, the *Jackson Sentinel* reported,

They were the pioneers in the [woman's] suffrage movement and now that the example of the western states in giving the franchise to women [has] been followed by so many states[,] it would be a gracious compliment to them and politically profitable to the democracy to reward the great work that they had done, both in bringing about woman suffrage in the United States and in aiding Democratic success.⁵⁹

Gainesboro and the hill communities of Jackson County in the Upper Cumberland were keeping up with the forward national roll, state by state, of ratification of woman's suffrage. Similarly, Camden, Big Sandy, and the hamlets across the flatlands of Benton County followed suffrage's progress through a regular news column titled "Suffrage News Notes," written by a Lillian Perrine Davis.⁶⁰ Mrs. Davis supplied the county with up-to-date news on the National American Woman Suffrage Association, the Tennessee Equal Suffrage Association, and surrounding counties' suffrage activities. Importantly, local counties' efforts to keep rural women informed about national and state suffrage

59. "Democratic National Convention to Meet in San Francisco," *Jackson County Sentinel*, Jan. 15, 1920, 1, *Chronicling America*.

60. Lillian Perrine Davis, "Suffrage News Notes," *Camden Chronicle*, Oct. 13, 1916, 2, *Chronicling America*.

action show there was real interest by rural women across Tennessee's remote backwaters in woman suffrage, which the historiography of suffrage has left out.

In addition to receiving outside news, the three counties of this study participated in their own suffrage meetings, debates, and lectures. Announcements in the counties' newspapers provide evidence that rural women were not only just taking in information, they were also participating in suffrage discourse of their own. This, obviously, is no surprise, given the many questions of the time in which rural women were engaging. They were part of the greater political theater, which included suffrage. By gaining the vote, women would be able to have a direct say in selection of the politicians making legislative and county decisions on social issues like child welfare, rural education, temperance, and war.

Marion County had multiple clubs that held debates on the question of suffrage, especially in the years 1915 and 1916. One such *Sequachee Valley News* article about the Marion Culture Club stated, "Only one debater discussed the woman's suffrage question, Rev. E. R. Lewis, for the affirmative and a negative had to be supplied."⁶¹ Only a week before, the club had had another debate about suffrage where it "Resolved that Women should be allowed suffrage."⁶² Even years before that, in 1900, the Marion Literary Club had held similar debates on the right of women to vote, and after one debate in March

61. "Culture Club Session Disturbed," *Sequachee Valley News*, July 6, 1916, 3, *Chronicling America*.

62. "Culture Club," *Sequachee Valley News*, June 29, 1916, 1, *Chronicling America*.

that year, a resolution passed that, yes, women's voting should be allowed.⁶³ Both these two Marion County social groups—its Culture Club and Literary Club—had both females and males who attended the meetings and participated in the organizations. Clearly for years their local clubs were interested in, welcomed, and engaged in debates on woman suffrage, and supported the suffrage cause. Given the numerous articles that spoke positively about suffrage in the Marion County newspaper, there was a vocal majority in the county in favor of suffrage, and women were being exposed to the idea both in print and in person over the course of many years.

In addition to club activity, all three counties had speakers travel to their locales to give lectures at main centers in the county. Jackson County reported in 1917 that

Miss Josephine Miller, of Little Rock, Ark., delivered an interesting and eloquent lecture at the courthouse Wednesday night on Woman's Suffrage. An audience composed mostly of ladies greeted Miss Miller, who were deeply impressed with the forceful arguments presented favoring the ballot for women.⁶⁴

The same article announced that a local suffrage league was organized in Gainesboro, the county seat and logical gathering place for suffrage activities in Jackson County.⁶⁵

Similar lectures were held in Marion and Benton counties. The *Camden Chronicle* recounted that "Miss Ramsey of Nashville, a trained worker in the National Equal Suffrage Association, will speak at the courthouse tomorrow in the interest of the cause

⁶³ "Literary Society," *Sequachee Valley News*, Mar, 8, 1900, 1, *Chronicling America*.

⁶⁴ "Woman's Suffrage Lecture," *Jackson County Sentinel*, Feb. 23, 1917, 2, *Chronicling America*.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

she represents,” in February 1917.⁶⁶ Marion County hosted a similar lecture in 1915, led by state organizers of the Tennessee Woman Suffrage Association.⁶⁷

Lectures were essential parts of disseminating knowledge to rural areas, including the counties of this study. Lecturers provided information about suffrage, pointed out weaknesses in the anti-suffrage arguments, and established supportive environments so that women knew they were not alone in holding forward-thinking political views. Often, county women formed suffrage leagues after public lectures, such as the Jackson County League chartered in Gainesboro. These leagues would then go on to hold regular meetings of their own to continue rallying support for suffrage, such as a local Benton County league in February 1917.⁶⁸

The activities in Marion, Jackson, and Benton counties make clear that the rural women of these counties were not isolated from the suffrage conversation, nor were they indifferent to the critically important political discourse of the day on women’s rights. The rural women of the counties actively participated in local clubs and leagues and were keenly interested in information being shared about state and national suffrage progress. Previous scholarship has left these women out of the narrative about active participants in suffrage, but local documents demonstrate that rural women were integral in the greater suffrage story of Tennessee.

66. “Little Locals,” *Camden Chronicle*, Feb. 16, 1917, 3, *Chronicling America*.

67. “Jasper,” *Sequachee Valley News*, Jan. 28, 1915, 2, *Chronicling America*.

68. “Little Locals,” *Camden Chronicle*, Feb. 23, 1917, 3, *Chronicling America*.

Furthermore, beyond just keeping up with the news, women of the counties were active in their own leagues in the same way they were active in WCTU and home demonstration. Every county had a busy suffrage league that participated in suffrage advocacy. Lectures typically took place in public places such as churches, as in an article from the Marion County paper reporting that “Miss Hanna Price, daughter of Rev. R.N. Price, of Morristown, State Organizer of the Woman’s Suffrage League, lectured on Woman’s Suffrage at the M.E. Church.”⁶⁹ Clearly, leaders of the Tennessee state suffrage organizations were going to Marion County, traveling long distances—190 miles between Marion and Hamblen counties—to advocate for woman suffrage. Community meetings were a common way to reach out to other women and for women to organize themselves, as seen for WCTU and home demonstration. Many of the newspapers of the time, unfortunately, across some of Tennessee’s rural counties, have not survived, and thus many articles that may have discussed meetings of local suffrage leagues in distant counties have been lost to history, but it can be inferred from the numbers of newspaper articles for these three sample counties—suffrage is discussed in over 40 articles in each county—that there was active attention being paid to woman suffrage across Tennessee country communities. The level of interest, reflected in continued publication, makes evident that rural areas were not ignoring the politics around them. Rural women were combining pursuit of the vote with their other club work. Rural women had a stake in suffrage and in their own political rights.

