

Josephine Pearson

Table of Contents

	Pages
1. Content Essay	2-3
2. 5 th Grade Activity	4-5
3. High School Activity	6-7

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Essential Question: What role did Josephine Pearson play in Tennessee during the suffrage movement in 1920?

Josephine Pearson was born in 1868 in Gallatin, Tennessee. Her father was a minister. Both her parents believed in education so Josephine Pearson was a well-educated woman for her time. Pearson graduated from Irving College in 1890 and received her Master's degree in 1896 from Cumberland College. In the next few years she worked as a teacher and administrator at several schools. She served as dean and chair of philosophy at Christian College in Columbia, Missouri for 5 years before returning to Tennessee in 1914 to care for her aging parents.

The suffrage movement had already begun and there was growing interest in the country for women to gain the right to vote. Apparently, the Pearson family was against women's suffrage because Josephine Pearson wrote in her book, *My Story*, that she had promised her dying mother she would fight women's suffrage if it came to Tennessee for ratification.

John Vertrees, a Nashville attorney and a leader in Middle Tennessee in the anti-women's suffrage movement, asked Josephine Pearson to replace his late wife as President of the Tennessee State Association Opposed to Women Suffrage. Pearson also achieved a leadership position in the Southern Woman's League for the Rejection of the Susan B Anthony Amendment. She became well known as a speaker and leader in these organizations.

The basic position Pearson and these organizations took was that if women received the right to vote, southern traditions and their way of life would be lost. Broadsides such as "Declaration of Principles" and "Why We Oppose Votes for Women" also stated that voting would be a burden on women. Anti-suffragists believed voting would add just one more burden or duty to all that women had to do at home. At that time many men and women believed a woman's place was at home, but voting was done outside the home. Anti-suffragists believed women's suffrage would lead to Socialism, Bolshevism or Radicalism. They also believed that women's suffrage was a threat to the continuation of Anglo-Saxon domination of social and political affairs.

When Governor Albert Roberts called a special session of the Tennessee General Assembly to vote on ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, Pearson went to Nashville. The anti-ratification group set up headquarters in the Hermitage Hotel near the capitol. From there Pearson led her followers in talking to members of the General Assembly, handing out flyers, and leading peaceful rallies. Pearson and the antis worked actively but in the end Tennessee became the 36th state to vote for ratification. The Nineteenth Amendment became law and women could legally vote.

When the fight was over Pearson went back to Monteagle, Tennessee. She accepted a deanship at Southern Seminary of Virginia. Josephine Pearson continued to lecture throughout the south and write articles. She died in 1944.

Sources: "Josephine Pearson." *Tennessee Encyclopedia and History and Culture* 1st edition. 1998. Print.

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Use the text and your prior knowledge to answer the following questions.

1. Were you surprised to find out that some women were opposed to women's suffrage? Why or why not? _____

2. What were some of the reasons given for their opposition?

3. In what two organizations did Pearson hold leadership positions?

4. List the titles of two anti-suffrage publications

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2. What were some of the reasons given for their opposition?

Voting would take women away from their duties at home;

Believed women's suffrage would lead to Socialism, Bolshevism or Radicalism. They also believed that women's suffrage was a threat to the continuation of Anglo-Saxon domination of social and political affairs.

3. In what two organizations did Pearson hold leadership positions?

Tennessee State Association Opposed to Women Suffrage. ; Southern

Woman's League for the Rejection of the Susan B Anthony Amendment.

4. List the titles of two anti-suffrage publications

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5. Based on the answers above, how extensive do you think the women's anti-suffrage movement was in East Tennessee? Justify your reasoning.

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