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THE WOMAN'S MOVEMENT IN LOUISIANA:
1879-1920

DISSERTATION

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By

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In this study the term "woman's movement" is defined as any advancement made by women, socially, economically, legally, or politically. In addition to information gathered from various collections, memoirs, diaries, and contemporary newspaper accounts of Louisiana women's activities, material from a number of pertinent secondary works is included.

Chapter one gives a brief overview of the women's movement as it developed in America in the latter half of the 19th century. This is followed by a chapter on women in Louisiana before 1879. Evidence suggests that a number of Louisiana women shared a common bond with other southern, women in longing for an emancipation from their limited role in society.

The last six chapters are devoted to the woman's movement in the state, beginning in 1879 when women first dared to to speak out in public in behalf of women. After the Civil War, a large number of women were forced by post war conditions to depart from the traditional life-style of home and family and venture into public life. Liberated from their societal mold, women slowly expanded their sphere, going beyond the immediate need to provide a livelihood. Early women's organizations, temperance unions, church societies, and women's clubs, provided the necessary training ground as women moved into legal, civic and social reforms. Women

entered literary and professionaly fields and gradually became active in civic affairs. The movement reached a climax in 1920 with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, granting women the right to vote, and marking the end of an era. While the liberation of women was not complete, from the achievements gained by women of this era emerged the modern woman of today.

This study concludes that Louisiana women not only improved their lot, but made worthwhile contributions to society. While not all women desired change, the women's movement by 1920 had provided options for many Louisiana women whose desires and ambitions lay beyond the limited sphere of 1879.

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PREFACE

In this study, "The Woman's Movement in Louisiana," the term woman's movement is defined as any advancement made by women, socially, economically, legally, or politically. In addition to various collections, housed primarily at Tulane University and Louisiana State University, memoirs, and contemporary newspaper accounts of Louisiana women's activities, this study includes materials collected by historians of the woman's club and woman's suffrage movements. This information was contributed, for the most part, by women participating in these movements. While the material was collected nationwide, activities of Louisiana women were included. A number of secondary works have also proved useful.

During the period covered by this study, 1879-1920, Louisiana women not only improved their lot, but made worthwhile contributions to society as a whole. The achievements of these women have, by and large, been neglected by historians. Seldom can one find in historical accounts even a paragraph mentioning women. Admittedly, material on Louisiana women of the past is difficult to obtain, but even when there is ample evidence of women's accomplishments in areas of interest to the historian, there is little, if any, recognition given to the women involved. After the turn of the century, Louisiana women provided the leadership for a number of civic and social reforms and newspapers of the day reported in detail on most

of these activities. In many cases these accounts gave women credit for the success of these reforms. While historians write of these reforms, the significant contributions of the women involved have not been recorded.

It is hoped that this study of Louisiana women of the past will give to Louisiana women of the present an awareness and an appreciation of their heritage. The recent years have been a time of suspense for the women of America. With ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment pending before the states, strident voices—pro and con—echo from radios, televisions, and newspapers. Tension has grown and women are more deeply divided today than at any other time in this generation. While there are valid arguments on both sides of most of the issues involved, there is also a fear of the unknown. Conjectures of "what if" cloud many of the issues. Many privileges that Louisiana women enjoy and take for granted today are the fruit of heroic efforts of women of the past. They, too, in many cases, faced the challenge of "what if." How they met this challenge, and many others, is a story that needs to be told.

CHAPTER I

HOW IT BEGAN

Since the earliest periods in America's history there has been concern over the legal, political, economic, and social status of American women. One of the first to raise a voice in behalf of women was Abigail Adams. Writing to her husband, John, when he was sitting with the Continental Congress, she cautioned him to ". . . remember the ladies and be more favorable to them than your ancestors." She warned that ". . . if particular care and attention are not paid to the ladies, we are determined to foment a rebellion and will not hold ourselves bound to obey laws in which we have no voice or representation."[1]

Indeed, in succeeding generations large numbers of women did join in a non-violent rebellion ignited by the resentment and anger of those who considered their plight intolerable and fanned by a determination to alter the status of the American woman. Goals pursued with great courage and boundless conviction were often obtained only after enormous physical and mental sacrifice. In spite of endless obstacles, over a span of two centuries, progress was made in many areas, but in other areas issues remain unresolved to this day.

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[1] L. H. Butterfield, et al., eds., The Book of Abigail and John: Selected Letters of The Adams Family, 1762-1784 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 121.

At the beginning of the 19th century, the legal circumstances of the married woman were dismal. Under the English Common Law that prevailed in the United States the married woman was said to be "dead in law" and "husband and wife were one and that one the husband." The husband had absolute control of his wife's property and absolute control and power over their children. He could collect and spend his wife's wages and was allowed to beat her ". . . with a stick no bigger than the judge's thumb." If the wife ran away her husband could force her to return and the person who "harbored" her was liable for damages. Unmarried women were the wards of the nearest male relative.[2]

Only the daughters of the wealthy attended the few private schools available. There were no high schools for girls, and no college admitted women. The one sect that gave girls the same education as boys was the Quakers. However, even though this group charged the same tuition for boys and girls, following the universal custom they paid the woman teacher half the salary of the man.[3] Spirited and determined advocates pressed for equal educational opportunities for girls and women. In 1821 Emma Willard opened the Female Seminary in Troy, New York. Twelve years later John J. Shepard founded Oberline, the first coeducational college in the United States.[4]

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[2]Mary Foulke Morrisson, et al., Victory: How Women Won It (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1940), pp. 4-5.

[3]Ibid., pp. 5-6.

The first organized women's movement in the United States evolved from a pact made in London by two American women. In 1840 Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott were in London to attend the World Anti-Slavery Convention. Meeting for the first time at the convention, Stanton was the wife of a delegate, and Mott was one of eight Americans denied a delegate seat because they were women. Outraged by the rejection, the two females resolved to call a convention for the purpose of forming a society to advocate the rights of women.[5]

Eight years passed before realization of these plans. In the meantime, women gradually became more active in reform movements. They crusaded for married women's property rights and agitated for temperance and the antislavery cause. In 1841 three women from Oberline College were the first women to graduate from an American college.[6]

In July of 1848 the long delayed women's rights convention met in Seneca Falls, New York. Five days prior to the meeting Stanton, Mott, and her sister, Martha Wright, met with Mary Ann McClintock in the latter's home to draw up a declaration of sentiments.[7] Discarding a number of unsatisfactory drafts, the group finally agreed that the Declaration of Independence,

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[4]Alice Felt Tyler, Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History to 1860 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944), p. 25.

[5]Eleanor Flexner, Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in The United States (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1959, p. 71.

[6]Morrisson, et al., Victory, p. 23.

with slight changes, would be the perfect expression of their goals. An example of the changes was the substitution of the phrase "all men and women are created equal" for "all men are created equal."[8] Stanton reviewing the day's event recorded:

> Knowing that women must have more to complain of than men under any circumstances possible could, and seeing the Fathers had eighteen grievances, a protracted search was made through statute books, church usages, and the customs of society to find that exact number. Several well-disposed men assisted in their collecting, until with the announcement of the eighteenth women felt they had enough to go before the world with a good case.[9]

The community of Seneca Falls seems an unlikely place for a revolutionary movement to begin. New York or Boston would appear to have been a more logical place. However, the short notice in the town's only newspaper received an enthusiastic response. Perhaps the eager response from the women of a small community was an even more effective demonstration of the discontent of women of that day. From a radius of fifty miles, 300 women came to attend the meeting.[10]

The experiences of a nineteen year old farmer's daughter successfully captures the drama of the event. Reading the notice of the meeting, to be held in only two weeks, Charlotte Woodward went immediately from neighbor to neighbor to determine their interest. She was pleased to find that a number of women

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[7]Ibid., pp. 24-25.

[8]Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds., The History of Woman Suffrage, 6 vols. (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1861-1922), 1:67-68.

[9]Morrisson, et al., Victory, p. 25.

[10]Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 76.

shared her enthusiasm. In the early morning light of 19 July Charlotte and six of her friends set out in the farm wagon. Although concerned that they would be the only women attending the meeting, they arrived to find other wagons converging on the scene. For two days Miss Woodward sat on the back row and late into the evening listened to the speeches and the lively discussion.[11]

The convention adopted the declaration and a number of resolutions without opposition. Only one proposed resolution created a problem, but it too finally passed by a small majority. Introduced by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and advocated by Frederick Douglas, the resolution declared that "it is the duty of women of the country to secure to themselves the sacred right of the election franchise." Even Lucretia Mott was concerned with the daring proposal as she pleaded, "Why Lizzie, thee will make us ridiculous."[12]

The significance of the Seneca Falls Convention lies with the realization of the women of America that from 1848 women who were dissatisfied with the course of their lives now knew they were not alone, "although often the news reached them only through a vitriolic sermon or an abusive newspaper editorial."[13] The women's rights movement was launched, and its imprint touched the lives of women throughout

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[11]Ibid., pp. 76-77.

[12]Morrisson, et al., Victory, p. 28.

[13]Flexner, Struggle, p. 77.

America. On the thirty-two men and sixty-eight women who signed the Declaration of Principles, only Charlotte Woodward lived to vote for the President of the United States in 1920.[14]

Two years later the first national woman's rights convention was held in Worchester, Massachusetts, and was attended by more than 1,000 men and women. Traveling by stagecoach, river boat and the newly built railroads, they came from all six New England states, from Pennsylvania, Iowa, New York, Ohio, and from far-away California. All together there were delegates from over one third of the then United States. Among the delegates were temperance people, abolitionists, two Negro representatives from the "enslaved race," and Hicksite Quakers. Present were the "Boston Channings, Sargents, Parsons, Wendell Phillips, an Alcott, and Ralph Waldo Emerson. It was a meeting of earnest and liberal minds."[15] Lucretia Mott and Lucy Stone, two of the four women who were the most active in the agitation for women's rights in the last half of the 19th century, attended. Of the two other pioneers, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was busy with family obligations and Susan B. Anthony, who was to prove the most persistant of the four campaigners, while interested, was not yet ". . . convinced that equal rights included suffrage."[16]

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[14]Ibid.

[15]Morrisson, et al., Victory, pp. 37-38.

[16]Ibid., pp. 38-39.

The following year Anthony went to Seneca Falls to attend an anti-slavery meeting that had been called by George Thompson and William Lloyd Garrison. As she walked along the street after the adjournment of the meeting, Anthony was introduced to Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Stanton recalled that "I liked her thoroughly . . . we were at once fast friends, in thought and sympathy we were one, and in the division of labor we exactly complemented each other."[17] The two, who would become life-long friends, planned and plotted the coming agitation as they worked with other less famous women. Always only a small minority, the dedicated women battled against the firmly established order of law and thought. They attacked property laws, demanded extension of education for women, and even challenged religious beliefs as to the rightful place of women. They were often allied with other reformers in the temperance and anti-slavery movements, and were fleeting agitators for such unpopular causes as dress reform.[18]

Except for the year 1857, women's rights conventions were held annually until the Civil War. During this period of national crisis the women suspended their agitation as they became involved in the war effort. Their patriotism, devotion, and self-sacrifice were evident in many and varied

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[17]Stanton, et al., The History of Woman Suffrage, 2:459.

[18]Morrisson, et al., Victory, p. 42.

fields. The contribution of women during the war and the hardships they endured contributed greatly to shattering former ideas of the sphere of women.

Following the war, women leaders were dismayed to find the movement inextricably entwined with the pressing political problems of how to maintain Republican control in the South, and what to do with the freedman. They were alarmed with the introduction of the 14th Amendment when for the first time the word male was used in the constitutional definition of a voting citizen. In May of 1866, the women met again in convention and voted to resolve themselves into the American Equal Rights Association and pledged to work for the franchise of both women and Negroes.[19]

The issue of the 15th Amendment divided the suffragists. Many women believed they would be worse off if the amendment passed. Whereas before they were merely classed with criminals, children, and idiots, they were now the political inferior to a ". . . race they had helped to free, a race still in the complete ignorance of slavery." They were equally concerned ". . . that unless women were enfranchised when the question of suffrage was strongly before the country, the tide of public interest would turn to other things, and could not easily be swung back."[20] These women were extremely disappointed to find that men who had previously supported their cause were now concerned only with the Negro. Their friends William

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[19]Ibid., p. 50. [20]Ibid., pp. 49-50.

Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglas, Charles Sumner, and Wendell Phillips were firm in their belief that this was the hour for the Negro and that the hour for women would come in time.[21]

Lucy Stone and the majority of the American Equal Rights Association shared the opinion that suffrage should be granted the Negro and hoped that women would also be included. To the contrary, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and a small group believed all of their efforts should be spent in behalf of women and were willing to back the 15th Amendment only if it included women.[22]

The breach was widened over the question of the most effective method for obtaining the franchise of women—whether to concentrate the major effort on Congress or to emphasize state work. In 1869 the National Woman Suffrage Association was formed. Led by Anthony, this group opened the membership to women only, and was dedicated to securing a sixteenth amendment to the Federal Constitution enfranchising women. This immediately created a split with the group believing that the most effective approach was to secure the franchise first within the states. They were convinced that Congress would not support suffrage for women until there was greater representation from states where women had the ballot.[23] Lucy Stone called a convention of the

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[21]Ibid., p. 50.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Ibid., p. 51.

latter group for November 24, 1869. At that time the American Suffrage Association was organized despite an impassioned plea by Anthony not to jeopardize the cause of a national amendment by a division within the ranks.[24]

For twenty-two years the women's movement was divided and it was not until 1890 that the two factions united to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Alice Stone Blackwell provided the leadership for a compromise whereby the new association would work for suffrage through both state and federal constitutional amendment.[25]

In 1875 Anthony framed an amendment to the United States Constitution stating that "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex." This amendment was first introduced in Congress in 1878 and reintroduced in each succeeding congress until passed.[26]

The ceaseless campaign to remove the word male from the constitution began with the adoption of the 15th Amendment in 1870 and would continue for fifty years. There would be fifty-six campaigns for state referenda, 480 campaigns to persuade legislatures to submit suffrage amendments to the

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[24]Ibid., pp. 50-51; Alma Lutz, Susan B. Anthony: Rebel, Crusader, Humantarian (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 172.

[25]Edna Lampre Stantial, ed., Front Door Lobby (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), p. 5.

[26]Lutz, Susan B. Anthony, p. 181; Stantial, Front Door Lobby, p. 8; Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 78.

voters, forty-seven campaigns to persuade state constitutional conventions to include women suffrage in state constitutions, 277 campaigns to persuade state party conventions, thirty campaigns to convince presidential party conventions to write woman suffrage into party platform, nineteen campaigns in nineteen successive congresses for a national amendment and finally the arduous campaign to obtain the ratification of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution. One authority described the movement as follows:

> Millions of dollars were raised, mostly in small sums . . . and hundreds of women gave the accumulated possibilities of an entire life-time. Thousands gave years of their lives; hundreds of thousands constant interest and such aid as they could. It was a continuous, seemingly endless chain of activity. Young suffragists who helped forge the last links of that chain were not born when it began. Old suffragists who helped forge the first links were dead when it ended.[27]

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[27]Morrisson, et al., Victory, pp. 53-54.

CHAPTER II

LOUISIANA BEFORE 1879

After 1848 and the Seneca Falls convention, women in the North were making progress, and barriers were slowly falling away. The barriers facing antebellum southern women, however, were more complex and would be slower in falling. Yet, a common thread ran throughout the South, weaving a unique culture that separated it from the rest of the nation. Within this culture nothing was perhaps more distinct than the image of the southern women. The image was not only preached from the pulpit, written about in literary journals and novels, referred to in newspapers and periodicals, and often extolled in public speeches, but, by and large, most men and women in the South believed wholeheartedly in the image. The image often created unrealistic expectations from the men and cast a shadow on the lives of the women as they endeavored to live up to these expectations.

Contemporary sources describe the southern woman as a paragon of virtue who was raised from earliest childhood to believe that her sole reason for existing was to ". . . love, honor and obey and occasionally amuse her husband, . . ." as well as to manage his household and to rear his children. She was weak physically, ". . . formed for the less laborious occupations, . . ." and she was dependent upon the male for

protection. Futhermore "her mind was not logical," but this absence of the capacity to reason was compensated by a highly developed intuition and sensibility. Indeed, it was "to her advantage that the play of instincts and of the feelings is not cramped by the controlling influence of logic and reason."[1]

Evidence indicates that George Fitzhugh, one of the most outspoken and articulate antebellum proponents of slavery, expressed views held by southern men when he wrote:

> So long as she is nervous, fickle, capricious, delicate, diffident and dependent, man will worship and adore her. Her weakness is her strength, and her true art is to cultivate and improve that weakness. Woman naturally shrinks from public gaze, and from the struggle and competition of life . . . in truth, woman, like children, has but one right and that is the right to protection. The right to protection involves that obligation to obey. A husband, a lord and master, whom she should love, honor and obey, nature designed for every woman . . . . If she be obedient she stands little danger of maltreatment.[2]

Judiciously using letters and diaries written by southern women, historian Ann Firor Scott convincingly demonstrates that the image did not reflect the realities of life. Document after document reveals that, whether living in town or in a rural area, the southern matron assumed extraordinary responsibilities as she daily performed exhausting and difficult tasks.[3]

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[1]Southern Literary Messenger, 1 (1935) as quoted in Ann Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970). p. 4.

[2]George Fitzhugh, Sociology for the South (Richmond: Morris Co., 1854), pp. 214-15.

[3]Scott, Southern Lady, pp. 27-37.

Responsibilities did not lessen if one had slaves. The psychological and physical burden of slavery caused many women to long for an end to this institution.[4] Also frequently expressed was a profound resentment because of limited and unequal educational opportunities.[5] Marriage did not always produce the expected happiness. Constant pregnancies and the frequent death of children shadowed one's family life.[6] Daily contact with the "lord and master" often revealed that he was not the supreme being promised by the prevailing views of southern society, and "his sexual freedom was in marked contrast to the perfect chastity of thought and deed demanded for his wife."[7] For the most part women who left a mark on historical records were from wealthy or educated families. Consequently the following observation of Scott is particularly pertinent:

> In antebellum times the wives of small farmers and the slave women lived, bore children, worked hard, and died, leaving little trace for the historian coming after. Such women were not much affected by role expectations. When they sweated in the fields or tore their hands digging in the ground no one lectured them on feminine delicacy or told them it was unladylike to work so long and hard.[8]

Louisiana was for the most part rural with the largest concentration of population in one city, New Orleans. The state was distinct from other southern states, and New Orleans was unique when compared to the rest of Louisiana. As the

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[4]Ibid., pp. 46-52. [5]Ibid., pp. 72-77.

[6]Ibid., pp. 37-40, 59. [7]Ibid., pp. 59.

[8]Ibid., p. xi.

Civil War divided the nation one finds that, even though areas of Louisiana fell to the enemy early in the war, a common bond was again shared by all southern women. Fiercely loyal to the South, women exerted arduous efforts on the homefront to fill the gap left by men off to war. Their contribution to the war effort was enormous and coupled with their uncomplaining courage when faced with real hunger and other hardships earned for them a new found respect from southern men. After the war Louisiana women shouldered a large part of the burden of rebuilding a defeated state. Many widows were the sole support of themselves and their families. Even those with husbands were not spared the dire poverty that was rampant throughout the South. The greatest suffering was among those who lived in the towns and lacked the self-sufficiency of rural life.

Rural women had long proved the capabilities of southern women to not only perform the laborious and responsible tasks daily required of most women but to also manage large plantations. The experiences of one Louisiana woman show that as early as 1807, while her husband was on an extended trip, she gained "a high reputation as a cotton planter." She cared for her family and the plantation so well that her husband boasted, upon his return, that his affairs were "better conducted than if I had been at home."[9] Another Louisiana woman exhibited

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[9]David Bradford to David Redick, 30 November 1807, David Bradford Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

equal managerial ability when, as a young widow, she successfully ran her own sugar plantation.[10]

In the towns women were often forced to seek employment outside their homes. Among the upper class teaching and writing were considered the most suitable for a "southern lady," and many entered these fields.[11] Other women became dressmakers and milliners,[12] while some ran boarding houses, grocery stores and bakeries.[13]

Women ventured out of their homes to join societies formed to raise funds for memorials for the "brave soldiers" and to establish institutions for widows and orphans. In 1866 the Ladies' Benevolent Association was organized with about seventy-five women attending the first meeting. The initial purpose of the group was to provide artificial limbs to Confederate veterans and to care for the graves of Confederate dead.[14]

As Reconstruction drew to a close, bringing with it returning prosperity, many Louisiana men would have preferred

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[10]Scott, Southern Lady, p. 35.

[11]Kathryn Reinhard Shuler, "Women in Public Affairs in Louisiana During Reconstruction," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 19 (1936):750. This article is a reprint of Shuler's M.A. thesis, 1935, Louisiana State University.

[12]New Orleans Daily Crescent, 10 November 1865; Ibid., 1 January 1866.

[13]Baton Rouge Gazette and Comet, 1 January 1867; New Orleans Daily Crescent, 13 October 1865; Thomas Ewing Dabney, One Hundred Great Years: The Story of the Times-Picayune from Its Founding to 1940 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 300.

[14]Shuler, "Women in Reconstruction", p. 689.

that women return to their proper place. Even where financial circumstances allowed this, many women were not willing to accommodate them. They had had their first taste of public activity and found it to their liking. The door had been opened, and they did not intend that it would close. As these women broadened their base they became even more sensitive to their lack of equal rights with men.

Many Louisiana women, however, had no desire to relinquish their cultural heritage. An example of this was manifested in an exchange of letters published in a New Orleans newspaper. On 7 July 1870 The Daily Picayune printed a letter from Victoria C. Woodhull, a woman activist, orginally from Ohio, now of New York. The editor's comment, when publishing this letter, expresses the view held by most Louisiana newspapers during this period.

> One of the unquiet Sisterhood asked utterance through out columns, and we yield, distasteful though the subject matter of her discourse is. We could not toss into the basket so noble, and evidently sincere, a tribute to our women; nor would we think it right to deny one of the ablest of its advocates the liberty of demonstrating how utterly baseless are the claims of Woman's Rights, how imaginary the grievances that toss the soul of Sisterhood, and how little they know of the social conditions, the thoughts and ambition of the women of the South. Mrs. Woodhull's own tribute to their conduct during the war dissipates the notion that only with the ballot in her hand can woman reach her highest development. But we have no notion of reviewing this letter. Our women will feel grateful to the writer for her compliments, but smile as her commisseration.

Woodhull's long letter, filling almost an entire column, praised the war efforts of southern women and reminded women that ". . . the war could not have been conducted so long

without your much needed assistance." Without the aid of women, husband, fathers and brothers would have been helpless and ". . . they need you just as much now, but of this they remain to be convinced." She specified a number of reasons for southern women to insist on the opportunity to "stand by and with" men. In this way women could prove themselves "as useful in peace" as they were "necessary in war." The letter included a sentiment that one often finds in diaries and memoirs of southern women. This was expressed in the statement, addressed to women readers, that southern men did not "seem to realize that your former servants are now your political masters."

Within a short time an outraged response designed to set Woodhull straight was received by the Picayune. The views this writer expressed were no doubt those of many southern women. The editor could not resist the opportunity to express his pleasure at the response.

> We hope Mrs. Woodhull is answered. Certainly she can't complain of a lack of candor in the response; and we can assure her that every true Southern woman would answer her in similar terms. In publishing the "appeal" we said that Southern woman has no sympathy with the agitation of the unquiet Sisterhood; that they knew they held a far loftier position in, and wielded a nobler influence upon society as they are than any reforming legislation could open to them. And we need only point to this "Response" to show that we know our fair and brave countrywomen. Heaven keep them as they are!

The response to Woodhull followed this editorial comment.

> Madam-. . . You of the North wholly misunderstand us. Educated as you have been in the hotbeds of free love societies, Sorosis clubs and woman suffrage advocates, you have apparently lost sight of what true womanly dignity is;

you have unsexed yourselves, and set yourselves up as a target in all coming time for "laughter, sneers and jeers."

Whenever we read of any woman's rights meetings, Sorosis clubs, etc., we blush to think these creatures belong to the same race and sex with ourselves with the thoughts that no such things occur in our fair Southern soil.

. . . The tribute you choose to pay us for our conduct during the late war, (and which without vanity we know we merit, yet do not need to learn it from any Northern woman) your words savor plainly of flattery and cajolery. You exhibit a disposition to wheedle us into action with yourselves.

. . . We women of the South do not wish to vote-would positively refuse to do so were the ballot offered us today! We will not have the sanctum sanctorum of our homes invaded by politics or political women. A Godfearing womanly woman is always honored, revered, and also worshipped by all great and truly noble minds. It is the ambition of our countrywomen to be such; to exert a silent, potent influence in a woman's proper sphere—not to break down all the laws and barriers that fence in virtue and honor for society.

. . . We wish to have the "record of a well spent life" when we approach the shores of eternity; but God forbid that one moment of it should be the disgraceful record of having been spent wrangling and quarreling for positions which were never intended, or suitable, for women to occupy; or for "privileges," which, by their very nature, would soon cancel every feeling of female delicacy, to say nothing of decency.

. . . Do not accuse the men of the South of a "stupid lack of appreciation" of us; no nation of men under the sun honor, appreciate and reverence their women more.

Now, in conclusion, let me say, we are totally different from the Northern antipodes in all our aspirations, ambitions and feelings. . . . We do not wish to have anything whatever in common with you. We do whatever our hands find to do that is womanly and right, with all our "might, with all our souls and with all our bodies;" then we are content, prayerfully, to leave all the rest to God.

If you please, leave us alone in all our relations.[15]

Although this letter reflected the sentiments of a large number of women, there can be little doubt that the war efforts

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[15] New Orleans Daily Picayune, 31 July 1870.

of women and the circumstances that prevailed during Reconstruction, forcing woman to assume new roles, significantly increased the awareness of many Louisiana women that a greater equality with men was their right. Patriarchal society was weakened and an almost unrecognizable woman arose from the ruins of the South.

Many barriers remained, however. Among the opportunities denied to, and much desired by, Louisiana women was that of a higher education. The injustice and pain felt by women as a result of their limited education was dramatically expressed by one Baton Rouge woman. As she planned a detailed schedule for her own self-improvement, she wrote of her "shocking ignorance and pitiful inferiority." Following a particular conversation with a charming and intelligent male friend, she futilely cried out, ". . . why was I denied the education that would enable me to be the equal of such a man?"[16]

As frequently happens, attempts to right a festering social condition are often triggered by an incident that cries out for a solution. Developments of 1878-79 brought to the fore two remarkable women. Caroline Elizabeth Merrick and Elizabeth Lyle Saxon possessed extraordinary and natural qualities of leadership, and both were gifted with a talent for public speaking. They shared a deep seated resentment against the denial to women of rights and privileges that men took for granted. This resentment originated from many

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[16]Sarah Morgan Dawson, A Confederate Girl's Diary (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), pp. 249-50.

of the same experiences recorded, so vividly, by other southern women, in diaries and memoirs. Since the experiences of these two pioneers are typical of those recalled by other southern women, a brief biographical study of their lives, prior to 1878, provides one a fuller understanding of the discontent that finally led women to take action in 1879, as well as an appreciation of the heritage of Louisiana women.

In her memoir Caroline Merrick recalled:

> I early ascertained that girls had a sphere wherein they were expected to remain and that the despotic hand of some man was continually lifted to keep them revolving in a certain prescribed and very restricted orbit. When mild reproofs failed there were always other curbs for the idiot and eccentric inclinations.[17]

This awareness, while still a young girl, of her position in southern society is perhaps a clue to understanding what this intelligent and strong-willed person endured as a female living all of her life in the South.

Caroline Merrick was born on 24 November 1825 at Cottage Hall Plantation in East Feliciana Parish. Her father, Captain David Thomas, was from a prominent South Carolina family. As a young man he went to Louisiana and served under his close friend, General Andrew Jackson, in the Battle of New Orleans.[18]

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[17]Caroline E. Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land: A Southern Matron's Memories (New York: The Grafton Press, 1901), p. 12.

[18]Ibid., pp. 506; Frances E. Willard and Mary A. Livermore, American Women: Fifteen Hundred Biographies, 2 vols, (New York: Mast, Crowell and Kirkpatrick), 2:499; Edward T. James et. al., eds., Notable American Women 1607-1950 3 vols. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1971), 2:530; The New Orleans Daily Picayune, 30 March 1908.

After the War of 1812, David Thomas settled on Cottage Hall Plantation, five miles from Jackson, Louisiana. For many years he served as a trustee of the college that later became Centenary College of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and faculty members were often guests in the Merrick home. His daughter remembered Captain Thomas as a firm, courageous, and judicious man loved by many "even his slaves."[19]

While Caroline was still a small child, her mother, Elizabeth Patillo Thomas, died and her father, feeling that his six children needed a mother, remarried shortly afterwards. David Thomas, concerned that his children "were properly brought up and educated," chose as his wife "Miss Susan Brewer, who he thought would fill all these requirements."[20]

Before her marriage Susan Brewer, originally from Massachusetts, headed several successful schools in Washington, Baltimore, New York, and Tuscaloosa. On the advice of William Fish, she moved to the South and was instrumental in persuading more than sixty dedicated teachers to go into Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.[21]

The new Mrs. Thomas was a positive influence on the spirited young Caroline. In a letter written many years later to Frances Willard, Merrick remembered her stepmother warmly as a "gifted woman" and recalled that she was often compared to the well known Mary Lyon of New England, and that ". . . the

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[19]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, pp. 5-6.

[20]Ibid., p. 6. [21]Ibid., pp. 6-7.

cause of education in the South was greatly promoted by her influence.[22] Caroline Thomas was educated in her home by governesses, brought to Cottage Hall, and received a liberal, but thorough training. She later revealed, however, that for her education she "owed most of all" to her stepmother who "devoted herself to her step-children, training us in the most careful and methodical manner."[23]

Young Caroline asserted a telling independence when, only thirteen years old, she refused to return to the classroom following a quarrel with her governess. Much to the distress of her stepmother, her father refused to coerce her into returning.[24] For the next two years she was occupied by activities typical for a young lady of the antebellum era; acquiring skills necessary to manage a plantation household and attending parties and teas.[25]

It was not unusual in those days for girls to marry while quite young. Caroline Thomas was no exception, and when she was fifteen years old she married Edward T. Merrick, the nephew of her stepmother. Her father not only approved, but encouraged Caroline to marry for, as she recalled, ". . . he

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[22]Frances E. Willard, Women in Temperance, The Work and Workers of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (New York: Arno Press, 1972), pp. 563-64.

[23]Ibid., p. 564. Willard notes that there were seven stepchildren, Caroline being the youngest; Willard, et. al., American Women, p. 499.

[24]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, pp. 11-12.

[25]James, Notable American Women, 2:530.

thought I could not enter too soon upon woman's exclusive path and be marching along towards woman's kingdom with a companion in the prime of noble manhood."[26]

Edwin Merrick, at thirty-seven years of age, was more than twice his wife's age, and Caroline related that she was indebted to him for her "bringing up." Merrick perceived no problems because of the differences in their ages. In a love letter to Caroline, he wrote that he found her accomplishments, her excellent taste and mature judgment to be those of a woman of twenty, and that he was happier in her "society than in that of any other human being."[27] Merrick, originally from Wilbraham, Massachusetts, served as district judge of the Florida parishes and in 1855 he was elected chief justice of the Supreme Court of Louisiana, an office he held until the end of the Civil War. After the fall of New Orleans in 1862, Judge Merrick held court at Opelousas and Shreveport.[28]

Following the wedding the Merricks made their home in Clinton, a town a few miles north of Baton Rouge, and the fifteen year old bride assumed the duties of managing a southern household. This included supervising a number of

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[26]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 12.

[27]Ibid., pp. 12-13.

[28]Dumas Malone, ed., Dictionary of American Biography, 20 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's and Sons, 1931) 6:555.

slaves, some given to her by her father when she married.[29] Diaries written by southern women reveal that this was no small task. The household soon expanded with the rapid addition of babies. By the time Caroline was twenty, she was the mother of three children.[30] Life became more complicated as her responsibilites mounted, and evidence suggests that as the years passed Caroline Merrick was frequently unhappy.

In September of 1855, while she and the children were vacationing at Feliciana Springs, she confided to "My dear friend," that:

> This has indeed been a most disastrous year to me! Never has my soul been so tried, my heart so torn and bleeding, my head bowed down so humbled in the very dust, my spirit so crushed and sad! In many of the days of the byegone years I have sighed in heaviness, I have wept even in bitterness, I have sometimes even groaned in unutterable misery. But Heavenly Hope and Mercy always came to my relief. The bowed reed straightened itself after the gale passed over and flourished again in the pleasant calm sunshine in all its first green-ness and strength!
>
> But I find that there are earthly miseries from which there is found no earthly cure. There are some bitter feelings which embitter our lives forever—from which there seems to be no escape but death. Well, Well, I must endure my share of life's burden so I will _try_ not to complain and carry a brave face even if it covers a coward heart. No, no, the indifferent eyes of the many cannot look at my overturned interior nature, their unfeeling ears shall never be assailed by a solicitation for sympathy from me. Rather in uncomplaining silence would I endure all I have already suffered—continued out until my life's end.

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[29]Merrick, _Old Times in Dixie Land_, p. 17.

[30]Ibid., p. 21

> . . . The reason I like to stay here is that I can more nearly command my time here than anywhere else. . . . I am about at home in respect to doing what I please when I please—I have freedom here, I read, sew, and teach the children unmolested. At no other place except my brothers could I do this—and he has no iron-water and shower baths for the children.[31]

When Judge Merrick was elected chief justice of the Louisiana Supreme Court, in 1855, his wife spent the winter with him in New Orleans. Having left the children with their grandmother, Caroline returned to Clinton early in 1856. In May of the same year Judge Merrick bought a house in New Orleans and the family moved to the city in November.[32]

The house was not one that Caroline would have chosen, and she was disappointed that it was located out of the city. The fact that a plank road led to the city and the railway was nearby was of little comfort to her. Yet, in time the house became "very dear" to her, and she lived there for the remaining fifty-two years of her life.[33] The residence, that would become the setting for many gatherings held in behalf of the woman's cause, was described by its mistress as an old-fashioned and spacious double French cottage. The extensive grounds surrounding it abound with flowers, fruit trees, and gardens. As Napolean Avenue became part of the city and the

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[31]Caroline Merrick to my Dear Friend, September 18, 1855, Caroline Merrick papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University. The identity of "My Dear Friend" is not revealed in available evidence.

[32]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, pp. 24-25.

