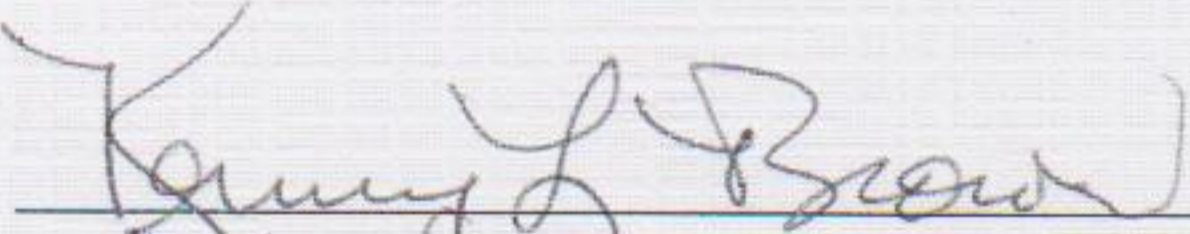
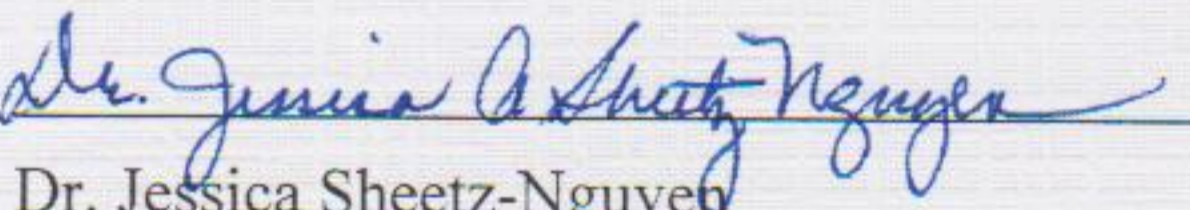


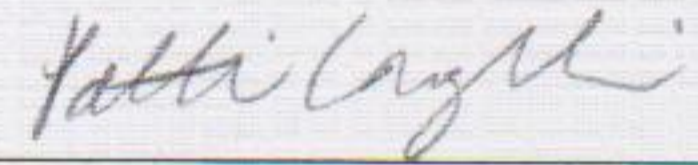
## THESIS APPROVAL

The abstract and thesis of Deah Caldwell for the Master of Arts in History was submitted to the graduate college on 6 December 2010, and approved by the undersigned committee.

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A True, New Woman:  
Alice Mary Robertson during First-wave Feminism,  
1854-1931

by  
Deah Caldwell

A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

University of Central Oklahoma

Edmond, Oklahoma

NAME: Deah Caldwell

TITLE OF THESIS: A True, New Woman: Alice Mary Robertson during First-wave Feminism, 1854-1931

DIRECTOR OF THESIS: Dr. Kenny Brown

ABSTRACT: The story of Alice Mary Robertson is complex and fascinating.

Constituents from the second district in Oklahoma elected her to the United States House of Representatives in 1920. That same year, women had gained the right to vote through the passage of the nineteenth amendment. Robertson, however, had served as the vice president for Oklahoma's anti-suffrage association in 1916 when the state pushed to amend women's voting rights. This major contradiction has enabled academics to continue writing about the former-congressperson, attempting to unravel her anomalous lifestyle.

The national media of the 1920s played a major role in characterizing Robertson as an anti-suffragist and anti-feminist representative, using her congressional seat to preserve the values of the Cult of True Womanhood, or domesticity, piety, and purity. Many secondary authors, since the rise of U.S. women's history in the 1970s, have continued to depict the former-congressperson in this way. None of the writers on Robertson, however, have attempted to place her within the time-specific context of first-wave feminism or exhausted all manuscript collections that relate to her directly, facilitating her defamed and misunderstood legacy. Few academics investigated: Robertson's brother's papers, Samuel Worcester Robertson, held at the Western History

Collections at the University of Oklahoma in Norman; her sister's papers, Ann Augusta Moore Robertson, held at the Oklahoma Historical Society's Research Center in Oklahoma City; papers she submitted to Elmira College in Elmira, New York; and vertical files from any library, including the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. This thesis draws heavily on all the existing manuscript collections that relate to Robertson, as well as placing her within the context of women's movements during the first-wave. With that said, Robertson emerges with a very different persona. In fact, this thesis finds she consistently emulated aspects of New Womanhood throughout her life. By discussing women's movements during the turn of the twentieth century, looking at Robertson's life before she became a media sensation in 1920, highlighting the manipulation of newspaper articles that were written about her during her term in congress, and using manuscript collections to discuss her side of congressional issues, this thesis asserts that Robertson operated as a transitional figure between the ideals of True and New Womanhood.

## Abbreviations for Archival Sources in Footnotes

AAMR/OHS	Anne August Moore Robertson Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
AB/WHC	Althea Bass Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.
AMR/EC	Alice Mary Robertson Papers, Library, Elmira College, Elmira, New York.
AMR/MPL	Alice Mary Robertson Papers, Muskogee Public Library, Muskogee, Oklahoma.
AMR/OHS	Alice Mary Robertson Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
AMRVF/OHS	Alice Mary Robertson Vertical File, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
BTW/UI	Booker T. Washington Papers, Special Collections, University of Illinois at Chicago, Chicago, Illinois .
CTF/OHS	Carolyn Thomas Foreman Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
DLC/WHC	Daisy Lemmon Coldiron Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.
ECJ/WHC	Edith Cherry Johnson Papers, Western History Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.
GF/OHS	Grant Foreman Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
IPC/OHS	Indian Pioneer Collection, Archives and Manuscripts Division, Oklahoma Historical Society, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.
PRW/UT	Papers of the Robertson and Worcester Families, Special Collections and University Archives, McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

SWR/WHC

Samuel Worcester Robertson Papers, Western History Collections,  
University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma.



## Introduction

Alice Mary Robertson (1854-1931) served as the second woman in the United States (U.S.) House of Representatives, winning in 1920 at the age of sixty-six. That same year women gained suffrage through the passage of the nineteenth amendment. Ironically, Robertson had operated as the vice president for Oklahoma's anti-suffrage association when the state pushed for the granting of suffrage to women in 1916. This apparent contradiction caused local and national journalists to sensationalize Robertson.

Upon arriving at Capitol Hill, media personalities seemed to overlook Robertson's anti-suffrage stance, favoring her clever and engaging personality. Positive coverage, however, quickly desisted; she seemed to position herself antagonistically against the self-proclaimed feminists. Ultimately, these women and contemporary journalists characterized Robertson as a True Womanhood advocate, or upholder of traditionally acceptable female roles of domesticity, piety, and purity. Those who called themselves feminists viewed Robertson as the anti-thesis of New Womanhood, because they claimed to push for occupational, political, and social identities beyond domesticity or male oversight. Secondary authors of Robertson have also continued to personify her as an anti-New Woman crusader. The Oklahoma representative, however, never married, birthed offspring, or relied on a man for an income. In fact, much evidence before she

became a media sensation in 1920 suggests she eagerly embraced many facets of New Womanhood, calling into question the widely upheld portrayal of her as an advocate of True Womanhood.

Robertson intentionally worked to achieve beyond domesticity, creating an identity for herself apart from male oversight. She also clearly supported other women who pursued a similar path to her own. Before ever considering a congressional run, she had surpassed many of her male counterparts in political and social leadership by her own efforts. During her college years, she pursued a career over love interests. By the age of twenty, she had received a higher education at Elmira College in Elmira, N.Y., and then left to work in the Indian Office in Washington, D.C., from 1873-79, becoming the first woman in the U.S. to do so. Robertson chartered what became the University of Tulsa, beginning in 1885. From 1900-05, she served as the Supervisor for Creek Schools in Indian Territory, becoming the first female in the U.S. hired for this position. In 1905, she was the first female postmaster to preside over a first-class post office in the U.S, serving until 1913. That same year, she built a successful club for working women that evolved and flourished into a profitable business, Sawokla Cafeteria. Due to her services during the Spanish-American War of 1898, she was honored as and received the burial of a Spanish-American war veteran, making her the only woman in the U.S. to obtain such an honor. Females like Robertson consisted of “perhaps the most politically influential and well-organized womanhood in American history, in a pre-woman’s suffrage period.”<sup>1</sup> Robertson’s pre-1920 activity clearly embodied the very definition of New Womanhood, demanding for a re-conceptualization of her life.

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy F. Cott, Ellen Carol DuBois, Nancy F. Hewitt, Gerda Lerner, and Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Considering the State of U.S. Women’s History,” *Journal of Women’s History* 15 (2003): 153.

Academics, historians, and the general public continue writing about Robertson in an attempt to give her historical significance; a complicated feat that only some authors have managed to do well, because few have relied heavily on extensive archival materials or contextually analyzed her according to women's movements during her lifetime. The historiography on her is comprised of both non-academic and scholarly perspectives, ranging in date from 1946-2009. Currently two schools of thought dominate historical monographs, journal articles, and dissertations and master's theses; those who hail her life-long accomplishments, but mostly those who personify the legislator as a sexist, puritanical hypocrite, who worked against her gender at Capitol Hill to promote the values of the Cult of True Womanhood. This perspective remains firmly grounded in the national press' interpretation of her during the 1920s, calling into question scholarship.

Most writers on Robertson utilized the vast, Worcester-Robertson Papers held at University of Tulsa, though they heavily drew from newspaper articles and secondary sources. Few authors consulted: her papers held at Elmira College in Elmira, N.Y.; Robertson's brother's papers at the Western History Collections at the University of Oklahoma in Norman; Althea Bass's papers at the Western History Collections, which are important since she wrote histories on the Robertson family; Edith Cherry Johnson's papers at the Western History Collections, remaining crucial since Johnson interviewed Robertson on several occasions; archives from the Muskogee Public Library; or vertical files from any library, including the Oklahoma Department of Libraries. Reliance upon contemporary journalists has greatly assisted in the discrediting of Robertson's legacy, especially her contributions as a woman during first-wave feminism and her outlook on True Womanhood. These views have ultimately caused her story to be somewhat

speculative or just a rehashing of earlier attempts. Many primary sources and first-hand accounts prove that Robertson was not an inflexible True Womanhood proponent, but rather a transitional figure between Victorian Era ideals and New Womanhood.

By heavily relying on archival material, logical alternate explanations emerge, correcting Robertson's seemingly anti-lady rhetoric. Furthermore, sources have been unfair to judge the former representative according to our modern understanding of feminism and women's history. Imperatively, her story needs to be retold, showing how she fit into the larger picture of women's movements during first-wave feminism, breaking away from the traditional narrative of how feminism and suffrage fit into her life. Last and more obviously, a thorough focus on her viewpoints about women in education, politics, society, and the workforce before her term in congress has not been carefully attempted, though sources have consistently acknowledged that her tenure as representative overshadowed her life-long pursuits before 1920.

Currently, authors have failed to consider the possibility that Robertson operated as a transitional figure between True and New Womanhood, serving as one of the many different hybrids of womanhood that existed during the Progressive Era.<sup>2</sup> Evidence suggests she embraced and supported females who pursued non-traditional roles outside of domesticity in politics, society, and the workforce, despite her anti-suffrage stance and anti-feminist rhetoric. Many primary documents before 1920 and records during her congressional tenure show that throughout Robertson's life, she remained proactive on

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<sup>2</sup> Readers need to be aware that this thesis will only use the word progressive to define an era that emerged in the late nineteenth century, extending into the early twentieth century. To narrate the idea of progressivism within the political and social climate of industrialization is a voluminous work in and of itself. One must note that many gender-based, political, race-based, and social factions referred to themselves as progressives. In effect, everyone who lived during this era may have referred to himself or herself as a progressive, making the term feckless. Today, progressive remains an overused, blanket term.



behalf of women in education, politics, self-expression, i.e. dress, the work force, and working-women's clubs. Ultimately, Robertson warrants a more time-specific, historically accurate account of her life.

Chapter one maps out the historiography of U.S. women's movements during the Progressive Era, as well as an in-depth historiographical analysis of secondary works on Robertson. Chapter two strictly concentrates on her activity and lifestyle from birth to 1920 as it relates to women, providing multiple examples of her New Womanhood approach. Chapter three relies mostly on newspaper articles from 1920-23 and is structured to illuminate contemporary opinions of her, as well as secondary personifications of her as an anti-New Woman crusader. This chapter only underscores that media sources can neither be taken at face value nor can they be solely relied upon for information. Chapter four offers Robertson's side of congressional issues from 1920-23, discussing the same points as chapter three, but relying on manuscript collections. Ultimately in many ways, Robertson represented the New Woman tradition, but at times reverted to values of True Womanhood, making her a transitional figure between the two. In sum, by weighing her on the scales of time-specific definitions of womanhood and placing her within the context of the period in which she lived, Robertson really emerges as more of a New Woman than True.

## Chapter 1

### From Victorian Boots to Kitten Heels:

Alice Mary Robertson during First-wave Feminism, 1854-1931

Think of the word feminism. What comes to mind? A handful of students in a freshman-level course, titled U.S. History since 1877 in April 2010 at the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, thought of the word as it relates to “other girl terms...bitch.”<sup>1</sup> Some women saw themselves as emotional beings, incapable of making rational decisions without a man’s advisement. Others confirmed the widely believed idea that feminism is a verb, representing militant or radical action against men and all forms of patriarchy. Some of the students, the males in particular, simply did not care. Only two ladies associated feminism with economic, political, and social equality between men and women. Unfortunately, those young adults, both female and male, had not considered feminism as it relates to history, maintaining little concern for the topic, begging the questions, “Why does history matter?” Gerda Lerner, a founder of U.S. women’s history, addressed the query best in her 1997 publication, *Why History Matters:*

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000), 50.

*Life and Thought*.<sup>2</sup> She stated:

Behind me stands a line of women historians, who practiced their profession and helped to build this organization without enjoying equality in status, economic rewards and representation...I would not be standing before you today, if it were not for the vision and perseverance of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century feminists, who treasured and collected the records and documents of female activity during their time. They laid the foundation for the study of women's history...the present generation of women historians, who assume equality as their right...They are the first generation of women professionals truly freed from the necessity of choosing between career and marriage.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, every woman, sitting and discussing feminism in that classroom, enjoyed the possibility of pursuing a higher education and anticipated a career, because women advocated for it over 100 years ago. Not all of the women that helped propel first-wave feminism were as obvious as others, however.

Alice Mary Robertson served in the sixty-seventh congress from the second district in Oklahoma, despite having an anti-suffrage past. This apparent conundrum has caused scholars and writers to author many works, regarding this irony. Most have upheld the notion she acted on Capitol Hill to preserve the ideals of the Cult of True Womanhood, or domesticity, motherhood, piety, purity, and wifedom. In fact, these interpretations enable many readers to conclude that she was bigoted and sexist against her own gender. However, her term in congress was not an anti-woman crusade. Primary documents throughout her life indicate that Robertson embodied elements of New Womanhood, creating an identity for herself in politics, society, and the workforce beyond domesticity and without the oversight of a male relative. She, however,

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<sup>2</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Why History Matters: Life and Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Gerda Lerner, *Why History Matters*, 112-3.

consistently revered domesticity and motherhood throughout her life, encouraging young women to pursue marriage. According to the evidence, Robertson was neither a True nor New Woman; she was a hybrid, incorporating elements of both, making her a transitional figure between both ideals of womanhood. With that said, she was one of the many women that helped propel first-wave feminism during the Progressive Era. If the students' understanding of feminism in U.S. History since 1877 accounts for the general lack of awareness of and regard for such issues in the United States, how can one begin to properly narrate Robertson's story as a possible transitional figure between True and New Womanhood during the Victorian and Progressive Eras? The dictionary seemed like the most logical place to start.

According to the eleventh edition of the *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* the word feminism is a noun and means: "1: the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes 2: organized activity on behalf of women's rights and interests."<sup>4</sup> Scholarship on the other hand uses lengthy prose founded on extensive primary and secondary research to characterize the term as it relates to history, just as this thesis is attempting to do for Robertson. The word, therefore, changes with each new analysis.

The concept of feminism continues to evolve from its original meaning. Gerda Lerner noted that research on class, suffrage, women's organizations, and feminism has yet to contribute to the historiography of U.S. women's history.<sup>5</sup> Making the case for Robertson as a transitional figure between True and New Womanhood, therefore, provides this opportunity; her life and memory has revolved around class, suffrage,

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<sup>4</sup> Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., 2003, 461.

<sup>5</sup> Cott, DuBois, Hewitt, Lerner, and Sklar, "Considering the State of U.S. Women's History," 146.



women's organizations, and feminism. New historiographical interpretations of women's individual economic, political, and/or social experiences, like that of Robertson, contribute to the constant redefinition. In fact, U.S. women's historians and scholars have readily overlooked the idea of transitional womanhood, allowing for a re-conceptualization of first-wave feminism, as well as a redefinition of Robertson.

This thesis will not examine how Robertson confused maleness and femaleness during the Victorian and Progressive Eras, because as a founder of the U.S. school of women's history, Ellen Carol Dubois noted, "The woman versus gender debate among historians is done, it is old news, it is not worth worrying about... Women's history was not washed away by the rise of gender history."<sup>6</sup> Instead, this research focuses on her personal achievements as one, who supported other women, at a time when many females accomplished a great deal occupationally, politically, and socially without the franchise.<sup>7</sup> Robertson's story is mostly compelling, because she intentionally helped transform women's activity in politics, society, and the workforce in the U.S. by choosing to live the life of a New Woman before women had gained the right to vote, adapting and justifying her lifestyle and pursuits as an extension of household affairs.

Robertson never married or birthed offspring. Most of her life, she supported herself and relatives, as well as the orphaned children she raised financially. Perhaps, the need to make a living pushed her in the direction of non-traditional occupations. Emily E. Ruggs, a historian on Robertson, claimed the harsh environment she grew up in caused her to unintentionally blur the lines between gendered behaviors.<sup>8</sup> However, primary

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<sup>6</sup> Cott, Dubois, Hewitt, Lerner, and Sklar, "Considering the State of U.S. Women's History," 151.

<sup>7</sup> Cott, Dubois, Hewitt, Lerner, and Sklar, "Considering the State of U.S. Women's History," 153.

evidence suggests that before Robertson ever considered running for the U.S. House of Representatives, she intentionally pushed to achieve beyond the domestic sphere. Her hard work and intelligence allowed her to accomplish more in her life than many of her male counterparts in terms of political and social leadership, ultimately making her an ideal candidate for congress. Robertson was paradigmatic of “perhaps the most politically influential and well-organized womanhood in American history, in a pre-woman’s suffrage period,” allowing her to take a well-deserved place in women’s history as a transitional figure between True and New Womanhood during first-wave feminism.<sup>9</sup>

Robertson had beaten all odds of winning the election as an anti-suffrage Republican in the Democratic South, heading to Capitol Hill, where she served one term from 1921-23. Throughout the first year of her tenure, she remained positioned against H.R. 2366, or Sheppard-Towner, a bill proposed to improve maternity and infant health care. Her anti-suffrage past and anti-feminist rhetoric earned her the hatred of professional, self-proclaimed New Women who ultimately defeated her bid for re-election in 1923. Since her seemingly incompetent political career, she has continued to serve in the secondary literature as the shining example of Progressive Era, Republican women who clung to the values of the Cult of True Womanhood, rejecting gendered acknowledgement or legislation. Significantly, when primary source documents are closely examined, some of Robertson’s politics reflect New Womanhood. Because of this, her story demands a re-conceptualization, contributing to our understanding of U.S. women’s history.

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<sup>8</sup> Emily E. Ruggs, “A Man’s Job” (Master’s thesis, University of Tulsa, 2009), 23, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Cott, Dubois, Hewitt, Lerner, and Sklar, “Considering the State of U.S. Women’s History,” 153.

Although she did not support suffrage in Oklahoma in 1916, Robertson ran for congress and won, serving as a syncretic figure in the Progressive Era when many women took to the streets to gain the vote.<sup>10</sup> Complex, fascinating, and seemingly ironic, her story is embedded in the historiography of U.S. and Oklahoma women's history, as well as Progressive Era history. Her legacy asks those searching for a better understanding of this era to move towards unraveling these complications. Her life before 1920 exemplifies New Womanhood, though during her congressional tenure she appeared to advocate True Womanhood. Ultimately, Robertson provides scholars of the historiography on U.S. women's history from the Victorian to the Progressive Era with a better understanding of many women's roles as transitional figures between True and New Womanhood, since she revered the idea of domesticity and motherhood, while establishing herself in politics, society, and the workforce.

