

Letters from the Library

"There shall be ... a library ... known as the state library"
An Act to provide for a State Library – General Laws, 1838

December 2019

In This Issue

19th Amendment	1
Wolfe	4
2019	5

State Library Hours

Monday – Friday
8am – 5pm

Library Staff

Stephen Parks –
State Librarian

Cassandra Noel –
Circulation Librarian

LaTavius Jackson –
Reference Librarian

The 19th Amendment at 100

The Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was officially adopted on August 26, 1920. Over the next few newsletters into 2020, we will trace the history of the Amendment in Mississippi and its eventual adoption by the Mississippi Legislature in 1984, yes, in 1984.

In this first installment, however, we start in 1890. As Wyoming was becoming the 44th State and the first to officially grant suffrage to its female citizens, the State of Mississippi was gearing up for a new Constitutional Convention to be held in Jackson. It was at this Constitutional Convention that delegates debated, likely for the first time, granting women the right to vote, white women at least.

Delegate Jon W. Fewell of Meridian introduced a resolution providing the enfranchisement of all women who owned or whose husband owned \$300 worth of Mississippi real estate. The motive behind this measure, however, was not for the benefit of women but was to increase the size of the white vote. It was thought that few, if any at all, black females could meet the property ownership qualification.

The resolution further provided that women themselves would not be able to physically show up and vote. Male electors would be authorized to cast ballots on behalf of women. Also, the resolution made clear that women would not be authorized to hold political office. It was referred to the Committee on Elective Franchise.

Newspaper reaction was mixed:

It would do us no possible good, but work greater hardships upon us. It is all the Delta can do to manage the men, and now if both sexes are to be turned loose, there is no telling the result.—Yazoo City Herald.

WOMEN can't be beat as long as they stay in their place. But around and at the ballot box is no place for a respectable lady.—Choctaw Plaindealer.

WOMAN SUFFRAGE.

It Would Increase the White Vote More than Thirty Thousand.

Editor of the Clarion-Ledger.

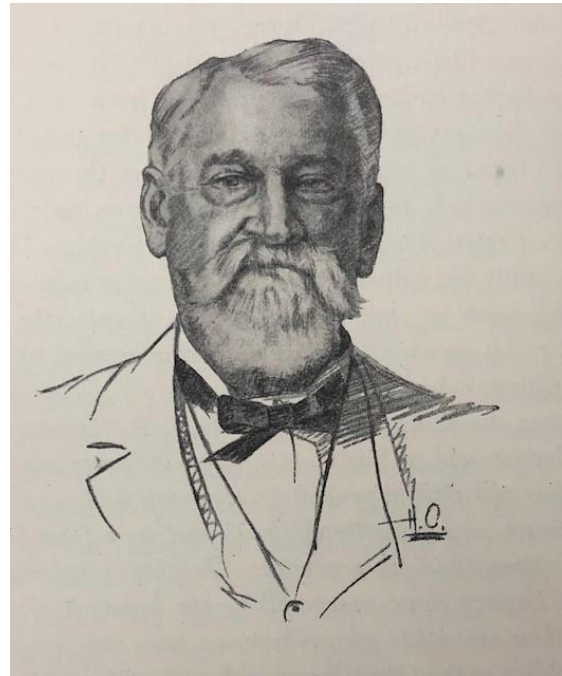
Among the numerous "plans" submitted, none deserves more careful consideration than the proposition to extend the right of suffrage to women, such right, however, being restricted by an educational and property qualification. While not offering a complete solution of the problem before us, such a measure, coupled with certain needful restrictions upon male suffrage, would go far toward effecting a much desired result. But some old fossil is ready to cry out in holy horror at the idea of woman appearing at the ballot-box. Unfortunately, some men believe that by exercising the right of suffrage woman would lose some of her loveliest attributes and suffer a woful degradation. But let us not be alarmed at the cry "wolf!" when there is no wolf. Is it not a

The Committee on Elective Franchise ultimately did not include women's suffrage in its final report. Delegate Fewell, however, reintroduced his resolution for floor debate with an increase in the property requirement to \$400. Debate ensued, with supporters arguing women's suffrage was necessary to maintain white supremacy and detractors arguing women shouldn't be dirtied up by politics and didn't want the vote anyway.

sibility of advocating it. He claimed that modified woman suffrage would secure white supremacy in Mississippi, and nothing else will. This was a question of practical politics, and the State may never again have the opportunity of employing it so as to insure and perpetuate the supremacy of the white race in Mississippi. He referred to the natural antagonism of the two races, and condemned the lawlessness and the shot-gun policy that had been considered essential to maintain the ascendancy of the white race. He enumerated the many States and English speaking countries that for party purposes had conferred suffrage, in various forms, on woman.

He reviewed the many objections that had been urged to woman suffrage, and declared that the time had come when we should throw aside prejudice and sentiment, and inasmuch as Mississippi was the first State in the American Union to invest married women with separate property rights, we should now invest her with the ballot, not only to protect those rights but the rights and liberties of all classes as well.

Delegate S.D. Lee of Oktibbeha County's comments, as reported in the Clarion Ledger.



