

My Story:

Of How and Why I Became an Antisuffrage Leader

Josephine Anderson Pearson

In the opening paragraphs of this fascinating memoir, Pearson described her goals in writing it: to “enshrine all the bitterness of the bitter periods” of what she called “the 1920 Bloody war of Women” and “the Verdun 1920,” an “era in Tennessee history . . . so vital, that no one could live, actively, through it . . . without the sting of hurt,” and to create a record of the “claimed but not constitutional nor honorable . . . passage in Tennessee of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment.” She intended it to be a “Garden of Poesy,” a dramatic rendering of her own motives and the actions of the antisuffragists, who attempted to prevent what was, to them, an error of monumental proportions. Inspired by a sense of obligation to these loyal friends who had given her guidance and support, nevertheless she acknowledged that, considering the bitterness of the conflict and the possible reactions to “My Story,” she would like to see it “silently rest a little while longer in kindness and respect to those now gone!” “Possibly,” she wrote, the document “may be for some historian to excavate for dissertations in the making!”

The memoir is dedicated to Pearson’s mother, Amanda Caroline Roscoe Pearson, who, on her deathbed, elicited Pearson’s famous pledge to oppose woman suffrage if and when it became an issue in Tennessee. One of Amanda Pearson’s antisuffrage writings, an intriguing document in itself, is included within.

“My Story” has much to offer the student of the suffrage movement. Rarely have any of the participants on either side of this great political and social battle left such a detailed personal history of the development of their views. Pearson’s memoir is particularly helpful in understanding her relationship with the male antis, especially John Verrees, who, as Anastacia

My Story

Sims points out, selected Pearson to lead the women antis largely because she was too “brainy” and “factful” to try to direct the actions of the men.¹

Pearson’s memoir is also quite interesting for its discussion of class in the southern suffrage movement. As she was well aware, Tennessee suffrage leaders had impeccable social credentials; but like her revered mother, Pearson considered support for suffrage to be beneath the dignity of any woman “to the manner born,” a “plebeian” movement, instigated by the wrong kind of northern women such as Susan B. Anthony, of whom she spoke with contempt. Like Verrees, and many southern antis, Pearson believed the elite, white southern women who became involved in the movement were simply misguided.

“My Story” also captures the sense of outrage and indignation shared by southern antis at President Woodrow Wilson’s “face about”; their anger at all Tennessee men who supported ratification, especially Governor A. H. Roberts and Harry Burn; their reverence for the antisuffrage heroes of “The Red Rose Brigade”; and their belief that Tennessee’s ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment was fraudulent and unconstitutional.

“My Story,” as it appears here, is put together from several versions of the memoir, both handwritten and typed. Never published, it contained many spelling and punctuation errors that Pearson, I believe, would have been loathe to have in print, and which made the document quite difficult to read. I have taken the liberty of correcting these, and of omitting a few passages that were either incomprehensible, repetitive, or irrelevant to the story. Deletions are indicated by ellipses; words inserted for clarification are in brackets. I have taken care not to distort Pearson’s meaning.

Readers of this version of “My Story”—or the original—should bear in mind, however, that Pearson wrote this document in 1939, nearly twenty years after the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, and five years before her death. Age and the passage of time had taken a toll on her memory. For example, she refers to her “three campaigns vs. federal suffrage . . . 1917 through August 1920,” when in fact she fought two campaigns against state suffrage legislation in 1917 and 1919, and only one against the federal amendment in 1920. While her memoirs capture the spirit of the southern antisuffrage movement, specific facts cannot always be corroborated.

As a preliminary statement, I beg in justice to myself, to mention that this leadership was an honor not sought or coveted! But the surprising feature of My Story, so colorful, is—that now, in retirement, that as one grows older, at each year’s sunset—“The South Winds of Memory” brush so many phases—recalled, that suffuses the Spirit with—serenity! Wisfully, I wander through the Winding Galleries of the Past—selecting the outstanding precious bits of Fading Tapestries!

One of the most cherished, and outstanding [memories] . . . is My Story, officially offered, of *How and Why*—I became an Anti-Suffrage Leader! . . .

My own record . . . [began with] the pressure in Memory of My Mother, Amanda Caroline (Roscoe) Pearson, [of] my vow, made as a daughter to her one week before she faded away! . . .

I was raised in an atmosphere of a cultured people, who respected Temperance! Many are the occasions, that as a child early and long accustomed to be called before the public in reciting, dramatics,—in the town of my girlhood, beautiful McMinnville, at the foot of Ben Lomond—I can well remember . . . bowing at the knees of some incognito inebriate (so assumed) while singing out my little soul to the words "Please do not Leave Me Tonight Dear Father" until the entire audience wept! When the Temperance War first strangely struck that section for organization, I was on "The Float of Yellow," and when we reached the church for the opening of the [temperance] convention, I was called on to pray for the cause! But later, when my frail mother was driven to see the great festooning of yellow cloth, that caught up several of the pictures of *Susan B. Anthony*, . . . my gentle, always poised Mother, quietly turned aside, remarking, "It would seem this occasion is one where the *Yellow* predominates the *White*—the Temperance insignia!" From that day to her death, my mother was in opposition to the encroaching stamp of Susan B. Anthony upon the South. [Anthony's] name became more and more objectionable to her aristocratic breeding, [since she opposed] the Abolitionist Leader! Her opposition was never harsh; just deadly positive! When in 1902 one of my former schoolmates [who] became a Temperance and Suffrage Leader (*Carrie Lee Carter*) of national reputation, was at Montreagle Assembly, she was invited as our guest during the period of her lectures. My Mother did not attend—no criticism, however! When this friend attempted, once, some instructions to my Mother, she was so surprisingly rebuked that pardon was asked!