Today, many people, especially in Oklahoma, do not even know Robertson existed. For those who remember her, their opinions of her are very typical. Recently in a letter to the editor, one person asserted, "Alice Robertson was not an Oklahoman deserving of a tribute, primarily because she was against suffrage."<sup>11</sup> For someone who has not conducted an in-depth study of Robertson's life and achievements, they would

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<sup>10</sup> We cannot just say that Robertson did not support voting rights for women, because that interpretation of her is laden with negative connotations, causing the reader to assume she was sexist against her own gender. For many females in Oklahoma, suffrage was a complex issue, running deeper than casting a balloted vote. Robertson had been against Oklahoma's proposition in 1916, not the national proposition by 1920. Evidence from Tally Fugate's article titled "Where Angels Belong" (2004) indicates that many Oklahoma women regarded the proposition as an insult to their intelligence, since many politicians only attached the franchise to bills in order to fulfill their own political agendas, completely disregarding women as intelligent citizens. In fact, "Even women who were anti-suffrage were not necessarily against women's political involvement and identity: 'We have the antisuffrage women's own word that they thought themselves citizens, that they did not think their citizen status depended on the franchise.'" This quote can be found in Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortensen, "'Persuasion Dwelt on Her Tongue': Female Civic Rhetoric in Early America," *College English* 60 (1998): 177.

<sup>11</sup> Ruth Richards, "Meaningless Memorial," *Tulsa (Oklahoma) World*, July 10, 2008, A-16.

most likely conclude she was a hypocritical, puritanical woman of Victorian stock who promoted the values of the Cult of True Womanhood, acting in the legislature as a sexist voter against her female counterparts. These people would, of course, be judging her wrongly, because their interpretations were not firmly grounded in the women's movements of the Victorian and Progressive Eras.

To understand Robertson's hard-won place, readers and researchers on the topic must be informed on the historiography of True and New Womanhood as it pertains to first-wave feminism. Victorians attached the phrase True Woman to ideas of femaleness, attributing piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity as feminine qualities, all remaining closely tied to Christianity.<sup>12</sup> During the nineteenth century, preachers, laymen, and women alike took it upon themselves to write books on the value of the Cult of True Womanhood, promoting Victorian ideals of womanhood.

Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864) noted in the *Blithedale Romance* that a True Woman:

Is the most admirable handiwork of God, in her true place and character. Her place is at man's side. Her office, that of sympathizer; the unreserved, unquestioning believer; the recognition, withheld in every other manner, but given, in pity, through woman's heart, lest man should utterly lose faith in himself...All the separate action of woman is, and ever has been, and always shall be, false, foolish, vain, destructive of her own best and holiest qualities, void of every good effect, and productive of intolerable mischiefs!<sup>13</sup>

Also, a late-nineteenth century doctor of divinity, Reverend Franklin Johnson (1852-1925), went to great lengths, authoring a work that instructed women on their proper

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<sup>12</sup> Ruggs, "'A Man's Job,'" 43; Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 152.

<sup>13</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Blithedale Romance* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1852), 13-4.



place. An educated man, fluent in the scriptures, wrote, “I have selected for my text...‘keepers at home,’ because it directs the attention at once to the subject [of True Womanhood].”<sup>14</sup> He claimed that women only reign when true to their own nature, which “her sceptre is kindness; her palace is the home...and her kingdom is the heart of her husband.”<sup>15</sup> Clearly, Christian duty bound a woman to her husband through domesticity. Wherever a woman went in the mid-nineteenth century, even escaping through reading, she could not hide from the ideals of True Womanhood. As the age of industry and urbanization progressed and women moved with their families into the cities, American women, as well as immigrants and indigents, grew weary and dissatisfied with traditional roles.<sup>16</sup> Female populations in the U.S. began mobilizing and spawned the first-wave of feminism that peaked during the Progressive Era.

Leading U.S. women’s historians have categorized feminism in three waves: the first wave began at the turn of the twentieth century and can clearly be seen by 1913; the second wave ignited during the 1960s and lasted through the 1980s; and the third wave really encompasses the last twenty years.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, the first-wave, which has affected womanhood throughout the last century, continues to be the most ignored, though vast amounts of resources and records exist from this period.<sup>18</sup> According to U.S. women’s historian, Kathryn Kish Sklar, scholars have barely investigated Progressive Era reform

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<sup>14</sup> Franklin Johnson, *True Womanhood* (Boston: Rand, Avery, and Co., 1882), 44.

<sup>15</sup> Johnson, *True Womanhood*, 112.

<sup>16</sup> Judith Walzer Leavitt, ed., *Women and Health in America: Historical Readings* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), 15.

<sup>17</sup> Jennifer Drake and Leslie Haywood, *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 35.

<sup>18</sup> Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Organized Womanhood: Archival Sources on Women and Progressive Reform,” *The Journal of American History* 75 (1988): 176.

among women's groups between 1880 and 1920, noting that womanhood experienced "a congruence between their search for power over their own lives and their search for influence in society as a whole."<sup>19</sup> In order to accomplish this feat, many of them chose not to marry. Currently, academics that study this period are mostly familiar with middle-class women leaders that include, "Jane Addams [1860-1935], Florence Kelley [1859-1932], Julia C. Lathrop [1858-1932], Lillian D. Wald [1867-1940], and Mary van Kleeck [1883-1972]."<sup>20</sup> What about Alice Mary Robertson? She was a middle-class leader that served in congress in 1920, who chose to not marry, and is widely unknown to the field of U.S. women's history. The most important point of Robertson's story as it pertains to first-wave feminism is to understand women's movements during the Victorian and Progressive Eras in relation to the former representative's activity before her congressional tenure.

All persons maintain predispositions that influence their every judgment. Because of this, sharp disruptions and divisions occurred between groups of women, based on their ladies-club membership, married-with-children status, political affiliations, race, and economic or social class. With this in mind, Peter Filene from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill argued that the "Progressive Era never really existed," because it lacked organization and common goals.<sup>21</sup> Varying groups of people rallied around their common interests, calling themselves progressives, or forward-thinkers. At times, organizations heavily clashed. Women's movements during the Progressive era are no exception. Perhaps this is why so many different hybrids of womanhood existed within

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<sup>19</sup> Sklar, "Organized Womanhood," 177.

<sup>20</sup> Sklar, "Organized Womanhood," 177.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Filene, "An Obituary for 'The Progressive Movement,'" *American Quarterly* 22 (1970): 31.

the first-wave of feminism.

In their 2000 publication titled *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*, authors and activists Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards suggest the French had been using the word *feminisme* or “the F word” by the late 1800s to describe suffragists like Hubertine Auclert (1848-1914). This term really encompassed more than just the concept of women’s enfranchisement, including “the political belief that the sexes are culturally, not just biologically, created; the process of opposing male supremacy; and a woman’s right and responsibility to realize her own potential.”<sup>22</sup> Robertson had continued to demonstrate these qualities well before the nineteenth amendment. While the French seemingly labeled economic, political, and social reform among women as *feminisme*, these ideas were not French-born.

Women in the U.S. shared their European sisters’ sentiments by opposing the patriarchal grip over society. By 1906, “the F word” appeared in an American article to describe Madeleine Pelletier (1874-1939), a socialist and suffragist.<sup>23</sup> In 1914, an editorial read, “the time has come to define feminism; it is no longer possible to ignore it... We need an appropriate word which will register this fact... that women are changing.”<sup>24</sup> Well before 1920, Robertson had been among this group of women who lived change through their lifestyle and professional decisions, which men and women alike by the mid-nineteen-teens frequently used the term feminism to describe that transformative lifestyle.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Baumgardner and Richards, *Manifesta*, 51.

<sup>23</sup> Baumgardner and Richards, *Manifesta*, 51.

<sup>24</sup> Nancy F. Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New York: Vail-Ballou Press, 1987), 13.

<sup>25</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 13.

In *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, published in 1987, Nancy F. Cott suggests that first-wave feminism aimed to end “specialization by sex” between men and women, placing women on the same political level as the men.<sup>26</sup> According to Steven M. Buechler in *Women’s Movements in the United States: Women Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (1990) suffrage was one of the only issues that connected women, despite social status.<sup>27</sup> According Ellen Carol DuBois in her 1998 publication titled *Women’s Suffrage and Women’s Rights*, the right to vote was to first-wave feminism as abortion was to the second-wave, noting that women seeking the enfranchisement referred to themselves as radical feminists, because their “demands for suffrage threatened to disrupt and reorganize the relations of gender.”<sup>28</sup> First-wave feminism, however, was more complicated than suffrage alone. It captured different women’s movements throughout the Progressive Era and encompassed a wide-range of ideas and ways in which women began setting themselves apart from traditional roles, forcing us to reexamine this class of women like Robertson as transitional figures between True and New Womanhood.

The idea of New Womanhood became one of the main movements within first-wave feminism, serving as the poster child. It challenged society to accept new views of femininity and female sexuality. More importantly, “The New Woman was politically active, intelligent [,] and independent.”<sup>29</sup> Robertson embodied all three of these concepts.

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<sup>26</sup> Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Steven M. Buechler, *Women’s Movements in the United States: Women Suffrage, Equal Rights, and Beyond* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 148.

<sup>28</sup> Ellen Carol DuBois, *Women’s Suffrage and Women’s Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 4.

It remained a major topic of debate within the press and country, which may serve as an explanation as to why so many Victorian idealists began writing instructional books on the Cult of True Womanhood.<sup>30</sup> Conceptually, New Womanhood originally existed as a journalistic cliché in the later part of the nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> New Women wore short haircuts and practical dress, demanding access to a higher education. They insisted on suffrage and the right to a profession outside of domesticity. Because so many different women from varying economic, political, and social backgrounds subscribed to this idea, New Women “existed in an array of identities and hybrids, living in a much wider cultural and social context, challenging and disrupting ‘existing structures of gendered identity.’”<sup>32</sup> Eventually, first-wave feminists absorbed New Womanhood into their movement, because it clearly separated itself from traditional female roles. Part of the apprehension came from civil disruption in the U.S. during the nineteenth century. At that time, the notion of Republican motherhood underwent significant changes.<sup>33</sup>

Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919) once “called good mothers ‘sacred,’ but accused native white women who refused to bear large families of being ‘criminals against the race.’”<sup>34</sup> A popular concern among middle and upper class American families who were

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<sup>29</sup> Ruggs, “‘A Man’s Job,’” 44; B. June West, “New Woman,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 1 (1955): 55-68; Margaret Beetham and Ann Heilmann, eds., *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 2-3.

<sup>30</sup> Beetham and Heilmann, *New Woman Hybridities*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Beetham and Heilmann, *New Woman Hybridities*, 2.

<sup>32</sup> Beetham and Heilmann, *New Woman Hybridities*, 1-2.

<sup>33</sup> Eldred and Mortensen, “‘Persuasion Dwelt on Her Tongue,’” 184.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Madeleine Ladd-Taylor, “Mother-work: Ideology, Public Policy, and the Mothers’ Movement, 1890-1930” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1986), 2.

predominately white was the idea of “race suicide.”<sup>35</sup> Native-born, college-educated American women began experiencing falling birth rates.<sup>36</sup> Even New Women advocated for motherhood. For example, under the pen name of George Egerton, New Woman writer Mary Chavelita Dunne Bright (1859-1945) at the turn of the twentieth century, “encouraged women to fulfill their lives through maternity and in equal relationships with men,” though marriage was not necessarily a prerequisite for a woman’s happiness.<sup>37</sup> Robertson may have wholly agreed with this idea, though she poorly articulated it. The concept of motherhood was a huge topic during the nineteenth century and into the Progressive Era. It appeared in two major forms: as a part of pro-natal politics during the Civil War Era among American born citizens and then as a part social motherhood during first-wave feminism.

Two factors precipitated the evolution on the idea of motherhood during the nineteenth century. The country had been receiving high numbers of immigrants, and the republic faced the ever-growing threat of disunion.<sup>38</sup> Racial intolerance lay thick in the minds of the majority of the white populous. Physicians, politicians, men, and even New Women strongly promoted childbirth, attached at this point to the Cult of True Womanhood, a concept not unique to Robertson alone, as well as racial duty.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ladd-Taylor, “Mother-work,” 2.

<sup>36</sup> Ladd-Taylor, “Mother-work,” 1.

<sup>37</sup> Carolyn Christensen Nelson, ed., *A Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, Drama of the 1890s* (Buffalo, New York: Broadview Press, 2001), 3.

<sup>38</sup> Eldred and Mortensen, ““Persuasion Dwelt on Her Tongue,”” 184.

<sup>39</sup> Readers must note: at the age of seven, the Worcester-Robertsons fled Oklahoma into Kansas during the outbreak of the Civil War, because of their alliance to the North. Interestingly, Robertson experienced another Caucasian family for the first time. Very little secondary research exists on her outlook towards non-Caucasian groups. A fragmented mimeograph held at the University of Tulsa may shed some insight into her views on religious freedom for Native Americans, as well as the abolition of government oversight

Furthermore, some men, physicians in particular, viewed women as prisoners of their reproductive system. Inherently, “woman was thus peculiarly the creature of her internal organs.”<sup>40</sup> As stated by a mid-eighteenth-century physician, but similar to writings of early to mid-nineteenth-century practitioners, “an idealized female world, rooted in the female reproductive system,” should remain intellectually and socially limited.<sup>41</sup> Because most “real mothers were economically dependent, had few legal rights, and did not have the right to custody of their children,” women began absorbing the idea of motherhood into feminist movements, giving rise social motherhood.<sup>42</sup>

Motherhood serves useful purposes for civilizations, and Robertson’s avocation of it does not automatically make her sexist toward her own gender or racist.<sup>43</sup> Many secondary sources have continued to highlight Robertson’s promotion of motherhood,

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over the indigents. She also beheld a seemingly forward-thinking view toward African Americans, appealing to Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) to train her at Tuskegee. Robertson may or may not have attended his conference. Future research is needed to determine this; however, in November 1905, Washington visited Oklahoma and Indian territories, touring Oklahoma City, Guthrie, South McAlester, and Muskogee. Her letter is located in the Booker T. Washington Papers, which the University of Illinois Press has published: Louis R. Harlan, Barbara S. Kraft, and Raymond W. Smock, eds., *The Booker T. Washington Papers* vol. 6 (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 27-8. While more research on her outlook towards non-Caucasian groups is needed, her seemingly open attitude to race may have been a part of her opposition to the mainstream feminists.

<sup>40</sup> Leavitt, *Women and Health in America*, 13.

<sup>41</sup> Leavitt, *Women and Health in America*, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Ladd-Taylor, “Mother-work,” 6.

<sup>43</sup> Since antiquity, patriarchal societies placed a high premium on motherhood. During times of high death rates, low population, war, and other crises, women biologically and socially have maintained the responsibility for carrying on the species. For thousands of years governments and policy-makers have been offering incentives for high birth rates. Under Caesar Augustus (63 B.C.E.-14 C.E.), the state expected women to marry and produce children. If their husbands died, they were to remarry and birth more offspring. Legitimate women, or females born to free male citizens of the Roman Empire, belonged to their father until marriage. Upon their union, they then belonged to their husbands. If all male guardians had died, but women had birthed three or more children, they were free of male oversight. If slave women birthed four children, they were free of guardianship. During this period, Rome experienced a dramatically low population of legitimate citizenry and high death rates, rationalizing the seemingly degrading legislation. Many aspects of Roman culture, however, were suppressive towards women. In reference to the aforementioned information, please consult: Andrea O’Reilly, *Encyclopedia of Motherhood*, v. 1-3, (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2010), 1083.



fueled by her Christian beliefs, to be the basis for her anti-suffrage, anti-club women, and fervent True Womanhood stance. While this probably is not completely invalid, she remains judged according to our modern understanding feminism, because few have dared to understand the historiography of political and women's movements during the Progressive Era in conjunction with her life choices and career pursuits.<sup>44</sup>

To date, the historiography on Robertson is comprised of both non-academic and scholarly perspectives that range in date from 1946-2009. Some sources are attached to, but not products of or trained in the discipline of history. Problematically, narratives on Robertson are not always historically accurate. Much of the literature serves as a rehashing of the three sources: Bessie Allen Millers master's thesis titled, "The Political Life of Alice M. Robertson" (1946), Joe Powel Spaulding's dissertation, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson" (1959), and Louise B. James' 1977 article, "Alice Mary Robertson—Anti-feminist Congresswoman."<sup>45</sup> While most sources provide a chronology of her life and career pursuits before entering congress, they have not spent time studying and analyzing her views towards women as it relates to first-wave feminism before her congressional career in 1920.

By 1946, only fifteen years after Robertson had passed, Bessie Allen Miller submitted her master's thesis to the University of Tulsa. In it, she identified that people under the age of forty knew nothing about the former congressperson. She, therefore, fashioned her thesis as a chronological listing of Robertson's achievements early in life,

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<sup>44</sup> Kathryn Kish Sklar, "The New Political History and Women's History: Comments on The Democratic Experiment," *The History Teacher* 39 (2006): 512.

<sup>45</sup> Bessie Allan Miller, "The Political Life of Alice M. Robertson," (Master's thesis, University of Tulsa, 1946); Joe Powell Spaulding, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson," (Ph.D. diss., University of Oklahoma, 1959); and Louise B. James, "Alice Mary Robertson—Anti-feminist Congresswoman," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 55 (1977-78).

focusing on courageous stands she made during her congressional tenure.<sup>46</sup> Joe Powell Spaulding utilized Miller's observation of Robertson's achievements as the foundation of his Ph.D. dissertation. He asserted Robertson maintained a strong character and individuality that enabled life-long accomplishments.<sup>47</sup> Ruth Moore Stanley asserted in her 1967 publication, "Alice M. Robertson, Oklahoma's First Congresswoman," that the representative fulfilled her campaign slogan, "I cannot be bought, I cannot be sold, I cannot be intimidated," by openly opposing the women's lobby from 1921-23 and voting against Sheppard-Towner.<sup>48</sup> Robertson's views on womanhood and her avocation for domesticity, however, have served as the primary focus for many writers, especially since the rise of U.S. women's history in the 1970s.

Louise B. James, a history graduate from Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, argued that Robertson believed a woman's place was in her traditional sphere as wife and mother, using her position in congress to preserve Victorian Era ideals of femininity. James strongly insinuated that Robertson excluded herself from domesticity and justified her success in the workforce, since she came from a noted family of missionaries. This attitude apparently severed all ties with the self-proclaimed feminists of the Progressive Era. James' approach to understanding Robertson's role in congress has served as the basis for most recent works on the former congressperson as she relates to women's issues.

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<sup>46</sup> Miller, "The Political Life of Alice M. Robertson," 1.

<sup>47</sup> Spaulding, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson," 1.

<sup>48</sup> Gayle J. Hardy, "Alice Mary Robertson, 1854-1931," in *American Women Civil Rights Activists: Bibliographies of 68 Leaders, 1852-1992* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Company Inc., 1993), 322; Ruth Moore Stanley, "Alice M. Robertson, Oklahoma's First Congresswoman," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 45 (1967): 259.

Maitreyi Mazumdar of Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, claimed in her 1992 article, “Alice’s Restaurant: Expanding a Woman’s Sphere,” Robertson yearned to be a mother and wife, voting vicariously to preserve domesticity and wifedom.<sup>49</sup>

Mazumdar also asserted that Robertson remained a reluctant politician, full of insecurities throughout her life. The idea that Robertson was hesitant, insecure, and adamant about marriage and motherhood has served as a common ground for historiographical analyses.

Furthering James and Mazumdar’s perspective, Suzanne H. Schrems, an author and women’s historian, who earned her Ph.D. from the University of Oklahoma in Norman, emphasized that ex-service men of the Spanish-American War and World War I primarily elected Robertson to congress in 1920 in *Across the Political Spectrum: Oklahoma Women in Politics in the Early Twentieth Century, 1900-1930* (2001).<sup>50</sup>

Schrems also proposed that Robertson’s sole interest in political circles emerged from her desire for career opportunities, since she struggled to make ends meet throughout her life, which is why she constantly breached the ideals of True Womanhood.<sup>51</sup> In 2003,

Oklahoma State Graduate, Sunu Kodumthara, approached the topic of Robertson very differently than authors before her. In her master’s thesis titled, “The Role of Gender: The Political Biographies of Three Oklahoma Women,” she argued that Robertson’s political success and failures happened because of the decisions she made, not because of

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<sup>49</sup> Maitreyi Mazumdar, “Alice’s Restaurant: Expanding a Woman’s Sphere,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 70 (1992): 303.

<sup>50</sup> Suzanne H. Schrems, *Across the Political Spectrum: Oklahoma Women in Politics in the Early Twentieth Century, 1900-1930* (New York: Writers Club Press, 2001).

<sup>51</sup> Schrems, *Across the Political Spectrum*, 83; Yvonne Litchfield, “Early Feminine Politico Was Christian, American, Republican,” *Tulsa World*, 3 March 1997, 8; Gene Curtis, “Miss Alice Overcame Political Reluctance,” *Tulsa World*, 7 November 2006, A7.

her gender.<sup>52</sup> She voted against Sheppard-Towner and the Soldiers' Bonus Bill, which her constituents were embittered and offended. The congressperson ultimately underestimated the women's voting bloc who greatly aided in ending her political career. Up to this point, Kodumthara remained the only academic to look at Robertson's successes and failures as personal choices, leaving gender as a side note.

