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FLORIDA WOMEN GET THE VOTE

by KENNETH R. JOHNSON*

FLORIDA WOMEN WORKED long and hard to secure the right to vote. In 1912 Mrs. Roselle Cooley, Miss Frances Anderson, and a few other energetic women in Jacksonville organized the Florida Equal Franchise League.¹ The idea spread to other communities, and in 1913 a small group of suffragists from all parts of the state, led by Dr. Mary Safford, met at Orlando and organized the Florida Equal Suffrage Association. This organization carried on the main fight for woman suffrage in Florida.² It was composed of twenty-eight local leagues, five of which were men's leagues. They were organized between June 1912 and November 1920 in thirteen different counties. Apathy among the women was such, however, that total membership in all these leagues never exceeded 1,000. Sympathizers in other communities carried on some suffrage activities but never formed organizations.³

While suffrage leagues might be organized anywhere, most were located in places that were new or had a very rapidly growing population. Except for Pensacola, the suffrage leagues were almost entirely in the central, south, and east coast areas of Florida. No rural leagues were organized; all members apparently lived in urban areas. Most of the women active in the suffrage movement were already involved in other community social and professional activities.

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1. Roselle Cooley, "Suffrage in Florida," *Suffrage in the Southern States*, (comp.) Ida Clyde Clark (Nashville, 1914), 21; *Jacksonville Florida Times Union*, June 20, July 9, 24, 1912; *Proceedings of the National American Woman Suffrage Association*, 1914, 159.
2. *Jacksonville Florida Times Union*, November 2, 5, 1913; *Florida Equal Suffrage Association Bulletin*, I, No. 1 (July 1914), 1, 2. While the FESA led the fight for woman suffrage, the Florida Federation of Womans Clubs also played a significant role. In 1915 it endorsed woman suffrage and in 1917 made woman suffrage one of its legislative goals.
3. Suffrage leagues were organized at Jacksonville, Pensacola, Orlando, Lake Helen, Zellwood, Pine Castle, Winter Park, Milton, Tampa, St. Petersburg, Tarpon Springs, Miami, Davis, Fort Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, Coconut Grove, Stuart, Orange City, Tallahassee, Ruskin, Florence Villa, and Winter Haven.

The Florida suffragists carried their fight to the state legislature four times. When the legislature met in 1913, 1915, and 1917, the ladies were there asking that a constitutional amendment granting the full franchise be submitted to the people.⁴ While their efforts were unsuccessful, they gained friends and came closer to their objective each time. They were much more successful in securing the passage of local legislation authorizing municipal suffrage. By 1920 Florida women in twenty-three municipalities located in ten different counties were voting in local elections.⁵ All these municipalities were in the southern part of the state and all in the first and fourth congressional districts. In 1919 the suffragists, better organized than ever before; went to Tallahassee a fourth time requesting that a constitutional amendment be submitted to the people and also requesting legislation permitting women to vote in primary elections. Their dreams were crushed by recalcitrant legislators in the early part of the session.⁶ It became increasingly evident that fulfillment of their dreams would depend on the action of the national Congress.

At a special session of Congress, May 19, 1919, President Wilson urged passage of the woman suffrage amendment to the Constitution.⁷ Quickly reported out of committee, the measure was brought before the House for a vote on May 21. Representative Frank Clark of Gainesville, representing the second congressional district in Florida, led the opposition. He was a long-time suffrage opponent, and offered a variety of arguments against the amendment. He frequently quoted the Bible to

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4. A. Elizabeth Taylor, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Florida," *Florida Historical Quarterly*, XXXVI (July 1957), 42-60; Kenneth R. Johnson, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Florida" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1966), 182-217.
 5. Johnson, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Florida," 237-61. Women could vote in the following municipalities: Fellsmere, Palm Beach, Moore Haven, Pass-a-Grille, Fort Lauderdale, Florence Villa, Orange City, Daytona, DeLand, Daytona Beach, Aurlantia, Delray, Clearwater, Miami, West Palm Beach, Winter Park, Orlando, Tarpon Springs, St. Petersburg, Dunedin, Ormond, Cocoa, and Coconut Grove.
 6. Johnson, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Florida," 225-37.
 7. The woman suffrage amendment, commonly known as the Susan B. Anthony amendment, was first proposed in 1878, and it was kept constantly before the Congress thereafter until passage. It included two simple provisions: Section 1. 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; Section 2. The Congress shall have power by appropriate legislation to enforce the provision of this article.

