

Anne Dallas Dudley

Table of Contents

	Pages
1. Content Essay	2-4
2. 5 th Grade Activity	5-6
3. High School Activity	7-8
4. Primary Source: Oberlin Debate	9-10

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Essential Question: What role did Anne Dallas Dudley play in the women's suffrage movement?

Anne Dallas Dudley was beautiful, articulate, and privileged; a wife and the mother of two daughters, she enlisted in the crusade for women's rights, laboring for nearly ten years in a hard fought campaign to achieve women's suffrage. Unlike the pioneers of woman suffrage, Dudley embodied a new generation of feminist leaders that emerged in the progressive era. Dudley represented a living retraction of the negative anti-suffrage argument that women's rights advocates were both unattractive male-haters and childless radicals bent on destroying the idea of the traditional American family.

Born into a wealthy Middle Tennessee family, Dudley was raised and educated at Ward Seminary and Price's College in Nashville as a belle of the post-Civil War New South. Her father, Trevanion B. Dallas, prospered as he joined a leading mercantile firm and began to build and buy cotton mills in Nashville and southward in Huntsville, Alabama. His support of the Confederacy during the Civil War helped open doors to him upon his arrival in Tennessee's state capital in 1869.

His daughter created a buzz in social circles as her gowns, parties, and her suitors became material for the gossip columns. In 1902, she married widower Guilford Dudley, a prominent local banker and insurance broker (one of the founders of the Life and Casualty Insurance Company) and maintained a country estate in West Nashville.

Proper Victorian notions of a woman's sphere were instilled in her as part of an unspoken education. Dudley later acknowledged that prior to her involvement in the women's suffrage campaign, she had once been an anti-suffragist. "But reading and studying showed me that it was the only way that women could come into their own.... Not only does the world need women's votes, but woman needs the ballot for her own development."

Like several other middle and upper class women, Dudley joined local groups in which women met for self-improvement. Typically, these groups of women discussed art, books, music, and drama. Later, the meetings evolved into discussions concerning problems of urban living that were consequences of industrialization. They concerned themselves with the education of children, poverty, political corruption, and working conditions of women and children. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century's progressive female leaders originated within these societies. They began to argue that women needed the vote in order to cure and purify the ills of American society.

This notion reflected a subtle but important change in the thrust of the women's suffrage movement that Dudley and other middle and upper class would enlist in. Earlier generations had insisted that women were fundamentally equal to men; however, a new generation of Progressive era suffragists argued that women were different from men. Many of the movement's new leaders began to couch their language and justification for suffrage in less threatening ways that did not overtly challenge the separate spheres in which men and women resided in late nineteenth-century American society. By doing so, they ignored the natural constraints of their position to speak with great force and persuasion. Women, they stressed, possessed a moral sense and a nurturing quality that men naturally lacked. Consequently, they understood the civic obligations implied by the franchise and could be trusted to vote virtuously. Their votes would hasten to completion the progressive task of

cleansing the political process of corruption. Moreover, their experience as mothers and household managers would enable them to guide local and state governments in efforts to improve education, sanitation, family wholesomeness, and the condition of women and children in the workforce.

In September 1911, Dudley enlisted in the women's suffrage cause when she and a handful of other Nashville women formed the Nashville Equal Suffrage League. The League nominated Dudley as its president, who set about to link up with other equally committed women throughout the state to organize similar local organizations. Between 1911 and 1919, they helped found suffrage organizations in 78 towns in Tennessee. The suffragists throughout the state followed Dudley's lead to institute May Day parades throughout their cities and towns. Dudley often led these parades with her two young daughters. She was also photographed reading to her children, which was widely distributed among other women's suffrage materials, all in an effort to rebuke negative stereotypes created by anti-suffragists that all suffragists were mannish and disregarded their children.

