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By
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It was February 1919, and Minnie Fisher Cunningham was running out of time. The culmination of four years of relentless effort, cobbled together far too often with a poverty of both funds and volunteers, now loomed but three short months away, and the President of the Texas Equal Suffrage Association (TESA) needed help. With the enthusiastic blessing of a governor recently elected thanks in no small part to Cunningham and her allies, the state legislature had in January unexpectedly set a referendum date of May 24 for the question of full enfranchisement for the women of Texas. Caught unawares, Cunningham scrambled to assemble what few resources she could in the hope of mounting something resembling a coherent campaign. On February 12, the TESA Executive Board gathered in Austin for strategic planning; there it authorized the creation of a Speakers' Bureau through which qualified advocates would canvass the state and, hopefully, shepherd Texas voters to the polls in support of the suffrage measure. Amateur hour was over; with but twelve weeks in which to make her case, Cunningham needed hardened veterans with the experience and the language to move her message. The National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) rose to meet that need, deploying over the next few weeks a cadre of polished activists with campaign experience from other states. For three months, these women would give Cunningham eyes and ears in the field, and in their work lay the best hope for woman suffrage in Texas.[1]

On February 2, word came to Cunningham from Alice Ellington of Dallas that Arkansan Gertrude Watkins, a veteran suffrage activist and now NAWSA Field Organizer, might welcome the opportunity to convince Texans to support the woman franchise.[2] "She happens to be home just now," Ellington advised, "[and] was so afraid she would be sent far away before you had fully made plans for Texas."

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Cunningham immediately pressed Ellington for details, and sent a personal invitation to Watkins to join the Texas campaign. Watkins, whose bona fides included the organization of dozens of suffrage associations in her home state in 1917, proved as enthusiastic as she was qualified, replying, "Indeed, next to winning [Arkansas], I should like nothing better than to have a hand in helping to steer Texas into the full suffrage fold." While Ellington lauded Watkins's skill as a "good speaker of the modern school of conversational speaking," Watkins herself was more pointed with her assets: her southern identity; her familiarity with Texans' suffrage rights; and, her experience in circumnavigating a particularly toxic "enemy alien" clause that had been written into the language of the Texas referendum bill. All that remained was NAWSA's approval, which Cunningham secured after some modest confusion that threatened to send Watkins instead to Tennessee. Watkins arrived in Austin on March 1, 1919, a newly minted field commander in the mounting struggle for equal suffrage in the Lone Star State.[3]

While the historical reality of both the suffrage campaign in Texas, Arkansas, and the greater United States doubtless bears the mark of her activism, Gertrude Watkins and her exploits remain largely invisible within the historical record of the movement. Organized manuscript resources in her native state prove fruitless in giving some sense of her work. And yet, Watkins occupied a position sufficiently prominent to merit mention in a 1917 edition of NAWSA's *The Woman Citizen* periodical, which described her as an "able young organizer" who had been "active in state and national suffrage work for the last four years." She entered the suffrage campaign on the heels of extension work for the Y.W.C.A., where she found her efforts "to help create better conditions for working women" thwarted by political impotence.[4] The earliest indicator of Watkins's engagement with the Arkansas campaign appears with the July 26, 1916 meeting of the Arkansas Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), at which she was chosen as one of four delegates from Little Rock to attend the NAWSA national convention in Atlantic City later that year.[5] A. Elizabeth Taylor credits Watkins with organizing sixty local suffrage auxiliaries in Arkansas in a month's time in 1917, while the magisterial six-volume movement history edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Ida Husted Harper places Watkins in no fewer than five states as a field organizer

for NAWSA.[6] In 1918 Watkins addressed attendees at the first annual meeting of the Arkansas Equal Suffrage Central Committee on "Organizing for Suffrage in Arkansas."[7]

With this essay, I reconstruct a vignette of the suffrage activism of Gertrude Watkins in southeast Texas, and use her experiences to diagnose qualities unique to the rural electorate in the state, and that may have influenced the contours of the suffrage advocacy there. Such an investigation is long overdue, as the silence of the nonurban suffragist in the history of the suffrage movement continues to obscure our understanding of that movement as a political and cultural phenomenon. Historians to date have typically privileged cities in the published narrative of the southern suffrage campaign, and perhaps appropriately—manuscript sources there are voluminous, organized, and accessible. Yet, though historians may rightly identify the urban suffrage campaign as the decisive front in the regional or national movement, that understanding remains nevertheless incomplete. Indeed, few accounts of organized suffrage activism, particularly in the South, make visible the legions of suffragists and sympathizers who occupied physical and cultural spaces beyond the cityscape; the small-town and rural suffragists who comprised the preponderance of the foot soldiers in the campaign remain unknown and uncelebrated in the historical canon. Nor is a lament of their absence especially novel: twenty years have now passed since Elizabeth Hayes Turner urged suffrage historians to turn from the "lofty altitudes of state and regional politics" and scrutinize instead "the rise as well as the role and function of *local* [emphasis original] suffrage societies in the South—to try and discover if, in fact, the grass had any roots, and if so, how healthy they were, and whether they advanced or held back the greening of the general suffrage movement."[8]