69. “Jasper,” *Sequachee Valley News*.

The women of the rural areas shared the same concerns as did women all over the country, both urban and rural. There was a great deal of crossover in the interests of urban and rural women during the suffrage movement. Temperance, war involvement, property, and laws that impacted their households affected all women of every race, area, and class. Different county newspapers all across the state had duplicate articles being published that laid out why women should have the vote, or why not.

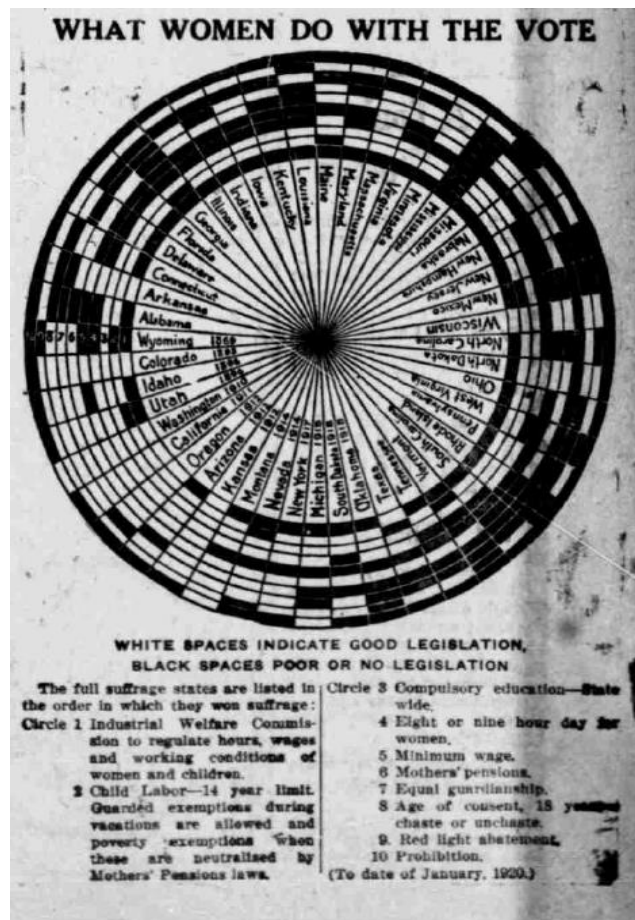


Figure 3.1. "What Women Do with the Vote." Circle graph on states with and without women's suffrage as of January 1920 and what legislation had passed in each state.⁷⁰

The graphic of figure 3.1 appeared in both the *Sequachee Valley News* and the *Jackson County Sentinel* as Tennessee's special session to vote on the 19th Amendment was being called and interest swelled statewide in August of 1920.⁷¹ The women-centered legislation listed in the chart matches up with many of the issues cared about by both urban and rural women of Tennessee. Prohibition, mothers' rights, age of consent, compulsory education, and labor laws are some of the pertinent legislative briefs summarized in the chart, all of which were concerns of both the WCTU and Division of Extension. In Tennessee the WCTU participated in legislation that raised the age of consent from 10 years old to 18, helped mothers' rights, and provided education on temperance.⁷² The Division of Extension invested heavily in rural county betterment through education and improved work strategies. Suffrage, as seen in the circle graph, had crossover in all these areas. Members of social activism groups overlapped and integrated with each other and with suffrage supporters.

It can be deduced, from the evidence on rural interactions on suffrage, that rural women took active roles in the discourse of the suffrage movement. Their interests and involvements in progressive programs and the activism of their time illustrate how they were invested in what was going on around them and understood who had power to advance their programs. The women of the rural counties were involved members in differing groups such as WCTU, home demonstration, and suffrage leagues. They went

71. "What Women Do With the Vote," *Jackson County Sentinel*, Aug. 5, 1920, 4, *Chronicling America*; "What Women Do With the Vote," *Sequachee Valley News*, Aug. 19, 1920, 4, *Chronicling America*.

72. Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State*, 11.

to meetings, held events, and produced and consumed information to advance their causes. They were active participants. Newspaper articles provide evidence of rural women's attentiveness to suffrage both nationally and in the state. The work of Tennessee's rural women helped in broad, statewide acceptability over time of women's involvement in politics and in the inevitability of women's voting. Women themselves made manifest that fighting women's public participation would be stagnating progress. It is these women in rural areas, the geographic majority and population majority of the state of Tennessee during the 1920s, who helped build the victory for suffrage, together with their urban sisters.⁷³ Country women were the rural support, they were collaborators, promoting the idea throughout the state, building networks of buy-in, shifting attitudes, creating acceptance. The narrative that Tennessee's rural women were passive about or opposed to woman suffrage and other progressive programs is demonstrably false. The Tennessee story of suffrage is unfinished if they are silent in the historic record.

73. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth...1920: Population, Composition and Characteristics of the Population*, 956.

CHAPTER IV
RURAL SUFFRAGE ANALYSIS AND
REPRESENTATION ON THE LANDSCAPE

When scholarship ignores a section of history, whether by choice or focus elsewhere, there is loss of full historical narrative. As explored in this research, there has been silence involving rural women's involvement in the historiography of women's suffrage in Tennessee. Previous work has left out rural contributions or furthered the idea that rural women were indifferent to the surrounding political climate of both suffrage and connected progressive movements during the Progressive Era.¹ While it can be argued that progressive movements such as temperance and Country Life took no direct stances on Tennessee suffrage politics,² it cannot be concluded that there was no crossover in the social reform issues and in memberships in the aligned movements. Women of Marion, Jackson, and Benton counties were not disconnected from the larger political movements that swept through their regions in the early 20th century, nor were they simply passengers on the train to political progress of the time. Rural women were active members and participants in suffrage and related social movements that permeated the political landscape of Tennessee. Their previous absence from the narratives of suffrage is a disservice to the women involved with the movement, the suffrage story at large, and interested students of history who would gain from understanding that women

1. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 36-40.

2. Beard, *The W.C.T.U. in the Volunteer State*, 25; Hoffschwelle, *Rebuilding the Rural Southern Community*, 5.

on the edges of modern societies could and did make impacts on the local, state, and national political environments.

The prior chapters of this study have looked at the history of women's suffrage in Tennessee, its historiography, rural women's concerns in political matters, and women's activism to address societal issues. All of this investigation was done with the goal of providing evidence to counter the notion that rural women were indifferent to the matters of suffrage in Tennessee and nationally. Primary documents provided have confirmed that women of the sampled rural counties were informed and involved in political matters that had strong connections to the fight for women's enfranchisement. There was dissemination of information through publications such as local newspapers, as well as lectures and demonstrations provided by local, state, national, and international activists. In the case of all the movements examined, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the Country Life Movement, and women's suffrage, rural women interacted with representatives of statewide groups and took part in developing and running their own local organizations guided by the larger ideas. Rural women adapted the provided lessons and political beliefs to fit their own needs, but they worked within the organizations and grew their local networks, forming WCTU chapters, suffrage leagues, and canning clubs. Rural women were not watching from the sidelines, nor were they disregarding the political climate around them. Rural women's lack of involvement is false narrative. Rather, they were engaged.

