

Angelina County — some history

The Battle for Texas Women's Right to Vote

By ELLEN TEMPLE
Special to The Free Press

"A woman's place is in the home" was the battle cry for those opposed to granting Texas women the right to vote (suffrage) back in the late 1800's and early 1900's. Though much of this information is from House and Convention journals, some of the following accounts of that battle was taken from Antoinette Taylor's "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Texas", *The Journal of Southern History*, May, 1951.

In Texas, voices opposed to woman suffrage charged that voting was unwomanly and that a true woman would shrink from mingling in the busy noise of election days.

In explaining his vote, one representative argued that suffrage would lower woman and rob her of her modest charms so dear to Southern men. Another argument was that woman suffrage would break up the home and destroy chivalry. And the religious argued that suffrage violated the Biblical teachings of the subjection of women.

Some raised the issue that women would have to serve on juries when their children might be home sick with the measles! And one of the strongest arguments against giving women the right to vote was, "Women should not expect to exercise all of the privileges of citizenship because they could not help to defend the country by serving in the armed forces." Others added that women did not want to vote anyway!

The woman suffrage proponents countered that women did want to vote, that their disenfranchisement was unjust and that the anti-suffrage arguments were ridiculous. After all, they argued, many women are taxpayers and should have a vote in the election of officials who make and execute laws. Otherwise they suffer from taxation without representation.

And they argued that the Texas Constitution classes women as far as franchise is concerned with children, idiots, lunatics, paupers and felony convicts who are also denied the right to vote. Negroes and aliens have the vote, why not women?

The battle in Texas raged intermittently for 51 years. Opening scenes were at the Constitutional Conventions of 1868 and 1875. The first apparent interest in woman suffrage came at the Texas Reconstruction Constitutional Convention of 1868. In January 1869, the delegates rejected a proposal which would have granted suffrage to every person without distinction of sex, race or previous condition of servitude by an overwhelming 52 to 13 vote. W. H. Mullins and M. A. Gaston represented Angelina and Cherokee Counties at the Convention and both voted with the majority — no.

THE BATTLE BEGINS

At the post reconstruction 1875 Constitutional Convention (which wrote the 1876 Constitution that Texas still has though it's much amended) women suffrage was once again an issue. A Mr. Weaver offered a resolution extolling woman's virtues and stating that: "...she is a citizen of these United States...and inasmuch as woman is of the people, and must be governed by the laws made by the people, and is often a taxpayer, there is no reason, political, human or divine, why she should not have the same rights at the ballot box that man has." His resolution was referred to the Committee on Suffrage.

An indication of how most delegates felt about woman suffrage is apparent in a Mr. Russell's response to Mr. Weaver's above resolution. He demanded that "the suffrage resolution recommending the incorporation of women suffrage in the organic law of this state be expunged from the journals of this Convention by drawing a black line or mark around said resolution!" Mr. Russell's resolution joined Mr. Weaver's in the Committee on Suffrage.

The Convention later disposed of women suffrage by ignoring it. The State Affairs Committee report recommended that voting privileges be extended to all male persons except minors, paupers, lunatics, felons, soldiers and sailors. Aliens could vote if they lived in the state for one year and had declared their intention of becoming citizens. The Convention adopted this report by a vote of 61 to 20 and it became part of the Texas Constitution.

Organized efforts to amend that 1876 Constitution to give Texas women the vote began in the 1890's. And in the spring of 1895, A. C. Tompkins of Hempstead introduced the first woman suffrage resolution in the Texas House. His resolution to enfranchise women by amending the state constitution was referred to the Committee on Constitutional Amendments but never reported. Again in 1911 and 1913 woman suffrage resolutions were introduced but died in Committee. Lobbying efforts of the Texas Equal Rights Assc. and then the Texas Woman Suffrage Assc., later called the Texas Equal Suffrage Assc. were not quite strong enough.

