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Source: *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society*, Vol. 99, No. 3, Special Issue on Kentucky Women in Government and Politics (Summer 2001), pp. 249-284

Published by: Kentucky Historical Society

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23384605>

Accessed: 24-02-2020 21:59 UTC

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The Slow and Unsure Progress of Women in Kentucky Politics

by Penny M. Miller

The voice of women in Kentucky politics has been largely muted during the commonwealth's two-plus centuries of statehood. As voters, appointed officeholders, members of boards and commissions, party activists, interest-group participants, lobbyists, campaign contributors, and as elected local and state-wide officials and judges, women in Kentucky have lagged behind women in the nation, who themselves have been largely marginalized. When the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) ranked states in 2000 according to the percentage of females serving as state and national elected officeholders, the commonwealth placed forty-ninth among the fifty states (see Table 1). More than eighty years after suffrage, women are still the missing majority on Kentucky's ballots.

Throughout its history, what political scientists have called the "traditionalistic" political culture of the commonwealth has proven disadvantageous to women. Kentucky is a classic example of the southern political culture in which government's active role is primarily that of maintaining the old social order and patriarchal status quo.¹ As noted in Table 1, seven of the

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This article draws on three earlier ones published by Miller: "Staking Their Claim: The Impact of Kentucky Women in the Political Process," *Kentucky Law Journal* 84 (1995-96): 1163-96; "Political Leadership and the Progress of Women," in *The Future Well-Being of Women in Kentucky* (Frankfort, 1999), 71-86; and "The Silenced Majority: Glacial Movement of Women into Kentucky Politics," *Southeastern Political Review* 28 (2000): 499-529.

¹Daniel J. Elazar, *American Federalism: A View from the States*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1984), 115-22.

Table 1: Status of Women in Kentucky and the Southern and Border States

	Women in State Legislatures in 2002	Women in 2000 Elected Offices (Composite Index)	Women Voting in 1992 & 1996
	Percent	State Rank	State Rank
Alabama	7.9	50	29
Arkansas	13.3	45	43
Delaware	25.8	1	28
Florida	23.8	21	44
Georgia	20.8	30	47
Kentucky	10.9	47	41
Louisiana	16.0	38	13
Maryland	29.3	11	24
Mississippi	12.6	46	31
Missouri	22.8	24	12
North Carolina	18.8	33	38
Oklahoma	10.1	49	19
South Carolina	10.6	48	37
Tennessee	15.9	39	46
Texas	18.8	34	48
Virginia	15.0	43	33
West Virginia	18.7	35	45

ten states with the lowest percentage of female representation were all in the South.² As in most southern states, the political culture of the commonwealth has not fostered major political and social change throughout much of its history. Political affairs have remained chiefly in the hands of established elites, whose members often claim the right to govern through economic and social position. In this context of powerful incum-

²For the complete list, see the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) web site (<http://www.iwpr.org/states/>). The data in the two right columns of Table 1 is from IWPR, *The Status of Women in the States* (2002). The data in the two left columns is from the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP), Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers University, *Women in State Legislatures 2002*, available online along with a wealth of other information (<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~cawp/Facts.html>). Internet addresses here and below current as of March 2002.



Courtesy University of Kentucky Special Collections, Laura Clay Papers

Kentucky led the South in establishing a strong woman suffrage organization. Here Laura Clay (center with umbrella) and a delegation from the Kentucky Equal Rights Association attended the Democratic National Convention in 1916.

bency at all levels, entrenched political networks dominated by male leaders, and inadequate or absent party support for female candidates, women have been discouraged from seeking office.³

Women's issues have ebbed and flowed in the state for more than two hundred years. The fights for woman's suffrage and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) are typical cases in point from more than fifty years apart. The Kentucky Woman Suffrage Association was founded in 1881, the first state suffrage society in the South. During the 1890 Kentucky constitutional convention, Laura Clay was allowed to address the delegates and called for a provision giving women property rights and suffrage. This effort failed, but in 1894 the general assembly passed a married women's property act and extended "school suffrage" (the right of women to vote in school-board elections) to the state's second-class cities of Lexington, Covington, and Newport. School suffrage had been in effect in rural districts since 1838, but it was repealed for the cities in 1902 when statistics showed that more African American women were voting

³Miller, *Ky. Politics and Government*, 3-4, 58-80.

in Lexington than their white counterparts, leading to charges that black women “practically controlled” the school-board elections there. When school suffrage was again bestowed in 1912, a literacy test was included.

When woman’s suffrage finally did come to Kentucky, the traditionalistic and conservative natures created an ironic twist as Clay, the leading suffragist in the South, chose to work against the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. A firm believer in state rights, she felt the amendment was unnecessary federal intervention and also believed that the Republicans would get credit for it, potentially meaning “the defeat *nationally* of the Democratic party for a generation.” Nevertheless, on January 6, 1920, Kentucky became the twenty-third state to ratify the Nineteenth Amendment, which became law in August 1920 after being ratified by thirteen more states. Kentucky’s laws continued to be permeated with provisions that treated men and women differently, however. In 1923, a constitutional amendment striking the word “male” from the election clause of the state bill of rights was defeated by a margin of 11,000 votes.⁴

Similar conflicts arose half a century later over the ERA. Kentucky became the sixteenth state to ratify the amendment in 1972, but the anti-feminist “Pink Ladies” maintained pressure on the general assembly to rescind the ratification. Rescission passed in 1978, but Lieutenant Governor Thelma L. Stovall, the first woman to hold that post, vetoed the bill while Governor Julian M. Carroll was out of the state. The general assembly overrode the veto, making Kentucky one of five states to take the questionable legal action of rescinding ERA ratification. The point became moot as deadlines passed for national ratification, but the energy and ambiguity of the process neatly illustrate the conservative political culture in the commonwealth that ultimately left Kentucky in favor of preserving the status quo.⁵

⁴Paul E. Fuller, *Laura Clay and the Woman’s Rights Movement* (Lexington, 1975), 25, 43-47, 152-60, 165; *Acts of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky* (hereafter *Ky. Acts*), 1838, 282; 1984, 234-314; 1902, 85-86; 1912, 174-76; 1920, 721-22.

⁵*Journal of the House of Representatives of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Kentucky . . . 1978* (Frankfort, 1978), 2347-52, 2508-9; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, March 21, 1978, A1, February 6, 1994, B1; *Lexington Herald*, July 12, 1982, C1; *Lexington Herald-Leader*, February 6, 1994, A1, A14; *Frankfort State Journal*, March 21, 1978.

Table 2: November 2000 Voting Patterns, by Age and Gender, in Kentucky

	Age 17-24	Age 25-34	Age 35-49	Age 50-61	Age 62+	State Totals
Male	131,726	257,610	412,936	241,410	232,006	1,043,682
Registered						
Male	53,398	10,503	239,037	165,339	162,622	630,899
Voting	40.50%	42.90%	57.90%	68.50%	70.10%	60.45%
Female	144,595	275,581	445,592	256,029	306,961	1,428,758
Registered						
Female	64,976	129,731	269,442	176,895	196,025	758,032
Voting	44.90%	47.10%	60.50%	69.10%	63.90%	58.57%

Women as Voters

Despite the stultifying effects of tradition, however, Kentucky women have become a force at the polls. Women of the commonwealth have registered and voted in larger numbers than their male counterparts for two decades. Table 2 shows registration and voting in that election by gender and age.⁶ As in the 1992, 1994, and 1996 canvasses, the percentage of registered women who voted outpaced men in every age category except age sixty-two and over. As in the rest of the nation, Kentucky has shown a noticeable gender gap in the last three presidential elections and in the 1995 gubernatorial contest.⁷ Democrat Paul Patton gave much of the attribution for his narrow victory in 1995 (by less than 22,000 votes over Republican Larry Forgy) to female voters, whom he had targeted with his stances

⁶Table 2 data from Kentucky State Board of Elections, *Official Primary and General Election Returns for 2000* (Frankfort, 2001).

