After Suffrage

Pennsylvania's Inaugural Class of Women Legislators

Curtis Miner

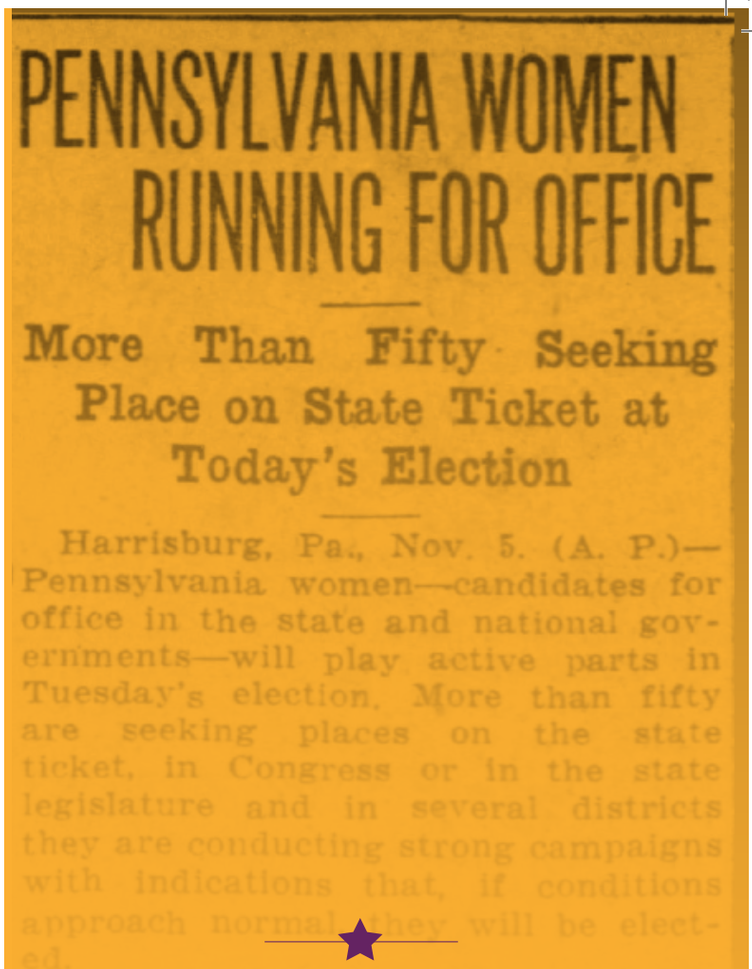
> *"For one born and reared as this writer was in hidebound Pennsylvania, it is startling to find eight women in the Legislature of that State. Moreover, to learn from their men fellow-members of the natural way they take their place and do their work."*
>
> - Ida Tarbell, 1924

For American women, few milestones could surpass 1920, the year the 19th Amendment became law. But 1922 came close: That year, an unprecedented number of women ran for political office, most as candidates for seats in state legislatures. By November, when the results were tallied, 26 women in 17 states were elected to state legislatures. In Pennsylvania, eight women were elected to the state General Assembly, more than that of any other state.

Ida Tarbell was likely not the only one surprised by the turn of events in her native "hidebound" Pennsylvania. Seven years earlier, the state's liquor interests, centered in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, had combined with socially conservative sections of the commonwealth to defeat a statewide referendum that would have granted women the right to vote. Suffragists were disappointed, but the results were in keeping with the state's deeply ingrained traditionalism. Still, over the next several years, as the suffrage movement shifted from state-by-state efforts to a national campaign focusing on an amendment to the federal constitution, opposition to women voting in Pennsylvania softened. When the congressional amendment was passed and pushed out to the states for approval, Pennsylvania became the seventh state to ratify in June 1919. More than a year later, the state's suffragists celebrated the official ratification by ringing a replica Liberty Bell in front of Philadelphia's Independence Hall. During the failed 1915 state referendum campaign, the replica bell's clapper had been intentionally shackled to symbolize how women had been silenced at the ballot box.

Women would not have to wait long to use that voice: The ceremonial bell ringing occurred less than two months from the first general election in which women in Pennsylvania would be eligible to vote. Underneath a headline announcing Tennessee's confirming ratification in August, a Philadelphia newspaper proclaimed, "2,000,000 Women to Vote in Pennsylvania in Fall." Less thought, however, had been given to other rights of citizenship implied but not spelled out in the amendment: the right and duty to serve on juries, to be assessed for taxes, and most importantly, to run for and hold public office. As one suffragist had put it, "it is important to remember that the right to vote includes the right to be voted for."