[33]Ibid.

location of many elegant residences, the "Merrick Farm," as it was often called, presented a comfortable and unique appearance in the midst of its modern environment.[34]

Life remained bleak for Caroline Merrick. In a letter written from New Orleans in March of 1858 she complained to "My dear friend" that she was "so depressed that only shadows and dark objects come up in my mind."[35] In December of the same year, "My dear friend" was the recipient of another letter. Written in the last days of the year, the author expressed the determination not to judge the new year by the past. She continued by stating that "hope will elevate the most desponding at times and I am cheating myself, I trust not however, into the belief that I shall do many agreeable things in 1858." Expressing "a misgiving that I hope too much," she was, nevertheless, "determined to be contented."[36] Longing for a "circle of interesting acquaintances," she related that "it has been a sore trial to give up my son to Centenary and my husband to the State and my daughters to school." Registering a desire frequently expressed by other intellectually deprived southern women, she wished for interesting friends to "fill up this blank in my life but I do not repine, nay, I tell you I hope."[37]

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[34]Ibid., p. 25.

[35]Caroline Merrick to My Dear Friend, 8 March 1858, Merrick Papers.

[36]Caroline Merrick to My Dear Friend, 27 December 1858, Merrick Papers.

Efforts to present evidence that Caroline Merrick shared many of the same frustrations often expressed by other southern women necessitates an emphasis on the dark periods of her life. One must not, however, fail to note that there were many happy experiences during these years. Caroline received much pleasure from sharing life with her children. Twelve years after the birth of her third child, a second son and last child, Edwin, Jr., joined the family circle. His mother observed that children are the "treasure idols" of their parents. Parents are joined to their children by heartstrings, and ". . . we spend anxious days and sleepless nights soothing their cries and comforting their wailings, and we rejoice in our powers to cherish and nourish them into a full and happy life by any sacrifice of ourselves."[38]

The Merrick marriage appears to have been a warm and happy one.[39] In her memoir, written in the early 1900's Caroline recalled a "long life of contentment and domestic happiness.[40] This statement leads one to assume that the "miseries" mentioned in the letter to "My dear friend" did not originate within her marriage. If problems in the marriage were serious enough to warrant the discontent Mrs. Merrick expresses through her letters, it would appear that Judge

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[37]Ibid.

[38]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 22.

[39]James, Notable American Women, 2:530; Daily Picayune, 2 March 1890.

[40]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 22.

Merrick grew in wisdom through the years and developed an awareness of the sensitivity and deep seated needs of his wife, and had the largeness of character to remedy the situation. There is also the possibility that time had healed the wounds leaving only pleasant memories of "a good husband, a wise and loving father always gentle and lovable without the least apparent pride."[41] In any case, there can be little doubt that Judge Merrick supported his wife in the many public activities that she engaged in after 1879. As she developed her talents as a persuasive leader, his encouraging words were often the catalyst she needed while pursuing her many interests.[42]

Another source of enormous pleasure for Caroline was her beloved gardens. Enjoying the beauty and color of the "bursting buds," she took pride in the prizes she frequently won at horticultural exhibits. Her appreciation of the promise of springtime is revealed when she wrote: ". . . there is no outward influence that can be compared to that of living, growing blooming things."[43]

The years of the Civil War were years of separation for the family. The eldest son, David, only seventeen years old, left from New Orleans to join the Confederate army in Virginia.

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[41]Ibid., p. 14.

[42]Ibid., p. 125; James, Notable American Women, 2:530; Stanton, History of Woman Suffrage, 3:792; Willard, Women and Temperance, p. 566.

[43]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 34.

When New Orleans fell to the federal troops, early in the war, Judge Merrick took refuge behind Confederate lines. Early in the war, Caroline went to Myrtle Grove Plantation to bid farewell to her brother who was leaving to join the Confederate forces. While temporarily absent from her home when New Orleans was captured; she remained, with her three children, on this plantation, for the duration of the war.[44]

Myrtle Grove Plantation, located on the banks of the Atchafalaya River, was alternately within the Union and Confederate lines; and this caused the family many anxious and fearful times. They were ". . . often awakened by the sounds of guns and to the sight of Federal blue-coats drawn up in battle-line with gleaming bayonets."[45] Few homes were spared, and the women mourned their dead. "Those were counted happy who could lay teardewed flowers upon the graves of their soldier." Many mothers "never looked again even upon the dead face of him who had smiled back at them as the boys marched away to the strains of Dixie."[46]

From Caroline's immediate family, her son David was critically wounded in the Battle of Seven Pines; sustaining a loss of hearing and the sight in one eye. She later wrote, ". . . When I saw my handsome boy in this condition my distress will not tax the imagination."[47]

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[44]Ibid., p. 30-31, 72; James, Notable American Women, 2:530; Dictionary of American Biography, 6:555.

[45]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 34.

[46]Ibid., p. 75. [47]Ibid., pp. 30, 70.

It is perhaps significant that in spite of the many trials and much privation, she later recalled these years in a letter to Frances Willard, "as the happiest epoch of her life." Willard explains this statement by pointing out that perhaps for the first time, "every faculty of her mind was in lively exercise," for she was dependent entirely upon her own resources.[48] This often required her to make hazardous voyages on the bayou and river to secure supplies. She nursed the sick and wounded of both the Confederate and Federal armies, as well as providing nursing care for her family and the slaves on the plantation. She found an outlet for artistic expression in the sketches she wrote, in dialect, from stories told her by the slaves. These sketches were said to be "not a wit inferior to Uncle Remus."[49]

In her memoir, Merrick titled the chapter on the reconstruction period "How Women Came to the Rescue," demonstrating her assessment of the role played by women during Reconstruction. She recorded that ". . . the war was prosperity to the state of things which peace has wrought."[50] Elaborating on this statement she wrote:

> The women in every community seemed to far outnumber the men; and the empty sleeve and the crutch made men who had unflinchingly faced death in battle impotent to face their future. Sadder still was it to follow to the grave the army of men, of fifty years and older when the

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[48]Willard, Women and Temperance, pp. 564-65.

[49]Ibid., p. 565; Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, pp. 48-58.

[50]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 77.

> war began, whose hearts broke with the loss of half a century's accumulations and ambition, and with the failure of the cause for which they had risked everything. Communities were accustomed to lean upon these tried advisers; it was almost like the slaughter of another army—so many such sank beneath the shocks of reconstruction.
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> It is folly to talk about the woman who stood in the breach in those chaotic days, being the traditional Southern woman of the books, who sat and rocked herself with a slave fanning her on both sides. She was doubtless fanned when she wished to be; but the antebellum woman of culture and position in the South was a woman of affairs; and in the care of a large family—which most of them had—and of large interests. She was trained to meet responsibilities. So in those days of awful uncertainties, when men's hearts failed them, it was the woman who brought her greater adaptability and elasticity to control circumstances, and to lay the foundations of a new order. She sewed, she sold flowers, milk and vegetables, and she taught school; sometimes even a negro school. She made pies and cornbread, and palmetto hats for the Federals in garrison; she raised pigs, poultry and pigeons, and she cooked them; . . . she washed, often the mustered-out soldier of the house filling her tubs, rubbing beside her and hanging out her clothes; and he did her swearing for her when the Yankee soldier taunted over the fence: "Wall, it doo doo my eyes good to see yer have to put yer lily-white hands in the wash-tub!"[51]

Shortly after the war the Merricks returned to New Orleans, and in time the Judge was pardoned "for giving aid and comfort to the Confederacy" and was permitted to resume his law practice. The plantation in West Feliciana and the Merrick home in New Orleans, which the Federal government had taken during the war, were returned to him.[52]

Caroline Merrick eagerly joined in to do her share and to assume the civic responsibilities necessitated by the war and Reconstruction. She served on charity committees and

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[51]Ibid., pp. 75-76.

[52]Dictionary of American Biography, 6:555.

institutional boards. By the end of the 1870's, she was becoming more and more aware of the plight of women and often expressed a desire to "do something for her own sex."[53]

Often spoken of "as the wonderful woman with a mighty intellect, but born fifty years too soon,"[54] Elizabeth Lyle Saxon, who worked with Merrick in initiating the women's movement in Louisiana, was a crusader who spent much of her adult life working, writing, and lecturing in behalf of equal rights for women. Born in Greenville, Tennessee on 2 December 1832, she was seven years younger than Caroline.[55] Despite this fact, the younger woman is often credited with giving Merrick the necessary encouragement in the initial stage of the Louisiana women's movement.[56]

There are probably several explanations for this. One might be that whereas Merrick was as painfully aware of the unequal treatment of women as Saxon, she was inhibited by a more conservative background from taking any public action. Saxon, on the other hand, while identifying herself as a

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[53]Willard, Women and Temperance, p. 566.

[54]Lyle Saxon, Poems of Elizabeth Lyle Saxon (Dallas: Clyde C. Cockrell Co.) p. 12. This is a small book of poems collected by Mrs. Saxon's son, in which he included a brief biographical sketch. There is no publishing date given. Lyle Saxon is not to be confused with his nephew and Mrs. Saxon's grandson, Lyle Saxon, the well known contemporary author. It will hereafter be referred to as Poems.

[55]Ibid., pp. 8-12; Willard and Livermore, American Women 2:634; an undated clipping, Elizabeth Saxon Scrapbook, Saxon Papers, Department of Archives, Tulane University.

[56]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 128.

"southerner in every view and fiber of being,"[57] had travled and lived for a number of years in the North, most of those years living in New York City.[58] Contributing the most to her liberal views, however, was Saxon's father, Andrew L. Lyle. In contrast to Caroline Merrick's father, Lyle was a man of broad and advanced views regarding the development and sphere of women.[59]

Young Elizabeth was left motherless at the age of two, and after the death of her mother Clarissa N. Crutchfield Lyle, she and her father moved to Wetumpka, Alabama, a small community that was the headquarters of the Creek Indians.[60] Here Elizabeth became the chosen companion of her father and was permitted to roam the fields and "to grow up naturally much as a boy would have done."[61] Saxon wrote of her "boundless devotion"[62] to her father and it was from him that she first

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[57]Elizabeth Lyle Saxon, A Southern Woman's War Time Reminiscences (Memphis: Pilcher Printing Co., 1905) p. 14. Hereinafter referred to as War Time Reminiscences. This small volume was privately printed for the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

[58]Lyle Saxon, Poems, p. 10; Elizabeth Saxon, War Time Reminiscences, p. 9; undated clipping, Elizabeth Saxon Scrapbook, Saxon Paper.

[59]Lyle Saxon, Poems, p. 9; James, Notable American Women, p. 3:634; undated clipping, Elizabeth Saxon Scrapbook, Saxon Papers.

[60]Lyle Saxon, Poems, p. 9.

[61]James, Notable American Women, p. 3:634.

[62]Elizabeth Saxon, War Time Reminiscences, p. 62.

developed her concepts of right-doing and justice that were later reflected in her crusades and humanitarian work. Even as he lay dying while a prisoner of war, Andrew Lyle asked his grieving daughter to promise to "never cease working for unfortunate women, so long as life should last."[63]

An appreciation and enjoyment of literature doubtless influenced Lyle's selection of Caroline Lee Hentze, a well known writer at that time, as young Elizabeth's teacher. Later Elizabeth Saxon would establish for herself a reputation as a writer of prose and poetry. Appearing under the "nom de plume" of Annette Lyle, her poems and later her sketches and short stories were published in the years from 1853 to 1857 in the Columbia Banner, the Louisville Courier and the Philadelphia Courier in South Carolina, Kentucky and Pennsylvania respectively. After the Civil War, her work appeared in publications wherever she happened to be— in New Orleans, Memphis and various other cities and towns. By this time her writings appeared over the signature of "E.L.S." and then later over her full name.[64]

In January of 1849, when only sixteen years of age, Elizabeth Lyle married Lydall A. Saxon, a native of Loraine District, South Carolina. The couple resided in Alabama until 1855 when the Saxons moved to New York where Saxon

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[63]Undated clippings, Elizabeth Saxon Scrapbook, Saxon Papers; James, Notable American Women, p. 3:634.

[64]Lyle Saxon, Poems, pp. 9-10; James, Notable American Women, p. 3:635.

had business interests spending the summers in the city and the winters in the South.[65]

In late December of 1860, within days of Alabama's secession, Elizabeth Saxon returned to Alabama via steamer to Savannah, Georgia, while her husband remained in New York. She remained in the South throughout the war, even though she had an abiding "hatred for every form of slavery,"[66] and recalled the day Alabama seceded from the Union as the saddest day of her life.[67]

For one seeking an understanding of Southern women during the war, Saxon's War Time Reminiscences compliments Merrick's memoir in defining this role. Whereas Merrick wrote of the experiences of a southern woman on a plantation, Saxon's experience typifies that of a woman living in the towns of the South. Lacking the self-sufficiency of a plantation, town women found the very survival of themselves and their children an unending struggle, especially after the blockade imposed by the North. As the war progressed, the South was at a distinct disadvantage when compared to the industralized North, and the women assumed part of the burden of supplying clothing and hospital supplies for the Confederate Army.

Saxon vividly recalled these activities as she recorded them in her War Time Reminiscences.

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[65]Lyle Saxon, Poems, p. 10. There is no evidence to indicate what Saxon's business interests were.

[66]Ibid.

[67]Elizabeth Saxon, War Time Reminiscences, p. 18.

> Money had now to be raised for the soldiers, and, as usual, women had to raise a good share of it. Every household became a workshop and women congregated by hundreds in halls to sew for the soldiers . . . . Women that never touched a needle before knit far into the night with eyes so dim with tears they could scarcely see their needles.
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> . . . I was the secretary of our association, and my task was no sinecure. I cut, sewed and basted incessantly, as did every woman in town. I would be glad if I had the old books to tell how many hundreds of garments and boxes of supplies we sent out from that long room. No less than seventy or eighty women were sewing there for months. Prior to this we had raised money by giving concerts and entertainments of every kind; we had tableaux and charades, dramatic entertainments, and shows of every sort. We wore out our finery in this manner more than in any other way.
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> . . . We were working all the time trying to get up clothing and supplies for the hospitals. Every old-time loom that had been put aside, every long-disused wheel was called forth—the cobwebs brushed off, the legs put in order, and every woman who could weave, high or low, sent the flying shuttle with busy fingers, while the young girls turned the wheel. . . . The famous butternut, or walnut-dyed jeans, was woven, cut into pantaloons and jackets, and forwarded to the various departments. It was no longer a question of uniform of gray clothing—it was any covering for comfort. Every long-prized coat, cloak or carpet that could be used was made into clothing for the boys.[68]

Saxon's personal loss included the death of her father while he was held as a prisoner of war by the Federals and the death of one brother. The last member of her family, a brother, died shortly after the close of hostilities. None of her sons served in the war, her eldest son being only twelve years of age, and her husband, a Unionist, remained in New York for the duration of the war.[69]

Shortly after the war, in 1867, the Saxon family moved to New Orleans where Saxon had "business interests." Since

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[68]Ibid., pp. 33-34. [69]Ibid., p. 70.

Saxon was a Unionist, one might assume that the family fared better than most during the years of Reconstruction. Records do not indicate whether or not the family shared the hardship suffered by others or whether Saxon only identified with the sufferers. The only reference to this period is in the closing chapters of War Time Reminiscences when she states that she "had experience in Memphis, Mobile, and New Orleans during the years of Reconstruction and know all of its horrors and bitterness." The end of reconstruction "ended much of our trouble, and a new era of prosperity began, and the whole South roused like a giant from its humiliation and almost despair."[70]

Saxon remained in New Orleans until late in 1879, only months after she and Mrs. Merrick had led the initial public step that would aim the goals of Louisiana women toward legal and political emancipation.[71] Absent from the state for about twelve years, she did not return until sometime in the 1890's. During these years she actively led and participated in numerous activities, wherever she went, on behalf of women.

While the wartime and reconstruction experiences of Elizabeth Saxon and Carolyn Merrick were not necessarily the same as those of all Louisiana women, they are representative of events in which, for the first time in most cases, women had the opportunity to emerge from the sheltered role of their

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[70]Ibid., p., 72; Lyle Saxon, Poems, p. 10.

[71]Lyle Saxon, Poems, p. 11.

sex. The expanded role of Louisiana women during these periods was a major catalyst in the women's movement in Louisiana as circumstances forced them in new directions. This led, in time, to women seeking even broader fields of endeavor. Evidence suggests that in the cases of Merrick and Saxon it was an important phase in their evolution from a nearly life-long and almost instinctive awareness of the denial of equal rights for women to the role of public activist. It was these two women who opened the door for the woman's movement in Louisiana, and although their names are not well known today, they were revered by women of their generation as the first advocates of women's rights in Louisiana.[72]

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[72]Daily Picayune, 25 November 1905.

CHAPTER III

THE PIONEER GENERATION: EARLY ORGANIZATION

During the last two decades of the 19th century women moved from the "unthinkable" to the realm of the "acceptable" in many fields of endeavor. Against a background of hundreds of years when women were only allowed a limited role, the accomplishments of women in such a short span of time are indeed remarkable. Each woman who appeared in public as a club woman, community worker, speaker, writer, doctor, lawyer, business woman, or any other capacity, broadened the path for the women who came after her. There are few women living today, who do not enjoy a fuller and richer life, and in turn enrich the lives of those in their families, churches, and community due to the efforts of these courageous women. Make no mistake, it took great courage for these women to move from the mold in which generations of society had placed them.

As Louisiana was rural in character it was logical that the initial steps in the state's women's movement began in New Orleans. It was early in June of 1879 that women first spoke before a state body on behalf of women's rights. This action was provoked by an incident that happened in the previous year. St. Anna's Asylum in New Orleans, an institution for destitute women and children, was governed by a board composed entirely of women. Caroline Merrick was secretary

of the board. An inmate, a German woman, revealed that she had one thousand dollars in a bank. On her death bed, she expressed a desire to leave this money to the institution which had sheltered her. A will was drawn up and witnessed by the ladies from the board. When the will was later probated, the ladies were informed that the will ". . . is not worth the paper it is written on." It seemed as though, that among those "incapables" who could not witness a legal document were ". . . women, insane, idiots, and felons." The capables were ". . . all males above the age of sixteen years." As a result, "the bequest went to the state, and the women went to thinking and agitating."[1]

Early in 1879, when a state constitutional convention met at New Orleans, it occurred to Elizabeth Saxon that this might be an opportune time to air their grievances. She approached Merrick and suggested that they appear before the convention, but Merrick did not feel equal to the effort, as her beloved daughter, Laura, had only recently died in the yellow fever epidemic of 1878. Ironically, Elizabeth had also lost her young duaghter, Elizabeth, in the same epidemic. From the depth of her own grief, she pleaded with her friend that ". . . instead of grieving yourself to death for your daughter who is gone, rise up out of the ashes and do something for the other women who are left."[2] One has

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[1]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 125. A similar account is found in Stanton, History of Woman Suffrage, 3:789, and Willard, Woman and Temperance, p. 565.

only to read the poem, "An Angel's Birthday," written several years after her daughter's death, to realize the agony with which Saxon was coping with her own emotional turmoil.[3] Her urgings to Merrick were taken up by Judge Merrick, who insisted that now was the opportunity for his wife to fulfill her long desire to do something for women. Caroline Merrick did join her friend and together they drew up the following petition:

> To the Honorable President and Members of the Convention of Louisiana, convened for the purpose of framing a new Constitution.
>
> The undersigned, citizens of the State of Louisiana, respectfully represent:
>
> That up to the present time all women, of whatever age or capacity, have been debarred from the right of representation, notwithstanding the burdensome taxes which they have paid.
>
> They have been excluded from holding any office save in cases of special tutorship in limited degree, or of administration only in specified cases.
>
> They have been debarred from being witnesses to wills or notarial acts, even when executed by their own sex.
>
> They look upon this condition of things as a grievance proper to be brought before your honorable body for consideration and relief.
>
> As a question of civilization, we look upon the enfranchisement of women as an all-important one. In Wyoming, where it has been tried for ten years, the law-makers and clergy unite in declaring that this influx of women voters has done more to promote morality and order than thousands of armed men could have accomplished.
>
> Should the entire franchise seem too extended a privilege, we most earnestly urge the adoption of a property qualification, and that women may be allowed a vote on school and educational matters, involving as they do the interests of women and children in a great degree.

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[2]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 125.

[3]Lyle Saxon, Poems, pp. 22-23.

> So large a proportion of the taxes of Louisiana is paid by women, many of them without male representatives, that in granting consideration and relief for grievances herein complained of, the people will recognize justice and equity. To woman as well as man "taxation without representation is tyranny," she being "a person, a citizen, a freeholder, a tax-payer," the same as man, only government has never held out the same fostering, protecting hand to all alike, nor ever will, until women are directly represented.
>
> Wherefore, we, your petitioners, pray that some suitable provision remedying these evils be incorporated in the constitution you are about to frame.[4]

Merrick tried to get the ladies on the board of the St. Anna's Asylum to sign the petition. Although they had been greatly distressed over the results of the ill-fated will, the ladies refused to sign the petition. She pressed the issue by pointing out that, in reality, the board had no legal power to perform independent and free acts and that the women of the board were no more than children, acting the part of a state citizen. The situation was hopeless. for the ladies would not budge from their position.[5]

Refusing to accept defeat, Caroline Merrick and Elizabeth Saxon scurried in all directions and succeeded in securing over 400 signatures. Saxon, alone, obtained almost 300 names within a five week period.. Included among the petitioners, were all of the city administrators, two distinquished judges, a number of lawyers, many of the leading businessmen, seven

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[4]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 125.

[5]The following account of the initial attempt of Louisiana women to obtain some form of the franchise is drawn from Stanton, History of Woman Suffrage, 3:790-95.

of New Orleans' most prominent physicians, two Presbyterian ministers, and the wives of three others.

When the petition was received by the convention, it was referred to the committee on suffrage. On May 7, the ladies were invited to the St. Charles Hotel for a conference with the committee. Saxon and her husband, accompanied by three others, attended and Elizabeth Saxon spoke for an hour in behalf of the petition. The committee was impressed enough with her remarks, that they granted the women a formal hearing at the June 16 evening session of the convention.

Saxon and Dr. Harriette C. Keating (who came from outside the state to appear before the committee) agreed to speak, and Merrick was persuaded to give the closing remarks. Reluctant to speak, for fear that she could not be heard, she suggested that her son-in-law read her speech. But again, Saxon was ready with just the right words of encouragement. She quickly reminded her friend that since she did not want to be represented by a man at the polls, she should give the speech herself. "No matter if they do not hear a word you say! . . . Represent yourself now, if you only stand up and move your lips."

The hearing was scheduled for eight o'clock, and a New Orleans newspaper reported that the scene before the session was amusing and interesting. Approximately fifty women of all ages and degree of beauty were present. A few "society girls" were seen in a "retired corner" of the hall, while a larger group of "notables" (among these was

Myra Clark Gaines, the famous litigate) were in possession of the middle of the assembly. Saxon's speech was described as earnest and impressive, while Dr. Keating was praised for enunciation and confidence. The greatest enthusiasm and applause was reserved for Merrick's talk. Her speech was reprinted in its entirety for the readers of the Daily Picayune.

In her address, Merrick thanked the convention for its unexpected kindness and compared the graciousness of the reception with the aggressive and persistent effort that was required, by the women of the North, before they could be heard by any legislative body. She assured the delegates that the women of Louisiana harbored no ambition for political honors and did not seek to become legislators, governors, or members of Congress. Continuing, she said, ". . . we do ask with most serious earnestness that you should give us the ballot which has truly been called the allegiance and responsibility to the government." Pointing out that this same movement was advancing all over the world, the speaker stated that thoughtful, and earnest women were ". . . working day and night to elevate their sex; to secure higher education; to open new avenues for their industrious hands; trying to make women helpers to men, instead of being millstones round his neck to sink him in his life struggle." She was confident that if the women present ". . . could only infuse into your souls the courage which we, constitutionally timid

as we are, now feel on this subject. . .," the convention ". . . would hasten to perform this act of justice, and inaugurate the beginning of the end which all but the blind can see is surely and steadily approaching." Adding that women would "accept anything," Merrick reminded the assembly that women were accustomed to the position of begger, and could not be choosers if they wished. Therefore, they would be grateful for the franchise on any honorable terms. If the convention thought an educational test proper, the women would make every effort to attain it. There would be no complaint if a large property qualification was required, and any amelioration of women's legal disabilities would be accepted with gratitude.

The hearing before the convention created a sensation, even in the remote parishes of Louisiana. The Webster Tribune reported that the ladies seemed to be waking up and demanding greater liberties. The Tribune had assumed the women of Louisiana had all the latitude they wanted, but if they wanted more, then gallantry, if not justice, dictated that the ladies' wishes be granted.

Pleased and grateful for the reception of the convention, the women were hopeful of positive results. The news that their efforts had gained only a relatively minor concession was received with cries of disappointment. Article 232 of the new constitution stated that, "Women twenty-one years of age and upwards, shall be eligible of any office of control or management under the school laws of the State."

Even this small concession lay dorment for a number of years. In the autumn of 1885, the governor was approached to appoint a woman to the New Orleans school board, this being one of his duties during this period. Governor Samuel McEnery refused to make the appointment. He argued that the new article was inoperative because it did not repeal the laws creating essential differences between women and men. He pointed out that if the husband changed his domicile, the wife would be obliged to follow, and the wife could not sign any bond, that might be required, without her husband's consent. Since the husband would be bound "in solido" with the wife, as implied in Article 255, then in fact "the husband would share the office with her."

The ladies were not long in replying. At a specially called meeting, Merrick refuted the governor's interpretation by stating that many of Louisiana's best lawyers held a different view. She then presented, in detail, these contrary views and concluded by saying that in any event perhaps the husband would sign his wife's bond, and perhaps he would not move while his wife held office. Moreover, she asked, would it really be so bad if the husband did assist his wife? "Is it not manifest that the two together would have a superior office knowledge. . . than the husband could attain by himself." Merrick suggested another solution to the problem. Women really had no objection to the appointment of an unmarried woman, or a woman who had the misfortune to be a widow. The governor did not appoint a woman.[6]

This was not Merrick's only disappointment in the area of education. She and her husband were members of the New Orleans Educational Society, and as chairman of a committee she was requested to report on the committee's view on a particular subject. When Merrick handed in her report, she was not allowed to read it to the society, as it was thought proper for a man to read it to the members. This was not the end of her unpleasant experiences with the society. When the balloting for the annual election of officers was held, she was dismayed to find that she was not allowed to vote, although, she paid the same dues as the men and was a working committee member. Her frustration and disgust are dramatically revealed in her statement to the society:

> I always thought that a vote in political affairs was withheld from a woman because it is not desirable for her to come in contact with common rabble lest her purity be soiled. She should never descend into the foul, dusty arena of the polling booth; but here in Tulane Hall where we are specially invited, in the respectable presence of many good men—some of them our 'natural protectors'—it is not fair; it is as unjust as it would be for me to invite a party to dinner and then summon half of them to the table while the other half are required to remain as spectators only of the feast to which all had had the same call.

Following this meeting, Merrick refused to attend another meeting of the Educational Society and discontinued paying dues.[7]

Shortly after her appearance before the constitutional convention, but in the same year, 1879, Elizabeth Saxon left

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[6]New Orleans Daily Picayune, 16 November 1885.

[7]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, pp. 22-23.

the city and was gone for about twelve years. These twelve years were her most active years in public service. The reason for her absence is not clear. One source relates that ". . . a visitation of yellow fever and other causes broke up her home. . . with growing health problems she came North with two of her children."[8] Another source mentioned that ". . . circumstances compelled Saxon's absence from her home."[9] Her son, Lyle, in his brief biographical sketch of his mother, only mentions that she went North in the latter half of 1879. Her son, however, does give the most detailed account of his mother's varied and many activities during her absence from New Orleans. He reports that in 1879 she accompanied Susan B. Anthony to Washington D.C., where for the first time she spoke before a national woman's convention. She returned to Washington in 1880 and addressed the Senate Judiciary Committee on behalf of women, then toured the New England states with Anthony. Combining suffrage work with temperance work, in 1882 she organized fifty chapters for the W.C.T.U., acting without the aid of any organization. In 1885, she organized and was appointed as State President of the Tennessee Suffrage Association by the then president of the National Suffrage Association, Elizabeth Cady Stanton. In the next few years she was invited to speak in many places and traveled to Missouri, Texas,

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[8] An undated clipping, Elizabeth Saxon Scrapbook, Saxon Papers.

[9] James, Notable American Women, p. 634.

Massachusetts, Nebraska, Colorado and Kansas. In Kansas and Nebraska she was said to have accomplished ". . . more than any one woman to arouse sentiment and carry these states for municipal suffrage, hundreds of women going from one of her meetings direct to the registration office."[10]

In the last three or four years before she returned to New Orleans, Saxon went with her youngest son, Lyle, to live in Washington Territory, ". . . to regain her lost health." Little is known of her activities during this time, but they must have been of an extraordinary nature, because she was admired and honored by those she met. The Origin of Washington Geographical Names records that in Snohonish County, near the Cascade Mountain Range, ". . . around 1888. . ." a railroad station and at one time a Post Office ". . . was named after a Mrs. Saxon, a widow." After two years she moved to Whatcom County.[11] The History of Whatcom County records that the Northern Pacific railroad station and pioneer post office was named after ". . . Elizabeth Lyle Saxon, whose husband died some years earlier." This history also states that Saxon helped found a public library, now known as the Bellingham Bay Public Library.[12] Since her son records that "her husband" died

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[10]Lyle Saxon, Poems, p. 11.

[11]Edmund S. Meany, Origin of Washington Geographic Names (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1923), p. 814.

[12]Lottie Roeda Roth, History of Watcom County, (Seattle: Pioneer Historical Publishing Co., 1926), pp. 712, 957.

in 1901,[13] it would seem that the above two books were inaccurate as to Saxon's marital status, or that during this period she preferred to be known as a widow. By 1892 she was back in New Orleans, and from there she continued to work on the behalf of women.[14]

Saxon's absence from Louisiana was no doubt a loss to the women of the state, but the door had been opened. In the next ten years, the women's movement would move forward at a rapid pace as women became more and more active in public affairs.

For some years after the events of 1879 there was no immediate follow-up to gain the franchise for women. Saxon was out of the state, Merrick was committed to temperance, and perhaps the most telling reason was that an organized suffrage movement in Louisiana, at this time, would have been premature. Women lacked the training and dedication needed for a concerted suffrage drive. The path from the parlor did not lead directly to the suffrage battleground. New experiences awaited, and opportunities undreamed of, or at best only longed for, were suddenly available. There was satisfaction to be felt as one learned to lead discussions, training to be had as one kept minutes and records, recognition to be received as one attained accomplishments in one's chosen field, and self-confidences to be built. If leaders were

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[13] Lyle Saxon, Poems, p. 11.

[14] An undated clipping, Elizabeth Saxon Scrapbook, Saxon Papers.

needed, so too there must be followers. The 1880's was the decade of church societies, temperance unions, and women's clubs. It was these groups that influenced a substantial number of women who began to feel that denying women the right to vote was an intolerable situation, one they were determined to remedy.

The achievement gained by the women in 1879 cannot be measured by the disappointing results. Woman had dared to speak out in public and the reception by the constitutional group and the favorable response of the leading newspapers were a prophetic gauge of the future acceptance of a more public role for women. Louisiana women made few political or legal gains during the remaining years of the century, but from 1879 they appeared more and more on the public scene, following the pattern of progression frequently used by women in other southern states, from missionary societies to temperance unions and then to women's clubs. These organizations not only drew women into public activities, but served to break ground in the cultivation of more privileges for women. It would be difficult to overemphasize the enormous contribution of these pioneer groups to the women's movement. These groups served as training schools where women experienced a personal transformation as they were encouraged to think for themselves, to speak for themselves, and to develop leadership.[15]

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[15]Scott, Southern Lady, p. 5.

Spirited, but timid, women seeking at least a partial emancipation found that the church and temperance movement offered a respectable initiation into public life. Thus, one prominent southern minister assured his daughter that attending a meeting of a missionary society would be ". . . no compromise of female modesty."[16] It is doubtful if many of the men who encouraged women in these activities realized the psychological consequence of the opening door. Women, who in the beginning could only muster the courage to recite in unison the Lord's Prayer, soon spoke sentence prayers, progressed to delivering seriatim, and in time more than half could be counted on to lead the prayer. One historian of the Methodist Missionary Societies records that, "with experience and a growing and compelling sense of mission, women in the church began to gain confidence and slowly emerge from the self-consciousness and fear which bound them."[17]

Similar experiences were reported in Louisiana during the early days of the Baptist Woman's Missionary Society. The first society organized in Louisiana was at Mt. Lebanon in 1874. Within ten years, twenty societies had been organized in the state. While the ladies sewed, quilted and held oyster suppers to raise money for the missions, they were also trained ". . . in the value of making reports. . ." and their leaders ". . . encouraged timid women to pray in their meeting."[18]

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[16]Ibid., pp. 149-50. [17]Ibid., pp. 140-41.

[18]Anna Thurman Pate, The Incense Road; A History of Louisiana Woman and Temperance (n.p., Bible Institute Press, 1939), pp. 11, 15, 17.

Closely following the organizing of missionary societies, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, founded in 1874, filtered south and counted among its earliest successes a statewide network of temperance unions in Louisiana. It was perhaps inevitable that when Francis Willard was seeking to expand the W.C.T.U. into the South, her attention would focus on Caroline Merrick. A newspaper report in June of 1881 first caught Willard's interest. As the first woman to speak at Whitworth College, a women's college in Brookhaven, Mississippi, Merrick's address was praised for its wit and wisdom. Reading the newspaper account, Willard was fascinated by the closing extemporaneous remarks of the speaker. Impulsively, she had decided to treat the men in the audience to the "sugar plums" that they were accustomed to showering on women from the rostrum, ". . . just to let them see how it feels." The men in the audience were delighted.[19]

On an earlier visit to New Orleans, Willard had failed to promote the interest needed to sustain a successful society. Now, one year later, she was quick to act on her intuitive belief that here was a ". . . lady who can make the W.C.T.U. a success, even in the volatile city of the Mardi Gras." Writing to the Reverend D. L. Mitchell, secretary of the Y.W.C.A., she inquired if he thought Merrick could be persuaded to use her influence for the Union. Although Merrick was not particularly interested in temperance, her desire to help another woman

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[19]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, pp. 140-42; Willard, Woman and Temperance, pp. 566-67.

outweighted an inclination to reject the overture. In January of 1882, she wrote the temperance leader, welcoming her to New Orleans and inviting her to stay in the Merrick home.[20]

The invitation dispatched, Merrick set about making the necessary arrangements to assure Miss Willard an audience in New Orleans. Looking up the remnant of the previous society, she went with the former president to call on every minister in New Orleans, requesting that they announce the date of Willard's address and urge their congregation to attend. Hundreds of cards went out for a reception in the Merrick home because, ". . . first of all, the keynote of society must be set at concert pitch." The Merricks' standing in the community was such that an invitation from Caroline invoked an immediate turnout of the elite of New Orleans society; distinguished members of the bar, the bench, the pulpit, the literary world and the press. Francis Willard remembered fondly the beautifully decorated house; banks of flowers on the mantel, walls adorned with vines, and the choice music. She was delighted with the opportunity to meet the well known New Orleans writer, George W. Cable.[21]

Equally well attended were the various meetings Willard held in New Orleans. The ground work laid by Merrick provided the audience, but the temperance leader was given credit for

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[20]Willard, Woman and Temperance, p. 567.