⁷See Cal and Janet Clark, "The Gender Gap in 1996: More Meaning Than a 'Revenge of the Soccer Moms,'" in Lois Duke Whitaker, ed., *Women in Politics: Outsiders or Insiders?* 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J., 1999), 68-84; Jason Pigg and Laurel Elder, "Political Parties and the Gender Gap," *American Review of Politics* 18 (1997): 333-52; Mary E. Bendyna and Celinda C. Lake, "Gender and Voting in the 1992 Presidential Elections," in Elizabeth Adell Cook, Sue Thomas, and Clyde Wilcox, eds., *The Year of the Woman: Myths and Realities* (Boulder, Colo., 1994), 237-54.

on education, health care, welfare issues, and particularly in his support for reproductive rights. Forgy, who wanted to restrict abortion, had been shown as leading with male voters as of an October 28, 1995, Bluegrass State Poll. In this election and in the 1996 and 2000 presidential elections, Democrats made a special appeal to older women in Kentucky (25 percent of whom live in poverty), citing Medicare, Medicaid, and other social-welfare cuts proposed by the national Republicans at the federal level.⁸

While Kentucky women vote in larger numbers than men, their participation still lags behind the national average. The commonwealth ranked forty-first among states for women's voter turnout in the combined numbers of the 1992 and 1996 elections. As Table 1 shows, however, female turnout in Kentucky is similar to or better than that in most southern states, perhaps again a reflection of the pervasive traditionalistic political culture of the region.

Women as Interest-Group Members, Campaign Contributors, and Lobbyists

Women with an interest in public affairs in Kentucky have only recently seen elective office and professional government service as viable outlets for their energies. Like their female neighbors in other southern and border states, however, they have actively participated for more than 150 years in various aspects of the political process, especially at the grassroots level—suffrage groups, church clubs, temperance societies, school networks, and neighborhood associations.

Interest-Group Members

A traditional avenue for women with an interest in public affairs has been involvement in interest groups such as suffrage organizations, church clubs, temperance societies, school networks, and neighborhood associations. Historically, women

⁸*Louisville Courier-Journal*, October 28, 1995, A1, A15, November 9, A1, A10; *Lexington Herald-Leader*, November 8, 1995, A1, A6.

have been the mainstays of these organizations.⁹ Perhaps the best known is the League of Women Voters, a national nonpartisan group founded in 1920 that has worked to engage voters with candidate and issue debates, political skills workshops, and public forums. Membership in the Louisville chapter peaked in the 1950s at around five hundred but has fallen to less than half that number now as women's energies have been devoted more recently to more specific political interest groups.¹⁰ These range across the ideological spectrum. Most of the better-known and most influential groups in Kentucky have branches or similar organizations in other southern states.¹¹ The nonpartisan Kentucky Women's Political Caucus recruits and trains women to run for office at all levels. Kentucky Women Advocates (KWA) is a statewide coalition of forty women's organizations that lobbies for legislation, works to improve the judicial system, monitors executive and legislative decision makers, and encourages women to seek elective office.

To ensure that women are represented in policymaking, the Kentucky Commission on Women (KCW) was created by executive order in 1964 by Governor Edward T. Breathitt and became an official state agency in 1970. Under the leadership of Executive Director Betsy Nowland-Curry, KCW pushed for the creation of the Governor's Task Force on the Economic Status of Kentucky's Women, which was formed in November 2001. The purposes of the task force are to examine issues that are obstacles to the economic progress of women of the commonwealth, identify solutions, and develop an action plan.¹²

⁹Denise Baer, "The Political Interests of Women: Movement Politics, Political Reform and Women's Organizations," in Whitaker, ed., *Women in Politics*, 99-118.

¹⁰John E. Kleber, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Louisville* (Lexington, 2001; hereafter *Ency. of Louisville*); *Louisville Courier-Journal*, August 13, 1995, H4.

¹¹Among the most prominent in the commonwealth are the Pro-Choice Coalition of Kentucky, the National Organization for Women (NOW), the Kentucky Federation of Business and Professional Women (BPW), Planned Parenthood, the Right-to-Life Association, the Kentucky Pro-ERA Alliance, the Junior League, the National Council of Jewish Women, the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the Kentucky Nurses Association, the Network of Women in State Government, the Owensboro Women's Coalition, the Kentucky Women's History Coalition, and the Kentucky Domestic Violence Association.

¹²*Faces and Facts: Newsletter of the Kentucky Commission on Women*, Summer 2001. For more information on KCW, visit the organization's web site (<http://women.state.ky.us/>). There are commissions on women in thirty-six states. Center for Policy Alternatives (CPA), *The State of States for Women and Politics* (Washington, 1995), 9-15.

Campaign Contributors

Women historically have been less likely than men to make sizeable donations to political candidates, although they have long constituted an important part of the direct-mail base of small gifts for progressive and Democratic groups. EMILY's List, the WISH List, and other national female political action committees (PACs) have also enlisted the support of Kentucky women. A local-level version of these groups, Emma's List, was established in Louisville in 1993. Named for Emma Guy Cromwell, the first statewide female elected officeholder, Emma's List is a nonpartisan donor network and PAC that provides information about, and campaign donations to, qualified pro-choice women candidates from Jefferson County.¹³

As women have become more a part of the financial marketplace, their importance as contributors has increased. Current candidate Lois Combs Weinberg, a Democrat from Hindman and daughter of former governor Bert T. Combs who is seeking to unseat U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell in 2002, had raised more than one million dollars by the beginning of the election year with nearly half of the two thousand contributions to her campaign coming from women.¹⁴

Lobbyists

Having gained experience through work with interest groups and PACs, women have also begun to become more prevalent as lobbyists in Frankfort. Judith Taylor was named one of the eight most influential lobbyists in the 1998 general assembly, earning a six-figure income for representing clients such as Keeneland Association, Kentucky Physical Therapists Chapter, and Lexington Center Corporation. Other groups with female lobbyists during the 2002 general assembly included Lexmark, Humana, MCI WorldCom, the Kentucky Education

¹³EMILY's List (Early Money is Like Yeast) supports pro-choice Democratic women candidates; WISH List (Women in the Senate and the House) backs pro-choice Republican women candidates. Candice Nelson, "Women's PACs in the Year of the Woman," in Cook et al., eds., *The Year of the Woman*, 181-96; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, April 18, 1993, B1.

¹⁴*Lexington Herald-Leader*, January 15, 2002, B3.

Association, and the Kentucky Nurses Association.¹⁵

Many unpaid female "citizen lobbyists" also congregate in Frankfort and monitor legislative proceedings during regular and special sessions of the general assembly. They generally represent both registered and unregistered groups and include nonprofit, social-service, and special-interest groups. These include the state chapters of the League of Women Voters, NOW, Business and Professional Women (BPW), American Association of Retired Persons (AARP), and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD); community and neighborhood associations; the state PTA, Kentucky War on Drugs, and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth.

Women as Party Officials, Workers, and Activists

Since attaining suffrage in 1920, Kentucky women have played increasingly important roles in county and district Democratic and Republican organizations. In the middle years of the century, a couple even reached the status of local party bosses, Lennie Walls McLaughlin (1900-1988) of Jefferson County and Marie Roberts Turner (1900-1984) of Breathitt County. Turner, the long-time county school superintendent and wife of a state senator, briefly served as head of the state Democratic Party during Governor John Y. Brown's administration.¹⁶

In an age of weak party allegiance and declining party activity, women tend to be more committed to the survival and rejuvenation of local party institutions than their male counterparts, maintaining the party apparatus from one election to the next. By the assessments of many party leaders, women contribute disproportionately in terms of time and effort. Working

¹⁵Anthony J. Nownes and Patricia K. Freeman, "Female Lobbyists: Women in the World of 'Good Ol' Boys,'" *Journal of Politics* 60 (1998): 1181-1201; *Kentucky Gazette*, June 16, 1998, 8-12. Prominent female lobbyists in Kentucky as of 2002 include Lisa Carnahan (Kentucky Press Association), Jane Chiles (Catholic Conference of Kentucky), Sharon Currens (Kentucky Domestic Violence Association), Judith Gambill (Kentucky Education Association), Penny Gold (Kentucky Academy of Trial Attorneys), Sylvia Lovely (Kentucky League of Cities), Elizabeth Marshall (Kentucky School Boards Association), Debra Miller (Kentucky Youth Advocates), Sarah Nicholson (Kentucky Hospital Association), Elizabeth Strom (Kentucky National Organization for Women), and Beth Wilson (American Civil Liberties Union).

¹⁶For McLaughlin and Turner, see John E. Kleber, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Kentucky* (Lexington, 1992; hereafter *Ky. Ency.*).



