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# Treading Water in a Sea of Male Politicians—Women's Organizations and Lobby Activities in Historical Perspective

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Treading Water in a Sea of Male Politicians—Women’s Organizations and Lobby  
Activities in Historical Perspective

Danelle Moon

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The suffrage victory in 1920 represented a watershed victory for American women, ending 72 years of lobbying activities for the right to vote; As one long chapter closed, new chapters opened granting women full participation in politics, as voters, office holders, and lobbyists. While suffrage brought together some two million women and represented an important milestone, women had made considerable progress as social activists, lobbyist, and policymakers prior to the suffrage victory. Organization such as the YWCA, WCTU, GFWC, Hull House, National Women’s Bureau, DAR, NWP, and the NAWSA played a key role in American politics and changed state and federal laws on a variety of issues including moral reform, public health & safety, and labor and welfare reform, prior to the suffrage victory.

The ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment recognized women as voters, but more importantly it gave women activists new legitimacy as potential office holders and increased their visibility and credibility as lobbyist at all levels of government—local, state, and national. Despite the flurry of political activism preceding and following the suffrage victory, early scholars critical of feminism, characterized the suffrage victory and the women’s movement as a failure. In part early scholars focused on voting trends, which were in general decline during the 1920-decade, but they also focused on the splintering of the women’s movement following the suffrage victory. Over the past thirty years, women’s historians documenting individual women and female centered organizations paint a different picture of post-suffrage activism.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The early post-suffrage scholarship focused more on the failure of feminism during this time period, including the work of: William O’Neill, *Everyone was Brave; the Rise and Fall of Feminism in American* (Quadrangle Books, Chicago, 1969), 129-130, 276-294 (especially 283); William Chafe, *The American: Her Changing Social, Economic and Political Roles, 1920-1970* (University of Minnesota Press, 1963); Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (Columbia University Press, 1965); Lemon, Stanely J. Lemons, *The Woman Citizen: Social Feminism in 1920s* (University of Illinois, 1973). It should also be noted that not all historian agree that women’s political activism was continuous, and clearly not all American women participated as voters or were activists. For example, Nancy Cott argued that the percentage of female participation in voluntary organizations during the 1930s matched the participation of suffragists in the 1920. See Cott, *Grounding Modern Feminism*. 95. Glenna Matthews

As historian Kristie Anderson reminds us, before women could vote, the political infrastructure had to change to allow for female participation through voter registration, voter education, and political party participation. No longer consigned to the private sphere, women had to learn to navigate the male sphere of politics, and develop new expectations and roles as enfranchised citizens. In contrast to the majority of female voters, female activists were well versed in government civics and had been working for years as lobbyist for suffrage, social reform, education, and many other issues. Archival records make clear that many women engaged indirectly as social activists, and directly as voters, and in some locations as candidates and office holders; female political activism varied and was more complex than originally thought.<sup>2</sup>

The foundation for women's political expression can be traced to separate voluntary organizations; a tradition that continued long after the suffrage victory. Historian Estelle Freedman has argued that the coexistence of a variety of female networks reveals the continuity of post-suffrage activism. She has called for a revision of modern history that includes the "pockets of quiet persistence," to explain where and why women's organizations survived, and deepen our understanding of 20<sup>th</sup> century reform and its impact on second wave feminism. Nancy Cott's work also illustrates the "striking continuities" and overlapping participation between organizations that took place in the post-suffrage years. Voluntary organizational records confirm that women's interest in politics did not wane rather they diversified, and membership in these organizations overlapped. In short, suffrage did not fail, but represented a new beginning for female political participation as activists, lobbyists, and policy makers.<sup>3</sup>

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argued that female voluntary organizations, including the newly formed League of Women Voters, had lost some of their political edge, and the majority of the political work belonged to small groups of women. Moreover, female voting trends in 1920 and 1924 paled in comparison to the election of 1928. As Matthews notes, "The election of 1928 was a significant one for women voters because afterward women were never again so remote from the electoral process...." See Matthews, *Public Women*, 177-179.

<sup>2</sup> Andersen, *After Suffrage*, 53-60, 68-69.

<sup>3</sup> Estelle Freedman, "Separatism Revisited: Women's Institutions, Social Reform, and the Career of Miriam Van Waters," in *U.S. History as Women's History; New Feminist Essays*, Edited by Linda K. Kerber, Alice Kessler-Harris, and Kathryn Kish Sklar (University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 171-175. Nancy Cott provides a thorough analysis of women's political role in this era. She shows a continuity of female voluntary organizations that continued to press for social legislation. As noted, women moved from the suffrage campaign to support issues that they were interested including child welfare, women's legal rights, peace, labor, citizenship education, international feminism, and the ERA. See Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism* (Yale University Press, 1987), especially chapter three "Voluntarist Politics," 85-114.

The purpose of this paper to present three provide a historical view context for this session, which is focused on how non-governmental organizations (NGO) interacted with the three branches of government. To this end, I will examine the early role of two national leaders, Dorothy Detzer, Secretary of the U.S. Branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and Alice Paul, leader of the National Woman's Party (NWP), and juxtapose their lobbying activities to the work of local Connecticut social activist, Florence Kitchelt. Through this brief examination, I will demonstrate the fluidity of women's post-suffrage activism, and show how a variety of archival collections can be used to piece together women's early political history. I will conclude by describing some of the personal and congressional papers that I have used to document women's experiences.