support his point of view. Speaking in 1915, he claimed that God intended woman to be the “helpmeet” in the Christian home, silent in the churches, and always subject to her husband’s wishes. No Christian, he argued, could believe in equal rights for men and women. Later, he maintained that the whole woman suffrage movement was dominated by a socialist-Negro-radical element which aimed at overthrowing the United States government. Woman suffrage, especially if granted by the constitutional amendment would, according to Congressman Clark, destroy state rights, let an avalanche of Negroes vote, destroy the American home, pull woman down from her high and honored position, and soil her noble character with the filth of masculine politics. Clark once dramatically concluded an anti-suffrage speech with the statement, “Let us then leave woman where she is - the loveliest of all creation, queen of the household and undisputed dictator of the destiny of man.”⁸ But as the House of Representatives moved toward the final vote, Clark conceded that “the cards are stacked and the decree is written,” meaning that the “dictator of the destiny of man” had the votes to pass the amendment. On May 21, 1919, the measure passed the House by a vote of 304 to 89.⁹ Florida Congressmen Herbert Drane and William Sears, representing the central and southern part of the state, supported the measure while Congressmen John H. Smithwich and Frank Clark, representing north and west Florida, opposed it.

The Senate acted more slowly but with the same sureness. Florida Senators Duncan U. Fletcher and Park Trammell joined most other southern senators in opposing the passage of the amendment. Fletcher had taken such a firm stand against woman suffrage and the amendment that the leaders of the National American Woman Suffrage Association “blacklisted” him and had urged his defeat in 1914.¹⁰ But with the passage of time and a change in public opinion, his attitude toward woman suffrage became more moderate, and in April 1919, he

8. Tallahassee *Daily Democrat*, January 29, 1915; *Tampa Tribune*, January 16, 1918; Maud Wood Park, *Front Door Lobby* (Boston, 1960), 145-46.

9. *Tampa Tribune*, May 22, 1919; *New York Times*, May 22, 1919; *Woman Citizen*, III (May 3, 1919), 1150. *Woman Citizen* was the official organ of the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

10. James Wayne Flynt, “Duncan Upshaw Fletcher: Florida’s Reluctant Progressive” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Florida State University, 1965), 83.

expressed the hope that the state legislature would submit an amendment to the people extending full franchise to Florida women.¹¹ His opposition to the federal amendment, however, never wavered.

Fletcher gave many reasons for opposing the nineteenth amendment. He felt that woman suffrage was a question which should be settled by the people of each state, and he noted that the national Democratic Party platform in 1916 had urged extension of woman suffrage by the states rather than the federal government. He also pointed out that neither the Florida Democratic Executive Committee, state legislature, nor the people of Florida had endorsed woman suffrage. Moving closer to the heart of his opposition, Fletcher stated that this amendment would enfranchise 2,000,000 Negro women and authorize federal intervention into the registration of voters and elections as a means of protecting them in the exercise of their right to vote. He believed the fifteenth amendment which enfranchised Negro men was a mistake and that the woman suffrage amendment would simply compound this grievous error. Related to this, Fletcher offered as his "most controlling reason" the belief that, "each state should have and preserve the absolute right to say who shall vote for its state officers. . . . If we fail to keep this principle of local self government inviolate, the republic . . . cannot long endure. . . . I hold that the people of Florida . . . are capable of prescribing the manner of conducting elections, the proper system of holding them in the state, and I am not willing to transfer to other authority the power to fix a different registration system, or to put on us a primary law, which our people might find highly objectionable."¹²

Senator Trammell's position was identical with that of his colleague, except that he spoke out more clearly on the race issue: "In our state at present our elections are participated in almost exclusively by our white men and the negro is not a factor in the selection of our public officials. I am opposed to

