

graphy - Ames Lulu Daniel

A 59055 Suffragette

Recalls Her 1918 Vote Fight

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E DANIEL AMES, LAST SUFFRAGETTE
A Klux Klan was worse than the demon rum.

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Jessie Daniel Ames, the last of the great suffragettes, understands the indignities the Negroes of Alabama and Mississippi may be going through as they work for the right to vote.

Mrs. Ames understands because she, too, battled the strange little roadblocks officialdom can throw up to deprive people of their vote.

You see, Mrs. Ames was a woman seeking the right to vote in Williamson County in 1918.

Now 82, Mrs. Ames is still pert and lively, troubled by a touch of lumbago, but still working in politics and to build a better world. She lives now in Tryon, N. C., and is visiting here this May with her daughter, Miss Lulu Ames.

"We got started working for the vote during World War I," she remembers. "Governor William P. Hobby was for us, and he helped us get a law through the Texas Legislature giving women primary suffrage — the right to vote in the primaries."

The vote in the Legislature wasn't large enough to make women's suffrage an emergency measure, so the new law did not go into effect for 90 days.

"That left us only two weeks to register all the women before the deadline," recalls Mrs. Ames. "So we began a get-out-the-vote drive to end all such drives."

"And it was a good thing we kept up with the law. The trouble with the men was that they underestimated our intelligence."

Mrs. Ames knew well what the law said — that women seeking to vote must register "in their own hand" at the county courthouses.

County officials of Williamson County placed advertisements in both the Georgetown and Taylor newspapers saying representatives would be sent to all the precincts, as a convenience, to register the voters.

"We knew this wouldn't do," says Mrs. Ames. "So we began to organize. In the July heat 3,300 Williamson County women went to Georgetown by wagon, by hack, by foot to register."

There's never been anything like it again.

Mrs. Ames is disappointed because women have failed to live up to the high hopes the suffragettes had.

"We were idealists," she says. "We thought that when we got the vote, the whole pattern of politics would be greatly im-

did in the last campaign between Lyndon Johnson and Barry Goldwater."

Mrs. Ames believes the main trouble has been that women haven't voted in great numbers, that fewer women who are eligible vote than men.

Mrs. Ames worked with the great Texas women who brought the women's vote to this state — Minnie Fisher Cunningham, Mrs. S. J. Smith, Jane Y. McCallum, Annie Webb Blanton . . .

In August of 1920, the Federal Suffrage Amendment (the 19th Amendment) was ratified, and Mrs. Ames went to the state and national Democratic conventions as a delegate.

With the women's suffrage victory behind her, Mrs. Ames then turned to do battle with the Ku Klux Klan. In the 1924 elections, the Klan issue was of paramount importance. Mrs. Miriam A. Ferguson was in the runoff with Felix B. Robertson, the Klan candidate. Mrs. Ferguson was running on a platform opposing prohibition (supported by the Saloon League) and opposing the Klan.

"I figured the Ku Klux Klan was worse than drink," says Mrs. Ames, "so I supported Mrs. Ferguson."

She wrote a letter to the editor of the Dallas News in which she said that the Ku Klux Klan, not prohibition, was the issue at stake.

"I was a strong Methodist," she says, "and the Methodist sisters wrote to me asking why I would uphold the banner of the Fergusons and the liquor dealers . . ."

Later, Mrs. Ames, active in the League of Women Voters, worked for prison reform, for a home for delinquent Negro girls and for a Negro orphanage for Texas.

She remembers going to see Gov. Ferguson one day.

"We had an appointment with the governor, but when we arrived, there was Jim Ferguson

sitting in the governor's chair," she recalls. "We were disappointed, but it seems Mrs. Ferguson was in the mansion, making strawberry jam. We forgave her. It was strawberry season, and perhaps strawberry jam was Jim's favorite dish . . ."

With the story of the strawberry jam, Mrs. Ames may unaware have stumbled onto the secret of why the high hopes for women's suffrage have failed to materialize: Women may be still more interested in feeding their husbands than in politics.