On October 3, 1914, the Cleveland Woman’s Suffrage Party staged a parade of ten thousand men, women, and children from sixty-four Ohio cities to rally support for a suffrage amendment pending in the state legislature. Proudly displaying the suffrage colors of gold and white, marshals on horseback led nurses, teachers, social workers, Yugoslavian and Czech women, factory workers, members of the Men’s Suffrage League, and a handful of African American women through the city streets. In the ranks marched future political activists Marie R. Wing, Mary B. Grossman, Lethia C. Fleming, and Florence E. Allen. Although the state amendment failed in 1914, the parade dramatized women’s new political activism, and when the Nineteenth (woman suffrage) Amendment did pass in 1920, politics replaced religion, charity, and clubwork as women’s route into public life. (See Figure 59.)

The enfranchisement of American women took place during years of progressive reform, and women’s political organizations and women politicians kept reformism alive through the 1920s. Called progressive because of its optimistic faith that change brings progress, the reform movement of the first two decades of this century pursued some goals long sought by women, such as temperance and an end to prostitution, and others that women readily endorsed, such as the protection of working women and children. In general, progressives believed that these reforms could be achieved through the political system, especially the election of sympathetic public officials and
the passage of appropriate legislation. Progressive men also believed that enfranchised women would become a powerful force for reform: so did suffragists.

Cleveland’s yeasty political climate invited women’s participation. Tom L. Johnson, Cleveland’s flamboyant mayor from 1901 to 1909 and a (tardy) supporter of woman suffrage, reformed the city’s welfare and tax systems, revitalized its parks and playgrounds, redesigned its downtown by initiating the Group Plan, and attempted—unsuccessfully—to remake its transit system by instituting a three-cent fare. His lively administration made Cleveland “the best governed city in the country,” according to journalist Lincoln Steffens. From 1912 to 1916 Cleveland’s mayor was Newton D. Baker, a more enthusiastic suffragist who watched the 1914 parade from the reviewing stand.

The most politically active women’s reform organization was the Consumers’ League of Ohio (CLO), founded in 1900 at Goodrich House. Affiliated with the National Consumers League, the organization was dedicated to improving the working conditions of women and children. The officers and executive committee of the Cleveland league were all women, but a few men—including philanthropist Samuel Mather, reformist

FIGURE 59. A float in the June 1914 suffrage parade sponsored by the Woman’s Suffrage Party of Cleveland. Western Reserve Historical Society
Rabbi Moses Gries, and activist Episcopal bishop William A. Leonard—served as honorary vice-presidents.

CLO investigations of women’s working conditions and wages were intended to determine whether a factory or department store should be patronized or boycotted by CLO members. Employers appeared on the league “white list” when they met acceptable standards, which in 1902 meant a six-dollar-a-week minimum wage for experienced department store saleswomen, a ten-hour day, and safe and sanitary workplaces and lunchrooms. Because women and children often worked in the same places, such as the paperbox and candy factories, the league also endorsed safe and healthy working conditions and hour limitations for working children. The CLO published its findings, hoping that employers would want to avoid unfavorable publicity.

Consumer boycotts and publicity, however, proved ineffective, and especially during the presidencies of Myrta L. Jones (1908–15 and 1918–20), the CLO turned to political strategies, lobbying for the passage of state laws regulating the hours, working conditions, and wages of women and children. In 1911 the league hired the famous labor lawyer Louis Brandeis to defend the constitutionality of Ohio’s fifty-four-hour work week. Three years before, in Muller v. Oregon, Brandeis had successfully defended a ten-hour day for working women before the United States Supreme Court (on which he would later serve). In 1916 the CLO committee on legislation endorsed an eight-hour day for women but lamented that the state legislature was “a notably reactionary one.” The league’s 1919 annual report summarized its political agenda: to promote protective legislation for women in industry, to abolish child labor and night work for women in factories, and to establish a minimum wage for women.

When the suffrage movement took shape in Cleveland in the 1910s, many of its earliest supporters—including Belle Sherwin, Myrta L. Jones, and Marie Jenney (Mrs. Frederic) Howe—came from the CLO. They had learned that politicians are far more responsive to voters than to the voteless.

In 1869 the city had hosted the founding convention of the American Woman Suffrage Association, the moderate wing of the suffrage movement, and the organization met in Cleveland the next year as well. In 1890 the American Woman Suffrage Association merged with the more radical National Woman Suffrage Association, led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). At this stage, NAWSA strategists sought woman suffrage by amending state constitutions. Five states, most in the West, enfranchised women this way by 1910.