11. Duncan U. Fletcher to Mrs. William S. Jennings, published in the Tallahassee *Daily Democrat*, April 23, 1919.

12. Quoted in the *Tampa Tribune*, September 6, 1918. Also see the *St. Petersburg Times*, October 22, 1918; Senator Duncan U. Fletcher to Reverend A. G. Adams, January 26, 1918, and Fletcher to Mrs. Frank Stranahan, January 28, 1918, May Mann Jennings Papers, Box 12, P. K. Yonge Library of Florida History, University of Florida, Gainesville.

any proposition which would possibly invite greater and more extensive participation in our election on the part of the negro population. I am also opposed to any policy that may invite and probably stimulate citizens of other states who do not understand and appreciate our race problem in making an effort to bring the negroes of Florida into politics.”¹³ While Trammell never altered his position, he was not above using his vote in bargaining for committee assignments he wanted.¹⁴ This seemingly flexible position resulted in extensive but futile efforts by the Florida suffragists to win his vote.

The position of the Florida senators was typical of most southern Democrats in Congress. With the strong support of President Wilson and the leaders of a Republican-controlled Senate, the amendment was brought to a vote on June 4. It passed by a vote of sixty-six to thirty.¹⁵ It was estimated that ratification by thirty-six states could add 25,000,000 names to the lists of voters in this country.

While Congress was acting on the amendment, the Florida legislature was closing its regular session in Tallahassee, with adjournment scheduled for June 6. Florida thus had the opportunity to be the first state to ratify the amendment. But speed was essential. When the Florida Equal Suffrage Association made no move, the initiative was seized by a small group of Jacksonville suffragists, Governor Sidney J. Catts, and Mrs. William S. Jennings, the chairman of the legislative committee of the Florida Federation of Womans Clubs.¹⁶ Some members of the Florida Equal Franchise League called a meeting in the Seminole Hotel in Jacksonville on June 4. Realizing the need for haste, they dispatched a telegram to the Duval County legislative delegation urging ratification of the amendment.¹⁷ Governor Catts sent a special message to the legislature the following day, urging ratification and pointing out that Florida

13. Quoted in the *Tampa Tribune*, March 24, 1918.

14. Park, *Front Door Lobby*, 199.

15. *Tampa Tribune*, June 1, 5, 1919; Carrie Chapman Catt and Neillie

16. Mrs. William S. Jennings was the wife of former Governor William S. Jennings (1900-1904). Both were loyal, active Democrats. Mrs. Jennings was past president of the Florida Federation of Womans Clubs and currently the state representative to the National Federation of Womans Clubs.

17. Jacksonville *Florida Times Union*, June 1, 4, 6, 1919.

could win for itself "a unique and lasting honor" by being the first state to act. While he had not yet received official word that Congress had taken final action on the amendment, he pointed out that the newspapers and the Associated Press "would not dare publish something of such vast importance as this if it were not true."¹⁸

No ratification resolution was introduced in the Florida legislature, however, notwithstanding the efforts of Governor Catts and the suffrage supporters. This failure to act was later explained in many ways. Representative S. H. Strom of Gadsden County claimed that the matter was not brought up because defeat was certain.¹⁹ Representative Edgar W. Waybright of Duval County stated that a majority of the legislators favored ratification, but had failed to act because such action would have violated article sixteen, section nineteen of the state constitution, which provided that no convention or legislature should ratify an amendment to the federal Constitution unless it was elected after the amendment was submitted.²⁰

Mrs. William S. Jennings, who was in Tallahassee at the time lobbying for the legislative program of the womans clubs, urged the legislature to ratify the suffrage amendment, but the hour of adjournment came before any action was taken. Mrs. Jennings claimed that Waybright had polled the house and could have gotten the majority which it would take to ratify the amendment, but he would not have been able to secure the necessary two-thirds needed to waive the rules, which prohibited the introduction of new business so late in the legislative session. Senator W. L. Hughlett of Cocoa County had polled the senate, but he found that there were only three of his colleagues who would agree to allow the ratification question to be brought up

18. *Tampa Tribune*, June 6, 1919; *Florida Senate Journal* (1919), 2264.

