

Dedication to Serve

Clara Ueland was born on October 10, 1860, in Akron, Ohio. Even at a young age, Clara was taught the importance of equality and service. After moving to Minneapolis, she focused on issues such as early childhood education, child labor, and clean water, but her most valued work was during the women's suffrage movement in the early 20th century.¹ Through her humble upbringing and determined character, Clara Ueland helped shape the path for equality among men and women in Minnesota.

Clara Ueland's focus on equality was prevalent in all aspects of her life. Eliza Hampson, Clara's mother struggled to raise Clara and her brother. Early in Clara's life, her father, Henry Hampson, passed away leaving Eliza as the single provider for the family. After moving to Minneapolis in 1869, Clara attended the Washington school for her elementary and high school years. As an intellectually curious student, Clara had hoped to pursue higher education; however, she could not afford the costly expense. Though still committed to education, she began teaching seventh and eighth grade in 1877 at the Jefferson school. Later, Clara married Andreas Ueland on June 19, 1885. They had 8 children in total, but Dorothy, their daughter, died before the age of 3.² As a mother, she openly indicated her feminist views and conveyed a manner of equality throughout the household. Brenda Ueland, her third daughter, recalled, "[Clara] made no distinction between [boys and girls] in actions, freedom, education, or possibilities".³ She did not express any caution with her children rather encouraged her children to be daring and brave. At the time, she had a unique approach to parenting that many would often criticize. While Clara continued to raise her children, she quickly became interested in establishing a more permanent and prevalent early education system in the early 1880s. Along with a few other pioneering women, Clara campaigned on creating kindergartens throughout the city of Minneapolis to the Minneapolis School Board. By 1905, kindergartens were implemented in the Minneapolis public school system. As Barbara

¹ Elizabeth Loetscher, "Ueland, Clara (1860–1927)," MNOPEdia, last modified August 13, 2018, accessed August 16, 2020, <https://www.mnopedia.org/person/ueland-clara-1860-1927>.

² Barbara Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors* (n.p.: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 1995), 35-52

³ Brenda Ueland, *Me* (1939; repr., Holy Cow! Press, 1994), 36.

Stuhler writes in her novel, “Clara’s concern for the education of all children, not merely her own, prompted her initial foray into the arena of public policy”.⁴

Clara Ueland’s early works of service among others led her to become more involved in the rising popularity of the women’s suffrage movement. Elsa Ueland, Clara’s daughter, was critical in attracting Clara to the movement as she was the president of the University of Minnesota Women’s Equal Suffrage Association. Along with the influence from her daughter, Clara became more inspired by the movement after attending a Minneapolis convention on the subject in 1901. However, she did not become fully involved until later due to her concern regarding the leaders of the movement at the time, which she believed lacked the courage to be leaders. Later, in 1907, she began to focus on the equality of men and women, and, with a few other women, they founded the Women’s Club of Minneapolis. The club gained an important role as it allowed women to publicly train their speech and etiquette that would eventually benefit them in the fight towards equal voting rights. With opposing viewpoints on the issues arising within the club, Clara Ueland took the matter into her own hands through her many “fund-raising suffrage garden parties”. During these meetings, she called upon the women, to form, in Clara’s words, “a stronger feeling of sisterhood” in order to build a better sense of community that ultimately led to the formation of the Equal Suffrage Association. The organization included men and women members, which was unprecedented at the time. Clara Ueland explained her reasoning for the formation of the association saying, “You can’t have too many clubs... the more clubs there are the more voters we reach”.⁵

Although the women’s suffrage movement was beginning to gain national prominence towards the end of 1913, a growing impatience had occurred throughout the suffragist community with little success from the organizations. Therefore, Clara Ueland saw this as an opportunity to involve more people through a suffrage march. On May 2, 1914, Clara organized “The Great Suffrage Parade” with the purpose of “galvanizing the community and bringing support to the cause”. The march was a huge

⁴ Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 49-51.

⁵ Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 76-83.

success, gathering 1,972 people together in support of the suffrage movement. Later, Clara Ueland began receiving wide-spread recognition throughout the suffrage community, which led her to be appointed the president of the Minnesota Women's Suffrage Association (MWSA), a section of the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA) partially founded by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. While leading this organization, she advocated for greater conservative measures of action prioritizing order rather than violence. A leading suffragist in Minneapolis, Rene Stevens, wrote to Ethel Briggs, the MWSA Secretary, explaining, "Many have tried to convey to me their sense of [Clara's] sweet wisdom or wise sweetness or that intangible something which makes her her".⁶ Towards the end of the 1910s, the movement became strongly debated and contentious among state and federal legislatures. In 1915 and 1917, the Minnesota suffrage movement however suffered two setbacks when the state legislature failed to ratify two different women's suffrage bills by a slim number of votes. However, this problem did not deter Clara from continuing to push for the goal of equal voting rights.⁷ Clara's granddaughter, Clara Ueland, explained during our recent conversation, "Clara would take the bus to St. Pauls to the state capitol building nearly every day to discuss equal voting rights, which really represented her dedication". As the suffragists' tireless persistence continued, the United States ratified the 19th amendment on August 18, 1920. After the amendment was ratified, the NAWSA was replaced by the National Women's League of Voters, in which Clara Ueland became the first president of the Minnesota branch. Clara continued to fight for women's rights and child labor protections until her death in 1927.⁸

Through Clara Ueland's persistent effort and determination in the fight for voting equality, men and women alike were able to express their political opinions through elections. Clara Ueland strived to make her community a better place in a time when womens' voices were not often heard. Although, in

⁶ Stuhler, *Gentle Warriors*, 82-86.

⁷ "Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association: An Inventory of Their Records at the Minnesota Historical Society," Minnesota Historical Society, accessed August 15, 2020, <http://www2.mnhs.org/library/findaids/00756.xml>.

⁸ Clara Ueland, telephone interview by the author, August 19, 2020.

modern times, the fight is not directly for equality of voting among men and women, all citizens should have equal opportunities to vote, specifically, as Clara would have hoped, in this upcoming election.

Sources

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