When in 1909 I went to Missouri [where she became the dean and held a chair in philosophy at Christian College, affiliated with the University of Missouri, Columbia], the only prominent leaders who were for suffrage in Tennessee at that time [were] Mrs. Judge East and the far more able Mrs. Selina Holman, who had a magnetic personality! Personally, as always, upon new soil, I was open to convictions on Western questions [including] Co-Education, witnessed in a University Center of some 5000 or more students. . . . I had been wide-eyed, during the preceding year of travel in Old Mexico, New Mexico, and over to Yacatan [sic], etc. . . . [One] Thanksgiving, there was a notable Banquet, where sat the leading professors of the University of Mis-

souri and myself, quite demure! As a stranger I was watching [and making] observations, when out of the brilliant repartee, came a challenge: "Miss Pearson, I presume you are too far from the South to be able to accept Equal Suffrage, now the predominant political issue in Missouri?" I accepted the challenge in words not (here) quite befitting to repeat; but for me, it resulted in a happy event. Instead of my becoming "taboo" for my outspoken response, I was the unexpected subject of congratulations from my opponent—later my friend [Dr. Charles Elwood]! This led to my undertaking, during vacation periods, a certain amount of seminar work, going from first to last into several Western Suffrage States, to collect data, contacting the Suffragists themselves, personally and in clubs. Later, I was invited to make lectures, purely from an academic viewpoint, in the state of Missouri through two successful campaigns vs. Equal Suffrage! That led to my being rated an Anti Suffrage Leader! . . . All this [was prior] to the forthcoming Epidemic, destined to sweep America—floating from the North under the Banner of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment, 1920—and to Tennessee becoming, once again, as in The Sixties, the National Battle Ground!

During Commencement 1914 I was called from Columbia, Missouri, to the bedside of my mother, following the accident of her falling! I had not been informed—that for the last three years she had used her always graceful pen in articles sent to be published in the East—where a coterie of brilliant women had begun organizing, possibly first in conservative Boston, v. "Votes for Women"! . . . She had just finished the article I've incorporated.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE

A Resume.

Extracts from an article, written by Mrs. P.A. Pearson, Montreagle Assembly Grounds, to her friends, which was published, first, a few months before her death, July 1915.

Dear Friends in Tennessee:—

I wish to relieve your minds of "the soft impeachment" that I am for Equal Suffrage. Following almost from the genesis of the movement . . . to its present crisis, I could say many things. . . . Up in a New England school from whence it became prominent, a few plebeian pupils working their way through school started the agitation from coarse natural audacity perhaps—which was repulsive to all femininity of finer mould, especially to the "Old South." It shows, however, what agitation will do. You see from this small beginning, before the war, over what a great stretch of country it has spread itself and how insidious in its effects into a section hitherto unsuspecting.

Boston has long considered herself "the hub of brains and talent" and New England literature has long held prestige by all lovers of book-love. I have many dear northern friends and a niece living in Boston, whom I hope have not become inoculated with the virus of Equal Suffrage, so you see there is no prejudice of locality.

But back to the main point a-g-i-t-a-t-i-o-n, which . . . gives any cause zeal and notoriety and a rapid spread of influence in its behalf! Spiritualism, Daweism [Darwinism?], Eddyism, Mormonism, etc., are examples of it. The press ever alert in promulgating news, kept these unwholesome influences before the public, until each have, today, a fair following. It is said that a unique form of suicide brings a score of imitators in like self-murder, and the police understand that any new form of murder will, as soon as the newspapers have spread the story, reproduce itself in a dozen other attempts at assassination. So, Woman Suffrage is as a stone thrown into a river, sending out its innumerable circling waves, and . . . the press has kept up a constant agitation! But, alas! poor woman, your very first edition produced a damaging effect, when she influenced Adam her husband, to eat of the forbidden fruit: Now she is biting at the apple again, wanting the ballot which if granted will be through woman's persistence and man's submissiveness. I believe that if the feelings of most men were sounded and expressed, they would want their wives at home, and would not want them to become liable for jury duty, nor to be locked up all night, serving on a mixed jury especially when the children needed them at home! There are enough men to do men's work!

The gentleness and refinement of womanhood and the deference and chivalry [forward] womanhood are the two most important elements in nature, and the movement for women's political equality, if perfected, would destroy both. Womanly nature, biologically speaking, is unfit for politics, and if the public work is being ill done by men, the only remedy is to do it better, not shift the burden to weaker and already over-laden shoulders. But don't you see the trend of the movement? She [the suffragist] not only doesn't you see the trend of the movement? She [the suffragist] not only I fear two-thirds of them would want to be "Speaker of the House."

And again woman must remember she could not make any "Jim Crow" distinction either against the sister-in-black! Many good women of the day are seeming to lose sight of the purpose of their Creator in the formation of the human race; that He made them male, and female and designed them for entirely different vocations in life, and neither ever can be fully at ease in the calling of the other.

God's purposes in the creation of woman are inimitable, and she should consider those purposes paramount to every other purpose. Then why does she clamor so frantically for the ballot, which if obtained, might prove her undoing, and destroy home, love and happiness?

I do think that little English woman, Miss [Sylvia] Parkhurst, from across the waters [England], a Militant Suffragist, too, who came a year or so ago [1912] to the United States, and included Nashville, was an imposition on America. But shame! thrice shame! that she was accorded all the courtesies and privileges as if she had been a whole delegation of authority to inspect the institutions of our land, and, acting as some great censor capable of instructing what is right, and rectifying the wrong, while her mother was back in England smashing windows and destroying property. Now, my dear friends, I believe that woman's clamoring for the ballot, (equal rights) to be in direct conflict with divine teaching. You take from man this moral obligation, this sacred uplift, and in a measure you extract his highest ideals, and listen! [You] give him the softening of the brain, at least you minimize his influence, and in time make a weakening of him, and future sons of them all.

