



# Women's National Suffrage in 1920: *Its Local Path*

By Bill Jeffway

Women across the US gained a right to vote that was equal to men on August 26, 1920, when the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution was adopted. This expanded right happened at a tumultuous time. The deadliest war in history, the "World War," formally ended in the summer of 1919. "Prohibition," the prohibition of alcohol in the US by Constitutional Amendment took effect in January of 1919. The unprecedented global flu pandemic that peaked in September and October 1918 had taken more lives than those lost in the World War, whether measured in terms of the county, or country or world.

As a way to acknowledge the women's suffrage milestone, DCHS is putting the spotlight on the broader issue of women's history in Dutchess County through a year-long program called, "2020 Focus: Women's Voices & Talents." This article summarizes some local key moments and individuals on the path to 1920 national suffrage for women.

## **Two generations worked across two centuries**

Two distinct generations of activists advanced the argument for women's suffrage. In the 19th century, the 1848 Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention is considered to be the launch of organized efforts to effect equal rights for women, including suffrage. National suffrage for men of color was achieved in 1870, after the deadly and traumatic Civil War. Although barriers to voting remained significant. In New York State, in 1880, women in rural areas were given the right to vote in school elections. The law caused a good deal of confusion but was an important step in the process and animated much activity (and legal debate) in cities, such as Poughkeepsie.

In the early 20th century, a new generation emerged to replace the elders of the first generation, most of whom had passed away.

A failed NY State vote on suffrage in 1915 was succeeded by a successful November 1917 vote, ensuring that women's suffrage in New York State would take effect in 1918, two years prior to national suffrage. The US involvement in World War One, 1917 to 1919, accelerated the process nationally. The War reminded everyone of the free and democratic ideals the US was fighting for. "*Make the world safe for Democracy!*" And women participated very successfully in a wide range of new and varied roles.

**Three influential schools** committed to women's equal education emerged in Dutchess County. In the 19th century, two highly regarded co-educational schools included the Quaker Nine Partners Boarding School and Methodist Amenia Seminary. The women-only Vassar College opened in 1865, but as mentioned earlier, its leadership and faculty remained intentionally quiet on the "political" issue of women's suffrage until the early 20th century.



The Quaker Nine Partner Boarding School in the Town of Washington. *DCHS Collections.*



Amenia Seminary. Courtesy the [Amenia Historical Society](#).



Vassar College, Poughkeepsie. Courtesy Library of Congress.

By 1910 in Dutchess County we see women active from the full range of social-economic strata. The "River Estates" were represented by women such as Ruth Morgan and Margaret Chanler Aldrich. Although the elite were represented in the public "Anti" side of the campaign, as well. The "Anti's" included women like Mrs. James Roosevelt, FDR's mother. Although a few Vassar students were reported to have tried to vote in the 1880 school elections, the emergence and visibility of Vassar College faculty, such as Laura J. Wylie, occurred only from 1910. Then she, and other current or former faculty and staff, started to have a large public presence. Outreach to, and interest from the working class grew.

Once victory for NY State Suffrage was achieved, effective in 1918, most local women switched their focus to registering and voting, some becoming candidates. Their focus was more on using their vote to solve local problems, than focusing on national suffrage, which was of course not yet achieved.

### Quaker influence

Described as the largest Quaker population outside of Philadelphia in the 1800s, Dutchess Quakers were not only large in number but operated a highly regarded Quaker School, the Nine Partners Boarding School, in Millbrook.

Quakers were plain in dress, but radical in thought and practice. Quakers believed in equal education among boys and girls. They banned slave ownership by "Friends" or members in the 18th century, while New York State allowed slavery until 1827.

Quakers allowed women to travel as ministers in the 18th century while the handful of women seeking to be preachers in Churches of Dutchess in the 19th century were, for the most part, rebuffed. In general, the Quakers' focus on "truth" accorded women greater authority and respect.