19. *Woman Patriot*, III (October 25, 1919), 5. This magazine was the official publication of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage.

20. *Ibid.* (October 4, 1919), 4. While this constitutional question was much talked about, it probably had little influence on the legislators. This same legislature had violated this provision of the constitution in ratifying the eighteenth (prohibition) amendment. Later, in June 1920 the United States Supreme Court ruled in the case of *George S. Hawke v. Harvey C. Smith* that a referendum provision of the state constitution could not apply to ratification or rejection of amendments to the federal Constitution. See U. S. Supreme Court, *Reports, Lawyers Education*, Vol. 253 (Rochester, 1921), 871-77; *Tampa Tribune*, June 2, 1920.

for consideration. In view of the results of these decisive polls, Mrs. Jennings insisted that she "would not permit the introduction of the amendment feeling sure of defeat. It would have given the whole cause a set back throughout the United States and there was nothing to be gained by it."²¹ In view of the hectic rush during the closing hours of a typical Florida legislative session, Mrs. Jennings' explanation seems most reasonable.

Rather than becoming the first state to ratify the nineteenth amendment, the Florida legislature won for itself the unique honor of being the last state to take action on the measure. Finally in 1969, after a fifty-year delay, and long after American women-black and white - were voting and playing an active role in politics and government, the legislature unanimously ratified the amendment in 1969.²²

After the regular session of the legislature in 1919, there was some talk of a special session. The Equal Franchise League in Jacksonville on July 19 adopted a resolution urging Governor Catts to call a special session to act on the suffrage amendment.²³ The Jacksonville suffragists, calling themselves the Woman's Non-Partisan League, continued to discuss a special session until April 1920, but they took no positive action. At that time Carrie Chapman Catt, president of National American Woman Suffrage Association, advised that no further action be taken in Florida and assured the women that the amendment would be ratified in time for them to vote in the general election.²⁴ The National Woman's Party also sought a special legislative session. Early in 1920, Helen Hunt of Jacksonville, chairman of the Florida branch of the National Woman's Party, polled the legislators and reported that a majority would ratify the

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21. Mrs. William S. Jennings to Mrs. Edgar Lewis, June 7, 1919, May Mann Jennings, Papers, Box 15.
 22. In May 1969 both houses of the Florida legislature unanimously adopted Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 1172 which ratified the nineteenth amendment to the Constitution. This action was taken at the request of the Florida League of Women Voters as a means of recognizing the fiftieth anniversary of the League of Women Voters of the United States and the thirtieth anniversary of the League of Women Voters of Florida. Also see Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 1168 as filed in the office of the secretary of state, May 22, 1969.
 23. Jacksonville *Florida Times Union*, July 20, 1919.
 24. *Ibid.*, April 15, 1920. A few Florida women including Mrs. John T. Fuller, president of FESA, continued their effort by joining the NAWSA campaign in other states. See *Tampa Tribune*, May 14, 21, 1920.

amendment if called together. ²⁵ Governor Catts, however, refused to issue the call; it was believed that he had told the suffragists that there was no purpose in a special session unless the suffrage sentiment changed after the regular session. ²⁶ There was never any real indication of such change, but the National Woman's Party was conducting another poll of the legislators when the amendment became law. ²⁷

By the end of March 1920 thirty-four states had ratified the amendment, and it seemed certain that two other states would ratify it in time to permit Florida women to vote in the Democratic primary in June. Gradually, problems of voting began to be more widely discussed than ratification. Was a special session of the legislature needed to permit women to vote when the amendment was ratified? How could women vote if registration books were already closed? State law required that poll tax be paid two years before an election. How could this legal requirement be avoided? The National Woman's Party, fearing that opponents of woman suffrage would use these technicalities to prevent or relay the ladies voting, were especially active in raising these questions for consideration. These problems were widely discussed by the newspapers and the Democratic leadership. Buford Rivers, Democratic nominee for attorney general, took the lead in demanding a special session of the legislature. Many Democratic leaders, including Attorney General Van C. Swearingen, Circuit Judge and former United States Senator Nathan P. Bryan, State Senator J. T. Butler of Jacksonville, assured the women that no special legislation was needed to supplement the nineteenth amendment. ²⁸ This public debate resulted in clearing away many obstacles that might have interfered with women voting. The papers pointed out that under existing laws, if a man became of voting age after the registration books closed and before an election, he could still vote. Also, the poll tax requirement did not apply to per-

