



Nurses Fight For The Right To Vote: Spotlighting Four Nurses Who Supported The Women's Suffrage Movement

By: **Phoebe Pollitt, PhD, RN**

Abstract

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Nurses Fight for the Right to Vote

Spotlighting four nurses who supported the women's suffrage movement.

By Phoebe Pollitt, PhD, RN

ABSTRACT: The Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees women the right to vote. Its ratification in 1920 represented the culmination of a decades-long fight in which thousands of women and men marched, picketed, lobbied, and gave speeches in support of women's suffrage. This article provides a closer look at the lives of four nurse suffragists—Lavinia Lloyd Dock, Mary Bartlett Dixon, Sarah Tarleton Colvin, and Hattie Frances Kruger—who were arrested for their involvement in the women's suffrage movement.

Keywords: social justice, voting rights, women's suffrage

The women's suffrage movement was one of the most consequential U.S. social movements of the 20th century. Its origins, however, are in the previous century. Beginning in the 1840s, thousands of women and men stood for women's voting rights by marching, picketing, lobbying, and giving public speeches. They believed that sex-based discrimination in education, employment, family relationships, and other areas could best be addressed through the ballot box. By the early 1900s, laws varied by state, but most American women still weren't allowed to vote or hold political office.

Among the suffragists who continued to demonstrate and speak publicly in the early 20th century about women's right to vote were nurses, some of whom were arrested and served time in prison for their efforts. Their work, and the decades-long efforts of all suffragists, was ultimately successful: in 1920, the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ensured that "the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any state on account of sex."¹

NURSES AND THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

In the late 1800s, nursing was emerging as a profession. As it developed, nurse leaders sought to enact registration laws to establish boards of nursing that had the legal authority to oversee practice and set standards for nursing education programs, which were predominantly available to women only.² The uphill battles they fought to turn these ideas into law in all-male state legislatures made many nurses early advocates of women's suffrage; they recognized the importance of having the right to vote for legislators

who would advocate for nursing.^{3,4} Several of these nurses were leaders of local, state, and national suffrage organizations, including Mary Eliza Mahoney, the first black nurse to graduate from a training program (in 1879) and one of the founders of the National Association of Colored Graduate Nurses (NACGN) in 1908; Agnes Dillon Randolph, a great-granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson and president of the Virginia State Association of Nurses (now the Virginia Nurses Association) from 1911 to 1913; Adah Belle Thoms, a pioneering nurse educator and administrator who also helped to organize and later led the NACGN; and Margaret Brydon Laird, the first nurse and one of the first two women to hold public office in New Jersey upon her election to the state assembly in 1920.⁵⁻⁸

In June 1915, delegates to the 18th annual American Nurses Association (ANA) convention in San Francisco voted to endorse a motion favoring the passage of federal legislation for women's suffrage.⁹ Known as the "Susan B. Anthony Amendment," the legislation was named after the pioneering women's rights activist who had first drafted it in 1875 (Anthony died in 1906).¹⁰ In addition to leading suffrage organizations, nurses wrote articles and letters to the editors of their local newspapers, spoke publicly, and lobbied their elected officials.⁶ Still others demonstrated in support of women's suffrage, risking jail time for the right to vote. The stories of four such nurses are presented in this article.

LAVINIA LLOYD DOCK: SUFFRAGE MARCHER AND 'SILENT SENTINEL'

Lavinia Lloyd Dock is usually remembered as a visiting nurse at the Henry Street Settlement and a political

activist, author, historian, educator, and secretary of the International Council of Nurses (ICN), a position she held from 1899 to 1922.¹¹⁻¹³ She was also an ardent and militant suffragist who planned and participated in many demonstrations.

Born into a prosperous Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, family in 1858, Dock entered Bellevue Hospital's nursing school in New York City in 1884, graduating two years later.^{14, 15} She began her career as a visiting nurse in Connecticut and New York City. Beginning in 1896 and for the next two decades, Dock lived and worked at the Henry Street Settlement on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.^{15, 16} It was there that she, Lillian Wald, and other nurses provided care for some of the poorest immigrants in the country. They also worked to change the conditions that contributed to poor health (by advocating for better working conditions for women and making birth control accessible, for example).¹² In addition to her work as a settlement nurse, Dock wrote and coauthored several nursing textbooks, including *Hygiene and Morality*, *Text-book of Materia Medica for Nurses*, and *A History of Nursing*. Dock was also a contributing editor and frequent writer for *AJN*, beginning with the first issue in October 1900.

