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TROUT, GRACE WILBUR

c. 1864–October 21, 1955

SUFFRAGIST, POLITICAL LEADER, ORATOR, CLUBWOMAN

Suffragist and community leader, possessing great skill both on the lecture platform and in politics, Grace Wilbur Trout was born in Maquoketa, Iowa, to Thomas and Anne (Belden)

Wilbur. Wilbur received a public school education in Maquoketa, supplemented by private instruction in languages, literature, and dramatic art. On January 5, 1886, Wilbur married George William Trout (1862–1949), also from Maquoketa. They had four sons: Thomas Wilbur, Philip Wilbur, Ralph Belden, and John Vernon. They later adopted a nephew, George William Sackett. George William Trout was a hardware merchant in Maquoketa for fifteen years until 1893, when he moved to Chicago, continuing in the hardware business. By 1896 his firm was George W. Trout and Company. In 1915 Trout changed his company into a merchandise and real estate brokerage, and around 1919 he became engaged in the oil business.

In the early 1900s, Grace Wilbur Trout became an active clubwoman, first in Chicago, and then in Oak Park, when the Trouts moved to the near western suburb in 1904. Like many upper-middle-class women of her time, Trout joined a number of clubs, including the West End Woman's Club, the Nineteenth Century Woman's Club of Oak Park, the Illinois Woman's Press Association, and the Chicago Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She served as president of the Ladies' Auxiliary of the Ashland Club of Chicago and of the Woman's Auxiliary of the Oak Park Club. She joined the Chicago Woman's Club in 1901 and the Chicago Political Equality League (CPEL) in 1903. During this period Trout also pursued an interest in women and Mormonism, the result of which was her 1896 novel, *A Mormon's Wife*.

Trout's emergence as a state suffrage leader in the second decade of the twentieth century illustrated the shift that took place within the ranks of the suffrage movement's leadership across the United States. Upper-middle-class, educated, socially conservative women embraced the campaign for women's political rights and gained preeminence in the movement. As a result, social activists like CATHARINE McCULLOCH, many of them middle-class and working-class women who had fought for suffrage for decades, lost the ability to shape the campaign. Trout's leadership, eloquence, and political and organizational skills were most fully engaged and demonstrated in her work for woman suffrage from 1910 to 1920. Her first active participation in suffrage work began when she was elected president of the Chicago Political Equality League in May 1910. Under her administration, the CPEL enlarged its focus to include constructing and staffing a parade float, undertaking an automobile tour, and completing a successful membership drive. These endeavors enhanced the group's visibility and presented people in Chicago and the surrounding area with the demand for women's political rights.

The CPEL entered the first suffrage float in Chicago's annual Sane Fourth Parade, held on July 4, 1910, after some hesitation on the part of the men's committee over whether such an innovation should be allowed. The CPEL was given permission, and after contributions were raised for its construction, mostly from among Trout's friends and neighbors in Oak Park, the float received more cheers from the crowd than any other entry in the parade, with the exception of the Union Civil War Veterans. A *Chicago Tribune* reporter, however, wondered how much of the cheering emanated from the crowd's sympathy for suffrage and how much from the sight of pretty young women on the float.

A week later, on July 11, 1910, the first Suffrage Automobile Tour in Illinois began, lasting five days. The entourage, led



FIG. 120. Grace Wilbur Trout behind the wheel of her automobile in a parade for woman suffrage.

by Trout, included Catharine Waugh McCulloch, legislative chair of the Illinois Equal Suffrage Association (IESA) and vice-president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA); ELLA SEASS STEWART, the state president of the IESA; and S. Grace Nicholes, corresponding secretary of the IESA. An Oak Park neighbor of Trout's donated the use of his expensive touring cars and his chauffeur for the project. At each stop Trout spoke first, outlining the idea of woman suffrage, and then introduced the other speakers, who addressed specific issues surrounding women's need for the vote. Setting a grueling pace for themselves (sixteen towns within forty miles of Chicago in five days), the women gathered crowds on street corners and at train stations, held up traffic, and used a megaphone in order to be heard. They waded through deep mud and drove through rain storms to meet their scheduled appointments. When there were no suffrage groups to welcome them, they organized the local women.