Four out of five organizers of the landmark meeting in Seneca Falls in 1848 had Quaker backgrounds, including Lucretia Coffin Mott. Lucretia Coffin Mott was greatly influenced by her education in Millbrook at the Quaker Nine Partners Boarding School where she was a student and then a teacher. She was involved in movements to abolish slavery but having gone to London for an Abolitionist Conference, she found women were prohibited from participating, which is said to have accelerated her plans to advocate for women's equal rights. Given that motivations were based so much on broader principles, we find in the earlier years of the effort to establish equal rights for women,



Lucretia Coffin Mott was a student, then teacher at Nine Partners Boarding School. *Library of Congress.*

there was great overlap with the issues of the abolition of slavery, Native American rights, peace, temperance, and children's health and education.

While the Quaker faith went into decline after a major internal split in 1828, called the Hicksite Separation, there is abundant evidence that local women of Quaker faith or upbringing expressed their principles and energy through very effective secular organizations or other religious faiths such as the Universalist Church. The following women were all raised as Quakers, with noted exceptions.

The Town of Milan's *Julia Wilbur* attended the Nine Partners Boarding School. She was arguing for the equal pay of women teachers as early as 1857, specifically citing statistics that women were paid only "one half" or "one third" of what men were paid for the exact same work. She moved to Virginia during the Civil War where she was involved with abolitionist causes and cared for the sick and wounded. In 1869, she attempted to vote with five other women in Washington, D.C. Although unsuccessful, she gained visibility for her action.

The Town of Clinton's *Elizabeth Powell Bond* became Dean of the Swarthmore College, a Quaker College, for 25 years. Also from Clinton, the *Rev. Amanda Deyo* was among only a handful of women in the country so licensed. Born into a Quaker family, Deyo and her husband were both licensed preachers in the Universalist Church. Together they also led the Dutchess County Peace Society which during its peak in the 1870s and 1880s brought together as many as 5,000 people at Wiley's Grove in Clinton.



**Julia Wilbur**, born Milan. Advocated equal pay for women teachers in 1857. Abolitionist, suffragist.



**Elizabeth Powell Bond**, born Clinton. Dean of Quaker Swarthmore College 25 years.



**Rev. Amanda Deyo**, born Clinton. Preacher, Universalist Church, Founder Dutchess County Peace Society.



**Katherine Lent Stevenson**, Global Ambassador, WCTU. Composer, "One Fine Day."



**Ophelia Shadbolt Amigh**, born Clinton. National Leader in protecting young girls, prison reform.

### **Amenia Seminary & other backgrounds**

*Katie Lent* was born in Columbia County, the daughter and granddaughter of a Methodist Minister. She attended Amenia Seminary and then lived in Dutchess County for some time. She became a licensed preacher in the Methodist Church in a vote by the Poughkeepsie District in 1878. The license was revoked two years later by the National Methodist Conference. Undeterred, Miss Lent focused her energies on the WCTU. Perhaps as a kind of revenge, she emerges as Mrs. Katherine Lent Stevenson, ultimately in a major worldwide role with the Women's Christian Temperance Union. She is best known for having written the song "One Fine Day" that remains an anthem of the WCTU to this day. All the women mentioned will be among the women DCHS profiles next year.

*Ophelia Shadbolt Amigh* was not a Quaker. Born in Clinton, the Shadbolt family name had been associated with earlier Quaker settlers, but she appears to have been raised in the Presbyterian faith, her father a public advocate for the abolition of slavery. After being a nurse, deeply engaged in battles of the Civil War, she became a nationally known advocate for the protection of young girls. She was outspoken on the topic of "White Slavery." She was involved in prison reform. She did return to Poughkeepsie for a

few years in the late 19th century to operate a home for young boys and girls. But largely, as an adult, lived and worked in Illinois and Alabama.

### 1880 school vote

A victory of sorts was achieved when women got the right to vote in New York State for school positions. The motivation was simple. There was a feeling that women's thinking and approach to school matters, and the education of young children, were a strength and perhaps even a distinct advantage over men. With a good deal of pushback, for example for the City of Poughkeepsie and its attorney, the law was shown to be unclear and caused a good deal of confusion. While there was activity all over the state, there appear to have been a number of instances of women voting in Dutchess County.

