

## Introduction

The historiography and scholarship of the suffrage movement in the United States promotes a narrative that focuses on urban middle-class white women and their vital efforts in gaining enfranchisement for the women of the country. While this story is important, it leaves a large section of the population out of the historical narrative, namely rural women. Some of the past scholarship has gone so far to state those in rural areas had no interest in suffrage and other progressive reform movements. This is obviously a false belief and narrows the impression of who suffragists were, what their concerns were, and what work was done to lead to the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

This has additionally been true for Tennessee suffrage scholarship, with little study on what rural women were doing in the discourse of suffrage. Fuller exploration of rural women's concerns and activities during the era of the final push for women's suffrage show that rural women were just as involved in the political discourse of suffrage perspectives as their urban counterparts, despite their differing socioeconomic cultures. Exploring urban and rural women's commonalities and divergences examines the realities of being a rural woman living in Tennessee at the height of suffrage politics and digging into the specific interests rural women had with progressive programs. This study aims to address the silences in suffrage scholarship and show that women in rural areas of Tennessee had concerns that were both different and similar to their urban counterparts.



"Marching suffragists" Sadie Warner Frazer Papers, 1894-1974 Tennessee State Library and Archives

# Rural Realities: Tennessee Rural Women's Concerns and Involvements During the Suffrage Era

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## Methodology

Tennessee is made up of 95 counties, which for a study of this length is far too large of a section to study. Instead this study, into rural women's engagement and attitudes during the suffrage period, will study only a small sample of carefully chosen counties. The counties will each be looked into deeply with each selected county originating from one of the Three Grand Divisions of Tennessee: East, Middle, and West. Primary Sources such as county newspapers and manuscripts of people of interests have been explored.

### Parameters for County Choices

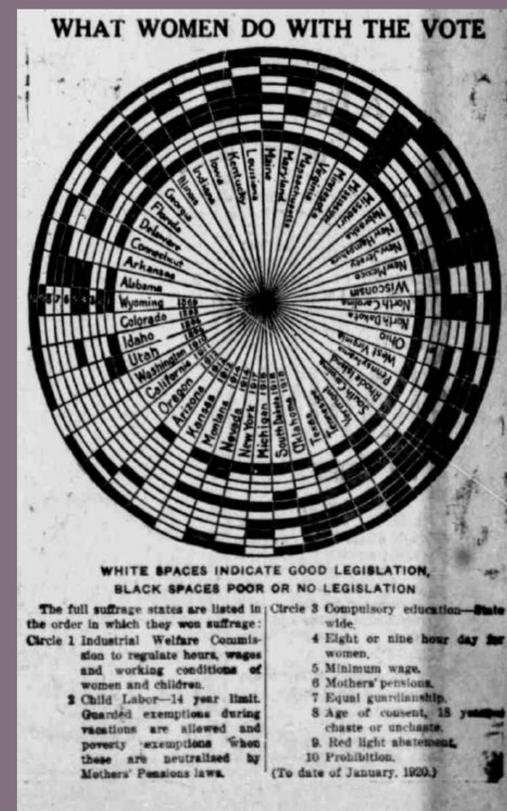
- Population in 1920's is between 10,000-20,000 county residents.
- Active Woman's Suffrage League
- No active colleges in the County
- Similar Farming Crops: Corn

### Counties Chosen

- Marion County: East
- Jackson County: Middle
- Benton County: West

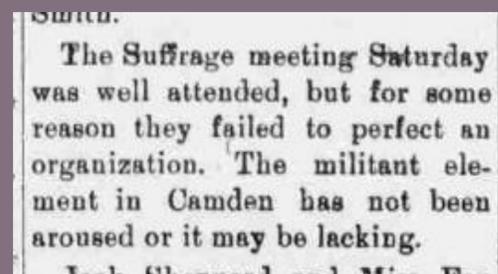
## Women's Activities and Interests

Rural	Urban
WCTU	WCTU
Suffrage	Suffrage
WWI-Red Cross	WWI-Red Cross
Country Life Movement: Receiver	Country Life Movement:: Enforcer
Home Demonstration	Woman's Clubs
Education	Child and Labor Rights
Property, Financial, and Parental Rights	Property, Financial, and Parental Rights

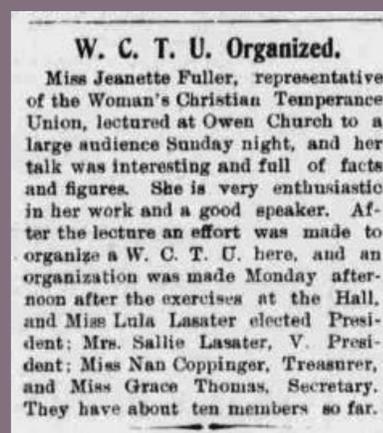


Jackson County Sentinel, August 05,1920

Accompanied with articles titled, "Why American Women Want the Ballot" and "Suffrage in the Southern States".



The Camden Chronicles, February 23, 1917. Meeting of the Suffrage League in Benton County



Sequachee Valley News, June 02,1910.  
Formation of the WCTU in Marion County

## Conclusion

It can be deduced from the evidence of rural interaction with the subject of suffrage shows that they took an active part in the discourse of the movement. Their interests and involvements in the progressive programs of the time illustrate how they were invested in what was going on around them and the people that had power in these programs. Throughout the newspaper articles explored there is evidence of an active attentiveness on what was going on in suffrage both nationally and in the state. Though partial suffrage came to Tennessee before the 19th Amendment the need to be able to vote in the presidential election was important to gain some form of voice on what was going on in their lives. In all the counties newspapers there is also a sound of inevitability on women's suffrage becoming reality.

## Recommendations

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- Taylor, Elizabeth A. "A Short History of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Tennessee." *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 2, no. 3 (Sept. 1943), 195-215.