### **Detzer, Dorothy (1893-1981)**

The New York Times described Dorothy Detzer as one of the most famous political female lobbyists of her day. Radicalized by her war relief work with the American Friends Service Committee in Vienna and Russia after World War I, she became a committed pacifist and launched a twenty-year career as the National Executive Secretary of the U.S. Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), where she lobbied for disarmament and economic justice.<sup>4</sup>

Upon recommendation from Jane Addams, Detzer was hired as the Executive Secretary of the U.S. section of WILPF in 1924, where she directed the organizations lobbying campaign to promote peace through disarmament legislation and economic justice. Despite her youth and inexperience, she became a quick study on foreign policy and the political process, and she used her connections with grassroots organizations to pressure legislators and the executive branch to promote American neutrality, disarmament, and "Good Neighbor" policies between the wars..

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<sup>4</sup> Rosemary Rainbolt, "Women and War in the United States: The Case of Dorothy Detzer, National Secretary W.I.L.P.F., *Peace and Change* IV, number 3 (Fall 1977), 18; <sup>4</sup> Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *Changing Differences; Women and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy, 1917-1984* (Rutgers University Press, 1999), 65.

As a lobbyist, she influenced numerous legislative investigations, including and most notably the munitions investigation launched by Senator Gerald P. Nye to investigate allegations that U.S. bankers and arms manufacturers instigated World War I for profit. The investigation and resulting conclusions of the “Nye Commission” reinforced American neutrality between the wars. While there are many books written about the Nye and his work on anti-war legislation, Dorothy Detzer’s lobbying role in the investigation has been largely overlooked by foreign policy historians.

Historian Carrie Foster thoroughly examined government, personal, and the organizational records of WILPF and other peace organizations to help correct the historical record. Between the 1920 and 1930s, WILPF focused some of their lobbying efforts to investigate the munitions industry, which was fueled by economic instability and aggressive action by Japan to invade Manchuria. The WILPF believed in universal disarmament, and Japan’s violation of China, represented a new world crisis. Through the lobbying activities of Detzer and other peace advocates, WILPF took direct action and sent telegrams to President Hoover and Henry Stimson, Secretary of State and urged them to support the enforcement of the Nine Powers Act, which safe-guarded the rights and interests of China, to which Japan and the U.S. were signatories. When these efforts failed, they petitioned Hoover to send a “strong public message” to Japan, which eventually led to support an arms embargo against Japan and China. Fearful of a government conspiracy and lack of reliable information on the affairs of state in the Near East, Detzer urged Stimson to end the secret diplomacy and demanded that the U.S. observe the international acts. Discouraged by the administration’s lack of real action by Congress, WILPF drafted a bill to limit U.S. munitions sales.<sup>5</sup>

Between 1931 and 1934, Detzer worked the chambers of Congress to promote adoption of legislation to prohibit of munitions to any country that violated the Kellogg-Briand Pact, outlawing acts of war. As Congress wrestled with the issue, Detzer worked with Congressmen Howard Fish to promote a resolution that would address all of their concerns, but as press coverage and peace activist converged, the State Department

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<sup>5</sup> Carrie A. Foster, *The Women and the Warriors; The U.S. Section of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, 1915-1946* (Syracuse University Press, 1995), 192-208.

worked in concert with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to kill the bill. By 1933 the mood in this committee shifted some, and through a series of letters and personal exchanges, Detzer found favor with newly elected Senator Gerald P. Nye, of North Dakota, and by 1934 the Senate authorized an investigation, due in large part to the lobby efforts of Detzer and other peace organizations.<sup>6</sup> for which the New York Times referred to Detzer as the “most famous lobbyists of the 1920s and 1930s. While Detzer played a critical role in the instigation of the Nye Committee (1933-1936), she also worked on numerous other foreign policy issues, including her work with WIL (international) and lobbying work with the League of Nations and the U.N.<sup>7</sup>

Detzer spent twenty years on the Hill as a lobbyist, and in 1947 wrote about her experiences in her autobiography, *Appointment on the Hill*, following her retirement from WILPF. While her autobiography provides an antidotal account of her work, the records of the U.S. Section of WILPF, in addition to standard Congressional papers and publications, and the personal papers of other peace activists and Congressmen reaffirm her significance. The U.S. Section papers document the full range of Detzer’s activities, from her work with Congressmen, petitioning the President and Secretary of State, to the regional activities, which included coast to coast travel, speaking tours, building support for the branches, attending international peace conferences at the Hague, and working with the international organization of WIL. These records document her diversity as a lobbyist, and most importantly show the global impact of American foreign policy, while reinforcing the role that local activists played in promoting peace. While the bulk of the collection reside at Swarthmore College, the U.S. Section records are available on microfilm and include a portion of the branch records documenting the early history of WILPF, bulk 19\_\_-19\_\_. WILPF is the only surviving women’s peace organization in the U.S. and is likely the only surviving organization following the inter-war period. WILPF celebrated 90 years in 2005, and still is a functioning peace organization with branches across the U.S. and the globe. Archivists interested in documenting local peace

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 208-217.