Recently, author and columnist for *The Daily Oklahoman* and *Midwest City Sun*, Glenda Carlile, reiterated James, Mazumdar, and Schrems' perspectives in *Petticoats, Politics, and Pirouettes: Oklahoma Women from 1900-1950* (2006). Carlile argued that the legislator used her position in congress to preserve the women's traditional role inside the home and made her "career a mission" to protect the family unit she never had.<sup>53</sup> Only one historian visited Kodumthara's gendered evaluation of Robertson; however, Kodumthara's work never appeared in the list of references.

In her 2009 master's thesis titled "'A Man's Job': Congresswoman Alice Robertson Cleans House," Emily E. Ruggs analyzed Robertson under the lens of gender studies. She points out the contradictions in Robertson's political career, claiming the representative unintentionally blurred the lines between maleness and femaleness.<sup>54</sup> Ruggs interestingly pointed out that as Robertson began assuming traditional occupations for men, she validated herself by drawing on her unconventional childhood. Living in Indian Territory at a mission, gender lines did not exist and little girls did not always

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<sup>52</sup> Sunu Kodumthara, "The Role of Gender: The Political Biographies of Three Oklahoma Women" (Master's thesis, Oklahoma State University, 2003), 1.

<sup>53</sup> Glenda Carlile, "Miss Alice Robertson," in *Petticoats, Politics, and Pirouettes: Oklahoma Women from 1900-1950* (Stillwater, Okla.: New Forums Press Inc., 2006), 41.

<sup>54</sup> Ruggs, "'A Man's Job,'" 35.

follow traditionally acceptable behavior, due to the harshness of the environment.<sup>55</sup> Up to this point, the historiography that relates to Robertson and her life has enabled or ignored several methodological problems, which has contributed to some of the historical inaccuracies, regarding Robertson's appearance as a True Woman and her viewpoints about women's involvement outside of domesticity.

Most historians who take Robertson as their subject have used valuable archival material, though they have mostly relied on newspaper articles and secondary sources to support their arguments. The majority of authors did not consult manuscript collections from Elmira College, the Muskogee Public Library, Oklahoma Department of Libraries, the Oklahoma Historical Society, the Western History Collections, as well as vertical files from any library. This thesis carefully consulted and utilized manuscripts from each of the above referenced repositories, as well as the Library of Congress that only maintains photographs of the representative. By excavating the wealth of archival resources that exist on Robertson and combining them with a thorough explanation and time frame of first-wave feminism, this work asserts that Robertson was not an inflexible True Womanhood proponent, nor did she unintentionally excel in traditionally acceptable occupations for men. She actively and eagerly embraced many facets of New Womanhood.

The idea of feminism is not a cut and dry term. In fact, the idea consistently evolves over space and time. As academics continue to research and write about females like Robertson, U.S. women's history can better map women's experiences during the Progressive Era. Revisiting Robertson serves U.S. women's history, primarily because her existence as one of many hybrids between True and New Womanhood greatly

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<sup>55</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 23, 35.

contributes to understanding many women's experiences during first-wave feminism. Her story provides valuable lessons for all academics and historians. Scholars need to abandon the use of blanket terms like progressive reform or conservative. In Robertson's case, labeling her as a conservative, anti-suffrage, and anti-feminist congresswoman without clear and concise definitions causes readers to draw incorrect conclusions about her attitude towards women. Also, the press sets the backdrop for issues, but remains biased and, at times, factually incorrect. Reliance upon as many existing resources, relating to the topic at hand, allows for more accurate accounts of history. In sum, Robertson's story deserves a retelling, contextually set within the confines of first-wave feminism during the Progressive Era in the U.S. Her activity before 1920 only underscores the need for a re-conceptualization of her legacy, since she lived the life of a New Woman.

## Chapter 2

### Sewing Her Oaks, 1854-1920\*

During the time surrounding Alice Mary Robertson's congressional election in 1920, local and national journalists frequently engaged and reported on the only woman sent to Capitol Hill, partially because of her anti-suffrage past. Primarily due to her vote against Sheppard-Towner and her seemingly juvenile interaction with the self-proclaimed feminists during 1921, the media labeled her as an anti-New Woman, which secondary sources have carried over into their analyses of her. Today, many people have never heard of her, and those that have mostly remember her in an anti-lady context. Secondary authors continue to enable this interpretation of the former congressperson, paying little attention to her other significant achievements by focusing on her failed, anti-feminist political career. Ironically, these authors have acknowledged that she gained her bad reputation while serving in congresses, though few to none have attempted to explain those other accomplishments relative to women's movements during the Victorian and Progressive Eras.<sup>1</sup> This lack of attention paid to Robertson's persona before she became a

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\* The idea for this title came from a quote Robertson's mother printed at the bottom her publication, titled *Our Monthly*, which she said, "Acorns make oaks." *Our Monthly*, 2 January 1873, folder 9, box 1, AMR/OHS.

<sup>1</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 4.



media sensation in 1920 has remained a huge flaw in the studies on her, especially regarding her views towards women.

Readers, researchers, and writers of the former congressperson and similar topics must consider that women in the U.S. did not go to bed as True Women and wake up as New Women. The nation went through periods of transition, where different forms and hybridities of womanhood existed between True and New Womanhood during the Victorian and Progressive Eras. By not solely relying on newspaper articles and focusing on Robertson before her race and election in 1920, primary evidence strongly indicates she was a transitional female between True and New Womanhood, revering motherhood and domesticity, while embracing many of the newfound roles for women in politics, society, and the workforce.

A substantial amount of primary documents of her life from birth to 1920 supports the idea that she favored women breaking through traditional barriers, establishing themselves as individuals apart from their male relatives. Proof of her adopting aspects of New Womanhood exists in essays dated in the 1870s that she submitted to Elmira College, in letters to various family members before her term as representative, in first-hand accounts of her experiences before 1920, and in part her lifestyle; she chose a career over marriage. During her congressional tenure she reflected, “To a brilliant girl hesitating between a career and marriage to the man she loved, I once held out my strand of pearls and said, If these pearls were real, they would cost a king’s ransom. The real pearls of the woman’s kingdom are home and love; to obtain them you must give up the king’s ransom, your career.”<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this statement was a genuine

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<sup>2</sup> “Her Place Empty Honor Compared with Mother’s, Miss Robertson Thinks,” *Daily Oklahoman*, 16 October 1921, 18.

reflection of regret. As the pre-1920 evidence indicates, she intentionally pursued the life of New Womanhood over creating a family that left her alone in many aspects of her life. The loneliness she felt throughout her life likely impelled her during her term as representative to encourage young females who were at the point of deciding between careers or families to not make what she considered later in life to be a mistake. With that said, she undisputedly chose and embraced the lifestyle of New Womanhood.

In the early part of her life, Robertson admired many of the newfound freedoms for women in education, liberating fashion, occupations, and working girls' clubs. She later warned, however, that men did not particularly like career-oriented women, which prompted her to continuously encourage females to enjoy financial benefaction through marriage, a luxury she claimed she wanted, but decided against early in life. Robertson, nevertheless, supported women's work beyond the traditional sphere of domesticity and motherhood, often discussing her own potential and the ability of her sex. Her first major influence was her mother.<sup>3</sup>

In a letter to President Roosevelt on 24 December 1901, Robertson wrote, "According to Oliver Wendell Holmes [1841-1935] the training of a child should begin a hundred years before its birth. My training in Indian work began thirty years before I was born."<sup>4</sup> Due to her grandfather Samuel Austin Worcester (1778-1859), a missionary among the Cherokees, the story of the sixty-six year old representative did not begin upon her entrance into congress, nor did her realization of a woman's capability. Born on 2 January 1854 to William Schenck Robertson (1820-81) and Ann Eliza Worcester

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<sup>3</sup> Schrems, *Across the Political Spectrum*, 92.

<sup>4</sup> Alice Mary Robertson, "I Want the Job," in *Alice Robertson: Congresswoman from Oklahoma*, Bob Burke, Reba Neighbors Collins, and Kenny Arthur Franks, eds. Oklahoma Statesmen Series, vol. 6 (Edmond: University of Central Oklahoma Press, 2001), 85.

Robertson (1826-1905) at the Tulaheessee Mission in Indian Territory, Alice Mary was the second eldest of seven children. Her siblings were Ann Augusta, Grace Leeds (1856-1911), Samuel Worcester (1860-1939), Dora Platt (1863-84), and twins John Orr and William Henry (1866-67).<sup>5</sup> Robertson's Grandfather, Samuel Austin, was a famous missionary among the Cherokee Indians in New Echota, Georgia. He utilized Sequoyah's (ca. 1767-1843) syllabary to translate the Bible into Cherokee, and he worked with Cherokee leader and newspaper editor Elias Boudinout (1835-1890) to publish the *Cherokee Phoenix*, the first Native American newspaper in North America. Samuel Austin is most notable for the U.S. Supreme Court case *Worcester v. Georgia* in 1832.<sup>6</sup>

The court ruled the extension of Georgia's State law into Indian lands to be unconstitutional, and Georgia erred in placing Samuel Austin in the penitentiary for not leaving Cherokee country. Georgia released him in 1833. By 1836 Samuel Austin permanently settled his family at Park Hill in Indian Territory among the Cherokees who had been removed from Georgia and settled in present-day Eastern Oklahoma. Continuing with native translations, Samuel Austin established a press in our modern state and printed the non-religious *Cherokee Messenger*. Unsurprisingly, Ann Eliza followed her father's lead and began deciphering various texts into Creek that included the Bible, establishing herself as one of very few women in the U.S. to receive University-awarded degrees for their achievements.<sup>7</sup>

At a very early age Robertson watched Ann Eliza pursue non-traditional roles for

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Wenger, "Samuel Worcester Robertson," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 37 (1959): 51. Traditionally after an individual is introduced into the narrative, academics identify the person by surname thereafter. Since many of Robertson's immediate relatives appear in this paper, they will be denoted by first and middle name, only referring to Alice Mary Robertson by surname.

<sup>6</sup> Muriel H. Wright, "Samuel Austin Worcester: A Dedication," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 37 (1959): 3.

<sup>7</sup> Wright, "Samuel Austin Worcester," 4.

females. Her mother attained fluency in Creek and began translating a host of English materials, including the majority of the Old Testament, into the indigenous tongue. Together with William Schenck and the Reverend Robert M. Lockridge,<sup>8</sup> Ann Eliza circulated material, two hymnbooks, and catechisms in Creek in the mission's periodical titled *Our Monthly*.<sup>9</sup> Because of her linguistic efforts among the natives, Wooster College in Wooster, Ohio, bestowed an honorary doctorate upon Ann Eliza in 1892, which was unusual at that time.<sup>10</sup> On 19 November 1905 at the time of her death, she had been editing her fifth edition of the New Testament in the Creek language.<sup>11</sup> Undeniably, Ann Eliza's labors outside of traditional womanhood established a standard for Robertson, who later in life worked hard to achieve astounding feats.

The family structure in the Worcester-Robertson household was unconventional for that period in time, possibly contributing Robertson's seemingly True Womanhood avocations later in life, but New Womanhood lifestyle. Ann Eliza's accomplishments came at a price that affected an impressionable Robertson, who bore many of the domestic responsibilities, resulting in the loss of a childhood by our modern standard. Also, her father's consistent absence in the family's lives may serve as an explanation as to why Robertson embraced elements of New Womanhood, in particular relying on herself for an income and never marrying.<sup>12</sup> While Robertson never clearly discussed

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<sup>8</sup> Birth and death dates unknown.

<sup>9</sup> Hope Holway, "Ann Eliza Worcester Robertson as A Linguist," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 37 (1959): 35.

<sup>10</sup> Letter from the University of Wooster in Wooster, Ohio, to Ann Eliza Worcester Robertson, dated 1892, folder 1, box 16, series 2, PRW/UT.

<sup>11</sup> David Baird and Danny Goble, *The Story of Oklahoma* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994), 249; Althea Bass, "The Inheritance of Alice Robertson," folder 2, box 67, AB/WHC.

<sup>12</sup> Holway, "Ann Eliza Worcester Robertson," 35.

the impact that her childhood made on her life choices or psychoanalyzed her childhood, her brother Samuel Worcester did, providing greater insight into Robertson's apparent choice to pursue New Womanhood.

Ruggs pointed out that though William Schenck was not always around, due to missions' affairs beyond Tulaheesee, the Robertson children continued to look to their father for guidance and love, though they developed a profound sense of abandonment.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps this sense of abandonment contributed to Mazumdar's analysis that Robertson beheld noticeable insecurities, especially in her interaction with the opposite sex.<sup>14</sup> Robertson's brother, Samuel Worcester, admitted he felt that his parents believed the Native Americans "needed their help more than their own children did, or that God would look after the children and see that they grew up to lives of usefulness in spite of the little attention they would be likely to receive from their parents."<sup>15</sup> Robertson's brother also confessed that his parents' attention should have been given to him and the other siblings, instead of being "wasted on children who could not appreciate the efforts put forth in their behalf."<sup>16</sup> Samuel Worcester captured an aspect of the Worcester-Robertson children's youth that Robertson had not mentioned. Perhaps William Schenck's consistent absence was the basis for Robertson relying solely on herself and choosing the path of New Womanhood instead of enjoying the financial freedom through marriage that she later advocated. Other factors, too, likely contributed to Robertson's future propagation for seemingly True Womanhood values, domesticity and motherhood.

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<sup>13</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 20.

<sup>14</sup> Mazumdar, "Alice's Restaurant," 303.

<sup>15</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 89; Carlile, "Miss Alice Robertson," 36.

<sup>16</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 20.

William Schenck and Ann Eliza constantly engaged their time with affairs of Tulahassee Mission and linguistics. In 1866 when Robertson was twelve Ann Augusta attended Cooper Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. With her older sister gone and her parents diverted with mission work, Robertson endured many of the domestic responsibilities, since she was now the senior child at home. Robertson reared her younger siblings, prepared all of the meals, and assumed the task of housekeeping.<sup>17</sup> This apparent loss of a childhood probably influenced her avocation for domesticity.

Later in life, Robertson reflected, “There always seemed a specially heavy responsibility on my shoulders for I must take care of mother and the babies, and mother was not very strong. Sometimes I thought I was as brave as any 12-year-old boy could possibly be, for one day I chased a big grey wolf away from the house with nothing but a stick and I often went away down to the old well for a bucket of water all alone in the dark.”<sup>18</sup> As Ruggs pointed out, Robertson had clearly been blurring the lines of gender identity early in her childhood.<sup>19</sup> The year after Ann Augusta left to attend college proved to be difficult on the entire family and enduring for Robertson in particular.

In the summer of 1867 an epidemic of cholera threatened the lives of entire families. The Worcester-Robertsons were not an exception. The fever first befell Robertson’s father and mother and then claimed the lives of the twin boys. Robertson explained:

But in the autumn had come days of fever to all the family. Brave little sister and I had been the last to yield to it, but when father and mother both lay sorely stricken with it, first one and then the other of the twins

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<sup>17</sup> Spaulding, “The Life of Alice Mary Robertson,” 35.

<sup>18</sup> Bass, “The Inheritance of Alice Robertson,” folder 2, box 67, AB/WHC.

<sup>19</sup> Ruggs, ““A Man’s Job,”” 5.

slept in that waxen loveliness of purity that death brings. Old uncle John made little boxes from the rough boards of the attic floor which I covered and lined with one of mother's sheets. I remember helping Uncle John to close the lid for the last time shutting out the baby face, and then the fever seized me too and for many days the fever dreams left no memory.<sup>20</sup>

Though her recollection of the cholera outbreak expressed a dispirited tone and conveyed one of the harsh tragedies of her childhood, the example of determination and hard work set forth by Ann Eliza attested to the potential of females outside of the home. Robertson did not hesitate to embrace her mother's standard, which enabled a life of New Womanhood. As her brother Samuel Worcester said, "Father and mother did not trust wholly to God's looking after their children. We got a lot more training than professed Christians of today are giving theirs."<sup>21</sup> In 1871 at age seventeen, Robertson left for Elmira College, where she studied history, English, and civics.<sup>22</sup>

Before attending Elmira, an impressionable Robertson witnessed the potential women possessed through the example of her mother. Alone and far away from home, attending an all-girls' college, Robertson utilized the opportunity of higher education, discovering, harnessing, and implementing her own capabilities beyond the conventions of True Womanhood. Though Ann Eliza received an honorary doctorate from Wooster College, Elmira was one of the first universities for women, opening its doors in 1855.<sup>23</sup>

Robertson identified with the expanding function of womanhood and appeared to eagerly embrace the changing roles. In an essay submitted to Elmira College in 1872

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<sup>20</sup> Alice Mary Robertson, "Christmas Time in Indian Territory," folder 3, box 67, AB/WHC; Spaulding, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson," 37.

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Worcester Robertson, "Your Hot Cakes Experience," folder 13, box 40, SWR/WHC.

<sup>22</sup> Grant Foreman, "The Honorable Alice M. Robertson," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 10 (1932): 14; Edith Cherry Johnson, untitled essay, undated, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC; Spaulding, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson," 41.

<sup>23</sup> Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC.



Robertson wrote, “I have ever been much interested in the subject of woman’s work in her various spheres. Wherever I go I try to see all that I can of what she is doing.”<sup>24</sup> She further explained, “At the capitol I saw that severely criticized specimen of woman’s work—Vinnie Ream’s [1847-1914] statue of Lincoln...It seemed to tell how obstacles may be overcome and prejudices removed by perseverance.”<sup>25</sup> In early adulthood, Robertson acquired a keen awareness of the possibilities that women possessed beyond domesticity, and Ream’s accomplishment served as encouragement for the young, impressionable Robertson.

Throughout her college career Robertson employed the ethic of hard work that Ann Eliza instilled in her. She wrote, “I know though that my future depends upon my present action, so I will not wait idly for my ship to come in but will try to work.”<sup>26</sup> In a letter home to Ann Augusta, Robertson reiterated, “I do try so hard to win and if determination will accomplish anything I shall do something.”<sup>27</sup> She clearly revered fortitude and admired women who achieved unconventional success, and her essays and letters prove that. She, however, possessed a profound sense of insecurity in her physical appearance and interaction with love interests that also may have contributed to her choosing a career.

In 1869, Robertson told Ann Augusta in a letter, “I am so ugly in every respect...If

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<sup>24</sup> Alice Mary Robertson, “Woman at the Capitol,” folder 5, box 2, series 1, PRW/UT; Alice Mary Robertson, “Woman at the Capitol,” in *Alice Robertson: Congresswoman from Oklahoma*, Bob Burke, Reba Neighbors Collins, and Kenny Arthur Franks, eds., Oklahoma Statesmen Series, vol. 6 (Edmond: University of Central Oklahoma Press, 2001), 90.

<sup>25</sup> Robertson, “Woman at the Capitol,” folder 5, box 2, series 1, PRW/UT.

<sup>26</sup> Alice Mary Robertson, “When My Ship Comes In,” in *Alice Robertson: Congresswoman from Oklahoma*, Bob Burke, Reba Neighbors Collins, and Kenny Arthur Franks, eds., Oklahoma Statesmen Series, vol. 6 (Edmond: University of Central Oklahoma Press, 2001), 79.

<sup>27</sup> Spaulding, “The Life of Alice Mary Robertson,” 41.

you were me don't know what you would do."<sup>28</sup> Her feelings of rejection by men began very early, which may be tied to her father's absence and her mother's neglect.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps, Robertson knew she was different than most women of her generation, which is why she later warned that men found career-oriented women unseemly, encouraging females to enjoy financial support through marriage.<sup>30</sup> Despite her self-doubt, while attending Elmira College, Robertson wrote Ann Augusta on several occasions, disclosing her interest in two different boys, Horace Garst<sup>31</sup> and Captain Wilkinson.<sup>32</sup> For unknown reasons, she did not pursue these men. Perhaps, the idea of independence and earning a living detoured her from these love interests. After she left New York in 1873, Robertson chose to achieve beyond marriage and domesticity and from this point forward, she embodied many characteristics of New Womanhood.

Robertson left Elmira in 1873 and went to work as a copyist in the Indian Office in Washington, D.C. She broke a traditional mold, becoming the first woman employed in that department. During her duration Robertson taught herself shorthand and typewriting. She also learned about domestic science and social welfare work from local educators, seeing the training as practical.<sup>33</sup> Robertson quickly advanced in the department over the men by "sheer ability."<sup>34</sup> She stayed in Washington for six years, but

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<sup>28</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 21.

<sup>29</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 21.

<sup>30</sup> Schrems, *Across the Political Spectrum*, 92.

<sup>31</sup> Birth and death dates unknown.

<sup>32</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 25; birth and death dates unknown.