Courtesy Republican Party of Kentucky and Kentucky Democratic Party

For the first time, both major parties in Kentucky are led by women. Ellen Williams (left) chairs the Republican Party of Kentucky, while Nicki Patton (right) chairs the Kentucky Democratic Party.

and retired women—not the stereotypical housewife volunteers—are predominant in many campaign activities, including campaign management, speechwriting, volunteer organizing, directing mass mailings and telephone banks, door-to-door canvassing, scheduling, and poling. Women have played vital roles in every Kentucky gubernatorial primary and general election since 1979.¹⁷

Current state-party rules mandate that both men and women be in state and county leadership positions. Women play major roles at every level. For the first time in Kentucky, and for one of the few times nationally, women concurrently chair both state party organizations. Ellen C. Williams, a self-proclaimed “soccer mom” from Anderson County, leads the Republicans, while Nicki Patton, daughter of the governor, heads the Democrats. Both were chosen for their positions in 1999 after nearly two decades of party involvement by each.

Women are also providing the majority of assistance for fe-

¹⁷Xandra Kayden and Eddie Mahe, *The Party Goes On: The Persistence of the Two-Party System in the United States* (New York, 1985); Miller and Jewell, *Political Parties and Primaries in Ky.*, 125-51.

male candidates, another trend that will have an impact on future elections if more female candidates run for office. In 1998, women were the main staffers and directors of the U.S. congressional campaigns of Teresa Isaac in Lexington and Virginia Woodward in Louisville. Female activists have provided significant support for U.S. congresswoman Anne Meagher Northup, Lexington mayor Pam Miller, and Jefferson County judge-executive Rebecca Jackson. Having gained experience as fundraisers and campaign treasurers, some of these female volunteers plan to translate their newly acquired political skills into their own electoral pursuits.

Women as Elected Government Officials

Despite the key roles of women as party activists, both of Kentucky's major parties have lagged as effective organizations to help women achieve elective office. Both parties rarely nominate female candidates for seats that are easily won. Women tend to run in closely contested races, in politically balanced districts, and sometimes as sacrificial lambs in districts where the party has little chance to win.¹⁸ The Republican Party of Kentucky, which fielded six female state-senate candidates in 1998, has done more to recruit and groom women than the state Democrats, a detriment to women in a state with a Democratic majority. While the Democratic Party did little for years to bring women into the process, party leaders now hold political-skills workshops for women around the state.

In the last decade, both national parties have taken active steps to promote women's candidates, including national conferences for female party activists aimed at encouraging them to run for office, special funds allocated for women candidates, training seminars, and positive statements in party platforms. The gender gap has highlighted the advantage of women candidates who can attract crossover votes. Moreover, given the strong tide against incumbents, the perception of women challengers as "outsiders" can make them attractive to voters.¹⁹

¹⁸Jewell and Miller, *Ky. Legislature*, 50-51.

¹⁹Barbara Burrell, *A Woman's Place is in the House: Campaigning for Congress in the Feminist Era* (Ann Arbor, 1994); Baer, "Political Interests of Women," in Whitaker, ed., *Women in Politics*, 99-118; Pigg and Elder, "Political Parties and the Gender Gap," *American Review of Politics*, 18:333-52.

The long delay for women to achieve public office, so remarkably lagging behind their activities as voters, interest-group members, and party activists, parallels a distinction in established political philosophy, a convergence that is not surprising since both the philosophy and the behavior are elements of the same political culture. The early twentieth-century suffragists argued that by the ballot alone, women would influence male politicians to effect reforms and would themselves help enact direct legislation by ballot initiatives and ratifications, as in the case of prohibition. After national suffrage was granted in 1920, women overwhelmingly did not participate in campaigns for elective office. By 1929, only 122 women served in state legislatures, and that number had increased only to 140 (less than 2 percent of the positions) in 1937.²⁰

French lawyer and sociologist Maurice Duverger in 1955 noted the absence of women from public office and theorized that women encounter three obstacles to obtaining it. The first he labeled "voter hostility," explaining that both male and female voters may prefer, for a variety of cultural and psychological reasons, to be represented by men. The second, "male conspiracy," meant that male-dominated political parties would resist challenges to their control posed by new groups. The third barrier he posited was structural. He suggested that electoral arrangements vary in their susceptibility to the election of women, with female candidates tending to be more successful in multimember districts than in single-member districts, the

²⁰Robert Darcy, Susan Welch, and Janet Clark, *Women, Elections and Representation*, 2nd ed. (Lincoln, 1994); Nancy E. McGlen and Karen O'Connor, *The Struggle for Equity in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (New York, 1983), 19-23; Aileen Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1929* (New York, 1981), 1-13; Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 233-345. Statistics from Dorothy Moncure, "Women in Political Life," *Current History* 29 (1929): 639-43; National League of Women Voters, *A Survey of Women in Public Office* (Washington, 1937).

The suffragists reflected the wider culture of political theorists who, with a few significant exceptions, had not envisioned active participation by women. The major exceptions were Plato and John Stuart Mill. Writing around 400 B.C., Plato in *The Republic* viewed men and women as having equal political ability, provided they were trained for the positions. He envisioned the ideal state as one governed proportionately by each gender. In *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Mill argued not only for suffrage but also for full and equal rights for women—legal, economic, and political. Mill, who participated in the British woman's suffrage movement, averred that women should participate equally with men at every level of government. See Darcy et al., *Women, Elections and Representation*, 18-25; George and Margaret G.

predominant American electoral arrangement.²¹

Whatever the causes, women are significantly underrepresented in elected government offices in Kentucky, as in the rest of the nation. Only eleven women have been elected to statewide office in Kentucky, and none hold statewide elective positions at this time (see Table 4). One has been elected governor, two have served as lieutenant governor and have represented districts in Congress, but no Kentucky woman has served in the U.S. Senate. Women comprise 51.1 percent of the state's population but hold only 10.9 percent of the seats in the 2002 general assembly, ranking the state forty-seventh in the country in this category (nationally, women hold 22.5 percent of the seats in state legislatures). Men in Kentucky hold 82 percent of the state's 6,610 elective positions. Women have had the most success at the local level as circuit-court and county clerks, positions traditionally held by females across the South. Table 3 presents a statistical profile of the underrepresentation of Kentucky women in elective office in 1992 and 2002.²²

At least two of Duverger's theories are reflected in Kentucky's experience. The extent of an explicit "male conspiracy" is impossible to quantify, but the powerful inertia of incumbency at all levels—the entrenched "good-old-boy network"—keeps many women from political office. Incumbents, who tend to be white males promoted by the "courthouse gang," are difficult to unseat. Despite the involvement of women in Kentucky political organizations, their positions in these groups have not proven to be good springboards to candidacy. The effects of a broadly understood "voter hostility" are also apparent. For a variety of cultural and psychological reasons, male and female voters have viewed men as more suited to public office. Studies show that women are *expected* to prove their competence, electability, and toughness, while men are *assumed* to

Klosko, *The Struggle for Women's Rights: Theoretical & Historical Sources* (Upper Saddle River, N.J., 1999); Arlene W. Saxonhouse, *Women in the History of Political Thought: Ancient Greece to Machiavelli* (New York, 1985), 39-52; Susan Moller Okin, *Women in Western Political Thought* (Princeton, 1979), 58; Ernest Barker, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (New York, 1959), 144-45.

²¹Maurice Duverger, *The Political Role of Women* (Paris, 1955).

²²For Table 3, the 1992 data is from Bob Babbage, *Toward Balance: Women and Politics* (Frankfort, 1995), and from information gathered by the author from individual agencies, commissions, offices, and boards. All 2002 data is from the latter sources.

Table 3: Women Elected Officials in Kentucky, 1992 and 2002

<i>Office</i>	<i>Women in 1992</i>	<i>Women in 2002</i>	<i>Total Offices</i>	<i>Percent in 1992</i>	<i>Percent in 2002</i>
U.S. Senators	0	0	2	0	0
U.S. Representatives	0	1	6	0	17
Supreme Court Justices	0	1	7	0	14
Court of Appeals Judges	1	2	14	7	14
Statewide Elective Officers	1	0	7	14	0
State Legislators	6	15	138	4	11
Railroad Commissioners	0	0	3	0	0
Mayors	71	74	436	16	17
City Council Members	371	561	3276	11	17
County Judge-Executives ^a	5	9	120	4	8
County Magistrate/Commissioners ^a	50	38	584	9	7
Circuit Judges	3	21	111	3	19
District Judges	16	34	128	13	27
Commonwealth's Attorneys	0	3	56	0	5
County Attorneys	0	5	120	0	4
County Sheriffs	2	4	120	2	3
Circuit Clerks ^b	54	71	120	45	59
County Clerks ^c	59	66	120	49	55
County PVAs ^d	31	37	120	26	31
Jailers	6	4	120	5	3
Coroners	4	7	120	3	6
School Board Members	206	257	882	23	29
TOTALS	886	1210	6610	13	18

^aA fiscal court governs most of the 120 counties. The fiscal court may consist of a county judge-executive and three to eight magistrates. Alternatively, a county may have a commission form of government, made up of the county judge-executive and three commissioners. As the presiding officer, the county judge-executive has equal authority with the magistrates or commissioners when the court is in session. When the fiscal court is not in session, the day-to-day duties of running the county fall to the county judge-executive, who along with the magistrates and commissioners is elected on a partisan basis for a four-year term.