Earlier scholarship promoted the idea that only urban women in Tennessee contributed to suffrage, which can be attributed to lack of data-gathering on suffrage activism in the rural areas. Core narratives of social movements focus on large events and

famous people; suffrage is no exception. While large events were important for the suffrage movement, the majority of Tennessee's population was rural.³ The rural work of embedding acceptability for suffrage across the state is what gave the movement a solid base to stand on. Without support by women in rural areas there would have been less power behind the voices who spoke for suffrage at the Capitol.

But what of rural representation in the suffrage narrative after the passage of the 19th Amendment? Women's participation in political movements did not end once the suffrage bill was ratified; rural women participated in the aftermath, after gaining enfranchisement. How were women's voter participation rates in Marion, Jackson, and Benton counties after Tennessee's ratification of the 19th Amendment? This chapter examines rural Tennessee women's exercise of the franchise once they got it, using Marion, Jackson, and Benton counties as examples across the state. It also considers the effect how lack of rural representation in the historical narrative has translated to lack of physical representation on the landscape, and what that means in terms of understanding the fullness of history. Both contribute to the idea that rural women were not part of the suffrage movement in popular consciousness, in the memory of the people of Tennessee, and in the rural counties studied. Women's history must be represented in the greater story of the nation, and rural women must be a part of the narrative.

3. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census...1920: Population, Composition and Characteristics of the Population*, 956.

The Cost to Vote

Women did not stop their activism once the 19th Amendment was ratified in Tennessee and added to the United States Constitution. Many of the women's leagues in these counties, after the passage of suffrage, converted to chapters of the League of Women Voters. Local League of Women Voters groups would promote voting and voter education to the women of their region.⁴ Women went on to use their gained right to vote in their respective counties. Each county's poll tax records lock in what actually took place in the ensuing voting years. Many Tennessee counties' tax books are archived in microfilm at the Tennessee State Library and Archives, where relevant tax books were examined for this study. The years researched varied by county, extant copies, and availability. The objective was to study the tax records of poll taxes closest to the year the 19th Amendment was ratified. The best years that could be accessed were 1923 for Jackson and Marion counties and 1926 for Benton County. The goal in gaining access to and collecting the data of women voters in each of these counties is to illustrate whether or not women were pursuing the use of the vote. At that time in history, poll taxes were paid for the right to a ballot; poll tax was a voting tax standard across much of the country until the 24th Amendment eliminated poll taxation nationwide. Ratified in 1964 as part of national Civil Rights legislation, the Twenty-fourth outlawed the use of poll taxes as a requirement for voting in federal elections.⁵ While poll taxes were an obvious

4. Spruill Wheeler, *One Woman, One Vote*, 353-54, 360-65.

5. U.S. Constitution, Amend. 24, Sec. 1: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote in any primary or other election for President or Vice President for electors for President or Vice President, or for Senator or Representative in Congress, shall not be

tactic to keep lower classes and African Americans from voting, records on poll taxes from the years they were collected offer researchers information into the demographics of voting populations.⁶ County poll tax logs can provide data on how many rural women participated in the right to vote in local, state, and federal elections and are evidence on whether women were interested in politics and participated in the franchise.

The research for this portion of the study was carried out by the author during January 2020 in the Reading Room of Tennessee State Library and Archives. After gaining access to the tax records for each county—Marion, Jackson, and Benton—each woman’s name, handwritten in the tax book, who paid the poll tax, was manually counted. The numbers gathered and tallied are therefore approximations. Imprecisions in the count derive from human error, illegible entries, and inability to definitively ascertain whether the name entered in a roll book was a woman’s or man’s name. Each potential error lessens the accuracy of the count. Thus, the results provided are considered approximate, although they are close approximations.

Most of the women entered into the county records were accompanied with the prefix Mrs. or Miss, but there were exceptions, which then relied on gender discernment—attributing the name to being either male or female. The lack of prefix before a name was additionally a race indicator: meaning, African American women and men were not entered into the county records as Mr. or Mrs., but only by a first and last

denied or abridged by the United States or any State by reason of failure to pay any poll tax or other tax.”

6. Spruill Wheeler, *One Woman, One Vote*, 316-17.

name. Corroborating race, African Americans also usually were identified with a (c.) beside their names.⁷

The following graphs for each county, figures 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, were created from data collected from the three counties' tax books in the year available that was closest to 1920. The year 1923 was researched for Marion and Jackson counties and the year 1926 for Benton County. The counts reflect:

- Total number of taxpayers, both property tax and poll tax, male and female, white and black, for the tax year;
- Total number of women listed as taxpayers, both property tax and poll tax, white and black;
- Total number of women, white and black, who paid the poll tax and presumably voted;
- Number of African American women listed as taxpayers, both property tax and poll tax; and
- Number of African American women who paid the poll tax and presumably voted.

7. Marion and Benton counties had white and black women's records mixed throughout the record books. Jackson County did not differentiate if someone was white or African American, which could have various explanations, one being voter suppression, or simply the lack of any racial designation. In the Jackson Co. tax book, the last c. one hundred pages of the tax book was a continuous list of women who paid the poll tax and nothing else. Was there an influx of Jackson Co. women voters right before the 1924 presidential election? Further study is required.