Although Dock is revered as a nursing pioneer, her work as a suffragist is less well known. On election day in 1886, she attempted to vote with other suffragists in New York City. Although the other women were jailed, Dock was released—to her chagrin—according to Lillian Wald's account of the event.¹⁷ A police captain whose son Dock had cared for told Wald he didn't want to see her go to jail and "had to pull her off the paddy wagon," noting that she was kicking in response.¹⁷

In 1907, Dock urged delegates at the 10th annual convention of the Nurses' Associated Alumnae of the United States (which became the ANA in 1911) to support women's suffrage. At the meeting, which was held in Richmond, Virginia, she proclaimed from the speakers' platform¹⁸:

I am ardently convinced that our national association will fail of its higher opportunities and fall short of its best mission if it restricts itself to the narrow path of purely professional questions and withholds its interest and sympathy and its moral support from the great, urgent, throbbing, pressing social claims of our day and generation. . . . I would like to have our journals not afraid to mention the words political equality for women.

Most delegates at the time refused to support Dock's stance on suffrage. However, just five years later, their



Lavinia Lloyd Dock, a visiting nurse at the Henry Street Settlement and secretary of the International Council of Nurses, was also an ardent suffragist. Photo courtesy of the National Library of Medicine.

views had begun to shift. The delegates to the ANA's 15th annual convention, held in Chicago in 1912, voted to send representatives to the ICN's meeting in favor of women's suffrage.¹⁹ Dock does not appear to have been at the conference but requested that the vote occur.¹⁹

While working at the Henry Street Settlement, Dock organized and led multiple suffrage parades between 1908 and 1912. Clad in sashes and suffrage buttons, thousands of women and men carried banners down New York City's streets, demanding that women have the right to vote.^{12, 20, 21} Through the years, the marches grew in number and enthusiasm but did not accomplish the goal of persuading either the New York State legislature or the U.S. Congress to enact suffrage legislation.

In December 1912, suffrage leaders decided to draw attention to their cause and increase pressure on New York's all-male state legislature by staging a nearly 200-mile march from New York City to the state's capital, Albany.²² On December 16, 1912, approximately 500 women, led by Rosalie Jones, Ida

Craft, and Dock (who was 54 at the time), began walking. Most participants joined the march for a day or two on the stretches nearest their homes. Jones, Craft, and Dock, however, covered more than 10 miles a day and made time for rallies and speeches wherever they stopped to rest. Outfitted with hiking staffs, yellow (a color that symbolized the movement) knapsacks, and hundreds of leaflets to distribute, suffragists marched in skirts through rain, mud, and snow for 12 days before reaching their destination.^{22, 23} Newspaper reporters accompanied the women and wrote daily dispatches chronicling the hike. On December 29, the *Chicago Tribune* announced, “Lavinia Dock, crippled but indomitable, is the heroine of the march.”²⁴ On December 31, the marchers and their supporters met with the governor-elect, William Sulzer, at the executive mansion.²⁵ In response to the written message the women presented to him, in which they expressed their hope that his administration would promptly pass a women’s suffrage amendment to the New York State Constitution, Sulzer pledged his support for their cause. Declaring victory, the hikers headed home.²⁵

Public outrage surrounding the suffragists’ arrests motivated more women to join the demonstrations.

Soon after, these same women organized a march from the New York area to Washington, DC, where they planned to participate in a women’s suffrage parade—the movement’s first major national event—more than 60 years after the women’s suffrage movement had begun.²⁶ National leaders of the movement had called for the action, in which they planned to march down Pennsylvania Avenue on March 3, 1913, the day before Woodrow Wilson’s inauguration, in an effort to pressure him to support women’s suffrage.^{26, 27} An article published on February 9, 1913, titled “Miss Dock Will Lead Marchers on Long Hike,” notes the suffragists planned to depart on February 12, 1913, Abraham Lincoln’s birthday.²⁸ Dock and more than a dozen women began their trek in Newark, New Jersey (there was no bridge spanning the Hudson River for them to cross at the time), and arrived in Washington, DC, to join a crowd of more than 5,000 suffragists on Pennsylvania Avenue.²⁹⁻³¹ There the mostly female marchers encountered large and rowdy crowds of male onlookers. The marchers were pushed, jeered,

and tripped. Although some were violently attacked, the police along the parade route did little to help. By the end of the day, more than 100 women had been hospitalized with injuries.²⁶