^bCircuit court clerks, the administrative and clerical officers of the judicial system, serve both the circuit and district courts. Each county has one circuit clerk who is elected on a partisan basis for a six-year term.

^cCounty clerks keep county records, prepare tax bills, perform election-related duties such as voter registration, and issue licenses. Each county has one county clerk who is elected on a partisan basis for a four-year term.

^dThe property valuation administrator (PVA) establishes the value of property for the purpose of taxation. Each county has one PVA who is elected on a partisan basis for a four-year term.

have these qualities.²³

Other influencing factors that have been observed include escalating campaign costs, the rise of negative campaigning, stereotypical attitudes about politics as a male domain, the lack of women willing to run, and differential treatment by the media. Kentucky's traditionalistic political culture exacerbates many of the factors. Women do not have the same access to campaign money, especially in eastern Kentucky where so many women (and men) are saddled with poverty. Women in more traditional roles have demanding family obligations that often preclude travel to Frankfort, particularly for those in the eastern and western parts of the state. Most of the female members of the general assembly live in the more densely populated and more cosmopolitan areas of Louisville, Lexington, and northern Kentucky. Even in these areas, the limits of a traditional, southern, and profoundly religious society make it difficult for women who are outspoken feminists to gain a following. Feminist issues lack voter interest in the commonwealth.²⁴

In addition, women have not had many role models and mentors in politics, nor have they had networks to help one another politically. Also, a lack of training in public affairs and fundraising handicaps young women who might otherwise be interested in political office. The innate "toughness" and combativeness of politics also may deter women more accustomed to conciliatory roles from seeking political office.

Some researchers suggest that the gender gap in media coverage has contributed to the significant underrepresentation of women in elected offices. The electability of women candidates may be influenced by press treatment. Female candidates may

²³Kathleen A. Dolan, "Gender Differences in Support for Women Candidates: Is There a Glass Ceiling in American Politics?" *Women and Politics* 17 (1997): 27-41; Leonie Huddy and Nayda Terkildsen, "Gender Stereotypes and the Perception of Male and Female Candidates," *American Journal of Political Science* 37 (1993): 119-47. Duverger's theory of a structural barrier is not a useful tool of analysis in a static formal political structure, with one exception. Term limits, which are infrequently discussed in Kentucky, would, through the demise of the power of incumbency—a "male conspiracy" mechanism—enhance opportunities for female candidates.

²⁴Cook et al., eds., *Year of the Woman*; Malcolm E. Jewell and Marcia L. Whicker, "The Feminization of Leadership in State Legislatures," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 26 (1993), 705-13; Wilma Rule, "Why Women Don't Run: The Critical Contextual Factors in Women's Legislative Recruitment," *Western Political Quarterly* 34 (1981): 60-77; Lynne E. Ford and Kathleen A. Dolan, "Women State Legislators: Three Decades of Gains in Representation and Diversity," in Whitaker, ed., *Women in Politics*, 203-18; Debra L. Dodson, "Change and Continuity in the Relationship Between Private

be covered differently because of standard operating procedures of the press as well as because of stereotyping by reporters and editors. In recent U.S. Senate and statewide races nationwide, female candidates have consistently received less coverage than men. The coverage that they do receive has focused more on their chances of winning, with less time devoted to issues. Feminine traits and strengths in typical "female" policy areas are emphasized.²⁵

These and other elements of the Kentucky political and social cultures contribute to a bottom line that the *Lexington Herald-Leader* accurately summarized in 1995: "What this all adds up to is the simple fact that fewer women are elected because fewer run in the first place."²⁶

Women as Statewide Executive Officeholders

Kentucky rarely elects women to statewide executive office (see Table 4).²⁷ The two who have attained the highest offices have followed paths that men have traditionally trod to the same positions. Thelma Loyace Hawkins Stovall (1919-94) worked her way up through elective office. "She came up, as we say, the hard way," noted Wendell Ford, with three terms in the house, three as secretary of state, and two as state treasurer before winning the race for lieutenant governor in 1975 (she faced ten male opponents in the Democratic primary). She ran for governor in 1979 but finished a distant fifth in the primary, nearly 120,000 votes behind John Y. Brown Jr.²⁸

Martha Layne Hall Collins (1936-) was in a similarly crowded field in the same 1979 primary, facing six male oppo-

Responsibilities and Public Officeholding: The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same," *Policy Studies Journal* 25 (1997): 569-84; Carol Nechemias, "Geographic Mobility and Women's Access to State Legislatures," *Western Political Quarterly* 38 (1985): 119-31.

²⁵Marcia Braden, *Women Politicians and the Media* (Lexington, 1996); Kim Fridkin Kahn, *The Political Consequences of Being a Woman: How Stereotypes Influence the Conduct and Consequences of Political Campaigns* (New York, 1996).

²⁶*Lexington Herald-Leader*, November 5, 1995, E1.

²⁷Table 4 data from CAWP Kentucky facts page (<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~cawp/StbySt/KY.html>); Annie Harrison, *Women in Kentucky State Government, 1940-1980* (Frankfort, 1981); and lists of holders of respective offices supplied by the Kentucky Legislative Research Library.

²⁸*Ency. of Louisville*; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, February 6, 1994, B1; *Lexington Herald-Leader*, February 6, 1994, A1, A14; *Lexington Herald*, July 12, 1982, C1.

Table 4: Women Who Have Held Statewide Elective Offices in Kentucky

Emma Guy Cromwell	Secretary of State	1925-1929
	State Treasurer	1929-1933
Ella Lewis	Secretary of State	1929-1933
Sara W. Mahan	Secretary of State	1933-1937
Pearl Frances Runyon	State Treasurer ^a	1949-1955
Thelma L. Stovall	Secretary of State	1955-1959
	State Treasurer	1959-1963
	Secretary of State	1963-1967
	State Treasurer	1967-1971
	Secretary of State	1971-1975
	Lieutenant Governor	1975-1979
	Mary Louise Foust	State Auditor
State Auditor ^b		1969-1975
Doris Owens	Clerk, Court of Appeals	1959-1963
[Lelia Feltner Begley]	Secretary of State ^c	1970-1971
Frances Jones Mills	Clerk, Court of Appeals	1971-1975
	State Treasurer	1975-1979
	Secretary of State	1979-1983
	State Treasurer	1983-1987
	State Treasurer	1991-1995
Martha Layne Collins	Clerk, Court of Appeals ^d	1975-1979
	Lieutenant Governor	1979-1983
	Governor	1983-1987
Alice McDonald	Superintendent of Public Instruction	1983-1987
Mary Ann Tobin	State Auditor	1983-1987

Number of Female-Won Statewide Elections in Kentucky by Decade

<i>1920s</i>	<i>1930s</i>	<i>1940s</i>	<i>1950s</i>
3	1	0	5
<i>1960s</i>	<i>1970s</i>	<i>1980s</i>	<i>1990s</i>
2	8	4	1

^a Appointed in 1949; elected to a full term in 1951.^b Appointed in 1969; elected to a full term in 1971.^c Appointed to replace her late husband, Elmer R. Begley, on September 12, 1970; served until replaced by another appointee on February 2, 1971. Never elected.^d The last time this was an elective position. Became an appointive position as part of the 1976 judicial reforms.



