The Economic Lives of Disenfranchised Women: New Women and Old in 1910 St. Louis

One of the major differences you'd see in 1910 St. Louis would be the relative lack of women in the workplace—not to mention in government. And most of the women you did see working would be young, probably unmarried. What follows is numbers about women workers in St. Louis, a survey of the kinds of work, the matter of union membership, and the general attitude about women workers.

By 1920, St. Louis had fallen to sixth place in city size, overtaken by the rapidly growing industrial cities of the north, Detroit and Cleveland. In particular, immigrants had crowded into those cities before World War I. Here's a table (A) to compare the 1920 populations of women age 16 and over in St. Louis, Cleveland, and Baltimore, the only other border city among the top nine in both 1910 and 1920. (No Southern cities ranked among the nation's largest. Note that the population of women is still larger in St. Louis, even though the total population was larger in Cleveland. That's because many immigrants were men, who came without families.) You can see the immigrant surge in Cleveland and the significant number of first generation women in St. Louis—meaning they had arrived in an earlier immigration wave. St. Louis had fewer African American women than Baltimore, but more than Cleveland or other cities of similar size.

Table A

Population of Women Age 16 and Over in St. Louis and similarly sized cities, 1920

	St. Louis	Baltimore	Cleveland
Total population of women 16 or older	293,722	268,739	260,964
White women with native parents	120,403	131,486	67,650
White women with foreign-born parents	100,878	56,699	79,780
White, foreign-born women	45,294	38,368	101,071
African-american women	27,116	42,163	12,237
Total population and rank 1910	687,029 (4)	558,485 (7)	560,663 (6)

Total population and rank 1920	772,897 (6)	733,826 (8)	796,841 (5)

Of the women 16 and older in St. Louis in the early twentieth century, the percentage "gainfully employed," to use the Census Bureau's phrase, increased from 25% to 33% between 1900 and 1920. You can see in Table B that the percentage of employed women who were married more than doubled between 1900 and 1920. Married working women were more common in native groups; 36% of African American married women worked. Only 7.4% of foreign born married women and only 6.5% of first generation married women worked.

Table B

Women 16 and older in gainful occupations in total and in various categories

St. Louis, Missouri: 1900, 1910, 1920; percent of women 16 and older

	Number in 1920	% in 1920	% in 1910	%in 1900
Women 16 and older	96,827	33	29.8	25.5
Married women	18,623	11.2	8.4	4.9
Unmarried women	78,204	61.1	55.0	48.2
Native white women of native parentage (% married in 1920)	44,086 (10.6)	36.6	31.8	25.2
Native white women of foreign parentage (% married in 1920)	30,837 (6.5)	30.6	29.7	28.4
Foreign-born white women (% married in 1920)	8,486 (7.4)	18.7	17.9	15.4
African-American women (% married in 1920)	13,405 (36.1)	49.4	56.0	46.7

In Table B, all the percentages increase except for those of African-American women from 1910 to 1920. This oddity is discussed below; if fits with other national data trends I'll explain.

All the numbers above come from Census data and were compiled by Joseph Hill, in a Census Monograph entitled *Women in Gainful Occupations, 1870 to 1920.* Reflecting on the data, he noted that, "It still remains true, although less true now than it once was, that to a woman marriage normally supersedes or precludes the pursuit of a gainful occupation, in that it involves the establishment and care of a home, with the housework or household duties incident thereto, and at the same time provides her with a livelihood . . . . With some women, particularly those having a superior education, ambition for a career or the desire for a wider sphere of activity than the domestic hearth affords is a motive which leads them to follow a profession or gainful occupation after marriage. This class, it is safe to say, is not very numerous." He does admit that some women have to supplement their husbands' incomes; others add to the family income not so much from necessity as from the choice to secure "a better living for herself and husband." (Hill, pages 73 and 74.)

As was common in the early twentieth century, most working women were young, although the percentage of working women increased in all age groups between 1900 and 1920. You can see this in Table C, which indicates age breakdowns in St. Louis in 1900 and 1920.