Dock’s attention had shifted from nursing to women’s suffrage in the decade between 1907 and 1917, leading her to move to Washington, DC, to focus on ensuring that women attained the right to vote.³² Despite decades of marching, public speaking tours, publishing and distributing women’s suffrage newspapers, and lobbying elected officials, suffragists had not realized their dream of gender equality at the ballot box. By 1917, the National Woman’s Party—a political activist group within the women’s suffrage movement founded by Alice Paul and Lucy Burns; Dock was an active member and leader within the organization—had decided to increase the pressure on President Wilson and Congress by picketing the White House daily.^{27, 33} Six days a week, from January 10, 1917, until the Senate passed the Nineteenth Amendment on June 4, 1919, women silently stood at the White House gates with banners and sashes, passing out literature in support of women’s suffrage. For two and a half years, through summer heat and winter snowstorms, nearly 2,000 women participated in these daily vigils. The women became known as the “Silent Sentinels.”^{10, 21, 27, 34} Although they were often taunted and harassed by the public and the police, they continued the demonstrations, which they viewed as a way of exercising their constitutional rights of free speech and assembly.^{10, 27}

As the months of picketing wore on, President Wilson ordered the police to begin arresting the Sentinels for obstructing traffic. On June 27, 1917, Dock was among the first six sentenced for suffrage activities. Because they refused to plead guilty or pay fines for standing silently on a public sidewalk, the women spent three days in the District of Columbia jail.^{10, 27} Dock’s imprisonment did not deter her from continuing to demonstrate at the White House. Along with five other women, Dock was arrested and sentenced on August 18, 1917, “serving thirty days, with ‘five days off for good behavior,’” according to an article in *The Suffragist*.³⁵ This time Dock served her time in the notorious and brutal Occoquan Workhouse in nearby Virginia.³⁵

Public outrage surrounding these arrests motivated more women to join the demonstrations. At the same time, however, a suffrage amendment stalled in Congress. In 1918, National Woman’s Party leaders continued the Silent Sentinel demonstrations in front of the White House and added public rallies across the street in Lafayette Square that included speeches and songs.²⁷ On August 6, 1918, Dock was arrested in the park while reciting “My Country, ’Tis of Thee.”³⁶

At her August 15, 1918, trial, Dock was sentenced to 15 days in the District jail.³⁷ As she was led away from the courthouse, Dock told reporters: “In going to jail we are simply going ‘over the top for democracy.’ We hope the passage of the amendment will soon make such sacrifices unnecessary.”³⁷ Dock and many other newly imprisoned suffragists went on a hunger strike to protest their incarceration. According to an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on August 19, 1918, many of the women were too sick to get out of bed, and Dock’s condition was described as “alarming.”³⁸

Dock continued to participate in suffrage activities and was arrested on at least five different occasions.³⁹ In the years after the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified, she moved back to Fayetteville, Pennsylvania, to live with her sisters.³² Dock died in 1956, at age 98. In an autobiographical article she wrote in 1923 that wasn’t published until 1977, she reflected on her time in the suffrage movement: “It was a great joy to do a little guerilla war in that cause and I believe that going to jail gave me a purer feeling of unalloyed content than I ever had in any of my other work where I always saw some imperfections to cause chagrin.”¹⁶

MARY BARTLETT DIXON: LOBBYING THE PRESIDENT

Maryland nurse Mary Bartlett Dixon (later known by her married name, Cullen) was a nursing pioneer and crusader for women’s equality in the early 20th century. Born in 1873, Dixon graduated from the Johns Hopkins Hospital Training School for Nurses (now the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing) in 1903.⁴⁰ After graduation, she quickly became active in the new Maryland State Association of Graduate Nurses (now the Maryland Nurses Association) and was serving on its committee on legislation by 1906.⁴¹

In early 1907, Dixon was living in Easton, Maryland, and helped to establish the area’s first hospital, the 32-bed Emergency Hospital, which was later named the Memorial Hospital at Easton and is known today as the University of Maryland Shore Medical Center at Easton.^{42, 43} That same year, she and Elizabeth Wright founded the first nursing school in the area.^{44, 45} Now called the Macqueen Gibbs Willis School of Nursing, it continues to educate nursing students as part of Chesapeake College.