Although a few Cleveland women’s clubs had discussed—but not endorsed—suffrage, not until 1910 and the formation of a local branch of the National College Equal Suffrage League did Cleveland women organize for the vote. Shortly afterward, inspired by the possibility of amending the Ohio constitution to
enfranchise women and by the presence of Elizabeth Hauser, suffrage organizer and former secretary to Tom L. Johnson, the Cleveland Woman’s Suffrage Party was formed.

When Ohio women succeeded in getting a suffrage amendment on the ballot in 1912, Cleveland suffragists spoke bravely from open touring cars and soapboxes. They also sought support from the city’s ethnic voters with posters in many languages, and aided by trade unionist Rose Schneiderman, they spoke to workers in factories and shops. Nevertheless, the suffrage amendment was defeated in the November elections, as it was two years later. In 1917, when the Ohio legislature signed a bill giving women the right to vote in presidential elections, opponents quickly rallied and engineered a referendum of dubious legality, which overturned the bill. (See Figure 60.)

The opposition to suffrage was fervent and well financed, often by distillers and brewers, who feared that enfranchised women would vote them out of business. (They were voted out of business anyway by the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1919, even before women got the vote.) The Ohio Association Opposed to Woman’s Suffrage had many wealthy members, published its own “anti” literature, and sponsored public debates with suffragists, in which the “antis” argued—as they probably believed—that woman suffrage would ruin home, family, and traditional American life. (See Figure 61.)

To the contrary, claimed the suffragists. Voting was simply an extension into the political arena of woman’s historic responsibilities: far from destroying the home and family, suffrage would preserve them and expand their virtuous influence into the polling place. Suffrage billboards carried messages such as “Say, Mother, Don’t You Care Enough About My School To Vote?” (See Figure 62.)

The cause of woman suffrage got an unanticipated boost from the United States’ entrance into World War I in April 1917: women’s support for the war legitimized their claims to political equality. Cleveland mayor Harry L. Davis appointed a Mayor’s Advisory War Committee to coordinate local efforts to raise funds, conserve food, and Americanize the city’s large immigrant population. Members included Georgie Leighton Norton, head of the Cleveland School of Art, and suffrage leader Belle Sherwin.

Women’s organizations quickly threw themselves behind the war effort. A short-lived magazine, Cleveland Women: Official Publication of the Womanhood of Cleveland, cheer-led for the war and women’s war-related activities. Suffragists who had raised funds for political rallies and distributed handbills urging votes for women now sold war bonds and distributed pamphlets urging women to can food. The Sorosis abandoned its pursuit of culture to sell bonds and knit clothes for servicemen. The Federation of Women’s Clubs organized victory gardens and
FIGURE 60. The headquarters for the Cleveland suffrage movement at the Bulkley Building in 1912. The franchise would not be extended to women until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920. Western Reserve Historical Society

FIGURE 61. Suffrage leader Lucia (Mrs. Malcolm) McBride exercises her long-awaited right to vote in the early 1920s. Western Reserve Historical Society
supported liberty loans. The YWCA housed a unit of the Women’s Land Army, who plowed fields and planted crops to feed American and Allied troops. The CLO expanded its monitoring of women workers by serving as the Committee on Women and Children in Industry for Ohio. Hundreds of women volunteered at the Red Cross headquarters. (See Figure 63.)

Almost 41,000 Clevelanders served in the armed services, and among the first to the front were the nurses of the Lakeside Unit, formally designated U.S. Army Base Hospital No. 4. The
unit was organized by Dr. George W. Crile of Lakeside Hospital, who had led a surgical team of volunteers to serve in France in 1915. The unit's 26 medical officers and 64 nurses arrived in Rouen, France, at the end of May 1917, helping to staff a British hospital there. In August 1918, 61 members of the Lakeside Unit staffed a hospital in the Bois de la Placys, near the Meuse-Argonne offensive. By the war's end in 1919, the unit included 124 nurses, headed first by Grace Allison, who was succeeded by Elizabeth Folckemer. (See Figure 64.)

The war expanded professional opportunities for women. Married women entered the public school classrooms when the historic requirement that female teachers be single was waived. Faced with a rapidly dwindling supply of male students (down from 115 in April 1917 to 46 in October 1918), the Law School of Western Reserve University began to admit women in 1918. So did the university's medical school.