In contrast to McCulloch's confrontational style and militant strategies, one of Trout's strengths as a leader was her ability to use persuasion and diplomacy to win over opponents and hesitant supporters alike. She approached them as friends and colleagues, as uninformed and well-intentioned people who only needed gentle prodding and suggestion on the question of suffrage. Trout also accepted support for the cause from individuals not traditionally associated with the progressive women's reform agenda. For example, in 1913 Trout accepted the assistance of William Randolph Hearst, antilabor editor of the *Chicago Examiner*, despite the opposition of prolabor suffragists. McCulloch, a seasoned political lobbyist and good debater, clashed with Trout over philosophy as well as political methods.

McCulloch perceived suffrage as a tool women should use to improve their low social status. As part of the new wave of suffragists, Trout viewed the ballot as an end in itself, a natural right due to women because of their humanity. Trout's conciliatory approach allowed her to maintain good relations with the press and with her political opponents. During the automobile speaking tour, the *Chicago Tribune* assigned two reporters to travel with Trout in her car. Local newspapers also featured front page stories about the women's endeavors. Trout reported that their success encouraged similar automobile suffrage campaigns in other parts of the state by IESA members. Trout also maintained a generous attitude toward her political rivals. After one suffrage victory in Illinois, when asked if "her enemies" (opponents to suffrage) should be invited to the victory celebration, Trout replied, "We have no enemies" (Wheeler, 112).

During Trout's two-and-a-half-year tenure as CPEL president, the league was transformed into a more active, visible political organization. Dissatisfied with the CPEL's slow growth, Trout initiated a vigorous membership campaign in the summer of 1910, and by that fall the roll had increased from 143 to 388. By 1912 the CPEL had nearly one thousand members. Along with its size, the league also expanded its activities; in May 1911 it designated three areas of political work, known as the Legislative, Study, and Propaganda Sections of the CPEL. Each section met once every month, in addition to the regular monthly CPEL meetings, and each offered a course of lectures, often followed by discussion, on a particular topic pertaining to women and their social status.

In addition to her Chicago political work, Trout became a state board member of the IESA in October 1910. Her leader-

ship and energy at the local CPEL level helped her to be elected president of the IESA on October 2, 1912, an office she held until 1920, with a one-year hiatus 1915–16. Although Trout initially did not want or seek the office and desired to retire from public life, she changed her mind after one of her sons encouraged her. Tragically, this young man died just three weeks after Trout's election to the presidency. In response to her loss, Trout dedicated her IESA work to his memory.

As IESA President, Trout decided to launch a statewide campaign to pass a bill in the Illinois state legislature granting women the right of presidential and municipal suffrage. Dismayed by previous campaigns at the legislature in Springfield, where suffragists were ignored and treated disrespectfully, Trout was determined to make the issue of woman suffrage a serious and respected issue. She decided to extend her collegial, persuasive style to the legislative fight. Her strategy also included embracing a nonpartisan approach to gain support for the suffrage bill, systematically learning about each legislator and foiling attempts to derail the bill in committee. Although many longtime suffragists were skeptical, and McCulloch openly showed opposition, Trout's practical strategy paid off: the Presidential and Municipal Suffrage Bill was brought up for final vote on June 11, 1913, and passed. On that morning, Trout remained alert to last-minute, antisuffrage political maneuverings. Realizing that a vote to defeat could be taken quickly if any legislators supporting the bill left the chamber, and that the doorkeeper, who opposed suffrage, would illegally admit antisuffrage lobbyists onto the floor if left unobserved, Trout stationed herself at the chamber door and successfully kept lobbyists out and suffrage supporters in until the vote was taken. For the first time in any state east of the Mississippi River, women won the right to limited suffrage.