In addition to founding a hospital, running a nursing school, teaching students, and working in her professional association, Dixon found time to become active in the suffrage movement. In 1910, she chaired the legislative committee of the Just Government League of Maryland, which fought for women’s suffrage, and by 1914 she was the legislative chair of the Maryland Suffrage Association.^{46, 47}



Nurse suffragists Mary Bartlett Dixon (third from left) and Hattie Frances Kruger (third from right) were among the “Silent Sentinels” arrested for picketing the White House on November 10, 1917. From 1917 to 1919, suffragists participated in daily vigils to pressure president Woodrow Wilson to support women’s right to vote. Photo © Records of the National Woman’s Party, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

At the time, women’s suffrage was a controversial issue, even among women and nurses. The delegates to the Nurses’ Associated Alumnae of the United States’ 11th annual convention in San Francisco in 1908 refused to endorse a motion supporting women’s suffrage.⁴⁸ Some delegates believed it was more important to not alienate male legislators as they advocated for state registration laws; others thought it was improper for a professional organization to take a political position.⁶ After the convention, the editors of *AJN*, which was affiliated with the Nurses’ Associated Alumnae at the time, declared in its September issue, “On every nursing subject [the journal] has a definite policy. On all other broad questions its attitude is neutral.”⁴⁹ Dixon wrote a letter to the editor in response that was published the following month.⁵⁰ In it, she wrote that the editors’ decision “is a deep disappointment to me” and asked, “Is it logical for you to interest us in such subjects distinctly outside the four walls of a sick room, as social hygiene, school hygiene, almshouse reform, child-labor laws, factory inspection, etc., if your attitude on ‘broad questions’ is to remain neutral?”⁵⁰

Dixon frequently spoke to gatherings of people in Maryland and nearby states about the need for women’s suffrage. She wrote articles and letters to the editors of various publications, explaining why women should be involved in the political issues of the day. In addition, in the 1912 elections, Dixon actively supported Theodore Roosevelt and other Progressive

Party candidates who were in favor of women's suffrage.^{51, 52} Roosevelt lost the presidency to Democratic Party candidate Woodrow Wilson. Two weeks after his inauguration, President Wilson met with five leaders of the suffrage movement, including Dixon, at the White House. They asked him to support a constitutional amendment for women's suffrage in the current Congress.⁵³ The president listened to the women and promised to consider their request but didn't actively support legislation to give women the right to vote.

Almost four years passed, and thousands of women and their male allies encouraged President Wilson, the all-male Congress, and the virtually all-male state legislatures to support voting rights for women. In November 1917, Alice Paul, president of the National Woman's Party, was serving a 60-day jail term for suffrage activities. She and other imprisoned suffragists began a hunger strike, resulting in officials putting Paul in isolation in the psychiatric wing of the prison and force-feeding her. A mass demonstration followed, with the longest picket line to date forming at the White House; 41 suffragists, including Dixon, were arrested on November 10, 1917.¹⁰ In a surprising turn of events, however, when the suffragists arrived in court on November 12, they were given suspended sentences and permitted to go free.^{10, 54, 55}

Dixon returned home and was never imprisoned. She continued to work for suffrage until women gained the right to vote in 1920. That same year, she married Dr. Thomas S. Cullen, a professor at Johns Hopkins Medical School.⁵⁶ She remained active in social and political affairs and in the alumni association of the Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, editing its alumnae magazine and participating on the board.⁴⁰ In 1949, a fund in Dixon's name was set up by the Memorial Hospital at Easton to advance nursing education in the area.⁵⁷ She died in 1957 and is buried at Easton's Spring Hill Cemetery.^{58, 59}

SARAH TARLETON COLVIN: RIDING THE RAILS AND TENDING THE 'WATCH FIRES'

Before radio, television, or the Internet, political activists were known to publicize their cause by chartering a private railroad car and making "whistle stop" tours across the country. Sarah Tarleton Colvin participated in two such rail journeys, in 1916 and again in 1919, in support of women's suffrage.

