

# From Socialite to Public Servant

## Luella Johnston and the Evolution of “True Womanhood” in Sacramento

**ABSTRACT** In 1912, one year after women won the right to vote in California, Luella Johnston became the first woman elected to Sacramento’s city council, and to any city council in the state. She played an integral role linking the local clubwomen, progressive, and suffrage movements in California’s capital city. Her remarkable life provides a case study of how women in the early 1900s acquired and used political power, and in doing so changed their own and public perceptions of a woman’s role in the public sphere. **KEYWORDS:** Luella Johnston, political candidates, women candidates, first female councilmember, first councilwoman, women’s history, suffrage, suffragists, feminism, women’s clubs, clubwomen, Tuesday Club, Woman’s Council, moral reform, temperance, Lilleon Hough, political parties, political reform, progressive, Progressive Era, Municipal Voters’ League, political corruption, political machine, Edward Carraghar, Marshall Beard, Southern Pacific Railroad, Pacific Gas & Electric, urban politics, city politics, municipal politics, municipal government, commission form of government, California, Sacramento, 1900s, 1910s

**T**HE 1910S WERE a time of immense political and cultural transformation in the United States. The nation’s women drove the conversation, challenging centuries-old gender roles by demanding inclusion in the nation’s democracy. At the same time, an ascendant political reform movement was winning battles to clean up and professionalize government. The progressives, as they came to be known, ultimately joined the fight for woman suffrage, seeing women as natural allies in their campaigns against government corruption and social vice. In the western states, California became the epicenter for these twin political efforts. In the capital city of Sacramento, a local clubwoman suffragist, Luella Johnston, would carry the flag for both women and progressives into City Hall as the city’s first elected councilwoman.<sup>1</sup>

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**FIGURE 1.** Luella Johnston, c. 1912.  
*Courtesy of Library of Congress*

Luella Buckminster Johnston was an early-twentieth-century society grande dame who metamorphosed from socialite to clubwoman to suffragist to elected official (Figure 1). She discovered her political voice in the clubwoman movement in Sacramento through two of the city's most influential cultural and political organizations, the Tuesday Literary Club and the Woman's Council. Her 1912 election to Sacramento's city council came in the first year that California women could vote, making Johnston the first woman elected to municipal office in that city, the first elected councilwoman in all of California, and the first elected councilwoman in any of the one hundred largest American cities of that era.

Despite her exceptional achievements, Johnston shared many of the characteristics that scholars identify as common to the white, middle-class women who gained and used political power in the early twentieth century. Karen J. Blair, for example, shows how club work gradually moved even politically conservative women into the pro-suffrage fold. Gayle Gullett identifies the mutually beneficial links that emerged between California's suffragist clubwomen and other progressive reformers. Linda Van Ingen explores the gendered challenges that California women faced, post-suffrage, as political candidates and officeholders.<sup>2</sup> This essay builds upon their scholarship by detailing the political maturation of one such California candidate and officeholder as she moved from clubwoman to politician in the city at the center of governmental and political power in California. By focusing on a single person and the politics of a single city, this essay paints in the details of the transformative "process by which [activist women] constructed their political beliefs," as one scholar puts it, that has been missing from suffrage histories, and explores "the ideological conflicts among them and with their male counterparts."<sup>3</sup> Johnston's personal and political journey illustrates the challenges, successes, and limitations that shaped women leaders' efforts to enter and reshape the public sphere in the early twentieth century.

## THE INTERSECTION OF THREE MOVEMENTS: A BRIEF HISTORY

Johnston was at the center of the inextricably linked clubwoman, suffrage, and progressive causes in Sacramento. However, as Johnston herself grasped, she was also swept up in the larger statewide and national currents that surrounded these movements. "It is interesting in reading of other Clubs," Johnston noted as president of the Tuesday Literary Club in 1901, "to find that our growth has run parallel to that of the general Club movement throughout the United States." "Club Spirit," Johnston mused, had infused women with "a desire to do something of worth."<sup>4</sup>

A rich body of scholarship documents how the clubwoman movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries became a powerful entry point for white, middle-class women into what had been the exclusively "male sphere" of politics.<sup>5</sup> Social and literary clubs were far more popular with women at that time than suffrage organizations, whose demands for political equality were controversial and stridently condemned by many political and religious leaders.<sup>6</sup> Clubs tended to hold more traditionally conservative views on gender, including that women should claim responsibility for the home and children but leave to men the marketplace and political arena.<sup>7</sup> Nonetheless, clubs cultivated a subtle form of "domestic feminism," argues Blair, which embraced "the domestic and moral traits attributed to the ideal lady to increase autonomy, assert sorority, win education, and seize influence beyond the home in the forbidden public sphere."<sup>8</sup>

Many elite white women's clubs ventured beyond their origins as social or reading circles to lobby on issues particularly affecting the home, such as early childhood education and pure food and drugs.<sup>9</sup> The Friday Morning Club in Los Angeles, San Francisco's California Club, and the Twentieth Century Club of Berkeley pressed for reforms as varied as health regulation, nature conservation, and city governance reform.<sup>10</sup> Ironically, these activities thrust women into the political sphere, although many clubwomen believed or claimed otherwise, since few clubs directly campaigned for candidates and most claimed nonpartisanship.<sup>11</sup> As clubwomen grew more comfortable with political engagement, and as their successes provoked pride in club achievements, many formerly agnostic clubs joined the suffrage movement.<sup>12</sup> For California clubwomen, the tipping point came in 1911 when, with a woman suffrage measure on the ballot, members pushed the California affiliate of the General Federation of Women's Clubs to finally endorse votes for women.<sup>13</sup>

California women's clubs' advocacy of moral reform and civic improvements frequently aligned them with male-led "good government" groups, and this alliance became the foundation of a statewide progressive movement.<sup>14</sup> Although initially ignored or overlooked in earlier histories, recent scholars have demonstrated the importance of clubwomen in advancing the causes of California progressives.<sup>15</sup> In many cities, women's clubs lent crucial support to reform agendas, from prosecuting San Francisco's corrupt political boss Abe Ruef to regulating housing, billboards, and dance halls in Los Angeles.<sup>16</sup> Demographic and ideological overlaps between suffragist clubwomen and male reformers further united them, as both groups were predominantly white, Protestant, and middle-class. Both groups framed their campaigns, whether for woman suffrage or political reform, in moral and nonpartisan terms. Moreover, as Gullett explains, both camps saw

themselves “as holding down the middle,” operating “somewhere between the corruption of great wealth and the ‘barbarism’ of the laboring class.”<sup>17</sup>

Many clubwomen saw these two movements as intertwined: progressivism was key to winning suffrage, and women’s political participation was key to advancing progressive goals.<sup>18</sup> Katherine Philips Edson, who came to prominence leading the Friday Morning Club’s pure milk campaign, argued that women’s concerns for family and community health meant they would be reliable voters for progressive causes. With such arguments, Edson convinced many progressives to endorse female suffrage.<sup>19</sup> Though they often sought support from women’s clubs, many male progressives were initially ambivalent about woman suffrage.<sup>20</sup> Progressive Governor Hiram Johnson, for instance, privately worried that giving women the vote might “destroy” progressivism. Other reformers strongly supported the movement because it buttressed their efforts, arguing that women had proven themselves pro-reform and anti-machine.<sup>21</sup> It was the combined advocacy of progressives and suffragists that convinced the state legislature to place the equal suffrage constitutional amendment on the 1911 ballot and finally tipped the scales in favor of the female franchise.<sup>22</sup>

Winning the vote in 1911 prompted many California women to run for office in 1912. But the arguments that had helped women win suffrage—that women were moral, selfless, and nonpartisan—were difficult to reconcile with women running as candidates.<sup>23</sup> Van Ingen contends that early female candidates faced a daunting challenge: they had to compete against men as equals “while also tending to social constructs of their womanhood that marked them as politically different than men.”<sup>24</sup> On the campaign trail, this could mean displaying their mastery of topics typically coded as male, such as finance, while simultaneously projecting themselves as demure and ladylike, which precluded such common campaign practices as, for example, interrupting others or even raising one’s voice to talk over a male opponent.<sup>25</sup>

Not many female candidates succeeded in 1912. Through the decade, of the sixty-five California women who ran for state or federal office, only four were elected to the state assembly, all in 1918 (see Linda Van Ingen’s article in this issue).<sup>26</sup> As the *Sacramento Union* remarked, Californians were “willing that [their] daughters vote but dubious about putting them in office.”<sup>27</sup> This was an observation with which Johnston, one of those rare chosen daughters, would probably have agreed.

## EARLY LIFE: THE SPHERE OF THE SOCIALITE AND “TRUE WOMANHOOD”

Luella Buckminster was born in New Hampshire in 1861, the daughter of a Union soldier who perished in the Civil War.<sup>28</sup> She came to California in 1869, settling first in San Francisco. At age fifteen, she became a public schoolteacher.<sup>29</sup> In 1884, she wed businessman Alfred John Johnston, who ran Sacramento’s largest printing business.<sup>30</sup> Alfred was active in Republican politics; in the early 1890s, he was chairman of Sacramento’s Republican political committee.<sup>31</sup> In 1891, Republican governor Henry Markham appointed him as superintendent of state printing. Shortly thereafter, this became a statewide elective office, which Alfred won in 1894 and 1898.<sup>32</sup>



**FIGURE 2.** Painting of the Tuesday Club's clubhouse, c. 1912.  
*Courtesy of Special Collections of the Sacramento Public Library*

By the close of the nineteenth century, the Johnstons could be fairly described as wealthy, well-traveled in political circles, and, owing in no small part to Luella, leaders of elite Sacramento society. Luella's greatest talent was as an organizer. In 1899, she founded the Club of '99 to entertain the wives and daughters of state elected officials.<sup>33</sup> The club's lavish soirées included distinguished guests, catered suppers, and orchestral accompaniment. Newspaper accounts portrayed these events—attended by many of California's most powerful politicians—as light, fun, nonpolitical affairs.<sup>34</sup> Yet society hostesses such as Luella understood that the networking and social bonds fostered through club affairs helped advance their husbands' careers. What “would arise in the political relations,” asked one woman at the club's final banquet, if local women did not oil “the social relations of the Capitol?”<sup>35</sup>

Luella's social engagements appeared frequently in local papers in the 1880s and '90s, but there was never a word about her political beliefs (by contrast, her husband Alfred's views and activities were frequently reported). Women of Luella's race, class, and era, as one historian puts it, met society's expectation that “women be demure and confine their interests to the private sphere.” The “cult of true womanhood” held that women's intrusion into the masculine sphere, “especially voting and engaging in civic affairs,” would cost “women irreparable damage to their reputations.”<sup>36</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century, however, such views faced powerful challenges.