Table C

Women gainfully employed by age group; percents in 1900 and 1920, St. Louis, Missouri

16 to 24 years of age		25 to 44 years of age		45 years of age and over	
1900	1920	1900	1920	1900	1920
43.7	55.9	21.7	30.5	11.7	19.0
Native white women of white parentage					
37.1	55.7	20.9	30.2	12.3	20.8

Native white women of foreign parentage					
46.1	60.8	20.5	28.7	11.8	17.7
Foreign-born women					
48.6	49.8	16.2	18.9	7.9	12.2
Negro women					
49.1	47.6	46.1	50.8	44.7	47.7

The numbers in St. Louis reflect those of the country as a whole. Nationwide, the percentage of women ages 16 and older in non-agricultural pursuits increased from 11.8 percent in 1870 to 21.3 percent in 1920. (Hill, page 19) In the shorter period from 1890 to 1920, for native white women of native percentage, the percent working increased from 10.6 percent to 18.3 percent. For native whites of foreign parentage (first-generation,) the percent increased from 25.4 to 28.6. For foreign born white women, the percentage was 18.6 in 1890, 18.1 in 1900, 21.1 in 1910 and 18.1 in 1920. For African-American women, the percentages were 23.1 in 1890, 26.5 in 1900, 30.9 in 1910 and 28.4 in 1920.

Here's the kind of complication you run into with historical numbers. Joseph HillI was well aware that there is a distortion created in the 1910 census. The census takers, the people who went door-to-door, were instructed to note all women working. The specific instruction wasn't given in 1900 and wasn't given again in 1920. This served to pick up—in 1910 only—more women working, particularly agricultural laborers. The census date also changed: in 1910, the enumeration was mid-April; in 1920, it was on January 1. Hill says, "The changes in the instructions here considered should, however, have no effect—and the change of date very little, if any, effect—upon the number of women returned as engaged in nonagricultural pursuits." He therefore recounted for women in non-agricultural jobs, and these are the data reported in the previous paragraph and below. (Hill, pages 16 to 19.) All responsible census users have to make adjustments or at least be aware of issues like these.

Even with the census-taker issue, it is noteworthy that the percentage of foreign born women working fell from 1910 to 1920, including the restriction of considering non-agricultural pursuits. This is, of course, a consequence of lower immigration numbers (due to World War I) and the aging of the female immigrant population.

The decline in non-agricultural participation by African-American women from 1910 to 1920 is even more interesting. Most African-American women working in cities were employed as servants or laundresses. The laundry profession declined between 1910 and 1920 as more households took up the services of commercial laundries. Still other households took up the new "electrically operated home washing machines and ironing appliances, making it easier for the thrifty housewife to do her own laundry work." (Hill, page 113) Negro women moved into industry as factory workers, in large percentages but in small numbers. (Hill, page 117.)

If you look at the number of "women and girl breadwinners" in 1917, on the eve of World War I hiring, and compare to figures from 1900 , you can see more than a two and a half fold increase. There were 50,149 women and girls employed in 1900; 134,684 in 1920. (This analysis is from the Missouri Bureau of Labor Statistics [for 1916-1917, page 76] and includes girls below the age of 16, hence the difference from Table B above.) Some of the largest increases were in the categories of bookkeepers and accountants (which increased 3.83 times, to 3,435), clerks and copyists (which increased almost six times, to 5,310), saleswomen (which increased almost three and a half times, to 8,328), stenographers and typewriters (which increased almost three times, to 6,394), and telephone and telegraph operators (which increased two and a half times, to 1,439). I will note below the impact of organized female labor. In 1917, 4,315 St. Louis women were members of labor organizations, along with 52,978 men. (Same source, page 139.) Note that the women who did typing were called "typewriters," along with the machine!