LOCAL CHAPTERS ORGANIZED

After 1913 the Texas Equal Suffrage Assc. held a convention every year and organized on the local level. By 1918 there were 98 local societies which tried to educate their communities and influence legislators with rallies and letters. There were chapters in Nacogdoches and San Augustine but none in Angelina County. The Association may have exerted some influence in Nacogdoches for its representative voted consistently for women suffrage.

By 1915 some opposition had organized called the Texas Division of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage with a woman president. Its announced purpose was to tell people, "...of the evils which would follow the adoption of a scheme to force upon the women of Texas the political duties and responsibilities of citizenship". Their effort was not well organized with no state conventions and few local chapters.

The pro suffrage faction established a headquarters in Austin and lobbied during the regular 1915 session of the Legislature. And the 1915, 34th session finally had its first chance to vote on a resolution to amend the Texas Constitution to provide women suffrage.

It was an important issue. The Speaker put a call on the House, which meant the sergeants were to lock the doors and no member could leave without written permission from the Speaker. Nevertheless, the resolution failed with 90 for; 32 against; ten absent; seven absent-excused. Two-thirds of votes (100 votes of the 150 House membership) are required for passage of a resolution to submit a state constitutional amendment to the people. With only 90 votes, the resolution failed. The same resolution was introduced in the Senate but that body took no action on it.

Angelina County's state representative at the time was B. A. Calhoun of Lufkin who served in 1915 but later died in office. Mr. Calhoun voted yes — for women's suffrage.

LEGISLATIVE EFFORT FAILS

Again in 1917, at the 35th Legislative session, those for women's suffrage made another effort to amend the state constitution. Mr. Jess Baker, the sponsor, argued: "Our present Constitution classes women, as far as franchise is concerned, with children, idiots, lunatics, paupers, and felony convicts. We are only asking you to submit an amendment of the Constitution to the qualified voters of the entire State, which shall take our women out of the above mentioned classes and lift them to a higher plane, where their intelligence and patriotism may have full play."

In the House the resolution failed to get the necessary two-thirds for adoption with 76 for; 56 against; the rest absent. A like resolution in the Senate never came to a vote. Two East Texas representatives, namely Stewart of Jasper, Sabine and Newton Counties and Thomason of Nacogdoches voted yes, for women suffrage. I. D. Fairchild of Lufkin, who had replaced Calhoun and represented Angelina and San



A GROUP OF WORKERS GATHERED in 1888 at the Goddess of Liberty's feet before she was raised to her home atop the Texas Capitol dome. Her Lone Star sisters finally got the right to vote

Augustine Counties voted no.

Angelina County's Mr. Fairchild served through three legislative sessions and then became a State Senator in 1920, a position which he occupied until 1928. Marguerite Shearer Fairchild, the Senator's wife, served in 1935 as the only woman member of the nine member University of Texas Board of Regents.

The 1917 session of the legislature also impeached Gov. James A. Ferguson and removed him from office. Suffragists rejoiced for he was an implacable foe of woman suffrage. Lt. Gov. W. P. Hobby became governor; he was committed to woman suffrage.

Since suffragist efforts to amend the Texas Constitution had failed in 1915 and 1917, it was time for a different effort. The plan was to pass a law allowing women to vote in primary elections in Texas. Such an act could be passed by a simple majority vote of the House and Senate. It would not require a two-thirds vote of the Legislature and ratification by a majority of Texas voters as do constitutional amendments.

FINALLY, A VICTORY

Governor Hobby called the Legislature into special session in March, 1918. C. B. Metcalfe of San Angelo introduced the bill providing that women could vote in primary elections and nominating conventions in Texas. After voting down a couple of amendments, one to provide separate voting booths for women and another to provide separate voting booths for white and black women, members finally passed the bill on March 12. The House vote was 84 for; 34 against; 16 absent. Fairchild of Angelina, Thomason of Nacogdoches and Stewart of Newton all voted for this bill.

in primary elections in 1918. (Photo courtesy of the Chalberg Photo Collection, Austin-Travis County Collection, Austin Public Library, Austin, Texas.)