## THE TUESDAY LITERARY CLUB AND THE EMERGENCE OF WOMEN AS A POLITICAL FORCE

At first, the Tuesday Literary Club was just another entry in Luella Johnston's busy social calendar (Figure 2). Established in 1895, the club was originally a weekly reading group of seventeen Sacramento housewives.<sup>37</sup> Charter members included women from Sacramento's most well-heeled families, including the wife of then mayor-elect C. H. Hubbard and Helen Hopkins, great-niece of Mark Hopkins Jr., descendant of the famed Central Pacific

Railroad founder.<sup>38</sup> The Tuesday Literary Club proved immensely popular. In fewer than ten years, membership exploded to almost four hundred women, making it one of California's largest women's clubs.<sup>39</sup>

Most members were white, middle-class, and married.<sup>40</sup> In 1900, the *Sacramento Bee* approvingly described the club as "composed of conservative women, representing many Nationalities, creeds and beliefs." Members, the article assured readers, were "not bent on any sweeping or radical methods of reform," a probable allusion to woman suffrage; instead, they were "animated by a desire to study that which shall be helpful to the individual, and through the individual, the home."<sup>41</sup> It is unlikely that the club began with any black or Asian members; however, the club was more progressive on issues of race than many of its contemporaries. In 1902, for example, members instructed their delegates to the General Federation of Women's Clubs to vote to admit black clubs to that body; instead the federation voted to remain racially segregated.<sup>42</sup>

Within a few years, like Los Angeles's Friday Morning Club, the reading group boasted specific departments, such as "Current Topics" and "Home Economic[s] and Education."<sup>43</sup> Members gave talks on such topics as "Our Duties to the Poor" and the "Educated Woman's Value to Society," and staged debates on social and political themes.<sup>44</sup> The club hosted an impressive and diverse roster of guest speakers, including poets Joaquin Miller and William Butler Yeats; civil rights leader Booker T. Washington; reformer Jacob Riis; and San Francisco Congregation Emanu-El's Rev. Dr. Jacob Voorsanger, who spoke on the evils of anti-Semitism.<sup>45</sup> As the club broadened its social and political scope to include matters of local, national, and even international significance, Johnston's intellectual horizons expanded accordingly.<sup>46</sup> In 1904, Johnston said she had learned "things to make me wish I could go back 20 years and begin all over again. It seems to me that, having eyes, I have not seen, and having ears, I have not heard."<sup>47</sup>

If the Tuesday Literary Club changed Johnston, she, in turn, changed the club. Johnston's presidency (1899–1901), reports the Center for Sacramento History, "changed the mission and direction of the organization."<sup>48</sup> Under her leadership, it moved from studying social issues to acting on them. A literary group no more, the club shortened its name to the "Tuesday Club" and announced that its mission was "to further the education of women for the responsibilities of life; to encourage all movements for the betterment of society; and to foster a generous public spirit in the community."<sup>49</sup>

Eliminating city vice became the Tuesday Club's primary target. Members lamented that early twentieth-century Sacramento had not quite shed its Wild West past. Prostitution was rampant, writes one Sacramento historian. "Saloons, gambling, illegal lotteries, opium dens, and bars that stayed open all night were as hard to erase as original sin."<sup>50</sup>

In 1900, the club penned its first petition to Sacramento's board of trustees, calling on leaders to deny licenses to new saloons in residential areas.<sup>51</sup> Johnston and five other clubwomen appeared before city leaders to plead their case, delivering a petition with hundreds of signatures.<sup>52</sup> As women concerned with "the protection of our homes and the moral development of our youth," clubwomen explained, they opposed the "multiplication of saloons in the residence portion" of Sacramento, calling saloons "extremely pernicious to the morals and destructive to the beauty" of their neighborhoods.<sup>53</sup>





**FIGURE 3.** Sacramento annexed unincorporated Oak Park in 1911, bringing its saloons under the Tuesday Club Ordinance. In this cartoon, Oak Park saloonkeepers cower before a female figure labeled “Sacramento” who aims a shotgun marked “Tuesday Club Ordinance.” A notice on one saloon’s “Ladies Entrance” reads “County License Expires October 1, 1911.” Arthur Buel, “Armed for Defense; No Surrender,” *Sacramento Bee*, September 15, 1911.

The *Sacramento Bee* endorsed the women’s petition and published a series of articles explaining and promoting the club’s campaign. (It did not hurt that Johnston was close friends with Ella McClatchy, wife of *Bee* publisher Charles.)<sup>54</sup> Editors simultaneously argued for and against local women’s intrusion into the matter, claiming first that the “*Bee* is not as a general rule in favor of women taking the initiative in such matters, for they too frequently ruin a good cause by becoming so fanatic as to be impracticable,” then concluding that, in the case of saloons in residential districts, the proposal was so reasonable that “no one having the best interests of the city at heart could object.” Even saloonkeepers, wrote the *Bee*, “should approve for selfish reasons” of preventing future competition.<sup>55</sup> Remarkably, the board of trustees agreed to the ban, which came to be

known as the “Tuesday Club Ordinance,” giving the club a significant win and its first political victory (Figure 3).<sup>56</sup> The ordinance lasted until 1919, when the Eighteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution rendered it obsolete.<sup>57</sup>

Energized by their victory, new campaigns quickly followed. Over the next few years, the club petitioned Sacramento to employ a matron at the city jail, started a cooking school for young girls, and convinced city leaders to dedicate land toward a grand park in eastern Sacramento.<sup>58</sup> These civic successes attracted the attention of local businessmen, reformers, and city officials who sought the club’s help on various political initiatives, from passing infrastructure bonds to new anti-vice measures.<sup>59</sup> In short order, the Tuesday Club became what Johnston’s Club of ’99 was not: a political player.

In her final report as club president in 1901, Johnston wrote that “we slipped out of our swaddling clothes by dropping the word ‘Literary’ from our name.”<sup>60</sup> She urged club women to not let up on their civic activism, evoking military imagery. “It was Napoleon who said ‘the tools to him who can use them,’ ” she explained, and now they finally had those “tools ready and waiting for our use.”<sup>61</sup>

## AN ORGANIC UNION: THE WOMAN’S COUNCIL

The Tuesday Club’s accomplishments demonstrated the power organized women could have to effectuate change in Sacramento. In 1904, under the auspices of the Tuesday Club, Johnston brought together a coalition of thirty women’s organizations—mostly church, social, art, or charitable clubs—to form the “Woman’s Council.”<sup>62</sup> Consolidation amplified the political might of local women’s clubs in their ongoing campaigns for various causes. Each club would send a voting delegate to the council, although it and its constituent clubs remained independent. The council’s mission, adopted in its constitution, was to “bring the various associations of women of the City and County of Sacramento into closer relations through an organic union.”<sup>63</sup>

The Woman’s Council soon became the primary organ for women’s political and civic advocacy.<sup>64</sup> Its log of early activities includes numerous early wins, such as a 1904 effort that placed a successful \$100,000 bond on the ballot to build a new high school. In 1905, the council convinced the city hospital to hire a matron for its receiving department, someone with whom women would be comfortable in discussing their ailments. In 1906, at the council’s request, city leaders agreed to add name plates to every street. The council also joined coalitions for good government reform, including campaigns to add initiative and referendum to the city charter.<sup>65</sup>

In these early years, Johnston served the Woman’s Council as a Tuesday Club delegate, rather than as council leader.<sup>66</sup> Husband Alfred had fallen sick; he battled his illness for two years before his death in 1906.<sup>67</sup> The governor, secretary of state, and state printer’s offices closed for the day in his honor.<sup>68</sup> Alfred’s death left the forty-five-year-old Luella a single mother of five, three of them still minors. In addition to single parenthood, Luella took over the management of the A.J. Johnston Printing Company, described in contemporary accounts as Sacramento’s “largest stationery and printing house.”<sup>69</sup> (She ran the business until 1910, when she brought in new investors and management, before selling her interest in 1911).<sup>70</sup>



After Alfred's death, Johnston plunged again into club work. She was elected president of the Woman's Council from 1907 through 1909.<sup>71</sup> Council minutes report that, "again and again" local elected officials, business associations, and neighborhood organizations asked the women to "plan and promote campaigns for City improvements," including a public swimming pool, electric power transmission lines along city streets, public drinking fountains, and river levee upgrades to protect local homes and businesses.<sup>72</sup> Johnston used her presidency to push for professional city government, which further cemented the council's association with city business and reform leaders. Like women's clubs around the state, including San Francisco's California Club, the Woman's Council pressed Sacramento to adopt the then new science of "city planning." Johnston brought University of Chicago professor Charles Zueblin to Sacramento to deliver lectures on the "City Beautiful" approach to planning used in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, and other state capitals.<sup>73</sup> Business and city leaders' embrace of Zueblin's ideas launched what one contemporary source called Sacramento's "modern period of city planning."<sup>74</sup>

However, Johnston's proudest accomplishment as president was convincing administrators to add courses in manual training (e.g., woodworking) and domestic science (e.g., cooking, sewing) to city school curricula.<sup>75</sup> This had been a personal campaign for the former schoolteacher since at least 1901, when she launched a free cooking class for girls at the Tuesday Club.<sup>76</sup>

## THE FIGHT OF A NEW GENERATION: WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

Johnston's decade of club activism reached an inflection point in 1911 when, for the second time, the men of California would vote on a constitutional amendment enfranchising the state's women. California's male voters had decisively defeated the 1896 amendment campaign—especially those in the northern half of the state, including Sacramento, where 60 percent voted against the measure.<sup>77</sup> "Political life is cut out for men," argued the *Sacramento Record-Union* at the time, and "the less women have to do with it the better for women."<sup>78</sup> Local men generally agreed.

Support for suffrage began to shift early in the twentieth century. In 1911, the College Equal Suffrage League sent Dr. Mary Roberts Coolidge, a former Stanford sociology professor, to Sacramento to organize local campaign leaders.<sup>79</sup> Coolidge approached the Woman's Council first, which she described as "the most influential body of women in the city."<sup>80</sup> The council agreed to co-lead the local suffrage effort, joining forces with the College League and the Sacramento chapter of the State Equal Suffrage League (Figure 4). The latter was led by Lilleon Hough, a nurse and clubwoman, whose energy and quotability earned her substantial press coverage.<sup>81</sup>

The campaign kicked off in dramatic fashion on August 24, 1911, when five hundred women suffragists took the train from San Francisco to Sacramento, joined an automobile parade through Sacramento, then held a rally the next day.<sup>82</sup> In the months leading up to the election, Sacramento suffragists conducted a spirited, well-organized campaign that included public speaking on street corners and before church groups, civic clubs, and labor unions; distributing handbills to homeward-bound schoolchildren; convincing



**FIGURE 4.** Luella Johnston (far right) and Lilleon Hough (second from right) with suffragists at Hotel California suffrage headquarters, *Sacramento Union*, "Suffragists Fight Bravely," October 11, 1911.



**FIGURE 5.** Lilleon Hough, Sacramento chapter president of the State Equal Suffrage League, passing out pro-suffrage handbills, *Sacramento Union*, "Suffragists Fight Valiantly," October 11, 1911.

store and business owners to display campaign materials; and canvassing house-to-house (Figure 5).<sup>83</sup> Johnston prominently campaigned for the vote and served as precinct captain on election day.<sup>84</sup>

The most potent argument in favor of woman suffrage was local women's track record following a decade of activism. Their successes spoke eloquently against Senator John B. Sanford's ballot argument opposing woman suffrage, in which he repeated the old attack that politics was "no place for a woman," because it would "unsex" her and "change her sphere."<sup>85</sup> The problem with Sanford's position was that Sacramento women were already practicing politics. Johnston, still a mother and homemaker, and others routinely lobbied business and political leaders and campaigned for various ballot measures to benefit the city. Only the year before, the Woman's Council had played a leading role in passing a 1910 river dredging bond. The *Sacramento Bee*, which had previously been wary of women's political engagement, now pointed to this bond campaign as an argument in favor of suffrage, writing that "when women show themselves better citizens than men—more public spirited, energetic and progressive—it is not becoming in mere males to insist on a monopoly on the right to vote."<sup>86</sup> Suffragists leaned into this argument, with one speaker beseeching Sacramento men to enfranchise women so "that they may stand side by side with you for a better government."<sup>87</sup>

Early on election day, October 10, 1911, all seemed lost. With early returns showing the amendment failing statewide, State Suffrage League local chapter leader Lilleon Hough waxed philosophical. "We have been through about six million years" without the vote, she said, but "we will not give up."<sup>88</sup> As reports from rural counties trickled in, though, it soon became clear that the women had succeeded after all. Even Sacramento County narrowly approved, this time with 52 percent voting in favor.<sup>89</sup>

On January 18, 1912, Johnston became one of the county's first women to register to vote. She listed herself as head of household, five foot four, and a Republican.<sup>90</sup>