Gazing upon a Sistine Madonna has caused many a woman to realize in herself that glorious type of womanhood which has made possible our most sacred institutions; which has given to the world her Knight-hood; which has brought about her nation builders, her dreamers, her philosophers; and under whose tender guardianship patriots, heroes and martyrs have been molded.

So, dear woman of the southland, I would plead with you to be slow in giving up your sweet province the jurisdiction of home, keeping it immaculate and training your children in the way they should go. Your sweetest desire should be this ability, which means Eternal vigilance, the greatest allotment appointed to mortal. This is truly the coronation of your duty, and for woman to respond to the bugle call of the government is to leave her assigned work undone.

Amanda Caroline Pearson
(Mrs. P. A. Pearson)

[She had recently finished this article] . . . when I stepped, in the early evening into the Library, where sat my beloved parent. When [I was] as usual kissing her brow—she grasped my hand—showing me this *her last article*, saying: "Daughter, when I'm gone—if the Susan B. Anthony Amendment issue reaches Tennessee—promise me, you will take up the opposition, in My Memory!" I was, of course dazed! My father's glances gave me a kindly, awakening signal; and, I as I bent, again to impress the vow upon her forehead, I answered "Yes! God helping, I'll keep the faith, My Mother!"

Following my mother's death, I began to write, [to] write volumes, as it were; sometimes the entire night, I spent in writing, sending articles in all directions vs. "Feminism," "The Amendment," anything that could hold me

true to my promise! I organized the women on the Mountain [Monteagle, Tennessee] into a Chapter vs. Equal Suffrage—anything, [though] the desire to ever again be in politics [was] so utterly detested by me! I had all my life been a sincere student of Political (Science) Economy, growing up with such discussions with my father, and many exceptionally informed men, until I was once told by a noted scholar: “*You think as a man!*” I [had] taught, a simplified form of political science, correlated with Constitutional American History, while Principal of McMinnville High School [1890-94]... But... this growing game of “Votes for Women”—[to] whom American men had granted every “Exaltation”—became a game I was unprepared to [comprehend]; with their [womens] general lack of information, ... they knew not how “To Count Their Blessings!” Personally I had been a believer in “Limited Suffrage”... (on the basis of real information, and [knowledge of] great issues); [I was] early influenced, likely, by my delight in reading of “The Women of the French Salon”... [about] those who, mentally, and personally attractive, could hold their own with a Beaconfield. But the “Band Wagon Equal Suffrage Song,” as an issue, started from the proletarian class calling for votes: [It] was an intellectual compromise, ... [according to] my ideas of the intelligent American type of Woman.

So, “Go West Young Woman!” Meet these women in their Clubs, and I did! Listen to their expressions of dexterity of Men’s (?) I did! Often the first amazement—amused me! Later came... a pure, calculating reasoning about all this imbibed experience. To transmit—How! Alas! To the Young Women I essayed to influence in College! As a teacher, I loved to believe I was receptive to the best, [was] broad in ideals! Then came the occasions to address audiences relative to “Feministic Impressions!” “The Good and Bad Approach,” “The Negative and Positive Results,” etc. until I became noted as an Anti-Suffrage Leader (through two campaigns) in Missouri! The better classes of the Univ. Fraternity Men were my staunch supporters, [though] few of the Professors, who generally are impracticable in their exhaustive rather than convincing reasoning!...

Not one of my family—on either side—stood with me on the Equal Suffrage Question—except Col. and Mrs. D. R. Roscoe... A dear cousin—once a Sumner County belle—“Miss Betty Prince” (long the wife of Dr. A. H. Cousins of St. Louis) and her family (in which home for years I was an intimate) were all so incensed at my attitude... on the *Suffrage Issue* that it was tragic! One day, this very dear cousin said: “I hope to live to see the day that Missouri will elect you to the U.S. Senate—by the Suffrage Contingent!” [Pearson goes on to say her cousin did not live to see her actual triumphs, including being appointed

on “a private mission of moment to meet some of the Nation’s most brilliant Senators (and both occasions successful!),” a group of senators including two prominent antisuffragists, Senator Henry Cabot Lodge of Massachusetts and Senator John Sharp Williams of Mississippi, for whom she gave a dinner.]

As the World War began to grow, I... [noted] in the Tennessee papers, The Nashville, Memphis and Chattanooga *Times*... the names of prominent women in the State, who began to agitate Equal Suffrage in a business-like way, for, and opposed! The situation in Nashville became acute, when the Equal Suffrage faction proposed, that Women’s Suffrage become a plank in “The Federation of Women’s Clubs in Tennessee!” Heretofore, this had been taboo! I noted the Nashville women of great stamina, social position and influence, including Mrs. T. M. [Nannie] Steger, Mrs. Norman [Josephine Elliston] Farrell and a host of others, ... appointed Mrs. John [Virginia] Vertrees, Chairman of an organization opposing this radical initiation! By invitation, Mrs. [Arthur M., Josephine] Dodge, National Pres. at that time of the Anti-Suffrage Association, New York [The National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage], came to Nashville [1916]. I was cordially invited to be present, but graciously declined, stating I was in mourning for my mother, and now desired to give my entire time—when not writing—to my father’s declining years. (My answer was respected).