<sup>7</sup> Rhodri Jeffreys-Jones, *Changing Differences; Women and the Shaping of American Foreign Policy, 1917-1984* (Rutgers University Press, 1999), 65-67; Rosemary Rainbolt, “Women and War in the United States: The Case of Dorothy Detzer, National Secretary WLPF,” *Peace and Change* 4 (Fall 1977); Dorothy Detzer, *Appointment on the Hill* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1948) .

organizations, can still locate local organizational records, and combined with other historical collections and congressional records, provide students and scholars with important sources to build on the historical record, and help advance the study of women's history.

### **Alice Paul (1885-1977)**

Alice Paul is best known as the leader of the National Women's Party (NWP), the leftwing of the suffrage movement. The NWP formed out of the Congressional Union, a branch of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, which later split over tactics and goals. Paul's work is most closely associated with suffrage militancy. As the leader of the NPW, she incited controversy over wartime picketing of the White House, which led to jail and hunger strikes—as popularly represented by the film *Iron Jawed Angels*. While she indeed played a primary role in the last push for suffrage, she spent the remainder of her life working for the Equal Rights Amendment, and promoted international equal rights and human rights. Conflict between Paul and moderate feminists following the suffrage victory over the ERA contributed to another long struggle for women's rights—a 49 year struggle. Paul drafted and the ERA and it was first introduced to Congress in 1923, and every year thereafter, until it passed Congress finally passed the Amendment in 1972. Following the first introduction of ERA, Paul temporarily resigned as chairman, and spent the 1930s in Europe working for international equal rights. While in Europe she lobbied the League of Nations and formed the World Woman's Party, but she continued to play a key role as primary advisor to NWP, until she returned to the states in the 1940s.<sup>8</sup>

Paul's role in the NWP and ERA campaign was complex. She served largely in an unofficial/semi-official position as honorary chairman, but she directed the campaign and lobbying efforts of the organization, often working side-by-side or directing the lobby activities from a distance. For example, Emma Guffey Miller worked closely with Paul, and spent much of her time promoting ERA through the Federation of Democratic Women's Clubs, while Pearl Mitchell Sayre worked the Republic clubs and had influence

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<sup>8</sup>Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism*, Chps.2 & 4; Susan D. Becker, *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment; American Feminism Between the Wars* (Greenwood Press, 1981), 19-21, 29-30, 166-169, 204-205

with the Republican Party, particularly in Oklahoma. The NWP leadership and members were largely privileged women, and used their political and social connections to promote the Amendment.<sup>9</sup>

Following the first introduction of the ERA to Congress in 1923, mainstream women's organizations mobilized an anti-ERA opposition on the basis that the amendment would nullify sex-based protective legislation mandating working conditions, hours, and wages. The membership base of the NWP prior to the ERA debate included a number of women who had worked for suffrage and protective legislation, and many feared that ERA would undermine their work to improve working women's rights. A small group of the leaders, including Florence Kelly of the National Consumers League and Maud Wood Park, President of NWLV approached Paul to include an exemption for protective legislation. Paul's absolute refusal alienated social feminists and Park later commented that Paul would "...divide the woman's movement."<sup>10</sup> Other predominant figures including Carrie Chapman Catt, the League of Women Voters, Mary Anderson of the Children's Bureau, Dr. Alice Hamilton, champion of industrial medicine and labor advocate, National Women's Trade Union League, Women's Christian Temperance Union and General Federation of Women's Clubs opposed to the ERA . It would take several decades before mainstream groups would support ERA.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the lack of support from major women's groups and from laboring women, Paul disregarded mainstream opposition to the Amendment, which was grounded on protective labor legislation. The NWP consistently maintained that sex-based legislation reinforced women's economic dependence, and "...relegated them to the lowest, worst paid labor," and their unwillingness to compromise with social feminists bottle-necked their lobbying efforts.<sup>12</sup>

Both the supporters and opponents of ERA focused on protective legislation to support their viewpoints. The NWP argued that ERA would abolish the need for

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<sup>9</sup> Alice Paul Oral history, Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library (ROHO), 267-277, 385-387; Becker, *ERA*, 31-32

<sup>10</sup> Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 123-124.

<sup>11</sup> Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 120-129; Cott, "Equal Rights and Economic Roles: The Conflict over the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1920s," in Kerber and Dehart, *Women's America: Refocusing the Past* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 357-58; Younger, *In the Public Interest*, 58-59.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 124; Becker, *ERA*, 19.



protective legislation because it would grant full equality "...not abridged by sex."<sup>13</sup> The NWB argued that the Amendment would result in legal and social chaos by negatively affecting the Social Security system, force female military conscription, and challenge the laws mandating male support of their families. The NWB and other supporting organizations firmly believed that ERA would adversely impact women as mothers and wives, and believed that the statutes should be changed at the state level. They countered the NWP by forming the National Committee to Defeat the Unequal Rights Amendment (1944).<sup>14</sup> Both groups found supporters in Congress and in government to promote their position. In the following example, Secretary of State Dean Acheson testimony to the Senate Judiciary Committee, reflects the oppositions view:

The Constitution is no place to theorize about relations between the sexes. Law is law. It is not a place for emotions or hope.... I think everyone will agree with us, that the thing to do is to legislate to change the statutes. It is not to put into the Constitution an act which do[es] nothing useful, but will produce the most terrific confusion, and make it most impossible for any man or woman to know where he or she stands in regard to property or personal rights and duties."<sup>15</sup>

