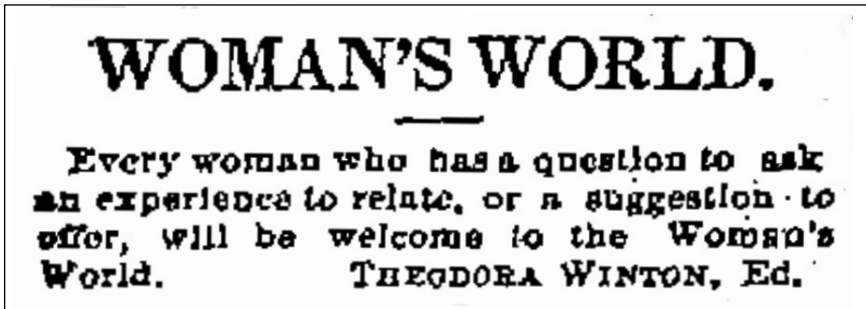


# FROM WOMAN'S WORLD TO GOOD CITIZENSHIP FOR WOMEN

by Pat Church, John Schoenknecht and Bonnie Byrd

For this article, the three of us endeavored to provide an overview of columns written and edited by Waukesha activist Theodora Youmans. In this first part, Pat Church reviews Winton's early columns which were given the title "Woman's World."



## WOMAN'S WORLD

"Every woman who has a question to ask, an experience to relate, or a suggestion to offer will be welcome to the Woman's World." Each feature column written by Theodora Winton for the *Waukesha Freeman* was published under that heading.

The columns of 1888 and 1889 had a wide range of topics. They offered advice, community information, and glimpses of the changing times.

Some advice columns addressed parents, graduates, and travelers. Parents were addressed in "Accomplishments for Girls." Winton suggested a middle path between giving all girls opportunities to explore creative arts and viewing these activities as being a waste of time and money and not being central to life's necessary skills. Winton's suggestion was to encourage girls if there was an interest, a talent, and affordability. In "The Graduation Essay," Winton's advice was to decide on a topic early, write leisurely, and use clear and direct language. The thoughts expressed should be those of the graduate, not those of a philosopher or poet. Travelers, especially "The Woman Traveler," were encouraged to use their common sense when traveling by train. The woman traveler of the title was a complainer, even though she had traveled by

train before. Addressing some of the complaints, Winton advised travelers to choose cool clothing but have a warm wrap and choose clothing that doesn't show dirt easily.

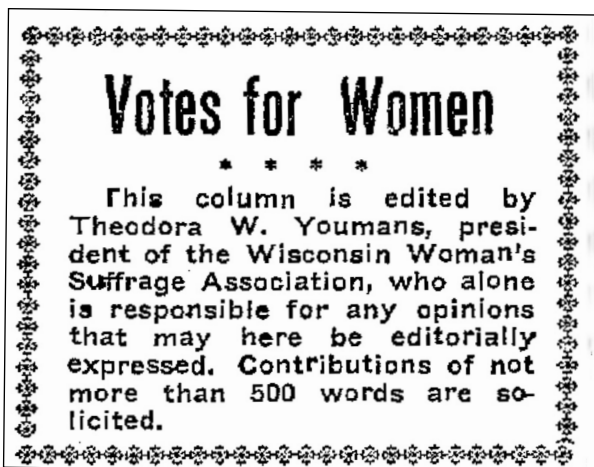
Informational columns were also part of this review of Winton's columns. The Women's Christian Temperance Unions (WCTU) of Waukesha, Winton informed the readers, met in Waukesha. The feature reviewed the memberships of various unions, the formation of a county group, discussions of future activities and women's suffrage (of which they approved). Women's property rights were presented in another column.

Key vocabulary was explained and examples given which was important since the statutes changed from state to state. One column was especially addressed "To the Women of Waukesha." Winton reported that a group of women living outside of the city of Chicago started a charitable endeavor. These women offered city girls a week's vacation, all expenses paid, in the country or small town to enjoy the fresh air, green space, and good food. Winton recommended that the charitable women of Waukesha institute a similar program.

