

**The American Woman Suffrage Movement:  
Connecting the Pieces between Suffragettes, Indiana, and College Campuses**

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Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are concerned with their civil rights. In the summer of 2022, the United States Supreme Court overturned the ruling on the consequential 1973 court case *Roe v Wade*, which generally allowed the right to abortion in the United States. Many American women suddenly felt the ground shake beneath their feet. This foundation of rights was not as solid as they once thought. The *Roe v Wade* overruling was perhaps the first time many young women questioned whether they took their rights for granted. In protest, tens of thousands of women across the nation participated in marches and rallies. This event, however, is not the first time many women have felt undervalued by the government, nor the first time women have come together to fight for something they believe in. Women have been fighting for their civil rights for a long time.

Over 100 years ago, women known as suffragists set the precedent for fighting for women's rights. These women fought for a right many consider to be the most important American of all: the right to vote. They fought for this right as early as the late 1800s by means of public protest such as rallies, marches, speeches, and even hunger strikes. When a young America broke away from Great Britain, one of the main arguments used by the colonists was the idea of "no taxation without representation." The desire for the right to vote has been engrained in Americans from before the 'shot' was even 'heard round the world.' However, for nearly 150 years, the nation lived on and only extended suffrage to less than half of the population. Even after 1870, when African American men received constitutional protections extending to them the right to vote with the Fifteenth Amendment, women remained excluded. It took another fifty years of fighting for women to receive the ballot, and even longer for women of color to be able to exercise those rights as well.

The American women's suffrage movement took place from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and affected young women in the United States who were coming of age in an era when women attending institutions of higher education was becoming the status quo. In Indiana, over 20 of these historic institutions were founded before 1900 and several began to accept women as students as early as 1842. The suffrage movement expanded college women's views and allowed them to explore ideas related to their identity that they never would have been exposed to at home. As the women's suffrage movement progressed, so too did the population of women in college. At Purdue University and Indiana State University (previously Indiana State Normal School), women were exposed to ideas of suffrage and women's rights through campus suffrage organizations, newspaper articles, art, and debates. While some women were catalysts for the suffrage movement, the real importance of the suffrage movement on college campuses in Indiana was to create an environment that educated women as well as incubated the next generation of women's rights activists.

## **Historiography**

The American woman suffrage movement is a very dynamic subject with a rich historiography, and with the recent celebration of the centennial anniversary, the Nineteenth Amendment has received heightened attention from scholars. In her book, *The Practice of U.S. Women's History*, historian Elizabeth Clapp examined the entire history of American women, finding the woman suffrage movement to be a very popular area of study.<sup>1</sup> She not only delivered an overview of the subject, but a detailed historiography up until her work was published in 2007. Clapp argued that over the years, there has been a reinvigoration of political

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth J. Clapp, "The Woman Suffrage Movement, 1848–1920," In *The Practice of U.S. Women's History: Narratives, Intersections, and Dialogues*, Rutgers University Press, 2007.

history and a focus on intersectionality that has completely changed how historians view the woman suffrage movement. She discussed how the woman suffrage movement began less as a call for civil rights, but more as an extension of democracy. Historians noticed how the research had focused on women who were held in esteem at the time, lived successfully in the male-dominated society as upper-class white women, and were supported by their husbands. A shift later occurred in the historiography to try to learn more about suffragists who did not fit in this role, like lower-class women and women of color. Many women joined the movement to advance their other goals of temperance or social reform. Clapp noted over seventy sources that have written about the woman suffrage movement over the years, ranging from Elizabeth Cady Stanton herself, to political historians, to gender historians, to 21<sup>st</sup> century historians like Clapp. Around 1995, micro-histories began to appear that examined anti-suffragists, regional and local investigations, the impact of race and ethnicity, and case studies on specific people. Clapp included historian Thomas J. Jablonsky's quote that anti-suffragists "were less likely to be college-educated than the suffragists" and Clapp herself admitted that while there is an abundance of research about the impact of the movement on the South and the West, there is a lack of research on the Midwest.<sup>2</sup> Clapp closed out her argument by explaining the places in which scholarship is still lacking, such as over the militant perspective, working class and immigrant women, and local/state campaigns.

While Clapp covered the majority of the important historical perspectives of historians over the woman suffrage movement since the 1920s, other historians focused on different aspects of the time such as the idea of the "new woman." Susan Goodier and Karen Pastorello's chapter, "Radicalism and Spectacle: New Women Modernize the Suffrage Movement," explored how

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 245.