The NWB, NLWV, and National Consumer's League (NCL) along with other organizations shared Acheson's views. These groups continued to oppose ERA because they believed that it would not resolve the complex labor issues women faced on a daily basis, or preserve female difference. The NWB led the opposition, while offering other alternatives to improve the status women, including the Taft-Wadworth Bill (status bill), and changed their name to the National Committee on the Status of Women. The Status Bill was designed to offer an alternative and a compromise to ERA for other women's organizations who had given support to the ERA. They Bill failed as an alternative, but laid the groundwork for a future National Commission on the Status of Women.<sup>16</sup>

Paul remarked in her oral history that the real challenge was not getting the amendment into Congress, but changing the minds of American women. In reality, the NWP and its lobbying arm, the Women's Joint Legislative Committee worked against

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<sup>13</sup> Caroline Babcock to Kitchlet, February 2, 1945, *NWP*, reel #84, CSL.

<sup>14</sup> Cynthia Harrison, *On Account of Sex: the Politics of Women's Issues, 1945-1968* (UC Press, 1988), 17-19.

<sup>15</sup> Kitchelt to Alice Paul, October 11, 1945, *NWP*, reel 87, Yale; Harrison, *Account of Sex*, 19-27.

<sup>16</sup> Harrison, *Account of Sex*, 24-30

the only government policy arm, the NWP. Both sides believed in equal rights, but they clearly disagreed over the methods and to a large extent, the ERA debate became a power struggle between women's organizations over the control of public policy; neither side was entirely successful, and while Paul dominated the campaign, she failed to build consensus beyond the political vanguard of NWP women.<sup>17</sup>

Considering the power of the opposition, a series of lobbying victories advanced the ERA cause. By 1944 the National Federation of Business Women, Professional Women's Club, and the General Federation of Women's Clubs offered their endorsement. Moreover, the Republican and Democrat parties endorsed ERA into their party platforms. Given the hostilities that all women's organizations faced in this period, the NWP's lobbying activities and the work of the WJCC laid the groundwork for the modern movement.<sup>18</sup> There is little question that Paul played a significant role in the lobbying efforts. Oral historian Amelia Fry remarked that Paul at age 85 had a remarkable memory—a "running-record" of every congressmen, his past and present actions on ERA; she knew the attitudes of the wives, secretaries and assistants."<sup>19</sup> She used her drive, ambition and talent to inspire other women to join her cause—a pattern that she continued until the ERA passed Congress in 1972.<sup>20</sup> Paul spent her life lobbying Congress, mentoring her contemporaries and younger women to become lobbyists for the cause of ERA. Amelia Fry learned quickly the power of Paul's persuasion. Paul would not agree to an interview until the Amendment passed Congress. Fry thus became inducted as a Paul lobbyist and worked with California HR, Don Edwards to support the

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<sup>17</sup> Paul Oral history, (ROHO) 442-443, 448-450; Harrison, *Account of Sex*, 10-15; Lelia J. Rupp, "The Woman's Community in the National Woman's Party, 1945-1960s," *Signs* 10 (Summer 1985), 715-740.

<sup>18</sup> Cott, "Equal Rights and Economic Roles," *Women's America*, 361-363. It should be noted that during the 21 year struggle to gain women's group support, the NWP participated in number of organizations to promote equal rights, including international work with International Alliance of Women, supported the equal rights treaty from the Sixth Pan American Conference in 1928 and lobbied the League of Nations through other international women's groups. See Becker, *ERA*, 22-25.

<sup>19</sup> Amelia Chita Fry recorded Paul's oral history over the period of 6-months, but prior to that she had cultivated a six relationship, where she worked as a lobbyist for ERA, prior to its passage in Congress in 1972. See Fry's notes describing her impressions of her long-term relationship with Paul. See Paul, Oral History, ROHO, iii-xix, 286,598.

<sup>20</sup> Amelia Fry, "From West to East for Freedom Now! *American West* 6 (January 1969) : 16-25; Alice Paul Oral History, Interview History and Interviewer's Impressions of Alice Paul, iii-xix, 286,598. See the following articles: Amelia Fry, "Suffragist Alice Paul's Memoirs: Pros and Cons of Oral History", *Frontiers*, Vol II (1977)82-86; "Two Searches for Alice Paul," *Frontiers* VII (1983), 21-24. In addition to Fry's interview see: Robert Gallagher; Lynne Cheney, "How Alice Paul Became the Most Militant Feminist of them all," *Smithsonian*, November 1972; Becker, *ERA*, 29-31.

Amendment in California and Congress. Fry recalled “ I had jokingly struck a bargain with Alice: I would lobby if she would agree to a tape record after ERA passed Congress.”<sup>21</sup>

On records, the history of Paul, the NWP, and the ERA, can be traced through a number of sources including the NWP papers, Alice Paul Papers, other organization records (LWV, NWB, AAUW, GFWC etc...), Congressional records, papers of Congressmen, personal manuscript papers, and oral history.

