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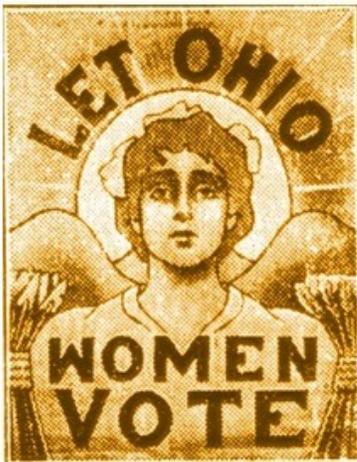
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Women in Politics



◀ *The rising sun in the letterhead of the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association symbolizes women's hopes for winning the vote in 1914. Their dreams were realized six years later. From Vadae Meekison Collection (MS 211).*

The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 1920, granting women the right to vote. That event was neither the beginning nor the end of women's activity in politics. From suffragists to feminists, women have always worked for the causes in which they believed. The Center for Archival Collections features numerous collections documenting women's role in the public sphere.

From the founding of the nation, men were always considered the political authorities in their households—only men could vote, serve on juries and in public office, and acquire or dispose of property. Early court records show the appointment of "guardians" for widows as well as children, men who were to look after the property and legal interests of women who were not considered capable (and in any case, not legally able) of taking care of these interests themselves. A woman's citizenship derived from her father's or her husband's regardless of her place of birth. This was the situation as it always had been, and yet, in the mid-19th century women began to rise up in earnest and demand equal rights. What brought about the change?

Prior to the Civil War, some women began to work for the abolition of slavery. They found themselves hampered because as non-voters, the men in power felt no need to address their concerns. The struggle for women's suffrage began at that time, and as the century progressed, the cause at last began to attract the support of the average woman as well as the activist. Vadae G. Meekison ([MS 211](#)) was an attorney and suffragist in Napoleon, Henry County, Ohio. She was a critical figure in Ohio's Woman Suffrage Movement because of her work as a speaker, petitioner and local organizer between 1905-1920. The correspondence in this collection offers an intimate view of the pressures felt by suffrage supporters during an early campaign to win women the right to vote in Ohio. In addition to the correspondence are speeches, brochures, flyers, advertisements, and special-interest newspapers dealing with the pro-suffrage point of view.

One of the few respectable outlets women had for activity in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was charitable work, often through their local churches, but also in the social and cultural clubs which spread everywhere during this period. The Olive A. Colton Papers ([MS 201](#)) document the life of a socially, politically, and philanthropically active woman from the turn of the century into the early 1960s. The daughter of a wealthy Toledo family, she considered herself a late-comer to the suffrage cause, but devoted herself to political activity in order to advance her concerns for the living and working conditions of children and the poor.



◀ Governor Cooper with Myrna Hanna and V. D. Emmons signing the Emmons-Hanna Bill making Bowling Green and Kent Normal Schools state colleges. BGSU's Hanna Hall is named for the first woman legislator to represent Wood County. Photograph gift of Julia Hanna.

Another woman working through politics to improve the quality of life in her community was Myrna Reese Hanna (MMS 434), elected as the first woman to represent Wood County in the Ohio General Assembly (1928-1932). She introduced the bill which made the normal schools (the state teachers' colleges) at Bowling Green and Kent into state colleges. Hanna Hall at BGSU is named in her honor.

Myrna Hanna (identified with an arrow, at right) poses on the steps of the Capitol in



Columbus along with eight other women who served in the General Assembly in 1930. Photograph gift of Julia Hanna. ▶

Once women had won the right to vote, the League of Women Voters was established to "promote political responsibility through informed and active participation of citizens in government," a goal now directed at all voters. The Bowling Green Chapter (MS 139) was founded in 1953, and the collection housed at the CAC documents its non-partisan activities in voter education, charity projects, and community development programs.

A new wave of feminism swept the nation in the late 1960s, bringing a new generation of women into politics. Irma Hotchkiss Karmol () had raised family and worked as a teacher and social worker before being elected to the Ohio General Assembly in 1974. Reflected in the legislative files in this collection, her special areas of interest were in child abuse, juvenile corrections, welfare, health care, women's issues, school funding, and energy conservation. Also documented are her work for constituents and her 1978 re-election campaign.

Women have a rich history of political activity, and with a view to better documenting that history, the CAC hopes to continue to collect, preserve, and make available records of political leaders and organizations, as well as those who have been important behind-the-scenes in political parties and advocacy groups. Donors who wish to contribute materials of this sort or researchers interested in using these collections are encouraged to contact [Steve Charter](#), Reference Archivist, at the Center for Archival Collections.

The story of women in politics is often a story of grass-roots democracy in action, with people banding together for a common goal and achieving it through hard work. As Olive Colton observed: "Women voters have no monopoly of the virtues, but what some of them have taught me by their sincerity, information, and consecration so enriched my memories that these little adventures in politics have been among the most blessed adventures of life."

—Lee N. McLaird