Although they faced a very compressed timeframe, an intrepid few threw their hats in the ring that fall, among them Kate Heffelfinger (1889–1958) of Shamokin, Northumberland County. In early October, Heffelfinger announced that she would be challenging incumbent William C. McCollough for his state senate seat in the Northumberland-Snyder-Union district. Though she would be required to run as an independent, Heffelfinger had a few things going for her: a strong progressive platform emphasizing penal reform and women's rights, name recognition (she had been arrested nine times for picketing in front of the White House during the Silent Sentinels protests), and endorsements ranging from "substantial Shamokin men" to National Woman's Party head Alice Paul. But Heffelfinger's campaign was hampered by the lack of party sponsorship and the organizational support that came with it. Like the handful of other women across the state seeking



PENNSYLVANIA WOMEN RUNNING FOR OFFICE

More Than Fifty Seeking Place on State Ticket at Today's Election

Harrisburg, Pa., Nov. 5. (A. P.)—Pennsylvania women—candidates for office in the state and national governments—will play active parts in Tuesday's election. More than fifty are seeking places on the state ticket, in Congress or in the state legislature and in several districts they are conducting strong campaigns with indications that, if conditions approach normal, they will be elected.

"I believe these eight women are going to make an impression. I believe they are going to ask themselves on every measure on which they vote: 'Is this measure good for the whole State of Pennsylvania, or is it just good for the little district I represent?'"

- Mrs. John O. Miller, President, Pennsylvania League of Women Voters, November 1922

Opposite, The first group of women elected to the state General Assembly gathered in front of the Capitol for this photograph, which the Pennsylvania League of Women Voters published in the May 1923 issue of its bulletin. In the front row, from left to right, are Sarah Gallaher, Alice Bentley, Lillie Pitts, Martha Thomas and Sarah Gertrude MacKinney; in the back are Martha Speiser, Helen Grimes and Rosa de Young.
PENNSYLVANIA LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

office during the first election cycle, Heffelfinger was soundly defeated. "Some people do not like the idea of women running for office. It strikes them [as] a bit of a shock, as if the female candidate were overstepping traditional decorum," an Adams County newspaper opined after the election. "This feeling will not probably last long."

By the time the next election rolled around in 1922, the "feeling" had indeed begun to change. Much of the credit for that goes to the work of the Pennsylvania League of Women Voters, the successor organization to the Pennsylvania Woman Suffrage Association (PWSA). A chapter of the National League of Women Voters, the state league had formed in November 1919 in anticipation of the 19th Amendment's eventual ratification and the subsequent disbanding of state and national suffrage associations such as the PWSA. In Pennsylvania, the league got down to business immediately: The Philadelphia chapter held its first mass "How to Register" meeting in Center City just three days after the U.S. secretary of state certified the new amendment. "An effort is being made to get the women assessed and registered as soon as possible," one league official noted. "[But t]here is so much red tape, and so little time."

Kate Heffelfinger was among a handful of women who ran for office in the fall of 1920, just weeks after passage of the 19th Amendment. Although her work on behalf of women's suffrage earned her admiration and publicity—she had been among the Silent Sentinels arrested and imprisoned for picketing the White House in 1917—her bid for state Senate could not overcome her lack of party support and campaign experience.
RECORDS OF THE NATIONAL WOMAN'S PARTY, MANUSCRIPT DIVISION, LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, WASHINGTON, DC

The 1920 registration drive and general election were instructive because they laid bare the imperfections of the present system and the informational gulf that separated women from the political process. Following the 1920 election, the league ramped up its efforts to teach women the mechanics of voting, from how to mark and cast ballots to how to register, which at the time required women to meet tax assessment criteria. By 1923 the Pennsylvania league boasted some 33,000 members. Working through 40 county chapters, it held on-site registration meetings and "straw primaries," published and distributed thousands of pamphlets and voter's guides, organized "candidates meetings" to familiarize both women and men with those running for office, and conducted classes in civics and government through a network of Citizenship Schools.