Progressive Era and college women became increasingly important in the late 1800s because women's enrollment in universities increased immensely.<sup>3</sup> By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was an entirely new demographic of women in the United States – educated ones. Goodier and Pastorello also examine how institutions were often hesitant to allow suffrage clubs, but some college women were passionate enough to go off-campus to learn more and hear speakers. While suffrage was a polarizing topic at first, the authors claim that as time went on, most college women ended up supporting the cause due to increased education and exposure to new ideas. The authors noted that both suffragists and anti-suffragists saw the potential in college women to be leaders for their cause, and both created organizations with chapters on many campuses.<sup>4</sup>

This idea of the “new woman,” went hand-in-hand with the idea of women's education. The suffrage movement picked up speed parallel to women increasingly attending institutions of higher learning. In the article, “The Gibson Girl Goes to College: Popular Culture and Women's Higher Education in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920,” historian Lynn D. Gordon discussed the idea of the Gibson Girl and how the perspective of the first college women changed over time.<sup>5</sup> Gordon explained how the first generation of college women in the late 1800s were seen as “mannish” and did not have societal approval, but in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they began to be more accepted and seen instead as American beauty Gibson Girls. Women proved they were eager for education and by 1920, women were 47.3% of all undergraduates in the United States.<sup>6</sup> This number is consequential because women received degrees in an almost equal manner to men

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Goodier and Karen Pastorello, “Radicalism and Spectacle: New Women Modernize the Suffrage Movement,” In *Women Will Vote: Winning Suffrage in New York State*, Cornell University Press, (2017): 114–41.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 120-121.

<sup>5</sup> Lynn Gordon D, “The Gibson Girl Goes to College: Popular Culture and Women's Higher Education in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920,” *American Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (1987): 211–30.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 214.

after only a few decades. Gordon argued that the first generation of women graduates served the purpose of enriching later students' lives by giving them advice, blazing the trail, and helping them enjoy college life by beginning campus clubs and organizations; she specifically mentions social reform clubs like those related to suffrage. These women not only received an education, but also discovered for the first time that they could contend with men and deserved the same rights as them. The college atmosphere allowed them to explore life outside of the sphere of domesticity and begin to think more openly about the possibility of being more than just a wife and mother.

Most historians who have covered college suffragists only include them a paragraph or two of their work, but one historian wrote a detailed and extensive article in 2021 that focused on college suffrage organizations. In "Students, Suffrage, and Political Change: The College Equal Suffrage League and Campus Campaigns for Women's Right to Vote, 1905-1920," Kelly Marino argued that college women were important to ultimately winning the right to vote.<sup>7</sup> One of her main points is about how the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) passed the torch from important early suffragists like Susan B. Anthony and Stanton to new leaders such as Carrie Chapman Catt around the turn of the century. NAWSA believed getting young people involved was one of the keys to success. It focused on getting support from upper class, white, educated women, and there was nowhere better to find those than at universities. From there, NAWSA helped to form the College Equal Suffrage League (CESL) that recruited young college women, caused debates at universities, and got women alumni and faculty involved.

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<sup>7</sup> Kelly Marino, "Students, Suffrage, and Political Change: The College Equal Suffrage League and Campus Campaigns for Women's Right to Vote, 1905-1920," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 20, no. 3 (2021): 370-91.

Marino discussed how institutions perceived the suffrage movement.<sup>8</sup> Many schools hesitated to begin branches of the CESL because they feared it was too radical and would scare away possible students and donors. Universities that already accepted women seemed like logical choices to have CESL clubs on campus. However, these universities feared that supporting suffrage as well as admitting women students would push the opposition over the edge. While protests were not unheard of, most college women supported the suffrage movement with essay contests, art (such as poetry and theatre), and public debates. Despite the CESL and NAWSA being selective in their supporters and formal in their ways, Marino argued that incorporating young, educated women into the movement was one of the reasons suffrage was inevitable in 1920.

Indiana history professor Anita Morgan brought a new perspective to the historiography in her book *We Must be Fearless: The Woman Suffrage Movement in Indiana*.<sup>9</sup> Until her work, which focuses on Indiana women's rights campaigns, most historians focused on the movement nationwide or different regions other than the Midwest. She discussed both African American involvement in the movement and how Indiana suffrage clubs did not discriminate, though as African American women began to join, the clubs received backlash from their communities. Indiana suffragists also faced challenges with female antisuffragists. Morgan illustrates how many women simply believed that they did not need the right to vote due to societal norms of the time and dependence on husbands and fathers. One point Morgan does not include in her book is any mention of college women. She does not bring up anything about colleges or universities in

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 373.