*Union Vale* elected a woman School District Clerk. Nancy Boyd Duncan was a school teacher in Dover and the daughter of Irish immigrants.

*Stanford's* election of a School Trustee involved candidate Henry Carpenter advocating for the hiring of a woman teacher. Despite reported good turnout among women supporting him, he was defeated.

*Coffin Summit* in Millbrook, named for the Quaker family of Lucretia Coffin Mott, now Oak Grove, saw a woman nominated to be school trustee. Six women voted, the the female candidate lost.

*In Arlington*, six women voted. Most seem to have been students at Vassar College, among them, "*Miss Wheeler*," who is said to have attended with her parents.

*Three Wards in Poughkeepsie* reported activity. In Ward 5, "*Mrs. Welton*" was refused. In Ward 6, two unnamed women were refused registration. In Ward 3, *Helen M. Loder*, *Mariam Culver Mosher* and *Mary Mott* all tried to register but were ultimately rebuffed. During the year, DCHS will expand on the profile of *Helen Loder*. A daughter of Irish immigrants, her husband was a freight handler for the railroad. They lived adjacent to the railroad tracks on North Hamilton Street. Loder was active as a speaker, journalist, organizational member, voter and candidate.



**Helen M. Loder** was influential in the School vote era. No photo of her has been found, but she had a wide variety of roles, including Presidential Elector when Belva Lockwood ran for President in 1884 and 1888/

### Vassar College influence

In terms of the visible role of Vassar College in suffrage, there is greater visibility after 1910. In the earliest years of Vassar College, the founder himself, Matthew Vassar, commented on suffragist, Quaker speaker Anne E. Dickinson's talk at the college in April 1868 entitled, "Idiots and Women," with generally supportive comments in a private letter. Dickinson was referencing the law at the time that denied the vote to "criminals, paupers, idiots and women." Vassar wrote that he felt some sympathy with the words of Dickinson, but he did not attend her talk. Matthew Vassar died two months later.

Vassar College students and faculty were strongly encouraged to refrain from visible political activity, which included suffrage. The Poughkeepsie Eagle News of 1909 shows the emergence of very visible leaders, including Dr. Grace Kimball (who had left Vassar by that time) and Vassar Professor Lucy Salmon.

The allowance of greater visibility of student and faculty voices on the topic perhaps came from the sheer scale of the pressure to allow suffrage that was



**Henry Nobel MacCracken** (right) took over as President of Vassar College from James Monroe Taylor in 1915, creating a more open environment for faculty to speak publicly on suffrage. But change was gradual.

growing everywhere. The transition from President Taylor to the more liberal President MacCracken at Vassar in 1915 created more space for this kind of sentiment to be expressed. But perhaps understanding the conservative bias of the board of trustees, or for whatever reason, change even under MacCracken's leadership was initially relatively gradual. The emergency of World War in 1917 demanded that all women step up in essential roles and pushed the suffrage effort into full view and over the top by 1920. The Governor specifically required at least two women to be on each of NY State's County Defense Councils. Advice from the County Council to cities and towns was to have "at least one woman" on its board.

**“World War” is tipping point**

Dr. Grace Kimball (for whom Kimball Road is named in Poughkeepsie) arrived in 1896 to serve at Vassar College as Asst. Physician. She left that position after four years. In addition to her private medical practice, Dr. Kimball was head of the Young Women's Christian Association for 41 years. As part of the YWCA, she was involved in the creation of the local "League for Women's Service" in 1917 to support the war effort. She was highly praised as the only woman in the state to lead the county's military census in 1917 and was a member of the county Defense Council.

Vassar Professor Laura J. Wylie emerged as a leader in the suffrage movement in 1910 as head of the Equal Suffrage League of Poughkeepsie. A New York State 1915 referendum on women's suffrage failed. But a 1917 referendum passed, allowing women in New York State to vote. They were allowed to vote for local, state and national level elections, as long as they were residents of New York State.



