Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association Ends Long Career: FIFTY-ONE ...
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Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association Ends Long Career

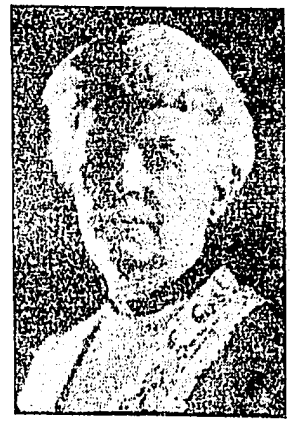
FIFTY-ONE YEARS OF ACTIVITY NOW BROUGHT TO CLOSE

Many Stunts, Such as Heckling President and Cabinet During War Days, Were Simply to Get Free Adevrtising In Newspapers and Magazines.

MRS. M. TOSCAN BENNETT.

MRS. ANNIE G. PORRITT.

MRS. THOMAS N. HEPBURN.



MRS. GEORGE H. DAY, SR.

MISS KATHERINE M'LLEN.

MISS EMILY PIERSON.

MRS. DOROTHY BARTLETT.

NOW that the American people have extended suffrage to include women, naturally the organizations whose main purpose it was to promote this change are dissolving The Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association, formed in 1869, wound up its affairs last week and found only a very few of the original members now living It has had a sensational career of late years, due to its determination to get publicity at any expense even to heckling the government by picketing the White House in the trying days when the government and nation were trying to put every ounce of energy into supporting the boys in the trenches. Some of its members so disturbed the President that he had to have them removed by arrest and then came the hunger strikes—all for the sake of publicity. They got into the papers, which was the idea of the picketing and the refusal of food, and some of the women thought that this kind of free advertising did their cause good. However, all this is over now, and advocates of other changes and "causes" have not taken an example from the "militants" and picketing the White House, else we should have an unhappy mess at Washington continuously.

The work of the suffrage organization was finished when the Federal Suffrage Amendment was ratified. Some of them dissolved before the election. Others waited until the women had actually come into possession of the franchise and are dissolving now.

The Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association was one of the earliest of the state associations to come into existence, and last, Tuesday, at its final annual convention, it announced its own dissolution. For fifty-one years it has worked to win suffrage for women, and of the original members are few indeed who are left. Of the officers elected in 1869, when the group of men and women came together to form a suffrage organization, only one remains, Miss Frances E. Burr of this city, was the first Recording Secretary of the C. W. S. A. and from 1869 to 1909 she was re-elected at every convention.

From 1870 to 1906 the President of the C. W. S. A. was Mrs. Isabella Beecher Hooker, and like the militants of a later day, Mrs. Hooker and some of her contemporaries understood well the basal principles of propaganda—the need of publicity, the absolute necessity that people should become accustomed to the new idea before they could be asked to embrace it. Mrs. Hooker accomplished much for the women of Connecticut even if she did not win the vote for them. She won for them the married woman's property act, the equal guardianship of children law and other measures which were granted by a legislature not willing to extend suffrage to women.

Twenty years ago Mrs. Hooker had begun to grow old and to lose some of her fire and energy. From that moment until 1910 the C. W. S. A. declined in numbers and influence, and Connecticut began to forget that there was any such movement as that for woman's suffrage. Just at that moment when suffrage seemed to be at its lowest ebb—more distant a prospect than it had been forty years before—the tide began to turn. It turned in this state with the incoming into the movement of a new group of women. The revival began simultaneously at two distant points in the state—at Hartford and at Greenwich. In Hartford the leaders were Mrs. Thomas N. Hepburn and Miss Emily Pierson, in Greenwich the most prominent members of the little group were Dr. Valeria H. Parker, now of this city, Miss Caroline Bruutz Rees and Mrs. Ernest Thompson Seton.

Hartford got some startling reminders of the fact that there were women who wanted to vote in the winter of 1909-1910. Mrs. Hepburn and a little group of women who formed a new suffrage league—until its recent dissolution the Hartford Equal Franchise League—began a campaign of advertising. Whole pages of the newspapers were secured, and the reasons for woman suffrage were set forth in easy propositions. There were public meetings also for which speakers of national reputation were secured. This work attracted the attention of the Greenwich group, and the two groups came together and took possession of the offices and machinery of the Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association. This was accomplished at the annual convention in 1910. It was held at Greenwich and quite a fight developed, when the older suffragists who had been in possession of the moribund association tried to hold the fort against the younger, enthusiastic group which was determined to infuse new life and much more "pep" into the movement.