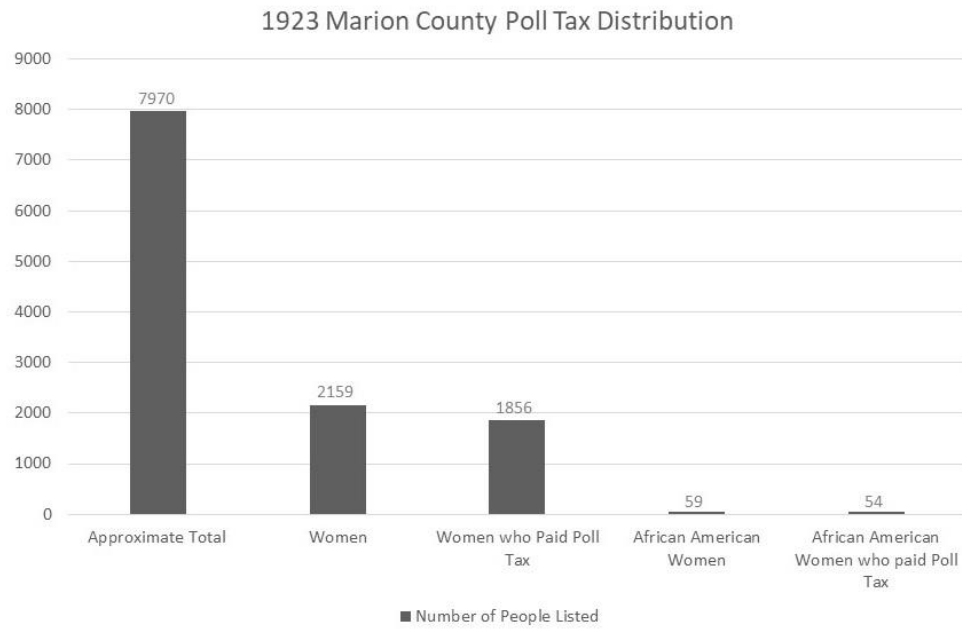


Figure 4.1. Marion County poll tax demographics for the year 1923.⁸

8. The table is made from data collected from “Trustee Tax Books 1923,” Marion County, Tennessee, Microfilm Roll 132, TSLA.

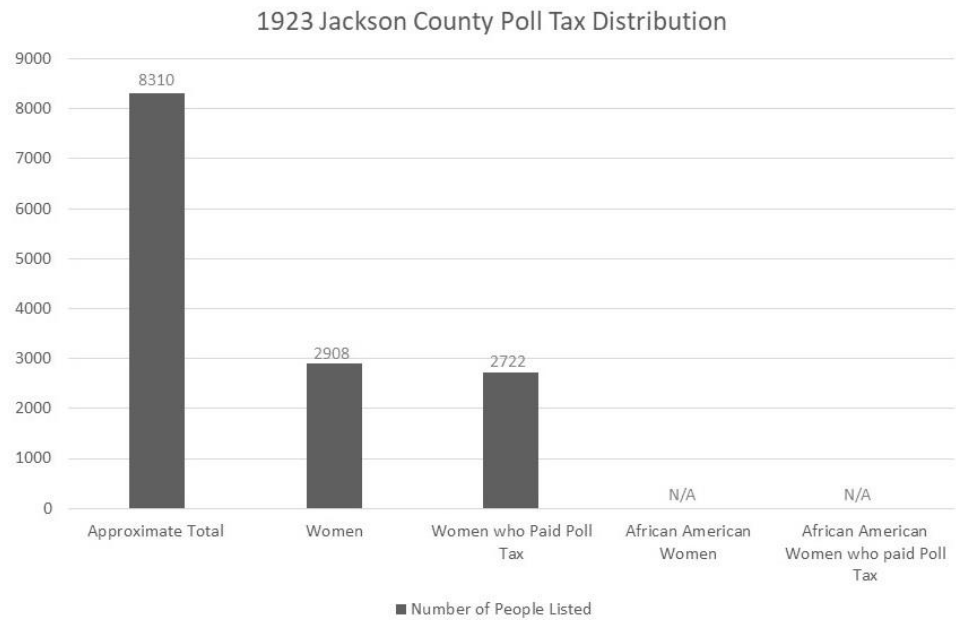


Figure 4.2. Jackson County poll tax demographics for the year 1923.⁹

9. The table is made from data collected from “Trustee Tax Books and Duplicates, vol. 7, 1923,” Jackson County, Tennessee, Microfilm Roll A3674, TSLA.

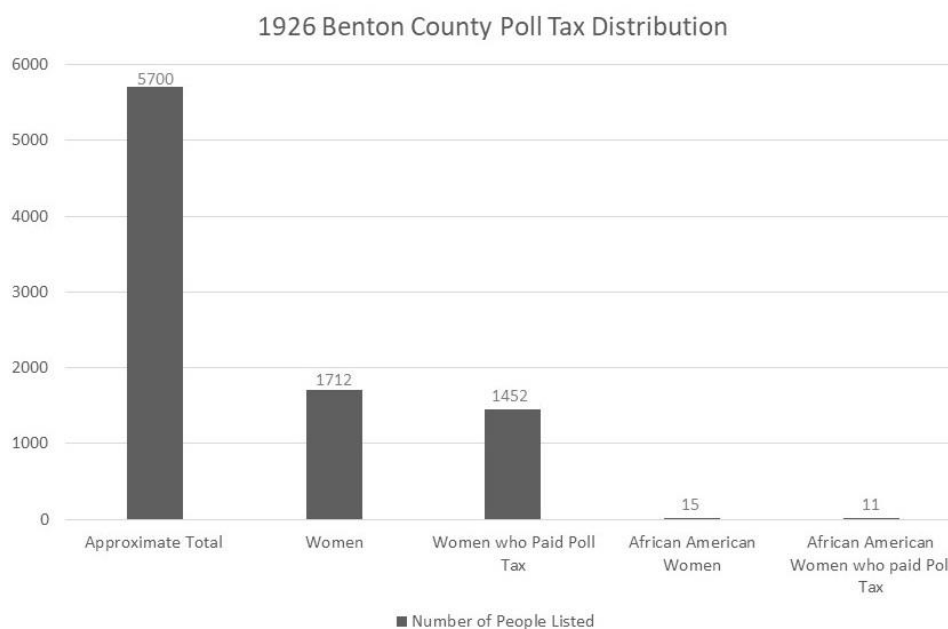


Figure 4.3. Benton County poll tax demographics for the year 1926.¹⁰

These histograms illustrate that, of the women listed in the tax records for the specified year, there was a consistent percentage who paid poll taxes and presumably voted. Women constituted approximately a quarter to a third of the voting population in all three counties in the examined years. Connecting these county data sets to census data close in time shows that the percentage of the population, both male and female, that did pay voting tax was abysmally small in comparison to the total population of each county at the time. Examining 1920 census numbers alongside the poll tax records of a few years

10. The table is made from data collected from “Trustee Office Tax Books 1926,” Benton County, TN, Microfilm Roll 164, TSLA.

later gives an approximate idea of how many women paid the poll tax compared to the total female population of each county.

Marion County's approximate female population, adult, age 21 or over, was 8,478, as recorded in the 1920 census.¹¹ Compared to the 1,856 women who paid the 1923 poll tax,¹² the entire female voting population of Marion County was only a little over one-fifth, 22%, of the voting-age-eligible women who lived in Marion County then. Of the total female population in the county, 817 women were African American,¹³ about 10% of the total female population, and of those 817 adult black Marion County women, only 54 of them,¹⁴ c. 7%, voted. Subtracting the counts of black women from the total female population and from the total female tax payers, approximately 23.5% of the white women, versus about 7% of the black women, voted in Marion County.