Thousands of women entered industry. The Women's Division of the State-City Labor Exchange found that fifty-four iron and steel plants which before the war had employed 2,575 women now employed 4,165. Women worked in hardware and
munitions plants and as telegraph messengers, elevator operators, and freight checkers. Many companies, hastening to fill war orders, violated child labor laws and the fifty-hour-a-week law for women in industry, according to the CLO. The league bulletin noted with dismay the dangerous conditions in which many women worked: “colored women, dressed in overalls and high heeled shoes, employed as engine cleaners and engine pullers [in the railroad yards]. In one scrap iron yard, Slavic and Italian women sort iron, stooping, lifting, and throwing heavy pieces of iron.” More dismaying, “In all these cases, women are paid less than men.” (See Figure 65.)

Wartime workers also prompted a controversial strike. Sixty-four women had been hired as streetcar conductors by the Cleveland Street Railway Company. Local 268 of the Amalgamated Association of Street, Electric Railway, and Motor Coach Employees of America, fearing competition for its male members, announced a walkout in December 1918 if the women were not fired. The women conductors had formed their own

FIGURE 64. Soldiers heading “over there” depart the Cleveland station as the crowd watches in 1917. Western Reserve Historical Society
FIGURE 65. Women weave and sew fabric for airplane wings during the first World War. Western Reserve Historical Society

union, the Association of Women Street Railway Employees, led by Laura Prince. The legality of their employment was eventually upheld by the War Labor Board, but the railway company ignored the board’s ruling on the grounds that the war was over, and the women lost their jobs. Unlike the striking textile workers in 1911, however, the female streetcar conductors received support from the suffrage organization and the legal services of lawyer Florence Allen because suffragists wanted working-class support for their own cause.

And the cause of suffrage did triumph. In June 1919 Ohio legislators passed a state presidential suffrage bill and ratified the Nineteenth Amendment. In August 1920 all adult American women became voters.

Although the political conservatism and pro-business Republican administrations of the 1920s effectively dampened
much of the prewar progressive enthusiasm, in Cleveland and elsewhere newly enfranchised women continued to work for reform.

Political education and leadership came from the League of Women Voters (LWV), founded in 1919 on the eve of the passage of the suffrage amendment by Carrie Chapman Catt, president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association. Cleveland suffragists formed the local LWV in April 1920 when the Cuyahoga County Woman's Suffrage Party voted to disband and turned over the names of its 80,000 members to the new organization.

Led by seasoned politicos such as Belle Sherwin and Lucia (Mrs. Malcolm L.) McBride, the LWV set out to encourage women to get to the polls and into politics. Sherwin announced that the league's first task was to register at least half of the estimated 100,000 women eligible to vote in Cuyahoga County. By the end of October, 41,416 women had been registered. LWV publications also offered advice and moral support to women serving as officials in the November election: "Do not be intimidated. Remember you are a duly accredited official." In keeping with the guidelines of the national organization, the Cleveland league remained nonpartisan, endorsing issues, not candidates, and became the first to poll candidates on issues and publish their responses, now standard LWV strategy. Sherwin's political experience and abilities were rewarded by the national League of Women Voters, which she served as first vice-president from 1921 to 1924, and president from 1924 to 1934. (See Figure 66.)

The Cleveland LWV continued to support a progressive reform agenda throughout the 1920s, enthusiastically campaigning for a city manager plan and proportional representation in city council, which the league believed fostered good (nonpartisan) government. The local league also worked for the passage of the federal Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Act, which became law in 1921; a child labor amendment to the federal constitution; a state minimum wage for women; and a more stringent school attendance law. When the National Woman's Party introduced an equal rights amendment into Congress in 1923, the LWV, and most other women's organizations including the YWCA and the WCTU, opposed it (and continued to oppose it until the 1970s) because the amendment endangered protective legislation for women.

Sherwin and other suffragists had founded the Women's City Club in 1916 because women were excluded from the City Club of Cleveland. The Women's City Club, like the LWV, sought to promote women's interest in civic and public issues. It had not officially endorsed suffrage but did enthusiastically support the war effort by selling Liberty Bonds and opening a lunchroom for working mothers and their children. After the suffrage victory, the club threw itself into political activities because "city government is city housekeeping, and women know about that." Like the LWV, the club endorsed not candidates but issues such as the passage of city levies for parks and schools, tougher
BELLE SHERWIN (20 Mar. 1869–9 July 1955) was the daughter of wealthy industrialist Henry Sherwin, the founder of the Sherwin-Williams Co. After her graduation from Wellesley College in 1890, Sherwin studied history at Oxford University for a year and then taught history in a Boston private school. She returned to Cleveland in 1900 and became the first president of the Consumers League of Ohio. She was an activist who served in several social welfare organizations, including the Visiting Nurses Association and the Federation for Charity and Philanthropy, as well as with the suffrage movement and the League of Women Voters.

enforcement of smoke-abatement laws, the city manager plan, and proportional representation. In the progressive tradition, the club maintained a particular interest in women and children, establishing child nutrition clinics and successfully pressuring for a Women’s Bureau in the Cleveland Police Department.