<sup>9</sup> Anita Morgan, "We Must Be Fearless: The Woman Suffrage Movement in Indiana," *Indiana Historical Society Press*, 2020.

Indiana joining the fight, but she created a great base of information to build upon for those studying woman suffrage.

While Marino discussed college suffrage clubs at-large and Morgan is the expert on the suffrage movement in Indiana, a small amount of research exists that combines the two topics. One such undergraduate paper is, "DePauw Women during World War 1: Female Citizenship and Higher Education in Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century America," written by Kristine Ruhl.<sup>10</sup> She argued that World War I changed women's roles on DePauw University's campus and in small-town Indiana. She discussed how the Woman's Franchise League of Indiana influenced the university and DePauw created its own branch of the Equal Suffrage League Association, which later evolved into the DePauw branch of the Woman's Franchise League of Indiana in 1912. She argued that the women at DePauw were passionate about discussing important civic issues, which led to the League growing. She concluded her argument by talking about how every time a woman casts a ballot, DePauw women "in seemingly unrecognizable ways, [made] it happen."<sup>11</sup>

The American woman suffrage movement at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century affected college women in Indiana by awakening them to issues they likely never would have considered had they not sought out an education. While previous historians have explored the suffrage movement in Indiana and others the suffrage movement in regard to universities, the cross-section of the two leaves a gap that is filled by this analysis using primary sources like newspapers, art, and debates from Purdue University and Indiana State University (previously Indiana State Normal School). These primary sources show that while women certainly received a traditional education, in reality they received so much more thanks to their exposure to the

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<sup>10</sup> Kristine Ruhl, "DePauw Women during World War I: Female Citizenship and Higher Education in Early 20th Century America," *Student Research*, DePauw University (2014): 6.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, 39.



ideas of the woman suffrage movement. When the movement started, white middle and upper-class women were generally expected to be obedient housewives that took care of the house, raised the children, and listened to the men in her life. By the end, many women had college degrees, direct involvement in American politics, lived through the Great War, and to an extent – their own autonomy.

## **Background**

The woman suffrage movement on college campuses in Indiana was part of a larger national movement of women working toward suffrage. The woman suffrage movement in the United States spanned over 70 years and involved the entire country. The movement began even before the dawn of the Civil War with the Seneca Falls Convention in New York in 1848 where suffragist pioneer Elizabeth Cady Stanton declared, “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men *and women* are created equal.”<sup>12</sup> Far from New York, where the movement began, Wyoming became the first state to ratify women’s right to vote along with other western states.<sup>13</sup> In between these initial states, Midwestern Indiana also had rather early activity in the suffrage movement. Only three years after Seneca Falls, the creation of the Indiana Woman’s Rights Association, later the Indiana Woman’s Suffrage Association, occurred in 1851.<sup>14</sup> Despite a hiatus when the United States entered World War I in 1917, the battle for woman suffrage achieved victory in 1920 when the “Susan B. Anthony” 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment went into effect under President Woodrow Wilson.

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<sup>12</sup> Morgan, “We Must Be Fearless,” 21.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 79.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 5.

Ida Husted Harper and May Wright Sewall were prominent suffragists who led the charge in the Hoosier state and rallied support despite not being located in an urban hub.<sup>15</sup> Terre Haute native Ida Husted Harper attended Indiana University for one year and later found herself at the heart of the suffrage movement by being close friends with Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.<sup>16</sup> In fact, she wrote Anthony's biography as well as helped author several volumes of *History of Woman Suffrage*. May Wright Sewall led an international women's organization and served on the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA)'s governing board.<sup>17</sup>

Along with these suffragists, Indiana was home to several suffrage organizations such as the Indiana Woman's Rights Association, Indiana Woman's Suffrage Association, Equal Suffrage Association, and Woman's Franchise League.<sup>18</sup> Some of these were branches of national organizations, and others were state-based and had smaller branches in different Indiana towns. For example, in Greencastle, the Woman's Franchise League branch, which was successful and even managed to open a separate branch on DePauw University's campus in 1912.<sup>19</sup> This process was happening all over the state. In Lafayette, the Woman's Franchise League extended a branch to Purdue University as well as in Terre Haute, the Equal Suffrage Association had success creating a chapter at the Indiana State Normal School.