Jackson County's census numbers reveal that of the approximate 7,281 women age 21 and above,¹⁵ who lived in Jackson County in 1920, only 2,722 paid poll taxes.¹⁶

11. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census of the United States Taken in the Year 1920: Population, Composition and Characteristics of the Population*, 961-66. Note that in all three counties in the 1920 census, looking at total population figures of inhabitants 21 years of age and older by sex, men and women were approximately equal in the population (Ibid.).

12. See figure 4.1.

13. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census...1920: Population, Composition and Characteristics of the Population*, 961-66.

14. See figure 4.1.

15. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census...1920: Population, Composition and Characteristics of the Population*, 961-66.

16. See figure 4.2.

So about 37% of the women of Jackson County were voters, a remarkably high percentage. Approximately 128 of the 7,281 female population of Jackson County were African American, according to the 1920 census,¹⁷ less than 2% of its rural, hill-country population. Of those, there is no available record to indicate that any members of the black population were able to pay the poll tax; lack of race differentiation in the tax books makes black-voter information unobtainable for Jackson County. But projecting from numbers and percentages calculable, the 37% of women voters in Jackson County in the early 1920s were almost entirely white.

In Benton County in the 1920 census, 6,031 women, age 21 and older, are recorded, and of those, only 115 were African American,¹⁸ blacks constituting, as with Jackson County, just under 2% of the population. Poll taxes in 1926 in Benton County were paid by 1,452 women.¹⁹ So 24% of Benton County women were voters. Of the 115 African American women in Benton County in the early 1920s,²⁰ only 11 of them paid the 1926 poll tax,²¹ c. 7%, the same black voting percentage as in Marion County. Again, doing the backward calculations, about 19% of the white women in Benton County voted, compared to 7% of the black women. The raw number of black women who voted

17. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census...1920: Population, Composition and Characteristics of the Population*, 961-66.

18. Ibid.

19. See figure 4.3.

20. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census...1920: Population, Composition and Characteristics of the Population*, 961-66.

21. See figure 4.3.

was tiny, but all of Benton County's numbers were fewer across the board because (as discussed in chapter 1) Benton County had the smallest population of the three study-counties investigated.

Based on the very approximate calculations generated in this study, in the 1920s, 22% of the Marion County women voted or were potential voters, 24% of Benton County's women were, and 37% of the women of Jackson County voted or at least paid the poll tax to be able to try to vote. Realistically, whether the women made it to the polls, or were permitted to cast a ballot, is not calculable. Suggestive of discontinuities, the total population of Tennessee, age 21 and up, was, 2,337,885 in the 1920 census,²² but only 300,275 Tennesseans, according to U.S. congressional tabulations, voted in the 1924 presidential election.²³ Those who voted were fewer than 13% of the age-eligible people living in Tennessee. Demographic breakdowns of those who voted in the election were not provided, but the 1920 census informs that 81% of Tennesseans (1,885,993) were white and 19% black (451,758), with a statistically insignificant handful (134) of others. Further study would be required to know more.

This study shows, through the poll tax graphs, that women in the rural counties of Tennessee were taking part in exercising their right to vote. Rural Tennessee women were voting, or at least were taking the costly steps to vote. The women of Marion,

22. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census...1920: Population Number and Distribution of Inhabitants*.

23 House of Representatives, "Statistics of the Congressional and Presidential Election of November 4, 1924" (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office: 1925), 20.

Jackson, and Benton counties were participating in the rights that the passage of the 19th Amendment allowed them. The counties of this study still had a significant gap between their overall female populations²⁴ and the women who had taken steps to vote (figs. 4.1-4.3). Marion had a female population of 8, 478, yet only 1,856 women paid the poll tax, as seen in figure 4.1. Similar ratios are found in the other two counties, with Jackson having 2,722 women “registered” (fig. 4.2) of its 7,281 women eligible to vote, and Benton with 1,452 women having paid the voting tax (fig. 4.3) of the 6,013 age-appropriate women who could legally have voted.²⁵ These data show that even with the support of suffrage in their counties, only a quarter to a third of the local women were paying the poll tax to vote.

Low female voter turnout following the 19th Amendment in the three Tennessee study-counties is not actually unusual. The pattern follows the national trend of a large gender gap in voting in the years after passage of the Nineteenth.²⁶ There was long-term cultural patterning to overcome, and women (and men) needed to be educated in women’s new civic duty of voting. A survey of women non-voters in 1923 in Chicago offered these explanations for women’s non-participation: “disbelief in woman’s voting,” “objections of husband,” and indifference or lack of knowledge about the elections.²⁷

24. Department of Commerce Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census...1920: Population, Composition and Characteristics of the Population*, 961-66.

25. *Ibid.*

26. Paul Kleppner, “Were Women to Blame? Female Suffrage and Voter Turnout,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 12, no. 4 (1982): 621-22.

27. Tom Rosentiel and Jodie T. Allen, “Reluctant Suffragettes: When Women Questioned Their Right to Vote,” Pew Research Center (March 18, 2009),

Although there is debate on why the voting gender gap existed and persisted, scholarship proposes fuller explanations. A study published in 1995 compared the ages of 20th century voters who were born and grew up before the Nineteenth Amendment to those born after 1920. Results show a broad pattern of lack of voting by women who were born and came of age prior to 1920, versus women born after the 1920s who engaged in voter participation in similar numbers to men in the mid- and later-20th century.²⁸ The conclusion reached by the researchers is that voting is a culturally acquired, learned behavior, developed during youth and young adulthood. Women who had grown up during disenfranchisement were less likely to participate in voting, and the scholars' interpretation is backed by similar studies.²⁹ That voting is culturally patterned, acquired, learned behavior, which must be taught, is fundamental knowledge about citizenship that continues to be realized and applied in the present day, as work goes on to increase voter participation across the entire nation's electorate.³⁰

<https://www.pewresearch.org/2009/03/18/reluctant-suffragettes-when-women-questioned-their-right-to-vote/>, accessed Jan. 29, 2020.

28. Glenn Firebaugh and Kevin Chen, "Vote Turnout of Nineteenth Amendment Women: The Enduring Effect of Disenfranchisement," *American Journal of Sociology* 100, no. 4 (1995): 984.

29. *Ibid.*, 986-87; Kleppner, "Were Women to Blame? Female Suffrage and Voter Turnout," 622-24; Andrew S. Fullerton and Michael J. Stern, "Explaining the Persistence and Eventual Decline of the Gender Gap in Voter Registration and Turnout in the American South, 1956-1980," *Social Science History* 34, no. 2 (2010): 132-35.

30. Jennifer Domagal-Goldman, "Rising to the Challenge of Full Civic Participation," paper presented at the Campus Civic Summit, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN, Feb. 21, 2020, <https://mtsu.edu/amerdem/campus-civic-summit.php>; Abby Kiesa, "Growing Voters," paper presented at the Campus Civic Summit, Middle Tennessee State University, Murfreesboro, TN, Feb. 21, 2020, <https://mtsu.edu/amerdem/campus-civic-summit.php>.