25. *Tampa Tribune*, April 7, 1920. The National Woman's Party was a highly centralized organization with headquarters in Washington. Its objective was the adoption of the nineteenth amendment; its activities in Florida were intended to contribute to that end.

26. *Gainesville Daily Sun*, July 2, 10, 1920.

27. Eunice Wald, National Woman's Party headquarters secretary, to Helen Hunt, June 24, August 27, 1920, Helen Hunt West Papers, Arthur Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

28. Jacksonville *Florida Times Union*, August 20, 21, 1920.

sons voting for the first time.²⁹ It gradually became clear that once the amendment became law, all other barriers were removed.

Senator Fletcher agreed that no legislative action was needed, but he suggested that the Democratic Party alter its requirements for membership in order that all white women could become members.³⁰ Others voiced the same views. In response to these opinions, George P. Raney of Tampa, chairman of the state Democratic Executive Committee, announced that under recently adopted rules for membership, white women could join the party and participate in the party primary.³¹

But the Democratic primary was held without their participation, as Florida women sat impatiently waiting for other states to act. Finally, in August 1920, Tennessee, after a long, dramatic fight, became the thirty-sixth state to ratify the suffrage amendment.³² Secretary of State Bainbridge Colby signed the proclamation making the woman suffrage amendment a part of the federal Constitution.

Early on the morning of September 7, 1920, Helen Hunt entered the Duval County courthouse and registered to vote. She was the first woman to register in Duval County and one of the first in Florida.³³ Women registered according to the same procedure as men, except the registration forms were on blue paper rather than white. The problems encountered by women were few and mainly of their own creation. Some of the ladies resented having to tell their age, but diplomatic supervisors of registration refused to make an issue of this matter; they simply permitted the women to register as "twenty-one plus."³⁴ Other women objected to revealing their party affiliation. This matter was settled when the attorney general announced that no law compelled the women to give party affiliation in order to vote in the general election.³⁵ But everyone

29. *Tampa Tribune*, March 14, 18, 1920; Jacksonville *Florida Times Union*, August 20, 1920; *Gainesville Daily Sun*, March 28, August 21, 29, 1920.

30. Jacksonville *Florida Times Union*, March 24, 1920.

31. *Gainesville Daily Sun*, March 30, 1920.

32. A. Elizabeth Taylor, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee* (New York, 1957), 104-25; Catt and Shuler, *Suffrage and Politics*, 422-61.

33. T. Frederick Davis, *History of Jacksonville, Florida and Vicinity 1513-1924* (St. Augustine, 1925; facsimile edition, Gainesville, 1964), 277.

34. *Gainesville Daily Sun*, September 23, 1920.

35. *Ibid.*, September 6, 1920.

was not so considerate. A few gullible women in Jacksonville, eager to exercise their newly won privilege but ignorant of procedures, were relieved of two dollars each when they bought a "permit to vote" from men posing as government officials. The "permit" was a printed document bearing what appeared to be the signature of R. A. Newman, Duval County supervisor of registration. The city and county authorities moved quickly to halt "this newest member of the confidence fraternity."³⁶

While the women's preparation to vote proceeded smoothly, the Democratic leaders were concerned with how they would vote. The Republicans in Florida had avoided woman suffrage as a political issue, giving no encouragement to the suffragists. On the national level suffrage leaders had found the Republican Party more friendly than the Democratic Party. While most leading suffragists claimed to be unpartisan, some were known Republican sympathizers. This led many Southerners to claim that an alliance existed between the woman suffrage movement and the Republican Party.³⁷ A Republican-controlled Congress had passed the nineteenth amendment which seemed to confirm these suspicions.³⁸ In 1919 and 1920 the National Republican Committee led by Chairman Will H. Hays started a drive to break the solid Democratic South in the 1920 general election.³⁹ The surge of population in Florida after World War I, particularly in the resort areas along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, had swelled the number of registered Republicans. The *St. Augustine Record* announced that if a real Republican Party was formed in Florida, it would certainly win in the fourth congressional district.⁴⁰ Other Florida papers reported enthusias-