In the nation as a whole, the number of women clerks outside stores increased almost fourfold from 1910 to 1920. The number of stenographers and typists, the number of telegraph operators and the number of telephone operators each more than doubled. There was an increase of almost a third of a million women in the category of semi-skilled operatives in factories—a 33 percent increase, representing the second largest raw number change. Bookkeepers, cashiers and accountants almost doubled. The numbers of women teachers, librarians, and college professors increased dramatically. (This is from Hill's work, page 33.)

As one might expect, there were occupations in decline: the most obvious was probably milliners, due to changing fashions—women still wore hats but they were more conservative and fewer. There were also declines in the numbers of tailoresses, laundresses, dressmakers and seamstresses outside factories, and servants. Joseph Hill found the situation noteworthy and suggested that changes would continue.

> . . . the occupational classification of women gainfully employed may change materially in a comparatively short time. Such changes may, of course, be temporary, as was the case to a large extent during the World War; or they may be indicative of a permanent tendency, or of an adjustment to conditions that are likely to continue. It is by no means certain that women have as yet filled the place they will ultimately come to occupy in the industrial world. The general employment of women in wage-earning pursuits is still a comparatively recent development, and the census statistics indicate that they may be going through a period of adjustment to changing conditions in industry and in society. (Hill, page 32)

Elise Rotella, a current writer, has a fascinating analysis of how women made decisions about when to work. She says young unmarried women didn't pay as much attention to the family situation in 1930 as in 1890. Young unmarried women were most of the female labor force in both periods. However, in 1890, younger women made decisions much as married women did: they looked at the male head-of-household income and weighed the need for additional income against the need for their efforts at home. (*From Home to Office: U.S. Women at Work, 1870-1930,* UMI Research Press, 1981, page 42.) By 1930, male wages didn't

matter as much, indicating to Rotella that, "it become more acceptable for daughters to work outside the home before marriage." (As above, page 51) She believes that having fewer younger children in the house and household cleaning gadgets (like a vacuum cleaner) led daughters to give less weight to their work in the home.

My own analysis of 1910 St. Louis census records supports her contention to some extent. In working-class neighborhoods, it is common to uncover households headed by a widower in which the oldest daughter worked in the home and the younger daughters (as well as working age sons) helped by working outside the home. This indicates that once the need for "household production" was met by one daughter, others were free, both economically and socially, to take jobs. Many of these younger workers were below the age of 16; therefore, they are not reported in the census totals above. It seems, from my analysis of specific households in the 1910 St. Louis census, that 14 was a common start-work age for lower class women, both foreign, first-generation, and native.

Even more relevant for the point at hand is Edith Abbott's 1909 analysis of societal reaction to women working. A Ph.D. and associate director of the Chicago School of Civics and Philanthropy, she said that what bothered folks in 1909 was not that women produced, but that they bargained; that is, they were forced to participate in the give-and-take of business with men. "Objections are . . . raised and difficulties encountered, due not to any novel industrial activity on the part of women, but to the disturbance created by their participation in the bargaining function." (Abbott, in her introduction, pages ix and x.)

Abbott explained that, "helplessness and weakness characterize women in bargaining because they have trouble adjusting to 'modern business.' They have never accepted the ideal of giving as little and getting as much as they can." (page x.) The public "doesn't much care," Abbott said, about the possibility of women increasing their share of work in agriculture or domestic science (because those were not showing disproportionate increases.) It was the increases in the numbers of stenographers, typists, bookkeepers, sales ladies, and,

most of all, professional women like herself, that bothered some people. Those activities were the ones that had increased by 1909 and that were “almost exclusive characteristics of the present day.”