This call has to date gone largely unanswered; meanwhile, the history languishes. A narrative preoccupied with urban activism denies in historical memory the complexity that defined the suffrage movement in historical reality. This is about far more than the ongoing expectation of historians to fill gaps in the chronicle of events, though that certainly represents a necessary beginning. Absent a thorough integration of the full spectrum of suffragists, organizations, tactics, and rhetoric in play throughout the life of the

movement, our *understanding* remains inauthentic and incomplete—we cannot know the suffrage campaign in three dimensions. After all, we can confidently assume that the nonurban electorate was demographically, culturally, and politically distinct from its urban counterpart, and therefore offered a unique milieu in which to pursue such a provocative electoral reform. What's more, in the case of both Texas and Arkansas, the nonurban electorate comprised a sizeable majority of each state's population; their silence leaves critical questions unanswered. What, for example, do the demographic traits of nonurban suffrage advocates and their sympathizers reveal about the character and appeal of the movement? What was the nature and method of the opposition? What conclusions can be drawn from those tactics, arguments, and ideas that succeeded among certain constituencies throughout the state versus those that failed? Most importantly, in those polities where suffragists did convince the local electorate to support the expanded franchise, what ideas superseded the gender conventions typical of both the culture and the age, and what can we extrapolate from those dynamics about the nature of identity within and among these nonurban groups?

Alas, the tale of Gertrude Watkins abroad in Texas does not and cannot satisfy all of these questions. After all, the manuscript evidence we do have—in the form of correspondence between Watkins, her allies, and the state leadership (most notably, Cunningham and Jane Yelvington McCallum of the Austin auxiliary of the TESA)—offers but episodic glimpses into Watkins' activities, obstacles, and ideas. Watkins' counterparts and observers in the field do supplement her own accounts, but only obliquely, and without the expository detail that an historian would covet in reconstructing the events of the day. Despite these constraints, however, we must concede that glimpses win out over blindness, and while the limits of our sources restrict our interpretive possibilities, we can still expose the darkened byways of the past to new light, however dim the wattage. In this capacity, Gertrude Watkins and her contemporaries prove valuable docents in moving us toward a more thoughtful and more thorough treatment of the southern suffrage campaign.

The 1919 suffrage referendum represented the zenith of Texas politics that year, paired as it was with a prohibition measure that

would surely generate turnout. This was to the great advantage of the suffragists, who shrewdly capitalized upon the marriage of prohibition and suffrage to style the franchise as an act of moral agency that would project the feminine purity of American womanhood into the "degraded" politics of the day. It had come, however, only at great cost and from tireless labor on the part of suffrage leaders across the state. As President, Minnie Fisher Cunningham knew this cost perhaps better than any—since assuming the office in 1915, she had managed simultaneous state and federal amendment campaigns while teetering perpetually on the cusp of organizational bankruptcy, confronting prolonged stretches of outright apathy among the very constituency she sought to empower, and staring down opposition flush with influence, visibility, and wealth.

The 1919 referendum had also crystallized beyond the ability of the TESA and its auxiliaries to shape it. Texas suffragists scored a strategic victory in the spring of 1918 when, in exchange for the support of the woman vote against impeached ex-Governor "Farmer Jim" Ferguson, acting Governor William Hobby signed into law a bill granting Texas women the primary vote. Texas being a Democratic stronghold, the right to vote in the party primary was a broad step toward full suffrage, so foregone was the outcome of general elections. Texas women were good to their word, and Hobby was easily elected that summer. In securing this right, however, the women of Texas immediately captured the attention of interest groups who now viewed the woman vote as a potentially decisive factor in their own ambitions. Prohibitionists in particular saw *deus ex machina* in the newly-enfranchised women, and pushed both houses of the state legislature to demur on the federal suffrage amendment in favor of a state referendum for the full franchise.[9]

Cunningham and her allies had already worked meticulously at the state Democratic convention in September 1918 to derail any prospects for a state initiative, opting instead to pursue NAWSA's "Winning Plan" for passage of a federal amendment, which had been gaining momentum in Washington. The political calculus was clear: all previous attempts at suffrage referenda in the South had met with ignominious defeat, and failure in Texas could jeopardize critical swing votes in Congress. This prospect was not lost on the anti-suffrage forces in the state, who compounded the difficulty of

the situation by securing an early election date, thereby bringing the referendum campaign into direct conflict with an upcoming Liberty Loan drive.[10]