Courtesy Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives

Thelma Stovall celebrates her 1975 victory as Kentucky's first female lieutenant governor. She is flanked by former governor A.B. "Happy" Chandler and former superintendent of public instruction Wendell Butler.

nents. She won the Democratic nomination to succeed Stovall as lieutenant governor with only 23 percent of the vote and defeated Republican Harold D. "Hal" Rogers in November. As chronicled in the preceding article, she had entered politics by working on Wendell Ford's gubernatorial campaign in 1971 and had been elected clerk of the court of appeals in 1975 (the court that became the state supreme court). With Stovall having already blazed a path to higher office, Collins was mentioned in the *Louisville Courier-Journal* as a possible successor to her as early as 1976.²⁹ Once she was elected lieutenant governor, talk of Collins's possibly succeeding Brown began. She faced stiff challenges in the 1983 Democratic primary, however, narrowly defeating Louisville mayor Harvey Sloane and Grady Stumbo. In a time when only 28 percent of the state was registered Republican, Collins beat Jim Bunning by more than 100,000 votes in the general election. Collins's greatest achievements as gov-

²⁹"The ground's been plowed," began the October 17 *Courier-Journal* piece (B4) on Collins's future prospects. "There are a lot of people encouraging me" to run for lieutenant governor, she said, "but it's early, really early." After winning the lieutenant governorship, Collins later commented that Stovall "was an example to us all." *Frankfort State Journal*, November 7, 1982.

ernor came in two of the state's areas of highest priorities of need: education and economic development. She brought unprecedented attention to the need to invest in education and negotiated a pact with Toyota Corporation to build a car manufacturing plant in Georgetown, which has resulted in substantial investment and job creation in the state.³⁰

Currently, no female holds a statewide elected executive position. None have since the 1995 general election, during which the major parties offered all-male slates.³¹ Women were elected to four positions during the 1980s and eight in the 1970s but only one in the 1990s. In 1999, the all-male statewide executive incumbents faced minimal or no opposition in the general election. Politically inexperienced Republican gubernatorial and lieutenant gubernatorial nominees Peppy Martin and Wanda Cornelius garnered only 22.2 percent of the vote against Democrats Paul E. Patton and Stephen L. Henry in the 1999 canvass. The Republican candidates suffered from minimal financial and organizational support from their party. Not that women fared any better with the Democrats, as the only woman seeking a statewide office under that banner lost in the primary race for state treasurer. Both the Reform and Natural Law Parties had a woman on their 1999 gubernatorial slates.

Women play a far more substantial role nationally, holding more than a quarter of the statewide elective executive positions since 1995. As of 2002, women hold 88 of the 321 jobs, including 5 governorships and 17 lieutenant governorships (although thirty-three states have never elected a woman governor). In a dozen states, women occupy at least half of the statewide elected positions. In the southern and border states, however, the numbers are less encouraging: 1 governorship (Delaware), 5 lieutenant governorships, and 25 other assorted positions. Three of the six states with no women are from this region: Kentucky, Tennessee, and Virginia, which are joined by

³⁰*Lexington Herald-Leader*, December 6, 1987, A1; *Louisville Courier-Journal*, December 6, 1987, A1, A14.

³¹Former University of Louisville political scientist Mary Hawkesworth declared the decision of both parties not to run any women candidates in 1995 "a symptom of a profound indifference to gender equity." Hawkesworth, "Battling for Ballot Position: Women Must Run an Obstacle Course to Seek Office in Kentucky," *Kentucky Journal*, April/May 1998, 3.



Courtesy Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives

The Kentucky Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs honored "Women of Achievement" in 1983 at the Frankfort Country Club. Pictured here are Joetta Wickliffe, Frances Jones Mills, Martha Layne Collins, Heidi Margulis, Mary Ann Tobin, Alice McDonald, and Katherine Peden.

Maine, New Jersey, and Oregon.³²

Women as State Legislators

Nationally, women have been winning state legislative seats in increasing numbers, especially in the last two decades, from 4 percent in 1969, to 10.3 percent in 1979, to 14.8 percent in 1985, to 18.3 percent in 1991, to 22.5 percent (1,668 of 7,424 seats) in 2002. There are considerable differences among the states, however. Washington leads the nation with 38.8 percent, far ahead of most of the southern states (as shown in Table 1), again reflecting this region's conservative political culture.³³

In its history, Kentucky has elected only 69 women to the general assembly, with the 15 serving in 2002 constituting 21.7 percent of that all-time total. There are 138 seats (100 in the

³²Maine has a female state treasurer who was chosen by the legislature and two female U.S. senators. Christine Todd Whitman resigned as New Jersey governor in 2001 to accept a position in George W. Bush's cabinet. Data from CAWP, *Statewide Elective Executive Women 2002 Fact Sheet*.

³³CAWP, *Women in State Legislatures 2002*.

Table 5: Women in the Kentucky General Assembly

Regular Session	Senate Dem/Rep	House Dem/Rep	Women/ Seats	% of Seats	National Rank
1922	0 / 0	1 / 0	1 / 138	0.7	
1926	0 / 0	0 / 1	1 / 138	0.7	
1934	0 / 0	2 / 0	2 / 138	1.4	
1946	0 / 0	1 / 0	1 / 138	0.7	
1948	0 / 0	2 / 0	2 / 138	1.4	
1950	1 / 0	3 / 0	4 / 138	2.9	
1952	0 / 0	3 / 0	3 / 138	2.2	
1954	1 / 0	2 / 0	3 / 138	2.2	
1956	0 / 0	1 / 0	1 / 138	0.7	
1958	0 / 1	1 / 0	2 / 138	1.4	
1960	0 / 1	0 / 0	1 / 138	0.7	
1962	0 / 0	2 / 1	3 / 138	2.2	
1964	2 / 0	2 / 0	4 / 138	2.9	
1966	0 / 0	1 / 0	1 / 138	0.7	
1968	1 / 0	2 / 2	5 / 138	3.6	
1970	1 / 0	4 / 0	5 / 138	3.6	
1972	1 / 0	3 / 0	4 / 138	2.9	
1974	2 / 0	3 / 0	5 / 138	3.6	
1976	1 / 0	3 / 0	4 / 138	2.9	
1978	1 / 0	7 / 0	8 / 138	5.8	
1980	2 / 0	7 / 1	10 / 138	7.2	
1982	2 / 0	7 / 1	10 / 138	7.2	
1984	2 / 0	7 / 1	10 / 138	7.2	42
1986	2 / 0	5 / 2	9 / 138	6.5	45
1988	2 / 0	3 / 3	8 / 138	5.8	47
1990	2 / 0	3 / 3	8 / 138	5.8	47
1992	1 / 0	3 / 4	8 / 138	5.8	49
1994	1 / 0	5 / 2	8 / 138	5.8	49
1996	0 / 2	5 / 4	11 / 138	8.0	49
1998	0 / 2	7 / 4	13 / 138	9.4	49
2000	0 / 4	10 / 2	16 / 138	11.6	47
2001	0 / 4	9 / 2	15 / 138	10.9	47
2002	0 / 4	9 / 2	15 / 138	10.9	47

Table 6: Female Legislative Candidates in Kentucky, 1973-2000

	1973	1979	1981	1984	1986	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000
				<i>House</i>								
Number of women running	12	22	28	26	18	16	11	11	21	27	20	21
Number of women elected	3	8	7	7	5	6	6	5	9	11	12	11
Number of men running	279	210	221	236	211	179	201	203	191	202	186	137
				<i>Senate</i>								
Number of women running	2	6	7	3	1	2	6	3	8	5	9	1
Number of women elected	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	4	0
Number of men running	48	47	41	52	44	36	47	47	40	45	43	41

house, 38 in the senate), so only 10.9 percent of the seats are currently held by women. Only three states have a lower percentage. As Table 5 shows, the commonwealth has consistently ranked near the bottom despite increases since the mid-1990s in the number of seats held by women.³⁴

As indicated in Table 6, 272 women ran for the Kentucky General Assembly during the last two decades (1979-2000). Of those, 98 (including incumbents who ran multiple times) won general elections, 36 percent of the total number who ran. Of the 2,660 males who ran in primary and general elections, 1,211 won seats—46 percent. Given the predominance of male incumbency, the showing by women has been strong.³⁵

Female incumbents have been just as likely to retain office as their male counterparts. During 1979-2000, only one woman in the senate and four in the house lost reelection bids. Victories by first-time women candidates came primarily in races for open seats, but the same could be said for first-time male candidates as well. In 1998, Republican women made historic gains in the senate, capturing four seats. Twelve women won seats in the house (ten Democrats, two Republicans). In 2000, eleven females (nine Democrats, two Republicans) were elected in the house while one female Republican challenger lost her bid for a senate seat.