Laura J. Wylie emerged in 1910 as a visible advocate for women's suffrage while a Vassar Professor of English. She headed the Equal Suffrage League of Poughkeepsie. When New York State suffrage was won in 1917, she channeled her energy into leading the local Dutchess County City and County Club. *Photo Vassar College.*

**Parades and Pageants**

At this time, pageants had become a popular means of education and information in the US and Britain. Combined with parades, these activities gave Suffragists greater press coverage and visibility. Both were used frequently during the "World War" to serve aims like patriotism, bond sales, and Red Cross and other volunteer organization recruitment efforts.

**Women of color**

The Dutchess County Equal Suffrage League held an outreach meeting at the AME Zion Metropolitan Church in Poughkeepsie on March 12, 1914, addressing issues related to suffrage for women of color. Sadie Johnson Peterson

read an original poem entitled, "A Suffrage Call." She would go on to be Chief Librarian at Tuskegee Veterans Administration Hospital and a world-recognized leader in the practice of using reading to heal. Her work at Tuskegee Veterans Administration would be recognized by Universities, by Congress, by Eleanor Roosevelt, and many others.



As a precursor to her 1913 march to Washington D.C., "General" Rosalie Jones led a parade from New York City to Albany to petition the Governor on suffrage, making five overnight stops in Dutchess County in December 1912.



Each State that had granted women suffrage is portrayed by a woman depicting that state at Troutbeck, Amenia. *Background information courtesy the Amenia Historical Society.*



On July 4, 1917, over 200 children participated in the pageant "Columbia's Reception" in Poughkeepsie's Eastman Park. It portrayed the reaching out of Europe to the US for protection, and demonstrated what was called at the time, the importance of "Americanization." *C. Fred Close Collection, Reuben Van Vlack photographer, DCHS Collections.*

## 1919 to 1920 and beyond

After New York State suffrage was achieved, Wylie focused less on what could be seen as the obvious the next step of *national* suffrage for women, and instead focused on the specific tasks at hand locally. She became President of the “Women’s City & County Club” of Dutchess County. The League of Women Voters emerged as another post-suffrage group that remains active to this day.

These stories are only just emerging as the program, “2020 Focus: Women’s Voices & Talents” in Dutchess County evolves! We welcome your input, help us tell the stories by sharing yours. Please contact Bill Jeffway at [bill.jeffway@dchsny.org](mailto:bill.jeffway@dchsny.org) so we can include them in the stories we share in 2020.



Initially Asst. Physician at Vassar College in the 1890s, Dr. Grace Kimball was one of two women on the County Defense Council during WW1. After suffrage was won, she lead the local YWCA for two decades.



Sadie P. Delaney read a poem she wrote as call to action for women of color and suffrage at her Church in 1914. After two decades growing up in Poughkeepsie she became internationally known as head of the Library and “Bibliotherapy” services at Tuskegee Veterans Administration Hospital. She is shown receiving an honorary Doctorate from Atlanta University. She received recognition from Congress and Eleanor Roosevelt, among many others.

## Dutchess County Historical Society 2020

Sunday, January 26

### 2020 Focus: Women’s Voices & Talents in Dutchess County

The Journey to 1920 & Women’s Right to Vote  
The Restored Legacy of a Nationally Recognized LaGrange Women Artist  
*Bill Jeffway DCHS Executive Director & Melodye Moore, DCHS Trustee*  
Cuneen-Hacket Arts Center,  
Poughkeepsie

Thursday, April 16

### *Death of a Neighbor:* Local Reaction to FDR’s Passing on the 75th Anniversary

Michael Dolan,  
DCHS Vice President for Poughkeepsie

FDR Library & Museum, Hyde Park

September 5 through 27

### Saving Miss Clowes: Restoring the Works & Legacy of Caroline M. Clowes

An exhibition of paintings  
and exploration of her life

Barrett Art Center, Poughkeepsie