[21]Ibid.; Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, pp. 142-44.

inspiring courage and purpose to those who attended, coming ". . . to most of these as a revelation—this unassuming delicate, progressive woman, with her sweet, intelligent face, her ready gaiety and her extraordinary enlarged sympathies."[22] Caroline Merrick did not attend all of the temperance meetings and was surprised when, after one of the meetings, she was informed by Francis Willard that she was the president of the city and state W.T.C.U.. Since at this time Merrick's only interest was in the extraordinary leader, she protested. Only after determined persuasion, did she relent and thus began a ten year term. Whatever her previous misgivings, once committed, Merrick gave her ". . . heart and conscience . . ." to the work at hand.[23] Even the death of her surviving daughter, Clara, a few months after she assumed office, failed to break her spirit. Broken hearted, but refusing to bow to her grief, she wrote to Willard that ". . . this temperance work has come to me like a beam of heavenly sunshine in the great darkness of my grief."[24]

So successful were her efforts that within ten years organizations had been established in most parts of the state. Interest in the W.C.T.U. crossed racial, religious, and social lines as evidenced by records of a report on organization given by a Catholic lady from Baton Rouge, an appeal for work

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[22]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 144.

[23]Ibid., pp. 144, 171.

[24]Willard, Woman and Temperance, p. 569.

among the German community made by the wife of a Lutheran minister and words of praise from a ". . . teacher among the colored people." Among Merrick's co-workers in New Orleans were the wives of one of the most influential Episcopal bishops in the South, a leading Baptist pastor, and a prominent physician.[25]

While local, state and national leaders deserve much of the credit for the rapid growth of temperance unions in Louisiana, evidence suggests a more complex explanation. Following the Civil War, there was a marked increase in the drinking habits of the males of both races. Women were perhaps the first to sustain the brunt of the adverse effects of this social phenomenon, as alcohol threatened family stability and was responsible for much of the hardship suffered by women. Forced in the past to rely solely on the dubious results of the ". . . power of 'woman's influence' to bring men, not naturally so inclied, to virtuous habits," many women now looked with hope to the W.C.T.U. for an effective solution.[26]

Merrick saw Willard's arrival in Louisiana as a "peculiar fitness." Whereas women had been previously occupied with societal requirements and the responsibilities of slave dependency, they ". . . were now tossed to and fro amidst

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[25]Ibid., pp. 567-568; Georgia Payne Durham Pinkston, A Place to Remember; East Carroll Parish, La. 1831-1976 (Baton Rouge: Claitor's Publishing Division, 1977), pp. 167-68.

[26]Scott, Southern Lady, p. 147.

the painful circumstances, and were eager that new adjustments should relieve the strained situation, and that they might find out what to do." To many, Francis Willard gave not only a holy purpose, but a direction into broad fields of philanthropic and spiritual culture.[27]

A catalytic force in the women's movement was the development of the woman's clubs. While a bold and radical step for Louisiana, they served to fill the void created by a complete lack of access to a higher education for women. Only those few Louisiana women who had the means and possessed an overwhelming determination were able to leave the state and travel north to college. The clubs allowed women to emerge from their cocoons to share with other women common interest. They also provided women an outlet for social concerns and an opportunity for artistic expression.

Louisiana led the southern states in this direction when a woman's club was organized in New Orleans in 1884. It was organized in response to an article in the New Orleans Times-Democrat. The call was for a club for working women. Calling attention to the Young Men's Christian Association and various other social and benevolent organizations through which young men of New Orleans ". . . are elevated financially, socially and morally, . . ." the writer pointed out that these good results were often due to the assistance of women's auxilliaries who devote ". . . much gratuitous labor. . ." to the social

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[27]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, pp. 171-72.

side of these associations. Surely, the article continued, those who had shown such concern with the welfare of young men, must realize the needs of young women whose circumstances have forced them ". . . into the world to struggle for existence . . . . The temptations around women are fully as great and as difficult to be resisted." It was suggested that a short and practical approach would be for the young working women to organize a society themselves with its object the mutual assistance and protection of its members. Educational and social features could be added at a later date. Desirable goals should include ". . . equal salaries with men whenever women rendered equal services, and assistance when a member was out of work or ill."[28]

Women responded quickly to the call, and twelve women assembled in the parlor of the Y.M.C.A. to organize a woman's club. Elizabeth Bisland was elected the first president. Already well known for her literary abilities, she would later challenge the world's imagination by swiftly girdling the globe as a reporter for Cosmopolitan Magazine.[29]

The club constitution, as originally written, provided only for the working woman. As an expression of the motives for forming the organization, it stated its purpose as mental

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[28]New Orleans Times-Democrat, 9 September 1884.

[29]Edwin Anderson Alderman, et al, eds., Library of Southern Literature (New Orleans: The Martin and Hoyt Company, 1907), pp. 770-71; Jane Cunningham Croly, The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America (New York: Henry G. Allen and Co., 1898), p. 510; Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 216.

and moral advancement for these women. As the club had evolved from a progressive civilization, ". . . its movement must be elastic, and its work versatile and comprehensive." In recognition of the precedent breaking nature of the club, the constitution stated that: "In the aggregate we are breaking down and removing barriers of local prejudice; we are assisting intellectual growth and spiritual ambition in the community of which we are a dignified and effective body." As stated, the scope of the club must always remain within sociological lines. This term embracing ". . . pursuits of study and pastime, our labors and relaxations."[30]

Before the end of the club's first year, Bisland resigned and moved to New York. During the short period she served, her magnetic personality and leadership qualities gave the infant organization a strong and solid foundation.

Mrs. M. J. C. Swayzie was the second president of the club. As yet, the club had no name, and after a lengthy discussion it was decided that "Woman's Club" was an appropriate name. At about the same time, the constitution was revised and the word "working" was deleted and as a result membership rapidly increased. Within a short time, the club won the confidence, respect, and sanction of the community, even those who, at first, had bitterly opposed the organization.[31]

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[30]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, pp. 216-17.

[31]Croly, History of the Woman's Club, p. 510. Mrs. Swaysie's first name is not available. In this instance, and in similar instances that follow, the husband's name or initials are given. In some cases only a woman's last name is known.

The New Orleans Woman's Club, being the first in the South, attracted much attention and interest and Merrick, for one, recognized the wisdom of the club, from its beginning, in allying itself with the general women's movement. Delegates attended the 1889 National Convention of Women's Clubs, held in New York, and the 1892 Chicago Convention of Federation Clubs. At the 1894 "Federation" convention held in Philadelphia, Elizabeth Saxon was appointed to the Advisory Board.[32]

Projects undertaken in the club's early years included the successful campaign to place matrons in station houses, furnishing a bed in the Women's and Children's Hospital, and distribution of clothing and food to the victims of the great overflows of the Mississippi River.[33] With the enlarged membership, the club's finances improved and it moved from Baronne Street to a large rented house on Camp Street. At this time rooms were let to club members, industrial classes were formed, lectures given, and entertainments were frequent. The amusements, tableaux and dramatic presentations, readings, and concerts, became extremely popular. As late as 10:00 p.m. on many nights it was not unusual ". . . to see two or more scores of husbands amiable cooling their heels in the club halls while their wives in the pretty parlors beyond were listening to literature lectures, to good music, or to practical talk,

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[32]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 217; Croly, History of the Woman's Club, pp. 513-14.

[33]Ibid.

calculated to make them better homemakers and more sensible women."[34] Among topics discussed were: "English Literature," "Russian Literature," "Higher Education of the Masses," "Browning," "The Press; Should it Represent or Endeavor to Shape Public Opinion?" and "Louisiana, from Discovery to Foundation of New Orleans." Classes in literature and languages were organized, as well as industrial classes in typing, shorthand, telegraphy and elocution. The Picayune commented that such a variety of activities could only have been maintained by women, ". . . and those the wisest, most unselfish and most liberal-minded of their sex."

In 1890 the club acquired a large, handsome house on the corner of Clio and Prytania. The clubhouse was now situated in a fashionable residential area, and even the most arbitrary husband could no long complain when his wife ". . . runs away for a few hours of reading or recreation." Always emphasising the club's intention of providing benefits and protection to the working woman, the club helped women obtain employment and charged its members only a nominal rate of from two to ten dollars a month for room rentals. Women who lived in the clubhouse were allowed access to the parlor, library, piano, typewriter, and the kitchen where many of the ladies ". . . prepared their own dainty meals." The Picayune was pleased to report on the absence of ". . . orphan asylum or

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[34]The material on the New Orleans Woman's Club in this and the next paragraph is found in an article in the New Orleans Daily Picayune, 9 November 1890.

'home' rules to depress or restrain the ladies. . . ." It was pointed out, however, that since no one except those who have ". . . spotless lives. . ." were permitted to live in the club, no rules were needed.

In 1896 the club discontinued the rental of rooms and shortly afterwards it moved to St. Charles Street, where it remained through the end of the century. The influence of the Woman's Club on future clubs for women was dynamic. One contemporary evaluated the contribution of the club by saying, "It is clearly manifest . . . that the New Orleans club for women . . . was the initial step of whatever progression women have made through subsequent organizations."[35]

Literary and study clubs became a vital part of the lives of many Louisiana women. The first study club, composed entirely of women, was the Geographic Club. Membership was limited to twenty members and during its early years meetings were held every Saturday morning. The group studied the daily life, religious life, geography and history of a number of countries, including Judea, Egypt, Phoenicia, India, China, and Japan. By the 1900's many of its members were known names in the world of art, and literature, as fiction-writers, essayists, poets, reviewers, and artists.[36]

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[35]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 217; Croly, History of the Woman's Club, p. 514.

[36]The account of the Geographic Club and the following account of the Quarante Club and the Current Topic Class is drawn from Croly, History of the Woman's Club, pp. 520-21.

Taking its name from the fact that originally there were forty members, the Quarante Club was organized in 1885. Meeting every Saturday morning from the middle of November to the middle of May, the members decided on the subjects for study and discussions at the annual meeting held for the election of officers. In time, the limitation on the number of members was removed. Among the subjects studied were; "The Victorian Poets," "Shakespeare's Historical Plays," and eighteenth century France, Germany and England.

The Current Topic Class was another group typical of early study organizations for women. Formed with Mrs. Oscar Nixon as leader and lecturer, weekly lectures were presented followed with certain members, selected for the day, discussing the topic. As indicated by its name, lecture subjects were selected by current public interest. Among topics discussed were: "German Music," "The President's Message," "Mr. Gladstone," "The Impressionist School of Art," and "The Higher Education of Women."

Women's clubs were forming throughout the state. The Hypatia Club, of Shreveport, was the first federated woman's club outside of New Orleans. Mrs.James Foster was elected as the first president, and the membership was limited to twenty-five women. Encouraging its members to speak extemporaneously, the club also held frequent debates on important events of the day. Instruction was given on parliamentary law, and members were taught how to conduct business meetings. Free discussions at the meetings were encouraged and a free circulating library

was available to the members. The Hypatia Club was said to represent ". . . the best social and intellectual life of the community, and is not only a center of influence, but is rapidly becoming an increasing power of good." Dues were ten cents a month and members were fined for failing to perform assigned work.[37] A club for Jewish women, the Fidelio Club, was organized in Shreveport early in 1897. Clara Florsheim was the first president, and there were twenty members. Meeting every two weeks, the club had as its purpose the study of English literature. Another early Shreveport club was the Pierian Club, organized in 1897 with twenty-five members drawn from the young society women of the town. A Miss Leonard, the first president, presided over the semi-weekly meetings. The purpose of the club was the study of current literature, with social gatherings several times a year.

In New Iberia, The Woman's Kindergarten Literary Club was formed. Emily L. Grant was founder and first president. In addition to various literary subjects, the members were enlightened by such subjects as "Physical Culture," "Hygiene," and "Child Nature."[38]

An embroidery club evolved into one of the first literary organizations in Ruston. The Cultural Club was organized in

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[37]Ibid., p. 521; Maude Henry-Opry, Chronicles of Shreveport (n.p., 1927), p. 277.

[38]Croly, History of the Woman's Club, p. 521.

the 1890's with Dr. Amanda Taylor as president. In addition to intellectual pursuits, the club concerned itself with civic improvements. Another early woman's club in Ruston was the Pierian Club organized in 1899. Founded with the help of a member of Hypathia from Shreveport, a member of the New Orleans Woman's Club, and one from the Lesche Club, of Natchitoches, the members were composed mostly of teachers of the local college. One of the original founders recalls the ". . . free and easy discussions . . ." that marked the meetings. The earlier meetings were informal and the teacher would come directly from school in their "work-day clothes." The meeting days were later changed to Saturday afternoon.[39]

By the end of the century there were a number of literary clubs in Baton Rouge. The Women's Club was organized in 1892 with its purpose as literary and social. Mrs. J. N. Ogden was elected as the club's first president and she was succeeded by Mrs. C. J. Reddy. Literary, social, and business meetings were held regularly and every three months friends of the members were entertained at a reception.[40]

Clubs for women continued to multiply, and membership increased in existing clubs. While all of the members of women's organizations did not become active in the woman's

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[39]Frances Griffin Roper, ed., A Historical and Pictorial Review; City of Ruston 1184-1959 (Ruston, Louisiana: The Leader Publishing Co., 1959), p. 49. Hereafter referred to as City of Ruston.

[40]Croly, History of the Woman's Club, pp. 521-22. The Woman's Club that was organized in Baton Rouge in 1892 is not the same club that is known by that name today.

rights movement, the organizations did prove a valuable training ground for those who became involved.

CHAPTER IV

PIONEERS IN POLITICS AND REFORM

The women's movement in Louisiana was well served by the groups that organized in the 1880's. By 1892, ". . . some of the strong, progressive and intellectual women of New Orleans were ready to meet . . . and organized the first suffrage association in Louisiana. . . ." With nine charter members the "Portia Club" elected Caroline Merrick as its first president. It is not clear whether Elizabeth Saxon was a charter member, or whether she had even returned to New Orleans at the time the club was organized. It is known, however, that she did return sometimes during this same year and she was the second president of the Portia Club.[2] Although this was the first organized suffrage group, a number of New Orleans' women had long harbored a personal desire for suffrage, and Susan B. Anthony had stimulated a wide public interest in the movement when she had visited the city in 1885. Arriving in New Orleans to visit the Cotton Exposition, she was invited to speak before large audiences, and it was said that "the surprise of finding her a simple, motherly, gentle mannered woman . . . disarmed and

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[1]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 218.

[2]Croly, History of the Woman's Club, p. 522.

warmed their hearts." During her two week visit, she was "cordially" received by the people and the press.[3]

One of the initial acts of the Portia Club was to get Governor Murphy Foster to appoint four women to the school boards of northern Louisiana parishes. Educational programs were frequently scheduled with such topics as "The Initiative and Referendum," "Would Municipal Suffrage for Women Be a Benefit in New Orleans?" and "Has the State of Wyoming Been Benefited by Woman Suffrage?"[4] Of interest was the debate held by the Portias on "Has the Entrance of Women Into the Wage-earning World Been a Benefit to Civilization?" Attracting a large audience, it was held in the parlors of the Woman's Club. The Picayune found it ". . . noteworthy . . . and a sign of a new trend of thought . . ." that the negative side won the vote of the audience, an audience composed mainly of women, many of whom were wage-earners.[5] After the debate Merrick, as the last speaker of the day, was introduced. The comments of the Picayune reporter about her address are representative of the extraordinary impression Merrick made when she appeared in public and of her influence in the community. Of all the distinguished women speaking that day, none received the acclaim given ". . . the brilliant and

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[3]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, pp. 212-13.

[4]Ibid., pp. 218-19.

[5]The following account of the Portia Club meeting is drawn from the New Orleans Daily Picayune, 31 May 1893.

gifted Mrs. Merrick. . . always earnest and interesting,. . . her remarks are always listened to with great pleasure. . . ." It was felt that the ". . . original and charming little allegory she delivered will put the women's movement in a new and stronger phase than it has yet been presented." As the Picayune's response to the presentation was typical, so the presentation itself was a demostration of Merrick's ability to sway public opinion and to lead the women of her day. Addressing the audience, she said:

> The mariner who guides his ship by the north star does not stop to consider that this light has been forty-six years traveling toward him—he simply makes use of it like the women of to-day, never thoughtfully dwells upon the work which has been done in the last half century by Susan B. Anthony and her colleagues to open the door of industry and learning to them, while they complacently go in and enjoy the privileges and avail themselves of the benefits of these noble and disinterested labors; we hope that some of them will feel it incumbent upon them to join this little band and in like manner try to assist those who are, in the next generation, to come after them.
>
> I merely stand here in my place tonight to be counted as a true friend to the advancement of my sex in every excellent and honorable way. I will only say a few words.
>
> Once there was a time, or maybe I dreamed it so, that the angels of heaven were gathered at the windows looking out into infinite space, and their attention was particularly attracted to one heavenly body, which was rolling along around another, larger and brighter, and it was this earth, our own planet freighted with humanity.
>
> The principle object of their interest seemed to be an immense creature, which was clothed after a motley fashion, and moved with a peculiar gait. The immortals could not rest until they had sent out an investigating committee to report concerning this compound concrete being of such large bulk and so strangely equipped.
>
> One half was dressed mostly in linen and broadcloth and the other was bandaged and wrapped in silk and lace and ornamented with jewels. One hand was resting in a sling, while the lower limb on the same side was bent and bandaged until it could not touch the ground.

Then the creature moved with spasmotic jerks and hops and did not seem to be able to walk after the manner of any properly constructed animal.

When the angel got in speaking distance he found his name was Humanity, and the divine visitor was not slow in expressing his astonishment. "Good gracious alive," said he, "what is the matter with you?" I have been sent down here to note the progress and improvement of the human race and find it represented by a big man, hopping along on one leg; will you explain this absurdity?"

Humanity took off his big hat, and hung down his large head for an instant and replied: "You are not a man and you do not live here Mr. Angel; if you did you would be able to understand my position. One-half of me is male and the other female, and this better and weaker half must needs be subject to the other, for God has ordained it so. This foot pointing to the left, is too good to be put on the ground, and these taper fingers are too tender and white to be soiled with work. My male side is strong, able and willing to carry the female side if it will only be quiet and stay in its place and say it has all the rights it wants."

"But these flagturesare cruel," said the angel. "These bandages and things prevent all exercise and air. Do you never liberate this half of your body?" "Yes," said Humanity. "In fact it is really the mother of the other half, but must be kept in its sphere all the same. Nevertheless we allow some exercise when dinners are to be cooked and clothes washed; some liberty is allowed to do these offices and some others."

"Humanity you will never make any real progress and advancement, you will never reach perfection until you liberate this side you are carrying and have justice and equality ruling in all the members of you body."

"Why, Mr. Angel, let me tell you we love our dear women better than ourselves, but we cannot trust them. If this side was allowed to run around on a perfect equality with that the first thing we know every saloon in the world would be shut up and a man could not get a drink to save his life. I had rather hobble along in this one-sided way and stop the wheels of progress forever than to change the existing state of things." The angel look disgusted, and said, "Humanity, you are a fool," and flew away to relate to the clestials what he had seen on earth.

The Portia Club, in 1895, in connection with the Woman's Club, hosted the "Association for the Advancement of Women."

Enjoying the "novelty" of New Orleans, the national association met in New Orleans for one week.[6]

During the 1890's there was a growing interest throughout the state, in suffrage for women. Early in the decade Clara C. Hoffman came into the state to address the Woman's Christian Temperance Union Convention, held in Shreveport, and was cautioned not to mention suffrage ". . . as Southern people are conservatives and bitterly opposed to any mention of equal suffrage. . . ." Carefully following instructions, suffrage was not discussed. On the closing day of the convention, however, she received an invitation from Shreveport's leading business and professional men to speak on the voting issue. Appearing before a packed audience at the Opera House, she presented her views and answered questions from the audience. Interrupting her remarks with numerous rounds of applause, many of the audience crowded to the stage at the close, expressing warm regards. As she later told of these events, she concluded by saying, "How is that for Shreveport, and Louisiana?" Feeling free now to speak out on suffrage, she moved on to Monroe and Lake Charles, and was warmely received in both towns.[7]

In 1895, an offshoot of the Portia Club was organized. The new group, playing on the words "Equal Rights Association," adopted the name, "Era Club." Like the Portia Club, the new

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[6]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 218.

[7]Ibid., pp. 219-20.

organization was orginally formed with nine members, and Belle Van Horn became the first president. The new group soon outgrew the mother club, and in the coming years this group was the most active group in the state in behalf of women. Within ten years membership in the Era Club would number in the hundreds.[8]

In the same year, Susan B. Anthony paid another visit to Louisiana, this time accompained by Carrie Chapman Catt. The two women were enthusiastically accepted in New Orleans. One morning following a suffrage meeting a letter arrived for Anthony. Openly moved, the famous suffragist read:

> . . . That was a great meeting last night. When people are willing to stand for three long hours and listen to speakers it means something. There were ten or twelve men and a score of women standing within ten feet of me, and not one of them who did not remain to the end. There are few men who can hold an audience in that way. I looked around the Assembly Hall and counted near me eight of my legal confreres. One of the most distinguished lawyers in the State told me in court this morning that Mrs. Catt's argument was one of the finest speeches he had ever listened to. Yesterday I was asked at dinner to define the word 'oratory.' Mrs. Catt is an exponent of 'the art of moving human hearts to beat in unison with her own'—which is the end and aim of oratory. . . . Give the speaker a lawyer's compliments.[9]

Traveling on to Shreveport, Anthony was received with equal warmth. The Shreveport Times could not recall an

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[8]Ibid., p. 221. Susan B. Anthony in History of Woman Suffrage, 4:680 gives the date of Era Club as 1896. Beginning with the fourth volume of History of Woman's Suffrage, the authors are Susan B. Anthony and Ida Harper.

[9]Ibid., pp. 221-22.

audience that listened with such intense attention and was so deeply interested. The audience was evenly divided between men and women; ". . . the best element of all classes of Shreveport's citizens . . . greeted her plain, matter-of-fact arguments, earnestly and honestly presented . . . ." The paper concluded by acknowledging that there was indeed justice in Anthony's claims.[10]

Encouraged by a state-wide interest in suffrage for women, committees from the Era and Portia Clubs met in November of 1896 and organized a State Woman Suffrage Association with Caroline Merrick as president and Evelyn Ordway as vice-president. This set up a formal link with the national association, and at the next national convention Helen Behrens was sent to represent Louisiana.[11]

It would appear that the suffrage movement had established a strong "foothold" in Louisiana. But interest, and often support by "packed audiences" did not mean that the majority of the people had been reached or supported the movement. It was a strong base, however, and these pioneer women deserve much credit for having attained such success. It would be for the next generation to build from this base a force strong enough to achieve their goal, the right for women to vote.

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[10] Shreveport Times, 25 January 1895.

[11] Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 222.

The first statewide involvement of women as a political action group took place in 1891 when a large number of Louisiana women joined forces to support an Anti-Lottery campaign.[12] The campaign, already in progress for a year, was aimed at forcing the Louisiana Lottery Company out of business. The Lottery Company had purchased a twenty-five year franchise from the 1868 legislature. The Lottery held weekly and monthly drawings with two celebrated Confederate Generals, P.G.T. Beauregard and Jubal A. Early, presiding. Addiction to the lottery ran from the most humble, including children, to business tycoons, in cities as far away as New York.[13] The Lottery Company paid an annual license fee of $40,000.00 to the state of Louisiana, but the enormous profits made by the lottery owners were frequently used to corrupt local and state politicians in order to gain political power, within Louisiana for the company. The franchise was due to expire in 1893 and the Lottery Company generated an all-out effort for a charter renewal. The Anti-Lottery League, formed in 1890, was just as determined that the charter should not be renewed.[14]

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[12] Robert Berthold, "The History of the Louisiana State Lottery Company", Louisiana Historical Quarterly 27:(1944):1061.

[13] Hodding Carter, et al., eds., The Past as Prelude: New Orleans 1718-1968 (New Orleans: Tulane Univeristy Press,1968), p. 311.

[14] Joy J. Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress 1880-1896 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1969), pp. 111, 113, 126.

The Women's Anti-Lottery League, with Mrs. William Preston Johnson, wife of the president of Tulane University as League president, had local leagues in every town, with nine hundred members in New Orleans.[15] Women of all classes and ages united in this campaign. They raised money and held numerous meetings, educating the public on issues, and arousing the public conscience against the lottery.[16] Victory against the Lottery held inestimable value for the morale of the involved Louisiana woman. At least one contemporary author felt that it would have been ". . . impossible . . . to reckon how far back into inertia she would have been thrown by defeat."[17]

Before the expiration date of the charter, a crippling blow was dealt to the Lottery Company. New federal legislative action prohibited the Lottery from using the United States Mail, or the interstate transportation of lottery tickets and reports. Any hope the company had of continuing to operate within the state was shattered when the anti-lottery ticket was swept into office in the state election of April, 1892.[18]

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[15]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 218; Roper, City of Ruston, p. 49.

[16]John T. White, "The History of the Louisiana Lottery" (M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1939), p. 64; Berthold, "History of the Louisiana State Lottery Company", 27:1062.

[17]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 218.

[18]Carter, Past as Prelude, p. 312; Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age, pp. 133-34; Richard H. Wiggins, "The Louisiana Press and the Lottery" (M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1936), p. 192.

During the state Democratic Convention, held in Baton Rouge, complimentary resolutions recognizing the women's contribution were read and then placed in the Tulane University Museum. The resolutions acknowledged the contribution by stating in part: ". . . how much is due them. . . can never be known . . . whenever and wherever they could be of assistance . . . they were ready. Nor did they lose aught of their womanliness in the struggle."[19] The last fact was important to the men, and it seldom failed to surprise them that women who were active outside the home could be physically attractive and/or retain their "womanliness" in manner.

The social consciousness of women, that had served Louisiana so well during the Civil War and Reconstruction period as women cared for soldiers, veterans, widows, orphans and other victims of the times was not diminished as women moved into public activities. No one person did more to raise the level of the social consciousness of a people than Margaret Haughery, a poor, illiterate washerwoman, whose life was devoted to the orphans of New Orleans. A statue of her was erected in 1884, one of the first monuments to honor a woman in the United States.[20] Only the death of Jefferson Davis in New Orleans, seven years after Haughery's in 1882, was said to have ". . . so wrung the heart of the city. . . ."[21]

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[19]Berthold, "The History of the Louisiana State Lottery Company", 27:1113.

[20]Undated clipping, New Orleans Scrapbook, Louisiana Room, Tulane University.

Margaret Haughery, orphaned at the age of five by a yellow fever epidemic in Baltimore, moved to New Orleans when she was twenty-three. Arriving in New Orleans shortly after the death of her husband, the grieving young woman was penniless with virtually no resources for making a living. She had never attended school and could not read or write. She began working at the St. Charles Hotel as a laundress, and from her meager earnings she contributed two-thirds to the Sisters of Charity. At the time, the Sisters were raising money for an orphanage. From this first contribution developed a lifetime of dedication to helping children. When unable to work, she would beg for the children's cause. Allowing herself only a minute sum for expenses, she saved enough to buy two cows and selling the cow's milk, provided more funds for the children. In the next ten years St. Elizabeth's Asylum, St. Vincent's Infant Asylum, and the Camp Street Asylum rose with funds donated by this compassionate woman. Taking over a bakery, heavily in debt, she built it into a large plant and was able to give large quantities of bread to flood victims, destitute Confederate families, and needy persons. Despite her many donations, at her death her estate was in excess of $600,000.00, all

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[21] Thomas Ewing Dabney, _One Hundred Great Years: The Story of the Times-Picayune from its Founding to 1940_ (New York: Greenwood Press, 1972), pp. 300-01. After 5 April, 1914 the _Daily Picayune_ became the _Times Picayune_. On 5 April the _Daily Picayune_ and the _Times-Democrat_ carried identical announcements (filling two and three-quarter columns) of the merger. The first _New Orleans Times-Picayune_ was published the following day.

willed to the orphanages of the city. Children from eleven orphanages attended her funeral. Among the mourners were the archbishop, the mayor, the governor, society ladies, leading business and professional men, and many from the working class of the city.[22]

With social awareness, could social reform by women be far behind? In 1892 Mrs. J. M. Ferguson thought there was a need for a woman's club to study economic, political and social questions of the day. Founded in her home, the Arena Club was organized, with Ferguson as the first president. While giving a tacit endorsement to suffrage, as a society concerned with socio-economic problems their attention was frequently directed to reform. In 1896 the club was successful in securing a law that fixed the "age of protection" for girls at the age of sixteen. Late in the century, members' attention was turned to creating a public interest in anti-trust legislation.[23]

A number of clippings from the pages of Elizabeth Saxon's scrapbook indicate that she was one of the first women in the South to speak and write on reforms for women and children, who, as young as ten years of age, labored long hours under appalling conditions for pennies a day. One woman received $1.75 for sewing a dozen pairs of men's jeans, said to be of excellant workmanship. Another clipping tells of a woman,

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[22]Ibid.

[23]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 220; Croly, History of the Woman's Club, pp. 518-19; Anthony, History of Woman's Suffrage, 4:687.

an expert tailor, arrested for wearing men's clothing because as a man she was paid $3.00 a day, as a woman; starvation wages.[24] Testifying before a Senate Judiciary Committee in 1880, which was considering a constitutional amendment for woman's suffrage, Saxon related that it was her interest in reform that first drew her to the suffrage cause. She said it was only after being rebuffed by men on every side as she was seeking reform that she realized how necessary it was for women to have the vote.[25]

Another phase of reform that consumed many hours of Saxon's energy was the need to help the "lost sisterhood." As she explained to the Senate Committee on this point, "The children that fill the houses of prostitution are not of foreign blood and race. They came from sweet American homes and for every woman that went down some mother's heart broke."[26] As a pioneer speaker on social questions, on another occasion, in 1888, Saxon gave the principal address before the International Council of Women held in Washington, D.C. Speaking on "Social Purity" (or the control of venereal disease), she made a "stirring" speech before an assembly of over five thousand women in Albangles Opera House. After this, she responded to numerous requests and spoke in five states. In many towns the men in her audiences numbered in the thousands.[27]

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[24]Undated clipping, Elizabeth Saxon Scrapbook, Saxon Papers.

[25]Stanton, History of Woman's Suffrage, 3:157.

[26]Ibid.

In September, 1892, now back in New Orleans after a twelve years absence, Saxon led the attack against the Harman Ordinance, an ordinance which would provide for the licensing of prostitutes, a class she said was ". . . already subjected to humiliation and blackmailing sufficient." In a communication sent to Major John Fitzpatrick, she listed a number of objections. For one thing, the ordinance was seen as a means for Dr. J. R. Harman to make "vast" amounts of money. There was also great concern that the police would have the authority to ". . . suspect of prostitution many of the laboring women and girls." From her ". . . work in trying to save young girls in a Western town, . . ." Saxon was also convinced that the ordinance would result in ". . . blackmailing and licentiousness . . . appalling to comtemplate." Also pointed out was that the bill had been suddenly sprung on the community while all of the philanthropic societies were suspended and their leaders were out of town for the summer. Above all else, Saxon believed that prostitution was an evil that could only be eliminated by moral rather than legislative means. She was willing to consider a trial period of one year, but she thought it would be "suicidal" for the city to be bound for the proposed ten year period.[28]

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[27]Lyle Saxon, Poems, p. 12.

[28]Undated newspaper clipping in the Elizabeth Saxon Scrapbook, Saxon Papers.

Following up the communique, Saxon hastened to organize a mass meeting to protest the ordinance. In the face of such opposition, and before the mass meeting, the mayor decided to veto the ordinance. He so informed Saxon and requested that the meeting be cancelled. The women, however, did not cancel the meeting. On the morning of the 2 P.M. meeting, Fitzpatrick publicly announced to reporters his veto plans. Elizabeth Saxon was present for the announcement and conveyed her appreciation and that of her associates in the protest.[29]

At the meeting, the news of the veto was greeted by a round of vigorous applause and it was decided to send a resolution to Mayor Fitzpatrick expressing "heartfelt thanks" for the veto. Another resolution was sent to The _Times-Democrat_ thanking the newspaper for ". . . its editorial support of this woman's movement for the protection of the honor and homes of New Orleans; especially the recognition of an equal stand of morality for both sexes." A newspaper account related:

> It was a dramatic meeting. A soul stirring speech was made by Mrs. Saxon. It was a speech that made the hundred listeners bow their heads and sob. Its eloquence touched all hearts alike.
>
> The lives of the unfortunate sisterhool were depicted in vivid colors. Their miserable deaths and hereafter were reviewed in words of living fire. The great majority of listeners heard for the first time the story of the awful life of the outcasts of society. It went home to everyone. It nerved the audience for action. It strenghtened their resolution to leave no stone unturned to defeat the infamous ordinance and to uphold the honor of the city. . . .

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[29]Ibid.

> Mrs. Saxon had just commenced speaking when a large party of women entered the room. Their entrance caused a sensation. The speaker stopped. They were invited to take seats nearer the speaker. They declined, however, and sat in a body at the rear of the parlors. There were twenty-five or six in the party, and they were representatives of the unfortunate sisterhood. They took a deep interest in the preceedings. Mrs. Saxon's remarks effected them deeply. It was a strange scene to view these women as they sat in assemblage sobbing wildly as the burning words of the speaker depicted the present and future of an outcast's life. The party of women came in a body and went away together.[30]

It appears that Saxon remained in New Orleans through the turn of the century. As the leader in various causes for women, her name appeared, from time to time, in public print as she continued to work in behalf of women. In the latter part of the 1890's, she was editor of the New Orleans Item's Labor Department. It is not clear how long she remained in the city, but it is known that she was in New Orleans in 1905.[31]

Her son, Lyle, reported that her "last years" were spent quietly with her daughter, Ina Saxon Murray, in Memphis, Tennessee.[32] At the age of eighty-two, she died March 14, 1915.[33] Lyle Saxon concludes his brief biographical sketch of his mother by noting: "Wherever she went this Godsent woman saved and blessed womankind . . . . Her life experiences would fill volumes."[34] From the sketchy information available on Elizabeth Saxon, this last statement is no doubt true. Caroline Merrick summarized the contemporary view of Saxon in this manner:

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[30]Ibid.