Cunningham was caught fast. NAWSA's master strategy was known only to President Carrie Chapman Catt and her inner circle; explaining it openly to Texas suffragists would surely deliver NAWSA to its enemies elsewhere. The conflict moreover threatened fratricide within the TESA, from whom Cunningham had already wrangled a resolution against a state amendment. Yet, how could the suffragists publicly reject an overture for full voting rights and not unravel their growing support among men and women who believed—naively, Cunningham thought—the success of the Hobby campaign indicated strong prospects for approval? Cunningham attempted a delaying tactic, arranging for her allies in Austin to introduce bills setting the referendum date for the 1920 general election. By then, she hoped, the federal amendment would pass and render the state question moot. These maneuvers were thwarted, however, as overconfidence among citizens and legislators alike generated an irrepressible momentum toward an early election date.[11]

The collapse of the federal amendment in the U. S. Senate generated a perfect storm, which materialized when Hobby, in a January 1919 message to the legislature, called for a vote on full woman suffrage that year. The nativist hysteria touched off by the First World War and the patriotic fervor generated by women's voluntarism on the home front gave the suffrage amendment rhetorical and political heft; Hobby called for a suffrage bill enfranchising women while disenfranchising resident aliens.[12] This final addendum all but gilded the political irony: the women who stood to gain from the referendum could not vote for it, while the minority groups who stood to lose the franchise could easily vote against it. A furious Cunningham, fresh from a conclave with the NAWSA leadership in D.C., returned to Texas in February and, with the blessing of NAWSA President Carrie Chapman Catt, determined to both put the state amendment over the top and make Hobby pay for his lack of vision.[13]

Watkins was deployed into this fray as a member of the TESA Speaker's Bureau and Field Secretary for the state's Fourteenth

Senate District, a ten-county stretch of land huddled along the Sabine River in the easternmost part of the state. Bookending the district in the north was the historic city of Nacogdoches; in the south, the oil boomtown of Beaumont—easily the largest metropolitan area in the district, with an urban population in excess of forty thousand. Between these poles, a population of over 200,000, over sixty percent of whom lived in rural communities; six of the ten counties boasted no urban residents whatsoever in 1919.[14] Awaiting Watkins there was Lillian Knox of Hemphill, herself only recently returned from a stay in Hot Springs, Arkansas, where her ailing husband Hiram had taken the waters to fend off a stubborn case of influenza.[15] In conjunction with Liba Peshakova, a South Dakota suffrage campaign veteran and Senate District Finance Chair, Watkins planned to raise five thousand dollars while saturating the district with pro-suffrage literature.[16] Prospects for the field were dim; of the several organizers canvassing Texas on behalf of the suffrage referendum, Watkins inherited one of the most adverse political environments in the state.

Through Watkins's irregular correspondence with the TESA state leadership, we can piece together at least some portion of her work in Texas' fourteenth Senate District. In April, a timely boon appeared in the form of NAWSA Honorary President Anna Howard Shaw, who agreed to tour the state and employ her formidable presence on behalf of the TESA. While Shaw's itinerary generally favored Texas' metropolitan centers, it nevertheless gave Watkins the opportunity to promote and feature a charismatic suffrage leader with a celebrated national profile. Shaw was scheduled to speak in Beaumont on April 17 and 18, and from there a final stop further north in Palestine. Watkins intended an ambitious agenda for Shaw's visit, including a local reception and parade; both, however, went unrealized at the urging of Cunningham, who curtailed Shaw's itinerary on the basis of Shaw's frail constitution. Though limited, Shaw's canvass was revealing. A few days after Shaw's visit, Watkins intimated that, despite a "nice conference in [the afternoon and a] splendid little night meeting," the local women were "so apathetic that I was uncertain, up to the very day, just how every thing would go."[17]

As a member of the TESA Speakers' Bureau, Watkins made a regular tour of the district and offered tactical advice and encourage-

ment to local associations and general audiences throughout. At the invitation of the Nacogdoches Equal Suffrage Association, Watkins spoke in early April at the Nacogdoches County courthouse. There she urged her all-female audience to use their sway to compel the men of their community to support the equal franchise on May 24. Watkins was followed on the eve of the election by another prominent Arkansas suffragist, Florence Cotnam, who entreated a sizeable audience of local voters to "make the emancipation of womankind complete."[18] These engagements appear to have had an energizing effect on local suffragists—especially the women of Nacogdoches, whom Watkins later described as "splendid" women who "deserved to win certainly."[19]

Watkins's adventures as a suffrage activist in Texas also supply useful insights into the dynamics of the 1919 campaign. First, Watkins's correspondence reveals the difficulty in raising funds in a hostile region. Watkins came to Texas in March with intentions to raise five thousand dollars in promotion of the May referendum. By April 8, she reported that she had to date only raised $1150, and was decidedly pessimistic about her prospects to reach her original goal. District Finance Chair Liba Peshakova capitalized upon the enthusiasm surrounding Dr. Shaw's visit to scrounge up an additional $350 later that month, but Watkins conceded "its [*sic*] hard to get in [Beaumont]."[20]