In its effort to promote "the effectiveness of women voters and to further better government," the league also advocated for

Pennsylvania League of Women Voters officials convene inside the organization's newly opened regional headquarters in Harrisburg, across from the State Capitol. During the recently concluded 1923 session, the league had used a private residence on North Front Street as its temporary legislative headquarters.
FROM BULLETIN OF THE PENNSYLVANIA LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS, *AUGUST 1923*

One of the arguments made on behalf of suffrage is that women, once enfranchised, would help to clean up the "dirty pool" of politics, especially in "boss-ridden" states such as Pennsylvania where graft and corruption were rampant.
DIVISION OF POLITICAL AND MILITARY HISTORY, NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AMERICAN HISTORY, SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

reforming aspects of the electoral process that they deemed either inefficient or prone to corruption. League officials instinctively took a dim view of political parties but understood that they were not going away any time soon and that women would need to make their peace with them. "You women citizens of Pennsylvania are going to align yourselves with some political party," a New York league member counseled a group of women during a Philadelphia gathering. "Will it be the best? There is none. Make up your minds which is the least bad, hold your noses, and go in." In the end, politics and government would be better for it: "We shall have women sitting as jurors, women running for office, probably women as ward heelers and organization workers. And we shall also no doubt have a better class of candidates all around."

The May 1922 primaries offered the first test for that proposition. Across the state, 35 women—23 Republicans and 12 Democrats—sought their party's nomination for the state legislature. Nearly half of that total—eight Republicans and eight Democrats—were running in Philadelphia, then divided into multiple legislative districts. The three women who subsequently won Republican primaries there had all been sponsored by William Vare (1867–1934), a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from the 1st district and boss of Philadelphia's Republican machine. In Allegheny County, Helen Grimes (1871–1957), a prominent "club woman," won the Republican primary in the Knoxville district, a small borough bordering Pittsburgh. Given the Republican Party's control of both cities, primary wins almost always translated into victories in the general election. A handful of women also won primaries in nonurban districts scattered around the state. Sarah Gertrude MacKinney (1874–1966), a librarian and former card-carrying suffragist from Butler, won her county's Republican primary, as did Alice Bentley (1859–1949), a former schoolteacher turned small businesswoman from Meadville. Bentley had won her county primary by 700 votes, a convincing 57 percent majority. She credited her victory to weeks and months of relentless campaigning in her "little motor car" over "every highway and byway in Crawford County."

When voters in Pennsylvania went to the polls that November, nearly 50 women were on the ballot for every conceivable office, including at least one for governor. The largest clump

After his brother Edwin died in 1922, William Vare (seated, with his wife Ida behind him) became boss-apparent for the powerful Republican machine in Philadelphia. Although political machines had been opposed to suffrage, "old guard" bosses like Vare did their best to manage women after it became clear that they were in politics to stay. In 1925 Vare tapped his sister-in law, Flora Vare, to succeed him in the state Senate, making her the first woman to serve in that legislative body.
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EYES OF PENNSYLVANIA WOMEN INTENTLY VIEW PROCEEDINGS IN STATE'S CAPITOL

EIGHT WOMEN MEMBERS IN HOUSE

League of Women Voters, Only Such Organization with Permanent Home in Harrisburg, to Report Developments in Legislation and Administration as They Arise

By the time subscribers receive this issue of the Bulletin, the State Legislature and the new State Administration headed by Governor Pinchot will have begun their work—work which may be of tremendous importance to all of the people in

WOMEN DON'T OBJECT TO SMOKE IN LEGISLATURE

(By United Press.)

Philadelphia, Pa., Jan. 4. — The chivalrous members of the Legislature who wondered whether or not they would be able to smoke on the floor of the House because of the presence of women members have relaxed their strained nerves and are laying in a supply of stogies.

The suspense is over and legislators with the tobacco habit are breathing a sigh of relief for the women legislators say "smoke all you want to."

W. Harry Baker, chairman of the State Republican Committee, helped to settle the question.

"Certainly men will smoke during the session. As a matter of fact, perhaps the women will enjoy a cigarette or two during the oratory."

of women candidates, though, were for seats in the state legislature, where some 20 women were positioned as their party candidates. By the time votes were tallied, eight emerged victorious—all Republicans. For the first time in Pennsylvania history, a small but clearly visible contingent of women would be occupying seats among the men in the 208-member chamber.

To many observers, most notably advocacy groups such as the League of Women Voters, the election formed a clear milestone, even if "some might well feel that these few women law makers would find themselves sitting in 'splendid isolation'" or be received as "merely [an] added attraction to the Hall of the House." The election guaranteed that women now had "a voice and vote in shaping its legislation." That they will "carry into their legislative efforts the same conscientious devotion to service that has earned them the confidence of their constituents there can be no doubt." For others, the prospect of women sitting in the state legislature inspired mock concern: "What word will [the speaker of the House] employ when he recognizes the feminine member from Cambria?" one newspaper asked sardonically. "Tell me . . . what is a woman member of the House? Is she a legislator? Or is she a legislatrix? Would you say the eight women members are legislatrices?"

