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ADELE CLARK:
SUFFRAGIST AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS PIONEER FOR VIRGINIA

AN HONORS THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

BACHELOR OF ARTS

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UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study chronicles the life of Adele Clark, a political activist, writer, civic educator and artist. Over the span of her one hundred year life (September 27, 1882-June 4, 1983) her passion for improving society led her to campaign for suffrage for women, the rights of children, and increased opportunities for all mankind. In addition, Adele Clark's personality is explored to reveal what she was like as an individual and to explain the reasons behind her actions, which were a force for change. This work is based heavily on research in the Adele Clark Papers, which are housed at Virginia Commonwealth University.

ABBREVIATIONS

A.C.	Adele Clark
ERA	Equal Rights Amendment
ESLV	Equal Suffrage League of Virginia
n.d.	No Date
NLWV	National League of Women Voters
NWP	National Woman's Party
V.C.U.	Virginia Commonwealth University
VLWV	Virginia League of Women Voters

In 1870, women in the Commonwealth of Virginia began organizing a campaign for the right to vote when Anna Whitehead launched the Virginia State Woman Suffrage Association. As the group's president from 1870 to 1872, Whitehead tried unsuccessfully to win public support for woman suffrage. She wrote articles for the local press, invited national suffrage leaders to speak in Richmond, and attempted without success to vote in the November 1871 municipal election. Despite her efforts, the movement gained few followers. Journalist Orra Gray, a native of Lynchburg, Virginia, was likewise disappointed in her attempts to awaken the suffrage spirit twenty years later in the 1890s.¹

Far more significant was the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, formed in 1909 by a small group of Richmond activists. Adele Clark, a Richmond artist, was one of the founders of this organization. Who is Adele Clark one may ask? What impact could this largely unknown suffragist possibly have exercised? She is never mentioned in standard American history or political science textbooks as a "suffrage crusader." This study is an attempt to "remove the shroud of mystery" surrounding Adele Clark. What impact Adele Clark had on the woman suffrage movement through her work in the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, the mark she left on Virginia, and a little bit about her personality will be explored in hopes of showing that local and state leaders played key roles in the eventual success of the suffrage movement.

Adele Clark was born September 27, 1882 in Montgomery, Alabama, the second of three children. Her father, Robert Clark, worked for the railroad. In pursuing this career, Robert relocated at least five times, accepting positions with several different

¹ "From Municipal Housekeeping to Political Equality: The Virginia Suffrage Movement, 1870-1920," pamphlet, The Library of Virginia, 1995.

railroads as the industry expanded across the country. Each time Clark moved, he took his family with him. Therefore, Adele lived in several cities before the family permanently moved to Richmond, Virginia in 1894. Adele's mother, Estelle Goodman Clark, supplemented the family income by teaching music.²

Soon after this final relocation, disaster struck the Clark family. Adele's father had a stroke that left him partially paralyzed, in ill health and unable to work. Edward Goodman, Adele's uncle, assumed responsibility for the family. He paid for Robert's medical bills and made sure Adele and her two sisters received a quality education.

Adele graduated from Miss Virginia Randolph Ellett's school (now St. Catherine's) in 1901. After graduation, she began working as a stenographer at the Richmond Chamber of Commerce for seven dollars a week to earn money for art lessons.³ Early in her childhood, Adele exhibited talent in the field of art and her parents encouraged her to develop this ability. Adele's persistence paid off in the form of a scholarship to the Chase School of Art in New York in 1906. Her work focused on depicting urban people in an urban environment.⁴ Adele finished her studies and returned to Richmond in early 1908. She began teaching and painting at the Art Club of Richmond, the Society for Crippled Children, and the Adult Recreation Center for the Richmond Department of Parks and Recreation, occasionally supplementing her income by doing clerical work.⁵ In 1917, the Richmond Art Club unexpectedly closed its doors,

² "Adele Clark Cast a Long Shadow," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 12 June 1983.

³ Biographical sketch, n.d., Adele Clark (A.C.) Papers, Virginia Commonwealth University (V.C.U.).

⁴ "Adele Clark Cast a Long Shadow," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 12 June 1983.

⁵ *Ibid.*

but Adele and a close friend named Nora Houston, opened an art school in Richmond on Linden Row several months later.⁶ Her philosophy of art was clear. Adele stated that:

The artist is a vital and integral part of society; the artist's craft should reflect the totality of the human condition, both good and bad. Moreover, the best and only way to achieve these goals is through total involvement and participation, by the artist, in her or his society, in life. The artist who works only for self and keeps aloof from life is not likely to create anything vital.⁷

Adele's passion for art led her to become an "art activist" in Richmond. In 1916, she participated in a successful lobbying campaign to create a state Art Commission⁸ and fought vigorously for the establishment of the Chevalier Quesnay de Beaufort Academy of Arts and Sciences.⁹ Adele "came into a city that needed to be awakened to the joys of art, and she banged the drum until it listened."¹⁰

Adele's art activism, coupled with her teaching, placed her in contact with important political figures and Virginia suffragists. Prior to coming into contact with these persons, Adele stated that she "hadn't thought a great deal about it [woman suffrage] before 1909."¹¹ These meetings were the springboard that catapulted Adele into the woman suffrage movement.

One such meeting was between Adele and two women she taught at the Art Club. Anne Fletcher and Harriette Taliaferro called Wyoming and Colorado home respectively,

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Adele Clark and Nora Houston, an open letter to Virginia high schools and boarding schools, 27 May 1916, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

⁹ "The Dream of Quesnay de Beaufort," *Richmond News Leader*, 26 May 1917.

¹⁰ Edmund Archer, "Nomination Form for the Richmond Arts Council Distinguished Service Award," 8 March 1979, A.C. Papers, V.C.U., p. 2.

¹¹ "Suffragist, 96, Recalls Clearly," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 26 January 1979.

states that allowed women to vote. The two women shared their voting experiences with Adele, and perhaps this alerted her to the suffrage movement.¹²

Adele's first leap into the suffrage cause was in 1909 when she signed a petition in support of a constitutional amendment for equal suffrage for women. By this time, a viable woman suffrage campaign had begun to take shape in Virginia, culminating with the establishment of the Equal Suffrage League in November 1909.¹³ Two early leaders, Ellen Glasgow and Mrs. Charles Meredith addressed a meeting of the Art Club. While the records do not show how many members attended the meeting, only four signed the suffrage petition.¹⁴ Suffrage for women was not a popular cause in the Commonwealth at this time, and apparently some members of the Art Club resigned their memberships over the matter. Adele did not understand why so much controversy surrounded the right to vote for women. She simply stated, "I thought women ought to be allowed to vote."¹⁵ After signing the petition, Adele became increasingly involved in the suffrage campaign, an involvement that would last for over fifty years.¹⁶

On November 20, 1909, Adele attended a meeting where the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia was born. The members elected her recording secretary, meaning she was responsible for keeping records of all the League meetings as well as storing

¹² L. Moody Sims, Jr., "Adele Clark: Painting and Politics," *The Richmond Literature and History Quarterly* 2, No. 2 (Fall 1979): 39-41.

¹³ Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Ida Histed Harper, eds., *The History of Woman Suffrage* (New York: J.J. Little and Ives Company, 1922), p. 665.

¹⁴ Adele Clark Interview by Winston Broadfoot, 28 February 1964, Richmond, Virginia, Interview # 4007 (G-14-2), transcript, p. 2, Southern Oral History Program, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill, North Carolina.

¹⁵ Quoted in *AARP News Bulletin*, 24, No. 2 February 1983, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

¹⁶ "Adele Clark Cast a Long Shadow," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 12 June 1983.

documents and papers of the League.¹⁷ Adele was only one of a handful of single members of the organization; most of her colleagues were married to prominent men.¹⁸ Because of the strong anti-suffrage presence in Virginia, Adele and the other members of the group attended the meetings in secret,¹⁹ and when the business of the day was completed, the women left at different times so as not to attract attention.²⁰ Despite these painstaking measures, nasty rumors spread throughout Richmond and newspapers printed editorials that scolded the women for being involved in such an endeavor. Many criticisms came from the mouths of the prominent men whose wives were members of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia.²¹

Between 1909 and 1913, Adele Clark and the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia kept a relatively low profile. Their philosophy was to politely demand the vote as their natural right, but they also emphasized it was a tool by which they would feminize, strengthen, civilize, and improve the family, government, politics, society, even the world.²² They recruited new members by advancing the notion that giving women the right to vote would make for “better babies, better homes, better schools.”²³ According to Adele, “The ballot will not invade the home; it will only connect the home with the

¹⁷ *Yearbook of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia*, Richmond, Virginia, 1910, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.; *Richmond News Leader*, Suffrage Edition, 2 May 1914.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ “Art for Man’s Sake,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 5 February 1943.