Colvin was born on September 12, 1865, on her grandfather's cotton plantation in Greene County, Alabama. Her family moved to Baltimore, Maryland, after the Civil War and Reconstruction.⁶⁰ In her autobiography, Colvin describes herself in 1890 as "a discontented member of a large family" and jumped at the suggestion of a physician at Johns Hopkins Hospital that she enter the facility's training school for

nurses.⁶¹ "When Miss Isabel Hampton, the Superintendent of Nurses, agreed to try me," she wrote, "I went home, got some plain wash dresses and white aprons, and in two weeks was back and enrolled as a pupil nurse."⁶¹ After graduating, Colvin worked at the hospital and later at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Montreal. There she met her husband, Dr. Alexander Colvin, a physician. They married in 1897 and moved to St. Paul, Minnesota, to establish his career.⁶⁰

Colvin was instrumental in founding the Minnesota State Graduate Nurses Association (now the Minnesota Nurses Association) and served as its president from 1905 to 1910.^{60, 62} In addition, she served as second vice president of the Nurses' Associated Alumnae of the United States in 1907 and subsequently as its first vice president.⁶⁰ During this time, she was also instrumental in obtaining funding for the building and equipping of a tuberculosis sanitarium in Ramsey County.⁶⁰

In addition to her work to improve the health of her community, Colvin was active in the women's suffrage movement, serving as chair of the Minnesota branch of what would become the National Woman's Party from 1915 to 1920.⁶³ She was passionate about passing the Nineteenth Amendment, giving speeches, writing letters, and lobbying elected officials to persuade them to vote in favor of suffrage. Her first activities on the national stage occurred in the spring of 1916. Colvin was one of 23 suffragists who participated in a five-week "Suffrage Special" trip by rail around the country.^{27, 64} At that time, 4 million women in western states had the right to vote, and suffrage leaders sought to convince these voters to support suffrage candidates in the fall elections; they also encouraged them to gather in Chicago in June for a convention that would launch the National Woman's Party.^{10, 27}

Six months later, on October 20, 1916, Colvin and other suffragists were attacked while demonstrating outside a Chicago auditorium where President Wilson was speaking. In her autobiography, Colvin describes how the women "were suddenly attacked by a group of men who hurled themselves at us in a flying tackle, scattering us from side to side. They set upon us, and while they did us no violence, they seized the banners and tore them to shreds."⁶⁵ President Wilson won reelection in 1916 against the Republican candidate, Charles Evans Hughes, who supported women's right to vote.

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, Colvin's husband volunteered for military duty and Colvin volunteered as a Red Cross nurse.^{10, 60} Living relatively close to Washington, DC, made it possible for her to participate in the Silent Sentinel demonstrations in the nation's capital. On January 1,

1919, National Woman's Party leaders, including Colvin, initiated a new strategy to pressure President Wilson and Congress to pass the Nineteenth Amendment and send it to the states for ratification before Congress adjourned in March. In addition to picketing in front of the White House as Silent Sentinels and speaking at public rallies in Lafayette Square, suffragists began burning President Wilson's speeches and writings in urns they called "watch fires."⁶⁵ Some suffragists fed the fires while others held banners and passed out suffrage literature to onlookers.⁶⁵ In January 1919, Colvin was arrested during a watch fire demonstration and sentenced to five days in jail.^{10, 61, 65} In her autobiography, she describes how she was arrested for displaying a banner in front of the White House and her subsequent imprisonment and hunger strike, which she called "a most unpleasant experience": "The lack of food begins to affect one physically. . . . I was violently nauseated after the second day, my head ached all of the time, and I was unable to sleep. I lost weight very rapidly."⁶¹

Soon after her release on Monday, January 27, Colvin was arrested at another watch fire demonstration, on February 9.⁶⁶ In her account of the demonstration that led to her second jailing, Colvin describes how this was the "largest and most spectacular demonstration we pulled off"⁶¹:

We had a huge demonstration in which we burned Woodrow Wilson in effigy; and each one of us threw a small bundle of wood on the fire to keep it alive while speeches were being made. . . . There was a huge crowd waiting for us, with many soldiers and sailors in it [who] were prevented by their officers from attacking us. According to our plans, we marched two by two, each of us holding a small bundle of kindling wood under her arm. I had mine under my coat so that it would not be seen by the police. . . . I succeeded in throwing my bundle on the fire, and then I was arrested.