The attitudes of the legislators they would soon be sitting among were less clear. Although few commented openly about the matter, some were anxiously concerned that they might be expected to modify habits in deference to the fairer sex. Would lawmakers so inclined still be able to smoke at their leisure, for instance? Like most places of business, meeting rooms and chambers inside the Capitol were liberally furnished with spittoons and ashtrays—a cloud of tobacco smoke hung over late-night sessions. Just days before the start of the new legislative session in January, the chair of the state Republican Committee sought to put lawmakers at ease: "Certainly men will be allowed to smoke during the session. As a matter of fact, perhaps the women will enjoy a cigarette or two during the oratory." In return for the accommodation, women asked for moderation. "Surely everyone who wants to smoke should," Rosa de Young (1881–1955), one of the new representatives from Philadelphia, told a reporter, "but there should be enough common sense used so that it will not be really annoying." Martha Speiser (1884–1968), one of her fellow legislators from Philadelphia, concurred: "They may smoke all they want to providing they don't try to smoke the women out." A Pottsville newspaper noted, with a wink, that the relieved legislators were now eagerly "laying in a supply of stogies" and "there has been no little worry, for a fat political cigar enhanced the dignity of appearance, and is considered a fair graft from constituents."

Although it made for amusing copy, the tobacco question tied into a deeper concern: To what degree would women lawmakers change the way that politics got done under the Capitol dome? Outside of saloons and fraternal societies, few institutions were more of a boys' club than state politics, whether expressed through ward clubs, polling stations or state assemblies. "The presence of women in the legislature may have some effect on the decorum of members," one newspaper speculated. "Usually it is a sort of rough and tumble affair, not noted for refinement of either manner or methods." But the newspaper went on to note that, where it counted, the status quo would be unaffected: "The state machine at

Martha Thomas conformed most closely to the image of old-line suffragist turned lawmaker. She descended from one of Chester County's original settler families. During the 1920s, Thomas continued to live and work on the family's 200-acre farm in Whitford, where she and her sister raised Guernsey cattle. During her two terms in office, she championed causes that overlapped closely with the League of Women Voters' legislative agenda.
PAPERS OF HON. BARBARA MCILVAINE SMITH, 2007-2010, PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ARCHIVES, HARRISBURG

Harrisburg will continue to operate and the women members will have to go along, or take back seats."

For its part, the League of Women Voters had high hopes that its inaugural class of legislators would do neither. Just a few weeks after the landmark election in November, the league convened its fourth annual meeting in Harrisburg—fittingly, inside the General Assembly room at the State Capitol. Speakers included Cornelia Pinchot (1881–1960), the wife of governor-elect Gifford Pinchot (1865–1946). But the stars of the show were the "fair pioneers" who would soon be working full time in the House chamber. The league had extended the invitation to the incoming legislators so that "they may know at first hand in preparation for their service as lawmakers just what is in the minds of the women of Pennsylvania." Half of the group—Martha Thomas (1869–1942), Alice Bentley, Sarah Gertrude MacKinney and Rosa de Young—accepted and offered prepared remarks. Thomas and Bentley would later board at the league's headquarters on North Front Street while the legislature was in session.

The league's courting of the delegation made sense. League officials had been transparent about their desire to have women elected to office, had claimed credit for getting them elected, and were equally candid about their expectations for them once they were seated at the table. For the 1923–24 legislative session, the league had identified three particularly important issues of concern to the "organized women of the state": increased appropriations in the state budget for public school funding and the state public welfare department (which, under Pinchot, would be headed by a woman—another first in Pennsylvania); Prohibition enforcement, championed by incoming governor Gifford Pinchot and other temperance advocates; and the reorganization of the then special-interest besotted state government, either through a rational administrative code or, preferably, a constitutional convention. Shortly after the group assembled in Harrisburg, the league arranged to have the women photographed together in front of the State Capitol. The photograph was published in the *Bulletin of the Pennsylvania League of Women Voters*, captioned with optimism, "the Keystone Eight."

