

Reflections from the Past

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American Suffragist

Anne Dallas Dudley (1876–1955) was founding president of the Nashville Equal Suffrage League in 1911 and in 1915 became president of the Tennessee Equal Suffrage Association, Inc. As of 1917 she became a vice president of the National American Women Suffrage Association (NAWSA).



Photo credit: Library of Congress



With an astounding exertion of positive energy, charm, and leadership, she was, up until August 1920, one of the active leaders who helped bring about the legislative votes to ratify the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution.

The setting for these important steps forward has been described in this way: “During the progressive era, the society woman, preoccupied with her daughter’s debut and her whist parties, yielded to the upper-class clubwoman, a civic-minded, serious breed given to a moderate brand of feminism. This upper-class version of the “new woman” often distanced herself from the self-indulgent society matron and called for a larger role for her sex in civic affairs. In response to the remarkable query by a Nashville Banner reporter in 1912 who asked, “Does society justify itself?”, several Nashville women dismissed the “purely frivolous” activities of the former society woman and pointed to the new “club woman spirit” that brought

women to the serious business of philanthropy, cultural uplift, and “civic housekeeping.” (*Nashville Banner Oct-12, 1912*) It was this new sense of purpose that propelled women like Nashville’s Anne Dallas Dudley, daughter of a wealthy industrialist and wife of a prominent hardware dealer and insurance entrepreneur, to take a leading role in the woman’s suffrage movement. The most significant women’s civic clubs sprang out of the New South industrial expositions of 1895 and 1897, events that helped crystallize a new understanding of the roles women would assume in the progressive era.”¹ Case in point, Dudley founded the Nashville’s Girls Cotillion Club in 1897.

¹ Doyle, Don H “New Men, New Cities, New South- Atlanta, Nashville, Charleston, Mobile - 1860 - 1910”, University of N. Carolina Press, 1990, p. 223

Marching Forward



Courtesy of Tennessee State Library and Archives

Catherine Talty Kenney is credited with creating Nashville's first "Votes for Women" march.

She was praised for her remarkable executive ability, winsome personality, and her untiring energy. During those early years, as researched by historian Carole Bucy, "She quickly became the spokeswoman for the local and state suffrage organization. She joined forces with Luke Lea's progressive Democratic coalition that supported the successful campaign of Republican Ben Hooper when he ran for governor in 1914. Lea owned the Nashville Tennessean newspaper, and Kenny began to organize events in Nashville that would gain positive publicity for the suffrage cause. She organized a suffrage parade, the first in the South, on May 2, 1914 that proved to be a great success. Running from the state capitol building to Centennial Park, it included marchers, decorated automobiles, an elaborate tableau, and a rally staged at the Parthenon in Centennial Park."² The newspaper quoted her as saying, "The interests of men and women are not superior or antagonistic one to the other, but mutual and inseparable. I believe that equal suffrage, like co-education, will react not to the special advantage of either men or women, but will result in a more enlightened, better balanced citizenship and truer democracy."³

An even greater Nashville parade took place in May 1915 and another in 1916, until America's involvement in the war eclipsed the voting rights priorities, rechanneling energies.



Photo credit: Wikipedia

² Bucy, Carole Stanford, *Biographical Sketch of Catherine Talty Kenny*, Included in *Biographical Database of NAWSA Suffragists, 1890-1920*, *Online Biographical Dictionary of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the United States*

³ *Nashville Tennessean*, May 3, 1914, page 4

Anna Howard Shaw and the 1914 National Convention

Dr. Shaw was re-elected president of the National American Women Suffrage Association during the meetings here in Nashville. It would be her last of eleven years as president before passing the torch to Carrie Chapman Catt. Dr. Shaw had, in 1914, helped lead and orchestrate 7 individual state women's suffrage campaigns (2 won and 5 lost).

Momentum was becoming unstoppable. NAWSA itself was bursting, with the militant Congressional Union about to splinter off, taking a militant and federal (Washington DC) tact, while Shaw, Catt and the NAWSA supporters would focus on winning suffrage state by state, thereby influencing Washington's congress via elected officials.