Shortly after this “The Tenn. Federation of Women’s Clubs” convened in Chattanooga. One morning, as usual, I walked to the N.C. and St. L. station—in view of our home and The Assembly Grounds to take The Chattanooga *Times* from the Agent. I walked along reading, slowly! The first column of the *Times* was given over to the Federation Gathering. [Then] I saw that in the Response of Welcome by Miss Earnestine Noe [was] the startling accusation that the “Anti-Suffragists were allied with the Whiskey Element and the Red Light Districts of America!” Immediately, my passivity of action was... [abandoned]! I handed the paper to my father saying, “Please read, hastily, I’m answering this challenge.” Quite excited, my father urged, “Oh! no my Daughter! I beg you not to think of entering a newspaper controversy; it is bad enough between men, but a fearful thing between women—and most unthinkable for my daughter!” As I left him reading, I went to my desk and wrote out a reply to go down on the 11:00 a.m. train to Chattanooga. When I came out on the Veranda, my father ever gallant, arose. Then [he] placed his hands on my head, tenderly, and said, “Daughter you have my Blessing; you could not in honorable Memory to your Mother—as well as your own active pen of late, do otherwise than answer such untrue statements!” Before the next day’s sundown—after my reply to Miss Noe had appeared in that Morning’s Chattanooga *Times*—I

was showered with letters [and] telegrams from leading lawyers—both of the Democratic and Republican parties in Tennessee, even [lawyers] in New York on the following day, offering me their support, etc. . . .

It all ended with Miss Noe's apology, published in *The Chattanooga Times*, and her personal apology to me! She gave as her authority some preacher in the North! Following all this came a lull—it did seem for a time—in Suffrage activities in Tennessee, at least in the open! Then, I began to note that . . . Mrs. James C. Bradford [Sara P. Bradford of Nashville] had espoused the Anti-Suffrage cause, having met a member of [the] Anti-Suffragists in the East. This did not interest me; I was heart-sick of suffrage—nausea! But, when Pres. Wilson (whom I had never admired—in spite of my parents' admiration and the loyalty of all my family . . . came out so strong in his statements "That Federal Suffrage was an issue to be settled by each state," *I was Delighted!* For the first time, I felt the sense of Allegiance. I had written extensively vs. "The Wilson Watching and Waiting Mexican Policy"; I did not—as one who has been close with the great, financially and politically, of Mexico—for a year think the President knew the conditions. . . . Again at that time I was "Was from Missouri" and for Champ Clark and "Hound-dog." Mr. Wilson was of half-southern inheritance, through his mother—(not his father). . . . [Pearson goes on to say she was on the faculty at Winthrop State Normal College for Women in Rock Hill, South Carolina (1897-99) with Wilson's aunt, Miss Woodrow, "a woman of real brains, but erratic and obstinate . . . yet a loyal friend of mine in emergencies."]

When the Tennessee Legislature met in Session, and the National Spotlight was first thrown on the Volunteer State as the likely *Leit Motif* for National Action; I, "In the Fastness of My Mountains" felt Tennessee was safe! Then—as a bolt out of the clear sky—came the message: "You are unanimously elected as President of The Tennessee State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage," I replied; "Overcome with the honor, but impossible to accept." Then followed a long distance; urging me to at least come to Nashville. My father suggested that he thought that . . . [owing] to the memory of my mother [and] to this courtesy and the honor paid me, that I [should] go down to explain my position, and to assure these distinguished Tennesseans of my appreciation. I conceded to his advice, and I was met at the Nashville Union Station and driven to the residence of Mr. and Mrs. John Vertrees, where, on the night of my arrival, some were invited to meet me at dinner. Others, during the evening called, both women and men! By midnight, I had about been persuaded to accept this sacred honor, as Pres. opposing Federal Suffrage in Tennessee, feeling the assurance of the President's pronounced platform, and

his expressed attitude that each State settle this question for itself, "Let We Forget." I said to those assembled that my acceptance would depend [upon] . . . my conversation, next morning with my father, over the telephone! Mr. Vertrees assisted in this tentative acceptance; but I told him I desired, also, to consult a long, kind friend, [my friend] since my early childhood, Maj. E. C. Lewis [in McMinnville]. . . . Mr. Vertrees accompanied me to see Maj. Lewis. His reply was characteristic: "Go to it, damn it, and win!" His daughters, my dear friends, were suffragists! [Pearson then writes that, as her "swifly-going pen now records so much that followed of so much personal bitterness," there is "some I could willfully expose" but more that she feels "the desire to make obscure 'at this hour of the day' in assembling these compilations." But she is particularly thankful for the "love and affection" of "possibly the favorite daughter of Maj. Lewis [unnamed]—as dear to me as a daughter—who blesses my last years, this 1939!"]

From now on I desire to confine "My Story" . . . [to the] strictly official! Speaking direct and simple to Tennessee Women and Men! [As] a woman who had awakened to the emergency of the issue at stake, and who held in sacred trust the honor accorded to her, in *Three Campaigns v. Federal Suffrage in Tennessee through 1920. . . .*²

It seems that Mrs. Jas. C. Bradford of Nashville, had before this occasion—on her own initiative—been active and cordial in extending invitations to some of the most noted members of The National Anti-Suffrage Association in New York to come to Nashville, to assist her in organizing a Nashville Chapter. This occurred simultaneously with . . . "The Inauguration of The President [Pearson] of The Tennessee State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage."

This action was not approved by such leaders as Judge John Allison, and a host of others, as well as our constituents in the Tennessee Legislature, who felt it imperative—at this critical time—that only the Women of the State of Tennessee—should be in evidence to direct this pending campaign. [They believed] that suffrage as a Federal issue [should] be either enacted or rejected by the peoples of each state and its state leaders—as according to the expressed opinion of President Wilson—whose policy the Tennessee Legislature and the Tenn. Anti-Suffrage Constituents, were following! So when these noted women from the East—all unadvised, except by Mrs. Bradford, personally arrived, it gave rise to a very delicate situation that was delegated—a very unhappy task—to the President of the Tennessee State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage. In this most embarrassed connection, as well as many other then pending emergencies at this time, I stay my pen from the run of "My

Story" to pay my living respects to this long, loyal [friend], Mrs. Morgan Brown, Secretary [of the Tennessee Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage].