The name that the league bestowed on the group implied a unity of purpose that was more wishful than guaranteed. Beyond a common gender and party affiliation, the group was diverse in every conceivable way—from age and marital status to education, occupation and residency. Half of the delegation were from the state's two largest cities (three in Philadelphia, one in Pittsburgh) while three of the remaining four were from medium-sized towns in western Pennsylvania. Alice Bentley was the oldest at 63; Martha Speiser, at 38, was the youngest.

The League of Women Voters did its best to scorecard the incoming legislators. Thomas was the most familiar face to the suffrage crowd. A resident of Whitford, Chester County, she was already serving as treasurer of the league at the time of her elec-

tion. Along with being a "prominent advocate of woman suffrage," Thomas was described as "active in many civic movements and organizations," including during World War I "chairman of the 26 organizations represented by the women's committee of the Council of National Defense." The league also spoke approvingly of Helen Grimes of Allegheny County—"[f]or fifteen years Miss Grimes has been in the forefront of all important civic movements and for four years was president of the Congress of Women's Clubs of Western Pennsylvania" —and Sarah Gertrude MacKinney of Butler County—"one of the early suffrage workers" and also a member of the state board of the Pennsylvania Federation of Women.

The intentions and predilections of the three legislators from Philadelphia proved more opaque. The league simply identified them by name and noted that all three had been "slated" by the Vare organization. Martha Glazer Speiser was the youngest and most glamorous of the cohort—the press fawned over her physical attractiveness and cosmopolitan air. But like her two fellow Philadelphia legislators, she came to Harrisburg with no particular credential beyond being politically well connected; her husband, Maurice Speiser, served as deputy attorney general for the city of Philadelphia and personal advisor to William Vare. Rosa de Young, elected from the 17th district, was also tied through marriage to the city's Republican machine. Though it did not identify them by name, the league likely had both in mind when they expressed concern that some women might be used to "play petty political tricks or to serve the interest of some local faction or local district."

At the start of the legislative session in January, of course, such ruminations were speculative; the proof would be how the group positioned on bills deemed intrinsic to women's rights and interests. The first legislative test appeared, on the surface, to be benignly procedural. In February, Horace Schantz, the powerful Republican senator from Lehigh County—and an opponent of both the 18th and 19th amendments—introduced a bill exempting women

The Pennsylvania League of Women Voters enjoyed a very close relationship with several women in the first class of legislators, most notably Martha Thomas of Chester County's 1st district. Thomas served as state treasurer at the time of her election and retained the post during her first term in office. She is shown here with Lucy K. Miller, the league's president, inside the group's legislative headquarters at 203 North Front Street in Harrisburg. Thomas was one of two women legislators who boarded at the headquarters—a private residence owned by Gabriella Gilbert—during the 1923 session. The league envisioned the mansion as a kind of "political salon" for the "organized women of the state."
FROM BULLETIN OF THE PENNSYLVANIA LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS, *APRIL 1923*

from serving on juries. The proposed legislation relied on an old trope: If women sat on juries, they would be exposed to potentially unsettling evidence and testimony, especially in criminal trials for rape and murder. The bill was designed to protect them. The league and other women's organizations were unanimous in their condemnation of the move—"a first step toward limiting the full rights of citizenship which were won when the 19th Amendment was ratified"—and argued loudly for its defeat. "We don't want discriminatory legislation," another league member stated. "We have obtained the privilege to vote and we want the duties and responsibilities as well." When the vote on the measure wound its way to the House, all eight assemblywomen voted against it.

For the same reason, the eight assemblywomen were united in support of a bill to repeal a law, which had been on the books since 1834, exempting women from arrest and imprisonment for nonpayment of taxes. John Ogle, a Republican from Somerset, opposed the repeal and during debate over the bill urged "chiv-

Gifford Pinchot's victory in the 1922 Republican gubernatorial primary stunned Pennsylvania's "old guard" Republican establishment. Although he lost machine-controlled Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, the nation's "first forester" and Teddy Roosevelt's protégé carried 61 of the commonwealth's remaining 65 counties. Pinchot's primary platform, which emphasized government efficiency and Prohibition enforcement, resonated strongly with women voters. He credited his victory in large measure to their support.
THE U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES

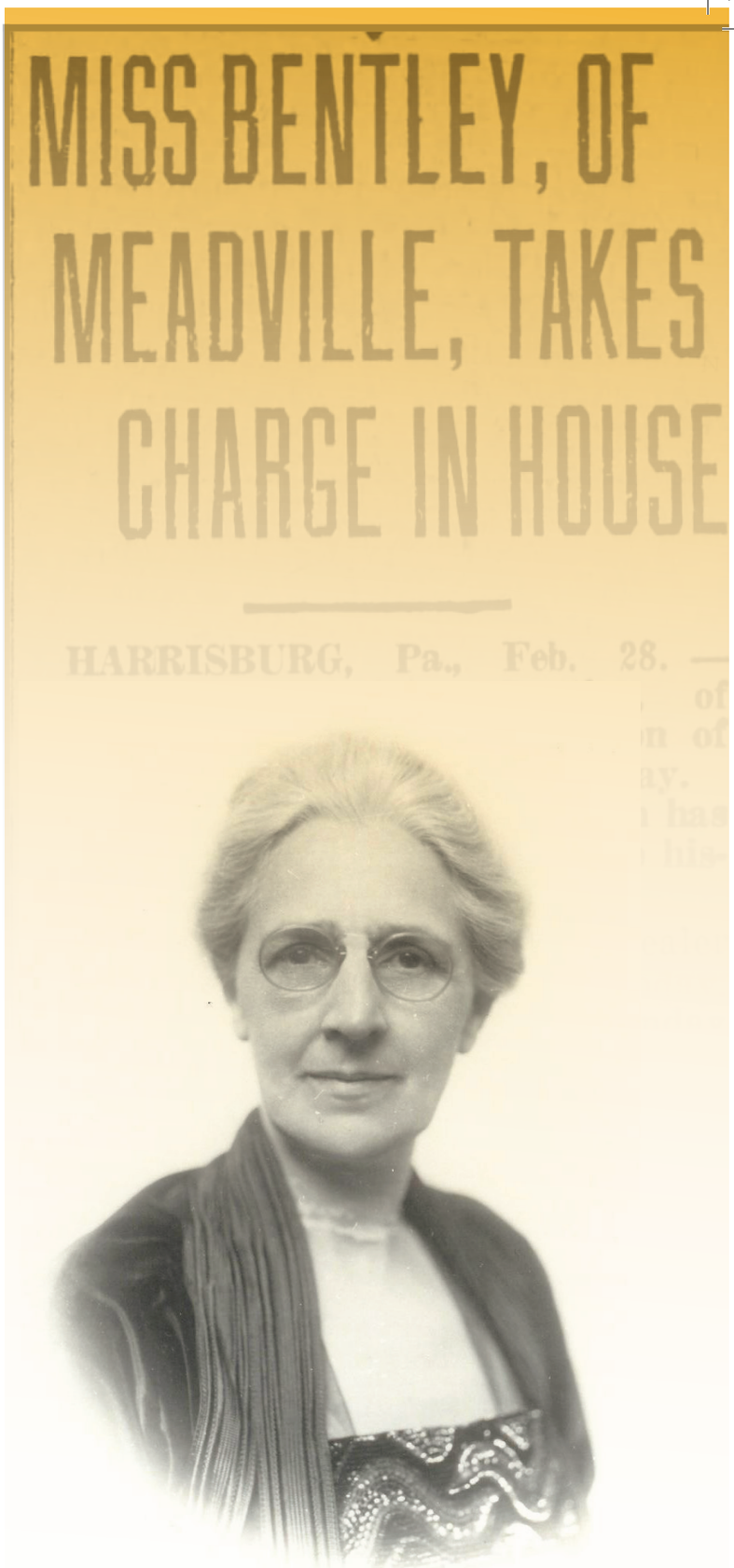
alrous men" to "take to the fore and undertake [women's] protection." The 72-year-old Ogle explained, "[W]omen through the gallantry of men have been permitted to step beyond the household threshold and to insinuate themselves into the public affairs of the Commonwealth. . . . I was born in the age of chivalry." Sarah Gertrude MacKinney and Sarah Gallaher (1864–1964) were blunt in reply: "As for your old age of chivalry, that was the age of woman's degradation." The women in the House won their second "tilt with men."

The first test of the group's solidarity on broader policy questions of concern—or at least perceived concern—to women was the so-called "enforcement bill." The bill's architect, Gifford Pinchot, had defied the Republican machine and been swept into office the previous fall partly owing to his uncompromising stand on Prohibition. Although "wets" likely outnumbered "drys" across the state's electorate, Pinchot enjoyed the unqualified support of most women's organizations. In return, Pinchot and his wife promised to use the administration to promote both good government and the political advancement of women. (Pinchot made good on the promise when he became the first Pennsylvania governor to nominate a woman to his cabinet.) The league could not have been more hopeful, at least at the start: "Pinchot . . . proposes to give expression in law and administration to many ideas for which women in the League have been fighting."