<sup>33</sup> Foreman, "The Honorable Alice M. Robertson," 14; Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC; Spaulding, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson," 45.

rejoined her family in 1879 to assist them financially. On 19 December 1880, Tulahassee Mission burned to the ground.<sup>35</sup>

Robertson took charge and raised funds to rebuild a new school, *Nuyaka*. In a letter to her mother, Robertson said of her achievement, “Do you know that my success everywhere frightens me? People compliment until I have to pray constantly for humility. I am simply overwhelmed with requests to deliver addresses.”<sup>36</sup> While this statement seems arrogant according to our modern perspective, perhaps she was genuinely shocked at her success, because women generally did not engage crowds, making public speeches, especially successful ones that raised money. By this point, Robertson began recognizing and embracing her strengths, all elements of True Womanhood.

In 1884, Robertson helped found the Indian Territory Teachers Association (I.T.T.A.) in Muskogee, serving as the first secretary. The I.T.T.A. merged with the Oklahoma Teachers Association (O.T.A.) in 1906, becoming the Oklahoma Educational Association (O.E.A.).<sup>37</sup> As she continued to succeed in the workforce, she took on each new occupation with great enthusiasm, breaching boundaries of traditional womanhood of the Victorian Era that restrained women from the public sphere.<sup>38</sup> Women and men, educators, and politicians began seeking her expertise in various fields, which was largely unknown to women in the U.S. at that time.

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<sup>34</sup> A photocopy titled, “Information for the National Cyclopedia of American Biography,” dated 7 October 1931, folder 2, box 1, AAMR/OHS.

<sup>35</sup> Spaulding, “The Life of Alice Mary Robertson,” 47.

<sup>36</sup> Spaulding, “The Life of Alice Mary Robertson,” 53.

<sup>37</sup> Melvena K. Thurman, ed., *Women in Oklahoma: A Century of Change* (Oklahoma City: Oklahoma Historical Society, 1982), 149.

<sup>38</sup> Ruggs “‘A Man’s Job,’” 3.

In 1885 Robertson took charge of Minerva Home, a Presbyterian Mission Boarding School for girls in Muskogee.<sup>39</sup> She employed the domestic science training she received in Washington and taught the girls home economics. She educated and encouraged the girls to establish happy homes. She noted, “Give me a nation of great mothers and I care not who the husbands be.”<sup>40</sup> This statement sheds insight on the idea that she encouraged motherhood, possibly because she was lonely, since she maintained a disregard for the men. Dissatisfied with the facilities at Minerva, Robertson appealed to the Presbyterian Board of Missions for expansion. They approved the grant, began admitting men, and converted the boarding school into Henry Kendall College, which continued in Muskogee until 1906. “In seven years, Robertson ‘increased its attendance from ten to about two hundred and its property value three fold.’”<sup>41</sup> The institution later moved to Tulsa, Oklahoma, and became the University of Tulsa.<sup>42</sup> Largely due to her efforts, in 1886, Elmira conferred an honorary master’s degree upon her, and in 1921, the University of Tulsa awarded her with an honorary doctorate.<sup>43</sup> Between 1885-1913, Robertson had accomplished more in the workforce than many of her male acquaintances, shedding many values of the Cult of True Womanhood and continuously evolving toward New Womanhood. During this time, she joined strong political alliances with Roosevelt that ultimately helped her secure federal appointments.

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<sup>39</sup> Foreman, “The Honorable Alice M. Robertson,” 14.

<sup>40</sup> Spaulding, “The Life of Alice Mary Robertson,” 57.

<sup>41</sup> Ruggs ““A Man’s Job,”” 32-33.

<sup>42</sup> Carolyn Thomas Foreman, untitled essay, undated, folder 33, box 3, AMR/OHS; Foreman, “The Honorable Alice M. Robertson,” 14; Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC; Spaulding, “The Life of Alice Mary Robertson,” 57.

<sup>43</sup> “Degree Conferred On Alice Robertson,” *New York Times*, 16 September 1921, 14; Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC; Spaulding, “The Life of Alice Mary Robertson,” 45.

Robertson gave a speech at Lake Mohonk, New York, at an Indian conference in 1891.<sup>44</sup> She spoke of her views on Indian education, capturing the attention of the U.S. Commissioner of Civil Service, Theodore Roosevelt. Impressed with her beliefs and oration, Roosevelt went directly to her after the speech and introduced himself. Their encounter initiated a unique association of mutual admiration and respect that carried throughout the rest of Roosevelt's life.<sup>45</sup>

When the Spanish-American war broke out in April 1898, Roosevelt arranged a group of soldiers known as the Rough Riders to fight in Cuba. Not being able to enlist, Robertson assisted many Native American men to join troops L and M by writing letters of introduction to Colonel Roosevelt.<sup>46</sup> Due to her patriotic service, Roosevelt in *The Rough Riders* ended his book with a letter from Robertson and commented, "Is it any wonder that I loved my regiment?"<sup>47</sup> The Society of Spanish War Veterans requested that Robertson sponsor their chapter, and they bequeathed her with a cup and a badge, recognizing her service for the soldiers. During her congressional tenure, Robertson traveled to the Spanish War Veterans Camp in Panama, where she was an honored guest, receiving a gavel of native wood.<sup>48</sup> Also, upon the funeral procession for America's dead unknown soldiers, "all members of congress who had worn service uniforms during the

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<sup>44</sup> Foreman, untitled essay, folder 33, box 3, AMR/OHS; Mazumdar, "Alice's Restaurant," 310; Spaulding, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson," 59.

<sup>45</sup> Mazumdar, "Alice's Restaurant," 310; Spaulding, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson," 59.

<sup>46</sup> Foreman, untitled essay, folder 33, box 3, AMR/OHS; Foreman, "The Honorable Alice M. Robertson," 15; James, "Alice Mary Robertson," 455; Mazumdar, "Alice's Restaurant," 310; Spaulding, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson," 59; Stanley, "Alice M. Robertson," 259.

<sup>47</sup> Foreman, untitled essay, folder 33, box 3, AMR/OHS; Mazumdar, "Alice's Restaurant," 310; Theodore Roosevelt, *Rough Riders* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1902), 236.

<sup>48</sup> A photocopy titled, "Information for the National Cyclopedia of American Biography," dated 7 October 1931, folder 2, box 1, AAMR/OHS.

World War were asked to precede other members of the House” during the procession. Robertson was the only representative from Oklahoma and the only woman to rightfully enjoy the honor of participating. She proudly wore her Red Cross uniform with her Spanish War Veteran metals attached to her shoulder.<sup>49</sup> At her funeral, Robertson received the burial of a Spanish War Veteran, making her the only woman in the U.S. to obtain such a glorified honor.<sup>50</sup> Her direct assistance and support of Roosevelt’s Rough Riders secured a long-term, highly beneficial political bond between the colonel and Robertson.

From 1900-20, Robertson took advantage of every opportunity that passed her way, implementing characteristics of New Womanhood, including her higher education, independence, and a sense of forthrightness. As a result, she accomplished much during this period.<sup>51</sup> When the position for provost over Indian Territory schools opened up in 1900, Robertson asked Roosevelt for a reference. She wrote, “I want that appointment, because I believe that I am better fitted by training and experience to perform its duties than anyone else. I know I am capable and competent.”<sup>52</sup> This letter exudes a lack of insecurity, as well as her own regard for her intelligence and competence as a human being in the work force, side-stepping the values of the Cult of True Womanhood. She also wrote President McKinley, stating that “the only objection which can logically be

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<sup>49</sup> Untitled clipping on Alice Mary Robertson’s participation in the funeral procession of the dead unknown soldiers, author unknown, undated, folder 2, box 1, AAMR/OHS.

<sup>50</sup> Samuel Worcester Robertson’s letter to Professor E.E. Dale, dated 24 October 1931, folder 12, box 12, SWR/WHC.

<sup>51</sup> Ruggs, “A Man’s Job,” 34.

<sup>52</sup> Robertson, “I Want the Job,” 85, 86.

raised—my being a woman can surely be met.”<sup>53</sup> With great confidence in Robertson, Roosevelt praised her in a letter to the Secretary of the Interior in Washington, and Robertson got the job. In 1900 she assumed her new role as the U.S. School Supervisor for Creek Schools, showcasing her expertise and credentials. She, however, endured harsh environmental conditions when traveling, and so in 1905 she resigned.<sup>54</sup> By then Roosevelt was president, and their alliance proved to be stronger than ever.

Robertson pursued becoming postmaster of Muskogee and asked Roosevelt to appoint her. He sent her name to the Senate on 12 December 1904, ignoring the will of the local politicians of Muskogee. In January 1905, Robertson became the first woman in the country to preside over a first-class post office.<sup>55</sup> Local officials remained extremely disgruntled with the president’s choice. They thought Roosevelt overlooked their patronage rights.<sup>56</sup> They insisted that Robertson lacked the ability to manage an office that received more commerce than two businesses combined, because she was a woman.<sup>57</sup> Quickly, men began to change their opinion about her, as she implemented the qualities of hard work, intelligence, and candor.

While postmaster, Robertson attended the National Association of Postmasters meeting in St. Louis in 1906. She was an instant hit among the men at the convention,

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<sup>53</sup> Ruggs, “A Man’s Job,” 34.

<sup>54</sup> Foreman, “The Honorable Alice M. Robertson,” 15; James, “Alice Mary Robertson,” 455; Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC; Mazumdar, “Alice’s Restaurant,” 310, 312; Spaulding, “The Life of Alice Mary Robertson,” 61.

<sup>55</sup> Foreman, untitled essay, folder 33, box 3, AMR/OHS; Foreman, “The Honorable Alice M. Robertson,” 15; James, “Alice Mary Robertson,” 455; Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC; Spaulding, “The Life of Alice Mary Robertson,” 66.

<sup>56</sup> Spaulding, “The Life of Alice Mary Robertson,” 66.

<sup>57</sup> Mazumdar, “Alice’s Restaurant,” 312.



and the president of the association placed her on every committee.<sup>58</sup> She became known as “Uncle Sam’s Best Girl.” According to various sources, Robertson fully fulfilled her nickname.

Under Robertson’s management, the Muskogee Post Office remained the fastest growing agency in the country, and she received the highest earnings of any woman in the area with a salary of \$3,400.00 yearly. When Robertson became the appointee, the office annually passed through \$35,000.00 in receipts. Upon retiring in 1913, Robertson’s agency conducted \$110,000.00 of business per year.<sup>59</sup> By 1920, *Harlow’s Weekly* reported, “Wemen [women] are being given greater recognition in postoffice appointments than ever before....”<sup>60</sup> Perhaps Robertson’s success as postmaster contributed to other women’s postal appointments, along with women’s changing roles in society altogether, which Robertson had been an active participant.

As of 1 January 1912, The Trans-Mississippi Commercial Congress elected Robertson as a congressperson for a term of two years, helping in the “upbuilding of the great west,” which was their motto.<sup>61</sup> From 1913-20 she took no federal appointments. Instead she turned her attention to building her own home and becoming businessperson. With the money she made as postmaster, Robertson erected a mansion in 1910 on the historic Agency Hill that lay three miles west of Muskogee. She drilled her own gas well to supply the farm with fuel.<sup>62</sup> Fittingly she named her home *Sawokla* and explained that

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<sup>58</sup> Ruggs, “A Man’s Job,” 37.

<sup>59</sup> Mazumdar, “Alice’s Restaurant,” 312; Spaulding, “The Life of Alice Mary Robertson,” 71-72.

<sup>60</sup> “Miscellaneous,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 1 October 1920, 7.

<sup>61</sup> Certificate titled, “Trans-Mississippi Commercial Congress,” signed by the secretary and president, certificate no. 1032, folder 9, box 1, AMR/OHS.

*Sawokla* was the name of a band of Indians who lived near Conchartey. The last known members were buried on her brother-in-law's farm, and the term *Sawokla* meant a gathering place for people.<sup>63</sup> *Sawokla* contained massive fireplaces and wrap-around porches that overlooked fifty-five acres. She wasted no time using her home as a gathering place. While she entertained veterans of two wars, the Oklahoma Press Association in 1913, and a campaign barbecue in 1920, Robertson found the most joy in extending the use of *Sawokla* to women. Robertson selected a renowned Oklahoma historian, writer, and her personal friend Carolyn Thomas Foreman (1872-1967) to "light the first fires in the fireplaces."<sup>64</sup> At this point, Robertson exemplified many elements of New Womanhood, especially financial independence.<sup>65</sup> Other aspects of Robertson's life besides occupations support the notion that she embraced components of New Womanhood. The story of Susan Barnett,<sup>66</sup> especially, appeals to this idea.

In the 1880s a Creek woman begged Robertson to take her daughter Susan Barnett, because the father had already died in Isparhecher 's or the Green Peach War (ca. 1880), and the mother's life remained in danger. Robertson, however, was unsure about taking the girl. She wanted to pursue a career in education as opposed to being a mother, reflecting New Womanhood at its very core. Ten days later, however, Susan was

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<sup>62</sup> Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC; Mazumdar, "Alice's Restaurant," 313; Spaulding, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson," 74.

<sup>63</sup> Spaulding, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson," 74.

<sup>64</sup> Spaulding, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson," 75.

<sup>65</sup> Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC; Mazumdar, "Alice's Restaurant," 313; Spaulding, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson," 75.

<sup>66</sup> Birth and death dates unknown. Barnett's first name has three alternate spellings. Edith Cherry Johnson, a reporter for the *Daily Oklahoman*, spelled it Suzanne in an interview with Robertson. In his 1959 Dissertation, Joe Powell Spaulding spelled it Susan. Online sources spell it Susanne.

orphaned. Robertson immediately rescued the six-year-old girl and legally adopted her.<sup>67</sup>

She took Barnett's education upon herself and taught the child English, since she only spoke Creek.<sup>68</sup> Barnett showed signs as a promising musician, so Robertson footed the bill and enrolled her into Henry Kendall College, where she graduated with honors in 1900. That same year on 31 December, Barnett wed the oil-production-tycoon Charles Edward Strouvelle of Tulsa.<sup>69</sup> Now living in a new city, Barnett joined a small piano club presided over by Jane Heard Clinton (1875-1945). Their organization needed a name, and Barnett took it upon herself to find one. After consulting with Ann Eliza, they decided on "Hyechka...the generic Creek word for music."<sup>70</sup> Their group succeeded as a prominent setting. Today, *Hyechka* continues as a venue for many promising and outstanding musicians.<sup>71</sup> While alive, Robertson largely claimed the club "helped build the very soul of Tulsa."<sup>72</sup> Robertson's active participation in Barnett's higher education, as well as her career, also lends to facets of New Womanhood. Her assistance and encouragement of women did not end with Barnett.

According to various primary sources Barnett was not the only girl that Robertson took under her wing and fostered. She aided dozens of other less fortunate girls in the celebration of their weddings. Robertson by all appearances enjoyed assisting with

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<sup>67</sup> Foreman, untitled essay, folder 33, box 3, AMR/OHS; Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC; Cecile Davis Richards, *Wherever You Go: The Life of Jane Heard Clinton: Indian Territory Bride* (Parker, Colorado: IUniverse, 2003), 47.

<sup>68</sup> Foreman, untitled essay, folder 33, box 3, AMR/OHS; Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC; Richards, *Wherever You Go*, 47.

<sup>69</sup> Richards, *Wherever You Go*, 47.

<sup>70</sup> Richards, *Wherever You Go*, 46.

<sup>71</sup> "Hyechka Club's Work Music to Tulsa's Ears," *Tulsa World*, 10 November 2007, A-4; Richards, *Wherever You Go*, 46.

<sup>72</sup> "Hyechka Club's Work Music to Tulsa's Ears," *Tulsa World*, A-4.

trousseaus and purchasing silk stockings for her younger girlfriends, though she claimed to never have worn a pair.<sup>73</sup> On the subject she wrote, “I have bought twelve trousseaux, some very modest ones, others very elaborate. Although an old maid, I have always held myself up as a warning and not an example to my girls. My greatest ambition has been to do all in my power toward the establishment of happy homes.”<sup>74</sup> Reflecting back on her good will to young girls, she claimed that she was happy to “have been able to earn enough to give other girls what it was so hard for me to give up,” motherhood.<sup>75</sup> Despite assisting young women in their marriages, these stories uphold the idea that Robertson was pro-women. As in the case of Barnett, Robertson not only encouraged the girls to pursue higher education and careers, she also maintained an unusual perspective on women’s clothing that did not always reflect the puritanical beliefs attached to the Cult of True Womanhood.

Liberating fashion in the early twentieth century was synonymous with women’s movements. Reporters and the media sought Robertson’s view on the matter during her campaign, since she dressed simply and modestly.<sup>76</sup> Her thoughts on suggestive apparel, however, preceded her congressional tenure by twenty years.

As U.S. Supervisor for Creek Schools, Robertson frequently spent time in and out of Washington. In 1900 while riding a streetcar to her destination, she noted, “There is a

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<sup>73</sup> Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC.

<sup>74</sup> “A Busy-Bee Idealist,” undated *Hollands’ Magazine* clipping, folder 26, box 7, series 4, AMR/EC; Spaulding, “The Life of Alice Mary Robertson,” 78; “Oklahoma Women in Politics,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 13 August 1920, 10.

<sup>75</sup> Note written by Alice Robertson, undated, folder 2, box 2, series 1, PRW/UT.

<sup>76</sup> “Miss Alice to Be Meek in Congress,” *New York Times*, 26 February 1921, 10; Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3.

young woman with the very short skirt whose pretty feet make the abbreviation seem quite pardonable and the other elderly woman—surely a spinster—with spectacles and grizzled hair and oh! such ugly feet and her short skirt seems almost a crime.”<sup>77</sup> Though Robertson was a sturdy woman and plainly dressed in dark clothing she said at the time of her campaign, “I do not believe that the modern short skirts...are much worse than the prudish long skirts of the mid-Victorian period.”<sup>78</sup> Also in 1920 for the first time, Robertson attended and witnessed a motion picture that featured girls in bathing suits. In a letter to the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix* concerning the film, she stated that “it’s for the American Legion,” and she also helped sell tickets for the screening.<sup>79</sup> Despite her own physical appearance by 1920, Robertson consistently had not maintained a conservative approach to women’s fashion. She also was not opposed to career-oriented women.

Some literature suggests that Robertson was against workingwomen, because an identity outside of domesticity breached the values of the Cult of True Womanhood. In 1913, she opened an eatery called Sawokla Cafeteria after her home, which began as a club specifically for professional girls. She wanted to offer services to ladies that the Young Women’s Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.) lacked.<sup>80</sup> Robertson, therefore, invested in crops and livestock and turned her home into a farming business, growing all

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<sup>77</sup> Alice Mary Robertson, “Social Washington,” in *Alice Robertson: Congresswoman from Oklahoma*, Bob Burke, Reba Neighbors Collins, and Kenny Arthur Franks, eds., Oklahoma Statesman Series, vol. 6 (Edmond: University of Central Oklahoma Press, 2001), 89.

<sup>78</sup> “Miss Alice to Be Meek in Congress,” *New York Times*, 10; Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC.

<sup>79</sup> “Alice Robertson Hasn’t Forgotten Her Soldier Boys,” undated newspaper clipping, folder 26, box 7, series 4, AMR/EC.

<sup>80</sup> Litchfield, “Early Feminine Politico,” 8; Grant Foreman, “The Lady From Oklahoma,” *The Independent*, 26 March 1921, 326; Mazumdar, “Alice’s Restaurant,” 313; Spaulding, “The Life of Alice Mary Robertson,” 78.

her own produce for the restaurant.<sup>81</sup> The dining hall consisted of a cafeteria, locker rooms, a reception area, a restroom, and shower facilities. Any woman who paid a fee obtained a membership card and access to *Sawokla*'s services. Eventually rumors of Robertson's good cooking spread throughout Muskogee, and local businessmen convinced her to open her doors to males and females alike, making her diner the most popular in town.<sup>82</sup> Due to her success in business, Robertson served as a member of the Business and Professional Women's Club. Later in life, she received a nomination for president over the national organization in Oakland, California.<sup>83</sup> While *Sawokla* Cafeteria initially began by catering to women on the go, it expanded and served many purposes between 1913 and 1920. The cafeteria brought in enough revenue for Robertson to branch out further and pursue alternate avenues of woman's work as the founder of the Muskogee Chapter of the Red Cross during World War I (1914-18).<sup>84</sup>

Robertson once again extended her support to the war boys by providing the soldiers and their families with free meals at *Sawokla* Cafeteria. By 1916 she had already been meeting troops at the train station, loading her Ford down with candy, cigarettes, coffee, food, and postcards.<sup>85</sup> She devoted herself to the men and some evenings camped at the train station all night long. From 1917-18 Robertson had assisted over 5,000 troops, offering encouragement and warm meals. She worked out of an empty-passenger-coach

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<sup>81</sup> Mazumdar, "Alice's Restaurant," 313.

<sup>82</sup> Spaulding, "The Life of Alice Mary Robertson," 78.

<sup>83</sup> A photocopy titled, "Information for the National Cyclopedia of American Biography," dated 7 October 1931, folder 2, box 1, AAMR/OHS.

<sup>84</sup> Schrems, *Across the Political Spectrum*, 83.