### **Florence Kitchelt (1874-1961)**

In contrast to Detzer and Paul, Florence Ledyard Cross Kitchelt (1874-1961)) never developed a national reputation as an activist. Kitchelt’s work took place at the regional level, though her activist life intersected with national organizations and their leaders. Kitchelt’s early career as a settlement house worker launched her life-long struggle for women’s rights and human rights. Her political trajectory began with the suffrage movement, and like many of her contemporaries, her work diversified into the Connecticut League of Women Voters (CLWV) and then to the Connecticut League of Nations Association (CLNA), where she worked to promote the League and worked for world peace. Following twenty years of peace activism, she joined the National Women’s Party (NWP) in 1943, and helped form the Connecticut Committee for the Equal Rights Amendment (CCERA). She spent the last eighteen years of her life building support for ERA from mainstream women’s organization and from local representatives and members of Congress.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Conversations with Alice Paul: Woman Suffrage and the Equal Rights Amendment, Oral Interview, Conducted by Amelia R. Fry (Regional Oral History Project, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1976), iii.-vii; Amelia R. Fry, “The Two Searchers for Alice Paul, *Frontiers* VII, number 1 (1983), 21-24, and “Suffragist Alice Paul’s Memoirs: Pros and Cons of Oral History, *Frontiers* II, number 2 (1977), 82-86.

<sup>22</sup> Florence Kitchelt’s activism can be traced through her personal papers and through the organizational records of the Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association (CWSA), the Connecticut League of Women Voters (CLWV), the Connecticut League of Nations Association (CLNA), and the National Women’s Party (NWP). See the Florence Ledyard Cross Papers, MS-A1, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University (hereinafter cited as Kitchelt, SCHL); Florence Ledyard Cross Papers, MS 315, Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library (hereinafter cited as Yale); Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College; Kroch Library, Special Collections & Archives, Cornell University Library; Connecticut Women’s Suffrage Association records; the Connecticut League of Women Voters records located at the Connecticut State Library (hereinafter cited as CSL), and the National Women’s Party records available on microfilm (MISC. 950), Yale University Library (hereinafter cited as NWP).

Kitchelt spent her early career working with the Italian community in Rochester, New York and New Haven, Connecticut as a settlement house worker. Her contact with the Italian immigrant community, and especially her work with immigrant women shaped her views on social reform, and reinforced her commitment to support protective labor legislation for women and children. Closely aligned with other social feminists and especially with the LWV, Kitchelt did not support ERA, because she feared that the Amendment would nullify protective labor legislation for women and children.<sup>23</sup> Life experience and the realities of the lack of economic opportunities for working women and continued discrimination against women convinced Kitchelt that a federal Amendment was a better approach to permanent and long lasting equality. At the same time, she continued to believe that women and children required some special protection in the labor force. Like many other Progressive women, early on she believed that the ERA would force legislative change at the state level, and thereby force the elimination of discriminatory labor practices against women. Frustrated by the constant sexual double standards women faced in society, she wrote the NWP:

As one who in the past has disbelieved in the Equal Rights Amendment, and spoken against it, I now wish to retract and join the National Woman's Party....No special argument but just life in general has convinced me. The vote, for which I worked, and marched in one of Alice Paul's parades in Washington, gave us an immense lift, but it was not enough. For a long time I have been growingly conscious that no amount of special benefit to women is good enough to offset the basic damage done to human equality by continuing to accept for women a second place in our social structure. I want to work toward a society in

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<sup>23</sup> By and large social feminists, and particularly settlement house workers, and leaders of the Women's Bureau focused on improving the general health and work environments of poor and working class women through such measures as the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infant Act, 1918-1924. The League of Women Voters became an important lobbying arm for the Women's Bureau and provided the footwork to support numerous infant and maternity studies initiated by the Bureau. These women represented mainstream women, and many of the key leaders who held membership in the NWP, left the organization over protective legislation issues. See Robin Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion in American Reform* (Oxford University Press, 1991), 103-110, 126-128; Louise M. Young, *In the Public Interest; The League of Women Voters, 1920-1970* (Greenwood Press, 1989), 59-61; Katherine Kish Sklar, "Florence Kelley and Women's Activism in the Progressive Era," in *Women's America: Refocusing the Past*, Editors Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sharron Dehart (6<sup>th</sup> edition, Oxford University Press, 2004), 336-338; Glenna Matthews, *The Public Woman; Woman's Power and Woman's Place in the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 180-181; Sherry Katz provides an interesting account of California Socialist women, many of whom came from the middle class. These women also focused on labor legislation, but their aims were focused on economic justice for the family and the eradication of poverty. Kitchelt shared similar views, but the Socialist Party was never very strong in Connecticut, and as result she worked through mainstream channels. See Sherry Katz, "Socialist Women and Progressive Reform," *California Progressivism Revisited*, Edited by William Deverell and Tom Sitton (University of California Press, 1994), 117-120.

which character wins. The mere possession of wealth and the accident of sex are too often the determining factor. And finally I am convinced it will be good for women to protect their own social and economic rights, rather than to be protected. It may stimulate them to a better use of their vote and to political activity.<sup>24</sup>

Kitchelt spent the next eleven years lobbying women's organizations and the Connecticut legislature. She also wrote numerous editorials in various New England and New York papers in response to anti-ERA attacks and promoted the Amendment. She corresponded regularly with Alice Paul and other NWP board members, and provided them with periodic updates on the activities in the state. Working through the newly formed CCERA, she lobbied for regional support of the ERA, and developed a close friendship with Alma Lutz, the literature chairman of the NWP and Vice President of CCERA, and other NWP and leaders.<sup>25</sup>

Kitchelt's interactions with the NWP, LWV, the American Academy of University Women (AAUW), and the General Federation of Women's Club (GFWC), provides an interesting account of the divisions that existed between women's organizations over the protective labor legislation for women. The pitched battle over protective legislation dominated both sides of the debate, and the NWP's stance on ERA and inability to compromise with social feminists over the protective labor legislation created a feminist divide; a divide that Kitchelt naively hoped to repair.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Florence Kitchelt to the Secretary [Caroline Lexow Babcock] of the National Woman's Party, April 1, 1943, NWP, reel #76, Yale.