The professional woman was unique within the social structure. In a chapter on Public Opinion and the Workingwoman, Abbott explains that

> The efforts of the professional woman to realize a new ideal of pecuniary independence which have taken her out of the home and into new and varied occupations, belong to recent if not contemporary history. But this history, for her, covers a social revolution, and the world she faces is a new one. The woman of the working classes finds it, so far as her measure of opportunity goes, very much as her great grandmother left it. (page 323)

The reference to the great grandmother’s choice follows an enlightening description of the public attitude toward women’s work in the 19th century and in the early 20th century. Abbot says,

> In the days when the earliest factories were calling for operatives the public moralist denounced her for “eating the bread of idleness” if she refused to obey the call. Now that there is some fear lest profuse immigration may give us an oversupply of labor, and that there may not be work enough for the men, it is the public moralist again who finds that her proper place is at home and that the world of industry was created for men. (also page 323)

How about that? If women don’t work when male factory owners need them, they’re lazy. If they do work and a man wants their job, the women are immoral for not staying at home. Abbott’s work, like Hill’s, is particularly helpful because it’s contemporaneous. It comes from the data of the time period, but, more importantly, it reflects the attitudes of the time.

Paid Work and Non-paid Work

Turn-of-the-twentieth-century women in St. Louis excelled in activities that impacted the economies of the City—and that would not be recorded then or now in gross domestic product.

Closest to market activity was the work of the Women's Trade Union League. The League was a "mixed-class organization" in the words of Robin Miller Jacoby. (This is from page 203 of a chapter Jacoby wrote on "The WTUL and American Feminism," for a book called *Class, Sex, and the Woman Worker*, edited by Cantor and Laurie.) Upper, middle and lower class women joined forces, ideally, to educate themselves and the larger community about working conditions, to encourage membership in established (read that: male-dominated) labor unions, and to push for protective legislation for working women.(same page) It was not always a happy marriage of interests.

Jacoby describes the WTUL as "the women's branch of the labor movement and the industrial branch of the women's movement." (Same page.) The problem was that male-dominated labor unions were not particularly eager, as a group, to admit women to the club. Part of the reason was their concern that women would take jobs from men if the women were encouraged in their gainful industrial employments. Therefore, the job of the WTUL as the women's branch of the labor movement was uphill at best. When it came to occupations that predominantly hired women, the task of organizing was made difficult by much higher turnover than in male-dominated vocations.

Remember that young women often worked only when they were single; as soon as they married, they quit working. That led to high turnover and, honestly, less interest in long-term union work.

As for being the industrial branch of the women's movement, the obvious embarrassment was the national organization denouncing immigrants and "ignorant" working class men as less fit to vote than the educated woman. It was an image problem for upper-class WTUL organizers.

Jacoby asserts that the call of feminism and class may pull women in opposite directions. She believes that, for middle-class feminists outside the WTUL, class outweighed solidarity with other women. The workers, however, saw themselves as women first and workers second.

In some cities, particularly the Eastern cities where the League started, there were more "allies" as the upper class women were called, than workers. St. Louis was noted as having many more working women, perhaps because the organization was started there by a young factory worker named Hannah Hennessey. (I first became aware of the St. Louis distinction from a single sentence in Nancy Schrom Dye's *As Equals and As Sisters: Feminism, Unionism and the Women's Trade Union League of New York,* University of Missouri Press, 1980, page 8.) Information about Hennessey is scarce; we know she died in 1910 of tuberculosis.(This is from Katharine T. Corbett's excellent book, *In Her Place: A Guide to St. Louis Women's History*, Missouri Historical Society, 1999.) Tuberculosis was a common disease of garment workers because the lint from the unventilated factory spaces lodged in workers' lungs. What remains of records of the WTUL in St. Louis show that three women were involved in its leadership. Florence Richardson, Cynthia Knefler, and Mary Bulkley each lived in prosperous Central West End neighborhoods, showed no employment of their own, and were instrumental in the early suffrage activities as well. Presumably, most of the rest of the members were workers like Hennessey.

The WTUL in ST. Louis helped women organize in unions and supported them in strikes: in 1910, women as well as men struck Marx & Haas, a large garment manufacturer. In 1913, St. Louis telephone operators organized under the impetus of the WTUL and struck both St.