[31]Daily Picayune, 30 November 1908.

[32]Lyle Saxon, Poems, p. 12

[33]Ibid. [34]Ibid.

> . . . Elizabeth Lyle Saxon is a woman possessed of fine intellect and an uncommonly warm and generous nature . . . . All along the way she has given of her best with whole-hearted zeal to further the cause of women, and should claim the undying gratitude of those from whom she has helped to build the bridges of human equality.[35]

Women who followed the pioneer activists became more and more involved in reforms and the political action often necessary to accomplish these reforms; reforms that benefited women, children, and often the entire community. It was Saxon and Merrick, however, who first led the way. On the occasion of Merrick's eightieth birthday in 1905, speeches detailing the contributions of these two women were the focal point of an event held at the St. Charles Hotel. A conservative estimate by the New Orleans Picayune, was that over one thousand of the city's female elite gathered for the birthday celebration. The paper was pleased to point out that for those who believed that female supporters of women's rights were ". . . sour old maids, childless women, and embittered, dried-up, ancient dames, . . ." the event was a revelation. Except for the few pioneers of women's rights, whose faces reflected the serenity and dignity of age, the women were young and lovely. The scene was one of pretty faces, beautiful dresses, and sparkling jewelry.[36]

Elizabeth Saxon was among the guests, and she too was recognized, by several speakers, for her influence and

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[35]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 128.

[36]New Orleans Daily Picayune, 25 November 1905.

dedication on behalf of the women's movement. Representatives from all of the city's women's organizations paid tribute to the two women as the first advocates in Louisiana of women's rights, ". . . the guiding star of all the several associations of women that have been formed in this city. . . ." Included were members of the College Women, the Era Club, the Woman's Club, the Arena Club, the National League of Woman's Clubs, and representatives of the women in the medical and legal professions. Among the men, who spoke that day, was one who found in Merrick an example of the fact that " . . . a pure personal and domestic life . . ." was entirely consistent with the cause to which she had devoted her life. In fact, thought Dr. Richard Wilkenson, a representative of the clergy, ". . . it was indeed the motivating force."[37]

Caroline Merrick lived for three more years, dying in March, 1908.[38] It must have been of great satisfaction to her to receive the wide recognition for her many years of labor. In reading the closing pages of her memoir, however, one senses the big disappointment of her life—that Susan B. Anthony did not see ". . . Louisiana woman vote as unrestricted as the Louisiana man."[39]

Written only a few years before her death, her memoir left one unanswered question. A question, no doubt, that

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[37]Ibid.

[38]Daily Picayune, 30 November 1908.

[39]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 288.

has been asked many times, even to the present. She addressed the question to those women and men, ". . . and there have been many such, . . ." who believed in the rightness of the women's cause, but who did not ". . . come forward and strengthen the struggling vanguard . . . ." Her question was:

> Why is it that you choose to blow
> Your bugle in the rear?
> The helper is the man divine
> Who tells us something new;—
> The man who tells us something new
> And points the road ahead;
> Whose tent is with the forward few—
> And not among the dead.
> You spy not what the future holds,
> A-bugling in the rear.
> You're harking back to time outworn,
> A-bugling in the rear.[40]

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[40] Ibid.

CHAPTER V

WOMEN IN THE PROFESSIONS

As post-war conditions required more and more Louisiana women in dire financial straits to seek paid employment, women of refinement turned in increasing numbers to teaching in private and public schools. By 1870 there were more women than men in this field. This trend continued, until by the end of the century women teachers outnumbered men by two to one.[1]

The need of women to find suitable occupations paralleled an increased public interest in public education. Women of Louisiana lacked the proper preparation to meet this challenge, having been denied any opportunity for a higher education within the state. The situation was somewhat remedied in 1884 with the creation of the Louisiana Normal School in Natchitoches. This institution, established primarily for women, was created ". . . to train teachers for the public schools."[2]

There still remained, however, a desperate need for a training program for those already in the classroom. None felt this more than the teachers themselves. During the

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[1]Bureau of the Census; Tenth United States Census, 1880, Population (Washington; U.S. Printing Office, 1883), p. 825; Twelveth United States Census, 1900, Population (Washington: United States Census Office, 1901), p. 521.

1889 state convention of the Louisiana State Education Association, Mattie H. Williams, an educator from Shreveport, proposed that a state chautauqua be organized. In a speech, later described by Judge A. A. Gundy as ". . . an electric thrill, . . . the mother of the Louisiana Chautauqua . . ." challenged the people of Louisiana ". . . to arise and shake off the encumbers of illiteracy, and undertake measures which would stimulate a new sense of responsibility in affording educational opportunities to the young people of this state." Organized officially the next year in Ruston, the Louisiana Chautauqua received an immediate and enthusiastic response. Within two years, the large numbers of teachers drawn to the summer institute made it necessary to construct special buildings to accommodate those attending. Nationally known speakers and eminent teachers from throughout the state lectured, and for about fifteen years the Chautauqua made numerous educational and cultural contributions to the people of Louisiana.[3]

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[2]Marcus M. Wilkerson, Thomas Duckett Boyd; The Story of a Southern Educator (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1935), p. 279; Edwin Lewis Stephens, "Education in Louisiana in the Closing Decades of the 19th Century." Louisiana Historical Quarterly 16 (1933): 48; Edgar W. Knight, Education in the United States (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1934), pp. 325-26. Wilkerson gives the date for the founding of the college as 1885. This is incorrect.

[3]Edwin Adams Davis, Louisiana: A Narrative History (Baton Rouge: Claitors Publishing Division, 1961). p. 307. One educator who lectured at the Chautauqua was Sophie Bell Wright, see Sophie Wright to Mattie Williams, July 27, 1897, Sophie Bell Wright Papers, Department of Archives, Tulane University.

Little information is available on women educators of this period. The dramatic contribution of one New Orleans woman, however, made a lasting impression on the citizens of that city. The city honored its "First Citizen" by naming a girls' high school for her, and the Picayune awarded her a loving cup for outstanding service to the community. Sophie Bell Wright was born in 1866 to a family left financially destitute when the family plantation was destroyed during the Civil War. At the age of three, Sophie was left severely crippled when a fall injured her back and hips, and she spent the next six years unable to move while strapped to a chair. Determined to move about and despite agonizing pain, Sophie exchanged the chair for crutches when she was nine years old. Her first education came from her father, and from him she developed a strong interest in mathmatics. After studying at Franklin Elementary School, she entered the Girls Central High School and graduated from this school in 1880. The next year, the fifteen year old Sophie opened her own "Day School for Girls" in her home. She taught in her day school in the morning and taught mathmatics at the Peabody Normal School in the afternoon. In exchange for her services, she was allowed to attend foreign language classes. Within four years her school had prospered to the point that she was able to add boarding facilities to her day school. Soon the school had established a reputation as one of New Orleans' best private schools.[4]

In the meantime, while just eighteen years of age, she was approached to tutor at night a poor young circus performer preparing for a civil service examination. Soon, he was joined by other young men, and thus began the free night school for men and boys that was to become an established institution before the end of the first year. The only requirement of the free school was that the students must be too poor to pay for their lessons, and they had to be employed during the day. With the assistance of volunteers, the class grew in size until Wright had to borrow funds for a larger building. In time the enrollement reached over fifteen hundred, and this tiny woman, on crutches and wearing a steel harness, ". . . enriched the lives of thousands of working men and boys and won. . . the city's esteem."[5]

Serving with a number of charitable and civic groups; the United Daughters of the Confederacy, the Prison Reform Association, and the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Wright was also president of the New Orleans Woman's Club from 1897-98. One project that held a special interest for her was a non-sectarian religious organization, the Internal Order of King's Daughters and Sons. As president of the Louisiana branch, she worked to secure public playgrounds and bath and to provide

[4]Viola Mary Walker, "Sophie Bell Wright, Her Work and Life" (M.A. thesis, Tulane University, 1939), pp. 6,53; James, Notable Women, 3:687-88.

[5]James, Notable Women, pp. 687-88; New Orleans Times-Democrat, 27 October 1905.

summer vacations for children and needy women at its camp, Rest-Awhile.[6]

She was only forty-six when she died in 1912, and the entire city of New Orleans went into mourning. Despite an unimaginable physical burden, this dynamic woman had indeed left her mark as a tireless community and welfare worker, and above all, a dedicated teacher.[7]

Normal schools, as training schools for women who wanted to become teachers, were a progressive first step; but young women who wanted a broader liberal arts education packed up and headed for a northern college. It was an endowment from a grieving mother that first opened the door that allowed a Louisiana woman to obtain a college education in her home state. Josephine Louise Newcomb, a native of Baltimore, had moved to New Orleans in 1831, when she was fifteen years of age and after the death of her parents. She lived with a married sister until she married Warren Newcomb in 1845, at which time she and her husband, a wealthy sugar merchant, divided their time between New Orleans, Louisville, and New York City. Upon the death of her husband, in 1866 Josephine Newcomb turned for comfort to her young daughter, Harriott Sophie, to whom she and her husband had always been extremely devoted. When four years later, in 1870, the fifteen year

[6]Croly, History of the Woman's Club, p. 515; James, Notable Women, 3:688.

[7]New Orleans State, 11 June 1912; Times Democrat, 11 June 1912; Daily Picayune, 11 June 1912.

year old child died, the grieving mother was so distraught that family friends were concerned for her sanity. As she slowly recovered, she set about finding an appropriate memorial for her beloved daughter. None of the many gifts, given in her daughter's name, satisfied Newcomb's desire for a perfect memorial. Then one day in 1866, a letter arrived from New Orleans.[8] Ida Ann Richardson, a close friend, suggested that she consider establishing a college for women, as a part of Tulane University, as the most appropriate way to honor the memory of her daughter.[9]

Shortly after receiving the suggestion, Newcomb offered to donate one hundred thousand dollars for the establishment of the H. Sophie Newcomb Memorial College, asking only that a nonsectarian chapel be held daily, and that an Episcopal minister conduct a memorial service on the dates of her daughter's birth and death. The college was founded in October of 1887, and so pleased was Newcomb the results, and convinced that she had finally found the right memorial, she increased her donations until they totaled one million dollars during her lifetime. Upon her death, in April, 1901 she left the bulk of her estate, two million dollars, to the college. The college, with its own educational policy, faculty and buildings,

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[8]Edwin Whitfield Fay, _The History of Education in Louisiana_ (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1898), pp. 220-21; James, _Notable Women_, 2:618-19.

[9]Grace King, _Memories of a Southern Woman of Letters_ (New York: Macmillan Company, 1932), p. 329; James, _Notable Women_, 2:618-19. Richardson donated a medical school and a Chair of Botany to Tulane. King, _Southern Women_, p. 328.

became the first "co-ordinate college," a college for women, yet connected with a college for men. One course offered in the new college was a "regular preparatory course." Since many Louisiana girls lacked the qualifications to enter a college of first quality, it was necessary to prepare these prospective students with the courses needed before they could be admitted to the college.[10]

Although the presidency of the college was entrusted to a male, women served with men on the faculty, and a number of these women were active, and even served as leaders, in the women's organizations of New Orleans. Perhaps the most active, during the pioneer period of the woman's movement, was Evelyn W. Ordway. A native of Massachusetts, she was professor of chemistry in the college. During the time she served as the second president of the Era Club (one of several groups she was active in), Ordway initiated a number of progressive actions. She also served as the third president of the Portia Club.[11]

The privately endowed Sophie Newcomb College, charging large tuition fees,[12] did not completely quench the thirst of

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[10]Anthony, History of Woman Suffrage, 4:688; James, Notable Women, 2:619; New Orleans Daily Picayune, 8 April 1901.

[11]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 223; Croly, History of Woman's Club, p. 522.

[12]Ida A. Richardson donated one of three $1,500 Scholarships, to cover the tuition of Newcomb College. These scholarships were to be awarded to a graduate of New Orleans City High School, recommended by the principal, and based on a competitive examination held at the college. Fay, The History of Education in Louisiana, p. 231.

Louisiana women for a liberal college education. Sorely needed was a state supported institution that would allow for less restricted enrollment. In the early 1890's members of the Women's Christian Temperance Union agitated for a college for women to be connected to Louisiana State University, in an arrangment similar to that between Sophie Newcomb and Tulane University. They contended ". . . that women were entitled to the same educational facilities as men, they persisted in their efforts and succeeded in working up much sentiment for the project." With Mrs. Goodale, wife of Professor William Goodale, as one of the leaders, a committee went before the Board of Supervisors, requesting that women be admitted to the state university. The board, however, refused their request.

Determined to establish a state college for women, and refusing to accept defeat, the group turned in the direction of northern Louisiana. The women had previously been connected with the Chautauqua at Ruston, and therefore Ruston seemed a likely site for their college. They succeeded, in 1894, in getting the legislature to appropriate funds to establish an "Industrial School for Girls." It was necessary for this institution to start in the elementary and secondary fields, and while it was in no way at the academic level of Sophie Newcomb, it did reach the rank of a standard college in 1920. By this date, elementary and high schools had developed in the parishes of the state.[13]

The notion that women should be allowed to enter Louisiana State University was an idea that would not die. The appearance on the campus of women attending a summer session of Peabody Norman School resulted in a pertinent editorial in the The Reveille, the student newspaper, on 3 July 1897. Impressed by the women attending the summer session the paper commented:

> . . . Their presence here at the Summer Normal gives dignity, grace, refinement—good conduct and good manners, in fact, to the gentlemen teachers and to the school exercises. Why should it not do the same for the cadets and the University classes? It doubtless would. Then let the ladies enter the University as regular, constant students . . . . There is no good reason for excluding them—only a prejudice and clinging to the dead past. The educational world around is moving. Shall we of Louisiana stand still, and get left?

After all the efforts to make the university co-educational, the circumstances surrounding the admission of the first woman to the University was comparatively easy and casual. In 1904, Thomas Duckett Boyd was president of the University. At this time Olivia Davis, a mathematics teacher at Baton Rouge High School, was living in the Boyd home. The young woman asked, and received, faculty permission to attend an afternoon calculus class. Shortly thereafter, she received permission to take a complete graduate course, and in 1905 Colonel Boyd appeared

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[13]Wilkerson, Boyd, pp. 270-71. Stephens records that there was apparently an unawareness that the adjective "Industrial" had been used for over a hundred years in England and North America to identify "reform schools". Although the error was corrected by the Constitution of 1921, as late as 1933 "the force of long custom has given annoying persistence to the old name, and the real injury . . . . has continued to have effect." See Stephens, "Education in Louisiana", p. 49.

before the board and recommended her for a master's degree. Explaining how Davis had been permitted to schedule classes, he made the point that at no time had the young woman's presence on the campus affected the routine of the male students. Unless the Board forbade him, he further stated, ". . . he would admit women students to the University." The Board, sensing that it was time for the women of Louisiana to have access to a college education, raised no objection. Davis received her degree, and thereafter the doors to Louisiana State University were open to women.[14]

Velia M. Richard registered as a special student in the fall of 1905, and the following year seventeen female graduates of Baton Rouge High School enrolled as freshmen in the University, all registered in the Teacher's College. In the same semester, one woman registered as a senior, and thirteen women enrolled as special students for a total enrollment of thirty-one women. Louisiana State University was at last co-educational.[15]

As one might suspect, the medical profession was a difficult field for a woman to enter. The founding of Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania in 1850 was cause for considerable attention among medical societies and journals around the country, with Louisiana medical journals eager to republish the denunciations that ranged from amusement to outrage. The New Orleans Bee, no doubt expressing the views of the general

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[14]Wilkerson, Boyd, pp. 271-72.

[15]Ibid., pp. 272-74.

public, thought it not only improper, but injudicious and incongruous for a female physician to attend the diseases of the male sex.[16]

In 1857, Dr. Elizabeth Cohen, a graduate of the Pennsylvania Woman's Medical College, arrived in New Orleans, and was the first woman to practice medicine in the state, and one of the first in the South. The wife of a physician, she encountered a minimum of opposition. She did, however, have to register as a midwife in order to practice medicine. Years passed before other women attempted to hurdle the barriers facing women desiring to become a doctor. Examining the medical career of one young woman, Sarah Tew Mayo, one finds that for a woman to practice medicine in Louisiana, near the end of the century, was indeed a momumental task and undertaken under the most trying conditions.[17]

In the 1890's Mayo, undaunted by the fact that Tulane University Medical School would not accept women students, set out for Philadelphia and graduated with a medical degree in 1898. Her medical career was the result of an interest in medicine nurtured from early childhood. Born in Vidalia, Louisiana, in May, 1869, Sarah was ophaned when her father, George Spenser Mayo, a practicing attorney, and mother, Emma Tew, both died within a short period of time, With her four

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[16]Rudolph Matas, History of Medicine in Louisiana, ed. John Duffy, 2 vols. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1962), 2:102.

[17]Ibid., 2: 102,392.

sisters, the young girl went to live with her father's cousin, Judge Brainerd Spencer of New Orleans. She attended primary school in New Orleans and then graduated from the Millwood Institute in Jackson, Louisiana, before going on to Woman's Medical College. With her medical degree in hand, Mayo returned to New Orleans, only to be barred from clinical and hospital facilities and the doors of medical societies which were closed to women physicians. There was never any question of a need for her skills, as she quickly learned while working in the free clinic of Kingsley House, a settlement house. Not to be defeated, Mayo joined with six other women physicians, all with medical degrees obtained outside the state, and founded the New Orleans Hospital and Dispensary for Women and Children, using a house loaned by a friend. Winning the strong support of the public permitted the dispensary, within three years, to erect a hospital building. At this time a nursing school was added, and in 1911 Fannie R. Glover was its first graduate.[18]

Good works and nobility did not insure the women physicians acceptance into the Orleans Parish Medical Society, a prerequisite to membership in the state and national societies. In 1908 the society's judiciary committee recommended that women physicians be admitted, and Mayo and three others were proposed for membership. After a heated debate, however, the proposal was voted down. Only after five more years of

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[18] Ibid., 2:526-27; Undated clipping, New Orleans Scrapbook; James, Notable Women, 2:517.

agitation by their friends within the society were women physicians finally, in 1913, admitted. In March, Dr. Elizabeth Bass, a co-founder of the Hospital and Dispensary for Women and Children, was the first woman voted into the society. A few months later, Drs. Mayo, Edith Loeber Ballard, Maud Loeber, Etta P. McCormick and Caroline Mims were accepted.[19]

Work with the Dispensary remained Mayo's primary interest, but she also served for a number of years as physician for St. Anna's Asylum for destitute women and children, and in time was a member of the staff at Baptist Hospital and Touro Infirmary. She was a member of the YWCA, and the Era Club. In 1910 the Daily Picayune presented Mayo a loving cup, its coveted annual award for outstanding community service. Shortly after her sudden death in 1930, the name of the hospital to which she had devoted so many years of service was changed to the Sara Mayo Hospital.[20]

It was not until 1893 that women were even permitted nursing training. The need for a nursing school had been recognized by a segment of the medical profession for some time. However, an attempt in the 1880's to establish an acceptance of women in this field ". . . led directly to

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[19] A. E. Fossier, History of the Orleans Parish Medical Society 1878-1928 (Privately Printed, 1930), pp. 131-35; Rudolph Matas, History of the Louisiana State Medical Society ed. Hathaway Gibbens Aleman, 2 vols. (Marrero, La.: Hope Haven Press, 1959), 2:15.

[20] James, Notable Women, 2:517.

the removal of the board of administration and the house surgeon. . ." of Charity Hospital.[21] The efforts to establish a nursing school met with bitter political and personal quarrels, clouding the real issues. The <u>New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal</u> favored a nursing school, and the <u>Times-Democrat</u> supported this position, while the <u>Daily Picayune</u> raised a negative cry in the name of economics, sacred religion, and human decency, denouncing the proposal as an attack upon the Sisters of Charity. Pointing out the economics of the issue, the <u>Picayune</u> informed its readers that it cost about $6.80 per sister for a month's clothing and incidentals compared to the proposal to pay $10.00 to $14.00 per month for a trained nurse. It seemed to the <u>Picayune</u> a rather expensive experiment.[22] This was followed a few days later with an editorial deploring the thought of driving out ". . . the noble band of women who have dedicated their lives to the service of the poor and helpless, . . ." and all ". . . on the plea that they are ignorant."[23] The opponents were not impressed with the hospital board's assurance that there was no intent to eliminate the sisters and besides, the board pointed out, the Sisters of Charity's responsibilities were administrative, and they depended on convalescent patients to do the actual nursing.[24]

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[21]Matas, <u>History of Medicine in Louisiana</u>, 2:503.

[22]<u>Daily Picayune</u>, 26 February 1882.

[23]Ibid., 1 March 1882.

[24]Matas, <u>History of Medicine in Louisiana</u>, 2:504-05.

Taking issue with the Times-Democrat's endorsement of the trained nurses proposal was an indignant reader who inquired as to the source for nurses. Married women were not to be considered if one recalled how those who were involved with the temperance movement had left ". . . their children at home ragged, unwashed and unkept, their houses filthy and their dinner uncooked when their hardworking husbands came home hungry." One could not count on young ladies, except to fall in love and get married. To expect spinsters and childless widows to become nurses was not realistic because ". . . only those who have arrived at an age when they need nursing themselves . . ." would be ". . . willing to work in a hospital the whole day long for their food, the sake of the Lord and a little pen money." The obvious solution was to abandon the proposal and to leave things, as they are, with the Sisters of Charity.[25]

Despite the controversy, the planning continued for organizing the New Orleans Training School for Nurses. The hospital board, by resolution, expressed their appreciation of the sisters and stressed that the board had no intention of replacing the sister's influence. This was followed a week later by an announcement of impending plans to inaugurate the school with four students and a matron, and a report was made of a gift of $500.00 from a Boston woman. All was for naught, however, as the program was aborted when the new

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[25]New Orleans Times-Democrat, 3 May 1882.

governor, Samuel McEnery, filling the office after the untimely death of Governor Louis Wiltz, bowed to pressure, replaced the house surgeon and appointed a new board for Charity Hospital. The new board, in turn, ". . . repudiated all connections with the nurses' training school." Thus ended the "well-planned program" for training nurses to improve the medical care of the people of New Orleans.[26]

Ten more years passed before the Sisters of Charity, no longer able to ignore the need for trained nurses, and under the leadership of Sister Agnes, sponsored a new proposal for a nursing school. This time the house surgeon, who had assumed this position ten years earlier, and the hospital board, supported the plan. The following year, in May, 1893, four sisters joined seven other students and enrolled in the first nursing class. While discipline and matters concerning authority were retained by the Mother Superior, Mary Agnes O'Donnell, a graduate of Bellevue Hospital in New York, was in charge of the nursing program. The first months were difficult ones for the new venture, but gradually conditions improved and new students entered the program. With the first commencement exercises, in December, 1895, the services of twenty newly trained nurses (seven of them Sisters of Charity) were available to the patients of Charity Hospital.[27]

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[26] Matas, History of Medicine in Louisiana, 2:506.

[27] Ibid., 2:507.

By 1898 at least one of the graduates of the Charity Hospital nursing school had organized another school for nurses. Dora Williams, a member of the third graduating class of Charity Hospital, took her new diploma and went to Shreveport, a town that had never had the services of a trained nurse. The doctors of Shreveport welcomed her warmly but were concerned that the lack of public acceptance would prevent her from earning a sufficient income. For the next fifteen months Williams was in charge of Shreveport's Charity Hospital, a small, coal-heated and gas-lighted, wooden building with portable bathtubs. When Dr. T. E. Schumpert, owner of the Shreveport Sanitarium (the only private sanitarium in town), decided to open a training school for nurses, Williams became the head nurse. Misses DeBegory and Thurmond were the school's first graduates, and at the time they received their diplomas there were seven other young women in training at the Sanitarium.[28]

Evidence indicates that the efforts of women to enter the pharmaceutical profession met with easy success as it was this group that ". . . first breached the conservative stronghold of medicine in Louisiana."[29] Compared to the trials of those who attempted to open schools to train women nurses and the struggles of women who wanted to establish a medical practice, it would appear that this group was spared the usual

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[28]Maude Hearn-Opry, Chronicles of Shreveport (n.p., 1927) pp. 272-73.

[29]Matas, History of Medicine in Louisiana, 2:541.

negativism that was associated with efforts of women to gain admittance to a field customarily prohibited to women.

The first, and for a number of years the only, woman to enter this field was Eliza Rudolph. It is not clear when she entered the "drug business," but it is known that since women were not permitted to register for a pharmacy course in a state university, she ". . . perfected herself in pharmacy by a course of private lectures."[30] Rudolph's entry into a field previously dominated by men is unique in that it seems she was readily accepted in the State Pharmaceutical Association when it formed in 1882. Organized with 110 members, the group unanimously elected Rudolph as a member. In 1884, further recognition was accorded its only female member when she was elected corresponding secretary for the association. Acceptance in her chosen field was, no doubt, rewarding to Rudolph and perhaps helped to alleviate the frustration of not being allowed to study at a state university. If one, however, is to judge by her promptness in registering in the laboratory of practical pharmacy, when Tulane School of Medicine admitted women to this program in 1888, her desire for formal training was a vital part of her life. The first women to register, she was still prohibited from taking the regular course toward graduation. It was not until 1894 that this would come to pass.[31]

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[30]Stanton, History of Woman Suffrage, 3:798.

[31]Ibid.

1894 was a momentous year for the supporters of women's rights. Their pressure on the state legislature brought about the passage of a new act, granting the authority to all colleges in the state to grant degrees in law, pharmacy and medicine to women.[32] Despite concerted and repeated efforts by the Era Club and others, women were still unable to register as students in the Tulane College of Medicine.[33] Finally in 1915, twenty-one years after the act was passed, women were permitted to register in Tulane's medical college. Two years later, Dr. Linda Coleman became the first woman to graduate from a medical school in Louisiana.[34]

Women fared better in their efforts to open the doors of the university to pharmacy students. Dr. Rudolph Matas reports that in the same year the act was passed, ". . . supporters of the women's rights were able to bring enough pressure to bear on . . . the medical school to win another victory." Eliza Rudolph was allowed to attend as a regular student and the next year, 1895, received a master's degree in pharmacy.[35]

It was not until 1897, three years after the legislative act was passed, that women were permitted to study law at Tulane. Bettie Runnels of New Orleans was the first to be

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[32]Matas, History of Medicine in Louisiana, 2:541.

[33]Act. 118, Acts of Louisiana (Baton Rouge: n.p., 1894), p. 156.

[34]Merrick, Old Times in Dixie Land, p. 227.

[35]Matas, History of Medicine in Louisiana, 2:542.

admitted, and in 1898 she received a degree, the first law degree ever conferred by a Louisiana University on a woman.[36] One of only four New Orleans women practicing law around the turn of the century was Florence Loeber.[37] From a remarkable family that saw three of its daughters enter a professional field at a time when any women in a professional position was extremely rare, her sisters were Drs. Maud Loeber and Edith Loeber Ballard who, as previously mentioned, were among the first six women admitted to the New Orleans Parish Medical Society.

Born in New Orleans, Loeber's father was Dr. Frederick Loeber and her mother was Kathleen Humbrecht Loeber. She was educated at St. Simeon's parachial school and Sophie Newcomb College. After a two year law course at Cornell University, she returned to Tulane (now admitting women to its law department), where she was graduated. In addition to her regular law practice, she found that as a member of the legal profession she frequently had the opportunity to work on behalf of individuals as well as for the society in general. Strongly advocating woman suffrage, she was president of the Era Club and the Catholic Woman's Club. Early in her legal career, she was a member of the New Orleans Court House Commission. Long before her death, in September, 1933, she had established an outstanding reputation among her peers.

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[36]Ibid.

[37]Bullentin: Tulane University of Louisiana Law Department (May, 1907), p. 69.

In 1922, the <u>Reference Biography of Louisiana Bench and Bar</u> reported that Loeber's ". . . work as counsel and advocate has commanded the admiration of her professional associates, . . . she has been distinguished by a keen mind, a comprehensive knowledge of her profession, and also by a decided interest and influence in the civic and social problems of her home city."[38]

Large numbers of women continued to enter various professions, and women soon dominated such fields as teaching and nursing. Other fields (medicine as an example) were a persistent challenge to the determination and perserverance of those women desiring to enter these professions.

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[38] <u>Reference Biography of Louisiana Bench and Bar</u> (1922), Tucker Civil Law Collection, 1300 Beck Building, Shreveport, Louisiana, p. 58.

CHAPTER VI

PIONEER WOMEN WRITERS AND JOURNALISTS

As women moved into public life, writing was second only to teaching in attracting "genteel" young women of this era. Writing presented attractive possibilities as a means of earning a living, having already received the sanction of society in the antebellum South. In addition, it allowed the writer to remain in the home; and by taking advantage of an almost universal practice, the timid could even conceal her identity by using a "nom de plume." In ever increasing numbers, Louisiana women, who were literarily inclined, submitted their poems and sketches for publication. The results of their efforts frequently appeared in local newspapers, with some gaining a wider audience through national publications. Writing in a sentimental and romantic vein, common and popular during this time, most of these works have little appeal today. Newspapers and magazines of the day reveal that a number of these women fancied themselves as poets. The realization that their poems were published indicates that many editors and readers agreed with them and, no doubt, some of the poetry would find favor with later generations.

Perhaps the most successful Louisiana female poet of this era was Mary Ashley Townsend, writing under the pen

name of "Xariffa." Born and educated in the North, she came to New Orleans in 1856 as a bride. She was a frequent contributor to local newspapers, and national magazines also published her poems. While quite young, she had established a reputation as a gifted poet and was poet laureate to Rex, king of the Mardi Gras for a number of years. Among her several collections of poems were Xariffa's Poems, Down the Bayou and Other Poems, and Distaff and Spindle.[1]

Canadian-born Cecelia Viets Jamison was another woman who moved to New Orleans after her marriage and enjoyed a national reputation as a writer. Still widely read are her children's books, Toinette's Philip and Lady Jane. Using as a background the Mississippi River levee, the Vieux Carre, and swamps on the outskirts of New Orleans, Jamison's books have delighted young readers for generations.[2]

Like many another Louisiana woman, Ruth McEnery Stuart turned to writing when poverty seemed imminent. She later recalled that "When the time came I found that I must make money, I did not know which way to turn. Like the majority of southern women, I had been brought up to enjoy life and take no thought of its serious complexities, ..." It

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[1]Rex, King of Carnival to Xariffa, 1 January 1874, Townsend Collection, Department of Archives, Tulane University; Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age, p. 296; Ida Raymon, Southland Writer: Biographical and Critical Sketches of Living Female Writers of the South, 2 vols., (Philadelphia: Claxton Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1870), 1:381.

[2]Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age, p. 297.

was only when faced with impending financial disaster that she realized she had to ". . . rise to the emergency as so many have done before and since." There seemed to be only one answer, and as she reported, "I merely sat down and wrote a few stories about life I was most familiar with . . . the life of the people in the South. . . ."[3]

Ruth's father, James McEnery, migrated to Louisiana from Ireland, and her mother, Ruth Sterling, was the daughter of a Scotch nobleman. Although she was born in the small town of Marksville, in central Louisiana, the family moved to New Orleans when Ruth was three years of age. In August, 1879, Ruth McEnery married a prominent planter, Alfred O. Stuart, and made her home on her husband's plantation in western Arkansas. Upon her husband's death, five years later, she was left with the support of a son, Sterling McEnery, after her husband's estate was consumed by outstanding debts. Ruth Stuart and her young son returned to New Orleans, and it was at this point that she decided to seek a career in the literary field. Stuart found that there was a ready market for her short stories, and in January of 1888 the readers of the _New Princeton Review_ were the first to judge the quality of her work when "Uncle Mingo's Speculations" appeared in print. The following May, _Harper's New Monthly Magazine_ published "Lamentations of Jeremiah Johnsons," and Ruth Stuart's literary career was launched.[4]

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[3]James, _Notable Women_, 3:407.

Stuart's appeal to her readers lay in her talent for writing of the sights and sounds that had not escaped her keen observation and sharp ear during the years she lived among the people of the South. Writing in dialect, she wrote of the Negro, the southern poor white, the Latin and Negro Creoles, and the French and Italian immigrants of New Orleans. Her appreciation of folk humor and her understanding of, and an emphathy with, these people were vividly portrayed throughout her stories. As her stories became the object of interested bidding by numerous periodicals, and as many volumes of her collected works met with success, Ruth Stuart found it necessary to move to New York to be near her publishers. There she served, for a short time, as temporary editor of Harper's Bazar, and was a well-known member of the "Harper Set."[5]

In addition to possessing a ready wit, Stuart was talented in speaking as well as writing in dialect. Drawing on these gifts she took to the lecture platform in 1893, giving readings from her stories. In the tradition of Mark Twain, she delighted her audiences as a "literary comedian," a unique role for a woman.[6]

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[4]Mary Frances Fletcher, "Ruth McEnery Stuart: A Biographical and Critical Study," (Ph.D. Diss., Louisiana State University, 1955), pp. 5-7; Corine L. Saucier, History of Avoyles Parish, Louisiana (New Orleans: Pelican Pub. Co., 1943), pp. 348-49; James, Notable Women, 3:407.

[5]James, Notable Women, 3:407.

[6]Ibid.

For one who achieved such a large measure of literary success, it is surprising to note that the public lost interest in her stories, almost immediately after her death in 1917. Her writing failed to achieve a permanence in the field of literature, although she was once told by Joel Chandler Harris that, "You have got nearer the heart of the negro than any of us."[7] Not forgotten, however, by the women of New Orleans, Stuart was honored when the Ruth McEnery Stuart Clan, a woman's club was formed in 1913. As reported some seventeen years later, and thirteen years after Ruth Stuart's death, the Clan was ". . . most prosperous and progressive . . . ." Organized as a literary and social club, the Clan was founded by Mrs. Judith Douglas, with Ruth Stuart as one of its charter members. The Clan sought ". . . to give a hearing to young authors or musicians who have not yet arrived . . . . The name of Ruth McEnery Stuart is honored by the Clan . . . at every opportunity . . . ."[8]

The woman recognized, today, as one of the most talented southern writers of her time was Katherine O'Flaherty Chopin, better known as Kate Chopin.[9] She too, began writing after

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[7]Ibid.; Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age, p. 298.

[8]Women's Clubs of New Orleans (n.p., 1930), pp. 17-18. This is a small twenty page booklet found in the Louisiana Collection, Tulane University.