In dealing with the male-dominated general assembly, current women legislators can look back at the valuable contributions of their female predecessors.³⁶ Three role models include Louisville Democratic legislators Georgia Powers, Mae Street Kidd, and Gerta Bendl. Georgia Montgomery Davis Powers

³⁴Table 5 data from CAWP Kentucky facts page (<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~cawp/StbySt/KY.html>); Harrison, *Women in Ky. State Government*; Legislative Research Commission, *Kentucky General Assembly Membership 1900-2000*, 2 vols. (Frankfort, 2000), 2:327-28. For national figures, see Elizabeth M. Cox, *Women State and Territorial Legislators, 1895-1995: A State-by-State Analysis, with Rosters of 6,000 Women* (Jefferson, N.C., 1996).

³⁵For Table 6, 1973-86 data from Jewell and Miller, *Ky. Legislature*; 1988-2000 data compiled from records of the Kentucky State Board of Elections.

³⁶Mary Elliott Flanery (1867-1933) of Ashland, a subject of the following article, became the first woman to win a seat in the general assembly in 1921. Only three other women served during the quarter century between Flanery's election and that of Mary Elizabeth Burnett (1911-99) of Lexington in 1945. As Table 5 shows, there has been at least one woman in the legislature since Burnett took office for the first of her four terms in 1946. Carolyn Conn "Carrie" Moore (1904-86) of Franklin in 1950 became the first woman to serve in the senate, running unopposed in a November 1949 special election to fill the seat of her deceased husband J. Lee Moore. In that



Courtesy of Georgia Davis Powers

Georgia M. Davis Powers entered the Kentucky Senate in 1967 as the first African American to hold a seat in that body. Serving until 1989, she “chaired two important standing committees, Health and Welfare (1970-76) and Labor and Industry (1978-88).”

(1923-) and Minnie Mae Jones Street Kidd (1904-99) each entered the legislature in 1968, Powers in the senate and Kidd in the house. Powers (who was known as Georgia Davis until her marriage in 1973) served consecutively until 1989 and chaired two important standing committees, Health and Welfare (1970-76) and Labor and Industry (1978-88). The first African American of either gender in the upper house, she became known as a leading advocate for blacks, women, children, the poor, and the handicapped. Kidd, a woman of mixed race who had attended Lincoln Institute, served eight terms before losing a reelection bid in 1984. Known as the “dean of women” and the

same election year, Thelma Stovall won the first of three consecutive house terms, launching her thirty-year career in state government.

"lady of the house," she became the first woman to serve on the powerful Rules Committee and to chair the Enrollment Committee. An advocate for decent housing for minorities and the poor, Kidd cosponsored the Fair Housing Bill in 1968 and was the primary sponsor of what became known as the Mae Street Kidd Act, the 1972 legislation that created the Kentucky Housing Corporation, promoting and financing low-income housing. She also sponsored and floor-managed the 1976 resolution that ratified the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution 112 years after they had become law.³⁷

Another woman from Louisville, Democrat Gerta Koperek Bendl (1931-87), became a leading force in the house in the 1970s and 1980s, serving from her 1975 election until her death. She chaired the powerful Health and Welfare Committee (1980-84) and sponsored or worked for the passage of a host of significant bills relating to health-care issues and the elderly.³⁸

Women lost important seniority in the late 1980s with Powers's retirement, Kidd's defeat, and Bendl's death, but a new generation took the spotlight in 1998 as several female legislators, both Democratic and Republican, received much media attention for their successes and failures during the session. Most prominent were the six "liberal" house Democrats from urban areas who were nicknamed the "bitch caucus" by some of their male colleagues: Ruth Ann Palumbo and Kathy W. Stein of Lexington and Joni L. Jenkins, Susan D. Johns, Eleanor Jordan, and Mary Lou Marzian of Louisville. "We determined that our impact would be stronger and more effective if we used collective intelligence, energy, and political networking on some issues," said Jordan. "We also figured it was an excellent time to increase our visibility for other women and for girls who would be watching via nightly television news broadcasts and on KET wrap-ups." Seasoned male legislators could not remember a session when female representatives had been "more vocal and visible" as the 1998 general assembly passed several laws that were especially beneficial to women. As can be sur-

³⁷For Powers, see her autobiography, *I Shared the Dream: The Pride, Passion and Politics of the First Black Woman Senator from Kentucky* (Far Hills, N.J., 1995); for Kidd, see Wade Hall, *Passing for Black: The Life and Careers of Mae Street Kidd* (Lexington, 1997).

³⁸*Ency. of Louisville.*

mised by their nickname, the “bitch caucus” did not meet with universal acclaim, although Jordan was quick to note that “the six of us were only approaching our legislative duty the same way our male counterparts do.” She explained that “each day of the session, on the house floor, in the annex hallways and cafeteria, men gather to discuss issues, compare notes, cut deals or just to chat about the session. No one bats an eye. This is standard operating procedure. Six female legislators get together and immediately the focus shifts from our function as legislators to our gender.”³⁹

Opponents of the female coalition threw more obstacles in their way during the 2000 and 2001 sessions. A bill that would have protected Kentuckians from discrimination based on gender or sexual orientation in employment, housing, public accommodations, and insurance never made it out of the house Judiciary Committee in 2001, the first odd-year regular session ever. Marzian’s bill calling for gender equity on all state boards and commissions, cosponsored by every woman in the general assembly, stalled in the senate in both sessions after passing in the house.⁴⁰

The fifteen women in the 2002 general assembly served on a wide array of standing committees but held few top leadership positions. The most prominent exception was Republican Elizabeth J. Tori of Radcliff, who served as senate majority whip. Women chaired only one standing committee in the Democratic-controlled house and three in the Republican-controlled senate.⁴¹

³⁹Eleanor Jordan, “Joining Forces Draws Fire,” *Kentucky Journal*, April/May 1998, 9; *Lexington Herald-Leader*, March 15, 1998, A14. Significant legislation included an act that established the Office of Women’s Health and another that required the Department of Personnel to develop a new classification and compensation system to ensure pay equity. *Ky. Acts, 1998, 1727-34*.

⁴⁰*Faces & Facts: Newsletter of the Kentucky Commission on Women*, Winter 2001, Spring 2001.

⁴¹All four of the women in the 2002 senate were Republicans. Tori chaired the Enrollment Committee; Julie Rose Denton (Louisville) chaired Health and Welfare; Katie Kratz Stine (Fort Thomas) chaired Economic Development, Tourism, and Labor and was vice chair of Judiciary; and Alice Forgy Kerr (Lexington) was vice chair of State and Local Government and Economic Development, Tourism, and Labor. In the house, Palumbo chaired Economic Development. Jenkins, Marzian, Stein, Tanya Pullin (D-South Shore), Dottie J. Sims (D-Horse Cave), Robin L. Webb (D-Grayson), and Barbara W. Colter (R-Manchester) all served as vice chairs of standing committees. The other women currently serving in the house are Carolyn Belcher (R-Preston), Marie L. Rader (R-McKee), and Susan Westrom (D-Lexington).



Courtesy of Anne Meagher Northup



John W. Langley. They Tried to Crucify Me; or, The Smoke-screen of the Cumberlands (Pikeville, 1929), iv.

Only two women, both Republicans, have been elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from Kentucky—Katherine G. Langley (right) in 1927 and Anne Meagher Northup (left) in 1996.

Women as National Officeholders

Kentucky has sent only two women to the U.S. House and none to the Senate. Republican Katherine Gudger Langley (1888-1948) served two terms from the tenth district, 1927-1931, after her husband John was forced to resign from that seat. Sixty-nine years after Langley was first elected, Republican Anne Meagher Northup (1948-), a five-term state representative from Jefferson County (1987-96), narrowly defeated one-term third-district incumbent Mike Ward by 1,299 votes. She won favor with Speaker Newt Gingrich and received a choice seat on the House Appropriations Committee. In 1998, she founded the House Reading Caucus, a bipartisan group that seeks to raise awareness about the problem of illiteracy and promote research into the most effective methods for teaching children to read. Her skills in campaign financing have served her well, as she has faced stiff challenges in 1998 and 2000. Her opponent in the

latter race was state representative and "bitch caucus" member Eleanor Jordan.⁴²

Kentucky is one of 30 states never to have sent a woman to the Senate.⁴³ The sixty women in the House (42 Democrats, 18 Republicans) represent only twenty-seven states. Nevertheless, female representation in both houses of Congress is at an all-time high with 13 senators and 60 representatives for a total of 73 of the 535 seats (13.6 percent). The percentage is still low, but the number of women has more than doubled in the last ten years. Prior to entering Congress, 45 of the 60 female representatives (75 percent) held previous elective office. Thirty-four had served as state legislators.⁴⁴

Women as Local Officials

As illustrated in Table 3, female candidates have made a net gain of more than 300 positions in local races in Kentucky since 1992. Local elective positions are more appealing to many women interested in public policymaking since they must juggle their various professional, civic, and family responsibilities. "It's more convenient for them to serve at that level," said then-state Democratic Party chair Bob Babbage in 1996. As in other southern and border states, female candidates have had better success winning positions on school boards (currently 29 percent of the seats across the state) and as circuit court clerks (55 percent) and county clerks (59 percent). Women do least well in races for jobs associated with law enforcement like sheriff, jailer, county attorney, and commonwealth's attorney.⁴⁵

⁴²For Langley, see *Ky. Ency.*; for Northup, see *Ency. of Louisville*.