<sup>25</sup> The Schlesinger collection includes information on Kitchelt's early life as a settlement house worker, but the bulk of the papers document her suffrage, CLWV, and ERA work. The ERA materials are especially strong in detailing her lobbying activities through editorials and letters to various editors, and correspondence with the NWP and other organizations and individuals. In one example, the *New York Herald Tribune* published her editorial "Equal Rights; Amendment Rider Criticized as misplacing the issue." See Kitchelt, box 2, folder 17a; Kitchelt to Mrs. Katherine Hepburn, June 29, 1945, box 6, folder 153, SCHL.

<sup>26</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (Yale University Press, 1987) Chps.2 & 4; Susan Becker, *The Origins of the Equal Rights Amendment: American Feminism Between the Wars* (Greenwood Press, 1981), 166-169, 204-205; The National Women's Bureau embodied and controlled the opposition, but represented a number of organizations, including the YWCA, LWV, National Consumer League (NLC) AAUW, labor groups, Catholic organizations, and many others. Cynthia Ellen Harrison, *On Account of Sex; The Politics of Women's Issues 1945-1968* (UC Press, 1988), 12-23. .

## Connecticut Post Suffrage Activism

Connecticut women struggled for 52 years to promote women's rights despite the bitter contest by male legislators before and after ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. During the inter-war years dedicated Connecticut women made significant strides as voters, office holders, and lobbyists. Kitchelt's papers confirm the impact that the vote had on women's political activism both regionally and nationally.<sup>27</sup> While Kitchelt left personal papers documenting her activism, she has received little attention from scholars. In part, this absence reflects the initial push to document the national organizations and key leaders. Building the national narrative was an important first step. However, in order to fully grasp the role that women have played as lobbyists, it is important to make connections between regional and national work. The national organizations, in fact, depended on regional women like Kitchelt to build support and momentum for their political campaigns.<sup>28</sup>

As historian Carole Nichols' has noted in her work on Connecticut post-suffrage activism, the focus on national organizations and their leaders presents a skewed picture of women's political activism. She argued that these studies failed "...to recognize that most feminist activity occurred on the local and state levels..." and that female activism was driven by local community concerns. Kitchelt's activism supports this view. Well grounded as a local lobbyist, she understood the political process and the role that local activism played at the state and federal level. Her correspondence with Alice Paul and the

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<sup>27</sup> Cott, *Modern Feminism*, Chp. 3, Voluntarist Politics; Kristie Anderson, *After Suffrage; Women in Partisan and Electoral Politics before the New Deal* (University of Chicago Press, 1996), 49-75; Carole Nichols "Votes and More for Women: Suffrage and After in Connecticut," *Women & History*, no. 5 (1980), 1-53; Carole Nichols and Joyce Pendery, "Pro-Bono Publico: Voices of Connecticut's Political Women, 1915-1945," *Oral History Review* 11 (1983), 49-69.

<sup>28</sup> Katherine Clare Meerse in her study of the Minnesota Branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), presents a strong case for the need to document regional branches. WILPF did not focus on a single approach, and the national leadership philosophy was uneven and not fully defined. By studying state and local branches, historians can build a stronger understanding of the goals and objectives of the organization. The same could be said for the NWP. While they claimed to work on the single issue of ERA, the regional branches and individual members worked on a number of social reform issues. Kitchelt's work likewise was diverse, and regional studies of this kind will expand our understanding of national organizations, and their relationship to regional women and branches. See Katherine Clare Meerse, "Progressives for Peace and Social Justice; The Minnesota Branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1921-1941," (PhD. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1999) 4-6, 15-16; Becker, *E RA*); Cott, *Modern Feminism*, Jean V. Matthews, *The Rise of the New Woman; The Women's Movement in America, 1875-1930* (IVAN R. DEE, Chicago, 2003).

NWP highlight the importance of regional studies of this kind. In my larger project, I am examining Kitchelt's role as a state organizer and activist, and I will demonstrate the importance of documenting regional activists and show how their work shaped the ERA movement in a regionally distinct way, while contributing the larger national movement.<sup>29</sup>

The history of post-suffrage activism through the lens of Kitchelt's life is far too long and complex to describe in great detail here. Briefly, Kitchelt's lobby career for women's rights began with the Connecticut suffrage battle. The Republican Party controlled state politics, and the legislature was largely anti-suffrage and anti-feminist.<sup>30</sup> The Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association (CWSA) organized a series of campaigns between 1918-1920 in the final push. In January of 1919, the women launched a new signature campaign adopting the slogan "Strike while the Iron is Hot." Florence Kitchelt acting as the Legislative Secretary reminded the membership to make contact with each of the 258 legislators, which she argued would prove to the Legislature that suffrage was not "...a scheme 'cooked up' at Hartford," but had statewide backing.<sup>31</sup>

Connecticut became the 37<sup>th</sup> state to ratify the Amendment, and quickly following national ratification, the Connecticut Women League of Voters (CLWV) formed and became one of the best organized in the U.S. The CLWV provided important leadership on political education and the first two presidents, Katherine Ludington and Percy Maxim Lee became national board members. Kitchelt played a significant role in the education campaign, and helped organize the "Citizenship Education Program", produced designed to educate women on the political party system and teach general

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<sup>29</sup> Carole Nichols, "Votes and More for Women," 1-2; Nichols and Pendery, "Pro-Bono Publico," 49-69.