The Women’s City Club, the LWV, the CLO, and the YWCA were among the organizers of the Women’s Council for the Prevention of War, which on May 18, 1924, staged a march of five thousand women calling for world peace. More than two hundred women’s organizations sent delegations. The LWV had earlier endorsed world disarmament and the World Court, reflecting the general American disillusionment with war and the long-standing interest in peace activities of Carrie Chapman Catt and other suffrage leaders. LWV historian Virginia Clark Abbott boasted that almost every league member braved public allegations of being under Bolshevik influence to march in that parade. (See Figure 67.)
Cleveland women also braved public disapproval when they took on another progressive cause, the legalization of birth control, and founded the city’s first family-planning organization. The distribution of birth-control technology and information had been prohibited since 1873 by the Comstock Law, but by the 1910s changing sexual behavior and the desire for smaller families had inspired narrow but vocal opposition to these prohibitions. Margaret Sanger, national leader of the birth-control movement, was often arrested and once jailed for writing and speaking on behalf of legalizing birth control. Two Cleveland women, Mrs. Charles Brush and Mrs. Brooks Shepard, decided to give out birth-control information themselves at the prenatal clinic at which they volunteered. Brush quit when she was forbidden to distribute the information; Shepard was told to leave soon afterwards.

In 1923 the two women were joined by several others at the Women’s City Club, where they organized the Maternal Health Clinic. Their attempts to persuade the city’s hospitals to provide contraceptive information at outpatient clinics were frustrated.
FIGURE 68. A campaign flyer for Marie Remington Wing, who, along with Helen Green, was one of the first women elected to Cleveland City Council in 1923. Western Reserve Historical Society

MORTON, MARION (5 Nov. 1885—27 Dec. 1982) left Bryn Mawr College after three years because of the financial difficulties of her father, Federal Judge Francis J. Wing, and went to work for the Cleveland YWCA, visiting factories and organizing clubs of factory women. While on city council, Wing worked to establish a Women’s Bureau in the Cleveland Police Department. After losing the council seat in 1927, Wing went into private law practice, but she returned to public life in 1933 when she was appointed to the Cuyahoga County Relief Commission. From 1937 to 1953, she served as attorney to the regional Social Security Board.

FIGURE 69. Judge Mary B. Grossman at her bench in the 1940s. Western Reserve Historical Society

MARY B. GROSSMAN (10 June 1879—27 Jan. 1977) was one of nine children of Louis and Fannie Engle Grossman. After attending Cleveland public schools, Grossman became a stenographer in her cousin’s law office, where she determined to become a lawyer herself. In 1912 she graduated from Cleveland Law School and was admitted to the Ohio bar.

by local ordinances and public hostility, since Clevelanders—quite correctly—associated birth control with political radicalism. (In 1916 B. Reitman, lover and manager of anarchist Emma Goldman, had paid a $1,000 fine and served six months in the Cleveland workhouse for a speech on birth control.) In 1928, therefore, the women organized the Maternal Health Association and opened an independent clinic. The first staff put their own careers at risk: former public health nurse Rosina Volk, who served at the clinic until 1947, and Dr. Ruth Robshaw Rauschkolb, a recent graduate of Western Reserve University School of Medicine. Dr. Rauschkolb was succeeded by Drs. Sarah Marcus and Leona V. Glover. The clinic initially offered services only to married women with serious health problems, but subsequently extended them to women needing contraceptives for economic or social reasons. The clinic had an advisory board of prominent male doctors and received substantial financial support from Charles F. Brush, who was interested in eugenics and population control. The clinic further expanded services, opening a west-side branch during the 1930s when the Depression made family limitation more acceptable and when the federal government began to relax its prohibitions against birth control.

The suffrage movement and the League of Women Voters effectively politicized thousands of Cleveland women and launched successful political careers for some. On August 20, 1920, the day that the suffrage amendment passed, two women announced their candidacies for Cleveland City Council: Mrs. Anna Herbruck and Mrs. Isabelle Alexander. Both lost, but in 1923 Marie Remington Wing and Helen Green did win seats on the council. (See Figure 68.)