## OF RAILROADS AND REFORMERS

Johnston's affiliation with the Republican Party is not surprising. Her husband was a former party leader who had won statewide elected office as a Republican. Republicans presented themselves as pro-business, a meaningful stance for the woman who ran the A.J. Johnston Printing Company from her husband's death in 1906 to 1910.<sup>91</sup> More significantly, however, by 1910, progressives had captured California's Republican Party. After her years of collaborating with Sacramento reformers on various civic improvements, Johnston's politics fit well with those of the new GOP.<sup>92</sup>

California progressives were especially concerned with defeating what one historian calls the Southern Pacific Railroad's "vise-like transportation monopoly on a major part of the state," along with those corrupt party and elected officials who safeguarded the railroad from competition, taxation, and regulation.<sup>93</sup> In 1910, voters had swept the progressives into power on the force of Republican gubernatorial candidate Hiram Johnson's promise to "kick the Southern Pacific out of politics."<sup>94</sup> In his inaugural address, Governor Johnson pledged to clean up California's politics "calmly, coolly, pertinaciously, unswervingly and with absolute determination, until the public service reflects only the public good and represents alone the people."<sup>95</sup> With a legislature controlled by other progressive Republicans, state leaders promised a sweeping set of electoral reforms to empower citizens and weaken parties, including nonpartisan local



**FIGURE 6.** Edward Carraghar, the saloonkeeper and Southern Pacific Railroad–aligned Sacramento trustee who frequently clashed with progressives and pro-temperance women’s clubs. *Sacramento Union*, “E. J. Carraghar,” March 14, 1913.

elections; the initiative, referendum, and recall; and (despite Johnson’s private opposition) woman suffrage, which they hoped would create a reliable bloc of women voters who would support progressive aims.<sup>96</sup>

While state progressives worked zealously to dismantle the Southern Pacific’s (SP’s) influence in government, Sacramento’s city leadership was another matter (Figure 6). SP’s economic and political dominance was probably stronger in Sacramento than in any other major city in California. It was the dominant railroad serving Sacramento, and its railyard shops employed thousands of residents.<sup>97</sup> It was “the city’s largest employer,” explains historian William E. Mahan, its freight “rate structure fixed the transportation costs that determined whether the year would end with a profit or a loss” for local businesses.<sup>98</sup>

With so much at stake, SP kept a close eye on Sacramento politics. For most of the 1900s, city government was controlled by a Democratic political patronage “machine” led by county Democratic Party chairman Thomas Fox, mayor Marshall Beard, and city trustee Edward Carraghar.<sup>99</sup> The machine was routinely (and credibly) accused of being in the pocket of SP and other public-service corporations such as Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E).<sup>100</sup> In 1907, for instance, Carraghar and his fellow trustees blocked the Western Pacific from building a new rail line into the city, which would have threatened SP’s monopoly.<sup>101</sup> In return, SP strongly supported Democratic machine candidates at election time and pressured SP employees to vote for Democrats.<sup>102</sup>

Of the three machine leaders, progressives viewed Carraghar as the real power broker at city hall, and thus he was often the focus of their ire.<sup>103</sup> Carraghar was the “champion,” editorialized the progressive *Bee*, “of the Machine, the public-service corporations, and the reactionary elements generally.”<sup>104</sup> Reformers believed that Carraghar was corrupt and that he had awarded unduly favorable franchise contracts to the city’s rail, gas, and power

companies.<sup>105</sup> They accused him of abusing his office shortly before one election by participating in or condoning a jobs-for-votes scheme in which dozens of unemployed men were hired as city cemetery groundskeepers.<sup>106</sup>

Carraghar's blue-collar background and political base surely rankled well-educated, middle-class reformers. He was a working man with no college education who had lost two fingers in a milling accident.<sup>107</sup> He built a career for himself in the saloon industry, working his way up from short-order cook to owner of the Saddle Rock Saloon in the heart of Sacramento's working-class and immigrant "West End" ward, which elected him to office in 1901.<sup>108</sup> His saloon interests placed him at loggerheads with Johnston and the Woman's Council, which fought bitterly against his efforts to weaken the Tuesday Club Ordinance, passed just before he joined the board of trustees.<sup>109</sup>

Unable to rid city government of machine or corporate control, progressives turned to structural reform.<sup>110</sup> In early 1911, the city called an open election to pick a body of men to research and draft a new city charter, which would go to the voters for approval at the next ballot.<sup>111</sup> The progressive-aligned Sacramento Civic League, a local, male-led organization, brought together a coalition of business and reform groups to propose a nearly uncontested slate of candidates that went on to win every seat.<sup>112</sup>

The resulting city charter proposal was a progressive masterpiece.<sup>113</sup> Drafters proposed to reorganize the city along the "commission form" of government, a popular early twentieth-century progressive reform intended to reduce corruption and professionalize city government.<sup>114</sup> Commission government had recently taken off in California, including the cities of Berkeley, Oakland, Modesto, and Santa Cruz.<sup>115</sup> The proposal eliminated the mayor and replaced Sacramento's nine-member board of trustees with a five-member city commission. To maximize efficiency, the proposal also eliminated the city's school board and assigned its powers and duties to the commission. Just like trustees, commissioners could pass laws, enter into city contracts, and propose bond measures to voters. However, unlike trustees, who exercised only legislative powers, each commissioner had the additional, individual responsibility of supervising and directing a different city department.<sup>116</sup> For example, the commissioner of public health and safety oversaw the police department, whereas the education commissioner managed the city's schools. Charter drafters argued that commission government would promote more "efficient and business like administration" because commissioners specialized in distinct policy areas, enabling voters to assess their performance—good or bad—at the polls.<sup>117</sup>

Other elements of the proposal directly challenged the power of the political bosses and public-service corporations. It undercut the Democratic Party machine by making all city elections nonpartisan and by electing commissioners on a citywide basis instead of by ward, as trustees had been for over a decade.<sup>118</sup> So-called "at-large" elections, reformers believed, would strengthen the power of the higher-turnout, middle-class residential neighborhoods, at the expense of the working-class West End neighborhoods where the Democratic Party dominated.<sup>119</sup> To rein in corporate influence, the proposal enacted new limits on the commission's ability to approve public franchises but expanded its taxing powers.<sup>120</sup> Finally, to punish corrupt politicians, the draft charter equipped voters with a new weapon: the recall.<sup>121</sup>



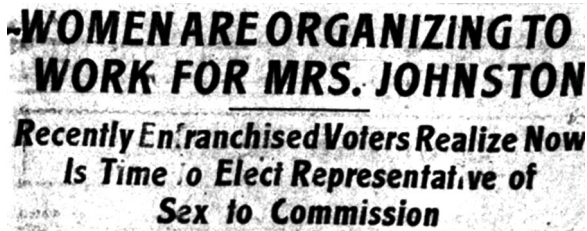


FIGURE 7. *Sacramento Bee*, “Women Are Organizing to Work for Mrs. Johnston,” May 6, 1912.

The vote on Sacramento’s new charter was scheduled for the same general election that decided California woman suffrage. Like suffrage, the charter battle was fiercely contested.<sup>122</sup> The Civic League led an effort to organize progressives, reform groups, merchants, and some labor unions in favor of the charter.<sup>123</sup> The Woman’s Council campaigned for the new charter as well—“a powerful factor toward the success of the charter” at the polls, observed the *Union*.<sup>124</sup> On the opposite side were administration men, SP, saloonkeepers, and public-service corporations working for Democratic officeholders and against the new charter.<sup>125</sup> Despite SP pressuring its workforce to “kill the charter,” the measure passed.<sup>126</sup> “The friends of clean, progressive, popular government” have won, crowed the *Bee*.<sup>127</sup>

Immediately, reformers and individual members of the Woman’s Council—including suffrage leader Lilleon Hough—founded the Municipal Voters’ League (MVL) to identify “friends of the charter” and support their election to seats on the new city commission, which would go into effect the following year.<sup>128</sup> The MVL’s platform was sparse but progressive, calling for rigid nonpartisanship in city government and municipal ownership of utilities.<sup>129</sup> The charter gave city leaders a new regulatory arsenal to check public-service corporations like SP. But with this power in the wrong hands, cautioned the MVL’s chairman, “it would be better that we had no new Charter.”<sup>130</sup>

#### “OUT OF THE USUAL LINES”: THE 1912 CAMPAIGN

One month after women won the vote and progressives won the new city charter, Luella Johnston declared her candidacy for the city commission (Figure 7).<sup>131</sup> On paper, she was the perfect candidate: leading citizen, former business owner, past president of two of the city’s largest civic organizations, and accomplished reformer. Perfect, of course, except for her gender. In 1912, men remained the bulk of the electorate. In the recent general election, 48 percent of Sacramento voters had voted against woman suffrage.<sup>132</sup> Among the slim majority favoring suffrage, how many of those voters would be willing to go the further step of electing a woman to run their city? The *Bee* anticipated the difficulty Johnston would encounter in overcoming the “peculiarity of some male temperaments—they will not admit that a woman has brains enough to hold public office.”<sup>133</sup>

One of Johnston’s greatest struggles was to justify her ambition for public office to voters. As Linda Van Ingen explains, the female candidate faced a difficult task, needing “to compete as men’s equal while maintaining her gendered difference,” in a society “still structured by women’s subordination to men.”<sup>134</sup> Johnston would thread this needle in

two ways. First, she framed her candidacy as one for the “education commissioner” post. With the school board abolished under the new charter, former school board decisions now rested with the city commission. That left Johnston no choice, she explained, because “the only way by which a woman may be on the Board of Education” was to be elected to the city commission and “for that reason [I] have placed my candidacy before the People.”<sup>135</sup> The move was calculated to reassure conservative voters, male and female, who agreed that care for children naturally fell within women’s sphere. Indeed, state law had allowed women to run for school office since 1873, but not to vote.<sup>136</sup> Sacramento voters had even elected a woman, Minnie O’Neil, as superintendent of schools in 1907.<sup>137</sup>

Second, Johnston made it clear that, although her priority was education, she could handle the putatively manly areas of governance. Her various club projects had given her experience “out of the usual lines,” she acknowledged, “for I have worked on the clear water problem, levee improvement, economy of administration, fire protection and general civic issues of importance to the whole city.”<sup>138</sup> Her campaign platform extended well beyond school walls: Johnston pitched herself as a law-and-order candidate, pledging firm enforcement of all city laws (likely an allusion to poorly enforced bans on gambling and prostitution). She was for levee improvement, addressing infrastructure needs of the newly annexed neighborhoods, and developing the late William Land’s donated estate into a public park for all to enjoy. She also identified herself as a progressive, favoring gradual public takeover of all utilities, and aligned herself with the charter’s new restrictions on public-service corporations. Finally, in a nod to her core constituency, she pledged to “do all in my power” and “bend every effort” to better “the condition of women.”<sup>139</sup>

Johnston parried the predictable bromide that women belonged at home and not in political office, but, unexpectedly, she also faced criticism that she represented an outdated vision of womanhood. Months after Johnston announced her candidacy, her former ally, local suffrage leader Lilleon Hough, entered the ring. Superficially, the two seemed similar: both were East Coast-born, mothers, middle aged, and prominent clubwomen active in civic and suffrage causes.<sup>140</sup> But Hough belonged to a far more liberal wing of the suffrage movement than Johnston, a point the former emphasized.<sup>141</sup> Hough described herself as an “emancipated woman” compared to Johnston, whom she derided as “belonging to the extreme conservative element.”<sup>142</sup> Johnston modestly (or tactically) staked a claim to the education commissionership; Hough’s speeches celebrated women now being “on the same footing” as men and “having an equal right and expecting to fill any office with the same degree of efficiency.”<sup>143</sup> The Woman’s Council was livid at Hough’s late entry to the race, fuming that it “endangered Mrs. Johnston’s chances” by potentially splitting the women’s vote.<sup>144</sup>