In 1915, Dudley was elected as the president of the Tennessee Equal Suffrage Association. She was instrumental in arranging for some of the nation's most prominent women's rights advocates to visit and speak in Nashville, which rallied support throughout the state for their cause. When a suffrage amendment to the state constitution failed, Dudley introduced a second measure to give women the right to vote in presidential and municipal elections. However, when her second attempt to secure woman suffrage (albeit on a limited scale) failed to pass the state Senate, she proclaimed "We are not cry-babies," and pressed her foot soldiers to push onward. In fact, the alternate bill did pass the General Assembly in 1919; however, at this time, Dudley and other women's rights advocates were consumed with the passage and ratification of the 19th Amendment.

Dudley was vitally important to the campaign for women's suffrage primarily for two reasons: she embodied a new (and attractive) generation of progressive era reformers and was an outspoken southern proponent of women's suffrage (a region in which the prospect of women's suffrage was very unpopular). To her southern male (and female) detractors, Dudley countered their hysterical, anxious, and racist arguments that enfranchisement of women would lead to "Negro" domination of the region, with a racist pro-suffrage argument designed to allay their fears: there were more white women than black women. Interestingly, white suffragists, including Dudley and her southern counterparts, crossed the South's Jim Crow racial barricades to enlist black women to join them. One black woman later observed, "a little patience, trust, vision, and the universal ties of motherhood and sisterhood could overcome the prejudice against them as voters."

As Dudley became nationally known for her activities, the National American Woman Suffrage Association elected her as its third vice-president in 1917. As a national spokesperson, Dudley addressed congressional committees and traveled across the nation urging the passage of the Anthony resolution, a federal women's suffrage bill that had been introduced in each session of Congress since 1878. She was a popular speaker who often held her own as she clashed with anti-suffragists on her tours. When the antis noted that since only men could bear arms for their country, only men should vote, Dudley countered, "Yes, but women bear armies."

In 1920, Dudley's public role in national affairs was highlighted as she attended the Democratic National Convention in San Francisco as a delegate-at-large where she made a speech for one of the party's candidates. As she walked across the stage, on her way to the podium to make her speech, the band struck up "Oh, You Beautiful Doll."

In August of that same year, Dudley successfully worked to achieve the ratification of the 19th Amendment by the Tennessee General Assembly. She continued her political involvement through the fall of 1920 as a volunteer in the unsuccessful reelection campaign of Democratic Governor Albert H. Roberts, who later blamed his support of women's suffrage for his defeat.

Though she was never active in the newly created League of Women Voters, Dudley helped organize the Woman's Civic League of Nashville to assist elected officials in a needed "municipal house-cleaning." More than thirty-five years before the passage of the metropolitan government in Nashville, this group fought for an end to overlapping city efforts and public education on health issues. In the 1930s Dudley served as president of the Maternal Welfare Organization of Tennessee, which brought Margaret Sanger to Nashville in 1938 to increase public awareness on the importance of birth control.

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Use the text to answer the 'True or False' prompts below. For the questions you mark "False", correct the mistake on the lines below them.

_____ 1. Anne Dallas Dudley was an uneducated and illiterate woman.

_____ 2. Dudley was a feminist and supported local groups focused on self-improvement for women.

_____ 3. She fiercely opposed the formation of the Nashville Equal Suffrage League.

_____ 4. Anne Dallas Dudley had no impact on the campaign for women's suffrage.

_____ 5. Dudley helped achieve the ratification of the 19th Amendment by the Tennessee General Assembly in 1920.

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Anne attended Ward Seminary and Price's College.

 T 2. Dudley was a feminist and supported local groups focused on self-improvement for women.

 F 3. She fiercely opposed the formation of the Nashville Equal Suffrage League.

Anne was a founding member of the Nashville Equal Suffrage League.

 F 4. Anne Dallas Dudley had no impact on the campaign for women's suffrage.

Anne worked tirelessly to help pass the 19th amendment.

 T 5. Dudley helped achieve the ratification of the 19th Amendment by the Tennessee General Assembly in 1920.

Anne Dallas Dudley

How did Anne Dallas Dudley and the new generation of feminists that emerged during the Progressive Era differ from the feminists who came before them? Use the text as your guide, and provide three specific examples.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Also, what forms of resistance/prejudice did Anne Dallas Dudley encounter?