²⁰ Adele Clark Interview.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Equal Suffrage League of Virginia (ESLV) Letter to prospective members, n.d., A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

²³ “Twelve Reasons Why Mothers Should Have the Vote,” ESLV broadside, 1916, A.C. Papers, V.C.U. See Appendix One for the text of the broadside.

State, tending to make a better State and better homes.”²⁴ They advanced this message by holding small public meetings, passing out literature at State and County fairs, and by attending pro-suffrage rallies and parades in neighboring areas such as North Carolina and Washington D.C.²⁵ As is clear from the quoted texts, Virginia suffragists wore the “traditional banner” in their advance for the right to vote. They did not want to eliminate the conventional family; instead, they contended extending the ballot box to women would strengthen it. Based on the conservatism of Virginia, this was the only argument the suffragists could have used in order to be taken somewhat seriously. If a more “radical” approach had been undertaken, the movement would have made no gains in the Commonwealth due to the content of the message.

The year 1912 was witness to the first vote on a woman suffrage amendment to the Virginia Constitution. Delegate Hill Montague of Richmond sponsored the measure. Adele vigorously lobbied for passage of this bill. She submitted pamphlets and broadsides to the members of the Virginia House of Delegates. She wrote numerous editorials, displayed publicly her pro-suffrage artwork and delivered speeches supporting the passage of this bill. The *Richmond Times Dispatch*, an anti-suffrage newspaper, took notice of the work Adele and other supporters of this legislation had done by printing the following news story:

Those who stand for the progressive element in the State – the younger men of the new generation and many of the most clear-headed and logical leaders among the older members – have been deeply impressed...and are giving their unqualified support to the bill.²⁶

²⁴ Quoted in Suzanne Lebsack, *Virginia Women 1600-1945, "A Share of Honour"* (Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1987), p. 121.

²⁵ *Roanoke World News*, 8 April 1960.

²⁶ “Leaders Endorse Woman’s Suffrage,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 11 January 1912.

Based on this newspaper quote, one may have expected the vote to be close.

However, the measure was defeated 84 to 12 in a closed session of the House of Delegates.²⁷ In 1914, the House considered the issue again. The vote was 74 to 13.²⁸ In two years, only one vote had been gained.

The main goal of Adele and the League was passage of a state woman suffrage amendment; however, the group was concerned with other issues. Among these included education, equal pay, guardianship of children, and an eight-hour work day. On October 23 and 24, 1913, the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia (ESLV) adopted eight resolutions which reflected their program goals.

1. Resolved, that the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia strongly desires to see introduced in the next General Assembly of Virginia a measure providing for the equal guardianship of children by mother and father.²⁹
2. Resolved,...equal pay for equal work.
3. Resolved,...an eight-hour working day and a living wage, and the abolition of child labor.
4. Resolved,...that the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia advocate a single standard of morals for men and women.
5. Resolved,...that we cooperate with all organizations seeking to ameliorate present congested and unsanitary housing conditions.
6. Resolved, that we strongly approve the increase of temperance sentiment in Virginia, and will use our influence for its extension.³⁰

²⁷ Stanton and Harper, eds., *The History of Woman Suffrage*, p. 669.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Before 1930, Virginia fathers, not mothers, were the legal guardians of their offspring.

³⁰ Temperance, the movement to abolish drinking and enforce sobriety, was a popular cause championed by many conservative suffrage groups. Temperance workers argued that drinking ruined families and victimized wives and children. Abstaining from liquor would preserve the integrity of the home and retain a high moral standard in society. In 1920, the eighteenth amendment to the Constitution was passed. This prohibited the manufacture, sale and transportation of alcoholic drinks in the United States. However, this measure proved impossible to enforce and in 1933, the eighteenth amendment was repealed by the twenty-first amendment.

7. Resolved,...equal [educational] opportunities for men and women, from the kindergarten through the university.
8. Resolved,...we stand for international arbitration.³¹

Adele was heavily involved in writing editorials to various newspapers throughout the state. The Charlottesville *Daily Progress*, a pro-suffrage newspaper, frequently printed her work, as well as anti-suffrage newspapers such as the Lynchburg *Daily Advance*, Portsmouth *Star*, and the Norfolk *Ledger-Dispatch*.³² Adele took advantage of the *Richmond Times Dispatch's* willingness to cover suffrage news by providing editorials, pamphlets, essays and leaflets.³³ Adele focused on two themes in her writings: (1) the second-class status of Virginia women as compared to women of other states such as Wyoming, Colorado, and Idaho which allowed women to vote and (2) the benefits of extending the ballot box to women.³⁴ In concentrating on these two points, Adele became a serious student of politics and government, reading works by John Locke, Thomas Jefferson and Alexis de Tocqueville.³⁵ Below is an excerpt from an editorial written by Adele and published in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* in 1912:

The proposed woman suffrage amendment to the Constitution of Virginia...has met varying degrees of opposition from people who preface their remarks by saying: 'If women were to vote.' It is as though they said: 'If men were to telephone.' The question of women voting is no more theoretical than railroads, telegraph lines or ocean liners...women do vote...they have voted in this country since 1888...therefore, it is idle speculation to say, 'If women were to vote'...a glance at the laws passed

³¹ "Resolutions Adopted by the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia," 23-24 October 1913, *Virginia Suffrage News* 1, No. 3, February 1915, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

³² Cynthia Kennedy-Haflett, "To Raise Oneself to a Higher Plane: The Political Activism of Adele Clark, 1909-1930" (Master's Thesis, University of Richmond, 1989), p. 49.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ See Appendix Two for an example.

³⁵ "Outline of Political Study," ESLV, n.d., A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

in some of our [suffrage] States...shows that good has resulted from equal suffrage.³⁶

By 1914, the ESLV had grown considerably. In 1910, the group had approximately two hundred members; four years later, the organization boasted over 2,500 members, both men and women.³⁷ The ESLV was averaging four to five public educational meetings each month and its newspaper, *Virginia Suffrage News*, was introduced in 1914. Later that year, Adele helped write and starred in a one-act comedy called "How the Vote Was Won." The play, performed in Richmond's Jefferson Auditorium, was not well received. One reporter objected to having a suffrage petition "thrust in his face" by "girls" who had earlier ushered and served refreshments.³⁸

In 1915, Adele was one of a group of pro-suffrage speakers who met with Governor Henry Stuart to try to convince him of the need for an amendment to the state Constitution allowing women to vote. Adele, representing the ESLV, wanted a state referendum on equal suffrage. The Governor ignored the request.³⁹

In 1916, the ESLV reorganized into the ten Virginia congressional districts, appointing a chairperson for each city or county, and a sub-chair for every magisterial district within each city, as well as the sub-chairperson for every city ward.⁴⁰ Miss Clark was made an "official League speaker." On average, she made three ESLV speeches a

³⁶ *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 8 February 1912.

³⁷ *Virginia Suffrage News*, 1, No. 1 October 1914, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

³⁸ "Play Proves Scheme to Get Votes for Women," *Richmond News Leader*, 19 February 1914.

³⁹ Stanton and Harper, eds., *The History of Woman Suffrage*, p. 667.

⁴⁰ *Yearbook of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia*, Richmond, Virginia, 1916, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

week, a “rather busy schedule.”⁴¹ She spoke in women’s clubs, on street corners, and in parks. By the end of 1916, Adele began appearing with candidates for local and state offices. This recognition gave the woman suffrage movement in Virginia a sense of legitimacy. If these candidates were willing to align themselves with what many Virginians considered a “radical” movement, perhaps more people in the Commonwealth would embrace this cause.

Also in 1916, the first public hearing of a state amendment resolution was held before a joint House and Senate committee. The hearing was two hours long and six representatives of the Equal Suffrage League – Adele Clark, Lila Valentine, Mrs. J.H. Whitmer, Miss Eudora Ramsey, Reverend John Wicker, and E.F. Sheeney – addressed this assembly. According to the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, each member spoke with “passion, dignity, and grace” urging passage of the State suffrage amendment.⁴² The resolution was defeated 51 to 40.⁴³

Adele contributed to the suffrage campaign in other ways besides speaking and writing. Her artist background allowed her to design banners and convention signs, illustrate pamphlets, and create posters and sketches that accompanied speeches. In 1912, Adele created a flag for the Equal Suffrage League, which was used by Virginia delegates in local and national suffrage parades.⁴⁴ The flag bears the seal of Virginia, which depicts a woman with a spear standing over a prostrate man above the state’s Latin

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 11 January 1916.