### **Indiana State Normal School**

In 1865, the Indiana General Assembly founded the Indiana State Normal School (ISNS) to be the official institution in Indiana for educating future elementary and high school

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 79-85.

<sup>16</sup> Mara Bernstein, " 'Closing Up Shop': Indiana University and the Suffrage Movement – Recorded March 11, 2021," *Indiana University* video, 54:41, March 12, 2021.

<sup>17</sup> Morgan, "We Must Be Fearless," 5.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Ruhl, "DePauw Women during World War I," 6.

teachers.<sup>20</sup> Since teaching was one of the acceptable professions for women at the time, the school had a larger female ratio than other universities with the class of 1870 boasting 13 female students and 8 male students. Beginning in the 1890s, students and faculty created a monthly journal labeled *The Normal Advance*.<sup>21</sup> This journal discussed activities of clubs, had ads, told stories, gave advice, quoted prayers, and at the end of the year, highlighted seniors. It appeared to describe events for the purpose of historically recording them rather than to bring news to the campus, like a newspaper would.

*The Normal Advance* summarized the activities of different clubs on campus and documenting activities. Very early in its existence, this paper included information relevant to suffrage. The most notable suffrage event at the school would be the creation of the Equal Suffrage League (ESL) branch at the Indiana Normal School. As declared in *The Normal Advance*, the school created the League on December 5, 1912, and boasted over 200 members including students and four-fifths of the faculty.<sup>22</sup> The organization outlined its purpose as “dissipation of the ignorance and indifference which exists with regard to the equal suffrage movement.”<sup>23</sup> Their purpose was to advance the woman suffrage movement by means of increasing knowledge and encouraging people to be educated enough to have a stance on the issue. This is significant because it aimed to support the suffrage movement through purely academic means without intimidation, force, or even persuasion. Their goal was to make sure everyone had the opportunity to learn, to have an opinion, and to provoke bystanders to get involved. The *Normal Advance* summarized the creation of the League as follows:

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<sup>20</sup> “Indiana State Normal School,” Indianahistory.org, Indiana Historical Society, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> *The Normal Advance*, From Shadows of the Wabash – ISU Special Collections, “Normal Advance 1896,” (November, 1895), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, “The Equal Suffrage League of the State Normal School,” (December 1912), 69-72.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, “The Equal Suffrage League of the State Normal School,” (December 1912), 69-72.

It is not often that a formation of a society, or other organization in a school provokes as much discussion pro and con as has the formation of the Equal Suffrage League of the Indiana State Normal. The fact is that it is an important movement, advocating as it does one of the most burning public questions before the American people today. We, as students in a great state institution, who expect to go out over the state to instruct the future citizens of America, surely ought to have convictions on this subject, and be able to back them up with sound argument.<sup>24</sup>

It is interesting that the passage says the organization provoked more controversy and debate than any other group. This implies it was the first political club on campus, or at least the one most relevant to create discussion. Women were the first to mobilize and advocate for their passions. Also, it makes sense ISNS students felt that they should have a foothold in the suffrage movement because as future educators, they should be able to properly teach and prepare the next generation.

Perhaps the most notable part of this League was its devotion to impact and outreach. Along with elected leaders, the organization had twenty volunteers who each pledged to get 10 more members to join, as well as create a similar League in their respective Indiana hometowns to promote woman suffrage. This pledge shows a high level of devotion to the cause. Not only were these women getting involved on campus, but they were also fighting for women's rights and pledging to introduce the issue to friends and family back home too.

The following month, there was a call-out to join the ESL, inciting students to keep an eye out for events and speakers.<sup>25</sup> This call-out specifically mentioned the equal desire for both sympathizers *and* opponents to heed the call and join the largest organization in the school. This outlook of including people for and against is a theme that is prevalent in suffrage activities;

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, "The Equal Suffrage League of the State Normal School," (December 1912), 69-72.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, "Items of Interest," (January 1913), 96.

especially the common event of public debates. While debates are still something that occur today, oratory skills were necessary to learn in school during this era. The real question to historians, however, is if the results of these debates reflect the opinions of the students and judges, or if it depends more on the skill of the orator. Debates such as these were not often held by suffrage organizations, but groups dedicated to holding debates and oratory ability. As early as 1909, three years before the official ISNS ESL, a school organization called the Philomathean held a debate over the idea “that women be given the right of suffrage in the U.S.”<sup>26</sup> The description does not say whether the affirmative or negative won, but it does show that woman suffrage was a topic of interest. In January of 1914, the Eclectic Literary Society held a debate over the topic “that equal suffrage will benefit the American home.”<sup>27</sup> In this debate, the negative won, but it is unclear if this argument lost because the majority still did not support suffrage, or if the speaker defending the negative simply composed her argument better. Arguably, it does not matter which won; the important take away from these debates is that women were having intellectual discussions about political topics and opening their minds to new ideas and gaining new skills.