Through Mrs. Brown, officially, and other leaders, it was gracefully arranged that these visitors be entertained as guests of the President-Elect—for dinner at the Country Club. Then and there, as gracefully as this occasion could command, so acute a contretemps (that taxed all the powers of any hostess) was . . . [honorably handled]. Be it said, that their understanding loyalty to the cause as well as . . . the amenities at stake [should be noted]; they were escorted—with every due consideration—to the Union Station, and left on the late train that night for the East! Then—all seemed to be moving along all advisedly smooth—as politics goes—directed by fine brains of Tennessee's best statesmen and true, who were giving all their best efforts vs. Suffrage, as a Federal issue in Tennessee, compatible with the proclaimed policy, on this issue, by Pres. Wilson! It seemed never necessary for our Anti-Suffrage women to even climb the capitol steps—to the Senate and House of Representatives quarters—as the suffrage forces kept up a constant visitation. Instead, early at certain hours and occasions, on each desk was a leaflet [placed]—a cordial message of some kind (one of assurance of appreciation of co-operation, or a suggestion); each leaflet [was] printed with Greetings, or reminder of some especial exigency of that day. Frequently, members of the legislature were entertained in small groups for dinner at the Vertrees residence, giving ample occasion to discuss—in private with the Legislative Leaders—who were conducting the Forces in the Tennessee Legislature opposed to Federal Suffrage!

One morning there was sent to the Vertrees residence a telegram addressed [to] The Speaker of the Tennessee Senate, relayed, immediately to me, that was from Pres. Wilson to the Senate; that he advised for political expediency that Tennessee pass the Federal Amendment! Before Mrs. Vertrees and I could finish its reading Mr. Vertrees—getting from his own car—hastily rushed into his wife's room. Addressing me, he said, "Of course, Miss Pearson, you will send your instructions [on] how to answer the President to the Senate." Then he added, "I did not know that the Speaker expected to send this to you, at once!" I replied, "Mr. Vertrees I'm going in person before the Senate." Startled! He, with all his power of his masterful eloquence and logic, used every argument—including the fact that I had been so dignified—[that] not once [had I] gone myself or desired any of my constituents to go to the capitol—where the Suffrage forces had swarmed! Concluding—he impressed me with the arguments [that had prevailed] for my appointment to The Presidency of the Opposition to Federal Suffrage in Tennessee; chiefly:

1st. We desired a woman who had outstanding ability—and who had your remarkable experience in the study and knowledge of the attendant questions . . . [owing to your experience as] a leader of the Anti-Suffrage forces in Missouri, [and] as an Educator.

2nd. [That you were] A Native Tennessean to the manner born.

3rd. That you are too brainy—as well as tactful, to want to direct—the strong alliance of the men constituents, legal and professional—as well as the members of the Legislature!

All were these facts, or, statements that were made to me upon my induction into office as President. To all, I agreed; all I respected—as I did this gallant, brainy, legal light facing me, whom I respected as I did few men! Then, his wife spoke: "John let Miss Pearson alone! If she wants to go to the Senate, let her use her judgment to go! She did not want this office of President, it was forced upon her—we virtually 'drafted' her." All this time—I had stood silently white, with a resolution! For the first, and only time, clashing with the opinion and loyal protection of my legal advisor; also my host!

Immediately—as always—did this every inch a gentleman—bow—to his wife's wishes. Then—with a somewhat compromising bow to me, he said; "If you must go, you go as a lady, accompanied by a gentleman!" We each rode in quiet, restrained rage—almost; sitting side by side, on the rear seat of his car, not one word was spoken—until he escorted me up the flight of steps of the Capitol. When we reached the Senate Chamber door, as I was being met to go to the platform, (for I later learned that Mrs. Vertrees had phoned), were my steps stayed, as Mr. Vertrees leaned over to ask: "What are you going to say?" I replied, "I do not know!" (How often have I wondered, how hurt [and] anxious—really how must have suffered this strong man of heart and action of mind—in his mystified effort to try to comprehend what this recalcitrant woman whom he had trusted, had advised not to be hasty in action, etc. might be going to say, or do, possibly to ruin the well laid plans, long conceived!)³

I was led on to the platform—as in a daze—even while being applauded! I can scarce recall any of it at all—even the introduction—or the sensation I was (unhappily for poor anxious Mr. Vertrees) creating! Then stepping to the edge of the platform, holding up that fatal telegram, which I read in a ringing voice, I seemed to hear my voice touch the Capitol Dome! Concluded, I said, stronger, even louder: "President Wilson has overstepped [his] prerogative as President of the United States! Will you follow his advice?" I can never recall what, if anything, was said! I knew, only, that, two to one was that moment, in a shout, defeated Federal Suffrage in Tennessee! I was, after it was over, so

dazed that I can scarcely recall how proud were the words of congratulations that reached my ears, as Mr. Vertrees—more proud than any—whisked me to his awaiting wife, who met me with welcome arms—so tenderly, so true! Then, “Home to My Mountians,” that night once again, in the arms of my adoring father!

The World War waged on! Caring tenderly for my father, I did not need to go to Nashville—even to the funeral of that beloved, high-toned friend, the wife of Mr. Vertrees, whom I sincerely mourned! . . . [Pearson says in the years until the suffrage issue was again raised in Tennessee she took care of her father, and was active in an organization founded in her “father’s library,” “The Council of The Dixie Highway via. The Cumberland Divide,” and served as leader of its auxiliary—“to please my father.” She was also active in war work, Red Cross work, etc. She left her father only to give an October 1917 address, “to again, please him,” the first “Woman’s Address” before a National Good Roads Association meeting. At this time, she wrote, “it seemed that the Suffrage issue was so secure in its defeat in Tennessee, that I only went to Nashville once, as a formality of presentation, before its defeat, again, by the Tennessee Legislature!”]