⁴³ Stanton and Harper, eds., *The History of Woman Suffrage*, p. 669.

⁴⁴ Scrapbook of the ESLV, n.d., A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

motto that translates, “Thus Always to Tyrants.” She also painted the portrait of Mrs. Maude Park, president of the National League of Women Voters.

By 1918, the ESLV and Adele Clark expanded their focus beyond woman suffrage. World War I was raging across the globe and the League suspended some of its activities to support the war effort. Many League members believed that “there would not have been a war had women been participating in government,” meaning if women had been granted the privilege of voting, war would have been avoided.⁴⁵

Adele was heavily involved in the recruitment aspect of the war. She made speeches urging young men to “have a deep sense of patriotic duty” and sign up to fight for the homeland.⁴⁶ However, she later lamented her involvement in recruiting stating, “I felt terribly guilty, for fear they [soldiers Adele had urged to “sign up”] had enlisted on account of my eloquence...I felt terribly responsible.”⁴⁷ After World War I, Adele exhibited pacifist tendencies. She opposed later conflicts in Korea and Vietnam and supported peace-keeping institutions such as the League of Nations and the United Nations.

Adele also worked at Walter Reed Hospital during the war as an occupational therapist. She used art as a rehabilitative therapy for wounded soldiers. In 1922, the state of Virginia passed a law incorporating occupational therapy into the state school

⁴⁵ *Virginia Suffrage News*, 1, No. 1, October 1914, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

⁴⁶ Adele Clark, “Mrs. Lila Meade Valentine,” *The Richmond Literature and History Quarterly*, 2, No. 2 (Fall 1979): 35.

⁴⁷ Quoted in “Art for Man’s Sake,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 5 February 1943.

curriculum. Adele had lobbied diligently for this measure and its quick passage reflects the scope of Adele's influence.⁴⁸

During World War I, the contributions and involvement of women were substantial at both the local and national levels. Thousands of women workers flooded into factories and fields, taking up jobs vacated by men who left the assembly line for the front line.⁴⁹ Women's war work helped convince President Woodrow Wilson to endorse woman suffrage as "a vitally necessary measure," a pay back for the job done by women during this conflict.⁵⁰ The ESLV rejected the notion that women were suddenly worthy of the vote because of their wartime service. At the Seventh Annual Convention of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, held in Richmond between November 12 and 14, 1917, Lila Valentine, the president of the ESLV stated:

Such a notion we utterly repudiate. We base our claims upon the simple fact that we are as completely human as man, and as entirely indispensable in the ideal conduct of a democratic government; we should...be recognized as such by the law of the land, and be given that sign and seal of sovereignty in a democracy -- the ballot.⁵¹

By the close of World War I, most, if not all, United States woman suffrage groups had abandoned the state by state amendment battle; the focus was now exclusively on a Federal amendment. As Adele stated, "by 1918 it was too late to bother with the State Constitution."⁵² Consequently, the literature of the ESLV changed. Adele

⁴⁸ Unidentified newspaper clipping, n.d, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

⁴⁹ Thomas Bailey, David M. Kennedy and Lizabeth Cohen, *The American Pageant* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), p. 729.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Quoted in Kennedy-Haflett, "To Raise Oneself to a Higher Plane: The Political Activism of Adele Clark, 1909-1930," p. 97.

⁵² Adele Clark Interview, p. 11.

and the other writers focused on the increasing number of states that were allowing women to vote and argued that eventually women will be granted this right so why avoid the inevitable? In a broadside entitled “Mr. Legislator, Does it Make Any Difference to You?” Adele asked, “Will you let other states give self-government to Virginia women and you vote to withhold it?”⁵³ Other arguments Adele and her colleagues advanced can be found in this quote from a broadside titled, “Why the Federal Amendment for Woman Suffrage?”

Because the men of the nation have had suffrage secured to them by federal enactment (Article XIV) subject to State qualification. Why should not women ask that same protection under the Constitution?
Because woman suffrage by Federal Amendment does not deny to the State the right to fix the qualifications of the voter, such as poll tax and literacy tests.⁵⁴

These same arguments were used when the campaign for suffrage for blacks was being waged.

After the focus shifted from state amendments to a Federal amendment, the leaders in the ESLV, including Adele, began to grow tired of the “refined Southern woman” approach. The mood shifted to one of frustrated anger, as evidenced by the writings of Adele.⁵⁵ In an undated speech, Adele addressed the repeated refusal of Virginia to amend the State Constitution. She stated that, “Equal suffrage will be won...even though Virginia stands back...[but the State’s] heritage will be one of shame.”⁵⁶

⁵³ “Mr. Legislator, Does It Make Any Difference To You?” ESLV Broadside, 1920, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

⁵⁴ “Why the Federal Amendment for Woman Suffrage?” ESLV broadside, 1917, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

⁵⁵ See Appendix Three for an example.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Unidentified newspaper clipping, n.d., A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

Gaining support for a Federal Amendment in Virginia proved to be just as difficult as drumming up support for a state amendment. One pro-suffrage Confederate veteran told Adele that he would not “vote for anything federal,” because he still bore, “a wound received in Chancellorsville,” and he “...would not vote for the federal government to do anything.”⁵⁷ The attitude of this former soldier is not surprising. The wounds from the Civil War were relatively fresh. Virginia, which had seceded during the conflict, was a strong advocate for state's rights. Having the federal government impose a woman suffrage law was not high on the state's agenda.

The anti-suffrage forces became bolder and more vocal in their attacks as the focus shifted to a Federal amendment. It was reported that legislators were repeatedly threatened and one member of the House was almost kidnapped because of his support for woman suffrage.⁵⁸ The anti-suffrage forces were strong in Virginia. Their origin can be traced back to 1912 when the first meeting of the Virginia Association of Conservative Women Opposed to Suffrage was held in Richmond. This group linked allowing women to vote to the practice of socialism. With its headquarters on Franklin Street, this organization sponsored lectures, wrote editorials, pamphlets, and broadsides and kept track of the activities of the ESLV. Their arguments against allowing women to vote can be divided into five categories: (1) the pedestal argument, (2) religious arguments, (3) racial arguments, (4) state's rights arguments and (5) unwomanly or unsexed woman arguments.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Adele Clark Interview, p. 42.

⁵⁸ Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1959), p. 322.

⁵⁹ Kennedy-Haflett, “To Raise Oneself to a Higher Plane: The Political Activism of Adele Clark, 1909-1930,” p. 76.

The pedestal argument stated that women were naturally and intellectually inferior to men. Women's place was in the home and in certain social activities such as the church, social work and the like. Only men were supposed to concern themselves with public affairs; women were too moral and too "clean" to dirty themselves with these matters.

The religious argument advanced the idea that allowing women the privilege of voting was contrary to the laws of nature and God. Often, the teachings of Saint Paul were cited as proof of this contention.⁶⁰ One unidentified minister was quoted as saying, "Almighty God forbid the day that Virginia shall adopt this suffrage heresy and drag her women down to the soiling cesspool of political strife."⁶¹

The racial argument is quite complex. Proponents of this line of thinking may not have been opposed to allowing white women the vote, but they were against allowing women of color the right to cast a ballot. With the ratification of the "Civil War Amendments" (13th, 14th, and 15th), voting laws could not be passed which blatantly discriminated against people of color.⁶² Virginia, as well as many other states, was upset that black men were now being allowed to vote. With this anger in mind, they did not want to have to extend the ballot box to women of color. Since Virginia could not pass a law that stated "Only women of Caucasian decent are allowed to vote," anti-suffrage members took the position of denying all women the privilege of voting. Adele, while

⁶⁰ See the following verses in the Holy Bible: I Corinthians 12:34-35; Ephesians 5:22-6:4; I Timothy 2:9-15; I Peter 3:1-7.

⁶¹ "Goals Weren't the Same for First Suffragists," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 13 January 1985.