Johnston was endorsed by the Municipal Voters’ League, which spent several months investigating all thirty-five candidates before recommending Johnston. They praised her unrivaled education credentials and lauded her as “a close student of civic affairs,” “well qualified by experience,” possessing “marked executive and constructive ability and well-balanced judgment.”<sup>145</sup> Undoubtedly, the MVL also hoped that adding Johnston would boost the prospects of the entire MVL ticket with newly enfranchised women. As for the more outspoken Hough, who had helped found the MVL, it concluded that she lacked “the

poise and judgment that The People will demand of a Commissioner” and was “not qualified, either by experience or temperament” to serve on the city commission.<sup>146</sup> Naturally, the MVL disparaged mayor Marshall Beard and trustee Edward Carraghar, opponents of the new charter. The former they labeled a “pliant servant in [the] hands of [the] machine,” the latter “more favorable to the corporations than [to] the City of Sacramento.”<sup>147</sup>

Four other distinguished candidates completed the MVL’s ticket: attorney, city charter coauthor, and assemblyman Charles Bliss; surgeon and charter coauthor Dr. E. M. Wilder; former state senator J. A. Filcher; and union blacksmith and city trustee M. J. Burke.<sup>148</sup> Arrayed against them was the machine (or “Administration”) ticket led by Marshall Beard and Edward Carraghar, along with SP contractor and trustee J. B. Hicks, realtor and county supervisor Robert Callahan, and newspaper editor Peter Fitzgerald.<sup>149</sup>

While the MVL’s endorsement was a huge boon to her chances, Johnston did not rely on MVL men to run her campaign. She now had over a decade of experience campaigning for ballot measures, ironically in elections in which she could not vote. Johnston created a “Women’s Precinct Organization” to bring her campaign to the voters.<sup>150</sup> Sixty-four women—a veritable army of electioneers, even in a modern city council race—enlisted as her precinct captains.<sup>151</sup> On election day, her volunteers staked out polling stations to hand out endorsement cards and organized drivers and automobiles to bring women to the polls.<sup>152</sup>

And go to the polls they did. The *Bee* reported that “the big vote in the residence district was due largely to the fact that the women got out in force.”<sup>153</sup> Female turnout exceeded expectations. When a poll worker joked to a *Union* reporter that women were only voting for the free car rides, a female voter “immediately emerged from the booth, went up to the clerk, took him to task for his remarks and demanded an apology.” That ended all talk “about joy riding” for the rest of election day.<sup>154</sup>

Due in large part to the female vote, the MVL slate won a clean sweep, besting Beard, Carraghar, and other Democratic Party picks (Figure 8). “The women of this city have taught the men a lesson in practical politics,” one paper announced. “By organizing a machine of their own, they routed the professional politicians, defeated all five candidates put up by the Southern Pacific Machine . . . and swept into office the five commissioners of their own choosing.” Among them was “Mrs. Luella B. Johnston, head of the women’s machine.”<sup>155</sup> (Hough, however, placed near the bottom of the pack of candidates.)<sup>156</sup>

Naturally, Johnston’s win was historic. Not only was she the first woman elected to the Sacramento city council, she was “the first woman elected to city office in the state,” reported the *San Francisco Call*.<sup>157</sup> In fact, although not reported at the time, Johnston was the first elected councilwoman of any major American city.<sup>158</sup> Of the one hundred biggest U.S. cities in 1910, only one other (Los Angeles) would elect a woman to city government in that decade: Estelle Lawton Lindsey, elected in 1915.<sup>159</sup> Moreover, the median city of that group would not elect a councilwoman until 1956, several generations after Johnston’s term, and the last city to do so would not be until 1989, when voters in Kansas City, Kansas, elected Carol Marinovich.<sup>160</sup>



**FIGURE 8.** In this cartoon, a bouquet of progressive candidates adorns a city hall desk. Clockwise from the top are M. J. Burke, Luella Johnston, Dr. E. M. Wilder, Charles Bliss, and J. A. Flicher. A bouquet representing Sacramento's political machine lies discarded in a wastebasket. Underscoring the role of newly enfranchised women, the discarded bouquet reads: "To Miss Sacramento, Compliments of the Machine." Arthur Buel, "To Miss Sacramento, Compliments of the Machine," *Sacramento Bee*, May 20, 1912.

## THE COMMISSION'S FIRST YEAR: SACRAMENTO AWAKENED

The five members elected in 1912 were the first to serve on Sacramento's newly created city commission, which met in a grand and modern new city hall, just completed the year before (Figure 9). Their first act was to decide their departmental assignments. Sacramento's charter created five commissioner positions: public works, streets, public health and safety, finance, and education.<sup>161</sup> Unsurprisingly, Johnston, the former teacher, claimed education. In that position, Johnston presided over the commission whenever it considered school matters. The charter gave her supervision of "all school buildings, property and grounds, and . . . the construction, maintenance, and repair thereof."<sup>162</sup> Added to her responsibilities was oversight of parks and playgrounds; the municipal employment office; libraries, art galleries, theaters, and other places of public amusement; reformatory boards; and, as a catchall, "all matters affecting the intellectual and moral advancement of the city, other than police and sanitary regulations." As two city historians observe, this "sounded like the script [Johnston] wrote for the Tuesday Club in 1900."<sup>163</sup>





**FIGURE 9.** Sacramento's new city hall, c. 1912. The historic council chambers in that building were renamed for Luella Johnston in 2018. *Courtesy of Special Collections of the Sacramento Public Library*

Johnston was eager for the commission to move quickly on its reform agenda. By charter, city commissioners were elected to serve five years, except for the inaugural commission, which staggered terms so that only one commissioner was elected each year. Thus, the city's first commissioners were elected to one-, two-, three-, four-, and five-year terms, with the longest terms going to the highest vote-getters. Because Johnston had received the fewest votes of the winners, she had the shortest term. Undaunted, Johnston promised voters "to work that much harder to crowd into my present one-year term all the improvements of which I am capable."<sup>164</sup>

Sacramento's thoroughly progressive city commission had an energetic first year pre-occupied with financing large infrastructure improvements intended to bring the city into the modern era and, equally, with undoing what progressives had argued were machine politicians' corrupt bargains with local public-service corporations.

Among her campaign promises, Johnston pledged to prioritize flood control measures as crucial infrastructure improvements. One of the commission's first successes was gaining voter approval of a bond measure to raise city levees and construct a new flood spillway.<sup>165</sup> Other successful bond measures extended water mains and sewer lines to newly annexed neighborhoods (another of Johnston's campaign promises); purchased an asphalt-mixing machine for paving city streets; and secured and then gifted downtown real



estate to the state on the promise that modern government offices would be built there, a job-creation venture sure to please both blue- and white-collar workers.<sup>166</sup> Another successful commission-sponsored bond would enable Sacramento to build or seize by eminent domain a city-owned electrical distribution system for lighting city streets and parks, a step toward municipal ownership of utilities.<sup>167</sup> Unsurprisingly, PG&E, the city's sole electricity provider, fought against it.<sup>168</sup>

The commission passed a long list of ordinances aimed at local public-service corporations. It rescinded the half-century streetcar franchises granted by the prior board of trustees as too long and too generous.<sup>169</sup> Gas rates, which could be set under the new charter, were reduced.<sup>170</sup> New maximum rates were also imposed or planned for water, electricity, phone, and other private utility services.<sup>171</sup> The commission even charged railroads and utilities a "ground rental" tax for the use of city streets to run pipes, wires, or rails, the first city in California to do so.<sup>172</sup>

In addition to her legislative work on the city commission, Johnston applied a steady hand to her principal concern, the education department. Attendance had risen in the city's twenty-four public schools.<sup>173</sup> Teachers received raises while the state reduced its financial support.<sup>174</sup> Even so, Johnston's department stayed within budget. Partially responsible were the city's new open-bidding requirements for supplies and services, which reduced costs as well as opportunities for graft and cronyism.<sup>175</sup> Johnston also responded competently when a fire destroyed a downtown school, ordering construction of portable classrooms so that instruction could continue until a replacement building could be purchased or built.<sup>176</sup> And Johnston scored a personal victory when the hated, anti-progressive SP sent railroad "shop boys" to the nighttime vocational courses at the local high school—both the courses and the high school having been projects she helped bring to fruition.<sup>177</sup>

Johnston executed her other department responsibilities with equal acumen. She cleared out crony hires at the city cemetery, a notorious perk distributed under the prior administration.<sup>178</sup> With a donation from Weinstock, Lubin & Co., Johnston opened the city's second playground at South Side Park; thousands of children attended its grand opening.<sup>179</sup> Library membership grew by several thousand, and 11,000 new volumes were added to the shelves.<sup>180</sup> Only one assignment gave her trouble. The charter gave Johnston final approval over prizefight permits in Sacramento—an innovation that was ridiculed in the national press and that also made Johnston quite uncomfortable (Figure 10). Pugilism was legal, but she would not condone it, so she transferred her permitting to the commissioner of public safety, Charles Bliss, who was more eager to sanction bouts.<sup>181</sup>

True to her ideals as a clubwoman and progressive, Johnston took seriously her charter-mandated duty to squelch vice.<sup>182</sup> She fought to curtail illegal gambling and eliminate the saloon side entrances that facilitated prostitution, and assigned officers to prevent young people from "spooning" in city parks.<sup>183</sup> She was especially concerned by the licentious behavior exhibited in Sacramento's theaters and dance halls. In 1912, after fighting broke out over what newspapers called "near-nasty musical numbers" in a local play, Johnston exercised her authority to "pass upon the moral nature of the shows."<sup>184</sup> A musical comedy, *Follies of Frisco*, became the city's first commission-censored production.



**In Sacramento, Cal., Mrs. A. J. Johnston Grants Fight Permits.**

**FIGURE 10.** Political leaders around the country monitored the results of California's 1911 enfranchisement of women. In this *Boston Herald* cartoon, two promoters, hats in hand, ask Johnston to license a fight, saying, "I'd like a permit to put on a boxin bout," and "Ah say, you cin have a ring side seat." *Boston Herald*, "In Sacramento, Cal., Mrs. A.J. Johnston Grants Fight Permits," July 31, 1912.

Johnston ordered chorus dancers' movements to be "toned down" and suggestive lines of dialogue rewritten.<sup>185</sup> The commission moved swiftly to regulate dance halls, passing an ordinance that banned all but society and military dances. This meant, of course, as local papers explained, that young people were forbidden such dance steps as "the 'grizzly bear,' 'bunny hug,' 'Sacramento squeeze,' 'turkey trot,' and other sinuous dances."<sup>186</sup> A supportive chief of police expressed confidence that "after a few lessons in the terpsichorean art, the policemen will be able to ferret out improper dances at first sight."<sup>187</sup>

All in all, it was a remarkable first year in office for Johnston. Against strong public doubts that women could govern at all, Johnston had run, proclaimed the *Bee*, "a very successful administration" in the education department.<sup>188</sup> She had delivered on several key campaign promises, including securing funding for major infrastructure improvements, and advanced a bold reformist agenda to regulate the public-service corporations. "It is evident that the progressive spirit of The People has been awakened," Johnston said toward the end of her first year, reflecting on the voters' approval of a raft of commission-proposed infrastructure bonds. "Henceforth Sacramento is to take its place among the wide-awake and enterprising cities of the country."<sup>189</sup>

## THE MACHINE STRIKES BACK: JOHNSTON'S 1913 REELECTION CAMPAIGN

As the first of her peers to face reelection, Johnston was the standard-bearer for what the commission accomplished in its first year. Johnston, wrote the *Bee*, “represents the reform and progressive movement which has done so much for the municipality.”<sup>190</sup> Yet, even with a positive record to run on and the advantages of incumbency, Johnston faced a difficult election. Sexism posed an even greater threat in 1913 than in 1912, when Johnston just barely won the last of the commission’s five open seats. In 1913, hers was the only seat at issue, making Johnston an easy target. “At an election where only one is to be elected,” fretted one of her female supporters, “all the chances favor the election of a man.”<sup>191</sup>