<sup>85</sup> Mazumdar, "Alice's Restaurant," 314.

that the train station had provided, initiating and managing a small Red Cross canteen.<sup>86</sup> She joked, “Some women collect china or jewels or lace. I have a fad for collecting boys and girls.”<sup>87</sup> Through her charity, hard work, and networking during World War I, Robertson had gained the respect of a Democratic district that gave her an advantage during her congressional campaign in 1920.

Roosevelt once said, “Let the United States, as a matter of right and justice, take the lead and in this country put the women in fact on a level with the men by saying that every woman who does her duty shall stand at the ballot box exactly as every man who does his duty is entitled to stand.”<sup>88</sup> Many celebrated Republicans shared a similar sentiment, dating back to Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865). This makes Robertson’s case even more unusual. Two factors perhaps contributed to Robertson’s opposition against the vote.

Her Quaker, Presbyterian stock hailed from Vermont and New Hampshire. The national anti-suffrage movement also began on the East coast.<sup>89</sup> Intrinsicly, the puritanical and political ideologies of her ancestral roots influenced her social values, but likely remained a smaller reason for her anti-suffrage response. In 1907, Roosevelt signed the Oklahoma Enabling Act that joined Oklahoma and Indian Territory, a measure that displeased Robertson. Before this legislation passed, anti-suffrage activity in the territories remained relatively stationary. In 1899 when the proposition for boundary

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<sup>86</sup> Mazumdar, “Alice’s Restaurant,” 314.

<sup>87</sup> James, “Alice Mary Robertson,” 459; Alice Mary Robertson letter to Lieutenant Card, dated 29 January 1919, folder 33, box 3, AMR/OHS.

<sup>88</sup> “The Republican Party Stands for Woman Suffrage: Stand with Your Leaders,” undated newspaper clipping, folder 3, box 7, DLC/WHC.

<sup>89</sup> Tally Fugate, “Where Angels Belong: the Oklahoma Antisuffrage Movement,” *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 82 (2004): 201; Wright, “Samuel Austin Worcester,” 3.

changes of Payne and Noble counties went before the congressional committee, supporters of the bill attached women's suffrage to the request. Politicians commonly extended the enfranchisement to women for the passage of similar measures. Some women contested the vote to protect the traditional women's role as the upholder of morale within the household, which was based on religious points-of-view.<sup>90</sup> For educated women like Robertson, the granting of suffrage by self-serving, ambitious politicians was offensive to her gender. Many females recognized the potential of their sex as contributing citizens, even without the franchise. However, many rural women living in the U.S. had not received an extensive education. Robertson and other women like her feared the majority of females could not cast an informed ballot.<sup>91</sup> While Robertson admitted that her discontentment with the franchise stemmed from a fiscally conservative point-of-view, other factors also influenced her position against suffrage.

By 1916 Robertson served as the Vice-President of the Oklahoma Anti-Suffrage Association, though she likely only passed out a few pamphlets. In fact, primary documentation on her involvement in the organization is lacking. The absence of evidence may indicate that Robertson's embittered opposition to the vote is generally an overstatement. She simply did not support suffrage for a few reasons. She admired the financial support of women through marriage, or she was offended that politicians only wanted women to vote when it suited their agendas. Also as one onlooker noted, "Even women who were anti-suffrage were not necessarily against women's political involvement and identity: 'We have the antisuffrage women's own word that they thought themselves citizens, that they did not think their citizen status depended on the

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<sup>90</sup> Fugate, "Where Angels Belong," 201.

<sup>91</sup> Schrems, *Across the Political Spectrum*, 101.



franchise.”<sup>92</sup> Robertson might have remained unconvinced of suffragettes’ arguments, because she did not see the vote as a means of proving “women’s equality to men; she had proven that on her own.”<sup>93</sup> “To Robertson, women did not need to prove their political or social value through voting. They proved it in their other responsibilities.”<sup>94</sup> Ultimately, Robertson’s anti-suffrage stance was likely not founded in the values of the Cult of True Womanhood, but in carrying the burden of earning a living and being the breadwinner for herself, her mother, and the orphaned children she raised.

Robertson viewed her monetary situation as cumbersome instead of liberating.<sup>95</sup> She spoke out against the enfranchisement by saying, “I’ve always done a man’s work, carried a man’s burden and have had to pay the bills. I believe that’s why I never wanted to see suffrage for women.”<sup>96</sup> Like many anti-suffragists, Robertson simply thought that women’s enfranchisement would limit the cushy positions they already enjoyed.<sup>97</sup> Once the nineteenth amendment passed in 1920, Robertson made a logical move, not just as a woman, but also as a person who had already accomplished more than many of her male counterparts; she filed to run for congress.<sup>98</sup>

Up to 1920, Robertson continued to exhibit elements of New Womanhood, especially through her chosen lifestyle of never marrying and pursuing careers. Other

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<sup>92</sup> Eldred and Mortensen, “‘Persuasion Dwelt on Her Tongue,’” 177.

<sup>93</sup> Kodumthara, “The Role of Gender, 30.

<sup>94</sup> Kodumthara, “The Role of Gender,” 30.

<sup>95</sup> Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC

<sup>96</sup> “‘Old Maid,’ Sent to Congress, is Not ‘Man Hater,’” undated newspaper clipping, folder 26, box 7, series 4, AMR/EC; Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3.

<sup>97</sup> Schrems, *Across the Political Spectrum*, 92.

<sup>98</sup> “Oklahoma Women in Politics,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 18 June 1920, 6; Mazumdar, “Alice’s Restaurant,” 316; Ruggs, “‘A Man’s Job,’” 95.

factors also greatly contribute to this notion. Robertson went to Elmira College in New York, acquiring a higher education. From school, she wrote home and spoke of her admiration for women like Ream, who removed prejudices towards women by persevering in their own endeavors. She clearly appreciated the artist for her achievement. On the topic of herself, she underscored her own desire to work hard in life, realizing many unconventional accomplishments for women that included chartering Henry Kendall College. Potentially, her determination caused her to abandon love interests during her Elmira years. From college, Robertson continued down the path of hard work and holds many firsts for women in the U.S. that include: working in the Indian office in Washington, D.C., becoming a postmaster over a first-class post office, as well as receiving the burial of a Spanish American War veteran. In the instances of Susan Barnett, her adopted daughter, Sawokla Cafeteria, and short skirts, she undoubtedly illuminated New Womanhood.

### Chapter 3

The Anti-lady, Lady from Oklahoma:

A National Press Sensation, 1920-23\*

Women in the U.S. found 1920 to be a highly productive year for their gender. Not only had females won their victory over suffrage through the passage of the nineteenth amendment, but also the National League of Women Voters (N.L.W.V.) and the National Women's Party (N.W.P.) helped create the Women's Joint Congressional Committee (W.J.C.C.), apparently the most powerful and persistent lobby to invade Washington, D.C.<sup>1</sup> This group of women considered themselves feminists of the New Woman generation of the emerging twentieth century that advocated for women's identity and financial freedom beyond the domestic sphere, rejecting Victorian Era values of the Cult of True Womanhood that worked voraciously to preserve piety, purity,

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\* The idea for this chapter title came from three sources: "The Lady from Oklahoma," *The Woman Patriot: dedicated to the defense of womanhood, motherhood, the family, and the state, against suffragism, feminism, and socialism* 4 (November 1920): 4. Hereafter shall be cited as "The Lady From Oklahoma," (1920): page number; Grant Foreman, "The Lady From Oklahoma," *The Independent* (New York), volume unknown (March 1921): 326, AMRVF/OHS; and "A Woman Who Got into Congress through the Want-Ad Columns," *The Literary Digest*, volume unknown (December 1920): 56, AMRVF/OHS.

<sup>1</sup> J. Stanley Lemons, "The Sheppard-Towner Act: Progressivism in the 1920s," *The Journal of American History* 35, 4 (March 1969): 779. Lemons extracted this information from the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 77 (Dec. 1921): 1913-14.

marriage, and motherhood.<sup>2</sup> The W.J.C.C. evidently coordinated two-dozen national women's organizations and "claimed to speak for 20 million members."<sup>3</sup> Evidence of feminine agency in the public sphere addressed the needs of women as mothers and manifested itself in the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act, marking the first major priority for women's groups after gaining the right to vote.<sup>4</sup>

Sheppard-Towner served two primary purposes: the bill granted financial assistance to each state through the Children's Bureau, recognizing the mother-child duo and funding education on proper hygiene in an attempt to reduce mother/infant mortality rates, especially during childbirth. The act also pushed the federal initiative to recognize motherhood as an occupation.<sup>5</sup> The anti-suffragist community maintained opposition to the pre-natal project. Among this group, we find the sixty-six-year-old Alice Mary Robertson, and she had filed to run for congress from the second district in the state of Oklahoma.

During Robertson's lifetime, newspapers and magazines played a huge role in shaping public opinion, similar to today's media.<sup>6</sup> For a short time, the local and national press seemed to like Robertson. She possessed a colorful and outgoing personality that added to the media sensationalizing of her. Mostly, she received much publicity, because she was the only woman elected to congress the same year women gained the right to

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<sup>2</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 43; Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood, 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 152.

<sup>3</sup> Lemons, "The Sheppard-Towner Act," 778.

<sup>4</sup> Lemons, "The Sheppard-Towner Act," 778; Jan Doolittle Wilson, *The Women's Joint Congressional Committee and the Politics of Maternalism, 1920-30* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 48.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Madeleine Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Ideology, Public Policy, and the Mothers' Movement, 1890-1930* (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1986), 9.

<sup>6</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 62.

vote, as well as a known anti-suffragist. Positive attention, however, was short lived, due to her stance and vote against Sheppard-Towner and the Soldiers' Bonus Bill, which appeared as a direct assault against women and soldiers of the U.S. Ultimately, the press served as a fighting ring between the representative and the self-proclaimed feminists, mostly siding with women's organizations and deeming Robertson as an incompetent politician that utilized her position in congress to protect the values of the Cult of True Womanhood.

Since her term, many of the secondary sources have continued to base their analyses of the former representative on the media's portrayal of her, which remains somewhat inaccurate, since Robertson and many Oklahomans believed that winning the election was unrealistic. Robertson had maintained an anti-suffrage past. She also was a staunch Republican in the Democratic South. She had to campaign through a want-ad column titled "Sawokla Cafeteria," since the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix's* owner was a Democrat.<sup>7</sup> She conducted the majority of her campaigning from her cafeteria also called Sawokla Cafeteria. She, therefore, likely did not intend to run for congress in order to protect the values of the Cult of True Womanhood. Instead, the fact she filed to run in the race reflects her improvisation as an anti-suffragist, evolving with the standard of womanhood. Also, serving as a congressperson was a logical next step for a woman who had contributed so much to society and her gender beyond the domestic sphere.<sup>8</sup> In order to understand the secondary sources' foundation of their interpretations of her as a True

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<sup>7</sup> Newspaper clipping titled, "Old Maid," date unknown, found in folder 11, box 11, series 4, AMR/EC; Johnson, untitled essay, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC.

<sup>8</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 95.

Woman, a critical examination of the chronology of press coverage on the representative must be consulted.

Once the local and national media realized the seriousness of Robertson's candidacy, journalists began paying her closer attention. They marveled at her seemingly hypocritical position, especially since she served as the vice-president of Oklahoma's anti-suffrage association in 1916 when the Oklahoma State Legislature proposed to amend women's voting rights.<sup>9</sup> Oklahoma had granted women suffrage by 1918, having turned down two previous attempts: one in 1907 at the Constitutional Convention and in 1910 through State Question 8.<sup>10</sup> A reporter for *Harlow's Weekly* noted that the focus of Robertson's race was a strange feature, because "she was among the strongest woman opponents of suffrage for her sex, opposing the constitutional amendment when Oklahoma was voting on that question."<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Robertson and like anti-suffragists seemingly improvised, despite having said, "I do not ever want to see a woman political candidate."<sup>12</sup> Robertson, however, was the only woman from either party to file for congress in the state of Oklahoma, and nationally, out of 27 million women, only eighteen ran.<sup>13</sup>

Had Robertson really clung to the values of Victorian Era gender roles, she never would have filed to run for a seat in the U.S. House of Representatives. This action alone

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<sup>9</sup> Carrie Chapman Catt, *Woman, Suffrage and Politics: The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1926), 312; "May Have Woman Candidate," *Harlow's Weekly*, 23 July 1920, 5; "Oklahoma Women in Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 23 July 1920, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Cindy Simon Rosenthal, *When Women Lead: Integrative Leadership in State Legislatures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 97.

<sup>11</sup> "May Have Woman Candidate," *Harlow's Weekly*, 23 July 1920, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Mazumdar, "Alice's Restaurant," 312; Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 95.

<sup>13</sup> "Oklahoma Women in Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 18 June 1920, 6; Foreman, "The Lady from Oklahoma," 4.

exemplifies her own, personal evolution with the changing social tides for women during the Progressive Era. While many sources illogically claim she ran for office to protect the traditional sphere of domesticity, a fundamental value to the Cult of True Womanhood, the odds were heavily against her winning the election, making this argument moot. She was a Republican anti-suffragist in the Democratic South, a party to which many self-proclaimed feminists belonged. Robertson's actions up to this point spotlight the fact she remained a transitional figure between True and New Womanhood, revering domesticity and motherhood, while embracing new-found roles for women occupationally, politically, and socially.

Robertson led her campaign in the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix* via her want-ad column called "Sawokla Cafeteria," showcasing her restaurant's menu and her political agenda. According to the press, Robertson prefaced her announcement to run for office, stating she felt obligated to "see whether they [the people] are really sincere in wanting the women to take part in politics and hold office."<sup>14</sup> She expressed that she particularly sought to test the men's earnestness towards women's suffrage.<sup>15</sup> She evidently saw political office as a duty, comparing running for congress to having to chop wood during a blizzard to keep her family alive. She said, "I didn't like to do it. I didn't think it was work for a woman to do. But it was my duty—the nearest one."<sup>16</sup> Her reported platform was "first, I am a Christian; second, I am an American; and third, I am a Republican and a standpatter, too."<sup>17</sup> She continued, "I cannot be bought, I cannot be sold, I cannot be

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<sup>14</sup> "Oklahoma Women in Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 11 June 1920, 4.

<sup>15</sup> "May Have Woman Candidate," *Harlow's Weekly*, 23 July 1920, 5; "Oklahoma Women in Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 23 July 1920, 13.

<sup>16</sup> Kodumthara, "The Role of Gender," 31-32.

intimidated.”<sup>18</sup> As the race wore on, she increasingly drew more media attention with her reportedly colorful comments and behavior.

Columnists seemed to like Robertson. Her clever and outgoing personality fostered her popularity with the press. Writers enjoyed Robertson’s openness, especially about her age, which women customarily did not reveal. Reporter Nelle Bunyan Jennings<sup>19</sup> claimed, “Miss Robertson’s announcement will probably go down in political history as the first—if not the only—one in which a woman candidate told her age.”<sup>20</sup> Robertson energetically engaged the media, and they played back.

Ultimately, Robertson defeated Democratic incumbent William Wirt Hastings (1866-1938) by 228 votes.<sup>21</sup> After winning the congressional race, columnists went wild, writing about her success. Reporter Jennings commented, “Miss Alice Robertson of Muskogee, a brilliant woman, splendidly qualified and deserving this high honor, because of the very great contributions of service she has made to the state, which she has spent her entire life.”<sup>22</sup> Other editorial titles called her “Oklahoma’s most useful citizen.”<sup>23</sup> G.

<sup>17</sup> “A Congresswoman Elected with Want Ads,” *Current Opinion* 70 (January 1921): 41.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley, “Alice M. Robertson,” 259; Hardy, “Alice Mary Robertson,” 322.

<sup>19</sup> Birth and death dates unknown.

<sup>20</sup> “Oklahoma Women in Politics,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 11 June 1920, 4.

<sup>21</sup> State Election Board to Alice Mary Robertson, dated 28 January 1921, folder 4, box 8, series 2, AMR/MPL; “Hastings Concedes Victory to Alice Robertson, but Figures Give Him Lead,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 4 November 1920, 1; “Elmira College Woman Hailed as ‘Historic Figure,’” *Elmira College Alumnae News* 19 (1930): 15; “Old Maid,” undated, folder 11, box 11, series 4, AMR/EC; Johnson, untitled essay, undated, folder 10, box 3, ECJ/WHC.

<sup>22</sup> “Oklahoma Women in Politics,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 13 August 1920, 10.

<sup>23</sup> “Miss Alice Robertson Who Is ‘Our Uncle Sam’s Best Girl,’” *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, date unknown, AMRVF/OHS; “Her Place Empty Honor Compared with Mother’s Miss Robertson Thinks,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 16 October 1921, 18.



B. Parker,<sup>24</sup> an editor for *The Daily Oklahoman*, said that Robertson was a breath of fresh air in congress.<sup>25</sup> Also at the time of her election, letters poured in from all over the world, congratulating the newly elected representative. Surprisingly, the N.L.W.V. and the N.W.P. sent her well wishes and asked her to provide photographs, her life story, and details about her career as soon as possible.<sup>26</sup> This admiration was short-lived, and friction quickly emerged between the so-called True Woman congressperson and the self-proclaimed feminists.

Several factors initiated a mutual disdain between Robertson and women's organizations. The Oklahoma representative seemed to possess a sexist attitude toward women in general. Reports claimed that she decided to employ Benjamin Cook<sup>27</sup> as her secretary in Washington on the grounds that he was a man. Also, she outright refused to accept gender-based politics or legislation. She had apparently made derogatory comments on women serving on the League of Nations' Disarmament Commission. Most importantly, however, she inflexibly opposed the provisions outlined in the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act of 1921. Parker noted in his exposé that she cultivated the disrespectful relationship between herself and the self-proclaimed feminists, because she never failed to take jabs at equal suffrage by always praising the

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<sup>24</sup> Birth and death dates unknown.

<sup>25</sup> "Miss Robertson Praised," *Harlow's Weekly*, 24 December 1920, 6; "Clubs Go in for Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 24 December 1920, 8; "Legislation That Women Are Seeking," *Harlow's Weekly*, 24 December 1920, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Florence Brewer Boeckel of the N.W.P. to Alice Mary Robertson, dated 5 November 1920, folder 1, box 8, series 2, AMR/MPL.

<sup>27</sup> Birth and death dates unknown.

housewife and mother.<sup>28</sup> Because of her apparent Victorian Era attitude and her anti-suffrage past, Robertson compounded the existing tension between herself and women's organizations.

The press reported that domesticity and motherhood dominated Robertson's rhetoric during her term as representative, though she never wed or birthed offspring.<sup>29</sup> She had apparently argued for women's traditional gender roles, regardless of regularly sidestepping those boundaries throughout her life.<sup>30</sup> Robertson had contested Kate Bernard's (1875-1930) avocation for suffrage by saying, "It was never intended for woman to be other than homemakers and mothers."<sup>31</sup> At the annual luncheon of the Elmira College Club held in New York on 30 April 1921, Robertson stated that she was originally an anti-suffragist, because she believed in the need for a home atmosphere.<sup>32</sup> Ironically, Robertson's reported philosophies greatly contradicted her lifestyle that enabled an identity and financial freedom outside of domesticity, all values of New Womanhood.

By 1921, Robertson seemed to constantly validate her newfound role. She evidently commented that "the salvation of the country now rests with the women...It is up to us to drive out the dishonest politicians."<sup>33</sup> While she appeared to justify her own life choices, she traveled the country and gave public lectures to young girls, encouraging

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<sup>28</sup> "Miss Robertson Praised," *Harlow's Weekly*, 24 December 1920, 6; "Clubs Go in for Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 24 December 1920, 8; "Legislation That Women Are Seeking," *Harlow's Weekly*, 24 December 1920, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 3.

<sup>30</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 3.

<sup>31</sup> Kodumthara, "The Role of Gender," 30-31.

<sup>32</sup> "Says Our Salvation Rests with Women," *New York Times*, 1 May 1921, 9.

<sup>33</sup> "Says Our Salvation Rests with Women," *New York Times*, 1 May 1921, 9.

them to pursue motherhood. In a speech at Henry Kendall College, newspapers reported Robertson saying, “I have the empty honor of being a congresswoman. I pay the price. I look with envy on the real mother.”<sup>34</sup> In part, her apparent advocacy of Victorian Era gender roles enabled a rapid deterioration between herself and the self-proclaimed feminists.

The representative seemed to possess three primary character flaws: an antagonistic nature, arrogance, and a profound sense of paternalism.<sup>35</sup> In a letter, the future congressperson had written, “Sometimes I speak so pathetically there is not a dry eye in the room...I get flattery enough to be very dangerous.”<sup>36</sup> At the time of her election, she noted, “I set out in this campaign to conduct my portion of it upon the basis of my personal record and qualifications,” leading onlookers to conclude that she believed herself to be an exception to her own rules against women’s suffrage, domesticity, and motherhood.<sup>37</sup> Robertson looked as if she personified Progressive Era Republicans who despised New Women and utilized her position at Capitol Hill to lead crusades against them, preserving the values of True Womanhood by launching three attacks of resistance.<sup>38</sup>

Robertson’s preliminary assault on feminists came in the form of passive-aggressive slanders. Naturally, the media served as the fighting ring for her and women’s political organizations. In an attempt to antagonize them, the congressperson-elect

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<sup>34</sup> “Her Place Empty Honor Compared with Mother’s Miss Robertson Thinks,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 16 October 1921, 18.