The changing times of the late 1880s were also the focus of several columns. "The Summer Vacation" and its advantages outweighed the complaint that vacations were a "useless extravagance." In 1889, the hustle and bustle of daily life and work expe-



THEODORA YOUMANS



rienced by workers was exhausting. They needed time to relax and regenerate. “A Lecture on Dress” also reflected the changing of time. In her report on a lecture, Winton summarized the dress reform encouraged by the lecturer and already adopted by many women. The radical change in dress suggested was for looser, more comfortable clothing, including undergarments. Radical ideas for the time.

In this next section, John Schoenknecht reviewed the second version of Theodora’s columns which focused on the Suffrage movement and were called “Votes for Women.”

#### VOTES FOR WOMEN

We were unable to pinpoint the exact beginnings of Theodora’s column entitled “Votes For Women.” We do know that there was a meeting held in the basement of the public library in early December of 1910 which had the theme of “Votes For Women.” It was late in the next year, 1911, that Theodora began writing her column with the same name. The column continued the themes of *Women’s World* - becoming a hub of information on the issue of Suffrage. Each column contained tidbits of information from around the USA.

For instance, in 1911, Olympia Brown of Racine, president of the Wisconsin Suffrage Association, spoke in Waukesha and as a result, a suffrage club was formed at Carroll College.

Youmans continued the column in the ensuing years. A few highlights were:

In 1912 Youmans eviscerated an article opposing Suffrage that was published in the *Milwaukee Free Press* “an intelligent newspaper with the most astonishingly unintelligent streaks that is possible to imagine.” Youmans refuted statements in that paper which stated that twenty-two million women did not want the vote.

In 1913, Youmans attended her first national convention. She reported on the great activities of like-minded women and the amazing amounts of money they raised for their cause. She returned invigorated and enthusiastic.

In December of 1914, Youmans reported on the upcoming state convention. The sessions were devoted to organization, legislation, publicity, and finance.

This trend continued in 1915. In reading the columns, I noticed that Youmans liked to insert a bit of humor, often poking fun at the “Antis,” as those against Suffrage were called. In July, she wrote of State Senator David G. James of Richland Center. His daughter was the Suffrage leader Ada James. When the senator was returning home from the State GAR encampment in Wausau, a woman questioned him about his daughter. The woman, an “Anti,” stated that his daughter should stay at home darning his socks. The Senator replied that she does help him and that his socks were in perfect order. He even offered to take off his shoes, much to the laughter of those around him.

In December, Youmans published a poem by Alice Duer Miller:

**Song Of The Watchers**

They told us it was dangerous  
For women at the polls  
They told us it would smirch, degrade  
And coarsen women’s souls.  
We found it quite the opposite  
And want to tell you now  
That men are nicer people  
Than the antis will allow.

The year 1916 saw great progress for the Suffrage movement. Wisconsin sent 100 women to Chicago to march at the Republican

## WOMAN SUFFRAGE AND WOMEN'S WAR WORK

This suffrage column will not be suspended during the war any more than other suffrage activities will be dropped. The editor is convinced that woman suffrage work is essentially patriotic work, and that it becomes every day more apparent that the influence of loyal women is needed in the conduct of affairs of state.

This department is now enlarged to cover all kinds of war work of women. It seems to the editor that it will be a help to the women of the county to have a department of their own in their county paper. Women are invited to send in brief articles not more than 500 words in length on any phase of women's war work. They are invited to ask questions. Let us all work together and make this department of real value to ourselves and our country.

THEODORA W. YOUMANS, Editor.

National Convention. Numerous conventions were organized and attended. In October, the state headquarters were moved to a suite of three rooms on Jefferson St. in Milwaukee.

“Legislative and congressional work will be one of our main lines of activities during the coming year. We shall extend our organizations,” wrote Youmans in December.

Youmans' columns throughout 1917 emphasized the equality of the men and women who were paying for the war. The women paid the same property and other taxes as men, but could not vote. The sacrifice of a son to the war effort was born equally by mother and father. The suffrage movement did not cease, but the War took priority. Womens' groups throughout the state and nation declared their loyalty and support of the war effort.

In this final section, Bonnie Byrd reviewed the changes to Youmans' column as the war reached its height and conclusion and as women finally won the right to vote.

## WOMAN SUFFRAGE AND WOMEN'S WAR WORK

Youmans column expanded its mission in 1918, becoming “Woman Suffrage and Women's War Work” with the explanation “The editor (Youmans) is convinced that woman suffrage work is essentially patriotic work, and that it becomes every day more apparent that the influence of loyal women is needed in the conduct of affairs of state.” During the Great War, her columns addressed questions of citizenship, advocated for war support and relief, and gave advice for home front efforts. They also continued to address questions surrounding enfranchisement.