Another way in which the ISNS exposed women to suffrage ideas was news from other places in Indiana. In the April, 1914 edition of the *Normal Advance*, a poem from Taylor University was included:

It doesn't unsex her to toil in a factory

Minding the looms from dawn to the night;

To deal with a schoolful of children refractory

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, “Oratory and Debating; Philomathean,” (June 1909), 382.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, “Literary; Eclectic,” (January 1914), 99.

Doesn't unsex her in any one's sight;  
 Work in a store—where her back aches inhumanly  
 Doesn't unsex her at all you will note;  
 But think how exceedingly rough and unwomanly  
 Woman would be if she happened to vote!<sup>28</sup>

Above is one verse of three in this poem, but from this one you can understand the message: Why change the *status quo* by finally allowing white women to work outside of the home in places like factories and other laborious jobs, yet still deny her the privilege of the ballot? It argues against the claim that voting is only for men and allowing women to vote will diminish their femininity. While impoverished women and women of color did have jobs outside the home before this era, they were generally not considered by movement leaders, historians, and most likely neither the poet nor the university audience as well. Opportunities to read art like this poem allowed women to see that suffrage was not something special to their own school; it was something happening everywhere. This poem also shows the different mediums with which college women advocated for suffrage. Some women joined organizations, while others participated in debates, or wrote poignant literature. By attending university during this Progressive Era, women saw more and more that the world was their oyster and their place was no longer solely being a wife and mother. Their place was wherever they wanted it to be.

## **Purdue University**

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid, "Exchange Column," (April 1914), 191.

At a remarkably similar time to the State Normal School, another Indiana institution began to break ground only 80 miles to the north. In 1869, the founding of Purdue University took place in Lafayette, Indiana after large donations from Tippecanoe County and local merchant John Purdue. Classes officially began in 1874 with 6 instructors and 39 students.<sup>29</sup> Student life quickly took off with the creation of a student newspaper as early as 1875. Long before the turn of the century, this publication included the first mention of suffrage in a section of graduate quotes in 1883. One such graduate felt it was important to note that he did not support woman suffrage and another said that he was “big for women’s rights, but not for women’s suffrage.”<sup>30</sup> This shows that woman suffrage was not only in existence at Purdue practically since its inception, but a topic so prevalent that two graduates felt the need to address it in their senior biography. Five years later, the class of 1888 shared their opinions of equal suffrage through a poll and all respondents but one was opposed to the idea. Despite the class being 25% women, the one who agreed with equal suffrage was a male student.<sup>31</sup>

In 1889, the Purdue student newspaper organized into a publication known as *The Purdue Exponent* that is still in use today as a campus news outlet.<sup>32</sup> During its inaugural year, the *Exponent* printed a suffrage poem with neither a title nor author listed that read as follows:

I do not care to vote she said,  
I hate this suffrage rant,  
But I don’t want some horrid man,

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<sup>29</sup> “About Purdue,” Purdue University, accessed October 23, 2023.

<sup>30</sup> *The Purdue student newspaper, From Purdue University Archives and Special Collections*, “Locals: Class of ’83,” June 1, 1883.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, “Programme for Commencement Week,” June 1, 1888.

<sup>32</sup> “About Us,” *Purdue Exponent*, Accessed October 23, 2023.

To tell me that I can't.<sup>33</sup>

These are some of the first words written in the *Exponent* that both are in favor of woman suffrage and from the perspective of a Purdue woman. It even has an almost contemporary ring to it that is surprising to see from a 19<sup>th</sup> century poem with its contractions and lamentation of the patriarchy. This author is not passionate about the suffrage movement, she even goes so far as to say that she hates it, yet still concedes and supports the cause because the idea of being controlled by men irks her. While this opinion was not the majority, this poem at least shows that this opinion existed and possibly introduced a positive perspective on the suffrage movement to readers.