⁴³Only two women have received major-party nominations for the U.S. Senate, Democrat Katherine Graham Peden (1926-) in 1968 and Republican Mary Louise Foust (1909-99) in 1980. Foust had little chance against popular incumbent Wendell Ford, but Peden lost a close race for an open seat to Marlow W. Cook. Foust apparently was the first woman to seek the Kentucky gubernatorial nomination, running in the Democratic primaries in 1963 and 1975 before switching parties. As a Democrat, she twice won statewide election as state auditor, serving 1955-59 and 1969-75. For Foust, see *Lexington Herald-Leader*, December 19, 1999; for Peden, see *Who's Who in the South and Southeast*, 28th ed. (Chicago, 2002).

⁴⁴CAWP, *Women in the U.S. Congress 2002*; idem, *Women in the U.S. Senate 1922-2002*. See also Burrell, *A Woman's Place is in the House*.

⁴⁵Charles S. Bullock III et al., "Winning in My Own Backyard: County Government, School Board Positions Steadily More Attractive to Women Candidates," in Whitaker, ed., *Women in Politics*, 121-37. Babbage quoted in *Kentucky Gazette*, February 15, 1996.



Courtesy of Pam Miller



Courtesy of Karen Cunningham

Pam Miller (left), mayor the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government since 1993, is one of 15 women to serve as mayor in one of the nation's 100 largest cities. Karen L. Cunningham (right) joined a growing number of female mayors when she was elected mayor of Madisonville, Ky., in 1998.

In 2002, 74 women are serving as mayors across the state (17 percent), primarily in fourth- to sixth-class cities. Of the commonwealth's 347 largest cities, 26 percent of the mayors, council members, and commission members are women.⁴⁶ However, only 7 percent of the 584 county commission members are women. While most city councils have at least one woman, more than 100 of the state's 120 counties have no female representatives on their county fiscal courts, and only nine have female judge-executives. Three women serve as commonwealth's attorneys and four as sheriffs.

Pam Miller of Lexington is one of 15 women who serve as mayors of cities among the nation's 100 largest. The number of female mayors in cities with more than 30,000 people increased from 12 in 1973 to 211 in 2002 (21.3 percent). More than 25,000 women currently serve as mayors or members of city or county councils across the country. These local female officials may

⁴⁶Kentucky League of Cities, unpublished database of mayors, council members, and commissioners for 2002. Karen L. Cunningham of Madisonville typifies the growing number of impressive female mayors in the state.



Courtesy Governor's Office



Courtesy Education, Arts and Humanities Cabinet

Eugenia Crittenden "Crit" Luallen (left), secretary of the Governor's Executive Cabinet, holds the highest appointive office in the Patton administration. Dr. Marlene Helm has served as secretary of the Education, Arts and Humanities Cabinet in the Patton administration since 1999.

work their way up through the political ranks and strive for higher elective office in the future.⁴⁷

Women as Appointed Officeholders

In contrast to elected offices, Kentucky women have a long history in appointive positions in state and local government. National research shows that women have used such positions as springboards to run for public office, just like their male counterparts.⁴⁸

All governors since John Y. Brown Jr. took office in 1979 have made strong efforts to appoint women to cabinet-level roles. Under Wallace Wilkinson, women held cabinet positions in the departments of Labor, Tourism, Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, and Workforce Development, and more than 560 women were appointed to various executive positions. During Brereton Jones's tenure, one-third of his top-

⁴⁷CAWP, *Women in Elected Office* 2002.

⁴⁸Darcy et al., *Women, Elections and Representation*.

level appointments were women, placing cabinet-level female representation in the top fifteen among the states.⁴⁹

Under Paul Patton's administration, more women have held top administrative positions than at any other time in Kentucky's history. Eugenia Crittenden "Crit" Luallen, who held cabinet posts under Jones and a commissionership under Collins, holds the highest appointed position in Kentucky state government as Patton's secretary of the Executive Cabinet. Women currently in the cabinet are Marlene M. Helm (Education, Arts and Humanities), Dana Bynum Mayton (Revenue), Viola Miller (Families and Children), Marcia R. Morgan (Health Services), and Carol M. Palmore (Personnel). In addition, Audrey Tayse Haynes, who was deputy assistant to the president and director for Women's Initiatives and Outreach at the White House under Bill Clinton in 1997 and later an advisor to Al Gore, was appointed in 2001 to represent Kentucky in Washington as director of Intergovernmental Relations.

Women held 31 percent of the positions on the state's 300 boards and commissions during the Jones administration, the highest percentage up to that time. Patton has increased the number to 45 percent and in September 2000 signed an executive order mandating gender equity on all state boards and commissions. A bill in the general assembly to that effect had failed in 2000 and did so again in 2001 despite Patton's edict and strong support, stalling in the senate both times.⁵⁰

Kentucky's first ladies have also taken visible leadership roles in the commonwealth. Current first lady Judi Conway Patton has successfully lobbied legislators for initiatives dealing with domestic violence, child abuse, and breast cancer. She received a national award in 2001 for her victims' rights advo-

⁴⁹Miller, *Ky. Politics and Government*, 77. Brown appointed Jackie Swigart of Louisville as secretary of the Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection in 1979, making her the first woman to serve as the secretary of a cabinet. Margaret Woll (1896-1989) was the commonwealth's first female commissioner, heading the Department of Welfare, 1938-41. Cattie Lou Miller (1923-) was commissioner of the Department of Public Information, 1960-67, and Katherine Peden was the first woman in the country to head a state development agency, serving as commerce commissioner in Governor Edward T. Breathitt's administration (1963-67). Harrison, *Women in Ky. State Government*; for Swigart, see John Ed Pearce, "Frankfort's Influential Females," *Courier-Journal Magazine*, June 29, 1980, 10-15, 32-37; for Miller, see *Frankfort State Journal*, September 7, 1982.

⁵⁰*Facts and Faces: Newsletter of the Kentucky Commission on Women*, Winter 2001, Spring 2001. See also Hawkesworth, "Battling for Ballot Position," *Kentucky Journal*, April/May 1998, 3.

cacy work. She and Martha Layne Collins are the cochairs of the current Governor's Task Force on the Economic Status of Kentucky's Women. Patton's predecessor, Elizabeth Lloyd "Libby" Jones, has been a statewide leader in historic preservation, agriculture, environmental, and education issues, and played a significant role in gaining approval and funding for the new Kentucky History Center.

Women in the Judiciary

In the 1990s, Kentucky women made historic inroads in the male-dominated judiciary. Sara Walters Combs, widow of former governor Bert T. Combs, was appointed in 1993 to fill the vacancy of retiring supreme court justice Dan Jack Combs (no relation), becoming the first woman on the state's highest court. She lost a special election for the court seat in November 1993 to Janet Lynn Stumbo, who subsequently won a full eight-year term in 1996. In November 1994, Sara Combs was elected to the seat on the Kentucky Court of Appeals that Stumbo had vacated. Stumbo had been the second woman on the court of the appeals, the first to have been elected.

As Table 3 shows, the number of females at the circuit and district levels has increased dramatically in the last decade, especially in the metropolitan areas of Lexington and Louisville. In 1994, Janice Martin of Louisville was elected as the state's first female African American judge, winning a position on the Jefferson District Court. Margaret Kannensohn of Lexington was elected as the first female county attorney that same year. The state's first female commonwealth's attorney had been elected a year earlier.