[9]Although much of Kate Chopin's life was spent outside of Louisiana, she has been so closely identified with Louisiana it would be difficult to exclude her from a study of Louisiana women writers. Her home in Cloutierville is on the National Register of Historic places, and the restored home is now the Bayou Folk Museum, dedicated to Kate Chopin. Among the items displayed is the original manuscript of Chopin's Bayou Folk.

the death of her husband. Kate was born in St. Louis, Missouri. Her father was an Irish immigrant, and her mother was of French Creole extraction. In June of 1870 Kate married Oscar Chopin, and after a three month's honeymoon, moved with him to his home in New Orleans. She lived in New Orleans until 1889, spending her summers in Grande Isle, Louisiana, then a fashionable seaside resort. An independent woman who enjoyed cigarettes, unconventional clothes, and went off on long and solitary jaunts, she, no doubt, welcomed the more tolerant climate of the Creole world that she found in New Orleans. It appears that Oscar not only approved his wife's inclinations, but often shared them. Although Kate rejected the role of housewife, she apparently had no objection to motherhood, as she bore six children in the nine years between 1871 and 1880.[10]

When the family business failed in 1880, the Chopins moved to Cloutierville, in Nachitoche Parish, ". . . a rambling little French village of one street, with the Catholic Church at one end and our plantation at the other." The family settled on Chopin family property, and Oscar ran a general store for almost three years, until his death in 1882.[11]

Kate remained in the community for almost a year and then returned to the home of her mother in St. Louis. It was not

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[10]James, Notable Women, 1:333-34.

[11]"Bayou Folk Museum", brochure found at the Bayou Folk Museum, Cloutierville, Louisiana; Nora Alice Norris, "Kate Chopin" (M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1932), p. 4.

until 1888, when she was thirty-seven, that Kate Chopin began writing and her first piece was published in the same year. After the publication, in 1890, of a mediocre novel, At Fault, Kate began an intensive study to improve her writing skills. She carefully polished her short stories as she studied the works of Flaubert, Daudet, and especially the short stories of de Maupassant.[12]

New Orleans, Natchitoche Parish, and Grande Isle form the setting of Kate Chopin's fiction. Drawing from her multitude of experience and penetrating observations of Creoles and Acadians in south Louisiana and New Orleans, and Creoles, Negros, mulattoes, and Confederate veterans in Cane River country, Kate Chopin developed a literary realism that was in sharp contrast to sentimental romance of earlier fictional writing. Among her best known works were Bayou Folk and A Night in Acadie, collections of short stories set in the Louisiana Creole regions. She was a regular contributor to such periodicals as The Atlantic Monthly and The Century. Among the other magazines publishing her short stories were the Saturday Evening Post, Vogue, Youth's Companion and the Mirror.[13]

It was her second and last novel, The Awakening, that was most responsible for the recognition of the fact that

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[12]James, Notable Women, 1:334.

[13]Marie Fletcher, "The Southern Woman in the Fiction of Kate Chopin," Louisiana History 7 (1966):123; Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age, p. 297; Norris, "Kate Chopin," p. 7.

Kate Chopin's fiction was ". . . not merely superior to but importantly different from the body of second line local-color fiction produced in the South during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." Labled offensive and scandalously shocking at the time of publication, one reviewer found it not only indecent, but likely to poison public morality. To many of today's readers, Chopin's novel of a woman awakening to her needs and finding sexual fulfillment outside of her marriage would indeed seem ". . . a remarkable psychological portrayal, certainly without parallel in the southern literature of the time." No doubt mindful of the strong possibility that her novel would be received with hostility, Kate Chopin kept it from the press for over five years, allowing only close friends to read it.[14]

Kate Chopin died in August, 1904, at the age of fifty-three, from a brain hemorrhage. Comparing her writing with George Washington Cable, who often dealt with the same sources, one critic observed that ". . . Mrs. Chopin did not have Cable's subsequent influence on American letters, but she was the greater writer."[15]

Grace King's literary career began when she indignantly took up the challenge to counteract the portrait of Creole society as protrayed in the literature of Cable.[16] Born in

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[14]Richard Beale David, et. al., eds., Southern Writing 1585-1920, (New York: Odyssey Press, 1970), p. 810.

[15]James, Notable Women, 1:334.

New Orleans in 1853, Grace Elizabeth King was educated in the French speaking Creole schools, and she shared the view of most of the city's society that Cable, a native of New Orleans, ". . . had been well treated by its people, and yet he had stabbed the city in the back . . . in a dastardly way to please the Northern press."[17] Cable's romantic and colorful tales were widely read, and the haunting fiction created a great deal of interest in New Orleans. Many resented the invasion to their privacy in the Vieux Carre, ". . . but like it or not, they had to admit that most of the Vieux Carre landmarks that were tourist attactions and subjects of national magazine articles by the 1890's were the places . . . Cable had chosen as the scenes of his stories in the early 1880's."[18] It was the enlargement and embellishment, by later writers, of Cable's legends ". . . of Creoles, quadroons, pirates and voodoo . . ." that made romantic old New Orleans the center of ". . . a robust tourist industry."[19] The Latin Creoles of New Orleans were bitter over what they felt was a gross misreprensentation by Cable, and while they did not deny the existence of the "colored Creole" of New Orleans, they found it shocking that Cable gave them a leading

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[16]John S. Kendall, "A New Orleans Lady of Letters," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 19 (1936):450.

[17]King, Memories of a Southern Woman, p. 60.

[18]Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age, p. 284.

[19]Ibid.

role. Cable depicted them as having the same complex range of human emotions that ". . . had heretofore been reserved for white heroes and heroines. His indiscriminate use of the word 'Creole' to cover the colored Creoles as well as white French-speaking New Orleaneans was the sorest point of all . . . ."[20] Grace King was not a Creole but, as one who defended and spoke for the Latin Creoles she felt that Cable lacked an understanding of these people.

It was Richard Watsen Gilder, the New York editor of Century Magazine, which published much of Cable's work, whose words to King prompted her to write "our side" and not ". . . submit to Cable's libel in resignation."[21] While escorting her home from a New Orleans function, Gilder asked, "If Cable is so false to you, why do not some of you write better?"[22] She sat down the next morning and wrote "Monsieur Motte" and mailed it anonymously to the Century, only to have it returned without comment. Charles Dudley Warner, a Connecticut essayist, whom the Kings had entertained when he was assigned to write an article about New Orleans, was later able to sell the story to the New Princeton Review, and it was published in the January, 1886, issue.[23] In subsequent

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[20]Ibid., p. 286. Jackson believed that more to the point was that Cable's image of a Creole was contrary to the image that white, upper-class Creoles considered valid.

[21]King, Memories of a Southern Woman, p. 60.

[22]Ibid.

[23]Kendall, "A New Orleans Lady of Letters," pp. 449-51.

years, King achieved moderate success as a fiction writer with her short stories and novels. Writing during the waning vogue of local color, King's work was influenced by the eminent historian, and her father's closest friend, Charles Gayarre. With a romantic flair, she wrote of the past grandeur of the Latin Creole. The southern point of view is especially expressed in those stories that tell of the evils of Reconstruction and its effects on those who supported the old regime.[24]

As the interest in local color stories declined, Grace King turned to historical writing in 1892 when she was commissioned to write a biography of Bienville for the Makers of American Series. She authored a number of historical books and enjoyed a long association with the Louisiana Historical Society, serving for many years as its recording secretary, and then as a member of the advisory board of the society's Quarterly when it was initiated in 1917.[25] King was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts and Sciences in England, and as an Officier de Instructior Publique by the French government. In 1915, Tulane University conferred on her the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters.[26]

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[24] James, Notable Women, 2:331-32.

[25] "Death of Grace King," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 15 (1932):330-34, 343.

[26] King, Memories of a Southern Woman, pp. 357, 371; James, Notable Women, 2:332.

While her reputation declined on the national scene after the turn of the century, King remained an active part of the cultural life of New Orleans until her death in January, 1932. In April, 1923, the Louisiana Historical Society used the approach of King's seventieth birthday as an occasion to honor its illustrious member with a celebration. Notables overflowed into the halls and other rooms as the commemoration took the form of a social ovation. It was reported that "nothing like it has ever been witnessed in the ancient Sala Capitulaire of the Cabildo, consecrated as it is by the civic celebrations of the past two centuries."[27]

Journalism provided career opportunities for a number of Louisiana women. The first woman to draw a salary as a newspaper reporter in New Orleans was Martha Field, known to her readers as "Catherine Cole." Born in 1856 in New Orleans, she went to work for the New Orleans Picayune as a young woman. Before her untimely death at forty-two years of age, Field also worked on the New Orleans Times and for a brief period on the San Francisco Post. During her years as a leading writer and "star" of the Picayune, she was editor of the woman's department, covered the Chicago World's Fair in 1893, and made several trips to Europe on behalf of the New Orleans newspaper.[28]

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[27]"Grace King: Tribute of the Louisiana Historical Society", Louisiana Historical Quarterly 6 (1923):345.

[28]Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age, p. 294; Willard and Livermore, American Women, 3:288-89; Dabney, One Hundred Years, p. 306.

Throughout the state of Louisiana women demostrated a talent for journalism, and a number were involved in newspaper work. For over fourteen years a large part of the state profited from the practical agricultural information given by Mrs. S. V. Kentzei in the St. Tammany Farmer. Among other women active in the journalistic field were Susan Dupaty, owner and editor of the Pioneer in Assumption Parish; Addie McGarth of the Baton Rouge Truth; Mrs. M. L. Garner, owner and editor of the Lake Providence Banner and Marie Roussel, editor of Le Propagatoui Catholique of New Orleans. The New Orleans Democrat, owned by Mrs. Edward A. Burke, but managed by her husband, Colonel Edward Burke, employed a number of women. Among these, Bessie Bisland contributed to the Sunday paper under the nom de plume of B.L.R. Dane and edited the "Bric-a-Brac" column, which consisted of reviews and criticisms of the leading magazines. Jennie Coldwell Nixon served for a number of years as editor of the paper's society column. With such statewide interest in journalism, in May, 1885, a Woman's National Press Association was formed in New Orleans with Eliza Nicholson as its president.[29]

The desire of one young woman to find a means of expression through her poetry, culminated in her becoming the first woman in the Deep South to be the publisher of a daily newspaper. Born at the family home, located on the banks of the Pearl River, in Hancock County, Mississippi, Eliza Jane Pointevent

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[29]Stanton, History of Woman Suffrage, 3:798-99.

was the fifth of eight children born to William James Pointevent and Mary Amelia Russ. Due to her mother's poor health, Eliza was raised by an aunt and uncle who lived twenty miles from her birthplace. Growing up as the only while child in the area, she was dependent upon her resourses and imagination for entertainment. As a result the young girl developed a deep interest in nature. At the age of fifteen, Eliza entered the Female Seminary at Amite, Louisiana. The next three years were spent on a typical curriculum considered proper for a southern young lady, small doses of reading, writing, arithmetic, with a little foreign language and music. In later years she would recall the experience as an "useless education." In appearance, the eighteen year old Eliza was the model of southern femininity. Physically attractive, she was slim, with blue eyes, auburn hair, and tiny hands and feet.[30]

Eliza's love of nature was reflected in the poetry that she began writing when she was fourteen. After graduating from the Seminary in 1867, she hesitantly submitted her poems to the New York Home Journal, the New Orleans Picayune, and New Orleans Times. Her work was immediately accepted by these publications, and within two years she was included in an anthology of southern writers. Her poems were published

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[30]James Henry Harrison, Pearl Rivers: Publisher of the Picayune, (New Orleans: Department of Journalism, Tulane University, 1932), pp. 7,9; James, Notable Women, 2:630.

under the name of Pearl Rivers, a name adopted from the river that she often referred to as "the river I love so much."[31]

On a visit to her grandfather, Samual Russ, Eliza met Colonel Alva Morris Holbrook, owner and editor of the Picayune. He offered her the position of literary editor of the Picayune at a salary of twenty-five dollars per week. Her family strongly objected to the prospects of a young lady entering the world of tobacco-reeking, shirt-sleeved men. Rejecting their disapproval, Eliza moved to New Orleans around 1870, thus becoming the first Louisiana woman to earn a living by working on a newspaper. In addition to expanding the book review section of the newspaper, she introduced fiction, art, and fashions as features in the Picayune. Her own poems continued to be published in the paper, along with those of many other poets, dead and alive. Her prose delighted her readers, and her earliest signed article appeared in the 19 February 1871 edition of the paper. Covering three columns, it described a trip to Mississippi and the quality of this article was such that it was subsequently recommended as profitable reading for "any student of English."[32]

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[31]Dabney, One Hundred Years, pp. 261-62; James, Notable Woman, 2:630.

[32]James A. Renshaw, "Eliza Jane Pointevent Nicholson ('Pearl River'): A Bit of a Tribute," Louisiana Historical Quarterly 6 (1923):582; Harrison, Pearl Rivers, p. 10; Dabney, One Hundred Years, pp. 261-263.

Holbrook's admiration for Eliza's literary talents soon turned to love and in May, 1872, the Colonel and Eliza were married; she was twenty-three, he was sixty four. Soon after, Eliza was the victim of an unfortunate accident. Holbrook's earlier marriage had ended in divorce and his former wife had moved to New York. Upon hearing of his marriage, the former wife returned to New Orleans, and, overcome by hatred and jealously, she entered the Holbrook home on the morning of 17 June 1872. Finding the young bride alone in her bedroom, she fired two shots at her with a revolver, and, missing at point-blank range, the demented woman proceeded to beat Eliza about the head with a bottle of bay rum. Saved by the timely entrance of two servants, Eliza fled, bleeding, to the safety of a neighbor. At this point the woman seized an ax from the yard, and destroyed much of the furniture in the house.[33]

This incident was followed in the next year by adverse business developments for Holbrook. Having sold the Picayune early in 1872, he was forced to buy back the heavily-indebted newspaper late in 1873. For the next three years Holbrook struggled to keep the paper going, and when he died in 1876, the Picayune owed eighty thousand dollars in debts.[34]

Encouraged by her family and friends to declare bankruptcy, the twenty-seven year old widow chose to carry on as

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[33]Dabney, One Hundred Years, p. 265.

[34]Ibid., Harrison, Pearl Rivers, p. 15.

publisher of the newspaper. The new banner on the paper proclaimed: "Mrs. A. M. Holbrook, proprietor; George W. Lloyd, managing editor; George Nicholson, business manager."[35] The realization of tasks ahead, the decisions to be made, and the thought of the many men who would now look to her for orders caused the new proprietor to have many anxious moments. She later recalled, "I never felt so little, so weak, so inadequate."[36]

Quickly responding to the challenge, she called the entire staff together and announced that those who did not want to work for a woman were free to leave, with no ill feelings. She closed with a question to those who chose to stay. "Will you give me your undivided loyality, and will you advise me truly and honestly?" While a few left, the majority remained, and loyal they were. It was reported that the chief editorial writer, Jose Quintero, polished his dueling pistols and sent out word that if anyone desired satisfaction for anything published in the Picayune, he was available.[37]

Shortly after Eliza became the first woman publisher of an important daily newspaper, the business manager, George Nicholson, became a part owner. Again a business arrangement developed into a personal relationship, and two years later, in June of 1878, they were married. From this union Eliza bore two sons, Leonard and Yorke.[38]

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[35]Dabney, One Hundred Years, p. 266.

[36]James, Notable Women, 2:631.

[37]Dabney, One Hundred Years, p. 266.

The newspaper flourished under the combined managment of the Nicholsons. Eliza continued as active editor of the paper, and her husband supervised the business matters. Contrary to the prophecies of the more pessimistic, the woman publisher ". . . went on no wild tangents . . ." and showed an extraordinary ability in choosing associates.[39] Two worthy examples were the two ex-Union Army officers who had previously worked on the New Orleans Republican, the pro-Union newspaper published during Reconstruction. These two able newsmen were hired despite strong criticism and their enormous contributions helped to make the Picayune a success.[40] Perhaps Eliza's greatest contribution as editor was the evolution of the Picayune into a family newspaper. Departments for women and children were added, and, in time, features on fashions, medical advice, household hints, theatre gossip, comic sketches, and a department for complaints were included.[41]

The inclusion of a society column created the greatest stir among the Picayune readers. While society columns were not new in other sections of the country, it was a daring innovation for a New Orleans newspaper. A buzzing bee decorated the column, a whimsical bee ". . . whose hum, hum,

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[38]James, Notable Women, 2:631.

[39]Dabney, One Hundred Years, p. 267.

[40]The ex-Union Army officers were Majors Nathaniel Burbank and Henry Robinson.

[41]James, Notable Women, 2:631.

humming, buzz, buzz, buzzing, began so long ago that the memory of the oldest inhabitant runneth not back to the contrary. It was a gossipy little creature, and when of the genuine stock . . . has no sting . . . ."[42] The bee buzzed from one social event to another gathering social news, and his journey always ended with a knock at the window of the "old lady of the Picayune," to whom he recited the latest news. The amusing conversational style between the bee and the "old lady" received an unappreciative response from the "best people" in New Orleans. In time, New Orleans society would be delighted to see their names mentioned, and were eager to be included in the column. In these early columns, however, indignation over this invasion of their privacy provoked a number of notes to the editor. As the bee related on its next visit to the "old lady," one critic thought it was ". . . very wrong to mention any lady's name in the newspaper. She said it was 'shabby' and 'shoddy and shameful!"[43]

For many years the personality and influence of Eliza Nicholson was expressed in New Orleans through the pages of the Picayune and in the many benevolent programs that she ardently supported. By the time of her death in 1896, the Picayune had developed into a newspaper containing many of the elements found in a modern syndicate-served newspaper, and this came about in an era when many contemporary journals

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[42] New Orleans Daily Picayune, 16 March 1879.

[43] Ibid., 23 March 1879.

had made little progress beyond the tedious and dull journalism of the Civil War era. She died from influenza, at the age of forty-six, only ten days after her husband had died from the same disease.[44]

As the 19th century faded, another Louisiana contribution to journalistic stardom appeared in the form of a tiny New Orleans newspaperwoman. Barely five feet tall, and weighing only ninety pounds, Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer, Eliza Nicholson's "bright little next door neighbor," began her newspaper career in 1894 as a newspaper "roustabout." Her first assignment was to ferret out births and deaths for the vital statistics column; salary, six dollars a week.[45] Two years later she began a column for women that would evolve into the internationally famous "Dorothy Dix Talks" column, that during the next fifty years would span four continents and eventually be read daily by over sixty million people, men as well as women. Born the year the Civil War started, Gilmer's lifespan covered four wars. On her death in December of 1951, newspapers from most of the nations around the world carried full stories on her life. During her life, she was ridiculed or honored in cartoons from the New Yorker, Judge, and Leslies' Weekly, and written about by Heywood Broun, Ogden Nash, Ernie Pyle, Arthur Brisbane and Irvin S. Cobb.

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[44]James, Notable Women, 2:631.

[45]Harnett T. Kane, Dear Dorothy Dix: The Story of a Compassionate Woman (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1952), pp. 50-51.

"Dear Dorothy Dix" was sung about in popular songs and musical reviews and written about in essays and poems. At her death she left an estate of nearly two and a half million dollars, wealth accumulated entirely from her professional earnings. This sum has been equaled by few writers, either men or women, even in the days of inflated money.[46] While her column was itself a social phenomenon, there is perhaps no where else to be found a clearer picture of the societal changes in the attitudes of and about women than that which emerges from the columns of Dorothy Dix.

Elizabeth Meriwether was born on a farm on the border between Kentucky and Tennessee in 1861. Although she graduated, at sixteen from a female academy, she would claim, in later years, that her real education came from the yellow pages of the classics found in the family library. She was taught to read by a ". . . half-demented old man, a pensioner of my grandfather's and the prototype of Mr. Dick in David Copperfield." Before she was twelve years of age she could recite from memory passages by Shakespeare, Scott, and Dickens, and had read Fielding, Richardson, and Smollett.[47]

Elizabeth later recalled that after she graduated from school she ". . . tucked up my hair and got married, as was the tribal custom among my people."[48] She expected to settle down

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[46]Ibid., pp. 9, 11-12.

[47]Dorothy Dix. This is a small, bound, five page booklet found in the Louisiana Room, Tulane University. No author is given, and no date, publisher or page numbers. Hereafter it will be referred to as Dorothy Dix.

and live on "Main Street" as a main streeter, but fate would have it otherwise. Within a short time catastrophe struck. Her marriage to young George Gilmer, which had seemed so promising only a short time before, now loomed as impending disaster. Sinking into grim moods, George would often disappear for a day or so, then just as suddenly, he would regain a measure of stability. Since he was unable to sustain an interest in any position for any period of time, Elizabeth was forced to accompany George from one town to another in Tennessee and then on to Birmingham, often suffering not only from despair, but actual hunger. Whether from financial or psychological desperation, Elizabeth slowly returned to an earlier interest in writing. In 1886, when she was twenty-five, she started sending stories to newspapers, only to have her first offerings rejected. As her stories began to find an acceptance from the editors of a number of papers, including the New Orleans Picayune and the Nashville American, the few dollars that they produced were, no doubt, a welcome addition to the satisfaction of seeing her stories appear in print under the name Elizabeth M. Gilmer, or E. M. Gilmer.[49]

Domestic affairs continued to deteriorate until Elizabeth fled to her family in such a physical and mental condition that the Meriwethers were compelled, despite recent reverses in their own finances, to take her to the Mississippi Gulf Coast

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[48]Ibid.

[49]Kane, Dear Dorothy Dix, pp. 42-45.

to regain her health. It was there, as Elizabeth later related, that ". . . destiny—and I believe in Kismet as implicily as any Mohammedam—put me into the house next door to Mrs. Nicholson." The owner and publisher of the Picayune was drawn to the young woman and as Elizabeth slowly recovered her health, the two women shared many afternoon teas and after dinner talks. One day, after reading a story Elizabeth had written about how a Mr. Dicks had saved the family silver during the Civil War, Nicholson exclaimed, "Why, child you can write,"[50] and immediately bought the story. A year passed, more and more stories were accepted by the Picayune, and her health continued to improve. Elizabeth came to realize, more and more, that she must provide a means to support herself. The next logical step was to apply for a job on the Picayune.[51]

It did not take long, after she was hired, for Elizabeth to recognize that she had a natural "passion" for newspaper work. She began learning the craft with a fanatical zeal, pouring over workbooks and books of synonyms, dissecting the works of leading newspaper writers, and following big stories from all parts of the country. She remembered that, "I lived newspapers, I ate newspapers, I dreamed newspapers . . . ."[52]

When the editors decided that Elizabeth was ready to write a Sunday column of her own, thought had to be given as

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[50]Ibid. [51]Ibid.

[52]Dorothy Dix.

to what kind of a column she should write. The events that followed are perhaps one of the best examples that one might give of the change that had taken place in women and in women's place in society during the post Reconstruction period and of how women saw themselves as the nineteenth century drew to a close. Eliza Nicholson first thought that Elizabeth might write the kind of pieces that Fanny Fern had done so successfully. Elizabeth recalled that as she and Nicholson picked through the "syrupy" pages of Fanny's books, ". . . urging women to suffer and be strong, to hold fast to the male oak which would support the vine, . . . Mrs. Nicholson fairly shrieked: 'Stop it!' We saw that the ideas of women were far, far away from what they were then."[53]

When she returned to her rooming house, Elizabeth thought about the problem. She later recalled that:

> . . . it came to me that everything in the world had been written about women and for women, except the truth. They had been celebrated as angels. They had been pitied as martyrs. They had been advised to be human doormats. I knew that women knew they were not angels, and that they were tired of being martyr and doormats. They were fed up on fulsome flattery and weary of suffering and being strong.
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> So I began writing for my sex the truth, as I have seen it, about the relationship of men and women.[54]

Major Nathaniel Burbank, the managing editor, solved the problem of a title for the column; it would be "Sunday Salad." As he explained, it would have "A base of crisp, fresh ideas, over them a dressing mixed of oil of kindness, vinegar of

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[53]Kane, Dear Dorothy Dix, p. 59.

[54]Dorothy Dix.

satire, salt of wit; at the end, a dash of paprika of doing things." Now all that was needed was a new name for Elizabeth, for one was not expected to use one's own name. It seemed to be advisable to follow the examples of Catherine Coles, Jenny Jones, and the Fanny Ferns, and have the first and last name begin with the same letter. Seeing an opportunity to rid herself of the hated nickname "Lizzie," Elizabeth gave the matter serious thought. To her, the name Dorothy had a certain dignity and remembering the "Mr. Dicks" of her childhood, she thought that "Dorothy Dix" had a nice sound. So the matter of the name was settled, and she became Dorothy Dix to her friends as well as to her readers; even to eventually referring to herself in that way, signing personal letters as "Dorothy" or "Dolly."[55]

Columns "Dished up by Dorothy Dix as a Relish for a Feast," or "Mixed for a Sunday Dinner Relish," as Burbank continued to emphasize the salad motif, met with almost instant success. Soon letters began to arrive at the Picayune from the women of New Orleans, telling Dorothy how much they liked what she had to say. Arriving first one or two at a time, and then in small batches, they were a delight to Dorothy and the Major. Then, the tone of the letters began to change. Troubled women and girls, writing in tears, had sensed that here was a woman who understood their problems; could she perhaps tell them what to do? "Dear Mrs. or Miss

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[55]Kane, Dorothy Dix, pp. 59-60, 67-69.

Dix" was the way they started and so began the appeals that would be repeated for the rest of her life. These first letters were written in fear and desperation with the added plea, ". . . please, under no circumstances, tell the name to anyone . . . . Burn up this letter the minute you read it, . . ." or specifically the writer ". . . could not stand the humiliation, . . . "and if her identity, in anyway, was known the writer . . . would have to kill herself."[56]

No longer did the "Dorothy Dix" signature appear at the botton of the column, and the heading of "Sunday Salad" was dropped. It was now to be "Dorothy Dix Talks of Women We Know." Soon, men were observed to be reading the articles, and letters from men begin to trinkle into the paper. Only to comment at first, request for advice would come later, the letters from men would take the form of "Keep up the good work," "I quoted what you said to Mamie, and that helped," "Do you know you are writing the first sensible advice . . . ." Now that the column's appeal was not limited to women, the next step was the shorter and simpler "Dorothy Dix Talks," the name by which the column would be known for the next fifty years.[57]

After awhile, newspapers around the South began to pick up her column, and as her fame spread several small syndicates began reprinting her work, and northern newspapers carried stories on the young writer. Four years after she began her

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[56]Ibid., pp. 67-68. [57]Ibid., p. 69.

career with the Picayune, one of the most important newspapermen in the country, William Randolph Hearst, asked Dorothy to join the staff of the New York Journal. Reluctant to leave New Orleans but unable to resist a salary offer of five thousand dollars a year, almost three times her Picayune wages and more than the salary of the governor of Louisiana, Dorothy left New Orleans for New York.[58]

On the Journal, in addition to writing her "Talks" column, Dorothy wrote human interest stories and covered all the big murder trials of the day. Covering the famous Thaw, the Patrick, the Nan Patterson, and Ruth Wheeler trials, and dozens more, Dorothy earned the reputation of the country's "greatest crime reporter." She remained with the Journal for twenty years, and then, in order to devote full time to the "Talks" column, she transferred to the Wheeler Syndicate, then to the Ledger Syndicate, and finally to the Bell Syndicate. For most of her Journal years Dix lived in New York, frequently going back to New Orleans. In 1917 she returned permanently to New Orleans, from where she continued to write her syndicated column.[59]

Despite the advice of her friends and family, Dix remained married to George Gilmore until his death, financing his various projects undertaken in more stable times. Traveling a number of times abroad, and one time around the globe, Dorothy had

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[58]Ibid., p. 97; Dorothy Dix.

[59]Kane, Dear Dorothy Dix, pp. 231, 238, 304; Dorothy Dix.

a special fondness for the Orient.[60] In the 1920's she was delighted when she was chosen as a member of the board of directors of the Times Picayune,[61] and in 1927, Tulane University awarded Dix the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters.[62] In June of the following year, thousands of New Orleaneans poured into City Park to honor "New Orleans's First Lady" the "City's Best Beloved Citizen" and ". . . the world's best loved writer."[63] By this time Dix was earning more than $50,000 a year, and greater wealth lay in the future.[64] She continued writing her column until she was eighty-seven years of age, three years before her death. In April of 1950, Dix suffered a stroke and spent the last twenty-one months of her life at Touro Infirmary, where she died quietly in December, 1951, shortly after her ninetieth birthday.[65]

While the Dorothy Dix columns carried a variety of views from her readers, her personal feelings about the relationship between men and women remained fairly constant throughout her life. Dorothy wanted women to vote and have the rights of full citizenship, but she frowned on the woman who saw all men as enemies. She encouraged the woman unlucky enough to have

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[60]Kane, Dear Dorothy Dix, p. 321.

[61]Ibid., p. 233.

[62]Undated clipping, Woman's Club Scrapbook, Department of Archives, Tulane University.

[63]Ibid., Kane, Dear Dorothy Dix, p. 244.

[64]Kane, Dear Dorothy Dix, p. 232.

[65]Ibid., pp. 315-16.

to make her way alone, but at the same time she discouraged her from thinking that it was the ideal way. On the whole, Dorothy generally concluded, a husband around the house was a pretty good thing to have.[66]

The "Talks" columns are of particular interest as a barometer of the changes in the attitudes of women throughout the decades. Long before many of the women readers dared to articulate their thought in any other forum, they poured out their true feelings to Dorothy Dix. For a comparison between the Louisiana woman at the end of the 1890's and women prior to 1879, one need only to read those columns published near the end of the century. The realization that these columns were so widely read and accepted in New Orleans that they would catapult Dorothy Dix into international fame indicates that many agreed with the views that Dix expressed in her column. Her readers saw the wisdom in the column written about the young bride who wept because her husband complained of her cooking. Dorothy's answer as to what this meant was:

> It means you have married a man instead of an archangel. You needn't cry; you probably wouldn't have found an angel very congenial. But you have got to come to a realization that the man who told you he would make your life a dream of bliss, filled with light and perfume, has forgotten he ever said it, and expects you to, too. . . . He wants his dinner on time, and his house as economically managed as if he had married any of the domestic and homely girls he ever looked at.
>
> 'Doesn't he love me still?'
>
> Surely. Nevertheless I advise you to read the papers and buy a good cookbook.[67]

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[66] Ibid., p. 61. [67] Ibid., pp. 61-62.

Dorothy's eager readers apparently supported the enlightened views she expressed in a typical column:

> The other Sunday I went to church and the preacher took the woman question for his text. He went over the old ground and told how woman ought never to leave the sacred precincts of home and how when she went out into the world to battle with men for money, she unsexed herself and killed the chivalry every man cherished for his ideal of womanhood. Do you know what I wanted to do? I wanted to stand right up there and talk out in the meeting . . . . I wanted to say: There are many thousands more women than men in the country. Are the superfluous multitudes of us to sit on the curbstones and suck our thumbs until some man comes along?
>
> I wanted to ask him if it was nobler to stay in the sacred precincts of home and starve, or be the object of grudging charity, then it was to earn an honest, independent living. Finally, I wanted to tell him that chivalry isn't dead, and that no one sees more of it than the working woman. The chivalry that prompts a man to give his women employees reasonable hours and fair wages, and that shows them invariable courtesy, may not be as romantic and picturesque as that which sent a knight into the list with his lady's glove on his helmet, but it's a good deal more to the point, nowadays.[68]

The above column reflects an open-mindness that would have found little acceptance in 1879. It serves as a gauge of the effectiveness and success of the pioneer generation of women in moving Louisiana women into a more realistic and just place in society.

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[68]Ibid., p. 61.

CHAPTER VII

WOMEN IN CIVIC AFFAIRS

At the turn of the century and in the first quarter of the 1900's, a well known trio was frequently seen at public functions in New Orleans, the socially prominent Gordon sisters, Frances, Kate, and Jean. Kate and Jean Gordon were the most active and best known of the women involved in the woman's movement and other social reforms of this era. Their father, George Hume Gordon, an emigrant from Scotland, was a teacher. For a number of years he operated his own school, the Gordon Academy, but after 1871, and until his retirement, Gordon served as the principal of the Jackson's Boys' School. Their mother, also a teacher, was from a socially prominent New Orleans' family, and her five children were accepted by the most exclusive clubs in New Orleans. Their two brothers, both successful and respected business men, were also active in New Orleans civic affairs.[1]

The role of Frances, the oldest daughter, was that of a silent partner. While Kate and Jean battled with legislators, secured signatures on petitions, founded charitable institutions, and raised funds for these and other institutions; Fannie, as

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[1] New Orleans Item, 13 February 1939; James, Notable Women, 2:64-65; New Orleans Times Picayune, 25 and 26 February 1931; Ibid., 4 January 1931.

she was called, ". . . kept the home fires burning. . . ."[2] She encouraged and supported her sisters with her presence at public functions, but she seemed the happiest when supervising and presiding over their home.[3] One woman, who knew the three sisters in their later years, remembers frequently hearing references to the fact that Kate and Jean usually talked over plans with Fannie before making decisions.[4]

Kate Gordon believed that woman's suffrage would benefit all of society and devoted a large part of her wealth, energy, and time to this cause. Jean took a more direct approach in solving the social evils of her time. It was Jean who first became interested in social service. In 1888, her fiancee, Edward Jennings, died, and as a means of dealing with her grief she joined the Charity Organization Society.[5] As a volunteer in this organization, her attention was drawn to the conditions suffered by working children, some as young as eleven years of age, and she decided that reform in this area was imperative. In 1896, she persuaded the Era Club to set up a committee to investigate child labor. Presenting the committee's finding to the 1896 legislature, she asked for new laws to regulate child labor and to allow women to be appointed as factory

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[2]Undated clipping, New Orleans Scrapbook, Louisiana Room, Tulane University.

[3]New Orleans Item, 13 February 1931.

[4]Interview with Corinne Dabezies Wilkinson, 13 February 1982.