As might be expected, the militant group was successful, and a board was formed with Mrs. Thomas N. Hepburn at its head. Money was pledged to an amount never dreamed of by the older suffragists and the convention was scarcely over before things began to move. There had been some big suffrage meetings in Hartford previous to the convention. These were the work of Mrs. Hepburn and Miss Pierson, and for the first time in history the newspapers carried page and half-page "ads," telling of the meeting and inviting the public to attend.

The winter of 1910-1911 showed an extension of work to other parts of the state. Bridgeport was the next city to form an equal franchise league and to affiliate with the C. W. S. A. Miss Emily Pierson became the state organizer and carried her work to every corner of Connecticut. During the winter the work was chiefly confined to the cities. Letters were sent to every woman's club and organization inviting them to secure a suffrage speaker.

The women who were guiding the suffrage movement knew very well that the first object of a newspaper is to give the news, and that if they were to enjoy space in the pages of daily newspapers they must provide interesting news. This knowledge was at the basis of most of the "stunts" and escapades.

Connecticut certainly had occasion to be surprised at some of the stunts of the years succeeding Mrs. Hepburn's first election as president. In those days it was an unknown thing for women to march in parades. We have now become so accustomed to this form of publicity that it is almost impossible to imagine the horror with which many men and women greeted the first woman's suffrage parade. The occasion was in 1913—the first Saturday in May. The parade was held in New York, and contingents went down from several Connecticut towns to take part in it.

It was for this parade that Connecticut suffragists had made their well known banner—the State symbol worked in suffrage colors of purple, white and green, with "Votes for Women" inscribed on it. This beautiful silk embroidered banner was carried down the line of March from Central Park and 59th street to Union square, along with smaller banners borne by Connecticut women in their special contingent of the parade. It needed courage for the women to take the bold step of marching in this parade, and an officer of the association remembers being called up just before the parade by one of the most faithful members of the C. W. S. A. who asked in horror whether the women were really going to march in the streets of New York. When she learned this was their intention, she said that she was afraid she would have to resign. However, she did not resign, and since then she has walked in many parades, and probably will walk in many more—not for votes for women but for other causes.

In those early days, parades of suffragists made front page news for all the papers, and there was usually an editorial in each of the papers, either approving or disapproving of votes for women. It did not matter very much to the C. W. S. A. whether it was approved or disapproved so long as suffrage was talked about.

Besides parades there were other methods of securing publicity. There were campaigns—automobile campaigns, trolley campaigns, county campaigns, campaigns when the suffragists for a week or two took possession of a town and plastered it over with their posters and window cards. Of course, there were parades in connection with these campaigns, and there were political campaigns whenever a republican or a democratic state convention invited this form of publicity. Bands of workers—during all the earlier years under the leadership of Miss Emily Pierson—were continually stirring up comment in one part or another of the state, and gradually the idea of votes for women became a commonplace, and the first great difficulty was removed.

It was in 1915—five years after the memorable convention of 1910, that a Connecticut Branch of the Congressional Union (afterwards the National Woman's Party) was organized. It was not until 1917 that Mrs. Hepburn resigned her position as president of the Connecticut Woman's Suffrage Association to give her services exclusively to the work for the Federal Amendment. With her went many of the old group that took over the C. W. S. A. in 1910. As members of the National Woman's Party there were Miss Emily Pierson, Mrs. M. Toscan Bennett, Mrs. Jessie Alder, Miss Elsie Hill, Dr. Valeria H. Parker and many others. Miss Catherine Flanagan, a later comer into the suffrage ranks also went over to the militant branch.

These were the days when the National Woman's Party was fighting for publicity. It was impossible to keep the cause of "Votes for Women" in the public eye in those days of wars and rumors of wars, without sensational action. So the idea arose of picketing of the White House.

They began to make their banners highly provocative and at last the patience of the administration and the country gave way, and the authorities tried to suppress the nuisance with doses of prison. This yielded more publicity.

The women concentrated on their objective and forgot some other things. In their wild hunt for publicity, they heckled the country and sacrificed consistency. If everyone with a "cause" to plead, picketed the White House and resorted to hunger strikes we would have not government but chaos. However, that is past, and advocates of other "causes" have not resorted to picketing the White House. Finally the federal amendment was passed, and was quickly ratified by thirty-five states, and on Tuesday, November 2, 1920, the women of America went to the polls.

Their activities now will be less dramatic. They will be working in the cause of good government, which usually is not advanced by press agent methods but by quiet and steady endeavor which attracts little attention and publicity