Another potentially decisive complication in the suffrage advocacy effort illuminated by Watkins's correspondence is the chronic apathy that hamstrung leaders' efforts to recruit dedicated and energetic volunteers. In the early weeks of the referendum campaign, NAWSA recommended a petition drive to demonstrate to both lawmakers and the general public the demand among Texas women for the right to the full franchise. This had two potential benefits: first, it could generate pressure on the male electorate to respond to women's demands—or more precisely, husbands to respond to the demands of their wives—particularly in light of their service to the war effort; and second, it offered a substantive and empirical refutation to opposition claims that Texas women did not want the ballot, and that the campaign had been cooked up by a handful of unfeminine malcontents at the behest of outside agitators.[21]

In part, the ability of field organizers to recruit reliable volunteers was compromised by the TESA's empty coffers and NAWSA's inability to underwrite the campaign beyond Cunningham's salary as president.[22] Watkins complained of the effects of unpaid volunteers on the petition effort early on: "In regard to petitions—since you are so emphatic about not paying girls to circulate them—it means that our [district] will have 2,000 women's names instead of 5,000, as we had hoped." The petition drive moreover allowed Watkins to bring to bear her experience and perspective from Arkansas and elsewhere: "There is so little interest in getting petitions done—and it is different after women have actually voted. Quite naturally they are bored to tears having to use the 'indirect influence' of a petition."[23]

Frustration toward suffragist inertia percolated up to the putative leaders of local auxiliaries or county campaigns. Though Watkins secured Chairmen in eight of ten counties by early April, not all proved equally competent to the task. Shortly after her arrival in the district, Watkins delivered a rather unvarnished opinion of Mrs. F. J. Calhoun, Chairman of Jefferson County: "Whoever wished Mrs. Calhoun off on us as a County Chairman should be shot—[and] I speak for the job of killing her. She will give neither money nor time, [and] she has plenty of both." A sympathetic Cunningham replied, "I am afraid if some of us yielded to our feelings there would be quite a shooting at sunrise on the morning of the 25th of May if the suffrage amendment fails to carry." Irritation gave way to resignation by April 8, as Watkins complained, "Mrs. Calhoun is a poor excuse—though really, there is no one except Mrs. Bradley, who positively refuses to do another thing for [suffrage], in the least interested enough to be of much help."[24] Instability of leadership at the local level was an acute problem, not only for the reliability of the lines of communication between the state and local leaders at a critical hour, but also because even a brief interruption in the active leadership of the movement could yield a disproportionate decline in public interest in the cause.

Finally, Watkins's correspondence casts light into the shadowy character of the opposition to woman suffrage active in her district, and at least one measure of the extremes to which suffrage opponents

were willing to go to thwart electoral reform in the state. In a letter sent on the day of the referendum election, Watkins described in Liberty County "slanderous attacks on the womanhood of Texas in his Forum," thereby invoking the specter of "Fergusonism" and the legacy of former Governor James "Farmer Jim" Ferguson. A Temple businessman with a charismatic presence and a talent for striking a populist tone on the stump, Ferguson first entered Texas politics in March 1914 on an anti-prohibitionist platform. His outsider image and folksy oratory catapulted him into the governor's seat, where he built not so much an administration as an empire, projecting his influence throughout both the state legislature and the state Democratic party machinery. He proved particularly strong in nonurban counties in Texas, building on that advantage to crush his primary opponent during his 1916 reelection campaign.[25] Throughout his gubernatorial career, Ferguson remained a steadfast ally to business and liquor interests, and a bitter enemy to prohibition and woman suffrage. Ferguson's cronies thwarted repeated attempts to move equal suffrage bills through the state legislature before 1917, and Ferguson outmaneuvered prohibitionist allies to the suffrage cause to block the inclusion of a pro-suffrage plank in the state Democratic platform in 1916.[26]

With his audacious attempt in 1917 to bring the University of Texas to heel through intimidation, faculty and administrative purges, and a veto of university appropriations, however, Ferguson inaugurated his own political decline. His assault on the state's flagship public university united students, faculty, alumni, and a broad majority of Texans in bitter opposition to his administration. Ferguson's opponents soon unearthed financial improprieties sufficiently egregious to merit impeachment proceedings in the state House in an August special session. That body brought twenty-one articles of impeachment against Ferguson, and managers were dispatched to the state Senate to prepare for trial, when Ferguson escaped conviction by resigning from office in September. The Senate convicted Ferguson in absentia, and forbade him from ever again holding "any office of honor, trust or profit under the State of Texas."[27]

Impeachment did little to deter Ferguson's ambition, as he began

in November 1917 a "campaign for 'vindication'" by personally editing and publishing a propaganda organ, the *Ferguson Forum*, designed to sustain the support of his electoral base. The first issue of the weekly *Forum* appeared on November 8, 1917, and ran almost continuously until 1935. The "Ferguson for Rum," as it was known to Ferguson's enemies, gained quick currency among his supporters. A subscription advertisement in the *Forum* from February 1918 crowed that the paper had subscribers in 233 of the 248 counties in the state, and circulated twenty thousand copies each week. Later claims cited a readership exceeding one hundred thousand Texans.[28]