Further detailed study of Tennessee women voters is needed to gain a more complete picture of where Marion, Jackson, and Benton County women of the 1920s fell in the larger scheme of both national and Tennessee voting demographics, but it is likely that the rural women voters of Tennessee's non-urban counties—with less-than-men voter participation percentages—were right in line with urban women voters in Tennessee's big cities and with the national trend of low-woman-voter turnout during the 1920s, and for decades to come as women grew into and learned about their citizenship.³¹ Rural women's voting participation was quite comparable to urban women's voting.

The data gathered from the Marion, Jackson, and Benton county records give evidence that the early women voters in Tennessee's rural counties were assuredly not indifferent to the right of enfranchisement they had gained. Their voter participation numbers were low but they were not nonexistent, nor were they outliers compared to the national trend of women not rushing to vote. One barrier was that Tennessee voters were each paying a \$2.00 poll tax to vote, which would be equivalent to about \$30.00 per person in the year 2020,³² so voting necessitated determination and financial means.

Exceedingly low numbers of African American women in these data verifies Jim Crow segregation of the era. There was extreme separation in voting by race in these

31. The U.S. Census only began recording voting demographics in 1964, in which year women's voting numerically exceeded men's, but it was not until 1980 that women voters finally equaled and superseded men in percentage of participation (Rosentiel and Allen, "Reluctant Suffragettes").

32. "CPI Inflation Calculator," CIP Inflation Calculator, United States Department of Labor, last modified Jan. 2020, <https://cpiinflationcalculator.com/>, accessed Feb. 21, 2020.

county records. The racial injustices that kept black male Tennessee voters from the ballot applied to African American women as well. White supremacy in Tennessee still controlled the right to enfranchisement.³³

Additionally, the state's poll tax created a barrier for the rural poor of Tennessee, which would have impacted black voters, both male and female. Poll taxes also limited access by poor whites. While a family may have been able to afford to pay the voting tax for one voter, it is not a stretch to conclude that there were likely many rural poor who could not afford for both the husband and wife to vote. Although nationally the poll tax was not eliminated until the 24th Amendment in 1964, Tennessee tried to get rid of poll taxation in the 1930s and 1940s, and it was finally removed during the Tennessee constitutional convention in 1953.³⁴

The aftermath after ratification of the 19th Amendment can also be seen in county newspapers. There is a shift in attitude toward education for women's voting, stepping away from the earlier emphasis on women's moral virtue that they would bring to the ballot box. Now, women's responsibilities as a citizen were advocated. The *Jackson County Sentinel* published an article titled "Women's Duty to Vote" that argued,

There was a time when there was a difference of opinion in the United States [on] whether or not women should have the right to vote....I do not look upon the right of suffrage as privilege I look upon it as an obligation. It is just as much your duty and my duty to take an interest...in the affairs of state....³⁵

33. Terborg-Penn, *African American Women in the Struggle for the Vote*, 151-58.

34. Dewey W. Grantham, "Tennessee and Twentieth-Century American Politics," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (1995): 219.

35. A. Pomerene, "Women's Duty to Vote," *Jackson County Sentinel*, June 29, 1922, 1, *Chronicling America*.

The article compares the duty of voting to that of mothers and wives taking care of the household.

Benton County also promoted the idea of voting as a responsibility. One article stated, “Now that the ladies have been granted suffrage, it is their duty to qualify themselves,” as part of rallying women for membership in the Democratic party.³⁶ Similar to these articles, others showed politicians actively seeking women voters’ support and ballots.³⁷ The counties had shifted from supporting suffrage to encouraging women to take part in their civic duties in politics. There was also a distinct shift in language, articulating that women would fail in their responsibilities as citizens if they did not take part in elections.

The newspaper records, along with the poll tax lists, demonstrate that the rural women in rural counties were actively involved in exercising the franchise. If women had been indifferent to their new right, there would have been noticeably fewer poll tax payments and little interest from the community in admonishing women to participate. Instead, there is promotion of voting. In Jackson County’s tax books, the last one hundred pages of the book are dedicated just to women’s poll taxes (see fn. 7, this chapter). More precise study is needed to properly interpret the extent of women’s voting in the counties after 1920, but for this analysis, the documents found and the data calculated reflect that the rural women of the study-counties were voters and they used their franchise.

36. “Local Mention,” *Camden Chronicle*, Mar. 31, 1922, 3, *Chronicling America*.

37. Newell Sanders, “Women,” *Jackson County Sentinel*, Oct. 19, 1922, 5, *Chronicling America*.

In the end, rural women were an active part of the political process, supporting the movement that fought for suffrage and the aligned social reforms they felt were in their female realm of duty. Seeing what this research has revealed, one necessarily asks, why has rural women's engagement during the time of suffrage been forgotten in public memory, and disregarded in the greater historiography of Tennessee suffrage? Why are the women of the rural counties left out of both women's history and larger historical narrative?

There are multiple factors pertaining to the question, such as a lack of interest in women's history until the women's movement of the 1960s, as well as historic loss of primary sources on minority histories. Women must be proactively researched in archives and historical records; collections dedicated only to women are few and far between.³⁸ Women are often hidden within collections and documents that at first appear to have nothing to do with women's history; women's stories require in-depth sleuthing. The advancement of technology and digital meta-databases have made finding previously silenced voices somewhat more accessible, but there is still much work to be done in reviving and representing women's history in the public's memory.

Representation and Public Memory

In the past decade there have been debates on how monuments, public memory, and representation inform us in the present about the past. In the case of women's

38. Tanya Zanish-Belcher and Anke Voss, *Perspectives on Women's Archives*, (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2013), 34.

monuments, while they have increased in number since the women's movement of the 1960s,³⁹ there are still lacunae in women's representation across and within the public landscape, especially about women of color. Both historic preservation and monuments for the remembrance of women are important to mark women's actions in history. When it comes to representation on the physical landscape of history, women are sorely lacking. Numerous famous homes and spaces are dedicated to the power and accomplishments of white men but few to women, and even fewer to non-white women. These omissions communicate a lack of care and understanding of women's roles in history. Physical representations of memory are ways we celebrate the country's history. Monuments create permanence on the historical landscape and call attention to what is considered important and meaningful.⁴⁰ The statement that is made by a lack of such memorials to overlooked people communicates that they do not matter in the story of the nation's history, that their actions do not count as history. The lack of women's monuments shows that women's lives and experiences were not part of the greater historical narrative; women were outliers, not relevant to masculine politics.⁴¹ It is only in recent decades that

39. Also known as the women's liberation movement, it occurred throughout the 1960s and into the 1970s in the United States. It was a wave of activism that sought to bring equal rights and opportunities to women. It included transforming laws, attitudes, expectations, behaviors, and environments, economically, bodily, and socially. "Women's lib" is recognized as the second wave of feminism. First wave was the fight for the vote and also women's movement out of the domestic sphere.