<sup>35</sup> Ruggs, “A Man’s Job,” 29.

<sup>36</sup> Ruggs, “A Man’s Job,” 32.

<sup>37</sup> “Sawokla Cafeteria,” *Muskogee Daily Phoenix*, 2 November 1920, 15.

<sup>38</sup> Ruggs, “A Man’s Job,” 4, 91.

seemed to oppose their endorsements and concerns.<sup>39</sup> Though she agreed that more women should serve in congress, she provokingly commented, “I do not see any of them falling over each other in the procession to get out in order that a woman may have their places.”<sup>40</sup> Newspapers continued to publish Robertson’s insults against the self-proclaimed feminists, as well as their defamations against her. At one point she criticized, “Women voters should not stand off in a wholly partisan way and look down in the pit where the fight is going on and say, ‘They’re not doing it right.’”<sup>41</sup> She charged, “The women have got to learn how to be good losers in order to be good winners.”<sup>42</sup> Quickly and assuredly, women’s organizations and publications began firing back.

The *New York World* printed that Robertson was “a small town anti-suffragist,” unknowing of women’s achievements.<sup>43</sup> Some people insisted that the Oklahoma representative was not a New Woman who embodied and valued higher education, a career, financial independence, sexual freedom, and no longer regarded silence as a feminine virtue, primarily because she refused to accept the modern-short skirt or to open her mind to “so-called advanced ideas in living or thought.”<sup>44</sup> She replied, “The women are against me, because I was not for suffrage originally, but I don’t mind. They did not

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<sup>39</sup> Ruggs, “A Man’s Job,” 78.

<sup>40</sup> “Church’s Day Now, Says Swearington,” *New York Times*, 21 February 1921, 5.

<sup>41</sup> “Woman M.C. Fights ‘Bonus Patriotism,’” *New York Times*, 14 February 1922, 2.

<sup>42</sup> “Woman M.C. Fights ‘Bonus Patriotism,’” *New York Times*, 14 February 1922, 2.

<sup>43</sup> Ruggs, “A Man’s Job,” 73; “What Miss Alice Really Said,” *The Woman Patriot: Dedicated to the defense of womanhood, motherhood, the family and the state, against suffragism, feminism, and socialism* 5 (1921): 3-4.

<sup>44</sup> “Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8; Ruggs, “A Man’s Job,” 44; B. June West, “New Woman,” *Twentieth Century Literature* 1 (1955): 55-68.

vote for me before, and I was elected.”<sup>45</sup> Her disregard for their opinions, sense of arrogance, and seemingly True Woman air was like pouring salt on open wounds, especially since she remained the only female representative in congress at that point.

The second wave of attack came in the form of Robertson’s manner of elitism. She seemingly acted superior to other women, constantly haranguing them about intelligent citizenship. *Harlow’s Weekly* printed a lecture Robertson had given to club women, stating, “If these clubs could accomplish only one thing, the creating of a liking among women for problems of government—they would be more than worth all the time and effort it is costing to make them popular. Too many women take their new responsibilities lightly.”<sup>46</sup> Newspapers also quoted her as suggesting that “a woman can do anything she sets out to do if ‘she keeps her mouth shut and her ears open,’”<sup>47</sup> which was not well received, since New Womanhood no longer valued silence. She further attacked women’s organizations by claiming, “They [club women] ‘need their eyes opened’ to the possibilities a participation in politics brings,” but a “woman will have no success in politics until she takes it seriously, until she is earnest, conscientious, and I might say, prayerful.”<sup>48</sup> Robertson’s reported attitude towards women’s inability in politics, blended with her True Woman avocations, paternalism, and sense of elitism attracted a whole new breed of negative publicity.

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<sup>45</sup> “Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8.

<sup>46</sup> “Oklahoma Women in Politics,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 16 September 1921, 7; “Urge Women to Study Bill,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 16 September 1921, 7.

<sup>47</sup> “Miss Alice’ to Be Meek in Congress,” *New York Times*, 26 February 1921, 10.

<sup>48</sup> “Oklahoma Women in Politics,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 16 September 1921, 7; “Urge Women to Study Bill,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 16 September 1921, 7.

The last and final assault was no longer passive-aggressive. Robertson berated and hammered fashionably sensitive clubwomen, ultimately committing political suicide, since they formed and ran the W.J.C.C. Many women continued to approach politics by hosting teas, also known as pink teas.<sup>49</sup> She generalized the type of woman who held a membership to these clubs, scorning, “All these women agitators, who appear before clubs with their nice gowns and long gloves, and look pretty so that the other women will sit up and exclaim, ‘oh isn’t she wonderful!’ make me wonder why some of them did not raise some sons to have reverence for them.”<sup>50</sup> Her verbal defilements and attacks against their family units and mothering abilities ultimately ignited a fire she could not quench. She, therefore, appeared to make herself out to be the victim of their venomous slanders.

Robertson had voted in favor of the Fordney bill, which placed a duty on hides, attempting to protect against the fatality of free trade. She commented, “Members of my own sex abused me for increasing the price on their long, white kid gloves.”<sup>51</sup> By this point, ill-feelings between Robertson and the self-proclaimed feminists would not be mended, especially since she made herself out to be the victim after scorning their political endeavors, personally attacking their mothering abilities even though she, herself, was not a mother, and seemingly maintaining a devout reverence for the Cult of True Womanhood. As a result, her attitude and actions provided a deadly combination for her

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<sup>49</sup> “Precinct Teas,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 8; “Silence No Political Virtue,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 8; “Farm Women Study Platforms,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 9; “Teachers Urged to Vote,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 9; “Notes of the Campaign,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 9.

<sup>50</sup> “Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8; Arthur Wilson Page and Walter Hines Page, *The World’s Work: A History of Our Time*, v 44 (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, Page, and Company, May-October 1922), 189.

<sup>51</sup> “Representative Robertson,” *New York Times*, 8 December 1921, 17; “Miss Robertson’s Future Plans,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 12 November 1922, 51.

reputation and career as a politician. Any attempt to resolve her differences with these women had been severed and solidified with the case of Benjamin Cook, the Disarmament Commission, gender-based politics, and the Sheppard-Towner Act.

According to the *New York Times*, Robertson refused to have a female secretary in Washington, quoting her, “It’s a man’s job, and I want to keep it down.”<sup>52</sup> Jennings also speculated that Robertson wanted to employ a male, “because she believes the duties of a congressman’s secretary are such that they would be difficult for a woman to handle.”<sup>53</sup> *Current Opinion* referenced her on the topic, claiming she said, “I’m going to have a man for a secretary in Washington...There’ll be a lot of questions about my district’s business that folks would rather talk over with a man, so I’ll have a man representative with me.”<sup>54</sup> Because Robertson employed Benjamin Cook as a secretary and then opposed sex-based politics and legislation, the self-proclaimed feminists waged their war against Robertson.<sup>55</sup>

The representative-to-be intentionally and adamantly left her gender out of her platform, because she refused to solely be a “woman’s representative.”<sup>56</sup> One contemporary observer noted, “In running for office, she emphasizes, not her sex; but rather her lack, in a political sense, of any preoccupation about sex. The formal platform she announces for herself is: ‘I am a Christian; I am an American; I am a Republican.’—

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<sup>52</sup> “Miss Robertson of Oklahoma,” *New York Times*, 13 November 1920, 10.

<sup>53</sup> “Oklahoma Women in Politics,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 12 November 1920, 9-10; “Women to Share in Patronage,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 12 November 1920, 11.

<sup>54</sup> “A Congresswoman Elected with Want Ads,” *Current Opinion* 70 (January 1921): 41.

<sup>55</sup> “Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8.

<sup>56</sup> “Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8.

meaning, apparently, by implication, to emphasize the fact that it is not as a woman that she appeals for votes.”<sup>57</sup> She had also made it clear in a speech before the directors of Tulsa’s Chamber of Commerce that she disapproved of being called congresswoman, asking that she be referred to as congressman or representative.<sup>58</sup> Disrespectfully, people continued to call her congresswoman and made jabs, like, “One hardly knows whether to refer to Miss Alice Robertson of our National Congress as a ‘Congressman’ or a ‘Congresswoman.’”<sup>59</sup> Newspapers also printed articles that suggested Robertson earned the hatred of professional feminists, because she refused to introduce the sex line into politics.<sup>60</sup>

On 24 February 1921, Robertson spoke to the Elmira College Club in Rochester, New York, deposing the N.L.W.V. and like organizations that promoted legislation exclusively for women, suggesting that their ambitions gave rise to class distinctions, which could dangerously lead to a backlash of sex discrimination against men.<sup>61</sup> The league women made low-belted blows at Robertson, claiming that she played with men all the time. They were also furious that Robertson did not support anti-smoking measures for women. The major issue, driving a wedge between Robertson and the league, was the representative did not support a “separate political identity for women...[since] constitutionally there was no sex, therefore, women could not claim

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<sup>57</sup> Page and Page, *The World’s Work*, 189.

<sup>58</sup> “Congressional Returns,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 19 November 1920, 3; “Oklahoma Women in Politics,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 19 November 1920, 7; “Miss Robertson at Capital,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 19 November 1920, 7-8.

<sup>59</sup> Ruggs, “A Man’s Job,” 66.

<sup>60</sup> “Representative Robertson,” *New York Times*, 8 December 1921, 17.

<sup>61</sup> “Opposes Women Voters’ League,” *New York Times*, 25 February 1921, 20.



certain rights.”<sup>62</sup> Robertson provoked with statements like, “Women who commit murder get off too easy. They are not judged according to the same standard as men who murder, but you don’t hear the suffragists demanding equal right for men, do you?”<sup>63</sup> She furthermore argued, “The suffragists want equal rights for women with special privileges... It should be a 50-50 proposition with the men, but there are some women who want to make it a 75-25 proposition.”<sup>64</sup> Seemingly, Robertson’s antagonism of New Women was unrelenting, especially by deposing the league and their endorsements of a woman serving on the Disarmament Commission.<sup>65</sup>

Apparently, Robertson had told reporters that a woman was not capable of serving on the Disarmament Commission, because most females lacked a keen understanding of foreign affairs, multiple languages, and a profound understanding of government altogether. Regarding Robertson’s comments, Mrs. Edward Richards,<sup>66</sup> the Vice President of the N.L.W.V. said, “In her contempt of women and their ability, her total ignorance of women and women’s affairs, she fortunately in no way represents women, though she sits as the only woman in Congress.”<sup>67</sup> Robertson began defending her reluctance to support a woman as a member of the Disarmament Commission. The representative clearly doubted that she would agree with the political make-up of any

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<sup>62</sup> Schrems, *Across the Political Spectrum*, 106.

<sup>63</sup> “Compulsory Disarmament for Women Urged by Miss Alice,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 11 August 1921, 1.

<sup>64</sup> “Woman M.C. Fights ‘Bonus Patriotism,’” *New York Times*, 14 February 1922, 2; “Compulsory Disarmament for Women Urged by Miss Alice,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 11 August 1921, 1.

<sup>65</sup> “Representative Robertson,” *New York Times*, 8 December 1921, 17.

<sup>66</sup> Birth and death dates unknown.

<sup>67</sup> Ruggs, “A Man’s Job,” 72.

endorsement made by the league, but she also was on the defense over other political issues as well.<sup>68</sup>

In 1920, an advertisement in the *Muskogee Daily Phoenix* read, “When a woman is almost distracted from overwork, her home is in disorder, crying children, and on top of all is suffering from backache, bearing down pains...then she should remember that hundreds of women in just her condition have been restored to health and regained their youthful strength by taking Lydia E. Pinkham’s Vegetable Compound.”<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, women all over the nation, especially members of feminist organizations like the N.L.W.V., N.W.P., and W.J.C.C., knew they were overburdened, and so they began pushing for maternal legislation like Sheppard-Towner that deemed motherhood as a legitimate occupation. The drawback of governmental involvement in motherhood was “the persistence of patriarchal values in a rapidly changing economy.”<sup>70</sup> Robertson had consistently demonstrated her discontent for paternalism in government, especially among the Native Americans, which may provide insight into her stance against Sheppard-Towner. One writer claimed that reforming motherhood gave rise to “proletarianization of parenthood.”<sup>71</sup>

The concept of motherhood became a central theme during Progressive Era Reform.<sup>72</sup> First-wave feminists believed they were more sensitive to less fortunate members of society, and so, paternalistically, they worked hard to promote legislation

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<sup>68</sup> Schrems, *Across the Political Spectrum*, 104.

<sup>69</sup> “Oklahoma Women in Politics,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 11 June 1920, 4.

<sup>70</sup> Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 4.

<sup>71</sup> Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 4.

<sup>72</sup> Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 3.

that protected them.<sup>73</sup> Middle-class women of America actively participated in what they understood as “social motherhood,” or women’s organized and political involvement in developing welfare in America.<sup>74</sup> Two issues central to reforming motherhood were mothers’ pensions and the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act.<sup>75</sup>

While Sheppard-Towner signified and represented the wonderful fact that the U.S. government began recognizing women and children’s needs, the provisions of the bill were questionable at best. Sheppard-Towner appropriated approximately 1.5 million dollars from 1921-22 and 1.2 million dollars from 1923-27 to all fifty states.<sup>76</sup> Out of the appropriated money, \$5,000 went directly to each state outright, and \$5,000 more would go to each state as long as they matched the funds. The remaining money was allocated on a population-percentage-basis.<sup>77</sup> States could not exceed a budget of \$50,000, had to pass enabling legislation, provide an implementation plan, and vote for matching funds before they could receive any financial assistance from the federal government.<sup>78</sup> Both the state and individuals of the population maintained the right to reject the funds.<sup>79</sup> Not only had the proposed legislation left out a uniform plan of implementation, but also the figures that sponsor’s had based their facts upon were sketchy.

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<sup>73</sup> Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 1.

<sup>74</sup> Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, abstract.

<sup>75</sup> Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 1.

<sup>76</sup> Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act,” 781.

<sup>77</sup> Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act,” 781.

<sup>78</sup> Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act,” 781-82.

<sup>79</sup> Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act,” 782.

Representative Towner (1867-1947) from Massachusetts largely claimed that mother/infant death rates had been reduced in the state of New York from 144 to sixty-five in one year. However, Representative London (1871-1926), a socialist from New York, who had been born in Russia, noted that the figures of increased live births were compared the U.S. census of 1918 when the country had experienced an outbreak of influenza.<sup>80</sup> Despite supporters' claims that the act would facilitate the instruction of hygiene in an attempt to raise mortality rates among mothers and infants, the legislation's provisions were questionable at best.<sup>81</sup>

Major adversaries of the bill included the American Medical Association, the Woman Patriots, the Massachusetts Public Interests League, the Sentinels of the Republic, and the Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.), which ironically the D.A.R. held membership with the W.J.C.C.<sup>82</sup> Representative Robertson was a proud and active member of the D.A.R. for many years. In reference to her opposition to the bill, she stated, "Of course, all the women's clubs are hammering me, because I will not champion the so-called woman's legislation...They are lambasting me because I would not vote for the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Act, which will not help the mothers of America a bit, but will give a lot of jobs for others in the bureaus of Washington."<sup>83</sup> Her main concern was that the bill "did not specify how appropriated

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<sup>80</sup> *Congressional Record*, 67<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1921, 61, pt. 3: 8003.

<sup>81</sup> Lemons, "The Sheppard-Towner Act," 782.

<sup>82</sup> Lemons, "The Sheppard-Towner Act," 784.

<sup>83</sup> "Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her," *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8.

money would be spent or outline how programs would be set up.”<sup>84</sup> She, therefore, voted against it.<sup>85</sup>

In the end, forty-one states accepted and promoted the Sheppard-Towner Act; however, Massachusetts spawned an effort against the legislation, calling the bill vicious, un-American, and paternalistic.<sup>86</sup> By 1929, congress did not re-instate the bill; nine women were serving in the U.S. House of Representatives at that time. Eventually, Title V of the New Deal embodied the Sheppard-Towner legislation, appropriating approximately \$6 million to maternity and infancy, \$4 million for crippled children, and \$25 million to “dependent children,” all channeled through the Children’s Bureau.<sup>87</sup> The act had represented, however, “the first major dividend of the full enfranchisement of women.”<sup>88</sup> Opposition to maternal legislation seemed to show individual refusals “to view motherhood as work,” and the feminists accused Robertson of representing women’s opinions from “the early general grant period.”<sup>89</sup> This served as the last straw for women’s organizations. The feminists in turn defeated Robertson’s bid for reelection on the grounds that she steadfastly clung to and promoted the values of the Cult of True Womanhood.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ruggs, “A Man’s Job,” 70.

<sup>85</sup> “Status of Legislation Watched by Sub-Committees of Women’s Joint Congressional Committee,” *Congressional Digest* 1 (1922): 21.

<sup>86</sup> Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act,” 782-83.

<sup>87</sup> Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act,” 786.

<sup>88</sup> Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act,” 776.

<sup>89</sup> Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 10; Page and Page, *The World’s Work*, 189.

<sup>90</sup> “One of Elmira’s Most Distinguished Alumnae Passes Away,” undated, folder 11, box 11, series 4, AMR/EC.

Once her term was up in 1923, the media continued to engage Robertson, especially since she planned to run for re-nomination. A reporter had asked “what platform she would stand on in her fight against her own sex.”<sup>91</sup> Robertson insisted that her first platform was good enough for a second run. Part of Robertson’s interest in serving another two years was “to show some folks that my first election was not a political accident...and I want to show some of these women who are out to beat me because I won’t take orders that they can’t do it.”<sup>92</sup> The congressperson-elect said that she believed she could possibly win, because her first term “was a great surprise...I had never thought of it. When they urged it I know I had a fighting chance, but victory seemed impracticable and my well known attitude upon suffrage would, of course, make defeat indeed humiliating.”<sup>93</sup> Robertson did not have a fighting chance. In fact, her constituents voted Hastings back into the legislature. Upon leaving Capitol Hill, she stated, “It has been the dirtiest kind of a campaign, full of misrepresentation, full of underhand attack,” again appearing to play the victim of the self-proclaimed feminists.<sup>94</sup> While she believed her hometown of Muskogee, Oklahoma, treated her unfairly, she really failed to understand how badly they resented her True Woman semantics in a New Woman’s world.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> “Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8.

<sup>92</sup> “Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8.

<sup>93</sup> “Miss Robertson Will Fight for Another Term in House; Taste for Politics Growing,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 27 December 1921, 9.

<sup>94</sup> “Miss Robertson’s Future Plans,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 12 November 1922, 51.

<sup>95</sup> “Miss Robertson Angry, Would Quit Muskogee,” *New York Times*, 12 November 1922, 18.

On 16 April 1923, President Harding signed an executive order that appointed Robertson as Welfare Director of the Oklahoma Soldiers' Memorial Hospital in Muskogee, a project she championed on behalf of the veterans while in congress.<sup>96</sup> By 1 February 1924, the Veterans' Bureau fired Robertson from the Memorial Hospital due to her activity in political meetings, which was a violation of Civil Service rules.<sup>97</sup> Also in February of 1924, a small boy found Robertson's faithful companion, a bulldog named Captain, shot in the head.<sup>98</sup> On 6 April 1925, Robertson announced the closing of Sawokla Cafeteria, because people stopped eating there. She also informed the public that she was putting her home up for sale.<sup>99</sup> By the end of April 1925, Robertson's home burned to the ground, and the fire marshal ruled that it was arson.<sup>100</sup> Robertson literally had no friends, no source of income, no home, and very little money at the end of her life. On 1 July 1931, Robertson died of cancer of the jaw with only her sister Ann Augusta with her.

Her grave, which is in Green Hill Cemetery in Muskogee reads, "Wherever she is, whatever she is doing, she is truly one of the great women of America." President Roosevelt had once said this about Robertson. In his column, titled "Will Rogers Says," Will Rogers (1879-1935) also expressed his condolences for the loss of Robertson, stating, "You remember I told you there was some awful good dead Republicans...."

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<sup>96</sup> "Place for Miss Robertson," *New York Times*, 17 April 1923, 5.

<sup>97</sup> "Bureau Drops Miss Robertson," *New York Times*, 2 February 1924, 11.

<sup>98</sup> "Pet Dog of Miss Alice is Killed," *The Daily Oklahoman*, 17 February 1924, 10.

<sup>99</sup> "Miss Alice Closes Her Restaurant," *The Daily Oklahoman*, 7 April 1925, 5.

<sup>100</sup> "Miss Alice Robertson's Stately Home in Ruins after Fire," *The Daily Oklahoman*, 21 August 1925, 1.