The readership of the *Forum* comprised Ferguson's deeply loyal constituency— tenant farmers, urban labor, and anti-prohibitionists. As late as 1924, Ferguson remained "strong among rural voters, who...never read anything but the *Ferguson Forum*." This was particularly true for the piney-woods region of East Texas, described by Norman Brown as "a red hot Ferguson bed" of Texans "dyed in the wool on Fergusonism."[29] Ferguson's support, however, defied geographical limits; though its authenticity is rightly questioned, correspondence to the *Forum*'s "Letters From Loyal Texans" (after 1918 entitled "Where the Voters Decide") column represented the entire state. All, of course, subscribed to Ferguson's provincial conservatism, and all were beguiled by his down-home charisma. One Mount Pleasant admirer perhaps best explained the rural view of "Farmer Jim," declaring Ferguson "the best friend the farmer ever has had in the governor's office."[30]

When, in April 1918, Ferguson upended the Democratic gubernatorial primary by defiantly declaring his candidacy for governor against incumbent William Hobby, the *Forum* added a new dimension to its agitprop directed specifically at suffragists and the woman vote in rural Texas. The previous December, the *Forum* introduced a reader named "Sally Jane Spottswood," allegedly a schoolteacher from a modest Texas hamlet by the name of "Pine Hollow," and a Ferguson devotee. By January, Spottswood had become a regular columnist, treating the question of equal suffrage with Ferguson's trademark folksy style and naked opportunism. Between January and August 1918, Spottswood assumed multiple positions on suffrage—each in direct relation to the potential of the

woman vote to benefit Ferguson's political fortunes. In the weeks before the Democratic primary between Ferguson and Hobby, Spottswood rejoiced in the growing number of female voters registered statewide; ironically, by the eve of the election, the *Forum* had become one of the state's most vocal proponents of the woman vote. Spottswood instead sought to divide the woman voter bloc by class, warning Texas farmwomen to avoid the "pink tea" city women, "who would rather nurse a poodle dog than a baby."[31] The honeymoon ended, however, with Ferguson's landslide defeat in the July 27 primary. An indignant Spottswood declared primary suffrage for women unconstitutional, concluding that "now...is the best time to stop it all." Ferguson himself condemned the "liars" who supported Hobby against him, proclaimed that Texas women did not want to vote, and that he would vote against it himself in the May referendum. A final *Forum* column in the month preceding the election warned that equal rights for women would precipitate the collapse of human civilization and the undoing of God's "divine arrangement."[32]

In Watkins's view, this was the spirit trafficking among voters in her district on Election Day. She claimed, incorrectly, that eighty percent of the vote in San Augustine County had gone to Ferguson in 1918 (the actual figure was sixty-nine percent), but her detection of the long shadow of Fergusonism appears nevertheless accurate. In February, Lillian Knox had cautioned Cunningham that her district had "ten hard counties," and that it "went for Ferguson and they are going to fight us," but determined to get it organized anyway. In fact, six of the ten counties in Senate District 14 supported Ferguson's defiant and arguably illegal candidacy in 1918, and three of those—Newton, Sabine, and San Augustine—had delivered strong majorities above sixty percent. Official returns for the May 24 suffrage referendum reveal the loss of the district overall, with seven of the ten member counties voting against the woman franchise. Of those seven, five had also favored Ferguson in the 1918 primary, and all featured overwhelmingly rural populations—only Nacogdoches County boasted any urban residents whatsoever, and that amounted to less than a sixth of the total county population. Ferguson's influence was surely not the lone factor in determining electoral outcomes on May 24—rain likely blunted turnout in the northern

part of the district—but a strong correlative relationship certainly seems plausible in light of Watkins's and Knox's anecdotal claims.[33]

Watkins's account supplies further evidence of the character of the opposition in the field. A host of "dreadful scurulous" [*sic*] anti-suffrage literature had been distributed to the men of the district. The suffragists had countered with "10,000 letters [and] in each one was a piece of our [literature] to try and offset even a little—the effect of the Anti's. The opposition in San Augustine and Sabine is really bitter." The suffragists had "waged a rather vigorous campaign" in Lillian Knox's home county of Sabine. For their trouble, however, Watkins reported "there was an attempt to burn Mrs. Knox's house. Isn't that just too vicious for words?" If attempted arson wasn't sufficiently demoralizing, Watkins observed on the day of the election "a few straggling men pass by on their way to vote. One has just announced to a group standing under cover of a roof that he ain't ashamed to say that he was going to vote a'gin the women and for the Wets—[and] his remark seems to meet with the approval of his hearers." None of this dampened Watkins's spirits, however, as she professed a "whole heart full" and "every wish for Victory" to Cunningham in her report.[34]