In her year in office, Johnston had also made powerful enemies, including public-service corporations and West End saloon and gambling interests. Johnston knew what she faced, having been warned early in her term that if she continued her “present course we will see that you stand no chance of re-election.”<sup>192</sup>

That warning was realized when the Democratic machine put forth a single challenger for Johnston’s seat: former trustee Edward Carraghar. Only one year prior, Carraghar had been one of the most powerful men in Sacramento politics. Johnston had disrupted that career, besting him for the last commission seat by only a few hundred votes. The rematch between the saloonkeeper and the pro-temperance clubwoman was certainly personal. But as well as he knew the gender conventions stacked against Johnston, the cagey Carragher also understood those that he faced. Rather than be seen as a man attacking a woman, Carraghar aimed his rhetorical sights higher. “Carraghar’s fight is not against Mrs. Luella Johnston,” went one of his ads, “IT IS AGAINST THE WHOLE CITY COMMISSION.”<sup>193</sup> This higher-order framing was necessary for another reason: if the election were seen as just a contest for the commission’s education seat, Carraghar’s qualifications could only come up short against Johnston’s.<sup>194</sup>

Johnston’s core supporters in the reelection campaign were unchanged from the prior election. The *Bee* framed her clash against Carraghar in the same sweeping moral language: Johnston stood “on the right side and for The People, as against corporate selfishness, graft and improper discrimination.”<sup>195</sup> The MVL, the city’s leading progressive organization, once more endorsed her candidacy.<sup>196</sup> Unsurprisingly, the Woman’s Council supported her again too, but it made a bolder appeal for women’s representation, proclaiming that “the women of Sacramento as citizens, voters and taxpayers have a legal and moral right to a representative of their own sex in the city government.”<sup>197</sup>

With her reconstituted 1912 women’s precinct organization behind her, the indefatigable Johnston stumped for votes before civic and women’s clubs and neighborhood associations, just as male candidates had always done.<sup>198</sup> However, this was a wholly new sight. For the first time in California history, a woman was campaigning for reelection to municipal office on the basis of her personal executive and legislative accomplishments. Women flocked to Johnston’s campaign appearances and made their support apparent. In the residential Oak Park district, where Johnston had recently inaugurated a new playground, the *Bee* reported that neighborhood women greeted Johnston with generous

applause and showered her with “three minutes [of] bouquets of roses . . . until the entire front of the stage was banked with flowers.”<sup>199</sup>

If the city’s ousted power brokers had underestimated the progressive challenge before, they were not about to repeat that mistake in 1913. Carraghar’s campaign was well bankrolled, with great sums of money presumably coming from SP and local utilities.<sup>200</sup> At one point, every automobile in the city garages was rented out to Carraghar supporters, perhaps to derail a repeat of Johnston’s 1912 election-day offer of free rides to the polls.<sup>201</sup>

Carraghar was a shrewd campaigner, particularly adept at using surrogates to spin his weaknesses as strengths and Johnston’s strengths as weaknesses. Although Johnston had led the campaign to pass the Tuesday Club Ordinance, which banned saloons in residential neighborhoods, and Carraghar had fought the law, his supporters claimed the liquor interests actually opposed the saloonkeeper’s candidacy and were supporting Johnston’s.<sup>202</sup> Although Johnston had campaigned for municipal ownership of utilities and the commission had voided several generous Carraghar-sponsored franchises, the Democratic-leaning *Union* praised Carraghar as Sacramento’s true defender against “rapacious public service corporations.”<sup>203</sup> “Every trick that political ingenuity can conceive is being used against Mrs. Johnston,” fumed the *Bee*. “No appeal to prejudice is too base, no lie too brazen, to be rejected in an effort by the old Machine to confuse voters.”<sup>204</sup>

The *Union* and Carraghar’s camp also pushed the message that organized womanhood—Johnston’s strongest base of support—had turned against her. A group calling itself the “Woman’s E. J. Carraghar Club” emerged to condemn the “scurrilous methods” of the “coward[ly] men” of the MVL who, they alleged, controlled Johnston’s campaign.<sup>205</sup> The group also countered the Woman’s Council’s appeal for gender representation, warning women voters to “be extra cautious . . . so that [you] may not be accused of voting for a woman simply because she is a woman.”<sup>206</sup>

Whether the pro-Carraghar women’s group represented a genuine slice of disaffected women voters, or was a front set up by the Carraghar campaign, is impossible to say for certain. Although the Woman’s Council strongly supported Johnston, she faced real detractors in the women’s clubs. Some had been angered by Johnston’s failure to nominate a prominent parks booster, Mrs. J. Miller, to the local parks board. But the pro-Carraghar club’s claim of one thousand female members dedicated to Johnston’s defeat seems unlikely.<sup>207</sup> The *Bee* was certainly skeptical, pointing out that the club’s public meetings attracted tens of attendees, not hundreds. Also, unlike Johnston’s precinct organization or the MVL, club leaders refused to produce a membership roster for inspection or publication.<sup>208</sup>

The speeches, hand-billing, and war of words finally ended at the close of election day. Johnston was soundly defeated. As expected, she carried the annexed residential neighborhoods—middle-class women had likely not abandoned her—but she lost everywhere else, especially in the West End.<sup>209</sup> She may have done so poorly there, speculates Sacramento historian William Burg, “because the livelihoods of many in those areas had been threatened by her attempts to clean up their business.”<sup>210</sup> Johnston took defeat graciously, saying, “I have given my best efforts to the city in the limited term of office that I served.”

Carraghar was less conciliatory. As Johnston’s term expired, her former commission colleagues voted to make her the city’s truant officer, responsible for boosting school

attendance.<sup>211</sup> Commissioner Carraghar cast a solitary protest vote against Johnston, reported the *Bee*, “on the ground that a man should fill the position.”<sup>212</sup> Progressives controlled four of the commission’s five seats, but the 1913 campaign foreshadowed challenges for reformers. The Democratic machine, which many had thought defeated for good just one year ago, was resurgent as the voting for the next city commission seat approached. “There is heard on the air a sound suspiciously like the rustle of grave clothes,” warned one newspaper. “Those bosses whom the people thought had been laid to rest for their long sleep” were “breaking the bonds that held them,” their spectral shapes to “again appear among the living.”<sup>213</sup>

## A GHOST ARISES: THE 1914 CAMPAIGN

Progressive and machine candidates collided again in 1914, but the stakes were higher than in 1913, due to an early resignation opening two commission seats instead of one. The progressives’ majority on the commission—which controlled the flow of money, jobs, and policy—was in jeopardy. Sacramento’s public-service corporations were eager for a changing of the guard. The two preceding years of commission government had brought stricter scrutiny and regulation of their businesses. Dr. E. M. Wilder, the anti-corporate commissioner of public works, faced reelection. He embodied the commission’s more combative spirit, having ordered SP to tear out an unlawfully constructed rail line, strong-armed the railroad into improving the city’s levees, and moved SP from its prime staging area at the wharfs.<sup>214</sup> Wilder had consistently voted to chip away at PG&E’s electrical distribution and streetcar monopolies, while openly campaigning for full municipal ownership of both.<sup>215</sup> O. H. Miller, a prominent developer, ran for the other open seat, pledging his support for Wilder’s platform.<sup>216</sup>

The Democratic machine lost no time raising opponents to face Miller and Wilder. “Give me a man—no, give me two,” Carraghar told a meeting of businessmen, “that I may once more get in the saddle and work in your interests.”<sup>217</sup> The Democrats put forward Thomas Coulter, a hop grower and realtor, and physician Frederick E. Shaw.<sup>218</sup> According to the *Bee*, Coulter and Shaw were supported by the full “power, influence, and money of the Southern Pacific, the Pacific Gas and Electric and other selfish public-service corporations.”<sup>219</sup>

Beyond dispute is that *someone* spent heavily to defeat Miller and Wilder. “Never before was known such lavish scattering of coin in a Sacramento election,” wrote the *Bee*.<sup>220</sup> Thousands of placards, hundreds of canvassers, and even a few brass bands trumpeted the candidates’ names. The *Union* estimated that Miller and Wilder’s enemies spent thousands in the 1914 campaign.<sup>221</sup> By contrast, Johnston claimed to have spent only \$10.25 on her 1912 campaign.<sup>222</sup>

Coulter and Shaw prevailed on election day. Commissioner Wilder took the loss less graciously than Johnston had: “It was announced two years ago by the leaders of the old gang in this city that they would get me when my time came,” grumbled Wilder, “and they have indeed done so.”<sup>223</sup> Sacramento’s progressive revolution was over as quickly as it began.

Johnston, for her part, sat out the 1914 campaign as truant officer: city employees were prohibited from electioneering under the new charter.<sup>224</sup> Instead, she crisscrossed the city



investigating student absences and organizing donations of shoes and clothing to entice low-income children back into the classroom.<sup>225</sup> But despite her abstention from politics, commissioner Carraghar had not forgotten her. Among the newly seated commission's first acts: firing Luella Johnston.<sup>226</sup>

Within short order, many of the commission's progressive reforms of 1912–1913 were undercut or undone. The civil service commission was defunded; health and safety ordinances, including the city's liquor laws, went unenforced; and regulation of the city's public-service corporations, notably SP and PG&E, was once again relaxed.<sup>227</sup> By the end of the 1910s, observed one historian, city hall had descended "to even worse corruption than under Mayor Beard."<sup>228</sup>

Ultimately, in 1921, Sacramento voters scrapped the commission form of government, which had started with such promise. They replaced it with the newest trend in municipal governance: the city manager form of government the city has today.<sup>229</sup>

## LATER LIFE

Johnston rebounded quickly. Months after her firing, Carolyn Webb defeated incumbent Minnie O'Neil in the race for county superintendent of schools. Webb then appointed Johnston as her deputy superintendent.<sup>230</sup> However, Johnston resigned her post in 1915, when Webb attempted to balance her department's budget by cutting Johnston's salary.<sup>231</sup> (Webb wanted to hire her own sister as a clerk.)

In her mid-fifties, Johnston returned to private life. According to local society pages, she remained active in the Tuesday Club and Woman's Council, though the press attributed to her none of the grand initiatives she had earlier sponsored.<sup>232</sup> Her name fades from the historical record, although not entirely. In 1948, a reporter asked Johnston about Belle Coolidge's election to the Sacramento city council and subsequent appointment as its first woman mayor—another first among major American cities.<sup>233</sup> "Man or woman has nothing to do with the case," said Johnston, age eighty-eight (Figure 11). "You have to do with women what you do with men—balance up their capabilities then judge." If a woman "is willing to assume the added responsibility of mayor," she concluded, then "in my judgment, she is fitted for it."<sup>234</sup> In the post–World War II era, when leaders were urging women to return to their roles as wives and mothers, Johnston's "equal rights" position in 1948 was now closer to that of her 1912 opponent for the city commission seat, Lilleon Hough. Luella Johnston had evolved one step further: from socialite to clubwoman to suffragist to elected official to feminist.

In her twilight years, Johnston devoted herself to writing a book, tentatively entitled *American Folklore*, designed to help immigrants learn English. Her passion for education had endured. She hoped the book would spark among recent arrivals a love of reading, particularly of newspapers and magazines. "The most vital thing for any newcomer to this land," she explained, "is to introduce him to the newspapers at the earliest possible moment."<sup>235</sup> Johnston passed away in 1958, age ninety-seven, her book unfinished.<sup>236</sup>

Johnston played a central role in the social and political development of early twentieth-century Sacramento. She led the Tuesday Literary Club, for a long time Sacramento's premier women's social club, to prominence, and founded the Woman's Council, which



**FIGURE 11.** Luella Johnston, c. 1943, approximately age eighty-two. (Left to right) Luella Bryant (Johnston's daughter); Luella Johnston; in her mother's lap, Sande Anderson (Johnston's great-granddaughter); and Barbara Adams (Johnston's granddaughter).