Wing had gained valuable political experience and allies in women’s organizations. She had joined the growing suffrage movement and the Women’s City Club. In 1922 she left her job as general secretary to the YWCA to attend night classes at Cleveland Law School, affiliated with Baldwin Wallace College, and to become executive secretary of the CLO. Throughout the 1920s, Wing acted as its lobbyist for child welfare and protective legislation. In 1925 Wing was reelected to city council, and with the women’s organizations she supported the Women’s Bureau of the Police Department. She lost her seat in 1927.

Mary B. Grossman was also a suffragist, a founder of the Women’s City Club, and a member of the League of Women Voters. In 1921 Grossman lost her bid for a municipal judgeship, but in 1923 she ran again and won a seat on the bench, which she occupied until her retirement at age eighty in 1959. In 1918 she became one of the first two women admitted to the American Bar Association. During her long tenure on the bench, she earned a reputation for being a tough judge, taking a particular interest in the “morals court,” which she organized in 1926 to hear cases involving domestic violence, vice, and prostitution. (See Figure 69.)
Vote for Marie R. Wing Council for 3rd Dist.
You can depend on her to represent You in Council.
Although she never ran for political office, Lethia C. (Mrs. Thomas) Fleming became a power in the Cleveland Republican Party and the African American community. She joined the Cleveland suffrage movement, marching in the 1914 parade, campaigned in 1920, 1924, 1928, and 1936 on behalf of Republican presidential candidates, served on the Cuyahoga County Republican Executive Committee, and organized the National Association of Republican Women. (See Figure 70.)

Two women were elected to the Ohio legislature in 1922. Nettie Mackenzie Clapp became the first woman to sit in the Ohio House of Representatives from Cuyahoga County. Active in the suffrage movement, she served three successive terms as a Republican and as chairman of the house committee on benevolent and penal institutions. Republican Maude Comstock Waitt was elected four times to the Ohio Senate. Waitt also did her political apprenticeship in the suffrage movement and in the Lakewood City Council, to which she was elected in 1921 and 1922. She retired from the Ohio Senate in 1930.

FIGURE 70. Lethia C. Fleming, social activist and founder of the Cleveland Urban League, ca. 1940.

LETHIA COUSINS FLEMING (7 Nov. 1876–25 Sept. 1963) had joined the suffrage movement in West Virginia before her move to Cleveland and subsequent marriage in 1912. A former schoolteacher, Fleming became a social worker with the County Child Welfare Board, where she worked for 20 years. Fleming got out of partisan politics because of her membership in the Bahai movement but remained extremely active in the black community. She was a founder of the Cleveland Urban League, served as president of the Home for Aged Colored People, served on the board of the Phillis Wheatley Association, and belonged to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Association for Colored Women, the National Council of Negro Women, the Elks, and the Glenara Temple.
The most prominent of this first generation of women politicians was Florence E. Allen. Appointed judge of the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in 1934, and in 1958 made chief judge of the Sixth Circuit, she was the first woman chief judge of any court. Allen began her political career as a stump speaker and debater for suffrage, and in 1917 she successfully defended before the Ohio Supreme Court the right of the city of East Cleveland to grant its women municipal suffrage. A loyal Democrat, Allen was appointed assistant county prosecutor in 1919. In 1920, as soon as women were enfranchised, she was elected to common pleas court, the first woman in the United States to be elected to a judgeship. (An early endorsement of Allen's candidacy by the LWV, in which she was an active member, was unauthorized and never to be repeated.) In 1922 and again in 1928 she was elected to the Ohio Supreme Court. In 1937–38 she presided over the Sixth Circuit Court's decision that the Tennessee Valley Authority was constitutional. (See Figure 71.)

FIGURE 71. Judge Florence Allen in her law library. In 1958, Judge Allen became chief judge of the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals, the first woman chief judge of any federal court. Western Reserve Historical Society

FLORENCE E. ALLEN (23 Mar. 1884–12 Sept. 1966) majored in music at the College for Women of Western Reserve University and received a master's degree in political science from Western Reserve in 1908. Because the university's law school did not yet admit women, Allen attended law school at the University of Chicago from 1909 to 1910, but after becoming involved in settlement work in New York City, she received her law degree from New York University in 1913. During the 1920s she became active in the movement to outlaw war and frequently wrote and lectured on international law. She retired from the bench in 1959.
Winning—and using—the ballot gave Cleveland women a new public visibility which they never relinquished. In the next decades, however, political activism would take a back seat to economic necessity as the city and the nation faced the challenges of the Great Depression and World War II.