



Elnora Monroe Babcock
President, Chautauqua County PEC, 1891-1893
Publicity Chief for New York State, 1899
Publicity Chief for the National American Women's
Suffrage Association, 1906

In November of 2019 the League of Women Voters of New York held a centennial celebration at the Buffalo History Museum. One of the suffragists featured in the exhibition was Elnora Monroe Babcock, a local woman from Dunkirk. She is the first suffragist to be profiled in an upcoming series. Elnora Babcock is the great-great grandmother of Christine Favata Ortiz, who is a League member.

We want to thank Christine for supplying some of the information for this article.

Elnora was born in 1852 in Columbus, Pennsylvania. Her family settled in Jamestown, New York and Elnora graduated from Jamestown High School and Lyons Musical Academy. At the age of eighteen she married Professor John W. Babcock. They lived in Ithaca, New York where John Babcock received an AB degree from Cornell. In 1880 the couple moved to Dunkirk, New York. John was appointed the city superintendent of public schools in Dunkirk in 1881 after teaching languages and mathematics. Their home still stands on Washington Avenue.

From early childhood she felt the injustice of denying women a voice in government. Children and household duties delayed her activism in the reforms of the day until 1889. This was not uncommon among many suffragists. Then, owing mainly to her efforts, a political equality club (PEC) was organized in Dunkirk. The club flourished under her management, and before the close of her first year as president of the Dunkirk club she was elected president of the Chautauqua County Political Equality Club. The Political Equality Club is recorded as being the first in New York State (Biographical Database of NAWSA Suffragists). Because of Elnora's organizational skills these clubs flourished. In the early 1890s, Chautauqua County boasted the largest county organization in the United States. There were twenty-five local clubs within its borders and a membership of 1,400. At a meeting of the Political Equality Club for the State of New York, Chautauqua County was recognized as having the largest membership in the State.

On July 25, 1891 Elnora Babcock had the honor of presiding over the first woman suffrage meeting ever held at the Chautauqua Assembly. The meeting at the Chautauqua Institution was sponsored by the Political Equality Club. Speakers included Susan B. Anthony, Zerelda C. Wallace, and Reverend Anna Howard Shaw.

She also served on a number of important committees connected with suffrage work, including chair of the National Woman Suffrage Association's press department. She devoted most of her time as their publicist to the enfranchisement of woman, believing this to be the most important reform before the American people in that day, and one upon which all other reforms rested. As press chair, Elnora's efforts were focused on combating anti-suffrage propaganda. She created a "clippings bureau" that tracked down as many anti-suffrage articles as possible so that her committee could counter the claims directly. During the state suffrage convention of 1899 that was held in Dunkirk, Babcock reported that the clippings bureau was finding more pro-suffrage articles than those against enfranchisement. Even newspapers that initially resisted publishing the women's suffrage articles had started covering the debate. This was a notable cultural shift. One of her most important accomplishments was her effort to

cultivate ties with local newspapers in locations where the push for enfranchisement had not yet gained traction. She disseminated thousands of general articles, special articles, and personal sketches.

WOMEN AND SUFFRAGE.

To the Editor of The New York Times:

Is it not strange that men who look upon suffrage for themselves above all price, and the denial of it the most severe punishment, think nothing of denying it to women? They even go so far as to make women the butt of ridicule who happen to be brave enough to express a desire for this right of citizenship which is freely given to the most ignorant foreign man who comes to our shores.

If a man serving a term in State prison has a friend outside, that friend will get up a petition begging the Governor to commute his sentence, if for not more than forty-eight hours prior to its expiration, so that when he comes out of prison he may not be compelled to suffer the disgrace of disfranchisement.

The penalty inflicted upon those who took up arms against their own country a few years ago was that of disfranchisement, but even that was felt to be too severe to be borne and our Government made haste to remove even from the leader of them all this humiliation, this degradation, and again restored to them their rights of United States citizenship.

How can men delude themselves into believing that what is ignominy unbearable for them is honor and glory for women?

We have become so accustomed to this inconsistency that we think no more of it than the Chinese do of binding the feet of their girl babies.

Here we have an educated, moral, law-abiding, taxpaying class of people, who are deeply interested in all that pertains to the welfare of their country, and are equally affected with the men by good or bad government, denied all voice in its affairs, and all this under a form of Government that has for its battle cry "Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed." Can any one conceive of a greater inconsistency?

ELNORA MONROE BABCOCK.
Dunkirk, N. Y., May 2, 1903.

The strategy in this article was not uncommon for the Suffragist movement. It was not unusual to demean other groups like immigrants so as to get a point across that certain groups were granted the right to vote while women struggled against a Congress that refused to enfranchise them. Many who celebrate the bravery and struggle of the suffragists regret that women of color were often not given support and were discriminated against by the very same women.

On a positive side, as many of us know, the League of Women Voters was formed 100 years ago by of the suffragists who worked for the passage of the 19th amendment. Then, as now, these women and men adopted a non-partisan approach. They had to. Nothing would have been accomplished without working across the aisle.

Elnora Babcock was also a member of the Adams Memorial Unitarian church and the Woman's Alliance of that church. She was also an important member of the Women's Literary Club. She died at her home in Dunkirk, on December 29, 1934, having seen the passage of the 19th amendment unlike other suffragists including Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.



1914 Photo of the temporary tent headquarters set up for the Women's Political Union in Dunkirk.

Elnora Babcock is the fourth women from the right, standing in profile between the woman in a hat and the woman with a sash.

Many of the references of this people came from the Dunkirk Historical Society, past Observer Articles, Chautauqua County Historical Society and a recent biography compiled by Sara Kibbler.