In her first column for 1918, Youmans directly connected women's citizenship to wartime concerns. “During the present war

American women married to Germans have automatically become enemy aliens even though they are in heart thoroughly loyal.” Women’s legal vulnerability had long been at the core of the suffrage movement, and anti-German sentiment only amplified the argument. In addition, Waukesha’s German immigrant population had grown the generation before, with both immigrant and first generation Americans considered as “foreign stock.” In 1900, Waukesha County’s foreign stock made up 68% of the population, with 38% of the total foreign stock German. Youmans was careful to maintain the focus on women’s risk on entering a marriage under such legal conditions.

The “War Work” content in 1918 included advocating for liberty loans, recognizing and recruiting volunteers for civilian defense work, and sharing advice for home front rationing efforts. Rationing topics varied from mending wool and leather clothing for reuse to Potato Patriots taking on the challenge of incorporating more of the starchy tuber into diets. Food rationing discussions also gave the opportunity to remind readers of another platform plank for the women’s movement: temperance. Brewers enjoyed seemingly unrestricted access to grain while American housewives abided by ration and limited supply. Writing in a summary of suffrage activities across the country, Youmans shared a tactic from Superior, Michigan, “Why should we (women) be asked to save a little flour and a little sugar, when the breweries are permitted to use all the grain they want and when our men drink up every day more supplies than we can possibly save.” Again, the wartime realities served to reinforce the arguments of the column and larger suffrage movement.

Youmans’ article from June 6, 1918, is noteworthy for the extreme departure from normal course. The article reflects almost entirely on the trial and conviction of Grace Lusk of second degree murder. This trial is well-known even today. While Youmans gave no exoneration to Lusk for the murder of Mary Roberts, she did address the questions surrounding the extramarital affair and women’s culpability that had been raised during the trial. “It was long ago that the first culprit tried to shield himself from the consequence of his guilt by the craven plea ‘the woman tempted me

## GOOD CITIZENSHIP FOR WOMEN

(Theodora W. Youmans, editor)

This department has changed its name. It still remains a woman suffrage department but it takes on new characteristics. It will aim to help the women of this county to prepare for the duties which have been laid upon them by the legislature in giving them the right to vote for Presidential electors, and for the still broader duties which will come to them when the partial suffrage they now have gives place to full suffrage, the same as that enjoyed by men.

and I did eat.' It has been a common plea ever since, not often presented in quite the cave-man style of this case, but still substantially the same." As ever, Youmans wit was well pointed and aimed.

Columns from the fall of 1918 and into the spring of 1919 gave attention to the progress and hurdles of a federal amendment. After mid-term elections in November 1918 and an unusual direct congressional address from President Wilson on the matter of woman suffrage, the thrum of excitement was strong. However, as had been seen again and again over the course of the movement and the column, defeat was an ever-present outcome. On February 13, 1919, Youmans wrote "Now we have to begin all over again in securing the passage of the federal amendment..(sic)..Republicans will control the new Congress and there will be many changes in membership of both House and Senate." Yet, Youmans reported that an informal canvass of the new Congress gave "ground for believing that this Congress will pass the amendment easily and promptly."

## GOOD CITIZENSHIP FOR WOMEN

With the war's end the column was once again in need of rebranding. By Spring 1918, it earned the title "Citizenship for Women" with the explanation: "This department has changed its name. It still remains a woman suffrage department, but it takes on new characteristics. It will aim to help the women of this county to prepare for the duties which have been laid upon them." Wisconsin's legislature had granted partial suffrage (the right to vote for presidential electors) in February 1919 and had also passed a resolution that the state would pass an amendment from Congress on the issue of full woman suffrage.

The column continued to give coverage for state-level efforts. Youmans addressed readers directly in May 1, 1919, reminding

that “each step means a nearer approach to that political quality which is our especial aim.” She continued, “The war taught women a lesson which they can never forget, that public affairs are their affairs, that laws passed by legislatures and Congress have a direct and vital influence on their families and their homes.” The article continued to outline specific issues and policy recommendations that fell in line with the long-advocated causes: children’s welfare and labor standards. Youmans gave a smart sequel to this message the following week. The May 8 article gave account of the passage of Wisconsin’s School Suffrage law, written by the law’s author, Mrs. Alura Collins Hollister of Waukesha.