Colvin notes that more than 30 women were arrested and served five-day sentences.⁶¹ On February 15, 1919, barely a day after being released from her second jail term, Colvin and 25 other newly freed suffragists, including Lavinia Dock, began a multiweek, nationwide whistle stop train tour known as the "Prison Special."^{27, 67-69} Their slogan was "From Prison to People."⁶⁹ Donning prison garb, the women spoke about their incarceration and the need for women's suffrage.²⁷ They were often greeted by large and supportive audiences.⁷⁰

In the early 1920s, the Colvins returned to St. Paul. For the next quarter century, Colvin was active in



Nurse suffragist Sarah Tarleton Colvin, who chaired the Minnesota branch of the National Woman's Party, visits its Washington, DC, headquarters in 1918. The headquarters were on Lafayette Square—the site of numerous suffragist rallies and arrests. Photo © Women of Protest: Photographs from the Records of the National Woman's Party, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

local and state politics and served on the Minnesota state board of education from 1935 to 1941.⁶⁰ Colvin died in St. Paul in 1949.⁶⁰

HATTIE FRANCES KRUGER: ENDURING THE 'NIGHT OF TERROR'

As the number of participants in the Silent Sentinel demonstrations increased, so did President Wilson's frustration with the National Woman's Party members' determination to fight for the right to vote. In a particularly brutal event in which the government violently punished the women for their efforts, more than 30 suffragists, including nurse Hattie Frances Kruger (later known by her married name, Maynard), were arrested and jailed during what's known as the "Night of Terror" at the Occoquan Workhouse on November 14–15, 1917.²⁷

Official documents related to Kruger's birth and education are scant. Her grandson, Terrence P. McGarty, has compiled extensive information about Kruger's life in an unpublished family history that indicates she

is believed to have been born in Buffalo, New York, in the mid-1880s.⁷¹ She was educated at the Buffalo General Hospital School of Nursing, and civil service records show Kruger was a pupil nurse at the Erie County Almshouse in Buffalo beginning on March 3, 1901.⁷¹ In 1905, Kruger was chief nurse at the New York State Hospital for the Care of Crippled and Deformed Children in Haverstraw, New York.⁷¹

Kruger had strong progressive political views and was active in politics. As McGarty has noted, she was “a major player in the Socialist Party during the 1912 through the 1920 period.”⁷¹ She was also an active suffragist. Kruger, it’s believed, was working as a nurse in Buffalo in 1917 when she participated in the Silent Sentinel demonstration on Saturday, November 10, 1917, and was arrested along with Mary Bartlett Dixon and 39 other suffragists.^{10, 71} After the 41 suffragists were released with suspended sentences on Monday, November 12, 1917, 31 went back to the White House, resumed their nonviolent protest, and were again arrested.^{10, 54} The judge sentenced the repeat offenders to the Occoquan Workhouse in Virginia, where they served terms that ranged from six days (for Mary Nolan, a 73-year-old suffragist from Florida) to six months (for Lucy Burns, a suffrage “ringleader”).^{10, 72, 73}

The savagery the women were subjected to on their arrival at Occoquan led to the naming of the event as the “Night of Terror.” As Barbara Leaming recounted in her biography of actress Katharine Hepburn, whose mother was an active suffragist⁷⁴:

Under orders from W. H. Whittaker, superintendent of the Occoquan Workhouse, as many as forty guards with clubs went on a rampage, brutalizing thirty-three jailed suffragists. They beat Lucy Burns, chained her hands to the cell bars above her head, and left her there for the night. They hurled Dora Lewis into a dark cell, smashed her head against an iron bed, and knocked her out cold. Her cellmate Alice Cosu, who believed Mrs. Lewis to be dead, suffered a heart attack. According to affidavits, other women were grabbed, dragged, beaten, choked, slammed, pinched, twisted, and kicked.