Following my father’s death, I attempted a new avocation for an Educator! The ravages attendant to securing the luxuries I had showered upon the declining years of my parents, [a] above normal cost during the World War, had depleted [what had been] a fair bank account in 1914. . . . [After that, it was necessary] to mortgage, at 10% interest, my last piece of property (of several formerly owned), to meet the expenses incumbent upon me for these years out of college, for I spared nothing in the final care, attention, and the burial of my parent! So, in 1920 I opened my large home to “Paying guests.” I was just in the flush of this season’s adventure—my house full of delightful friends—when on July 17 (?), the very hottest day I think I ever experienced, came the message, “Mrs. Carr arrived. Extra called session imminent by the Governor. Our forces are being notified to rally at once. Send orders—and come immediately,” etc.

I left on the afternoon train, arriving in Nashville alone, unannounced . . . [I went] to [the] Hotel Hermitage, where I found orders were left—at my demand! I first, inquired the location of Mrs. Carr. Then I surprised the authorities at the desk by engaging the lowest-priced—an inside room—for myself, but [asking them] to set aside until further notified the large room on the Mezzanine floor [and] also the large Assembly Room on the 1st. floor. Going to that room—almost suffocating after coming down from the Mountians—I at once plunged into the bath, calling the office to line me up with New York! For hours, I stood in cool trickling water; that seemed like hiring a spot in the suburbs of Hell in which to pass the night! With the unfailing telephone in my

hand, I had before midnight contacted through New York and Boston and Montgomery, Ala., the line up of many rushing forces to Nashville!

[Thus the anti-suffrage contingent was] there or were on the way, and by dawn [there was also] an assurance of money to be rushed from the United Efforts of our Women, East, North, and South. I had the feeling that this battle of Women vs. Women must be started with Women’s funds; then we could be open to large benefits. After assurances from Women all over the land, we immediately merged “The Tennessee State Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage.” [It had then, in] two sessions of the State Legislature, defeated honorably, and we felt, definitely, the issue . . . [of] Federal Suffrage in Tennessee, but for the action of a perfidious Governor, and [the] changed attitude of President Woodrow Wilson. . . . The organization now effectuated—by Women and Men—became a part of National History!

The women of Nashville who had left the city’s heart (some far up in the East, some ready to sail to Europe), because of intense convictions entered their return, to join, [giving] generously of time and means in co-ordinated union of strength—upon arrival “to enter the fray!” Some Women and Men of Nashville, who had opposed [the antisuffragists, who supported suffrage if by state action], now joined wholeheartedly in this fight vs. the Federal Amendment all [their] forces. [Antisuffragists] from many states came to offer services; every conceivable loyalty was manifested in representation from 37 states, Mrs. Jas. Pinckard and Mrs. [Walter D.] Lamar leading our own forces from Ala. and Ga., while Laura Clay—who for 20 years had fought [for] Equal Suffrage—came at her own expense to remain the entire session—to fight Federal Suffrage [According to her biographer, Paul E. Fuller, Clay actually stayed only a few days⁴; also in this line were the Misses [Kate and Jean] Gordon of New Orleans—and life-long suffragist and the brilliant wife of Gov. [Ruffin G. Pleasant] of La., [Anne Pleasant].

Our Eastern women from New York and Boston were a grand United force in all ways. Long had they led “Remain in Boston”—under Mrs. [Randolph] Frothingham; in New York following Mrs. Dodge was Mrs. Jas. Wordsworth—then Miss Kilbreath; and Mrs. Wiess in Baltimore, ad infinitum. . . . Reporters [came] from all the Eastern press, Chicago to Dallas, west to Denver—and all the Southern press [were] represented generously, waiting for daily, hourly interviews—which alone taxed the strength. No greater test of loyalty can be attributed to a once Noted Woman, the late Mrs. Van Leer Kirkman [Catherine], Pres. [of] the Woman’s Board of the Tennessee Centennial, than when I urged her to let me place her own name in place of mine as President of the Tennessee Division; with her arm around me, with a tear in her eye she

replied, "Listen—if you will just keep quiet about such an arrangement, (for I verily know nothing about all this), . . . I'll get out of the bath-tub, any hour, day or night, to come at your call!" Indeed it may be said [that] we each and all "Pass[ed] under the Rod of Denial!" . . .

The Great Bishop, Edward Thomson, D.D., L.L.D., of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in his delightful volumes "Oriental Missions," when he received in India, the news from the United States of the results of the War between the States, writes: "There is no telling what backwoods steps the world might have taken—if the Southern Rebellion had been successful." I, myself, have often ventured the opinion, that, for long, there existed—in *certain classes in the North*, such exponents as Dr. Mary Walker who defied the Courts to *wear pants*; the writer Harriet Beecher Stowe, of "Uncle Tom's Cabin"; Dr. Anna Howard Shaw, who, in an address in Calif., asked: "What is The American Flag, but a piece of bunting?"; Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt (Mrs. Tom Catt) [Catt's late husband's name was actually George William Catt]; Susan B. Anthony and others—(in *certain classes in the North*)—where this same Susan B. Anthony—the great "Abolitionist" and later leader of the suffrage forces, beginning in the North—all felt toward *Equal Suffrage* as did the great Bishop feel toward the Fall of the Confederacy!

Thus there arose from such leaders and classes—the origin of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment! Thus, we, representative women of the South arose, as did the representative women of Boston and the East and North, vs. (The Federal Suffrage) "Susan B. Anthony Amendment" which we declined to Digest without Protest!