Although the league was not as focused on enforcement as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, it had nonetheless identified Pinchot's bill as one that the right-minded women in the legislature would naturally support. Prohibition may have been the law of the land, but in Pennsylvania regulations were applied inconsistently, and breweries still exercised considerable clout in Harrisburg. "It is a woman's problem to make the 18th amendment a fact as well as the law." The enforcement bill, which made its way to the state House for approval in March, aimed to shore up the state's compliance with the 18th Amendment; some four years after Prohibition, breweries, distilleries and licensed saloons were largely still operating with impunity in "wet" districts such as Pittsburgh and especially Philadelphia.

The first enforcement bill—there were two companion bills that were introduced alongside it—passed both chambers and was signed into law on March 27. Although it was a clear legislative victory for the administration, as a litmus test for the "women's bloc," it was a failure. Speiser and de Young were conspicuously absent when the vote was taken on the House floor; Grimes was present and voted against it. In breaking ranks with both the Pinchot administration and the league, the three assemblywomen had fallen in line with their local delegation. Vare's girls had behaved as expected, but Grimes' dissenting vote had come as an unwelcome surprise. Weeks after the vote, the Western Pennsylvania Federation of Women's Clubs, the very organization that Grimes had once presided over, issued a strong rebuke and voted overwhelmingly to censure her.

The fractured vote on enforcement nagged at women leaders who had fantasized about women's potential as change agents once they had established themselves within the legislature. The Keystone Eight were failing at their most basic obligation—to support their fellow women in principle and in politics. If there


MISS BENTLEY, OF MEADVILLE, TAKES CHARGE IN HOUSE

HARRISBURG, Pa., Feb. 28. —

The much anticipated "women's bloc" never materialized in 1923, but Alice Bentley, the oldest of the group at 63, did manage to earn the respect of her fellow female legislators. In March, her female colleagues voted unanimously to have her take the speaker's podium and read out bills in the House—the first time a woman had ever performed that duty. Bentley, elected to two additional terms, later became the first woman to chair a House committee—on education, an area of particular interest to the former schoolteacher from Meadville, Crawford County.
CRAWFORD COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Gifford Pinchot signs the Sheppard-Towner Maternity Act into law as women supporters look on. The bill allowed Pennsylvania to receive matching federal funds in support of women and children's welfare.
FROM BULLETIN OF THE PENNSYLVANIA LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS, *JULY 1923*

was anyone in a position to command them, it likely would have been Alice Bentley, the representative from Crawford County and perhaps the most politically experienced of the group. In February, she had been unanimously selected by her fellow assemblywomen for the honor of being the first woman to preside over the House. (In a largely symbolic gesture, Bentley was invited to take the speaker's stand and read out 15 bills for consideration, after which she was treated to a round of bipartisan applause.) But when it came to rallying her colleagues in support of key pieces of legislation of interest to women, Bentley failed to exercise much leadership. In April, for instance, she sponsored a bill to provide tenure protection to public schoolteachers and thus remove education from "the realm of politics." But as with the enforcement bill, the tenure bill fell prey to the interests of various local factions, which had arranged against the measure. One unnamed legislator declared she was adamantly opposed to the bill despite confessing "she knew nothing about it." The president of the Pennsylvania State Teachers' League made no effort to hide her frustration: "If these women are not going to show the intertest they should in the welfare of those who teach their children . . . we who send them there should remember it when they declare their candidacy in the future."

Martha Thomas, representing Chester County's first legislative district, probably performed most consistently to expectations. Thomas proved reliable not only in her support for major bills such as Prohibition enforcement but also for a string of "protective legislation" measures put forth during the 1923–24 session. In February, she was the first of the group to introduce legislation—a bill to codify state laws governing child welfare—that had been first up on the league's legislative agenda. She was also House sponsor for the Sheppard–Towner Maternity Act, which once passed made the state eligible to receive matching federal funds for "the promotion of the welfare and hygiene of maternity and infancy." But even Thomas was cautious about being perceived as a single-note crusading feminist or league functionary. "[I]t is idle to demand [the election of women] because of their sex or because women were enfranchised in August, 1920," she opined in May. "If a suitable woman is elected, neither she nor anyone else should ever assert that she represents the women, organized or unorganized, of her district. She represents all the people."