Louis telephone companies. Unions were organized in brewing, shoe and Hannah Henessey's garment industries as well as among telephone operators. (Corbett, pages 168-9)

By the second decade of the century, a well-organized labor organization was bound to draw men's attentions and the WTUL in St. Louis apparently succeeded in doing that. We know that the St. Louis WTUL was recognized by the central body of labor unions in the city—which was not the case in New York City, home of the league. (Dye, pages 79 and 80.) The organization was a factor in the city and in the nation in the time period in question. By the early twenties, it had lost steam; it disappeared in the 1950s. At its best, it was a "bridge between the nativist, racist NAWSA and the working classes," according to Jacoby.

In addition to strikes and the possibility of such actions, St. Louis women made their concerns about working conditions heard. For several days in May of 1913, the *Post-Dispatch* reported in detail the proceedings of a hearing by a State Senate investigating committee on the wages of working women. The committee heard testimony of laundry girls (one of whom complained of fainting from the heat but found the wage of $5 to $6 a week much better than she could earn in the country) and an envelope factory worker (who roused the committee's ire by reporting that girls injured in the envelope machines are sent to public dispensaries at public expense) and two scrubwomen (who cleaned office buildings) who made $1 a day. (*Post*-Dispatch, May 23, 1913) Also providing testimony was Mrs. Helen January, wife of a "well-known insurance man," testified in her role with the Consumers' League. She identified the League as a national organization that worked to abolish sweatshops and improve working conditions. Also testifying was Mary Bulkley (see below), chairman of the Industrial Relations Committee of the Central Council of Social Agencies. Between them they set what we would call the living wage for working women at $8.75 a week. (*Post-Dispatch,* May 21, 1913)

January and Bulkley were typical of women who started talking about issues in various clubs and organizations, and moved into the public sphere. In general, they were society women with the leisure to devote their time to "municipal housekeeping," the pursuit of

better civic living by women who presumably knew how to organize a household and thus a municipal economy.

A particularly significant example of this non-paid economic function is Charlotte Rumbold. Born to an upper class family and educated as a social worker, she joined the very upper class Wednesday Club and by 1900 had worked through the Club's Practical Work Committee to organize a summer playground in a neighborhood not normally visited by well-bred women. She moved on to the League for Civic Improvement and helped organize a summer recreation program for 35,000 St. Louis children in the summer of 1902. She also worked through that group to provide public bathhouses.

In 1905 she chaired The Wednesday Club's section on social economy while continuing her work with the Civic League. In 1907, she became head of the new Public Recreation Commission in the St. Louis Parks Department, the city's extensive playground system being a result of her enthusiasm. That year she also wrote the report of the Civic League Housing Committee survey of housing conditions in a major slum area, based on the work of graduate students in the Missouri School of Social Economy. She drafted legislation later passed that required higher construction standards in tenements; the work gained acclaim in focusing attention on the need for city planning.

In 1914, she supported a very successful public pageant, a staple of Progressive Era city reformers. But the public climate was about to turn ugly. In 1915, as city recreation supervisor, she obtained an injunction against the showing of the controversial segregationist film, *Birth of a Nation*. Katharine Corbett, in her detailed work on St. Louis women, says Rumbold, "became publicly identified with opposition to racial discrimination." While the controversy still raged, Rumbold's salary became an issue with the Board of Alderman. Seeking increases in pay for workers in the recreation department, she sought an increase in her own pay from $1,800 to $2,400. Aldermen, mostly from the brewery wards, denied the request, despite outcries that resulted in public hearings and testimonies to her work.

Opposition voices complained of paying so much to “woman material”; it was said she was “not a voter and when she has jobs to give she never favors Republicans”; and the final insult was delivered in her hearing: “Woman’s place is in the kitchen.”

Rumbold permanently left St. Louis for Cleveland, to continue her municipal housekeeping there. (All information on Rumbold is from Corbett, pages 170 to 173.)