Mrs. Minnie Fish Cunningham, a leader in the Texas fight for women suffrage, described the drama of that final vote: "we rose to leave the gallery of the House...the men saw us...and gave us a perfect ovation, cheering for some minutes...It was a surprising and greatly appreciated tribute to the work that the women have been doing."

The bill passed the Senate 18 to four. Gov. Hobby signed it. And for the first time women could vote in Texas primary elections!

Since the act exempted women from the poll tax in 1918, they were eligible to vote in the July primary of that year. In the 17 days to register before the election, 386,000 women did so, dispelling any doubts about whether women wanted to vote.

July, 1918, articles in the *Lufkin Daily News* indicate that Angelina County women were very excited about the prospect of voting in the July 27th primary. By July 3, 823 Angelina County women had already registered and 1500 were expected to do so. The Hobby Clubs, formed to support Gov. Hobby against the impeached former Gov. James P. Ferguson, were the main focus of the ladies' political activity. They held meetings in Diboll and Lufkin to discuss candidates for state and local offices, attended rallies and speakings, ran ads for favored candidates, and on election day provided transportation to the polls and baby sitting at Hobby headquarters in Lufkin!

HOBBY CARRIES ANGELINA COUNTY

Political ads in *The Lufkin Daily News* in July, 1918 were designed to appeal largely to women voters. Congressional to sheriff candidates begged the ladies to consider them. With so

many of East Texas' men off to World War I, the woman's vote was going to make a difference!

Ferguson barely carried Angelina County with 2145 votes while Hobby got 2045. Hobby did carry the state though which was a great victory for the ladies.

After passage of the 1918 law, women participated actively in Texas politics. Since Texas was a one party state, the primary vote usually determined the outcome of the general election. Women attended party conventions, and soon a movement developed to try once again to gain full enfranchisement for women in Texas with a state Constitutional amendment. Some suffrage leaders opposed this move because they expected the suffrage amendment to the National Constitution to be approved by Congress during 1919 and wanted to concentrate on its ratification.

But when the Legislature convened in Jan., 1919, Gov. Hobby pushed for an amendment of the state constitution to enfranchise women. And he also recommended the disenfranchisement of aliens who under the Constitution could vote if they lived in the State for one year.

FAIRCHILD JOINS THE FRAY

Such a resolution passed the House with 105 for; 0 against; 36 absent. I. D. Fairchild voted for the amendment as did Walker of Newton and Thomason of Nacogdoches. It also passed the Senate 28 to 0.

Thus the proposed state constitutional amendment to give women the vote was finally submitted to the Texas voters.

The battle was on. The suffragists put on an intensive campaign. Fifteen hundred speakers fanned out over Texas, and supporters circulated more than 3,000,000 leaflets.

Those opposed to woman suffrage distributed 100,000 or so pieces of literature and argued that women did not want to vote and that enfranchisement would destroy the home.

Unfortunately the issues became confused. Enfranchisement of women and disenfranchisement of aliens had to be voted on together. Women could not vote on the proposed amendment since they had only primary suffrage, but aliens who were then fully franchised could vote on it.

On May 24, 1919, the votes were cast and the amendment went down by 25,000 votes. Angelina County voted 711 for; 937 against. Diboll (precinct 19) voted 62 for, 91 against the amendment.

But the undaunted suffragists argued that the alien plank caused confusion and defeated the amendment, that the vote should not be construed as a mandate against woman suffrage. Opponents argued that the vote clearly showed that the legislature should not ratify the federal amendment.

One month after the state women's suffrage amendment went down in flames, the U.S. Congress submitted a federal suffrage amendment to the states for ratification. Only the Legislature votes on an amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

THEN FAIRCHILD VOTED NO

Gov. Hobby called a special session of the Legislature to convene on June 23, 1919, and the next day the ratification resolution passed the Texas House 96 to 20. Thomason of Nacogdoches, who was always pro woman suffrage, voted for and Walker of Newton was absent. I. D. Fairchild of Angelina County voted against passage. His no vote was probably influenced by Angelina County's earlier rejection of the state woman suffrage amendment.