*Courtesy of Sande Anderson*

gave women an unprecedented seat at the table in making and enforcing municipal public policy.<sup>237</sup> Both organizations endured for more than a hundred years.<sup>238</sup> She was integral to the rise of Sacramento's progressive moment, which, although short lived, produced infrastructure (such as levee improvements) and political ideas (such as municipal ownership of electric utilities, ultimately achieved in the 1940s) that still serve Sacramentans today. As one of the rare female elected officials of her time, she enacted education reforms that were still in place decades later, wrote the *Bee* in 1948, "as monuments to the efforts of one frail woman who probably never weighed 100 pounds in her life."<sup>239</sup> Johnston's most important legacy was that, by slow evolution, she helped redefine "true womanhood" to include participation—even leadership—in the public sphere. In 1974, Alice Paul Stokes said of the women's rights movement, "I always feel . . . the movement is a sort of mosaic. Each of us puts in one little stone, and then you get a great mosaic at the end."<sup>240</sup> A liminal, continually evolving figure, Johnston placed more than her share of little stones.

## NOTES

1. When Johnston became active in municipal politics, the body now known as Sacramento's "city council" was called the "board of trustees." At the time of her election, it was called the "city commission." This article is adapted from a series of posts by the author originally appearing on *Sacramentality*, beginning with "California's First Councilwoman - Part I," October 31, 2017, <https://sacramentality.com/2017/10/13/californias-first-councilwoman-part-i/>.

2. Karen J. Blair, *The Clubwoman as Feminist: True Womanhood Redefined, 1868–1914* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988); Gayle Gullett, *Becoming Citizens: The Emergence and Development of the California Women's Movement, 1880–1911* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Linda Van Ingen, *Gendered Politics: Campaign Strategies of California Women Candidates, 1912–1970* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017).
3. Sherry J. Katz, "Review: Gullett, 'Becoming Citizens . . .,'" *Humanities and Social Sciences Online*, July 2000, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/9249/reviews/10729/katz-gullett-becoming-citizens-emergence-and-development-california>.
4. Tuesday Club Minutes, April 20, 1901, 47, Center for Sacramento History Archival Records, Tuesday Club Collection.
5. See, e.g., Blair, *Clubwoman as Feminist*; Steve Swatt et al., *Paving the Way: Women's Struggle for Political Equality in California* (Berkeley: Berkeley Public Policy Press, 2019), 67–70; Cameron Binkley, "Saving Redwoods," in Robert Cherny, Mary Ann Irwin, and Ann Marie Wilson (eds.), *California Women and Politics: From the Gold Rush to the Great Depression* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 151–174; Sandra L. Henderson, "The Civitas of Women's Political Culture," in Cherny et al., *California Women and Politics*, 175–208.
6. Blair, *Clubwoman as Feminist*, 2–3.
7. *Ibid.*, 3.
8. *Ibid.*, 4.
9. Van Ingen, *Gendered Politics*, 7.
10. See Judith Rafferty, "Los Angeles Clubwomen and Progressive Reform," in William Deverell and Tom Sitton (eds.), *California Progressivism Revisited* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 159–160; Clark Davis, "An Era and Generation of Civic Engagement," *Southern California Quarterly* 84, no. 2 (2002): 135–168; Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 133–137; Henderson, "Civitas of Women's Political Culture," 175–208.
11. Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 5.
12. Blair, *Clubwoman as Feminist*, 5; Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 151.
13. *Los Angeles Herald*, "California Club Federation Indorses Woman's Suffrage," May 17, 1911.
14. Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 151.
15. See, generally, *ibid.*, 151–200. See also Rafferty, "Los Angeles Clubwomen," 146–147.
16. Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 157, 162.
17. *Ibid.*, 152. In *California Progressivism Revisited*, William Deverell argues that progressive historian George Mowry's description of progressives as "class-anxious WASPs" no longer "provides a satisfying picture of the depth and breadth of the era's political and social activists," while acknowledging that this description does describe many of the movement's most important leaders ("Introduction," *California Progressivism Revisited*, 6). Glen Gendzel argues that, rather than disproving Mowry's thesis, many biographies in *California Progressivism Revisited* support Mowry's argument; Gendzel, "Review: *California Progressivism Revisited*," *California History* 74, no. 4 (Winter 1995/96), 435–436.
18. Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 152.
19. *Ibid.*, 189–190; Jacqueline R. Braitman, "A California Stateswoman: The Public Career of Katherine Philips Edson," *California History* 65, no. 2 (1986), 84–86.
20. Gayle Gullett, "The Women's Vote: How the West Led the Way," *Western Legal History* 30, no. 1–2 (2019): 74–75, [https://www.njchs.org/downloads/wlh\\_30-1\\_crp\\_color%5B1%5D.pdf](https://www.njchs.org/downloads/wlh_30-1_crp_color%5B1%5D.pdf).
21. Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 175.
22. *Ibid.*, 173–175.
23. Van Ingen, *Gendered Politics*, xiv, 7–8, 24.
24. *Ibid.*, ix.
25. Mary Ann Irwin, "California's 'First Four,'" in Richard B. Rice et al. (eds.), *The Elusive Eden: A New History of California*, 5th ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2020), 272.
26. Van Ingen, *Gendered Politics*, 2, 14; Swatt et al., *Paving the Way*, 101–125.
27. Quoted in Irwin, "California's 'First Four,'" 271.
28. Sacramento Woman's Council, *A Silhouette of Service* (Sacramento: News Publishing, 1955), 69, Special Collections of the Sacramento Public Library.
29. Mrs. John G. MacDonald and Nancy (Mrs. Anton F.) Leneis, *Tuesday Club of Sacramento: 1896–2014* (Sacramento: Tuesday Club, 2015), 26, Special Collections of the Sacramento Public Library.
30. The business was named for Johnston: A.J. Johnston Company. *Ibid.*; Leigh H. Irvine (ed.), *A History of the New California* (New York: Lewis, 1905), vol. 1, 524, <https://books.google.com/books?id=1lqVhOjBqs4C>.
31. *Sacramento Daily Union*, "Regular Republican Ticket," March 10, 1891.
32. Irvine, *New California*, 524.
33. *San Francisco Call*, "Ninety-Nine Club at the Capital," January 18, 1899.

34. See, e.g., *Sacramento Daily Union*, "Governor Gage's Inaugural Ball," January 10, 1899; *Sacramento Record-Union*, "A Brilliant Social Event," January 20, 1899. Underscoring the point, at one toast a clubwoman joked that, though she firmly opposed suffrage, she might yet "clamor for the ballot" if it "would keep in office these men whose charming wives have brightened our social life." *Sacramento Record-Union*, "Fair Women Respond to Toasts," February 23, 1899.
35. *Sacramento Record-Union*, "Fair Women Respond to Toasts."
36. Swatt et al., *Paving the Way*, 3. See also Binkley, "Saving Redwoods," 152–153.
37. *Valley Community Newspapers*, "Tuesday Club of Sacramento: 1896–2014," July 3, 2014, <http://www.valcomnews.com/tuesday-club-of-sacramento-1896-2014/>.
38. See MacDonald and Leneis, *Tuesday Club of Sacramento*, 14; *Daily Morning Union* (Grass Valley), "Hubbard Chosen," November 6, 1895; *Healdsburg Tribune*, "Distribution of Hopkins Estate," February 11, 1927.
39. Merren Gillis Morton, *Achievements* (Sacramento: Tuesday Club, 1933), 20, Center for Sacramento History Archival Records, Tuesday Club Collection.
40. Elaine Connolly and Dian Self, *Capital Women: An Interpretive History of Women in Sacramento, 1850–1920* (Sacramento: Capital Women's History Project, 1995), 139.
41. *Sacramento Bee*, "Something about the Tuesday Club," April 21, 1900.
42. *Sacramento Bee*, "Social News of Local Interest," February 1, 1902; Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 120–122; Mary Jane Smith, "The Fight to Protect Race and Regional Identity within the General Federation of Women's Clubs," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 94, no. 4 (Winter 2010), 511–512, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41304225>.
43. MacDonald and Leneis, *Tuesday Club of Sacramento*, 26.
44. Tuesday Club Minutes, February 6, 1900, 76; Morton, *Achievements*, 5.
45. Morton, *Achievements*, 20; MacDonald and Leneis, *Tuesday Club of Sacramento*, 14.
46. Terry Cook and Kathleen Paparchontis, "Sacramento Women Past and Present," *Golden Notes* (Sacramento County Historical Society) 44, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 26.
47. Tuesday Club Minutes, April 19, 1904, 59.
48. MacDonald and Leneis, *Tuesday Club of Sacramento*, 26; Center for Sacramento History, "Archive Record: Tuesday Club," <https://sacramento.pastperfectonline.com/archive/195FE48E-0B1E-4164-9B18-232638430900> (accessed February 13, 2020). See also Connolly and Self, *Capital Women*, 113 ("Within five years of their first meeting, however, Tuesday Club members, led by former schoolteacher Luella Buckminster Johnson [sic], began to rewrite the definition of 'womanly woman' in Sacramento.").
49. MacDonald and Leneis, *Tuesday Club of Sacramento*, 11.
50. Steven M. Avella, *Sacramento: Indomitable City* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2003), 76.
51. *Sacramento Bee*, "Something about the Tuesday Club."
52. MacDonald and Leneis, *Tuesday Club of Sacramento*, 12; *Sacramento Bee*, "Women to Appear before Trustees," February 12, 1900.
53. Tuesday Club Minutes, January 16, 1900, 67–68.
54. *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, "Social and Personal," July 13, 1886 ("Mrs. A. J. Johnston and Mrs. C. K. McClatchy have gone to Cool, El Dorado County, to spend a few weeks.").
55. *Sacramento Bee*, "Keep the Saloons from Spreading," January 20, 1900.
56. *Sacramento Bee*, "Something about the Tuesday Club."
57. Connolly and Self, *Capital Women*, 140.
58. Center for Sacramento History, "Archive Record: Tuesday Club."
59. Tuesday Club Minutes, January 30, 1900, 74.
60. Tuesday Club Minutes, April 30, 1901, 46.
61. *Ibid.*, 50.
62. Connolly and Self, *Capital Women*, 140. Johnston's invitations to woman-led groups were nondenominational, including those with Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Mormon members. The council probably was not racially or ethnically diverse, judging by the names of the original member-organizations. However, like the Tuesday Club, the council openly opposed segregation. In 1910, the council wrote the San Francisco Musical Club to denounce its whites-only policy, "such racial prejudice" being "an anachronism and unworthy of a body of enlightened and progressive women." Woman's Council, *Silhouette of Service*, 11–12, 21.
63. Woman's Council, *Silhouette of Service*, 13.
64. In the decades that followed, the Tuesday Club slowly retreated from political activity and once more became a primarily social and philanthropic organization. Emily Bazar, "Women's Club Marks Centennial," *Sacramento Bee*, October 10, 1996.
65. Woman's Council, *Silhouette of Service*, 17–19.
66. *Ibid.*, 11.
67. *Sacramento Bee*, "A. J. Johnston Is Dead," December 2, 1906.