Youmans traveled to Washington D.C. later that month and was present in the U.S. House of Representatives on May 21, 1919 when the 19th Amendment passed. She recounted the experience in the June 5 column, sub-headed, “When the Vote was Won,” but gave a prescient recollection of her feelings on that day: “The fight had been so long and the victory had come so gradually that it was difficult to grasp. We filed out smiling quietly at each other and that was all.” She also reminded readers of the political process, with one body down, the measure was sent over to the Senate.

The June 12 column opened with a transcription of a message Youmans received from Senator Isaac J. Witter, “Ratification amendment has passed both houses of legislature and Wisconsin will undoubtedly be the first state to ratify amendment. Congratulations.”

This was followed by the full printing of the passed amendment, and a reflection from Youmans on her long “prophesy” coming to fruition. The column also reminded that work was yet to be done for three-fourths of state legislatures to ratify the amendment and gave a summary of those jockeying to become the first to ratification. Wisconsin, along with Illinois and Michigan, would be the first three to ratify.

Over the next months, Youmans gave detailed updates to the status of the amendment in legislative bodies throughout the country. Too, the content of the column began to showcase opportunities for women to engage in political parties, become more educated to the political process, and understand the utility of the vote.



The March 4, 1920 column announced the dissolution of the Wisconsin Women’s Suffrage Association, and the creation of the Wisconsin chapter League of Women Voters. Thus the column, “Citizenship for Women” became an educative tool for the newly franchised.

On August 19, 1920 “Citizenship for Women” reported that the Tennessee legislature had “swung into the ratification column,” giving the necessary 36 states affirming the amendment. Youmans gave a more formal statement, which opened: “I consider this the most advanced step society has taken for many years – equal in importance to the founding of representative government and the abolition of slavery. It is a tremendous victory for principle and right after a contest which has lasted for seventy-four years.”

In the last months of 1920, “Citizenship for Women” echoed back to the earlier days of the editorial, blending more general interest content each week. But Youmans understood that while a significant battle had been won, a new round of skirmishes was just beginning. In her Christmas column on December 23, a full half of the column was dedicated to the second installment of the debate around women as jurors. Providing summaries of debates in dozens of states, Youmans concluded, “(T)hus it appears that the common opinion of the people throughout the country is to the effect that a voter is not necessarily a juror and that the question of women serving or not serving on juries is a question to be settled on its merits.”

Youmans’ editorial column gave a public platform for women’s issues across three decades. With each gain it celebrated, it likewise gave the next course direction. Youmans’ leadership, particularly as the President of the Wisconsin Women’s Suffrage Association, gave her unparalleled insight to the strategy of political victory, most especially not taking it for granted.

Her columns provide readers today with incredible detail of Waukesha’s experiences with woman’s suffrage, what the movement looked like in our community, the variety of women involved, the range of civic service the movement was involved in, and the power of press and the written word. □

## From the Director's Desk

With spring (hopefully) just around the corner we're well into our 2020 planning. Listed here are the annual programs and activities for historians at all ages - from our History Tots for the youngest in the family to our Speaker Series for learners of any age.

I'm pleased to share that we have received a grant from the Les Paul Foundation that will support new programs from our Education Department, and some new additions to the exhibit. We've also scheduled two special exhibits this year, "Wisconsin Remembers" in May, and "We Stand on their Shoulders" in August.

I also want to invite you - our members - to get involved! We are always seeking volunteers for our Greeter Desk and Docent Corps. Give us a call 262.521.2859 if you're interested in learning more about becoming a volunteer.

Best,  
Bonnie Byrd

*Executive Director, WCHSM*

## Join Us For These Events

### **Hands on History**

Every Saturday 10 – 2  
Head into the Waukesha State Bank Education Center for take home crafts & activities. Included with museum admission

### **History Tots**

2nd Friday 10:30 – 11:30  
am  
History inspired story time with activities for toddlers and their adults. Free, no registration.

### **History Club**

3rd Wednesday 2 – 3 pm  
Sponsored by the City of Waukesha Parks & Rec Department. Info & registration through their website:  
55+ Programs

### **Speaker Series**

1st Wednesday 5 – 6 pm  
Area historians join us to share their work and research.  
Registration required.