

19th Amendment

A History of Early Genevans Who Worked for Women's Suffrage

By E. THAYLES EMMONS

Inasmuch as the first women's Seneca Falls (July 1848), already the home of several industrious workers in the cause, this area, including Geneva, may justly claim the distinction of being foremost in a movement which eventually resulted in the ratification of the 19th amendment to the U. S. constitution in 1920, which gave women in every state the right to vote.

Almost from the first Geneva had had its own ardent supporters of the cause, who enlisted others in the movement, and the Seneca Falls convention provided a new impetus. One Geneva woman, Miss Rhoda Palmer, who attended the meeting in Seneca Falls, lived long enough to see the suffrage cause triumph in New York State and was able to cast her own first vote after seventy years of labor for the cause and at the age of 102 years.

Among those in Geneva who became early leaders in the suffrage movement was Mrs. Elizabeth Smith Miller and her daughter, Anne Fitzhugh Miller, who were largely instrumental in bringing about the organization of the Geneva Political Equality Club, whose activities were at their highest point along about the turn of the century and from then on until the passage of the suffrage amendment was brought about. Mrs. Miller and her daughter did not live to see their mission accomplished, but the torch was passed on to others and kept burning and the Political Equality Club did not cease to exist until after the granting of suffrage to women had been achieved.

Then recognition was made of

responding secretary, Miss Elizabeth Root; treasurer, J. E. P. Butts.

The program committee was kept busy and presented a most attractive program for the year's work. Through the influence of the Millers many distinguished men and women appeared on the program during the life of the club. Most of the early meetings were held in the YMCA, but later private homes were utilized with an occasional big meeting at the Opera House or Collins Hall.

At the close of the year "Lochland", the home of the Millers, was thrown open and everyone interested in suffrage was invited to attend. A musical program, a speaker of note, and refreshments made up the general program. This custom was continued each year until 1911, the date of Mrs. Miller's death.

Before the close of the first year, Mrs. Clapp resigned from the presidency and Miss Miller was elected to serve in that capacity. At the end of the first year the club numbered 139 members and a number of associate members.

From that time on to the time of Miss Miller's death in 1912 the work was carried on most aggressively from all angles. Miss Miller keeping in touch with all bills, both national and in the New York State Legislature, for the advancement of the "votes for women" cause. These pioneer women never faltered, when confronted by seemingly unsurmountable barriers, but fought valiantly for every inch of the way. They were indeed akin to the crusaders of old.

In 1900 Mrs. S. H. VerPlanck acted as recording secretary—pro-tem and later was one of the vice presidents. In 1901 a bill allowing women tax payers to vote on propositions to raise money by tax or assessments was passed and there was great rejoicing.

In 1902, Mrs. Caroline Hemihup Perkins resigned as second vice president and Mrs. Charles S. Burrall was elected to serve in her place. Henry A. Wheat was chosen to act as financial secretary and Mrs. D. W. Hallenbeck as treasurer.

At this time enrollment cards were distributed through Mrs. Vernie Hemihup Haley, who with her mother, Mrs. Marie Hemihup, was active in suffrage work. Later a county organization whereby the smaller clubs were to unite with the Geneva club was organized. In 1905, Miss Harriet Pope was chosen as a Geneva school trustee, she being a candidate named by the Political Equality Club. Mrs. George Schell was particularly active in school suffrage.

Municipal improvements, including lakeside parks, beautifying public properties, a new city hall, and voting machines were questions that were debated and supported by the Geneva Political Equality Club.

Mrs. C. A. Baldrige was chairman of the committee on "peace" and was also a member of the Board on several occasions. On March 26, 1906, a memorial service in memory of Susan B. Anthony, who had recently died, was held in the YMCA. Desperate efforts were made constantly for the passage of the so-called "third

class cities" bill which by degrees finally passed.

In 1907 "the Elizabeth Smith Miller Study Class" was formed for the education of the young people. In November 1907 the 39th annual N.Y. State convention was held in Geneva in the Baptist Church.

For the next few years, child labor, consumers' league, working hours for women, and like measures absorbed the attention of this club. Mrs. Charles Beard reported 23 yards of names for suffrage at the annual convention in Washington and 15,000 pieces of literature distributed in the county during one year. Mr. and Mrs. Henry B. Graves were actively engaged in both county and city clubs.

In 1910 on the death of S. H. VerPlanck, Mrs. Alfred G. Lewis was elected first vice president.

At this time more modern methods were adopted. The study class, the industrial department, after-committees were abolished and noon meetings and the "peace" replaced by open-air meetings, house-to-house canvassing, car-vay trips through the country and enlarged facilities for distributing literature.

In March 1911, three gorgeous suffrage banners were procured by the Geneva club and were used for the first time in a big New York City parade.

In April, 1911, Dr. Mary Jennings was elected as a school trustee, much to the joy of the suffragists. On April 25, 1911, Mrs. H. H. Henderson was elected president and was the last to hold that office.

Equal suffrage was granted on

Nov. 6, 1917 in New York state. The final meeting and disbandment of the club was held at Mrs. H. I. Putnam's on Jan. 14, 1918. The outgrowth of the final passion of both of these noble women, the sad news of their deaths cast sorrow and regret throughout the entire suffrage League of Women Voters, to establish out fine Woman's Club and building, and indirectly to have a well equipped rest room for women, all of which was the result of our labors.