In the next 20 years, awareness about woman suffrage only increased on campus. Despite there not being an abundance of student events centered on suffrage activism, there were many academic discussions of suffrage. Similar to the Indiana State Normal School, debates were common occurrences both on and off campus at Purdue University. Beginning in 1885, oratory contests concerning suffrage were typical to see. Explained in the Purdue student newspaper, the freshman class of 1885 engaged in a suffrage debate where both women represented the affirmative and negative, and it ended in a tie.<sup>34</sup> In an article from 1901 titled "A Country Debate," the author described a debate that took place in the Lafayette community in extensive detail.<sup>35</sup> Although the orator who defended anti-suffrage was the victor, the author noted how he was "greasy," did not speak as eloquently as his opponent, and possibly bribed the judges. His argument concluded with, "So in the name of our past superiority, our present comfort, and our

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<sup>33</sup> *The Purdue Exponent*, From Purdue University Archives and Special Collections, "Exchanges," March 20, 1895.

<sup>34</sup> *The Purdue student newspaper*, "Exchanges," March 1, 1885.

<sup>35</sup> *The Purdue Exponent*, "A Country Debate" February 14, 1901.



coming downfall, I call upon you to keep women at home as long as you can.” From this passage, it is evident that even he who was against suffrage seemed to think giving women the vote was inevitable. After all was said and done, the clerk accused the judges of being prejudiced. Although this anecdote did not take place on campus, *The Purdue Exponent* printed it and therefore, it was available for all students to read. This article would have affected its readers because the argument was between two adult men and the newspaper author undoubtedly agreed with the affirmative side due to the positive language used to describe the man defending suffrage and his conviction that the other man cheated. At the very least, it certainly exposed students to the notion that the argument of women’s right to vote extended to the community beyond campus, and it was not only women involved with defending it.

Several years later, debates were still at the forefront of the suffrage movement on campus. In 1907, the Jeffersonian Debating Society held a debate between two men discussing the topic that “women suffrage should be extended in the United States” and the affirmative won.<sup>36</sup> In 1908, this same debate team won an intercollegiate debate against Webster University defending the affirmative of women’s suffrage.<sup>37</sup> In 1911, the Forum Debating Society wondered whether “suffrage should be given to Indiana women.”<sup>38</sup> In this head-to-head, the anti-suffrage argument was victorious. As mentioned before when looking at the Indiana State Normal School, it is hard for historians to dissect debates like this and decide whether it means people were beginning to look more or less favorably on woman suffrage, or if the affirmative or negative orator was simply a more persuasive speaker.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, “Jeffersonian Debating Society,” January 25, 1907.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, “Jeffersonians Win,” April 9, 1908.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, “Regular Forum Meeting, May 9, 1911.

While debates were a way for co-eds as well as men to learn about political topics such as the suffrage movement, *The Purdue Exponent* also contained a plethora of information to keep the students abreast of state, national, and even global news. In 1908 and 1909, there were at least four articles written explaining the spread of suffrage in different parts of the world. In January, the *Exponent* described how suffragists in England were adopting new tactics after being completely ignored by King Edward and the country's Cabinet.<sup>39</sup> In October, the newspaper admitted that woman suffrage had "not been a failure" in Finland with 25 women being elected to their most recent parliament.<sup>40</sup> Making this worldwide news available to Purdue students really gave them the opportunity to broaden their horizons and see the world beyond Indiana. With these student newspaper articles, women of Purdue engaged with new ideas and were able to see that suffrage was not a fight limited to the United States. They were able to see that in fact, in other countries, it was already implemented *and* successful.

Indiana student newspapers also covered woman suffrage activity on college campuses from other states. In December 1908 and January 1909, *The Purdue Exponent* reported that Minnesota University had a "womans' club for the purpose of agitation of the equal suffrage question" and Oberlin College in Ohio had two suffrage clubs, one in support of the cause and one against.<sup>41</sup> Closest to home, the *Exponent* later highlighted DePauw University's suffrage organization that had been around for two years in 1914.<sup>42</sup> The writer surmised, "girls in some of the coed schools are becoming very much interested in the woman's suffrage problem... Indiana coeds are now becoming aroused and a number of determined young women have organized

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, "News of the Morning: Take London by Surprise," January 31, 1908

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, "Non-Collegiate News," October 8, 1908

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, "At Other Schools," December 20, 1908, and Ibid, "Untitled." January 10, 1909.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, "Women's Section: Coed Suffragettes," April 26, 1914.

with the purpose of carrying out their convictions in regard to voting rights.”<sup>43</sup> This passage reveals suffrage activism was building in Indiana, and the author wanted to encourage their fellow students to join. If other schools were being politically active, why not Purdue?