⁶² Literacy tests, the poll tax and the like were discriminatory, but whites could be affected by these laws as well as non-whites.

opposed to all of the arguments used by the anti-suffrage forces, was particularly angered by this mindset. In an undated interview, Adele made the following statement:

That whole Negro question was dragged into the woman's suffrage question, as it has been in every bit of progress in the South. It's dragged in [on] compulsory education; it's dragged in on things that it has no particular connection with. Until we can eradicate...the tendency to drag in the race question on every possible political question, I don't see how we're ever going to make much progress.⁶³

The state's rights argument stated that the Federal Government would be overstepping its bounds if it passed an amendment granting suffrage to women. Often citing Amendment X to the Constitution,⁶⁴ many argued that passing a woman suffrage amendment would be an "awful example of...a breach in the relation of our government powers -- State and Federal."⁶⁵

The final argument was an attempt to publicly disgrace and humiliate pro-suffrage women. Advancers of the unwomanly or unsexed contention claimed that women who fought for suffrage were either sexually "frigid" or sexually promiscuous. One "gentleman" contented that if suffrage for women became a reality, the world would be reduced to "free love and childless, flat-chested creatures who would be self-sufficient. Men would become dispensable."⁶⁶ Others claimed that suffragists were mentally unbalanced, anti-male or gay.⁶⁷

⁶³ Quoted in Kennedy-Haflett, "To Raise Oneself to a Higher Plane: The Political Activism of Adele Clark, 1909-1930," p. 80. For the ESLV's stance on the Negro issue, see Appendix Four.

⁶⁴ The tenth amendment to the Constitution states the following: "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people." See Sidney M. Milkis and Michael Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776 to 1993* (Washington D.C.: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1994), p. 448.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Harry St. George Tucker, *Woman Suffrage by Constitutional Amendment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1916), p. 50.

⁶⁶ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), p. 262.

measure by June 1919.⁷² Only one Virginia Congressman, Republican Bascom Slemp of southwestern Virginia, voted in favor of the measure.⁷³ Before the amendment could take effect, it had to be ratified by thirty-six of the forty-eight state legislatures.

In 1919, a special session of the Virginia General Assembly was held. ESLV leaders, hoping that more pro-suffrage candidates would gain seats in the upcoming fall elections, decided not to push for ratification of the Federal amendment during this session.⁷⁴ Despite a pledge from Governor Westmoreland Davis that the amendment would not be presented, in fact, it was in August of 1919 because of the receipt of a telegram from President Woodrow Wilson urging the Virginia legislature to consider the matter. The House voted 61 to 21 to reject the amendment. The Senate did not consider the matter in the 1919 session.⁷⁵

Beginning in 1920, the ESLV waged a massive campaign for ratification of the Federal amendment. The results of the fall 1919 elections were not what Adele and the ESLV had hoped, so they brought in a nationally known suffrage leader to try to persuade the Virginia legislators. On January 21, Carrie Chapman Catt, the president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and a founder of the Daughters of the American Revolution, addressed a joint session of the Virginia House and Senate. Each

⁷² In order to change the Constitution, a simple majority vote is not sufficient. The most common procedure for amending the Constitution is for two-thirds of the members of each House of Congress to vote for an amendment. Then, three-fourths of the state legislatures have to approve the proposal by a simple majority in order for it to be added to the Constitution. All but one of the amendments, the twenty-first, have been approved in this way. Amendments do not require the signature of the President nor can they be vetoed by the President. For all of the methods of amending the Constitution, see Article 5 in the Constitution.

⁷³ *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 11 January 1918. In 1919, Virginia had nine members in the House and two representatives in the Senate.

⁷⁴ The Virginia General Assembly was scheduled to meet again in 1920.

⁷⁵ *Richmond News Leader*, 4 September 1919.

member of the Virginia legislature, upon arrival at the Capital, found on his desk pictures of Mrs. Catt and Frederick Douglass⁷⁶ with an anonymous note accusing Mrs. Catt of being a Negro-lover, and advocate of free love and a Bolshevist.⁷⁷ Despite Adele's and the ESLV's lobbying efforts, on February 6, 1920, the Senate voted 24 to 16 to reject the nineteenth amendment. Six days later, the House voted down the amendment, 62 to 22.⁷⁸

Virginia's refusal to ratify the amendment did not prevent other states from approving the proposal. On August 26, 1920, Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to ratify the amendment. Later that day, Secretary of State Robert Lansing officially proclaimed its ratification. The nineteenth amendment to the Constitution states the following: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."⁷⁹ By adding this amendment to the Constitution, neither the United States, nor any state, can prevent a citizen from voting in any election solely because of one's gender. In addition, Congress has the power to pass laws that will make this amendment effective.

The ratification of the nineteenth amendment brought an end to the active, relentless eleven-year battle for the vote waged by Adele Clark and the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia. The League maintained that the struggle had been "brought to a

⁷⁶ Frederick Douglass was an abolitionist and reformer. An escaped slave, he worked to aid fugitive slaves and championed women's rights.

⁷⁷ Kennedy-Haflett, "To Raise Oneself to a Higher Plane: The Political Activism of Adele Clark, 1909-1930," p. 104.

⁷⁸ *Journal of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia*, 1920, pp. 65, 173.

⁷⁹ Milkis and Nelson, *The American Presidency: Origins and Development, 1776 to 1993*, p. 451.

successful conclusion,” so it “cheerfully went out of business in 1920.”⁸⁰ However, was the fight successful? Virginia was not one of the thirty-six states who ratified the nineteenth amendment in 1920; in fact, Virginia would not pass the measure until 1952. The ESLV’s battle to win the hearts and minds of the citizens of Virginia and its legislators failed. At its peak public support for woman suffrage, which included both men and women, was estimated to be less than thirty percent.⁸¹ Over an eight-year period (1912-1920), only ten pro-suffrage votes were gained in the House; support in the Senate remained virtually unchanged. The ESLV can be viewed as both a success and a failure. The main goal of the League was achieved; women of Virginia were allowed to vote in local, state and national elections by August of 1920. However, the state of Virginia itself played an insignificant role in the realization of this goal.

With the dissolution of the ESLV, Adele plunged into a new activity -- civic education. Even before women gained the right to vote, Adele was beginning to become involved in voter education programs. In April of 1920, she attended a seminar at the University of Virginia that addressed issues such as voter registration, the legal status of women, and related subjects.⁸²

November 10, 1920 was witness to an historic meeting held in the Virginia State Senate Chamber. Broadsides had announced the meeting urging all Virginia women to attend and help outline policies “for the welfare of Virginia, and the advancement of the

⁸⁰ Press release issued by “The Custodial Committee of the Records of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia,” n.d., A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

⁸¹ Stanton and Harper, eds., *The History of Woman Suffrage*, p. 672.

⁸² Adele Clark Interview, pp. 14, 18-20.

various phases of her life most interesting to women.”⁸³ At this meeting, Adele offered several resolutions, all of which were adopted:

1. That all members present agree to and carry out any task to which they were appointed by acting President, Mrs. John H. Lewis;
2. That the ESLV form an organizational committee to draft the constitution and proposed budget for a new women’s organization;
3. That the new organization be affiliated with the National League of Women Voters, that it be non-partisan, that it have educational and legislative programs, and that it be incorporated.⁸⁴

From these resolutions, the Virginia League of Women Voters (VLWV) was born. The VLWV was described as “a civic organization with the responsibility of being informed on all matters pertaining to citizenship and civic consciousness.”⁸⁵ Adele was named president of the new organization, and later claimed it was “almost by default because so few people were willing” to accept leadership positions.⁸⁶ Adele realized that although women were now enfranchised, the battle was not over. Opposition to suffrage for women had been particularly strong in Virginia, culminating with the rejection of the nineteenth amendment in 1920. Adele knew that overcoming the prejudices and stereotypes was not going to be an easy task, but it was one she was willing to tackle. Adele made the following statement in 1979, “it took too long to win the vote...it was only a tool, and it took such a long time to get.”⁸⁷

⁸³ “State Confederation to Complete Organization of Virginia League of Women Voters,” broadside, 1920, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

⁸⁴ Minutes of the Convention of the Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, 9-10 September 1920, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ “Suffragist, 96, Recalls Clearly,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 26 January 1979.

The mindset of the VLWV did not differ from the ESLV. It played on the mother sympathies, “better babies, better homes, better schools” would result from women expanding their nurturing instincts beyond the home. Ironically, Adele never married or had children, but she subscribed to the “mother sentiment in politics” theory. Forwarding this philosophy gave considerable credibility to the VLWV due to Virginia’s adamant stance supporting the traditional family and motherhood.

Besides educating potential voters, the VLWV worked towards other goals.