Victory, however, eluded Watkins and her allies that day. Watkins reported light voting in all counties, and some modest irregularities in election protocol, namely, "Some of our boxes were not opened all day long...[and] some closed early...but as the sentiment was friendly to our amend. [and] as we won (though the vote was light) we made little of this." Indeed, Watkins was most enthusiastic about the fate of the referendum in her district and the state, both of which she believed to be won in a "mighty close call." She correctly identified Jefferson, Hardin, and Orange Counties as victorious for suffrage, declared Sabine and San Augustine too close to call, and wrongly predicted a win in Jasper County. Statewide, however, the suffrage referendum fell to defeat by a margin of 25,000 votes out of 300,000 ballots cast. As the official returns became public, Watkins's jubilation took a sour turn. "I felt like someone had struck me a terrific blow between the eyes," she lamented to Cunningham, "when I read of our loss this morning—for that, I'm afraid, it will prove to be." Watkins praised Cunningham's leadership, but spared

no venom for those who did prevail in the referendum: "...I must say I have a perfect contempt for that sanctimonious, hypocritical bunch of Prohibitionists. I can almost see some of the 'Good Church' people fairly licking their chops over the outcome of the Election."[35] These sorrows proved but temporary, of course, as the Susan B. Anthony Amendment cleared Congress on June 4. Governor Hobby called for a special legislative session to consider ratification on June 23, and the amendment swept through the state House with impassioned but marginal opposition. Suffrage allies broke an "anti" filibuster in the state Senate on June 27, and the following day, Texas became the first southern state, and the ninth in the country, to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution.[36]

Through the eyes and efforts of Gertrude Watkins, an experienced Arkansas suffragist, we get some sense, however incomplete, of the nature of suffrage advocacy in the largely rural region of Texas to which she was assigned. We can reasonably conclude from her missives to state headquarters that cajoling local women of standing to campaign on behalf of suffrage was often an uphill battle, and yet a necessary one, as women of status and social capital were necessary to offset accusations of suffrage as a fifth column for free love, socialism, and the "de-sexing" of southern womanhood. Herein lay one of the decisive aspects of the 1919 campaign—maintaining continuity and consistency of local leadership during a truncated endeavor, and Watkins struggled to do so in her district. Watkins's experiences also demonstrate the problem of using unpaid volunteers for advocacy work—particularly the time-intensive, door-to-door labor of gathering petition signatures. Watkins argued, however implicitly, for paid volunteers in the understanding that they would be better motivated to meet campaign objectives; TESA's financial liabilities, however, precluded any such possibility, which may have diminished the efficacy of Watkins's efforts in her district. Beyond question, however, we see from Watkins's campaign the adverse environment in which many suffragists had to work, and the violent extremes suffrage opponents would employ to resist change. Likewise, in a single-party state, we are reminded from Watkins's correspondence of the ongoing power of personality among rural Texans still in thrall to an otherwise disgraced demagogue. That Ferguson could successfully appeal to the sympathies of East Texans

through traditional gender constructs suggests that those constructs retained potent currency among male voters in the region.

Thus in scrutiny of Gertrude Watkins do the dynamics of the Texas campaign come into somewhat sharper relief, and given of the many obstacles the suffragists faced in their endeavors, the fact that they scored so many victories throughout the state impresses even more in retrospect. More work remains, of course, before we can responsibly say that we have an authentic grasp of the southern suffrage movement in its many intricacies, but a thorough inquiry into local activism like Watkins's 1919 campaign is a step in the right direction. Did these same challenges and obstacles obtain elsewhere in the South, including Watkins' native state of Arkansas? How did suffragists respond to them, and what do their victories and failures tell us about the nature of the southern electorate on matters of gender and political power in the early twentieth century? How can we enrich our historical understanding of national suffrage activism with this new knowledge? These questions deserve answers, and all women who fought for political equality deserve to have their stories told. For her part, Watkins was grateful to have had the opportunity to join the suffrage battle in Texas, expressing her affection and admiration for Cunningham in one of her final missives, and declaring, "it was a great joy to have been a part of the Texas History."[37]

Notes

1 Cunningham to Senate District Chairmen, Feb. 27, 1919, Folder 1, Box 21, Jane Yelvington McCallum Papers (Austin History Center, Austin Public Library, Austin, Texas; hereinafter cited as JYM); Nettie R. Shuler to Cunningham, Feb. 20, 1919, Folder 7, Box 21, JYM.

2 Watkins was also the daughter of Claibourne Watkins, a co-founder in 1879 of the Medical Department of the Arkansas Industrial University, now the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences. See Max L. Baker and Fred O. Henker, "Claibourne Watkins (1844-1908)," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas History & Culture Online* (http://www.encyclopediaofarkansas.net/encyclopedia/entry-detail.aspx?entryID=2931), accessed February 15, 2013.