68. *Sacramento Bee*, "Borne to Last Resting Place," December 15, 1906.
69. Irvine, *New California*, 524.
70. *Sacramento Bee*, "Calkins Director in New Concern," January 26, 1910; *Sacramento Bee*, "Mrs. Johnston Is Conceded Place on Commission," March 2, 1912.
71. Woman's Council, *Silhouette of Service*, 69.
72. *Ibid.*, 19–20.
73. Steven Avella, *Sacramento and the Catholic Church* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2008), 140.
74. Lynn Simpson et al., "Its Investigation of the Planning of the Capital of California," State Capital Planning Commission, September 1, 1916, 6, <https://books.google.com/books?id=Kpw-AQAAMAAJ>.
75. *Sacramento Bee*, "In Race for Commissioner: More Sketches of Candidates for Office," April 12, 1912; *Sacramento Bee*, "Manual Training a Success Here," May 27, 1908.
76. Tuesday Club Minutes, April 30, 1901, 49.
77. Wendy Welles Franklin, "The Capital and Women's Rights: 1850–1911," *Golden Notes* (Sacramento County Historical Society) 34, no. 4 (Fall 1988): 18.
78. *Sacramento Daily Record-Union*, "The Terrorism of Lawlessness," June 17, 1896.
79. Mary Roberts Coolidge, "Campaigning in Sacramento," in *Winning Equal Suffrage in California* (College Equal Suffrage League of Northern California, 1913), 98–102, <https://books.google.com/books?id=nxsEAAAAYAAJ>. After the suffrage campaign, Coolidge would publish *Why Women Are So*, an important early feminist work on socialization and sex differences. Coolidge became president of the California Civic League and was later appointed to the California board of education. See Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 152–157.
80. Coolidge, "Campaigning in Sacramento," 98.
81. *Ibid.*; *Sacramento Union*, "Lilleon C. Hough," April 11, 1912; *Los Angeles Herald*, "Nurse Ill for Long Time Ends Own Life," July 18, 1916. Note that the Sacramento press alternated between "Lillian" and "Lilleon" when spelling Hough's given name.
82. Connolly and Self, *Capital Women*, 161.
83. Coolidge, "Campaigning in Sacramento," 99.
84. *Riverside Daily Press*, "Of Interest to Women," November 18, 1911; *Sacramento Union*, "Suffragists Fight Valiantly," October 11, 1911. See also Connolly and Self, *Capital Women*, 160; MacDonald and Leneis, *Tuesday Club of Sacramento*, 26.
85. Senator J. B. Sanford, "Reasons Why Senate Constitutional Amendment No. 8 Should Not Be Adopted," in State Voter Information Guide, October 11, 1911, [https://repository.uchastings.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=ca\\_ballot\\_props](https://repository.uchastings.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1023&context=ca_ballot_props).
86. As quoted in Connolly and Self, *Capital Women*, 160–161.
87. *Sacramento Bee*, "Final Rally Is Held by Feminists," October 5, 1911.
88. *Sacramento Bee*, "Suffrage Leaders Not Discouraged," October 11, 1911.
89. Franklin, "The Capital and Women's Rights," 21.
90. Connolly and Self, *Capital Women*, 167.
91. William E. Mahan, "The Political Response to Urban Growth," *California History* 69, no. 4 (Winter 1990/1991): 360.
92. Johnston's Tuesday Club biography identifies her as a city "leader of the Progressive Republican Women." MacDonald and Leneis, *Tuesday Club of Sacramento*, 26.
93. George Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Chicago: Quadrangle Paperback, 1963), 5, 9, 11–18; Spencer Olin, *California's Prodigal Sons: Hiram Johnson and the Progressives, 1911–1917* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 3, 26; William Deverell, *Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850–1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 169–170; Glen Gendzel, "The People versus the Octopus: California Progressives and the Origins of Direct Democracy," *Siecles* 37 (June 1, 2013): 2, [www.journals.openedition.org/siecles/pdf/1109](http://www.journals.openedition.org/siecles/pdf/1109).
94. Olin, *Prodigal Sons*, 26.
95. Hiram Johnson, "First Inaugural Address," State Capitol, Sacramento, January 3, 1911, <https://governors.library.ca.gov/addresses/23-hjohnson01.html>.
96. Gullett, *Becoming Citizens*, 174–175.
97. William Burg, *Wicked Sacramento* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2019), 20.
98. Mahan, "Urban Growth," 359.
99. *Ibid.*, 354, 360–361.
100. Burg, *Wicked Sacramento*, 19–20; Mahan, "Urban Growth," 362–367.
101. Mahan, "Urban Growth," 362.
102. *Ibid.*, 363–364.
103. Burg, *Wicked Sacramento*, 19.
104. *Sacramento Bee*, "The Broad, Plain Issue in this Campaign," April 26, 1913.



105. *Sacramento Bee*, "Municipal League and Mrs. Johnston," April 10, 1913; *Sacramento Bee*, "Carraghar's Official Record," May 1, 1913; *Sacramento Bee*, "Carraghar's Record on Natural Gas Co. Deal," April 25, 1913; *Sacramento Bee*, "How Carraghar Stood on Wharf Franchises," April 19, 1913; *Sacramento Bee*, "Record of Carraghar on Franchise Matters," April 17, 1913.
106. *Sacramento Bee*, "How Carraghar Changed on Cemetery Situation," April 29, 1913; *Sacramento Bee*, "Mother Administration's Family Badly Disrupted," May 10, 1912.
107. Mahan, "Urban Growth," 360; Burg, *Wicked Sacramento*, 31.
108. Mahan, "Urban Growth," 360–361.
109. *Sacramento Bee*, "Woman's Council Appeals to Women to Vote Against the Carraghar Ordinance," April 26, 1912.
110. Burg, *Wicked Sacramento*, 28.
111. *Sacramento Union*, "Regular Ticket of Freeholders Is Elected," June 28, 1911.
112. *Sacramento Union*, "Woman's Council Indorses Charter," November 2, 1911. A body devoted to charter reform, the Sacramento Civic League bears no relation to the statewide, female-led California Civic League, which was formed out of the College Equal Suffrage League after women's suffrage was achieved in California in 1911. The California Civic League became the California branch of the League of Women Voters in 1921. See *Sacramento Union*, "Civic League to Resume Meetings," September 2, 1911; Melanie Susan Gustafson, *Women and the Republican Party, 1854–1924* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 235, n. 73, <https://books.google.com/books?id=MsoJkYC-7TEC>.
113. 1911 City Charter in *Assembly Journal*, California State Assembly, December 12, 1911, 159 *et seq.*, <https://books.google.com/books?id=sUxNAAAAYAAJ>.
114. Bradley Robert Rice, *Progressive Cities: The Commission Government Movement in America, 1901–1920* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1978), xi–xiii.
115. Vincent Neale, "A City Charter," *Marin Journal*, April 11, 1912.
116. 1911 Charter, section 9.
117. *Sacramento Bee*, "Board of Freeholders Presents Arguments for the New Charter," November 3, 1911. See also Rice, *Progressive Cities*, 60.
118. 1911 Charter, sections 4 and 261.
119. Mahan, "Urban Growth," 369.
120. See, e.g., 1911 Charter, sections 230–231.
121. *Ibid.*, sections 264 and 275.
122. *Sacramento Bee*, "Heavy Vote Cast in Morning Hours," November 7, 1911.
123. *Sacramento Union*, "Disreputable Trick in Corrupt Campaign to Beat New Charter," November 2, 1911; *Sacramento Union*, "Retail Merchants Support Charter," November 2, 1911.
124. While the Woman's Council's endorsement was prized for the campaign, it was the only "important civic body[y]" not invited to help propose the progressive slate of charter reform candidates. *Sacramento Union*, "Woman's Council Indorses Charter." See also *Sacramento Union*, "How the Charter Was Made," November 4, 1911.
125. *Sacramento Union*, "Retail Merchants Support Charter"; *Sacramento Bee*, "Heavy Vote Cast in Morning Hours"; *Sacramento Bee*, "Many Seek Jobs under New Plan," November 8, 1911.
126. *Sacramento Bee*, "Heavy Vote Cast in Morning Hours."
127. *Sacramento Bee*, "Sacramento Homes Save Charter From Defeat at Polls," November 8, 1911.
128. *Sacramento Bee*, "Non-partisan Ticket to Urge Good Government," January 26, 1912.
129. *Sacramento Bee*, "Municipal League Will Seek Good Government," February 21, 1912.
130. *Ibid.*
131. *Sacramento Union*, "Mrs. A. J. Johnston Would Be a Member of City Commission," November 16, 1911.
132. *Sacramento Bee*, "Result of the Vote Cast in Sacramento County," October 11, 1911.
133. *Sacramento Bee*, "Woman's Public Ability Blind to Some Men," March 26, 1912.
134. Van Ingen, *Gendered Politics*, 4.
135. *Sacramento Bee*, "Charter Is Pliant on Schools," May 16, 1912.
136. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan Brownell Anthony, and Matilda Jodlyn Gage (eds.), *History of Woman Suffrage*, vol. 3 (Rochester, NY: Charles Mann Printing, 1886), 757, <https://books.google.com/books?id=14oEAAAAYAAJ>.
137. Sacramento County Office of Education, *Sacramento County Superintendents of Schools: 150 Years of Leadership*, 2003, [https://www.scoe.net/about/history/Documents/historical\\_timeline.pdf](https://www.scoe.net/about/history/Documents/historical_timeline.pdf) (accessed February 13, 2020).
138. *Sacramento Bee*, "Women Get Behind Mrs. Johnston," May 10, 1912.
139. *Sacramento Bee*, "Mrs. Luella B. Johnston Submits Clear Views on Several Vital Questions," May 2, 1912.
140. *Sacramento Union*, "In Race for Commissioner," April 11, 1912; *Sacramento Bee*, "Mrs. Lillian Hough Dies in Berkeley," July 19, 1916.

141. *Sacramento Union*, "Two Women Now in the Field for Civic Honors," February 21, 1912 (Hough explained that "the progressive element in the womanhood of Sacramento, as well as the conservative element, should be represented" in the campaign).
142. *Sacramento Bee*, "Cold Stares for Woman Candidate," February 3, 1912.
143. *Sacramento Bee*, "Women Candidates Address Citizens," April 26, 1912.
144. *Ibid.*; *Sacramento Bee*, "Candidacy of Mrs. Johnston Endorsed," January 4, 1912.
145. *Sacramento Bee*, "Municipal League Separates Wheat from Chaff," April 18, 1912.
146. *Ibid.*
147. *Ibid.*
148. *Ibid.*; *Sacramento Bee*, "League Adopts Burke," May 7, 1912.
149. *Sacramento Bee*, "Municipal League Separates Wheat from Chaff."
150. *Sacramento Bee*, "Will Urge All Women to Vote," May 10, 1912.
151. *Sacramento Bee*, "Women Named as Precinct Workers," May 13, 1912.
152. *Sacramento Bee*, "Burke, Filcher, Bliss, Wilder, Johnston, Commissioners," May 19, 1912; *Sacramento Bee*, "Women Participate in Election Prominently," May 19, 1912.
153. *Sacramento Bee*, "Municipal Voters' League Makes Clean Sweep with Its Ticket at the Second City Election," May 19, 1912.
154. *Sacramento Bee*, "Women Participate in Election Prominently."
155. *Seattle Star*, "Women Kick Out Political Bosses," May 25, 1912.
156. *Sacramento Bee*, "Voters' League and 'Gang' Will Contest Commissioner Jobs," May 6, 1912.
157. *San Francisco Call*, "Mrs. A. J. Johnston Is Awarded Office on Ticket," May 19, 1912. See also Carlos Alcalá, "Sacramento Tour—Diverse Causes Drove Cemetery's Patriots," *Sacramento Bee*, July 3, 2011. Of course, this was not the first time a woman had ever been elected to a city council in the nation. Occasionally, going as far back as the late nineteenth century, women had been elected to town councils. But these were neither well-known jurisdictions nor ones likely to be dealing with the complex politics and policies that typified the nation's urban centers. For example, a 1914 publication lists a few cities besides Sacramento with elected women mayors or councilmembers like Tyro, Kansas (1910 population: 603) or Warrenton, Oregon (population: 339). Jane Campbell, "Women Holding Office," *National Municipal Review* 3 (January 1914): 145, <https://books.google.com/books?id=stEQAAAYAAJ>; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistics for Kansas* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913), 590, table 2, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1910/abstract/supplement-ks.pdf>; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistics for Oregon* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913), 583, table 2, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1910/abstract/supplement-or.pdf>.
158. Nicolas Heidorn, "America's First Councilwomen (Sacramento Was First)," *Sacramentality*, March 18, 2018 (updated July 2020), <https://sacramentality.com/2018/03/18/americas-first-councilwomen-sacramento-was-first/> (listing the first elected councilwomen for the hundred biggest U.S. cities in 1910); U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Table 14. Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1910," <https://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0027/tab14.txt> (accessed July 24, 2020). In the 1910 census, Sacramento recorded 45,000 residents, just outside the hundred biggest cities. However, in 1911 Sacramento annexed three neighborhoods, adding 20,000 residents to its population, comfortably placing it in the top hundred cities by Johnston's 1912 election. See U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Statistics for California* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913), 582, table 2, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1910/abstract/supplement-ca.pdf>; William Burg, "1911: The Great Annexation," *Midtown Monthly* (Sacramento), September 7, 2011, <https://www.midtownmonthly.net/life/1911-the-great-annexation/>.
159. *Los Angeles Times*, "Sebastian's Majority Over Four Thousand," June 3, 1915.
160. *Kansas City Business Journal*, "Marinovich Named as 'Kansas Citizen of the Year,'" November 23, 2005, <https://www.bizjournals.com/kansascity/stories/2005/11/21/daily25.html>.
161. 1911 Charter, section 9.
162. *Ibid.*
163. Connolly and Self, *Capital Women*, 169.
164. Jacque Smith, "Women in Government Old Sacramento Story," *Sacramento Bee*, January 4, 1948.
165. *Sacramento Bee*, "City Votes to Issue \$887,000 Bonds to Control Flood Waters," July 25, 1912.
166. *Sacramento Bee*, "Carrying of Bonds Is Victory for Progress," April 21, 1913; Connolly and Self, *Capital Women*, 169; *Sacramento Bee*, "State Lawmakers Urge Importance of Capitol Extension Bond Issue," March 26, 1913; *Sacramento Union*, "Labor to Share in Big Benefits," March 20, 1913; *Sacramento Bee*, "Capitol Site Donation Compared to Big Paying Business Proposition," March 23, 1913; *Sacramento Bee*, "Capitol Extension Bonds Carry 8208 to 1098," April 6, 1913.
167. *Sacramento Bee*, "Carrying of Bonds Is Victory for Progress."
168. *Ibid.*
169. *Sacramento Bee*, "V. and N. Franchise Repealed by Board," August 16, 1912.