Current governor Paul Patton has an unprecedented record in appointing women to judicial positions. Forty-one percent of his appointees have been women, well above the 17 percent that had been the previous high for an administration. He appointed more women to judicial positions during his first four-year term than had all of the previous governors combined. In October 2000, Patton appointed the first African American woman to a circuit judgeship, Denise G. Clayton of Louisville.⁵¹

⁵¹*Facts and Faces: Newsletter of the Kentucky Commission on Women*, Winter 2001. For research on national trends, see Nicholas O. Alozie, "Distribution of Women and



KHS Special Collections

Kentucky first ladies Judi Patton (left) and Libby Jones (right) played important roles “in gaining approval and funding for the new Kentucky History Center. They are shown here with their husbands, Dr. Thomas D. Clark (far left), and KHS president James Shepherd at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for opening the Center, April 10, 1999.

With the large increase in women law-school graduates in the past decade, the pool of female candidates for judicial and law-enforcement offices has grown significantly. Women constitute 24 percent of the attorneys in the state and are actively encouraging female cohorts to run for the bench.⁵²

Minority Judges: The Effects of Judicial Selection Methods,” *Social Science Quarterly* 71 (1990): 215-25; Elaine Martin, “Women Judges: The New Generation,” in Whitaker, ed., *Women in Politics*, 278-91.

⁵²Women constituted 50 percent of the 1998 law school graduates at the University of Louisville, 42 percent at the University of Kentucky, and 34 percent at Chase. “A Statistical Look at Women in Kentucky,” *Kentucky Journal*, April/May 1998, 2. Denise Clayton’s departure from the Jefferson District Court decreased the number of women serving on it to ten (of eighteen seats). This number had risen from two in 1979 to six in 1998 to eleven in 1999. *Frankfort State Journal*, February 5, 1999.

Bill Clinton appointed Jennifer B. Coffman of Lexington as Kentucky's first female U.S. District judge in 1993 at the instance of Senator Wendell Ford. Karen K. Caldwell of Lexington became the second in the fall of 2001, appointed by George W. Bush with the strong backing of Republican senators Mitch McConnell and Jim Bunning.

Women and Kentucky Politics in the New Millennium

The future well-being of women in Kentucky is intricately tied to the increased development of women as public leaders in the new millennium. "Women in public service often approach challenges from a new perspective and bring diverse groups together to find solutions to complex problems," writes Sylvia Lovely, executive director of the Kentucky League of Cities. Former state representative Eleanor Jordan agrees, declaring that the women in the general assembly in the last few years have brought "a fresh, new perspective to the legislative and political processes and serve as a testament to the differences that gender can make in how we govern ourselves."⁵³

Studies by political scientists help explain the problems that underrepresentation by women in public policymaking creates for Kentucky and other states. Female state legislators have been found to be more "liberal" than men, even when controlling for party membership, and are three times more likely than men to offer at least one female-oriented policy issue among their top concerns. As women become involved in greater numbers, scholars expect state legislative agendas to include more legislation dealing with health care, child welfare, and women at home and in the workplace.⁵⁴ Currently, two-thirds of the state's single-mother families with children under age six live in poverty, and Kentucky ranks in the bottom third in the nation in

⁵³Sylvia Lovely, "Making an Impact: Opportunities for Leadership Begin at the Local Level," *Kentucky Journal*, April/May 1998, 10-11; author interview with Jordan, June 9, 1998.

⁵⁴Shelah Gilbert Leader, "The Policy Impact of Elected Women Officials," in Louis S. Maisel and Joseph Cooper, eds., *The Impact of the Electoral Process* (Beverly Hills, Calif., 1977); Susan Gluck Mezey, "Women and Representation: The Case of Hawaii," *Journal of Politics* 40 (1978): 369-85; Debra L. Dodson and Susan J. Carroll, "Reshaping the Agenda: Women in State Legislatures" (CAWP, 1991), 41-45; Sue Thomas, *How Women Legislate* (New York, 1994).

percentage of college-educated women, female business ownership, and percent of women above the poverty level. The median annual income for female-headed families is \$10,700.⁵⁵

Lovely is encouraged that women are moving up through the business ranks and hopes that they will make the leap into politics that many men in similar positions have taken. She believes that women must become involved at the local level, where they can “gain invaluable experience in community development, public administration, budgetary requirements, and civic awareness—all necessary prerequisites to higher elected office.”

“Parties need to play a greater role in promoting women to run for office,” says representative Mary Lou Marzian. “It is important for women to get in the pipeline of either party to be appointed to boards and commissions throughout the state. Women need to really be pushy and not sit back. We need to demand that we get put on boards and commissions all across the state. We [also] need women in leadership in the house and senate on both sides of the fence.”⁵⁶

“If women want to see greater influence in the business and political world, more voice in the process of policymaking and increases in the balance of power,” writes Lovely, “they must begin by supporting one another in their efforts, becoming involved in organizations committed to increasing the visibility and advancement of women, and committing talents and time to local community service and leadership.”⁵⁷ Only then will the commonwealth see the progress of women in Kentucky politics move beyond the slow and unsure pace of recent decades.⁵⁸

⁵⁵*Faces and Facts: Newsletter of the Kentucky Commission on Women*, Summer 2001.

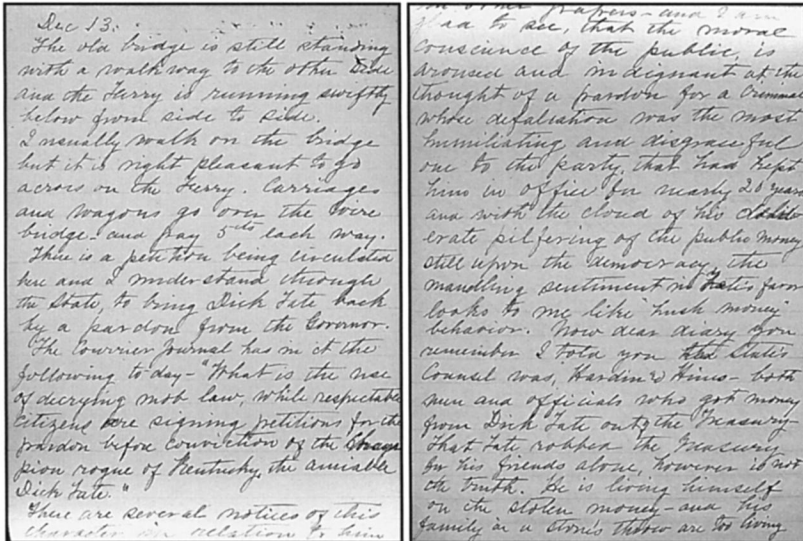
⁵⁶Author interview with Marzian, June 9, 1998.

⁵⁷Lovely, “Making an Impact,” *Kentucky Journal*, April/May 1998, 10-11.

⁵⁸To place more Kentucky women in local, state, and national elected and appointed positions, there must be greater political and civic capital; increased campaign monies; the energies of committed women’s organizations; the grooming of women candidates by political parties; and the support of individual female leaders. At all levels, women in public service must become mentors and role models for those climbing the ladder to leadership positions.

In Kentucky at the present time, there are a growing number of groups and programs that promote active political participation by women and girls. The Kentucky Commission on Women, in partnership with other agencies, has created a film, web site, and educational program, “Women in Kentucky: Our Legacy, Our Future” (<http://www.womeninkentucky.com/>), for students, teachers, and Kentuckians of all ages. The Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center published a collection of

Featured Collection



KHS Special Collections

Jennie Chinn Morton Diary, 1893.

This is a diary kept from August 1 to December 31, 1893, by Jennie Chinn Morton, who helped revive the Kentucky Historical Society and became the founding editor of *The Register*. The diary includes personal and family information, descriptions of the World's Fair (Columbian Exposition) held that year in Chicago, and information about the election of the state librarian.

The diary also discusses the case of former state treasurer James W. "Honest Dick" Tate, who embezzled \$247,000 in state funds before his vanishing in 1888. Never at a loss for words or an opinion, Morton wrote astutely in the diary on December 13, 1893:

articles by leading experts, *The Future Well-Being of Women in Kentucky*, in 1999 (full text available online at <http://www.kltprc.net/PDFs/Women.pdf>). At the college level, Women's Studies Programs, Women's Centers, sororities, public-service groups, student governments, political parties, and legislative and political internship programs encourage various forms of civic and leadership participation by young women. Kids Voting Kentucky provides voting opportunities and educational forums for elementary, middle, and high school students in some Kentucky counties, including Jefferson. Girls State, Girls Scouts, high-school service clubs, and religious youth groups also strive to instill good citizenship, public service, and political leaderships skills in girls and young women across the state.