The political independence that characterized the first class of female representatives could be seen most clearly with Lillie Pitts (1870–1960) and Helen Grimes. Of the original group, Pitts and Grimes enjoyed the longest political careers; both won multiple re-election bids and served into the 1930s. Of the two, Grimes had conformed most closely to the league's ideal of an "organized" woman: Before being elected to office, she was active in women's organizations and worked on behalf of such progressive issues as conservation and consumer protection. But once in office, she

proved maddeningly unpredictable and just as likely to support local interests as "women's issues," as revealed in her position on enforcement. Over the course of four terms in office, Grimes developed a reputation as a "fiery orator" and spoke often on the floor of the House on a range of issues, from daylight saving time to the gasoline taxes that affected her "little district."

Lillie Pitts achieved the longest tenure among the original group of female assemblywomen. Voters in Philadelphia's 21th district re-elected her four times. Her longevity was quite an achievement for a woman whose scant biography described her as a "housewife from New Jersey." Although her initial run had been supported by the Vare organization, she exercised over time a degree of independence from the city's machine that eluded Speiser and de Young, neither of whom chose to run for re-election after completing their first terms. For instance, during her first term, Pitts voted for Pinchot's enforcement measures despite facing enormous pressure from the Philadelphia delegation to vote against it; she did so to honor a campaign pledge she had made to local church groups. But like Grimes, Pitts was tepid in her support for other progressive, pro-women legislative items. The following year, she voted against a provision that would have further restricted child labor, a key element of "protective" legislation that most women could be counted on to champion. Pitts argued that the proposed bill would handicap Pennsylvania industry.

In May, the League of Women Voters took stock of the first few months of women in office. What had started out as a "glorious occasion" when women were first seated in the General Assembly in January, with "their desks loaded with baskets of flowers," had given way to a less rosy reality. "These women are as a grain of sand on a seashore. . . . Men still dominate. It appears that the leaders would like women to be 'present but not voting'—that is, not voting to any serious extent." The Pennsylvania Council of Republican Women concurred. At its meeting in November, the group refused to endorse the records of the eight standing legislators, citing the fact that some of them had "broken their pledge" to support enforcement. "We are proud of our women legislators, but not all of them." The cohort had voted together on three pieces of legislation, but "divided on all others." The following year, four members of the group were returned to office, but MacKinney and Gallaher both lost their re-election bids and Speiser and de Young both declined to run.

Sarah Gallaher appeared to take her brief moment in public office in stride. At the conclusion of her first and only term in the House, she resumed her life's work—educating young people. In 1904 Gallaher and her sister had opened Hallesen Place, a private boarding school in Ebensburg; she continued to serve as its proprietor and principal until the school closed in 1941. In her pioneering role as one of the first eight women to serve in the state's General Assembly, Gallaher had once urged the election of dozens of more women to the state House and Senate "to inculcate wholesome, intelligent consciousness and to arouse the public to a sense of its responsibility." But when interviewed decades later, on the cusp of her 100th birthday, Gallaher described her term as "a very pleasant and instructive experience" but not one she wanted to repeat. "I did not care to devote my time to the legislature," she told the reporter from a Johnstown newspaper. "I only ran the first time because women were given the right to sit and most of them were timid about running. I did it to give them an example."

Lillie Pitts ended up serving longer than any others in the first class of assemblywomen. Voters from the 21st legislative district in Philadelphia sent her back to Harrisburg four more times following her 1923–24 freshman term. Although the Vare machine had sponsored her initial campaign in 1922, she managed to assert sufficient independence to satisfy her local constituents.
FROM PENNSYLVANIA MANUAL 1931 *(HARRISBURG: COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA, 1931)*

Curtis Miner, *Ph.D., senior history curator at The State Museum of Pennsylvania, writes widely on Pennsylvania social and cultural history. His previous article for* Pennsylvania Heritage *was "Ringing Out for Women's Suffrage: The 1915 Campaign to Win the Vote for Women in Pennsylvania" in the Fall 2019 issue.*

Further Reading

Anderson, Kristi. *After Suffrage: Women in Partisan and Electoral Politics Before the New Deal.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996. / *Fifty Years Old and Proud of It: The League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania Looks Back to 1920 and on to the Future.* Philadelphia: League of Women Voters of Pennsylvania, 1970. / McGeary, M. Nelson. *Gifford Pinchot: Forester–Politician.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960. / Schmedlen, Jeanne H. *History of Women in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives, 1923–2005.* Harrisburg, PA: Pennsylvania House of Representatives, 2005.