Photo source: Wikipedia

On a Lighter Note...

Please enjoy this colorful and true story. Sadie Lindsley Warner, who was chairman of transportation during the convention, later reminisced about a mishap with auto transportation from the Hermitage Hotel to the state capitol, "Dr. Shaw emerged from the elevator and walked directly to my desk and announced that she was ready to go to the Capitol. The car that we were holding for her was not due for another hour. ...The only thing to do was temporize until we could get in touch with something on wheels, but at her third request, and realizing that she was getting very nervous, I replied, 'Yes, Dr. Shaw, your car will be at the ladies' entrance. I practically ran across the lobby and out the ladies' entrance, knowing I was going to commandeer the first car that came in sight' ... The street was empty. but in a moment

of relief and joy along came a friend Alvin Graham, and I hailed him in no uncertain terms, and said, 'I want you to take Dr. Shaw to the Capitol.' At this moment Dr. Shaw came through the door; the timing was perfect. I made the introductions. He opened the door gallantly, she stepped in, he took his seat beside her, and off they went, an amazing sight, Alvin Graham in hunting clothes, Dr. Shaw in sober black, and in the back seat three beautiful bird dogs, black and white setters, and all of his hunting gear. Dr. Shaw said to me afterward how much she enjoyed her ride to the Capitol with that delightful young man. This was a near crisis that ended in a happy climax.”⁴

Shaw gave a tremendous and dignified speech at Tennessee's capitol. A patriot, Dr. Shaw would soon become the first woman to earn the U.S. Distinguished Service Medal for her efforts and leadership during World War One.

Another footnote to history is this November 22, 1914 Tennessean newspaper report: “A boy born at the Hotel Hermitage during the suffrage convention was named “Tennessee League”, but what can he do about it?”

Although the events of August 1920 mark the climactic moment of success in passing the 19th Amendment, Nashville's hosting of the 1914 NAWSA (National American Women's Suffrage Association) national convention was a great honor and a feather in the cap for Tennessee suffragists. It also marked Tennessee as a “hopeful” Southern state, and that paid off hugely later on. For that 1914 convention The Hermitage Hotel was selected to be the headquarters hotel. The Nashville Equal Suffrage League fulfilled the role of hostess in this high-spirited era of committees. With teamwork from The Hermitage Hotel, visitors were shown genuine Southern hospitality. “Each of the national board proffered astonishment at the cordiality with which they were greeted by the Nashvillian suffragists. The gay yellow steamers which floated from the chandeliers of the lobby of the Hotel Hermitage and the festoons of yellow which hung pendant-like attracted no end of favorable comment. That the Nashville Equal Suffrage League is an ideal hostess was emphasized through the showers of compliments upon the thoroughness of arrangements. Accommodations had previously been made at the Hotel Hermitage for the national officers and Mrs. Guilford Dudley president of the host league, overlooked no opportunity to provide for the comfort and the national officers upon their arrival at the hotel. Automobiles under charge of Miss Mary Laps met the train which bore the national officers and brought them to the Hotel Hermitage.” (Editorial note: The Hotel Hermitage and Hermitage Hotel names were both used for the first few decades.)



Although the convention was filled with important and complex business, there were also some entertaining moments. In an emphatic display of women's equality, Nashville's Catherine Stinson flew a Wright Biplane racing her sister Marjorie, who drove an Overland racing car on the ground. The event, sponsored by the Nashville Equal Suffrage League, took place at the State Fairgrounds on November 17. Not only was this a sensational display of daring, but Catherine Stinson dropped “Votes for Women” dolls with tiny parachutes from her airplane to the crowd! Both ladies were pupils of Orville Wright and licensed instructors of the United States Army Aviators in Houston, Texas.



Do you have some special memories of The Hermitage Hotel ?

To share your own “news” please drop by and see Tom Vickstrom, telephone 615-345-7123 or e-mail archives@thehermitagehotel.com

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