Some of these included:

1. An adequate mother’s [widow’s] pension law
2. The nine hour day, forty-five hour work week for women
3. Support for better schools
4. Election Reform
5. Establishment of policewoman in cities to provide better moral protection to young girls and boys
6. Social hygiene education and prevention of social disease
7. Improvements in laws for the protection and welfare of children.⁸⁸

Since women had won the right to vote in August of 1920, this meant that they were eligible to vote in the upcoming presidential election. Candidates had to sway not only male voters, but female voters as well. In Virginia, Adele was a highly sought after speaker. She traveled throughout the state speaking at rallies for James M. Cox,⁸⁹ the Democratic presidential candidate. Adele also participated in registration drives which targeted women, urging them to exercise their newly bestowed right by registering to

⁸⁸ “To the Woman Citizen,” VLWV broadside, 1920, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

⁸⁹ Cox did capture the popular vote in the state of Virginia, but he lost the election by a wide margin to Warren G. Harding. In fact, it was the largest victory margin to date in a United States Presidential Election. Harding captured 60.3% of the popular vote and 404 electoral votes out of a possible 531 or 76.1%. As a side note, Cox’s running mate was Franklin D. Roosevelt. See Bailey, Kennedy and Cohen., *The American Pageant*, p. 742.

vote. By 1921, over 15,000 women had been added to the voter registration list in Virginia.⁹⁰

Adele, through the VLWV, championed the issue of government efficiency. In November 1921, Governor Westmoreland Davis created a state commission charged with studying the issue. Adele was the only woman appointed to the commission. She referred to her work as “one of the most exciting political experiences of her career.”⁹¹ Government efficiency was a popular cause in Virginia, and the prominent role played by the VLWV enhanced the group’s credibility and respectability. In fact, the *Richmond Times Dispatch* praised the League, stating its work was a “promising step toward a more simplified, economical and efficient form of State government.”⁹²

Adele broadened her horizons in 1922. She joined a commission that dealt with the protection of children. The rights of children had always occupied a special place in Adele’s heart. In her early twenties, she had worked for an insurance company in order to supplement her art teaching income. While filing insurance forms, her employer instructed her to sort out all applications from Danville, Virginia. When Adele asked why Danville was being singled out, she was told that the city of Danville was on a different rate scale. Its rates were twice that of other cities in Virginia. Adele inquired further, and was told that most applications from Danville were from children working in the cotton mills. Many would die before the age of fifteen from lung disease caused by constant inhalation of the fibers in the mills. Because the age of death was so young,

⁹⁰“Working Our Her Destiny,” pamphlet, The Library of Virginia ,1995.

⁹¹ “Miss Adele Clark,” *University of Virginia Record, Education Series* 6, No. 7 (February 1922), A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

⁹² *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 23 November 1921.

rates were higher. Adele recalled, “looking over the applications [and seeing that] the ages ran from eight to twelve...I thought this was one of the most shocking things I had ever heard.”⁹³

During the 1922 Virginia General Assembly Session, Adele and the other members of the VLWV worked tirelessly for passage of twenty-six initiatives aimed at improving the welfare of Virginia’s children; eighteen passed. Among these laws was the establishment of a statewide juvenile court system, a compulsory education law, a child labor law and a law dealing with the treatment of infants born to unwed mothers.⁹⁴ Later in 1931, Virginia's Commissioner of Public Welfare, Frank Bane, commended Adele for her role in getting the laws passed and credited her with the increase in appropriations for the various initiatives.⁹⁵

In 1923, the National Woman’s Party, led by Alice Paul, was successful in having the first Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) introduced to Congress. Adele and the VLWV denounced the measure. In a statement to the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, Adele said:

It [ERA] aims a blow at the family. It would eradicate laws on marriage, divorce, the responsibilities of fatherhood and motherhood. It would confuse laws on the relationship of the sexes....It would undermine legislation already secured for the protection of women....You must realize that equality does not mean identity.⁹⁶

Reading this statement, one may be surprised at Adele’s and the VLWV’s stand on this issue. However, one must remember that the VLWV, like the ESLV, was a

⁹³ “Adele Clark – a Tribute,” *The Catholic Virginian*, 20 June 1983.

⁹⁴ Adele Clark Interview, pp. 22-25.

⁹⁵ Minutes of the Eleventh Annual Convention of the Virginia League of Women Voters, Madison Hall, University of Virginia, 26-27 June 1931, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

⁹⁶ “Legislative Activities in 1923,” VLWV report, n.d., A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

conservative organization. Both groups' philosophies were to demand politely the changes they sought because these changes would be an effective tool in the ongoing quest for improvement of the family and the betterment of society.

By 1925, Adele was no longer President of the VLWV. She resigned her post to assume the position of Third Regional Director and Second Vice President of the National League of Women Voters (NLWV). However, she was still active in the VLWV. She retained her seat on the VLWV Board and helped draft the League's annual program of legislative initiatives.⁹⁷ Later that year, Adele embarked on a speaking tour, visiting states such as Texas, North Carolina, Georgia, Arizona and Oklahoma. Her speeches focused on two themes: (1) The NLWV's commitment to encouraging women's participation in government and (2) The NLWV's support of international cooperation to prevent war.

During her lectures, she compared women to the tribes of Israel – "...out of bondage but still wandering in the wilderness. Women must work together intelligently to become a positive force in politics and in the world."⁹⁸ Her work was well received, as indicated by this editorial in the *Daily Dispatch* of Douglas, Arizona: "She [Adele] speaks with a pleasant, soft southern accent, presenting her message quietly, yet impressively. She is one of the most gifted orators of the NLWV."⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Kennedy-Haflett, "To Raise Oneself to a Higher Plane: The Political Activism of Adele Clark, 1909-1930," p. 121.

⁹⁸ *Dallas Texas Journal*, 13 October 1925, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

⁹⁹ *Daily Dispatch* (Douglas, Arizona), 22 October 1925, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

In 1926, Adele served as interim Social Director of Women Students at the College of William and Mary. While on campus, she organized a local chapter of the VLWV. Adele enjoyed working with the students, saying:

The children of the free woman are looking at age-old problems with a frankness, a courage and a sense of power that comes like a breath of fresh, invigorating air. This lack of fear, if let into the currents of public concern, may be counted on to bring America back to the high destiny that was the desire of our forefathers.¹⁰⁰

Later that year, Adele attended the NLWV convention in Missouri, representing the Commonwealth of Virginia. In addition, the *Richmond News Leader* created a regular column titled, "Virginia League of Women Voters in Legislature." Adele regularly contributed to this column and Douglas Southall Freeman, the editor of the newspaper, sponsored it.

The following year remained busy for Adele. Her speaking schedule increased and she began to teach at the Virginia Institute of Citizenship and Government at the University of Virginia. She was often featured with such prominent persons as Virginia Governor Harry Byrd, Ohio judge Charles Hoffman and Douglas Freeman, editor of the *Richmond News Leader*.¹⁰¹ In 1929, Adele was appointed to a commission that studied the location of an undergraduate college for women.¹⁰² She also was elected an official representative of the National League of Women Voters and presented its agenda to the Democratic Party's Platform Committee.

¹⁰⁰ *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 10 October 1926.

¹⁰¹ Kennedy-Haflett, "To Raise Oneself to a Higher Plane: The Political Activism of Adele Clark, 1909-1930," p.125.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, p. 126.

The year 1928 was a presidential election year and Adele campaigned for Al Smith, the Democratic nominee. Again, she embarked on a speaking tour that took her primarily to northeastern and southern states. In New Orleans, Adele stated that Al Smith¹⁰³ would win the election “because of his record...because of his appeal he will make to the imagination of America, and because of his pre-eminently keen sense of justice.”¹⁰⁴ *The Morning Tribune*, a New Orleans newspaper, called Adele, “Virginia’s leading woman political leader and a pioneer woman leader.”¹⁰⁵

Adele returned to the helm of the VLWV in 1929. She was elected president by a wide margin. Later that year, she presented a proposed legislative program to the Virginia General Assembly. She advocated :

1. Establishing a Liberal Arts College for Women at the University of Virginia¹⁰⁶
2. Maternal and Child Health Education
3. Establishing a Children’s Bureau of Department of Public Welfare
4. Welfare
5. Local aid for mothers with dependent children
6. Making women eligible for jury duty
7. Legislating joint legal guardianship by mother and father¹⁰⁷

The VLWV also was concerned with the establishment of a World Court. Members of the VLWV, including Adele, sent telegrams to President Hoover urging him to support this idea. By 1945, this goal was realized.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Herbert Hoover, the Republican candidate, easily won the 1928 election. He captured 58.2% of the popular vote and 444 electoral votes out of a possible 531 or 83.6%. Bailey, Kennedy and Cohen, *The American Pageant*, p. 784.

¹⁰⁴ *The Morning Tribune* (New Orleans, Louisiana), 13 July 1928, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ As previously noted, Adele was on the Commission studying this issue.