During the remainder of 1919, thirteen other states approved the amendment. And in August, 1920 the required three-fourths of the states had voted for ratification.

The 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution reads as follows:

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.

The Congress shall have power by appropriate legislation to enforce the provisions of this article.

The federal amendment culminated 51 years of effort, and Texas women finally had the right to vote in all elections.

Rusk State Hospital to sponsor Independence Day celebration

For 23 years the Volunteer Services Council has provided services to the patients of Rusk State Hospital. It is in that continuing tradition that the council enlists the citizens' support for the upcoming Independence Day Celebration.

On Friday, July 1st the patients will enjoy a parade, picnic lunch, watermelon feast and a carnival that will include game booths, concessions and entertainment. The annual event is sponsored by the Volunteer Services Council working jointly with the Activities Therapy Department.

Council chairman George T. Hall explained the needs of the council include cash contributions and donations of merchandise and refreshments for the game booths and concession stands. He also encourages organizations to enter floats in the parade scheduled for 10 a.m. Friday, July 1st. Persons wishing to participate in the parade and carnival may contact Joe Rozelle, Coordinator of Volunteer Services, 214/683-3451.

Listed is merchandise needed for the Independence Day Celebration and locations that will receive and forward donations to the Volunteer Services Council for Rusk State Hospital: handkerchiefs, deodorant, hand and body lotion, clothing, bath soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, tobacco, facial tissue, cigarettes, cigars, sunglasses, shampoo, straw hats, mascara, lipstick, rouge, pantyhose, powder, body powder, headscarves, perfume, purses, hats, coin purses, cigarette cases, socks,

after shave lotion, cologne, billfolds, belts, ties, shaving cream, candy, gum, snowcone syrup, bananas, popcorn, popcorn salt, popcorn oil and bags, snowcone cups and fresh fruit.

These items may be delivered to: American Red Cross, 212 W. Angelina, Palestine, Texas 75801, 214/729-5977; American Red Cross, S. Highway 259, Longview, Texas 75601, 214/

753-2091; American Red Cross, 120 1/2 S. First St., Lufkin, Texas 75901, 713/634-6013; Mental Health Association of Tyler, Southside Building #1, 1324 S. Beckham, Tyler, Texas 75701, 214/592-0582 and; Mental Health Association of Beaumont, 650 Main St., Beaumont, Texas 77701, 713/833-8637.

Your tax deductible contributions may be mailed to

the Volunteer Services Council for Rusk State Hospital, P. O. Box 138, Rusk, Texas 75785.

Hall added, "Our continuing success depends on the generosity of the concerned citizens of East Texas. We sincerely believe this can be our best Independence Day Celebration." Rusk State Hospital is an equal opportunity employer.

Donation accepted

MHMR trustees hold regular meet

The Board of Trustees of the Deep East Texas Regional Mental Health Mental Retardation Services (MHMR) held its regular monthly meeting at the Lufkin Federal Savings and Loan Building, Lufkin, on June 14 at 5:30 p.m.

Ward R. Burke, Board member representing Angelina County and Chairman of the Board, was in attendance at this meeting. Burke also serves on the Program Committee.

Items for consideration by the Budget and Finance Committee included the Treasurer's report, discussion of Day Treatment/Administration Facility, consideration of third quarter FY 1977 Expenditure Report, Selection of

Axley and Rode as audit firm for FY 1977, and a discussion of proposed FY 1978 operating budget.

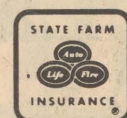
Items for consideration by the Program Committee included a discussion of Mental Health Management Information System and consideration of Joint Agreement with Texas Rehabilitation Commission.

Items for consideration by the Personnel and Public Education Committee included the acceptance of a donation of a piano from the Lufkin Altruus Club to Sunrise Manor and consideration of personnel matters.

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the board will be on July 26 at 5:30 p.m.

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