Trout spent 1913–15 successfully defending the new suffrage law from attempts by opponents to declare it unconstitutional under the Illinois Constitution or to repeal it through further legislation. She also worked to gather more support for the law in Illinois and to push for federal suffrage. In addition to her legislative work, from 1912 to 1915 she raised forty-four thousand dollars for the Illinois suffrage cause. Her hard work took a toll on her, however, and in 1915 she declined to stand for reelection to the IESA. Declaring that she needed rest, Trout spent the winter of 1915–16 at her Florida home. She was reelected to the post in 1916. In that same year, the IESA, dissatisfied with the limited Illinois suffrage law, decided to propose legislation for a new Illinois Constitution that would grant full woman suffrage. Trout fought for the Constitutional Convention Resolution in the Illinois legislature and saw it passed before the 1916 session ended.

During this same period Trout was beginning to be recognized in suffrage circles at the national level. Known for her speaking ability, Trout was invited to make suffrage speeches in the summer of 1914 at fifty Chautauquas in nine states. In 1915 suffragists across the country encouraged her to accept a nomination for president of the NAWSA; however, Trout did not allow her name to be considered. A year later Trout was called upon by the NAWSA to organize a suffrage parade and demonstration in Chicago while the National Republican Convention was in session. At that June 7, 1916, event, known afterwards as the "rainy day suffrage parade," five thousand women marched

through pouring rain for more than a mile down Michigan Avenue to the Coliseum convention site, arriving, drenched, just as Trout and three other NAWSA representatives concluded their suffrage plank appeal to the Platform Committee. The Republican delegates placed a suffrage plank in their platform. In 1917 Carrie Chapman Catt (president of the NAWSA) asked Trout to come to Washington, D.C., to work on the Federal Suffrage Amendment. During that time Trout met with President Woodrow Wilson to gain his support for the amendment. Finally, in 1919, she was called back to Washington by the NAWSA to work on the final push for passage of the suffrage amendment.

Trout was still president of the IESA in 1920 when the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was ratified by the states. She closed her suffrage career in September 1920 when the IESA declared its work finished and formed the Illinois League of Women Voters.

In 1921 Trout moved permanently to Jacksonville, Florida, where she and her husband owned a vacation home. She did not retire from active community service, however; she joined numerous clubs and societies. Trout was also an honorary member of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. In addition to club work, she served as president of the Jacksonville City Planning Advisory Board beginning in 1928; she was reelected to the board every year until 1943, when she was named president emeritus. In 1928 the Jacksonville American Legion awarded Trout a medal of honor as the most public-spirited Jacksonville citizen. Trout died of pneumonia at the age of ninety-one and was buried in Evergreen Cemetery in Jacksonville.

Trout's tenure as president of IESA provided the Illinois suffrage movement with a strong leader who was able to communicate effectively to a vast audience using modern mass media techniques. Furthermore, her public speaking skill and political acumen were crucial in the 1913 suffrage victory in Illinois. As an upper-middle-class, relatively socially conservative woman, Trout exemplified the new, and last, wave of suffragists who came into prominence before 1920 and the Nineteenth Amendment. She was a decisive, effective leader at a turning point in Illinois, and suffrage, history.

Sources. The best description of Trout's suffrage work in Chicago and Illinois appears in a paper Trout wrote and presented at the annual meeting of the Illinois State Hist. Soc. on May 14, 1920; it was published as "Side Lights on Illinois Suffrage History," *Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society for the Year 1920* (1920). A good analysis of the 1913 Illinois suffrage campaign and Trout's role in it is Adade Mitchell Wheeler's article, "Conflict in the Illinois Woman Suffrage Movement of 1913," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Summer 1983. Steven M. Buechler includes information about Trout's suffrage leadership in *The Transformation of the Woman Suffrage Movement: The Case of Illinois 1850–1920* (1986). CT articles on Trout include "Here Come the Motoring Militant Suffragettes," July 10, 1910; "Holds Up' Train for Votes," July 12, 1910; "Vote Pilgrims Still Militant," July 13, 1910; "Women on Suffrage Tour Gain Pledge of Support," July 14, 1910; "Crowd Leaves as Women Talk," July 15, 1910; "Suffrage Tour Ends in Triumph," July 16, 1910. The Oak Park newspaper *Oak Leaves* published "Grace Wilbur Trout," November 4, 1916. A biography of Trout appears in *NCAB* (1927).

RACHEL E. BOHLMANN