Rumbold, Bulkley, and other women used the clubs as a platform for their involvement in civic affairs. It’s no wonder McCammon *et al* found the number of prominent women’s organizations active in a state a significant variable in “the rise of the new woman.” (An excellent sociological look at the suffrage movement is found in McCammon, H.J.,K. Campbell, E.M.Granberg, and C. Mowery, “How Movements Win: Gendered Opportunities Structures and U.W. Women’s Suffrage Movements, 1866 to 1919,” in *American Sociological Review* 66, 2001.) The clubs the researchers looked for were the Consumers’ League, the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, the National Congress of Mothers, the National Women’s Trade Union League, and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Each of these appears in the 1919 St. Louis City Directory with the exception of the National Congress of Mothers. There are seven separate chapters of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union—in a city whose economy was often thought to be dominated by brewery interests.

A brief survey of women’s organizations in St. Louis is in order. The number and variety of those organizations increases steadily over the years. In 1882, the City Directory lists primarily religious-based women’s organizations and few of those. There is a Young Ladies Literary Club, identified as an organization for Bohemian immigrants. Without a Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA), there were several “homes” for women as well as the Worthy Women’s Aid organization; it is not clear if these organizations were directed by men with matrons overseeing day to day operations. There were no female versions of, or auxiliaries to, the dominant men’s groups, either Knights or Masonic. If women had social

organizations, it apparently was not seen fit to publicize them in the City Directory. (This paragraph is based on the 1882 *Gould's City Directory.)*

By 1896, the women's organizations associated with the Masonic Order (Order of Eastern Star and Rebekah Lodges) are listed in *Gould's*; we see the Knights **and** Ladies of Honor and the Knights **and** Ladies of Industry. There are, however, only Knights of Father Mathew—the Ladies of that organization appear in 1919; there are also no women Maccabees. In addition to church-related charitable organizations, there is a Ladies Central Mission and the Woman's Christian Home (which was listed in 1882 as well.) A Dramatic Club and the Women's Self-Culture Club have women officers, as does a Woman's Exchange and the Woman's Humane Society. The Woman's Relief Corps boasted nine corps in the city limits, one of them "colored." Two of the most important organizations of the early twentieth century are listed: the YWCA and the Wednesday Club. There are no women's labor organizations.

By 1912, the number of women's organizations had grown many-fold. Among the societies, there were 13 Eastern Star lodges for white women and another seven for African-American women, a dozen Rebekah lodges, and seventy lodges of the Knights and Ladies of Honor, 28 of which had female secretaries. There were nine "female branches" of the Order of Odd Fellows. The Woman's Relief Corps had seven corps, one still listed as "colored." There were Daughters of the American Revolution and Daughters of 1812. (There were no daughters of either the Confederacy nor the Union.) The Woman's Christian Temperance Union had a headquarters with city-wide officers and ten groups meeting around town, including one "colored." The Woman's Trade Union League is listed by 1912, along with several union locals that likely had a large proportion female membership—including the Waitresses' Union, separate from the Waiters' Union. (All from *Gould's.)*

I record organizations listed under "miscellaneous" in the 1912 Directory to give a sense of the diversity. There were the Altruist Community of St. Louis, the American Woman's

League, the Carondelet Woman's Club, the Christian Woman's National Benevolent Association, the Congenial Circle, the German Protestant Ladies Orphans' Aid Society, the Harmony Literary Club, the Home Economics Club (drawing from several schools), the Independent Progressive Daughters Lodge, the International Sunshine Society, the Knights and Daughters of Tabor, the Lutheran Nurses Club, the Mary and Martha Society for the Poor of St. Francis Xavier Church, the Methodist Deaconess Association, the Missouri Folklore Society, the National P.E.O. Sisterhood St. Louis chapter, The Pioneers, the St. Louis Osteopathic Society (with all women officers), the St. Louis Woman's Club, the Swedish Sister Society Linnea, the Teachers' Fellowship Society, the Tuesday Literary Club, the Wednesday Club (see below), the Society of Applied Arts, the Woman's Auxiliary to the Typographical Union, the Woman's Exchange, the Woman's Mission Board, the Women's Club of Self-Culture, assorted sororities from Washington University, and two Women's Socialist Clubs—one German and one English. In addition, women were officers in the Teachers' Mutual Aid Association, the Union Mission Association National Headquarters and Training School, the St. Louis School of Pedagogy, and the St. Louis School of Social Economy. (*Gould's.*) The latter started out as a School of Philanthropy pioneered by the Provident Association; it became associated with Washington University and its professional social work training. Women enrolled in the program in large numbers and received many of the masters degrees awarded in the decade of interest. (Corbett, pages 156-7)