3 Watkins agreed to come to Texas for a monthly compensation of one hundred dollars plus expenses, a fee supplied in full by Lillian (Mrs. Hiram) Knox of Hemphill, who also served as Chairman for Senate District 14 during the campaign. See Cunningham to Knox, Feb. 14, 1919, Folder 4, Box 24, JYM; and Cunningham to Knox, Feb. 28, 1919, Folder 4, Box 24, JYM. On Watkins' qualifications, interest, and availability, see Ellington to Cunningham, Feb. 2, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, Minnie Fisher Cunningham Papers (University of Houston Library Special Collections and Archives, Houston, Texas; hereinafter MFC); Cunningham to Gertrude Watkins, Feb. 7, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC; Ellington to Cunningham, Feb. 10, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC; Watkins to Cunningham, Feb. 11, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC; Cunningham to Nettie Shuler, Feb. 17, 1919; Watkins to Cunningham, Feb. 17, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC; and Shuler to Cunningham, Feb. 18, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC.

4 Mrs. Sam Worrell, "Two Interesting Arkansas Women," from *The Woman Citizen* Vol. 1, No. 11 (Aug. 11, 1917), 184.

5 AWSA Minutes, Jul. 26, 1916, Arkansas Woman's Suffrage Association Records (Loc. 1455) (Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville).

6 A. Elizabeth Taylor, "The Woman Suffrage Movement in Arkansas," *Arkansas Historical Quarterly* 15 (Spring 1956): 38. Watkins was dispatched as a field organizer to New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and West Virginia, in addition to her organizing work in Arkansas and Texas. See Ida Husted Harper, et al., ed., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 6 Vols. (National American Woman Suffrage Association, 1922), Apple iTunes E-Book, VI: 629, 712, 766, 859, 1010.

7 "First Annual Meeting of The Arkansas Equal Suffrage Central Committee" Program, Folder 2, Box 6, Series 6, South by Southwest Collection (MC971) (Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, AR), 6.

8 Elizabeth Hayes Turner, "'White-Gloved Ladies' and 'New Women' in the Texas Woman Suffrage Movement," in *Southern Women: Histories and Identities*, ed. Virginia Bernhard, et al. (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1992), 155-156, 129-130. More recently, Elna C. Green has complained of a "nearly exclusive attention on the state and regional leadership of the southern suffrage movement," and the resulting "distorted picture of suffragism in the region." Rejecting claims that the traits of the movement's leadership defined all suffragists, Green argues instead that local suffrage activists were "more typical." See Elna

C. Green, *Southern Strategies: Southern Women and the Woman Suffrage Question* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), xvii.

9 Judith N. McArthur and Harold L. Smith, *Minnie Fisher Cunningham: A Suffragist's Life in Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 61-62, 75; Ida Husted Harper, et al., ed., *History of Woman Suffrage*, 6 Vols. (New York: Arno Press, 1969), VI: 639. On the prohibitionist push for a state amendment, see Walter L. Buenger, *The Path to a Modern South: Northeast Texas between Reconstruction and the Great Depression* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 180.

10 McArthur and Smith, *Minnie Fisher Cunningham*, 75; Harper, et al., ed., *History of Woman Suffrage*, VI: 639.

11 McArthur and Smith, *Minnie Fisher Cunningham*, 76-78; Texas Legislature, House, *House Journal*, 36th Leg., Reg. Sess., 7.

12 Texas Legislature, House, *House Journal*, 36th Leg., Reg. Sess., 56-57.

13 McArthur and Smith, *Minnie Fisher Cunningham*, 80; Catt to Cunningham, Jan. 23, 1919, Folder 5, Box 21, JYM.

14 The district comprised Hardin, Jasper, Jefferson, Liberty, Nacogdoches, Newton, Orange, Sabine, San Augustine, and Tyler Counties. Population data obtained from the Historical Census Browser (http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/collections/stats/histcensus/index.html), accessed February 7, 2013. Published by the University of Virginia Geospatial and Statistical Data Center.

15 Knox to Cunningham, Feb. 24, 1919, Folder 4, Box 21, JYM.

16 Watkins to Cunningham, Mar. 5, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC.

17 Cunningham to Watkins, Mar. 27, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC; Shaw to Cunningham, Apr. 17, 1919, Folder 9, Box 25, JYM; Watkins to Cunningham, Apr. 22, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4 MFC.

18 *Daily Sentinel* (Nacogdoches, Tex.), Apr. 2, 1919, and May 24, 1919, quoted in Jennifer Baugh Hancock, "Society Suffragists: Women's Struggle for the Ballot in Rural East Texas" (M.A. thesis, Stephen F. Austin State University, 1999), 113-114.

19 Watkins to Cunningham, May 27, 1919, Folder 5, Box 23, JYM.

20 Watkins to Cunningham, Apr. 8, 1919, Folder 4, Box 7, MFC; Watkins to Cunningham, Apr. 22, 1919, Folder 4, Box 7, MFC.

21 Carrie Chapman Catt personally urged Cunningham to focus on petitioning for the referendum campaign. See Catt to Cunningham, Jan. 23, 1919, Folder 5, Box 21, JYM.