[5]E. E. Moise, "Jean Gordon," New Orleanian, March 1931, p. 15.

inspectors. Even though she was aided by Lieutenant Governor Jared Y. Sanders, the legislature refused to act. Undaunted, Jean waged a vigorous educational campaign in the newspapers throughout the state and urged people to visit and write their representatives. Unable to ignore this crusade, the legislators passed the Child Labor Act of 1906, and amended the state constitution to permit women to serve as factory inspectors. Among the new appointments, Jean Gordon was appointed as the first woman factory inspector in New Orleans, a position she held until 1911.[6]

Within a short time, Jean realized that a more stringent law was needed and drafted a new bill. She and other women, toured the state, speaking in behalf of a new law. Opposition came primarily from the cotton mill owners, with the canning industry interests being a close second. Testifying before various legislative committees, representatives from these groups described working conditions in their plants in such glowing terms that Jean later recalled that "one, not knowing any better, would have been convinced that the most healthful, remunerative, educational place in the entire world in which to develop children was in a mill or oyster cannery. One fairly tingled to spend the rest of life shucking oysters or peeling shrimp."[7] The New child Labor Law was adopted after

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[6]New Citizen, March 1914, p. 3; James, Notable Women, 2:65; Ida Husted Harper, ed., History of Woman Suffrage, 6:221. Beginning with volume 5, Ida Harper is the editory of volumes 5 and 6 of History of Suffrage.

the longest and most bitterly fought contest of the 1908 legislature. Gordon and her co-workers were exhausted after seven weeks of pleading and arguing "with men, most of them fathers, for a law to protect little children from the greed and neglect of those who should protect them . . . ."[8]

The bill Jean Gordon drafted called for a nine-hour day for women and children. When she and her committee arrived in Baton Rouge, they learned that a labor group was introducing a bill calling for a ten-hour day for women and children in the factories and mills. At the same time the labor group introduced another bill calling for an eight-hour day for railway clerks. Gordon later noted with sarcasm how much harder was the work of an adult man to write figures in a book while sitting in a comfortable office than that of women and children standing all day as they watched as many as fifteen shuttles go back and forth. The nine-hour day became the focus of a raging battle. When both bills were finally sent to committee, the Gordon bill was pigeon-holed and the labor group's bill was amended to provide a nine-hour day for women and children and was reported out of committee. Even with this amendment, the women were greatly distured over this turn of event: the word "mill" was conspicuously absent

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[7]Jean Gordon, "The Forward Step in Louisiana." Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 23 (1909):163; James, Notable Women, 2:65.

[8]Gordon, "The Forward Step in Louisiana," p. 163.

from the bill; there were no safety or sanitation regulations in the bill; and penalty provisions for violations were arranged in a manner that placed enforcement out of jurisdiction of every state court. The women were able to produce a compromise. By waiving the nine-hour day, they were able to restore many of the original provisions of their bill, and a promise from the governor that he would call a conference of all southern governors, labor organizations, manufacturers, and representatives from the women's clubs in order to set a uniform work day.[9]

Among the provisions of the bill in its final form was one making it illegal to employ anyone under fourteen years of age. Next to the nine-hour day, the age limit provision had been the most bitterly fought provision. Another clause made it prima facie evidence of guilt if any child under fourteen was seen hanging around an establishment, and a penalty was provided if any employer gave warning of the approach of a factory inspector.[10]

The following year, Jean Gordon, assisted by now Governor Jared Sanders and Mayor Martin Behrman of New Orleans, was successful in persuading governors of southern states to call a conference to study the issue of child labor. The conference was surprisingly successful, and the conferees agreed to meet annually. By 1912, a number of uniform child labor laws had been passed in the southern states, and Jean Gordon had received

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[9]Ibid., pp. 163-64. [10]Ibid., p. 165.

national recognition for her work in this field. From 1909 to 1911, she was president of the Southern Conference of Woman and Child Labor.[11]

It was while working with child labor problems that Jean Gordon became interested in the mentally retarded. As factory inspector she had frequently encountered young girls known as "repeaters". These were girls who were unable to hold a job in a factory, and drifted from factory to factory until they frequently ended up as prostitutes. Upon investigation, Gordon found that often the source of their maladjustment was feeble-mindedness. As board chairman for the establishment of the Milne Asylum for Destitute Orphan Girls, she suggested that the community might be better served by a home for retarded girls. However, it was not until 1919 that the Alexander Milne Home for Girls was established. This took place only after Jean, in searching through city records, found a long-forgotten clause in the Milne records that allowed the board to divert funds, orginally left in the Milne will for a home for orphan girls, to a home to care for the feeble-minded. The Milne Home was both a training school and a detention home for retarded girls and as such was a pioneer institution in this field in Louisiana. Although a state law was passed in 1918 creating an institution for the care of the feeble-minded, no funds were appropriated. The first state institution did

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[11] New Citizen, March 1914, p. 3; James, Notable Women, 2:65.

not open until 1921. Until her death in 1931, Jean Gordon was president of the board and in 1925 became superintendent and moved into the home.[12]

As an authority in this field, Gordon was appointed, in 1922, as a member of the board of the State Colony and Training School for the Feebleminded. For some time, she and others who worked with welfare and charitable organizations recognized a need for professionally trained workers. In 1914 they succeeded in establishing such a training program when the School of Applied Sociology opened in New Orleans. Gordon was a field supervisor and lectured at the school. Her other activities in this area included assisting in the establishment of: the Federation of Non-Sectarian Charity and Philanthropy in 1914; the New Orleans Central Council of Social Engineers in 1919; and the New Orleans Day Nursery. The Day Nursery was established as a result of an incident that occurred while Jean was inspecting a factory. As a fire engine passed the factory, a young mother started screaming. She later explained that she had no one with whom to leave her three children, and she had locked them in a room in her home. When she had heard the fire engine, she was afraid the house was afire. Upon hearing this, Gordon arranged for a room at the Kingsley House (a settlement house) to be set

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[12] "History of Money Left By Alexander Milne," complied by various members of the Board of Directors, pp. 6, 8-9, 13-14. Found at Milne Home for Girls, New Orleans, Louisiana.

aside for a day nursery. This was the beginning of the Day Nursery, and Jean served as its president for a number of years.[13]

The esteem that the people of New Orleans held for Jean Gordon was demonstrated upon her death in February, 1931. In recognition of her service as director of the Louisiana State Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, The National Humane Review reprinted a signed tribute from Dorothy Dix that had earlier appeared in the New Orleans press. The tribute, covering several columns, stated in part:

> Jean Gordon is dead.
>
> When that sorrowful news flashed over New Orleans yesterday morning a sob welled up in the throat of the whole city, and men and women, even those who did not know her personally, turned to each other with dimmed eyes and asked: "What shall we do without her? Who can carry on the great work of which she was the inspiration? . . . In her death New Orleans had not only lost one of its greatest daughters but perhaps its most useful citizen.
>
> The admiration and reverence in which she was held was attested by the throng that came to pay their tribute to her . . . all day long and half the night there passed by a procession of men and women as varied as her contacts in life had been. Rich and poor, high and low; men and women from the avenue, men and women from the gutters; society ladies and working girls, famous professional men and slouching boys; white and black, all came to say good-by to Miss Jean. And in the background a pathetic little group of girls with vacant faces, and bewildered eyes vaguely sensing that their best friend was gone. The girls whom the dead woman had mothered and who called her Mother Jean.
>
> And some of us who had knew Jean for half a lifetime gathered apart and with broken voices recounted our little reminiscences of her. We spoke of how we first remembered her, a radiantly beautiful young girl, fond of gayety and amusement, a favorite in society . . . . We spoke of the

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[13] New Orleans Times-Picayune, 25 August 1940; James, Notable Women, 2:65.

> deepening of her life and of her growing more interested in bettering the conditions of humanity . . . of her work for the enfranchisement of women . . . .
>
> But mostly we spoke of Milne, the home for the feeble-minded girls, which was her life work and for which she literally gave her life.

The tribute continued as it told of how Jean, in founding the Milne Home, financed the first buildings on "a shoestring". From an old, abandoned hut, donated by the state, she built a dormitory. Shown how to wreck the hut by one man, she borrowed trucks from another to haul it to New Orleans. There, carpenters, bricklayers, and plasters donated their time to construct the building. Lumber, windows, gravel, sand, and other material was given, ". . . until the building reared itself a monument to a woman's tact and personality, and persuasiveness, and her almost fanatical belief in the righteousness of her cause." When the building was completed, Jean kept the home operating in spite of inadequate funding, feeding and clothing the girls who found shelter there.[14]

During her long years of social service, Jean Gordon maintained a deep interest in suffrage for women, serving as Era Club president in 1903-1904 and president of the Louisiana Woman Suffrage Association in 1913-1920. It was, however, Kate Gordon who led the way in this area. The earliest evidence of the Gordons' interest in political action is their participation in the anti-lottery campaign of 1891. In later years the president of the Woman's Anti-lottery League recalled

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[14] National Humane Review, May 1931, p. 35.

that when she called a meeting to organize the woman's league, the Gordon sisters were among the first to appear at her home. It was the events that took place in 1898-99, however, that first won for Kate the acclaim and graditude of many citizens of New Orleans. The national suffrage leaders were so impressed with her accomplishments that only two years later she was elected as corresponding secretary of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, a position that required a temporary move to the suffrage headquarters in New York City.[15]

When a state constitutional convention met in New Orleans in 1898, the Era Club decided to try once again to have an amendment added to the Constitution that would allow full suffrage rights for women. On the day that the convention's suffrage committee met, New Orleans was flooded by a deluge. The submerged streets prevented most of the interested women from attending, and only four women, Mrs. Lewis S. Graham, Katherine Noble, and Kate and Jean Gordon appeared before the committee. Graham addressed the committee and presented a petition on behalf of the concerned women. At her request, Carrie Chapman Catt, from the national suffrage association, was invited to address the full Convention. For several days a number of committee members appear to have been seriously interested in women's suffrage as a means of insuring white supremacy.[16]

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[15]James, Notable Women, 2:65; New Orleans Times Picayune, 25 August 1940; New Orleans Daily Picayune, 7 July 1901.

Despite this factor, and near unanimous attendance by members of the Constitutional Convention at Catt's speech, the only clause added to the new Constitution stated; "All taxpaying women shall have the right to vote in person or by proxy on all questions of taxation."[17] Writing to a friend, shortly after the convention, Caroline Merrick's remarks reflected the bitter disappointment felt by many Louisiana women. She stated:

> I am so dead tired and heart-sore that I almost wish I were lying quiet in my grave waiting for the resurrection! God help all women, young and old! They are a man-neglected, God-forgotten lot, here in Louisiana, when they ask simply for a reasonable recognition, and justice under the Constitution now being constructed, and under which they must be governed and pay taxes. We pray in vain, work always in vain. How that grand old martyr, Susan Anthony, can still hold out is a marvel. The Convention has apparently forgotten the women. They discuss the needs of every man and his qualification for the ballot. Yet, good women brought such men into the world to keep other women in subjection and minority forever! Still, they love that sinner, man, better than their own souls—and I know they will continue that way until the end. But it is hard lines to be kept waiting. The dead can wait, but we cannot! Oh, Lord, how long![18]

Not only was women's gain slight, but the new Constitution took from women the small concession given them in the 1879 Constitution permitting the appointment of school boards. Article 112 of the new Constitution contained a clause stating that only qualified voters could hold any office. This eliminated

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[16]Merrick, <u>Old Times in Dixie Land</u>, p. 223; Anthony, <u>History of Woman Suffrage</u>, 4:680.

[17]Anthony, <u>History of Woman Suffrage</u>, 4:681.

[18]Merrick, <u>Old Times in Dixie Land</u>, p. 223-24.

the few women who held school board positions in rural districts. A number of women had held the office of state librarian prior to 1898.[19] Article 112 would be the focus for heated battles in the following years, as women sought to have it removed from the Constitution.

Within the year after taxpaying women were given the limited right to vote, women, led by Kate Gordon, took this meager concession and turned it into a glowing victory for those who argued that allowing women to vote was not only simply justice but would be of great benefit to society. The women saw the new voting right as an opportunity to solve a problem that had long plagued New Orleans. The saucer-shaped city, with a population of 300,000, was situated between the Mississippi River and Lake Pontchartrain, and suffered what was probably the most severe drainage problem of any American city. The water table was only four to six feet below the surface of the ground, and periodic floods, with water often three feet in some streets, caused untold misery. Equally serious was the city's water and sewage problems, and since the drainage problems had to be solved before the city could lay water or sewage pipes, the problems were closely related. With the public "accustomed to the shortcoming of their facilities" and hostile to the idea of new taxes, the city had abdicated its responsibility for the city's sanitary welfare. Municipal

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[19] Anthony, History of Woman Suffrage, 4:687-88.

services had been contracted to private firms. At times volunteer groups, such as the Auxilary Sanitary Association had attempted to clean, flush, and repair the city's gutters.[20]

The women felt that the answer was for the city to levy a property tax that would provide the funds for adequate drainage, water, and sewage systems for the city. Since there were a large number of taxpaying women in New Orleans, it was thought that surely these women could be counted on to recognize the need for the tax. It would be necessary, however, to plan an educational campaign. The Era Club called a mass meeting for women, at which time prominent community leaders spoke, emphasizing the great need to correct the dangerous conditions caused by inadequate drainage, water, and sewage systems. During the meeting, it was decided to form a Woman's League for Sewage and Drainage. Kate Gordon was chosen as president of the new league.[21]

Before the tax election could be held, it was necessary to petition the city administration. The law required that the petition be signed by one half of the property owners in the city. From her private funds, Gordon paid $100 to obtain a list of women property owners. But this was only the first step. On the tax rolls were 15,000 names of women who owned property, but no addresses were given. The magnitude of the

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[20]Jackson, New Orleans in the Gilded Age, pp. 147-48. A tax election held in 1886, only 2 years before women taxpayers were permitted to vote, was defeated.

[21]Anthony, History of Woman Suffrage, 4:682.

task of finding 15,000 addresses would have overwhelmed anyone with less determination than Kate Gordon and her small band of workers, as the rolls listed a person as owner ". . . of such and such pieces of property in such and such boundaries."[22] At last armed with names and addresses, the women were ready to gather signatures on the necessary petition. Dividing the lists of names into wards, a chairman was appointed in each ward and she, in turn, designated a lieutenant in each precinct. Numerous parlor meetings were held throughout New Orleans, in homes of the rich, the middle class, and the poor. On several occasions mass meetings were held, attended by both men and women. At these meetings "good speakers" called attention to the necessity for the election.[23] When the proper number of signatures were on the petition, the mayor called an election. Not all the names on the petition were those of women, but as one New Orleans newspaper reported, "It is unanimously conceded, as incontestably proven by facts, that but for the number of signatures of women sent to the mayor the election never would have been called."[24]

Encouraged by their success with the petition, the "handful" of women in the Sewage and Drainage League tackled the problem of winning the tax election. Since the new law

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[22]Ibid.

[23]New Orleans Daily Picayune, 7 July 1901; Undated clipping, New Orleans Scrapbook; Anthony, History of Woman Suffrage, 4:682.

[24]New Orleans Daily Picayune, 7 June 1899.

allowed women to also vote by proxy, it seemed a good idea to gather as many proxies as possible from those women who lacked the courage to go to the polls. Kate Gordon herself was successful in securing 300 proxies. At the same time she cleverly emphasized the legal inequalities long endured by Louisiana women. Driven by her Negro coachman, Sam, she went from house to house throughout the city, calling on many women, including women from old New Orleans' conservative Creole families. Each proxy required a witness, and since under Louisiana law a woman could not witness a legal document, it was necessary to locate a male witness. Frequently unable to find a male about the household, Gordon would announce with a gracious smile that she would get Sam to come in and help out. Getting down from his box, the Negro coachman would scrawl his name on the proxy of the aristocratic lady and give it the legal value needed. Thus, Kate Gordon obtained 300 proxies while "three hundred very conservative women had an opportunity to compare their legal standing with Sam's."[25]

On the morning of the election, Gordon was the first woman to cast a vote, and she was the last to vote at the end of the day. It took all day for her to vote the many proxies she held, going from one voting ward to the other. The polls closed at 6:00 p.m., and she cast the vote for the last proxie

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[25]Anna Howard Shaw, The Story of a Pioneer (New York: Harper & Brother, 1915), p. 314; Anthony, History of Woman Suffrage, 4:641.

at 5:50 p.m.[26] New Orleans's women voted for the first time in the history of the city, and newspapers of the day gave full credit for the successful results of the election. The following day the Picayune reported:

> . . . let the credit go where it belongs. The women of New Orleans did it, under the leadership of those two active, energetic and self-sacrificing young women, the Misses Kate M. and Jean Gordon, and all the glory is theirs . . . . The noble work of the women . . . won the day in behalf of these much needed improvements for our beloved city . . . . All honor to the fair sex! The women, or rather the few women who were in the Sewage and Drainage League, probably did as much work for the special tax as all the men in this city put together, and they did it quietly and thoroughly . . . .
>
> . . . it was a novel sight to see them at the polls. Enough of them showed their independence of the sterner sex to prove to the community that they are a deal more competent to wield the ballot than a vast majority of the male suffragans. From what some of the commissioners of selection say, the women demonstrated that they had observed the instruction as to voting with a great deal more punctiliousness than the men. They had no difficulty in arranging their ballots, and knew the routine better than many men who had been in the habit of voting.[27]

Progressive men in business and the city administration had realized for some time that the future prosperity of New Orleans depended on improved sewage and drainage in the city, therefore they were delighted with the outcome of the election. At the beginning of the tax campaign, one public-spirited citizen sent a beautiful and expensive gold-handled umbrella to the mayor. He requested that the umbrella be given to the person who had worked the hardest and achieved the most during the election. After the election, the mayor presented the

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[26] New Orleans Daily Picayune, 7 July 1901.

[27] Ibid., 7 June 1899.

umbrella to Kate Gordon and thanked her on behalf of the city of New Orleans. The Progressive Union (the predecessor of the New Orleans Association of Commerce) expressed their appreciation by presenting Gordon with a gold medal.[28]

In July, 1901, Kate Gordon went to New York City to assume her duties as an officer of the National Suffrage Association.[29] During her tenure she was able to persuade the national association to hold a national convention in New Orleans. She believed that such a convention, and the resulting publicity would greatly benefit the suffrage movement in Louisiana. The annual convention of the National American Woman Suffrage Association was held in New Orleans in March, 1903, and was headquartered at the historic St. Charles Hotel. Business sessions were held at the Atheneun. The convention met for one week, from Thursday, March 18, through the following Wednesday. Impressed with the hospitality of the host city, Dr. Ann Howard Shaw recorded that "In no previous convention were arrangements more perfect, and certainly nowhere else did the men of a community co-operate more generously with the women in entertaining us." The Progressive Union (a club of New Orleans men) paid the rent on the convention hall, chartered a steamboat to carry the delegates to a plantation party, and arranged for the visitors to take a trolley ride about the city.[30]

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[28] Ibid., 7 July 1901; New Orleans Item, 6 September 1931.

[29] New Orleans Daily Picayune, 7 July 1901.

The delegates attended symposiums and heard addresses by such well known leaders as Susan B. Anthony, Alice Stone Blackman, Carrie Chapman Catt and Dr. Anna Shaw. Columnist Dorothy Dix also addressed the convention.[31] Kate Gordon, as program chairman, suggested the innovation of a twenty minute question and answer period, to be conducted by Dr. Shaw, at the close of each day's secession. This proved a popular addition to the program, and all went smoothly until the third night of the convention. Aware of the explosive possibilities of a discussion of the Negro question, the northern women had taken precautions to avoid such discussions. They agreed that the convictions of the southern host should be respected. Consequently, when a racial question was passed to the podium, Dr. Shaw laid the paper to one side and did not answer the question. The troublesome question was:

> What is your purpose in bringing your convention to the South? Is it the desire of suffragists to force upon us the social equality of black and white? Political equality lays the foundation for social equality. If you give the ballot to women, won't you make the black and white woman equal politically and therefore lay the foundation for a future claim of social equality?[32]

On the second night the identical question was received and again placed to one side. On the third night the question was again asked, with the following addition: "Evidently you do

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[30]Shaw, The Story of a Pioneer, p. 310.

[31]Program of the 1903 convention of the National American Suffrage Association, Louisiana Room, Louisiana State University.

[32]Shaw, The Story of a Pioneer, p. 311.

not dare to answer this question. Therefore our conclusion is that this is your purpose."[33]

This challenge could no longer be ignored by the speaker. Going to the front of the platform, Shaw informed the audience of the question and the decision of the northern women to avoid any discussion of the race question. She asked for the will of the delegates as to whether she should answer the question. The reply was in the affirmative. Acting on this directive, the speaker responded that if political equality were considered the basis of social equality, and if the granting of political equality were the possible foundation for a claim of social equality, then it would seem that social equality had already taken place. By disfranchising both black and white women, they were political equals. Beyond this, placing the ballot in the hands of black men had made them the political superior of the southern white woman and all women of America. She continued by stating that for the first time in history the former slave was the political master of the former mistress. American women were the victims of a political degradation not experienced by women in any other nation. German men governed German women, and French men governed French women, but ". . . American women are governed by every race of men under the light of the sun." Concluding, Shaw emphasized her point by stating:

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[33]Ibid., p. 312.

> There is not a color from white to black, to red to yellow, there is not a nation from pole to pole, that does not send its contingent to govern American women. If American men are willing to leave their women in a position as degrading as this they need not be surprised when American women resolve to lift themselves out of it.[34]

After these remarks, the audience was at first silenced by amazement. Then, as the relevance of the statement became apparent, the audience applauded and the danger of the situation passed.[35]

Meeting in the South, it is not surprising to find that the convention was confronted with the racial issue. There was grave concern by many in New Orleans over what they supposed was the National Suffrage Association's position on the race question. The Association's board immediately drafted a statement declaring that while the association sought to eliminate sex qualifications for the ballot, other qualifications were left to each state. The Louisiana association was asking for suffrage for educated and taxpaying women only. The statement pointed out that it was as irrelevant to warn southern women of the danger of supporting the National American Woman Suffrage Association, because of the views of the northern states auxiliaries, as it would be to warn them against the WCTU, the General Federation of Women's Clubs, or, for that matter, Christianity, because northern and western clubs and churches did not draw a color line. This was the only discordant note from New Orleans's newspapers, however, and the convention's

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[34]Ibid., pp. 312-13. [35]Ibid.

official report was pleased to note that the Picayune, States and Item ". . . were most generous with space and complimentary in expression throughout the convention."[36]

It would be inaccurate to portray the race question as a predominant issue, however during the convention several of the many speakers did express the southern point of view. In an address presented on the last evening's program, it was pointed out that allowing educated women to vote "would insure immediate and durable white supremacy," because "in every southern state but one there are more educated women than all the illiterate voters, white and black, native and foreign, combined . . . ." The speaker, a Mississippi women, added that of all the southern women who could read and write, ten out of eleven were white. She believed that the South was slow in grasping the fact that enfranchising women "would settle the race question in politics."[37]

At the conclusion of the speech, Catt, then president of the National Association, said that she had received a number of letters from persons who were interested in joining the association, but were concerned that blacks would be admitted. She stated that the National Association recognized state's rights, and that while the Louisiana association had the right to regulate its membership, it did not have the right to regulate the membership of other states. Pointing out that Anglo-Saxons

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[36]Harper, History of Woman Suffrage, 5:59-60.

[37]Ibid., pp. 82-83.

were inclined to be arrogant, she reminded her audience that at one time the Romans considered them to be so inferior that they were not even wanted as slaves. She concluded her remarks, by adding that "the Anglo-Saxon is the dominant race today, but things may change. The race that will be dominant through the ages will be the one that proves itself the most worthy."[38]

Little is known of Louisiana organizations for Negro women. It is known that during the national suffrage convention, one such club, the Phyllis Wheatley Club, invited Susan B. Anthony, Alice Stone Blackwell, and Elizabeth Smith Miller to address the club. Dorothy Dix accompanied them and also spoke to the group. The club, a literary and social club, maintained a night school, a training school for nurses, and a kindergarten. In her address, Dorothy Dix cited a number of examples illustrating that (Mrs.) Sylvanie Williams, president of the club, was a woman of some prominence in New Orleans. She stated that "no woman in the city was more respected or had more influence . . . ."[39] Presenting a bouquet of flowers to Anthony, Williams remarks indicate the depths of frustration experienced by the Negro women of this era. She declared:

> Flowers in their beauty and sweetness may represent the womanhood of the world. Some flowers are fragile and delicate, some strong and hardy, some are carefully guarded and cherished, others are roughly treated and

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[38]Ibid., [39]Ibid., p. 60.

> trodden under foot. These last are the colored women. They have a crown of thorns continually pressed upon their brow, yet they are advancing and sometimes you and them further on than you would have expected. When women like you, Miss Anthony, come to see us and speak to us it helps us to believe in the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Men, and at least for the time being in the sympathy of woman.[40]

Holding the national convention of the Suffrage Association in New Orleans had the results hoped for by Kate Gordon. Membership in the Era Club was dramatically increased, and many men, who had previously been indifferent to woman's suffrage, were now supportive of the movement. One man remarked that he now realized that suffrage for women was a means to an end and not just an end. Giving women the vote would not only right an injustice but would allow them to take part in bringing about reforms that were greatly needed.[41] During the convention Kate Gordon asked to remain in New Orleans because of her mother's poor health. She would remain as corresponding secretary, but since it was necessary to have a national officer in charge of the national headquarters, the headquarters were moved from New York to Warren, Ohio, the home of the national treasurer.[42]

In 1900 the Era Club was officially recognized by the National Association as the Louisiana State Suffrage Association.

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[40] Ibid. [41] Ibid., p. 70; Ibid., 6:218.

[42] Ibid., 5:61 The national headquarters remained in Warren, Ohio, for the next six years, the years that Kate Gordon continued to serve as secretary.

The State Suffrage Association that had been formed in 1896 as a joint effort of the Portia and Era Clubs had lapsed after the Portia Club became inactive. Catt was aware of these facts when, as the new president of the National American Woman's Suffrage Association, she called for conventions to be held in the southern states. Although it established a precedent, Catt decided to allow one club, the Era Club, to be recognized as the state association. Evelyn Ordway was elected as president of the newly-organized state suffrage association, and Caroline Merrick was elected vice-president. In 1904, Kate Gordon became president, Mrs. James McConnell, vice-president, and Caroline Merrick, honorary president. The new association attempted to interest individuals in other sections of the state in establishing suffrage clubs. Failing in this effort the Era Club extended its membership throughout the state in order to have statewide representation at the national suffrage conventions.[43]

For a number of years there was no attempt to obtain full suffrage for Louisiana women. Instead, women sought to broaden their base by concentrating on other issues. Until 1913 political activity was conducted primarily by the Era Club's standing Legislature Committee, led by the Gordon sisters. This committee was first formed in 1904. Lacking legislative experience, the committee, in its first year, proposed twelve bills to the Legislature. Upon outside advice, the fate of

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[43] Ibid., 6:216-17.

the bills were placed in the hands of an influential lobbyist. With the legislative session nearing an end, and the lobbyist have failed to act, the Gordon sisters ignored propriety and precedent, and boarded an early morning train for Baton Rouge. From then on they personally directed the Era Clubs legislative program. Unsuccessful at the 1904 legislative secession, in the following years they wisely concentrated on fewer bills, primarily a school suffrage bill, a child labor bill, and an amendment to Article 210 of the State Constitution. In 1906 they were able to obtain a Child Labor Law and a law providing for women factory inspectors. An improved Child Labor Law was passed in 1908. In 1912, the amendment to Article 210 was successfully passed in both houses of the legislature, due in large part to a "monster petition" gathered from all sections of the state.[44] Fact sheets, pointing out the need for women on public boards and urging people to sign the petition, were placed in newspapers throughout the state.[45] When the amendment was sent to the voters for ratification, its supporters mounted an intense campaign. The Federation of Women's Clubs, the Newcomb College Alumnae, and the State Nurses Association actively participated in the campaign. Despite a monumental effort, the amendment was defeated. There was some speculation that Mayor Behrman, unhappy over some of the Era Club's civic

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[44] Ibid., pp. 220-21.

[45] Fact Sheet, McConnell Papers, Department of Archives, Tulane University.

improvement programs, had used his influence to defeat the amendment.[46]

Reading of the achievements of these women, one could easily be misled as to their nature and personality. These were "gentle women," at least according to contemporary descriptions, although the modern scholar would suspect that their calm, genteel facades concealed wills and determinations of iron. Kate Gordon was pictured in the following way:

> She is just above the medium height, fair and graceful, with deep blue eyes and jet black hair, and a face very fair to look upon . . . . She is young and talented, music being one of her great accomplishments. She is gifted with the pen and is eloquent as a speaker, her arguments always carrying force and conviction. While she cannot in any sense of the word be called aggressive, she nevertheless never fails to win her point . . . . She always brings reason to her aid, seeks to make everything clear and practical to her opponent and overcomes prejudices and contrary arguments with healthy, solid reasoning and facts that cannot gainsaid. Joined to all this, is a ready wit, a prompt courage, a quick resource in difficulty which never fails, and a sweet, sunny smile that takes off the rugged edge of some plain truth so gently and sweetly told, that the vanquished opponent is ready to take in gratitude the hand of the fair conqueror. It is this gentle grace and ever womanly manner that have made Miss Gordon succeed . . . .[47]

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[46]Harper, History of Woman Suffrage, 6:222; New Citizen, December 1912, p. 8. Mayor Behrman controlled the New Orleans political organization known as the "Ring," "Old Regulars," or "Choctaw Club". The Picayune claimed that the organization's block vote was 15,000 to 18,000. New Orleans Times Picayune, 31 October 1918. T. Harry Williams agrees that Behrman controlled the organization, and while he didn't state the number of votes involved he didn't dispute Behrman's boast that ". . . even as late as the night before an election he could send down the word and swing twenty-five thousand votes to any candidate." T. Harry Williams, Huey Long (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969), p. 130.

[47]New Orleans Daily Picayune, 7 July 1901.

Nina Ansley King, in an article, "As I Knew Kate and Jean," described Kate Gordon in a similar way. She related:

> I imagined Miss Kate Gordon as a warrior, a Greek Amazon. When I saw her for the first time, I was amazed—she stood before me handsome, well dressed, with gentle gracious manners, a captivating personality. She had a decided positive way of presenting her subject. She was unflinching—but SHE CONQUERED. She conquered—I became an ardent suffragists. She won over my 2 conservative sisters, Grace and Annie King.[48]

Evidence suggests that as sensitive persons, the early legislative experiences of those women were particularly trying. Kate Gordon related that members of the Era Club Committee were the first women to be actively involved in the legislative process. Prior to 1904, men had actually managed the legislation that was of interest to women. She cites as an example of this that although the Arena Club was instrumental in obtaining the "age of consent" law, a Unitarian minister had managed the bill in the legislature.[49] The legislative arena was a foreign and strange world to the women who ventured forth in 1904. Evidence does not indicate what they expected. In an article, "If I Were a Legislator," Jean Gordon left a record of what they found. Among the many bills that she would like to have seen enacted, were proposals that vividly demonstrated that their experiences were often frustrating, distasteful, and, at times, humiliating. One proposal was for the carpet on the floor of

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[48]Nina Ansley King, "As I Knew Kate and Jean," Warrington Messenger 16 (1938):18.

[49]Harper, History of Woman Suffrage, 6:220.

of the House of Representatives to be replaced by one that could be throughly cleaned, nightly, to elimate germs caused by the "continual spitting practices" of the lawmakers. Her closing proposal was that all legislators should be over thirty years of age, properly sober, and possessed of "a certain dignity which comes only from an innate gentility and good breeding." This would eliminate the scene she witnessed at the legislature when, as she related,

> A dignified request from women for a small share of what is their right as American citizens converted the Hall of Representatives into a scene which might be likened unto a vaudeville show, with many of its members filling the role of buffoon, their actions being a reflection upon their own sanity and an insult to the womanhood of the state.[50]

Faith in their cause and a dogged determination successfully brought about a slow change in the attitude of legislators. Within a few years Judith Douglas was able to report on this change. The same bills that only two years before had "met with jesting, indignity and ridicule" were listened to with consideration and dignity. Even though the bills were still defeated, there were more favorable votes, and the opponents were respectful and silent.[51]

During these years while women were battling for civic improvements by legislative means, women were also initiating

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[50] Jean Gordon, "If I Were a Legislator," Pioneer, August, 1906, pp. 27-28.

[51] Draft of a speech, Judith Douglas Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University. No date is given on the draft, but the contents indicate it was written shortly after the 1908 legislative session.

social services in other ways. Even Kate Gordon, while deeply involved in suffrage for women, stretched her seemingly boundless time and energy to make enormous contributions outside of legislative channels into social welfare. When problems were brought to her attention she felt compelled to act and did. No problem was too small. When her cook became ill, and was taken to the hospital in a rough cart, Kate did not stop until she successfully persuaded the hospital to improve its services with comfortable stretchers carried in rubber-tired vehicles. In 1906 she organized a chrysanthemum show and with the $6000 raised by the show established the first public diphtheria anti-toxin service in New Orleans. In later years, she related that the victory for which she was most proud, was finally getting women admitted to the Tulane School of Medicine, following a campaign that stretched over twenty years.[52]

However, it was her work in tuberculosis, along with woman's suffrage, that her contemporaries associated with the name of Kate Gordon. In 1906 she organized the Louisiana Anti-Tuberculosis League, serving as its first president. She maintained an interest in this work for the rest of her life. In the 1920's, she devoted much of her efforts to the founding of a tuberculosis hospital. The New Orleans Anti-Tuberculosis Hospital was erected in 1926, on property adjoining the Milne Home. The hospital had a clinic for education and diagnosis

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[52] Undated clipping, New Orleans Scrapbook.

and opened its door to all citizens, regardless of class or race. In her later years Kate Gordon and her sisters lived in a cottage on the grounds, and she actively managed the hospital and clinic, as well as the financial campaigns of the Louisiana Anti-Tuberculosis League. After Jean died, Kate also took over her work and became "Aunt Kate" to the girls of Milne Home. Kate lived only seventeen months after Jean's death, dying in August, 1932. Shortly after her death, the Kate M. Gordon Memorial Association was formed, and for a number of years its members met annually, at the New Orleans Tuberculosis Hospital, to pay tribute to the memory of Jean and Kate Gordon, and, after her death in 1939, Fannie Gordon.[53]

A Louisiana woman internationally recognized for her work in the settlement house movement was Eleanor Laura McMain. She was born in 1866 on a farm near Baton Rouge. The family had fled to the farm during the Civil War. Before the war, Eleanor's father, Jacob West McMain, had been a wealthy plantation owner. While she was still a small child, her family returned to Baton Rouge, where they lived in poverty. Eleanor was educated in private schools and was greatly influenced by the intellectual curiosity and profound idealism of her father. Until his death, in 1884, McMain was secretary and dean of Louisiana State University. For a number of years after 1866, Eleanor worked as a governess and teacher, and then formed her own private

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[53]Ibid., James, Notable Women, 2:67; New Orleans Item, 18 February 1939.

school. In the mid-1990's, she and her mother moved to New Orleans where, a few years later, she attended a training class conducted by the Free Kindergarten Association, an organization sponsored by the Episcopal Church.[54]

In 1900, the Kingsley Settlement House was founded with a non-sectarian board and Mrs. Joseph Califf as head resident. The following year Califf left New Orleans, and Eleanor McMain became head resident. Upon receiving her appointment, McMain spent the summer in Chicago, attending the University of Chicago and studying the settlement movement at Hull House and The Commons. Kingsley House, which began with a free kindergarten, soon became the center of social life in the neighborhood known in New Orleans as the "Irish Channel". Dramatics, athletics, courses for the blind, a trade school, a library, and the city's first day nursery and playground were among the many services offered at the settlement house. As one woman explained: "I have lived here ever since Kingsley House was started, and I have never missed a single thing that went on there. I have raised eight children, and they have availed themselves of everything that Kingsley House had to offer."[55] Eleanor McMain's clean-up campaign and educational program was said to have saved the "Irish Channel" during the yellow-fever epidemic of 1905. The neighborhood Anti-Tuberculosis League

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[54]James, Notable Women, 2:474-75.