Since 1920, I have been the guest in the elegant homes of a number of Eastern Women who came to Tennessee's assistance—several, including my House-Horess Mrs. Randolph Frothingham of Boston! In 1926—there was a notable gathering in my honor at *Hotel Statler* with Mrs. Jas. Wordsworth Hostess, with several of the ladies who were in the group at *Hotel Hermitage*. Later that same season, I was as the guest at Poland Springs, Maine, again of Mrs. Frothingham. She and her Social Secretary assisted me in several compilations of "The Remonstrance Organizations," in the East *preceding 1920*, which I desire to file with ours of Tennessee. I had become, during my several sojourns in Boston to know that the *first promoters of Suffrage of the East* were, originally, (even as in 1920) of the type of Women, as Mrs. Catt, or Susan B. Anthony! The Remonstrance Women of Boston were the type that opposed Federal Suffrage in Tenn. I feel *this is due from my pen* as to the contact with class and type of Womanhood—that has the real discretion to be respected in

any and all Sections! They often suggested to me the same old conservative type of families of the environs of Philadelphia and in Old Charleston, S. C!

The Mother of Mrs. Frothingham, the late Mrs. Anthony, whom I learned to love during my sojourn with them in Maine, at South Poland Hotel, was of that retired, quaint, sweet, conservative type of Women that reminded me of *My Mother*. She was raised in wealth [and] still quietly living in its environs. She was educated in Europe, which she knew well. Her fondness for literature—her tastes in general—all seemed to whisper memories that were linked in remembrance until *her death* a year later; the class of our own *Southern Women of the Old Regime!*

After my first night—spent in the bath-tub of *Hotel Hermitage*—all the authorities assembled had me moved to a private apt., in the N.W. corner 7th floor. Here I had private line connections; here, was showered on me all needed attentions; here,—where a friend on the opposing side (the late Mrs. Leslie Warner [Katherine Burch Warner] who had been a guest in my home) said, "If I can make Josephine Pearson mad—this fight will be over!" I valued this caution, and when I felt that suggestion stealing upon me I locked myself, for a spell, in room 718.

Pearson now completely skips a sizable part of the ratification story, including both the Senate vote in favor of ratification and the dramatic House battle in which the ratification resolution carried by one vote until Speaker Walker changed his vote to "aye" in order to move to reconsider—and buy time for the antis. Pearson's story resumes with that night.]

From this high place [the Hermitage] in the dead of night came the ring from Headquarters! Stealthily I went by a side-stair to find our Leaders in the Legislature, were corraling our 27 men (all wore a Red Rose) in various hotels to be gotten off on the 3:00 a.m. train for Alabama, thus to break the quorum in the House next morning! The "Red Rose Brigade" stayed in Alabama three weeks, thus giving constituents in the Legislature time to go home for a rest—and to get instructions from the Home folks. I, also, took, a day's vacation up to the Mountain, . . . [before going] to meet the Red Rose Brigade at Cowan as warriors returning! During this waiting spell, so vital to our side [and] (so to the contrary [of] the Suffrage side), our Women still at the helm in Nashville sent these men all kind of nice things. And when a baby was born to one of the group, away from his home, that baby was remembered by our forces at headquarters who sent a layette with their compliments from its—"An-tis" . . .

My story—possibly too long in detail—yet withal so superficially told, of the years of tragic moment, must come to a close—with the utter helplessness

of being unequal to discuss "The Burns Vote. . . ." The entire legislative procedure was so dishonored in Tennessee by this Episode that it . . . [would be] more dignified for a woman to ask that my Native State erase its false ratification—that had nothing valid about it—from the records as . . . for a woman to condescend to *outline* [the Burns story]!

That the compromised vote of the 19th Amendment was ratified by political corruption and, generally believed, bribery . . . will always be shrouded in doubt and uncertainty of some one or more man's dishonor! Also, that the Suffrage forces which could muster a quorum—because the Red Rose emigration to Alabama—they held a session just the same! They however admitted the validity of Mr. Walker's motion to reconsider—by taking it up and trying] to make it an illegal defeat. Then came the action of the Governor—already justly criticized for his lack of observance of the laws of the state, who had a Supreme Court judge summoned and without [a] hearing the injunction was dismissed! The illegal certificate of ratification was hurried to Washington with all possible haste, and to the shame of the Nation as well as the State, Sec'y. Colby issued the proclamation from his *own house*—not from his office!

Thus will a vital political issue overshadow each name! The whole thing was an acknowledged National "fake"—that produced a Jubilee! Mr. Roberts [was] up to his neck in so many schemes to slip over the Amendment [that he] may well be called, as it was my *happy privilege* from a *platform*, "The Perfidious Governor of Tennessee!" That this act, together with the face about of the U. S. President . . . , may well, indeed, excuse a simple "Bobby Burns" (not of poetry); but we leave Blank his riotous escape, only to be "carried back home" (for his gymnastic defeat) in a private car! All of each circumstance also had its beginnings when the Members of the Tennessee Legislature were first made to forget their oaths that they had taken to support the *State Constitution!* *Shame thrice shame!* have I always bowed my head, in honest disgust! No woman's pen could adequately trace the disgrace that marked Dear Tennessee! I leave it to some one, a man like . . . Dr. Gus Dyer, to equal the situation—even if he can! When I—go over the whole disastrous affair, I'm quite convinced that Hitler, hearing of this likely from afar, got the suggestion for his *first steps of his present power* from reading of this advertised feature of state and National Policy and Bravado—of such a degree of corruption in America! Having once known Godly, *classic Germany* (1900)—Last seeing it 1925—I sigh equally for *Germany*, as I blush to recall my state's (1920) policy, prototype of "Mein Kampf!"