<sup>30</sup> Alexander Epstein recently argued that the 1920 election is pivotal to our understanding of American women's entry into international organizations, because it was the first election where women could vote. Examining the role of California women in promoting the League of Nations, Epstein documents the success of the early state voting rights granted to Western women by liberal minded state legislatures. California women were granted state voting rights in 1911, which meant that they could vote in the primary. The election results demonstrate that women voted by party rather by issue, and women did not vote as a bloc. See Alexander Epstein, "American Women, the League of Nations, and the 1920 Presidential Election," (Paper Presented at the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, 2005), 1-3 (paper in possession of author); For a detailed study on the California suffrage, see Gayle Gullett, *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women's Movement, 1880-1911* (University of Illinois, 2000); Anderson, *After Suffrage*, 50-63.

<sup>31</sup> Herbert F. Janick, Jr., *Connecticut 1914 to the Present* (The Pequot Press) 16-18; Florence Kitchelt to County Chairmen and Organizers, March 1, 1919, National American Woman Suffrage Association records (hereinafter NAWSA), Microfilm, reel #51.

courses in civic responsibility. Kitchelt played a primary role as the Citizenship Director, and she authored “The Mechanism of Law-Making in Connecticut; A Diagram of the General Assembly,” which the League used as a teaching tool. Kitchelt and other CLWV members taught courses on local and national citizenship, and party machinery.

In July of 1920, the *Woman Citizen* in “Citizenship Classes in Quick Action in Old New England,” reported that the Connecticut program reached 2,380 women, and by the Fall of 1921, the CLWV gave 2,809 speeches across the state. In 1921, Ruth Finley writing for *Good Housekeeping* commented that Connecticut women “are laying bare politics,” and she credited Kitchelt for “revolutionizing politics in Connecticut” through her lawmaking pamphlet. Women like Kitchelt and Katharine Ludington, a board member of the National League of Women Voters, and President of the CLWV helped transform women’s political participation, and the CWLV education program and literature became a model for other states. Notwithstanding the success of local League women, they faced constant criticism, and mostly from male politicians who felt that the League provided an outlet for the “old crowd of suffragists.” Commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the League, the *Bridgeport Sunday Post* reported that some politicians referred to the League as “a bunch of short-haired women [who] are trying to tell us what to do.”<sup>32</sup> Despite the insults, the League helped women navigate an extremely hostile

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<sup>32</sup> Nichols, “Votes and More for Women,” 34-41; Cott, *Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 106; Anderson, *After Suffrage*, 111-115; The Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association formerly disbanded and formed the League of Women Voters following the November election of 1920. Letter from Katharine Ludington, President of CWSA to Suffragists, August 20, 1920, in the NAWSA records on microfilm, reel 51; Report of Citizenship Department, Connecticut Woman Suffrage Association, Since March 1920, Florence Ledyard Cross Kitchelt papers, MS-A1, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University (hereinafter SCHL), Box 2, folder 6; Florence Ledyard C. Kitchelt, *The Mechanism of Law-Making in Connecticut*, (1920), Kitchelt papers, SCHL, box 2, folder 16; “Citizenship Classes in Quick Action in New England,” *The Woman Citizen*, July 3, 1920, Kitchelt papers, SCHL, box 2, folder 16; Ruh E. Finley, “Laying Politics Bare,” *Good Housekeeping*, October 1921, 69, 101-106, SCHL, Box 1, folder 1; It is important to note that the LWV faced a similar problem in securing a strong membership base, but by 1938 twenty-six local leagues had formed. Actual information on the total number of members had not been well documented. The Biennial Report from the county organizations did not mention the total membership, though a few counties included the addition of new local branches and number of new members. For example, Middlesex County reported that for the 1936-1937 year, the Middletown League had 64 members. *Two Years of Progress; Reports of Activities, Connecticut League of Women Voters, Sixteenth, Third Biennial, Convention, May 9-11, 1938*, Connecticut Women League of Voters papers (hereinafter CWLV), box 1. See also Nichols & Pendery, 57-59; Nichols, *Votes and More*, 37-46; Young, Louise M. In *the Public Interest: The League of Women Voters, 1920-1970* (Greenwood Press, 1989), 51.



male public and legislature. Political women drew strength from female networks, and particularly from the CWLV.<sup>33</sup>

Kitchelt's leadership skills and knowledge of state politics worked in her favor, as she moved from the League to become the secretary and later director of the CLNA. In this capacity she worked with other leaders in the state to organize local peace conferences, led state-wide speaking tours to promote the League of Nations, and met with local organizations such as the LWV, YWCA, AAUW, and Labor. She worked collaboratively with peace organizations and civic/political organizations to promote the Emergency Peace Campaign and she helped establish educational programs for high school students through various state peace conferences, publications and curriculum, parades, peace plays and radio broadcasts. The *Model Assembly of the League of Nations* is such example; this conference provided students first-hand experience visualizing the work of the League and reinforced the value of solving problems by conference instead of by conflict and war.