40. Emily Weidenmuller, Taylor Williamson, Courtney Leistensnider, and John C. Finn, "History Written in Stone: Gender and the Naturalizing Power of Monuments in Southeastern Virginia," *Southeastern Geographer* 55, no. 4 (2015): 435.

41. Bennett, Judith M, *History Matters: Patriarchy and the Challenge of Feminism* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 11-24.

women's history has been considered legitimate. Representation of women on the historical landscape—monuments to women—only started to appear with more frequency toward the turn of the 21st century. Monuments give weight and significance to events past. The lack of them, especially of women in rural areas, perpetuates silence and denigrates women's involvement in milestones like suffrage and women's public movements.

The shortage of women's monuments creates the image that women are not part of our national heritage. The dearth of women's markers is one issue, but so is *how* women are represented. Martha Norkunas, in the monograph *Monuments and Memory*, details how women are represented on the physical landscape. She states, "Women were memorialized collectively as pioneers, worker, and wives," but only after the 1960s and 1970s' women movement was there a shift to represent individual women.⁴² There was a transition away from an unnamed mass of women to depicting singular heroines. As women's monuments changed from groups to exceptional individuals, there was not necessarily an increase in the number or percentage of women's monuments.

Also, depictions were not ideologically neutral. Norkunas explains that many monuments reflect "publicly sanctioned roles" in which women engaged, often in remembrance of men.⁴³ In other words a statue of a female figure may have nothing to do with women but rather may be a tribute to men. There is also the issue of how monuments are presented. Are the plaques off the beaten path? Is there just a name of a

42. Norkunas, *Monuments and Memory*, 92.

43. *Ibid.*, 106.

long-forgotten figure with no context? Where and how monuments are placed matter. If a monument cannot communicate who its figures were and for what they are being recognized, memory of the historic event fades. Historic moments only get brought up for a momentous occasion, such as the current centennial on the 19th Amendment.⁴⁴ Even with the memorials, information has been lost due to lack of thorough representation. As Hayden states, “It is not enough to add on a few African American or Native American projects, or a few women’s projects, and assume that preserving urban history is handled well in the United States....”⁴⁵ In other words, working to add a monument of women to an area dominated by monuments to men, while not a bad effort, should not be the end point in developing more representative, diverse historical landscapes.

Women are still underrepresented in physical representations of memory, and it is often only when there is the greatest of exception that monuments to women or women’s organizations are made. Even greater is their rarity in rural areas. Though women’s monuments do exist for suffrage, they are typically in cities and urban areas, not in rural towns. That does not mean that rural areas are completely lacking in monuments and memorials though, especially in the South. In the counties of this study, there are numerous monuments to men, especially involving the Civil War. These monuments connect to male memory, often to the glory of white supremacy. The irony is that many of the monuments were funded by women’s organizations.⁴⁶ Across the board there is a

44. Marcus, “Tourism Industry is (Finally) Shining a Light.”

45. Dolores Hayden, *The Power of Place: Urban Landscapes as Public History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997), 8.

lack of female representation on the historic monument landscape and even less for women who were not white.

Going even further, underrepresentation of women communicates ongoing, intractable maintenance of masculine space, versus what can be publicly allowed for feminine representation, thus the policing of public space.⁴⁷ Because women have historically been viewed as integral to the domestic sphere, the fact that monuments to men dominate public places perpetuates gender roles and gendered space divisions. Place and space allocated for southern womanhood does not, typically, as an example, include the Tennessee State Capitol.⁴⁸

This study's goal has been to provide evidence that the narrative in scholarship of suffrage in Tennessee has been incorrect about rural women. There has also been a need to show that the lack of representation of suffrage history on the physical landscape also extends to rural communities. The dearth of monuments to women and suffrage organizations constitutes an absence of place for citizens to reflect on the history of their area, including suffrage history. This is true for the rural counties of Marion, Jackson, and Benton in Tennessee.

46. Karen L. Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville: Univ. of Florida Press, 2003).

47. Norkunas, *Monuments and Memory*, 106.

48. Alan LeQuire and Wanda Stanfill, "The Tennessee Woman Suffrage Monument," statue, Centennial Park, Nashville, TN, Aug. 26, 2016; "Tennessee Woman Suffrage Monument," Tennessee Woman Suffrage Monument, Tennessee Woman Suffrage Monument Committee, last modified July 3, 2019, accessed March 10, 2020, <http://tnsuffragemonument.org/>.

The Tennessee Historical Commission provides a list of monuments and markers located in the study-counties. The Historical Commission's list is state-funded monuments, which may not be all the monuments in the counties since privately funded markers likely also exist; markers are usually funded locally in connection to being approved by the Tennessee Historical Commission. Altogether, the study-counties had thirty-five recognized state-funded historic markers and monuments, only two of which were dedicated to women and only one of which had anything to do with suffrage.⁴⁹ The marker that mentions suffrage is in Benton County. It was emplaced in 2008, Tennessee Historical Commission marker number 4A50, and commemorates Mary Cordelia Beasley-Hudson, the first women in Tennessee to vote.⁵⁰ Her marker reads:

Mary Cordelia Beasley-Hudson, a life-long resident of Benton County, was an advocate for women's suffrage. The Tennessee General Assembly approved an amendment to the state constitution to allow women's suffrage on April 15, 1919. Seven days later Beasley-Hudson was the first female in the state to cast a ballot when voting in the Camden municipal election. In 1920 the nation ratified the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution giving women the right to vote. One month before the 1920 presidential election Beasley-Hudson died; her remains are interred in Camden City Cemetery. On March 5, 2008, the Tennessee General Assembly recognized her with a proclamation.⁵¹

49. Tennessee Historical Commission, "List of Compiled Markers and Monuments for Benton County Tennessee," provided by Ashlee Pierce, Tennessee Historical Commission Administrative Secretary, Feb. 13, 2020.

50. Thomas R. Machnitzki, "Mary Cordelia Beasley-Hudson," metal marker 4A50, Camden, TN, July 26, 2012.

51. Ibid.

Beyond the marker, Beasley-Hudson was further officially recognized by the Tennessee General Assembly in a 2019 Senate resolution.⁵²

It was pleasing and unexpected to find a women's suffrage marker in one of the rural study-counties. It is dedicated to a named female and gives some basic information about the 19th Amendment. Although this is a positive step forward for women on the historical landscape, it is one of the unique-exception examples in a sea of male representations. All three counties had engaged suffrage leagues and other women's political and community activities. Where are the monuments to the WCTU or home demonstration clubs? The Beasley-Hudson marker is an outlier. Communication of power in the physical representation of monuments for historical remembrance is not gender equal. Lack of recognition of women expresses to citizens of the region and state that women were not important. There is a possibility that more monuments and markers exist commemorating women's contributions to history in these counties, but there needs to be further exploration to find and catalogue them.