¹⁰⁷ Program of the Ninth Annual convention of the Virginia League of Women Voters, Norfolk, Virginia, 18-19 April 1929, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

Later in 1929, Adele made a speech in which she announced she was reducing her activities in the VLWV. She stated she “would provide information, derived from nine years of state and national work, on the how and why of the real work of the League.”¹⁰⁹ Why she decided to reduce her activities is not indicated in this speech, but reasons can be found in a letter written by Adele to her friend Nora Houston. This note, written before her speech to the VLWV, reveals a bit of Adele’s personality. Adele supported numerous activities, giving each one enthusiastic, whole-hearted support. However, she had a tendency to over-commit herself, resulting in an inability to accomplish everything she had set out to do. Adele was aware of this personality trait, evidenced by her comments to Houston:

I threw myself into the campaign for more than I meant to do, and for more than I should have done both for myself and for the League, but it is so hard to do things halfway!...I know I shall have to do something radical to avoid...attempting to do things and then falling down of them. I suppose the only remedy is not to attempt so much....¹¹⁰

During the 1930 General Assembly session, a measure that Adele had vigorously championed over the years finally passed. The Joint Guardianship Bill, which gave equal guardianship of children to both parents, was signed into law. The VLWV was presented

¹⁰⁸ The International Court of Justice, which sits at The Hague, in the Netherlands, acts as a world court. It decides in accordance with international law disputes of a legal nature submitted to it by States, whilst in addition certain international organs and agencies are entitled to call upon it for advisory opinions. It was set up in 1945 under the Charter of the United Nations to be the principal organ of the Organization, and its basic instrument, the Statute of the Court, forms an integral part of the Charter. The International Court of Justice is to be distinguished from its predecessor, the Permanent Court of International Justice (1922-1946).

¹⁰⁹ Minutes of the Executive Committee of the Virginia League of Women Voters, 7 May 1929, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

¹¹⁰ Adele Clark to Nora Houston, 20 April 1919, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

with a pen used by the Governor in signing the bill “as a token of the influence exerted by the League toward its passage.”¹¹¹

Later in 1930, the annual VLWV convention was held in the Hall of the House of Delegates of the State Capitol. This being the League’s tenth anniversary, holding its convention here was appropriate as it was here that the League had been established in 1920. Since that time, only two women had served as its president: Adele Clark (1920-1924, 1929-1930) and Mrs. Charles Lee (1925-1928).¹¹² After much persuasion, Adele accepted another term as president, extending her responsibilities into 1931. The NLWV nominated Adele for Director of the Third Region, a post she had held in 1924 and 1925. This time Adele declined the nomination, stating that she must “devote all possible energies to my State League.”¹¹³ However, she did maintain close ties with the national group. In 1933, Adele was elected to another term as president of the VLWV. She accepted the position, but in a meeting of the League, she appeared weary and made the following statement, “What can we do? How can we prepare ourselves? How can we do our old job in a more efficient way?”¹¹⁴

Adele was growing tired of her political activism. In fact, after 1938, when her tenure of president of the VLWV ended, she did not involve herself in political activities again until 1973. At the age of ninety-one, she addressed the General Assembly’s Committee on Privileges and Elections, speaking against ratification of the Equal Rights

¹¹¹ *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 1 April 1930.

¹¹² Kennedy-Haflett, “To Raise Oneself to a Higher Plane: The Political Activism of Adele Clark, 1909-1930,” p. 147.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹¹⁴ Minutes of the State Wide Membership Committee, 1 June 1933, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

Amendment.¹¹⁵ Calling the provision a “blanket amendment,” Adele argued, just as she had in 1923, that the ERA would be detrimental to women, the family, and society.

Why did Adele stay out of the political arena for such an extended period?

Evidenced by her 1929 letter to Nora Houston and her statement to the VLWV in 1933, Adele had grown tired of the demanding schedule, the numerous speaking engagements, the Committee meetings, the heaven burden of responsibility. Adele had been actively involved in advocating women’s issues for over twenty-five years. She simply needed a rest.

Despite Adele’s absence from the VLWV and the political arena, she remained active in what she called her true love, art. She was the Director of the Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project in Virginia from 1936 to 1942, a Member of the Virginia State Arts Commission from 1941 to 1964, and she taught private art classes from 1948 to 1954. She held art exhibitions locally and nationally and was commissioned to paint portraits now displayed in several public institutions.¹¹⁶ In 1980, she was awarded the Distinguished Service Award of the Federated Arts Council of Richmond. She was also active in the Catholic Church, evidenced by the receipt of an award by the Richmond Catholic Woman’s Club in 1979. In 1967, Adele was the first

¹¹⁵ The proposed Equal Rights Amendment reads: “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States nor by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have the power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this article.” Passed by Congress in 1971 and 1972, the controversial issue failed to achieve ratification by the necessary thirty-eight states by the extended deadline of June 1982. Thirty-five states ratified the amendment. Virginia was not among the thirty-five. It was reintroduced in Congress in July of 1982, but was defeated in the House of Representatives in 1983. *Webster’s Family Encyclopedia* (New York: Arrow Trading Company, Inc., 1988), p. 875.

¹¹⁶ Much of her work is in the Valentine Museum and one of her paintings, “The Cherry Tree,” is on permanent exhibit at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts.

woman to receive the “Brotherhood Citation,” an award for distinguished service to civic affairs, issued by the National Conference of Christians and Jews.¹¹⁷

In a 1979 *Richmond Times Dispatch* article featuring Adele Clark, the interviewer asked: “Reflecting back on all of your accomplishments, do you have any regrets?”¹¹⁸ Adele emphatically stated no. She was proud of her association with the ESLV, the VLWV, the NLWV and the various causes she championed. She took pride in the fact that the ESLV was one of the fastest growing political movements in Virginia’s history, claiming that no other “has had so large a growth in so limited a period of time.”¹¹⁹ Indeed, the League did grow quickly -- from fewer than twenty women in 1909 to over 20,000 men and women in 1918, an average of over 2,200 new members each year.¹²⁰

As a tribute, Adele wrote and dedicated this poem to her ESLV comrades:

Unmentioned, but recorded in our minds
Are deeds of sacrifice and hours of toil
For every victory and every gain
Was won at cost of time, of life, of means
Contributed by those who greatly cared.¹²¹

Adele lamented at how long it took to gain suffrage for women. In the same 1979 interview mentioned in the above paragraph, Adele stated, “I don’t think we began early enough, or fought hard enough.”¹²² Despite this disappointment, Adele, in reflecting on

¹¹⁷ Kennedy-Haflett, “To Raise Oneself to a Higher Plane: The Political Activism of Adele Clark, 1909-1930,” p. 151.

¹¹⁸ “Suffragist, 96, Recalls Clearly,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 26 January 1979.

¹¹⁹ Quoted in Kennedy-Haflett, “To Raise Oneself to a Higher Plane: The Political Activism of Adele Clark, 1909-1930,” p. 155.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Adele Clark, “A Decade of League Work,” n.d., A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

¹²² “Suffragist, 96, Recalls Clearly,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*; 26 January 1979.

her long career said, "We have lived through a period in the world's history of which it shall be written that men and women have established new relationships, new sympathies, new understanding...to which we have contributed."¹²³

Despite her statement to the contrary, Adele did have two regrets. First, she failed to convince the state to establish a women's college at the University of Virginia,¹²⁴ the school Adele called the "great seat of learning." She faced fierce opposition from University of Virginia alumni, one of whom stated in "lyric verse":

Let she who dares approach one foot within
This holy ground and on her head, yea though
It's hair be bobbed, I launch against her
The Alumni's curse!¹²⁵

Her second disappointment was that she was not able to convince more Virginia women that their voices and opinions mattered in the world of politics. "The Pedestal Argument"¹²⁶ was still in the minds of women, despite winning the right to vote.

"Women haven't gotten into party politics the way they should."¹²⁷

Adele was well respected by her colleagues in the various organizations of which she was a member. One VLWV member stated:

She [Adele Clark] is capable, industrious, possessed of a judicial temperament, encouraging those less able, respected by all for her

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Mary Washington College, chartered in 1908, was consolidated with the University of Virginia from 1944 to 1972. By the 1970s, women were enrolled in all units of the University; previously they could attend only selected programs and the graduate schools. "Virginia, University of" *Encyclopedia Britannica Online* <http://search.eb.com/bol/topic?eu=77464&sctn=1> [Accessed April 19, 1999]

¹²⁵ Adele Clark, "A Decade of League Work," n.d., A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

¹²⁶ See page fifteen for an explanation.