Aside from those already mentioned, among the most active workers for suffrage were: Dr. F. A. Greene, Miss Mary Grey Peck, Rev. Dr. and Mrs. L. C. Stewardson, Mrs. Frank Organ, Prof. F. P. Nash, Mrs. O.J.C. Rose, Mrs. W. G. Howard, Miss Ida LaForce, Mrs. Florence Lewis, Mrs. W. Smith O'Brien, Mrs. Jennie Robinson, Mrs. William Sattler, Mrs. Preston Wright; and among those who rendered invaluable service in legislative work were: W. Smith O'Brien, Charles M. Hemihup, E. J. Cook, S. D. Willard, Dr. W. H. Jordan, O.J.C. Rose, S. H. VerPlanck, N. D. Lapham, P. N. Nicholas, and many others too numerous to mention.

Before the conclusion of the program at which Mrs. Partridge 022 enrolled suffragists. This was read her historical paper the following resolution was presented and adopted:

"Any recognition of a suffrage anniversary would not be complete without reference to Miss Rhoda Palmer, who was present at that memorable meeting in Seneca Falls in 1848.

"Miss Palmer was a life member of the Geneva Political Equality Club and kept her interest in

On May 22, 1911, Mrs. Elizabeth Smith Miller passed away and on March 19, 1912, Miss Miller departed this life while in Boston. Memorial meetings were held in honor of both of these noble women. The sad news of their deaths cast sorrow and regret throughout the entire suffrage League of Women Voters, to establish out fine Woman's Club and building, and indirectly to have a well equipped rest room for women, all of which was the result of our labors.

At a meeting on Nov. 18, 1912, a debate took place, the subject being: Is it Expedient to Have a "Woman's Building?" April 15, 1914, Mrs. H. L. Henry was elected to the office of president. On March 17, 1915, the Geneva suffragists issued an edition of the Geneva Daily Times.

A means of collecting money for the cause at this time was the "money pot." Old plate and gems were given and turned into coins. On Sept. 30, 1915, Miss Marjorie Wagner reported on the success of the suffrage "nursery" at the county fair.

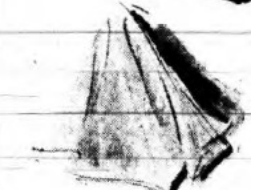
Mrs. Lewis, who had taken over the leadership in the County, reported thirteen clubs of 7-022 enrolled suffragists. This was read her historical paper the following resolution was presented and adopted:

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Then recognition was made of the fact that if women were to have the vote they must be skilled in politics and versed in public affairs, whereupon the League of Women Voters was organized and Geneva women at once, through its medium, began to better fit themselves for their new duties and a local unit of the League was organized.

Ten years after the passage of the 19th amendment the group of women who had been so active in the suffrage cause here deemed it fitting to get together for a celebration of the anniversary, by holding a luncheon meeting at the Hotel Seneca. This affair was well attended and as one of its features a history of the Geneva Political Club, which had been prepared by Mrs. Nellie Nares Partridge was read by Mrs. Dwight C. Carpenter. Inasmuch as this piece of research was carefully made by one who herself had been an ardent suffrage worker and long-time member of the Political Equality Club, her paper provides a rather complete history of the Club, and of historical importance. Mrs. Partridge wrote:—

The club was organized as the aftermath of the 29th annual New York State convention, that convened in Geneva in November, 1897 through the influence of Mrs. Elizabeth Smith Miller and her daughter, Miss Anne Fitzhugh Miller. The general meetings of the convention were held in Collins Hall. Mrs. Collins, strange to say, was an anti, but donated the Hall for the convention. Later Mrs. Collins became an associate member.

The convention was a great success. There were brilliant speakers, crowded sessions and gracious hospitality was extended the guests attending. A call was sent out by the Millers, Mr. S. H. VerPlanck and others for a meeting, whose object was to organize a local club.

Fifty people responded to the call and forthwith the Geneva Political Club came into existence. A constitution was drawn up and voted upon and the following officers were elected: Honorable president, Mrs. Elizabeth Smith Miller; president, Mrs. H. K. Clapp; first vice president, Louis J. Licht; second vice president, Miss Lillie Hopkins; third vice-president, O. J. C. Rose; recording secretary, Miss Louise Bunn; cor-

Seneca Falls in 1848.

—“Miss Palmer was a life member of the Geneva Political Equality Club and kept her interest in it to the last. On her 100th birthday, Feb. 15, 1916, Mrs. H. H. Henderson, president of the Geneva Political Club, and several of the officers called upon Miss Palmer and presented her with a bouquet and a basket of yellow roses in honor of the day.

“On Nov. 6, 1918, Miss Palmer, at the age of 102 years, cast her first vote in the Town of Geneva. She was accompanied to the polls by Mrs. W. H. Partridge and Miss Ruby Kenfield, who represented the Geneva Daily Times.

“Miss Palmer, who possessed all of her faculties and was a loyal suffragist to the last, departed this life on August 9, 1919, at the age of 103 years.

“A group of suffragists paid their last tribute of respect by attending her funeral in a body.”