[55]Undated clipping, New Orleans Scrapbook; New Orleans Item, 29 March 1936.

she established in 1906 was the nucleus of the city-wide organization to which Kate Gordon devoted the latter years of her life. In 1925, the New Orleans' philanthropist, Frank B. Williams gave $250,000 to the Settlement House, allowing the construction of a community center that Jane Hull considered to be unequaled anywhere in the world. Eleanor McMain's involvement with the settlement house went beyond her administrative duties. One woman related:

> I would think of doing nothing but what I would go and ask her first, and would abide by her advice whatever it might be. When she came into this neighborhood we were people with set ways. The fathers were cotton mill and cigar factory workers, and the children fell in line doing the same sort of work. There wasn't any way for them to enter the business world. One of the first things that Miss McMain did was to open a way for the children of this neighborhood to get an entrance into the business world. It was she who told the parents the value of giving the children higher education.[56]

In 1923, at the request of the National Federation of Settlements and Neighborhood Centers (McMain served six years on the federation's executive committee), Eleanor went to Paris. Remaining for nearly a year, she organized a settlement house in that city. Offers to head a number of settlement houses, including The Commons, were rejected as she preferred to remain in New Orleans and work with Kingsley House.[57]

Extending her civic activities beyond the Kingsley House, in 1905 McMain founded the Woman's League, an organization

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[56]Undated clipping, New Orleans Scrapbook; James, Notable Women, 2:475.

[57]Ibid.

composed of representatives from several New Orleans' women groups. Under her guidance the League sponsored the compulsory education law that was passed in 1910. On the board of directors of Milne Home, she also actively supported Jean Gordon in her 1906 and 1908 campaigns to establish effective laws to govern the working conditions of women and children. One expression of love and gratitude to Eleanor McMain came from the residents of the "Irish Channel" when, in 1924, she returned from France. Led by a band, a large contigent marched to the dock to welcome her home. It was on this occasion that the announcement was made of Williams' generous gift to Kingsley House. In 1920 the Times-Picayune recognized McMain's extraordinary community service by awarding her the newspaper's coveted Loving Cup. In 1932 the city named a high school in her honor. In this same year Eleanor McMain's health declined to the extent that she was required to spend much of her time in bed. Suffering from heart disease and hypertension, she died in 1934. Funeral services were held at Kingsley House and at St. James Episcopal Church in Baton Rouge, and she was buried in the capital city.[58]

Perhaps the most courageous social worker of this era was a black, Frances Joseph Gaudet. Evidence of her work is sketchy, but if the obstacles facing white women were difficult, one can easily imagine the problems confronting a Negro woman during these years. Born in a log cabin in Holmesville, Pike County,

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[58] Ibid.

Mississippi, in November, 1861, Frances Joseph was educated in private schools and Straight College in New Orleans. While still a young woman she married A. P. Gaudet, but was left a widow several years later. (Mrs.) Gaudet began her social work with prayer meetings in the parish prison. Often, when she was convinced a prisoner was innocent, she fought alone for the prisoner's release. Assisted by the Prison Reform Association, she was able to obtain the release of some prisoners.[59]

In 1900 she attended the W.T.C.U. international convention in Edinburgh, Scotland. On returning to New Orleans, she began the practice of attending the juvenile court, where she assumed the responsibility for young Negroes who had been arrested for misdemeanor or vagrancy. She took them to her home, where she worked for their reform. When her home became too small, she bought a farm on Gentilly Road and founded the Colored Industrial Home and School. Through public fund raising drives, the school was eventually expanded to 105 acres with a number of school buildings and dormitories.[60] One of the school's benefactors was Ida Richardson. In her memoirs, Grace King referred to Frances Gaudet as Richardson's protegee and related how Richardson enjoyed hearing Gaudet tell of her visit to England, of how she addresssed and stayed in the homes of the "great lords and ladies". In addition to

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[59] New Orleans Item, 27 December 1934.

[60] Ibid.

donations made while she was alive, Richardson named the Industrial School in her will as one of the beneficiaries of her vast fortune.[61] In 1921, Frances Gaudet gave the school to the Episcopal Church with the provision that it continue as a school, and if it were sold, the proceeds were to be used for a similar institution. She spent her last years in Chicago where she died in December, 1934.[62]

The late 1890's and early 1900's had been a period of enormous growth and advancement in the woman's movement in Louisiana. Even the limited voting right gained in 1898 was a considerable achievement when one considers the conservatism of the South. Using this small concession to improve an intolerable condition that existed was a victory for the woman's movement. It not only created a positive impression in the minds of the general public, but it also caused an awakening in many women of the positive good that women could accomplish in areas that had long been neglected by men. The victory of the tax election of 1899 was only the beginning. As women became more and more involved in social and civic reforms, there was an even more dramatic and positive change in the public's attitude toward women in public affairs.

It is difficult to judge how much the woman's suffrage movement in Louisiana benefited from the activities of women in the reform movements. As the leaders in the woman's suffrage

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[61]Ibid., King, Memories of a Southern Woman, pp. 328-31.

[62]New Orleans Item, 27 December 1934.

movement in Louisiana were, in many instances, also the leaders of social and civic reforms, those who applauded the reforms also looked with more favor on woman suffrage. There can be little doubt, however, that some actions of the Era Club made political enemies who, in turn, caused trouble for the suffrage cause in Louisiana. The great push by Louisiana women for suffrage did not begin until 1913, when a number of new suffrage groups were organized throughout the state, and, from 1913 to 1921, the suffrage movement eclipsed all other women's activities.

CHAPTER VIII

LOUISIANA WOMEN AND THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

By the early 1900's, interest in a federal suffrage amendment at the national level had dwindled until practically all congressional activity had ceased. No longer were there debates in either house, and the congressional suffrage committees that each year met routinely no longer reported to Congress, either favorably or otherwise. In 1912, the chairman of the National American Woman's Suffrage Association's congressional committee was so inactive that she incurred expenses of less than twelve dollars.[1]

The suffrage movement was rescued from the doldrums by a young Quaker social worker, Alice Paul. While in England from 1907 to 1910, Paul had worked with the militant wing of that country's suffrage movement and was sentenced to prison. While in prison, she and the other militants went on a hunger strike and were made to suffer the ordeal of forced feeding. Upon returning home, she frequently spoke at suffrage meetings about the British movement, and while completing her Ph.D. at the University of Pennsylvania, she worked with Pennsylvania suffragists. In 1912, she and another American who had worked with the British militants, Lucy Burns, met with Anna Shaw and

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[1]Flexner, Century of Struggle, pp. 262-63.

Jane Addams, then president and vice-president of the National American Suffrage Association, and offered their services on behalf of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. Accepting their offer, the Board of the National American Suffrage Association appointed them to its Congressional Committee, and Paul became the new committee chairman.[2]

The two women arrived in Washington in January 1913, only two months before Woodrow Wilson was to be inaugurated for his first term as president. Realizing that there would be a large number of visitors in Washington for the event, Paul planned a parade for the day before the inauguration, and within the short time available she was able to assemble 5,000 women on the day of the parade. Among the women marching in this parade were wives and mothers of men prominent in business and politics, including some of the most socially prominent women in America. Four members of the Era Club marched in the parade.[3] Parades by women suffragists were common, suffragists having marched in a number of cities on a number of occasions. The women, however, were not prepared for the treatment they received from the crowds gathered in Washington that day. Near-riot conditions prevailed as the women trudged up the street, many of them in tears, with the crowd hurling jibes and insults at the marchers. At one cross street, when progress became impossible, the police commissioner asked some members of the

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[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid., pp. 263-64; New Citizen, March 1915, p. 7.

Massachusetts National Guard Regiment to help out and clear the way. There was general laughter as one of the regiment informed the commissioner that he had no orders to serve as an escort. At one point during the parade the crowds pressed in on either side of the marchers and made it impossible for the women to march abreast. At this point students of the Maryland Agricultural College came to the rescue and formed a line, single file, on each side of the women, forming a protective wall. In the front of the marchers a number of the boys locked arms, forming a vanguard to break through the crowd. The women, forging ahead under great difficulty, were able to finish the march only when troops from Fort Myers were rushed to Washington to take charge of the parade. One newspaper account pronounced the parade, despite the delays, as a "great success." Passing through two walls of antagonistic humanity, the marchers, for the most part, kept their tempers. They suffered insults and closed their ears to jibes and jeers. Few faltered, though some of the older women were forced to drop out from time to time."[4] Outraged public opinion forced an investigation by the District Commissioner, resulting in the Washington chief of police losing his job. Newspapers all over the country picked up the story and thousands of people at the grass-roots level signed petitions of protest. Organized pilgrimages descended on the capital and on July 31, a group of senators received petitions bearing 200,000 signatures.[5]

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[4] Baltimore Sun, 4 March 1913.

Although the new surge of interest in the federal amendment was welcomed by all concerned, it was perhaps inevitable that before long differences between Paul and the leadership of the National Association would emerge. Within a short time, Alice Paul and her supporters formed the Congressional Union, and the National Suffrage Association floundered for two more years until, at last, Carrie Chapman Catt consented to return to the presidency, bringing with her a five year plan of action that infused new spirit into the association. The plan was kept secret from the public, so as to not alert the opposition, but within three years, two years ahead of its goal, the suffrage amendment was passed by Congress.[6]

Evidence does not indicate whether Louisiana women were among those who were spurred into action by the indignities suffered by the women participating in the Washington parade on 3 March 1913. However, in the same month, Mrs. A. B. Singletary of Baton Rouge organized in that city the State Equal Suffrage League, and the following month, Mrs. John T. Meehan in New Orleans organized the Woman's Suffrage Party of Louisiana. In both associations, membership was extended to men and women.[7] This was the first time that groups of women, outside the Era Club, had organized in support of woman's suffrage. While new life was infused into the Louisiana suffrage movement this was the beginning of a rift in Louisiana

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[5]Flexner, Century of Struggle, pp. 264-65.

[6]Ibid., pp. 264, 272-75.

between those women supporting a state suffrage amendment and women who supported a federal amendment. The gap widened until it resulted in the climactic events of May and June of 1920, when ratification of the Federal Women's Suffrage Amendment, the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, came before the Louisiana Legislature.

State's rights clouded the issue, but there was no effort made to disguise the belief of its advocates that white supremacy in Louisiana would be eliminated if woman's suffrage was granted by a federal amendment.[8] As the battle lines were drawn, the issue of a state amendment versus a federal amendment became confused with the issue of the pro-Gordon faction versus the anti-Gordon faction. Charges and counter-charge were leveled. With each charge, each side became more polarized. In the end, it is difficult to determine whether the actions

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[7] New Orleans Item, 14 November 1914; Ida Husted Harper, History of Woman's Suffrage, 6:226-27. Beginning with volumes 5 and 6, the editor of History of Woman's Suffrage is Ida Harper. The section "The Southern Woman Suffrage Conference" in volume 5 was contributed by Kate Gordon. "Louisiana I" in volume 6 was contributed by Kate Gordon, and "Louisiana II" was contributed by Ethel Hutson. In letters to Hutson, Harper urged her to give "your side." Harper wanted all details on the ratification battle in the Louisiana Legislature, and especially urged Hutson to get from Lydia Holmes a full account of Governor Parker's role in the proceedings. Letters from Ida Husted Harper to Ethel Hutson, 18 February 1921, 26 March 1921, Ethel Hutson Papers, Department of Archives, Tulane University.

[8] Flexner, in Century of Struggle, p. 295, states that opposition to a woman's suffrage amendment varied with the different sections of the country. In the East, opposition came primarily from business and industrial interests, and in the Middle West, primarily from brewing interests.

of certain women in 1920 were based on fundamental convictions, or whether they were the result of personality conflicts and bitterness that had built up over the period from 1913 to 1920.

Information on the activities of the women's suffrage organization during this period is more readily available than that of women's activities in previous years. As a result of an increased reader interest in the suffrage movement, Louisiana newspapers frequently printed news stories on the movement. In addition, two New Orleans publications were virtual "mouthpieces" for the two opposing groups. The views of the state's rights group were aired through the Era Club publication, the New Citizen, and their later publication, the New Southern Citizen. The woman who served for a number of years as publicity chairman for the group supporting the federal suffrage amendment was Ethel Hutson. Hutson was born in Baton Rouge in April 1872. Her father was Woodward Hutson, a professor at LSU and her mother was Mary Jane Lockett, a native of Alabama. As a young girl she was educated in public and private schools and her college training was at the University of Mississippi and Texas A & M College. Talented in art, she studied under Cary Lockett McAuley, in the Arts Student League, the National Academy of Design, the Pratt Institute and Newcomb College. Hutson began her career in 1905, designing tiles for U.S. Eneaustic Tile Company, in Indianapolis, Indiana, and drawing illustrations and writing articles for the Reader Magazines. She later lived in Texas, where she taught art in

public schools and held private art classes. Following a trip to Europe in the summer of 1910, she taught art for two years at Bellhaven College in Jackson, Mississippi. During three of the years previously noted, 1909-1912, Hutson also wrote feature stories and did art work for the New Orleans Picayune. She became a permanant resident of New Orleans in 1912, and for the next six years she was head of the woman's department and research clerk for the New Orleans Item. During World War I she was research clerk for the New Orleans Association of Commerce, and, after that she worked with various civic groups including serving as Executive Secretary of the Tuberculosis and Public Health Association of Louisiana. For most of her adult years she was a member of numerous art associations including the Mississippi Art Association, Arts and Crafts Club of New Orleans and the Southern States Art League. Her art work was exhibited in a number of exhibitions of these organizations.[9]

Trouble within the ranks of the women who were interested in the women's suffrage movement appears to have begun shortly after the States Suffrage Party was formed, during a meeting of the Era Club. Since all newspaper reporters were excluded when the club went into executive session, the source of the New Orleans Item's long, two-column account of the happenings in the executive session that was "supposed to be secret," is not known, but if one can rely on this source, the session was

[9]New Orleans Life, January 1927, p. 18.

indeed "a hot one." Kate Gordon related how club members had been approached and asked whether they were "Gordonites" or "anti-Gordonites," inferring that the organization of the new suffrage group was directed against the two Gordon sisters. Despite the efforts of one person, who held membership in the new Woman's Suffrage Party and the Era Club, to explain the objectives of the new group, the Gordons's views seem to have carried the day. The Club adopted a resolution, the contents of which the author of the newspaper article was unable to obtain, but its informant did divulge that the resolution was so worded that a person would be unable to belong to both organization, "constituting an open declaration of was against the new organization."[10]

Apparently the haste in which the women suffragists reactivated themselves as the Louisiana State Suffrage Association (all of their state activities had previously been an extension of the Era Club) produced an inquiry from the new Woman's Suffrage Party to the national association, as to whether a state association had existed prior to 1913. Dr. Anna Shaw's affirmative answer would seem to have laid the matter to rest.[11] However, the August 1913 declaration by the state's rights advocates for a convention, the first ever called by this group, to be held in New Orleans on 10-11 November, was apparently a direct result of the formation on the Women's

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[10]Undated clipping, Hutson Papers.

[11]New Citizen, November 1913, pp.4-5.

Suffrage Party, organized approximately four months earlier. The concerns of the Louisiana state's rights advocates were shared by other white women in the South, and shortly after the August announcement, a letter, carrying the signature of twenty-one southern women, was sent to governors of the southern states requesting that they attend or send a representative to confer with the women in New Orleans on 10-11 November, the same dates of the Louisiana State Suffrage Convention.

Among the signatures on the letter were those of the presidents of the suffrage associations in Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Virginia, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Texas and suffragists from North and South Carolina. At least two of the signers had served as officers of the National Association, Kate Gordon of Louisiana and Laura Clay of Kentucky, the latter a former national secretary. These women did not expect the governors to attend the conference, however, several did send representatives. The letter, nevertheless, served to publicize the suffragists cause and to state their position to the men who held much of the political power in the South. It explained that the suffragists believed that it was the constitutional right of the states to confer suffrage and that as southerners, they wanted to see the states retain these rights, but they were "equally determined to secure . . . the rights which is the birth right of an American citizen."[12]

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[12]Ibid.

The signators desired the governors to know that while they were united in their beliefs that suffrage was a state right, woman's suffrage was no longer a debatable theory but rather a condition that must be met. The question was whether the southern states would face the issue and preserve the rights of the states or whether public opinion would force an amendment to the United States Constitution. The letter concluded with the women expressing sentiments that would be repeated in the next few years, in various forms, to the men of the South: first, an appeal to the "gentlemen vested with the power to so largely shape conditions, to. . . influence public opinion to adopt woman's suffrage through state action." Then followed a warning that if the politicians failed to accomplish this, "the onus of responsibility will rest upon the men of the South, if southern women are forced to support a national amendment, weighted with the same objections as the 15th Amendment."[13]

By opening day of the joint convention of the State Women's Suffrage Association and the Southern States Suffrage Conference, the formation of an organization of the southern states' rights suffragists was a foregone conclusion. When the details were worked out, Kate Gordon was the president of the Southern States Woman's Suffrage Conference, and Jean Gordon was elected president of the State Women's Suffrage Association. Florence Loeber, was elected to represent the State Association as

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[13]Ibid.

a delegate to the National American Woman's Association convention, scheduled to convene in a few weeks.[14]

Shortly after the National Association convention in December 1915, Kate Gordon felt compelled to set the record straight and correct what she considered had been misrepresentation to the effect that the Southern States Woman's Suffrage Conference was a movement to secede from the National Association. Her letter was originally published in the <u>Woman's Journal</u> of Boston, later reprinted in the <u>New Citizen</u>, and was addressed to the women of the National Association. In light of later events the statements made in this are of particular interest. As she believed that there was little if no doubt that the strongest resistance to a national amendment would come from the "Solid South," Gordon described the new southern organization as a "flank movement" designed to force the controlling political party in the South, the Democratic party, to give the "inevitable," woman's suffrage, to southern women by state action. She then removed the thin veil that had softened the threat, previously made to the southern governors, and made it clear that women's suffrage had priority over the principle of state's rights. She was emphatic in stating that if the Democratic party failed in its duty, then "southern women to whom the suffrage is greater than even the state's rights principle, will be placed in a position to appeal

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[14]Ibid., December 1913, p. 9; <u>New Orleans Times Picayune</u>, 13 November 1913.

to other states to force the suffrage nationally, our own men having failed to protect us from whatever disadvantage a national amendment may incur."[15]

A few months later, Gordon made an even stronger statement concerning the matter of a federal woman's suffrage amendment. Pointing out that before an amendment could become law, it is necessary for three-fourths of the states to ratify it, and considering the strong feelings of the "Solid South," she believed that the chances for a federal amendment were hopeless. She then states, "I am a suffragist first, and . . . did I see one chance of a national amendment I would line up with its advocates."[16]

The Woman's Suffrage Party was also frequently on the defensive. Its adherents were accused of desiring only a federal amendment and were often obliged to protest "against a certain persistant misrepresentation" as to the policy and objectives of their organization. They were quick to point out that contrary to public statements in the past by "certain alleged suffragists . . . who have taken up the anti-suffrage bugaboo of negro domination, . . ." their platform distinctly stated that the aim of the organization was to secure a woman's amendment to the state constitution. These charges persisted even after the association had publicly endorsed an amendment in the state legislature.[17]

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[15] New Citizen, January 1914, p. 5.

[16] New Southern Citizen, July 1915, p. 11.

Both state associations had a number of branch organizations on the parish or congressional district level, and evidence indicates that here, too, there was heated controversy over the support of a federal amendment, with the center of concern being white supremacy. On at least one occasion there was an all-out "war" between the members of the factions in the Louisiana suffrage movement, illustrating the intense hostility that existed on both sides. In Monroe, the president of the district branch of the State Suffrage Association issued a statement to the local newspaper identifying her group as the only local group supporting a state amendment and leveling the routine criticism against the federal amendment. The opposition immediately returned with the charges that this was a gross misstatement of facts and that the split in New Orleans had been caused by the "Gordon tyranny," and this split had now spread to the local level.[18]

The race issue was also frequently used by opponents of women's suffrage. While reporting on a well-attended meeting in her district, the Calcasieu Parish Chairman of the Woman's Suffrage Party, Catherine Channelle of Lake Charles, called the Negro question a subterfuge raised by "those who do not wish to give us the ballot." She did not find it so objectionable to be placed on a par with Negro women, when white women had, for so long, been placed below par with Negro men. At the

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[17]Undated clipping, Hutson Papers.

[18]Ibid.; Monroe News-Star, 1 May 1914.

same time, she pointed out, as most Louisiana defenders of the federal amendment were quick to do, that in a practical sense the Negro was no longer an element of the Democratic party's control of Louisiana politics.[19]

Originally, the Sixth District Equal Suffrage League of Baton Rouge was not affiliated with the Woman's Suffrage Party nor with the Louisiana State Suffrage Association, but it was affiliated directly with the National Association. Within a short time however, many of the League members had also joined the Woman's Suffrage Party and the League Organizer, Mrs. Joseph Singletary, became the Woman's Suffrage Party organizer for the Sixth District. After the election, in November 1916, of Lydia Wickliffe Holmes of Baton Rouge, as state chairman of the Woman's Suffrage Party, a successful effort was made to bring together in one organization all of the groups in agreement with the National Suffrage Association. By the end of 1917 the Woman's Suffrage Party included not only the Sixth District Equal Suffrage League but also two new groups formed earlier in 1917, the Equal Rights Party and the Louisiana League for Equal Suffrage, both organized in New Orleans. At least one special interest group was formed within an already existing organization. In December of 1913, a teachers' branch of the Woman's Suffrage Party was organized in New Orleans. Membership in the branch was limited to teachers throughout the state. While working for women's

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[19]New Orleans Item, 22 March 1914.

suffrage, the female teachers were also seeking equal pay and equal consideration with male instructors.[20]

The experiences of Singletary in organizing the Sixth District Equal Suffrage League demonstrate the rapidly accelerating pace of the woman's suffrage movement in Louisiana after 1913. She relates that the first ten recruits were difficult to obtain, but, by the end of the first year, there were over 200 members and the organization was "growing by its own momemtum." Activities of the Baton Rouge group are typical of those of women suffragists around the state as they endeavored, by various means, to sway public opinion. One of the earliest accomplishments was persuading the Baton Route State Times to add a woman's department to its newspaper. One successful venture that resulted in favorable publicity for the suffrage cause, and interested a number of parents, was the Better Baby Show at the Baton Rouge Fair. Another project undertaken by the organization was awarding prizes to school children for suffrage debates and essays.[21]

For a short time after Lydia Holmes became chairman of the Woman's Suffrage Party, the Association maintained its headquarters in Baton Rouge, but after the nation entered World War I, there was a need for a state headquarters large enough to provide quarters for state meetings and educational

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[20] New Orleans Item, 14 November 1914; Harper, History of Woman's Suffrage, 6:228.

[21] Ibid.; Baton Rouge State Times, 11 September 1914.

programs and to coordinate the war services of the Louisiana suffrage women. In February of 1918, the Association opened a "Suffrage House" on St. Charles Street in New Orleans. In selecting suitable quarters, the suffragists chose a house of "beauty and dignity" that would unmistakably give one the impression of home, as "home and the child are the things nearest to the heart of the true suffragists. . . ." Women's clubs were invited to hold their meetings in the House and enjoy the services of the tea room, where care was taken that only war substitutes were served. Two bedrooms were furnished and available for out-of-town visitors. Mrs. William Lamb, state organizer for the Association, and also a member of the Woman's Committee on the State Council for Defense, organized free training classes for women who had registered for service in the statewide drive held in October 1917. The House remained open night and day for these workers. A model Red Cross work room was established and was open at all hours.[22]

An even more elaborate suffrage headquarters in the state was maintained by the Southern Woman Suffrage Conference. Opened in May of 1914, it was located at 417 Camp Street in New Orleans. From these quarters the Southern Conference carried on a vigorous campaign until May 1917, when the organization was disbanded. As Kate Gordon later explained, the war situation "demanded caution in continuing a movement which was costing over $600.00 a month." An added reason given by Gordon was

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[22]New Orleans Item, 24 February 1918.

that she had been giving all of her time to the work of the Conference, and she was "obliged to give attention to her own business affairs."[23] Although she traveled throughout the South organizing and attending conferences in the southern states, Kate Gordon, as president of the Conference, had donated long hours to the work generated at the headquarters. Ida Porter Boyer of Pennsylvania was hired as secretary, and, when in October of 1914 the New Citizen was succeeded by the New Southern Citizen, Kate Gordon and Ida Boyer took over as editors.[24]

In a lengthy article, the Times Picayune described the building as the most up-to-date suffrage headquarters in existence. The brilliant yellow doors (the color of the suffrage movement) with its "Votes for Women" sign attracted the passerby. It was the furnishings and activities on the inside, however, that most impressed the Times Picayune: the extensive shelves of suffrage literature; the numerous bookcases; the busy secretaries at several desks; and the even busier "Heads" going over the large volume of morning mail, dictating to secretaries and answering inquiries. Secretaries were able, when necessary, to produce 500-600 letters in an hour. A systematized clipping bureau was established, the most complete of its kind maintained by a suffrage headquarters in the country, and other suffrage groups, even the national association, looked

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[23] Harper, History of Woman's Suffrage, 5:672-73.

[24] Ibid.

to it for data. Suffrage news from all over the world was received through 600 papers and periodicals that were delivered weekly. In turn, the headquarters sent material on a weekly basis to 1,000 newspaper editors throughout the South.[25]

The same article in the Picayune gave details about the first suffrage parade held in the South, one that had taken place in New Orleans the year before. The occasion was the Americanization meetings that were being held all over the country to instruct newly naturalized foreigners about the principles of American government. The Era Club had requested permission for a speaker to take part in the program, but, when the members were denied this, the women decided to attend the meeting held in Lafayette Square and "silently protest against the exclusion of American women from rights so freely bestowed upon the most ignorant immigrant." As the meeting opened, hundreds of dignified women, dressed all in white, filed from the headquarters of the Era Club and formed a procession several blocks long. They marched up Camp Street with many banners asking for justice for American women. When the women entered Lafayette Square they were met by policemen and escorted around a tree to the foot of the speaker's stand. Kate Gordon's banner read, "For 100 Years the Women of My Family Have Paid Taxes in New Orleans." Among the other banners was one that read: "Our Equals-Idiots, Insane and Criminals."

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[25]The material in this and the following paragraph is found in the New Orleans Times Picayune, 28 May 1916.

Another declared, "Over 30,000 New Orleans Women Are Wage Earners - They Cannot Afford to Stay Home." When one platform speaker, citing the Declaration of Independence, read "that all governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed," a banner was waved on high, "Women are Governed." When the speaker reached the part of the Declaration that said "Taxation without representation is tyranny," a banner went up declaring "Women are taxed without being represented." Transparencies and banners from this parade, along with other banners, stood against one wall in the headquarters, a procession of silent but emphatic statements.

In 1914, Representative William Manion, a member of the State Woman's Party, introduced a woman's suffrage amendment to the Legislature, the first time a full suffrage bill was introduced in Louisiana. Although it passed, 60 to 41, in the House of Representatives, it was short of the two-thirds required for an amendment. The same Legislature adopted an amendment to Article 210 of the Louisiana Constitution. Once again the people of Louisiana were asked to allow women to serve on educational and charitable boards, and once again the New Orleans "Ring" defeated the amendment. The New Orleans Administration had endorsed the amendment, the word had been passed "to the boys," and ratification was expected. The main reason for the Administration's support was the large donation by Mrs. John Dibert for a Tuberculosis Hospital in New Orleans. The city had agreed to give a certain sum to the hospital

annually from municipal revenues. Dibert wished to become a member of the Hospital Board, and the Era Club endeavored to make this possible. Shortly before the election, the Era Club also came out in opposition to an amendment involving a nine million dollar bond issue that the women thought would endanger the public school system, and with this new issue the word went out to defeat the women's amendment. As Jean Gordon observed, "the women of the entire state were punished because the Era Club, the mothers Co-operative Clubs, and a few of the public school teachers refused to be ordered . . . ."[26]

The National Woman's Party, the militant arm of the suffrage movement, established an organization in Louisiana sometime before 1919. There is little information available on this group, but among its more active members were Mrs. E. J. Graham, (Mrs.) Rosella Bayhi, and Mrs. M. R. Bankston. In June, 1916, the Congressional Union, led by Alice Paul, formed the National Woman's Party. Until 1917 this group had limited its activities to organizing within the states, lobbying Congress and sending delegates to see the president. In January of 1917 the organization became militant and began a series of pickets, hunger strikes, and bonfires, activities which were widely publicized by the newspapers of the day. The organization directed its agitation against the Democrats and especially against the imcumbent president and party leader, Woodrow

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[26]New Orleans Times Picayune, 10 November 1914.

Wilson.[27] During the militant years over 500 of its members were arrested and 169 were given prison sentences, mainly at the infamous Occoquian Workhouse, or to the Washington District Jail. In most cases members had been arrested while picketing the White House in August and September of 1917, or during the Watchfire Demonstration outside the White House in January and February of 1919. Mauled and battered by mobs of onlookers as they maintained silent vigils, and brutually treated by arresting officers and prison personnel, these women received prison sentences of up to seven months. The charges ranged from obstructing sidewalk traffic to setting fire in a public place in the District of Columbia between sunset and sunrise. At no time were any of the mob, who had torn the banners from the women's hands and perpetrated other violent acts, arrested.

Among the militants serving jail terms were two Louisiana women, (Mrs.) Alice M. Cosu of New Orleans and Willie Grace Johnson of Shreveport. Cosu was vice-chairman of the Louisiana State Branch of the National Woman's Party and was arrested in November 1917, for picketing. She was sentenced to thirty days in the Occoquian Workhouse. Johnson was also a state officer of the organization and was a successful business women and prominent civic worker in Shreveport. She was arrested in a Watchfire Demonstration in February 1919.[28] Cosu was

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[27]Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 269; Harper, History of Woman's Suffrage, 6:233.

arrested with forty-one others, and on her first night in jail shared a cell with Mary I. Nolan of Jacksonville, Florida, who, at seventy-three years of age, was the oldest of the pickets.[29] Upon her release, Mary Noland dictated a statement telling of her six days of imprisonment. Although only part of her statement tells of the events relating to Cosu, it is enough to give one a chilling view of what must have been a night of terror for this Louisiana woman. Nolan narrated:

> At the end of the corridor they pushed me through a door. Then I lost my balance and fell against the iron bed. Mrs. Cosu struck the wall. Then they threw in two mats and two dirty blankets. There was no light but from the corridor. The door was barred from top to bottom. The walls and floor were brick or stone cemented over. Mrs. Cosu would not let me lie on the floor. She put me on the couch and stretched out on the floor on one of the two pads they threw in. We had only lain there for a few minutes, trying to get our breath, when Mrs. Lewis, doubled over and handled like a sack of something, was literally thrown in. Her head struck the iron bed. We thought she was dead. She didn't move. We were crying over her as we lifted her to the pad on my bed, when we heard Mrs. Burns call:
>
> "Where is Mrs. Nolan?"
>
> I replied, "I am here."
>
> Mrs. Cosu called out, "they have just thrown Mrs. Lewis in here too."
>
> At this Mr. Whittaker came to the door and told us not to dare to speak, or he would put the brace and bit in our mouths and the straight jackets on our bodies. We were so terrified we kept very still. Mrs. Lewis was not unconscious; she was only stunned. But Mrs. Cosu was desperately ill as the night wore on. She had a bad heart attack and was then vomiting. We called and called. We asked them to send to our own doctor, because we thought she was dying . . . they (the guards) paid no attention. A cold wind blew in on us from the outside, and we three lay there shivering and only conscious until morning.[30]

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[28]Doris Stevens, Jailed for Freedom (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1920), pp. 354-71.

[29]Ibid., p. 192. [30]Ibid., pp. 197-98.

As in the 1913 parade, many of the women given prison terms were wives and daughters of wealthy and socially and politically prominent men; one was the niece of former Vice-President Adlai Stevenson.[31]

News of the activities of the militants in 1917-1919 was received with understanding and approval by the members of the Louisiana Branch of the National Women's Party. The comments of the other women's suffrage groups and Louisiana citizens ranged from praise to condemnation. During a state convention, the Louisiana Federation Women's Clubs, a group that had strongly supported women's suffrage, denounced the militant policy of the National Women's Party, and several speakers described the methods of the national group as rash and showing evidence of "Bolshevism." Mrs. E.J. Graham, presidnet of the New Orleans Federation of Clubs, and also the New Orleans chairperson for the National Women's Party, was the only person to cast a negative vote against a resolution condemning militancy, and after the resolution passed, she left the convention in protest. During the ensuing discussion, Graham openly acknowledged her sympathies for the militants and stated that she was sure that there were other women in attendance who shared her feelings but would not publicly acknowledge it. She declared, "I publicly acknowledge my indebtedness to my sisters in Washington who are sacrificing themselves for this principle

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[31]Ibid., pp. 354-71.

for which we stand in common support. It is a wonderful thing to suffer and die for an ideal."[32]

Lydia Holmes, chairman of the Louisiana Woman's Suffrage Party, seemed anxious that the suffrage cause should not suffer because of a "willful few" who comprised only 2 percent of the women in America. In September of 1919 she issued a statement from Baton Rouge saying that the majority of women did not approve of the pickets and that she hoped the public would not hold 98 percent of the women responsible for the actions of the few.[33] On the other hand, the New Orleans Item, in an editorial, related how charging crowds, in attempting to stop a Watchfire Demonstration, had knocked down the women carrying banners and destroyed the signs. The Item thought that the crowd might have overlooked more opportune occasions to demonstrate. Certainly, former President Theodore Roosevelt's defamatory remarks and actions had been more disrespectful and destructive than the suffrage women had been, not to mention Senator Henry Cabot Lodge and others from a long list of Wilson critics. "Any of them would make nobler game for president - protecting mobs than, a few weak and unprotected women not even enjoying the good will of the police force."[34] During

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[32]New Orleans Times Picayune, 15 February 1919.

[33]Ibid., 15 February 1919; 23 December 1919. Carrie Chapman Catt was also concerned that the militants would harm the suffrage cause. In the New York parade in 1917, she had suffragists carry signs disavowing the pickets. See Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 286.