36. Jacksonville *Florida Times Union*, August 28, 1920.

37. Mrs. William S. Jennings on one occasion refused to help organize or support a branch of the National Woman's Party in Florida, claiming that it was in effect the Republican Party. See Mrs. William S. Jennings to Mrs. William Jennings Bryan, May 25, 1917, May Mann Jennings Papers, Box 10; Laura Clay to Kate Gordon, April 12, 1916, Laura Clay Papers, University of Kentucky Libraries, Lexington.

38. In the national House of Representatives, 200 Republicans and 102 Democrats voted for the proposed nineteenth amendment while nineteen Republicans and seventy Democrats opposed it. In the Senate, forty Republicans and twenty-six Democrats favored the amendment; nine Republicans and twenty-one Democrats opposed.

39. *Tampa Tribune*, February 23, 1919, quoting *New York Herald*, and June 19, 1919, quoting *Savannah Press*.

40. *Ibid.*, March 21, 1919, quoting *St. Augustine Record*.

tic meetings and activities by local Republicans.⁴¹ While there was no indication that Florida Republicans expected to gain very much as a result of woman suffrage, no one knew how the women would vote. Negro women were expected to register in large numbers and to vote Republican. If many white women also voted Republican or if they simply stayed away from the polls, Democratic supremacy might be threatened.

While Democratic Party officials had been hesitant about extending the ballot to women, they now took some definite steps to bring the ladies into the party. Immediately after the amendment was ratified, the Cox-Roosevelt Club of Leon County held a large meeting at the county courthouse to which all white women were invited.⁴² Many state and county leaders made speeches urging the women not to organize separate political bodies but to "unite and cooperate with the men of the county and to stand together as fellow citizens." A resolution adopted by the men of the club seemed to express their thoughts very well:

. . . also all white women of Leon County, irrespective of their views upon the necessity or advisability of the ratification of the federal amendment and regardless of the past indifference or opposition to the cause of woman suffrage, [are urged] to qualify and vote in all elections and party primaries. And we urge upon all white voters, irrespective of sex, the necessity of casting a solid vote in the November election, in view of conditions prevailing throughout portions of the Southern states of our Union more especially, as the surest and most effective way to preserve by peaceful and lawful means the security of life, person and property: to forestall the possibility of a return of conditions which prevailed in these Southern states a generation ago, and to obviate provocation to the extraordinary measures which were necessary at that unfortunate period to rescue Florida and other states similarly situated from the demoralizing and revolutionary conditions then existing.

And in this connection we feel justified in respectfully soliciting the support of the white women of Florida to now

41. *Tampa Tribune*, December 18, 25, 1919; *Tampa Tribune*, January 18, 1920, quoting *Miami Metropolis*.

42. James M. Cox of Ohio and Franklin D. Roosevelt of New York were the Democratic Party nominees for president and vice president, respectively. The Cox-Roosevelt Club was organized to secure the election of the Democratic candidates at all levels.

become citizens in the fullest political sense of the word, for the party which has made the state safe for womanhood, under whose administrations their personal property and civil rights have been cherished and protected and which regardless of individual opinion as to collateral questions of method or policy, has faith that its women will measure up to the highest standard of civic responsibility.⁴³

As the Tallahassee meeting drew to a close, the women present unanimously expressed their desire to become members of the Cox-Roosevelt Club. The club membership committee was immediately expanded to include six men and six women. The ladies selected for this service were Mrs. John G. Kellum, Mrs. Charles A. Gay, Mrs. George Davis, Mrs. H. B. Rea, Mrs. L. M. Lively, and Mrs. Benjamin A. Meginnes.⁴⁴ Later Robert A. Gray, then assistant state comptroller, was appointed by the club president to help the women leaders organize and run a school to instruct white women in Leon County how to vote.⁴⁵