President Wilson's face about, "for political emergency," [and] also other lesser possible mistakes, I've ever been grateful came after the death of my

Mother who admired him so! This, his *Perfidy* (I say the word with an understanding of its origin), I pray [will] ring down through the years, as long as *Tennessee is able to maintain the autonomy of its state hood.* That this act was a critical note bene for the then pivotal state of the Nation will ever remain to some, myself in particular, Unpardonable! For one so high in office! To me it has ever meant but one word—*Betrayal!*—to those who "entered the fray" believing his utterances were impeccable! . . .

That memorable night, after the 1920 verdict stolen, I was not sorry for *defeat.* Ah! No! (I can be a good loser.) But [I was sorry] for the proclamation of a *Stolen Verdict*, [and I was] tired and heartsick to have fallen victim of *Perfidy.* I never in all the years before or since felt so empty a void in life, as *Lost Ideals!* [I felt] not defeat, but disgrace for my native state, and my country! There I was utterly alone [with] no one to whom I could confide. I had seen all my brave co-workers off for their distant homes! Those in the city, had their homes! Then there began to creep upon me a listlessness, not ever aroused—even after the venture up to my *mountain home!* I felt utterly impersonal! That I had done my best "To Keep the Faith!" That did not matter; yet it was very precious! But, that we men and women had to lose dishonorably—in defense of every compromise with the Nation's and the State's executive—embarrassed my self-respect, and it also *lost something of trust never quite restored!*

In the shadows of my yet unlighted room, I began to feel as I do tonight (the eve of my Mother's anniversary, April 6, 1939; she was born April 6, 1840) the encircling arms of my Mother; in her efforts to help me banish the empty void of something "Lost," never "found!" Then, turning over the mass of long preserved manuscripts, papers, letters—strange as a *dream of yesterday*—I find these appended pages, by my own pen; nineteen years ago, that night alone in my room, Hotel Hermitage, as well preserved, as clear to read, as if written to-day!

. . . "Dead, yet she speaketh!" This I do aver, more than any other one national utterance; [the fact] that the President did *not keep faith to his Southern Constituency* lost the Democratic Party leadership, 1920 to 1932—and justly so! When the President's selection for a successor was Mr. Cox, who left his home in the very face of a representative delegation of Women of Tennessee (even led by Mrs. George Washington and Mr. Frank Stahlman) whom Mr. Cox declined to meet for an interview (having before this granted a hearing from the Suffrage Delegation), his "Bill of Rights" to lead *Southern Democracy*—was *defeated!* In consequence, did the Anti-Suffrage forces of Tennessee, including its women, bind themselves to follow every available privilege to elect Mr. Harding, President, which was done!

"Home to My Mountains," long ill after *This Battle!* On the morning of The Election 1920, I went with some literature sent to me by Mrs. Washington to post at the polls at Monteagle. While doing—and excitement began to run high! Then the Patron of all Monteagle elections for the past [and] until this day, nervous [and] trembling came up to me saying: "You aint agoing to vote is you—you fit it too long and too hard! Tell us what you want voted and we'll vote for you!" I did and so always have I let this long loyal friend of my late father (Rev. P. A. Pearson), one who still "Who knows the law from Kiver to Kiver!" to lead Grundy Co. politics—Esq. Wm. D. Bennett—[and] direct The Men of Grundy County to vote for

Josephine A. Pearson
April 20, 1939

Notes

"My Story" is in the Josephine A. Pearson Papers in the Tennessee State Library and Archives, Nashville, Tennessee.

1. See Anastatia Sims, "Beyond the Ballot: The Radical Vision of the Antisuffragists," part 1, essay 5, above; and "Powers That Pray and Powers That Prey: Tennessee and the Fight for Woman Suffrage," *Tennessee Historical Quarterly* (Winter 1991): 203–25.

2. Pearson's reference here is to one of the other titles of "My Story" used in the various drafts of the manuscripts, "My Story: of the Three Campaigns vs. Federal Suffrage in Tennessee—1917 through August 1920!" This title is inappropriate as the campaigns before 1920 were against state suffrage measures. Indeed, on p. 233 and several pages that follow, Pearson describes events that occurred in 1917 as part of the campaign against the federal amendment when Congress did not submit the amendment to the states until June 1919.

3. Anastatia Sims doubts the authenticity of this story of Pearson's address to the Senate in defiance of Verrrees. She speculates that—if it occurred—it may be based on events that occurred in 1920.

4. See Paul E. Fuller, *Laura Clay and the Woman's Rights Movement*. (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1975), 160.

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Tennessee

Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Shuler

From *Woman Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement*, 1923

Carrie Chapman Catt (1859–1947) was born in Wisconsin and grew up on a farm in Iowa. When her father objected to her going to college, she taught school until she could enter Iowa State College at Ames in 1877, supporting herself by working in the library and washing dishes. Graduating with a B.A. (1880), she put aside her goal of studying law in order to accept a position as a high school principal in Mason City. Within two years she rose to become superintendent of schools, quite unusual for the time. In 1885 she married Leo Chapman, editor of the *Mason City Republican*, and joined him at the paper as assistant editor. They moved to San Francisco, hoping to buy a paper there, but Chapman died suddenly, and she returned to Iowa. A talented orator, she went on the lecture circuit for a number of years.¹

In 1887 Carrie Chapman joined the Iowa Woman Suffrage Association. She attended the historic 1890 convention in which the American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Woman Suffrage Association were reunited. The same year, she married George William Catt, a successful civil engineer and construction company president who encouraged her to devote time to suffrage work. They lived in Seattle and then settled in New York City. At Catt's urging, the NAWSA set up an Organization Committee (that she chaired) to manage its field operations,² including vigorous promotion of woman suffrage in the southern states.³

Carrie Chapman Catt was twice president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Susan B. Anthony chose Catt as her successor