22 Ibid. Catt offered to subsidize Cunningham's salary from the national so that Cunningham could rightly claim that she, like the many volunteers now working for no pay throughout the state, was earning nothing from TESA funds for her labor.

23 Watkins to Cunningham, Mar. 11, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC.

24 On Watkins's endeavors to find county chairmen, see Watkins to Cunningham, Apr. 8, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC. On Calhoun, see Watkins to Cunningham, Mar. 11, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC; Cunningham to Watkins, Mar. 13, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC; and Watkins to Cunningham, Apr. 8, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC.

25 See "Election Returns from All Counties," *Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, Tex.), Aug. 8, 1914, and "Complete Returns by Counties of the July 22 Primary Election as Officially Compiled," *Houston Chronicle* (Houston, Tex.), Aug. 7, 1916.

26 "Ferguson Heads Delegation to National Convention," *San Antonio Express* (San Antonio, Tex.), May 25, 1916; "Use Steam Roller to Expedite Vote for Committeeman," *San Antonio Express* (San Antonio, Tex.), May 25, 1916; and "Antis Play Shrewd Game to Victory," *San Antonio Express*, May 25, 1916.

27 The entire impeachment affair is exhaustively chronicled in Louis L. Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democrats in the Wilson Era* (Austin: University of Texas, 1973), 185-221.

28 Norman D. Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug: Texas Politics, 1921-1928* (College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press, 1984), 97. Unverified claims to the escalating circulation of the *Forum* are found in *Ferguson Forum*, Feb. 14, 1918; Editorial, *Ferguson Forum*, Mar. 28, 1918; and Editorial, *Ferguson Forum*, October 24, 1918.

29 Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug*, 307-308.

30 "Letters from Loyal Texans," *Ferguson Forum*, Jan. 3, 1918.

31 Spottswood's initial letter appeared in "Letters from Loyal Texans," *Ferguson Forum*, Dec. 27, 1917, and her first column was "We Need Hands," *Ferguson Forum*, Jan. 10, 1918. There is some reason to suspect that Spottswood was Ferguson himself, as the community of "Pine Hollow" is conspicuously absent in the historical record of the state. The

"pink tea" quote is found in "Hobby's Contempt for Woman Suffrage Bill as Shown By Record Of the Texas Senate," *Ferguson Forum*, May 23, 1918. Other columns typical of Spottswood's work include "To Every Woman in Texas, Urban and Suburban," *Ferguson Forum*, Jun. 20, 1918; "To the Women of Texas Who Will Vote in Primary" *Ferguson Forum*, Jun. 27, 1918; Editorial, *Ferguson Forum*, Jul. 11, 1918; "Women of Texas; Vote!" *Ferguson Forum*, Jul. 25, 1918.

32 See "Is It Constitutional for Women to Vote?" *Ferguson Forum*, Aug. 1, 1918. Ferguson's reaction to the primary returns is in "200,000 Liars Running Loose in Texas," *Ferguson Forum*, Aug. 1, 1918; "Woman Suffrage," *Ferguson Forum* (Temple, Tex.), Apr. 10, 1919; and "Peril of 'Equal Rights' for Women," *Ferguson Forum* (Temple, Tex.) Apr. 17, 1919.

33 Watkins to Cunningham, May 24, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC; Knox to Cunningham, Feb. 24, 1919, Folder 4, Box 21, JYM. 1918 Primary Election returns are found in "Complete Returns Primary Election," *Dallas Morning News* (Dallas, Tex.), Aug. 11, 1918. May 24 Referendum returns are in Texas Legislature, House, *House Journal*, 36th Leg., 1st and 2nd Called Sess., 442-445.

34 Watkins to Cunningham, May 24, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC.

35 Watkins to Cunningham, May 26, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC; Watkins to Cunningham, Jun. 8, 1919, Folder 7, Box 4, MFC; Texas Legislature, House, *House Journal*, 36th Leg., 1st and 2nd Called Sess., 445; Watkins to Cunningham, May 27, 1919, Folder 5, Box 23, JYM. Watkins reported that polling sites in Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange were "never opened," while polling sites elsewhere were not opened until early afternoon and closed early. She estimated that it cost the suffragists "several hundred votes in our three friendly towns." Other voting irregularities occurred in East Texas counties where, not coincidentally, Fergusonism still held local sway. In twenty-eight counties, ballots listed the amendments in a different order, many opposing votes were very slow to return, and reports of unguarded ballot boxes proliferated. See McArthur and Smith, *Minnie Fisher Cunningham*, 82.

36 McArthur and Smith, *Minnie Fisher Cunningham*, 84; Harper, et al., eds., *History of Woman Suffrage*, VI: 642-643. The activity in the Senate documented in Texas Legislature, Senate, *Senate Journal*, 36th Leg., 2nd Called Sess., 24-29, 44-45, 51.

37 Watkins to Cunningham, May 27, 1919, Folder 5, Box 23, JYM.