In Duval County a similar effort was under way. By early October 1920, almost as many Negro women as white had registered. Fear of the Negro vote stimulated the organization of the Duval County League of Democratic Women Voters. Mrs. Roselle Cooley, president of the new club, worked closely with state and county Democratic leaders.⁴⁶ At the first meeting of the league, George M. Price, chairman of the Duval County Executive Committee, urged the women to support the Democratic Party. He reminded them that if the Republicans were elected, many Jim Crow laws might be repealed.⁴⁷ Most of the Negro women who had registered were Republicans, which made the appeal very meaningful to the whites. The leaders of the new women's movement made it clear that they would leave "no stone unturned to preserve white supremacy."⁴⁸ The League of Democratic Women Voters spent much effort getting white women registered to vote before the registration books closed. This was followed by a series of "schools for women voters" which were conducted in all wards of Jacksonville and

43. Jacksonville *Florida Times Union*, August 22, 1920.

44. *Ibid.*

45. Tallahassee *Daily Democrat*, October 22, 1920.

46. Jacksonville *Florida Times Union*, October 5, 1920.

47. *Ibid.*, October 6, 1920.

48. *Ibid.*, October 5, 1920.

in many parts of the county. All white women were invited to attend, and transportation and babysitting services were made available to them. County officials spoke at the "schools," and sometimes state officials would appear before the larger groups.⁴⁹

The action taken in Leon and Duval counties was typical of what the Democratic Party wanted in every other county in Florida. Mrs. William Jennings was appointed associate chairman of the National Democratic Executive Committee for Florida. At the request of the national committee, she set out to secure a county chairman to organize the women into the Democratic Party.⁵⁰ In some instances the white women were already organized and had begun working for the Democratic Party. For example, in St. Petersburg where the Negro women were registering faster than white women, the Democratic women launched a house-to-house campaign to get the white women registered to vote. The woman's club in St. Augustine started a systematic drive to register all white women in that city.⁵¹ Completely new organizations were launched in other areas. In late October Mrs. Jennings announced that a chairman had been appointed for every Florida county and that organizational efforts were under way. While the Democratic drive for the women's votes probably was not influential in some counties, it exceeded any appeal the other political parties were making.

Actually the Democratic leaders had little cause for concern. Voters tend to vote their economic interests and social preferences; the Florida women were no exception. Their economic interests were the same as those of the Florida men. Also, their social positions were often dependent upon the positions of their husbands and fathers. Hence no independent political movement was seriously considered. The women suffragists were mainly Democrats and, like their men folk, favored maintaining a solid Democratic state and white supremacy.⁵² The great mass of Florida women never sought the ballot. And the results of the 1920 general election strongly suggests that they

49. *Ibid.*, October 13, 18, 21, November 1, 1920.

50. *Ibid.*, October 25, 1920.

51. *Ibid.*, October 5, 1920.

52. Mrs. Frances Ewell (formerly Miss Frances Anderson) to Kenneth R. Johnson, May 20, 1966, Kenneth R. Johnson Papers, in possession of the author, Florence, Alabama.

were not greatly interested in using it. The Florida census of 1915 reveals that about 139,000 white and 88,000 black women could qualify to vote.⁵³ In the 1916 general election, when the women could not vote, there were 80,885 votes cast for governor and 83,264 cast for president. In the election of 1920 with women voting, there were 132,672 votes cast for governor and 155,799 for president.⁵⁴ While these figures do not reveal the exact number of women voting in 1920, it does show that at least two-thirds of the potential women voters did not cast a ballot. It thus appears that the nineteenth amendment did not satisfy any great need felt by the Florida women. But it did help complete the democratic system in this country and provided Florida women with a political weapon they could use at will.

53. Florida *The Fourth Census of Florida* (1915), 54-55.

54. Compiled from Allen Morris (comp.), *The Florida Handbook* (3rd ed., Tallahassee, 1952), 186-91.