The women were denied visitors, including their attorneys.¹⁰ They were placed in rat-infested, unlit cells. Their only water was in an open pail. Food was served crawling with maggots and worms. The women had no privacy from the guards, according to Dorothy Day, one of the women’s suffrage protestors to be imprisoned at Occoquan, who would go on to cofound the Catholic Worker Movement in the 1930s: “There

was a toilet in each cell, open, and paper and flushing were supplied by the guard. It was as though one were in a zoo with the open bars leading into the corridor.”⁷⁵

The women immediately began a hunger strike to protest the conditions inside Occoquan. Suffragist Mary Nolan was released after serving her six-day sentence and quickly composed a statement about the prison conditions.¹⁰ The vicious treatment of the suffragists became front page news across the country. Dudley Field Malone, an attorney and advisor to President Wilson, who also served as Collector of the Port of New York, resigned his position to represent the suffragists.¹⁰

On November 23, 10 days after they were arrested, the suffragists had their day in court. However, Kruger, Lucy Burns, and Dora Lewis were absent from the proceedings. Prison officials explained they were “too ill” to appear; the suffragists and their lawyers knew the women were emaciated and retained visible injuries from the beatings.¹⁰ The judge ordered that they appear the next day. The *New York Times*, reporting on the women’s appearance in court, described them as “weak from hunger-striking,” noting that they had to be “assisted into the court-room to testify concerning their charges of brutal treatment.”⁷⁶ The judge ruled the suffragists could be freed during the appeal process, but the women decided to serve out their sentences in the District jail and continue their hunger strike. Government and prison officials were not prepared to force-feed 30 women two or three times a day and did not want the suffragists to die in jail of starvation and become martyrs to the cause. On November 27 and 28, all of the imprisoned suffragists, including Kruger, were released.^{10, 27}

Kruger returned to her job in Buffalo and remained active in progressive political movements, running for Congress in 1918 and for New York State Treasurer in 1920 on the Socialist ticket.⁷¹ She later moved to New York City, first working at Bellevue Hospital and then at Seaview Hospital on Staten Island. She subsequently married and raised a family on Staten Island, where she died in 1976.⁷¹

MAKING NURSES' VOICES HEARD

By the spring of 1919, after more than 70 years of activism, the tide of public opinion turned in favor of women’s suffrage as a new, Republican-controlled Congress was seated. Both the House of Representatives and the Senate quickly passed the Nineteenth Amendment and sent it to the states for ratification. Thirty-six state legislatures needed to vote in favor of the amendment for it to become law. On August 18, 1920, the Tennessee legislature, by a one-vote margin, became the 36th state to ratify the amendment.^{10, 27}

With both houses of Congress and three-quarters of state legislatures voting in favor, secretary of state Bainbridge Colby certified the ratification on August 26, 1920.²⁷

The link between voting and improved health care quickly became evident. Barely a year after women won the right to vote, Congress passed the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act on November 23, 1921.⁷⁷ This legislation funded a variety of programs to reduce maternal and infant deaths. Although similar bills had been introduced between 1918 and 1920, none received sufficient support to become law. With the enfranchisement of millions of new women voters, however, most congressmen decided to support the bill in 1921. With funds from this legislation, states established nearly 3,000 prenatal care clinics, provided for 180,000 infant care seminars, and hired thousands of public health nurses, who made 3 million home visits to pregnant women and new mothers.⁷⁸

Lavinia Lloyd Dock, Sarah Tarleton Colvin, Mary Bartlett Dixon, and Hattie Frances Kruger signed petitions, wrote letters, published newspapers, marched, and were arrested because of their efforts on behalf of women's suffrage. The right to vote is fragile and can be suppressed if we are not vigilant in preserving this right for all citizens. To honor these strong, intelligent, and brave suffragists, nurses must register to vote, cast our ballots, and run for office. As ANA president Pamela F. Cipriano has noted, "Nurses' voices should be loud and strong. . . . When you set priorities for your busy life, please include time to exercise your right to vote . . . and help shape the direction of our country at the local, state, and national levels. Do your part."⁷⁹ ▼

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