Robertson happened to be one of them.<sup>101</sup> President Herbert Hoover (1874-1964) wrote Ann Augusta, expressing his sympathy on Robertson's death, stating that she was "a woman whose ancestry, idealism and outlook on life linked the pioneer past with the progress of the present. Hers was a life rich in usefulness."<sup>102</sup> Despite the bad wrap she received for her anti-suffrage past, her vote against the Sheppard-Towner Act, and her seemingly True Woman approach at Capitol Hill, these comments indicate that Robertson was more than a failed politician. Perhaps she really was a living linkage between the past and present, especially in regards to the ideals of womanhood.

This chapter intentionally reflected the popular opinions of the representative during her political career that has led many secondary interpretations of her to conclude she used her position in congress to uphold the values of the Cult of True Womanhood. By basing the majority of the information on newspaper articles from the 1920s, readers must be aware that the above presentation of her is not completely accurate; it is simply a manipulation of resources. Some of the evidence, however, does maintain elements of truth. For example, Robertson was an anti-suffragist, but in 1916 when Oklahoma began pushing to amend the constitution. By the time the nineteenth amendment arrived, she likely could have had a changed perspective on women's voting rights. She was antagonistic at times and perhaps a little paternalistic and arrogant. She clearly valued motherhood and homemaking and opposed the Sheppard-Towner Bill. However, to what extent was she against New Womanhood? Observers must remember she was the only woman elected to congress the same year women won the right to vote and also was an anti-suffragist. She could have kept quiet during her tenure, and the press and self-

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<sup>101</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 89; Carlile, "Miss Alice Robertson," 36.

<sup>102</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 89; Carlile, "Miss Alice Robertson," 36.



proclaimed feminists would have still written about her, due to the social and political climate of the era.

Ultimately, the national media disliked the representative's politics, referring to her as the anti-lady, accusing her of being anti-New Woman altogether.<sup>103</sup> Her seemingly juvenile interaction with the self-proclaimed feminists of her day appeared to prove she was an incompetent political figure, who was an arrogant, antagonistic, and paternalistic old maid of Victorian stock. This representation of her led one contemporary spectator to assert, "The time will come, of course, when a woman can be elected to high political office without receiving undue publicity."<sup>104</sup> While Robertson's failed congressional tenure seems to be well deserved according to the media, primary sources before 1920 show that she was not incompetent, nor was she against women advancing economically or socially, which is why she chose to run for congress in the first place when other women did not. In fact, she unequivocally favored women breaking through traditional barriers, establishing themselves in the workforce, ultimately embracing aspects of New Womanhood.

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<sup>103</sup> "Oklahoma Women in Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 16 September 1921, 7; "Urge Women to Study Bill," *Harlow's Weekly*, 16 September 1921, 7; "Precinct Teas," *Harlow's Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 8; "Silence No Political Virtue," *Harlow's Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 8; "Farm Women Study Platforms," *Harlow's Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 9; "Teachers Urged to Vote," *Harlow's Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 9; "Notes of the Campaign," *Harlow's Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 9.

<sup>104</sup> "Oklahoma Women in Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 9 December 1920, 8.

## Chapter 4

### The Face of Transitional Womanhood:

#### Alice Mary Robertson's Congressional Pursuit, 1920-23

Up to 1920, Alice Mary Robertson consistently embodied elements of New Womanhood primarily through careers and her lifestyle. By the time of her congressional campaign, she exhibited more feminist tendencies than many contemporary suffragists. She had received a higher education, as well as chartered a college, which she paid for young girls to attend. She kept her name, creating an identity for herself without male oversight. Also, she dominated and excelled in each profession she undertook, including business, education, and politics. After 1920, Robertson's forward-thinking persona quickly vanished, due to the media's characterization of her interaction with the self-proclaimed feminists. Currently, academics and writers continue to give her ill-famed legacy, created between 1920-23, precedence in the literature over other important aspects of her life. Furthermore, few authors have dared to unravel the complicated era in which she lived, better understanding her views towards New Womanhood.

Upon filing for congress, Robertson stated, "I want to go to Congress, first, because a lot of men moved that I go and then because a lot of women seconded them."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "A Congresswoman Elected with Want Ads," *Current Opinion* 70 (January 1921): 41.

Even at the age of sixty-six, her congressional run was a logical move, considering the astounding feats she continued to achieve throughout her life.<sup>2</sup> Her juvenile interaction with the self-proclaimed feminists, captured by the national media, defined how she is portrayed today, a puritanical old maid of Victorian stock, determined to preserve the values of the Cult of True Womanhood. Robertson's legacy is more complicated than the popular personification of a religious old maid, who was sexist against her own gender. Evaluating her pre-1920 endeavors within the broader context of women's movements during the Progressive Era, her existence reflects the complexities of women's changing roles outside of domesticity.<sup>3</sup> Her term as a representative reinforces this notion.

Two sides to every story exist. Such is the case with Robertson's avocation of gender-specific politics, intelligent or informed citizenship, Sheppard-Towner, and a woman serving on the Disarmament Commission. This chapter provides readers with her side of issues that arose during her congressional pursuit.

Robertson candidly opposed sex discrimination in politics, fearing hateful backlashes made by women against men, contesting it two different ways. During her campaign, she deliberately excluded gender from her platform, despising the term congresswoman; she refused to only represent women.<sup>4</sup> Robertson insisted that she embodied her constituency equally, shunning sex distinction.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps for Robertson, femaleness was simply a biological state of being, and she disliked people underscoring

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<sup>2</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 95.

<sup>3</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 3.

<sup>4</sup> "Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her," *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8.

<sup>5</sup> "Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her," *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8.

her femaleness. She incessantly asked citizens to call her representative or congressman; of course the word congressperson was not in use at this time.<sup>6</sup> Her ideas on leaving sex out of politics did not stop at suffix usage.

The Oklahoma representative began traveling the country, encouraging women to abandon gender-specific politics, pushing her peers to work within existing parties to enhance women's citizenry and freedom. Robertson argued that "women were given the right to vote...on the fifty-fifty basis...[and] were not entitled to any special political consideration just because they were women."<sup>7</sup> She thought club women attempted to forego their newly acquired rights, using force and prominence through the W.J.C.C. to enact legislation that favored women, largely overlooking the men. She continued, "The Party just wants its rights; the League wants its rights and special dispensations as well."<sup>8</sup> Robertson called this class selfishness, unfavorably declaring, "I therefore oppose all organizations of women as women voters, instead of American citizens —such organizations tending to the most dangerous class of legislation, that of sex."<sup>9</sup> One must note, even if Robertson maintained unjustifiably poor interaction with the self-proclaimed feminists, her concerns were not invalid. Other politically active women sympathized with the congressperson's views on class selfishness, disliking women's parties and their

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<sup>6</sup> Clayton Page, "A Person Representative of Oklahoma: Alice Mary Robertson," unpublished paper, submitted to the University of Central Oklahoma's History and Geography Department Women's Conference (Spring 2010): 2-3; Anne Curzan, *Gender Shifts in the History of English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 22.

<sup>7</sup> "Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her," *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Richardson, "The Ladies of the Lobby," 653.

<sup>9</sup> Robertson, "The Danger of Class Selfishness," 111-12; "Opposes Women Voters' League," *New York Times*, 25 February 1921, 20; "Miller Still Firm Against Sex Groups," *New York Times*, 9 February 1922, 15.

politics. Robertson, however, was simply in the spotlight, reflecting a hybridity of womanhood that existed within first-wave feminism.

Other female writers wrote of their discontent for mainstream feminists. Some argued that women continued to use “exasperatingly womanish” approaches to politics, clinging to gender and using pink tea campaigns, politics, and publicity as a means of climbing the social ladder.<sup>10</sup> One contemporary woman observed, “So pink tea politics is permitted to prevail. The average woman voter would rather be fashionable than right.”<sup>11</sup> A decade after the passage of the nineteenth amendment, a political writer claimed:

Ten years ago both groups were asking for the vote on the ground that a democracy should provide equality for all and special privilege for none. Now whenever the Woman’s Party is granted a legislative hearing, the League is arrayed against it, appealing to the men in the name of chivalry not to pass a blanket amendment or a blanket law that would deprive woman of the special privileges she enjoys.<sup>12</sup>

Robertson’s advocacy for equal representation was not the issue that ultimately enabled contemporaries to defame her legacy. With regard for the representative’s point-of-view, she was the sole female figure in the national spotlight, due to the congressional election of 1920. On the other hand, she apparently disregarded popular women’s issues. Her seemingly haughty digs and responses displaced her from any position of respect among the self-proclaimed feminists and ultimately the nation. Robertson launched a plan of attack, attempting to rationalize her position, but the women’s voting bloc found her concerns to be moot, since she was an anti-suffragist and now an apparent anti-feminist.

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<sup>10</sup> Eudora Ramsay Richardson, “The Ladies of the Lobby,” *The North American Review* 227 (June 1929): 651.

<sup>11</sup> Richardson, “The Ladies of the Lobby,” 651.

<sup>12</sup> Richardson, “The Ladies of the Lobby,” 654.

The representative instructed, “Don’t be beguiled away from your work or from you place in the party ranks because you think politics isn’t nice. Get out and work for your party, and, if conditions aren’t right, change them.”<sup>13</sup> Robertson acknowledged that women possessed the ability to change the game of government altogether through educated and informed citizenship, beginning at the bottom and working within the organization to transform it.<sup>14</sup> In fact, she insisted that a “woman is no more pacifist than man,” a trait she had always possessed and used to her advantage.<sup>15</sup> By this point, however, many mainstream feminists disliked the congressperson, though her recommendations seemed logical. Robertson continued to push for gender equality for women, as well as men, and began promoting informed voting as a means to effect change for women within the existing party ranks.

Robertson feared that women’s votes were uneducated, and that females cast their ballots for self-serving reasons. On the topic, she commented that she “dreaded [the] new and heavy responsibilities [of suffrage]. It matters not now whether we sought this duty or not. We cannot evade it and from cowardice or indolence we must not now fail our country.”<sup>16</sup> The representative prodded women to integrally take part in the political system, appealing for them to “arouse themselves from dangerous apathy...and to help win our present war...Women must have knowledge. As an education may not be

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<sup>13</sup> “Woman M.C. Fights ‘Bonus Patriotism,’” *New York Times*, 14 February 1922, 2.

<sup>14</sup> “Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8.

<sup>15</sup> “Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Schrems, *Across the Political Spectrum*, 93, 101.

acquired in a day, so intelligent citizenship was not conferred with the franchise.”<sup>17</sup> Even Booth Tarkington (1869-1946) in *The Magnificent Ambersons* identified that women were more concerned with looks instead of books, claiming, “In those days, all the women who wore silk or velvet knew all the other women who wore silk or velvet.”<sup>18</sup> Robertson viewed education to be U.S. women’s number one priority after the vote, instead of Sheppard-Towner.

Robertson urged women to acquire an in-depth awareness of governmental issues. Her advocacy for women’s education was not solely one-sided, however. In the spirit of New Womanhood, she stated, “Educate the women. I say educate both the men and women, and educate them together.”<sup>19</sup> As Ruggs pointed out, Robertson recognized women’s roles were changing by ambitiously pushing for civic awareness among women and men. While she justifiably advocated for the instruction of both genders, she was not a stand-alone proponent. Again, she emulated a hybrid of womanhood that existed within first-wave feminism.

Roughly a decade before the franchise, women’s clubs never mentioned the word politics unless they were giving warnings to steer clear from it.<sup>20</sup> During this time, Robertson was actively involved with governmental affairs. By 1930, author Clare Ogden Davis (1892-1970) asked, “After ten years of suffrage, have women learned the game of

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<sup>17</sup> Robertson, “The Danger of Class Selfishness,” 111-12.

<sup>18</sup> Booth Tarkington, *The Magnificent Ambersons* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1918), 3; Leavitt, *Women and Health in America*, 17.

<sup>19</sup> “Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8.

<sup>20</sup> “Miss Robertson Praised,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 24 December 1920, 6; “Clubs Go in for Politics,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 24 December 1920, 8; “Legislation That Women Are Seeking,” *Harlow’s Weekly*, 24 December 1920, 8.

politics?”<sup>21</sup> The issue of educating women did not crop up with the passage of the nineteenth amendment, but remained a typical post-Enlightenment attitude in the U.S.

During the nineteenth century, citizens remained concerned with the lack of a proper education, particularly among the electorate. Since immigration was at an all-time high, voters feared the collapse of the republic, unless the U.S. created a civic-minded citizenry.<sup>22</sup> In colleges and universities across the country, civic rhetoric began infiltrating curriculums.<sup>23</sup> Women’s institutions also began emerging, and females likewise learned the art of civic rhetoric.

While the federal government refused women the ballot, females exercised their newly acquired skill in the form of essays, since many thought themselves citizens even without the vote.<sup>24</sup> They honed in on specific issues like women’s education and appealed to the social conscience of what was acceptably right at that time, a method they utilized during the Progressive Era.<sup>25</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century, women in particular began absorbing civic rhetoric into traditionally acceptable female roles, raising their concerns for women’s education.<sup>26</sup> Many novels written before 1820 in the U.S. highlighted the need for improved instruction among females, and those mostly disturbed over the issue had learned civic rhetoric “as it was being taught in the elite northeastern colleges” like

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<sup>21</sup> Clare Ogden Davis, “Politicians, Female,” *The North American Review* 229 (June 1930): 749.

<sup>22</sup> Eldred and Mortensen, “Persuasion Dwelt on Her Tongue,” 180.

<sup>23</sup> Eldred and Mortensen, “Persuasion Dwelt on Her Tongue,” 176.

<sup>24</sup> Eldred and Mortensen, “Persuasion Dwelt on Her Tongue,” 176.

<sup>25</sup> Eldred and Mortensen, “Persuasion Dwelt on Her Tongue,” 174-75.

<sup>26</sup> Eldred and Mortensen, “Persuasion Dwelt on Her Tongue,” 178.



Elmira.<sup>27</sup> A young, educated Robertson implemented versions of these ideas like many females who helped cultivate first-wave feminism, employing a transitional approach to womanhood. In fact, Robertson had been funding girls' higher education before civic education became a topic for women. By 1920, Robertson was really one of many people who advocated for an in-depth civic awareness, again serving as a mirror of her era.

In the state of Oklahoma, women were eager to finally engage in politics.<sup>28</sup> Due to the seriousness of their newly acquired responsibilities, females precipitated civic education courses, because as a columnist in *Harlow's Weekly* noted, "Now that women are citizens, let them be good ones."<sup>29</sup> Attempting to make sense of the transition from True to New Womanhood, some women connected women's traditional occupations with their newly acquired right of suffrage, claiming, "Women, naturally teachers, are quickly educating themselves in the game of politics."<sup>30</sup> Other females continued to approach government by hosting teas, which Oklahoma women's clubs arranged one in every precinct at the end of October 1920.<sup>31</sup> Many females, however, finally began abandoning pink teas and organizing classes on intelligent citizenship, showing that Robertson was not completely wrong by hammering ladies' clubs to concern themselves with books instead of looks. On a side note, when reviewing Robertson's actual legislative-voting record, one finds that she did not cast a ballot on issues she was unfamiliar with. At the

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<sup>27</sup> Eldred and Mortensen, "'Persuasion Dwelt on Her Tongue,'" 174, 178.

<sup>28</sup> "Oklahoma Women in Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 11 June 1920, 4.

<sup>29</sup> "Oklahoma Women in Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 25 June 1920, 11.

<sup>30</sup> "May Have Woman Candidate," *Harlow's Weekly*, 23 July 1920, 5; "Oklahoma Women in Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 23 July 1920, 13.

<sup>31</sup> "Precinct Teas," *Harlow's Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 8; "Silence No Political Virtue," *Harlow's Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 8.

very least she practiced what she preached when it came to informed voting. At this point, women all over Oklahoma subscribed to courses on intelligent citizenship.

*Harlow's Weekly* reported, "With the granting of national suffrage, the all-absorbing topic for consideration at the early fall meetings is citizenship."<sup>32</sup> A lawyer from Washington, D.C., Miss Bessie Newsome,<sup>33</sup> spoke at the Pan-Hellenic organization in mid-November of 1920, talking on "The Value of Citizenship."<sup>34</sup> The Women's Christian Temperance Union, which Robertson had withdrawn her membership when the organization announced its endorsement of the Prohibition Party, revealed they would offer a program in citizenship before the November election.<sup>35</sup> The Garfield County Federation of Women's Clubs attended a program at the Y.W.C.A. in Enid, Oklahoma, at the end of October 1920 to study each candidate's platform.<sup>36</sup> The Women's Study Club of Hennessey had been implementing citizenship courses into their meetings since the fall of 1920.<sup>37</sup> Mrs. F. L. Fordice,<sup>38</sup> an instructor at the Muskogee night school, offered a course on citizenship to 200 students.<sup>39</sup> Women did not discontinue their courses on citizenship after the 1920 elections; they proved intelligent voting was a main priority.

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<sup>32</sup> "Assist Women's Club," *Harlow's Weekly*, 17 September 1920, 8.

<sup>33</sup> Birth and death dates unknown.

<sup>34</sup> "Oklahoma Women in Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 19 November 1920, 7.

<sup>35</sup> "W.C.T.U. to Study Civics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 1 October 1920, 8; "Muskogee's First W.C.T.U.," found in AMRVF/OHS.

<sup>36</sup> "Farm Women Study Platforms," *Harlow's Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 9.

<sup>37</sup> "Miss Robertson Praised," *Harlow's Weekly*, 24 December 1920, 6; "Clubs Go in for Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 24 December 1920, 8; "Legislation That Women Are Seeking," *Harlow's Weekly*, 24 December 1920, 8.

<sup>38</sup> Birth and death dates unknown.

<sup>39</sup> "Farm Women Study Platforms," *Harlow's Weekly*, 22 October 1920, 9.

The national vice president of the N.L.W.V., Edna Gellhorn (1878-1970), visited Oklahoma in January 1921 and proposed to establish summer courses on citizenship at the state university and normal schools.<sup>40</sup> In Enid on 13 November 1923, the state federation of women's clubs hosted a three-day convention that concentrated on ridding Oklahoma of illiteracy, which would save school children for "good citizenship."<sup>41</sup> More than 300 delegates attended the first session, which was a record for first-day registration.<sup>42</sup> From the mid-nineteenth century to after Robertson's term as representative, U.S. women remained concerned and engaged with women's education, an apprehension not exclusive to the congressperson. As women gained a better understanding of their newly acquired rights and governmental issues, they began organizing and participating more in the form of the W.J.C.C. who ultimately deposed Robertson, due to her vote against their champion legislation, the Sheppard-Towner Maternity and Infancy Protection Act of 1921.<sup>43</sup>

Robertson's stance against Sheppard-Towner continues to serve in the secondary literature as the primary example of the representative's seemingly incompetent term in office, as well as underscores the fact she acted as a True Woman proponent. Since the majority of her constituents favored the legislation, she appeared to unjustly represent her district. Two sides to every story exist, however.

Robertson partially opposed the maternity act, because the bill poorly specified a plan of implementation, as well as fiscal allocations. She considered the bill

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<sup>40</sup> "Summer Citizenship Courses," *Harlow's Weekly*, 10 December 1920, 8.

<sup>41</sup> "Club Women Open Session," *The Daily Oklahoman*, 14 November 1923, 1.

<sup>42</sup> "Club Women Open Session," *The Daily Oklahoman*, 14 November 1923, 1.

<sup>43</sup> "Oklahoma Women in Politics," *Harlow's Weekly*, 19 November 1920, 7.

bureaucratized childbirth and motherhood.<sup>44</sup> Since so many issues surrounded motherhood during the Progressive Era, i.e. creating an industrial being and carrying on the race, one can at least empathize with her rationale. The most logical stance against the bill in its presented form was the fact that, while Sheppard-Towner aimed to be pioneering, it was too small, remaining her biggest avocation against the act.<sup>45</sup> Robertson was not alone in her opposition.<sup>46</sup>

Members from both parties disliked the piece of legislation and some more bitterly than others. Robertson has been described as such a person; however, words like stringently, bitterly, strongly, or staunchly are generally an overstatement. Robertson called the act paternalistic, bureaucratic, and even socialist, though her argument centered around the bill not specifying “how appropriated money would be spent or outline how programs would be set up.”<sup>47</sup> Robertson went before congress six different times, offering explanations to her opposition against the maternity bill. Despite her efforts to explain her side, or perhaps play the game of politics, advocates of the legislation saw this as an act of betrayal, completely writing her off as a True Woman proponent.<sup>48</sup> While her understanding of the proposed bill may have very well been logical and reasonable, her unsympathetic and antagonistic interaction with the self-proclaimed feminists, in part, reflected her inability to fully embrace women’s activity in politics.

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<sup>44</sup> Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work*, 8.

<sup>45</sup> Lemons, “The Sheppard-Towner Act,” 781.