Kitchelt's expressed her activism in a number of venues, and with the war and formal decline of the League of Nations. In 1943 she resigned and moved on to organize the Connecticut Committee on the Equal Rights Amendment (CCERA); a separate organization, but closely tied to the NWP. In Connecticut the NWP branch formed during the last push for suffrage, but its small membership base did little to raise the bar for ERA until Kitchelt helped to organize the CCERA. Kitchelt spent the next eleven years lobbying women's organizations and the Connecticut legislature. She also wrote numerous editorials in various New England and New York papers in response to anti-ERA attacks and promoted the Amendment. She corresponded regularly with Alice Paul and other NWP board members, and provided them with periodic updates on the activities in the state. Working through the newly formed CCERA, she lobbied for regional support of the ERA.<sup>34</sup> Kitchelt's interactions with the NWP, LWV, the

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<sup>33</sup> Nichols & Pendery, "Pro Bono Publico," 61-64; Janick, *Connecticut 1914 to the Present*, 25-26; Howard Comstock, "League of women Voters Celebrates Two Decades of Service, *Bridgeport Sunday Post*, December 3, 1939.

<sup>34</sup> The Schlesinger collection includes information on Kitchelt's early life as a settlement house worker, but the bulk of the papers document her suffrage, CLWV, and ERA work. The ERA materials are especially strong in detailing her lobbying activities through editorials and letters to various editors, and correspondence with the NWP and other organizations and individuals. In one example, the *New York*

American Academy of University Women (AAUW), and the General Federation of Women's Club (GFWC), provides an interesting account of the divisions that existed between women's organizations over the protective labor legislation for women. This organization formed as an independent organization, with loose ties to the NWP, despite initial resistance from the NWP leadership.

Writing to Caroline Babcock, Executive Secretary of the NWP, she suggested that a broad-based program was needed in Connecticut to reach out to other groups:

There are 20 organizations in addition to the NWP, which are ready to some fighting for the Amendment....The middle of the road women are too busy in other ways, and in war work to come over to the Party in numbers. Numbers count with Congressmen. We cannot get numbers by confining our Committee to the membership of the NWP—hardly half-a-dozen in the state.<sup>35</sup>

An experienced lobbyist and organizer, Kitchelt understood the mindset of local politicians and the importance of broad-based support to win political endorsements. Bringing together women from all groups to fight for the Amendment became her primary goal and her connection to social feminists involved with the LWV and the American Association of University Women (AAUW) gave Kitchelt a strong advantage as she promoted the ERA; she also promoted gender diversity and supported male members, which the NWP did not.<sup>36</sup>

Similar to Alice Paul, Kitchelt spent a life-time as an activist. While Paul focused on the very discrete issue of equal rights, Kitchelt had her had in a number of projects, and like many social feminists her activities were equally diverse and her involvement in peace and women's rights overlapped. Dorothy Detzer on the other hand did not continue her political lobbying work after she left WILPF following WWII. Despite the distinct differences that separated these women as individuals, as members of different organizations, and as national and regional leaders, all three promoted women's rights

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*Herald Tribune* published her editorial "Equal Rights; Amendment Rider Criticized as misplacing the issue." See Kitchelt, box 2, folder 17a (SCHL).

<sup>35</sup> Kitchelt to Babcock, July 20, 1943, NWP, reel #7, Yale.

<sup>36</sup> Nichols, *Votes and More*, 46; Kitchelt to Caroline Babcock, July 20, 1943, NWP, Babcock to Kitchelt, August 17, 1943, reel #7, Yale.

through their lobbying activities, and thus served as important role models for younger women. The suffrage victory indeed became a watershed for women's political activities, and as Estelle Freedman suggests, despite the political and social climate against feminism, a number of pockets persisted, and they were not so quiet, and they have left a trail of documentation as they pressured all branches of government at state and federal levels.

### **A Few Words on Collection Development**

As archivists and historians we have a good understanding of the diversity of sources that provide the evidence that supports building more inclusive and broad-based studies on all topics. In the 1970s and 1980s, scholars searched high and low for collections documenting women's role in American society. We have come a long way since the rise of social history and the concentrated effort to document women's lives; there is still great opportunity to collect personal papers, organizational records, and congressional papers regionally. These records combined with the official government records, will provide the next generation of students and scholars with important materials to flesh out new stories and reinterpret the current historiography. To that end, the following papers, will provide a very specific look at similar organizational records and show how the American Red Cross and the American Home Economics Association influenced national policymaking—more pockets of not so quiet persistence.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Cott, *Grounding Modern Feminism*, 9-10; Anderson, *After Suffrage*, 7-8; As noted by Anderson and others, there is ample evidence to support the success of women before and after the vote. Club women continued to engage in reform politics, but the greatest measure of success can be seen during the Progressive Era to the New Deal with the “female dominion” in creating a welfare state. See Muncy, *Creating a Female Dominion*; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Harvard University Press, 1992).