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How did Anne Dallas Dudley and the new generation of feminists that emerged during the Progressive Era differ from the feminists who came before them? Use the text as your guide, and provide three specific examples.

Answers will vary.

1. Dudley did not argue that men and women were equal. She argued that women's nurturing qualities helped them understand the obligations of voting.
2. Dudley was married and had children that she was often pictured with. This refuted the old idea that suffragists were ugly man-haters who ignored their responsibilities at home.
3. Dudley argued that women's experiences in household management would help them improve local government, end corruption and improved areas such as education.

Oberlin College's Women's Suffrage Debate

Despite Oberlin's progressive tradition, not all reforms received the full support of the community. In particular, the women's suffrage question generated heated debate. In March of 1870, one hundred and forty married women of Lorain County petitioned the state legislature, protesting efforts to grant women suffrage. Among the notable signers was Mrs. Marianne Parker Dascomb, Principal of the Female Department at the College. The petition read:

We acknowledge no inferiority to men. We claim to have no less ability (?) to perform the duties which God has imposed upon us, than they to perform those imposed upon them. We believe that God has wisely and well adapted each sex to the higher performance of the duties of each. We believe our trusts to be as important and sacred as any that exist on earth. We feel our present duties fill the whole measure of our time and abilities; and that they are such as none but ourselves can perform. Their importance requires us to protest against all efforts to compel us to assume those obligations which can not be separated from suffrage: but which can not be performed by us without the sacrifice of the highest interests of our families and of society. It is our fathers, brothers, husbands and sons who represent us at the ballot box. Our husbands are our [unreadable] and one with us. Our sons are what we make them. We are content that they represent us in the corn field, the battlefield, and at the ballot box, and we them in the school room, at the fireside, and at the cradle; believing our representation even at the ballot box, to be thus more full and impartial than it could possibly be were all women allowed to vote. We do therefore respectfully protest against any legislation to establish "woman's suffrage" in our land, or in any part of it. (*Lorain County News*, March 17, 1870)

Community leaders offered cautious, measured responses to the petition. College President James Fairchild urged women to recognize the social importance of traditional roles and duties. He also acknowledged a growing dissatisfaction among women and asked the community to consider calmly their complaints. Richard Butler, editor and publisher of the *Lorain County News*, refused to endorse or reject women's suffrage. Rather, he questioned women's true commitment and asked that they prove their mettle:

Our principal object is saying all this is to find out whether the women of our land are really anxious to have the rights and privileges which some of them claim. It seems to us that this mighty clamor about "man's oppression of women" comes not from the mass of American females. The most of them seem to be contented with the lot they hold. And if they are not, we trust that every editor in the country will take the grounds we occupy in urging them, from the least to the greatest, to step forward and speak for themselves, if it be but only one word; and when they have spoken we trust that every editor will use his influence to help their cause. Is that fair? (*Lorain County News*. April 14, 1870)

Women responded in earnest to calls for independent action. A town resident writing as "An Enquirer" in the *Lorain County News* bemoaned that Oberlin, enlightened birthplace of coeducation, was the site of this conflict. She questioned the purpose of the anti-suffragists:

“What of the night?” In other days we were wont to look to Oberlin for the “breaking” of the morning. Has her light become darkness or do we “having eyes see not?” We have waited long and patiently for her advance in the cause of women suffrage and be sure that we were coming up to the help of the Lord in the work of truth and righteousness...that “protest” signed by the principal of the female department and the wives of the professors of Oberlin College carried blight to the hearts of many of its toiling daughters from four to eight years in its classic halls to fit themselves for display in the parlor or labor in the kitchen, according to the arguments there stated. (*Lorain County News*, April 14, 1870)

Soon after, one hundred and fifty Oberlin citizens organized a “Women's Suffrage Association.” The group met at First Church on April 29, 1870. Members were asked to pay twenty-five cents. Invited speaker Mary Ashton Rice Livermore called Oberlin's attitude towards women's suffrage behind-the-times.

Sources

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