¹²⁷ "Miss Adele Clark," *University of Virginia Record, Education Series* 6, No. 7 (February 1922), A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

integrity, she is a tower of strength in all emergencies and makes...working with her a constant source of pleasure.¹²⁸

Besides being capable and industrious, Adele had a sense of humor. The VLWV faced financial difficulties in its early years, and fund raising tactics were frequently discussed. Adele suggested six ways in which individuals could raise money for the VLWV:

1. For the prosperous, give the quota outright, and then give a little more.
2. For the famous cook, sell a few cakes.
3. For a natural born dressmaker, make a dress for a friend who uses the needle like a crowbar.
4. Ask a few friends for money, giving the League a good name while you do it.
5. For a good bridge player, give bridge lessons at 25 cents to 50 cents a lesson.
6. Buy the cheaper dress and give the League the difference!¹²⁹

Adele's family respected and admired her achievements. Her mother wished Adele had married and had a family; nevertheless, she was extremely proud of her daughter's work. While talking on the telephone, Mrs. Clark told the caller, "I don't know where Adele is; she's out saving the world, but she'll be back for supper."¹³⁰

Based on Adele's extensive involvement in the affairs of the state of Virginia, why is she such an obscure figure?¹³¹ The fact that Adele never married nor had a family was extremely unusual for a young woman in the 1920s and 1930s. The majority of Virginia's women were "contented wives and mothers."¹³² Single women were viewed

¹²⁸ Report of the Virginia League of Women Voters Chairman on Legislation, 6 April 1932, A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

¹²⁹ Minutes of the Eighth Annual Convention of the VLWV, 1928.

¹³⁰ Kennedy-Haflett, "To Raise Oneself to a Higher Plane: The Political Activism of Adele Clark, 1909-1930," p. 161.

¹³¹ See Appendix Five for a brief listing of Adele's accomplishments.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 164.

as “suspect,” “aggressive,” “unlady like,” “distasteful” and “too independent.” Her life as an artist, a segment of society still seen as “on the fringes,” did not gain any respectability points either.

Another factor is Virginia’s place in history concerning woman suffrage. The Commonwealth was adamantly opposed to extending the ballot box to women, culminating with the rejection of the nineteenth amendment in 1920. In works that deal with the suffrage movement, Virginia is rarely mentioned and when addressed, it receives negative press. Because Virginia is viewed as a hindrance in the struggle, its suffrage leaders and organizations are largely forgotten and undiscovered.

Adele Clark’s beliefs and value system were conservative. Her involvement in the suffrage movement was viewed as radical, but the tactics she employed in fighting this battle were tame. Some pro-suffrage leaders endured hunger strikes, were frequently arrested, and published anti-male literature to win enfranchisement for women. Adele was not a militant suffragist; on the contrary, she politely demanded the right to vote. Adele stated, “I believe that suffrage is the quietest, easiest, most dignified and least conspicuous way of exerting my influence in public affairs.”¹³³ Clearly, Adele’s attitude cannot be labeled as feminist. A devout Catholic, she did not depart significantly from the expected ladylike, well-mannered behavioral norm.

Why did Adele choose to dedicate much of her life to public service? It was not for monetary reasons; the only income Adele received came from her artistic endeavors. Adele felt an inner calling to become involved in activities she deemed would benefit and improve society. Her unyielding devotion to the dogma of the Catholic Church led her,

¹³³ “The Suffragist,” ESLV broadside, n.d., A.C. Papers, V.C.U.

as she stated, “to strive toward becoming more fully human, not content with just being a human being.”¹³⁴ Adele laid the groundwork for future reforms. She awakened women and men to the need for change and worked diligently to implement it. Adeline Cox, a friend of Adele, sums up Adele’s achievements and reveals a bit about her personality in an amusing quote: “Adele has mastered the intricacies of improving the status of women, protecting children and bettering the social order. However, she could not tell you where she put down her glasses.”¹³⁵

Adele Clark died on June 4, 1983 at the age of one hundred. Her funeral was held at St. Paul’s Roman Catholic Church on June 6, 1983 and her remains lie in the Emmanuel Episcopal Church Cemetery. Miss Clark was described as “a walking encyclopedia regarding Richmond history, the local art scene, women’s rights and government of all levels.”¹³⁶ The following quote, penned by Winifred Holtby, summarizes Adele’s vision and the work to which she dedicated her life:

It seems possible that in a wider world we should walk more delicately. We might, perhaps, consider individuals as individuals, not primarily as members of this or that race, sex and status. We might be content to love the individual, perceiving in him or her a spirit which is divine as well as human...we might allow individual ability rather than social traditions to determine what vocation each should follow. And is it possible in such a world we should find a variety of personality undreamed of today, a social solidarity today rendered unimaginable by prejudices, grievances, fears and repulsions, a radiance of adventure, of happiness, and satisfaction now only hinted at by poets and prophets.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ “Adele Clark – a Tribute,” *The Catholic Virginian*, 20 June 1983.

¹³⁵ Adeline Cox as quoted in the Adele Clark Interview.

¹³⁶ *Richmond Times Dispatch*, 5 June 1983.

¹³⁷ Quoted in Kennedy-Haflett, “To Raise Oneself to a Higher Plane: The Political Activism of Adele Clark, 1909-1930,” p. 167

APPENDIX ONE

TWELVE REASONS WHY MOTHERS SHOULD HAVE THE VOTE

1916

Better Babies – Better Homes – Better Schools

1. BECAUSE the mother's business is home making and child rearing, and the child and the home are the greatest asset of the nation.
2. BECAUSE the welfare of the child is affected by the laws of the State as well as the rules of the home.
3. BECAUSE there are just as many home interests in the government as there are business interests and the mother is primarily the custodian of these home interests.
4. BECAUSE the lowest death rate of babies in the world is in New Zealand, the country where mothers have had the right to vote the longest. In that country, the government sends out nurses to every town, village and county district, to instruct and aid mothers in the care of their babies. Young girls are taught baby hygiene and feeding.
5. BECAUSE the banner baby state, California, an equal suffrage state, has the highest birthrate and a very low death rate. (The lowest death rate of babies in the United States is in the city of Seattle, Washington State, where women vote.)
6. BECAUSE children have better school facilities where mothers vote. Washington, an equal suffrage state, is the banner state in education. Statewide compulsory education and child labor laws put every child under fourteen years of age in school, where women vote.
7. BECAUSE girls have equal educational opportunities with boys from Kindergarten to State University, where women vote.
8. BECAUSE the moral conditions of our country are regulated by law. Should not mothers have a say about the dangers and temptations which surround their boys and girls?
9. BECAUSE girls of tender age are better protected by law where mothers vote. The age of consent is higher in the suffrage states.
10. BECAUSE mothers are equal guardians with fathers of their children in the states which have had suffrage the longest.

11. BECAUSE widowed mothers are protected by mother's pensions in the states where women vote.
12. BECAUSE it is just, it is expedient, and has proven a good governmental policy for mothers to have a voice in the laws which control themselves and their children.

Source: Adele Clark Papers, Virginia Commonwealth University, No Author Specified.

APPENDIX TWO

RESULTS OF EQUAL SUFFRAGE

BY ADELE CLARK

Many ask the question, "What has been the gain in the states where women vote? Is it worth while?" they say. "Will Virginia have any better government when women vote?" The answer to these questions must come from the states where woman suffrage has been tested out. Let's compare the welfare laws of equal suffrage states with those of Virginia.

EDUCATION LAWS

In all equal suffrage states, a compulsory education law puts every child under fourteen years of age in school. Illiteracy has its lowest percentage in these states. Washington State, where woman suffrage obtains, leads the nation educationally. In all equal suffrage states, girls have equal educational facilities with boys, from the kindergarten to the state university.

In all equal suffrage states, women are eligible to highest positions in public school system. Not so in Virginia.

In Virginia, the state-wide compulsory education law is totally inadequate, reaching children only under twelve years of age, and for only sixteen weeks in each session, with many exemptions. In Virginia, the percentage of illiteracy is large among adults and children. In Virginia, girls have not equal educational facilities with boys, as they are not admitted to the state university, the cap-stone of our public school system. In Virginia, women public school teachers have not equal pay for equal work, as in the suffrage states.

PROTECTION FOR MOTHERS

In all the equal suffrage states, mothers are protected by mothers' pension laws, so as to remain with their children, if deprived of the support of the father. Mothers are also equal guardians of their children before the law in all but four suffrage states, sharing equally in the earnings of minor children, in the estates of deceased children, in the care and financial control in case of death or separation from the father.

In Virginia, the mother's pension law is optional with each county, and no county has put this law into effect, and the equal guardianship law does not include the guardianship of the estate of the child after the father's death. There are twenty-three non-suffrage states without equal guardianship laws.

PROTECTION FOR THE WAGE-EARNING WOMAN

All the suffrage states have an eight or nine-hour day for women. In Virginia, women may be worked ten hours.

The minimum wage law is also operating in a much larger proportion of suffrage states than in non-suffrage states.