There is power and embodiment in monuments, statues, and markers. In a study by Dolores Hayden titled *The Power of Place*, she looks at landscapes and at the importance memory and location have on the relationship between citizens and their history.⁵³ Her work examines the way public historical landscapes shape how events are

52. Tennessee State Senate, Senate Joint Resolution 536 (Mary Cordelia Beasley-Hudson), SJR 0536, 111th Tennessee General Assembly, introduced in Senate April 22, 2019, <https://trackbill.com/bill/tennessee-senate-joint-resolution-536-memorials-recognition-mary-cordelia-beasley-hudson/1742127/>, accessed Feb. 10, 2020.

53. Hayden, *The Power of Place*.

remembered vis-a-vis the representation of gender, race, and culture through historic preservation. Her study considers urban sites, but the framework she uses for consideration is relevant to any region. Hayden articulates that public space is formative of citizens' identity of an area.⁵⁴ The specific meaning of a space is translated through its public representations. The space could be where suffrage meetings were held or where the first ballot was cast by a woman in Tennessee, as in Benton County. It reifies remembrance. It becomes a place for people to turn to in commemoration of history and shared struggles. Historical spaces can be a treasure for people to stumble upon to learn something about which they had no prior knowledge.

The power that monuments have is both personal and political in nature. The acknowledgment that something important happened there, be it celebratory or tragic, can powerfully create remembrance. Someone gathered the support and funding to make a permanent historic record for the public, which gives heft to the place and to the idea. Monuments create recollection of events; they communicate to citizens that history is important. Hayden points out that "For women, the body, the home, and the street have all been arenas of conflict. Examining them as political territories—bounded spaces with some form of enforcement of the boundaries—helps us to analyze the spatial dimensions of 'woman's sphere' at any given time."⁵⁵

Where women could go and what they could do have been historically limited. It was the early women's movement and pressure from women fighting for enfranchisement and political presence that helped remove those limitations. Thus, the

54. *Ibid.*, 9.

55. *Ibid.*, 22.

absence of monuments to women's struggles in rural areas of Tennessee continues to promote the idea, whether intentional or not, that public space is meant for male tributes only. The fight for suffrage and the fight for representation have parallels. The fight for representation requires that women insist that male spaces be broadened and made open to all. Women's history on the public landscape through monuments and plaques matters. Women's struggle for presence in the public sphere continues into the present day in the fight for representational honor. The fight for space where it was previously denied goes on.

Conclusion

The turn of the 20th century brought an opening for women to push through into spaces previously not available to them. These spaces included education, politics, and activities that were considered to be outside women's domestic sphere. While the previous century started the commencement of this shift in attitudes, laws, and behavior, the first twenty years of the 1900s saw the greatest increase of support and change in ideology that allowed women to have a greater voice outside their traditional roles. Although the early women's movement included multiple fronts such as suffrage and temperance, women wanted to retain aspects of their traditional roles. During that era the private sphere of home intersected with the public sphere of politics in new ways. Women could stay true to their roles in the home but also participate in the civic realm. The societal objectives for which women were working made clear to them that enfranchisement was required to be successful. The suffrage movement gained traction at

the beginning of the 20th century across the United States, including in the state of Tennessee.

Previous studies have looked at the suffrage movement of Tennessee and, while contributing greatly to its scholarship, left out the voices of rural women in suffrage discourse. Misconceptions and silences within historical narratives promoted the idea that women in the rural areas of Tennessee were passive observers of social change, indifferent to suffrage and the progressive movements surrounding them.⁵⁶ These movements were portrayed as heavily urban driven. However, the idea that rural women were not participants, through both exposure and activism, is false. Primary evidence is used to strike down the old interpretation. The rural women of three counties examined in this study were involved in progressive movements like the WCTU, Country Life, and suffrage. Rural women had their own interests that both deviated from and intersected with those of their urban counterparts. The women of Marion, Jackson, and Benton counties formed their own leagues, organizations, and clubs to network with the larger groups in urban centers and to represent themselves in their own efforts.

The deficiency of rural representation in suffrage scholarship has made these women's efforts invisible within the larger suffrage narrative and carries on the stereotype that only in large populated areas can political change take place, especially for efforts considered progressive or liberal in their time. The dearth of historic identification of women's societal activities in rural counties parallels the lack of women's physical representations in monuments and plaques on historical landscapes,

56. Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee*, 36-40.

both of which perpetuate the lack of space for women in history. The persistent absence of women's representation in the public landscape continues the belief that rural women did not have interest in suffrage. Opportunities for citizens to learn from, relate to, and be proud of their local women's histories is an ongoing loss of identity and community enrichment. Recent efforts by the Tennessee Woman's Suffrage Heritage Trail have been working to address this issue.⁵⁷ The Suffrage Heritage Trail women have been gathering information on Tennessee suffrage history and have set out to create a map that shows the suffrage work that was done across the state. Hopefully their map will become a growing future reference for rural suffrage history.⁵⁸ These recent activities, including creation of new women's monuments with new focus on women's history, can be attributed to the centennial of the passage of the 19th Amendment that is occurring during the year of this study. The celebration of the centennial brings fresh attention to many forgotten figures and histories of woman's suffrage.

This study set out to find rural women's voices in suffrage and other related movements in the Tennessee countryside. The need to rationally narrow down the study to a sample of East, Middle, and West Tennessee rural counties for examination was identified. In the three counties chosen for study, there was evidence for rural women participating in suffrage and the lack of their historical representation in both scholarship

57 "About," TN Woman Suffrage Heritage Trail, TN Woman Suffrage Heritage Trail, last modified 2019, <https://tnwomansuffrageheritagetrail.com/about/>, accessed June 2019.

58. "Map," TN Woman Suffrage Heritage Trail, TN Woman Suffrage Heritage Trail, last modified 2019, <https://tnwomansuffrageheritagetrail.com/maps/>, accessed June 2019.

and physical remembrance. While newly accessed materials, newspapers, and data from the three counties broaden our understanding of rural women's civic responses to suffrage in those locales, there are many other counties that must be explored to achieve full understanding of what rural suffrage looked like in Tennessee. This analysis provides just a small sample of rural women's activism and acknowledges that there is much more research on rural suffrage yet to be done. Only when underrepresented women, rural and otherwise, are placed back into the narrative of history is knowledge strengthened. This study provides evidence for the greater story of rural women in suffrage, includes women in scholarship, and argues for their representation on the historical landscape. Hopefully it also contributes to increased shared identity through information about the activities of lesser known rural women in the history of Tennessee and the nation.

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