

Mary Hilliard Hinton and the antisuffragists

By Elna Green

The Senate galleries were packed. North Carolina's senators were about to vote on one of the most **controversial** issues of the day. The atmosphere was so tense that the Senate decided to do something it had never done before. Public seating areas were officially divided. Woman's suffrage supporters sat on the left side of the gallery, **antisuffragists** on the right. The trademark colors of the **suffragists**—yellow and white—could be seen on banners, badges, and armbands, while the antisuffragists distributed red roses.

The stakes were high, and the eyes of the entire country were turned toward Raleigh. As of August 17, 1920, thirty-five states had **ratified** the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution, nicknamed the Susan B. Anthony amendment in honor of the pioneer suffragist. Only one more state was needed to ratify the amendment to grant women the right to vote. But none of the remaining states had strong suffrage movements; none were considered certain to ratify. Observers considered North Carolina questionable at best.

Others were more certain that North Carolina would firmly reject the Nineteenth Amendment. Mary Hilliard Hinton, leader of the antisuffrage movement in the state, had argued against **enfranchising** women for years. The most **prominent** figure in the movement, she had helped organize the state's two antisuffrage associations. Hinton felt certain the antisuffragists had enough votes in the state Senate to prevent ratification.

WE SERVE THAT OUR STATE MAY LIVE, AND LIVING, PRESERVE THE UNION

NORTH CAROLINA BRANCH
OF
**The Southern League for the Rejection of the
Susan B. Anthony Amendment**

HEADQUARTERS: HOTEL RALEIGH, RALEIGH, N. C.

July 19, 1920.

Dear Mr. Nunn

The women of North Carolina, fully alive to the danger which threatens white supremacy, have organized a branch of the Southern League for the Rejection of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. As you know, tremendous out of state pressure will be brought to bear on our Legislature at its special session, convening shortly.

The Suff's say: "It's bound to come." Don't be misled by that propaganda. The Germans said they would be in Paris by Christmas, but they were mistaken.

Shall North Carolina be the state to force upon Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana an amendment which the people of those states have already rejected?

If North Carolina ratifies, her Representatives in Congress will have no grounds on which to join the other Southern men in opposing the three Force Bills now pending.

The fight is on - the issues are clear - where do you stand?

If you believe in the principle of local self government, if you think that the Old North State is still able to manage her own affairs, if you object to giving Congress at Washington the power to control local elections, then speak or write to your Senator and Representatives asking them to reject the Anthony Amendment and send us your name, and some money if you can, but your name anyway. Please show this literature to your friends and ask them to do the same.

Yours sincerely,
Mary Hilliard Hinton,
President.

I am writing the request of Mrs. J. D. Young, who is one of our members.

Mary Hilliard Hinton, a leader in the antisuffrage movement, argued against woman's suffrage in this letter to Senator Romulus Nunn. She used the issues of white supremacy and the right of individual states to determine their own destinies to support her stand.

The antisuffragists had good reason to feel confident about the outcome of the legislative vote. They were from important political families

that held much political and economic influence. Antisuffrage women had had husbands in the legislature, uncles in the governor's mansion, and

cousins in Congress. Their families owned plantations down east and textile mills in the Piedmont Region. And they believed they had a great deal to fear from woman's suffrage.

The antisuffragists often claimed that women's pure and noble nature would be spoiled by entering politics. They often predicted that voting would harm motherhood and womanhood, but they actually had other concerns about woman's suffrage. The "anti's" included women like Sallie Mayo

Cameron, whose husband, Bennehan Cameron, was a planter and railroad **magnate**, and like Gabrielle Waddell, whose husband, Alfred Waddell, was a former United States congressman and a leader against black enfranchisement. These antisuffragists were not actually afraid of voting themselves. They believed it was dangerous to let other women vote.

Antisuffragists feared that women would vote for **reforms** that they

opposed, such as laws for equal pay or to regulate child labor. North Carolina's textile industry relied heavily on the cheap labor of women and children for its profits. Opponents of woman's suffrage worried that women would vote in a block outside the two major political parties. They feared such a vote would throw current politicians out of office and cause the Democratic Party to lose control over the state government.



Gertrude Weil of Goldsboro (Far left) was a driving force in the woman's suffrage movement in North Carolina.

Gertrude Weil: suffragist leader

By Elna Green


While many North Carolinians believed that women ought to be allowed to vote, the most active and prominent suffragists were white women of the urban middle class. Suffrage organizations refused to admit African American

women into their ranks, regardless of how dedicated they might be to the goal of woman's suffrage.

Gertrude Weil (1879–1971), president of the state's Equal Suffrage League in 1920, came from a wealthy family in Goldsboro. Having graduated

in 1901 from Smith College in Massachusetts, she was very well educated for a woman of that time. As an unmarried woman, Weil did not have as many domestic responsibilities as most other women had. She was able to devote her entire adult life to public service, religious activities, and a variety of reform movements.

Like many suffragists, Weil first joined her local woman's club. Club women often worked to solve some of the problems of urban life. They raised money to build new schools, built playgrounds for poor children, and established public libraries.

Club women sometimes pushed for social reforms such as stricter child labor laws. These efforts often met with **opposition** from those in power, and the women soon learned to resent their lack of political **clout**. Gertrude Weil and other activist women learned that politicians listened to voters but quietly ignored all others. The suffrage movement was born when Weil, and others like her, concluded that women needed the vote in order to help others. 

VOTES FOR WOMEN

This yellow and white banner belonged to Gertrude Weil. Banners like these hung in woman's suffrage headquarters and may have also been worn by some suffragists.