SOCIAL PURITY LAWS

In most of the suffrage states, the age of consent is eighteen. In Virginia, it is fifteen. In the suffrage states, fathers of illegitimate children are compelled to contribute to their support. In Virginia, there is no such law.

PROHIBITION

There are only two full suffrage states where prohibition of the liquor traffic has not been accomplished by state action – California and New York. There are fourteen non-suffrage states where the state laws sanction the liquor traffic.

AN INTERESTED CITIZENSHIP

In all the suffrage states, the percentage of interested voting citizens has been largely increased by giving the ballot to women. Men vote in larger numbers than before, and women vote with more interest than men do in non-suffrage states.

The duties of citizenship are discussed and practiced with more interest where men and women vote together. Their blended view points bring results in better citizenship expressed in progressive welfare legislation.

In Virginia, there are 363,659 men of voting age, and only about 80,000 men generally vote and decide all elections.

When Virginia women get the ballot, our state will then have a larger and more interested electorate, and take its place in front rank in all that pertains to better government.

APPENDIX THREE

Reply to

THOMAS NELSON PAGE

on the

Federal Woman Suffrage Amendment

By ADELE CLARK

1918

Honorable Thomas Nelson Page, discussing the proposed woman suffrage amendment to the Constitution of the United States, expressed surprise that "any one who is the least familiar with the history of suffrage in Virginia should advocate placing the suffrage under the control of the national government."

A review of history of the framing and ratifying of the Constitution of the United States shows that, not only did Virginia agree to place in the hands of the Federal government three very important functions directly concerning suffrage in the several States, namely: the guarantee to every State of a republican form of government the power to confer citizenship uniformly throughout the United States upon aliens, and the right of the people to a numerical representation in the lower House of Congress, with the power of Congress to prescribe the time, place and manner of the vote for said lower House; but it was in the Virginia Convention of 1788 that objection was made to the lack in the Constitution of a Declaration, or Bill of Rights, defining the rights of the people; it was a Virginian – Patrick Henry – who objected to the difficulties involved in amending the Constitution as endangering the liberties of the people; it was a Virginian, no less than Chancellor Wythe, whose committee in that convention proposed an amendment to the Constitution of the United States incorporating into that instrument the clause from the Bill of Rights which reads, in part: "All men having sufficient evidence of permanent interest in the community ought to have the right of suffrage." By which acts it would seem that Virginia strongly desired to have the Federal government insure the right of the people of the several States to a voice in their government.

The proposed woman suffrage amendment gives to the Federal government no further authority with regard to the political liberties of the women of the United States that it already exercises and has exercised since its formation with regard to the political liberties of the men of the United States.

The Constitution of the United States, in its intention to preserve both popular rights and State's rights, established an interstate citizenship which equals, if it does not supersede, intrastate citizenship. See the opening words of the Constitution: "We the

people of THE UNITED STATES.” See also the term, “Citizen of the United States,” appearing in Article I, Section 3; Article II, Section 1; Article III, Section 2, etc., and the term “Rights of the people,” in Number I, II, IV, IX, and X of the first ten amendments, as well as the distinction made in Number X: “of the States – or the people.”

While the rights of the people are so insistently stressed, however, each State is left free to make sure qualifications for the electorate as do not interfere with the above specified rights. Qualifications of duration of residence, of education, of the payment of capitation taxes, or of the ownership of property are not in conflict with the rights guaranteed to the people by the Federal Constitution, and, as Mr. Page states, have been and are declared constitutional by the united States Supreme Court. They exist in Virginia in regard to man suffrage today. The same qualifications and restrictions will be imposed upon the women voters as are now imposed upon the men. They will operate to eliminate the illiterate and irresponsible women of both races, as they will eliminate the illiterate and irresponsible men of both races.

In any discussion of the race question, moreover, let it now be forgotten that every man in the South and in Virginia today is consenting to a classification of the women of the South and of Virginia unparalleled in history, for by the fourteenth amendment to the United States Constitution, with its unwarranted interpretation of the rights of citizens being applicable only to male citizens, together with the fifteenth amendment, the white women of the South are declared before the world, and are in fact, the political inferiors of negro men. Moreover, by the fact that Virginia makes citizenship in the United States the basis of her electorate, the women of Virginia are made the political inferiors of the newly assimilated foreigner naturalized by the Federal government and not by State law.

Therefore, let Virginia enfranchise her women in the only practical way now available – she having refused the pleas of suffragists to enfranchise the women of Virginia when the present Constitution was in the making, and again during the past ten years having refused three times to amend the State Constitution, let her now, by the historic method of amending the Federal Constitution in a way devised by the Virginian Madison, and in the spirit of 1788, insure to the women people, as well as to the men people, of each State their political freedom.

Source: Adele Clark Papers, Virginia Commonwealth University.

APPENDIX FOUR
EQUAL SUFFRAGE AND THE
NEGRO VOTE

The opponents of equal suffrage claim that the negro woman's vote will constitute a menace to white supremacy. This contention is altogether unfounded for the following reasons:

1. BECAUSE under the proposed amendment to the Constitution, the same restrictions, which now apply to men must also apply to women and as these qualifications restrict the negro man's vote, it stands to reason that they will also restrict the negro woman's vote.
2. BECAUSE there are 191,000 more white women of voting age in Virginia than there are negro women of voting age, and white women outnumber negro men and women put together by 31,407. So the enfranchisement of Virginia women would increase white supremacy.
3. BECAUSE white supremacy would be further increased by the literacy test. The Constitution says, in reference to qualification of the voter that "unless physically unable, he make application in his own handwriting," and that he "prepare and deposit his ballot without aid." Illiteracy among negroes is 22 percent, and among white people is only 8 percent.
4. BECAUSE the Constitution says that the would-be voter shall pay a poll tax of one dollar and fifty cents "for three years next preceding that in which he offers to register." This qualification will undoubtedly further increase the white supremacy.
5. BECAUSE the Constitution further says that "the General Assembly may prescribe a property qualification of not exceeding two hundred and fifty dollars for voters in any county, city or town," etc. (See Article II, Section 30. Elective Franchise and Qualification for Office.) This is a provision to be used if needed, but it has never been needed anywhere in Virginia, for there is no county or city or town where negro men qualify in larger numbers than white men. They are shut out by the present restrictions. We are secure from negro domination now – then, ever more.

Source: Adele Clark Papers, Virginia Commonwealth University, Undated, No Author Specified.

APPENDIX FIVE

BRIEF LISTING OF ADELE CLARK'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ❑ Charter Member, Equal Suffrage League of Virginia, 1909-1920
- ❑ Instructor Richmond Art Club, 1909-1916
- ❑ Instrumental in establishing the precursor of the State Art Commission, 1916
- ❑ Co-director, Atelier of Misses Adele and Nora Houston, 1917-1925
- ❑ Co-founder of Virginia League of Fine Arts and Handicrafts, 1919
- ❑ Charter Member and President of the Virginia League of Women Voters, 1920-1924, 1929-1938
- ❑ Member, State Commission of the Simplification of State Government, 1922-1923
- ❑ Regional Director, the National League of Women Voters, 1924-1925
- ❑ Second Vice-President, the National League of Women Voters, 1925-1928
- ❑ Acting Social Director and Dean of Women, The College of William and Mary, 1926
- ❑ Named by the Virginia Council of Administrative Women in Education as one of nine "Distinguished Virginia Women in Education," 1928
- ❑ First Woman Member of the Richmond Democratic Committee
- ❑ Member, Virginia Commission on a Liberal Arts College for Women, 1930-1932
- ❑ Co-founder and member of the Board, Richmond Academy of Arts, 1931
- ❑ State Labor Adjustment Supervisor, Civil Works Administration, 1934
- ❑ Director, Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project in Virginia, 1936-1942
- ❑ Member, Public Administration Committee of the Social Sciences Research Council, 1936-1937
- ❑ Member, Virginia State Art Commission, 1941-1964
- ❑ Instructor, private art classes, 1948-1954

- ❑ First Woman Recipient of the “Brotherhood Citation” of the National Conference of Christians and Jews, 1967
- ❑ Recipient, citation for contributions to society and church, Richmond Catholic Woman’s Club, 1979
- ❑ Recipient, Distinguished Service Award of the Federated Arts Council of Richmond, 1980
- ❑ Legislative Chairman and lobbyist , Diocesan Council of Catholic Women

Source: Cynthia Kennedy-Haflett, “To Raise Oneself to a Higher Plane: The Political Activism of Adele Clark, 1909-1930” (Master’s Thesis, University of Richmond, 1989,) pp. 150-152.

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