170. *Sacramento Bee*, "Lawyers Confer on New Gas Ordinance," May 21, 1913.
171. *Sacramento Bee*, "Corporations Asked to Furnish City with Data," January 17, 1913.
172. *Sacramento Bee*, "PG&E Will Fight City Rental," March 31, 1913.
173. *Sacramento Bee*, "Great Savings Shown in Buying City's Supplies," April 15, 1913.
174. *Sacramento Bee*, "Teachers to Receive All of Salary," March 19, 1913.
175. *Sacramento Bee*, "School Expense Being Cut by Mrs. Johnston," March 20, 1913; *Sacramento Bee*, "Great Savings Shown in Buying City's Supplies."
176. *Sacramento Bee*, "Portable Schools Will Relieve Congestion," April 5, 1913.
177. *Sacramento Bee*, "Mrs. Johnston Has Plan to Help Shop Boys," January 1, 1913.
178. *Sacramento Bee*, "Mrs. Johnston Orders Clean-Up," July 30, 1912.
179. *Sacramento Bee*, "Mrs. Johnston Dedicates South Side Park," April 14, 1912.
180. *Sacramento Bee*, "City Officials Filing Reports of Year's Work," May 7, 1913.
181. *San Francisco Call*, "Pugilism Added to Sphere of Woman," July 24, 1912; *Sacramento Union*, "Carraghar Wants to Direct Prize Fights," August 15, 1913.
182. For discussions of the prominent role progressives and women's clubs played in promoting "moral reform," see Gerald Woods, "A Penchant for Probity: California Progressives and the Disreputable Pleasures," in *California Progressivism Revisited*, 99–116; Teresa Hurley and Jarrod Harrison, "Awed by the Women's Clubs," in *California Women and Politics*, 237–262; and Mark Hopkins, "No Undue Familiarity," in *ibid.*, 289–308.
183. *Sacramento Bee*, "Officers to Stop Spooning in City Parks and Squares," July 23, 1912; Smith, "Women in Government."
184. *Sacramento Bee*, "Censored Theatres Next Result of Bunch Case," December 26, 1912; *Sacramento Bee*, "Board to Censor Theaters," December 27, 1912.
185. *Sacramento Union*, "Play Is Censored and Found Moral," February 17, 1913; *Sacramento Star*, "Dancing of Armstrong Chorus Too 'Riotous,' Says Mrs. Johnston," February 17, 1913.
186. *Sacramento Bee*, "When Is a Dance Immoral?" November 9, 1912.
187. *Ibid.*
188. *Sacramento Bee*, "Experience Cited as Campaign Aid to Mrs. Johnston," March 24, 1913.
189. *Sacramento Bee*, "Carrying of Bonds Is Victory for Progress."
190. *Sacramento Bee*, "The Broad, Plain Issue in this Campaign."
191. *Sacramento Bee*, "Women Organizing to Work for Mrs. Johnston," May 6, 1912.
192. Smith, "Women in Government."
193. *Sacramento Star*, "Local Issue Defined," April 28, 1913.
194. The pro-Carraghar *Sacramento Union* stressed this point in multiple editorials. See, e.g., *Sacramento Union*, "Misrepresenting the Charter," April 13, 1913.
195. *Sacramento Bee*, "Keep a Capable Woman in the City Commission," April 21, 1913.
196. *Sacramento Bee*, "Mrs. Johnston Wins Easily in Citizens' Ballot," April 15, 1913.
197. *Sacramento Bee*, "Mrs. Johnston Gets Backing of Woman's Council," April 17, 1913.
198. *Sacramento Bee*, "Women's Precinct Organization's Proclamation for Mrs. Johnston," April 16, 1913; *Sacramento Bee*, "Record Vote Is Cast," May 3, 1913.
199. *Sacramento Bee*, "Mrs. Johnston Is Cheered by Crowd," May 2, 1913.
200. *Sacramento Bee*, "Desperate Fight to Return the City to Machine Control," April 29, 1913.
201. *Sacramento Bee*, "Autos Needed in Cause of Good Government," May 1, 1913.
202. *Sacramento Bee*, "Carraghar and the Saloons," May 2, 1913.
203. *Sacramento Union*, "Carraghar in 1911, 1912 and 1913," April 16, 1913.
204. *Sacramento Bee*, "Desperate Fight to Return the City to Machine Control."
205. *Sacramento Union*, "Women Oppose Voter's League," April 26, 1913.
206. *Sacramento Union*, "Woman Advise Caution in Election," April 23, 1913.
207. *Sacramento Union*, "Carraghar Club Has 500 on Rolls," April 25, 1913; *Sacramento Union*, "E. J. Carraghar Addresses Women at Headquarters," May 1, 1913.
208. *Sacramento Bee*, "Carraghar Club Women to Keep Membership Dark," April 24, 1913; *Sacramento Bee*, "How Do They Speak When They Are Dumb?," April 25, 1913; *Sacramento Bee*, "Carraghar Women Hold Open House," April 28, 1913.
209. *Sacramento Bee*, "Commission Job Won by Carraghar," May 5, 1913.
210. Burg, *Wicked Sacramento*, 19–20.
211. *Sacramento Bee*, "Mrs. Johnston Truant Officer," September 12, 1913.
212. *Sacramento Bee*, "Carraghar Opposes Mrs. Johnston's Salary," September 12, 1913.
213. *Sacramento Union*, "Revival of the Old Gang," May 14, 1914. It is ironic that the *Union* supported the progressives against the machine in 1914 when it had just vigorously fought for Carraghar's election in 1913.
214. *Sacramento Bee*, "Some Recent Local History," May 1, 1914.

215. *Ibid.*; *Sacramento Bee* (advertisement), "No Wilder Promises Are Unfulfilled," May 10, 1914. See also *Sacramento Bee*, "Plan to Start on Public Ownership Next Year," August 28, 1912.
216. *Sacramento Bee*, "Coulter to Run for Commissioner," January 18, 1914; *Sacramento Bee* (advertisement), "No Wilder Promises Are Unfulfilled."
217. *Sacramento Bee*, "Merchants Talk on Politics and Water," May 10, 1914.
218. *Sacramento Bee*, "Coulter to Run for Commissioner."
219. *Sacramento Bee*, "Good Citizens Should Strive to Save the City from Misrule," May 10, 1914.
220. *Sacramento Bee*, "Plenty of 'Easy Money' in Sacramento Just Now," May 15, 1914.
221. *Sacramento Bee*, "'Political Row' Buzzes with Campaign Talk," April 24, 1914.
222. *Sacramento Bee*, "File Expense Accounts," May 28, 1912.
223. *Sacramento Bee*, "Mr. Wilder Thanks Voters for Support," May 19, 1914.
224. 1911 City Charter, section 192.
225. *Sacramento Bee*, "Poverty Causes Proud Boy to Be Truant," October 24, 1913; *Sacramento Bee*, "But Few Youngsters Really Play Hookey," November 3, 1913; *Sacramento Bee*, "Car Service Handicap, Says Mrs. Johnston," November 7, 1913.
226. *Sacramento Bee*, "Burke Votes to Oust Mrs. Johnston," June 26, 1914.
227. Mary Josephine Beebe, "Commission Government in Sacramento and Berkeley, California," master's thesis, Stanford University, 1917, 10, 44-45, <https://books.google.com/books?id=IWNEAQAIAAJ>.
228. William Burg, "Sacramento: 1910," *Midtown Monthly*, April 1, 2010, <http://www.midtownmonthly.net/life/sacramento-1910/>.
229. Everything old is new again. The city manager system has endured several repeal attempts, including this past November 3, when voters rejected a proposed charter amendment which would have brought city governance full circle back to the strong mayor form of government the city commission had replaced.
230. *Sacramento Bee*, "Mrs. Johnston Is Slated for County School Position," November 18, 1914.
231. *Sacramento Bee*, "Mrs. Johnston Quits County School Job," February 1, 1915.
232. See, e.g., *Sacramento Bee*, "Tuesday Club Fetes Past Presidents," December 11, 1941; *Sacramento Bee*, "Mrs. A. J. Johnston, Founder of Womans Council, Will Be Feted," September 2, 1952.
233. Lance Armstrong, "Belle Cooledge: A Lasting Tribute to a Sacramento Original," *Land Park News*, July 9, 2009, <http://www.valcomnews.com/wp-content/PDFs/LandPark/LP0913.pdf>.
234. Smith, "Women in Government."
235. Ernest Cox, "Capital Woman, 92, Spent 30 Years at Work on Book," *Sacramento Bee*, June 20, 1953.
236. *Sacramento Bee*, "Luella Johnston Funeral Rites Will Be Friday," March 12, 1958.
237. See Mrs. William Beckman, "Tuesday Club: Its History," in Sacramento Chamber of Commerce, *Greater Sacramento* (Sacramento: Kelman, 1912), <https://books.google.com/books?id=vTRQAQAIAAJ> (describing the club in county promotional literature as the "recognized center of social and mental culture"); Art Waugh, "Women's Council Shows Enviably Record of Achievement," *Sacramento Union*, February 12, 1922 (describing the council as having a "record of civic achievements second to no organization in the city").
238. *Valley Community News*, "Tuesday Club of Sacramento Ceases Operations after 117 Years," June 20, 2014, <https://www.valcomnews.com/tuesday-club-of-sacramento-ceases-operations-after-117-years/>; *Sacramento Bee*, "Election 2012," October 14, 2012 (identifying LaWanna Montgomery as council vice president in 2004).
239. Smith, "Women in Government."
240. Robert S. Gallagher, "Alice Paul: 'I was Arrested, Of Course . . .,'" *American Heritage* 25, no. 2 (February 1974), <https://www.americanheritage.com/alice-paul-i-was-arrested-course#19>.