[34]New Orleans Item, 4 January 1919.

the latter part of January 1919, three internationally —known militants visited New Orleans as guests of the Louisiana branch of the militant group. One, Mary E. Dubrow, held an outdoor meeting on the streets of New Orleans, addressing bystanders from the back of an automobile. Graham presided at the meeting, and within a short time there was a standing audience of over 125 persons. A few days later, the Louisiana Association held a dinner at La Louisiane Restaurant in New Orleans at which time (Mrs.) Abby Scott Baker from the National Association and the Reverend Quincy Ewing of Napoleanville, Louisiana, delivered the addresses. More than 100 women and men attended the event.[35]

Early in 1919, Senator Edward Gay of Louisiana, at the urging of Lydia Holmes, was drawn into the center of activities then evolving around the federal amendment for woman's suffrage, and for a brief time it appeared he might be the one responsible for Congress passing the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. By January of 1918, nationwide events relating to woman's suffrage had carried the Anthony Amendment to the threshold of success. Alice Paul and her National Woman's Party and Carrie Chapman Catt and the National Woman's Suffrage Association, with its winning plan, had produced results. In one month alone six states (three in one week) had granted presidential suffrage to women. There was even a victory in the "Solid South," when, in March, Arkansas gave women the vote in state primaries.[36]

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[35] New Orleans Times Picayune, 24 January 1919; Ibid., 29 January 1919.

Another dimension was added with the entry of the United States into World War I. Women assumed a large role in the work force, substituting for men in hundreds of occupations. Large numbers of women labored long hours in jobs that in many cases had been held previously by men. It became increasingly difficult to deny the ballot to women who had joined the war effort and held jobs manufacturing explosives, steel plates, armaments, electrical tools, automobiles, and airplane parts. Women were also involved in the production of fertilizer, chemicals, and oil; they performed numerous service jobs and worked in many other positions. The many war-related jobs of women brought about the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, and other women's departments were set up to meet the needs of women in the labor force. For the first time women were appointed to government bodies. Anna Shaw and Carrie Chapman Catt both served on the Women's Committee of the Council for National Defense. The association financed and maintained an overseas hospital in France, and "somehow the busiest suffrage leaders were also those who found it possible to raise food, can it, knit and work for the Red Cross."[37]

On 9 January 1918, President Wilson announced his support of the Anthony Amendment, and the following day the House of Representatives passed it with exactly the two-thirds majority

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[36]Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 290; Morrisson, et al., Victory, pp. 162-63.

[37]Flexner, Century of Struggle, pp. 288-89.

needed. The necessary Senate adoption proved elusive, however, and it took nearly nine months to bring the amendment before that body, only for it to fall short of adoption by two votes. Four months later, on 10 February 1919, the Amendment was again voted on in the Senate, and this time it was defeated by only one vote.[38] It was at this point that Senator Gay became a focal point of interest. At the suggestion of Lydia Holmes, chairman of the Woman's Suffrage Party, the Louisiana Assistant Attorney General, Harry Gamble, and Democratic National Committeeman Robert Ewing devised an amendment to the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. The proposed amendment would have altered the Anthony Amendment to allow the states, rather than the federal government, to have the exclusive authority to pass enforcement legislation. Holmes accompanied the two Louisiana men to Washington, D.C., where, after obtaining the consent of the officers of the National Association, they contacted Gay. The senator agreed to introduce the amendment, and if it passed, he would then change his vote and support the Anthony Amendment. Since the Anthony Amendment had failed by only one vote, Gay's vote would assure its passage.[39] The Gay Amendment was unanimously reported out of the Senate Committee on Woman's Suffrage. Since, however, the Anthony Amendment had been previously defeated in the Senate, it was

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[38] Ibid., pp. 291-93, 310-13; Stevens, Jailed for Freedom, p. 348.

[39] Letter from Ethel Hutson to Ida Husted Harper, 6 February 1921, Hutson Papers; New Orleans States, 19 February 1919; Harper, History of Woman's Suffrage, 6:228-29.

necessary to achieve unanimous consent of the Senate before the Anthony Amendment could be considered. With only three days left before the "lame-duck" session of the Sixty-Fifth Congress, Senator Wesley Jones, chairman of the Woman's Suffrage Committee, asked for reconsideration of the Anthony Amendment, but consent was denied. On each of the two remaining days of the session, Jones tried to bring the amendment to the floor of the Senate, but was unsuccessful. Thus, Louisiana's opportunity to change the course of history was lost.[40]

When President Wilson called the 66th Congress into special session on 20 May 1919, he again recommended that Congress pass the Woman's Suffrage Amendment. On the first day of the new session, the House again passed the Amendment, this time with forty-two votes more than the necessary two-thirds needed. This was largely a result of the 170 new members in the House. After only two days of debate, the Senate, on 4 June 1919, passed the amendment with two votes more than the minimum two-thirds. At long last, Congress had passed the Woman's Suffrage Amendment, in the same form as originally proposed by Susan B. Anthony. Of the two Louisiana Senators, Gay voted against the Amendment, but Joseph Randall, a long-time supporter, voted for it.[41] There had been some thought

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[40]Stevens, _Jailed for Freedom_, p. 327; _New Orleans States_, 2 March 1919.

[41]Stevens, _Jailed for Freedom_, p. 341; Flexner, _Century of Struggle_, pp. 314-15.

of trying to reintroduce the Gay Amendment in the Senate after the 66th Congress convened, but in a telegram to Holmes, Gay stated, "all of our friends consider it useless to introduce amendment presented by Senator Jones last session. Advocates of the Anthony Amendment have the votes and will not consider any compromise."[42]

Previous hostilities between the Louisiana group who supported a Federal Amendment and the group that opposed it were mere skirmishes compared to the intense battle that commenced in January 1918, with the first announcement that the House of Representatives had given a favorable vote to the Anthony Amendment. Except for a brief truce when the two associations, one led by the Gordon sisters and the other by Holmes, worked together for a state amendment, the battle would continue until its ultimate conclusion in August 1920, when the Anthony Amendment was finally adopted. Confident that Senate approval would shortly follow, the Louisiana Woman's Suffrage Party immediately begin to plan a state campaign for ratification in the May 1918, session of the Legislature. At the same time Holmes set up plans for a parallel amendment to the Louisiana State Constitution, reasoning that even if the federal amendment passed, it would be necessary to remove the word "male" from Articles 197 and 198 of the state constitution, or Louisiana women would not be able to vote in state primaries.[43]

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[42] Telegram from Edward Gay to Lydia Holmes, 27 May 1919, Edward Gay Papers, Department of Archives, Louisiana State University.

As the passage of the Federal Suffrage Amendment became imminent, it became increasingly more apparent that despite Kate Gordon's intense longing for woman's suffrage she, herself, could not accept the federal amendment and risk losing what was necessary to her—the maintainance of white supremacy in the South. There is no evidence to cause one to doubt the sincerity of her earlier statements to the effect that even though she believed that allowing women to vote was a state right, suffrage was of first importance to her, and that she would welcome it, even in the form of a federal amendment. One can only wonder whether her shift resulted from ingrained racial beliefs, deeper than she realized, or whether in seeking to defend her position, in numerous speeches made in Louisiana and throughout the South, she had convinced herself that a federal amendment would be disastrous.[44] In any case, side by side with the newspaper articles in which Holmes announced plans for the state ratification of the federal amendment, there was an article that presented excerpts from an anti-federal suffrage amendment speech given by Gordon. After the speech, the Era Club forwarded letters to the Louisiana congressmen who had voted against the amendment in the House of

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[43] New Orleans Item, 13 January 1918.

[44] Only as paid advertisement would the Picayune print the Era Club's side of the uproar created by the Picayune and Item when a Picayune reporter eavesdropped on the club's executive session and overheard a decision not to send a telegram to President Wilson, when his wife, Eleanor, died. A number of newspapers outside of New Orleans came to the defense of the Gordons and the Era Club against "the persecutions of a yellow journal." See New Southern Citizen, October 1914, p. 7-9.

Representatives, commending them for their action. In her speech Kate Gordon's remarks took on a more personal tone that noted in her previous addresses:

> The ballot that would come to women under a federal amendment . . . would not be worth the paper it would be written on.
>
> By a federal amendment negro women would be placed on the same basis with white women, and that while white men would be willing to club black men away from the polls they would not use the club upon black women.
>
> . . . If the federal amendment should be ratified, I shall have to revise my statement about the polls being proper places for white women, for they certainly would not be, and if the Democrats do force a federal amendment upon us, they will be no better than Republicans.[45]

A temporary truce between two of the state associations was called in September 1918, after the State Legislature adopted a state suffrage amendment. For the ratification campaign the women formed a joint committee that included the president and three members from each organization. The two presidents, Lydia Holmes and Jean Gordon, served as committee chairpersons, and each association maintained its own headquarters and finances.[46] Campaigning was difficult as an influenza epidemic caused a ban against public meetings. In addition, instead of the usual dry autumn season, a six week deluge of rain produced road conditions that prohibited any campaigning in the outlying districts. Despite these problems, the women waged a gallant campaign, sending out thousands of letters throughout the state. Various factions sent letters

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[45] New Orleans Item, 13 January 1918.

[46] Ibid., 8 September 1918; New Orleans Times Picayune, 8 September 1918.

and telegrams pledging support, and labor unions unanimously supported the amendment. One major exception was the New Orleans ring led by "Boss" Martin Behrman, the city's mayor. Eight days before the November 5 election, the seventeen ward leaders in New Orleans met and decided to oppose the amendment. Since they controlled approximately 15,000 votes, this was a severe blow to the hopes of the Louisiana Suffragists. The only hope for success lay in a heavy one-sided vote in the remainder of the state.[47]

On the morning following the election, women working in the state headquarters awoke to depressing news. The amendment had lost by 9,000 votes in New Orleans, and, although there were only scattered reports from around the state, it appeared as though the amendment would lose by 9,000 or 10,000 votes. Despite reports that many precincts did not open because of the weather and the epidemic, when the official returns were announced, voting outside of New Orleans had decreased the losing majority to only 3,605. The vote was 23,037 against and 19,432 for the amendment. The "Ring" had once again defeated the women.[48]

Angered with betrayal by the men in New Orleans, the Era Club called a protest meeting to be held at the Liberty Monument to drape black crepe on the monument. The monument had been

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[47] New Orleans Times Picayune, 31 October 1918; New Orleans Item, 3 November 1918; Harper, History of Woman's Suffrage, 6: 224-25, 228.

[48] New Orleans Times Picayune, 6 November 1918; Undated clipping. Hutson Papers; Harper, History of Woman's Suffrage, 6:225.

erected to commemorate the battle that took place on 14 September 1874, when New Orleans citizens made an unsuccessful attempt to gain control of the city government during Reconstruction. This meeting was called to protest the "actions of the city ring, whereby the white women of this state were continued by the votes of white men, the inferiors of negro men in their United States citizenship."[49]

With the defeat of the state suffrage amendment behind them, battle lines were drawn between the two state associations. With congressional adoption of the Anthony Amendment in June of 1919, the efforts of each side to win over public opinion accelerated, creating an even more tense atmosphere. Opponents of the federal amendment continued to raise the state's rights and white supremacy issues, adding others from time to time, such as variations of the statement expressed by Harry Gamble in a letter to Senator Ramsdall. Twenty-two pages in length, Gamble's letter warned Ramsdall that if women were granted suffrage by a federal amendment, it would bring "great evil" to the South. Among his arguments was an assertion that black women were "far more fearless" than black men, and opinions or intimidation would not deter them. He pointed out that while black women had a commendable and human ambition for their children and for themselves, they were "without a correspondingly good judgment as to what will contribute most certainly to that advancement." If they were presented with

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[49]New Orleans States, 22 November 1918.

the facts "that some great power at Washington had given them the right to vote, they will both qualify and vote, every possible one."[50]

Since Gamble and others who made similar statements supported a state amendment giving votes to women, these arguments were refuted by the New Orleans Item, arguing that under the state amendment,"scheme," if the "Bold Colored Lady" were given the right to vote by the state, and the federal government had already forbidden "the state to prevent her, as a Negro, from voting, she will simply step into the United States Court to enforce the existing 15th Amendment. The fat will then be in the fire."[51]

Kate Gordon, in a letter to the editor of the Item, presented the argument that the laws and policies preventing Negro men from voting were merely subterfuges that white Southerners believed were justified because ratification of the 15th Amendment had been obtained by "irregular" means. If the South accepted the federal suffrage amendment as regularly ratified, there would be no justification for these subterfuges, and the South would be conceding that the federal government had the right to define a state's election code and

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[50]Letter from Harry Gamble to Senator Ransdall, 26 January 1918, p. 22. A bound, printed copy of this letter can be found in the Louisiana Room, Tulane University. A notation in the book states that additional copies could be obtained from Kate Gordon.

[51]New Orleans Item, 26 July 1919.

supervise elections. The _Item_ declared that whether the South conceded it or not, Congress already had the power to do these things under the 15th Amendment.[52]

This thesis was the consensus of the judgment of six legal experts who rendered opinions for the Louisiana Ratification Campaign Committee. The opinions were given by Edward P. Merrick, son of Carolyn Merrick, L. E. Hall, W. O. Hart, Frank Loony, W. B. Waldo, and State Senator Norris P. Wilkinson. The gist of their opinions was that the 15th Amendment did not guarantee the black man the right to vote, only the right not to be denied this privilege because of race. In addition, the 19th Amendment did not guarantee anyone the right to vote, it only stated that no one could be denied suffrage on account of sex. As Judge Waldo declared:

> There never will be a FORCE BILL and certainly the ADOPTION of the NINETEENTH AMENDMENT will not in the slightest degree enhance the possibility of such legislation, for whatever warrant there is for such an enactment IS ALREADY IN THE CONSTITUTION and the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment will add NOTHING to that warrant, just as the adoption of women's suffrage THROUGH STATES' MEASURES could take NOTHING from the SAME WARRANT.[53]

Another one of the legal experts further added that since the state had adopted the 18th Amendment (prohibition), those who supported it could not oppose the suffrage amendment based on

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[52]Ibid.

[53]_Expert Legal Opinions on the Ratification of the Federal Amendment to the Constitution for Woman's Suffrage: Presented by the Louisiana Ratification Campaign Committee_ (New Orleans: n.p., 1920). This is a small, bound book containing twenty-two pages, although, the pages are not numbered.

the principle of state's rights, fearing that it would violate state sovereignty. "He cannot well say that he is unable to swallow the gnat, when he has been so recently seen to swallow an elephant."[54]

Following the advice of Governor-elect John Parker, suffrage groups supporting the federal amendment formed a Joint Ratification Committee. Women and men from throughout the state attended an organizational meeting on 7 April 1920. At the meeting an aide of Parker publicly pledged Parker's support. Marshall Ballard, editor of the New Orleans Item and a strong Parker supporter, was present and vouched for the authenticity of the pledge. The Committee was composed of Mrs. Joseph Devereaux and Mrs. Joseph Friend, representing the Woman's Suffrage Party; Mrs. E. J. Graham, (Mrs.) Rosella Bayhi, and Mrs. M. R. Bankston, from the Louisiana branch of the National Woman's Party; Mrs. S. J. Henry, from the Natchitoches Equal Rights Club; and Mrs. J. D. Wilkinson from the Shreveport Suffrage Club.[55]

The "antis" were also busy organizing. On 5 May forty people met and formed the Anti-Federal Suffrage Party with Governor Ruffin Pleasant's wife, Anne, as president. At this meeting the governor, a supporter of woman's suffrage by a state amendment pledged to fight the federal amendment. The

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[54]Ibid.

[55]Harper, History of Woman's Suffrage, 6:231. There is a copy of most of the manuscript of Hutson's report on ratification in the Hutson Papers.

meeting was attended by representatives from the Southern Woman's Rejection League and the National Woman's Anti-Suffrage Party. To those in the audience who were ardent suffragists but opposed the federal amendment, Governor Pleasant explained the presence of these representatives from groups opposed to woman's suffrage in any form by stating that the important issue was the fight against the federal amendment "and the difference between the others must be forgotten or the required opposing strength will be wanting."[56] These anti-suffrage representatives attended a later meeting of the new organization, held at the governor's mansion, and Anne Pleasant was careful to announce that although they were opposed to women's suffrage in any form, they would not distribute any literature against a state amendment.[57] The State Times editorialized against the visitors who rejected suffrage on any grounds, but who came from far distances to "help." Concern was expressed for Louisiana women who were "being led, some dumb, some blind, to the slaughter of their own golden goose." Reminding the "dear ladies" that the War between the States had ended fifty-five years ago, the State Times warned:

> With . . . "States rights" held before their charmed gaze by those of their own sex utterly opposed to woman suffrage in any shape or form, they are playing "Goblin will get you" as innocently and naively as if they were at a

[56] Baton Rouge State Times, 5 May 1920.

[57] Ibid., 8 May 1920.

> children's social instead of on the brink of the grave of their own bright dreams of enfranchisement ready to consign it to earth as soon as it proves stillborn by their own quixotic behavior.[58]

The Ratification Committee was expecting strong support from Parker, who was inaugurated as governor seven days after the beginning of the 1920 legislative session. Parker had been Theodore Roosevelt's running mate on the Progressive Party ticket in the 1912 presidential election, and women's suffrage had been a plank of that platform. Lydia Holmes met with Parker on a number of occasions, and she was always led to believe that he was solidly behind ratification and could be counted on to help when needed.[59]

By the time the Louisiana Legislature covened on 10 May 1920, thirty-five states had ratified the federal suffrage amendment, and its supporters hoped that the Bayou State would put the amendment "over the top" by being the thirty-sixth state to approve. Nationwide attention was focused on Baton Rouge, and Democratic leaders were pushing for Louisiana's ratification. From the opening day of the Legislature until the defeat of the federal suffrage amendment on 15 June, tremendous interest was focused on the issue of women's suffrage. Almost daily, Louisiana newspapers carried front page news, often in bold headlines, about the events taking place at Baton Rouge.

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[58] Ibid., 11 May 1920.

[59] Harper, History of Woman's Suffrage, 6:231.

On the third day of the session, Governor Pleasant submitted to both houses the federal suffrage amendment, and, in a lengthy message, urged the Legislature to reject it and instead adopt the state amendment. On the same day, Homer S. Cummings, chairman of the National Democratic Committee, issued an appeal to Democrats in the Legislature to support the federal amendment.[60]

In order to squash a damaging rumor circulating in the capital city, Carrie Chapman Catt, on 15 May sent a telegram to Baton Rouge denying that the federal amendment had been written by a Negro.[61] Two days later Parker was inaugurated as governor and the following day received a wire from President Wilson requesting that he use his influence to support the federal amendment. At this, now governor Pleasant issued a statement in which he objected to the telegrams Democratic leaders were sending into the state soliciting support for the federal amendment.[62] When Parker replied to Wilson that he was not taking sides on the suffrage question, Lydia Holmes and the ratification supporters were shocked. They were in for an even greater shock when later, for the first time, Parker refused to see a delegation of women.[63]

By the end of the month, legislative action on women's suffrage was in full swing, with bills introduced providing

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[60]<u>Baton Rouge State Times</u>, 13 May 1920.

[61]Ibid., 15 May 1920. [62]Ibid., 17 May 1920.

[63]Ibid., 19 May 1920.

for ratification of the federal amendment and also a bill creating a state women's suffrage amendment. In the Legislature, the ratification campaign was directed in the House by Representative S. O. Shattuch and in the Senate by Williamson. The state amendment was introduced in the House by L. L. Upton, and J. O. Stewart introduced it in the Senate.[64]

A highlight of the ratification debates was a five-hour hearing on the federal suffrage amendment before the Joint Committee on Federal Regulation. Held on the night of 2 June, the meeting lasted past 1:00 a.m. the following morning. There were eleven who spoke on behalf of ratification, including Lydia Holmes, Mrs. E. J. Graham, as well as three other suffragists. For the opposition there were four speakers, including Pleasant, Kate Gordon, and Charlotte Rowe from the National Woman's Anti-Suffrage Party. None of the speakers really offered new insights to the arguments that had been frequently given in the past. Phandor Brezeale added a touch of humor to the proceedings when he replied to Pleasant's rehashing of the argument that ratifying the federal amendment would give Negro women as well as white women the suffrage, and ratification of the 19th Amendment meant approving the 15th Amendment and as such would give suffrage to Negro men. Brezeale made the "crowd roar" with this comment: "Why, if the governor was as afraid of the negro question as he makes out he is, he

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[64]Harper, History of Woman's Suffrage, 6:225.

would have to get you ladies to escort him home tonight."[65] It was after 1:00 a.m. when another "big suffrage gun," Jared Sanders, was spotted standing at the rear of the room and in response to calls from the audience came forward: He declared:

> There has been more blank cartridges fired here tonight, than I have ever seen. It's a sham battle. Federal suffrage is here. You can't stop it. You can't prevent it.
>
> If you think the women are entitled to vote-don't hide behind the smoke screen of state suffrage. And for the negro, remember this. The same grandfather clause keeps negro men from voting will keep the negro women. I know because I wrote the grandfather clause on the Constitution.[66]

The strongest support for ratification came from the Senate, while the House favored the state amendment. As a result the state amendment fared well in the lower chamber, passing 93 to 17. It was rejected in the Senate, 23 to 16. Ratification for the federal amendment failed in the House by a vote of 67 to 44. This was followed by a resolution in the House definitely rejecting ratification by a vote of 60 to 29. Despite a last minute effort by Governor James Cox of Ohio, the Democratic nominee for president in 1920, to revive ratification, the Legislature adjourned on 8 July with Louisiana losing the historical opportunity to be the thirty-sixth state to ratify the 19th Amendment.[67]

On the final day of the session Lydia Holmes was able to finally see Governor Parker. When told that he had betrayed

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[65] Baton Rouge State Times, 3 June 1920.

[66] Ibid. [67] Ibid., 15 May 1920; Ibid., 17 May 1920.

the women and that the blame for ratification would be placed "where it belonged," he answered, "Go to it."[68] Holmes did just that, issuing a public statement one week later which declared that every woman lobbying in Baton Rouge and "all fair-minded men" could verify that "the responsibility for the failure of this amendment to enfrancise twenty seven million women, including Louisiana's women, was defeated by John M. Parker, Governor." She further stated, "the women were persona non-grata in his office, and were told that he did not care to discuss suffrage with them." While the governor closed the door to women, any man could go to him. Holmes added that the door of the governor's office had never before been closed to any citizen to discuss anything.[69]

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[68]Harper, History of Woman Suffrage, 6:235. T. Harry Williams does not agree with certain observers of Louisiana politics that Parker was "the greatest governor of his century." Since Parker had friends on both sides of the ratification issue, Williams's characterization of Parker is perhaps pertinent. Williams believed that while Parker was not reluctant to use political power, he lacked the will to use it, "and was hardly ever the master of a situation." This indecision colored the way he approached economic and social problems to which he was committed. This was a weakness he shared, in Williams's opinion, with most progressive reformers. These reformers, as members of the middle class, recognized the need for reform and would push change to a point, but would then pull back. In Parker's case, concern that he would do financial harm to his friends, and fear that he would "offend them socially" held him back. "Politicians like Parker prepare the way for revolutionary change. They improve conditions somewhat, enough to arouse desires for more change but not enough to satisfy existing needs. They sow the seed, but bolder men have to do the harvestings." See Williams, Huey Long, pp. 136-37.

[69]New Orleans Item, 15 July 1920.

The role that Mayor Behrman of New Orleans may have played during the legislative session varied with the person interviewed about this situation. Before the session commenced, he had announced he favored ratification of the federal amendment. Holmes believed that he had helped as much as he could, with all of his men in the Senate voting "right," and he had done everything possible in the House, but unfortunately could not persuade his men to stand together.[70] On the other hand, State Senator Thomas Craven charged that it was Behrman who killed ratification in Louisiana. Craven pointed out that it was only after thirty-five states had ratified, and women's suffrage was a certainty, that the mayor had pledged his supprt. This was merely a ploy designed to win favor with the National Democratic Party and not to offend any future women voters. When it came time for action, however, Craven found it "very peculiar" that Behrman's men in the House, where ratification did not have a chance, voted for the amendment, and in the Senate, where ratification support was strong, the Ring's henchmen voted against ratification. Craven had no doubts that Behrman had pulled a "fast deal."[71]

As for the defeat of the state suffrage amendment, Holmes believed that it had "killed itself." She claimed the Pleasants had both made statements to the effect they did not care whether the state amendment bill passed or not, for all they wanted

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[70]Ibid. [71]Ibid., 22 August 1920.

was to kill ratification. Jean Gordon made the same assertion to Senator Bagwell and others. As a result, Holmes declared, when ratification supporters in the Legislature learned that the state amendment was "simply a subterfuge and being used to catch men who were not suffragists, they reacted and automatically killed it." Kate Gordon found it "incredible" that "those who claimed to be ardent suffragists" worked to defeat the state amendment after they found out that ratification of the federal amendment could not pass.[72]

The suffrage battle was not over, however, and until the end, Louisiana women played a dramatic role. In the early part of August 1920, national attention turned to Tennessee, and it was in this state the drama of the woman's suffrage movement was concluded. The Tennessee Legislature convened in special session on 9 August and was urged by the governor to ratify the 19th Amendment promptly. Sensing the importance of this session, both sides turned out in forces. Carrie Chapman Catt came from the National American Women's Suffrage Association and joined forces with the state chairman of the National Women's Party to ratify the amendment. Holmes of Louisiana and another suffragist from Maryland came to assist Catt. Working side-by-side with anti-suffragists, who gathered in Nashville "from Maine to the Gulf of Mexico, many of them paid workers," were Anne Pleasant and Kate Gordon, along with another ardent suffragist and former national association

[72]Ibid., 15 July 1920.

officer, Laura Clay of Kentucky.[73] At one point, Pleasant even went to the small Tennessee town of Niota in an attempt to have a mother urge her son to reconsider his vote.[74] Following a desperate effort by both sides to achieve victory, on 18 August 1920, Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to ratify, and the 19th Amendment became a part of the federal constitution. News of the victory reached Louisiana with Holmes's telegram simply stating, "We Win."[75]

Throughout the state, Louisiana supporters of the federal amendment were jubilant. The celebration held in Baton Rouge on the night of "victory" was typical of many held in the state. It was reported that the Baton Rouge suffragists held a "jollification meet" on North Boulevard, near the City Hall. Following the celebration, the suffragists formed a parade, and riding in cars decorated with the suffragists colors and waving ratification signs left over from the legislative session, they paraded up and down the major streets of the city.[76] In the glow of victory, the Women's Suffrage Party,

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[73]Morrisson, et al, Victory, p. 150; Harper, History of Woman's Suffrage, 6:620-21.

[74]Flexner, Century of Struggle, p. 372. It was young Representative Harry Burns, keeping a pledge to his mother, to hurry and vote for suffrage, whose vote gave the necessary majority needed for Tennessee to become the 36th state to ratify the woman's suffrage amendment. Morrisson, et al., Victory, pp. 152-53.

[75]New Orleans Times Picayune, 19 August 1920; Antoinette Elizabeth Taylor, The Woman's Suffrage Movement in Tennessee (New York: Bookman Associates, 1957), pp. 104-25.

[76]Ibid.

the Equal Rights Party and the Louisiana branch of the National Women's Party held a banquet to honor the men who had aided in the ratification battle during the legislative session, and Senator Williamson was given a silver loving cup.[77]

Not all Louisiana women were cheering and celebrating. The day after Tennessee ratification, while Kate Gordon was making her way home from Memphis, Jean Gordon issued this statement:

> Tennessee has disgraced the South, I can only say that I am glad that it is not Louisiana which has brought this ignominy upon us.
>
> I am in the position of the women that has worked for suffrage all her life, and now that it has come about I do not want it. Since Governor Cox has supported the national amendment for suffrage, I would not for anything vote the national Democratic ticket.[78]

Ardent suffragists, but a product of their time, Kate and Jean Gordon could not make the transition necessary to accept suffrage coming in the form of a federal amendment. Of all the forces that opposed the suffrage movement from its conception, the liquor interests, primarily in the West, and other business interests, primarily in the East—only the racial barrier remained to the end. All other impediments had fallen in the onslaught of progress, but only the race issue could not be resolved. The scars were still fresh on those whites that were only one generation away from Reconstruction. The views of the Gordon sisters make this abundantly clear.

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[77] Undated clipping, Hutson Papers.

[78] New Orleans Times Picayune, 19 August 1920.

The contribution of the Gordons and those with similar views, however, to the women's movement in Louisiana cannot be overlooked. This crusade took an enormous step forward when women were allowed to vote, and Louisiana women had taken positive steps toward this achievement. It was the Elizabeth Saxons, the Caroline Merricks, and the Gordon sisters who had made it possible. When the Gordons stepped aside in the parade of progress, other Louisiana women quickly stepped forward to fill the gap. Lydia Holmes was with Carrie Chapman Catt in Tennessee when victory was achieved. Louisiana women did not, of course, achieve the suffrage alone. The handful of far-sighted men who had supported the women's movement from its beginning had grown throughout the forty-one years of crusading until, by 1920, a large number of Louisiana men stood side-by-side and shared in the women's victory and triumph.

CONCLUSION

With the adoption of the 19th Amendment a considerable amount of interest centered around the fledgling voters. The focus of this interest was primarily twofold, persuading women to register and concern as to how women would use their vote. Perhaps the most interested in these matters were former suffragists and local and state politicians. While the suffragists and politicians agreed that women should register, their views differed, for the most part, on women's use of the ballot.

In the meantime, parish registrars were busy with the task of arranging to accomodate the prospective registrants. No preparations were more thorough than those made in Orleans Parish. In order for women to be able to vote in the national elections of November 1920, the registration rolls were opened from 15 September through 2 October 1920. Special facilities were set up for women at the Washington Artillery Hall on St. Charles Street, restrooms were provided with a graduate nurse and a corps of nurses-aids on duty. While women were instructed not to bring babies, packages, or bundles to the registration counter, they were assured that "every provision has been made for your comfort." Registrar William Bell concluded with an urgent plea: "Don't crowd; don't hurry; don't worry! Smile and be patient! Every effort has been made to make it easy for you to register. Every woman qualified to register in

Orleans parish should do so."[1]

By October of 1920 there were 47,352 women registered in Louisiana; 1,901 of these were black. In the same year 213,463 men registered.[2] In Baton Rouge, it was thought that enough women had registered to possibly change the results of an election.[3] Within eight years women's registration had risen to 115,456, of whom 320 were Negroes. The rate of increase in the number of men registering during this period was not as great, with a total male registration of 263,561 reported in October of 1924.

Another development, in the wake of the adoption of the 19th Amendment, was the formation of the Louisiana League of Women Voters, following the founding of a National League by the National American Woman Suffrage Association. In March of 1919, approximately fourteen months before the amendment was adopted, the National Suffrage Association amended its constitution to include a League of Women Voters, made up of women from the fifteen full suffrage states. The purpose of the new organization was to "increase the effectiveness of

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[1] New Orleans Item, 5 September 1920.

[2] Report of the Secretary of State to His Excellency the Governor of Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Secretary of State Office, January 1921), pp. 306-07.

[3] Baton Rouge Woman's Enterprise, 19 August 1921.

[4] Report of the Secretary of State to His Excellency the Governor of Louisiana (Baton Rouge: Secretary of State Office, January 1929, pp. 328-30.

women's votes in furthering better government."[5] The following February, confident that the ratification campaign would be successful, a joint convention was held in Chicago. This was the final convention of the National American Suffrage Association and the first annual convention of the National League of Women Voters.[6]

On the morning of 10 December 1920, with their "allotted task completed," the leaders of the Woman Suffrage Party of Louisiana met in New Orleans and, after dissolving their association, formed the nucleus of an association "to foster education in citizenship and support improved legislation as part of the national league." Elizabeth Werlein, wife of Phillip Werlein, was elected state chairman, and Lydia Holmes, "for five years one of the most energentic suffragists in the country," was made honorary chairman. A district chairman was elected for each of the congressional districts, except for districts one and two where one person was elected to serve both of these districts.[7] Thus, Louisiana women wasted no time in implementing their new voting status.

The woman's movement in Louisiana, between 1879 and 1920, was not a planned and continuous campaign but rather was a chain of events with each link in the chain representing an achievement that advanced the cause of women to a more equitable

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[5] *Forty Years of a Good Idea: League of Women Voters* (n.p., 1945), p. 9.

[6] Ibid.

and just place in society. The number of links in the chain is indeed a marvel—a marvel that so much was achieved by a relatively small number led by a mere handful of brave and dedicated women.

After the Civil War, a large number of women were forced by post war conditions to depart from the traditional life style of home and family and venture into public life. Liberated from their societal mold, women slowly expanded their sphere, going beyond the immediate need to provide a livelihood. Women, who might or might not have been a part of the work force, were soon banding together in groups. The earliest groups were primarily missionary and other church societies, followed closely by temperance unions, and, finally by the development of the woman's club movement. In addition to providing the purpose for which they were formed, these groups also served, for many women, as a training ground in leadership. Women's clubs offered unlimited possibilities for women; as a social outlet, providing educational opportunities, and as a base from which to launch social, civic, and legal reforms.

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[7] New Orleans Times Picayune, 11 December 1920. This is contrary to information in the files of the state headquarters of the Louisiana League of Women Voters. Based on these files, the opinion commonly held by contemporary League members is that the first Louisiana League was organized in 1940. Interview with Kate Brown, 12 February 1982. The League of Women Voters Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, contain an extensive correspondence between the Louisiana League and the National League from 1922 to 1936 when the National League withdrew recognition of the state League.

Many women, acting independently of organized groups, also initiated reform programs. Women entered the fields of teaching, writing, and journalism with relative ease, but attempts to obtain a liberal arts education and to enter such graduate professions as medicine and law were successful only after much effort.

Early in the woman's movement, a number of women believed that in order to obliterate the inequities that existed between men and women, not only must the attitude of society change, but it was also necessary to change the legal status of women. The prohibition of the right of women to vote increasingly disturbed the leaders of the women's movement in Louisiana. Near the end of the nineteenth century the suffrage movement in the state was activated, but it was not until after 1913 that a state-wide momentum developed, and it did not subside until woman's suffrage was achieved. The drive for suffrage was marred by a division among women of the state, as to the best method of obtaining suffrage—by a state amendment or by federal amendment.

The woman's movement in Louisiana that began in 1879 reached a climax in 1920 with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, granting women the right to vote, and marking the end of an era. While the liberation of women was not complete, from the achievements gained by women of this era emerged the modern woman of today. The woman's movement in Louisiana made it possible for the women

of the state to take their place with women from around the country in the new era. The marked change in the dress and life-style of the 1920's was only an outward expression of a basic freedom newly experienced by Louisiana women.

Not all Louisiana women desired change, and not all women took advantage of opportunities then available to women, opportunities that increased with the passing years. The women's movement, however, by 1920 provided options for many Louisiana women whose desires and ambitions lay beyond the limited sphere of 1879.

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