One rather interesting article from 1910 is titled “No Suffragettes Here” and illustrated how the students of Purdue were not involved in the suffrage movement. The author stated that:

“Woman suffrage finds no home here. This statement is made with no little pride and means much in this age. The coed enrollment at Purdue has been growing and is becoming an important factor in school life. Evidently our coeds are the kind which should make a technical school justly proud. In other words, they are practical, scientific and womanly, and are not easily a prey to the fads of the time. Our coeds have had no public equal-suffrage demonstrations. Not that we wish to discourage this movement entirely... The intellect of woman is capable of great many things.”<sup>44</sup>

It is impossible to know whether there truly was a lack of suffrage support on Purdue’s campus, if this author was alone in their opinion, or if the passage was satirical or sarcastic. While the newspaper includes several articles about the woman suffrage movement since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is possible that they were included for academic purposes and not because students on campus actively cared. The article is even more dynamic when you analyze how the author described Purdue’s coeds as “practical, scientific and womanly,” as if these women were better than others for having ‘masculine’ traits like being logical, yet still lauded them for having disinterest in the right to vote, also something rather masculine since men were the only ones with the privilege of the ballot.

However, there is evidence to rebut the thoughts in the above article that supports the hypothesis that the campus actually was interested in the woman suffrage movement. Almost exactly a year before the publication of this article, the Purdue Exponent printed another passage,

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid, “Women’s Section: Coed Suffragettes,” April 26, 1914.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, “No Suffragettes Here,” March 4, 1910.

explaining that “the demand for women to speak on the subject of suffrage has increased so much in the last 6 months that it is now necessary to apply for a speaker a month or six weeks in advance.”<sup>45</sup> It is worth noting that it says “the *demand* for women to speak” and not something more passive like desire or opportunity. It emphasizes that the students themselves really wanted to hear the perspectives of various people involved in the suffrage movement. While perhaps Purdue women did not host any specific events in honor of suffrage themselves, as the “No Suffragettes Here” article dictates, this does not mean the Purdue coeds were indifferent to the movement. They actively yearned to learn more about suffrage and Purdue provided the environment to do so.

To further argue that women were eager to learn about the suffrage movement, Purdue hosted “well known suffragettes,” as a main attraction to their Saturday Carnival in 1914.<sup>46</sup> The stars would supposedly “so impress you with the efficiency of woman’s suffrage that you will forever after be a staunch supporter of the cause” as well as dance and sing songs with students such as “When Co-eds Rule Purdue” and “Hail Emancipation When Women Have Full Sway”.<sup>47</sup> Purdue continued to host important suffrage speakers for years to come. In 1916, the university hosted Dr. Anna Howard Shaw for the second time, a prominent suffragist who fought on the platform of human suffrage – not man or woman suffrage.<sup>48</sup> She was an ardent advocate for women’s rights in the United States from the 1880s until her death in 1919. In 1904, she became president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and later, during World War I, she gave lectures in the U.S. and Europe in support of world peace and the League of Nations per

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, “Notices,” March 30, 1909.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, “Purdue Carnival Saturday at Gym: Muttana and Jeffica,” October 14, 1914.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, “Purdue to Enter Peace Contest: Muttana and Jeffena,” October 15, 1914, and Ibid, “Purdue Carnival This Evening,” October 17, 1914.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, “Dr. Anna H. Shaw is Ardent Supporter of Woman’s Suffrage,” November 14, 1916.

the personal request of President Wilson and former President Taft.<sup>49</sup> She was such a spectacle that there were more than five articles written about her visit. In her speech, she said, “women are supposed to be curious, but if a man pries into a thing it is his deep and profound desire for research... In the voice of the people it must be remembered that there is a soprano as well as a bass solo.”<sup>50</sup> The importance of opportunities to hear speakers like these cannot be overlooked. Less than six months after Dr. Shaw, Purdue hosted United States Secretary of State William Jennings Bryan – “The Great Commoner” – and a Rabbi Silver who both advocated for suffrage and drew large crowds to hear what they had to say.<sup>51</sup> Through these kinds of events, women involved with the college including students and faculty had “the opportunity of coming into closer touch with one another.” These college women were able to grow passionate for this cause alongside their peers, creating a sisterhood that allowed meaningful connection and intelligent conversations.