<sup>46</sup> “The House Discusses the ‘Maternity Bill,’” *Capital Eye* (October 1921): 5.

<sup>47</sup> Ruggs, “‘A Man’s Job,’” 70.

<sup>48</sup> Ruggs, “‘A Man’s Job,’” 71; “The House Discusses the ‘Maternity Bill,’” *Capital Eye* (October 1921): 5.

Robertson referred to the clubwomen as agitators, using the media's spotlight to take low-belted jabs at their politics. The congressperson, however, keenly understood that women in the U.S. were on the threshold of a new era.<sup>49</sup> In fact, she had assisted in the propelling of women's changing function in politics, society, and the workforce. As previously noted, she excelled in her endeavors by sheer ability. Because she had successfully participated in politics, society, and the workforce without the franchise, she may have resented other women who had not employed hard work to acquire equality, though they demanded recognition. Perhaps her embittered feelings impelled her to make low-belted jabs at the league women. Perchance, if Robertson sympathetically disagreed with the self-proclaimed feminists, a different history of her might exist altogether. Whether she was right or wrong, she passionately defended her outlook on Sheppard-Towner, enabling their hatred for her.

Robertson was not alone in her disregard for women's party's activity, however. Senator William S. Kenyon (1869-1933), a republican from Iowa who supported the bill, noted that "if the members could have voted on that measure secretly in their cloak rooms it would have been killed as emphatically as it was finally passed in the open under the pressure of the Joint Congressional Committee of Women."<sup>50</sup> Despite having no plan of implementation, little funding, and being based on a census from when influenza broke out in 1918, the bill passed. Ultimately, the W.J.C.C. played the game of politics well; they capitalized on the fears of politicians who remained uncertain of the numbers of the women's electorate, and these women pressured congress to pass Sheppard-Towner.

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<sup>49</sup> "Miss Alice Wants to Go Back to Show Up Women Who Want to Boss Her," *The Daily Oklahoman*, 6 August 1922, 8.

<sup>50</sup> Lemons, "The Sheppard-Towner Act," 779; "The Most Powerful Lobby in Washington," *Ladies' Home Journal* (April 1922): 95.

As previously discussed, the W.J.C.C. was apparently the largest lobby to invade Washington, D.C.<sup>51</sup> Not only did this organization have money, they also had the power of unknown numbers at the polls. For years, women activists promised that upon receiving the enfranchisement, they would clean house, voting according to issue, not party.<sup>52</sup> The self-proclaimed feminists warned congress to pass the bill, or every female constituent would vote against them in the upcoming election.<sup>53</sup> Unlike the majority of legislators who caved in, enacting Sheppard-Towner into legislation, Robertson asserted that she made no pledges or promises to win her election and refused her support.<sup>54</sup> As a result, her opposition to the maternity bill earned her a True Womanhood persona, leading to her demise for re-election, along with her vote against the Soldiers' Bonus Bill that same year.

Robertson considered soldiers' needs and rights a top priority during her term at Capitol Hill. She stated:

Above everything else, however, I will work for the soldiers. It makes my blood boil to think that there is not one bed for a sick or injured soldier in Oklahoma. The last Congress appropriated \$46,000,000 for hospital care. Thousands of soldiers in the State need attention and treatment. If they get so much as an examination they have to go clear to Houston, Texas. It's the rottenest thing I know of. It is a disgrace to the State of Oklahoma.<sup>55</sup>

She regarded their sacrifices and services to the U.S., and through her efforts, the Jack C. Montgomery V.A. Medical Center was built in Muskogee. Her respect for the veterans,

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<sup>51</sup> Lemons, "The Sheppard-Towner Act," 779. Lemons extracted this information from the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 77 (December 1921): 1913-14.

<sup>52</sup> Lemons, "The Sheppard-Towner Act," 778.

<sup>53</sup> Lemons, "The Sheppard-Towner Act," 777-78, 779.

<sup>54</sup> "More Election Costs," *New York Times*, 16 November 1920, 11.

<sup>55</sup> "A Congresswoman Elected with Want Ads," *Current Opinion* LXX (January 1921): 41.

however, seemed to possess limits. When the proposal to monetarily compensate war veterans emerged in congress in 1921, she positioned herself against it.<sup>56</sup> Many men viewed her actions as an act of betrayal and vowed to vote her out of office in 1923. By this point, Robertson seemed to be an incompetent politician, refusing to represent her constituents' agendas. By mid-1921, she carried herself defensively. In particular, she felt obligated to defend her reluctance to support a woman nominated by the W.J.C.C. as a member of the Disarmament Commission, appearing in the media as an anti-New Woman.

Members of the W.J.C.C. simply wanted any female to serve on the committee, as long as the person was a woman. Robertson, however, insisted on understanding the political philosophy of the candidate. She refused to make a commitment with the women's parties until she knew whom the ladies had in mind.<sup>57</sup> Importantly, while Robertson doubted league women, she did not necessarily distrust a female's ability altogether because of gender. In fact, she had sent a well-qualified woman's name to the president to serve on the Disarmament Commission, Mary Chandler Hale.<sup>58</sup> In the end, for unknown reasons, Hale declined the nomination, but wrote Robertson stating, "I am really overcome by your letter to the President. It is a wonderful tribute to any woman to receive such a summing up. I am very proud of it and of what the President says, but I honestly cannot imagine anyone less fitted for the place."<sup>59</sup> The case of Mary Chandler Hale serves two primary purposes.

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<sup>56</sup> "Woman M.C. Fights 'Bonus Patriotism,'" *New York Times*, 14 February 1922, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Schrems, *Across the Political Spectrum*, 104.

<sup>58</sup> Birth and death dates unknown.

<sup>59</sup> Letter from Mary Chandler Hale to Alice Mary Robertson, dated 22 August 1921, folder 14, box 3, series 2, PRW/UT.

Robertson was not an anti-lady because she did not agree with the league women. In fact, by nominating Hale, she proves her support of a woman's ability and intellect as a human being to partake in political and international affairs, dispelling the notion that she only served in congress to preserve the values of the Cult of True Womanhood. Furthermore, her endorsement of Hale shows how the national media and clubwomen used the papers to manipulate information that ultimately defamed her legacy and ended her career. Her support of other pieces of proposed bills also demonstrated that she emulated elements of New Womanhood, especially by providing pensions for women.

While at Capitol Hill, Robertson introduced sixteen bills and supported many more. She voted for the Classification Act, which required equal pay for equal work regardless of gender, banning sex discrimination in civil service pay and demanded that military nurses receive equal pay to that of men.<sup>60</sup> On 12 May 1922, the McKenzie Bill passed with 219 to twenty-six votes, which readjusted the pay and allowance for personnel in commissioned or enlisted in all branches of U.S. military. With the passage of the legislation, Robertson's proposed amendment also succeeded, increasing "subsistence from sixty cents a day to one dollar and twenty cents per day and room rent money from forty to sixty dollars per day for army and navy nurses."<sup>61</sup> The Oklahoma representative also urged the government to pass legislation that paid pensions to retired U.S. deputy marshals in Oklahoma or their widows.<sup>62</sup> By this point in her congressional

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<sup>60</sup> Janet V. Lewis, ed., *Women and Women's Issues in Congress: 1832-2000* (Huntington, New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2001), 29; Page, "A Person Representative of Oklahoma," 11; "Passes Army Pay Bill," *New York Times*, 13 May 1922, 15.

<sup>61</sup> "Passes Army Pay Bill," *New York Times*, 13 May 1922, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Irwin N. Gertzog, *Congressional Women: Their Recruitment, Integration, and Behavior*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1995), 147.



career, members of the W.J.C.C. characterized Robertson as an anti-New Woman, despite the other pro-woman endorsements she made on the floor of the legislature. Not everyone, however, disliked the representative's politics.

Based on her legislative voting record, some people wanted her to run and win a re-election campaign. One such supporter wrote:

[Robertson was a] fine woman who so ably represents our district in Congress...Ever since my recent visit to Washington, where I could at least catch a little glimpse of the magnitude of her tasks, the way she met and overcame obstacles, and the homage paid her, I have been more enthusiastic than ever about her and about what she is doing and has done...She has shown to the world—has prove it—that a woman can take a statesmanlike view of the big questions and handle them in such a way that the bigness of her manner in doing it refutes utterly the old idea that a woman can view large questions only in her own small way, reflecting only her own small sphere...And in doing it all she has torn down the old wall of doubt as to whether a woman could hold public office or take an active part in politics....<sup>63</sup>

Despite her hard-won, pro-women efforts, the ladies' lobby and veterans did not forget about Sheppard-Towner or the Soldiers' Bonus, voting her out of office in 1923.<sup>64</sup> While exiting Capitol Hill, Robertson stated, "I did my duty in congress, and I am glad for that."<sup>65</sup> She continued, "The Congressmen have been wonderful to me...Never once have I felt disturbed, embarrassed or neglected because I was a woman. They have shown me only the highest respect and courtesy."<sup>66</sup> John W. Davis (1873-1955), the former ambassador to the Court of St. James's, stated that Robertson had taught everyone one of

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<sup>63</sup> A letter written from Mary S. Allen to all women voters of the second district in Oklahoma, dated 22 July 1922, folder 4, box 1, AAMR/OHS.

<sup>64</sup> "Representative Robertson," *New York Times*, 8 December 1921, 17.

<sup>65</sup> "Miss Robertson's Future Plans," *The Daily Oklahoman*, 12 November 1922, 51.

<sup>66</sup> "Miss Robertson Hunts Job," *New York Times*, 16 November 1922, 16.

the greatest lessons of politics, that of courage.<sup>67</sup> Whether all of Robertson's decisions in congress are justifiable, her efforts as a sixty-six-year-old woman, serving in the U.S. House of Representatives the same year women gained suffrage through the passage of the nineteenth amendment, are laudable. At times, she represented values of New Womanhood; however, by selecting Benjamin Cook for a secretary and apathetically and incessantly opposing women's leagues, she exercised attributes of True Womanhood, acting as a transitional figure between both ideals of womanhood, incorporating elements of both.

Robertson maintained an inability to entirely embrace women's participation in the political and public spheres, as demonstrated with her poor interaction with the self-proclaimed feminists.<sup>68</sup> With that said, her adversaries captured this side of her, calling into question the accuracy of these claims. Robertson cannot be completely measured and judged according to newspaper articles from the 1920s. Authors, historians, and scholars can no longer ignore her pre-1920 life-long accomplishments, as well as her pro-woman endorsements as a legislator. The complexity of her activity on behalf of both sides of womanhood during the Progressive Era forces us to reexamine and re-characterize her attitude towards women's expanding function beyond domesticity. Too much evidence supports the idea that she acted as a transitional figure between Victorian and Progressive Era ideals of womanhood.

By looking closer at Robertson's congressional pursuits, she approached many issues from a forward-thinking perspective, especially by abandoning sex discrimination,

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<sup>67</sup> "Passes Army Pay Bill," *New York Times*, 13 May 1922, 11.

<sup>68</sup> Ruggs, "A Man's Job," 80.

educating women so they could challenge existing party structures, nominating Hale to serve on the Disarmament Commission, and voting for equal pay and pensions for women. One peer suggested that because of her “inherent natural honesty,” Robertson was an influential figure at Washington, instead of a joke.<sup>69</sup> The defamation of her legacy stemmed from her objection to Sheppard-Towner. Many women, therefore, refused to acknowledge her role in transforming womanhood as a part of first-wave feminism by breaching the boundaries that relegated women to domesticity. Unlike many of the self-proclaimed feminists, however, Robertson consistently emulated elements of New Womanhood; her term in congress was no exception.

As a legislator, the national spotlight forced Robertson to take publically decisive stands on issues, some of which she may have never previously considered. At times, she seemed to reflect True Womanhood, especially by choosing Benjamin Cook for a secretary and voting against Sheppard-Towner. Her vote for or against these complex issues enabled her contemporaries and many secondary sources to write her off as a Victorian idealist, rejecting New Womanhood altogether. The lessons we can draw from Robertson’s term in congress, include media sources cannot be wholly trusted as factual information. On the side of public opinion, their feelings are legitimate, though their complete defamation of Robertson’s intentions and outlook on women beyond domesticity is not. Her approach to and votes for or against women’s issues that arose between 1921-23 at the very least situate her as a transitional figure between True and New Womanhood.

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<sup>69</sup> “Her Place Empty Honor Compared with Mother’s Miss Robertson Thinks,” *The Daily Oklahoman*, 16 October 1921, 18.

## Conclusion

Despite Progressive Era disunities, women were changing and evolving, some more rapidly than others. Alice Mary Robertson, like many contemporary women, was confronted with the Victorian values of her childhood, while enticed by the ideals of the New Womanhood, ultimately participating in and seizing new opportunities for her gender.<sup>1</sup> While she lived the life of a New Woman, she seemed to draw regularly from her understanding of traditional, cultural, and national values. Her existence only highlights the fact that different manifestations of the New Woman existed simultaneously, underscoring the notion that she was a transitional figure.<sup>2</sup>

Ironically, Robertson's male secretary, Benjamin Cook,<sup>3</sup> captured a side of the representative that few persons can appreciate unless they worked through her collection at the University of Tulsa, of which she was the creator. Her collection aids in analysis from an insider's perspective. For example, the amanuensis wrote, "I presume you know her method of 'system' and just about how her desk looks. She guards it zealously and is

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<sup>1</sup> Ruggs, "A Mans Job," 9, 59.

<sup>2</sup> Beetham and Heilmann, *New Woman Hybridities*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Birth and death dates unknown.

always ‘going’ to clean it up.’<sup>4</sup> In some regard, her life resembled her desk, messy. Most of all, her story has remained a model of ambiguity. Some historians have highlighted her many lifelong accomplishments, regarding her as a woman worthy of remembrance and honor. In most instances, however, the media sources, especially during her lifetime, and secondary literature has described the congressperson as a puritanical old maid, determined to preserve the values of the Cult of True Womanhood, resulting in either a forgotten or defamed legacy. While digging through her papers, many archives have spotlighted that her staunch regard for domesticity, motherhood, and submissive wifedom have remained an overstated misrepresentation, and she consistently demonstrated elements of New Womanhood throughout her life, as well as openly embraced aspects of a woman’s ability and achievement beyond the traditional sphere. Because of these clearly opposite interpretations of her life, historians continue their struggle to provide a more accurate account of Robertson’s views towards women’s changing gender roles during first-wave feminism.

This thesis forgoes acceptance of older interpretations of the representative’s political career, calling attention to the fact that media representations are not wholly accurate, defining True and New Womanhood within the context of women’s movements during first-wave feminism, and focusing heavily on Robertson’s outlook on women’s activity beyond the domestic sphere before she became a press sensation in 1920. By placing Robertson’s view of her female counterparts’ pursuits in education, politics, and the workforce, as well as her chosen lifestyle, within the broader context of first-wave feminism, she no longer appeared as a devout True Woman. In fact, she emulated many elements of New Womanhood.

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<sup>4</sup> Letter from Benjamin Cook to Mrs. Merriman, 27 December 1921, folder 4, box 1, AAMR/OHS.

When analyzing Robertson and aiming to give her historical significance, we can really only speculate on her beliefs, even reported ones. She has served as a classic example of actions-speak-louder-than-words. On one hand, she may have strongly supported the idea of motherhood, though the self-proclaimed feminists did as well, highlighting that the avocation of motherhood was not exclusive to the values of the Cult of True Womanhood. On the other, her behavior, even as a young girl, and lifestyle do not parallel with her documented assertions in the press, causing her to resemble a New Woman. At this point, Robertson clearly embodied a transitional approach to womanhood during first-wave feminism.

One way to better understand the former representative's views of femininity and womanhood during the Progressive Era is to search out other women's outlooks of the values of True or New Womanhood and conduct a comparative study. This type of analysis would help academics to better understand Robertson. Ultimately, this would greatly contribute to the field of U.S. women's history, providing clearer explanations and identifications of the different hybridities of womanhood that has existed, evolved, and shaped the concept of femaleness in society and the workforce today. This kind of study does not just apply locally or nationally, but calls for interracial studies as well.

Robertson's legacy not only contributes to our understanding of U.S. women's history, but also lends itself to race studies during the Progressive Era. Perhaps the conundrum of Robertson's life can be explained by this simple doctrine of the day, a pro-natal policy for Anglo American women. All her political and professional acquaintances and references remained avid proponents of white motherhood, which prompted her to play the game of politics and advocate for a lifestyle she neither chose, nor experienced.

At times, she seemingly needed to call attention to and justify the fact she never married. For example, she stated, “I am not a mother as you know, but God has given me more or less of a mother’s heart.”<sup>5</sup> Deep down, Robertson may not have truly believed that all women should be mothers, since she did not choose that life path, despite love interests during her college years and marriage proposals throughout her life. In fact, until reporters turned Robertson’s life into a media circus, she had always lived the life of and optimized the very definition of New Womanhood; educated, independent, political, and unmarried. Her legacy is not only ironic because she was a known anti-suffragist elected to congress in 1920 when women won the right to vote; she was an ardent Republican in a fervently Democrat state that maintained a strong sense of paternalism and racism.

The self-appointed feminists during the early twentieth century generally associated themselves with the Democratic Party, excluding non-white women from their organizations. As one scholar noted, “Womanism arose out of the gaping fissures in revolutionary movements that stood for marginalized categories in terms of race and gender... ‘womanism’ as a concept developed into an encompassing version of feminism that crossed boundary lines of race and class.” It arose out of the deprivation of class and race that Progressive Era feminism placed on non-white groups of women.<sup>6</sup> Essentially, womanists and feminists are the same, but show the deep rift that existed between Caucasian and non-white women during the first-wave feminism.

Schrems observed that after Robertson exited congress, “In 1923, many civic-minded women took a decisive turn to the right on the political spectrum when they

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<sup>5</sup> *Congressional Record*, 67<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 1921, 61, pt. 3: 7981.

<sup>6</sup> Sujarani Mathew, *Womanism: Off the Feminist Track*, (Dharmaram College, India: Dharmaram Publications, 2007), 23.

found the Women of the Ku Klux Klan to be the organization that best represented their political ideals.”<sup>7</sup> Throughout the Worcester-Robertson papers at the University of Tulsa, archives show that Robertson blamed the Klan for her defeat. Whether this is true, the division of race among Americans was prevalent, similar to today. This may or may not have contributed to Robertson’s disdain for the self-proclaimed feminists, but one must note that this was a central issue during first-wave feminism that few historians have researched and written about, allowing for more literature. Robertson’s story also lends itself to ongoing women’s movements in developing nations.

Scholars must continue researching, analyzing, understanding, and writing about the former-congressperson and like females. The idea of feminism allows academics, readers, and future generations to understand the importance of women’s movements. This type of information can internationally contribute to women’s basic human rights, especially that of individuality apart from male oversight. Worldwide, the lesson females can perhaps draw from Robertson’s legacy was her accomplishments outside of any male attachment, even before the nation recognized women as citizens or individuals.

Since world history has become a desired and prevalent genre of research, conducting analyses of similar movements among women around the world today is a necessity, especially in developing nations. At this point, how can women utilize existing models of feminism and implement them into women’s movements worldwide in order to gain their male counterpart’s acknowledgement of their contributions in politics, society, and the workforce? Like Robertson, though they may not know who she was, the Sisters of Islam in Malaysia promote education among Muslim women as a means of independence, choosing a similar path to the former-congressperson, advocating for

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<sup>7</sup> Schrems, *Across the Political Spectrum*, 106.



increased women's participation outside of domesticity. In sum, Robertson's life offers many lessons on the human experience across centuries, genders, races, and religions.

Another factor future researchers might consider is the role Presbyterianism played in her advocacy of education among all groups of people, which may have been greatly influenced by the idea of Christian Imperialism and the creation of missions; a vocation her family conquered. With that said, so many layers envelope Robertson. To really understand her, one must be an expert in the historiography of Christian Imperialism, gender studies, the Progressive Era, and U.S. women's history. This thesis has attempted to bridge major gaps in former analyses and research on the former congressperson's attitude towards women by combining previous research with new historiographies of U.S. women's history and manuscript collections. Ultimately, more analyses and research is needed to understand Robertson and the era in which she lived.

Many variables influence and shape a person's existence over space and time. At what point, however, do variables halt, causing the human experience to also cease? Does it happen during a person's lifetime, or does death bring about the stop? In the case of former Representative Robertson, authors and sources have considered her personal growth and views on womanhood to be wholly determined during her childhood, never evolving throughout her lifetime. Stories from her youth and archival materials dated during her congressional tenure indicate she engaged in New Womanhood activities. Her failure to wholly accept women's increased participation in politics perhaps signifies that she still valued aspects of True Womanhood. The evidence mostly indicates that she viewed marriage and motherhood as the ultimate fulfillment for a woman, as did women's parties. Because she clearly and intentionally acknowledged and embraced

newfound roles for women outside of domesticity, Robertson served as a transitional figure between True and New Womanhood during the Progressive Era, offering another facet to U.S. women's history.

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