In 1919, the City Directory includes many of the organizations above with a few notable additions. The Civic League lists its first woman officer, Mrs. Philip N. Moore. (Moore was also the first woman officer of The Provident Association. That charitable organization had been around since 1862 and undoubtedly had operated through the good works of several generations of St. Louis women. (Corbett, page 48) The Federated Women's Clubs shows up in the listing, as does the Town Club. (*Gould's,* 1919.) The Town Club was a business and professional women's club. By 1925, it was housed in a 12-story building and provided

athletics, sociality and contacts in the same way that the City Club and Missouri Athletic club did for men. (Corbett, page 223)

Some of the clubs listed above might seem to be purely social and have little impact on the serious issues of the day. We have comments on that matter from Mary Bulkley, a social activist, founding member of the Wednesday Club and the Equal Suffrage League, and active support of the WTUL. Bulkley's family was well-to-do but financial reverses meant that Bulkley, a skilled bookbinder, was much more in tune with working women than most of her society friends. (This is from Susan Beattie, who wrote the article on Bulkley that appears in Corbett's book, pages 200-01.) Late in life, Bulkley recalled the way the clubs were run.

> Limited as they were, these clubs did for the comfortable woman at that time what the Trade Union local was doing for her working sister. Although we did not know it and probably would have shuddered if we had, it was a needed and worthwhile preparation for "votes for women." At even our least important meetings everything was carried on with the utmost elaboration and decorum. We learned "to move the previous question" with no one batting an eyelash at such sophisticated temerity. (This is from Bulkley's own unpublished manuscript, "Grandmother, Mother and Me," available at the Missouri Historical Society.)

Although Bulkley was somewhat cynical about what society women did in their clubs, she saw the value of the process. She described the General Federation (of Women's Clubs) as "too often a splendid, well-oiled and smoothly-running machine turning a pin wheel, valuable mostly because it gathers a friendly group for study of various problems." (same source) After suffrage was won, the process paid off, according to Bulkley.

> All our punctilio did come in handy after we had the vote and had had more experience of the way things did or did not get themselves done, for in these clubs women were able for almost the first time to work with a basis of common aims to certain ends. We tried ourselves out in competition with one another and thus found who had the real qualities of leadership. And, although "politics" in its particular sense was banned, yet, as far as running the club was concerned, it was very much in evidence. (same source)

One of the clubs listed from 1905 on, the Young Women's Christian Association provided more than just residential and charitable services. The upper-class women who ran

the St. Louis YWCA took their concern for the working girl into factories and department stores, organizing clubs all over the city. (From the files of the YWCA in the Western Historical Manuscripts Collection at the University of Missouri-St. Louis.) In fact, the values of club work were, in a sense, passed on to middle and lower-middle class women via the "Y" clubs. Many of the clubs organized among domestics in hotels; among factory working in establishments such as the Buster Brown facility; among sales clerks in the big department stores like Stix, Baer & Fuller and in the Know Five and Ten Cent Store; among girls in the commercial laundries. Often the clubs involved Bible study, but also featured recreation activities. (More from the YWCA files.)

The "Y" taught classes in sewing, millinery and first aid, and trained "attendants," as well as offering cultural instruction in elocution, English and foreign languages. The Association also taught classes in typing and stenography and helped young women get clerical jobs, visiting offices to solicit positions and then monitoring working conditions. In February of 1912, Isabel Beeding, head of the clerical division of the Employment Department, called on thirty-four business men and firms. During that time, she helped place 28 stenographers, 15 typists, 12 general office workers, ten cashiers, four sales girls, one bookkeeper and one telephone operator. Like Beeding, many of the women doing the day-to-day direction of the "Y" were paid workers, a new professional middle class, some college educated. But the top leadership was an unpaid cadre of society women. The chairman of the Bible Study Committee, the group that organized Bible study groups, was Mrs. Selden P. Spencer. (YWCA files) Her husband was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1919, in time to vote for the woman suffrage amendment.