All of these speakers, events, and hullabaloo surrounding woman suffrage was leading up to the culmination of the passionate women of Purdue finally coming together in an official way. On April 6, 1917, *The Purdue Exponent* highlighted the creation of the Purdue Girl’s Franchise League in association with the Lafayette Franchise League.<sup>52</sup> With over 50 initial members, the duties of the League were to “prepare women and girls for the new position that they have been given, to help them to cast their ballots wisely and intelligently.” This is extremely reminiscent of the purpose of the Indiana State Normal School’s Equal Suffrage League with emphasis on ultimately gaining equal suffrage, but more so to educate women to wield their votes confidently

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<sup>49</sup> “Anna Howard Shaw,” National Women’s Hall of Fame, Accessed October 25, 2023.

<sup>50</sup> *The Purdue Exponent*, “Dr. Anna H. Shaw is Ardent Supporter of Woman’s Suffrage,” November 14, 1916.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, “Large Crowd Packs Fowler Hall to Hear the Great Commoner,” January 21, 1917, and Ibid, “Rabbi Silver Will Give Lecture Today,” March 15, 1917.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, “Co-eds Organize Franchise League,” April 6, 1917.

and eruditely once the ballot was won. While this League shows concrete evidence of Purdue women's interest in supporting the suffrage movement, it is also representative of the struggles suffragists had to go through nationwide. Besides this article from April 1917, the Purdue Girl's Franchise League is never mentioned again in *The Purdue Exponent*, which seems odd until one reads the headline of that same paper. It reads "House Passes War Resolution Declaring State of War exists with German Empire by Vote of 373-50," meaning the young women of Purdue created their League on the exact same day the United States entered World War I.<sup>53</sup> This undoubtedly had an effect not only on the Franchise League, but on the university as a whole. Unfortunately, it is likely that proper time and effort could no longer be fully devoted to gaining women's right to vote.

## **Conclusion**

As with any issue in political history, woman suffrage began as a small interest group and over the course of more than 75 years, grew into the most prominent debate America faced from the mid 1800s to 1920. When Elizabeth Cady Stanton began the fight at Seneca Falls, she could not have fathomed the future for which she paved the way.

Women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century grow up learning about gender issues such as the gender pay gap, sexism in women's sports, and double standards of female versus male celebrities. These concepts are no doubt alien to young women 100+ years ago who were fighting for their right to vote, and in turn fighting to be seen as equal counterparts to their husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons. While young women now begin fantasizing about what college they will attend starting in childhood, these suffragists were also the first generation of women to earn college degrees.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, "House Passes War Resolution Declaring State of War exists with German Empire by Vote of 373-50," April 6, 1917.

Some women who attended university during the suffrage movement actively fought for their right to vote, but more importantly, all women and men during this time were exposed to copious amounts of information, experiences, and opinions that they never even would have fathomed had they stayed at home. While women went to school to gain an education, what they really gained was so much more: a sisterhood, their own autonomy, and whether they liked it or not, the right to vote.

Further research on this topic is necessary as this analysis only covers the Indiana State Normal School (now Indiana State University), and Purdue University. Primary sources exist from schools like Indiana University (IU) and Earlham College, with IU having a female-student-led walk out on voting day in 1894 and both schools having prominent suffrage speakers visit, similar to the two case studies analyzed here of ISU and Purdue.<sup>54</sup> This type of research is open to be done with dozens of schools all across the Midwest, as this region is lacking most in sources and analyses of those sources. As stated in the *Normal Advance* in 1913, “There’s a breath or shall we say, a fragrance – of ‘woman suffrage’ floating through our halls!”<sup>55</sup> The chances are high that this fragrance drifted from school to school, gaining followers and inciting excitement everywhere it went – until it no longer floated through, but filled the air and women finally took the first step toward gender equality by gaining the right to vote. As these college suffragists grew up, they were the first in a new generation of women who were educated, socially advanced, had felt the bonds of sisterhood, and knew that they were just as capable as any man at voting – and so much more.

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<sup>54</sup> Mara Bernstein, “ ‘Closing Up Shop’: Indiana University and the Suffrage Movement,” and *The Earlham Press*, From Earlham Friends Collection and College Archives, “Votes for Women!: Suffragette at Earlham,” April 29, 1911.

<sup>55</sup> *The Normal Advance*, From Shadows of the Wabash – ISU Special Collections, “Untitled,” October 1912, 39.

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