Delegate W.S. Eskridge, a lawyer from Tallahatchie County, spoke in favor of the plan:

the safety of the white race demands it.
Adopt the Campbell plan and woman suffrage on the basis proposed, and we add to the white vote of the State not less than 80,000 votes, a certain and permanent majority which, for a generation at least, secures to us white supremacy. But I find opposed to female suffrage sentiment and assertion, not reason. It is said our women do not ask or desire the right of suffrage and would not exercise it if conferred. This is a mistake and an injustice to her. Let the noble white women of our State but know the body politic is in peril, that negro rule and negro domination were threatened, would she not with her husband, brother and father rush to the rescue and with them cast her vote to save the State. We all know that she would. We also know that she would bring to the State such a powerful moral and religious support and would cleanse it of vice and immorality of every shade and character which would be accomplished by law.

Delegate J.H. Jones, a lawyer from Woodville, spoke against the plan:

HON. J. H. JONES' SPEECH	desire, sir, to transmit this noble heritage, unimpaired, to those who come after us.
HE ELOQUENTLY OPPOSES THE FEMALE SUFFRAGE PLAN.	Mr. Chairman, for these reasons I dare not vote for this measure lest I take from the Southern woman the proud supremacy which she now holds.
WOMAN NOT SUITED FOR POLITICS.	I dare not vote for it, lest I pull her down from the lofty pedestal on which her purity, her refinement, and her exquisite delicacy have placed her.
Do Not Pull Her Down from the Lofty Pedestal On Which Her Purity, Refinement and Exquisite Delicacy Have Placed Her.	I dare not vote for it lest it drag her from the shrine on which she sits enthroned in the heart of every true Southern man. This, sir, may be only a sentiment, but it is a sentiment sanctioned by the centuries; it is a sentiment that was instilled at my mother's knee, and it permeates every fibre of my manhood, and therefore, Mr. Chairman, I will cast my own vote, and that of my wife through me, against this measure.

Delegate W.S. Featherston, a lawyer from Marshall County, spoke against the plan:

Gen. Featherston was opposed to the proposed woman suffrage. The women didn't want it—wouldn't have it—they spurned it. He wanted woman to stay where God Almighty had placed her—the queen of the home, the moulder of character, with all her high privileges and great responsibilities. He did not want to put her in the ballot box—he was afraid of it.

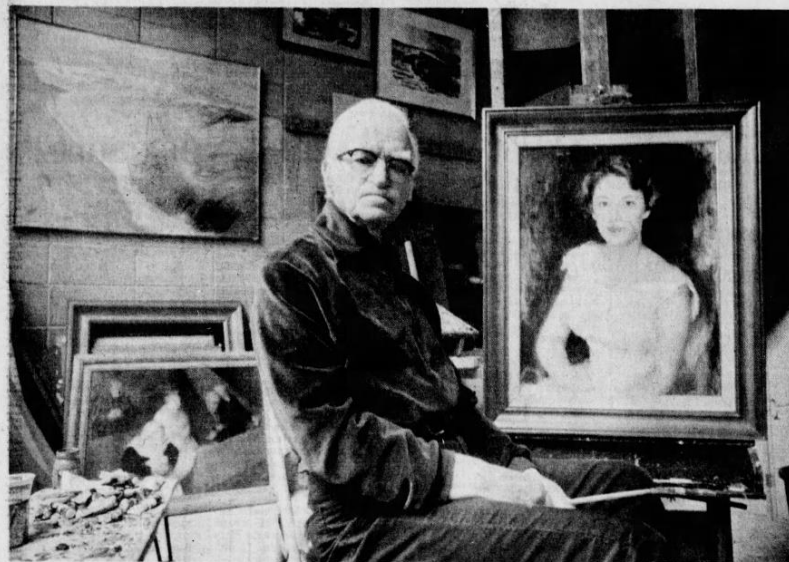


Although spirited debate was had, the suffrage plan that would have given some women the right to vote was not brought to a floor vote. It would be well over twenty years before the Legislature would again touch the subject of women's suffrage.

Karl Wolfe Portraits

The Library recently rearranged some of the portraits it oversees and brought the Judiciary's three Karl Wolfe paintings together. The Judiciary possesses three Wolfe paintings of Mississippi Supreme Court Chief Justice William Ethridge, State Librarian Julia Starnes, and Mississippi Lieutenant Governor Carroll Gartin. While it's unclear when the three portraits were completed, we do know the three state officials would have worked together in the state Capitol: Ethridge served on the Supreme Court 1950-1971;

Starnes was State Librarian 1940-1968; and Gartin was Lieutenant Governor 1952-1960, 1964-1966.



Karl Wolfe, 78, takes a break from work on his latest portrait in his Old Canton Road studio.

Staff photo by Mark Lyons

Born in Brookhaven in 1904, Wolfe attended the Chicago Art Institute. He traveled and studied in Europe and served in World War II as a photographer. After the War, Wolfe returned to Jackson where he became a widely respected portrait painter. He taught at Millsaps and helped establish the Mississippi Art Association which later became the Mississippi Museum of Art. He passed away in 1984.