In a different league than the society women who engaged in municipal housekeeping were the disturbing political voices. Widely respected was Kate Richards O'Hare, associate editor of the *National Rip-Saw*, the official organ of the Socialist Party. The paper was published from offices at 403 Olive Street. O'Hare was not only a popular spokesman for a

very viable political party; she also managed to work with a variety of organizations in St. Louis, including the WTUL, the Civic League, the Equal Suffrage League, and the Wednesday Club. In 1914, she was appointed by a Republican mayor to a commission studying unemployment problems. (Corbett, pages 174-5)

Finally, we must come back around to talking about the Equal Suffrage League. The old Woman Suffrage Association started by Rebecca Hazard and Virginia Minor was a memory. Part of the "new," twentieth-century movement, the ESL club was founded in 1910 at the society-neighborhood home of Florence Richardson (of the WTUL) with founding members such as Cynthia Knefler and Mary Bulkley (both also active in the WTUL); Charlotte Rumbold; and Althea Summerville Grossman, who was known for her work on labor legislation for Missouri women and children. (Corbett contributed the information on Bulkley; the rest is from Dina Young's important article: "The Silent Search for a Voice: The St. Louis Equal Suffrage League and the Dilemma of Elite Reform, 1910-1920," in *Gateway Heritage,* Spring, 1988, pages 3-19.) If Minor had sought "justice" when she cast a vote in 1872, the new club was all about "expediency," in the Kraditor sense of the word. (Aileen Kraditor wrote a highly influential book in 1965 that made a distinction between the early, 19th century, woman's movement seeking the vote as a matter of justice, and the 20th century movement seeking the vote by arguing for expediency, meaning that it would be beneficial for particular purposes. See *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement: 1890-1920,* reprinted in 1981.)

For one thing, the leadership and much of the membership of the St. Louis ESL was upper class and involved in various "good government" progressive causes. They weren't challenging much except their own potential allies in other classes. They had the support of their husbands, by and large. The West End Business Men's Association was on board from the beginning; by 1918, the Chamber of Commerce President (Jackson Johnson) headed the ESL's Men's Advisory Committee. Suffrage news was routinely reported in the local press alongside other society news—and containing descriptions of what the suffragists wore. The league had

to work at gaining the support of working-class women, but succeeded in doing so. The biggest obstacle lay in working around the entrenched political interests—which in St. Louis centered on the brewery interests. (All of this is from Young.)

Although endorsed by the Women's Christian Temperance Union, the ESL was careful not to openly support prohibition, both to maintain the peace with the city's ten breweries, their employees and extended business networks, but also to avoid offending voters in the much less progressive East End. Luckily for the movement, times changed. By 1917, the *Missouri Woman*, organ of the state Suffrage League, was advertising one of Anheuser-Busch's low alcohol products. The brewery interests, fearing prohibition, was seeking support of the women just as the women sought support of all male legislators. (Young)

Dina Young concludes that the St. Louis suffragists, "remained non-partisan, . . . and employed only strategies . . . which the national organization had tested and approved. . . . St. Louis suffragists took to an extreme the objective of keeping the movement 'respectable.'" (page 18)

So, in an era when the actions of women outside the home were beginning to be noticed, St.Louis women were right there in the swing of things, sometimes more aggressive and sometimes more subdued than women in other cities, doing it their way. We can scarcely imagine a time when women were daring simply to work outside the home, let alone agitate for change. In the 1970s, the motto (from a country song) was, "We've Come a Long Way, Baby." The debate on how far women have come in breaking into the public sphere is still being debated, but women in 1910 St. Louis were starting to do their part.